



Independent national experts network in the area of adult education/adult skills

Full Country Report – Netherlands

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1.0 COUNTRY OVERVIEW

1.1 Trends for the entire population

1.1.1 Employment rate – entire population

Table 1.1: Evolution of employment rate - national average (2010-2016) compared to EU data

Geographical area	Years									Targets	
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	EU 2020	National 2020
EU-28 average	:	67.9	68.6	68.6	68.4	68.4	69.2	70	71	75% of the 20-64 year-olds in employment	80
Member State	74.2	75.1	76.8	76.4	76.6	75.9	75.4	76.4	77.1		

Source: Employment rates by age and educational attainment level (%) Eurostat code lfsa_ergaed, last updated 25 April 2017.

Explanatory note: This table compares the average employment rate of the population (ISCED all levels) aged 20 to 64 in a given Member State over the period 2000-2016 to EU targets and average, including the EU2020 target, national 2020 targets and the average EU employment rate for 2016.

-Comparison to EU2020 target

In comparison with the EU2020 target of 75 per cent, the Dutch employment rate has already stood higher than this for over a decade. Even in the crisis years (2013-2014), the employment rate sat above the EU2020 target level.

-Comparison to National 2020 target

The National 2020 target is set at 80 per cent. The national employment rate increased by 1 percentage point between 2014 and 2015 and by 0.7 percentage point between 2015 and 2016 and there are still four years to bridge the 2.9% gap (77.1 per cent - 80 per cent). It is realistic, also given the positive signals on the development of the Dutch economy that the National 2020 target will be reached (under the assumption that the economy will continue to recover).

-Comparison between 2016 national data and the EU-28 average for 2016

The Dutch employment rate is on average 6 percentage points higher than the EU28 average. In 2016 the EU28 average was 71 per cent and the Dutch rate was 77.1 per cent.

-Evolution over time

The recovery of the labour market continued in 2016 and the employment rate (20-64 year-olds) increased to 77.1 per cent. It surpassed the pre-crisis rates of 2010-2012 (of 76.8% and 76.4% respectively). The Statistical Office reported that as of 2016 the labour market has left the economic crisis behind, at this point, the number of jobs reached a new record and more people were in work than ever before. In addition, the total number of worked hours in 2016 was again higher than the pre-crisis levels (in 2008).¹

1.1.2 Participation rate – entire population

Table 1.2: Evolution of participation rate in education and training - national average (2010-2016) compared to EU data

Geographical area	Years									Targets	
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	EU 2020	National 2020
EU-28 average	:	9.6	9.3	9.1	9.2	10.7	10.8	10.7	10.8		
Member State	15.5	15.9	17	17.1	16.9	17.9	18.3	18.9	18.8	15% of adults in lifelong learning (LLL)	20% of adults in lifelong learning (LLL) ²

Source: Participation rate in education and training by sex and age (%), Eurostat code trng_ifse_01, last updated 25 April 2017.

Explanatory note: This table compares the participation rate in lifelong learning of adults aged 25-64 to EU data over the period 2000-2016.

-Comparison to EU2020 target

At 18.8%, the Dutch participation in lifelong learning rate has surpassed the EU2020 target of 15 per cent. The target has, in fact, exceeded target for more than a decade.

¹ CBS (2017), De arbeidsmarkt in cijfers 2016: <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/publicatie/2017/19/arbeidsmarkt-in-cijfers-2016>

² Golsteyn, Bart (2012), Waarom groeit leven lang leren in Nederland niet sterker ondanks de vele adviezen erover? Een onderzoek in opdracht van de Onderwijsraad, Netwerk Sociale Innovatie Universiteit Maastricht: <https://www.onderwijsraad.nl/upload/documents/publicaties/volledig/waarom-groeit-leven-lang-leren-in-nederland-niet-sterker.pdf> [accessed 14-07-2016], p. 4.

-Comparison between 2016 national data and the EU-28 average for 2016

In 2016 the participation rate in the Netherlands was 18.8 per cent. This is above the EU28 average of 10.8 per cent. The Netherlands is quite steady in the top-five of European Union Member States when it comes to participation of adults (25-64 year-olds) in lifelong learning. In absolute numbers, this amounts to 1.6 million adults. Better performing countries are Denmark, Sweden, Finland and France.³

-Evolution over time

The multi-annual trend is that in the Netherlands the participation rate is increasing at a slow pace. Between 2000 and 2016, the rate increased from 15.5 per cent to 18.8 per cent.

Some years have however indicated an on-year decrease. This is for instance the case in 2012 when the rate decreased by 0.2 per cent point. In 2016 a similar development is noticeable and the rate decreased by 0.1 per cent point.

1.2 Trends for low qualified adults

1.2.1 Share of low qualified adults

Table 1.3: Share of low-qualified adults (ISCED 0-2) – national data (2010-2016) compared to EU-28 average 2016

Geographical area	Years								
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU-28 average	:	30.6	27.3	26.6	25.8	24.8	24.1	23.5	23
Member State	33.9	28.2	27.7	27.5	26.6	24.2	24.1	23.6	22.9

Source: Population by educational attainment level, sex and age (%), Eurostat edat_ifse_03, last updated 25 April 2017.

Explanatory note: this table compares the percentage of the population with low qualifications (ISCED levels 0-2) in 2016 to the EU-28 average for 2016 and the period 2000-2016.

-Comparison to EU-28 average

The share of low-qualified adults (ISCED 0-2) in 2016 is at a similar level compared to the EU28 average. The Dutch rate stands at 22.9 per cent compared to the EU28 average of 23 per cent.

³ CBS (2016), Article Nederland in Europese top 5 'leven lang leren' 15-2-2016: <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2016/07/nederland-in-europese-top-5-leven-lang-leren-> [accessed 14-07-2016]

-Evolution over time

The share of low-qualified adults (ISCED levels 0-2) has decreased from 27.7 per cent in 2010 to 22.9 per cent in 2016. Taking an even longer period, from 2000 the Dutch rate decreased by 9 per cent points from 33.9 per cent to 22.9 per cent in 2016, and indicated a consistent drop across this period. In some years, the Dutch rate was above the EU-28 average (2010, 2011, 2012, and 2015).

1.2.2 *Employment rate of low skilled adults*

Table 1.4: Employment rates of low skilled adults (ISCED 0-2) – national data (2010-2016) compared to EU-28 average 2016

Geographical area	Years								
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU-28 average	:	55.7	53.8	53.4	52.7	52	52.6	53.2	54.3
Member State	58.3	59.5	61.4	61.7	61.7	60.3	58.8	60	60.7

Source: Employment rates by age and educational attainment level (%) Eurostat code lfsa_ergaed, last updated 25 April 2017.

Explanatory note: This table compares the employment rates of those with low qualifications (ISCED levels 0-2) to the EU average over the period 2010-2016.

-Comparison to EU-28 average

The employment rate of low-qualified adults (ISCED 0-2) in the Netherlands has stood above the EU28 average across recent years. This is the case in 2016 as well. The 2016 rate of 60.7 per cent is more than 6 percentage points higher compared to the EU28 average of 54.3 per cent.

-Evolution over time

The national employment rate of low qualified adults increased between 2000 and 2011 (58.3 per cent, and 61.7 per cent respectively). The rate stagnated (61.7 per cent in 2012) before fluctuating to the point of the 60.7 per cent rate reached in 2016.

The employment rate of low qualified adults (levels 0-2) is generally lower than the overall employment rate, though the employment situation of the low qualified is improving. In 2016, the employment rate of the low qualified is slowly climbing towards the pre-crisis rates of 61.7 per cent (2011 and 2012). In 2016, the total number of unemployed low qualified adults was lower than 200 thousand for the first time since 2011 (2016: 195

thousand; 2011: 175 thousand). The peak on unemployed low qualified adults was reached in the first quarter of 2014 (270 thousand).⁴

1.2.3 Participation rate of low skilled adults

Table 1.5: Participation rate of low skilled adults – EU average in comparison to national average

Geographical area	Years								
	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU-28 average	:	3.7	3.9	4	3.9	4.5	4.5	4.3	4.2
Member State	8.6	8.2	9.6	10.8	10.3	9.2	9	9.3	9.1

Source: Participation rate in education and training by sex and educational attainment (%), Eurostat code and trng_lfse_03, last updated 25 April 2017.

Explanatory note: This table compares the participation rate in lifelong learning of adults aged 25-64 with low qualification levels (ISCED levels 0-2) to EU data, over the period 2000-2016.

-Comparison to EU-28 average

The participation of low-qualified adults in lifelong learning in the Netherlands is higher than the EU-28 average. The participation rate in the Netherlands in 2016 was 9.1 per cent, compared to an EU-28 average of 4.2 per cent.

-Evolution over time

The participation of low-qualified adults in lifelong learning in the Netherlands has increased overall from 8.6 per cent in 2000 to 9.1 per cent in 2016. However, this overall increase of just 0.5 percentage points conceals a pattern of fluctuation in the rate.

As measured by the Labour Force Survey (LFS), in the years before 2011, the participation rate of those with low qualifications (ISCED 0-2) increased to 10.8 per cent, which had decreased to 9 per cent in 2014, then saw a slight increase to 9.3 per cent in 2015 but decreased again in 2016 to 9.1 per cent. The comparatively lower participation rate of low qualified adults can be explained (in part) due to the fact that low qualified adults often work in occupations and sectors that are less subject to change and innovation. In addition, continuous professional development is provided more often to higher qualified adults working in occupations that are subject to change (for instance medical specialists, lawyers and teachers).⁵ Interestingly, the participation rate evolution in the Netherlands shows a

⁴ CBS (2017), Arbeidsdeelname; binding met de arbeidsmarkt; 15 mei 2017: <http://statline.cbs.nl/Statweb/publication/?DM=SLNL&PA=82922NED&D1=5&D2=a&D3=9-12&D4=25-28,30-33,35-61,64,69&HDR=T,G2,G1&STB=G3&VW=T>

⁵ See: CBS (2016), Een Leven Lang Leren in Nederland; een overzicht, Sociaaleconomische trends.

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different pattern compared with the EU28 average evolution. In years when the EU28 average is increasing, the Dutch rate is going down (2011- 2014) and when the EU28 average is going down, the Dutch rate shows slight improvement (2015-2016).

2.0 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ADULT LEARNING SYSTEM

2.1 Main features and a concise summary of historic development

The adult education sector in the Netherlands is a very heterogeneous sector with no overarching legal, financial, structural framework. The history of the sector is therefore dependent on what part of the adult learning sector one is referring to. Before highlighting some historic developments, a mapping is provided of what the sector looks like. In order to understand on what part of the adult learning sector government policies focus on, a distinction should be made between state-regulated and non-state-regulated adult education. The state only funds what is state-regulated, however both state-regulated and non-state-regulated adult education can be privately funded as well. Here below an overview is provided of the landscape of adult learning in the Netherlands:

- **State-regulated and state-funded adult education:** State-regulated adult education is provided for persons over 18 to obtain a degree via second chance education. Also, people that face difficulties in reading, writing and other basic skills can access courses. Second chance education (secondary education: voortgezet algemeen volwassenenonderwijs: vavo) is the responsibility of the regional training centres (Regionale Opleidings Centra: ROC). The municipalities are responsible for providing opportunities in Dutch as a second language (NT2), and Dutch language and numeracy courses. Target groups eligible for participation included illiterate adults, immigrants and elderly people and also specific groups such as young mothers or the long-term unemployed.⁶ The municipalities buy in these courses from the regional training centres (Regionale Opleidings Centra: ROC). In addition, in recent years specific policy emphasis is placed on reducing low-literacy in the Netherlands.
- **State-regulated, but privately funded adult education:** In the Higher Education and VET sectors, courses can be provided by generally state-funded institutions (bekostigde instellingen), such as the ROCs, Universities of Applied Sciences (hogeschole) and Universities (Universiteiten); but also by non-state-funded institutions (niet-bekostigde instellingen), namely private providers (private aanbieders). It should be noted that providers offering initial education (VET colleges and universities) are generally state funded, but do not get additional funding to educate adults. In this respect the post-initial adult education provision itself is not state-funded. Hence, adults can access state-regulated education, leading to a formal qualification at each of the eight levels of the Netherlands Qualifications Framework (NQF)⁷. The participants however, have to pay the

⁶ Eurypedia article on Adult Education and Training:

https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Netherlands:Adult_Education_and_Training [accessed 20-10-2017].

⁷ Commissie NLQF - EQF (2011), Advies Commissie NLQF – EQF:

http://www.nlqf.nl/images/downloads/NLQF/c_Het_advies_van_de_Commissie.pdf [accessed 20-10-2017].

(whole) fees themselves (or costs are covered by employers) when the adult education is not related to basic skills and second chance education.⁸

- **Non-state regulated, privately funded adult education:** In addition to state-regulated education, all providers (state-funded and privately funded) can be active in providing non-state-regulated education. This form of adult learning can be vocational in-service training programmes, non-formal, liberal education programmes (e.g. languages, history), and informal learning (on the job, or as a pastime).

Private providers and employers play an important role in the Dutch adult education landscape as almost 85%⁹ of the adult education/learning is provided by the private sector. It should be emphasised that "in the Netherlands there is no real "CVET system". CVET is mainly regulated by social partners who promote CVET by providing on-the job and up-skilling for workers by means of the sectoral Labour Market and Training Funds. No institutional framework exists so the social partners, as well as the individual employers and employees are responsible. The provision of further training is market driven with a great many suppliers."¹⁰

The following table (2.1) provides an overview of the number of participants by level of education per age category in formal education and training. In total over 500,000 persons over 20 years of age participate in formal education, whereby a large part of those aged 25 and older are still following initial education programmes. Given that according to the Labour Force Survey almost 19% of the population participated in education and training (accounting for around 3 million adults), formal education and training programmes only accounts for a fraction of the total learners.

⁸ Although education and training costs are tax deductible. See for instance: Belastingdienst (2014), Aanvullende toelichting Bij voorlopige aanslag inkomstenbelasting 2014:

http://download.belastingdienst.nl/belastingdienst/docs/at_aftrek_studiekosten_andere_scholingsuitgaven_2014_ib2751t41fd.pdf [accessed 20-10-2017].

⁹ ECBO (2011) Een leven lang leren in 2010, p. 72

¹⁰ Panteia (2015), CVET in the Netherlands "Cooperation" Project Czech Republic – Netherlands: <http://www.panteia.nl/Over-Panteia/projecten-en-publicaties/Overzicht-publicaties/765650145%20CVET-in-the-Netherlands> [accessed 20-10-2017].

Table 2.1 Number of participants in formal education and training by level of education and age

	Age 20-24	Age 25+	Total
Level of education (i.e. basic, vocational, higher)			
Primary	0	0	0
Lower secondary	4,291	10,950	15,241
Upper secondary	149,262	114,558	263,820
Post-secondary non-tertiary education		0	
Short-cycle tertiary education		13,426	
Bachelor's or equivalent level		150,826	
Master's or equivalent level		101,939	
Doctoral or equivalent level		12,854	
			558,106

Source: Eurostat, Eurostat database table "Pupils and students enrolled by education level, sex and age (educ_uoe_enra02)", accessed 2017.08.21

To conclude, state-regulated and funded adult education is targeted at those lacking basic skills. Other types of state-regulated education (CVET and HE) are open for all, but privately funded. What is not state-regulated is also funded by the participating adults themselves (or supported by their employers). Hence national policies focus on the state-regulated, state-funded adult education, leaving a large part of the adult education sector open to free market dynamics.

Concerning historic developments, in the last decade the government mainly focused its policy priorities on low-literacy and numeracy projects. In 2005 it published its Action plan low-literacy (Aanvalsplan Laaggeletterdheid 2006-2010)¹¹. As a follow-up plan the 2012-2015 Functional Illiteracy Action Plan was published.¹² Another development is the decentralisation of social services to municipalities in 2015 and the changes in civil integration sources (see section 3.2.4).

¹¹ Ministerie van OCW (2005), Aanvalsplan Laaggeletterdheid 2006-2010: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2005/12/09/aanvalsplan-laaggeletterdheid-2006-2010> [accessed 20-10-2017].

¹² Ministerie van OCW (2011), Actieplan Laaggeletterdheid 2012-2015: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/volwassenenonderwijs/documenten/kamerstukken/2011/09/08/aanbiedingsbrief-actieplan-laaggeletterdheid-2012-2015-geletterdheid-in-nederland> [accessed 20-10-2017].

2.2 Provision

In this section the provision of adult learning is discussed. This includes both state-regulated and state-funded adult learning, and non-state regulated and funded adult learning.

2.2.1 *Helps adults improve their Basic Skills*

According to article 7.3.1 of the Adult and Vocational Education Act, adult education (educatie) covers the following types: 1) Second chance education (secondary education: voortgezet algemeen volwassenenonderwijs: vavo)); 2) Dutch as second languages (NT2), and; 3) Dutch language and numeracy. The provision that helps adults improve their basic skills relates usually to support in reading and writing. This provision is organised at municipality level and is organised by a high number of organisations. These include libraries, reading and writing foundation, ROCs, not-for-profit organisations and private providers.

On digital skills, there are many initiatives either funded by government initiatives or privately funded initiatives to try to increase the digital skills levels. Foundation Centre of Expertise Oefenen.nl (Stichting Expertisecentrum Oefenen.nl) provides an example of a support programme.¹³

2.2.2 *Helps adults achieve a Recognised Qualification*

The provision to help adults achieve a recognised qualification is legally embedded in the education laws for VET and HE (Adult and Vocational Education Act; Higher education and scientific research). These laws provide the framework for recognised qualifications to be obtained by young people and adults. Both state-funded and non-state funded providers can offer these recognised qualifications once the programmes are accredited.

In addition, there are possibilities for Accreditation of Prior Learning (Erkenning van eerder verworven competenties: EVC). The social partners support this EVC system.¹⁴

2.2.3 *Helps adults develop other knowledge and skills, not for vocational purposes*

The provision that helps adults develop other knowledge and skills, not (directly) for vocational purposes, is provided by a range of organisations, most noticeably, this includes Folkuniversities (Volksuniversiteiten). There are around 75 folkuniversities.¹⁵ There is no national framework or policy to support this provision. However, at municipality level, there is support to organisations (for instance in reducing housing costs). Besides the folkuniversities there are many private providers who are active.

¹³ See: <https://oefenen.nl/programma/soort/digivaardig> [accessed 20-10-2017].

¹⁴ See: <http://www.nationaal-kenniscentrum-evc.nl/> [accessed 20-10-2017].

¹⁵ See: <https://www.volksuniversiteit.nl/over-ons> [accessed 20-10-2017].

2.2.4 *Facilitates Transition to the Labour Market for unemployed people or those at risk of unemployment (ALMPs)*

The provision that facilitates transition to the labour market for unemployed people or those at risk of unemployment is organised through the PES and employers. The PES at municipality level arranges with providers (being public or private) to offer courses to unemployed people. Employers can organise, in cooperation with the PES, courses for the soon-to-be unemployed, to allow smooth transitions. In addition, employers, when cancelling labour contracts have to provide a 'transition fee' (transitievergoeding) to the employee that can be used to enrol in courses that ease the transition into new employment. Currently, there are initiatives to establish learning accounts or another system of financial incentives for adults that can be used for transitions as well (see section 3.5).

2.2.5 *Opens up Higher Education to adults*

Higher education is accessible for adult learners. Adults can enrol in regular higher education programmes at public providers, in part-time programmes (offered at more convenient times for working adults) or, they could enrol in higher education programmes offered by private providers. The introduction of the Associate Degree programme (a two-year higher education programme referenced to NQF/EQF level 5), facilitates an easier access to higher education for working adults. In addition, in 2016 pilots have started to make part-time higher education more attractive (Experiment flexibilization part-time education: experiment flexibilisering deeltijdonderwijs).¹⁶

2.2.6 *Enables adult employees to develop their work-related skills*

Provision that enables adult employees to develop their work-related skills is organised generally by the employers, and funded by employers and employees. It can be provided by the employers themselves (internal training), or provided by private providers.

¹⁶<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/hoger-onderwijs/experimenten-om-deeltijdonderwijs-flexibeler-te-maken/pilots-flexibilisering>

3.0 ADULT LEARNING POLICIES

3.1 Context

There is not an overarching policy and legal framework for adult learning; nor is there a national lifelong learning strategy. One part is not covered by policies and legal frameworks (non-state regulated; non-state funded adult learning); another part is covered by specific targeted policies and programmes (focus on illiteracy); yet another part is covered by general education policies and acts (higher education, VET) and part is covered by policies and programmes focusing on employment/employability.

3.1.1 Distribution of responsibilities regarding adult learning

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap: MinOCW) is responsible for the implementation of both the Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB: 1995) and the Secondary Education Act (WVO: 1963) and hence carries the responsibility for state-regulated adult education (leading to a formal qualification). According to article 7.3.1 of the Adult and Vocational Education Act (1995), adult education (educatie) covers the following types: 1) Second chance education (secondary education: voortgezet algemeen volwassenenonderwijs: vavo)); 2) Dutch as second languages (NT2), and; 3) Dutch language and numeracy.

As indicated, the legislative framework in relation to adult education (WEB and WVO) covers the state-regulated adult education, related to second chance and basic skills. Other types of state-regulated adult education (often referred to as post-initial education) such as vocational education and higher education, are covered by the respective legal frameworks without specific reference to adults.

3.1.2 Major national socio-economic strategies governing the provision of Adult Learning

There is not a national socio-economic strategy that explicitly refers to adult learning.

3.2 Adult learning policy framework

Adult education (educatie) is legally covered in the 'The Adult and Vocational Education Act' (Wet educatie en beroepsonderwijs: WEB 1995¹⁷), introduced in stages between 1996 and 2000. This act is mainly devoted to initial vocational education, but describes how adult education, focussing on basic skills, is organised as well. Recently (2010), the rules for determining the learning outcomes for education (language and numeracy) were

¹⁷ Adult and Vocational Education Act' (Wet educatie en beroepsonderwijs: WEB: <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0007625/2017-10-01/0> [accessed 20-10-2017].

implemented by law.¹⁸ Second chance education (voortgezet algemeen volwassenenonderwijs: vavo), aimed at obtaining a secondary education qualification is covered by the Adult and Vocational Education Act and the Secondary Education Act (Wet op het voortgezet onderwijs: WVO, 1963; revised in 1998)¹⁹.

3.2.1 *A summary of major developments/ changes since 2010*

The legislative changes (as discussed in section 3.2.4) impacted a number of key stakeholders in the adult learning field in the last years (since 2010). This concerns the following:

- Municipalities: To support the municipalities with the new tasks provided by the Participation Act. The Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) in partnership with the Adult Education Support Agency (Steunpunt volwasseneneducatie) and the Reading and Writing Foundation (Stichting Lezen en Schrijven) have produced a support document in 2015 entitled: 'More opportunities: the transition from adult education to the social domain' (De transitie van educatie naar het sociaal domein)²⁰.
- Regional training centres (ROCs): The ROCs were the main provider of civic integration courses for migrants. With the legislative change of 2012²¹, this part of their service has mainly been abolished. The role of ROCs in adult education is therefore diminished and given the competition with private providers, they experience difficulties becoming main players in the further education and training of adults.
- Higher education institutions: the flexibilisation of entrance pathways in higher education should allow more non-traditional students (amongst others adults) to enter higher education. Many initiatives are not specifically targeting adult learners but provide changes to the general institutional framework, making it easier for adults to enrol in higher education. An example of this is the implementation of the Associate Degree programmes (EQF level 5), which provides more opportunities for learners to advance their education pathway in higher education when already in employment.
- Given the enhanced liberty of municipalities to spend the Education budget and participation budget - and the new programme 'Tel mee met Taal' ('Count on Skills') and the new Act on Libraries - the role of libraries is strengthened as well in

¹⁸ Wet van 29 april 2010 tot vaststelling van regels over referentieniveaus voor de taal- en rekenvaardigheden van leerlingen (Wet referentieniveaus Nederlandse taal en rekenen)

¹⁹ Adult and Vocational Education Act and the Secondary Education Act (Wet op het voortgezet onderwijs: WVO): <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0002399/2017-08-01> [accessed 20-10-2017].

²⁰ VNG (2014), De transitie van educatie naar het sociaal domein: een handreiking voor gemeenten: <https://vng.nl/files/vng/20160119-transitie-educatie.pdf> [accessed 20-10-2017]

²¹ See for legal text: <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0020611/2014-03-29> [accessed 20-10-2017]

providing basic skills education and linking to local schools for preventive measures to combatting low literacy.²²

An important stakeholder in the last decade, also responsible for the consumption of a large proportion of the budget targeting people with low-literacy skills, is the Reading and Writing Foundation (Stichting lezen en schrijven²³). This is an initiative of H.R.H. Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands. The foundation was launched on May 27, 2004. The objective of the foundation is to devote attention to the 1.1 million Dutch citizens who are unable to participate fully within society due to literacy related problems.²⁴

An important development is the establishment and further implementation of the Netherlands Qualifications Framework (NLQF²⁵). More and more qualifications outside the formal education sector are being registered and included in the NLQF enhancing acknowledgements of learning outcomes achieved; mobility between sectors and education sectors.

3.2.2 *Main legislative act(s) governing the provision of adult learning*

The main acts that govern adult learning are the education laws:

- The Adult and Vocational Education Act (Wet educatie en beroepsonderwijs: WEB) of 1995.²⁶
- The higher education and scientific research act (Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek: WHW) of 1992²⁷
- Secondary Education Act (Wet op het voortgezet onderwijs: WVO) of 1963.²⁸

Based on a prior evaluation, the Adult Education part of the Adult and Vocational Education Act (Wet educatie en beroepsonderwijs²⁹) will be revised in 2017.

²² See for an overview: Cubiss (2015), Wetgeving rond participatie-samenleving biedt kansen voor bibliotheken: https://www.kb.nl/sites/default/files/20150113_infographic-gemeentelijke-wetten-laaggeletterdheid-2.pdf [accessed 20-10-2017]

²³ Stichting lezen en schrijven: <http://lezenenschrijven.nl/>

²⁴ Reading & Writing Foundation: <http://www.readingandwriting.eu/>

²⁵ See: <http://www.nlqf.nl/> [accessed 20-10-2017]

²⁶ Adult and Vocational Education Act' (Wet educatie en beroepsonderwijs: WEB): <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0007625/2017-10-01> [accessed 20-10-2017].

²⁷ higher education and scientific research act (Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek): <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0005682/2017-09-01> [accessed 28-09-2017].

²⁸ Secondary Education Act (Wet op het voortgezet onderwijs: WVO): <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0002399/2017-08-01> [accessed 20-10-2017].

²⁹ See for the legal text: <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0007625/2016-02-01> [accessed 20-10-2017]

3.2.3 *Main strategy(-ies)*

What comes close to being strategies are the action plans and programmes related to low literacy and the flexibilization of higher education and VET:

- In 2011, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science published the Action Plan 2012-2015.³⁰ The Action Plan strived to improve the literacy level of adults. This plan contained the following actions: 1) In adult education, focus on language and numeracy; 2) Increase quality and effectiveness of the courses; 3) Improve the transparency concerning price and quality of courses; 4) Test new innovative approaches in pilot-projects; 5) Improve mobilisation strategies to reach low-literate persons; 6) Monitor progress and effectiveness of the Action Plan.
- As a follow-up of the Action Plan, in 2016 a new programme was initiated and is currently being implemented. The action programme Count on Skills ('Tel mee met Taal')³¹ is a recent policy programme that is developed in cooperation with several departments, including the Ministry of Education, Culture & Science, the Ministry of Health, Welfare & Sport, and the Ministry of Social Affairs & Employment. The overall aim of the programme is to combat the perception that people with a low literacy level do not 'count' in society and to prevent people with limited language skills from becoming marginalised.
- The Policy Brief Leven Lang Leren. Brief van de regering (Life long learning. Letter from government)³² includes a number of initiatives that require adjustments of the legal framework for higher education and VET. To allow experimentation in higher education, a legal framework is developed to surpass some legal provisions³³.

3.2.4 *Main implementing act(s)*

Besides these acts, there are acts related to how adult learning is organised and offered at municipality level and specific acts related to how libraries are involved in adult learning and what are requirements for migrants in terms of civic integration. There have been a

³⁰ Ministerie van OCW (2011), Geletterdheid in Nederland, Actieplan laaggeletterdheid 2012-2015; <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/richtlijnen/2011/09/08/bijlage-1-actieplan-laaggeletterdheid-2012-2015-geletterdheid-in-nederland.html> [accessed 20-10-2017]

³¹ Ministerie van OCW (2016), Actieprogramma 'Tel mee met Taal'; <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/volwassenenonderwijs/documenten/kamerstukken/2015/03/06/actieprogramma-tel-mee-met-taal> [accessed 20-10-2017]

³² Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) (2014), Leven Lang Leren. Brief van de regering (Life long learning. Letter from government). 2014-2015. <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2014/10/31/kamerbrief-leven-lang-leren>
Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) (2015), Voortgangsrapportage Leven Lang Leren (Progress Life Long Learning policies). 2015-2016. <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2015/10/26/kamerbrief-over-voortgang-leven-lang-leren>

³³ A so-called 'Algemene Maatregel van Bestuur (AMvB)': see Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) (2015), Voortgangsrapportage Leven Lang Leren (Progress Life Long Learning policies). 2015-2016. P. 4: <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2015/10/26/kamerbrief-over-voortgang-leven-lang-leren>

number of changes in legislation in recent years that affect adult learning. These concern the following:

- Participation Act (1 January 2015): With the implementation of the Participation Act (Participatiewet³⁴) in 2015, municipalities are empowered to offer more customised schemes for different target groups at a distance from the labour market.
- Adult and Vocational Education Act (1 February 2016): The changes to the Adult and Vocational Education Act (Wet educatie en beroepsonderwijs³⁵) removed the obligation for municipalities to spend the budget allocated to 'adult education' to Regional VET centres (ROCs), enhancing competition between the public and private providers. The budget for adult education (including Dutch as a second language (NT2) is not integrated in the participation budget. Municipalities can decide for themselves how to spend the budget.³⁶
- Changes in the Library Act 2015 (1 January 2015)³⁷ increased the role of Libraries in the prevention of low literary through better cooperation with local schools.
- Changes with regard to civic integration courses (29 March 2014): Since 2006, migrants are obliged to pass a civic integration exam (Act on Civic integration (Wet inburgering)³⁸). In 2012³⁹ this Act was amended so that migrants need to pay for the courses and examination themselves. They are provided with the possibility of receiving a social loan.

3.3 National quantitative policy targets

In the current policy arena related to adult learning and lifelong learning, there are three policy priorities to mention⁴⁰; these are discussed in more detail here below:

- Policies on low-literacy/ low skilled
- Policies on establishing a learning culture
- Policies on decentralisation

³⁴ See for the legal text: http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0015703/geldigheidsdatum_01-01-2015 [accessed 20-10-2017]

³⁵ See for the legal text: <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0007625/2016-02-01> [accessed 20-10-2017]

³⁶ Min OCW (2013), Kamerbrief nader besluit toekomst educatie: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2013/05/16/kamerbrief-nader-besluit-toekomst-educatie> [accessed 20-10-2017]

³⁷ See for the legal text: Wet stelsel openbare bibliotheekvoorzieningen: <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0035878/2015-01-01> [accessed 20-10-2017]

³⁸ See for legal text: <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0020611/2009-01-01/1> [accessed 20-10-2017]

³⁹ See for legal text: <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0020611/2014-03-29> [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁴⁰ Identified by the author on the basis of an assessment of the national policies in the field of adult learning and lifelong learning.

Low literacy /low skilled

A recent mapping exercise on low-literacy revealed that one out of nine persons in the Netherlands is of low-literacy, which has severe consequences for society and the economy.⁴¹ 70 per cent of those with low literacy have a non-migrant background. Adults facing these difficulties also have more difficulties finding and maintaining a job. Half of those with low-literacy are unemployed or inactive. Reading difficulties can also lead to health problems, for instance when adults cannot read medical instructions.⁴²

Given this background, the policy priorities for adult education and adult skills development in the Netherlands focus mainly on basic skills education and combatting low literacy. The Dutch government sees mastery of Dutch as a precondition to fully participate in further learning, employment and society at large. The social costs of low-literacy are estimated at 556.4 million Euro (550 Euro per person of low-literacy).⁴³ There are a number of national initiatives related to this policy area. In relation to low-literacy, as a follow-up of the previous plan to combat low-literacy⁴⁴, in 2011, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science published the Action Plan 2012-2015.⁴⁵ The Action Plan strived to improve the literacy level of adults. This plan contained the following actions: 1) In adult education, focus on language and numeracy; 2) Increase quality and effectiveness of the courses; 3) Improve the transparency concerning price and quality of courses; 4) Test new innovative approaches in pilot-projects; 5) Improve mobilisation strategies to reach low-literate persons; 6) Monitor progress and effectiveness of the Action Plan. In addition to the Action Plan, the pilot programme Language for Life (Taal voor het Leven)⁴⁶ was initiated. This pilot programme helps communities and organisations to organise language training for people who have low levels of literacy and want to improve their reading, writing, speaking, numeracy skills or use a computer.⁴⁷ In this pilot the Language-test (Taalmeter⁴⁸) is developed to assess a person's literacy level.

⁴¹ De Greef, M., Nijhuis, J., Segers, M., (2013), Feiten & cijfers geletterdheid, Overzicht van de gevolgen van laaggeletterdheid en opbrengsten van investeringen voor samenleving en individu: http://lezenenschrijven.nl/algemeen/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/LS_literatuurstudie_170x240_def.pdf

⁴² See: Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (Ministerie van OCW) (2016), dossier Aanpak laaggeletterdheid: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/volwassenenonderwijs/inhoud/laaggeletterdheid> [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁴³ PwC (2013). Laaggeletterdheid in Nederland kent aanzienlijke maatschappelijke kosten

⁴⁴ Ministerie van OCW (2005), Aanvalsplan Laaggeletterdheid 2006-2010.

⁴⁵ Ministerie van OCW (2011), Geletterdheid in Nederland, Actieplan laaggeletterdheid 2012-2015; <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/richtlijnen/2011/09/08/bijlage-1-actieplan-laaggeletterdheid-2012-2015-geletterdheid-in-nederland.html> [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁴⁶ Taal voor het leven: <http://www.taalvoorhetleven.nl/> [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁴⁷ See: Taal voor het Leven (2016), Factsheet Slim samenwerken loont: Het ondersteuningsprogramma Taal voor het Leven helpt gemeenten en organisaties die aan de slag willen met de aanpak van laaggeletterdheid: https://taalvoorhetleven.nl/uploads/bestanden/Factsheet_Taal_voor_het_Leven_%28dec_2015%29_A4.pdf [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁴⁸ Taalmeter: <http://www.taalvoorhetleven.nl/over/de-aanpak>

As a follow-up of the Action Plan and the pilot programme, in 2016 a new programme was initiated and is currently being implemented. The action programme Count on Skills ('Tel mee met Taal')⁴⁹ is a recent policy programme that is developed in cooperation with several departments, including the Ministry of Education, Culture & Science, the Ministry of Health, Welfare & Sport, and the Ministry of Social Affairs & Employment. The overall aim of the programme is to combat the perception that people with a low literacy level do not 'count' in society and to prevent people with limited language skills from becoming marginalised.

The policy initiatives focus on the supply and take-up of learning provision of low-literate adults and on increasing the quality of courses targeting low-literate adults.

The objectives of the Count with Language programme are 1) that 45,000 new participants enter a language course to improve their language proficiency in the period 2016-2018, for them to score better in language proficiency tests and participation in society, including employment. and 2) that one million young children up to primary school age are reached with reading stimulation activities in order to increase their language skills and reading ability by 2018. The programme consists of the following action lines and contains both preventive measures (aimed at young people and curative measures (aimed at adults):

- Action line 1: Local network approach: The local network approach tested in the pilot Language for Life (Taal voor het Leven)⁵⁰ is extended to the whole country. By providing an infrastructure in each of the 35 labour market regions (arbeidsmarktregio's), 45,000 new participants in language trajectories will be reached. For this purpose a sustainable infrastructure, involving all main stakeholders will be established and by 2018 3,000 new language volunteers will be trained. In each region, at least one recognisable meeting point will be established (Taal punt).
- Action line 2 (consists of two parts):
- Language agreements (Taalakkoorden): In each of the 35 labour market regions (arbeidsmarktregio's), the sustainable infrastructure is agreed upon in Language Agreements. Municipalities can sign agreements with various employers and other partners to put language proficiency on the (sectoral) agenda.
- Arrangements on language education: a small stimulation budget is made available to employers to provide additional practice-oriented language training for low-literate people.
- Action line 3: Stimulation of reading: This concerns a continuation of the action plan Art of Reading (Kunst van Lezen), to reach one million children with reading-stimulation measures. In this action plan the libraries play a key role and introduce the library to newborns (and their parents).⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ministerie van OCW (2016), Actieprogramma 'Tel mee met Taal';

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/volwassenenonderwijs/documenten/kamerstukken/2015/03/06/actieprogramma-tel-mee-met-taal> [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁵⁰ Taal voor het leven: <http://www.taalvoorhetleven.nl/> [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁵¹ See: <http://www.boekstart.nl/> [accessed 20-10-2017]

Independent national experts network in the area of adult education/adult skills
Full country report - Netherlands

- Action line 4/5: Pilots, knowledge and communication: This action line includes a number of experiments including the pilot *Educatie voor Vrouwen met Ambitie: EVA* ('Education for Women with Ambition'); Language for parents and children and a pilot aimed at adults aged 50 years and over. Action line 5 consists of knowledge sharing activities and communication.

To achieve this, municipalities, the Public Employment Services (UWV), social district teams, Regional VET providers (ROCs), schools, employers and libraries work closely together in order to train at least 3,000 language volunteers in 2018. In previous programmes, 3,000 volunteers have already been trained to become so-called language buddies, or language coaches to accompany someone who is illiterate. On average, an annual budget is available of €18 million of which €11 million comes from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science budget, €5 million from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and € 2 million from the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport.

The Policy Brief *Leven Lang Leren*. Brief van de regering (Lifelong learning. Letter from government)⁵² includes a number of policy initiatives aiming at increasing flexibility of higher education and VET, providing financial support (vouchers), strengthening validation processes and reducing hampering factors in legislative frameworks. It aims at establishing a learning culture and targets the education sector (higher education and VET) and the labour market stakeholders (employers).⁵³

Establishing a learning culture

Although adult education policy is focused on basic skills in the framework of lifelong learning, and sustainable employment, in recent years, many strategic documents have been produced that focus on developing the learning culture in the Netherlands. The Policy Brief *Leven Lang Leren*. Brief van de regering (Lifelong Learning. Letter from government)⁵⁴ mentions a number of policy initiatives aimed at increasing flexibility of higher education and (Continuing) VET, providing financial support (vouchers), strengthening validation processes and reducing hampering factors in legislative frameworks. The Policy Brief is based on a high number of reports that generally recommend the instigation of policy action to improve the position of post-initial education

⁵² Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) (2014), *Leven Lang Leren*. Brief van de regering (Life long learning. Letter from government). 2014-2015.

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2014/10/31/kamerbrief-leven-lang-leren>

Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) (2015), *Voortgangsrapportage Leven Lang Leren* (Progress Life Long Learning policies). 2015-2016.

<http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2015/10/26/kamerbrief-over-voortgang-leven-lang-leren>

⁵³ The policy brief will see an update in September 2016.

⁵⁴ Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) (2014), *Leven Lang Leren*. Brief van de regering (Life long learning. Letter from government). 2014-2015.

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2014/10/31/kamerbrief-leven-lang-leren>

Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) (2015), *Voortgangsrapportage Leven Lang Leren* (Progress Life Long Learning policies). 2015-2016.

<http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2015/10/26/kamerbrief-over-voortgang-leven-lang-leren>

and to better stimulate the enrolment in post-initial (CVET) education in order to maintain a sustainable workforce. The 2012 report of the Education Council (Onderwijsraad⁵⁵) recommended improving the position of low-educated/low-skilled adults in the labour market and in society by means of post-initial education.⁵⁶ In addition, the 2012 Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (Sociaal-Economische Raad: SER) report on post-initial education pointed to the future needs for post-initial education and provided recommendations to further develop the market. It clearly stated the importance of Open Education Resources (OER) for post-initial education. The discussion was predominantly focused on higher education, but mentioned other sectors as well. The most recent report on flexible higher education for employees (Flexibel hoger onderwijs voor werkenden)⁵⁷ emphasised the importance of flexible learning trajectories for adults, mixing formal, non-formal and informal learning towards obtaining a formal qualification and creating possibilities to develop online learning material. The focus on establishing a learning culture is integrated in the sustainable employability programme (programma Duurzame Inzetbaarheid⁵⁸) where one of the pillars concerns 'learning while working'. This programme is supported by the European Social Fund (ESF).

The policy initiatives indicated in the Policy Brief on lifelong learning focus on improving the flexibility and access to HE/VET provision for adults; stimulate the supply and take-up of adult learning..

Decentralisation of responsibilities for social and employment policies

An important development related to the governance of adult learning is the decentralisation of responsibilities for social and employment policies from the national government to local governments. The most prominent legislative framework is the 'Participation Act' (Participatiewet) of July 2nd 2014. This Act supports all people that can work but need some kind of support in order to work. The act, which was enacted starting from January 1st 2015, replaces the 'Wet Werk en Bijstand' (WWB), 'Wet Sociale Werkvoorziening' (WSW) and parts of the 'Wet werk en arbeidsondersteuning jonggehandicapten (Wajong)'.⁵⁹ The Participation Act replaced the legislative proposal 'Act Working according to capability' (Wet Werken naar Vermogen). The aim of the Act is to get people who are far from the labour market (i.e. labour disability or impairment, living on social benefits) back to work. The Act shifted the responsibility for labour integration from the national government to the local government. Municipalities are now responsible for the support to those facing limitations to work and for the integration of those people

⁵⁵ <http://www.onderwijsraad.nl/> [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁵⁶ See for instance: Onderwijsraad (2012), Over de drempel van postinitieel leren: <http://www.onderwijsraad.nl/publicaties/2012/over-de-drempel-van-postinitieel-leren/volledig/item205> [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁵⁷ Adviescommissie 'Flexibel hoger onderwijs voor werkenden' (2014), Adviesrapport Flexibel hoger onderwijs voor volwassenen: <http://www.hogeronderwijs.nu/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/adviesrapport-flexibilisering-hoger-onderwijs.pdf> [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁵⁸ See Min SZW (2015), Kamerbrief voortgang programma Duurzame Inzetbaarheid: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2015/07/14/kamerbrief-voortgang-programma-duurzame-inzetbaarheid> [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁵⁹ See: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/participatiewet> [accessed 20-10-2017]

in the labour market. Municipalities are responsible for providing/organising counselling, support, additional training, supported employment, reintegration trajectories and employment subsidies. The idea is that at local level, better and more tailored support can be provided. At this level the coordination between different organisations involved in different types of support can be effectively and more efficiently organised.⁶⁰

The recent developments in relation to decentralisation concern primarily an amendment of the governance structure. Secondly, these initiatives aim to deliver better quality (at reduced costs).

The table below provides an overview of the quantitative targets linked to adult.

Table 3.1 Targets linked to Adult Learning in broader economic policies/LLL strategies/framework or implementing act

General information		Progress toward target		
Target (target figure and date to be achieved by)	Adoption date (e.g. 31/03/2018)	Initial value (at date of adoption)	Current value	Summary of progress against target
20% participation in lifelong learning (Labour Force Survey) in 2020	2000	15.5	18.8	Between 2000 and 2016 the participating increased slightly with just below 4 %.
45,000 new participants enter a language course to improve their language proficiency in the period 2016-2018	6-03-2015	0	No update	NA

⁶⁰ The introduction of the Participation Act faced severe criticism. The criticism mostly concerned that local governments were felt not to be fully equipped to carry out the new tasks and that the shift of responsibilities came at the same time as a severe budget cut in social and employment policies. More fundamental criticism concerned that the act insufficiently takes into account the high unemployment rate, especially under low educated. Secondly, the employment positions in which many of the target groups will have to be re-integrated are difficult to find and hence it remains to be seen whether it is feasible to create the required number of jobs. See for instance: Tinnemans, Will (2014), Participatiewet wordt een drama april 2014, Sociaal Bestek: <http://www.mogroep.nl/thema/transities-transformatie/nieuws/3090-scherpe-kritiek-op-participatiewet> [accessed 20-10-2017]

3.4 Quality assurance

State-regulated, formal education is subject to inspectorate and accreditation regimes. The Education Inspectorate (Inspectie van het Onderwijs)⁶¹ is responsible for primary and secondary (vocational) education. The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (Nederlands- Vlaams Accreditatieorgaan: NVAO) is responsible for the accreditation of higher education programmes.⁶²

3.5 Future policy developments

In the last year three reports were published that contain orientations for future policy developments related to lifelong learning and the learning of adults. These publications have not (yet) led to policy changes, but can influence coalition negotiations after the March 2017 general elections. Here below; the highlights of these three publications are discussed.

Learning and developing during a career: advise concerning post-initial learning ('Leren en ontwikkelen tijdens de loopbaan: een advies over postinitieel leren') (March 17, 2017)⁶³

This report of the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (Sociaal-Economische Raad: SER) concludes that recommendations provided since 2002 have been taken over by the government but that they have not been implemented or withdrawn and hence have not led to a growth in the participation of adults in education and training activities. As factors that hamper further development the council mentions that the urgency for taking action is insufficiently felt; funding and time is lacking; there is a lack of transparency of the possibilities and benefits of learning; and finally, adults can have negative prior experiences of learning.

In order to overcome these constraining factors and stimulate learning of adults, the Council suggest investing in three areas:

- Strengthen the infrastructure to be able to provide better-tailored and flexible provision and better alignment with the needs of employees and employers. Education providers should be provided more opportunities to offer partial programmes and differentiate enrolment starting dates. In addition, the Education and training funds (O&O fondsen) need to improve the offer for employees. The infrastructure should also include improved possibilities for validation of prior experience and (career) guidance and counselling. For low-literate individuals additional funding needs to be made available. Civic integration should be more labour market relevant and should be a basic service for all in which the quality is nationally assured.
- Supporting the learning demand through making more transparent what are the funding possibilities for adults to enrol in (formal) education; making formal

⁶¹ Inspectie van het Onderwijs: <http://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/> [accessed 20-10-2017].

⁶² NVAO: <http://www.nvao.net/> [accessed 20-10-2017].

⁶³ SER (2017), Leren en ontwikkelen tijdens de loopbaan een advies over postinitieel leren

programmes delivered in a more flexible way (modules) and developing an individual learning account by which employees can in a tax-friendly way save for learning pathways. Other organisations (employers, Education & Training funds, municipalities and individuals) can 'fill' the account (contribute money to the account) to allow the individual to enrol in learning pathways of his/her own choice.

- Developing a broad learning culture through providing national-level messages concerning the importance of further learning; stimulate dialogue and discussions between employers and employees concerning the need for learning and facilitating (independent) career guidance.

Continuing learning works: Invest together in new security ('Doorleren werkt: Samen investeren in nieuwe zekerheid') (April 4, 2017)⁶⁴

The Commission 'financing demand VET: Continuous education works' are assigned by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science to further think about modalities for demand-driving financing in VET within the framework of continuous or permanent learning. The report will be used to prepare further policy decisions. The main outcomes of the assessment concern:

- In order to stimulate a lifelong learning in the Netherlands, the existing barriers will have to be re-worked into conditions to enable everyone to take responsibility (control) of their own continuous development. There needs to be sufficient funding and time to engage in learning and there needs to be a transparent and qualitative good offer of learning, and aligns with the needs of adults. In addition, the environment in which adults live and work needs to be conducive for learning.
- Individual learning accounts are considered the most appropriate instrument to stimulate the learning engagement of individuals with a qualification level up to NLQF/EQF 4. This instrument is considered more appropriate compared to a voucher system or tax benefits.

The commission recommends:

- 1) To develop individual learning accounts
- 2) To install a 'deltacommissaris': Someone who overlooks the agenda of the commission and the programme Continuous education works ('Doorleren werkt') and that stimulates lifelong learning
- 3) Establish a National Education and Training Pact: engage with a broad group of stakeholders to develop an overarching programme to stimulate continuous learning in all its forms
- 4) Provide regional support and national coordination. At regional levels, professional support needs to be provided to adults in coordinating their own learning.
- 5) Use all forms of learning: The use of formal and non-formal learning needs to strengthen and better validated.

⁶⁴ Commissie vraagfinanciering mbo (2017), Doorleren werkt: Samen investeren in nieuwe zekerheid.

OECD Skills Strategy: Diagnostic report: the Netherlands (presented April 20, 2017)

The OECD Skills Strategy diagnosis identified a number of priority areas for actions in the Netherlands:⁶⁵

1. **Fostering more equitable skills outcomes:** The skills system in the Netherlands works well to ensure that most people develop strong cognitive, social and emotional, and job-specific skills. Nonetheless, a sizable number of adults still have very low levels of basic skills. Moreover, certain groups have more limited opportunities to develop and fully use their skills. The Netherlands should strive to ensure that skills outcomes better reflect individuals' abilities and efforts, rather than their personal circumstances.
2. **Creating skills-intensive workplaces:** Developing and using skills fully and effectively in workplaces is critical for increasing the productivity and competitiveness of firms, as well as for improving the earnings and job satisfaction of workers. Skills-intensive workplaces are particularly important for creating opportunities for adults to use and further develop their skills, especially those from groups that may be lagging behind (priority 1), and who may be reluctant to return to formal schooling, such as low-skilled adults.
3. **Promoting a learning culture:** In a world where people are not only competing with increasingly highly skilled people in low-wage countries, but also with increasingly cheap labour saving technologies, it is more important than ever for adults to engage in continuous skills development, so that they can adapt to change and seize new opportunities as they arise. Promoting a culture of learning in the Netherlands is not only an important goal in its own right, but could also help to foster more equitable skills outcomes (priority 1), and encourage the formation of skills-intensive workplaces (priority 2).

Policy initiatives

Related to these three publications, there are two policy initiatives:

- **Training voucher scheme:** A concept law is prepared to withdraw the tax benefits for individuals related to training (aftrek scholingsuitgaven).⁶⁶ The tax benefit did not prove effective.⁶⁷ The uptake is small (only 2.6 per cent of those paying taxes aged between 25 and 60 make use of the possibility) and is used mostly by those higher educated. The evaluation indicates that the tax benefit only very limitedly provides an additional incentive to learn (also because individuals do not see the direct benefit when paying costs for training, but only in their tax return). The withdrawal of the tax benefit will save yearly €212 million Euro in 2017 (and €218 million Euro in 2018). It is proposed that around €100 million Euro will be devoted to installing a training voucher system (scholingsvouchers). The Ministries are

⁶⁵ See: OECD (2017), OECD Skills Strategy Diagnostic Report Executive Summary Netherlands 2017.

⁶⁶ See: Concept law "Wet fiscale maatregelen rijksmonumenten en scholing" 20-09-2016.

⁶⁷ CPB-notitie 1 juli 2016, Evaluatie aftrekpost scholingsuitgaven.

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currently discussing this system. The March 2017 general elections put a hold on the policy developments. The new Cabinet will have to make decisions on the concept law and the establishment of the voucher system.

- Preparing Act for the NLQF: A concept act was published in 2015. In 2017 an evaluation was conducted (published in September 2017⁶⁸). Based on this evaluation, the act will be revised.

Finally, there are a number of pilots initiated around flexibilization of higher education (already running in 2016) that can lead to changes in higher education in the long term.

⁶⁸ Ockham IPS (2017), Onderzoek NLQF

4.0 INVESTMENT IN ADULT LEARNING SYSTEMS

4.1 Total investment in adult learning and change over time

4.2 Public national investment

Due to the decentralisation taking place, more funds are shifted to municipalities to provide social services for those in need. This 'Participatie Fund' (Participatiebudget) is considered a lump sum where municipalities can decide for themselves on which social services to allocate the fund to. The overall aim of the Participation Fund is to guide people into employment who are able to work. It can be used for language courses, civic integration, health-related services, services for people with impairments, and social cohesion activities. This fund, is therefore, not necessarily linked to adult learning (and hence no budget indication is provided here).

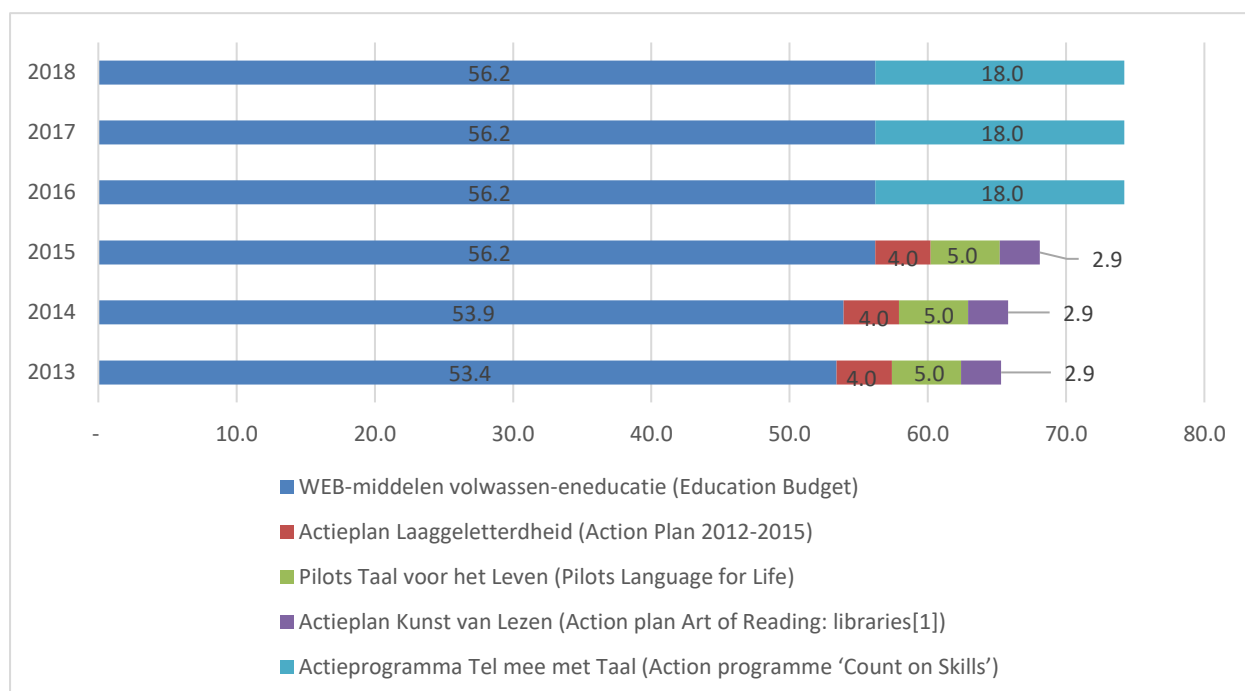
Specific budget allocations can be found in relation to specific governmental programmes and initiatives related to Basic Skills Education:

- The **Education budget**, which is provided to the municipalities for 2016, is €56 million Euro.
- The previous **Action Plan 2012-2015** had an annual budget of €4 million Euro.
- The pilots **Language for Life (taal voor het leven)** had an annual budget of €5 million Euro.
- **Action programme 'Tel mee met Taal' ('Count on Skills')**⁶⁹ has an average budget allocation of €18 million for the period 2006-2018. This is allocated to the following action lines: Action line 1: Local network approach: €10.5 million Euro; Action line 2: Language agreements (Taalakkoorden) and arrangement language education: €1.7 million Euro; Action line 3: Stimulation of reading: €2.9 million Euro; Action line 4/5: Pilots, knowledge and communication: €3 million Euro. The Ministry of Education, Culture & Science is responsible for €11 million Euro; the Ministry of Health, Welfare & Sport is responsible for €2 million Euro, and the Ministry of Social Affairs & Employment is responsible for €5 million Euro.

The following figure provides an overview of the annual budget allocation.

⁶⁹ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2015/03/06/actieprogramma-tel-mee-met-taal>

Figure 4.1: allocation of budget to different policies and programmes related to adult education (in millions of Euros)



Source: Various policy documents.⁷⁰

There are also budget lines not specifically focused on basic skills education. This concerns the provision as stated in the Policy Brief Leven Lang Leren. Brief van de regering (Lifelong learning. Letter from government. The Policy Brief Leven Lang Leren. Brief van de regering (Lifelong learning. Letter from government)⁷¹ has a number of action lines and allocated budgets. To the Pilots Flexibilisation higher education and demand-side funding, €65 million Euro is allocated. These pilots experiment with providing more flexible pathways into higher education. In the framework of developing Sector Plans, the governments made available €600 million Euro to co-fund Sector plans developed by sectors and industries. The plans should focus on how the sectors confront emerging labour market challenges and focus mostly on the education and training of future employees (CVET). In addition, work-to-work transitions and unemployed –to-work transitions are within scope of the plans.

⁷⁰ Action plan Art of Reading: libraries is not discussed in detail as it is more focused on prevention of low literacy and on young people. See: http://www.kunstvanlezen.nl/index.html?page_id=4000 [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁷¹ Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) (2014), Leven Lang Leren. Brief van de regering (Life long learning. Letter from government). 2014-2015. <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2014/10/31/kamerbrief-leven-lang-leren>
Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) (2015), Voortgangsrapportage Leven Lang Leren (Progress Life Long Learning policies). 2015-2016. <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2015/10/26/kamerbrief-over-voortgang-leven-lang-leren>

Other policies with allocated funding related to the learning of adults, in particular related to vocational training (CVET) concern:

- Top-Sector Policy: the Ministry of Economic Affairs has developed the so called 'top sectors policy'. Nine top sectors are defined (Agri-food; Chemicals; Creative Industry; Energy; High Tech Systems&Materials; Life Sciences&Health; Logistics; Horticulture and propagation materials). Every top sector has a Human Capital Agenda, and an action programme to invest in the current and further workforce. All Agenda's provide analyses of Human Capital needs in the sector; a vision of the sector on lower secondary, upper secondary, and higher education and agreements on contributions of education and business to the Human Capital Agenda. Above that, there is a cross-sector Human Capital Roadmap for cross-sector issues on educating and attracting talented employees.
- Training vouchers (€30 million Euro, max. €2,500 Euro per voucher⁷²) offered by the PES: a subsidy for job seekers (employed and unemployed) for training or for a work experience certificate (see below). The subsidy is only available for education and training related to a so-called 'promising profession'. These promising professions are defined by the PES. There are extra vouchers available for unemployed people aged over 55.

In addition to these more specific programmes, the government provides general funding to the VET and higher education system of which adults can benefit from. Furthermore, the government facilitates second chance secondary education for adults (voortgezet algemeen volwassenenonderwijs: vavo)⁷³. Finally, the government has in place a number of financial incentives to stimulate education and training⁷⁴ such as tax incentives for companies (Wet vermindering afdracht (WVA) Onderwijs (payment reduction for education tax credit)) and tax incentives for individuals (study costs are tax deductible).⁷⁵

An important funding source for adult learning, and in particular CVET, are the sectoral Labour Market and Training Funds (Arbeidsmarkt en Opleidingsfondsen or Opleidings- en ontwikkelingsfondsen). They are owned by the employers and employee organisations and are spending something like €1 billion Euro per year on the training of employees (and future employees), but no exact figures are available. Some funds are quite big and have

⁷² <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/stcrt-2016-23557.html>

⁷³ VAVO is covered by the Adult and Vocational Education Act and the Secondary Education Act (Wet op het voortgezet onderwijs: WVO, 1963; revised in 1998).

⁷⁴ The Cedefop study 'Financing adult learning' identified a number of financial instruments for the period 2010-2013. A number of them do no longer exist (saving schemes: spaarloonregeling, levensloopregeling), or are not specifically targeting adults, but students in initial education between 18 and 30 years of age (student loan), or are not governed by the State, but by social partners through collective labour agreements (payback clauses, educational leave). See: Cedefop (2013), Study on financing the adult learning sector. See for the database: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/FinancingAdultLearning/> [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁷⁵ See for an evaluation of both: Regioplan (2012), Evaluatie van de afdrachtvermindering onderwijs 2006-2011: <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/bestanden/documenten-en-publicaties/rapporten/2012/09/18/evaluatie-van-de-afdrachtvermindering-onderwijs-2006-2011/evaluatie-van-de-afdrachtvermindering-onderwijs-2006-2011.pdf> [accessed 20-10-2017]

budgets of tens of millions of Euros, whereas others are working for very small branches of industry and also have very small budgets.⁷⁶

The table below summarises the main public investments in adult learning.

Table 4.1 Breakdown of public national investment

Title of public investment source	Source of funding	Amount of funding	Targeted number of participants	Targeted level of provision	Start/ end date
Education budget	MinOCW	56 million Euro per 2016	NA	Mainly basic skills	Regular funding
Action programme 'Tel mee met Taal' ('Count on Skills')	The Ministry of Education, Culture & Science is responsible for 11 million Euro; the Ministry of Health, Welfare & Sport is responsible for 2 million Euro, and the Ministry of Social Affairs & Employment is responsible for 5 million Euro.	18 million Euro per year	45,000 new participants	Mainly basic skills	3 years, start 2016
Pilots Flexibilisation higher education and demand-side funding	MinOCW	65 million Euro	NA	Mainly higher education and CVET	Start 2015, end-date depends on the duration of the experiments
Training vouchers	Min Social affairs and Employment	30 million Euro	No target mentioned	CVET	1 Mai 2016 – 1 January 2018

⁷⁶ Panteia (2015), CVET in the Netherlands "Cooperation" Project Czech Republic – Netherlands: <http://www.panteia.nl/Over-Panteia/projecten-en-publicaties/Overzicht-publicaties/765650145%20CVET-in-the-Netherlands> [accessed 20-10-2017].

4.3 EU support via structural funds (primarily ESF)

4.3.1 Structural fund support planned as part of 2014-2020 financial framework

No data is available regarding the planned EU financial support for the investment priority most directly focused on adult learning (i.e. Investment priority 10.3 – Enhancing access to lifelong learning) for the Netherlands, according to data on financial support provided to Member States between 2014-2020 (made available to the European Commission from Operational Programmes for the ESF in July 2016).

The programming period 2014-2020⁷⁷ is focusing on Active Inclusion and targeted at people at distance from the labour market. It includes young people (until 28 years of age); unemployed people; older adults (age 50+), prisoners and migrants. Many of the priorities and actions include some form of training. ESF also support the sustainable employability programme (programma Duurzame Inzetbaarheid⁷⁸), which focuses on establishing a learning culture. This programme includes one pillar on 'learning while working'.

4.3.2 Key stakeholders in the ESF programme are the municipalities and the 35 Labour Market regions consisting of partnerships and networks containing the PES, employers, municipalities and education providers.

4.3.3 EU support via structural funds (primarily ESF) provided as part of 2007-2013 financial framework

The ESF programming period 2007-2013 focused on prisoners. With ESF support, they received an education and training pathway. In addition, ESF funds were used to train low-qualified employees to increase their potential to make the transition to another job. In addition, the ESF funds were used to support social innovation in companies: employees can be provided with training in order to work better and smarter.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ See: <https://www.agentschapswz.nl/subsidies-en-regelingen/actieve-inclusie-esf-2014-2020/inhoud/overzicht-aanvraagcriteria> [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁷⁸ See Min SZW (2015), Kamerbrief voortgang programma Duurzame Inzetbaarheid: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2015/07/14/kamerbrief-voortgang-programma-duurzame-inzetbaarheid> [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁷⁹ See: <https://www.agentschapswz.nl/subsidies-en-regelingen/esf-2007-2013-algemene-informatie-europees-sociaal-fonds/inhoud/over-het-europees-sociaal-fonds-tussen-2007-en-2013> [accessed 20-10-2017]

4.4 Effectiveness of investment

Recently the Court of Audit (Algemene Rekenkamer⁸⁰) conducted an audit of all initiatives taken in the field of adult education focusing on those of low-literacy (Education budget, Action Plan 2012-2015 and the current Action Programme)⁸¹. The audit took into account the years 2006-2015 and the plans proposed for 2016–2018. The total budget related to the audited activities in 2016 was €74 million Euro. The Audit bureau concluded that tackling low-literacy by the Ministers of Education (OCW), Social Affairs (Social Affairs) and Health (VWS) is not proportional to the size of the problem. In other words: the policy is not capable of making a substantial contribution to solving the persistent problem of low-literacy and low basic skills in general (including low numeracy) both in budget and approach. The policy, moreover, covers only a part of the problem. The following more detailed conclusions were drawn:

- **Targets government only focused on language proficiency:** The literacy policy is intended for people who have difficulty with language and / or maths. However, numeracy courses are hardly offered in practice. The policy is aimed solely at improving language skills. Ambitions in this area are modest: the ministers strive to improve the proficiency of less than 5% of the target for the period 2016-2018. The courses offered, are furthermore, not aimed at achieving a proficiency at VMBO level (preparatory secondary vocational education: NLQF 1-2; the level at which people are called "literate"), but at an unspecified, improving linguistic proficiency.
- **Indications that the diversity target is not adequately controlled:** The low-literate policy target group is diverse. It is not solely focused on migrants (first and second generation), but also native Dutch. It also concerns not only low-literacy, but also low-numeracy. The Minister of Education aims to provide courses that serve this diverse target group as a whole. However, there are indications that this is not realised in practice. Native Dutch people and the elderly in particular hardly participate in the courses.
- **Waiting lists for courses:** The Minister of Education holds the position that by increasing the budget it is not necessarily possible to significantly increase the number of participants in the courses. However, the results of research point to another direction. In eight of the thirteen Labour Market regions, the survey found waiting lists for language courses. Causes for the waiting lists concern lack of budget and a shortage of volunteers / tutors. There are also regions where, due to the limited budget, low-literate people are actively recruited for only a few months per year.
- **Unclear whether policy contributes to decrease in number of low-literate people:** Although the Minister of Education has commissioned research in recent years on the effects of the courses, they do not provide an indication of whether people following a course possess a language proficiency level at VMBO level. In

⁸⁰ See: <http://www.rekenkamer.nl/> [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁸¹ Algemene Rekenkamer (2016), Aanpak van laaggeletterdheid: http://www.rekenkamer.nl/Publicaties/Onderzoeksrapporten/Introducties/2016/04/Aanpak_van_laaggeletterdheid [accessed 20-10-2017]

addition, the minister is not in the position to know how the number of low-literate people develops due to its policies.

The Policy on low-literate adults is critically assessed by the Court of Audit. In defence of the policy, it can be argued that combatting low-literacy is a persisting problem which is not easily solved by providing one course, and it cannot target all people that face difficulties reading, writing and difficulties with numeracy at once. Furthermore, focusing on having low-literate adults reach a specific qualification level appeared to be an ineffective way of combatting low-literacy as it leads to higher levels of dropout. However, adults like to learn Dutch or improve their skills if this contributes to solving immediate problems. For example, evaluations of the Pilot Language for Life show that participation in the pilot led to enhanced social inclusion; enhanced activity in the labour market; and increased mental and physical health. Around 70 per cent of the participants are able to apply the language skills in practice.⁸²

The ESF actions in the programme period 2007-2013 have been evaluated mid-term. This evaluation concerns, for instance, Action E: Social Innovation. This action focuses on 'working smarter' and includes elements related to professional development and training. The action is assessed as being effective as awareness was raised on the benefits of social innovation and the approach led to results in terms of greater variety and depth in the work, a better picture or image of the organisation amongst the employees and more possibilities for utilising the employees' competencies and skills. An improvement in the quality of work is particularly expressed through great involvement of the employees, more input from them and greater autonomy in their work.⁸³ Another mid-term evaluation was conducted on Action A and D focusing on vulnerable groups at a distance from the labour market and low-qualified employees. Mid-term the actions were on schedule in delivering the projected outcomes and results. No indication was provided on the impact.⁸⁴ Action B, focusing on ex-prisoners, was evaluated mid-term as well. The evaluation indicated that already twice as many ex-prisoners were reached by the action as was envisaged from the start of the action.⁸⁵

⁸² Maastricht University (2014), Impact onderzoek taaltrajecten Taal voor het Leven door Stichting Lezen & Schrijven op het gebied van sociale inclusie en leesvaardigheid:
http://www.lezenenschrijven.nl/uploads/editor/Rapportage_evaluatie_Impact_taaltrajecten_Taal_voor_het_Leven_UM_ERD_06-08-14_DEF.pdf [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁸³ See: Bureau Bartels (2011), Evaluatie Tijdvak 1 Actie en Sociale innovatie van het ESF-programma 2007-2013: <https://www.agentschapsw.nl/subsidies-en-regelingen/esf-2007-2013-algemene-informatie-europees-sociaal-fonds/documenten/publicaties/subsidies/esf-2007-2013-algemene-informatie-europees-sociaal-fonds/rapporten-over-esf/evaluatie-tijdvak-actie-e1-sociale-innovatie-vitale-bedrijven---2011> [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁸⁴ Research voor Beleid (2010), Tussentijdse evaluatie ESF Acties A en D:
<https://www.agentschapsw.nl/subsidies-en-regelingen/esf-2007-2013-algemene-informatie-europees-sociaal-fonds/documenten/publicaties/subsidies/esf-2007-2013-algemene-informatie-europees-sociaal-fonds/rapporten-over-esf/tussentijdse-evaluatie-esf-acties-a-en-d> [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁸⁵ Research voor Beleid (2011), Tussenevaluatie Actie B en Actie C:
<https://www.agentschapsw.nl/subsidies-en-regelingen/esf-2007-2013-algemene-informatie-europees-sociaal-fonds/documenten/publicaties/subsidies/esf-2007-2013-algemene-informatie-europees-sociaal-fonds/rapporten-over-esf/tussenevaluatie-actie-b-en-actie-c>

A final aspect to discuss is the introduction of the Participation Act⁸⁶, which has faced severe criticism. The criticism mostly focused on the fact that local governments were felt not to be fully equipped to carry out the new tasks and that the shift of responsibilities came at the same time as a severe budget cut in social and employment policies. More fundamental criticism noted that the Act insufficiently takes into account the high unemployment rate, especially amongst low and underqualified people. Secondly, the employment positions in which many of the target groups will have to be re-integrated are difficult to find and hence it remains to be seen whether it is feasible to create the required number of jobs.⁸⁷ A monitoring system has been put in place and mid-term evaluations are scheduled for 2017 and 2019. In 2020, a final evaluation will be conducted.⁸⁸ As no evaluation yet been conducted, and the effects of the implementation remain to be seen.

europees-sociaal-fonds/documenten/publicaties/subsidies/esf-2007-2013-algemene-informatie-europees-sociaal-fonds/rapporten-over-esf/tussenevaluatie-actie-b-en-actie-c---2011 [accessed 20-10-2017]

⁸⁶ With the implementation of the Participation Act (*Participatiewet*) in 2015 municipalities are empowered to offer more customised schemes for different target groups at distance from the labour market.

⁸⁷ See for instance: Tinnemans, Will (2014), *Participatiewet wordt een drama april 2014*, Sociaal Bestek: <http://www.mogroep.nl/thema/transities-transformatie/nieuws/3090-scherpe-kritiek-op-participatiewet>

⁸⁸ Ministerie van Sociale Zaken Werkgelegenheid (2013), *Plan van Aanpak Monitor en Evaluatie Participatiewet*: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/binaries/rijksoverheid/documenten/brieven/2013/12/02/plan-van-aanpak-monitor-en-evaluatie-participatiewet/plan-van-aanpak-monitor-en-evaluatie-participatiewet.pdf>

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF EXISTING POLICY

The question “to what extent do existing policy interventions comprehensively and sufficiently cover all the necessary elements of an effective adult learning system?” is based on the premise that the government should have an overarching, comprehensive framework for adult learning in place. The situation in the Netherlands is different as the government takes the view that they should only intervene when there are institutional framework barriers for learning, or when it concerns specific target groups (e.g. low skilled); for other parts of the system, it relies on private providers, employers and adults themselves. In line with this approach, the policy framework has a narrower scope and proposes a targeted approach to specific disadvantaged groups. It needs to be emphasised that 84 per cent⁸⁹ of adult learners are enrolled in learning trajectories with private providers and are hence funded by themselves or by employers. This is mostly not supported directly by any policy framework (however, the trajectories could be part of Sector Plans; made possible by more flexible entry to higher education and VET, etc.).

On one hand, the adult education landscape in the last decade has been subject to decreasing budgets; the abolition of specific policies and programmes, shifting of responsibilities and a strong focus on adults of low-literacy. This, as an overall assessment, has deteriorated the conditions for an accessible adult learning system, especially for those that need it the most. The non-formal adult learning sector (such as Folkuniversities) and the adult learning provision, which is very close to social cohesion initiatives such as the use of community centres, are not subsidised at national level. At local level, municipalities can decide to maintain/expand existing structures or stop supporting them. There is no overarching view on what choices municipalities have made in this regard. On the other hand, at national level there are initiatives to make higher education and VET more flexible for adults to access and through this provide a better institutional framework for adult learning.

Against this background, the adult learning system is assessed by looking at the criteria mentioned in the conceptual framework for the assessment of adult learning policies.⁹⁰

5.1 Develop learners’ interest in learning

As indicated, adult learning is dominated by the private providers and the learning provided in companies. As explained in chapter 1, employees in higher-level professions generally benefit from more learning opportunities offered by employers. The action programme *Tel mee met Taal* (Action programme ‘Count on Skills’) and ‘Education budget’ builds further on existing initiatives to establish groups of volunteers to support low-

⁸⁹ ECBO (2011) *Een leven lang leren in 2010*, p. 72

⁹⁰ Key success factors for effective adult learning policies, indicating the strength of evidence (available in all EU languages): <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/policy-tool/key-success-factors>. Also see chapter 3 of the following report: EC, (2015). An in-depth analysis of adult learning policies and their effectiveness in Europe. Available at: <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/final-report-20150817-en.pdf>

literate adults. The approach is low-key, not directly aimed at obtaining a qualification (which is evidenced as unsuccessful in reaching out to low-literate adults) but to help them improve their practice in using Dutch. This action programme aims at having 45,000 new enrolments in literacy courses (2016-2018). The Policy Brief *Leven Lang Leren* as indicated earlier includes measures to increase demand-driven funding in higher education and VET (providing vouchers). This should increase the learners' disposition towards learning.

5.2 Increase employers' investment in learning

In the Netherlands, employers and participants themselves are important funders of adult learning. The Education and training Funds (O&O fondsen) are (partially) used to upskill employees. Within the framework of the action programme *Tel mee met Taal* (Action programme 'Count on Skills') the Language Agreements aim to have employers take responsibility in providing language training to employees that need it and to discuss the issue of low level language and numeracy skills. The policy brief on lifelong learning refers to the Sector Plan which includes co-funding of professionalization trajectories in companies.

5.3 Improve equity of access for all

As indicated, adult learning is highly dependent on the private market and the government provides learning pathways, only for those in need or to stimulate specific developments (an example of this is the 'teacher scholarship (lerarenbeurs⁹¹) to improve the quality of teachers. The *Tel mee met Taal* (Action programme 'Count on Skills') and eEducation budget aims especially at providing learning possibilities to the low-skilled (in the Dutch language and numeracy). The specific focus and scope of the Education budget depends on the choices made at local level by the municipalities. The Policy Brief *Leven Lang Leren* aims at increasing flexibility in higher education and VET and making access to education easier for non-traditional students.

5.4 Deliver learning that is relevant

The decentralisation process aims at enabling decision-making on who needs what support at the most appropriate level. This is considered to be at the local level. The Education and Training Funds (O&O fondsen) are jointly owned by employers and employees and are used to upskill the employees meeting both the needs of employers and the learners (CVET). Within the state-regulated VET and HE provision, experiments have started that go in the direction to make the offer more modular and better aligned with the needs of

⁹¹ See: <https://duo.nl/particulier/leraar/de-lerarenbeurs/hoe-de-lerarenbeurs-werkt.jsp> [accessed 20-10-2017]

adults (Seethe Policy Brief Leven Lang Leren. Brief van de regering (Life long learning. Letter from government))⁹².

5.5 Deliver learning that is of high quality

The adult learning system is regarded as a market place. The government has made arrangements on quality with the private providers. The Association of Private Providers (NRTO) established a code of conduct (quality label)⁹³. The provision in higher education and VET is supervised by the relevant quality assurance bodies (all formal education: Dutch Inspectorate of Education: Inspectie van het Onderwijs⁹⁴; Higher education: Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders: Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie (NVAO)⁹⁵; VET: Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market; Samenwerkingsorganisatie Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven (SBB)⁹⁶)

5.6 Ensure coherent policy

As indicated earlier, there is no such thing as an overarching lifelong learning policy. The government only partially intervenes in the sector and focuses on providing learning opportunities for specific target groups and on removing specific institutional barriers. That being said, there is communication between the different Ministries involved in (parts of) the adult learning system. Furthermore, the decentralisation process challenges the coherence in policies related to adult learning (and social services more broadly) between municipalities. What adult learning is supported and offered in one municipality, can be different in another. Finally, there is limited emphasis on evaluation of policies and action plans to establish policy-learning effects.

92 Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) (2014), Leven Lang Leren. Brief van de regering (Life long learning. Letter from government). 2014-2015.

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2014/10/31/kamerbrief-leven-lang-leren>
Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) (2015), Voortgangsrapportage Leven Lang Leren (Progress Life Long Learning policies). 2015-2016.

<http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2015/10/26/kamerbrief-over-voortgang-leven-lang-leren>

93 See:

http://www.nrto.nl/partnerorganisaties/kwaliteitslabels_en_keurmerken/keurmerk/kwaliteitseisen-nrto-keurmerk/ [accessed 20-10-2017]

94 <http://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/> [accessed 20-10-2017]

95 <https://www.nvaio.net/> [accessed 20-10-2017]

96 <https://www.s-bb.nl/> [accessed 20-10-2017]

6.0 STRENGTH AND WEAKNESSES OF THE ADULT EDUCATION SYSTEM

As indicated, the adult learning sector is highly fragmented, not covered by an overarching legal/institutional framework and highly dependent on the learning provided by private providers. The government has the capacity to intervene when there are market failures, specific groups to be targeted or when legal and institutional arrangements could be improved. It can be argued, however, that the government is limited in its capacity to sufficiently address the following key challenges:

- To substantially reduce the level of low-literacy. The current programme aims to have 45,000 participants whereas there are 1.3 million people with difficulties with reading and writing.⁹⁷
- To support employees in further learning. The establishment of a learning culture as expressed in the Policy Brief Lifelong Learning is a good initiative; however, this initiative does not have the weight to really install a learning culture in companies and societies. It does improve the position of higher education institutions and VET providers when competing with private providers and removes some financial barriers for learning (which are generally better utilised by those with higher income levels).
- To support the society in further learning. As a result of fragmentation, the basic infrastructure for non-formal learning is under pressure. Learning remains at a distance from many adults who do not have a positive disposition to learning. There are limited places and opportunities where adults come in direct contact with learning venues and learning programmes as the non-formal sector is only very limitedly present in neighbourhoods. An example is the closing down of public libraries. The number of libraries decreased from 508 in 2001 to 156 in 2015.⁹⁸

As a general trend, learning is better facilitated for those that already have a positive disposition to learn (the higher educated, those in higher levels of employment) than those that do not have a positive disposition to learn. With regard to the latter, the government focus is on the adults of low-literacy. A large group, those that possess literacy skills but lack the disposition to continue their learning are largely unsupported in participating in adult education/lifelong learning programmes. This group predominantly has an educational attainment level of ISCED 2/3.

97 1.3 million adults only refers to low-literates aged 16-64. When taking into account older adults and low numeracy, the total number is 2.5 million (see: Algemene Rekenkamer (2016), Aanpak van laaggeletterdheid:

http://www.rekenkamer.nl/Publicaties/Onderzoeksrapporten/Introducties/2016/04/Aanpak_van_laaggeletterdheid [accessed 20-10-2017]

98 CBS (2016), Openbare bibliotheken 22 juli 2016:

<http://statline.cbs.nl/Statweb/publication/?DM=SLNL&PA=70763ned&D1=a&D2=a&HDR=T&STB=G1&VW=T> [accessed 20-10-2017]

Based on the description of the developments in legal and institutional framework and the current policy programmes, the following strengths and weaknesses can be identified.⁹⁹

6.1 Strengths

- **Strength:** The policy frameworks and programmes on combatting low-literacy focus both on preventive and curative measures involving stakeholders from different background (libraries, PES, local governments, schools, employers, VET providers, private providers etc.). The line of reasoning is that low-literacy is an intergenerational problem, whereby the low-literacy level of the parents affects the proficiency levels and societal chances of the child. Furthermore, children may also provide a gateway to reach out to low-literate parents.
- **Strength:** The implementation of the Participation Act received criticism in practical terms (do municipalities have the necessary capacities to implement the services?). To provide a tailored and coordinated approach to social services - including adult education - is however best ensured at local level and appears to be viable.
- **Strength:** The reliance on the market in providing adult learning courses (which also has negative aspects being that it is less directed to low-literate and disadvantaged groups and that quality is not always well assured) leads to provision that is in terms of content and flexible delivery attuned to the needs of adult learners and employers.

6.2 Weaknesses

- **Weakness:** As indicated already and evidenced by evaluations and studies¹⁰⁰, an integral governmental policy on lifelong learning and career development is lacking in the Netherlands. A distinction can be made between the policies and programmes aimed at low-literacy and basic skills on the one hand, and the policy on lifelong learning focusing mainly on adjusting existing higher education and VET institutional frameworks on the other hand. The latter has as a main objective to establish a learning culture in the Netherlands and goes in the direction of an integral policy framework, but lacks the strength, both in terms of investment and authority to make this happen in reality.
- **Weakness:** Although measurements on effect and results are completed at the individual level (i.e. the programme leads to increased level of individual skills), as indicated by the Court of Audit, it is difficult to measure the extent to which the programmes aimed at low-literates contribute to lowering the total number of low-literate people. The policies and programmes state the high number of low-literates as a key problem, but seemingly do not provide the mechanisms to reduce this on

⁹⁹ These strengths and weaknesses should not be interpreted as being based on a thorough analysis of the situation in the Netherlands. This is beyond the scope of this country briefing.

¹⁰⁰ For instance: Ockham IPS (2013), Implementatieonderzoek naar het NCP NLQF: <http://www.leidoacademy.nl/doorzeven/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Eindrapport-NCP-NLQF.pdf> [accessed: 20-10-2017].

a large scale. In defence of this approach, it can be argued that it is better to be realistic given the available budget and ensure that policies and programmes make a change at the individual level than to target the entire group of low-literate people (1.3 million) and to not be able to show any results in the end.

- **Weakness:** The general governance framework in the Netherlands and the reliance on the market in providing adult learning courses leads to a deterioration of the basic infrastructure for non-formal adult education. Given this situation, there is a high level of provision for those that have the means (disposition, money and time) to learn, but a low level of provision and support for those that lack those means. One could question whether there is a place in the market for the education of disadvantaged groups who do not have the means to enter adult learning programmes.¹⁰¹ The government intervenes here to some extent with action plans and programmes targeted as specific groups, but leaves aside other parts of the non-formal adult learning sector, which would be more accessible to those disadvantaged groups.

Given the strengths and weaknesses, it is not expected that the participation rate in lifelong learning will increase due to the recent policy actions. In order to increase the participation rate, more needs to be done to establish a learning culture in companies, for example. This aspect has been subject to some recent reports.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ An example of an initiative that provides adult learning for the disadvantaged through online provision is ETV (www.oefenen.nl). This initiative is subsidized on an ad hoc basis and searches for viable business models to maintain active and further develop the programmes.

¹⁰² See for instance: Onderwijsraad (2012), Over de drempel van postinitieel leren: <http://www.onderwijsraad.nl/publicaties/2012/over-de-drempel-van-postinitieel-leren/volledig/item205> [accessed 20-10-2017]; Adviescommissie 'Flexibel hoger onderwijs voor werkenden' (2014), Adviesrapport Flexibel hoger onderwijs voor volwassenen: <http://www.hogeronderwijs.nu/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/adviesrapport-flexibilisering-hoger-onderwijs.pdf> [accessed 20-10-2017]; Min SZW (2015), Kamerbrief voortgang programma Duurzame Inzetbaarheid: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2015/07/14/kamerbrief-voortgang-programma-duurzame-inzetbaarheid> [accessed 20-10-2017]

7.0 FURTHER POLICY REFORMS AND ORIENTATIONS NEEDED

The establishment of a learning culture has become a prominent policy objective in recent years. A Taskforce to study potential policy directions for a new government (after the upcoming elections) discussed policy measures related to awareness raising for lifelong learning (or, using a different terminology: permanent learning); strengthening the educational offer for permanent learning; and specific support for specific target groups in permanent learning.¹⁰³ In more detail:

- In the proposals that would stimulate 'permanent learning', the most prominent role in this involves the employers. The government can only invest in awareness raising (initiating a National Strategic Agenda on permanent learning); experiment with intensifying the role of the Regional Investment Fund; or establish agreements with social partners concerning the sustainable use of the Education and training Funds (O&O fondsen).
- In the proposals concerning strengthening the educational offer. The taskforce discusses the possibilities for non-state funded higher education and VET to deliver official certificates for specific labour market relevant parts of formal HE and VET qualifications. Furthermore, the taskforce discusses the establishment of a support unit to improve the educational offer of HE and VET for working adults.
- In the proposals for specific support for specific target groups, a number of financial instruments are mentioned for specific target groups (vouchers for low-qualified; lifelong learning credit for those aged over 55). Furthermore, work-to-work transitions making use of an education fund is mentioned and finally further agreements with employers on sustainable employability is presented as option.

The policy directions related to the eEducation budget also relies on the upcoming evaluation and proposed revision of the Adult and Vocational Education Act (Wet educatie en beroepsonderwijs¹⁰⁴) in 2017. This includes a possible transfer of the eEducation budget from the Adult and Vocational Education Act to the Municipality Funds (Gemeentefonds) in 2018¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰³ Rijksoverheid (2016), Kiezen voor duurzame groei: Rapport Studiegroep Duurzame Groei: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2016/07/06/advies-studiegroep-duurzame-groei> [accessed 20-10-2017]

¹⁰⁴ See for the legal text: <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0007625/2016-02-01> [accessed 20-10-2017]

¹⁰⁵ Algemene Rekenkamer (2016), Aanpak van laaggeletterdheid: http://www.rekenkamer.nl/Publicaties/Onderzoeksrapporten/Introducties/2016/04/Aanpak_van_laaggeletterdheid [accessed 20-10-2017]

8.0 SUMMARY

In this section, a summary is provided of the previous sections.

Summary of country statistical performance

Employment rates have risen in the Netherlands. In the last quarter of 2015, the total number of jobs even reached the milestone of 10 million, the most jobs ever recorded in the Netherlands. Despite the positive employment development figures, reaching the National 2020 target of 80% employment amongst 20-64 year olds remains a challenge.

The Netherlands is quite steadily situated in the top-five of European Union Member States when it comes to participation of adults (25-64 year-olds) in lifelong learning. In absolute numbers, this comes down to 1.6 million adults. Adult learning in the Netherlands is often not subsidised by the State. In the age 25-65 group, only 16 per cent of educational participation is in learning trajectories that are subsidised; 84% is funded by either the employer or the participant. Differences in participation rates can be found in relation to age, gender, and employment status.

1.3 million people had difficulties with reading and writing in 2015. In absolute numbers, the low-literate are mostly native Dutch people (especially the elderly). In relative terms, the percentage of low literacy among immigrants is higher.

Summary of policy reforms CSR/NRP

In the CSR and NRP for the Netherlands in recent years (2015-2016), no reference is made to adult learning or upskilling the low-qualified.

Summary of key challenges faced

The adult learning sector is highly fragmented, not covered by an overarching legal/institutional framework and highly dependent on the learning provided by private providers. It can be argued that the government is limited in its capacity (i.e. funding) to sufficiently address the following key challenges:

- To substantially reduce the level of low-literate adults. The current programme aims to have 45,000 participants (2016-2018) whereas there are 1.3 million people having difficulties with reading and writing.
- To support employees in further learning. The establishment of a learning culture as expressed in the Lifelong Learning Policy Brief is a good initiative; however this initiative does not have the weight to really install a learning culture in companies and societies.
- To support society in further learning. As a result of fragmentation, the basic infrastructure for non-formal learning is under pressure. Learning remains at a distance from many adults who do not have a positive disposition to learning.

8.1 Summary of further policy reforms needed

A Taskforce to study potential policy directions for a new government (being installed in October 2017) discussed policy measures related to awareness-raising for permanent learning;

- Stimulate 'permanent learning' through intensifying the role of the Regional investment fund; or establish agreements with social partners concerning the sustainable use of the Education and training Funds (O&O fondsen).
- Strengthening the educational offer for permanent learning by establishing (amongst other measures) the possibilities for non-state funded higher education and VET to deliver official certificates for specific labour market relevant parts of formal HE and VET qualifications.
- Specific support for specific target groups enrolled in permanent learning by providing a number of financial instruments (vouchers for the low-qualified; lifelong learning credit for people aged over 55).

The policy directions related to the Education budget also rely on the upcoming evaluation and proposed revision of the Adult and Vocational Education Act (Wet educatie en beroepsonderwijs) in 2017. This includes a possible transfer of the Education budget from the Adult and Vocational Education Act to the Municipality Funds (Gemeentefonds) in 2018.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1: List of adopted legal acts, strategies, laws

Name	Date of adoption	Short description of content
The Adult and Vocational Education Act (Wet educatie en beroepsonderwijs: WEB) ¹⁰⁶	1996/2000	This act is mainly devoted to initial vocational education, but describes how adult education, focussing on basic skills, is organised as well.
The higher education and scientific research act (Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek: WHW) ¹⁰⁷	1992	This act is mainly devoted to initial higher education, but does describe part-time higher education and 'contract' services as well.
Secondary Education Act (Wet op het voortgezet onderwijs: WVO) ¹⁰⁸	1968; revised in 1998	This act covers obtaining a secondary education qualification.
Participation Act (Participatiewet) ¹⁰⁹	2015	With the implementation of the Participation Act in 2015, municipalities are empowered to offer more customised schemes for different target groups at a distance from the labour market.
Library act (Wet stelsel openbare bibliotheekvoorzieningen) ¹¹⁰	2014	It determines the role of libraries in supporting education
Act on Civic integration (Wet inburgering) ¹¹¹	2006	Since 2006, migrants are obliged to pass a civic integration exam.

¹⁰⁶ Adult and Vocational Education Act' (Wet educatie en beroepsonderwijs: WEB: <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0007625/2016-08-01> [accessed 20-10-2017].

¹⁰⁷ higher education and scientific research act (Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek): <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0005682/2017-09-01> [accessed 28-09-2017].

¹⁰⁸ Secondary Education Act (Wet op het voortgezet onderwijs: WVO): <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0002399/2016-08-01> [accessed 20-10-2017].

¹⁰⁹ See for the legal text: http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0015703/geldigheidsdatum_01-01-2015 [accessed 20-10-2017]

¹¹⁰ See for the legal text: Wet stelsel openbare bibliotheekvoorzieningen: <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0035878/2015-01-01> [accessed 20-10-2017]

¹¹¹ See for legal text: <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0020611/2009-01-01/1> [accessed 20-10-2017]

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Annex 2: Inventory of policy interventions

Name of intervention	Source (with hyperlink)	Budget	Outputs	Which of the 6 building blocks for successful adult learning policies does it target? (tick all relevant)						Further details/description (purpose, duration, responsible entity etc.)
				Fosters learners' interest in learning	Employers' investment in learning	Improve equity of access for all	Learning that is relevant	High quality learning	Coherent policy	
Action programme 'Tel mee met Taal' ('Count on Skills')	https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2015/03/06/actieprogramma-tel-mee-met-taal	18 million Euro per year (2016-	Build local infrastructure; 45,000 new participants; establishing	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	The programme is developed in cooperation with several departments, including the Ministry of Education,

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		2018)	language agreements in 35 labour market region; Stimulation of reading; conduct pilots and knowledge creation							Culture & Science, the Ministry of Health, Welfare & Sport, and the Ministry of Social Affairs & Employment. The overall aim of the programme is to combat the perception that people with a low literacy level do not count in society and to prevent people with limited language skills from becoming marginalised. Municipalities, the Public Employment Services (UWV), social district teams,
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										Regional VET providers (ROCs), schools, employers and libraries work closely together.
Pilots Flexibilisation higher education and demand-side funding	Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) (2014), Leven Lang Leren. Brief van de regering (Life long learning. Letter from government). 2014-2015. https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2014/10/31/kamerbrief-leven-lang-leren Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) (2015), Voortgangsrapportage Leven Lang Leren (Progress Life Long Learning policies). 2015-2016. http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2015/10/26/kamerbrief-over-voortgang-leven-lang-leren	65 million Euro	Flexibilisation part-time higher educated; experiment with demand-side funding in part-time higher educated; strengthen validation processes ; strengthening the Associate Degree			Y	Y	Y	Y	This initiative includes experiments which can lead to changes in organisation part-time higher education.

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			program me.						
Sector plans	<p>Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) (2014), Leven Lang Leren. Brief van de regering (Life long learning. Letter from government). 2014-2015. https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2014/10/31/kamerbrief-leven-lang-leren</p> <p>Tweede Kamer (Second Chamber) (2015), Voortgangsrapportage Leven Lang Leren (Progress Life Long Learning policies). 2015-2016. http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2015/10/26/kamerbrief-over-voortgang-leven-lang-leren</p>	600 Million Euro	Support sectors to deal with labour market challenges		Y		Y		<p>The plans should focus on how the sectors confront emerging labour market challenges and focus mostly on the education and training of future employees (CVET). Also, work-to-work transitions and unemployed - to-work transitions are in the focus of the plans.</p>

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