

introduction
to the
education council
..raad
wijs
onder

about the education council

Good education for everyone: that is the goal which the Education Council of the Netherlands is committed to helping achieve. For more than a hundred years the Council has been advising successive governments, parliaments as well as local authorities on education policy and legislation. It provides this advice both on commission and on its own initiative. The Council's work culminates in evidence-based explorations and advisory reports focused on offering solutions for the long term. They deal with all aspects of the education system, from pre-school provision right through to post-university education and lifelong learning and development.

The Council is an autonomous body, which is grounded in Dutch society and education. Its reports are based on scientific knowledge and insights, fed by the knowledge and experience of those working in the field, and also draw on education policy and legislation.

Council members

Members of the Education Council are appointed for a term of four years in a personal capacity. They are recruited because of their scientific knowledge, practical experience in education and/or contribution to society, in combination with their educational vision. The broad range of experience within the Council means that topics are always considered from multiple perspectives – for example educational, economic, international and legal. If a particular topic warrants it, the Council may invite one or more external committee members to contribute to preparing an advisory report.

Secretariat

The Education Council is supported by a Secretariat with a staff of around twenty people, who provide both subject-specific and facility management support. The Council advisors possess specific and diverse expertise in the field of education. The Director of the Secretariat is also the Council Secretary.

Youth Education Council

Special mention should be made of the Youth Education Council (JongerenOnderwijsraad), in which pupils and students across a range of ages and school types support the Council with experiences and ideas about Dutch education and a range of linked topics on which the Council provides advice.

Cooperation

In preparing its advisory reports, the Council also draws on the knowledge and expertise of other advisory bodies and agencies. Conversely, the Education Council also contributes its expertise on request for advisory reports published by other bodies. Joint advisory reports are also sometimes published.

As one of the founding members of EUNEC, the European Network of Education Councils, the Council also shares knowledge and expertise with other advisory councils in Europe and beyond.

About the Education Council

Advisory reports and explorations

Theme: Pupils and students

Theme: Teachers

Theme: Freedom of education

Other

advisory reports and explorations



About the Education Council

Advisory reports and explorations

Theme: Pupils and students

Theme: Teachers

Theme: Freedom of education

Other

We have selected a number of recent advisory reports and explorations which give an impression of the areas covered by the Education Council. The reports are grouped into four themes: pupils and students; teachers; freedom of education; and other.

Theme: Pupils and students

Pupils and students are at the heart of everything the Education Council does, whether it concerns the organisation of education, accessibility, equal opportunities, teaching quality or the match with the labour market. The Council's work also embraces groups of pupils and students who warrant specific education within education, such as refugee children and children and adolescents with disabilities. The Education Council also incorporates the experiences of pupils and students in its advisory reports via the Youth Education Council.

[Advisory report: Work-based learning under pressure](#) *Published at the request of the government*

Work-based learning is an essential part of vocational education. However, the current labour market shortage is leading to a lack of placements and threatening the quality of work-based training. The Education Council therefore recommends that vocational training providers and employers make conscious and judicious use of work-based learning, working together to determine which educational activities should take place within a workplace setting and identify where alternatives might also work well. It is also vital to safeguard the quality of work-based learning by drawing up a framework of national standards.

[Advisory report: Balanced Internationalisation bill](#) *Published at the request of the government*

The Council recommends that this legislative proposal be thought through and fleshed out further. The Council takes a positive view of the proposed cap on international student numbers with a view to aligning the intake of (international) students better with the available educational capacity in the Netherlands. With regard to the proposed measures on language of instruction, the Council sees problems with justification, proportionality, legal certainty and feasibility.

[Advisory letter: Provisions for young children](#) *Published at the request of Parliament*

The Education Council advises the government to guarantee and strengthen early childhood education (ECE) for children aged between 2.5 and six years who are at risk of educational disadvantage. Properly functioning ECE forms an indispensable link in securing more equal educational opportunities. The Council calls for greater alignment between preschool facilities and primary schools by developing national aims for play and learning provision within ECE and striving for better collaboration and more professionalisation of preschool and primary school teachers.

[Advisory report: Language and mathematics in the spotlight](#) *Published at the request of Parliament*

To ensure good and sustained quality of language and maths teaching, the Education Council advises a comprehensive and structural focus on these subjects from stakeholders including the government, school administrators, school heads and teachers. The Council advises central government to formulate clear goals for language and mathematics teaching as part of the national attainment targets and standards (core attainment targets, examination standards, qualification requirements and benchmarks) and to systematically monitor the achievement of those goals. Other recommendations are that language and maths teaching be embedded in all subjects and subject areas; that high language and maths standards be set for teacher training programmes; and that the professionalism of language and maths teaching be improved.

[About the Education Council](#)

[Advisory reports and explorations](#)

[Theme: Pupils and students](#)

[Theme: Teachers](#)

[Theme: Freedom of education](#)

[Other](#)

About the Education Council

Advisory reports and explorations

Theme: Pupils and students

Theme: Teachers

Theme: Freedom of education

Other

Advisory report: Select later, differentiate better

Published at the request of the government

In this advisory report the Education Council addresses the question of how differentiation and selection in the education system can better support the capacities of all pupils. Early selection, strong differentiation into different school types, the reduction in the number of transitional classes and fewer opportunities to switch or combine courses mean that by no means all young people are following the type of education that best meets their capacities. Dutch economy and society are missing out on talent as a result. These problems cannot be resolved within the existing education system. The Education Council therefore advises that the selection for a particular school type be deferred until the end of a three-year broad transitional period, and that pupils be offered a more flexible programme starting from primary school, which is more aligned to differences between pupils.

Advisory report: Let's read! A call for a reading offensive

Published at the request of the government

In a joint report, the Education Council and the Council for Culture issue a call for a reading offensive to motivate young people to engage in 'deep reading': thoughtful, concentrated reading of longer texts and books. The reading skills of young people are declining and that is having an impact on their functioning at school and in society, and ultimately also on the functioning of society as a whole. Libraries, schools and parents need to work together to address this, and it is important that the government invests more in a cohesive reading policy. Powerful collaboration between all stakeholders is vital, with a key role for central government as well.

Advisory report: Increasing inclusivity

Published at the request of the government

The Education Council argues that mainstream education needs to be more inclusive and advises school boards, school partnerships and government to bring special and mainstream education closer together. Offering both types at a single location can enable mixed forms of education to emerge and make it possible to offer appropriate education close to home and shared teaching for pupils who need more support and facilities. Facilities and expertise can moreover be shared. To further increase the expertise at schools, the Council recommends giving more inclusive education an explicit place in the initial teacher training curriculum and that it be incorporated in refresher training programmes, so that the number of schools and senior secondary vocational colleges ready and able to provide support for pupils and students with disabilities gradually increases.

Exploration: Sex differences in education

Published at the request of Parliament

This Education Council study shows that differences in achievement between boys and girls are not due to differences in their skills or brains. It is also not the case that boys underperform girls due to an overrepresentation of girls in primary education. Differences in school and professional careers arise at home, among peers, at school and in society. Differences between boys and girls are acceptable, but not if they are the result of limited freedom of choice and unequal opportunities. The Council believes it is important that everyone has an opportunity to develop his or her capacities and feels free to choose a school and professional career which matches that capacity. In this study, the Education Council indicates what the education system can do, but acknowledges that there are other stakeholders who also need to act.



Theme: Teachers

Teachers are crucial for good education. However, the profession is under pressure, with growing teacher shortages and (excessively) high pressure of work. The Education Council devotes a lot of attention to teachers in its advisory reports and studies, whether the focus be on the teaching profession, the position of teachers, teacher training programmes, the policy and labour market for teachers, teachers' terms of employment or the role of the government. In compiling these advisory reports, the Council always consults teachers, school heads, school boards, sector councils, trade unions and other education professionals.

[Exploration: Scarcity grinds](#)
Published at the request of the government

The Education Council warns that the teacher shortages are persistent and unequally distributed. Continuing to provide education in the face of a teacher shortage demands painful choices. The Council stresses that teacher shortages must not be a problem solely for those schools and school boards which are most badly affected. And they must not further exacerbate inequality of opportunity in education. The Minister for Primary and Secondary Education asked the Education Council to explore ways in which education can be provided against a backdrop of a continuing shortage of teachers. The Council spells out a number of options for action and their implications.

[Exploration: Use of intelligent technology in education](#)
Published at the request of the government

Teachers, lecturers, their managers, administrators and government all have a crucial role to play in the rise in the use of intelligent technology in education. It is important to avoid use of technology becoming an end in itself and enabling all pupils and students to benefit from it. The Education Council observes in the study 'Use of intelligent technology in education' that technology can enrich education, but can also impoverish it.

[Advisory report: Time for focus](#)
Published at the request of Parliament

The Education Council recommends focusing more on teachers' activities, reducing the number of teaching hours and investing in more staff in and around the classroom. The Council believes that too many responsibilities are placed on the shoulders of individual teachers. This prevents primary school teachers from devoting enough time to their core task of providing and developing education. This is impacting on quality. It is not only up to teachers to set priorities and manage the pressure of work; that is a shared responsibility of teachers, school heads and school boards. A structural increase in funding from government is also needed in order to reduce the average number of hours that teachers spend teaching and to enable more staff to be recruited.

[About the Education Council](#)

[Advisory reports and explorations](#)

[Theme: Pupils and students](#)

[Theme: Teachers](#)

[Theme: Freedom of education](#)

[Other](#)

About the Education Council

Advisory reports and explorations

Theme: Pupils and students

Theme: Teachers

Theme: Freedom of education

Other

[Advisory report: Broadening the scope for teachers](#)

Published at the request of Parliament

The Education Council introduces new perspectives in the teaching profession, with more opportunities for mobility, more attractive job content, a better start for new teachers and more opportunities for educational quality and innovation. To this end, the Council calls for teachers to be given broader educational powers, in combination with development programmes. This will require changes in the training and employment structure. The Council recommends that the dividing lines between teaching qualifications be removed and that they be grouped into clusters, in combination with opportunities for specialisation.

[Advisory report: A new perspective on professional space in education](#)

Published at the request of Parliament

The professional quality and expertise of teachers both creates and demands a certain professional space. This professional space does not come free of obligation or duty, but must at all times be geared to enhancing educational quality. The Education Council believes that a new perspective is needed on the concept of professional space, in which 'one-dimensional' policy measures focusing on the competences of individual teachers are replaced by a more integrated approach, and also that teachers are given greater freedom of action. This could be achieved through better alignment of teachers' competences and the structure and culture of the school. More and better collaboration in school teams needs to be encouraged, and more attention is needed for a structure and culture which supports teachers' freedom of action. This is primarily an organisational issue. The government should remain at arm's length.

Theme: Freedom of education

For more than a hundred years, Article 23 of the Dutch Constitution has guaranteed freedom of education in the Netherlands and made education a responsibility of the government. But what does this latter aspect mean today? On the one hand, Article 23 charges the government with doing certain things (such as setting standards for the quality of education), and on the other compels it to refrain from doing things (such as intervening too much in the day-to-day life of a school). The Education Council focuses on the relationship between government responsibility and freedom of education provision, and in particular on how the government responsibility is given form in practice.

Advisory report: Set limits, allow freedom *Published on own initiative*

Make clear what must form part of education, and what is and is not permitted in terms of freedom of education; do this within the normative framework of the democratic society. That is the advice given by the Dutch Education Council in this report on Article 23 of the Dutch Constitution. Schools must adhere to the framework set by the democratic society, contribute to that society and not undermine it. The same applies for the government, which must make it clearer where the limits to the freedom of education lie and enforce them more rigorously. Setting those limits is important in order to future-proof freedom of education and the freedom to expound certain beliefs, educational approach or world view within a democratic society

Memorandum: Educational freedom and government responsibility

Published on own initiative

Article 23 of the Dutch Constitution is perhaps the most widely discussed topic in relation to education, alongside Covid. There is a wide diversity of views, not infrequently accompanied by tensions. Some of these tensions lie in the text of the Constitution itself, while others become visible in the way in which Article 23 works in practice. What lies beneath these tensions, where do they come from and what are those differing views? In this informative memorandum, the Education Council offers pointers to clarify Article 23 of the Dutch Constitution. The Council explains precisely what is in Article 23 and what it means.

Advisory letter: Promotion of citizenship bill *Published at the request of the government*

The Education Council advises that the legally mandated citizenship education be focused on democracy. It gives this advice in response to a draft legislative proposal from the Minister for Primary and Secondary Education and Media. The Minister wishes to clarify the purpose and principles of citizenship education. The Education Council supports this intention, but is critical of the bill in its present form. The principle of freedom of education demands a clear picture of precisely what the government expects from schools. The bill fails to provide clarity on this. The bill has since been amended and adopted by Parliament.

Advisory report: Bill on alternative education in the case of objections to a school's philosophy or religion *Published at the request of the government*

The Education Council believes it is important that children who are exempt from school attendance on the grounds of objections to the school's philosophy or religious direction should also receive a good education. It is therefore sensible to link exemption from compulsory school attendance to a legal requirement to provide home education and to set standards for that education. However, those standards must not be so stringent that home education is no longer a realistic option for some parents. The Council advises the minister not to submit the bill in its present form. Exemption from compulsory school attendance is necessary in exceptional cases in order to meet parents' conscientious objections. The legislation needs to provide genuine opportunities for this by setting realistic standards. That will give parents more freedom and enable educational quality to be safeguarded more effectively. The bill has been stayed by the outgoing government.

[About the Education Council](#)

[Advisory reports and explorations](#)

[Theme: Pupils and students](#)

[Theme: Teachers](#)

[Theme: Freedom of education](#)

[Other](#)

Other

[Letter to *informateur*](#)

Education will not benefit from a new Coalition Agreement containing temporary investments and isolated proposals which have to be achieved within a period of four years. What is needed instead is focus, structural funding and long-term ambitions which go beyond individual government terms, partly in order to be able to tackle the stubborn problems within Dutch education. In a letter to the *informateur* (the official charged with exploring the possibilities for forming a new coalition government), the Education Council, as an independent advisor to the government and parliament, recommends the formulation of focused and cohesive ambitions for education in the long term, and warns against cutting education spending.

[Advisory report: Education as investment](#)

Published on own initiative

Education is an investment in the earning capacity of the individual and of society, generates wide-ranging returns and is a mark of civilisation. The Education Council advises government and parliament to base decisions on education within the national budget on these three considerations. Currently, spending on education is primarily seen as a cost with no corresponding return. An understanding of both the costs and the returns will create a better foundation for political decisions on education spending.

[Advisory letter: Forward study of senior secondary vocational education, higher education and science](#)

Published at the request of the government

The Education Council expresses its appreciation for the coherent and long term-focused thinking about the future of senior secondary vocational education (MBO), higher education and science in the forward study looking at the situation in 2040 ('Today is 2040' (*Vandaag is 2040*)). The Council recommends going a step further and drafting a single long-term agenda for primary and secondary and further education. The Council offers the minister a number of pointers for fleshing out regional cooperation and urges that more thought be given to the role of digital technology in education.

[Advisory report: Clear positioning for school boards](#)

Published on own initiative

The government must adopt a consistent approach and ensure a clear positioning for school boards. School boards must in turn ensure that decisions about education are as far as possible taken at school level and that where necessary they cooperate externally in the public interest. School boards form an indispensable hub within the Dutch education system, acting as a link between schools, government and the local community; however, the administrative relationships have become distorted. The government and school boards must do more to clarify their own administrative role in order to guarantee the provision of good education. The Education Council advises the government to focus more on a consistent than a centralised approach and to fund education structurally as far as possible and suppress competitive incentives in the funding system.

[Advisory report: Active in Europe](#)

Published on own initiative

Engage seriously with European education policy: that is the Education Council's advice to the government. The present 'wait-and-see' approach by the Netherlands fails to acknowledge the growing influence of Europe on education. The Council advises Dutch education ministers to work with education professionals to develop a strategic agenda, which offers clarity on the Dutch ambitions for European education policy. This will provide focus and a framework for education professionals and government, enable the Netherlands to respond more effectively to the opportunities and risks of European education policy and contribute to that policy.

[About the Education Council](#)

[Advisory reports and explorations](#)

[Theme: Pupils and students](#)

[Theme: Teachers](#)

[Theme: Freedom of education](#)

[Other](#)

About the Education Council

Advisory reports and explorations

Theme: Pupils and students

Theme: Teachers

Theme: Freedom of education

Other

Advisory report: The essence of external supervision
Published on own initiative

Give higher priority in the external supervision of education to promoting quality and provide for direct oversight of teaching practice. To achieve this, target supervision more at what happens within a school and step up the frequency of quality reviews of schools and teaching programmes. This will enable the government to fulfil its responsibility for educational quality more effectively. That is the advice given by the Education Council in this advisory report on the function of external supervision in education.

Advisory report: Emphasising the public character of education
Published on own initiative

The Education Council recommends that the government, school boards and schools do more to protect the public character of education. The Council observes that private education provision is not only growing sharply, but that public and private education are becoming ever more intermingled. This carries the risk that financial barriers will mean that education at publicly funded schools are no longer equally accessible to all pupils. In addition, educational quality is declining and teachers and school heads have less control over the education provided at their schools.

good
education
for
everyone:
that is the goal
which the education
council of the
netherlands is
committed to helping
achieve.