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Teachers matter

Strong foundation for the future

Summary of the action plan

'Teachers matter: tackling the teacher shortage and improving the position and quality of teachers in the Netherlands'

The Netherlands faces an impending shortage of good teachers

Education in the Netherlands is internationally acknowledged to be of a very high standard, producing good results. The vast majority of children enjoy attending school; research confirms that they are among the happiest children in the world. In surveys among parents, the quality of primary education is rated at an average of 7.8 (out of ten), while secondary education scores 7.4.

We wish to maintain and build upon the current high standards, but both the quality and the effectiveness of the Dutch education system are now under pressure. If problems are to be averted, the system must be able to rely on a fully professional teaching force. Research shows that teacher quality goes a long way towards determining student achievement. We must therefore intensify our efforts to recruit new high-quality teachers, and to retain those we already have.

*The **Commissie Leraren** (Commission on Teacher Recruitment and Retention), chaired by Alexander Rinnooy Kan, was asked to produce recommendations to this end. On 12 September 2007, the commission returned its final report "Leerkracht". The Action Plan (of which this document is a summary) represents the Dutch government's response.*

Targeted approach

The government endorses the broad outline of the Rinnooy Kan Commission's report. Good education requires expert and self-assured teachers who will enable all students to achieve their full potential. Such teachers provide a firm foundation for the individual and for society as a whole. It is precisely because teachers themselves are so important in terms of results that the various sectors of the education system have now been asked to assist in the process of educational reform and improvement, with each producing its own 'quality agenda'. Good teacher performance deserves appropriate recognition. Training must be of the highest possible quality, and teachers should enjoy attractive terms and conditions of employment. Teaching must once again be seen as a profession in its own right, with its practitioners accorded appropriate status and respect. We wish to place teachers 'on a pedestal'. Like the commission, we also believe that good education demands a strong school organization with good personnel policy.

The government intends to adopt many of the recommendations made by the Rinnooy Kan Commission. In some areas, however, we have opted for a slightly different approach. The result is a set of measures which will combine and interact to ensure the best possible result. The exact 'mix' has been determined on the basis of research and past experience.

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The main areas in which the chosen approach differs from the commission's recommendations are as follows:

- ⋮ There will be no automatic link between qualifications and rewards, since salary levels and other benefits must also reflect actual performance and results.
- ⋮ Measures addressing salary structures will apply to the primary, secondary, senior secondary vocational and higher professional sectors, but with an emphasis on secondary and senior secondary education.
- ⋮ A salary supplement (weighting allowance to encourage recruitment) is to be introduced, primarily benefiting teachers in the junior/vocational (vmbo) component of secondary education and the senior secondary vocational sector in the four major cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague) and in Almere, since it

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is here that the shortage of teachers is likely to manifest itself first and strongest.

- ⌘ The career lines (salary scales with periodic increments) are to be simplified in two stages, from 18 to 15 tiers, and thereafter from 15 to 12. With a view to staff retention, there will also be a (discretionary) supplement for teachers who perform well but are already paid at the highest possible tier within their salary scale.
- ⌘ Salaries for school managers in the primary sector are to be improved.
- ⌘ We intend to implement a professional register for teachers, to be administered by the sector itself (under private law) rather than by the government. It is felt that teachers themselves should remain the masters of their own profession and professionalism. A privately administered register is clearly more appropriate to this aim than a 'state' register.
- ⌘ Greater attention is to be devoted to innovation in the education process, the reduction of teachers' workload, and participation on the part of various groups.





Measures

To stave off the impending negative developments calls for a policy which addresses several points simultaneously. This action plan therefore represents a cohesive package of measures which focus on three specific themes: 'A stronger profession'; 'A more professional school' and 'Better rewards'. The full implementation of the action plan cannot be completed within a single government term of office. Both the measures and their funding are therefore subject to long-term planning.

A stronger profession

6 **We wish to ensure that teaching is once again seen as a profession in its own right, with its practitioners accorded appropriate status and respect. Accordingly, we intend to implement the following measures:**

- ⋮ A stronger professional organization for teachers will support the personal and professional development of its members. This organization should be run for and by teachers themselves. It would seem logical for the existing *Stichting Beroepskwaliteit Leraren* (Association for the Professional Quality of Teachers; SBL) to play a role in its development.
- ⋮ The government will consult with the new professional organization about ways in which two new professional registers can be set up: a general register of all qualified teachers, and a 'register of excellence'. These registers will be maintained by the teaching profession itself, thus emphasizing its willingness to invest in its own professionalization.
- ⋮ A fund is to be created to provide individual training grants, thus enabling teachers to obtain higher qualifications or to specialize. The fund will also reimburse schools in respect of the costs of substitute teachers. The profession is to be consulted about the eligibility criteria for a grant award.

- ⋮ Teacher training programs must be of indisputable quality. In January 2008, the Schools Inspectorate reported on the implementation and progress of the Policy Agenda for Teacher Training, 2005-2008. While taking the Inspectorate's findings into account, the government also intends to make agreements with teacher training colleges regarding the development of common course components and common final examinations.



A more professional school

8 To support teachers in enhancing their own quality and position within the school calls for a more professional school organization. We therefore intend to implement the following measures:

- ⋮ Agreements are to be made with the various sectors regarding ways in which the government can assist in strengthening the position of teachers. In particular, it is important to improve opportunities for consultation and co-determination, and to support the various organizational and administrative structures. This may entail the further roll-out of the concept of 'social enterprise' and the teachers' cooperative.
- ⋮ We shall amend current legislation to enable the Education Inspectorate to supervise the *quality* of schools' performance, in addition to its current responsibility of ensuring compliance with statutory requirements. The quality of the school's personnel policy will then become an even more relevant factor.




⋮ We shall make agreements with the social partners with a view to alleviating teachers' workload. This will entail greater participation on the part of other categories of school staff. There is to be a better balance between the actual teaching duties and the non-teaching responsibilities. Primary schools will have more support staff, while vocational education will make greater use of (suitably trained) professionals from the field. There will be better opportunities for 'fast-track' teacher training for those holding appropriate

qualifications, and recruitment efforts will focus on attracting more ethnic minority teachers and more male teachers in primary schools.

Better rewards

- 10 **An improved salary and benefits structure will assist in achieving higher overall quality in that it will provide better career prospects. It will also encourage better performance on the part of individual teachers, since qualifications and performance will play a greater role in appraisal and remuneration. Finally, this will enhance the competitive position of the teaching profession, thus assisting in recruitment. The following performance-related agreements are to be made with the social partners in the primary, secondary and senior secondary vocational education sectors:**





⌘ Qualifications and performance are to be rewarded by better career prospects:

⌘ The number of tiers in the salary scales is to be reduced in two phases, from 18 to 15 and thereafter from 15 to 12.

⌘ The automatic annual increment will be abolished.

⌘ Differentiation (of responsibilities and remuneration) will be enhanced by means of a 'function mix' for each sector.

⌘ A separate salary scale for holders of a post-graduate (PhD) degree is to be introduced.

⌘ A special supplement is to be introduced for teachers who perform well but who are already paid at the highest possible level within their salary scale.

⌘ Temporary supplements (weighting allowances) are to be introduced for teachers in secondary and senior secondary vocational education in the four large cities and Almere, and the salaries for primary school managers are to be increased.

⌘ The full-time working week is to be increased in phases from 36 hours to 40, with a concomitant increase in salary. There will also be better opportunities for part-time teaching staff and 'starters', with appropriate help and guidance offered to the latter by experienced teachers who opt to defer retirement (or forgo the entitlement to early retirement). By replacing the existing arrangements for senior staff (*Bevordering Arbeidsparticipatie Ouderen; BAPO*) with an 'age-aware personnel policy' which incorporates the flexible pension entitlement, it will be possible to retain the services of senior staff for longer.

Short-term measures

In order to address the immediate shortage of teachers, particularly in secondary and senior secondary vocational education, we shall focus our efforts on recruiting from the 'silent reserve' of qualified teachers currently employed in other sectors. There will also be 'fast-track' teacher training for holders of appropriate qualifications, and we shall attempt to encourage postgraduate students to spend (part of) their time in the classroom.



Why these measures will work

No cure, no pay

All the measures outlined in the action plan are to be subject to results-based agreements with the relevant social partners. These agreements will be formalized by means of a covenant entitled 'The more professional school'. Progress and results will be monitored at both the sector level and that of the individual school, with particular attention devoted to the aspects of salary differentiation, 'function mix' and the number of qualified teachers employed. Schools will be assessed on the basis of these performance indicators. They will receive additional resources if – and only if – the objectives set out in the covenant are attained. This is therefore a 'no cure, no pay' approach.

Accountability

Each school's board of management is accountable for quality of both education and management, as established by various legislative requirements. One specific requirement is that the board should implement a policy whereby individual members of staff are fully able to exercise their own responsibility in terms of professional expertise and the quality of education.

Co-determination by teachers plays a crucial role here. The teachers' representatives on the various co-determination bodies have the right to be consulted on staffing levels and on differentiation of responsibilities and remuneration. We intend to extend

both horizontal and vertical accountability. Schools' annual reports will be required to include aspects such as staff satisfaction, training, absenteeism and sick leave, salary differentiation, unfilled vacancies and the number of non-qualified staff employed. Schools will be encouraged to produce a full Annual Social Report.

Supervision

The new *Wet op het Onderwijstoezicht* (Education Supervision Act; WOT) states that the Education Inspectorate will monitor various aspects of schools' performance. The personnel policy, and measures within that policy to encourage the improvement of teacher quality, will therefore become an even more important factor in assessing the strength of the school as a whole and in deciding whether closer supervision is necessary.

Expected results

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The combination of better salaries and enhanced career opportunities is expected to retain more teachers in the education system. Projections made by the Central Planning Bureau suggest that implementation of the measures will reduce the expected teacher shortage in secondary education by one third, with more teachers deciding to remain in the education system and a greater inflow of new teachers.

The attractiveness of the teaching profession will be enhanced for both existing teachers and new recruits. Those teachers working part-time will be able to work more hours (hence enjoying better remuneration), while senior staff are likely to defer retirement if the terms and conditions are more favourable. Higher salaries and better career development opportunities will result in more students opting to enter teacher training, and more graduates from the teacher training colleges will actually go on to practise the profession of teacher. This effect was clearly visible following a previous revision of the salary structure (Van Rijn, 2001). Higher salaries and better career potential will also serve to attract graduates from other fields, as well as the 'silent reserve' of qualified teachers currently working in other sectors.



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