



EUROPEAN  
ASSOCIATION FOR  
THE EDUCATION  
OF ADULTS

# **Country Report on Adult Education in THE NETHERLANDS**

Helsinki, 2011



**Please check our website for the latest version of this country report via the following url or QR-code, or contact us directly at [eaea-info\[at\]eaea.org](mailto:eaea-info[at]eaea.org).**

**<http://www.eaea.org/country/netherlands>**



**Please cite this report as: EAEA (2011): *Country report the Netherlands*. (Helsinki). [www.eaea.org/country/netherlands](http://www.eaea.org/country/netherlands). Date of Access.**



## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	3
Overview .....	4
Objectives of LLL and future concerns .....	5
Funding.....	5
Politics and Law .....	6
Specific legislative framework.....	6
Work and Income (Implementation Structure) Act (SUWI) .....	7
Future trends/key concerns/directions.....	9
Structure overview.....	11
Key Providers/Main institutions/Sources for Adult Education .....	11
Secondary vocational education .....	11
- Regional Training Centres (ROCs).....	11
- Agricultural Training Centres (AOCs) .....	12
National Qualification Structure .....	12
Adult education .....	13
National bodies .....	14
Universities .....	15
e-learning.....	15
References.....	16

## Introduction

This Report covers the situation of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in the Netherlands. It is divided into two sections. The section *Policy and Politics* gives an overview of the key policy currently in force, and also outlines the main legislation or political situation in the country. *Structure and Providers* gives a more detailed look at the organizational structures, and also outlines the main adult education providers, mainly looking at non-formal and informal learning.

We want to thank our members for their contributions to this reflection on the adult education situation in the Netherlands as far as possible as of 2010/2011. Inevitably there will be new things emerging within the ever changing situation of adult education, but we believe the majority of the information provided will be relevant and useful for the foreseeable future. However, to keep the resource accurate and up to date we are open to suggestions to improve the texts. If you feel there is something you can add about your country please contact us via email at [eaea-info\[at\]eaea.org](mailto:eaea-info[at]eaea.org).



## Overview

Lifelong learning has been prioritised in The Netherlands over the last decades, and **access to adult education** for as many people as possible is often cited as an important or high priority goal. Lifelong learning and adult education is linked to the idea of **self reliance** and **personal achievement** in society, but also strongly connected to **employability and vocational training** to the point where adult education and vocational education are often difficult to separate (or at least as seen by the Ministry of Education in terms of organisational structure and provision). They both emphasise **basic skills** and qualifications for workers to secure their positions or enhance their work life, which is seen to reflect in the **labour market** and society as a whole. To this aim educational institutions are given a **high level of autonomy**, and are encouraged to put the needs of the student first, especially related to devising learning pathways to meet the needs of **disadvantaged students**.

However, this importance of lifelong learning has not yet been transformed into structural state funding. In fact currently almost 50% of adult education is provided by **private non governmental institutions** with no state funding (local folkhigschools, local community centres and commercial providers).

It is, however, also common that people access **short vocational training courses**, workshops and seminars **through their employer**, as there is significant funding invested in this annually. Learners can also undertake private professional training, which can amount to an acknowledged diploma (VWO, MBO, HBO, WO), or post initial education courses (marketing, accountancy, ICT, secretarial, administrative, languages etc.) The local **folkhighschools** also provide such courses.

Another key concern with adult education in the Netherlands is related to **integration and social assimilation of immigrants**. This usually takes the form of a compulsory **civic integration programme**, including the Dutch language, but also has a focus on providing opportunities for immigrant to gain professional skills and qualifications in order for them to find work of a suitable level. The courses aim to increase the **self-reliance** of newcomers, and give them more opportunities to undergo further training and find work.

There are also courses providing a broad basic education which teach the skills needed for people to function independently in everyday situations, for instance when in contact with a child's school or the healthcare services. They include speaking, reading, listening and arithmetic, and some also aim to foster self reliance at a minimum level with, for instance, **social skills**.



## Objectives of LLL and future concerns

Social trends and the need for lifelong learning have made adult and vocational education of crucial importance for individuals, the labour market and society as a whole. One of the aims is to ensure that **every person is able to obtain a minimum basic qualification**. The learner should come first, meaning that institutions must offer courses that are geared to the needs of people who have no job experience, employed people and those seeking work. A priority for the future is that adult and vocational education courses should be better attuned to each other. Various options will be available, both full time and part time, to suit the learner's personal circumstances and preferences.

It is also a future priority that a new **quality assurance system** should be introduced to improve the quality of teaching, together with a funding system designed to **encourage better performance**. An example is the introduction of performance-related grants for MBO students (post 18 years tertiary education aimed towards vocational training). Adult education is also seen as important in the Netherlands for various purposes, including preparation for vocational training, assimilation and social integration of migrants and the personal and social development of people who are **at risk of becoming marginalised**.

## Funding

There are currently several funding routes for Adult Education in the Netherlands:

1. Institutions receive income from contract activities for **companies** and private individuals. This is the case for most of adult education in the Netherlands (offered by **private non-formal** education institutions).
2. Contribution from participants and students. Participants and students pay **course fees** to the institutions. Students on vocational training courses (BOL) pay fees to the Minister and are eligible for student finance.
3. Municipality funding.
  - a. The central government budget for adult education is allocated to the municipalities on the basis of the number of inhabitants over the age of 18, the number of ethnic minorities and the number of adults with an educational disadvantage.
  - b. The municipal **authorities then buy in adult education courses** by concluding contracts with the **regional training centres (ROCs)**.
  - c. The municipalities receive a separate "**participation budget**", for which the Ministry of Internal Affairs is responsible, for civic integration courses for **ethnic minorities** (bought in from the ROCs).
4. Government funding.



- a. **The Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB)** (see below) governs the funding of adult and vocational education.
- b. **The Minister of Education, Culture and Science** funds vocational education courses directly, based partly on the number of students per course/learning pathway and partly on the number of certificates awarded per institution
- c. The Minister funds the **knowledge centres for vocational education** and business on the basis of the number of qualifications devised, the number of training companies recognised as such and the number of practical training places (BPV places) filled.

## Politics and Law

### Specific legislative framework

#### Adult and Vocational Education Act

The Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB), which entered into force on 1 January 1996, brings together the various forms of adult and vocational education in a single statutory framework. The Act was introduced in stages between 1 January 1996 and 1 January 2000 beginning with the introduction of the qualification structure for vocational education in 1997. The last group of new regional training centres (ROCs) opened their doors in 1998, and offer a complete range of adult and vocational education courses under one roof. Finally, on 1 January 2000, a new funding system was introduced. Under this system, institutions are funded partly on the basis of student numbers by course and learning pathway, and partly on the basis of numbers gaining qualifications.

At the heart of the Act are the national qualification structures for adult and vocational education. Each qualification structure is a system of full and partial qualifications, each with its own diploma or certificate. Private educational institutions can take part in the national qualifications structure for vocational education subject to the same conditions as government-funded institutions, although they are not entitled to funding.

One of the Act's aims is to ensure that every person is able to obtain a minimum basic qualification. Educational institutions are free under the terms of the Act to devise learning pathways tailored to the needs of educationally disadvantaged students. As well as a socio-economic function (matching supply to demand, aiming towards greater employability), the Act therefore also has a socio-cultural function (mainly integration of disadvantaged groups, and greater social participation).

The Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB) also contains measures to bring education more into line with the world of work. The knowledge centres for



vocational education and business form the link between vocational education and the business sector organisations. Organised by sector, they are managed by representatives of employers and employees, and in most cases, educational institutions. The centres are responsible for developing a clear qualification structure setting out the knowledge and skills required by employers. They also decide which companies or organisations are qualified to provide practical training, doing so on the basis of specific criteria. Employers meeting these criteria receive official recognition and are entered in the knowledge centre's register.

The WEB Implementation Decree regulates the funding of vocational education and the knowledge centres for vocational education and business, and central government grants to adult education institutions. The Manpower Services Act provides a statutory framework for training measures for the unemployed.

### **Work and Income (Implementation Structure) Act (SUWI)**

Centres for Work and Income (CWI) have been set up throughout the Netherlands as a direct result of the introduction of the Work and Income (Implementation Structure) Act (SUWI), which entered into force on 1 January 2002. The motto of the new Act, drafted by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, is 'work above income'. The role of the CWIs is to serve the unemployed, other jobseekers and employers by bringing together supply and demand in one place. The services they provide are geared towards helping jobseekers find work and employers to fill their vacancies, in both cases as quickly as possible. Where necessary, an intake interview is held to collect and assess information in order to establish whether an individual is entitled to unemployment or social assistance benefit.

Another result of the new Act is the merger of the National Social Insurance Institute (LISV) and the existing benefit agencies (GAK, Cadans, GUO, etc.) to form a single agency, the Employee Insurance Schemes Implementing Body (UWV). In 2002, the basic services previously provided by manpower services were taken over by the CWIs. The CWIs have also taken over most of the other statutory tasks performed in the past by manpower services, such as support for jobseekers and benefit claimants in seeking work and support for employers in finding employees. The CWIs help to increase the transparency of the labour market by collecting data; the availability of relevant market information plays an essential part in matching supply and demand quickly and efficiently and will enable individual jobseekers and employers to take the initiative themselves. In this light, the centres provide information and advice on employment, the labour market and social security matters. They also support sectoral, regional and occupational group-specific initiatives, where necessary and possible.



The government's aims are as follows:

- to establish an operational network of approximately 130 Centres for Work and Income;
- to find suitable work for jobseekers by offering a job placement service (and where necessary arranging for benefit) so that they are able to re-enter the labour market as quickly as possible;
- to offer an appropriate service to every employer that registers a vacancy at a CWI, either via access to [www.werk.nl](http://www.werk.nl), the vacancies and job applicants database, or by putting forward suitable candidates so that vacancies are filled as quickly as possible.

### **Training measures**

Employees without a basic qualification (equivalent to secondary vocational education (MBO), level 2) who were previously unemployed are often the first to lose their jobs when there is a downturn in the economy. In order to ensure that this group has a better chance of staying in work, in the Netherlands it is seen as essential that they have the opportunity, while working or before starting a job, to obtain a basic qualification. Until now, the following instruments have been deployed for this purpose:

- reductions in tax and social insurance contributions to offset the wage costs of employees on day release schemes;
- training for the employed to basic qualification level, upgrading to MBO level 4 and cross-sectoral training. (These types of training are currently funded with a grant from the European Social Fund (ESF)).

As of 2002 employers have also been eligible for a reduction in their tax and social insurance contributions to offset the extra costs of training and supervising employees who subsequently obtain a basic qualification and who had to abandon a training scheme in order to accept their current job or did not have a basic qualification when they started work and were not already receiving training. The size of the potential target group is estimated at 150,000 people a year.

### **Newcomers Integration Act**

Furthermore, it is compulsory under the Newcomers Integration Act for all newcomers to the Netherlands to attend special courses designed to help them integrate into Dutch society.





## Future trends/key concerns/directions

### APL - 'Earlier acquired competencies'

Currently it seems that one of the directions policy will take in the future is trying to bridge the perceived conceptual jump from formal to non-formal and informal learning routes whilst still maintaining the recognition of earlier acquired competencies (APL). APL - EVC (recognition of acquired competencies) is increasingly used as an important instrument to facilitate developments towards lifelong learning.

In the Netherlands at present it is seen that this is leading to a lack of coherence between the world of learning and the world of work. However, an integration of the two worlds might be attained by stimulating work-based learning (or dual programmes) in HBO's as well as universities (particularly at master and doctoral level).

### Learning & Working

This has been endorsed by a special Project Directorate Learning & Working, initiated by Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) and at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW). It is based on the belief that the knowledge economy requires continual learning as well as work throughout people's lives, and that these two activities support each other. Employers, employees, job seekers, the government, Centres for Work and Income (CWI) and education institutions in 44 regions have demonstrated over the past years that much can be achieved with co-operation and ambition.

Over the last three years, the government members aimed to see another 90,000 people complete work-based training programmes. In order to achieve this, the number of trajectories completed each year was stepped up. Together with municipalities, Centres for Work and Income, the Social Security Agency (UWV), employers and educational institutions, efforts were made to achieve lifelong learning in the region. Another spearhead of the government's Learning & Working policy that has been realised was to give 30,000 difficult-to-place job seekers better chances on the labour market through training. Learning & Working also contributed to 20,000 APL trajectories for working youth without a basic qualification for the labour market (a level 2 Secondary Vocational Education qualification - MBO 2).

### Flexible and efficient education

Flexibility is also a key future concern in the Netherlands, as it is believed that adults must be able to combine learning with other activities, such as work, family care and free time, meaning flexible education is a prerequisite. Unfortunately,



public educational institutions are still somewhat inadequately equipped to organise customised programmes for adults so there is room for improvement on this level.

### **Reaching citizens and employers**

Another area for development is that citizens and employers are often not aware of training opportunities for adults. Nor is there enough of a sense of urgency about lifelong learning.

### **Further decentralisation of funding**

By the implementation of the broader 'participation fund' (a merger of different sub-budgets) adult education has to compete on local level with funds for the provision of the handicapped or social welfare (etc). The new government has shown clear intentions to considerably down-size the national budgets provided for ABE and civic integration, as well as for re-integration into education.

### **National Qualification Framework**

The Netherlands is currently developing a national qualification framework: the **NLQF (Netherlands Qualification Framework)**. This is, for the Netherlands, an important step to put the aims of lifelong learning on the agenda. The NLQF covers all qualification levels within the Netherlands. These descriptions are matched to the standard descriptions of the European Qualification Framework lifelong learning (EQF). All education sectors can be ranked in the levels of the NLQ, from professional education to general education, from initial education to adult education and including both formal and non-formal qualifications. This facilitates and stimulates the lifelong learning system, as the comprehensive NLQF adds to the transparency of the Dutch formal, non-formal and informal learning systems. It also increases the ability to validate earlier acquired competences, which can be equated to the NLQF to gain a comparable level.

### **Participation**

From 2008 there were in the Netherlands 6.6 million working people in the age of 25 up to 65 years. Largely two thirds took part in some kind of courses during the previous year.

Work is frequently a reason not to participate in courses (around 20 per cent), mainly because the course was seen as incompatible with working hours or because the employer would not support the course financially. Another main reason for lack of participation is obstacles of age or health (18 per cent).



## Structure overview

The structure of adult education is similar to that of the compulsory education, in that it is characterised by a **centralised system for content** but a **decentralised system for provision and access**. In short this means that what is being taught is under guidelines from the Ministry of Education Culture and Science (including centralised funding), but the educational institutions and therefore the provision of the education falls under **the responsibility of local municipal authorities**. The main target groups for the local municipal authorities are **illiterate adults, immigrants and elderly people** and also specific groups such as young mothers or the long-term unemployed.

The knowledge and skills required of teachers in adult and vocational education are specified in the Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB). Qualified secondary school teachers may also teach adult and secondary vocational courses; however graduates who have not undergone teacher training are required to obtain a **certificate of competence**, as designated by ministerial order. Certificates of competence are also required of people who have at least **three years practical experience in the profession** for which the course trains, or have gained the necessary skills through a combination of training and experience.

## Key Providers/Main institutions/Sources for Adult Education

### Secondary vocational education

The aim of secondary vocational education, as defined in the Adult and Vocational Education Act, is to provide both theoretical instruction and practical training in preparation for a wide range of occupations for which a vocational qualification is necessary or useful. It also furthers the general education and personal development of students and helps them to play an active part in society.

### - Regional Training Centres (ROCs)

There are 41 **regional training centres** (ROCs) offering a complete range of adult and vocational education courses, both full-time and part-time. On 1 January 1998 institutions which were not part of an ROC ceased to be eligible for government funding with the exception of 13 **specialist colleges** providing training for a specific branch of industry. Two other institutions have been granted exemption on religious grounds, two are attached to Inholland, an institution of higher professional education and two are attached to institutes for the deaf.



## - Agricultural Training Centres (AOCs)

**Agricultural courses** are now provided at agricultural training centres (AOCs). **Vocational education courses** in the agriculture and natural environment sector are the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality. The field which is subject to government policy - provided in the regional training centres in the form of adult basic education and literacy courses - is diminishing slowly over the years, with exception of the civic integration courses. However, this is set to further diminish in the future as the government have decided that in 2013 integration courses will **no longer be subsidised**.

## National Qualification Structure

The **national qualification structure** for vocational education, comprising all qualifications and partial qualifications and the relevant diplomas and certificates, was introduced in 1997. The courses are divided into four levels. Students can take these courses consecutively, as the diploma from one course serves as the entry requirement for the next. For each course there are in principle two learning pathways:

- **vocational training (BOL)** where practical training will take up between 20% and 60% of the course;
- **block or day release (BBL)** where practical training will take up more than 60% of the course.

Secondary vocational education (MBO) provides both theoretical instruction and practical training in preparation for the practice of a wide range of occupations for which a vocational qualification is necessary or useful. It also furthers the **general education** and **personal development** of students and helps them to play an active part in society. Its main target group is young people **from the age of sixteen**. Vocational education within the meaning of the Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB) does not include higher professional education (HBO).

All courses within the qualification structure are entered in the **Central Register of Vocational Courses** (CREBO). This register records:

- which institutions provide which courses;
- what the exit qualifications are;
- which learning pathway is involved and
- which of the partial qualifications awarded are subject to external validation.

The exit qualifications comprise an overview of the knowledge and skills students should have gained by the end of the course. The register also indicates which



courses are funded by the government and which bodies are authorised to validate examinations. Anyone who wishes may consult the register to find out what courses are on offer and how they fit into the qualification structure.

Private (i.e. non-government-funded) educational institutions can incorporate their courses into the new system subject to the same conditions as government-funded institutions.

The courses vary in length:

- training to assistant level: 6 to 12 months (level 1);
- basic vocational training: 2 to 3 years (level 2);
- professional training: 2 to 4 years (level 3);
- middle-management training: 3 to 4 years (level 4)
- specialist training: 1 to 2 years (level 4)
- other courses, e.g. computer courses: at least 15 weeks.

Courses lead to qualifications for successively higher levels of professional practice, middle-management and specialist training courses being the fourth and highest level. For each course there are in principle two learning pathways: vocational training where practical training will take up between 20% and 60% of the course and block or day release where practical training will take up more than 60% of the course.

## Adult education

Adult education is geared to furthering the personal development of adults and their participation in society by developing their knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes in a way that fits in with their needs, potential and experience and the needs of society. Where possible, it brings students up to the level required for admission to vocational education courses. Adult education does not include any form of higher education. The main part of adult education in the Netherlands is **non-formal** either related to **local policies** or in the **private sector**. This non-formal education is in many respects distinct from formal education:

- The learner is in the centre of the learning process
- Course and learning content are adapted to the training requirements of participants.
- There is a strong connection to changes in the professional field
- Technological advances are followed and applied
- Training is adapted directly to changing requirements of the labour market.



- Teachers have practical experience in the professional field for which they teach
- The pathways are flexible and varied, customer-specific and demand-oriented.
- Individual and independent education is possible
- Participants have options and control over place and time of study
- Accreditation of prior learning - APL - (EVP and EVC) is taken into account
- The output of training and training investments are measurable

There is opportunity for a wide variety of study options: full-time and part-time learning, active learning & work combined (dual system), E-learning (CD-ROM, Internet, etc.), blended learning (combinations of learning methods), tailor-made job training and development, and in-company training.

## National bodies

The different sectors which make up adult and vocational education are represented by national bodies. These bodies primarily act as centres **of knowledge** and expertise and they also work to ensure the establishments offer sufficient good **quality** work placements to integrate training with the needs and realities of the work place and labour markets. Work experience was made compulsory in the Adult and Vocational Education Act (see Politics and Law in 'Policy and Politics') to guarantee the relevance of the courses to practice, and thus strengthen the ties between education and the labour market.

These national bodies currently are:

- the **Bve Council** (association of Vocational Education and Training-colleges)
- the **AOC Council** (association of agricultural colleges)
- **PAEPON** (platform for private teaching institutions)
- **Colo** (association of national bodies for vocational training)
- the **JongerenOrganisatie Beroepsonderwijs** (association of young people in vocational education)
- **The 'Nieuwe BV'** (expertise network for non-formal adult education and social participation)
- **Foundation ABC**, Union of adult literacy learners



## Universities

In the Netherlands, university education focuses on training in academic disciplines, the independent pursuit of scholarship and the application of scholarly knowledge in the context of a profession and aims to improve understanding of the phenomena studied in the various disciplines and generate new knowledge. There are currently (2010) thirteen 'regular' universities in the Netherlands, including three technical universities and the Agricultural University in Wageningen, which is financed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality. Besides these, there are over 40 colleges offering different programmes for a variety of professions in a range of social areas.

Institutions for **higher professional education** (HBO institutions) provide theoretical and practical training for occupations for which a higher vocational qualification is either required or useful. Graduates find employment in various fields, including middle and high-ranking jobs in trade and industry, social services, health care and the public sector. In addition to government grants, these institutions rely on tuition fees and revenue from external work (primarily contract education).

In 2002, the main change in higher education was the implementation of the Bachelor and Master degree system, which is intended to give students greater **international mobility**. In concordance with this shift, the value of study programs must be more easily recognisable, and they will be **accredited** to indicate quality.

## e-learning

- Open Universiteit

The main provider for distance and e-learning in The Netherlands is the Dutch Open University (Open Universiteit), founded in 1984 by the government with the aim of offering university level education to those without formal qualifications and in a more accessible way. The Open Universiteit offers modular short courses, Bachelors and Masters degrees and short courses including short vocational training courses, postgraduate courses and short undergraduate programmes, which are developed in co-operation with universities of professional education (HBO), academic universities, professional bodies or commercial companies. There are also a number of short courses provided free of charge which are entirely online.





## References

Written in association with Learn for Life, with extensive input and support from Jumbo Klercq

Educational system in The Netherlands, Eurydice-Report | 23-12-2005 | OCW  
<http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/rapporten/2005/12/23/education-system-in-the-netherlands.html>

OECD Thematic Review on Recognition of non-formal and informal learning, Country Background Report for the Netherlands May 10thth 2007  
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/4/22/41680313.pdf>

Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Vocational education, training and adult education, <http://english.minocw.nl/english/education/369/Vocational-education-training-and-adult-education.html>

Eurydice report - The Netherlands,  
[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/eurybase\\_full\\_reports/NL\\_EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/eurybase_full_reports/NL_EN.pdf)

Colo, <http://www.colo.nl/>

Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Higher Education  
<http://english.minocw.nl/english/education/363/Higher-education.html>

The Open Universiteit in the Netherlands, <http://www.ou.nl/eCache/DEF/36.html>

Nederlandse Raad voor Training en Opleiding (NRTO) <http://www.nrto.nl>

Netherlands Qualification Framework (NLQF) <http://www.nlqf.nl>

Educational system in The Netherlands, Eurydice-Report | 23-12-2005 | OCW  
<http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/rapporten/2005/12/23/education-system-in-the-netherlands.html>

OECD Thematic Review on Recognition of non-formal and informal learning, Country Background Report for the Netherlands May 10thth 2007  
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/4/22/41680313.pdf>

Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Vocational education, training and adult education, <http://english.minocw.nl/english/education/369/Vocational-education-training-and-adult-education.html>





Eurydice report - The Netherlands,  
[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/eurybase\\_full\\_reports/NL\\_EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/eurybase_full_reports/NL_EN.pdf)

Colo, <http://www.colo.nl/>

Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Higher Education  
<http://english.minocw.nl/english/education/363/Higher-education.html>

The Open Universiteit in the Netherlands, <http://www.ou.nl/eCache/DEF/36.html>

Nederlandse Raad voor Training en Opleiding (NRTO) <http://www.nrto.nl>

Netherlands Qualification Framework (NLQF) <http://www.nlqf.nl>