

Craftmanship in continuous development

13 October 2016

Ensuring a good match between education and the labour market demands constant attention. Developments in society and on the labour market place heavy demands on people's flexibility and learning ability. The position of people with a secondary-level education is particularly worrying in terms of their labour market position and their low participation in post-initial education. With this in mind, in this report the Council focuses on the 'middle segment', i.e. those with a senior secondary vocational (mbo) qualification level 2 or higher.

The standard of high-quality craftsmanship needs to be constantly maintained; completing an initial education programme is no longer sufficient for this. Lifelong learning is of special importance for those with a secondary education level, and there is a strong argument for taking preparatory steps during the initial education phase to pave the way for later participation in lifelong learning.

The Council believes that attention needs to be given in the context of lifelong learning to personal development goals and work-related goals. Although personal development is a goal in itself, in this report the Council takes the view that personal development goals reinforce work-related goals. By striving for both goals in combination, people learn how to shape their lives and build social networks, but also how to expand their knowledge and skills and participate in the labour market. To ensure that this broad objective of lifelong learning is properly channelled and to prevent fragmentation of policy and funding, the Council advocates a more coherent (regional) approach, as well as greater involvement of all stakeholders: secondary education students, employers, educational establishments and government. The Council puts forward three recommendations in this regard.

Strengthen the regional approach

The Council advocates more regional control to improve the match between education and the labour market in the context of lifelong learning, because this will facilitate a better response to the specific needs of employees and the labour market. This will help prevent fragmentation of the supply, organisation and funding of education, but will require cooperation between different stakeholders. The Council believes that control should be placed in the hands of local authorities and advocates thorough evaluation and monitoring of policy measures and interventions in relation to lifelong learning.

Encourage and support responsibility

The Council believes it is important that people in the 'middle segment' are made aware of the need for continuous learning and that they take responsibility themselves for undertaking learning activities in this context. They will need to be supported in this awareness-raising process, as well as in undertaking the learning activities themselves. The Council advocates that lifelong learning should be positioned prominently within the education system. The need for continuous learning and the development of self-steering capacity needs to be emphasised early, in initial education. To achieve this, the Council believes that the mandatory input with regard to career orientation and guidance in senior secondary vocational education needs to be intensified over time to create mandatory output targets for students.

Provide a personal post-initial training budget

The Council identifies two sticking points in one of the elements of the funding of lifelong learning, namely the Training and Development (O&O) funds. First, these funds often appear to be focused on an individual sector rather than on intersectoral mobility. Second, the way the resources in these funds are spent is not organised efficiently. The Council calls for the reform of the Training & Development funds and the creation of a personal post-initial training budget. The Council believes it is right that employees should be given access to the reserves they have built up themselves. They should be able to use these training funds to pay for training programmes or courses which improve their employability in their current jobs. However, they should also be able to draw on these funds to facilitate intersectoral mobility on the labour market or if they should become unemployed. The Council believes that creating a personal budget will improve the accessibility, quality and efficiency of post-initial education.