2027

work programme

onderwijsraad

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foreword

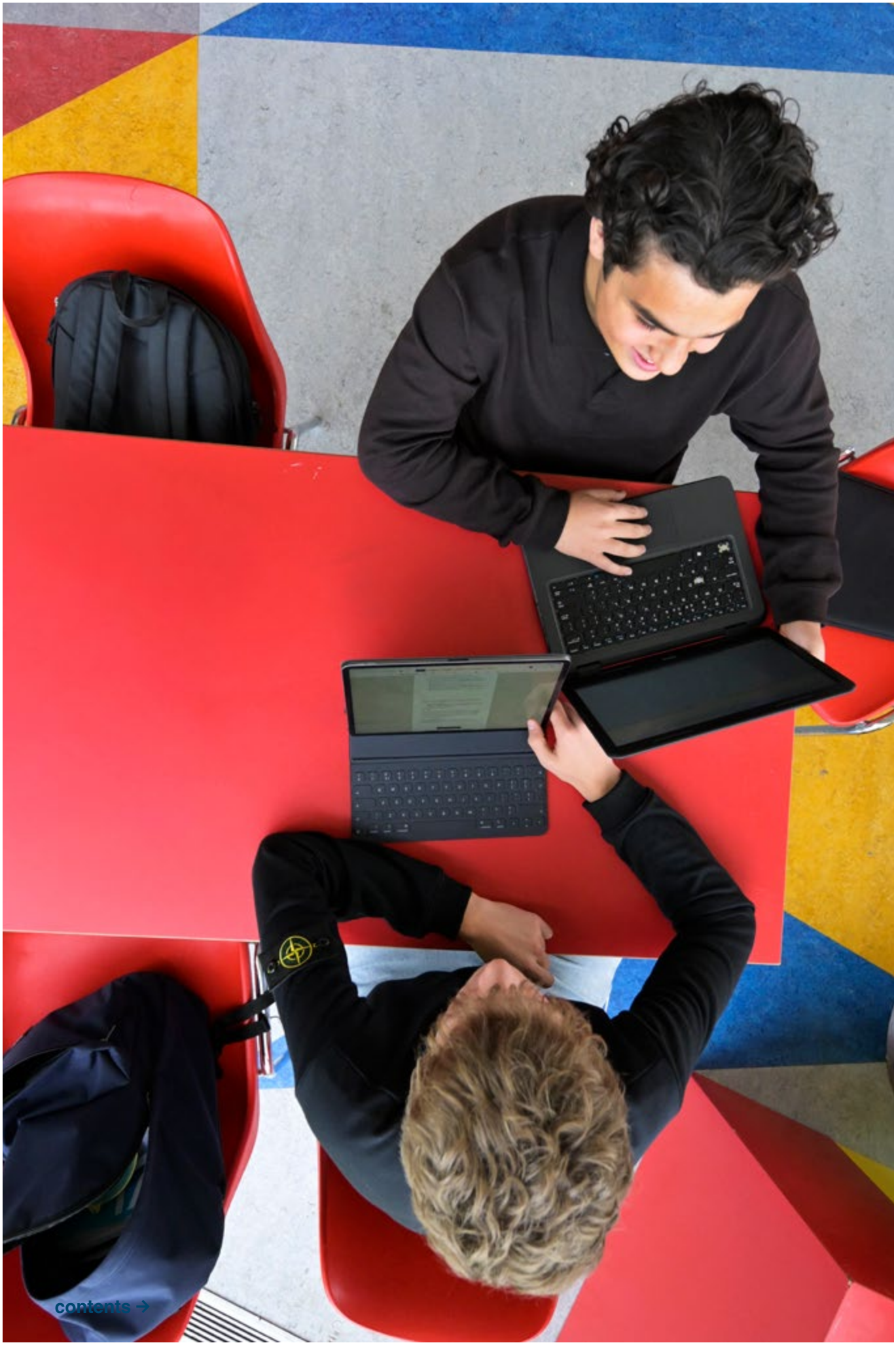
The Education Council of the Netherlands issues advisory reports on a wide range of topics, both upon request and on its own initiative. The choice of topics is informed by developments in education and society, by emerging or ongoing policy challenges, and by proposed policies and legislation. Earlier this year, for example, the Council issued advice on education in the Caribbean Netherlands, assessment within a revised curriculum, addressing welfare issues in education, and the utilisation of research findings in educational practice and educational policy.

Every year, the Council engages with numerous organisations and stakeholders regarding developments in and around education that warrant inclusion in its work programme. Some issues are long-standing or structural, appear persistent, or require a fresh perspective at regular intervals. For example, the coming year the Council will examine the structure of the education system, the position of specialised education, governance arrangements, good education, and quality variations between schools. Other issues are novel, unforeseen, or require updating - particularly when developments accelerate rapidly. Examples include the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in education (a topic the Council previously advised on) and the contribution education makes to societal resilience amidst growing geopolitical tension.

Responding to occasionally swift changes - partly through interim requests for advice - requires an agile planning framework. For this reason, the Council is transitioning to an annual work programme structure. This *2027 Work Programme* outlines the advisory reports scheduled for the coming year. The Education Council extends its gratitude to all who contributed to the creation of this work programme and looks forward to its implementation.

Louise Elffers
chair

Mirjam van Leeuwen
secretary-director



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work programme 2027

This work programme outlines the advisory reports the Education Council will work on in the coming year, alongside anticipated requests for legislative advice. In addition to the reports specified here, requesting bodies may approach the Council with additional or new queries – including legislative advice – throughout the year.

The *2027 Work Programme* comprises four ongoing or scheduled advisory reports and three new advisory initiatives.

Ongoing and scheduled advisory reports

The Council is currently working on, or will shortly commence, several advisory reports, which will continue into 2027:

- education system – requested by the Senate;
- specialised education – requested by the House of Representatives;
- good education – requested by the House of Representatives;
- governance of the education system – on the Council's own initiative.

New advisory reports

This *2027 Work programme* also includes several new topics:

- resilience and education – requested by the Ministry of Education, Culture & Science;
- AI and digitalisation – requested by the Ministry of Education, Culture & Science;
- differences in quality between schools – requested by the House of Representatives.

1.1 Education system

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is currently reviewing several systemic issues. These include the position of practical learning pathways within foundational education - such as practical *havo* (senior general secondary education) and practical tracks within the combined and theoretical pathways of *vmbo* (pre-vocational secondary education); the structure of upper secondary education; the feasibility of a five-year *vmbo*; and the positioning of vocational and academic education within further and higher education. Establishing an effective systemic policy requires addressing persistent bottlenecks, taking into account the different components of the system.

At the request of the Senate, the Education Council is examining the measures government must take to structure the education system in a way that guarantees good education for all.

1.2 Specialised education

Demand for specialised education is increasing. Special primary education (*sbo*), special education (*so*), and secondary special education (*vso*) are struggling to meet this rising demand. Long waiting lists mean pupils remain in mainstream schools for longer than appropriate or – if this is unfeasible - temporarily miss out on schooling entirely. At the same time, questions arise as to whether every pupil currently referred to specialised education is best served by that placement. The growth in specialised education pupil numbers is at odds with the government's ambition for inclusive education, where pupils jointly attend mainstream schools wherever possible.

At the request of the House of Representatives, the Education Council is exploring the evolving role and position of specialised education within the current system, centred on the question of what pupils require to participate fully in education.

1.3 Good education

Policy and practice frequently reference the pursuit of good education. Varying interpretations exist regarding what constitutes good education and what is required to achieve it - a diversity that aligns with a pluralistic educational landscape. However, a lack of clarity or consensus on this definition makes it difficult to assess which policies contribute effectively and whether investments yield the desired outcomes.

At the request of the House of Representatives, the Education Council is examining what can be defined as good education.

1.4 Education system governance

Governance arrangements in education are a subject of ongoing debate in politics and society. The distribution of duties and responsibilities is not fixed in perpetuity; it shifts over time due to policy changes or operational developments. The last major explicit reform stemmed from the 'Scheveningen consultations' in the early 1990s, which laid the foundation for the current governance model. This framework is characterised by an emphasis on decentralised management, administrative autonomy, and a strong sector-level organisation. It also underpins the current funding scheme and the negotiation of employment terms.

On its own initiative, the Council is reviewing current governance arrangements to determine how various actors can best fulfil their shared responsibility for delivering good education.

1.5 Quality differences between schools

Significant quality disparities exist across schools. Educational debate reflects concerns over student outcomes and attainment, as well as institutional processes, such as a professional culture and organisational capacity of school organisations. While some schools fail to deliver good education for all, others achieve success under comparable circumstances. This raises the question as to which interventions are needed to narrow quality gaps and assist persistently underperforming schools in improving their standards. The coalition agreement prioritises enhancing the expertise of teachers and school leaders while leveraging insights from best practices.

At the request of the House of Representatives, the Council is investigating how to enhance the learning and organisational capacity of schools to reduce quality disparities.

1.6 Resilience

Geopolitical tension and global instability are escalating, directly impacting Dutch society. The coalition agreement emphasizes strengthening the resilience of individual citizens and society as a whole, noting: "Old international certainties are disappearing, and threats to our free way of life and the rule of law are increasing." Enhancing resilience requires a comprehensive evaluation of how various institutions, including education, can contribute.

At the request of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, the Education Council is exploring the role education can play in building societal resilience in the Netherlands. For this publication, the Council will collaborate with other advisory bodies.

1.7 AI and digitalisation

In 2017, the Education Council published the advisory report *Thoughtful digitalisation (Doordacht digitaal)*, followed in 2022 by the study *Use of intelligent technology in education (Inzet van intelligente technologie)*. These publications addressed the government's role in supporting schools with digitalisation, educational ownership of technological developments, and the opportunities and risks associated with intelligent technology. These issues have since grown more pressing. The rise of (generative) artificial intelligence (AI) offers new avenues for teaching and learning, but also raises concerns regarding quality, autonomy, privacy, and public values. Furthermore, recent geopolitical events have highlighted the risks of dependency on major technology corporations. The digital landscape has changed radically as a result, presenting educational institutions and the government with new challenges.

At the request of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, the Education Council is updating and elaborating its previous advice on educational digitalisation. The focus will be on defining and safeguarding the collective prerequisite conditions for the responsible use of generative AI within the education system.

1.8 Legislative advice

The Council has a statutory task to advise the government on legislative proposals. This applies to bills introducing substantive changes to governance, steering mechanisms, oversight, or funding structures, which touch upon Article 23 of the Constitution or carry major operational implications for education. The Council consults with the Ministry to determine which bills meet these criteria. Additionally, Members of Parliament may submit private members' bills to the Council for advisory review.

In its legislative advice, the Council evaluates a bill's practical impact on educational settings and checks compliance with Article 23 of the Constitution. It also reviews proportionality, feasibility, and consistency within education legislation.

Legislative review by the Education Council occurs after public internet consultation and prior to scrutiny by the Council of State (*Raad van State*). Turnaround times are short, with the Council generally publishing an advisory letter within six weeks.

In the coming period, the Council expects to advise on:

- supplementary funding for equal learning and development opportunities, alongside clarification of educational disadvantage policies;
- tailor-made solutions in foundational education;
- promotion of governance quality and integrity in foundational education;
- revisions to the small schools allowance;
- lowering the compulsory school age; and
- future-proof funding for secondary vocational education (*mbo*).

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tasks and working methods

Good education for everyone: that is the goal which the Education Council of the Netherlands is committed to helping achieve

For over a century, the Education Council of the Netherlands has provided independent advice on education, policy and legislation to the Government, the Senate, the House of Representatives and occasionally local authorities, both upon request and on its own initiative.

The Council monitors the operation of the education system, looking back at historical trends while projecting far into the future to maintain a long-term strategic perspective. It points out or addresses emerging issues, identifies bottlenecks or unwanted side-effects in proposed policy and legislation, and outlines potential perspectives or solutions. These insights are delivered as advisory reports, exploratory studies, or legislative advice. Periodically, the Council publishes the *State of Education in the Netherlands (Stand van Educatief Nederland)*, providing an overarching appraisal of the national education landscape. It also advises municipalities on school accommodation matters.

The Council's advisory work encompasses all sectors of education for children, young people, and adults: from pre-school provisions to post-university education and lifelong learning. Key considerations include how education can foster individual and societal growth, which stakeholders should take the lead, the role of government, the scope of responsibility for governing boards versus school leaders and teachers, when external organisations and professionals should step in, and the responsibilities of pupils, students, and parents.

Independent and informed by broad expertise
The Council operates independently, while remaining attuned to societal and educational developments. Its advice is grounded in practical insights from classrooms, legislative practice, and policy formulation, as well as scientific knowledge and insights across disciplines including pedagogy, economics, sociology, public administration, organisational science, and education legislation. International and cross-sectoral comparisons are regularly integrated. A notable contribution comes from the Youth Education Council (*JongerenOnderwijsraad*), where pupils and students of various ages and educational backgrounds share their experiences with and ideas about Dutch education to inform the Council's work.

During preparation, the Council also draws upon the knowledge and expertise of other advisory bodies and planning agencies, and reciprocates by contributing to their work. Joint reports are occasionally issued. As a founding member of EUNEC (European Network of Education Councils), the Council actively exchanges knowledge and expertise with counterpart bodies across Europe and beyond.

Members of the Education Council are appointed in a personal capacity for a four-year term based on their academic expertise, practical teaching experience, or broader societal contributions, coupled with their commitment to education. This multidimensional makeup ensures every topic is examined through various lenses – for example a pedagogical, economic, legal or international one.

Guiding principles
The Council speaks plainly and acts as a critical sparring partner to government and educational institutions. Advisory work touches upon key values underpinning good education, including quality, accessibility, efficiency, pluralism and freedom of choice, social cohesion, inclusion and democratic values. Each value merits promotion, but may occasionally affect one another; emphasising one may inadvertently compromise another. Therefore, balancing these competing priorities requires careful evaluation.

When evaluating *quality*, for example, the Council can consider both broad educational standards and the underlying conditions required to sustain them. *Accessibility* centres on unimpeded access to education for every pupil and student, directly connecting to issues of equal opportunity. *Efficiency* relates to the cost-effectiveness of the education system relative to societal return, in addition to clear goal-setting, alignment with financial policy, and monitoring outcomes. *Pluralism* originates from Article 23 of the Constitution; the Council stresses the importance of a diverse educational landscape that guarantees a full provision of state schools concurrent with parental and student *freedom of choice*. Regarding *social cohesion, inclusion, and democracy*, the Council views the school as a social community and a training ground for democratic citizenship, requiring opportunities for students of diverse backgrounds to meet and engage with civic principles.

Educational policy involves constant trade-offs, for example when it comes to structuring the education system and the allocation of responsibilities. In its advice, the Council carefully holds these considerations up to the light - by balancing standardisation with customization, professional discretion with regulatory frameworks, and institutional autonomy with central steering. Or collective with individual interests, and a specific target domain with the broad, formative task of education. The Council emphatically brings these trade-offs to the fore to ensure policy choices are well-considered and robust.

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The *Work Programme 2027* was presented to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science and to the Minister for Primary and Secondary Education and Equality.

Composition of the Council
prof. dr. L. (Louise) Elffers (chair)
prof. dr. G.J.J. (Gert) Biesta
dr. D.J.M. (Dominique) Majoor
D. (Daisy) Mertens MEd
dr. C.J. (Cor) van Montfort
prof. dr. S.F. (Susan) te Pas
prof. mr. S. (Stefan) Philipsen
prof. dr. T. (Trudie) Schils
drs. L.Y.P. (Luc) Sluijsmans
mr. H. (Harmjan) Vedder
drs. M.P. (Mirjam) van Leeuwen (secretary)

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thonik

Photography
Edwin Walvisch
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Onderwijsraad
Prins Willem Alexanderhof 20
2595 BE Den Haag
The Netherlands
secretariaat@onderwijsraad.nl
(070) 310 00 00