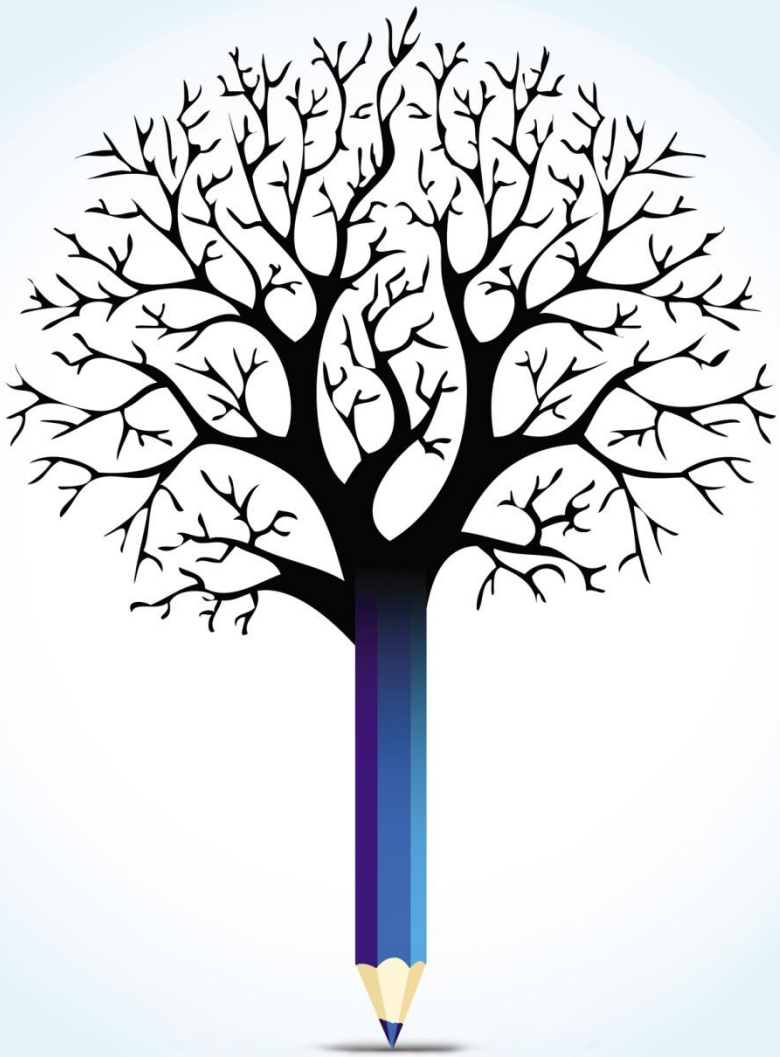
EDUCATION POLICY OUTLOOK

NETHERLANDS



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EDUCATION POLICY OUTLOOK

This **policy profile on education** in the Netherlands is part of the new *Education Policy Outlook* series, which presents comparative analysis of education policies and reforms across OECD countries. Building on the substantial comparative and sectorial policy knowledge base available within the OECD, the series will result in a biennial publication (first volume in 2015). It offers a comparative outlook on education policy by providing: a) analysis of individual countries' educational context, challenges and policies (education policy profiles) and of international trends and b) comparative insight on policies and reforms on selected topics.

Designed **for policy makers, analysts and practitioners** who seek information and analysis of education policy taking into account the importance of national context, the country policy profiles offer constructive analysis of education policy in a comparative format. Each profile reviews the current context and situation of the country's education system and examines its challenges and policy responses, according to six policy levers that support improvement:

- Students: How to raise outcomes for all in terms of 1) equity and quality and 2) preparing students for the future
- Institutions: How to raise quality through 3) school improvement and 4) evaluation and assessment
- System: How the system is organised to deliver education policy in terms of 5) governance and 6) funding.

Some country policy profiles contain spotlight boxes on selected policy issues. They are meant to draw attention to specific policies that are promising or showing positive results and may be relevant for other countries.

Special thanks to the Government of the Netherlands for their active input during consultations and constructive feedback on this report.

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Sources: This country profile draws on OECD indicators from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), the Survey of Adult Skills and the annual publication *Education at a Glance*, and refers to country and thematic studies such as OECD work on early childhood education and care, teachers, school leadership, evaluation and assessment for improving school outcomes, equity and quality in education, governing complex education systems, vocational education and training, and tertiary education. Much of this information can be accessed through the Education GPS.

Most of the figures quoted in the different sections refer to Annex B, which presents a table of the main indicators for the different sources used throughout the country profile. Hyperlinks to the reference publications are included throughout the text for ease of reading, and also in the References and further reading section, which lists both OECD and non-OECD sources.

More information is available from the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills (www.oecd.org/edu) and its web pages on Education Policy Outlook (www.oecd.org/edu/policyoutlook.htm).

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The Netherlands' educational context

Students: The Netherlands is an overall high performer in PISA 2012 in mathematics, reading and science, although mathematics performance has decreased across PISA cycles. Students' socio-economic background had a lower impact on performance than the OECD average in PISA 2012. Policies in place aim to increase participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in programmes such as early childhood education and care. Starting at age 12, students can choose from among seven different programmes (the highest number in OECD countries), with flexibility to transfer between them. The proportion of students reported in PISA 2012 as having repeated a grade is above the OECD average. There is open school choice (somewhat restricted by the school guidance given at age 12), with control applied at the local level to mitigate imbalances in school composition. Flexibility, guidance and counselling are available to support Dutch students as they transition into further education and the labour market. Enrolment in vocational education and training (VET) is above the OECD average. Labour market perspectives for young people are positive, with one of the lowest unemployment rates among OECD countries. According to the 2012 OECD *Survey of Adult Skills*, adults have above-average literacy skills (Figure 1).

Institutions: Schools in the Netherlands are characterised by great autonomy. All teachers receive initial training, and most school leaders take additional professional training while they are on the job. Teachers' salaries are relatively high, but lower than other highly-trained employees in the Netherlands, and the teaching workforce is ageing. There has been an increased focus on the use of evidence from assessment and evaluation. Results from school self-evaluations, monitoring reports from the Dutch Inspectorate of Education and student assessments can provide information to schools on areas for improving school quality and student learning.

System: The Dutch education system combines a centralised framework and policies with decentralised administration and school management. This framework provides standards with broadly-formulated attainment targets and supervision, while schools are highly autonomous on matters related to resource allocation, curriculum and assessment as compared to other OECD countries. School boards are responsible for governance of schools and implementation of national education policy. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science provides funding to all levels of education. Public and private schools are funded on an equal basis through a lump sum allocation. Students pay tuition fees in secondary vocational and higher education institutions. Targeted funding for schools with specific student needs is available through the government or municipalities.

Key policy issues

The Netherlands' high education performance and equity can be supported with continued policy efforts to support low performing or disadvantaged schools and students, within the context of system-level characteristics such as academic selection and grade repetition, which can hinder equity and quality. Growing student diversity requires teachers to be able to adapt their practice to meet diverse student needs. In a context of high autonomy for schools, a priority in the Netherlands is to attract, train and retain quality teachers. Another priority is to strengthen the steering capacity and responsibility of school boards so that they can address student needs consistently, develop positive learning environments and use resources more effectively. Better use of results from school, teacher and student assessments can also support school improvement and student learning.

Recent policy responses

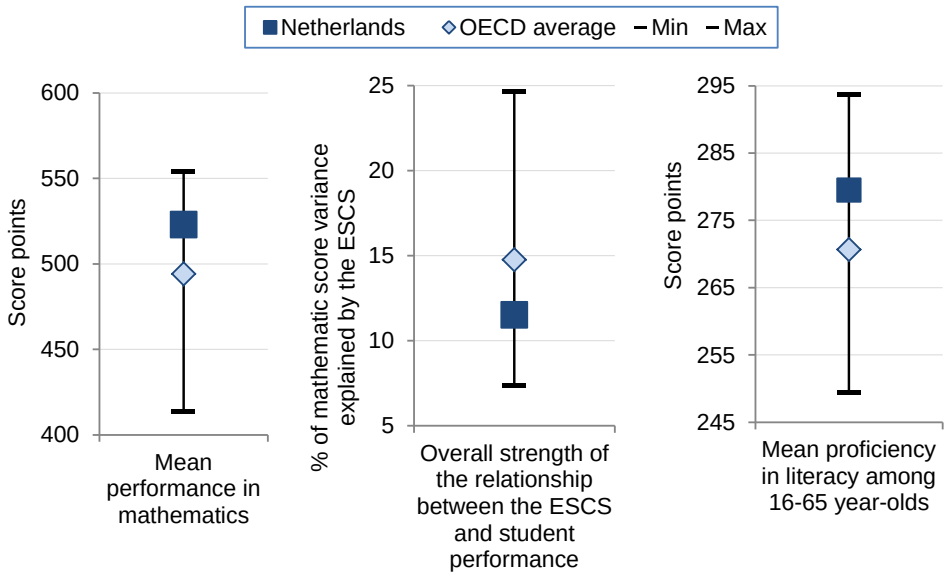
Multi-annual voluntary agreements (2012-15) draw from the initiative *Drive to Reduce Dropout Rates* (2006), which aims to improve student outcomes through various initiatives to reduce the proportion of early school leavers. The Vocational Professionalism Agenda (*Focus op Vakmanschap, 2011-15*) aims to strengthen the focus on resilience to adapt to changes in the labour market. Several recent initiatives also aim to increase the number of higher education graduates.

Multiple policies have been put in place to develop teacher quality, including the Teachers' Programme 2013-2020 (*Lerarenagenda 2013-2020*).

The government aims to improve accountability of schools through a student monitoring system and compulsory primary education student assessment. There is also a new focus on stimulating further improvement by schools with moderate, average or good results. At all levels of education, the government aims to commit stakeholders to education policy through agreements such as the National Agreement on Education (*Nationaal Onderwijsakkoord,* 2013), as well as sub-agreements for primary and secondary education.

The Netherlands achieved above-average scores in mathematics, reading and science on PISA 2012. Across PISA cycles, performance in reading and science remained unchanged, while mathematics performance decreased. The impact of students' socio-economic status on mathematics scores (11.5%) decreased between 2003 and 2012 and remains below the OECD average of 14.8%. Among participating OECD countries, literacy proficiency among adults (16-65 year-olds) is above average on the 2012 OECD *Survey of Adult Skills.*

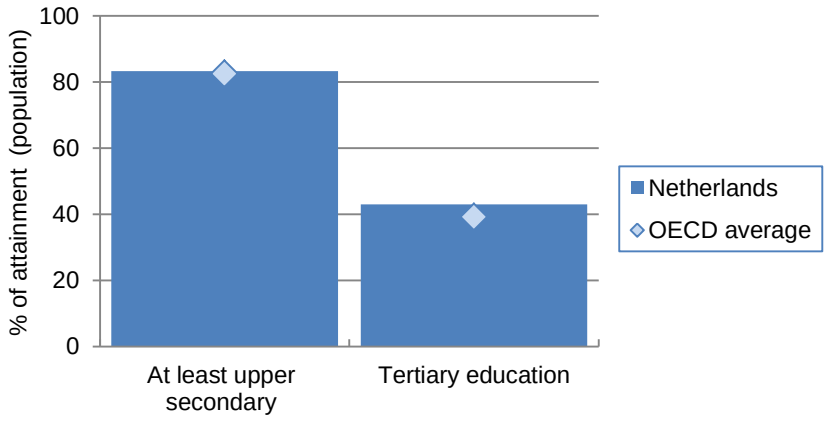
Figure 1. Performance of 15-year-olds in mathematics, relationship between student performance and economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) (PISA 2012) and performance of adults in literacy (PIAAC)



Source: *PISA 2012 Results: What Students Know and Can Do (Volume I, Revised edition, February 2014): Student Performance in Mathematics, Reading, and Science*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264208780-en; OECD (2013), *First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264204256-en.

In the Netherlands, the share of 25-34 year-olds with at least an upper secondary education is around the OECD average (83% compared to the OECD average of 82%). The proportion of 25-34 year-olds with a tertiary education in the Netherlands is 43%, four percentage points above the OECD average of 39% in 2012 (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Upper secondary and tertiary attainment for 25-34 year-olds (2012)



Source: OECD (2014), *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2014-en.

EQUITY AND QUALITY: A STRONG START IN EDUCATION FOR ALL STUDENTS

The Netherlands is among OECD top performing countries and has positive equity indicators for 15-year-olds: performance of students was above average in mathematics, reading and science in PISA 2012; it had a greater share of top performers (with 19.3% of students at or above Level 5 compared to the OECD average of 12.6%) and a lower share of low performers (with 14.8% of students below proficiency Level 2 compared to the OECD average of 22.2%) (Figure 3). Across PISA cycles, performance has decreased in mathematics and has remained unchanged in reading and science. Socio-economic background had less impact on student performance than the OECD average in PISA 2012, and has decreased since PISA 2003. Students in the Netherlands also performed above the OECD average in creative problem-solving in PISA 2012.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) *policies* aim to foster equity and increase the participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. About 83% of 3-year-olds and all 4-year-olds are enrolled in early childhood education in 2012 (above the OECD average of 70% for 3-year-olds and 82% for 4-year-olds). A large majority of students in early childhood education (70.1%) are in public institutions, slightly above the OECD average (68.4%). Children are entitled to free ECEC from the age of four. Provisions for children below that age include child care for 0-4 year-olds and play groups, which are open to all 2-4 year-olds, particularly for children with language delay or at risk of other developmental delay.

System-level policies, such as early tracking, school choice, academic selection and grade repetition can hinder equity if not managed appropriately. Education is compulsory from age 5 to age 18 in the Netherlands, three years more than the OECD average. Tracking begins at age 12 (the OECD average is 14) and is based on students' academic records and reports from previous schools. There are seven different secondary education programmes available (the highest number of such programmes among OECD countries). In PISA 2012, principals reported that 76.6% of students live in areas where two or more other schools compete for students. School choice is common in the Netherlands (somewhat restricted by the school guidance given to students at age 12), with control applied at the local level to mitigate imbalances in school composition or weighted student funding to support greater social diversity in schools. Ability grouping is also common: on PISA 2012, principals reported that only 6.4% of 15-year-olds were not grouped by ability for any mathematics classes (compared to the OECD average of 25.4%). In the Netherlands, 27.6% of 15-year-olds repeated at least one year in primary (ISCED 0 or 1) or secondary education levels by the age of 15 (twice the OECD average of 12.4%). Evidence in an *OECD study of equity and quality in education* shows that grade repetition can be costly and may contribute to later dropout. According to *national statistics*, one in six children does an extra year of school at the beginning of primary education in the Netherlands (equivalent in other countries to still being in kindergarten).

Students with immigrant background (first or second generation immigrants) comprise 10.6% of 15-year-old students in the Netherlands, and are at higher risk of low performance. National sources show that student diversity is increasing, particularly in general secondary programmes. In PISA 2012, after adjusting for socio-economic status, students with an immigrant background performed significantly lower than non-immigrant students in mathematics (a difference of 35 score points compared to the OECD average of 21 score points), with a decreasing gap between 2003 and 2012 (Figure 3). According to the *Netherlands Institute for Social Research* (*Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau*, SCP), migrant students have improved their school results over time.

The challenge: Further addressing system-level policies, such as grade repetition, school choice and early tracking.

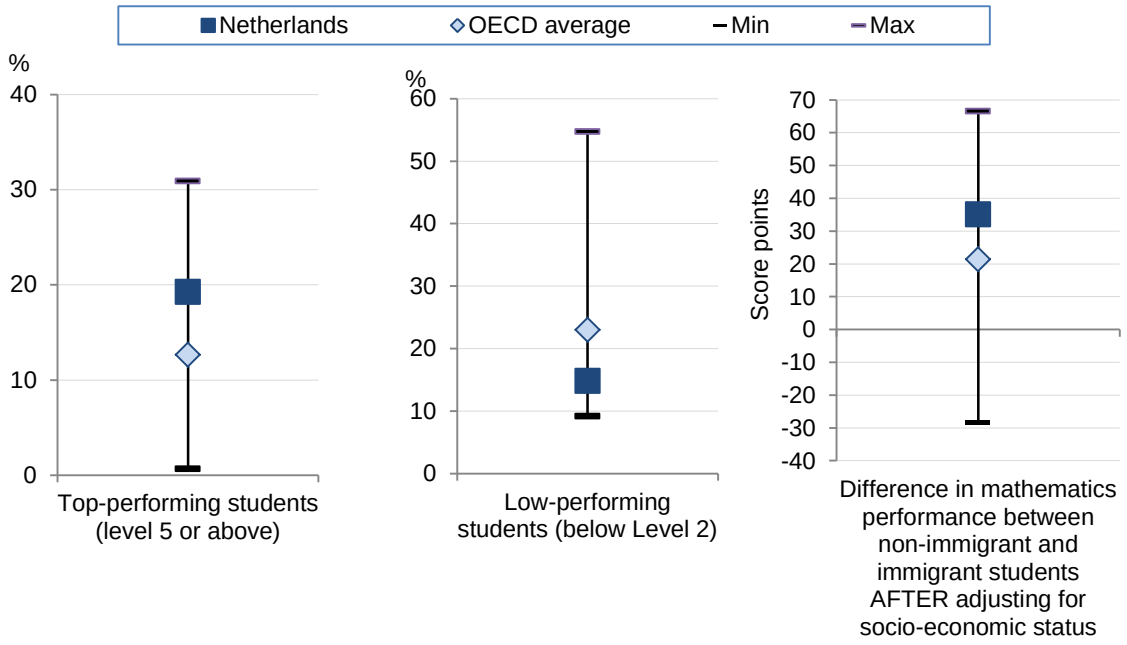
Recent policies and practices

Steps are being taken to harmonise quality and financing of child care and play groups (2013), as playgroups and childcare providers will have to meet the same quality requirements from 2016.

The Promotion of Excellence programme (*Sirius Programma*, 2009-14) provides extra school funding to address the needs of the 20% high-achieving students and to consult the public on how gifted and talented students can be better taught (see School Improvement, Recent policies and practices). In a *statement to Parliament* on excellence (*Toptalenten*) of March 2014, emphasis on the need to improve the performance of high achievers was made.

The *National Knowledge Centre for Mixed Schools* (Kenniscentrum Gemengde Scholen, 2007) produces knowledge and influences work on school choice. This centre also provides procedures for school choice and information on the topic to parents.

Figure 3. Percentage of top and low performers and difference in mathematics performance between non-immigrant and immigrant students, PISA 2012



Source: *PISA 2012 Results: What Students Know and Can Do (Volume I, Revised edition, February 2014): Student Performance in Mathematics, Reading, and Science*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264208780-en.

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE: EFFECTIVE TRANSITIONS TO THE LABOUR MARKET

The capacity of a country's education system to effectively develop **skills and labour market perspectives** can play an important role in the educational decisions of its population. Adults (16-64 year-olds) in the Netherlands perform above average in literacy among countries participating in the 2012 OECD *Survey of Adult Skills* (Figure 1). Young adults (16-24 year-olds) have, on average, higher skills proficiency than 25-64 year-olds and their peers in other participating countries. Labour market perspectives in the Netherlands are positive, with unemployment rates below the OECD average for individuals across all educational levels (4.4%).

Upper secondary education aims to provide students with flexible pathways. Around 30% of students in the Netherlands enrol in a general secondary programme (below the OECD average of 54%). Students can receive educational or career guidance and counselling when moving from primary to secondary education, and then to tertiary education. Secondary schools often have different educational programmes, and students can transfer across programmes, as well as switch between general or vocational tracks. According to an *OECD review of equity and quality in schools*, this flexibility can help prevent dropout. Guidance and career counselling can better prepare youth to navigate the complexity of choices and their transition into work or further learning. *Government data* show that 0.9% of students dropped out of secondary education in 2011/12.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) engages different ministries, such as economic affairs and agriculture, and employer-represented organisations to better match the skills needed in the workplace. Students experiencing difficulties in pre-vocational education have access to a learn-work arrangement that combines education with work. According to *ministry sources*, about 6.9% of students dropped out of vocational education programmes in 2011/12.

Dutch **tertiary education** has high participation and attainment rates. Students under the age of 25 have higher entry rates in theory-based tertiary (type-A) programmes (59%) than the OECD average (48%), and students who complete general secondary education (HAVO, VWO) or vocational upper secondary education (MBO) can access tertiary education. In 2012, about 37% of Dutch 25-34 year-olds have attained tertiary education, compared to 35% among OECD countries. They can expect to earn on average 37% more than those with an upper secondary education (below the OECD average of 40%).

The challenge: Ensuring that all secondary tracks provide sufficient flexibility and career guidance to help students successfully move to the labour market or to tertiary education.

Recent policies and practices

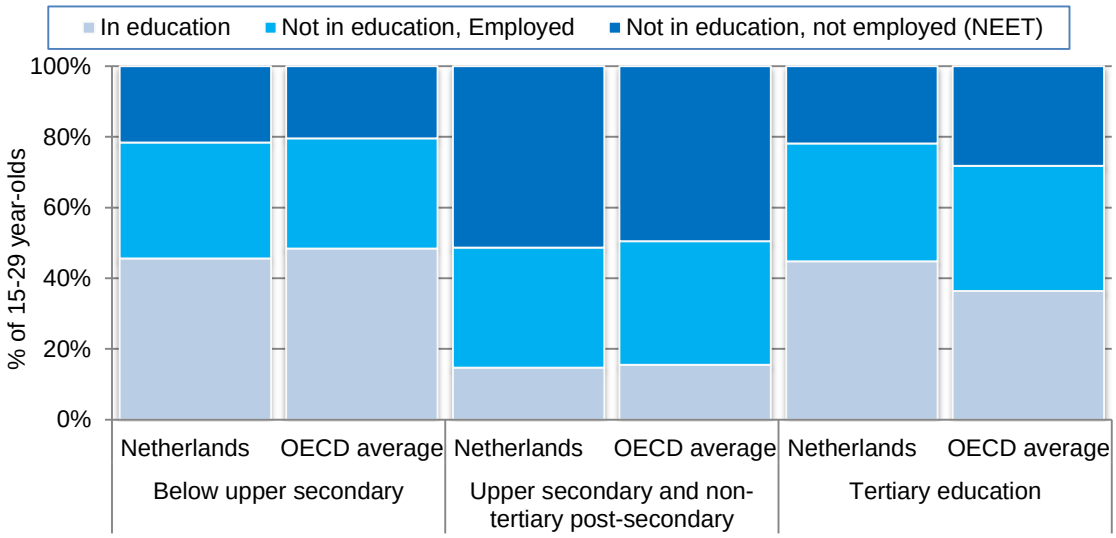
As part of its reforms on education in line with the *Europe 2020 Strategy*, the Netherlands has continued its efforts to reduce the number of early school leavers (see Spotlight 1).

The Investing in Young People Act (2009-12) required municipalities to provide work or learning opportunities to 18-27 year-olds, and a salary or allowance in exchange for their work or to support their education. The *Youth Unemployment Action Plan* (2013) aims to prevent youth from dropping out of education or the labour market in a context of economic crisis. It consists of: (1) creating 10 000 training jobs for youth in industry; (2) financially supporting employers who make agreements within their sector to create more training jobs; (3) 50% co-financing sectorial plans that lead to trainee-places for youth; (4) government and social partners exploring together how to provide more job security to youth; and (5) exempting employers from employee-insurance premiums when employing youth who were previously dependent on social security.

The Vocational Professionalism Agenda aims to improve secondary vocational education by reducing and condensing four-year courses into three years (only a restricted number of courses is exempted), increasing classroom hours, improving the transition to higher professional education and improving the quality of this level. *An analysis* of ongoing implementation and follow up of this policy points to the need to (1) be more responsive to labour market demands; (2) organise craftsmanship as a route to a sustainable future; (3) raise VET quality standards further and (4) cope with demographic reductions in primary and secondary education, which will also affect VET.

In higher education, the Quality in Diversity in Higher Education Act (*Wet Kwaliteit in verscheidenheid hoger onderwijs*, 2013) advances the deadline for applications to enter higher education to May 1st and sets study checks to help prospective students make informed decisions about their future education. Activities in these study checks include online questionnaires, interviews with prospective students, attending a lecture or a seminar (with homework assignments). Also, all higher education institutions have signed performance agreements with goals set for 2015, and they will be evaluated on the basis of these agreements.

Figure 4. Percentage of 15-29 year-olds in education and not in education, by educational attainment and work status (2012)



NEET: Neither Employed, nor in Education and Training (by higher education status)

Source: OECD (2014), *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2014-en.

Spotlight 1. Increasing student retention

As part of the 2013 National Reform Programme (based on the education and training targets of the *Europe 2020 Strategy*), two key initiatives advance efforts to reduce the number of students who drop out: Drive to Reduce Dropout Rates (2002) and multi-annual voluntary agreements (2012-15).

The *Drive to Reduce Dropout Rates* programme (2002) was introduced by the Dutch Government with the goal of reducing the dropout rate to 2.5% by 2012, with no more than 35 000 students dropping out of school. By 2012/13, *provisional results* showed that the number of early school leavers had been reduced to 27 950 (from 71 000 in 2001). For 2016, the government has set a new target of no more than 25 000 early school leavers.

This policy is based on six key points: (1) improved transition between pre-vocational education and vocational education, (2) a focus on special needs facilities in schools, (3) an offer to students who prefer to work in tailored programmes, (4) information and career guidance and counselling to students, (5) more attractive sports and cultural activities, and (6) programmes for 18-23 year-olds who drop out of school.

To accomplish these goals, the government:

- partnered with regions, local authorities, employers and other key stakeholders
- created Open Education Data (*Open Onderwijsdata*, DUO) to improve the system of data collection and analysis and to better understand the students and the strategies being used to prevent dropout
- linked school funding to reduction of the number of early school leavers
- funded programmes and facilities (2008-11), particularly for students who might not attain a qualification.

In addition, *multi-annual voluntary agreements* (2012-15) were signed between the ministry, municipalities and secondary vocational schools. As part of the performance-based funding agreement, the government will provide funding until 2015 (EUR 110 million per year), and schools, which provide transparent figures on early school leaving, will receive incentives for preventing student dropout.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: FOSTERING BETTER TEACHING AND LEADERSHIP

Learning environments in the Netherlands serve more than 1.6 million primary students and 960 000 secondary students, according to a *2012 report from the ministry*. Students in the Netherlands receive one of the highest number of hours of compulsory instruction time in OECD countries: 940 hours annually in primary education and 1 000 hours in lower secondary education (the OECD average is 791 hours for primary education and 907 hours for lower secondary education). In PISA 2012, students reported less positive views of their learning environments than the OECD average (Figure 5).

School leaders in the Netherlands work in schools that are autonomous, with school boards responsible for educational quality within a national framework. School leaders are appointed by and accountable to the school board. Their role varies depending on educational level and the legal and supervisory responsibilities granted by the school board. Most school leaders are responsible for financial matters and for ensuring that teaching and learning comply with the school's educational goals and standards. In a context of school autonomy and the governing role played by school boards, there are few nationally defined eligibility requirements for school leaders. School boards appoint school leaders after a selection process and manage their training and development. Candidates can come from teaching staff or, in some cases, from outside the education profession. New school leaders are often trained through a combination of in-service education training, external training courses provided by the Dutch School Leaders Association (*Algemene Vereniging Schoolleiders*, AVS), or through training by the School Leaders Academy (*Nederlandse Schoolleiders Academie*, NSA). Professional development is not strictly obligatory, and new policies aim to promote qualification and training.

Attracting and developing new **teachers** is important to maintain the quality of the education system in coming years. Dutch teachers are older than the OECD average in 2012: 46% of secondary teachers are over age 50 (compared to the OECD average of 36%), suggesting a possible future teacher shortage. Primary teachers must successfully complete a four-year professional education programme that focuses on teaching practice and includes practical training. They must also pass language and mathematics examinations. Secondary teachers either follow a higher professional teacher education programme or take a post-graduate programme after completing a subject-based bachelor's degree. Teaching standards to guide the teaching profession are regulated under the Education Professions Act. Schools, along with training institutions, develop teacher training and induction programmes and are required to have support programmes for new teachers. According to the *Dutch Inspectorate of Education* (*Inspectie van het Onderwijs*), teacher training and development could be improved to develop skills to adapt to diverse students needs. Teachers' salaries in the Netherlands are relatively high compared to the OECD average, but low compared to other tertiary educated professions. Primary teachers earn 69% of the average salary of a 25-64 year-old tertiary graduate (compared to the OECD average of 85%) while secondary teachers earn 82% (compared to the OECD average of 88% at lower secondary level and 92% at upper secondary level). In the 2013 OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey, a higher proportion of teachers in the Netherlands than the average consider that the teaching profession is valued in society and would choose to work as teachers if they had a second chance to decide on a career.

The challenge: Attract and retain quality teachers to meet the needs of a diverse student body and avoid teacher shortages.

Recent policies and practices

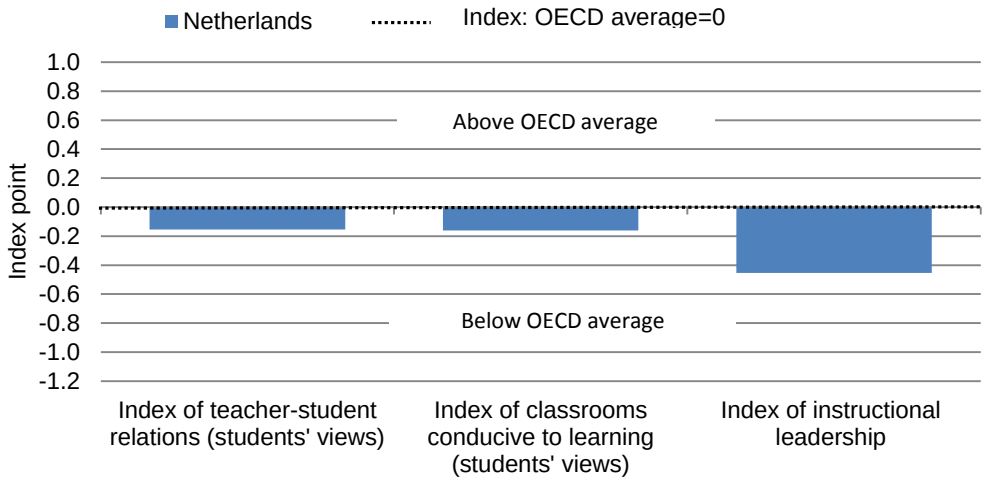
In recent years, the Netherlands has conducted efforts to improve the quality of the teaching profession, and to stimulate schools' internal motivation to improve (see Spotlight 2).

The Promotion of Excellence programme (*Sirius Programma*, 2009-14) aims (through non-monetary initiatives) to encourage schools to become outstanding; to promote peer-learning from outstanding schools through the Schools Learn from One Another programme; and to promote professionalism among teachers.

New professional standards have been established (2012), and school leaders in primary education will have to be inscribed in the new Primary Education School Leaders' Register, starting in 2015, as detailed in a recent *OECD report*. To keep their registration valid, school leaders will need to comply with professional development requirements. Registration for teachers to monitor their formal qualifications and the professional development they have undertaken started on a voluntary basis in 2012. It will become compulsory in 2017.

To further improve student performance, school leaders can benefit from initial and ongoing support in their professional responsibilities. As noted in an *OECD report on school leadership* (2005), school principals collaborate through knowledge networks and co-coaching, where principals work in pairs to coach one another to achieve higher personal and professional effectiveness.

Figure 5. The learning environment, PISA 2012



Source: OECD (2013), *PISA 2012 Results: What Makes a School Successful? Resources, Policies and Practices (Volume IV)*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en.

Spotlight 2. Improving the teaching profession and strengthening schools

Aiming to improve the teaching profession and promote the excellence of education, the Netherlands has recently introduced a comprehensive strategy called the Teachers' Programme (*Lerarenagenda 2013-2020*). The main points of the programme are:

1) attracting high performing students into teacher training programmes
2) improving teacher pre-service training programmes
3) providing attractive and flexible development pathways
4) developing support for teachers at the start of their careers
5) developing schools as learning organisations by engaging teachers, school leaders and school boards
6) helping all teachers maintain and develop their skills and qualifications
7) sustaining a strong professional organisation that represents teachers.

The Netherlands has also made efforts to improve the capacity of schools to improve through a three-year programme called Schools have the Initiative (*School aan Zet*, 2012). This programme aims to leverage internal motivation to increase the effectiveness of the education provided through work in six areas:

1) results-oriented work
2) human resource management / learning organisation
3) basic skills
4) dealing with differences between students
5) excellence / gifted students
6) science and technology skills.

Participation in this programme is voluntary and begins with schools defining their own goals and ambitions. With the help of experts to set objectives, schools can conduct three sessions known as ambition conversations as well as three evaluation conversations to monitor achievements in line with their own expectations. The programme also encourages schools to apply for funding to provide for, among other things, visits of independent experts and so-called critical friends to participate in these conversations. There are no specific reporting requirements connected to the funding allocated through the programme.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES: TRUSTING SCHOOLS TO PROVIDE QUALITY EDUCATION

Defining effective **evaluation and assessment** strategies is important to improve student outcomes and develop a better and more equitable school system. Under the Education Inspection Act, each education institution has primary responsibility for the quality of education it offers, and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is responsible for quality of education across all levels. There is no national curriculum, just core learning objectives for what students should learn by the end of primary and lower secondary education. A recent *OECD review of evaluation and assessment in the Netherlands* found that the Dutch approach to evaluation and assessment stands out internationally for its balance between different components and levels.

System evaluations aim to provide evidence about the state of the education system. The Dutch Inspectorate of Education (*Inspectie van het Onderwijs*), an agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, monitors the quality of schools and their compliance with legislation and funding mechanisms. It also publishes an annual report, *The State of Education in the Netherlands* (*De staat van het onderwijs*). The ministry commissions research and evaluations from the Education Council or research institutions.

To balance a high level of school autonomy in the Netherlands, effective **school evaluation** is central, as is the capacity of school actors to implement evaluation practices and improvement strategies. Schools are evaluated externally by the Inspectorate of Education. The first phase of external school evaluation consists of a risk-based analysis of student performance, projections and financial indicators. Results of this analysis are used to identify schools at risk of underperforming; these are evaluated more thoroughly and can receive increased supervision or sanctions. All schools have to set school plans every four years and report back yearly on student performance and progress, quality of education, finances and professional governance. Their reports on student progress and school quality do not necessarily take the form of self-evaluations, but they must include quality care. School accountability data are shared with parents and students through an annual school prospectus, which contains information such as students' goals and achievements. *Evidence gathered by the ministry* shows that parents make little use of this information when choosing schools.

Teacher appraisal can influence teachers' career progression in the Netherlands. Schools are responsible for evaluating their teachers' performance regularly (ISCED 1: at least every four years; ISCED 2 and 3: at least every three years. The Inspectorate evaluates teachers' compliance, using professional standards for primary and secondary teachers that were developed in co-operation with key stakeholders, including teachers, labour unions and the ministry.

Schools have autonomy over teaching and **student assessments.** The ministry sets learning standards in Dutch and mathematics, as well as objectives for primary and lower secondary education. External standardised tests for summative purposes exist at the end of primary school (starting in 2014/15) and the end of secondary school. One part of the test at the end of secondary education is set by the Central Institute for Test Development (*Centraal Instituut voor Toetsonwtikkeling*, CITO), while the other part is set internally by the school. In addition, children from the age of 3 have a Personal Identification Number (*persoonsgebonden nummer*, PGN), which follows them through their schooling. According to the Dutch Inspectorate, most primary schools track student development, and half of the schools use the information to improve school policies, teaching and learning.

The challenge: Ensuring that results from school evaluation and student assessments are used effectively to improve school quality and student learning.

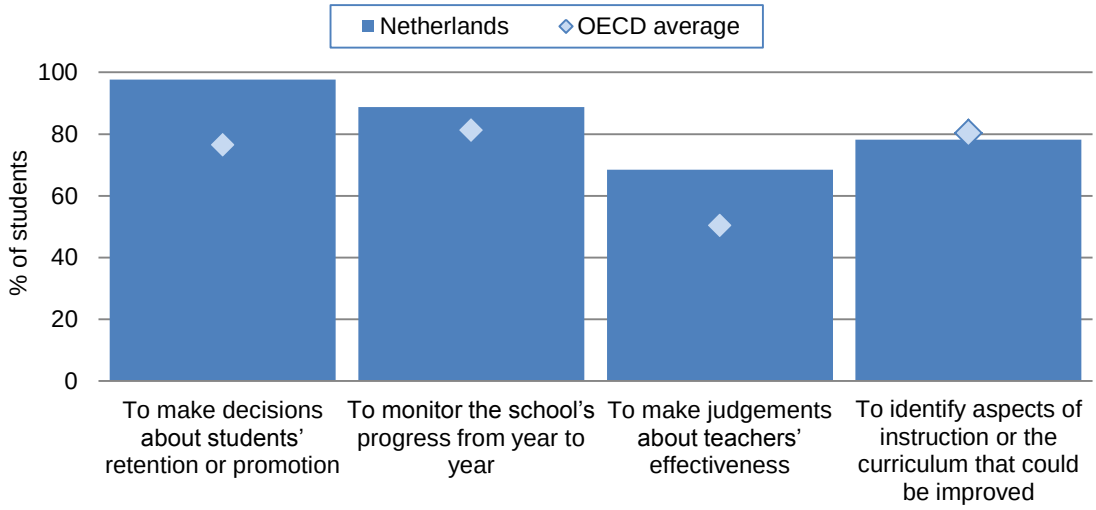
Recent policies and practices

Starting in 2014/15, under new legislation, an existing *standardised student assessment* will become compulsory at the end of primary education to evaluate numeracy and literacy. Schools will retain the right to choose from a variety of test providers that comply with criteria set by the College for Assessment and Examination. In some cases, test results can be used to confirm access to secondary education after consideration of schools' advice on students' readiness. The *Language and Numeracy Act* (2010) sets out the knowledge and competencies that students must attain in literacy and mathematics at both primary and secondary (general and vocational) levels.

Schools are required to create an internal supervisory board to assure compliance with legislation, approve the annual school report and oversee financial management (2010). The Windows for Accountability initiative (*Vensters voor Verantwoording*, 2012) benchmarks primary and secondary schools for key stakeholders (parents, schools, municipalities and the Inspectorate). In efforts to increase accountability, the database contains quantitative and qualitative information provided by schools.

As part of the government programme for 2012-2016, the Inspectorate is introducing "differentiated inspection", by extending the supervision framework (formerly applied only for schools deemed *weak* or *very weak*) to include schools that have had *moderate*, *average* or *good* results for some time, but have not demonstrated a clear drive to improve performance. Quality indicators will be included to boost motivation in schools and help schools with good results to further raise student achievement.

Figure 6. Percentage of students in schools where the principal reported the following uses for student assessments, PISA 2012



Source: OECD (2013), *PISA 2012 Results: What Makes a School Successful? Resources, Policies and Practices (Volume IV)*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201156-en.

GOVERNANCE: CENTRALISED POLICY IMPLEMENTED BY SCHOOL BOARDS WITH A HIGH DEGREE OF SCHOOL AUTONOMY

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (*Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschappen*, OCW) is responsible for the quality of the education system. It sets national education policy for early childhood education and care (ECEC) and for primary and secondary education, including standards, examinations and funding mechanisms. For tertiary education, the ministry sets the teaching and examination framework. Other bodies also shape education policy:

- The Education Inspectorate reviews and monitors the quality of educational institutions.
- Statistics Netherlands (Central Bureau of Statistics) collects and processes data on education and on transition to the labour market.
- The Dutch Education Council is an independent advisory body of leading academics, administrators and other experts on education.
- Ministries responsible for health, welfare, sports, social affairs, employment, economy, agriculture and innovation address specific education issues.
- Other stakeholders include unions representing teachers and school leaders, umbrella organisations of school boards, and the Education Co-operative (*Onderwijscoöperatie*), which includes the five leading teachers' organisations, and is pledged to support the quality of the teaching profession.
- Also involved are research institutes and other institutions, such as the National General Institute for Curriculum Development (*National Expertisecentrum Leerplanontwikkeling*, SLO); the Central Institute for Test Development (*Centraal Instituut voor Toetsonwtikkeling*, CITO); the Centre for Tests and Examinations (*College voor Toets en Examinering*, CVTE); the Netherlands' School Leaders Academy (*Nederlandse Schoolleiders Academie*, NSA); the Foundation for Co-operation on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (*Samenwerking Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven*, SBB); the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (*Researchcentrum voor Onderwijs en Arbeidsmarkt*, ROA); and school support agencies (*schoolbegeleidingsdienst*).

Municipalities are responsible for certain areas of education policy in compulsory schools, including infrastructure. Municipal authorities monitor compliance with the Compulsory Education Act and collect information on students who drop out. They also aim to informally influence local school policies. Under certain policies, such as the Local Education Agenda (*Locale Educatieve Agenda*, LEA), co-operation is mandated between municipalities and other levels of government.

Within the framework set by the central government, administration of **Dutch schools** is highly decentralised. Under the constitutional principle providing for freedom of education, anyone may establish a school based on personal beliefs or principles. These schools must be recognised by the ministry provided that they meet all requirements in their sectors. Dutch lower secondary schools make 86% of the decisions related to their schools, one of the highest proportions of decision making among OECD countries (Figure 7). School boards have legal authority over one or many schools. Boards are responsible for organisation of schools, including management of personnel and resources, organisation of instruction, and school self-evaluation and quality monitoring. School boards can be composed of volunteers such as parents, and/or of professional managers, and their composition varies widely across the Netherlands. School leadership can be shared among various officials in larger schools, and, in secondary education, teachers are involved in school management. In the *annual report on the state of education in the Netherlands*, the Dutch Inspectorate reports that the number of ineffective school boards has decreased, but there is still a need to strengthen the capacity of school boards to govern effectively.

Tertiary education institutions are governed by boards that formulate and implement an institutional strategy. The government provides a framework for teaching and examinations, and each university or institute for higher professional education is responsible for expanding upon the framework. A supervisory board oversees these governing boards.

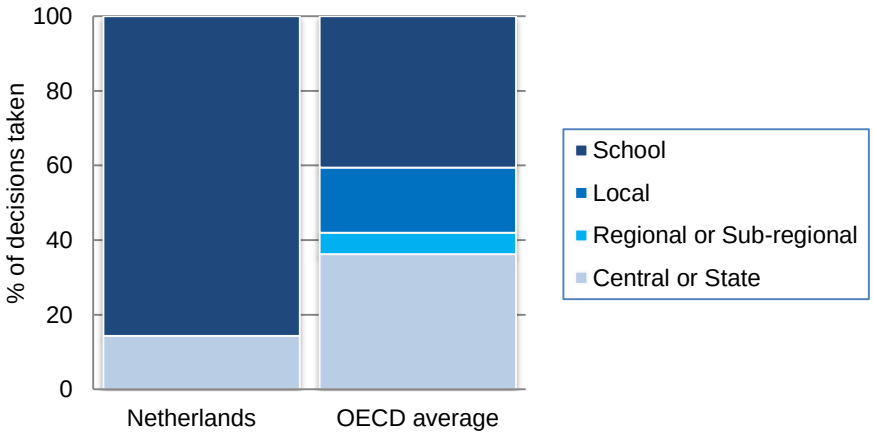
The challenge: Ensuring that school boards have the capacity to implement national policies consistently and transparently

Recent policies and practices

The *National Agreement on Education* (2013) between the ministry and stakeholders' representatives sets broad goals, which are further developed in specific sub-agreements (*sectoraccoorden*) and the Teachers' Programme 2013-2020. Agreements were made in five areas: (1) content and quality of education; (2) retaining and working in the best interest of quality teachers; (3) labour conditions; (4) relationship between the education sector and national government; and (5) education governance.

The introduction of differentiated inspection aims to enhance the effectiveness of supervision to strengthen individual schools (see Evaluation and Assessment). This approach to policy has been used in other policy sectors, but has recently been introduced in education and health.

Figure 7. Percentage of decisions taken in public lower secondary schools at each level of government, (2011)



Source: OECD (2012), *Education at a Glance 2012: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2012-en.

FUNDING: PUBLIC FUNDS ALLOCATED TO ALL EDUCATION LEVELS WITH EQUAL FUNDING FOR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS

The Netherlands' **investment in educational institutions** at all education levels is at the OECD average (6.2% of GDP) (see Figure 8). Over 2000-11, expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP increased by 1 percentage point (compared to the OECD average increase of 0.7 percentage points). Almost all expenditure on educational institutions is from public sources (82.3% in 2011), and the share of private expenditure on institutions across all education levels (17.7%) is slightly above the OECD average (16.1%). Private expenditure is highest at the tertiary level, with 29.2% of the proportion of expenditure (compared to the OECD average of 30.8%). In primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education, private expenditure accounts for 13.4% (OECD average of 8.6%). From 2005-11, public expenditure at all education levels increased by 13% (OECD average of 18%), and private expenditure increased by 31% (OECD average of 19%).

Annual expenditure per student from primary to tertiary education in 2011 is USD 11 701, above the OECD average of USD 9 487, while expenditure per student in primary education is USD 8 036, near the OECD average of USD 8 296. Expenditure per student in secondary education is above the OECD average for both general programmes (USD 10 460 compared to the OECD average of USD 8 572) and vocational programmes (USD 13 890 compared to the OECD average of USD 9 643). Between 2005 and 2011, expenditure per student in primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education increased by 12%, while enrolment increased by 2%. Over the same period, expenditure per student in tertiary education increased by 2%, while enrolment increased by 22%.

Schools in the Netherlands receive **equal public funding** according to the number of students (except for schools fully funded from private sources), as long as they meet certain requirements, and targeted funding provides additional resources to schools. For early childhood education, municipalities receive grants from the government's Municipalities Fund, based on parents' educational background and school location. Schools receive block grants for staffing and operating costs based on their student population, and school boards can distribute block grants as needed. Schools with students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, those with special education needs (SEN), or other specific student populations can receive additional funding. Schools can also receive additional funding from municipalities for specific educational purposes (such as for students at risk of dropping out of education). Other sources of funding for schools include voluntary contributions from parents or businesses, with significantly more private funding in private schools than in public schools. Parents receive an allowance until a child is 18, based on the age of the child and the number of children in the family.

In **secondary vocational education and higher education,** institutions receive block grants from the government and students pay tuition fees. Secondary vocational schools receive block grants, with 80% of the grant based on the number of students and the rest based on the number of certificates awarded. Tertiary education funding is based on performance criteria, and professional institutions receive funds mainly based on their student population. Performance-based tertiary funding depends on the number of students enrolled and students completing their first bachelor's or master's degree. Students over age 17 have access to grants and loans. In secondary and tertiary education, grants and loans are available to students based on their socio-economic status and their parents' income.

Reduced school budgets will require schools and their school boards to plan and allocate funds effectively. According to the *Dutch Inspectorate for Education*, certain regions of the Netherlands are facing a declining population and reduced budgets, in part due to the economic crisis. This may lead to the reduction of additional funding for schools by municipalities. Education institutions and school boards across the Netherlands must develop the capacity to use limited resources more effectively, while continuing to provide quality education and meet student needs.

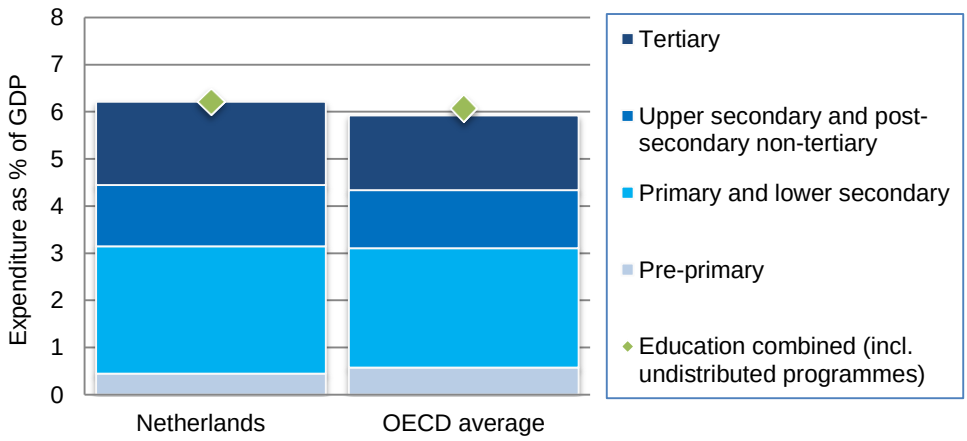
The challenge: Using resources more effectively while ensuring a high quality of education.

Recent policies and practices

In 2012, the government introduced performance-based budgeting in secondary vocational education and in tertiary education. With the aim of boosting performance of students, teachers and school leaders, performance-based budgeting will provide schools with additional funding if they reduce dropout rates, while low performing schools will receive less funding.

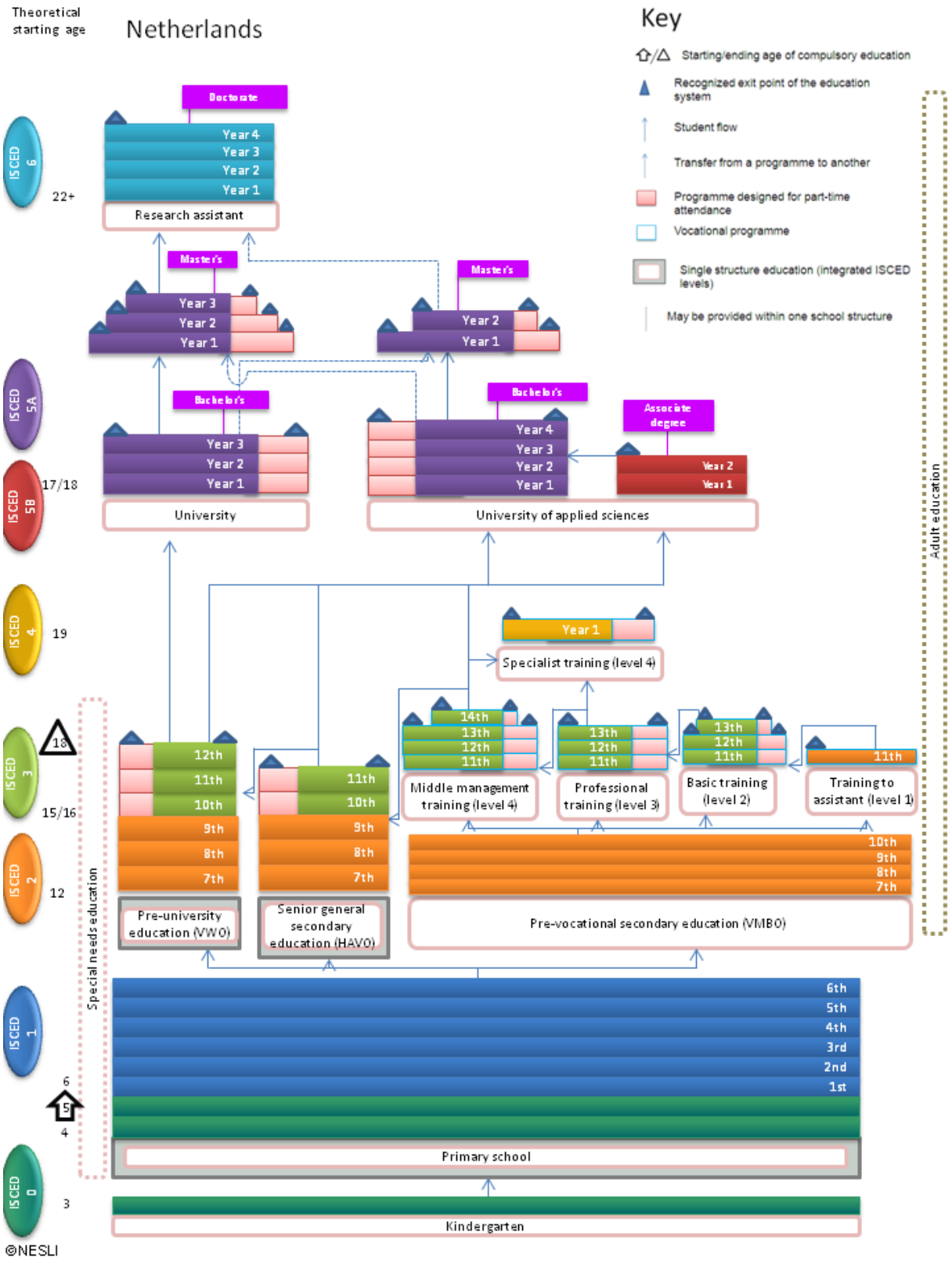
A *new loan system for students* (2014) will be introduced in 2015/16 for bachelor's and master's degree programmes.

Figure 8. Expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP, by level of education (2012)



Source: OECD (2014), *Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2014-en.

ANNEX A: STRUCTURE OF THE NETHERLANDS' EDUCATION SYSTEM



ANNEX B: STATISTICS

#	List of key indicators	Netherlands	Average or total	Min OECD	Max OECD
	Background information				
Political context					
1	Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP, 2011 (EAG 2014)	5.9%	5.6%	3.8%	8.7%
Economy					
2	GDP per capita, 2011, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs (EAG 2014)	43 150	n/a	17 125	88 668
3	GDP growth 2013 (OECD National Accounts)	-0.8%	1.3%	-3.9%	4.1%
Society					
4	Population density, inhab/km^2, 2010 (OECD Statistics)	492	138	3	492
5	Population aged less than 15 as a percentage of total population, 2010 (OECD Factbook 2014)	17.5%	18.6%	13.1%	29.6%
6	Foreign-born population as a percentage of total population, 2011 or latest available year (OECD Factbook 2014)	11.4%	n/a	0.3%	42.1%
	Education outcomes				
7	Mean performance in mathematics (PISA 2012)	523	494	413	554
8	Annualised change in mathematics performance across PISA assessments (PISA 2012)[4,5]	**-1.6**	-0.1	-3.3	4.2
9	Annualised change in reading performance across PISA assessments (PISA 2012)[4,5]	-0.1	**0.0**	-2.8	4.1
10	Annualised change in science performance across PISA assessments (PISA 2012)[4,5]	-0.5	**1.0**	-3.1	6.4
11	Enrolment rates of 3-4 year-olds in early childhood education and primary education as a percentage of the population of the same age group, 2012 (EAG 2014)	91%	76%	12%	99%
12	% of 25-64 year-olds whose highest level of attainment is lower secondary education or below, 2012 (EAG 2014)	27%	24%	8%	69%
13	% of 25-34 year-olds whose highest level of attainment is at least upper secondary education, 2012 (EAG 2014)	83%	82%	43%	98%
14	% of 25-34 year-olds whose highest level of attainment is tertiary education, 2012 (EAG 2014)	43%	39%	21%	66%
15	% of 25-64 year-olds whose highest level of attainment is vocational upper-secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education, 2012 (EAG 2014)	31.8%	32.6%	8.2%	73.0%
16	***Unemployment rates of 25-64 year-olds by educational attainment, 2012 (EAG 2014)***				
	Below upper secondary	6.6%	13.6%	2.6%	41.5%
	Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary	4.6%	7.8%	2.3%	24.4%
	Tertiary education	3.0%	5.0%	1.6%	17.0%
	Students: Raising outcomes				
Policy lever 1: Equity and quality					
17	First age of selection in the education system (PISA 2012)	12	14	10	16
18	***Students performing at the highest or lowest levels in mathematics (%), (PISA 2012)***				
	Students performing below Level 2	14.8%	23%	9.1%	54.7%
	Students performing at Level 5 or above	19.3%	12.6%	0.6%	30.9%
19	***Variance in mathematics performance between schools and within schools as a percentage of the OECD average variance in mathematics performance (PISA 2012)***				
	Between-schools percentage of variance	65%	37%	6%	65%
	Within-schools percentage of variance	34%	63%	34%	90%
20	% of students reporting that they have repeated at least a grade in primary, lower secondary or upper secondary schools (PISA 2012)	27.6%	12.4%	0.0%	36.1%

#	List of key indicators	Netherlands	average or total	Min OECD	Max OECD
21	Percentage of variance in mathematics performance in PISA test explained by ESCS (PISA 2012)[4]	**11.5%**	**14.8%**	7.4%	24.6%
22	Score difference in mathematics performance in PISA between non-immigrant and immigrant students AFTER adjusting for socio-economic status (PISA 2012)[4]	**35%**	**21%**	-29	66
23	Score differences between boys and girls in mathematics (PISA 2012)[4]	**10**	**11**	-6	25
Policy lever 2: Preparing students for the future					
24	***Adjusted mean proficiency in literacy among adults on a scale of 500 (Survey of Adult Skills, 2012)***				
	Among 16-65 year-olds (adjusted)	279.5	270.7	249.4	293.6
	Among 16-24 year-olds (adjusted)	292.1	278.0	260.0	297.0
25	***Upper secondary graduation rates in % by programme of orientation, 2012 (EAG 2014)***				
	General programmes	42%	52%	18%	85%
	Pre-vocational/ vocational programmes	78%	48%	4%	97%
26	Average annual growth rate of upper secondary graduation between 1995-2012 (EAG 2014)	m	m	0%	0%
27	***First-time graduation rates by programme of orientation, 2012 (EAG 2014)***				
	Graduation rate tertiary-type A (general programme)	45%	39%	21%	60%
	Graduation rate tertiary-type B (technical programme)	1%	11%	0%	29%
28	% of 15-29 years-old not in education, employment or training, 2012 (EAG 2014)	6.7%	15.1%	6.7%	29.2%
Institutions: Improving schools					
Policy lever 3: School improvement					
29	Mean index of teacher-student relations based on students' reports (PISA 2012)	-0.15	0.00	-0.42	0.47
30	Mean index of disciplinary climate based on students' reports (PISA 2012)	-0.16	0.00	-0.33	0.67
31	***% of teachers above the age of 50 by education level, 2012 (EAG 2014)***				
	Primary education	36%	31%	16%	52%
	Lower secondary education	42%	34%	19%	58%
	Upper secondary education	51%	38%	25%	65%
32	***Number of teaching hours per year in public institutions per education level, 2012 (EAG 2014)***				
	Primary education	930	782	569	1 131
	Lower secondary education	750	694	415	1 103
	Upper secondary education	750	655	369	1 103
33	***Ratio of teachers' salaries to earnings for full-time, full-year adult workers with tertiary education, 2011 (EAG 2014)***				
	Primary education	0.69	0.85	0.43	1.36
	Lower secondary education	0.82	0.88	0.43	1.36
	Upper secondary education	0.82	0.92	0.43	1.36
34	Growth rate of teachers' salaries between 2005 and 2012 in lower secondary education, 2012 (EAG 2014)	m	2%	-29%	31%
35	% of lower secondary education teachers who report a "moderate" or "large" positive change on their knowledge and understanding of their main subject field(s) (TALIS 2013)	30.2%	53.5%	26.7%	86.2%

#	List of key indicators	Netherlands	average or total	Min OECD	Max OECD
Policy lever 4: Evaluation and assessment to improve student outcomes					
36	Percentage of lower secondary education principals who report that they use student performance and student evaluation results (including national/international assessments) to develop the school's educational goals and programmes	84.1%	88.8%	58.5%	99.5%
37	***% of students whose school principals reported that assessments are used for the following purposes (PISA 2012)***				
	To make decisions about students' retention or promotion	98%	77%	1%	98%
	To monitor the school's progress from year to year	89%	81%	48%	100%
	To make judgements about teachers' effectiveness	68%	50%	14%	88%
	To identify aspects of instruction or the curriculum that could be improved	78%	80%	49%	99%
38	***% of lower secondary education teachers reporting appraisal/feedback from the school principal on their work with this frequency (TALIS 2013)***				
	Once every two years or less	88.8%	33.9%	3.2%	88.8%
	Once per year	9.5%	41.5%	9.5%	82.1%
	Twice or more per year	1.7%	24.7%	1.0%	49.6%
Systems: Organising the system					
Policy lever 5: Governance					
39	***% of decisions taken at each level of government in public lower secondary education, 2011 (EAG 2012)***				
	Central or state government	14%	36%	0%	87%
	Regional or sub-regional government	0%	6%	0%	36%
	Local government	m	17%	4%	100%
	School government	86%	41%	5%	86%
Policy lever 6: Funding					
40	***Annual expenditure per student by educational institutions, for all services, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs for GDP, 2011 (EAG 2014)***				
	Pre-primary education	8 020	7 428	2 412	25 074
	Primary education	8 036	8 296	2 218	23 871
	Secondary education	12 100	9 280	2 736	16 182
	Tertiary education	17 549	13 958	7 868	26 021
41	***Relative proportions of public and private expenditure on educational institutions, 2011 (EAG 2014)***				
	Public sources	82.3%	83.9%	59.9%	97.6%
	All private sources	17.7%	16.1%	2.4%	40.1%
	Index of change in expenditure on educational institutions, public sources, (constant prices, 2005=100)	113	118	87	186
	Index of change in expenditure on educational institutions, all private sources, (constant prices, 2005=100)	131	119	76	170

Notes

1. The average, total, minimums and maximums refer to OECD countries except in TALIS and the Survey of Adult Skills, where they refer to participating countries.
2. "m": included when data is not available.
3. "NP": included if the country is not participating in the study.
4. Statistically significant values of the indicator are shown in bold (PISA 2012 only)
5. The annualised change is the average annual change in PISA score points from a country's/economy's earliest participation in PISA to PISA 2012. It is calculated taking into account all of a country's/economy's participation in PISA. See www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-overview.pdf.
6. "n/a": included when the category is not applicable.

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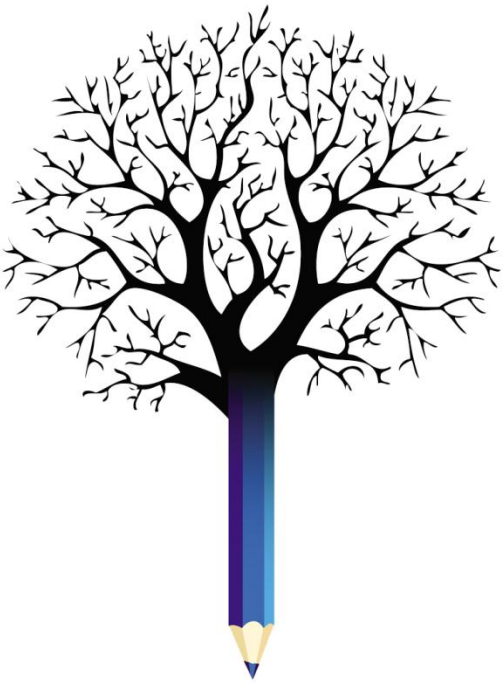

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