

Summary

Active in Europe

The Dutch Education Council advises the government to engage seriously with European education policy. The current 'wait-and-see' attitude adopted by the Netherlands fails to acknowledge the increased influence of European education policy and recent developments in Europe. The Council recommends that Dutch education ministers work together with education professionals to develop a strategic agenda which provides clarity on the Dutch ambitions with regard to European education policy. What goals does the Netherlands want to achieve? And how will they contribute to Dutch education? A strategic agenda will provide focus and a guidance framework for both education professionals and government. This will enable the opportunities offered by Europe to be exploited more effectively in Dutch education, enable risks to be monitored and anticipated, and enable the Netherlands to help strengthen education in other EU Member States.

onderwijsraad

Growing influence of Europe in Dutch education

The influence of Europe in Dutch education is increasing. The governance dynamic within the complex and multi-layered context of Europe is leading Member States to forge agreements and take decisions which have a direct impact on education. They include agreements on foreign language teaching, collaboration between education establishments and international exchanges of pupils, students and teachers as part of the drive to achieve a European Education Area. The role of the European Union within that dynamic is steadily increasing, not only through its ambitions and initiatives in relation to education, but also as a result of targets and legislation in related policy domains (economic, social) which impinge on education, for example the Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications and internal measures in relation to the freedom of establishment and the free movement of services and workers.

European education policy is now reaching the classroom, laboratory and lecture theatre, partly because of a more active approach to and closer collaboration with Europe on the part of education establishments. This manifests itself most clearly in higher education, though Europe's growing influence can also be seen in senior secondary vocational, primary and secondary education.

Member States and institutions in and around Europe increasingly see education as part of the solution to major challenges such as climate, labour market, technology and digitalisation, migration, the energy transition and the strengthening of constitutional democracy. This has led to an expansion of European education policy, with more money (a doubling of the budget), more knowledge and greater educational ambitions.

The European Union is set to take a series of strategic decisions over the next few years, for example on recalibrating the existing European educational targets, as well as new initiatives in relation to education. The Netherlands assumes the presidency of the European Union in 2029, giving the Dutch government an opportunity to help shape the European education policy agenda. This forthcoming presidency makes it even more important that the Dutch government engages seriously with Europe. What can the Netherlands contribute? And how will that contribution help education in the Netherlands? These and other questions prompted the Dutch Education Council to formulate this advisory report on its own initiative to answer the question of what stance the Dutch government should take in relation to European education policy. The report is aimed at education ministers.

Engage seriously with European education policy

The Education Council recommends that Dutch education ministers engage seriously with European education policy by adopting a proactive approach. The present 'wait-and-see' approach is out of kilter with the more intensive governance dynamic in Europe and the educational ambitions of the EU, which are increasingly impacting on Dutch education. Such a wait-and-see attitude is also out of line with the wishes of stakeholders and education establishments; they need greater clarity regarding the chosen strategy and objectives, so that they are better able to anticipate and prepare for future European education policy. A wait-and-see approach also sits uneasily with the government's systemic responsibility. To be able to fulfil that responsibility, the government needs to have a clear picture of the developments among education professionals and their participation in European education policy, for example exchanges and cooperation, grants and comparative research. That will bring clarity regarding both the opportunities and risks for the accessibility, efficiency and quality of education.

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Create a Dutch strategic agenda for European education policy

Engaging seriously with European education policy starts with a strategic agenda describing the Dutch input and how that input will contribute to Dutch education. There is currently no such agenda. A strategic agenda will provide focus and guidance for both government and education professionals. It will enable better use to be made of the opportunities offered by Europe in relation to education, enable risks to be monitored and anticipated, and help strengthen education in other EU Member States.

The Education Council recommends using a roadmap for drawing up a strategic agenda, covering the period until the Netherlands assumes the EU presidency in 2029 and incorporating the timings of formal decision-making within the EU. These can act as milestones or waypoints, enabling the Dutch input to be thoroughly prepared in partnership with education professionals and parliament. The Council strongly advocates the involvement of education professionals in drawing up a Dutch strategic agenda. This will ensure that the government is aligned with movements and developments already taking place within education, and enable it to exploit the knowledge and experience gained by stakeholders in the field.

The Council also recommends that the objectives set out in the agenda be limited and advocates good coordination between education and related policy domains, such as science policy, youth policy and labour market policy. The Council also recommends that the objectives in the strategic agenda be periodically recalibrated after the Dutch presidency has ended. This will ensure that the agenda remains a valuable assessment framework for the Dutch input in Europe and that it will provide a guideline for the policy of Dutch education establishments.