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ABSTRACT

This document presents an overview of the systems and procedures in place for certifying vocational qualifications in the Netherlands. Chapter 1 describes the following components of the Dutch education system: primary and special education; first phase of secondary education; second phase of secondary education; higher education; adult education; training for job seekers; training for people in work; and structure of education and training. Detailed in chapter 2 are the existing procedures for assessment and certification of students at the various educational levels and in the various types of postschool training described in chapter 1. Chapter 3 discusses the following parties with an interest in a qualification structure that has been legitimated by the state and by industry: participants; industry (employers, workers, and labor organizations); provider institutions; providers of initial and continuing education; and funding sources. The following functions of assessment and examination are considered in chapter 4: allocation of training and selection of students, qualification of participants, prognosis (identifying potential dropouts and predicting participants' success in specific programs), monitoring standards, and management and control. Chapter 5 is devoted to quality and standards in vocational education and available instruments of quality control. (MN)



**Systems and procedures
of certification of qualifications
in the Netherlands**

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Systems and procedures for the certification of qualifications

National monographs

In the context of preparation by the social partners of a "joint opinion on occupational qualifications and certification" (adopted on 3 July 1992), the Centre has been asked to undertake comparative analysis of systems and procedures for certification currently being applied within the European Communities. The authors of the monographs on the national training systems, another area of CEDEFOP's work, and who are in an ideal position to acquire information, have for the most part been asked to carry out this work.

National reports have now been concluded in the original language and are currently being translated. We are pleased to present these in a new publication series

"CEDEFOP Panorama"

These may be obtained free of charge upon request from CEDEFOP.

In these publications the authors, after making brief reference to the characteristics of the general and vocational training systems in their countries, describe all aspects of how qualifications are certified:

- formulation and introduction of certificates, qualifications and diplomas: the relevant institutions, procedures, tripartite or joint consultation or decision-making commissions;
- access to qualifications: conditions, means, motives, channels;
- certification: aims, contents, means, procedures;
- usefulness, use, trends and problems.

To keep up to date with national situations which are in a constant state of flux, the Centre would be grateful for reader's comments.

Cross-reference reading of the twelve monographs to formulate a synthesis report and a summary table is being carried out by a European institute specialized in international comparison of education and vocational training systems.

Maria Pierret
July 1993

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INTRODUCTION

This paper on assessment and certification comprises five chapters.

Chapter 1 outlines the Dutch education system, focusing particularly on the conditions, generally of a statutory nature, governing access to the various courses and institutions; this gives a picture of the starting levels needed if participants are to follow successfully particular types of education or course. The pathways that can be followed through education and training are also outlined. The chapter ends with a chart of the Dutch education system.

Chapter 2, the core of the paper, is concerned with assessment and certification. It looks at the content and/or objectives of the various types of provision considered in chapter 1 and at the means used to check that participants reach prescribed standards (interested parties, statutory procedures, content, certificates). The descriptive approach adopted in the first two chapters parallels that used in the Cedefop monograph "Vocational education and training in the Netherlands" by L. Römken and K. Visser, which may be consulted for more detailed background information.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the various groups who have an interest in a qualification structure legitimated by the state and by industry. It also looks at the links with the procedure for the development of learning targets (chapter 2).

Chapter 4 deals with the functions of assessment and examinations - the ways in which they are actually used - in the Dutch education and training system. These partly overlapping functions are illustrated with examples from the first two chapters.

Chapter 5, finally, places the subject of assessment and examination in a broader perspective in a consideration of quality and standards in vocational education, bringing in the question of the objectives of vocational education. The quality-control instruments used in the maintained sector are discussed in the second part of the chapter.

K. Visser

November 1992

1. THE DUTCH EDUCATION SYSTEM IN BRIEF

1.1. Primary and special education

Mainstream primary education, which covers the 4-12 age range, is so organized that pupils follow an uninterrupted learning pathway extending over eight years. Special primary schools cater for children with learning and behavioural difficulties and those who, through cognitive, sensory or physical handicap, require more help, or help of different kinds, than mainstream provision is thus far able to offer. Children enter special education when they are between three and six years old, depending on the type of school. Special secondary education caters for youngsters aged from twelve up to not more than twenty, with around half of all secondary-age youngsters in special schools transferring at some stage to one or other form of prevocational or vocational education.

1.2. First phase of secondary education

1.2.1. Selective versus integrated provision

Secondary education, to which children transfer at twelve, is divided into two phases. The first phase comprises the whole of the four-year prevocational (VBO) and lower general (MAVO) courses and the first three years of the five-year higher general (HAVO) and the six-year academic (VWO) courses; the different types of course are commonly delivered in different schools, and while the common initial curriculum to be introduced in August 1993 is integrated in substance it will still be delivered in this selective framework. This political decision, following twenty-five years of debate on how schooling for the 12-16 age group should be organized, has implications for the assessment and examination systems used in the first phase of secondary education. We return to this question later on.

1.2.2. Common initial curriculum

The common initial curriculum will cover the first two years of secondary education, with a core of fifteen subjects occupying 80 per cent of teaching time. The key objectives in these subject areas are set by the Minister of Education and Science. While all fifteen subjects are in principle compulsory for all pupils, individuals may be exempted from one or more if the overall burden proves too heavy. The schools themselves decide what is taught in the remaining 20 per cent of lesson time. A recommended timetable has been issued to shape delivery of the common curriculum. On completing the common curriculum pupils continue their secondary education on one of the four different types of course: prevocational (VBO) (formerly lower vocational, LBO), lower general (MAVO), higher general (HAVO) and academic (VWO); combined VBO/MAVO courses also exist.

1.2.3. Prevocational education

The replacement of lower vocational (LBO) with prevocational (VBO) education is taking place at the same time as the introduction of the common initial curriculum. In VBO years three and four pupils take prevocational alongside general subjects in the initial curriculum. The prevocational element may be taken to four levels of qualification, from A (the lowest) to D. Levels C and D are comparable with MAVO level. Different subjects may be taken to different levels. A VBO or MAVO certificate provides access at 16 to the apprenticeship system and to intermediate vocational education (MBO), which forms part of the upper secondary sector. A MAVO certificate also gives access to the fourth year of a HAVO (higher general) course. The common initial curriculum and prevocational education lead to qualifications at EC Level I.

1.3. Second phase of secondary education

1.3.1. Preparation for higher education

The senior years of higher general (HAVO) and academic (VWO) education form the non-vocational component of the second phase of secondary education. A HAVO certificate provides access to colleges of higher vocational education (HBO) or to the fifth year of a VWO

course, though some HAVO leavers transfer to intermediate vocational education (MBO) where they can follow a shortened programme. A VWO certificate gives access to the whole HE sector, i.e. both universities and HBO colleges.

1.3.2. The apprenticeship system and intermediate vocational education

The vocational component of the second phase of secondary education comprises the dual pathway through the apprenticeship system and the college-based courses of intermediate vocational education.

1.3.2.1. The apprenticeship system

The starting level for apprenticeship courses is that reached at the end of prevocational (VBO) and lower general (MAVO) courses; entrants must have reached the age of 16, i.e. not be subject to the statutory requirement to be in full-time education. The apprenticeship system includes:

- two- and three-year primary courses to "junior practitioner" level (EC Level II); these courses also provide access to advanced apprentice training and to part-time intermediate vocational education.

The National Commission for Apprentice Training and Vocational Education may not impose any admission requirement in excess of possession of a VBO/LBO or MAVO certificate or of a favourable report on the first three years of a HAVO or VWO course;

- one- and two-year advanced courses to "independent practitioner" level (EC Level II/III); admission is open to the holders of certificates at "junior practitioner" level, whether obtained through an elementary apprenticeship course or through a shorter course of intermediate vocational education (see 1.3.2.2);
- one- and two-year higher courses to "specialized practitioner" level (EC Level III/IV); admission is open to the holders of certificates at "independent practitioner" level or of certain certificates of intermediate vocational education (see 1.3.2.2).

Hitherto admission to apprentice training has been governed by the Apprentice Training Act; from 1 August 1993 onwards it will be governed by the Training Services Act (WCBO).

1.3.2.2. Intermediate vocational education

Each college of intermediate vocational education (MBO) is in one of four sectors: technology; agriculture and the natural environment; business; and services and health care. The starting level of MBO courses is that reached at the end of prevocational (VBO) and lower general (MAVO) courses or of the first three years of a higher general (HAVO) or academic (VWO) course. In terms of length and level MBO courses fall into three groups:

- shorter courses (KMBO) of not more than three years leading to qualifications at "junior practitioner" level, which also provide access to intermediate and full-length MBO courses or advanced apprenticeships. KMBO qualifications are comparable in level with those issued at the end of an elementary apprenticeship (EC Level II). There are no formal requirements for admission to a KMBO course;
- three-year intermediate courses (still on an experimental basis) of equal value with advanced apprenticeships (EC Level II/III).
- full-length (three- or four-year) courses leading to qualifications at "independent practitioner" level (EC Level III), which also provide access to higher vocational education.

Admission to the three-year and full-length courses is open to the holders of LBO/VBO or MAVO certificates at the higher levels (C/D) and to youngsters who have successfully completed the first three years of a HAVO or VWO course. Access to intermediate vocational education is governed by the Secondary Education Act. Alongside the full-time courses there are also part-time courses governed by the Training Services Act (WCBO).

1.3.3. Work-based training in health care

Work-based training for nursing and allied professions is a form of initial vocational education which comes under the responsibility of the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs. Entrants must be at least 17 years of age and hold a Level D MAVO certificate or higher. The duration of courses depends on their type; in terms of level they are equivalent to intermediate or higher vocational education (MBO/HBO).

Work-based training in health care is governed by four nurse education and certification schemes introduced in 1986; moves are currently under way to coordinate this form of training more closely with the MBO and HBO courses in health care funded by the Ministry of Education and Science.

1.3.4. Taster and access programmes

Colleges of intermediate vocational education also offer a range of taster and access programmes for youngsters who have yet to make their choice of occupation or post-school course or who lack certain knowledge and skills required to enter a vocational course. Similar programmes are available at institutions providing personal and social education for 16-year-olds (who, if they leave full-time schooling, are required under Dutch law to be in education for two days a week).

1.4. Higher education

1.4.1. Higher vocational education

There are seven sectors of higher vocational education (HBO): agriculture and horticulture, teacher training, technology, business, social work, health care, and art. Entrants must hold a certificate of higher general (HAVO) or academic (VWO) secondary education or one issued on completion of a full-length MBO course. Admission to HBO courses, which normally last four years, is governed by the Higher Vocational Education Act; specific requirements may be laid down as to the subjects which entrants to particular courses must have taken in their HAVO, VWO or MBO examinations. The number of such requirements will be sharply reduced from 1993 onwards under the Higher Vocational Education and University Research Act 1992; it will be for the HBO colleges themselves to run supplementary programmes to remedy any shortcomings in first-year students' knowledge. There are both full-time and part-time HBO courses; they lead to qualifications at EC Level IV.

1.4.2. The universities

Admission to university is open to the holders of certificates of academic secondary education (VWO) or of qualifications at higher vocational level (HBO); holders of HBO certificates can generally follow a shortened university course. Admission has hitherto been governed by the University Education Act; from 1993 it will be covered by the Vocational Education and University Research Act 1992. The first phase of university education lasts four years.

1.5. Adult education

Adult education exists in a wide range of forms.

1.5.1. Adult basic education

The purpose of adult basic education is to enable people aged 18 and over to function effectively in society; it mainly comprises part-time courses in the areas of literacy, numeracy and social skills.

1.5.2. General secondary education for adults (VAVO)

VAVO courses - "second chance" provision for adults - lead to MAVO, HAVO and VWO qualifications which confer the same rights as their school counterparts. While adults may take examinations in individual subjects, full certificates are awarded only to those completing prescribed ranges of subjects.

1.5.3. Vocational education and training

The various vocational courses for job-seekers, people in work and entrepreneurs are considered separately in sections 1.6 and 1.7.

1.5.4. The Open University

Our brief survey of adult education ends with the Open University, a recognized state institution of distance education at higher level open to anyone aged 18 or over; most students combine study with paid work.

1.6. Training for job-seekers

1.6.1. Provision

Training courses for job-seekers are predominantly of short duration and aimed at people wishing to maintain or improve their position on the labour market or to reach a new position; the statutory framework is provided by the new Training Services Act (WCBO). Participants' educational level on entry may be anywhere between that achieved at the end of primary school to that required for admission to higher education; they must be aged 16 or over, i.e. no longer be subject to the requirement to be in full-time education. The main provider agencies are:

- the Centres for Occupational Guidance and Practice (CBBs), catering for groups whose position on the labour market is especially vulnerable. The Centres prepare participants for unskilled work or admission to a training course (at an Occupational Training Centre or in the apprenticeship system);
- the Occupational Training Centres (CVs), running both technical and clerical courses for job-seekers and those at risk of unemployment. In terms of target levels CV courses are more or less equivalent to EC Level II;
- the elementary vocationally oriented adult education (PBVE) scheme, which includes taster and access courses as well as courses leading to qualifications; these last are at EC Level II. PBVE courses are aimed at adult job-seekers whose educational level is low;
- women's training units, catering for women aged 25 and over who have not previously been in paid employment or who wish to return to paid employment after an absence; the level is comparable with that of CV courses.

1.6.2. Relationship with mainstream education

The 1990s have brought moves towards greater coordination between intermediate vocational education (MBO), the apprenticeship system (section 1.3.2), general secondary education for adults (VAVO) (section 1.5.2) and the institutions providing taster and access programmes (section 1.3.4) by bringing them together in Regional Training Groups (ROCs); work-based

training in health care (section 1.3.3) and training for the unemployed (section 1.6.1) are also very likely to be included in this grouping process, covering all vocational and adult education below HE level. A major aim of the operation is to ensure that every citizen has a chance to achieve at least a basic qualification at elementary-apprenticeship level. We return to this topic in the sections on assessment and certification.

1.7. Training for people in work

1.7.1. Training for enterprise

"Training for enterprise" courses are designed for people who want to set up small or medium-sized businesses. The statutory rules governing the establishment of small businesses are laid down by the Minister of Economic Affairs; they include requirements as to the prior training and qualifications of aspiring entrepreneurs. Participants must at least hold a certificate of lower vocational education (LBO) or have completed an elementary apprenticeship. The scope of the statutory regime is currently under discussion; the Ministry of Economic Affairs would like to see a more limited statutory scheme with greater self-regulation within the various sectors of trade and industry.

1.7.2. Training for people in work

Training for people in work, which may or may not be governed by the terms of collective agreements, falls into three categories:

- internal employer-provided training courses;
- independent private training institutions, some of them recognized by the Minister of Education and Science under the Recognition of Educational Institutions Act, which use both face-to-face and distance teaching;
- maintained institutions (colleges of higher and intermediate vocational education, apprentice training institutions, adult education institutions) which provide courses, on a self-financing basis, to other organizations ("contract education").

1.8. Structure of education and training

The chart below shows the structure of the education and training system maintained by the Ministry of Education and Science, including the points of transfer from one form of provision to another.

2. ASSESSMENT AND CERTIFICATION

2.1. Assessment in primary education and in connection with the common initial secondary curriculum

2.1.1. Primary education

The general objectives of primary education are set by the Primary Education Act 1985, which lays down the areas of study to be covered; in their last two years at primary school pupils in the Netherlands often also study English. At the end of the 1980s, to give primary schools more concrete guidance in deciding curriculum content and to ease youngsters' transfer to secondary school, the objectives were expressed in terms of learning targets specifying what pupils were expected to know and to be able to do, and to what levels. While the statutory objectives of primary education are not linked to any prescribed central tests or any process of selection based on such tests, many primary schools nevertheless make use on a voluntary basis of the tests in mathematics, Dutch and information-processing developed by the Central Institute for Educational Testing (CITO); these are taken by pupils in their last primary year. The type of secondary school to which pupils transfer at the age of 12 (section 2.2) is determined mainly by the wishes of the parents (and the child) and, above all, on the primary head's recommendation; the latter has proved a reasonably reliable predictor of youngsters' later educational progress. Where a child has taken CITO tests the results play only a relatively minor role in the selection process.

In addition regular surveys are conducted to check what is being taught and what standards are being achieved. These surveys are a major element in quality control, since they enable schools to engage in a process of self-evaluation by comparing their own results with those found nationally. The survey results are also useful in the development of curricula and testing and the production of teaching materials.

Primary schools account for what they do in biennial work plans which they submit to the Education Inspectorate.

2.1.2. Common initial secondary curriculum

The core objectives for the fifteen subjects in the common initial curriculum being introduced in all secondary schools from 1 August 1993 (section 1.2) are set by the Minister of Education and Science; they are formulated at a single general level and resemble the core objectives of primary education. They also tie in with the examination syllabuses for the different types of secondary school in which the common curriculum is delivered.

At the end of the second secondary year schools must give every pupil advice on the pathway to be followed in the remainder of the first phase of their secondary education. To check whether pupils have achieved the core goals of the common initial curriculum schools must conduct tests, and while these are provided by the state they are organized and marked by the schools. The tests are taken not earlier than the end of the second year of secondary education and not later than the end of the fourth; pupils who perform satisfactorily receive a certificate. However, this certificate does not entitle them to enter post-16 vocational education; for this they need a certificate for the type of secondary course they have followed (see 2.2).

While the nature of the common initial curriculum is such that it would be most easily delivered at multilateral (comprehensive) schools encompassing all four school types in the first phase of secondary education, the formal qualification that pupils receive (and with it their entitlement to enter different types of post-16 education) still reflects the four-way split of the Secondary Education Act 1968. Basing transfer entitlements on the common curriculum would require a change not only in the content of children's education but also in the structure of the system; such a structural change has not proved politically feasible.

2.2. Assessment and certification in secondary schools at age 15/16 and after

2.2.1. Introduction

This section focuses on assessment in vocational, general and academic secondary schools. Unlike the certificates issued in connection with the common initial secondary curriculum, the

formal qualifications gained by pupils successfully completing their secondary schooling entitle them to enter different forms of post-school education (see chapter 1 and section 2.1.2). Final testing and assessment in the four types of secondary school are governed and/or guided by:

- the Secondary Education Act 1968,
- the VWO, HAVO, MAVO and LBO Examinations Decree, whose main features are discussed below (passing over minor provisions relating e.g. to external candidates and exemptions),
- ministerial policy intentions with regard to coordination between prevocational education (LBO/VBO) for 12-16s and vocational education at upper secondary level.

2.2.2. General (MAVO/HAVO) and academic (VWO) secondary schools

Pupils in these types of school are not examined in the full range of subjects taught. They take final examinations in at least six (MAVO and HAVO) or seven (VWO) subjects, of which some are compulsory and others optional (Dutch and one foreign language are compulsory in all three school types); they may opt to take an additional subject in which they are also examined. The range of options is slightly greater in MAVO and HAVO than in VWO schools.

As a rule pupils make their subject choice in their penultimate year. In practice the combinations chosen are not always the right ones for admission to their preferred course at a college of intermediate vocational education (after MAVO), college of higher vocational education (after HAVO) or university (after VWO), the transfer from HAVO to higher vocational education in particular being problematic.

The problem is being tackled on two fronts: the statutory regulations governing the range of subjects that prospective students must have taken in their final school examinations are being modified (see section 1.4.1) and the number of permitted subject combinations is to be reduced in HAVO and VWO schools. Four "transfer profiles" are being introduced with the aim of creating sets of permitted combinations of equal difficulty and value, each of which provides a broad range of transfer options. In addition to a general compulsory curriculum pupils may opt

to specialize in:

- nature and technology,
- nature and health care,
- business and society,
- culture and society.

MAVO, HAVO and VWO final examinations are conducted by the schools, which must submit examination regulations and an assessment scheme to the Education Inspectorate; these documents govern the procedural and substantive aspects of the examination. The examination comprises two parts, a series of school tests taken during pupils' final year and a central written examination, the results of the two being averaged to give the candidate's overall mark in each subject.

For each type of secondary school the Minister of Education and Science lays down an examination programme setting out:

- the syllabus for each examination subject,
- the part of the syllabus to be examined centrally,
- the number and duration of the component parts of the central examination.

The Central Examining Board (CEVO), appointed by the Minister, has the job of:

- fixing the dates and times of examinations (including retakes),
- setting questions for the central examinations,
- fixing assessment criteria for the central examinations,
- issuing marking regulations,
- specifying what aids candidates may use.

The Board uses the services of the Central Institute for Educational Testing (CITO).

Each paper is marked twice, once by the teacher who has taught the candidate the subject in question and once by an external examiner, often a teacher at another school. The two examiners then determine the final mark in consultation. Youngsters receive a list of their marks from their school and, if they have passed, a certificate showing the subjects covered.

MAVO, HAVO and VWO certificates have little or no direct value on the labour market; their significance lies in the access they give to post-school educational provision.

2.2.3. Lower vocational education/prevocational education

Lower vocational/prevocational (LBO/VBO) courses are taken to four levels. Different subjects may be taken to different levels; MAVO/LBO combinations are also possible. The four levels are:

- level D (comparable with MAVO level) for general final- examination subjects only (see section 2.2.2);
- level C, for general subjects and a limited number of vocational subjects. A central examination syllabus is also laid down at this level; the arrangements are similar to those detailed in section 2.2.2;
- alongside the examination syllabus fixed by the Minister of Education schools may also adopt an A or B syllabus. At these levels there are school examinations only.

The examination syllabus comprises Dutch and five other subjects, depending on the vocational field to which the course followed relates.

Broadly speaking, youngsters completing LBO courses mainly at levels C and D can go on to full-length courses of intermediate vocational education (MBO); those who reach mainly levels A and B can enter shorter MBO courses (KMBO) or the apprenticeship system. Their school-leaving certificate shows which level they have reached in which subject. Certificates of lower vocational education, particularly those of a technical nature, have some value on the labour market in relation to less skilled occupations in small and medium-sized businesses.

The replacement of lower vocational (LBO) with prevocational (VBO) education is taking place at the same time as the introduction of the common initial secondary curriculum. The need for coordination with post-16 MBO and apprenticeship courses (section 2.3) and the desirability of strengthening the position of the prevocational schools have prompted a number of developments in relation to assessment and testing (policy statement of July 1992):

- the introduction of more Level C examination programmes for vocational subjects to

ensure a smooth transition from the common initial curriculum to the prevocational curriculum and prevent a proliferation of syllabuses;

- the introduction of VBO certificates for individual subjects which exempt youngsters from certain requirements regarding vocational subjects at MBO and apprenticeship level. This development must be seen in relation to the work of the new national bodies for vocational education, which involves devising a unified structure of qualifications for intermediate vocational education and the apprenticeship system. The VBO sector will be involved in this work (see 2.3);
- research into the technical feasibility of tighter central regulation for examinations in vocational subjects. Given the specific problems associated with testing these subjects and their number and diversity, responsibility for assessment remains (for the moment) with the schools;
- the introduction of a departmental structure in the VBO sector to bring out its distinctive features;
- increased provision for combined MAVO/VBO certification.

2.3. Assessment and certification in post-16 secondary vocational education

2.3.1. Introduction

Secondary education for youngsters aged 15/16 and over is currently in a state of flux (the position is described in detail in the Cedefop monograph "Vocational education and training in the Netherlands"). In this section we look successively at:

- testing and assessment as regulated by the Apprenticeship Act and the associated examinations decree. From 1 August 1993 onwards the apprenticeship system will be subject to the Training Services Act (WCBO);
- the new examinations decree for intermediate vocational education as a whole, which took effect on 1 August 1992, and the differences between it and earlier decrees;
- the process of curriculum development in intermediate vocational education and the apprenticeship system, in relation to the new functions of the national apprenticeship

bodies now being recast as centres of expertise for vocational education in individual industrial and occupational sectors.

This section also looks at the work-based training in health care for which the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs is responsible.

Vocational education at upper-secondary level leads to a three-way qualification: a general qualification, a vocational qualification and one entitling the holder to enter some further form of education.

2.3.2. Apprenticeship system

Apprentice training syllabuses have hitherto been drawn up by the national apprenticeship bodies, on which the role of the two sides of industry is mainly administrative. The Minister of Education determines the "total programme" for each area of study, comprising an outline syllabus and a practical programme and specifying admission requirements, the duration of practical training and the requirements that students must satisfy in their practical and theoretical examinations. At the end of their practical training the national bodies give students the opportunity of taking an examination which is open to students who have regularly attended the general and vocational courses making up off-the-job education (BBO) for apprentices. The examination comprises a practical section and a theoretical one testing the understanding and skills specified in the vocational syllabus. In some sectors the practical examinations are held in specialized examination centres.

The examinations are administered by a board appointed by the Minister of Education on the recommendation of the relevant national body; its members must not only possess the necessary expertise but also represent industry and the colleges providing off-the-job apprentice training. Candidates who pass both parts of the examination receive a certificate, the model for which is determined by the Minister of Education; those who pass only the practical section can receive a practical diploma. The details are laid down in the Apprenticeship Examinations Decree.

The Training Services Act makes a number of changes to these arrangements:

- examination syllabuses are determined by the national bodies. The Minister's role is limited to setting learning targets and the associated division into certification units, which are compiled by the national bodies (see 2.3.4);
- students who pass a section of the examination associated with a certification unit receive a certificate for that section.

Apprenticeship certificates are also issued to persons who have not followed an apprenticeship course but who have been admitted to and have passed the examination. It goes almost without saying that certificates gained in a system which combines learning and working are of great value on the labour market.

Apprentice training is increasingly being modularized as syllabuses are organized into units in which the theoretical underpinning ties in closely with students' practical work. Testing and assessment are being brought into line with the new structure, with modular tests coupled (as necessary) with a final examination.

Some apprentice-training courses at elementary level are covered by the EC's comparability programme; students completing these courses can obtain from the national body concerned a Euro-certificate setting out in various languages what their qualification represents. Employers and guidance agencies can obtain sectoral summaries detailing the diplomas issued in the various EC countries and describing the associated practical requirements.

Students living in border areas may take both Dutch and foreign examinations, and if they pass they receive a double diploma. This happens on a modest scale, e.g. in the metal-technology field in collaboration with Germany.

2.3.3. Intermediate vocational education

This section outlines the new, harmonized examination regulations for full-time and part-time intermediate vocational education.

- Learning targets, grouped into certification units, are set by the Minister of Education (in the case of agricultural courses, by the Minister of Agriculture). The procedures involved are set out in section 2.3.4.

- There are both college and central examinations. Central examinations relate only to subjects, examination sectors or certification units governed by statutory provisions other than those where responsibility rests with the Ministry of Education and Science.
- Every year the Minister appoints a national examining board for each MBO sector whose duties are virtually identical with those of the Central Examining Board (CEVO; see 2.2.2). The examination sections which must be taken for a certificate to be issued, the options that are available and the centrally examined sections are laid down by Ministerial Order. The central examination syllabuses drawn up by the national examining board are the subject of consultation with bodies from the worlds of education and industry designated as representative by the Minister (the new national commissions for vocational education include committees bringing education and industry together; see 2.3.5.3). Finally, the central examination syllabus is fixed by the Minister.
- Each MBO college must submit to the Education Inspectorate:
 - a. examination regulations which cover the central and college examination syllabuses and the general rules and procedures relating to marking, the use of external examiners and expert assessors from industry, retakes, etc.;
 - b. annually, before 1 October, a programme of testing and assessment.
- The conduct of both central and college examinations is a college responsibility. Both registered students and external candidates may be admitted.
- The placement or period of practical learning may function as an examination section in its own right or as part of one. The result of the placement is expressed as a pass or fail.
- Candidates must pass all sections of the examination to obtain an overall pass.
- The overall diploma is issued in exchange for the certificates awarded in connection with each section of the examination syllabus and, where applicable, the practical placement. MBO certificates have considerable value on the labour market.
- The models for the mark lists associated with diplomas are determined by the Minister.

The above regulations will apply to students starting MBO courses from 1 August 1993 onwards.

The various MBO sectors are still covered by examination decrees which differ to varying extents from the new arrangements. We look below at differences in two areas, namely central versus college examinations and the position of the placement within the examination.

- The existing regulations for full-length MBO courses in services and health care (MDGO) largely coincide with the new regulations. There is however to be greater emphasis on the college examination, while the placement is to be included as part of the examination.
- Under existing regulations the main emphasis in full-length MBO courses in the business and clerical field (MEAO) is on central examinations. This will change under the new regulations, which give an important role to college examinations and include the work placement as an essential element in the course.
- The existing regulations relating to education for the distributive trades (MMO) differ sharply from the new ones. There is currently no college written examination, though there is an oral examination which is very largely a matter for the colleges. However, much of the syllabus is governed by statutory provisions, for which a central examination and the associated regulations are to be compiled, in part by the Ministry of Economic Affairs (see section 2.7.1 on changes in the legislation governing the establishment of businesses). The placement will also be included as an integral part of the examination syllabus.
- Full-length courses of intermediate technical education (MTO) are currently governed by regulations similar to the new ones; in both cases the emphasis is on college examinations, though the placement is not currently an examination requirement.
- The new regulations resemble existing arrangements most closely in the case of the shorter MBO courses (KMBO).

It is noteworthy that the new middle-length courses introduced on a limited scale in the MBO sector include a period of full-time college-based education and a concluding dual phase on the same lines as in the apprenticeship system.

2.3.4. Work-based training in health care

The various courses of work-based nurse education which come under the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs are governed by detailed regulations, dating from 1986, which lay down among other things learning targets and testing and assessment arrangements. The final examination is the responsibility of a board comprising the head of the school of nursing and the teachers involved in the course; the course ends with a national written examination and an oral examination; the written tests are set by the health minister. Diplomas (for which the model is determined by the health minister) are awarded to candidates who achieve pass standard in the successive periods of theoretical and on-the-job training, in their projects and in all sections of the final examination. (In the Netherlands examinations are normally graded on a scale from 1 (very poor) to 10 (outstanding); the pass mark is normally 5.5 or 6.)

The Inspectorate of Public Health has the job of ensuring that the regulations governing nursing diplomas are properly implemented.

2.3.5. Towards a more coherent system of intermediate vocational education

The Cedefop monograph on vocational education and training in the Netherlands (June 1992) dealt at length with moves to achieve greater coherence in vocational education at intermediate level, focusing notably on administrative and institutional issues alongside more substantive matters. Here we look particularly at the development of course curricula and examination syllabuses, touching on institutional matters where they are relevant to this process. In what follows we deal successively with:

- the various stages in the evolution of a unified structure of MBO and other qualifications for each industrial and occupational sector,
- how the structure is being developed and will be used (the "royal road");
- the place of the new-style national bodies for vocational education (LOBs), which replace the former national bodies for the apprenticeship system.

2.3.5.1. Evolving a unified structure of qualifications: four stages

In the Netherlands it is a major principle of public policy that every citizen must have a chance to achieve at least the initial qualifications needed to join the labour market. Various training pathways exist for this purpose and a process is now under way of moulding them into a coherent system of provision at a level below that of higher education. It divides into four stages.

The first stage, which began in the late 1980s with college mergers and course restructuring in intermediate vocational education, was completed at the beginning of the 1990s with the amalgamation of shorter and full-length MBO courses. Existing course objectives were translated into learning targets set by the Minister of Education, which are assessed under the terms of existing examination decrees; this was the first generation of learning targets.

The development process involved in the second stage is now also virtually complete; its results will be implemented from 1 August 1993. This second generation of learning targets, applying to intermediate vocational education, has been developed by way of the "royal road" (see 2.3.5.2).

The next stage, likely to culminate in the introduction of a new Vocational Training and Adult Education Act on 1 January 1996, involves harmonizing the content and level of MBO and apprenticeship courses. This third generation of learning targets will be devised by the new-style national bodies (see 2.3.5.3).

The fourth and final stage will be the creation of a unified qualification structure for each industrial and occupational sector. Where the third generation of learning targets will cover courses for which the education and agriculture ministries are responsible, the fourth will also encompass forms of training linked with other ministries: the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and the Central Employment Services Board (e.g. for the Occupational Training Centres and the women's training units; see 1.6) and the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs (for work-based nurse education; see 1.3.3). It is also hoped to include training for people in employment, including private training provision, in this process.

The eventual outcome will be a single structure of qualifications for each sector: a coherent system of training provision encompassing learning targets, certification units, examinations and

diplomas, with the associated entitlements.

2.3.5.2. Substantive steps along the "royal road"

The statutory "royal road" for the development of vocational curricula and examinations divides into three parts which largely reflect the procedure originally followed within the apprenticeship system.

Part 1 Compiling occupational profiles

An occupational profile reflects the essence of a job or group of jobs, comprising as it does a description of current and future occupational activities together with the requirements which must be satisfied by anyone practising the occupation now or wishing to practise it in the near future. In other words, an occupational profile is a structured assemblage of statements regarding the tasks normally found in the exercise of a particular occupation. The compilation and approval of occupational profiles is primarily a responsibility of employers' organizations and trade unions in the sectors concerned.

Part 2 From occupational profile to training profile

The occupational requirements to which training is geared are generated by making choices among the types of knowledge and skill implied by one or more occupational profiles. Such requirements are supplemented with others relating to forms of education and training which participants may subsequently wish to enter (transfer requirements) and to more general learning objectives of a social nature (general social requirements). Training profiles define course content in terms of learning targets grouped into certification units and indicate the duration (shorter, medium-length, full), form (dual, full-time, part-time) and educational principles of the course concerned.

Training profiles are compiled jointly by representatives of both sides of industry and of the world of education (see 2.3.5.3); learning targets and certification units are set by the Minister after consultation with the Education Council, the highest ministerial advisory body.

Part 3 College work plans (including practical work plans) and examination syllabuses

Reference should be made to section 2.3.5.3 for the development of examination syllabuses and to sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3 for the apprenticeship system and intermediate vocational education

respectively. The work plan of a school or college is a full description of its educational programme, showing how the institution intends achieving its students' learning targets. Responsibility for part 3 is largely in the hands of the schools and colleges.

2.3.5.3. New-style national bodies

The late 1980s saw the creation of numerous forums through which the worlds of industry and education could work together to design training profiles for intermediate vocational education. As from 1992 these Sectoral Training Councils (BOOBs) are being integrated with the national bodies for the apprenticeship system to create new sector-based national commissions for vocational education. Each of these new-style national bodies has a tripartite or bipartite membership, with representatives of the two sides of industry and the world of education, or only of the two sides of industry. Within each body there is an education/industry committee with equal numbers of representatives of industry (employers and unions) on the one hand and the world of education on the other. The publicly funded functions of these bodies, whose number is to be reduced thirty-one to thirteen over the next few years, are:

- to develop training profiles and learning targets for the occupational components of intermediate vocational education and the apprenticeship system on the basis of occupational profiles compiled in the light of research conducted by industry;
- to develop and apply a system of testing and assessment for apprenticeship courses and to make proposals relating to MBO examination syllabuses (central examinations);
- to undertake planning and examining duties in connection with the apprenticeship system as specified in the Training Services Act (WCBO);
- in the context of the apprenticeship system, to conclude training contracts with employers, to select firms where apprentices will receive their practical training, and to supervise apprentices during practical training;

They also undertake other functions which are not publicly funded.

As this range of functions indicates, it has been decided to give responsibility for testing and assessment in intermediate vocational education to the colleges and in the apprenticeship system to the national bodies. Central MBO examinations under state supervision are held

where statutory requirements exist, e.g. in relation to the establishment of businesses, health professions and maritime occupations.

With a view to enhancing credibility it is possible that both industry and educational institutions might prefer to make use of nationally compiled examination syllabuses. Such syllabuses do not have to be set by the state, though there could well be a legitimating effect if it were were strongly to recommend advisory examination syllabuses compiled by the national bodies.

2.4. Assessment and certification in higher education

2.4.1. Higher vocational education

Higher vocational education (HBO) is divided into two phases, a preliminary (propaedeutic) phase and a principal phase. The preliminary phase (which generally lasts one year and for which students may not remain registered for more than two years) is designed to give students a taste of what further study would involve while at the same time making possible referral and selection at the start of the principal phase. At the end of the preliminary phase every college must give its students a written report with its recommendation regarding further study at the college concerned or elsewhere.

The principal HBO phase comprises courses in particular fields of study with a range of specialized options in the latter stages. Industry's complaint that the diversity of options available has produced fragmentation and made the system difficult for outsiders to grasp has recently found an echo in the HBO sector itself, and in 1992 broad agreement was reached with the Council of Central Employers' Organizations on streamlining and simplifying course provision. The many course options are to be clustered into a number of study areas, notably in economics and business studies. In addition, new courses will only be launched when the need has been identified at national level. The HBO colleges have thus sacrificed some of the autonomy they gained in the 1980s.

After the principal HBO phase a limited number of students in possession of HBO certificates go on to post-HBO courses.

The Higher Vocational Education Act and the HBO Regulations laid down by the Minister of

Education govern among other things course organization, admission requirements, and testing and assessment. The following points are relevant here:

- the HBO Regulations set out objectives for the various study areas and regulate the content of both preliminary and final examinations in each, indicating at least the fields to which the examinations relate. Courses generally include out-of-college placements when students receive practical preparation for the occupation concerned; the Regulations specify what sections of the practical preparation students must undertake with a view to taking sections of the final examination;
- the course objectives set out in the HBO Regulations are translated into learning targets in college work plans, meaning that the job of determining the content and organization of the preliminary and final examinations rests with the HBO institutions themselves;
- passing a preliminary examination in a particular study area entitles a student to go on to the final examination in that study area at the same or a different institution. External candidates are also admitted to examinations;
- each college establishes an examining board for the examinations in each study area, generally comprising the teachers teaching in it. Both experts designated by the college and state examiners appointed by the Minister may be involved in setting and marking examinations; state examiners are involved in this way in the case of courses which prepare students for the exercise of occupations subject to statutory regulation (e.g. health-care, teaching and maritime occupations);
- successful candidates receive a certificate (in accordance with a model determined by the Minister of Education) showing the subjects in which they have been examined. Unsuccessful candidates and those who fail to complete their course receive a report showing how much of their course they have completed and what parts of the examination they have passed. HBO certificates (other than those for art) generally have considerable employment value.

2.4.2. The universities

Students who successfully complete their foundation (propaedeutic) course may continue their studies in the same study area or transfer to one which lacks its own foundation course. The *doctoraal* examination marks the end of the first stage of university education; for most students it completes their university career. In some fields post-doctoraal study is compulsory: prospective researchers and teachers must study at post-doctoraal level, for example, as must students on certain other courses subject to statutory regulation (e.g. in medicine and accountancy). There are also many post-doctoraal programmes which do not involve examinations regulated by the Universities Act.

Open University students may take:

- individual courses leading to course examinations, with successful candidates receiving a certificate;
- combinations of courses leading to combined certification;
- short programmes of higher education based around a single theme;
- individually determined or set diploma programmes leading to a university-level qualification.

2.5. Assessment and certification in adult education

2.5.1. Introduction

This section looks at certification in relation to adult basic education and general secondary education for adults (VAVO); certification in relation to vocational training for adults is discussed in sections 2.6 (training for the unemployed) and 2.7 (training for people in work), to the extent that it has not already been covered in section 2.3 (apprenticeship system and part-time intermediate vocational education). Adult education through the Open University is the subject of section 2.4.2.

2.5.2. Adult basic education

Adult basic education is governed by the Adult Education Framework Act, which defines study areas only in very broad terms: language (Dutch, introduction to English), numeracy, social skills, and bridging courses leading to other forms of education and training. While there is no formal testing and assessment, an initiative by the Adult Education Study Centre and the institutions providing basic education has produced a set of programmes showing the areas of study in detail. These documents provide a framework for developing curricula and learning resources and for coordinating basic-education targets with the starting requirements for subsequent forms of education and training.

2.5.3. General secondary education for adults

General secondary education for adults (VAVO) is governed by the VWO, HAVO, MAVO and LBO Examinations Decree (see 2.2), which allows VAVO students to follow courses and take examinations in individual subjects. A student who has accumulated the necessary number of subject certificates at the appropriate level can exchange them for a VW0, HAVO or MAVO diploma.

2.5.4. Dutch as a second language

State examinations in Dutch as a second language are being introduced in 1993; a trial run in 1992 involved almost 600 candidates originating from over eighty different countries. The examinations, which cover the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, exist at two levels. Level 1 tests the Dutch-language skills of non-native-speakers wishing to enter "lower" forms of education (elementary apprenticeships, courses at Occupational Training Centres, shorter intermediate vocational education, various types of employer-provided training) or to take up "lower" forms of employment (above the level of unskilled labour). Level 2 is aimed at those wishing to enter "higher" forms of education (full-length intermediate vocational courses, higher vocational education, university) or to take middle-ranking or higher-level employment.

These are two different examinations, for two different target groups: the first level is not

intended to lead on to the second. Successful candidates receive a certificate, recognized by the Minister of Education and Science, which opens the way to the types of education or employment to which the examination level relates.

2.6. Testing and assessment in specific training for the unemployed

Training in the context of employment services was brought into the ambit of educational legislation for the first time by the Training Services Act 1992. The educational qualifications or practical experience which participants must possess if they are to profit from a course are indicated in course programmes; learning targets are laid down by the institutions running the courses. Courses may end with a test set by the institution; those who pass receive a certificate stating the type of test and whether or not external experts were involved in setting or marking it. Where there is no test participants completing courses receive a certificate of attendance.

Specific training aimed at helping people into employment is provided by:

- publicly funded training centres serving this target group;
- publicly funded mainstream education and training institutions, on a contract basis;
- private training institutions.

Currently there is a trend towards taking greater account of job-seekers' work experience and/or of the results of informal learning, with assessment procedures being used to create training and support programmes tailored to the needs of the individual. These new procedures are still in their infancy.

2.7. Testing and assessment in training for people in work

2.7.1. Training for enterprise

Training for prospective entrepreneurs is provided through mainstream courses at colleges of intermediate vocational education, through the apprenticeship system and in the form of specific courses. The training infrastructure closely reflects the current pattern of legislation governing the establishment of businesses, with its sector-specific decrees and requirements. These

sectoral requirements are fleshed out in examination syllabuses, the examinations themselves being the responsibility of training institutions and examining boards (often linked with sectoral organizations).

The many decrees governing the establishment of businesses distinguish between general entrepreneurial skills and those specific to the sector concerned. They set demanding standards for people wishing to set up in business in many sectors.

The Ministry of Economic Affairs is seeking to simplify establishment legislation and in a policy document issued in June 1992 it proposed abolishing formal requirements in many sectors; according to the document, training in general business skills was needed in only a limited number of sectors and specific training in a smaller number still, and the number of establishment decrees could be cut by three quarters by amalgamation and rationalization (as has happened in the retail sector) and by the simple abolition of requirements and diplomas. The purpose of the exercise is to cut state intervention, to render markets less rigid by relaxing sectoral compartmentalization, and to make it more difficult for established businesses to protect their markets. At the same time Parliament continues to press for measures to raise the standard of entrepreneurship, a task for which the sectoral organizations themselves must take greater responsibility. The recognition of firms and approval and certification of business-training courses are amongst the instruments that could be used.

2.7.2. Recognized private provision

A large proportion of the recognized private provision for correspondence and face-to-face education is vocationally oriented. Testing and assessment may take the form of:

- state examinations,
- examinations set by bodies external to the training institutions (they may be linked to sectoral organizations and/or supervised by state examiners);
- internal examinations.

There are of course also courses which do not lead to any formal qualification.

Private educational provision may be recognized by the Minister of Education under the Recognition of Educational Institutions Act, which came into force in 1987. The Act's main purpose is to protect the interests of the educational consumer and to ensure high standards in educational services which are not (or not fully) state-maintained.

Recognition is subject to checks on the educational soundness of the courses offered; it is also conditional on, among other things, ministerial approval of the examination regulations applied.

The Recognition of Educational Institutions Act applies to:

- courses leading to the state VWO, HAVO and MAVO examinations;
- courses leading to the qualifications required by persons wishing to establish businesses;
- courses leading to university examinations;
- courses for prospective practitioners of certain professions (teachers, interpreters, translators etc.);
- many refresher courses;
- courses leading to examinations under the supervision of a state examiner.

Where courses meet the statutory requirements the institutions providing them may print "Recognized by the Minister of Education and Science" on their brochures and other publications.

2.7.3. External courses for employees

Courses for employees may be provided internally (i.e. directly by their employers) or externally. By external courses we mean all types of provision delivered by training institutions that are not recognized by the state. There are many such institutions, some of them specialized, some closely associated with sectors of industry or sectoral organizations, and the courses they run vary widely in duration.

This market is a complex and changing one, and work is under way in various sectors aimed at identifying training needs, charting course availability, developing training structures for different sectors and creating a certification system for high-grade training provision by institutions linked with industrial and occupational sectors.

2.8. Summary

The summary chart relates only to institutions maintained by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries, with the exception of special schools and the universities.

	Primary education	Pre-vocational education (12-16) (VBO)	General and academic secondary education (MAVO, HAVO, VWO)	Adult basic education	General secondary education	Apprenticeship system	Intermediate vocational education (MBO)	Higher vocational education (HBO)
1. Structure	Full-time	Full-time	Full-time	Part-time	Part-time	Dual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full-time • Part-time • Full-time, then dual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full-time • Part-time
2. Examinations	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School examination (levels A and B) • School and central examinations (levels C and D) 	school and central examinations	None	School and central examinations	Central national examinations	College and some central examinations	College examinations
3. Learning targets set by:	Education ministry (core goals)	Education ministry	Education ministry	n/a	Education ministry	Education and agriculture ministries	Education and agriculture ministries	College (Ministries set general goals)
4. Examination syllabus	n/a	CEVO (Education and agriculture ministries)	CEVO (Education ministry)	n/a	CEVO (Education ministry)	LOB/CEC (LOB)	LEC (Education and agriculture ministries)	n/a
a. Central examinations		School	School		School	n/a		College
b. School/college examinations								
5. Role of industry in examinations	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Joint determination, implementation	Consultation, joint implementation	Joint implementation (in some cases)
6. Formal certification	Certificate n/a	Certificate n/a	Certificate n/a*	n/a	Certificate Single subject certificate	Certificate practical diploma, partial certificate	Certificate partial certificate	Certificate partial certificate
a. Successful completion of whole course								
b. Successful completion of part of course								
7. Recognition	National	National	National	n/a	National	National	National	National
8. Further educational options for holders	VBO, MAVO, HAVO, VWO	Apprenticeship MBO		Training for job seekers (MBO)	Apprenticeship, MBO, HBO (and > HAVO > VWO)	Training for people in work	Post MBO, HBO	Post HBO, university
9. Nature of assessment criteria	Knowledge (skills)	Knowledge (skills)	Knowledge (skills)	Knowledge (skills)	Knowledge (skills)	Knowledge skills performance	Knowledge skills	Knowledge skills
10. Employment value of certificate	None	Low/high, depending on course	None/low	n/a	None/low	High	High	High

* Students completing year 3 of a HAVO or VWO course must have a favourable report before they can enter year 4.

3. INTERESTED PARTIES

3.1. Introduction

Chapter 2 made frequent use of the term "qualification structure" in relation to initial training, notably the apprenticeship system and the post-16 system of intermediate vocational education. What is expected or required of qualifications has implications for the structure and content of vocational courses. In the Netherlands these requirements are translated into coherent training structures for each branch of industry, for both initial training and, if possible, occupationally or sectorally oriented continuing training. This produces a coherent system of training courses, in which greater flexibility is required in the post-initial sector given the changes taking place on the labour market and in occupational practice.

Such a system must satisfy two requirements: courses must be seen to relate to the nature and level of occupational practice in the area in question, and they must be recognized and accepted by industry. This requires in turn that clear goals - learning targets - must be formulated for every course within the system. The question of the purpose of a national qualification structure in the sense of an ordered overview of requirements on the demand side can be answered with the help of another question: who benefits from the existence of a clear qualification structure (the demand side), i.e. from clarity as to the standard of qualifications and the nature of the courses leading to them? This is the central question addressed in this chapter.

3.2. Participants

Learning targets enable participants in vocational courses, whether in the apprenticeship system or in intermediate or higher vocational education, to know in advance what is expected of them: how much time and effort will be required to qualify, to achieve a certificate. The freedom of education guaranteed by the Dutch constitution means that schools and colleges can decide for themselves what to teach and how, provided they work towards nationally determined learning targets (in the apprenticeship system and intermediate vocational education) or the general goals for study areas in

higher vocational education. No course is therefore delivered in precisely the same way in two different places: differing aspects may be stressed by different colleges of vocational education and different firms involved in apprentice training, while resources and facilities may vary slightly from one place to another. The match between educational provision and the needs of the labour market can be improved by adopting a regional approach to the interpretation of learning targets. Despite this freedom, the existence of a qualification structure reassures students that what they are learning is relevant to current and future occupational practice: they do not need to make comparative tests, in the manner of a consumer magazine, of the different courses available in the fields which interest them. This is certainly true of the apprenticeship system and intermediate vocational education; it is perhaps less true of higher education, where qualifications are formulated in more general terms at national level and the somewhat more detailed learning targets are determined by the colleges themselves. Thanks to the existence of standards and the related certificates participants in initial vocational education can be confident that they can attend a college near where they live and that the course they follow will qualify them for employment anywhere in the Netherlands. The value of a particular certificate to a job applicant is in principle the same throughout the country; that it is high is clear from the fact that qualified applicants are more likely to obtain jobs than unqualified school- and college-leavers.

Those who do not follow a course but nevertheless wish to take an examination as an external candidate (an option for which all examination regulations provide) also benefit from the existence of learning targets, since they provide participants with a basis for assessing the likelihood of success.

3.3. Industry: employers, workers and their organizations

Both workers and employers benefit from clarity as to the learning targets and value of vocational courses and the value of qualifications. For workers the value lies in the broadly formalized rights associated with taking or having taken a particular course, rights which are or can be incorporated into collective agreements in each sector of industry. Employers for their part need to know what they can expect of the trained workers they take on; learning targets give an indication of the knowledge and skills acquired during training, enabling employers to assess whether new workers

can be deployed directly and, if not, the nature and length of the induction process required. For employers the possession of formal qualifications is only one of the variables taken into account in personnel policies and recruitment strategies; from the training viewpoint craftsmanship (which for an employer need not coincide with examination success) and social skills are also of importance in these strategies.

Employers and organized labour thus have an interest in a clear qualification structure and associated pattern of training; that they recognize and act on that interest is evident from in section 2.2.3:

- employers' organizations and trade unions play a part in drawing up training programmes for the apprenticeship system; they have long been involved in this (non-dominant) form of vocational training in the Netherlands;
- since the end of the 1980s employers' organizations and trade unions have been directly involved, through the Sectoral Training Councils (BOOBs), in drawing up learning targets in intermediate vocational education (MBO). In 1992 the Councils merged with the national bodies for the apprenticeship system to form the new national commissions for vocational education (LOBs);
- employment service training provision is shortly to be geared to the apprenticeship system and MBO, in that training for job-seekers is to be incorporated into sector-specific training structures. Since the start of the 1990s the employment services, and with them training provision for the unemployed, have been the joint responsibility of government and both sides of industry.

As this shows, the involvement of industry, along with government and the world of education, in vocational education at lower and intermediate level is taking a very specific form in terms of organization and substance; the approach adopted has neo-corporatist features.

In higher vocational education (HBO) the provider institutions have greater freedom to decide the extent of industry's involvement in the compilation of learning targets. The move by the HBO Council and the confederation of employers' associations to streamline and simplify HBO course provision was mentioned in section 2.4.1.; relevance to the needs of the national labour market

is one of the criteria applied in deciding whether to start or retain a course, with a particular emphasis on broad deployability.

3.4. Provider institutions

Learning targets serve to guide the content and structure of vocational courses, providing points of reference for teachers and practical trainers and for the developers of curricula and compilers of tests and examinations. The more learning targets are specified in detail, the greater is their effect in this regard. There is not always unanimity as to how detailed learning targets in the apprenticeship system and intermediate vocational education should be. The government is responsible for setting the targets, following consultation with its highest advisory body in this field, the Education Council; this "arm's length" role is well served by targets formulated in fairly broad terms, which have the additional advantage that they are less quickly outdated. While this minimalist approach to target-setting is in keeping with the Dutch ideology of freedom of education, under which government sets and monitors standards and provides resources, those who develop and deliver vocational courses often feel a need for more detailed targets. The extent to which targets are specified in detail is in fact a political rather than an educational issue which, though identified and recognized, is in practice always resolved thanks to the continuity of vocational education with statutorily prescribed learning targets.

3.5. Providers of initial and continuing education

Knowledge of the foundations needed for participation in vocational courses and the targets to which the courses are geared helps smooth the transition from initial non-vocational education, and in general the existence of a qualification structure enables courses to be coordinated. For the apprenticeship system and intermediate vocational education (MBO) this means among other things:

- coordination with pre-16 prevocational education (VBO). Some of the learning targets and certificates of vocational education at intermediate (normally post-16) level can be obtained while youngsters are still at VBO schools (see 2.2.3); they are then exempted from the

course sections concerned;

- coordination within the apprenticeship system and MBO, facilitating horizontal and vertical transfers (e.g. between shorter MBO and elementary apprenticeship courses and from shorter MBO to advanced apprenticeship courses);
- coordination between the foundation requirements of vocational courses (notably in the apprenticeship system) and the learning targets applied in primary education and at the Centres for Occupational Guidance and Practice (CBBs);
- coordination with continuing training for people in work (normally outside the maintained sector);
- coordination between full-length MBO courses and the higher vocational sector.

The question of continuity between one phase of education and the next has also been addressed in other areas: transfer profiles have been developed in higher general and academic secondary education (HAVO/VWO) (see 2.2.2), paralleling the development of admission profiles in higher education. This simultaneous development of transfer and admission profiles reflects the fact that coordination must be seen as a process of mutual adjustment.

3.6. Funding sources

In the Netherlands it is accepted that primary responsibility for ensuring that youngsters have the initial qualifications needed to enter the labour market rests with the state; this responsibility also extends to adults who lack initial qualifications at EC Level II. The existence of a qualification structure recognized by government and industry enables the political debate on how initial and continuing training should be funded to be conducted in a more rational fashion:

- what contribution should come from the state, as the current main source of funding for initial education and training?
- what contribution should come from the customers (i.e. employers), the current main source of funding for training for people in work?

- what contribution should come from the users (i.e. course participants), who currently often bear some of the cost of training, taking into account the value of certificates of initial training in obtaining employment and of further training in gaining promotion?

4. THE FUNCTIONS OF FINAL TESTING AND ASSESSMENT

4.1. Introduction

The main beneficiaries from the existence of a clear and unambiguous structure of qualifications were considered in chapter 3; their interest, or this diversity of interests, relates closely to the significance which the various beneficiary groups attach to final testing and assessment, an instrument that can be used in many different ways. How final testing and assessment are used in practice constitutes their sometimes overlapping and sometimes contradictory functions, which are summarized below.

4.2. Allocation and selection

Education and training have an allocative function in the sense of guiding people to particular places in society; in a society such as ours, with its highly developed division of labour and differentiated qualification structure, such places form a hierarchy. Education and training also have a selective function whereby the various pupil or student groups are directed towards particular programmes; such selection may take place at the start of, during and/or at the end of a course. While allocation and selection are two different processes, in practice they are closely bound up with one another; both feature examinations differentiated by level and an emphasis on individual differences and similarities. In the Dutch education system as presently constituted these functions take effect in various ways:

- the selection and specialization which marks secondary education (see 1.2.1); the implications of the common initial curriculum being introduced in 1993 are considered below in the section on the qualifying function;
- the hierarchical structure of examinations in prevocational education, with their four levels (see 2.3.3);
- the "royal road" for the development of curricula and examinations in the apprenticeship system and intermediate vocational education from the qualification requirements associated

with job structures on the labour market (see 2.3.5); there is a close link here with the allocative function of education;

- the existence of a selective foundation programme (propaedeutic phase) in higher education (see 2.5);
- the fact that the "pass mark" in public examinations reflects not absolute criteria but relative numbers, giving fairly constant pass rates.

4.3. Qualification

The selective function of examinations links the quality of candidates with their numbers; the qualifying function is concerned primarily with determining whether candidates reach a set standard. These two functions are theoretically speaking distinct from one another.

All examinations have a qualifying function, not directly bound up with the assignment of candidates to particular positions or the performance of particular social roles, which relates to the granting of rights or recognition. This function is most evident in the admission requirements for the various types of education and training, though a distinction needs to be made between admissibility and actual admission: it is broadly the case that while admissibility to courses is governed by statute, with detailed requirements (relating e.g. to age, subjects previously studied, admission profiles etc.) being laid down, the principle of freedom of education means that actual admission is the responsibility of individual institutions. In the case of the apprenticeship system, the dual nature of this training pathway means that admission is determined in part by employers' recruitment and selection policies.

The qualifying and selective functions are not independent of one another, as these Dutch examples indicate:

- access to courses leading to examinations with a strong qualifying function (examinations of professional expertise) is via a selective system;
- the qualifying function of final examinations is not separated from the selective function: qualifying examinations are virtually always also selective admission examinations for some further type of course;

- the admission of students to university courses whose capacity is limited is a matter for admission boards, who decide among the qualified candidates (holders of a certificate of academic secondary (VWO) education) on the basis both of their school examination marks and a system of random selection. This combined procedure brings out both the qualifying and the selective functions of the VWO examination.

The common initial curriculum being introduced in all types of secondary school from August 1993 onwards does not lead to an examination (section 2.1.2) and is in principle non-selective; differentiation in the pupil populations will be brought about by assignment to the four different types of secondary course (prevocational, lower general, upper general and academic), however, and we can expect the common curriculum to retain a selective function in that the details of what is taught (in the common curriculum itself and the 20 per cent of lesson time outside it) will tend to anticipate the later parts of each course and the admission requirements of subsequent courses. Each type of secondary school delivering the common initial curriculum will thus flesh it out in its own way.

4.4. Prognosis

Drop-out rates are relatively high in Dutch education - figures of 40 per cent are not exceptional in some apprenticeship, intermediate vocational and higher vocational courses - and a reduction in this wastage is a major objective of education policy. There is a paradox here: while success at one level is known to be a poor predictor of success at the next, the use of the examinations taken at the end of a course as entrance examinations for subsequent courses implies an assumption that final examinations have high predictive value. There is a tendency to strengthen the prognostic function of education. In vocational education this is evident from:

- the basing of training and examination syllabuses in intermediate vocational education (MBO) and the apprenticeship system on occupational analyses, thus improving the match between course goals and the knowledge and skills which individuals will need at work (see 2.3.5);
- the existence of partial qualifications in the form of certificates for clearly defined skills of relevance to employment. Developments in prevocational education (see 2.2.3) and in MBO

and the apprenticeship system, with its certification system approved by the Minister, exemplify what is happening. The predictive value of success in an apprenticeship course, involving as it does the practice of the occupation concerned, is virtually 100 per cent; it is thus not surprising that within the apprenticeship system certificates covering only the practical element of a course have always been available to candidates who perform poorly on the theoretical side.

4.5. Monitoring standards

Another function of examinations is to monitor standards by checking how far learning targets are being reached, whether they are set by the Minister (MBO, the apprenticeship system) or by the provider institutions themselves (as in higher vocational education). The organizational implications of this function include partial or full centralization of the examination system and external moderation to ensure consistency of standards and grades.

The monitoring function is reflected e.g. in:

- the regular surveys of attainments in primary education;
- the attempts made over the years to ensure, with the help of psychometric techniques, that the national written examinations in secondary schools are of equal difficulty. Even so there is wide variation in the setting of pass marks, with a recent Education Inspectorate study finding that 23 per cent of examinations are too difficult and seven per cent too easy;
- the withdrawal in 1992 of a Bill which would have given full responsibility for final examinations to the education sector: it has been decided instead that the state is to retain a role in the system of national examinations for maintained schools and colleges. Also significant here is the fact that the proposal to hive off the Education Inspectorate as a freestanding agency has been called into question by the Council of State, the government's highest advisory body; the Council considered that such a move would undermine Parliament's constitutional right to monitor the educational standards;
- the combination of college-based and national examinations; in intermediate vocational education central national examinations are set for subjects which are tested on the basis of requirements laid down by ministries other than the Ministry of Education and Science (sections 2.3.3 and 2.4.1);
- the requirement that the examination regulations adopted by recognized private institutions be approved by the state (2.7); maintained provision is covered by examination decrees and e.g. the HBO Regulations;

- the use of external examiners by institutions providing training for workers and entrepreneurs (2.7).

In this connection it is noteworthy that the Training Services Act regulates specific training geared primarily to entry into employment much less tightly than the apprenticeship system and part-time intermediate vocational education.

We return to the question of standards and quality in education in chapter 5.

4.6. Management and control

Examinations offer the state a means of managing and controlling the education system. This management function operates in three ways:

- the state can use examination results as a basis for funding institutions. This happens notably in higher education, where a form of partial output funding was introduced in the 1980s: funding no longer depends solely on student numbers at the start of each year but also on the numbers successfully completing each prescribed period of study. This brings with it certain dilemmas, in that HE institutions have a number of duties which are not easily reconciled one with another, required as they are to operate a selective preliminary (propaedeutic) phase, ensure that wherever possible students complete their studies within the normal time limit, maintain educational standards, and maximize the number of successful course completions;
- examinations provide the state with a means of distributing youngsters among the various types of school and college (sections 4.2 and 4.3, admission requirements). A significant example here is the change being made to the prevocational (VBO) and lower general (MAVO) examinations for 16-year-olds, where requirements are being coordinated to facilitate the transition to intermediate vocational and apprenticeship courses;
- examinations are an instrument of quality control (section 4.5 and chapter 5).

4.7. Other functions

Examinations also have other functions, which include:

- a didactic function;

The form and content of examinations help to shape teaching and learning processes. In intermediate vocational education and the apprenticeship system, for example, the introduction of learning targets and certification units (see 2.3) has implications for course content and organization. In the apprenticeship system the experience of modular syllabuses gives an indication of likely changes.

- a communication function.

A recognized formal qualification is meaningful to outsiders thanks to the examination situation, with its explicit testing in known subject areas. Such qualifications have a high communication value in the Netherlands, partly because the models for the certificates and/or mark lists are determined by the Minister and are thus uniform. Pass certificates show in very concise form what the qualification in question encompasses, thus facilitating unambiguous interpretation.

5. QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

5.1. Quality in vocational education

Quality is normally related to product attributes: in education the "product" can be seen as the course graduate, the knowledge and skills acquired during the course, or the performance achieved on the course. On completing a course participants must possess attributes corresponding to the course objectives, i.e. learning targets, and where this is the case the course can be labelled good. On this definition quality is an output-related concept: it is effect that determines quality. The quality of vocational education is often seen in broader terms, however, taking account not only of its output but also of the professional status of teachers and trainers, the nature of the training institution and of the teaching and learning process, processes of improvement and innovation and the generalized attributes of incoming students. The manner and circumstances in which training occurs are thus also included in this notion of quality.

Taking quality as a product-related concept the quality of education or training is determined by four factors; these relate both to the courses followed and to the labour market, where former participants (with or without a formal qualification) have to make their way with what they have learned. These factors are:

- examination results;

On this criterion a good course (or institution) is one in which there are many passes and few or no fails and successful candidates reach examination standard within the normal time limit. This quantitative aspect of course quality currently plays a major role in official thinking on vocational education in the Netherlands.

- competence in a technical and instrumental sense;

Here a good course (or institution), at least in initial vocational training, is one:

- which teaches, and whose students acquire, technical, instrumental and professional knowledge and skills that can be used in ways specific to individual firms and common to many,

- where the short- and long-term prospects for exercising the occupation in question are good,
- where the occupation to be performed makes full use of the knowledge and skills acquired.

This aspect of quality may sit uneasily with the first, with its quantitative emphasis on examination results. The problem makes itself felt particularly in the HE sector, where official policy aims in the Netherlands include both high student numbers and high success rates; the implication is that levels in HE are now a more relative concept than they already were.

Calls for greater differentiation by level in the HE sector and proposals to improve coordination between the content of secondary courses and the initial requirements of higher courses (see 2.2.2) are signs of the tension between these two aspects of quality. In intermediate vocational education and the apprenticeship system this potential dilemma is resolved by the creation of a differentiated system in which students can obtain recognized part qualifications which fit into a qualification structure (see section 2.3.5).

- social functioning;

On this criterion a good course is one which enhances participants' social competence.

- aptitude for further learning.

Here a good course is one which lays sound foundations, in terms of knowledge and attitudes, for further learning.

In intermediate vocational education and the apprenticeship system these last three aspects of quality are reflected in three types of qualification: the vocational qualification, the general social qualification and the qualification entitling the holder to enter some further form of education or training.

5.2. Instruments of quality control (see also 4.5)

The instruments of quality control associated with a centralized education policy as we have known them in recent decades consisted mainly of three elements:

- detailed legislation and a very refined set of organizational requirements relating to the teaching and learning process and the conditions in which it takes place;
- regulation of the form and content of central examinations;
- the Education Inspectorate, which has access to all schools, colleges and firms employing apprentices in order to fulfil its function of securing educational standards.

This pattern is currently undergoing changes, some of which are already in place. The elements involved are (or may be) as follows:

- the determination of learning targets (in the primary and secondary sectors, including intermediate vocational education) and of general objectives (in higher education) by the Minister of Education and Science. The system of examinations linked to learning targets was described in chapter 2; this approach is also associated with a reduction in the number of regulations governing the organization of teaching and learning. The state is thus increasingly concerned with the output of the education system;
- greater autonomy for schools and colleges implies greater reliance on the institutions' capacity for self-regulation. A vital element in that capacity is self-evaluation, operating e.g. through:
 - the submission of work plans, including a section on institutional development,
 - internal quality-control systems;
- the requirement, recently imposed on colleges of intermediate vocational education, to issue annual reports showing among other things key data on intakes, course completions and graduates' destinations;
- external monitoring of the universities, with visiting committees of experts regularly scrutinizing what is done in each discipline. This external evaluation is preceded by an internal evaluation. A similar approach involving external monitoring has also been adopted in higher vocational education and is likely to be extended to other levels, notably in intermediate vocational education and the apprenticeship system (though given the large numbers of study areas and of institutions the practical details will most probably be different);
- the evaluation and monitoring functions of the Education Inspectorate. The Inspectorate's role vis vis the visiting committees of experts means that higher education is subject to

"meta-monitoring".

In the non-maintained training sector the certification of institutions - accreditation - is likely to play a growing role. External advisors are responsible for monitoring quality and can encourage those involved in internal monitoring to focus greater attention on course participants' history and prospects in education and employment.

Key

CEVO Central Examining Board

LOB National commission for vocational education

CEC Central Examining Commission for the Apprenticeship System

LEC National Examining Commission for Intermediate

Vocational Education

OU Open University

HBO Higher vocational education

MBO Intermediate vocational education

VWO Academic secondary education

HAVO Upper general secondary education

MAVO Lower general secondary education

LBO Lower vocational education

VBO Prevocational education

Appendix

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In these publications the authors, after making brief reference to the characteristics of the general and vocational training systems in their countries, describe all aspects of how qualifications are certified:

- formulation and introduction of certificates, qualifications and diplomas: the relevant institutions, procedures, tripartite or joint consultation or decision-making commissions;
- access to qualifications: conditions, means, motives, channels;
- certifications: aims, contents, means, procedures;
- usefulness, use, trends and problems

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