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ABSTRACT

This paper reports an investigation of the situation of employment in the Netherlands for individuals with mental retardation and discusses the function of schools in preparing students for the labor market. Background information on special schools for students with mental retardation is provided, focusing on vocational preparation of students. The role of Social Pedagogical Services in providing placement assistance and advice is explained. Regulations are cited, and the role of several organizations working to stimulate the employment of people with mental handicaps is examined. Two case examples are provided, one describing a school for special secondary education in Amsterdam and the other describing a mediation agency in Rotterdam which mediates between pupils who have finished special education and the labor market. The paper concludes that the creation of regulations to stimulate labor market participation of this population is a positive development, but an obstacle exists in that employees at sheltered workshops often earn more money than colleagues with mental handicaps in the open labor market. (Contains approximately 45 references and a bibliography of approximately 20 related publications.) (JDD)

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Persons with mental retardation in the Netherlands

An outline focusing employment possibilities and education

CLAUDIA A.-M. HETTINGA

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PERSONS WITH MENTAL RETARDATION IN THE NETHERLANDS
An outline focusing employment possibilities and education

Claudia A.-M. Hettinga

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As a part of three research projects on "The function of schools for the mentally retarded and the labour market" investigations on parallel situations in other countries are carried out. In this report "life after school" as well as its connection to earlier education in the Netherlands are focused. An outline of employment possibilities for persons with mental retardation is offered. The report also scrutinezes obstacles to a more integrated adult life and gives some prospects for the future.

Keywords: Disabilities, employment, mental retardation, the Netherlands, special education, work-life.

Preface

During the last decade three research projects concerning people with mental retardation have been performed at the School of Education in Malmö, Sweden. One of them, *The function of schools for the mentally retarded*, was carried out 1982-1989, the other, *Schools for the mentally retarded and the labour market*, was running 1989 - 1992, and the third, *Integration of persons with mental retardation in theory and practice*, has just started and is supposed to continue till 1995.

The overall purpose of these projects has been to identify, describe and analyse mechanisms in and outside school which prevent or impede access by former pupils of schools for the mentally retarded to the labour market and to an integrated adult life. The projects have also been aiming at establishing a scientific foundation for proposals concerning changes/improvements to instruction in, and organisation of these schools as well as recommendations to "the social partners" at the labour market. This in order to contribute to the fulfillment of the motto of the UN international year of the handicapped in 1981: "Full participation and equality".

There has also been an ambition to make comparisons with parallel situations in other countries, and, within the framework of the three projects, the living conditions for people with mental retardation has been studied in Canada, Germany (GDR and FRG), Hungary, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and in the United States.

In this article one of the collaborators of the projects, Claudia Hettinga, reports her investigation of the situation of employment in the Netherlands. Claudia Hettinga has earlier issued the report: *Education in the Netherlands: An outline of regular and special education focusing the situation of pupils and adults with disabilities*. In an appendix other reports in English and German from the mentioned projects are listed. They are all available at, and could be sent for from, the Malmö School of Education (address below).

Due to circumstances beyond our control the printing of this report has been delayed for about a year.

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Introduction

In this paper the position of mentally retarded persons on the labour market in the Netherlands will be described. It will give information about the actual situation, the function of the school as far as the preparation for the labour market is concerned and some of the initiatives taken to improve the present situation. The idea that mentally retarded persons are part of society and have every right to significant activities, also on the labour market, will serve as a point of departure.

This paper is a sequel to the report "Education in the Netherlands, an outline of regular and special education focusing the situation of pupils and adults with disabilities" (Hettinga, 1991).

At this place I would like to thank everyone who gave me material and information and who made it possible to write this paper, especially the persons of Stichting VSO-MLK, VSO-MLK school de Poort, Somma, de GMD and the SLO.

1. Background

Two percent of the Dutch population is considered to be "mentally retarded". Often this group is divided in subgroups: the mildly mentally retarded or debiles (IQ indication 51-80), the moderately and severely mentally retarded or imbeciles (IQ indication 21-50) and the profound mentally retarded or idiots (IQ indication 0-20) (Maas, et al, 1988). 70% of the mentally retarded is said to be mildly mentally retarded (v. Gemert & Noorda, 1988).

There are two kinds of special schools established for mentally retarded pupils in the Netherlands: the MLK-school (Moeilijk Lerende Kinderen) for mildly retarded children or "difficult learners" as they are called, and the ZMLK-school (Zeer Moeilijk Lerende Kinderen) for the "very difficult learners" or moderately retarded. Primary and secondary education is given at these schools.

In 1989 12,241 pupils followed secondary education at a MLK-school whereas 2,784 pupils followed secondary education at a ZMLK-school (Concept-rapport, 1990). In 1988-1989 38.7% of the pupils who finished secondary MLK-education found a job, 9.9% went to a sheltered workshop, 18.3% stayed unemployed, 18.3% followed other education whereas the rest went to a day-centre for mentally handicapped adults or an institution, worked in a project, went to another MLK-school, or did "something else". In 1976 and 1980 53% and 50% resp. of the pupils found a job in a company, so there is a decrease of 14.3% within 13 years' time. Of the pupils who finished secondary ZMLK-education in 1988-1989 practically no one found a job in a company, 5.2% got a place at a sheltered workshop, 52.6% got a place in an institution for mentally retarded or a day-centre for adult mentally retarded, 9.3% was unemployed whereas the rest of them went to another ZMLK-school, was in a project or did "something else" (Concept-rapport, 1990).

As a consequence of the small flow of mentally retarded to the labour market there is a shortage of places in the living and daycare provisions for mentally retarded. Those are used by more persons than could be expected on the basis of personal abilities. Persons who should be able to live (more or less) independent in society make use of provisions which are not actually made for them. Next to that special schools keep their pupils, although they have finished the schoolprogram and are ready to

go out into society. This gives the school other functions to fulfil, e.g. the "waiting room" function.

Despite the stabilized amount of mentally retarded persons, the amount of persons using provisions for mentally retarded increased 15% between 1980-1987. Researchers concluded that 85% of the increase had to do with another attitude towards mentally retarded in society (Kloosterman, 1990).

The overall conclusion is that not many mentally retarded adults find a place on the labour market and that the situation has got worse during the eighties. This is noticed in society, not only by special schools and social institutes but also by the State and (some) employers' organizations. Besides human aspects, economics are of influence.

The next parts will describe the efforts made by special schools, the Social Pedagogical Services, the State and the employers to improve the situation. Paragraph 7 will describe the way in which a department for secondary education at a MLK-school works, and a mediation agency, that mediates between pupils, who finished special secondary education, and the labour market

2. Secondary education for (Z)MLK

The main goal of secondary education on a MLK-school is to prepare the students for the labour market. In what way are they prepared for that?

The education is directed at the teaching of social and practical skills, adapted to every pupils' own level. The Interim Act for Special Education describes the activities which have to be undertaken by a MLK-school for secondary education (SLO, 1989). Mentioned are: the Dutch language, history and geography, mathematics, social civic studies, music, drawing, crafts and sports and at least two more subjects which are taught in regular secondary education. Besides that practical courses like: wood- and metalworking, childcare, beauty care, care for food, clothes and housing and the care for plants and animals.

All the activities have to be directed at future placement on the labour market. The pupils get a general orientation on labour, which means that they learn e.g. to obey the employer, the differences between a school and a company culture and tempo. Next to that they get general information

about professions and supervised work training possibilities to get used to working life step by step.

The supervised work training is a very important part of the education to practice the skills the pupil has learned in school. Often the pupil is 15/16 years old when he/she starts the supervised work training. Officially the pupil is allowed to have one or more trainee posts with a maximum of 100 days a year during three schoolyears. A general or a more vocational oriented supervised work training place can be chosen. The main goal of it is for the pupil to get used to professional and social situations in working life. It is also seen as an important employment mediation tool. Research has shown that there is a positive relation between a supervised work training place during the schoolperiod and a place at the labour market when school is finished (Concept-rapport, 1990).

A main goal of the ZMLK-school is to prepare the pupil to live as independently as possible in society. The training of skills which are useful in daily life get a lot of attention. Recent information shows that also the ZMLK-school is experimenting with supervised work training places (v. Riel, 1990). A survey of ZMLK-schools shows that most schools organize some kind of supervised work training place, although this concept is broadly interpreted. The amount of pupils with a training place is not very high but growing. The effect of it on the pupils is said to be positive. It is advised to pay more attention to supervised work training places in ZMLK-education. Most of these pupils will however go to a day-centre for mentally retarded adults after school and that is what they are usually prepared for. However, some of them are capable to work (under adapted circumstances) as experiences make clear (van der Wielen, 1987).

If employment on the labour market is a goal for (most of) these individuals, then why is it so difficult for them to get there? What can be considered the "main handicap" of these persons?

According to professor van Genneep (1977) it could be stated that the "handicap" of especially the mildly retarded is an invention of the twentieth century with the introduction of the industrialisation and its increasing complexity of the production process. Not everyone was able to, or had the capability to follow education and thus got more difficulties to take part in working life. This was due to socio-cultural more than

biological reasons. As the problem started with the increasing complexity of the production process these persons could also be called "social handicapped" (v. Gennep, 1977).

Another opinion was given by the Deputy Secretary of the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs on a conference for employers and other involved persons called "Chances of mentally retarded persons on the labour market" (Kloosterman, 1990). He stated that in our society (the Netherlands) we still use ideas from the Sixties and Seventies as far as the care for mentally handicapped is concerned. That means "caring", putting mentally retarded handicapped apart and spoil them with social benefits. What he mentions as a problem is that: "the public paid sectors, which have grown independently, have systematically forgotten to think of the subject 'flowing'. People should be stimulated to move on instead of staying on one place. The social security benefit should not be used as a net but as a trampoline".

Besides the above mentioned explanations given to the problems of (Z)MLK pupils to reach the labour market, and others, like high unemployment in general and the social attitude towards mentally retarded in society, special schools mention the more concrete problem of the ignorance of employers concerning the possibilities of the (Z)MLK-pupils on the labour market. Next to that employers find it difficult to indicate what kind of knowlegde, attitudes and skills they mostly want from a pupil.

To increase the knowledge about the possibilities of these pupils, schools and school organisations have, together with employers who have mentally retarded employees, published pamphlets which give an overview of the tasks and jobs a pupil of secondary special education can do. It is noticed that even in today's society there will always be jobs that are structured and not too difficult to do. Mentioned are: assisting, low qualified, well-organized, not too complex and routine activities (COA, 1989). Job descriptions are given e.g. in the agrarian-, the car-, the grafic-, the building-, the catering-, the wood-, the metal-, the textile- and the food industries. Tasks on all kind of different levels are described (Arkesteijn, 1989).

To improve the functioning of the school itself research has been done to see what the pupils expect from and experience in the special schools. As a result of that, tips and discussion items are given in a pamphlet to

stimulate the discussion between the school and the pupil, so that activities and expectations can be geared to one another and a more positive pedagogical climate can develop in which the pupil feels motivated to learn (Arkesteijn, 1989).

3. Social Pedagogical Services

Another institute besides school, which can be important for mentally retarded is the Social Pedagogical Service.

During lifetime a mentally retarded person and his family can get assistance, advice and help by the Social Pedagogical Services. They can e.g. arrange a placement in a day-centre for mentally handicapped adults but also work on the improvement of the connection "school - labour-market". It is their experience that (mildly) mentally handicapped persons often need guidance not only in search of work but also with the preservation of the job. Research among ex-MLK pupils confirms that finding a job on the labour market of today without assistance is almost impossible (v. Kooten, 1989). The Social Pedagogical Services have, in contrast with schools, the possibility to guide ex-pupils of special education on the job.

On a conference in 1990 a staff member of the National Association of Institutions for Social Pedagogical Services (SOMMA) mentioned the following problems and ideas for improvement:

"Not enough attention is paid this subject in general. From a political point of view this group is imperceptible; it is a group which represents a societal problem without a powerful lobby. A regional network, between schools and institutions involved in services and employment finding, needs to be developed to make this process more effective. A co-ordination point is wanted for guidance on the job. That means guidance of the involved persons from a social point of view and support and recommendations for those responsible for the job. When someone is looking for a job the method of 'personal guided developmental path' can be used (this means that an *individual* plan is made in which someone's strong and weak points are described and connected to that, what kind of steps that needs to be undertaken to improve the situation of the individual on the labour market. This method seems to be effective. More information for employers about the possibilities of 'special education-pupils must be given " (Middelhoff, 1990).

In a co-operation with other organisations the SOMMA published a pamphlet called "We can go to work at once", in which possibilities of the 'special education pupil' and the settling of financial matters for

employers is given. Also experiments have been started to see how and when organisations and schools can cooperate in the most fruitful way.

4. The Government

Several Ministries are involved in the improvement of the status of mentally retarded persons on the labour market: the Ministry of Education and Sciences, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs. As they mention, their recent interest is not only due to economic issues but also social and emancipatory ones.

Simply said the overall policy is directed at the decrease of the amount of pupils going to special education in the first place and besides that, to improve the education given at the special schools so that the pupils are better prepared for the labour market (see also Hettinga, 1990). The policy aim is that 75% of the MLK-students should find a job and the top 25% of the MLK-students should get a place in the sheltered workshop in the future (Concept-rapport, 1990).

The policy to enhance the chances of handicapped persons on the labour market is mainly directed at:

- economic stimulation of employers; subsidies and quota (described in paragraph 5, below) and,
 - a better co-operation between all the organisations working with employment and handicapped people (described in paragraph 6, below).
- On a more concrete level the development of e.g. "job-coaching" (a central person who can advise and help at the work place) and "personal guided developmental path" (see paragraph 3, above) is encouraged.

5. Regulations

Underneath the most important rules and laws which intend to enhance the possibilities for (mentally) handicapped persons on the labour market will be described. First the Acts concerning the insurance and the incomes for handicapped persons are mentioned. Within the framework of these Acts (most of) the stimulation rules can be applied.

- the *General Disability Insurance Act* (AAW) and the *Impairment Insurance Act* (WAO). The AAW insures everyone unable to work in the long term because of illness or handicaps. The WAO serves as a supplement to the AAW in case of earlier earned wage.

Within the framework of the AAW and the WAO arrangements can be made to improve the situation of (mentally) handicapped persons in society e.g. on the labour market.

- Since 1986 there is the *Jobs for Handicapped Employees Law* (wet arbeid gehandicapte werknemers WAGW). This law is aiming at the stimulation of equal treatment of handicapped and non-handicapped employees in their participation in the labour process. The law is directed to all persons with a handicap. This law means that 5% of the staff should consist of persons with some form of disability. If not, they have to pay a fine. Up till now no sanctions are connected to the "5% rule". The employer also have to adapt the work environment to the possibilities of the handicapped employee e.g. arrange a new chair or an elevator. Employers can get financial compensation for this from the State. The handicapped employee can claim the same wage as a nonhandicapped if the conditions of employment are the same. If not, a wage subsidy can be obtained by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. Employers can be released from this law in "special occasions".

- *the Wages Subsidy Rule* (loondispensatieregeling). In case the working performance of a handicapped employee is lower than the performance of a non-handicapped employee, exception of the principle of equal wages can be obtained. That means that a lower wage can be determined and a more "equal balance" between wage and performance is reached.

- *the Law Vermeend/Moor*: This law is directed at all long-term unemployed persons older than 21. In case an employer creates or offers a "work experience placement" or a normal job to a long-term unemployed person, exemption of all employers' premiums can be obtained with a maximum period of four years. Next to that there are subsidies for training and guidance.

- *Youth Work Guarantee Plan* (jeugdwerkgarantieplan). This plan is meant for unemployed persons younger than 20 years and 5 months. The meaning of it is to create temporary jobs in the public sector, with a minimum of six months, to give these persons the possibility to get more working life experience. Subsidies are available.

- *Youth Development Jobs* (Jeugd ontplooiings banen JOB). This plan is meant for persons between 18 and 25 years old, who are signed up for more than two years at the Employment Exchange. The employer receives a subsidy of 33% of the costs in case such a person is hired.

- *a trial period with the preservation of social benefit*. In case an employer has doubts about the performance of a handicapped person a trial period can be created. The handicapped person can try the job while retaining the unemployment benefit. After two months employer and employee have to decide.

- *the Framework Rule Schooling* (Kader Regeling Scholing). This rule creates the opportunity for the unemployed to follow extra education to enhance the possibilities on the labour market. Also specific training can be obtained.

- *Sociological training and education*. Youth and young adults with a MLK-background, with or without a job, can follow courses at educational and sociological training centres. Besides basic training job-connected courses can be followed

6. Involved organisations

There are several institutions working with labour that can stimulate or improve placement of mentally handicapped people on the labour market.

- *the Social Pedagogical Service*: as mentioned in paragraph 3 this service is important for the mentally handicapped during lifetime.

- *the Employment Exchange*: works with employment-finding. Vacancies are announced and unemployed mediated. The Employment Exchange also deals with special employment-finding for "special groups of unemployed" e.g. mentally handicapped persons.

- *Temporary Agency "Start"*: tries by means of temporary jobs to create the possibility for a permanent appointment especially for handicapped persons. Start looks for suitable persons for vacancies and arranges all money matters. The temporary job gives the employee the chance to get work experience and the employer the chance to get used to the handicapped employee. The agreement about a temporary job can be changed in a permanent appointment without any costs. Start also cooperates with the Employment Exchange.

- *the Common Medical Service* (de Gemeenschappelijke Medische Dienst): arranges the benefits for people who cannot work (anymore) because of illness or handicap (persons using the AAW and the WAO, see paragraph 6). They also mediate between these people and the labour market. Research is done to see what kind of work the certain person still can do and if further education is necessary. Since 1986, with the introduction of the Law Jobs for Handicapped Employees, they have the official possibility to deal with employment-finding.

- *Contact centres for Education and Labour* (Contactcentra Onderwijs-Arbeid COA): is a provincial coordination centre with the goal to improve the connection between education and the labour market. They can stimulate, initiate and coordinate all kind of activities to improve that. These centres develop activities to stimulate the pupils' chances when leaving secondary special education. They cooperate with special schools and bussines society.

7. Two examples: a special school and a mediation agency

Underneath an impression is given of my visit to two institutes that deal with mentally handicapped and their preparation for the labour market. I visited a school for special secondary education in Amsterdam and a mediation agency, which mediates between pupils who finished special education and the labour market, in Rotterdam. The information given is unique for these institutes and cannot be generalized.

7.1. A VSO-MLK school in Amsterdam

The VSO-MLK school I visited is a school for general secondary special education for pupils from 12 to 20 years old. They can come here when they have finished a primary school for special education or after an unsuccessful stay in a school for regular secondary education. The educational program lasts four years but can be prolonged to five in special cases. The school has 16 teachers who take care of the general non-vocational education and 14 vocational teachers.

Education takes place in groups of 6 to 15 pupils. Besides all kind of practical courses like cooking, metal working and textural arts attention is paid to general non-vocational education. Next to lessons in arithmetic,

hygiene, geography and reading there is development of social skills e.g. the student learn how to cooperate and to take responsibility.

The first two schoolyears mainly consist of individual general and social education. In the third year a choice has to be made between different, more specific education programs. Also an introduction of the supervised work training provision (which will take place in the fourth year) is then given to pupils and parents. The training place is the main part of the fourth year at this school. The education program is finished with a final exam. In case it is considered to be better for the pupil or if the pupil wants himself he can stay after the final exam and take the fifth year. In that year the pupil can get extra education and training as a preparation for the labour market. An extra trainee post is also an option.

The supervised work training takes place in the fourth year. The goal is to increase the chances of the pupils on the labour market after school. The pupils have to make the choice of "where and what" themselves. Central questions for the pupils to ask are:

-What can I do?

-What do I want?

- Is there a trainee post available? If not can we find such a post?

There is a career guidance teacher available, who can help the pupil to make a choice and to find a suitable trainee post.

A lot of supervised work training places are available in supermarkets, sport parks, parks departments and the sheltered workshop. If a pupil wants to do something else, the career guidance teacher and the pupil just start looking for that by calling companies etc. According to the career guidance teacher trainee posts are not so hard to find. Apparently the business community becomes more interested.

When a training place is found also a supervisor on the job is chosen, who can guide and assist the student. There is a regular contact between both supervisors and the trainee. Also the parents are involved, because it is experienced that stimulation by the family is important for success.

Pupils can go to a training place two days a week with a maximum of 100 days. As there are 40 weeks in a schoolyear a work training place of 80 days is common. Most of the pupils stay at one trainee post for a whole school year, so they have the opportunity to get used to it during the first months. The school experienced that most of the pupils need that.

The other three days of the schoolweek the pupils get practical training adjusted to the trainee post, general education and labour orientation in school.

The student on a supervised work training place earns fl.65,- (=200 sek) per month or fl.10,- (=32 sek) per day. This amount goes directly to the student. How to spend the money, how to open an account and write out a cheque etc. are issues dealt with in the classroom.

Most of the time a work training place works out fine as well for the institute where the trainee post is available as for the student. Most of the problems which occur have to do with false expectations on both sides. To diminish that the school recently made an inventory of companies and institutes where trainee posts were available. On this inventory the involved institutes could mark demands of the pupils on the job. This gives the school the chance to see if they can do something about it. Other, more general problems in the school have to do with the increasing amount of pupils with another cultural background than the Dutch (see also Hettinga, 1991) and the bureaucracy of the system, which hampers a flexible course of action.

If one can speak of special features of this "kind of pupil" one can say that positive features of these pupils are: they are hard workers, they are dutiful and have a positive attitude towards work and colleagues. Less positive features could be that the pupils can be easily influenced, there can be a lack of a good self-image or the under- or overestimation of own possibilities.

About 30% of the pupils find a place on the labour market directly after school!

7.2. The Mediation agency VSO-Arbeidstraject

In 1981 a "Labour project for school-leavers of secondary special education" (Arbeidsproject VSO-schoolverlaters) started under chairmanship of the Social Pedagogical Service in Rotterdam. The goal of it was to improve the position of mentally handicapped persons on the labour market, to create a situation in which the participants were able to find labour in its broadest sense. The unemployment increased unacceptably and it was felt that something needed to be done. All kinds of institutes working with employment and mentally handicapped persons were

involved. This project developed in such a way that it was decided to make it an independent foundation in 1988, funded mainly by the city of Rotterdam and the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs. Nowadays it is a very professional office, with a network of contacts, with 8 staffmembers and 24 trainees (e.g. from schools for higher vocational education or senior secondary vocational education) and volunteers, working in Rotterdam and surroundings.

Trainees and volunteers thus form a majority in the office. The office itself serves as place where students and unemployed can enhance their chances on the labour market under the motto: "job-seekers help job-seekers". An advantage of this procedure is that many more participants can be assisted. A disadvantage is the constant change of personnel.

Every year about 150 participants visit the agency to enhance their chances on the labour market. Originally only school-leavers of special education (especially MLK) visited the office. In recent years the target group is broadened to all youngsters in the age of 16 to 30 who have difficulties in finding a place on the labour market and need assistance with that. The goal has remained the same.

The procedure of the agency is aimed at "care on size", care that fits the individual. It means that after interviews with the person concerned a plan is made in which the necessary steps, needed to be taken by this particular individual to reach the labour market, are noted. These steps can among other things consist of training or supervised work training. On average this is a process which takes 9 months.

The process starts with an intake and introduction phase, to decide if and in what way the agency is best for the individual. Information about schooling, interests, motivation, extent of independent behaviour, psychological condition, behaviour, earlier experiences on the labour market and expectations is formulated. After that about 60% of the participants is given an introduction in the form of the Outward Bound, which means a kind of survival trip of 11 days in small groups. The philosophy behind it is that it creates situations like experiential learning, positive stimuli and group experiences. Besides that it is an answer to the wish of most participants "to start right away". It serves as a basis for the rest of the program. Due to reasons like difficult social behaviour, age and former experiences the other 40% get an individual introduction e.g. visits at companies and the Employment Exchange and general

information about the agency and the labour market. This phase can be very lengthy. Next to the Outward Bound Program career counseling, contact with parents, schools, the family doctor and visits at home can be arranged. All this information results in an individual plan of action in which the steps necessary to be taken are noted. These can be steps towards the favourable situation or steps aimed directly at the integration on the labour market.

The second phase is when the steps towards the favourable situation are taken. Besides education and/or socio-cultural training, it can include changes in living conditions and of the stimulation of motivation of the participant. For participants with a shortage in educational or social skills an individual study plan is set up. Most of the courses are taking place in different kind of schools, education- or socio-cultural centres and not in the agency. This facilitates the integration of the participants into society. The agency keeps in contact with these institutes about the courses and the participants. Besides education and training, short (two/four weeks) training placements for orientation on the labour market are available. Also other, more personal problems can be at issue. In those cases the agency gets in touch with institutes specialized in the specific question.

When this phase is completed, but before the third phase is started, the participants can follow a special course called "job orientation", for as good as possible a preparation. It deals with the issues:

- looking for a job,
- how to find a job (e.g. how to make telephone calls),
- how to keep the job (colleagues, how to behave, contracts etc.),
- more general information about a job (e.g. what to do in case of dismissal).

The third phase is directly aimed at the integration on the labour market. It means that selected training can be given and contact is made with the business community on individual basis. Other institutes like the Employment Exchange are also involved. This integration on the labour market can be worked out in different ways. One way is to use a supervised work training place of two months as a kind of extensive selection procedure. In this way the employer can get used to his future employee. It means that some certainty about a job after the work training must be present. Another way is to perform (some of) the rules and laws described in paragraph 6 (that means e.g. finding work

experience places for a specific period of time where the employers are stimulated with money and subsidies and the employee can work without loss of benefit). Important in this phase is that the employer as well as the employee get guidance from the agency. This guidance continues during three months. In recent years it has become clear that the main problem is not to find a job but to keep it. Guidance of both the employer and the employee is seen as a way to solve that problem.

During the whole process stimulation of the motivation is important. All participants have a mentor with whom they can discuss everything. Next to that the participants can meet one another in or outside the office to talk and have discussions.

The coaching of the participants is split in three teams: the intake team, the participants coaching team and the team working with the business contacts. The staff coordinator coordinates the three teams and informs the managing director. The latter coordinates the office, translates policy in to action and works with the public relations. There is also a special external team for the guidance of the foundation. Different institutions working with labour and (mentally) handicapped youngsters take part in it.

This way of working is very intensive. Is it worth it? Figures show that about 43% finds employment on the labour market (within the framework of the available provisions, see paragraph 6). About 12% continue the preparation by means of education or training. This can be seen as a very good result, especially in the light of the target group: "the very difficult to place ones"!

8. Some critical notes

In this paragraph I will point at some of the difficulties experienced within the subject of labour market and mentally handicapped persons.

First of all the label 'mentally handicapped' is not a clear one. The group of people labelled so is not homogenous but includes a variety of characters. At the institutes mentioned in paragraph 7 for example a lot of the participants and pupils were seen as persons having difficulties in learning and structuring the environment to a certain degree and not as mentally handicapped. Besides the stigmatizing effect the label has, it can

create unclearness in the question whom we are talking about. Obscurity about what is the target group can of course cause difficulties in a bureaucratic society.

A positive development in recent years is the creation of regulations made to stimulate the participation of (mentally) handicapped persons on the labour market. Unfortunately these rules are not always easy to find and understand. Also complaints about inflexible application are expressed by employers who really want to use them.

Another thing that might be mentioned about the regulations is that most of them are meant for all persons with a handicap. This creates the risk that mentally handicapped persons again become 'the last on the list'.

One of the practical problems which hampers the integration of mentally handicapped persons on the labour market is connected to the salary. At present mentally handicapped employees working at the sheltered workshops often earn more money than their mentally handicapped colleagues working on the open labour. In case integration of mentally handicapped on the labour market is the aim, this fact of course must be considered as an obstacle. So if an employer wants to hire a mentally handicapped person this can best be done by hiring an employee from the sheltered workshop.

In this paper I have tried to give an overview of the present situation for persons labelled 'mentally handicapped' and their ways to the labour market - the preparations made in school and during the period after that. One may say that only recently public attention has been paid to the matter. This means the process is still fully in motion - rules are made, more attempts are done etc. The situation will probably remain that way in the coming years given the anticipated changes within the school system in the coming years. The idea is to incorporate regular education and some of the special schools, among others the school for the difficult learners, the MLK-school, in 1995. The idea behind it is to stop the extension of special schools and to treat most of the pupils with problems in regular education.

In the long run this can have its consequences for the former 'special pupils' and their preparation on the labour market. Till now predications are difficult to make. More basic discussions about the pros and cons concerning the system of special education however do arise. Is it

favourable to treat pupils in the ordinary classroom, or is it better to give the pupils with learning difficulties the chance to meet other pupils with the same experiences? Will it be easier for the pupil with learning difficulties to reach the labour market without the stigma given by the special school? Will regular education be capable of giving the proper preparation? Unfortunately these questions cannot be answered right now. For that we have to wait a couple of more years for that.

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Abstract card

Hettinga, C. A.-M. Persons with mental retardation in the Netherlands: An outline focusing employment possibilities and education. Educational and Psychological Interactions (Malmö, Sweden: School of Education), No. 114, 1993.

As a part of three research projects on "The function of schools for the mentally retarded and the labour market" investigations on parallel situations in other countries are carried out. In this report "life after school" as well as its connection to earlier education in the Netherlands are focused. An outline of employment possibilities for persons with mental retardation is offered. The report also scrutinizes obstacles to a more integrated adult life and gives some prospects for the future.

Keywords: Disabilities, employment, mental retardation, the Netherlands, special education, work-life.

Reference card

Hettinga, C. A.-M. Persons with mental retardation in the Netherlands: An outline focusing employment possibilities and education. Educational and Psychological Interactions (Malmö, Sweden: School of Education), No. 114, 1993.