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**Our reference**

729386

Date 6 March 2015

Regarding the 'Tel mee met Taal' action programme (Count on Skills)

## 1. Introduction

Low literacy is a social problem that is often still taboo.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 1.3 million residents of the Netherlands between the ages of 16 and 65 have low literacy skills. They struggle to read, write and communicate in the Dutch language. Despite the efforts made by many parties, the number of people with low literacy skills has not decreased in recent years and has even increased among a number of groups.

However, literacy skills are becoming increasingly important in order to participate independently. Think about the use of public and corporate sector websites, online banking, writing a job application letter, or the possibilities for extended independent living. Equally important is the ability to understand safety instructions at work or the package leaflets of medication. Moreover, our government's efforts are sometimes still overly fragmented, and therefore do not effectively reach all low literates. Your house of representatives referred to this in the Siderius and Jadnanansing motion.<sup>2</sup>

The new Tel mee met Taal (Count on Skills) action programme is the response, with which the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment will jointly prevent the situation in which people with limited literacy skills become marginalised. Every low literate is one too many. We shall therefore pay extra attention to literacy skills in the coming years. We shall create synergy by linking various fields in which language plays a role: at school, in libraries and community centres, but also in social neighbourhood teams, the debt assistance scheme, early school leaving, (re-)integration, youth social services and income support departments. In this letter, we are also implementing a number of motions put forward by your House of Representatives regarding the approach to low literacy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This applies particularly to non-Dutch low literates.

<sup>2</sup> Said Siderius and Jadnanansing motion (33911, number 19) requests that the government apply an interdepartmental approach in order to reach larger numbers of low literates.

<sup>3</sup> The Rog motion (33650, no. 9), the Ypma motion (33750 VIII, no. 26), the Bergkamp and Dik-Faber motion (33846, no. 36), the Meenen cs motion (33911, no. 17), and said Siderius and Jadnanansing motion (33911, no. 19). Also applicable is the Yucel motion (30420, no. 181) which has already taken shape in the pilot project whose title translates as Education for Women with Ambition (EVA).

Moreover, we shall link the approach to low literacy of adults to the prevention of language deficiencies and the promotion of reading pleasure among children. This has been proven to contribute to language development and can help prevent low literacy later on in life.<sup>4</sup> In this way, we can improve the chances for vulnerable groups to participate in our society, now and in the future.

Numerous national and local organisations are already working to promote language proficiency. In The Hague for example, more than 250 volunteers from the Taal aan Zee organisation provide lessons for isolated foreign-language women, asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants. In nearly 100 municipalities, all over the Netherlands, the VoorleesExpress (Storytelling Express) ensures that families whose children have poor literacy skills receive a weekly visit from a volunteer who reads out loud to them. In Groningen, the Randstad temping agency provides tailored language support for job seekers with poor literacy skills, provided by a regional education and training centre.<sup>5</sup>

The challenge is to ensure that such initiatives are accessible for all low literates, regardless of their age, origin or where they live. We want to facilitate local councils, employees and the many dedicated professionals and volunteers to provide the best possible local level approach to low literacy. At the same time, we believe that all parties, including the low literates themselves, must be made aware of their responsibilities. We are offering this campaign nationally, as an impulse for local councils to reinforce the local approach to low literacy and promotion of reading.<sup>6</sup>

This campaign is thereby a continuation of programmes that have proven their success, such as the Actieplan Laaggeletterdheid (Low Literacy Action Plan), the "Taal voor het Leven" (Language for Life) pilot programme and the Actieplan Kunst van Lezen (Art of Reading Action Plan). These programmes were nationally developed to provide support to local councils, provincial authorities and civil society organisations in order to tackle low literacy and to promote reading. The programmes are being concluded this year and have been evaluated by now. The positive results of these evaluations (see appendices 1 and 2), and a dialogue with local councillors, language courseproviders, employers, the UWV (Social Security Agency), practical training organisations, the VNG (Association of Netherlands Municipalities), the IPO (inter-provincial body and civil society organisations), among others, have contributed to the design of this new action programme.<sup>7</sup>

Over the course of the programme, we shall be providing an average € 18 million Euros annually for the various measures, € 11 million of which will come from

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<sup>4</sup> Berg, H. van den, & Bus, A. *BoekStart maakt baby's slimmer (BookStart makes babies smarter)*. Amsterdam: Stichting Lezen, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> Appendix 1 gives a number of other good examples.

<sup>6</sup> This letter is aimed at literacy skills, but in practice such skills are often strongly interlinked with numeracy skills and digital competences. In the practical situation therefore, language courses often also improve other basic skills. Vice versa, courses aimed at ICT or numeracy skills can contribute effectively to improving literacy skills. In realisation of the approach, we shall regard literacy cohesively with digital and numeracy skills where necessary and relevant.

<sup>7</sup> Three meetings have been organised with stakeholders: a national meeting in Utrecht, which was linked to the LeerWerkdag (Learning to Work day), for which Friesland served as an example. There were also regional meetings in the municipality of Rotterdam and the province of Limburg.

the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science budget, € 5 million from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment budget and € 2 million from the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport budget.

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## 2. Problem analysis

The Dutch population has a high average level of literacy skills when compared with other European countries.<sup>8</sup> The Netherlands is also one of the countries with the lowest percentage of low literates. Nevertheless, the percentage of low literates in our country has increased from 9.4% (1994) to 11.9% (2012) over the past 17 years – the 1.3 million people referred to earlier (see appendix 4 for research figures).

Although native Dutch people with general secondary education still form the largest group of low literates in absolute terms, an increase has been seen in specific risk groups. By now, 21% of the population in the 55 to 65 year age group is insufficiently literate to play an active independent role in society. The percentage of low literates has also increased among the first generation non-Dutch population: from 25.8% (1994) to 36.2% (2012). Finally, low literacy has grown more strongly among women than among men in recent years. This is particularly true for women who leave the labour market in order to care for children, for example.<sup>9</sup>

### *Language maintenance is essential*

One of the reasons for the increase in numbers of low literates is the ageing population; literacy skills decline with age. Many people who are nowadays low literates received good basic education, but that basis does not always prove to be sufficient for the rest of their lives. People who do not read or write much in their work or daily routine, run the risk of losing their literacy skills. In this sense, the international study titled *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies* (PIAAC) refers to "use it or lose it".

### *Social and economic problem*

Low literacy is not only problematic for individuals, but certainly also for their environment. Growing differences in language fluency increase social inequality, decrease people's social and financial independence and reaffirm traditional role patterns between men and women.<sup>10</sup> Low literacy is also an economic problem, due to reduced productivity of low literates, less tax income and higher healthcare costs.<sup>11</sup>

Low literacy results in problems in the family and at work, and for poorer (awareness regarding) health.<sup>12</sup> Parents with poor literacy skills can provide less support for their children at school, and children who grow up in

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<sup>8</sup> Buisman, M. et al. (2013). *PIAAC: key skills for work and life. Results of the Dutch survey 2012*. Den Bosch: ECBO; OECD. (2014). *PISA 2012 Results in Focus: What 15-Year-Olds Know and What They Can Do with What They Know*.

<sup>9</sup> Buisman, M. & Houtkoop, W. (2014). *Low literacy mapped out* Den Bosch: ECBO, pp. 34-37.

<sup>10</sup> De Greef, M. et al. (2013). *Feiten & cijfers geletterdheid (Facts & figures of literacy)*. Maastricht University School of Business and Economics Educational Research and Development, assigned by the Stichting Lezen & Schrijven (Reading & Writing Foundation), p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Idem, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> 29% of the Dutch people have limited health skills, see <http://www.nivel.nl/dossier/kennissynthese-gezondheidsvaardigheden>.

a family situation lacking literacy skills themselves run more risk of facing a language deficiency.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, nearly 40% of the low literates in the Netherlands feels their health situation to be moderate to poor.<sup>14</sup> Low literacy is also an obstacle to labour participation. The employment market is characterised by growing demand for a broadly deployable workforce.<sup>15</sup> Even the simplest work is becoming more complicated, and requiring greater literacy skills from employees.<sup>16</sup> Low literates are experiencing more difficulty finding or retaining a job, are receiving benefit payments longer and cannot simply receive retraining.<sup>17</sup> Finally, low literacy makes it difficult to undertake social contact and therefore contributes to social isolation.

### 3. Vision of the Count on Skills action programme

Language offers opportunities: to follow good education, to find a job or to undertake and maintain social contacts. Language is learned from an early age at school and elsewhere. Continuous investment is required to keep literacy skills up to par – also after leaving the classroom.

The government has already done a great deal to combat language deficiencies and low literacy in and around the educational system in recent years, such as the extra investments in preschool and infant school education, the ongoing learning pathways for the Dutch language and mathematics, and the literacy requirements when claiming benefit (see appendix 5 for a summary of these efforts). Count on Skills contains additional activities required in order to achieve even more effect and to perpetuate the results achieved in previous efforts.

By means of this action programme, we aim to realise the following main objectives from 2016 to 2018:

1. In the 2016-2018 period, at least 45,000 Dutch residents will improve their literacy skills to such an extent that they score tangibly better at language fluency and social participation, including employment participation.
2. In 2018, a total of 1 million young children up to and including primary school age will be reached by reading promotion activities, in order to increase their literacy skills and pleasure in reading.

In these objectives, we are opting for ambition and feasibility. We do not wish to reiterate the past by suggesting that the number of low literates can be considerably reduced within a few years. Low literacy really is a long-term issue, which requires the continued efforts of many parties, including local councils,

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<sup>13</sup> Broekhof, K. & Nijhof Broek, M. *Meer voorlezen, beter in taal (More Storytelling, better Language). Effecten van voorlezen op taalontwikkeling (Storytelling to improve language. Effects of storytelling on language development)*. Amsterdam: Stichting Lezen, pp. 8-9.

<sup>14</sup> Buisman, M., et al. (2013). *PIAAC: Key skills for work and life. Results of the Dutch survey 2012*.

<sup>15</sup> WRR. (2013). *Naar een lerende economie. Investeren in het verdienvermogen van Nederland (Heading for a learning economy. Investing in the earning capacity of the Netherlands)*.

<sup>16</sup> Onderwijsraad (Education Council). (2013). *Meer kansen voor kwetsbare jongeren (More opportunities for vulnerable youth)*.

<sup>17</sup> Buisman, M. & Houtkoop, W. (2014). *Low literacy mapped out* Den Bosch: ECBO, p.5; p. 24.

employers and the low literates themselves. In the approach taken by this action programme, we wish to put a process into motion in which we can not only achieve the above-mentioned objectives in the short term, but also help create the preconditions under which low literacy can be structurally prevented and tackled. The objectives of this programme are not a final target thereby, but rather a milestone on the road to a structural decrease in the number of low literates in the Netherlands.

Together with other efforts made by the government to promote literacy skills, the measures implemented in Count on Skills will contribute to the Netherlands retaining its position in the top three countries with the lowest number of low literates.<sup>18</sup>

#### *Effective approach to low literacy*

There is a very high threshold for many low literates to register for a language course. This is why it is so important to involve various organisations in the direct vicinity of low literates, in their own role. They can identify low literates and can refer them to a suitable language skills provider. This may be in a ROC (regional education and training centre), but equally so in a community centre or library. Language education is most effective when taking place in the natural environment of the low literates: at their work for example, or via a temping agency or hospital. We want more civil society organisations to acknowledge their role in identifying and educating low literates, and in mutual cooperation. The evaluations of the current action plans and our dialogues, have shown that there is room for improvement.

We are also looking for ways to link the preventative approach to language deficiency and low literacy with the curative combating of low literacy. For example, a school can not only prevent language deficiency among children and young people, but can at the same time detect potential low literacy among parents. This broad approach to low literacy is also a furtherance of the Bergkamp and Dik-Faber motion (33846, no. 36),<sup>19</sup>

#### *Three domains*

Low literacy can be most effectively tackled in those situations where the major problems surrounding language deficits and low literacy are found, and where new links between organisations have the best chance of success. These are the family, the employment market and healthcare surroundings. These domains will be the focus in all lines of action described below.

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<sup>18</sup> In those countries who participated in the international comparative study of the OECD in 2013. Buisman, M. & Houtkoop, W. (2014). *Low literacy mapped out* Den Bosch: ECBO, p 39 e.v.

<sup>19</sup> which requested that the role played by libraries in combating low literacy be studied and developed. The libraries and the Royal Library will therefore play an important role in the implementation of this action programme.

### Family

Language deficiencies are often passed from one generation to another. Low literacy must therefore be simultaneously prevented among children and combated among parents, both mothers and fathers. This can break through the vicious circle of passing down language deficiencies.

### Employment market

On the employment market, employees, employers and job seekers alike have a great deal to gain from literacy skills. Employees are more flexibly deployable, can move on to better work more easily and are more capable of following (safety) instructions if they are sufficiently fluent in a language. Employers benefit from flexible, sustainably deployable employees with whom they can react to an ever more dynamic and competitive economy. Better literacy skills allow job seekers to find a job more readily, while those not entitled to benefits can improve their social position through better literacy skills.

### Healthcare

Low literates are often less capable of finding information on illness, health and a healthy lifestyle. Decentralisation of the long-term healthcare is a step in the direction of enabling people to live independently for as long as possible despite their advanced age or illness, and allowing them to participate fully in society. A lack of literacy skills must not be an obstacle in this process.

## **4. Count on Skills action programme**

### **Action line 1. Local network approach**

Action: the local network approach will extend the Taal voor het Leven (Language for Life) pilot programme throughout the Netherlands.

#### Main objective

Over the course of this action programme, at least 45,000 new participants all over the Netherlands will begin a language proficiency course in which the materials and volunteers of Taal voor het Leven (Language for Life) are deployed.

#### Intended results:

1a. A sustainable infrastructure will be formed in each employment market region, with which local councils cooperate with local and regional partners in managing the most effective way of identification and combating low literacy.

1b. In each region, new literacy volunteers will be trained, who can be deployed as language buddies, language coaches or supervisors of low literates. Throughout the Netherlands, at least 3000 volunteers will have been trained by 2018.

1c. In each region, at least one recognisable, permanent meeting place will have been set up for course participants, volunteers, teachers and other network partners: Taalpunt (Language Desk).

### *Language for Life network programme*

Language is learned locally, which is why it is so important to ensure that the language courses offered locally are in keeping with the needs of potential course participants. The network programme Taal voor het Leven (Language for Life) can play an important role. This programme has been conducted as a pilot in the four main cities and in the provinces of Flevoland and Overijssel since 2012. Regional language teams do not actually provide language courses, but rather meet the need of regional parties to make the existing range of language courses even more effective. They do so in the regions by promoting better cooperation between the locations where low literates can be found, such as the UWV (Social Security Agency), social working companies, Leerwerkloketten (education and career guidance organisations) and social neighbourhood teams, with those locations where language lessons are offered, such as ROC (regional education and training centre), libraries and community centres. By connecting these organisations, a regional literacy network is formed, which allows local councils to make their approach to low literacy more effective. Moreover, all kinds of other parties, including employers and health care institutions, are alerted to their role and responsibility.

We support local governments and organisations where low literates can be found or trained, with *nationally* developed teaching and recruitment materials adjusted to the learning needs of low literates. By doing so, local authorities do not all need to reinvent the proverbial wheel. Language volunteers will also be trained in each region, for deployment by local providers as coaches or language buddies, as reinforcement of the regular teaching programme. This will take place in cooperation with existing local volunteer initiatives such as volunteer agencies and the volunteer work by the Het begint met Taal (It starts with Language) support organisation or the Dutch Refugee Council. This will render the regional literacy efforts more effective, while course participants will book better progress in terms of literacy levels and social participation versus regular language courses.

### *Network approach in 35 employment market regions*

Thanks to the Taal voor het Leven (Language for Life) pilot programme (2012-2015), the preconditions for an effective approach to low literacy have been successfully organised in six regions. In these regions, more low literates have been trained and they have made considerable progress in language fluency and social inclusion.<sup>20</sup> Over the next three years therefore, we shall be extending this programme nationally in order to support local councils.

We shall ensure that the preconditions are in place in each region in order to effectively tackle low literacy. The language teams are active in each region where they are required. They help develop a language network, while supporting parties with expertise and teaching materials. Where possible, they work in line with existing regional structures, such as Leerwerkloketten (education and career guidance organisations), in order to identify low literates and provide literacy training. Over the course of the Count on Skills action

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<sup>20</sup> See appendix 1 for a summary of the results given in the evaluation of Language for Life.

programme (2016-2018), at least 45,000 new participants will thereby begin to improve their literacy proficiency, in which the teaching and testing materials and volunteers of Taal voor het Leven (Language for Life) are used. The number of newly recruited participants is a good indicator of the functioning of the regional infrastructure and the effectiveness of the language network.

The language teams will initially focus on the central municipalities of the 35 employment market regions.<sup>21</sup> The language teams ensure that local councils and other parties involved in a region can develop a sustainable regional infrastructure in order to identify low literates and to supervise them in finding (literacy) education. This basic infrastructure comprises:

- A Language Desk as the local or regional hub in the language network. Here, all regional information on the language training availability can be bundled, target group members can request information and courses and events can be organised.
- Use of the Taalmeter (Basic Skills Quick Scan), with which temping agencies, the UWV (Social Security Agency), the Supplementary Benefits and Leerwerkloketten (education and career guidance organisations) and care providers can more readily identify low literates and refer them to suitable language education (see appendix 3 for good examples).
- Provision of training for language volunteers.

### **Action line 2. Language Agreements**

Action: the network approach taken by Language for Life results in Language Agreements being signed in all (employment market) regions. These agreements allow local councils to keep control and take responsibility in rendering the language network sustainable, together with other (curative and preventative) parties. The existing Language Agreement with employers will be extended and will be given a role within the regional agreements, where possible.

#### Main objective

This action line contributes both to the main objective of tackling low literacy among adults and to the main objective of promoting reading among children.

#### Intended results:

- 2a. The number of employment market regions in which there is a Language Agreement will grow from at least 10 in 2016 to 20 in 2017 and 30 in 2018.
- 2b. The number of employers (including the national government) affiliated to the Language Agreement: Zet in op Taal! (Work with Language!) and/or the regional Language Agreements will increase to 300 in 2018.
- 2c. An incentive budget will be formed for all (employment market) regions with a Language Agreement, in order to facilitate extra practical language education for hard-to-reach target groups, on top of the existing budgets.

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<sup>21</sup> These central municipalities already have a coordinating function in the organisation of a regional range of literacy and numeracy courses for low literates, based on the WEB Adult and Vocational Education Act. The scale level of the employment market regions is also very much in keeping with the regional efforts made within the framework of preschool and infant school education, the Leerwerkloketten (education and career guidance organisations) and the regional working companies.



### *Language Agreements in the region*

Following the temporary support for the development of a regional language network offered by this action programme (2016 – 2018), local councils and other regional parties will be responsible for continuing the approach. Regional Language Agreements can be a helpful tool in doing so. In a regional Language Agreement, local councils, libraries, employers, language course providers, care institutions and other parties commit themselves to contribute to preventing language deficiencies and combating low literacy.

A Language Agreement will also pay explicit attention to the approach to literacy in families, the employment market and health (care) fields. The Language Agreement may contain agreements on concrete results in reaching the various target group and on the measurement of effects, for example. The regional language teams funded via this action programme will ensure that the Language Agreements are sufficiently ambitious while at the same time realistic and measurable.

A logical level at which to conclude a Language Agreement is that of the 35 employment market regions, though cooperating local councils may also choose an alternative workable scale. The Language Agreement also has room to incorporate existing local and regional agreements: on adult education, the combating of language deficiencies among children or the investment of participation and reintegration finance. By linking various agreements together, a cohesive regional plan can be formed in order to effectively tackle low literacy.

The national government will have a visible presence in supporting the achievement of regional and local results. During the various regional and local dialogues undertaken in the run-up to this action programme, it became clear that national government visibility and involvement was greatly appreciated. In designing the regional approach and the Language Agreements, we will conduct an active dialogue with the regions in order to determine the required national government role. Co-signature of a regional Language Agreement by the national government, together with local councils, is an option.

The target is to have concluded the first regional Language Agreements from 2016, as one of the results of the local Taal voor het Leven (Language for Life) network approach, and that Language Agreements have been formed for the 2019-2022 period in at least 30 regions by 2018. This will sustainably anchor the efforts made via this action programme, among local councils and other local and regional allied parties who sign the Language Agreement.

### *Language Agreement with employers*

Alongside the regional Language Agreements, the Heerma<sup>22</sup> motion already resulted in the Language Agreement: Zet in op Taal! (Work with Language!) signed by the Minister for SZW (Social Affairs and Employment) and 29 leading employers, on 27 January last. This is a pledge by the employers to support literacy activities within their own organisations. In doing so, they are encouraging other companies to join in.

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<sup>22</sup> The Heerma motion (32824, no. 15) requests that the government produce a supplement to the Integration Agenda aimed at stimulation and facilitation of citizenship and civil society initiatives. The Language Agreement for employers is part of this supplement. Refer also to the letter giving the state of affairs on Work and Language Agreements (32824, no. 77).

The ministry of SZW (Social Affairs and Employment) has co-signed the Language Agreement and is using its ambassador role to commit more organisations within the (national) government to the Language Agreement. The aim is that numerous departments, implementing bodies and supervising bodies play an active role in the literacy skills of their own employees. Via the leading employers, the target is to increase the number of companies working actively at literacy skills at work, by factor 10. In order to render this initiative sustainable, a link will be sought where possible between this Language Agreement and the regional Language Agreements as from 2016.

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#### *Incentive budget*

In order to make the local network approach and the signing of Language Agreements more effective, we provide those parties who have signed an Agreement with an annual budget to offer extra practical language training for low literates. This concerns short-term tailored courses with which low literate employees can learn directly applicable literacy skills, for example. Low literate employees in particular have a need for short, practical modules in order to retain employment, to move on or to find work (again). Such short courses can also serve as a stepping stone to a more extensive literacy or numeracy course through adult education and the regular education funds. Such provisions are now not always adequately deployed because the existing range of education offered is sometimes insufficiently flexible, as it is exclusively aimed at gaining a certificate or diploma or because the content of the courses has been strictly defined in national final results. This range is therefore not always particularly attractive for low literates who have a negative educational experience and who must cross a threshold in order to undertake retraining.

By supporting short-term, practically based language courses for low literates, we are also responding to the demand by local and national parties to not only provide essential preconditions to address low literacy, but also to ensure that financial means for the approach to low literacy are directly applied for the benefit of literacy education for the target group.

A comparable approach has had positive results in Norway, and a small-scale pilot is to be implemented in the Netherlands in 2015, within the framework of the Actieplan Laaggeletterdheid (Low literacy Action plan).<sup>23</sup> Based on these experiences, we shall be entering into a dialogue with the involved parties, such as the Stichting Lezen & Schrijven (Reading & Writing foundation), the VNG (Association of Netherlands Municipalities), libraries, language courseproviders and the target group, on the way in which this budget can be made available as effectively as possible, without fragmentation. The plan is to gradually increase the scope of this budget from € 1.1 million in 2016 to € 2.2 million in 2018. This approach also serves to answer the Ypma<sup>24</sup> and Van Meenen motions.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For more information, refer to <http://www.unesco.org/ui/litbase/?menu=4&programme=126>.

<sup>24</sup> The Ypma motion (33750 VIII, no. 26) requests that the government reserve 5 million Euros to combat low literacy from 2015, and to find this financing for upper secondary vocational education, as it becomes available in the budgeting agreement; it also requests that the government deploy these 5 million Euros for effective methods in order to resolve the issues surrounding low literacy.

<sup>25</sup> The Van Meenen motion (33911, no. 17) requests that the government formulate a national approach for combating low literacy in the elderly, including a more intensive cooperation with the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG), libraries, care institutions and care providers, and to thereby connect to initiatives such as Nederland Leest (the Netherlands reads), the Boekenweek (Book Week) and the Nationale Voorleesdagen (National Storytelling Days).

### Action line 3. Promoting reading

Action: the Actieplan Kunst van Lezen (Art of Reading action plan) will be continued for the coming three years. The Art of Reading will be rolled out nationally and reinforced. This will take place by means of extra efforts for parents with low literacy skills, and their children, by means of a pilot.

#### Main objective

In 2018, a total of 1 million young children up to and including primary school age will be reached with reading activities, in order to increase their literacy skills and pleasure in reading.

#### Intended results:

3a. By the end of 2018, the BoekStart (BookStart) programme will have been implemented in all basic libraries, by the end of 2018, 100% of the parents of newborn babies will be informed and 55% of the Dutch babies will be actively reached via their parents.

3b. By the end of 2018, 85% of the basic libraries will have implemented BookStart in childcare, in which 45% of the childcare institutions in their catchment area will participate. 3c. By the end of 2018, the Bibliotheek op School (Library at School) programme will have been extended. In primary education with 85% of the basic libraries reaching 60% of the pupils in their catchment area. In VMBO (pre-vocational education) with 25% of the basic libraries reaching 25% of the pupils in their catchment area. In HAVO (senior general secondary education) and VWO (pre-university education) with 10% of the basic libraries reaching 10% of the pupils in their catchment area.

#### *Promotion of reading*

The approach to low literacy cannot be seen separately from measures intended to prevent language deficiencies and low literacy, such as promotion of reading. Promotion of reading is aimed not only at children with a language deficiency, but at all children. By promoting reading, we are also working at cultural targets after all, such as reading pleasure and the reading of literary texts. Studies have shown that reading and storytelling also have a positive effect on literacy skills, including comprehensive reading, spelling, writing, grammar and vocabulary.<sup>26</sup> The policy aimed at promotion of reading and reading pleasure is therefore a valuable supplement to regular language education, and is part of the Actieplan Tel mee met taal (Count on Skills action programme).

In the 2008-2011 and 2012-2015 periods, the Stichting Lezen (Reading Foundation) has cooperated with SIOB (the Sector Institute for Public Libraries, now the Royal Dutch Library) to implement the Actieplan Kunst van Lezen (Art of Reading action plan).<sup>27</sup> The evaluation of Kunst van Lezen shows that corroborative partners (including local councils, childcare organisations, schools, child daycare centres and parents) are positive about the mutual cooperation within the framework of Art of Reading. A number of results of this cooperation

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<sup>26</sup> Broekhof, K. & Nijhof-Broek, M. (2014). [2<sup>nd</sup> print]. *Meer voorlezen, beter in taal (More storytelling, better in language)*. Sardes, p. 19; Broekhof, K. (2014). [4<sup>th</sup> print]. *Meer voorlezen, beter in taal (More storytelling, better in language)*. Sardes, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> See appendix 2 for a summary of the results given in the evaluation of Art of Reading (2012-2015).

are the more or less national roll-out of BookStart for young children aged 0 – 4 years and the quick rate at which library branches are being opened at schools throughout the country. BookStart and the Library at School have generally proven to be effective and are embedded in the structural library policy.<sup>28</sup>

We shall be supporting Kunst van Lezen for a further three years in order to facilitate further expansion. Our target is that, by 2018, a total of approximately 1 million young children up to and including primary school age, will be reached by the reading promotion activities of Kunst van Lezen each year: BoekStart for babies, BoekStart in childcare and the Bibliotheek op School. This is approximately half of the total target group: babies at home, children of 0-4 years at childcare and children of 4-12 years at primary school. The children reached in secondary education are additional to these numbers.

#### **Action line 4. Experimentation**

Action: by means of pilots, we shall establish connections between language and other subjects in which poor literacy skills play a role. This will allow us to better serve poorly accessible target groups.

We shall initially focus on the four pilots described below and will also support or initiate new experimental pilots.

##### Main objective

This action line contributes both to the main objective of tackling low literacy among adults and to the main objective of promoting reading among children.

##### Intended results:

4a. A substantially larger reach of children from (migrant) parents with poor literacy skills, within the approach of Kunst van Lezen via BoekStart (in childcare) and the Bibliotheek op School.

4b. Agreements between parents and schools with regard to the joint effort for their own literacy development and that of their children.

4c. The existing pilot *Educatie voor Vrouwen met Ambitie* (Education for Women with Ambition pilot, or EVA) and the Literacy approach for parents and children will be jointly further integrated in *Taal voor het Leven*, which will thereby become more effective in reaching these target groups.

4d. Greater reach of low literacy elderly (50-plus) in order that they can achieve health benefits.

##### *Experimentation*

We create space for innovation aimed at themes and poorly accessible target groups for whom insufficient results are currently booked. By means of

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<sup>28</sup> The education inspectorate has requested attention for the importance of promotion of reading at school. The Inspectorate has become aware that there is limited reading pleasure among Dutch children, and relatively speaking among boys. In their opinion, this is a matter for concern, because the regular reading of books has a positive and circular relationship with learning performance: children who read on a regular basis improve their comprehension of text and learn more easily from books, which in turn stimulates reading (educational report 2012/2013).

pilots, we can establish an active link between literacy and new themes, at the national government level for example. By linking this to the approach to literacy skills, even more impact can be made. Examples include themes such as (youth) counselling, digitisation and social neighbourhood teams. The pilots can be aimed at the development and testing of new forms of language education, but also at the organisation of experimental leeway where legislation or existing practices form an obstacle to cooperation. In doing so, we can determine which practices and preconditions are most effective. We shall begin with the four pilots described below. The aim is to develop new pilots together with regional and local parties. EU finance can also be requested for this purpose, to supplement the budget of this action programme.

One such pilot will take place within Kunst van Lezen, and is aimed at families with poor literacy skills, who have so far been ineffectively reached via Kunst van Lezen. Better cooperation with schools, the Stichting Lezen en Schrijven (Reading and Writing Foundation) and other storytelling and reading initiatives are expected to give added value. The monitor studies of Kunst van Lezen pay specific attention to reaching children of parents with poor literacy skills. We shall request the Stichting Lezen (Reading Foundation), de Koninklijke Bibliotheek (the Royal Dutch Library) and Stichting Lezen en Schrijven (the Reading & Writing Foundation) to jointly formulate a plan of approach.

The existing Educatie voor Vrouwen met Ambitie pilot will continue to exist as an independent project, but will be closely involved in the Taal voor het Leven network approach in order to facilitate optimum exchange of knowledge and (teaching) materials. Your House of Representatives has explicitly requested extra deployment for low literacy women who are remote from the labour market (Yucel motion 30420, no. 181), as women who leave the employment market often lose skills, which can make it difficult for them to subsequently regain employment. The pilot plays specific attention to the linking of literacy skills to other basic skills such as numeracy and ICT.

In 2016, we shall then follow up the current approach via the 'Language for parents and children together' approach in preschool and infant education, in a pilot at several schools. This is aimed at trying out methods to motivate parents with poor literacy skills to work at those skills, outside the education costing system. Schools can cooperate by making classrooms available for language courses for example, by referring parents to language lessons, by recording agreements with parents or allowing parents to use the teaching materials of their children.

Finally, we shall initiate a pilot in 2016, aimed at low literates of 50 years and older, due to this being a target group which is difficult to reach. Specific attention will be paid to the lifestyle and learning needs of this target group, aimed at increasing independent social inclusion, self-sufficiency and health skills by means of language schooling.

### **Action line 5. Knowledge and communication**

Action: we shall organise a number of national support tasks in order to support the regional and local approaches. These concern knowledge development and knowledge sharing, the formation of a national language network and the implementation of communication campaigns.

#### Main objective

This action line contributes both to the main objective of tackling low literacy among adults and to the main objective of promoting reading among children.

#### Intended results:

5a. Local and regional parties have access to knowledge of what works, and to relevant facts and figures.

5b. The national language network links the local, regional and national approaches, and commits national organisations within the social field to the tasks of this action programme.

5c. Deployment of national communication tools results in the activation of organisations who are in contact with the target group, and of the low literate citizens themselves.

#### *Knowledge*

The ministries of OCW (Education, Culture and Science), SZW (Social Affairs and Employment) and VWS (Health, Welfare and Sport) have jointly developed a knowledge agenda aimed at developing and sharing knowledge with the regional and local parties who reach out to low literates. This concerns knowledge on proven effective methods to combat low literacy and language deficits among children. At the same time, the research agendas of national and regional parties are linked to the European research agenda in the field of Adult Learning. This also concerns the collection and sharing of data on the (scope of the) target group and the degree to which the target group is reached via Taal voor het Leven or other approaches. Finally, we shall monitor and evaluate the effects of this action programme as a whole and of the five action lines separately, via an interim evaluation early in 2017 and a final evaluation at the end of 2018. We shall also be evaluating the changes to the law on adult education.

#### *Communication*

In 2015, we shall formulate a joint communication strategy for the 2016-2018 period, together with those parties involved. This will concern communication aimed at the agenda, breaking with taboos, increasing awareness and sharing of knowledge of low literacy. There will be specific attention for communication strategies which have already proven to be effective. Examples include the Week van de Alfabetisering (Week of Literacy) and the campaign titled Vaders voor Lezen (Fathers for Reading). The online knowledge portal of low literacy which was developed within the framework of the Actieplan Laaggeletterdheid (Low Literacy action plan) in 2014/2015 will be continued and adjusted to the domains and action lines in this action programme.

#### *Language network*

In order to achieve even more impact and reach, we have taken the initiative to

form a national language network, in which national and local players who are involved with low literate citizens and low literacy will commit to the objectives of this action programme. They will include local councils / the VNG (Association of Netherlands Municipalities), language courseproviders and managers of online learning environments for low literates such as the ETV (Educational TV), education and career guidance organisations, knowledge centres, libraries, health institutions, youth institutions, national volunteer initiatives and representatives of employers. The network meets regularly and its participants ensure commitment within their organisations, the exchange of knowledge and experience in execution of the action programme. Thus the network forms a link between the local approach and the national coordination and targets. In this network, relationships will also be established with other relevant initiatives which are (partly) aimed at reinforcement of basic skills, such as Mediawijzer.net (online initiative on how to use (online) media safely), the Digivaardig Digiveilig ('Digi skills digi safety') programme and the Alles is Gezondheid (All is Health) health prevention programme.

The network can also play a role in the administrative gearing between the national government and other government bodies. Municipalities and provinces fulfil several roles: they themselves are parties to the network while at the same time supporting other parties within such a network. Municipalities finance local libraries for example, while provincial authorities finance the provincial service organisations which play an important role in the approach to promotion of reading and combating low literacy. The Cabinet will therefore reach agreements with the IPO (inter-provincial body) and the VNG (Association of Netherlands Municipalities) on their role in execution of this action programme, and will periodically discuss progress with them. We shall formulate the language network in more detail over the course of 2015.

#### *Cooperation within the national government*

In the Rog motion (33650, no. 9), your House of Representatives requested a study of the national tasks and budgets required in order to efficiently and effectively implement the regional approach to low literacy. We have done so in dialogues with municipalities, language courseproviders and other parties involved. These dialogues and the evaluation of the Actieplan Laaggeletterdheid (Low literacy action plan) have shown that the current national support can become more effective if the commissioning ministries cooperate more effectively. Execution of the action plan and the measures described is therefore the joint responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. The expertise and experience of the Adult Education Support Team will be involved in this cooperation.



| <b>Financial investment in Count on Skills 2016-2018</b>                   |           |
|--|-----------|
| Average per year   |           |
|  | x million |
|  |           |
| Action line 1: Local network approach                                      | 10.5      |
| Action line 2: Language agreements and arrangements for literacy education | 1.7       |
| Action line 3: Promoting reading   | 2.9       |
| Action line 4/5: Pilots, knowledge and communication                       | 3         |
| <b>total (rounded off)</b>   | <b>18</b> |
|  |           |
| <b>Cover</b>   |           |
| OCW - Education, Culture and Science                                       | 11        |
| SZW - Social Affairs and Employment  | 5         |
| VWS - Health, Welfare and Sport  | 2         |
| <b>total (rounded off)</b>   | <b>18</b> |
|  |           |

## **Finally**

**Our reference**  
729386

The principles and action lines of this letter will be further concretised by the three ministries and the parties involved, over the course of 2015. We shall also keep you up to date via an interim evaluation of the execution of the action programme early in 2017.

In the Tel Mee met Taal action programme, this cabinet is taking the following step in preventing language deficiencies, promoting reading and combating low literacy: more stimulating, more visible and more effective. The action lines are a supplement to the measures already taken in preschool and infant school education and regular education. The final target is that as many Dutch citizens as possible have sufficient literacy skills that they can participate fully in society.

The Minister for Education, Culture and Science,

dr. Jet Bussemaker,

The Minister for Social Affairs and Employment,

L.F. Asscher,

The Secretary of State for Social Affairs and Employment,

Jetta Klijnsma,

The Secretary of State for Health, Welfare and Sports

drs. M.J. van Rijn.

## **APPENDICES**

1. Evaluation of Low Literacy action plan and pilots for Language for Life (2012-2015)
2. Evaluation of Art of Reading (2012-2015)
3. Good examples
4. Research figures: low literacy and language deficiencies in the Netherlands
5. Cabinet policy: what is already done in the literacy domain?

The Actieplan Laaggeletterdheid (Low Literacy Action Plan) and the Taal voor het Leven (Language for Life) pilot programme have run from 2012 up to and including 2015. The action plan was evaluated in autumn 2014. The Language for Life pilot programme is continuously evaluated. The ministry of Education, Culture and Science, finances both programmes. Over the 2012-2015 period, the action plan has received € 4 million annually and Language for Life € 5 million annually.

The action plan is initially aimed at bringing together and activating national and local parties who are involved in the approach to low literacy, putting low literacy on the agenda as a social problem, and the development and distribution of materials with which organisations can identify and address low literacy. The focus of Language for Life lies in the actual improvement of literacy skills of low literates by means of language education.

Although both programmes focus on literacy skills, they also include numerical skills and their applicability in a digital context. The Low Literacy action plan is a national action programme. The Language for Life pilot programme is being organised in the four large cities, as well as Flevoland and Overijssel.

Evaluation of the action plan has shown the vast majority of cooperation partners to be positive regarding the plan. More than 80 percent of the parties questioned indicated that their own organisation's approach to low literacy has improved with the aid of activities developed via the action plan, and that they would have achieved less in their approach to low literacy without the action plan. Activities which are particularly appreciated in this sense, and for which the added value of a national approach were emphasised, are the stimulation of activities, putting low literacy on the agenda as a social problem, the help desk function of the Adult Education Support Team, the sharing of research and the development of teaching and course materials.

The Language for Life pilot programme is continuously monitored. The monitor is specifically aimed at measuring the effect and impact of language literacy training courses on the language fluency and perception of social inclusion among individual course participants. The Language for Life programme is a collective name for various types of language courses for low literate adults, which is managed by the Reading & Writing Foundation and realised by local and regional partners, such as ROC (regional education and training centre), libraries and volunteer organisations. The Reading & Writing Foundation entered into alliances with dozens of organisations in each region, who can reach and serve the target group. These participating organisations are then actively supported with instruments and materials to help them identify low literates and offer fitting training courses. In 2013 and 2014, local partners reached 9000 course participants, while more than 3000 volunteers followed the national training course provided by Language for Life. Research by Maastricht University shows that this approach by the local organisations gives better learning results versus comparable learning situations at home and abroad.

Approximately 70% of participants can apply their literacy skills more effectively in practice, 53% has better reading skills, 53% experiences a greater degree of psychological health and 39% a greater degree of physical health. Approximately

70% scores higher on various criteria for social inclusion and a quarter of the participants reports a better employment market position.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science initiated the Kunst van Lezen (Art of Reading) action plan 2008-2011 in order to promote (literary) reading, in 2008. This action plan was continued in Kunst van Lezen 2012-2015. This continuation was put to the House of Representatives along with the Low Literacy action plan in 2011, as the cultural pendant with a useful target group within the Low Literacy action plan, aimed at teaching (technical) reading and writing by adults. The action plan is executed nationally by the Reading Foundation – the national organisation with regard to promotion of reading – in cooperation with the Sector Institute for Public Libraries (now the Royal Dutch Library) and financed by subsidy from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (€ 2.85 million per year). Its execution takes place via libraries, schools and childcare facilities, by specially trained employees; library staff have been trained as reading coaches and teachers as reading coordinators, who work in close cooperation.

The programme lines of Art of Reading 2012-2015:

- BoekStart for baby's (Bookstart for Babies) is a Dutch variant with a successful approach, adopted from the United Kingdom, in which families with a baby are brought into contact with reading and storytelling, books and the library. Local councils and/or infant welfare centres inform parents of newborn babies that they can collect a BookStart briefcase from the library, containing (rustling) books and a CD, and that their child is entitled to free membership of the library.
- BookStart in child care supports child-care institutions in order to improve the reading environment and the expertise of pedagogic staff.
- De Bibliotheek op School (The Library at Primary School) realises an attractively presented collection geared to the school population, which the children are also allowed to take home, and supports the library at the school by deploying a library reading coach.
- The Library at Secondary School continues to develop what was started at primary school, and is aimed at supporting secondary education institutions in the formation of a collection and attention for leisure reading and media skills.
- Leesbevorderingsnetwerken (Reading promotion networks) are cemented via regional workshops and conferences, the purpose being to accelerate the implementation of BookStart and the Library *at school* and to reinforce the relationships between libraries and educational parties at the local level (such as childcare facilities, educational facilities and local councils).

Being a low threshold public facility and specialist in promotion of reading, the library plays a central role in all programme lines.

These programme lines also work at continuation of the reading line and continuation of the media skills line from 0 to 18 years, via BookStart (0-4 years) and the Library at School (4-12 years, 12-18 years).

#### *A number of results of the evaluation*

Art of Reading is still underway until the end of 2015, though the evaluation was conducted at the end of 2014, for the purpose of this Letter. The intended

results with regard to the various programme lines have currently been partially achieved, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Generally speaking, one can ascertain that the Art of Reading programme has been successful: there is greater field support for this national approach to promotion of reading (the involved parties cooperate more) and there is more attention for the importance of reading. A number of results:

- BookStart for babies was successfully rolled out in 159 of the 160 basic libraries at the end of 2014; the ambition with regard to reach (65% of the Dutch babies) has not yet been realised and is not expected to have been realised by the end of 2015.
- The target for BookStart in childcare is expected to have been partially achieved by the end of 2015: the number of basic libraries to have rolled out the product in their own working area will probably meet the target, but the reach of the underlying target group (the intended 37.5% of childcare locations, currently 13%) will not be achieved.
- The Library at School will very probably achieve the reach target of 50% of primary school pupils by the end of 2015.

The target will not be achieved in secondary education, as the programme is still in the pilot phase there. As far as the reading promotion networks are concerned, the target will probably be reached (80% of the basic libraries working together with a (local) government body and institutions).

Not all targets have been achieved and the BookStart and Library at School products are not yet 'ready': both quantitatively and qualitatively speaking, greater efforts are required in digital resources, monitoring, anchoring, financing and cooperation in policy and execution. Also important is more structural gearing between the Foundation for Reading and Art of Reading on the one hand and the Reading & Writing Foundation on the other, at both the management and executing levels.

Generally speaking, we can ascertain that Art of Reading has realised a structural approach to promotion of reading via libraries, so that a new generation will grow up with storytelling and reading at home, at childcare facilities and at school, as a matter of course. However, if there is truly to be a new cohort of motivated and skilled readers in 10 years' time, it is now essential to continue the approach initiated via Art of Reading and to reinforce it according to the points described above.

## Appendix 3: Good examples

### Good Examples – decentralised

#### *Language incentives & parental involvement in Haaglanden*

Jeugdformaat (Youth Format) is an organisation for youth and pedagogic assistance in the Haaglanden region. Each year, this organisation supports approximately 7000 families and 1100 foster families who are experiencing problems with bringing up children. As part of its approach, Jeugdformaat screens parents' languageliteracy skills. When parents are shown to be low literates, Jeugdformaat offers the Taal voor Thuis (Literacy at Home) programme. This is an approach developed by the Reading & Writing Foundation, the purpose being to improve language incentives for children at home and to increase parental involvement.

#### *Language clinic in the hospital*

In the main hall of the Onze Lieve Vrouwe Gasthuis (OLVG) hospital in Amsterdam, patients, visitors and staff can receive support at a language desk, at set times. During the language clinic, specially trained volunteers provide assistance completing forms or reading folders or information leaflets. They also provide information on low literacy, refer people to language lessons in the neighbourhood and provide support for language course registration.

Every language clinic results in new course participants. By now, the example set by the OLVG has also been followed in language clinics in the Flevoziekenhuis (hospital) in Almere and the Albert Schweitzer hospital in Dordrecht.

#### *BoekStart in Klavertje Zes childcare centre in Groningen*

Various studies have shown that storytelling at a young age has a positive effect on the vocabulary, language development and concentration span of children. However, storytelling was not given enough time and attention at the Klavertje Zes childcare centre in Groningen. The available books were old and in poor condition. The situation has been improved thanks to the BookStart project in the childcare centre: the collection has been supplemented and greatly improved, and younger children now also read books more frequently and for longer periods. BookStart in childcare is a project initiated by the Foundation for Reading and the Sector Institute for Public Libraries (now RDL) following on from the BookStart for babies, which is aimed at parents and is executed by the library and infant welfare centres. Thanks to the subsidy for BookStart in childcare, a collection of books can be purchased and childcare and library staff trained. The project starts with a zero monitor, with which the current situation regarding the storytelling and reading policy is determined. Evaluation takes place after 8 months.

#### *Taal aan Zee (Language at Sea) in The Hague*

Taal aan Zee offers a low threshold and differentiated range of education for isolated foreign-language women, refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants and/or low literates. It allows them to improve their self-sufficiency and lowers

the threshold for their participation in society. The lessons are often tailored to their needs, either individually or as a group, at a central location in The Hague, at home or in the neighbourhood.

More than 250 volunteers provide the educational activities of Language at Sea, and are supported by a small and professional staff. There are also several organisations which co-facilitate the work of Taal aan Zee or which play an important role in some other manner. Taal aan Zee has been successful in serving vulnerable groups who are difficult to access, with an approach which offers new opportunities for full social participation.

#### *Chain approach to Low literacy in Friesland*

In Friesland, the Leerwerk Locket (education and career guidance organisation) is the driving force behind a chain approach to low literacy. Friesland is home to approximately 70,000 low literates and more than 30 organisations are involved in reaching them. The organisation screens clients in terms of low literacy, and links the results to opportunities for literacy training.

An important success factor of this approach is the linking of low literates to the range of education courses offered locally. An improved intake procedure and a language skills scan included in the methodology applied by parties who have frequent contact with low literates allows the organisations to reach more course participants and offer them more suitable education, leading to fewer drop-outs. This approach has also been introduced in other education and career guidance organisations as of September 2014.

#### *Arjen Robben trilogy in Groningen*

In order to stimulate pleasure in reading and writing, the Stichting Lezen en Schrijven (Reading & Writing Foundation) has collaborated with Groningen Football club in the Society, Kluitman Publishers in Groningen, and requested around 1000 primary school pupils to join adult low literates who are participating in a literacy course at the ROC, to write about former Groningen football club player Arjen Robben, in a relay style. The participants have jointly written three books in this manner.

Writing their own chapters and reading them out loud to other pupils resulted in greatly enhanced motivation, especially among those participants with weaker literacy skills. The books deal with the importance of good reading and writing. They were extremely popular, with more than 65,000 copies having been distributed. At various points in time, Arjen Robben also requested attention for the importance of reading and writing, in the media.

#### *Taal in de Bibliotheek (Language in the Library) - Breda*

The library in Breda has embedded the approach to low literacy in a broader approach to poorly educated job seekers, migrants required to integrate and low literates. This approach has taken the form of Taal & Werk (Language and Work) domains. The purpose of these domains is to cohesively present the literacy and work availability for the target group. The range comprises courses, information, workstations and books. A careers coach is available, in cooperation with the UWV (Social Security Agency). The Language & Work users are also issued a



free subscription to the library. Through this Language & Work programme, the library of Breda has developed its own version of the provincial employment project known as WerkZat (plenty of work).

The library also works together with Kellebeek ROC (regional education and training centre) and with private language courseproviders who are assigned by employers to give lessons. The ROC visits the library with course participants; this is a regular component of the teaching programme. Teachers employed by private language courseproviders can borrow material from the library by means of a company subscription. Moreover, there are reading clubs set up in cooperation with the ROC, for low literates. By establishing contact and reaching agreements with various parties outside of its own direct working field, the library plays a key role in the regional approach to low literacy.

#### *Taalmeter (Basic Skills Quick Scan) identifies young low literates - Rotterdam*

Each year, the Youth department of the Municipality of Rotterdam receives hundreds of questions from young people about education, work or income. These are young people aged 16 to 27 years who are not in education or employment. Language deficiencies are sometimes the cause of the problems encountered by these young people. The Youth department in Rotterdam therefore has all young people who request advice also complete the Taalmeter (Basic Skills Quick Scan). This is an online tool which gives simple and reliable insight into difficulties with literacy, within 12 minutes. More than 800 young people have completed the Basic skills Quick Scan since June 2013, and one third has been proven to have difficulties with language. This group can then receive support from the Taalpunt (Literacy Desk) via the same Youth department. The young people are provided with a tailored literacy course, which takes account of their specific situation. As a result, many young people can now move on into employment or education and are once again motivated to do so successfully.

### **Good Examples – National**

#### *The VoorleesExpress (Storytelling Express)*

The Storytelling Express is a national initiative by SodaProducties, an agency for social innovation. Families with parents and/or children with poor literacy skills are visited by a storyteller weekly, for a twenty week period. During this hourly session, the volunteer introduces the storytelling ritual. Parents are also given a guide to how to take over the storytelling process and to stimulate the literacy development of their children in other manners.

The Storytelling Express relies on volunteers, who are trained and supervised. The trainer is a paid staff member who operates out of a professional organisation, such as a library or welfare organisation. The Storytelling Express is active in almost all provinces by now, and frequently cooperates with regional and local partners in the field of promotion of reading, parental involvement and volunteer work. It is also linked to national programmes such as BookStart, Language for Life and the Library at School. Thus families are provided with a broad range of reading promotion and literacy stimulation products for a longer period of time.

Studies have shown that children who enjoyed the benefits of the Storytelling Express performed better in literacy skills by the end of the project (book

orientation, comprehension of a story, comprehensive reading and vocabulary) and had more reading pleasure. The literacy and environment in the home was also enriched: parents experienced more pleasure in storytelling and recognised the importance of reading; the number of library visits had increased and there were more books for children in the home.

#### *Handreiking Volwasseneneducatie (Guide to Adult Education)*

Due to an amendment to the Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB), local councils have more opportunities to provide low literate adults with a suitable range of educational courses, as of 2015. Changes have also been made in the municipal financing, and local councils must enter into agreements at the regional level in order to apportion the available resources.

In order to assist local councils and languagecourse providers in preparing for the changes, the VNG (Association of Netherlands Municipalities) has cooperated with Stenunpuntve (the Adult Education Support Team) and Stichting Lezen en Schrijven (the Reading & Writing Foundation) to develop a guide: 'More opportunities: the transition of education to the social domain'.

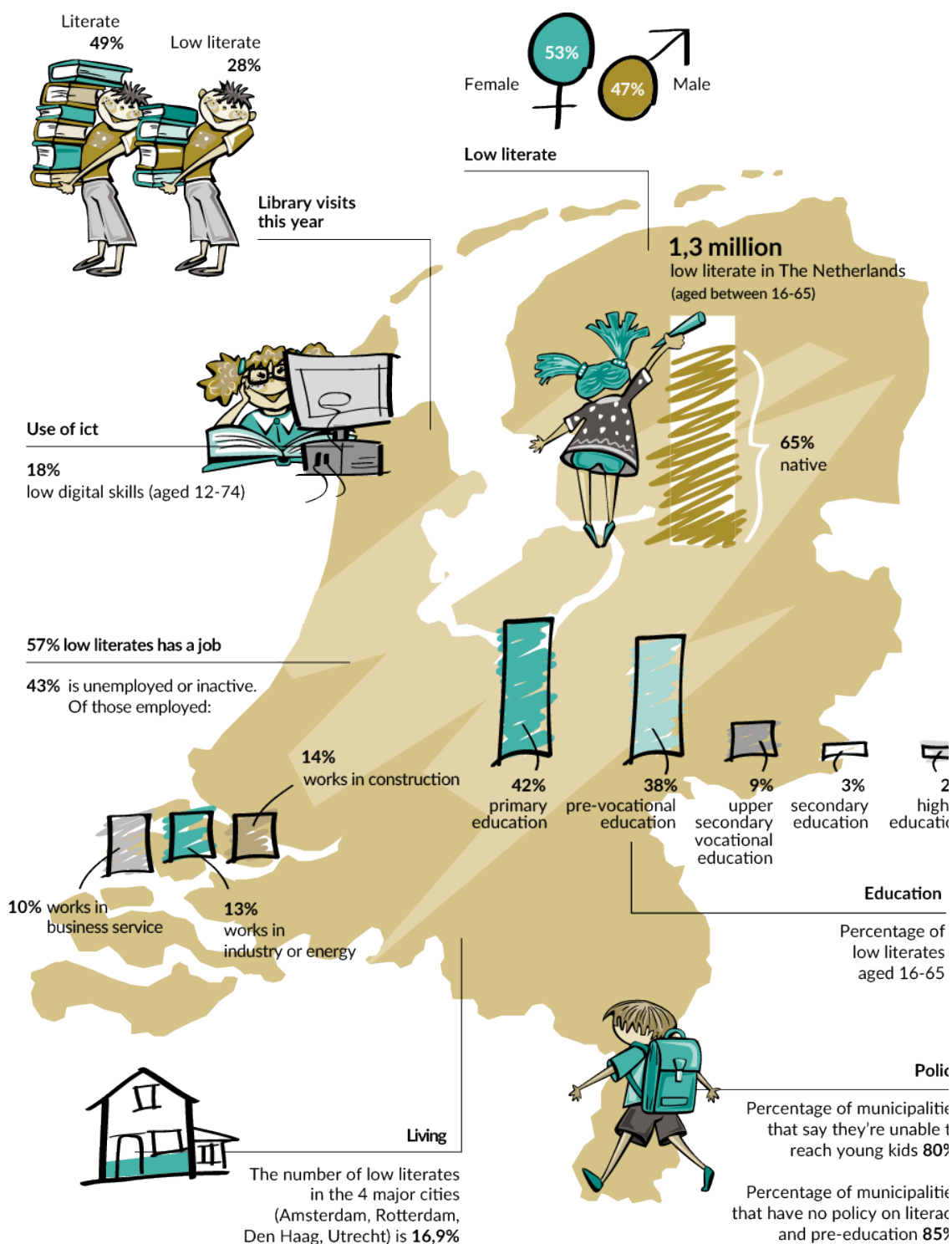
The guide pays attention, among other things, to the main points concerning supervision and execution of the WEB implementation, gives advice on justification of the deployment of education resources and monitoring of the quality, along with a number of current practical examples.

#### *Toolkit voor Huisartsen (Toolkit for GPs)*

Low literacy can result in patients not being able to fully understand the content of written information in the GP practice. The national 'Low literacy Toolkit' developed by the Landelijke Vereniging Huisartsen (National Association of GPs) in cooperation with various partners, offers GP practices a check-list for the identification of low literacy. Practice assistants can follow the 'Recognition and referral for practice assistants' e-learning module. In this digital training course provided by the Reading & Writing Foundation, the theory of low literacy issues is alternated with practice questions and tips for recognition and referral.

The toolkit also contains a check-list which is a guide to the communication with patients who not have good reading skills. And so GPs, practice assistants and practice nurses can provide low literate patients with the extra support they require. This can include an explanation of the use of a medicine or a referral to a specialist in a hospital. It makes the guiding role of the GP as a central care provider more accessible to low literates.

## Appendix 4: Research figures: low literacy and language deficiencies in the Netherlands (in Dutch)



Bron: Houtkoop et al. (2012) en Buisman & Houtkoop (201

## Appendix 5 Cabinet policy: what is already done in the literacy domain?

Extra investments have been made in preschool and infant school education in recent years. These are very important in order to prevent language deficiencies and have been proven to be effective.<sup>29</sup> The cabinet has also undertaken various measures in order to avoid young people leaving regular education with a literacy and numeracy deficiency. Thanks to the continuing learning lines for Dutch literacy and mathematics, foundations have been laid for improved control of these basic skills for our pupils in primary education, secondary and special education, secondary education and upper secondary vocational education.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, measures have been announced for the creation of extra opportunities for young people in vulnerable positions. These efforts are additional to the successful approach to school drop-out and the introduction of tailored education.<sup>31</sup>

The cabinet has also implemented literacy requirements in the Supplementary Benefits system, so that persons entitled to supplementary benefits have an incentive to keep their literacy skills up to par, where necessary. The integration obligation for new migrants has already been enhanced, and the social loans system will be accessible for EU migrants. The cabinet has also facilitated the financing of promotion of literacy skills from the co-financing of the sectoral plans and the European Social Fund. Furthermore, the letter regarding life long learning announces supplementary measures in order that adults are more able to remain active and productive throughout their working lives.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the amendment to the Adult Education act came into force in 2015, with which local councils gain extra opportunities to offer tailored education to low literate adults.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, promotion of reading and the combating of low literacy are an important supplement to the key functions of reading, literature, information and education in the new library act.<sup>34</sup> The equal rights policy is partly aimed at promoting the economic independence of low literate women, for example via the Education for Women with Ambition project (EVA). Finally, the cabinet is working at more effective provision of services to citizens in the digital domain and better equipment thereto, via programmes such as Digivaardig Digiveilig (Digi skills Digi safety)<sup>35</sup> and Mediawijzer.net.<sup>36</sup> In the All is Health national prevention programme supported by the cabinet, several parties have pledged to cooperate in order to improve health skills, including low literacy.

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<sup>29</sup> For more information, refer to the House of Representatives letter on progress of the administrative agreements of the G37 with regard to the covenant concluded in the field of preschool and infant school education (31293, no. 228, 02-12-2014).

<sup>30</sup> See the House of Representatives letter regarding the progress report on the continuing learning lines for Literacy and numeracy (31332, no. 28, 02-07-2014).

<sup>31</sup> See the House of Representatives letter on extra opportunities for young people in a vulnerable position (30079, no. 53, 30-12-2014).

<sup>32</sup> See the House of Representative letter on Life Long Learning (30012, no. 41, 04-11-2014).

<sup>33</sup> See the Adult and Vocational Education Act (Bulletin of Acts, Orders and Decrees).

<sup>34</sup> See the public libraries Act (Bulletin of Acts, Orders and Decrees 2014, 470, 05-12-2014).

<sup>35</sup> See the Vision letter on the digital government 2017 (26643, no. 280, 23-05-2014).

<sup>36</sup> Digivaardig Digiveilig will be executed by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, and Mediawijzer.net by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

The measures of this action programme are supplement to all these efforts, so that people can continue to augment the literacy skills learned (at school) and keep them up to par as an adult.

<sup>29</sup> See Paper 28760, no. 38, 19-02-2015.

<sup>30</sup> See Paper 28760, no. 3, 19-02-2015.

**Our reference**  
729386