Date 2 June 2014
Re Clearing the way for workmanship: future-oriented vocational education

1. Future oriented vocational education

Developing people’s talents as much as possible will be crucial for the Netherlands’ future welfare, and the continued acceleration of changes on the labour market is making this issue an urgent one. Our economy needs well-educated skilled workers, from electrical engineers to opticians, from maternity carers to game developers. People have to be flexibly employable, socially skilled, creative, and continue to learn throughout their lives, which will mean setting high standards for our vocational education [MBO] system. To increase people’s versatility, the Netherlands will have to transition from being a knowledge economy to what the Scientific Council for Government Policy [WRR] terms a “learning economy”. The foundation for the vocational education system will have to be sound before this transition can be accomplished.

The Netherlands is in a good position to achieve these ambitions. We have an extensive system of vocational training that few other countries can match. In terms of the scope and quality of our integrated line from pre-vocational [VMBO] to higher professional education [HBO], the Netherlands stands alone. It is therefore unsurprising that other countries are often interested in exploring the Dutch vocational training structure. Most recently, a delegation from China visited, indicating that they wished to implement a comparable system of vocational training in their homeland.

The foundation for vocational training is continuously being improved and updated. MBO institutions have been successful in reducing the number of early school leavers, and the harmonisation between the training they offer and the labour market is generally good. For example, school leavers who received a basic qualification at the end of the 2010-2011 school year were generally able to find a job within a month. There are, however, a large number of MBO training

1 House of Representatives, year of session 2013–2014, 26 695, no. 94.
2 A survey of former students conducted a year and a half after they left school shows that it takes students with a traditional vocational education pathway [beroepsopleidende leerweg, or BOL] qualification an average of just over a month to find a job (2010-2011 school year, reference date autumn of 2012), with those having a basic practical vocational qualification [beroepsbegeleidende leerweg, or BBL] found a job in two weeks.
programmes whose qualified school leavers are unemployed for longer periods of time or end up accepting a job for which they are overqualified.  

The Focus on Workmanship (Focus op Vakmanschap) action plan has begun paving the way towards more challenging vocational training programmes. In the coming years, MBO institutions will be busy implementing this action plan.  

Training programmes will be intensified and, whenever possible, they will enable students to complete MBO 4 programmes in three years. Programmes that are both compact and intensive are more attractive to students, and thus a good alternative for the higher general secondary education (HAVO) route. Any revision of the qualification framework will have to ensure that the content of vocational training programmes will be better tailored to the needs of the future labour market. My highest priority is a careful and effective implementation of the "Focus op Workmanship" action plan.

Based on my MBO Tour, however, I have concluded that additional measures are needed. In the context of this tour, I have spent the last several months meeting with directors of MBO institutions, students, instructors, employers, municipalities and other stakeholders.  

In each of those meetings, it was repeatedly emphasised that skilled workers will be indispensable to the Netherlands’ future. The Dutch Social and Economic Council’s ("SER") and the Scientific Council for Government Policy’s (“WRR”) advisory reports (entitled “Handmade in Holland” and “Towards a learning economy” (Naar een lerende economie), respectively) echo this point.  

After all, the Dutch economy is largely dependent on good skilled workers, and that need will not be decreasing given that large-scale dejuvenation is around the corner. MBO programmes are excellent ways of training these people. It would be a shame if students were to opt out of vocational education because they believe that something you have to use both your head and your hands to do is somehow worth less or offers fewer job prospects. This will have to be prevented by modernising programme offerings so that the individuals who obtain their qualifications from vocational programs will be thoroughly prepared for tomorrow’s job market, and the one they will encounter farther down the road. The key to accomplishing this will be mobilising and applying innovations and technologies across the borders that separate companies, sectors, and countries. During my MBO Tour, for example, I visited the Life Science MBO programme made possible by the partnership of Friesland College and Nordwin College. This MBO initiative crosses the lines that traditionally separate disciplines from one another and attempts to make crossovers in order to anticipate the demands of the labour market. Our economy needs the innovations that are made at that exact spot on the cutting edge. Vocational education must work with the business community to better anticipate such innovations.

According to the most recent Education Report (Onderwijsverslag) issued by the Education Inspectorate (Inspectie van het Onderwijs) ("the Inspectorate"), the quality of vocational education has remained at virtually the same level for the last ten to fifteen years. The time is therefore ripe for improving that quality, which, along with harmonising the programmes as well as possible with the labour market, will also improve the image of vocational education. The MBO institutions are already hard at work in this respect, but more efforts are needed.

Finally, I want to learn something from the financial problems that have arisen, such as those relating to the Amarantis Education Group (Amarantis)  

(Research Centre for Education and the Job Market [ROA] ("ROA"), 2013, 'School leavers between school and the job market' [Schoolverlaters tussen onderwijs en arbeidsmarkt], Maastricht, the Netherlands)  

ROA, 2013, The labour-market relevance of large-scale MBO training programmes [Arbeidsmarktrelevantie grote mbo-opleidingen], Maastricht. For an update, see:  

MBO 15, 2014, The foundation has been laid: now raise the bar [De basis gelegd: nu de lat omhoog], Ede, the Netherlands. In this publication, MBO 15 reports on the progress schools have made in implementing the Action Plan based on its interviews with the directors of MBO institutions.  


6 The Cabinet’s response to the SER advisory report “Handmade in Holland” will be submitted at the same time as this letter. See also the Cabinet’s response to the WRR advisory report “Towards a learning economy”. House of Representatives, year of session 2013-2014, 27,406, no. 209.
Onderwijsgroep. This situation highlighted the need for adequate control, management and regulation of educational quality and continuity. Managing a large-scale educational organisation in today’s world imposes significant demands in terms of the quality and mentality of its managers and regulators. The degree to which managers, regulators and school administrators are in control is crucial to the education process. The distance between the management and the primary process must not be excessive, as was the case at the Amarantis Education Group. Expert school administrators play an essential role in preventing such situations from occurring.

How do we ensure that MBO education will continue to be able to play its important role in both society and the economy? This letter identifies the most important challenges we face and the development I have in mind. In structuring this modernisation, I am creating leeway for educators to work with all of their partners to take on these challenges. Some issues will require more stringent measures in order to guarantee the quality of education. The letter is structured as follows. In Section 2, I list four issues that require additional measures. In Section 3, I explain the proposed measures in the order of the list of issues. Section 4 concludes the letter, while the appendix includes a legislative agenda.

2. Analysis

What new challenges and issues require additional measures?

2.1 The labour market is changing

The qualifications the labour market demands are in a state of continual flux. The pace of these changes continues to increase in response to ICT developments and globalisation. The duties associated with particular professions are evolving, and some professions are disappearing altogether. The Social and Cultural Planning Office [Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau] (“SCP”) asserts that the job loss rate ranged from 2% to 4% between 1994 and 2002. That rate rose to 4% to 6% between 2004 and 2008. An even higher number of new jobs were created in that same period. According to the SCP, the departure of employees has been coupled to an increasing degree with the creation of new positions and the elimination of old ones. From that point of view, the labour market has become more dynamic. Partly as a result of new technological developments and the pervasiveness of globalisation, however, the increased dynamism of the labour market has not led to fewer jobs. Measured in man-years of employment, job opportunities reached a high point in 2008.

Technological developments and globalisation seem to primarily impact the middle segment of the labour market. In recent decades, unemployment has risen among employees with an average level of education. The percentage of jobs held by employees with an average level of education has fallen in recent years. Since 2002, job opportunities for employees with MBO 2/3 levels of education have been less favourable. This development is consistent with the on-going trends in many other countries. While job opportunities are under pressure in the middle segment, those for people with both lower and higher levels of education are on the rise. Outsourcing and automation generally involve routine functions, such as machine processing in the metalworking industry and bookkeeping in the commercial sector. At the same time, the higher demand for personal services is presenting a significant challenge to vocational education. In addition to having thorough

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7 The annual rate of new job creation was 3% to 6% of all jobs between 1994 and 2002. That had risen to 4% to 7% between 2004 and 2008. SCP, 2012, Labour demand 2011 [Vraag naar arbeid 2011], The Hague.
knowledge of their trade, young people will also need to learn skills that will enable them to meet the needs of an evolving job market. Research also shows that people with a higher level of key skills are less often unemployed, more often have long-term jobs, more often have a high income level, more often do volunteer work, are more likely to trust others, and more often describe their health as excellent or very good (PIAAC).¹⁰

A learning economy will require skilled workers and citizens to be more resilient and flexible. Training students for the job market means not only ensuring that they have the knowledge and skills they will need for a specific profession, but also preparing them adequately to acquire new knowledge and skills later in their careers in order to keep them flexibly employable. The opportunities for mid-career re-training and continuing education are not commensurate with the demands of the job market. I very much want to change this by affording adults the opportunity to acquire the training they need to remain sustainably employable. Vocational education will have to be structured to better anticipate the need for this flexibility.

2.2 Learning a trade improves future job prospects

In recent years, the important role that skilled tradespeople play in our society has been allowed to recede too far into the background. A turning point in this attitude is on the horizon: I see opportunities in the new appreciation society has for the know-how-intensive manufacturing industry and the crucial role workmanship plays. Much of our innovative strength depends on specialised tradespeople; for example, consider research tool designers, who play an indispensable role in research that results in the construction of unique and experimental prototypes.¹¹ Unfortunately, I have not yet seen this new appreciation for workmanship reflected in a corresponding appreciation for vocational education.¹² The choice to pursue a vocational education is far from being seen as something to be proud of, but as the default choice of someone who cannot meet the challenges presented by a HAVO or pre-university programme.¹³ The fact that it takes longer to complete the course from VMBO/MBO to HBO than from HAVO to HBO may play a role in this regard. Given the ageing of the population, however, it has become a priority to ensure that people fully develop their talents and fully utilise the opportunities available to them.

This means not just fostering their cognitive skills, but also their entrepreneurial and practical skills, which may make alternative learning pathways more suitable for them.¹⁴ This will make it more important for us to focus on substantially increasing the percentage of students who enter MBO programmes after completing their theory-oriented VMBO or general secondary education ("MAVO") program. This will benefit the students, MBO programmes, and the Dutch economy.

2.3 The quality of vocational education can and must be improved

Subsequent Inspectorate reports show that while the number of weak and very weak programmes may have substantially decreased in recent years, there is still

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¹⁰ See, e.g.: House of Representatives, year of session 2013–2014, 33 750 VIII, no. 10. PIAAC encompasses "three key skills": literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments.
¹² SER, 2013, Handmade in Holland: workmanship and entrepreneurship in the skilled trades, The Hague. The House will receive the Cabinet’s response to this advisory report at the same time as this letter.
¹³ SCP, 2013, Opportunities for Workmanship in Vocational Education [Kansen voor vakmanschap in het mbo], The Hague.
plenty of room for improvement. Too many programmes and MBO institutions operate at a level that just barely meets the basic quality requirements. MBO institutions will have to strive to offer more programmes of above-average quality. Improvement is also needed in the area of examinations and graduation requirements, two areas in which barely any progress has been made in recent years. I consider this to be an urgent issue, given that there should never be any doubt about the value of a diploma.

In recent years, a great deal of attention has been devoted to vulnerable students, and research shows that those efforts have yielded results. However, sufficient attention must also be paid to talented students. We also have to offer opportunities for students who can handle more challenging levels of education. Nearly one third of the students surveyed indicated that they did not consider their MBO programme to be challenging enough. The Focus on Workmanship action plan has mapped out a route to more challenging vocational education programmes. The programmes will be more intensive and compact. I want to continue this restructuring by developing extra programmes for talented students.

2.4 Decrease in student numbers

The number of pupils in primary and secondary schools is decreasing as the result of demographic developments, which have also made themselves felt in MBO programmes. In addition, more and more pupils are entering HAVO and pre-university programmes, and more students are pursuing theoretical VMBO programmes rather than basic and specific VMBO programmes.

Lower student populations will mean that MBO institutions will have to work more effectively, possibly in partnership with one another, in order to cope with this development. Consideration might be given to better harmonising course offerings with secondary education, HBO programmes and between MBO institutions in order to preclude ineffective competition for students.

3. Measures

What are the solutions I have in mind?

3.1 The labour market is changing

The labour market is becoming ever more dynamic. The type of work we do in the Netherlands is changing, professions are becoming obsolete, and new professions are being created. This will require vocational education that can rapidly anticipate labour market changes and devote a great deal of attention to innovation.

Choice of study

Adequately preparing students for an evolving job market means, first, for them to make a wise choice of study. If a student inadvertently chooses a sector that offers few job opportunities, that student must have the opportunity to make a change in his course of study. The SchoolEx programme encourages holding more intake, change of course, and exit interviews intended to focus on choosing a course of study that will offer better job prospects or continuing to study for a longer period of time. At the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year, students will be provided with an informational brochure that includes information about job prospects. I adopted the proposal provided by the Foundation for Cooperation between

16 CPB, 2011, Dutch education performance in perspective. Education level falling, the best students in particular are lagging behind [Nederlandse onderwijsprestaties in perspectief. Niveau onderwijs daalt; vooral de beste leerlingen blijven achter], CPB Policy Letter 2011/5, The Hague.
17 ROA, 2013, ‘School leavers between school and the job market’, Maastricht.
Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market [Samenwerking Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven] ("SBB") with regard to the structure and content\textsuperscript{19} of the brochure. For the 2015-2016 school year, I want the Macroeffectiveness MBO [Macredoeltmatigheid mbo] bill to make it mandatory to provide future students with objective information. The career-orientation programme must be upgraded.

The advisory report recently published by the Education Council [Onderwijsraad] stressed the importance of smooth transitions in education. I also want to join the Secretary of Education [staatssecretaris van OCW] in exploring whether the last possible date for VMBO pupils to register to transfer to MBO programmes can be moved up to 1 May (the registration date for HBO programmes has already been moved up to 1 May). Moving up the registration date will enable these young people to seek advice sooner regarding finding a training programme that is suitable for their talents and the future job prospects. This will require institutions to further professionalise their system of intake, selection and placement.

**Internships and on-the-job placements**

The vocational education structure conditions graduation on serving an internship or apprenticeship. These positions are difficult to find, particularly in times of economic difficulties. MBO institutions and Vocational Education-Business Knowledge Centres [Kenniscentra Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven] ("KBBs") share responsibility for this with students and the business community. Businesses have to accept their share of this responsibility, particularly in sectors where qualified job seekers are expected to be scarce. We cannot have a situation in which students cannot graduate because they have been unable to find a place to serve an internship or apprenticeship.

The KBB, and after 1 August 2015 the SBB, will be responsible for ensuring that there are sufficient numbers of businesses and organisations of sufficient quality to provide these internships and apprenticeships ("practical placements"). MBO institutions are responsible for finding suitable practical placements for their students, as well as for providing them with adequate guidance. Students are also obliged to make efforts on their own behalf.

- Students will also acquire – with the proposed statutory basis for the right to file complaints – the opportunity to submit complaints if they believe that an MBO institute has failed to live up to its obligations to find the students a practical placement. MBO institutions must also be able to offer alternative programmes if the lack of practical placements is attributable to a long-term job shortage.

**Innovation and cross-overs**

The more educational institutions, businesses and the knowledge infrastructure cooperate with one another, the better they will be able to rapidly anticipate opportunities and difficulties. Brainport Eindhoven is a good example of such a cooperative relationship. MBO institutions can play a significant role in bolstering regional innovative power. MBO institutions will have to work closely with innovative businesses to ensure that there are attractive and current programmes that take regional differences and the evolving job market into account.

The "Practice Factory" [Oefenfabriek] is a good example of a partnership between MBO institutions and innovative businesses that trains students to become process operators, among other things. MBO students can study and gain practical experience in an actual plant. They can directly apply their theoretical knowledge, learn about how processes relate to one another, and learn to solve problems as they arise in practice. The Practice Factory includes businesses, researchers, teachers and students who work together intensively, creating strong ties between training courses, research and the business community.

For students to be well prepared for the job market, it is important that both they and the teaching staff can use state-of-the-art materials and keep up-to-date on

\textsuperscript{19} SBB, Education in Figures: Study Brochure for MBO Students [Studie in Cijfers: studiebijluiiter voor het mbo], Advisory report of 24 March 2014.
the latest technology. This might require significant investments for some training programmes. This would be difficult for an MBO institute to arrange without help from the regional business community. I want to use the Regional MBO Investment Fund [Regionaal investeringsfonds mbo] to create the same kinds of ties that educational institutions and businesses share as part of the Centres for Innovative Workmanship [Centra voor Innovatief Vakmanschap] (“CIWs”). For example, more than 200 SMEs and large enterprises in the high-tech industry are working with Graafschap College, Saxion University of Applied Sciences, and HAN University of Applied Sciences in the CIW HTSM Eastern Netherlands in the province of Twente. Through the Regional MBO Investment Fund, I will be providing a substantial incentive for MBO institutions, businesses and the region to form such a partnership.

- I have made EUR 100 million available for the Regional MBO Investment Fund for the period from 2014 up to and including 2017. I assume that regional governments and the business community will top this amount up to EUR 300 million. There is a great deal of interest in participating in the fund. Educational institutions, businesses and regional governments in Twente recently signed a letter of intent in anticipation of the fund’s opening.\(^{20}\)

There may be a certain degree of conflict between training students for the current job market and training them for a future job market which does not yet exist and which is difficult to predict. For example, a few decades ago there was no hint whatsoever that young people would be working in the gaming industry. Given this example from the past, it is important that the qualification structure should be such that MBO programmes can flexibly anticipate the demands of an evolving job market. This would enable us to reduce any imminent conflicts that may exist between the job market of today and that of tomorrow. Old divisions between sectors can no longer be permitted to present obstacles within those institutions, since crossing sectoral and industrial boundaries lies at the heart of innovation.

During my MBO Tour, I often heard it said that national structures would excessively hinder innovations such as smart combinations of technology and care. Such an eventuality must be eliminated.

- Starting with the 2016-2017 school year, all MBO institutions will be using the revised qualification structure. The qualifications have been drafted in broad terms, but they are specific enough to guide education providers. In addition to the qualifications, regions will be afforded the leeway to draft some of the options themselves, and thus to anticipate specific regional needs or to be put in just the right position to better prepare students to continue their education. The options will also allow them to provide coursework in the German language or commercial skills as part of their programmes.

- Starting with the 2016-2017 school year, and in addition to the revision of the qualification structure, more experimentation will be permitted for cross-overs, in which innovative training programmes can be created that go off the beaten path by combining parts of several qualifications. Being permitted to engage in such experimentation is conditioned on an institution’s qualifications being insufficient to offer demonstrable job prospects.

- The Budget Agreement [begrotingsakkoord] stipulates that, starting in 2015, an extra EUR 75 million in funds will be made permanently available for improving technical and other expensive programmes. A committee will advise me on the price factor model that will enable MBO institutions to offer programmes that are in demand on the labour market.

**Combined learning pathway**

In order to create more leeway for innovative cooperation between MBO institutions and the business community, it will become possible for the institutions to offer a

\(^{20}\) The first application period for the Regional MBO Investment Fund opened on 12 May and closed on 8 June 2014.
combined learning pathway incorporating a traditional vocational education pathway [beroepsopleidende leerweg] ("BOL") with a practical vocational education pathway [beroepsbegeleidende leerweg] ("BBL"). The first part of the training is held in the classroom, the second in an on-the-job training environment. This will enable practice-oriented students who might otherwise fail to complete a programme due to the lack of work-study placements to carry on. From the student’s perspective, this will make opting for a vocational education more attractive, but businesses will also benefit from the combined learning pathway. They indicate that young people educated in this way are better prepared and can learn more on the shop floor. The combined learning pathway will also offer companies’ in-house training programmes more leeway to customise their training at the desired level. The Technology Factory [Techniekfabriek] run by NedTrain and ROC Twente is a good example of a training that structures such a learning pathway within the statutory framework. In the first school year, the lessons are devoted to safety issues and realistic practical situations, which ensures that the students are well-prepared for the work they do at NedTrain in the second school year. Current law, however, restricts the possibilities MBO institutions have to offer a combined learning pathway. For example, MBO institutions will not be able to "sell" a combined learning pathway as a separate education programme; they will always have to offer a full BOL or BBL programme. An MBO institution can only transfer a student from a BOL programme to a BBL programme at the student’s request. The requirements regarding teaching time also complicate setting up a combined learning pathway.

- Starting with the 2015-2016 school year, it will be possible to offer a combined (BOL/BBL) learning pathway by way of experiment. This will make it possible to offer more flexible options than is currently the case. Under the law, the experiment may last no longer than six years. This experiment will be structured so that it will not have any budgetary consequences.

More leeway will also entail the possibility to intervene if the programmes offered by MBO institutions are not tailored to the job market or if the concentration of certain programmes throughout a region is uneven. Educational institutions are increasingly acknowledging that partnerships are crucial to offering the best vocational education programmes possible. MBO15\(^2\) shows that more than half of the educational institutions base their course offerings in some way on the course offerings of other educational institutions in the region. Conversely, only a few educational institutions take an organised look beyond the world of education to assess the demands of the business community.\(^2\) This type of assessment must be expanded and embedded in the institutions. The House may soon expect a bill of measures designed to better tailor education to the job market. This bill will oblige MBO institutions to offer only those programmes which will in turn offer students the prospect of finding a job within a reasonable period of time after they graduate. In order to achieve this, it will be very important for educational institutions and the business community, united in the SBB, to agree a joint method of ensuring that programme offerings are tailored as much as possible to the job market. The Minister will be able to intervene in situations in which these joint agreements fall short of their goal. An independent advisory committee will advise the Minister in this respect.

**Education for vulnerable students**

Vulnerable students require specific attention. Guiding these students to a basic qualification or a place in the job market will require close cooperation with other educational institutions, municipalities, the business community and welfare agencies. In addition to adequate intake arrangements, customisation and flexibility must also be options built into the education system. This became clear during the interviews I held on my MBO Tour. I will support and provide incentives for

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\(^2\) MBO15 programme management supports educational institutions in their implementation of the Focus on Workmanship Action Plan.

\(^2\) MBO15. Portfolio policy in MBO education [Portfoliobeleid in het mbo], report dated February 2014, Ede, the Netherlands. MBO15 programme management supports educational institutions with the implementation of the Focus on Workmanship Action Plan.
providing a good education to vulnerable students. I will also put municipalities in a better position to contribute to the education provided to this group of students. Municipalities’ current role in preventing students from leaving school before graduation, along with placing the responsibility for youth social work with municipalities and implementing the new system of customised education, will offer them opportunities to adequately structure the education to be provided to these young people in their region.

- This autumn, an action plan will be issued with regard to providing education to vulnerable students. This plan will encompass more than MBO and will include a discussion, for example, of the problems this target group faces in secondary education.

**Lifelong learning**

The evolving job market also demands increasing people’s flexible employability by devoting more attention to continuing education throughout their careers. I consider it important for MBO education to play a larger role in adult education. In order to make this possible, we must make it a point to make MBO education more flexible for adults; for example, it should be possible for them to take only part of the coursework offered in a particular programme. Customisation will make it easier for employees to continue their education, which will benefit both employees and employers. In my policy response to the Rinnooy Kan committee advice regarding the availability of part-time higher education, I will also discuss the availability of MBO programmes.

- In order to make the available programmes more attractive to adults, I will in any case continue experimenting with dividing qualifications into units, with study credits being awarded that can be transferred (including at European level) between institutions (ECVET). It must also be possible to use optional modules for lifelong learning. This would enable adults – if they have sufficient proof of proficiency – to be exempted from these portions of a programme so that they can obtain a diploma in less time.
- I would like to explore whether, from the perspective of the target group of adults, there is a more flexible way of dealing with the requirements relating to language, arithmetic, career skills, and citizenship.
- With effect from the 2016-2017 school year, in order to further stimulate and facilitate national and international transferability and student mobility, I ensure that the NLQF levels (Dutch qualification framework) are stated on diplomas and diploma supplements (see the Focus on Workmanship Action Plan).

### 3.2 Learning a trade improves future job prospects

Generally speaking, our society does not think very highly of learning a trade. This attitude has had far-reaching consequences; a great deal of talent has gone to waste because students who are naturally practical often still opt to pursue a general secondary education. If we want to do right by what these young people can do and who they are, we must work towards a broader orientation of teaching and talent development. The development of skills – specifically including the 21st century skills such as creative problem-solving ability – must enable students to think in terms of opportunities. The Netherlands is in a good position; the scores our MBO graduates receive on key skills (such as language and arithmetic skills and

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23 This is in contrast to the earlier announcement (House of Representatives, year of session 2013-2014, 26695, 94) that the action plan would be sent to the House this spring. Working out the solutions has taken longer than expected.

24 In our letter dated 5 March 2014 (House of Representatives, year of session 2013-2014, 26 695, no. 94), the Secretary of Education and I notified the House of this plan in response to the concerns and advice expressed by municipalities, institutions, and the Education Council. That plan will also discuss the Smits motion (House of Representatives, year of session 2013-2014, 33 187, 33).

problem-solving ability) are higher than the average achieved by graduates of higher-level programmes in some other countries (PIAAC). Getting language and arithmetic skills to an acceptable level and keeping them there remains a challenge for MBO programmes. I will inform you in more detail about this issue in the language and arithmetic progress report I will be sending to the House in June. In its recently published report entitled "Opportunities for Workmanship in Vocational Education", the SCP noted that a stronger emphasis on workmanship could also make MBO programmes more attractive.

- The Technology Pact [Techniekpact] stipulates that all primary schools will offer science and technology as a subject by 2020. In the context of his response to the SLO survey of the primary education curriculum, the Secretary of Education will examine the status of practical skills in both primary and secondary education. Interesting initiatives are already being undertaken in secondary education, such as the technologically oriented "technasia" in HAVO and pre-university programmes and the business schools in HAVO programmes, which use elective coursework for utilising career-oriented skills. These are ways of better developing the technological and practical talents of HAVO and pre-university students. The State Secretary and I will be examining how we can improve the transition process from HAVO/pre-university and MBO programmes to HBO programmes.

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Continuous learning pathways from pre-vocational secondary education to vocational education to higher vocational education

There is a great deal of differentiation in the Dutch education system, which can sometimes make it difficult for pupils and students to figure out which level and type of education is best for them. Education must therefore be offered in learning pathways that are consistent with young people’s talents. The Secretary of Education and I want to ensure well-defined learning pathways and students’ smooth transition from secondary education to vocational education in order to improve their chances of success. This is why we have begun experimenting with the workmanship and technology learning pathways. These experiments intensify and abbreviate learning pathways. This will enable institutions to offer more attractive vocational training programmes to students who are clearly oriented towards a certain vocation early on.

The "trade school" [vakcollege] option has shown that, with regard to the transition from pre-vocational education to vocational education, it is possible to offer inspiring training in a particular trade to the group of young people who want nothing more than to get working in practical situations from the earliest stage of their education. In recent years, trade schools have helped to put workmanship on the agenda, with regard to both pre-vocational programmes and employers.

Pupils who follow the "trade school" path in a pre-vocational education programme are exposed to workmanship from the first year of the programme. This motivates pupils and ensures that they are well-prepared for an MBO programme. The aforementioned workmanship experiment is making it possible to substantially increase the number of sites that currently offer pupils a trade school pathway. The Secretary of Education and I are therefore offering the Vakcollege Groep the opportunity to participate in the workmanship pathway experiment. The field is interested in further increasing the number of trade schools. In this same simple manner we will also be enabling any new trade schools to participate in the workmanship pathway experiment. This will enable even more young people to follow a course of education that is right for them.

The MBO also plays a significant role as a conduit to continued education. For example, nearly half of students who graduate at MBO level 4 (46 percent in the BOL programme) immediately continue their education in a HBO programme. In the first year, the drop-out rate at HBO level is substantially higher amongst former MBO students than among former HAVO pupils, but the success rate after five

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26 The Vakcollege Groep can submit a collective request for all of the trade schools.
years is somewhat higher for former MBO students than for former HAVO pupils.\textsuperscript{27}

The House has already been informed about the increased stringency of the requirements being imposed on the transition from MBO to HBO.\textsuperscript{28}

- The first experiments with the workmanship pathway – involving a continuing line of education from the third year of VMBO to MBO level 2 – will commence in the 2014-2015 school year. The Secretary of Education and I are also planning an experiment with MBO level 3 beginning with the 2016-2017 school year. This experiment will enable young people to develop and improve their vocational skills even further. The trade school concept will also be able to add “workmanship pathways” by offering a level 3 education (see the figure above).\textsuperscript{29} The Inspectorate intends to assign a special inspection team to take an integrated approach to regulating the continuous learning pathway at the interface between secondary and vocational education.

- An experiment with the “vocational pathway” will begin starting in the 2016-2017 school year. This vocational pathway entails the improvement of the continuous learning pathway from VMBO to MBO to HBO. The vocational pathway is an expansion to the HBO level and to other sectors of the on-going technology pathway experiment, which will focus on the transition to level-4 technological training (see the figure above) beginning with the 2014-2015 school year.

\textsuperscript{27} The drop-out rate after 1 year is 21.5% among former MBO students, and 11.6% among for former HAVO pupils. After five years, the success rate for former HAVO pupils is 47.7%, while that for MBO students is 50.2%. After eight years, the success rate for former HAVO pupils is 71.3%, while that for former MBO students is 66.7%. Information on this topic can be found at: http://www.vereniginghogescholen.nl/vereniging-hogescholen/feiten-en-cijfers/cat_view/60-feiten-en-cijfers/63-onderwijs.

\textsuperscript{28} See, e.g.: Parliamentary Documents II, year of session 2013-2014, 31,288, no. 359.

\textsuperscript{29} The motion made by MP Jadnanansing (PvdA) will be taken into consideration in structuring the experiment (see, e.g.: House of Representatives, year of session 2013–2014, 31 524, no. 198).
Recognisable vocational education

In order to increase the recognisability of MBO levels for students, parents and the business community, and to do justice to the nature of the levels, I believe that the names of vocational education levels need to be changed. This was also pointed out to me many times during my MBO Tour. With the implementation of the entry-level programme, “level 1” has already been eliminated. The name changes must be extended to other levels of MBO education. For example, we might from now on refer to MBO levels 2 and 3 as post-secondary vocational education [middelbaar vakonderwijs] and level 4 as post-secondary professional education [middelbaar beroepsonderwijs]. Naturally, we must always preserve students’ options to transfer from post-secondary vocational education to post-secondary professional education.

• Along with those involved in the field of education (administrators, teachers, pupils and students) and in the business community, I intend to explore the possibility of other names for the various levels of education.

Education for talented students

MBO students themselves are indicating that they would welcome more challenging programmes. Talented MBO students must be offered an ambitious programme of education, just as talented primary and secondary school pupils are. In the MBO arena, I want to determine whether students can be afforded an opportunity after graduation to pursue their trade to the highest level and receive the title of master. Because talented students who wish to pursue their education at HBO level must have challenging coursework available to them while they are still following their MBO programme, I want to promote excellence in MBO education. Excellence will make vocational education more attractive by devoting additional attention to top-level achievements and role models, and by increasing student awareness of these. Experience in higher education (which has had an excellence policy for ten years) also teaches that education for talented students has positive effects on the quality of regular education. In the context of a new excellence programme for MBO education, I want to propose that MBO institutions develop a programme that gets broad support from both within and outside institutions. This must result in ambitious plans and courses that offer more in-depth and broader education, courses that will enable the best students to pursue a higher level of workmanship. The mission statement must clearly formulate what the institution wishes to achieve and how those achievements will be expressed in terms of quantifiable performance. Knowledge-sharing will play an important role in the programme, which must be partly implemented by a research project on excellence in MBO education.

• The 2014 budget agreements stipulate that, starting in 2015, EUR 25 million will be reserved each year for an excellence in MBO programme. The idea is that MBO institutions will be able to participate in this programme by submitting plans to a steering group that will supervise their ambitions and quantifiable performance.

• A specific part of the excellence programme will be working with the business community to develop a modern take on the master-journeyman relationship. The title of master is already used for goldsmiths, silversmiths, maîtres d’hotel, chimney sweeps and plasterers. Several institutions, including Cibap, Media College, HMC College of Woodworking and Interior Design and St. Lucas have indicated their desire to create this relationship in the context of several new vocations in the creative industry, such as game design (serious gaming) and community management, Furniture Restorer, and 2D/3D design. Various regional education centres have also indicated their willingness to work on adapting this concept. The Royal Association MKB Nederland also favours this development. The title of master is conferred by the relevant industry, and that will not change. Industrial organisations and businesses are also responsible for determining which

employees qualify as masters. As part of this programme, I will be asking MBO institutions to make agreements with the business community in this regard. I will also be exploring whether this programme can include an internationalisation component, for example, through participating in international skills competitions or by otherwise gaining cross-border experience. Finally, I will be investigate whether it will be possible to extend excellence by supporting programmes involving partnerships between MBO institutions and schools offering HAVO/pre-university or HBO programmes.

- It will be important for MBO institutions to create a learning environment that enables students to utilise their full potential. A cum laude notation on a diploma might be helpful in this respect.

Associate Degrees (ADs), which are awarded for completing certain two-year programmes at HBO level, are attractive to students who want to continue studying after completing their MBO programme. AD programmes are a form of education that is important to ensuring that students find the right place for themselves and thus have better job prospects. Participation in AD programmes has risen by 25% in the last year. Thorou cooperation between MBO and HBO programmes will be essential for MBO students who want to continue studying in an AD programme immediately after graduating or after acquiring a few years’ work experience.

- I will be closely following the development of AD programmes and will take measures where necessary to reinforce the cooperation between MBO and HBO programmes.

3.3. The quality of vocational education can and must be improved

People can only become well-educated and resilient tradespeople if they receive a high-quality vocational education. We are well on the way to improving the quality of our vocational education, but we can definitely go much farther than we have. This is why it is important to continue the implementation of the Focus on Workmanship MBO Action Plan. As a supplement to the action plan and the 2011-2015 administrative agreement, I want to reach quality-improvement agreements with MBO institutions.31 An administrative agreement will be reached later this year with the MBO sector with regard to, among other things, further detailing the quality agreements. The conclusion of this administrative agreement will depend on the agreements the social parties make regarding a new collective agreement (National Education Agreement [Nationaal Onderwijs Akkoord]). Experience with the drop-out approach shows that making specific agreements, as well as monitoring compliance with those agreements and providing support, provides good incentives for improving quality. The Ministry's account managers will also play a role in the new quality agreements. The quality of school administrators, teachers and instructors are determinative of the quality of education. The teachers' agenda I have developed sets ambitious targets for improving the quality of teaching staff.

MBO colleges and their management

A good education must be both recognisable and provided by professional institutions. Institutions must also have a certain amount of financial resources to be able to anticipate developments and handle fluctuations in student populations and course offerings. This must always be coupled, however, with a feeling of being known in the MBO institution and concentration on the primary objective of education. The situation at the Amarantis Education Group has taught us that trying to be as big as possible and playing hardball with the competition does not do education any favours. The administrators end up being far from their primary objective, which is to provide a good education.

The human touch must be solidly embedded in the institution. The human touch in small-scale vocational education has had positive effects on the quality of that

31 See the letter regarding quality agreements with MBO institutions: Parliamentary Documents II, 2013-2014, 31 524, no. 189.
education: studies, even those carried out in other education sectors, show that a student’s chances of successfully completing his programme increase when he feels at home at his school and is part of a group. That feeling of being at home, which is naturally inextricably linked to one’s fellow students and teachers, is also seen as a factor that reduces the drop-out rate and study delays.

During my MBO Tour, I noted that many programmes were attempting to organise small-scale education within regional education centres (“ROCs”). Good examples of this were observed at ROC Twente and ROC Midden Nederland. Because I consider this development to be a positive one, I want to introduce a new administrative model: the association of MBO colleges, which will involve organising the education into separate colleges. The colleges will focus on a particular industry or sector, enabling institutions to better position their organisational units as MBO colleges headed by a director. This will provide more certainty for the institutions and clarify their structures to the outside world as well. The institution as a whole will then be able to refer to itself as an association of MBO colleges, a title I will be including in the law. The board of an association of MBO colleges will be ultimately responsible for the education those colleges provide.

This administrative model is also intended to provide incentives to teacher supervisors within the new MBO college to be developed. I will do this by introducing the position of college director. Although many MBO institutions have already made a start with improving their teaching supervision, the impression given by assessing the professionalisation and HRM policy indicates that much work remains to be done, particularly with regard to the administrative aspects of supervision. In this respect, I am thinking primarily of adequate supervision and managing the basic quality of the primary process: developing and assessing teaching teams based on their knowledge, pedagogical and didactic action, cooperation with the business community to enrich practical know-how, examinations, course offerings, rostering and execution.32 The lagging quality of examinations in MBO programmes illustrates the necessity for such improvement.

I am expressly asking all MBO administrators to consider applying this model, particularly when it comes to the human touch in their institutions. Naturally, the internal governance structure will – within the boundaries of the law – continue to be the responsibility of the competent authority.

In terms of goals, this administrative model harmonises well with the 2011-2015 administrative agreement, which orders the MBO sector to better embed and improve the skills of their institutions’ management, particularly with regard to supervision.33 The more prominent positioning of the MBO college director will help them achieve this goal. This was also illustrated by the Inspectorate’s recent study of the role administrators play in improving the quality of primary and secondary education.34 By adopting a structure of MBO colleges and the position of college director, MBO institutions will be following the proven system used at university level, with faculties and the dean acting as teaching supervisors. The executive board will remain ultimately responsible and will of course retain its statutory powers, such as those relating to financing, accommodation, accessibility of the programmes, and managing the effectiveness of those programmes.

- I will propose embodying the position of MBO college director in the law with effect from 1 August 2017 in order to reinforce institutions’ human touch and improve their teaching supervision. The details of the division of responsibilities between the executive board and the college director will be worked out in detail in this statute.

**ICT in education**

32 MBO 15, 2013, HRM in order and the professionalisation bar set higher, the sequel [HRM op orde en de professionalisering bar omhoog, Het vervolg], Ede.
ICT offers us opportunities to improve the quality of education. For example, ICT can contribute to offering a flexible education programme based on the student’s needs. Multimedia teaching materials, gamification and simulations have a positive effect on student performance. An increasing number of platforms are being developed that offer individualised learning by linking the content of teaching materials to students’ educational objectives, all at the level of an individual student.

ICT can also support educational institutions in their quest for flexibility and customised lessons, for example by distance learning through social media to improve “real time” interaction. The sector itself has taken the initiative to more collectively manage the offering of qualitatively high-quality virtual teaching materials at administrative level. I am waiting to see the results of these efforts and will take additional measures if necessary.

Examinations
The value of a diploma must never be subject to any doubt. The quality of examinations, however, is a cause of great concern. The most recent Education Report [Onderwijsverslag] indicates that the examination quality for many programmes is inadequate. In 2013, for example, nearly a quarter of the government-funded programmes were administering examinations that did not meet the relevant requirements. These inadequate examinations are generally those developed by the institutions themselves. Conversely, the quality of examinations purchased from outside the institution is virtually always adequate.

The insufficient level of quality assurance when it comes to examinations is an issue that requires the attention of the relevant examination committees. The Inspectorate notes that many programmes’ examinations committees do not function well, partly because they are unclear as to the extent of their authority. Although I support schools in their efforts to standardise exams and improve the professional skills of their examination officials, including the members of their examination committees, these efforts have not resulted in an improvement of examination quality across the board, and general commitment to improvement is apparently lacking.

- I will require all schools to purchase examinations only from certified examination suppliers or to have the examinations they develop themselves, either individually or jointly, be externally validated. I want to implement this statutory obligation on 1 August 2016, simultaneously with the implementation of the revised qualification structure.
- I want to clarify the duties of the examination committee in the Adult and Vocational Education Act [WEB], in which respect I will also be examining which additional requirements I will be imposing on examination committees. I would like this obligation to enter into effect on 1 August 2016 as well.

The measures outlined above will be worked out in more detail over the coming months in consultation with the sector. This will in any case involve an investigation of how institutions can have their examinations externally validated.

Supervision of quality
During my MBO Tour, some MBO institutions indicated that the Inspectorate’s regulation, which is accomplished by means of standardisation in quality assurance and administering examinations, does not always seem to do justice to the efforts being made in the field to improve quality. The Inspectorate’s supervision is partly oriented on bolstering the institutions’ culture of improvement. Given the institutions’ comments, the Inspectorate’s report will more expressly link its assessment of quality assurance to the quality and risks it has already observed at a given institution. This will serve to clarify the point that quality assurance is not the same as quality itself. In my view, the Inspectorate is the keystone of quality assurance. The responsibility for improving the quality of education lies primarily

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35 OCW, Regulation in transition [Toezicht in transitie], The Hague (House of Representatives, year of session 2013–2014, 33 905, no. 1).
with MBO institutions, teachers, and the director as the supervisor. I want to promote a system in which MBO institutions support one another in improving the quality of education and form close ties with the businesses in their community. The creation of the MBO Quality Network [Kwaliteitsnetwerk mbo], in which context directors learn from one another in setting up their quality assurance structure, is evidence of the need for such a system.

- I want to examine what the possibilities are for MBO institutions to learn from one another. Quality can be improved by learning from one another, exchanging best practices, and pointing out instances of substandard quality. I will be availing myself of the experiences gained in higher education in this regard. Learning from one another encourages flipping the system, which assigns teachers a central role in striving for quality improvement.
- The Education Inspectorate will soon implement new pilot supervision programs at education cluster (teaching team) level. Embedding the position of director as supervisor in the law will also offer institutions options with regard to better harmonising supervision with their organisational structure. This will also mean that an assessment will be issued at a recognisable level at the colleges. Moreover, an institution’s Executive Board, as the body ultimately responsible for the quality of education, is always the starting point for the Inspectorate’s supervisory activities.
- For situations in which the quality of one or more of an institution’s programmes continues to be substandard, I will be examining the possibilities of revoking the institution’s licences for that programme within a particular catchment area or on a college-by-college basis. I will also be examining how students can continue their education after a programme is discontinued. This will ensure that this measure only affects programmes with a poor performance record. In this respect, I also want to examine what the possibilities would be for separating practical vocational education from traditional vocational education, since a negative quality assessment of an institution’s traditional vocational programme would automatically encompass its practical vocational programme, even though the situations, target groups and teaching concepts are entirely different.

3.4 Decrease in the number of students increases importance of partnerships

The decreasing number of students is a serious problem that is affecting the entire education sector. The Education Secretary has already written a letter to the House regarding the measures designed to help primary and secondary schools deal with shrinking student populations. I am consciously choosing a somewhat different approach for the MBO sector, because the effects of shrinking student populations are currently being felt primarily in individual programmes or programme clusters rather than schools or institutions as a whole.

Where shrinking student populations threaten schools’ ability to offer a broad and effective range of programmes, or jeopardise the quality of those programmes, schools will have to improve their cooperation with one another to keep a broad range of programmes available. Fewer and fewer students per programme per institution will mean less financial leeway for investing in the quality of education. This shrinkage could result in a situation in which institutions attempt to attract large numbers of students to keep their heads above water without taking into account the effect such actions could have on the demand on the labour market.

These developments are also making it necessary for us to give more thought to how the MBO system is structured. In regions where shrinking student populations would make maintaining multiple ROCs in the same catchment area ineffective, the view is that government-funded vocational education should be provided by associations of MBO colleges that focus on the city or region where they are located. In regions where there is a great deal of demand for certain programmes,
multiple institutions with similar course offerings can continue to operate side by side, so that students will have a choice of institution. However, the effectiveness of the course offerings will have to be closely monitored in these situations. Where students do not have a choice of several MBO institutions, other administrative tools will have to be used to ensure that attention stays focused on the quality of education. To that end, my aim is to make MBO institution performance more transparent, including by providing objective information to students. I will be giving stakeholders a stronger voice, making examination requirements more stringent, and concluding quality agreements with all MBO institutions. This will ensure that MBO institutions that have little or no regional competition have sufficient incentive to ensure that they offer a qualitatively good education.

- I will propose that a provision should be included in the law with effect from 1 August 2017 mandating ROCs to offer a broad range of programmes in their regions. I will be basing this on the rationale underlying the present law. ROCs must work together to satisfy this statutory obligation (see below). An executive board can then ensure that MBO colleges offer a broad range of programmes (see section 3.2).

Types of cooperation
Cooperation between MBO institutions will make it possible to offer expensive, innovative programmes or to cope with shrinking student populations. For example, institutions in the northern part of the Netherlands are trading off technical programmes so that there will be enough students in each program. In the southern part of the country I have seen MBO institutions joining forces to ensure that they do not offer programmes in which very few students are interested.

During my MBO Tour, I heard that a great deal of energy and time was being wasted because MBO institutions have to keep reinventing the wheel when acting in partnership with one another. In order to prevent this, I will be eliminating obstacles where necessary and clarifying the amount of leeway institutions have to jointly offer programmes. The diploma can note the partnership between the institutions, so that it can be ascertained where the student acquired his education (see the figure below for an example of two MBO institutions that are organised as an association of MBO colleges with an MBO combined school).
I will be offering Rotterdam-based ROCs Albeda College and Zadkine more liberal possibilities for collaboration as an MBO combined school – in addition to the aforementioned administrative model of an association of MBO colleges – which offers attractive prospects for recognisably and effectively structuring vocational education. I consider their proposal to form a combined technical college to be a wise one, and I have already stated that I will eliminate any administrative or other obstacles that hinder them in this respect.

Up until now, it has been the administrators indicating that, after a merger, they want to split up the ROCs into new schools, each of which would have its own supervisory and executive boards. I heartily endorse the movement towards increased cooperation for the purpose of enhancing macro-effectiveness, and structuring the schools as small-scale institutions that will be readily recognised by the business community. However, splitting the institutions into new MBO schools that concentrate on a particular sector or industry would leave the schools too financially vulnerable and would increase the administrative burden.

Completely independent MBO schools that focus on only one or a few sectors would find it difficult to cope with fluctuations in student population and changing labour market conditions, which would jeopardise their financial continuity. Mitigating this risk would require the sectoral schools to grow to the point that the benefits of being a small-scale school would be lost. Ultimately, the primary objective is to offer small-scale programmes, but those programmes need not be offered by completely independent schools. There must be a sufficient number of teachers and the colleges within an institution must not be too large. A certain amount of financial resilience at institution level is indispensable to achieving such a goal.

Moreover, splitting the institutions into independent colleges would create new problems relating to delineating programme portfolios for schools in regions that already have a large number of MBO institutions. This situation was demonstrated when the Amarantis Education Group was split up. A drastic restructuring such as that proposed for the Rotterdam-based Albeda and Zadkine will require a great deal of money and energy. I would rather see these funds and energy invested in the quality of the education provided.

With the association of colleges model and the broader possibilities for cooperation, such as the MBO combined school, I offer an alternative. I consider this a sounder administrative model that will ensure that the benefits of scale – which are needed in situations such as those involving financial fluctuations or fluctuations in student populations – meet the need to ensure an institution's human touch and recognisability.

• I will propose that, with effect from 1 August 2017, the law should include an administrative model for an MBO combined school. This model will make it easier for institutions to make joint programme offerings. It will also designate which duties must be undertaken by school management and which must be undertaken by the executive board of the combined MBO institutions. In this respect, I will follow the possibilities already provided by the legislation on higher education.

• With the introduction of this new administrative facility, I will also be ensuring that it will be clear in the future which students have followed programmes at such a combined institution. By embodying this type of partnership and its requirements in the law, I hope to eliminate any uncertainty regarding the levy of VAT in cases involving staff secondments between MBO institutions. Administrative systems that are currently problematic at times, such as the student success rate in a program offered jointly (i.e. the annual result), will be harmonised with the MBO combined school.
Mergers
As I recently indicated to the House, the merger test is an important tool for ensuring that the human touch and freedom of choice remain part of the education system. Too many mergers could jeopardise the freedom of choice in education. A well-functioning merger test is needed because institutions and school boards that are too large might distance the administration too far from the shop floor and thus jeopardise the administration’s legitimacy. Depending on the regional context, it might be beneficial for two MBO entities or institutions to merge in order to ensure that the programmes they offer are effective and tailored to the job market. A merger must be conducive to improving quality while at the same time preventing a situation in which entities and institutions begin operating outside their remit. The Education Merger Testing Committee [Commissie Fusietoets in het Onderwijs] (“CFTO”) performs this test on a case-by-case basis and then advises me on each merger, taking into account such factors as the differences between urban and rural areas. Currently, the merger test provides a black-and-white result: a merger can only be 100% approved or 100% rejected. Merger tests in other sectors, such as health care, offer more room to manoeuvre. Such a test might be more appropriate for the MBO sector. I have agreed with the CFTO that I will ensure that the debate on the legislation includes the possibility of issuing conditional merger advice. I also want to ensure that the small-scale character of education is retained after a merger, particularly through applying the association of MBO colleges model. My adjustments to the merger test will be consistent with these goals.

• The merger test will prioritise students’ ability to opt for a vocational programme of their choice. In a situation involving a decreasing student population, this factor will carry more weight than the choice of multiple institutions, particularly if their programme offerings are more or less the same. The latter situation will occur when programmes are dispersed throughout an urban area.
• The merger test will also take into account the fact that institutions will only be permitted to merge if the programme is offered on a small scale. The institutions must be able to convincingly demonstrate that their programmes will continue to have a human touch. This can be accomplished, for example, by applying the new association of MBO colleges model. This amendment to the merger test rules is intended to enter into effect on 1 August 2015.
• It will also be important to provide better information on the merger test. I have agreed with CFTO that they will publish a guideline for all stakeholders in the MBO sector, including the representatives of school boards, teachers, and students.

Specialised trade schools [Vakinstellingen]
In addition to ROCs and Agricultural Education Centres (“AOCs”) – which may or may not be part of an association of MBO colleges – there are specialised trade schools that offer national certification in particular trades, such as SVO (specialising in food preparation) and the Leiden Instrument Makers’ School [Leidse Instrumentenmakersschool]. Because specialised trade schools offer high-quality education, I want to make sure they continue to operate. In its final form, I believe our system should include specialised trade schools whose course offerings do not overlap with those of the ROCs and AOCs or, in the future, the associations of MBO colleges.

Small-scale specialised programmes that offer good job prospects require specific attention. These are innovative training programmes that barely keep their heads above water because of their small student populations and fragmentation of the course. The SER’s advisory report on the skilled trades also draws attention to this issue.

• I will make an arrangement limiting the issue of certain qualifications to specialised trade schools and AOCs with effect from 1 January 2017.

This should prevent any unnecessary overlap with the programmes offered by other MBO institutions.

- In order to make training in small-scale, unique trades available in the future (such as those for orthopaedic shoemakers, glaziers, and orthodontic appliance specialists), I am considering transferring these programmes to a specialised trade school. I am therefore seeking someone to study the issue and advise me before the end of the year regarding the feasibility of, and support for, such transfer. Part of this study would relate to the question of whether MBO institutions are prepared to transfer these small-scale, unique programmes from their portfolios to this new specialised trade school. This will prevent these programmes from being cut back or eliminated altogether. Transferring these programmes to a new specialised trade school will increase their recognition in the business community and among students, as well as an MBO institution’s ownership of that programme. Given that vocational education is regulated entirely by law, any new specialised trade school would have to be provided for through formal legislation.

Agricultural education centres (AOCs)

AOCs will retain their unique position beside that of the ROCs and specialised trade schools. They do not offer nationally unique programmes like the specialised trade schools, yet they do operate on a larger regional scale than the ROCs in order to keep agriculturally oriented vocational training with good job prospects available over a wide area. The Minister for Agriculture [staatssecretaris van EZ] will soon conclude a pact with the institutions (AOCs, green universities of applied sciences and Wageningen University) and businesses in the horticulture industry. This pact will include agreements between the government, institutions, and businesses on such issues as optimal cooperation between VMBO, MBO, HBO and secondary education programmes specific to certain areas of the country and at sector level.

AOCs that have a Centre for Innovative Workmanship [Centrum voor Innovatief Vakmanschap] organised at sector level (or a Centre of Expertise for agriculturally oriented education programmes) will play a key role in forging links between commercial sectors and the entire vertical education system (secondary-MBO-HBO). At regional level, as well, we will be seeking specific connections between MBO institutions and businesses, for example by effecting the cross-overs being demanded by the business community. The pact includes an agreement that the AOCs will continue to work together on these regional clusters alongside the HBO programmes offered by green universities of applied sciences. The AOCs may also derive significant benefits from following a new organisational structure such as the “community of MBO colleges”.

4. Final note

We may not know what the world will be like in 30 years, but we do know that we will have to exercise our creativity and problem-solving abilities to their fullest if we are to enable ourselves to adjust to the evolving labour market. Students must be given the opportunity to utilise their full potential by following an excellent-quality MBO programme that offers future job prospects. I invite all of the stakeholders in the MBO system to work with me to tackle the challenge of developing a future-proof MBO education system, for our society, for our future economic growth, and most of all, for our students.

Also on behalf of the Minister of Economic Affairs,

Dr Jet Bussemaker

37 Life, Food & Planet, Education, the business community and the government jointly invest in top-quality education [Onderwijs, bedrijfsleven en overheid investeren samen in toponderwijs].
Appendix: Legislative agenda

The implementation agenda consists of three legislative packages. With the goal of completeness in mind, bills have also been drafted in relation to the Focus on Workmanship Action Plan or the “Building Bridges” Coalition Agreement [Regeerakkoord ‘Bruggen slaan’]. This appendix does not take into account any legislative amendments that could result from the studies referred to in this letter.

**Package 1: Regional renewal**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Legislation</th>
<th>Proposed effective date (start of experiment / programme)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellence in MBO programme (p. 15 of the enclosed letter)</td>
<td>Regulation</td>
<td>1 January 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiment with opportunity to offer a combined BOL/BBL learning pathway (p. 9)</td>
<td>General administrative order</td>
<td>1 August 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiment offering leeway to deviate from national qualification structure (innovative cross-overs) (p. 8)</td>
<td>General administrative order</td>
<td>1 August 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiment with expanding workmanship pathway to level 3 (p. 13)</td>
<td>General administrative order</td>
<td>1 August 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiment with the vocational pathway as a successor to the technology pathway, with expansion to all sectors at level 4 and HBO (p. 13)</td>
<td>General administrative order</td>
<td>1 August 2016*</td>
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* Depending on the structure of the experiment, this may also be expanded a year later to HBO (as a result of DUO’s alternate registration of students).

**Package 2: Quality of education**

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Legislation</th>
<th>Proposed effective date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Requirement to use examinations purchased from certified examination suppliers or internally developed examinations that have been externally validated (p. 18)</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>1 August 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clarification of the duties of the examination committee and requirements for the examination committee (p. 19)</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>1 August 2016</td>
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**Package 3: Organisation of institutions and programmes offered**

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Legislation</th>
<th>Proposed effective date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Amendment of merger test regulation (pp. 23, 24)</td>
<td>Regulation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative model of association of MBO colleges with college director as teaching supervisor (pp. 17, 22)</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>1 August 2017*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Embedding requirement for ROCs to offer broad range of programmes (p. 21)</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>1 August 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative model of MBO combined school (p. 22, 23)</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>1 August 2017*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction of possibility for qualifications only to be awarded by specialised trade schools and AOCs</td>
<td>Statute</td>
<td>1 January 2017</td>
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Bills relating to the Focus on Workmanship Action Plan or the "Building Bridges” Coalition Agreement

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Legislation</th>
<th>Proposed effective date</th>
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<td>Statute</td>
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<td>Restructuring duties of knowledge centres (p. 7)</td>
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* Depending on the structure of the association of MBO colleges, it may take longer to adjust DUO’s administrative systems.