



# spotlight on VET

# THE NETHERLANDS

## VET in the Netherlands

Study results and advice from school determine the type of secondary education that learners follow after leaving primary education at age 12. In the third year of secondary education, 53% of students follow lower secondary pre-vocational programmes (VMBO). Half of VMBO students are in vocationally oriented programmes; the rest follow general programmes offered by VMBO schools. VMBO is the main route to upper secondary vocational education and training (VET).

Apart from lower secondary pre-VET programmes, there are also general programmes that prepare students for higher education: integrated lower and upper secondary education (HAVO) and pre-university education (VWO). Some 45% of students in the third year of secondary education take part in one of these programmes.

Labour-oriented practical training (*praktijkonderwijs*) is available for learners not capable of entering pre-vocational education.

### Upper secondary VET

Learners aged 16 or above can enter upper secondary VET (MBO). Three structural elements determine provision of MBO programmes, with differentiation according to:

- level: upper secondary vocational education has four levels leading to EQF levels 1 to 4. Student admission to a level depends on the diploma obtained in prior education. Admission to level 1 programmes is limited to learners without a prior qualification at lower secondary level. It is possible to progress within upper secondary VET and the highest level (leading to EQF 4) gives access to higher VET programmes offered by universities of applied sciences;
- area of study: upper secondary VET programmes are available in four areas ('sectors'): green/agriculture, technology, economics and care/welfare;
- learning pathway: upper secondary VET has a school-based pathway (BOL) and a dual pathway (BBL). In the school-based pathway, work placements in companies make up at least 20% of study time. In the dual pathway (apprenticeship), students combine work-based learning with school-based instruction; this often

involves learning at work four days a week and one day at school.

In upper secondary VET, the desired outcomes of qualifications are defined in the national qualification system. Occupational standards cover one qualification profile or several interrelated ones. Social partners and education institutions represented in sectoral committees have legal responsibility to develop and maintain these standards. Once approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (the Ministry of Economic Affairs for agricultural programmes), schools – in cooperation with enterprises providing work-based learning – develop curricula based on the qualification profiles.

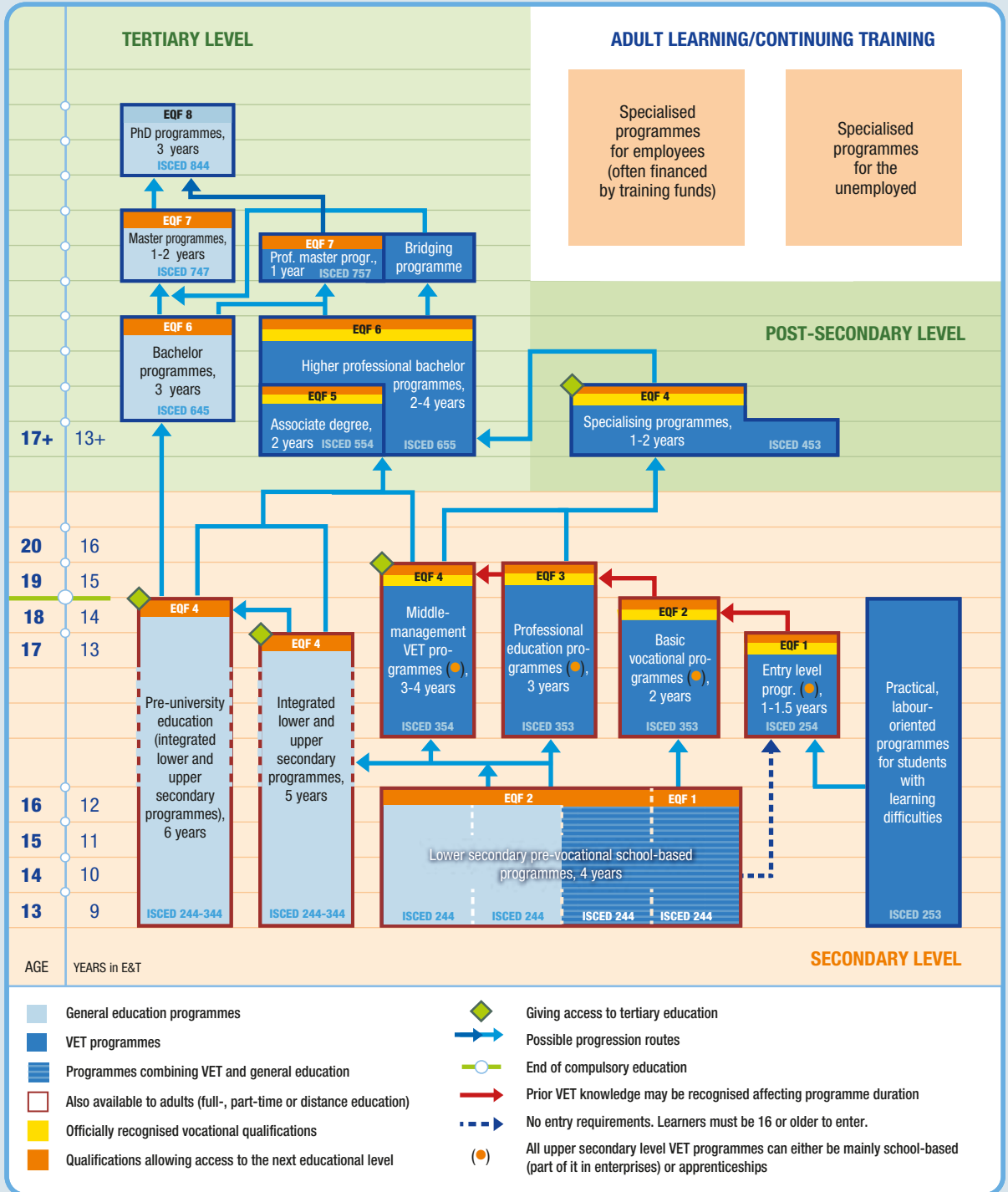
### Tertiary VET

Higher professional education (tertiary level VET, HBO) is open to students with upper secondary general education diplomas and graduates of level 4 upper secondary VET programmes. Around 50% of such VET graduates enter the job market; the rest continue to higher professional education. Most pursue a four-year professional bachelor degree programme which, on completion, can give access to a professional master degree programme, an option not yet extensively used. Also, two-year associate degree programmes (short-cycle higher education) open to MBO level 4 graduates and leading to EQF 5 have recently been developed.

### Continuing VET

There is no institutional framework for continuing vocational education and training (CVET). Provision is market-driven with many suppliers. Dual VET (the BBL pathway) can also function as CVET for adults. Social partners stimulate CVET through sectoral training and development funds. In 2014, there were about 125 such funds. Most approach and finance training from an employability perspective. They help employees progress in their careers, sometimes even in other sectors, offer special arrangements for older workers, and support the development of effective human resource management policies at sector level. Most funds also support projects that help young people find employment or take initiatives to sustain or expand apprenticeship places.

# VET in the Dutch education and training system



## Distinctive features of VET

The heterogeneous and multifunctional nature of upper secondary VET in the Netherlands is unique. Key distinctive features are:

- most publicly funded VET is provided by large multisectoral regional training centres (ROCs) with an average student population of 12 000. Sector-specific schools and agricultural training centres also provide VET programmes. ROCs provide VET for young people and adults (IVET) and general education for adults. They are also active on the continuing VET market, with privately funded programmes. Government-regulated IVET programmes are also offered by private providers under certain conditions;
- school-based and dual pathways in upper secondary VET lead to the same diplomas. Participation in each corresponds to the economic cycle stages: in periods of economic boom, the number of students in the dual pathway increases, while it decreases in the school-based pathway; the opposite happens during an economic recession;
- education institutions have a relatively high degree of freedom to shape VET provision. The VET law only provides a broad framework outlining key elements at system level; institutions receive a lump sum for their tasks;
- the Netherlands promotes a culture of evidence-informed VET policy and practice and encourages innovation. Recent initiatives include providing VET schools regularly with up-to-date regional labour market information and early school leaving data, and implementing plan-do-check-act mechanisms as a basis for organisation and programme development. To reduce the gap between research and practice in education, research and intelligence are increasingly used to improve VET quality and effectiveness, not only by involving professional researchers, but also by encouraging teachers to engage in research activities. To encourage knowledge sharing, VET teachers have opportunities to present their research projects and findings to a wide VET audience, for instance during teacher days.

## Challenges and policy responses

Three principles, to some extent conflicting, are crucial for the VET system: accessibility, quality and efficiency. Striking a good balance so that each is applied optimally is a constant challenge.

In practical terms, this means that Dutch upper secondary VET works towards developing talents of its highly heterogeneous student population, from students who transfer to higher education to those for whom obtaining a basic qualification is difficult. VET and the qualifications it leads to have to be accessible to all target groups.

At the same time, the challenge is to raise the quality and effectiveness of upper secondary VET. Key objectives are to reduce early school leaving and to increase programme completion. Recently, basic skills requirements (language, elementary mathematics) were made stricter to improve quality. Central testing of these basic skills is currently being implemented in VET. The challenge for VET programmes is to keep a good balance between transversal skills and job-specific knowledge and skills. Raising quality is also a core aim of the 'teacher 2020' action plan launched by the Education Ministry and the VET sector, which encourages VET teachers to obtain a master degree and offers them flexible opportunities to do so.

A third challenge is to increase VET efficiency by moving towards an all-embracing streamlined qualification system for medium-level vocations and corresponding upper secondary VET programmes. Recent policy measures have reduced the number of qualifications while ensuring their availability across the country. More efficiency is also achieved by reducing the nominal duration of programmes in upper secondary VET, and by introducing new funding principles for VET providers, which combine per capita funding with incentives rewarding faster programme completion.

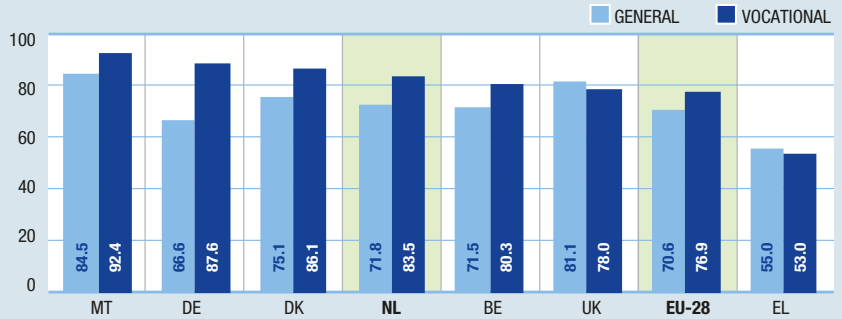
Guaranteeing the VET system's accessibility was high on the VET policy agenda until 2010; since then, efficiency and quality have been receiving more attention.



## Education and training in figures

### Employment rates of graduates by programme orientation

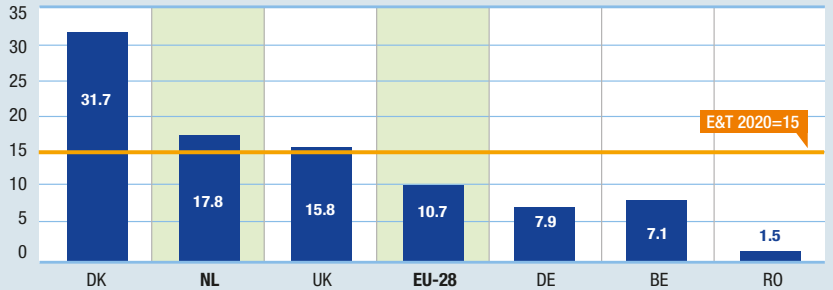
% of 20 to 34 year-olds with medium-level general or vocational education (ISCED 3-4) employed and not in education and training, 2014



NB: Break in time series.  
Source: Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 12.10.2015.

### Lifelong learning

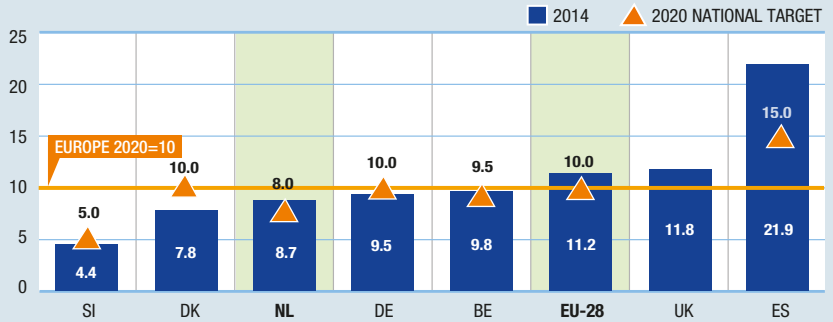
% of population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey, 2014



Source: Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 9.10.2015.

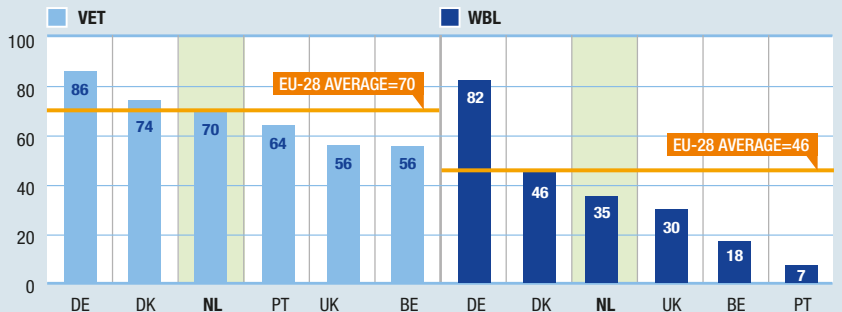
### Early leavers from education and training

% of early leavers from education and training, 2014



NB: Break in time series in all countries; definition for national target differs in DE, DK and ES; no national target in the UK.  
Source: Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 9.10.2015.

Share of employees (aged 24 to 65) with medium-level education (ISCED 3-4) who obtained a vocational qualification and whose highest level of education involved some learning at a workplace (% , 2014)



NB: VET: respondents of the survey described their highest qualification as vocational;  
WBL: studies involved some learning at a workplace (e.g. apprenticeships, internships, other forms of work-based learning).  
Source: Cedefop, European skills and jobs survey, 2014.



## Further information

- Cedefop (2016). *Vocational education and training in the Netherlands: short description*. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4142>
- Eurydice (2015). Netherlands: overview. In European Commission (ed.). *Eurypedia*. <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Netherlands:Overview>
- Statistics Netherlands, Education Executive Agency, and Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (2015). *Onderwijs in cijfers* [Key figures on education]. <http://www.onderwijsincijfers.nl/>

<a href="http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/ocw">www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/ocw</a>	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
<a href="http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/ez">www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/ez</a>	Ministry of Economic Affairs
<a href="http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/szw">www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/szw</a>	Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment
<a href="http://www.uuv.nl">www.uuv.nl</a>	Social security and labour market services agency
<a href="http://www.onderwijsraad.nl">www.onderwijsraad.nl</a>	Education Council
<a href="http://www.cbs.nl">www.cbs.nl</a>	Statistics Netherlands
<a href="http://www.statline.cbs.nl">www.statline.cbs.nl</a>	Statistical information
<a href="http://www.s-bb.nl">www.s-bb.nl</a>	Cooperation Organisation for VET and the Labour Market
<a href="http://www.vo-raad.nl">www.vo-raad.nl</a>	Dutch Council for Secondary Education
<a href="http://www.mбораad.nl">www.mбораad.nl</a>	The Netherlands Association of VET Colleges
<a href="http://www.vereniginghogescholen.nl">www.vereniginghogescholen.nl</a>	Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences
<a href="http://roa.sbe.maastrichtuniversity.nl">roa.sbe.maastrichtuniversity.nl</a>	Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market
<a href="http://www.ecbo.nl">www.ecbo.nl</a>	Centre for Expertise in Vocational Education and Training
<a href="http://www.refernet.nl">www.refernet.nl</a>	ReferNet Netherlands

This spotlight is based on input from ReferNet Netherlands.



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Publications Office

9 78-92-896-1949-3



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