

Count on Skills

ABSTRACT

Name/Project title	<i>Tel mee met Taal/Count on Skills</i>
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Country	Netherlands
Website	www.steunpuntbasisvaardigheden.nl
Lead organisations	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS)
Main partners	- Reading & Writing Foundation (<i>Stichting Lezen & Schrijven</i>) - Dutch Reading Foundation (<i>Stichting Lezen</i>) - <i>Steunpunt Basisvaardigheden</i> (Basic Skills Support Centre)
Period of activity	The Count on Skills programme was officially announced in November 2014. Two national events were held in 2015. During the kick-off on 19 June the programme was launched, the objectives outlined and ideas collected on how to 'flesh out' the programme. The event on 8 December marked the official start of the programme, when the three responsible ministries and the key partners outlined the planned activities, an information fact sheet was distributed, and the logo was revealed. The programme will officially start on 1 January 2016, and will conclude on 31 December 2018.
Language	Dutch
Objectives	Count on Skills is a national action programme by the ministries of Education, Culture and Science (OCW), Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) and Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) aimed at preventing and combating low-literacy and promoting reading, supplementary to regular education programmes. It is the fourth such programme to target these objectives. The Literacy Learning Action Plan (<i>Actieplan Alfabetisering</i>) 2003-2006

	<p>primarily targeted (functionally) illiterate native Dutch citizens; the Low-Literacy Plan of Attack (<i>Aanvalsplan Laaggeletterdheid</i>) 2006-2011 expanded the adult target group to include young children and adolescents, with an emphasis on prevention; and the Literacy Action Plan (<i>Actieplan Geletterdheid</i>) 2012-2015 was primarily aimed at increasing the quality of adult education and conducting the Language for Life pilot programmes (see also other good practice document) in 6 regions in order to reach more people with low literacy skills and to organise regional chain-oriented cooperation. The Count on Skills programme also represents a continuation of the Art of Reading programme (<i>Kunst van Lezen</i>, 2008-2011 and 2012-2015) that encouraged reading among (young) children. The Count on Skills action programme will aim to reach the following quantitative targets between 2016 and 2018:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved language skills among a minimum of 45,000 Dutch residents, so that they score demonstrably higher on language tests and social participation, including employment participation. • One million young children up to primary school age have been reached via reading-promotion activities, thus improving their language skills and enjoyment of reading. <p>The programme will also aim to achieve the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • long-term regional collaboration aimed at preventing and combating low-literacy; • improvements to the quality and accessibility of both local and regional language education programmes; • giving residents of the Netherlands opportunities for full social participation and integration.
Target group	<p>The Count on Skills programme is primarily aimed at supporting a regional approach to low-literacy and reading promotion, to be developed by a wide range of partners in the 35 labour market regions, and locally within municipalities. The programme therefore supports municipalities, training and employment help desks, language education providers, employers, schools, libraries and other social organisations by providing them with instruments and methods, knowledge and expertise. The key target group is made up of the 35 labour market regions and their constituent municipalities. As of 2015, labour market regions are responsible for the implementation of adult education, early childhood education and for ensuring benefits under the Participation Act.</p>
Number of people involved	N/A, as the programme will not commence until 2016.
Main activities	The programme is made up of five action points:

1. local networking approach to low-literacy via Language for Life
2. regional language agreements and incentive budgets
3. reading promotion via 'Art of Reading'
4. experiments
5. knowledge and communication

Action point 1: Local networking approach to low-literacy via Language for Life

This action point involves the implementation of the Language for Life approach (developed across 6 regions between 2012 and 2015) to provide tailored support for municipalities, training and employment help desks, libraries, language education providers and many other organisations in their long-term approach to low-literacy. This support will also involve local and regional initiatives, combining and enhancing them where possible. The experiences gained during the 2012-2015 pilot stage have shown that improved collaboration produces greater results.

Starting in 2016, support teams will become active throughout the Netherlands, contributing ideas on matters such as policy plans, alternative uses of funding, and linking literacy to other social focus areas such as employment, debt assistance and health care. Support may also be aimed at broadening the range of available courses, or the recruitment and training of volunteers.

A variety of instruments developed during the pilot stage of Language for Life may also be used for the screening, intake and support of volunteers.

Action point 2: Regional language agreements and incentive budgets

Regional language agreements set out the arrangements between various parties who contribute to promoting reading, improving language skills and combating low-literacy in the region. Partners such as municipal authorities, language education providers and libraries use the agreements to set out their joint objectives, define partners' roles and responsibilities, and make concrete agreements regarding their efforts to promote reading and raise literacy levels. Additional funding is available to encourage these types of partnerships between municipalities and other organisations involved in regional language agreements, which is connected and supplementary to the support for setting up long-term local networks (action point 1).

Regional language agreements may be linked to the employer language agreements initiated by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW), in which employers commit to addressing language deficits and recruiting other businesses to do so. Funding is available for employer language agreements to enable extra

	<p>investments in language education for employees with poor language skills.</p> <p>The objective is for the network approach outlined in action point 1 to result in a long-term infrastructure that municipal authorities can use to address low-literacy in conjunction with local partners. This makes regional language agreements more than just a declaration of intent, as they must always consist of a work plan and a description of concrete activities that cater to local needs. This makes it clear to everybody exactly who will contribute to the desired outcomes, and how this will occur. Existing agreements and alliances can serve as the basis for a language agreement. In addition to their employer language agreement, employers can also seek alignment with a regional language agreement as part of the Count on Skills programme, linking the efforts of employers and other parties in the region.</p> <p><i>Action point 3: Reading promotion via 'Art of Reading'</i></p> <p>Municipal authorities play a key role in shaping local libraries, and thereby also in the promotion of reading. The 'Art of Reading' programme offers municipalities a tailored approach via libraries, who coordinate the activities and support schools, child health centres and kindergartens in designing an approach to reading promotion. The Dutch Reading Foundation acts as the lead agency, working in conjunction with the National Library of the Netherlands to ensure coordination and support at national level.</p> <p><i>Action point 4: experiments</i></p> <p>Count on Skills invests in experiments aiming to better serve target groups that are difficult to reach, to unite various segments that are affected by low-literacy, and to develop instruments for addressing language deficits and low-literacy.</p> <p>Currently, two pilot programmes have been announced:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Art of Reading pilot for families with poor language skills; - Women with poor language skills and a disadvantage in the labour market (aged 30-55). <p>Funding is also available for other pilots, with funds already reserved for pilots specifically targeting senior citizens with low literacy skills (55+).</p> <p>Pilots will also be supported that are aimed at increasing the reach among various target groups, at developing new (digital and other) instruments or materials that address a need, and/or at connecting different policy areas or skills.</p>
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	<p>Reading for low-literacy parents: This pilot, run as part of the Art of Reading programme, helps parents with poor literacy skills to engage with reading, and to read to their children. The experiment is aimed at raising awareness and more effectively reaching low-literacy parents within BookStart (<i>BoekStart</i>, aimed at children aged 0-4 and their parents) and the Library at School (<i>Bibliotheek op School</i>) in primary schools. This approach encourages the enjoyment of reading, and helps to prevent language deficits among children. At the same time, parents are encouraged to take an active interest in language themselves. The Dutch Reading Foundation and the National Library of the Netherlands are conducting this pilot in collaboration with the Reading & Writing Foundation.</p> <p>1. Education for Women with Ambition Pilot Education for Women with Ambition (<i>EVA</i> in Dutch) is a pilot programme that supports organisations in five regions who help women aged 30-55 to improve their literacy, numeracy and computer skills. Low-literacy levels among women are comparatively higher, and the percentage of illiterate women in the Netherlands is higher than in neighbouring countries. The practical nature of these skills in day-to-day life is a core component of EVA. The pilot project will develop a range of digital lessons, accessible via the platform at www.evaenik.nl.</p> <p><i>Action point 5: knowledge and communication</i> In order to support the regional and local approach to Count on Skills, the ministries have organised a number of national support tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - knowledge building and knowledge sharing - monitoring and evaluation - communication <p>1. Research agenda Count on Skills initiates and supports policy and academic research into language deficits, reading promotion and low-literacy that is aimed at practical knowledge and impact assessments. In conjunction with the partners involved (the Reading & Writing Foundation and the Dutch Reading Foundation), research agencies and other parties, the mutual exchange and joint programming of research is addressed in the form of a research agenda.</p> <p>2. Monitoring and evaluation of Count on Skills</p>
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	<p>Count on Skills will be continually evaluated to enable activities to be modified where necessary. An interim evaluation will be conducted in early 2017 and a final evaluation in late 2018, both by an independent research agency.</p> <p>3. <i>Steunpunt Basisvaardigheden</i> (Basic Skills Support Centre) The Basic Skills Support Centre is the most recent incarnation of the Adult Education Support Centre. The new Support Centre no longer concentrates solely on implementing legislation in the field of adult education, but has expanded to include all areas addressed by Count on Skills. The Support Centre also organises events and training courses that promote knowledge exchange and networking activities (e.g. for municipal authorities). The Centre's focus areas still include basic numeracy and computer skills in addition to Dutch language.</p> <p>4. Communication activities A national website will be created that contains up-to-date information on the Count on Skills action programme, and provides access to tools, good practices and methods for improving literacy and promoting reading. The website is scheduled for completion in the first quarter of 2016. A bimonthly digital newsletter will also be initiated. Literacy Week (<i>Week van de Alfabetisering</i>) will be continued in order to keep the problem of low-literacy on the social agenda, and to encourage parties to do something about it.</p>
Methods for recruiting participants	N/A
Professionals involved	N/A
Role of each professional	N/A
Conceptual basis of the good practice examples	<p>The approach for Count on Skills was selected based on various underlying principles and concepts. The decision to target specific low-literacy groups (women, senior citizens) within the approach is based on the results of more detailed analyses from the Dutch report of the PIAAC study conducted in 2012. The report stated that although the Netherlands generally scores well particularly on the higher levels of adult education, low-literacy rates are still rising. The PIAAC figures show lower literacy scores for women than for men, and that a decrease in skills later in</p>

	<p>life is creating a growing group of senior citizens whose basic skills (particularly computer skills) are insufficient for participation in modern society.</p> <p>The decision to include an approach specific to young families is related to studies that indicate that low levels of education and literacy are often passed on from one generation to the next. Breaking this cycle will require preventive measures for infants and children, however the young parents of today must also be included in the approach.</p> <p>A third principle underpinning the Count on Skills policy decisions lies in European and national policy, which is being influenced more and more by socio-economic objectives: if Europe and the Netherlands are to belong to the best knowledge and service economies, investments will be necessary to increase the population's level of education. If 20% of European adults and 13% of Dutch adults do not possess sufficient basic skills, this is not a viable objective. All of this means that the approach to low-literacy and adult education must be increasingly viewed as an integral part of social policy aimed at economic growth.</p> <p>The Count on Skills approach is also being increasingly implemented as part of an approach whose basis was laid partially by the latest amendments to the Adult and Vocational Education Act (<i>Wet Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs</i>, WEB), and which is in line with a further trend in government policy, i.e. that of regionalisation and giving local authorities greater responsibility for the implementation of social policy. Municipal authorities are being allocated more and more tasks related to education, welfare and health care (youth care in particular). The underlying idea here is for municipal authorities to take charge of tasks concerning employment, income, health care, welfare and education, and to ensure that that all residents can participate in society. Literacy is a key element in these responsibilities.</p> <p>In terms of operational aspects, the programme will primarily seek alignment with previously developed methods and programmes whose effectiveness has already been demonstrated by research. This applies in particular to the Language for Life programme in action point 1 (which has already been running for three years in six regions), and the existing Art of Reading programme.</p> <p>Language for Life (For details, please see the other good practice document.)</p> <p>Art of Reading</p>
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	<p>The Art of Reading programme brings children and their parents into contact with reading and the world of books at an early stage. Reading for enjoyment, preferably using texts of cultural value, is of key importance. The Art of Reading is based on the following four principles (abbreviated to <i>LEES</i> in Dutch):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reading environment (including collections) • expertise (training both library staff and childcare/education professionals) • evidence (results supported by impact assessments and monitoring, collecting research results and communication via brochures and congresses/conferences) • collaboration (at strategic, policy and implementation level via national, provincial and local networks).
Resources and Materials List	http://www.steunpuntbasisvaardigheden.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Factsheet.pdf
Financing	<p>An annual sum of approximately €18 million has been reserved for the entire Count on Skills programme, the greatest portion of which is contributed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW).</p> <p>The largest part of the budget (approx. 50%) is reserved for action point 1, rolling out Language for Life in 35 labour market regions and the regional language agreements (over €10 million annually). The incentive scheme for employers under action point 2 comes to €1.7 million per year.</p> <p>Roughly €2.5 million is available annually for action point 3 (launching the Art of Reading programme).</p> <p>For action point 4 (experiments) €500,000 has been made available annually for the Art of Reading low-literacy families pilot, and around €900,000 per year in 2016 and 2017 for the EVA pilot programme for women who are disadvantaged in the labour market. There is also an available budget of €350,000 per year for other pilots that contribute to preventing or combating low-literacy, and pilots specifically targeting senior citizens with low literacy levels (55+) can access €250,000 per year.</p> <p>The budget for action point 5 (knowledge building, knowledge exchange and communication) is around €1.2 million.</p>
Evaluation	N/A
Political impact and policies	N/A
Transferability	
Reference List	https://taalvoorhetleven.nl/over-taal-voor-het-leven/het-programma/

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