Improving the quality and monitoring of basic skills education for adults

Assessment and Recommendations

OECD

1 Introduction

As low-skilled adults are significantly under-represented in adult learning, increasing their participation into training and learning is crucial to break the skills gap and improve their inclusion in the society and in the labour market. However, Dutch municipalities and the government lack data to monitor participation in adult basic education. The evaluation of the Adult Education and Vocational Education Act (WEB) in the Netherlands concluded that only in a limited number of Labour Market Regions non-formal learning providers consistently report on registration and progress of adult learners. Indeed, few municipalities have developed centralised registration systems for participants in adult basic education, some municipalities ask training organisations to transmit aggregate figures, while others do not collect any information. This calls for a monitoring system that would allow the collection of harmonized and comparable data in different contexts.

In a similar vein, while formal education in the Netherlands is supervised by the national Inspection of Education, the rapidly expanding offer of non-formal basic skills provision lacks a proper quality assurance framework. Some quality assurance approaches already exist in certain municipalities (such as Utrecht, Amsterdam, Roermond and 's Hertogenbosch) but there is no harmonised quality assurance framework for basic skills adult education at the national level. Moreover, even when policy documents, such as municipality plans for basic skills training or regional plans for adult education, address the quality issue, they do not further operationalise how quality should be assured or improved. As a result, training programmes across the country have highly uneven levels of quality and effectiveness, depending on the provider. Yet, as encouraging participation in adult education becomes a top priority of government, the demand for accountability has also increased, and guaranteeing quality provision is becoming gradually more important in the field of education.

To improve the monitoring of basic skills programmes and the quality of the non-formal adult education sector, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands has requested technical assistance to the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Service and the OECD. Through a series of interactive workshops, the project engaged key stakeholders to build a shared understanding of the challenges ahead and to create momentum for the development of a monitoring system and a quality framework for basic skills education for adults. To foster the discussion and inspire the reform in the Netherlands, European best practices were shared during initial studies and workshops. A number of municipalities volunteered to be part of dedicated working groups tasked to develop guidelines for the creation of the monitoring tool and the quality assurance scheme. Several trainings providers and their representatives were also invited to express their views during a consultation meeting. This document presents the proposals that emerged as a consensus from these different meetings.

In the Netherlands, the funding of adult basic education falls in most cases under the Adult Education and Vocational Education Act (WEB), and it is important to note that the recommendations presented in this document apply only to WEB funded activities. This does not prevent initiatives falling outside the WEB to also follow the guidelines, or to extend such coverage in the future. Yet, even among training programmes funded under the WEB, there exists a great diversity and heterogeneity of providers. The recommendations to implement a monitoring tool and a quality assurance framework have been developed to strike a balance between the necessity of a harmonization and the need for flexibility and adaptability to different contexts.

2 Monitoring of basic skills education for adults

Developing a nationwide monitoring system for WEB-funded courses

A harmonized monitoring system should be developed for all WEB-funded courses, whether funded via tendering and subsidies, while it should remain optional for non-WEB training. The reasons for adopting a unified approach for all WEB-funded courses, despite their diversity, are numerous. First, basic information needed to monitor participation is largely the same, irrespective of the training type. Second, a unified approach has the advantage of facilitating the tracing of individuals throughout the system. This is important as learning in different types of non-formal training courses mutually reinforce each other. For instance, while professional training programmes (i.e. relying on professional teachers) aim at improving individuals' proficiency in a specific area, those relying on volunteers may help adult learners maintain the proficiency level acquired. It is therefore interesting to observe how learners make use of multiple learning opportunities. Lastly, a unified approach will make it easier to compare results across municipalities and providers, to understand the reach of nationwide programmes and to identify potential gaps.

The development and implementation of such data collection system should take place at the national level, and thus should fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science or another national body (hereafter, the responsible body). Providers will fill in the necessary information about their participants, and they will be able to do so on a continuous basis. The dedicated IT tool should allow registrations and changes to each learner profile to be automatically forwarded to municipalities, which will be in charge of checking, validating and transmitting the data to the responsible body. The latter should decide on the frequency of data validation and transmission.

Include a minimum set of mandatory indicators

The tool should allow data collection at the individual level to register and monitor participation in WEB-funded courses. The complete set of variables that the system may include is listed below:

Basic information

- First name
- Last name
- Date of birth
- City of birth
- Country of birth
- Gender

Educational background

- Highest level of education completed (No education; Primary education; Lower secondary education; Upper secondary education; Post-secondary education)

Employment status

- Current employment status (Employed, full-time; Employed, part-time; Not employed but looking for a job; Not employed and not looking for a job)

Course details

- Topic (literacy, numeracy, digital skills, other)

- Teacher type (professional, volunteer, both)

- Course type (individual or collective)

- Number of hours

- Course offers certificate?

Progress

- Start date

- Completion status

- Certificate obtained (when relevant)

Information on participant's first and last name, together with date and place of birth, will allow in most instances the unique identification of individuals. This should permit the creation of an identifier for each participant. The purpose is to avoid double counting learners when producing aggregate figures while at the same time allowing tracking participation in several training programmes over time to better understand learning trajectories.

Having access to information on gender, age, education level and employment status of adult learners will allow getting an idea of the socio-economic background of participants and understanding whether the objectives of the programme in terms of targeting are achieved. Clearly, the effort associated with data collection (and hence the likelihood of misreporting or not reporting) increases with the number of variables included; as a result, any decision to add an indicator should be carefully weighed against its benefits.

In addition to information on participants, the system should make it possible to enter details on the course itself. Basic characteristics include topic of the training (literacy, numeracy, digital skills, other), information on the involvement of professional teachers, whether the course is collective or individual, number of hours, and whether the course delivers a certificate. This information is crucial to get an informative picture of non-formal basic education provision and allows constructing a national inventory of non-formal courses. This information will also ease comparability between programmes. Additional individual information regarding the course, such as the start date, completion status, and whether a certificate was obtained, will help get a sense of learners' progress.

Ensure compliance with privacy law

Given that personal data will be collected and stored by providers and municipalities, it is important to ensure that the developed system will comply with privacy law in effect in the Netherlands. The exact way in which learners' registration will be handled should be further investigated to ensure compliance with privacy law. To allow learners to make an informed decision about the collection of their personal data, the responsible body should clearly formulate the purpose for collecting such data, so that it can be communicated to learners when recording their information. The responsible body shall also check whether there is a legal basis to collect, provide and process personal data in the WEB. If not, the WEB might need

to be amended to enable municipalities to request such information from training providers. In the latter case, it might be wise to also consider collecting the citizen service number (*burgerservicenummer*, BSN) of participants. This would not only allow the unique identification of individuals participating in non-formal training programme in a more reliable manner than relying solely on name and birth information, but it would also allow linking the data with other databases on employment and taxes and would greatly facilitate the gathering of good quality information on participants' career development to monitor outcomes.

Further reflect on how to effectively monitoring other economic and social outcomes

The proposed system will allow the collection of a limited set of learning outcomes: completion, progress towards obtaining certificates, and participation in further training. Monitoring career development and social outcomes of adult education is a complex task and deserves further attention. First, participation in a non-formal training programme usually leads to small changes in variables related to career development or social inclusion, and these changes may not clearly appear in the data. Learning is a long-term activity whose outcomes strongly depend on past and future actions and may materialize in the long run only. This may hamper the ability to detect changes in the short term. Furthermore, while adult education presents various benefits, affecting different spheres of learners' lives, from labour market prospects to health, not all of these benefits are known or easy to measure quantitatively. Therefore, there may exist a bias towards collecting only information on the easily identifiable and measurable benefits, and this would provide only an incomplete picture. Furthermore, improvements in economic and social outcomes are not always uniquely related to participation in training. Changes in an individual's personal situation or in a labour market outlook can also affect career development and social inclusion. Lacking information on these dimensions would result in wrongly attributing positive or negative effects to training.

For these reasons, it is recommended that investigations into the monitoring of learning outcomes of basic adult education continue. In this respect, the National Expertise Centre that is currently being developed seems to be the best suited institution to support such reflection process. It could be tasked with conducting further research on what outcomes related to career development and social inclusion could be monitored, and how questions could be expressed in a way that is easily understandable for learners. The National Expertise Centre could also investigate whether municipalities have the capacity to organize such data collection or if the data collection should be coordinated at national level, and whether the whole population of participants in non-formal basic adult education or only a representative sample should be surveyed.

A first step to start the reflection on monitoring outcomes and to support the development of a monitoring culture among providers could be to ask providers to report on outcomes of non-formal basic adult education programme on an annual basis using a unified framework. This unified framework would include a small set of open questions, as follows:

- What learning outcomes do you measure?
- How are they measured?
- What are the results?

These questions may be directly included in the IT tool developed to monitor participation, or asked in a separate document. The proposed unified framework for reporting outcomes allows providers to use different methods to collect data, thereby limiting the comparability of the information. The responses may inform the reflection exercise carried out by the National Expertise Centre to develop a harmonized data collection process in the future. This will also ensure that, in the transition period necessary for the National Expertise Centre to establish and harmonize a monitoring tool for learning outcomes, providers also start developing a plan to organise how they could gather outcome data. The new National Expertise Centre

may be tasked with providing training centres that need assistance the tools and help necessary to collect and report outcome data.

Make the system user-friendly and compatible with already existing tools

Several municipalities and providers have already put in place different tools to collect and transmit some information about their participants. For instance, the Royal Library ('Koninklijke Bibliotheek') has developed the *National Effect Monitor*. Furthermore, some municipalities rely on the *SIT instrument* (Social Inclusion after Transfer), a tool developed by an independent provider. Others have developed a centralised registration system for participants (this is the case for instance in Amsterdam). Given that a number of providers have invested time and effort to become familiar with the existing instruments and that several municipalities and providers have already formally agreed on how to collect and exchange information, it is advisable to investigate the possibility to develop a system that could adapt to existing tools.

Two possibilities could be envisaged. On the one hand, compatibility might be automatically built in in the newly created system. This will however require the possibility of importing data from every existing system in the new tool, which will involve a great amount of technical background work. On the other hand, municipalities may also transfer data manually from existing systems to the new platform. This will come at the cost of an increased administrative burden for them. If compatibility between existing systems and the new tool cannot be ensured using one of the two approaches described above, all providers will have to use the same newly created tool. For municipalities that do not have a system for data collection already in place, providers will be able to use directly the new tool. In any case, municipalities will have to check and validate information, as it is already common practice to verify individuals' eligibility to participate in WEB-funded courses. There should therefore be one responsible data coordinator in each municipality. Yet, after this transition period, it is envisaged that all providers would use the new system.

Furthermore, it is important that the system is user-friendly. Registration and monitoring are often not a priority of non-formal training providers and are sometimes performed by volunteers, with little time to familiarise themselves with a new IT system. The monitoring tool should also allow the possibility of adding specific modules or questions, depending on the requirements of municipalities. This can be particularly useful to start monitoring outcomes, as discussed above.

Help the different stakeholders make the most of the data

To ensure adherence to and use of the newly created tool by all municipalities, the tool should allow producing different types of documents to report and visualize results. First, the system should allow creating different types of reports in line with the demand of different external stakeholders (municipality, province, or other grant provider) so that organisations do not have to use multiple administrative systems to meet the demands of different stakeholders. Second, as much as possible, the system should offer the possibility of visualising in dashboards and infographics data and results for each municipality. This will ensure that municipalities can understand and draw lessons from their own data.

Make sure data quality is sufficient

To get reliable results across the country, data quality needs to be carefully verified. This is especially important if aggregate statistics are made publicly available, or if funding choices rely on this data. Indeed, providers and municipalities may not have expertise in data collection and processing. Therefore, the envisaged tool should include automatic checks for implausible values and basic inconsistencies. In addition, some European countries have set up a team, usually from the National Statistical Office, tasked

with ensuring data quality (e.g. inspecting missing and inconsistent data). Furthermore, as is done in Denmark with a dedicated Working Group on data quality, the National Centre of Expertise could also play a role in ensuring data quality by providing suggestions for further improvements.

3 Quality of basic skills education for adults

A nation-wide framework to ensure quality should be established

The development of a nation-wide harmonised quality assurance framework for non-formal training is recommended. This will allow better gauging and reaping the full benefits of the recent promising developments in the country resulting from the creation of the new local and regional networks specifically created to tackle skills imbalances and provide more diverse education opportunities. Quality assurance is also a key tool to create trust in the adult training system through accountability, especially for non-formal learning. It can also serve as a tool for providers to attest their performance and enhance their credibility. Whether their funds are private or public, providers' efforts towards greater quality of education help them raise their profile with their stakeholders and students. Overall, a culture of continuous programme improvement contributes to promoting providers' future performance and creating a virtuous circle in the whole education sector.

All WEB-funded non-formal adult education needs to be covered

In the Netherlands, non-formal adult education is defined as education where the learning pathway does not lead to a diploma that is recognised by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. While not officially acknowledged in the legislation, municipal practices suggest the existence of two types of non-formal training: on the one hand, there are training courses led by a professional teacher (often supported by volunteers), while on the other hand, there are courses provided entirely by volunteers. Regardless of this distinction, municipalities are in charge of the whole non-formal educational offer, and can invest in it by using mainly two sources: public funding from the Vocational Education Act (WEB) and funds from social welfare (such as the Law on Integration, "*Participatiewet*").

Given this heterogeneous landscape, it is recommended that, in a first phase, the proposed quality assurance system cover all trainings funded through WEB resources, and leave aside non-WEB-funded education. This would not prevent, however, to expand the quality framework to other types of adult courses (such as non-WEB funded or informal education) in the future. In contrast, it would be important that the new framework cover the entire spectrum of training financed by WEB: if developed only for one segment, this could create an incentive for providers to downgrade the provision to fit the segment of the training that is not covered.

The establishment of a quality label would best fit the Dutch context

Municipalities have generally two ways of financing non-formal adult education provision covered by the WEB: through subsidies, whereby municipalities subsidise parts of the providers' training offer; and through tendering procedures, whereby municipalities organise competitive bids to allocate the WEB budget to one

or more training providers. Currently, quality assurance of WEB-funded training is arranged only through the inclusion of basic quality requirements in tendering and subsidy procedures. As a result, it is mainly based on trust, since, at present, municipalities find hard to follow-up on whether providers comply with the quality criteria included in the funding agreements on a continuous basis. In particular, the smaller municipalities do not have the capacity to regularly check the quality of provision, and have to rely on self-reporting mechanisms by providers. In order to ensure sustained quality improvements in the sector, it is therefore recommended that an external quality assurance mechanism is set up.

A so-called quality label – i.e. a certification guaranteeing that an entity meets some binding quality criteria – would fit well in the Dutch context. In this framework, providers of adult training would need to meet certain minimum quality standards set by an external body in order to receive the label, thereby ensuring that participants are offered effective and efficient training. In addition to improving accountability for learners and municipalities, a quality label system would also directly benefit providers, since it would help them make the case for their programmes' excellence, secure sustainable and diversified funding, market their services more effectively, and respond more quickly to tendering/subsidies procedures for WEB funds.

A two-tier quality label would better respond to municipalities' needs

Several European countries make quality labels compulsory in order to receive public funding. Such conditionality is seen as very important to make sure providers take quality seriously, especially in the case of non-formal education and in a context where a large multitude of (small) providers operates. While this is also the case in the Netherlands, the local context adds a layer of complexity. Providers in the Dutch non-formal adult education sector are exceptionally diverse and heterogeneous, and imposing the same quality requirements to all providers could be counterproductive, as it would imply either setting standards that are too high for some providers to meet – for example those working only with volunteers – or setting the bar too low so that quality assurance criteria are met by the majority of providers but are less meaningful.

Given this context, a two-tier quality label – with two levels of requirements – would be preferable. The lowest level of requirements would represent those minimum quality criteria that are believed to be essential for all providers to meet. This lowest quality level would be mandatory for all municipalities to include in their tendering or subsidies procedures. In other words, this lower tier label would be a minimum requirement for providers' access to WEB funds. The highest level, instead, would entail more demanding quality criteria, and it would thus be more difficult to obtain. As such, the highest level should not be mandatory for all providers wanting to obtain WEB resources, but could be required by municipalities on an *ad hoc* basis in certain tenders where circumstances call for a higher level of minimum quality. Besides the quality label, municipalities should maintain the flexibility to include additional quality requirements in their procurement and subsidy procedures. Overall, this two-tier quality label framework would help ensure quality in non-formal adult education provision, while avoiding the crowding out of providers. Indeed, this system would allow municipalities to work with providers that might not fit the full quality criteria, but that are important to support learners in their municipality. In addition, this two-tier rating system would allow imposing quality requirements that are in line with the capacity of providers of different size and nature.

Main elements of the quality label

Education and andragogy experts should be in charge of developing the exact quality criteria, in order to ensure that they fit with the local context and existing quality assurance systems. Yet, it is recommended that the new quality label cover the following elements.

- *Lower tier*: The aim of this level is to guarantee that all providers of non-formal training meet the basic minimum quality standards that are deemed essential to operate correctly in the sector and receive WEB funding. In this perspective, three macro-dimensions should be covered at this level: quality of the organization, quality of staff, and quality of results, each of which should focus on a number of criteria:
  - o Quality of the organization
    - Quality policy based on self-evaluation and quality consciousness
    - Complaints handling
    - GDPR compliance
    - Cooperation with partners in a broader local network
    - Learners' guidance
  - o Quality of staff
    - Continuous professional development for trainers
    - Staff management policies (contracts, allowances, etc.)
  - o Quality of results
    - Attainment of minimum levels for selected indicators collected through the monitoring tool
    - Measurement of learners' satisfaction
- *Higher-tier*: What really differentiates the lower-tier and higher-tier label is the focus of the latter on the quality of the didactics. While it is not feasible to impose to all providers of non-formal education in-classroom audits – given their large heterogeneity in practices, with many providers working entirely with volunteer trainers – it is important that the higher level aims at setting the bar higher for good quality teaching. In addition, some more stringent requirements are recommended in each of the four areas of actions :
  - o Quality of the organization
    - *All quality criteria of lower-tier*
    - Establishment of policy ambitions and plans, with precise goals
    - Presence of clear structure and coherence, appropriate training duration
    - Fitting and timely provision
  - o Quality of staff
    - *All quality criteria of lower-tier*
    - Presence of at least one professional trainer
  - o Quality of results
    - *All quality criteria of lower-tier*
    - Monitoring of learning progress based on assessments
  - o Quality of didactics
    - In-class inspections
    - Precise policies on assessments and evaluation of training

Integration with existing initiatives should be fostered

To avoid duplication of efforts, it is advised that the new quality label draw from existing quality assurance systems already in use in some municipalities, such as the *Blik op Werk* (BOW) or the *Kwaliteitsintrument Taalonderwijs van de Kwaliteitsgroep Educatie Taal* (KET-KIT). This is also envisaged in light of the upcoming changes in the civic integration law that would shift responsibilities of integration courses directly to the municipalities. Furthermore, as the proposed two-tier quality label somehow resembles the basic quality requirements imposed to formal adult education, the standards of the Education Inspectorate could also serve as a starting point. Finally, the lower-tier level of the label could draw from the certification of language houses.

In addition to adopting quality criteria similar to the ones already used by existing initiatives, the new quality label could also foresee the possibility of a much deeper integration across quality assurance systems. Since existing initiatives are not explicitly directed towards ensuring quality in the adult non-formal education sector (hence, the need to create a new quality label in first place), possessing an existing label should not automatically lead to the full acquisition of the new label. However, it is possible that certain elements of the existing labels – especially those on the quality of the organisation and on the quality of staff – are similar to those that would be required by the new proposed label. It is therefore recommended that, if a provider already owns an existing quality certification, the new quality label provides for the possibility of validating the elements that are already certified by the existing label. Such partial recognition should be complemented by proofs of evidence of possessing the remaining quality standards that are required by the new label. This would avoid putting too much bureaucratic pressure on providers, while still allowing different quality assurance mechanisms to co-exist.

The implementation of the quality label should be handled by a national body

To ensure harmonization of practices, an equal enforcement of the requirements and less bureaucratic red tape across the country, a national body should be tasked with the establishment, implementation and operationalisation of the quality label. As common in many European countries, such body could be public or semi-public, and funded through governmental budget and/or fees paid directly by providers. The Dutch social housing sector could provide an example of this kind of setup.

This national body should also play the important role of supporting providers that wish to improve their quality. Not only it would have to guide the rolling out and practical implementation of the quality label, acting as a helpdesk and supporting providers that need assistance with their applications, but it should also provide wider support towards quality improvements. This may include helping providers with self-evaluation exercises, knowledge management, sharing research, monitoring implementation and follow-up. In this way, such a supporting structure would come to play a central role in supporting providers that lack the capacity to elaborate good practices to improve their quality of training.

The quality label should not be just a piece of paper

Once the quality label has been granted, it is important that it does not become just an additional administrative requirement, but that it really drives providers' actions towards constant quality improvements. In order to maintain providers' accountability over time, the label should be to have validity limited to fixed duration. Through a pre-defined validity, the quality label would serve as a tool to encourage continuous investment in quality. The best examples of quality certifications in Europe (such as Switzerland's *eduQua* certification and France's *Eduform* label) fix such validity at three years, after which the provider must undergo a renewal process.

Several European countries have gone a step further and introduced annual audits or random inspections. For instance, both the Swiss *eduQua* and French *Eduform* foresee follow-up audits undertaken yearly throughout the validity duration of the label to confirm or not its correct attribution. In Norway, instead, in order to ensure quality of the *SkillsPlus* programme, inspections of training providers are undertaken at random. A negative finding from an inspection can result in an order to make changes, but also in withdrawal of public funding and/or an obligation to pay back received public funding.

Best practices from European countries could inspire the technical implementation of the framework

To implement the proposed quality label, the Netherlands could draw on the experience of several European countries which have implemented a variety of quality assurance frameworks, including labels, accreditation systems, or (self-)evaluation models. For instance, best practice in European quality assurance systems suggests the importance of disseminating the information on quality so that potential learners, employers and institutions can make informed choices about which training to invest in. Indeed, consumer protection is an important objective of quality assurance systems. As such, quality information should ideally be easily accessible and presented in a user-friendly format on a dedicated website under the responsibility of the national body. The website could also be useful to providers by including guides, booklets, webinars, and a mix of technical assistance documents to help providers undergo the certification process. An example of website providing assistance on quality of adult education to both providers and potential learners is the one by the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education.

Quality measures should be established for the transition period

The implementation of a whole new quality label for adult non-formal education may take some time. Moreover, municipalities might have ongoing contracts with providers that commit them for a few months to come, if not years. It is therefore necessary to start integrating quality criteria as soon as possible during this transition period, until the final label is established and implemented. A feasible possibility to steer quality in the transition period is to develop a harmonized set of quality criteria that all municipalities have to include in their tenders and subsidies procedures. These criteria could be the same requirements that will be included in the lower-tier quality label, or a subset of them. Such temporary measure is important to gather momentum, start fostering a quality culture, and support providers to improve quality in practice. It would also improve transparency in the market in preparation of the deployment of the quality label to the whole country.

Summary of key recommendations

Improving the monitoring of basic skills education for adults in the Netherlands

- Given the highly fragmented nature of non-formal adult basic education provision in the Netherlands, the development of a harmonized monitoring system to collect individual level data on adult learners is key to measure the reach of such provision more accurately.

- The proposed system will focus on monitoring participation in WEB-funded courses but will also allow the collection of information on a small set of learning outcomes (completion, progress towards obtaining certificates, and participation in further training).

- However, monitoring learning outcomes is a more complex task that deserves further attention. In this respect, the National Expertise Centre that is currently being developed seems to be the best suited institution to support such reflection process and foster the development of a monitoring culture among providers and municipalities.

- In practice, the development and implementation of the data collection system should take place at the national level, and thus should fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science or another national body. Information will be filled directly by providers. Municipalities will be in charge of checking, validating and transmitting the data to the responsible body.

- To ensure adherence to and use of the newly created tool by all municipalities, it should be user-friendly, compatible with existing systems and should allow the production of different types of documents to report and visualize results.

- Furthermore, to ensure that the information collected is reliable, data quality processes need to be put in place. This is especially important if aggregate statistics are made publicly available, or if funding decisions rely on this data. This will likely involve the creation of a dedicated team.

- Given that personal data will be collected and stored by providers and municipalities, it is important to ensure that the quality assurance system complies with Dutch privacy laws. In particular, it is important that learners are informed when they report their personal information. Furthermore, the responsible body shall also check whether there is a legal basis to collect, provide and process personal data in the WEB. If this is not the case, amendment options should be considered.

Improving the quality of basic skills education for adults in the Netherlands

- Given the large heterogeneity in the quality of non-formal adult education provision and the absence of a harmonised quality assurance framework, a nation-wide quality assurance framework is recommended.

- The new quality assurance system should cover the whole WEB-funded non-formal adult education sector, with the possibility of expanding to non-WEB funded non-formal training in the future.

- The current legal framework allows municipalities to impose minimum training quality requirements in the context of their tendering and subsidies procedures for WEB investments. However, this makes it difficult for municipalities to follow-up and regularly check the quality of provision. External quality assurance mechanisms are therefore required in order to help municipalities foster sustained quality improvements.

- The establishment of a nation-wide quality label is recommended, since it would guarantee that providers of non-formal adult training meet certain minimum quality standards set by an external

body. As such, to ensure harmonization and consistent enforcement of the requirements throughout the country, a dedicated national body should be tasked with the establishment and operationalisation of the label.

- Given that the Dutch landscape of non-formal adult education providers is very diverse, a two-tier quality label framework should be preferred. The lower tier would cover only the minimum quality requirements deemed fundamental to impart quality training, including criteria relating to the organisational structure, the staff, and the monitoring of basic result measures. This lower level of requirements should be made compulsory for all providers in order to receive WEB funds. The higher tier would instead include more demanding criteria, notably in terms of didactics – such as in-class inspections and clear assessment policies – and would therefore be optional for municipalities to impose only in selected tenders.

- In order to avoid duplication of efforts for all the parties involved, the specific minimum quality requirements to be included in the label should draw on existing Dutch initiatives. Moreover, an even deeper integration with existing quality certification could be envisaged: partial recognition mechanisms could be put in place in order to ensure that providers already owning a quality certification have those overlapping elements validated when applying for the new label.

- In order to ensure that the quality label does not become a mere administrative requirement, but drives actual quality reforms, it should be valid for a fixed period of time. Based on European best practice, this period could be fixed in three years, after which a renewal would be necessary including the re-assessment that the criteria are met. Introducing yearly audits or at random inspections could also help ensure quality reforms.

- The operationalization of the quality label should also draw on relevant European best practice. This would for instance involve the creation of a dedicated web platform where providers could find technical assistance documents to accompany them throughout the certification process, and where potential learners could get access to information on quality necessary for them to make an informed training choice.

- Since the development and implementation of a new quality label may require some time, a transition measure should be envisaged in order to gather momentum and start developing a quality culture within the sector. It is recommended that, during this transition period, municipalities include in their tenders and subsidies procedures a harmonized set of minimum quality requirements. To smooth transition towards the label, the criteria should be the same as, or a subset of, those required by the lower level of the quality label.