

Abstract 01/01E

Steering a course for BVE

SEER

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Steering a course for BVE

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Key issues

Senior secondary vocational education and adult education in the Netherlands – known jointly by the acronym *BVE* – face major challenges that they are well on their way to meeting. The Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science, Loek Hermans, has described these challenges in his policy memorandum *Steering a course for BVE (Koers BVE)*, but he has not focused enough attention on the dilemmas that educational institutions face. These dilemmas can be solved by setting strict priorities and a realistic timeframe for a well-defined quality strategy.

These are the conclusions reached in the advisory document on *Steering a course for BVE* that the Social and Economic Council (SER) discussed at its public meeting on Friday 19 January. The report was prepared by the Committee on Labour Market Issues under the chairmanship of Professor J.M.G. Leune. The Minister of Education, Culture and Science had requested the SER's opinion on 20 September 2000.

Challenges and dilemmas

According to the SER, the BVE sector as a whole faces major challenges. It must consider how it will help to increase the labour participation rate, remedy imbalances in the labour market and work towards helping those with real or potential disadvantages to achieve self-reliance and to participate fully in the life of their community. The BVE sector is vital to the labour market. Senior secondary vocational schools teach a total of 420,000 students, and adult education accounts for another 200,000.

Individual institutions will also find themselves coping with a large number of dilemmas. They must be both regional and international in outlook, provide tailor-made education and improve their success rate. They also have to cater for a wide variety of different parties (young people and seniors, long-term alien residents and newcomers, long-term unemployed and women re-entering the workforce), encourage the use of ICT and deal with different sources of funding, some of them public and some private. The SER believes that all these factors will soon be putting tremendous pressure on educational institutions. It therefore finds that the objectives should be made much more operational and quantifiable, and that the process of restructuring should take place within a realistic timeframe.

Quality strategy

According to the SER, the BVE sector is steering a course towards better performance. It will require a specific quality strategy to carry through properly to the end of this course. The strategy should ensure that adult

education is better aligned with one of the pathways in senior secondary vocational education, that senior secondary vocational education is better aligned with higher education, that the number of drop-outs falls and that access to education improves, for example by using ICT.

Numerous policy measures can go to make up this quality strategy. For example, the institutions should focus more specifically on their environments and encourage consultation with local authorities and businesses by producing quality performance reports. The quality of the examinations also needs improving. SER would wish to see the dynamic forces of the labour market have a more immediate impact on education than is now the case. Institutions can do this, for example, by emphasising their ties with trade and industry and by reserving space within their programmes to consider changes in the regional labour market. The SER also believes that the management of these institutions requires greater attention, and that the policy on working conditions and employment terms must be brought up to date.

Prospects

The BVE sector should reaffirm and reinforce its position within initial education for young people. It should also consider the growing importance of contract teaching for the employed and unemployed. The Regional Training Centres (ROCs) should become centres of *lifelong learning* and respond to new trends in the reintegration and employability market. That will require them to revise their programmes (to reflect demand) and to find a better balance between initial education and contract teaching.

The government will have to check regularly whether educational institutions are provided with enough funding to enable them to meet all their challenges. The institutions themselves will have to work more efficiently and effectively.

The SER applauds the intention of introducing more competition, more scope for market forces, and more sensitivity to the demand side of the BVE market, but would ask the Minister to elaborate on his ideas. The SER itself supports the idea of reinforcing the status of the sector's students and consumers. It also advocates the idea of promoting more competition between institutions. It eagerly looks forward to the results of the "individual learning accounts" experiment, in which employees have a savings account that can be used to purchase training.

The BVE sector in focus

Some basic facts

After the first phase of secondary education, two-thirds of all Dutch young people go on to *senior secondary vocational education* (MBO). It is also a “second chance” pathway that offers opportunities to enrol in further *adult education*.

Senior secondary vocational education is expanding its reach to include the employed, job-seekers, people re-entering the workforce and immigrants. Senior secondary vocational education provides a triple qualification: it enables graduates to enter the labour market, to enrol in further education and to function as part of the community. About 40% of the total working population in the Netherlands have completed a senior secondary vocational programme. Around 60% of those entering the labour market every year have just obtained their MBO qualification. The need for skilled employees continues to grow. The BVE sector (MBO and adult education combined) also helps ethnic minorities and those who are culturally disadvantaged to move towards self-reliance and integration into the life of their community.

In the last ten years, senior secondary vocational and adult education have undergone a radical process of restructuring, resulting in the Vocational and Adult Education Act (WEB), which went into force 1 January 1996. After a series of mergers, the number of funded educational institutions has dropped to 43 Regional Training Centres (ROCs), 15 Agricultural Training Centres (AOCs) and 19 other institutions (by comparison, in 1993 there were 330 institutions altogether).

Senior secondary vocational education

The total number of students in senior secondary vocational education is 416,365 (including those enrolled in pre-WEB training programmes). Most of the programmes that fall within the vocational education qualification structure (60%) are at the two highest qualification levels (3 and 4). In the economics, service and health-care sectors, the programmes at levels three and four are a multiple of those at levels one and two. The picture in the engineering and technology sector is more balanced: 45% at levels three and four as opposed to 55% at levels one and two.

Senior secondary vocational education is divided into two different “pathways”, both leading to the same qualifications. Two-thirds of the students are enrolled in the vocational educational pathway (BOL) and spend most of their time at school. The remaining third are enrolled in the vocational guidance pathway (BBL), which is basically an apprenticeship system. The 21 national, sector-related bodies for vocational education are involved in defining the educational goals. They also supervise the quality of

the 150,000 training companies. There are also 49 active examining institutes for senior secondary vocational education.

Specific target groups for senior secondary vocational education are ethnic minorities, students with deficient prior schooling, the disabled and women with technical training. For these groups, access and the possibility of obtaining qualifications are matters of special concern.

Adult education

The total number of people enrolled in adult education courses during the 1998/1999 academic year was 173,870. Most of these students are enrolled in lower-level courses. By definition, adult education courses are designed for specific groups of adults, for example those who have little prior schooling (the illiterate included) and ethnic minorities (including recent immigrants). Dutch as a second language and acclimatisation programmes are geared entirely towards ethnic minorities.

Steering a course

Although the BVE sector was recently restructured, the employers' associations, trade unions and Parliament are calling for a review of the position of the sector.

The aim of *Steering a course for BVE* is to bring the social significance of the sector into sharp focus and to describe the way the system operates and performs. The purpose of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science in publishing *Steering a course for BVE* was to describe the direction in which the sector is currently moving and to discuss the current policy initiatives, interesting developments, debates and potential dilemmas within a coherent framework. In this sense, the policy memorandum provides a literal description of the sector's current course.

The Social and Economic Council (SER) has been asked to issue an opinion about the direction outlined in the policy memorandum. This publication presents the English summary of the SER's advisory report.

Summary of the Advisory report

1. Introduction

Op 20 September 2000, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, Loek Hermans, asked the Social and Economic Council to publish an advisory report on his policy memorandum *Steering a course for BVE, Perspective for Senior Secondary Vocational Education and Adult Education (BVE)*.

The memorandum describes the mid-term prospects for the senior secondary vocational and adult education sector (known as the BVE sector) within an integrated policy framework. The actions it identifies are aimed at reinforcing the position of vocational education. More specifically, the Minister identifies the following goals in his policy memorandum:

- to lay down policy conclusions, mid-term views and directions for policy in the BVE sector;
- to present a coherent policy involving the themes of quality, access, self-management and accountability, and regional collaboration;
- to give the sector the attention it deserves, in view of its importance to the labour market.

In the following summary, the SER begins by looking at a number of more general aspects that transcend the separate themes. It then goes on to summarise its most important conclusions and recommendations.

2. General view of the SER

Evaluation framework

The SER has evaluated the policy measures described in *Steering a course for BVE* from a social and economic perspective. In line with the policy memorandum itself, it has therefore given less attention to the role of education in personal and social development.

The main question posed in the Minister's policy memorandum is how best to structure the BVE sector so as to enable it to meet its biggest challenges. A number of interrelated trends are relevant within this context: the intensification of the knowledge-based economy, changes in the labour market, the growing need for lifelong learning and the necessity, both now and in the future, of improving the labour participation rate and integration into the life of communities.

All of these factors mean that the BVE sector will soon be facing a number of *challenges* in the social and economic arena, which it will only be able to handle if it works together with the authorities and other interested parties. These challenges are:

- it must be able to meet forecast labour market shortages;
- it must increase and improve the transfer of graduates to follow-up educational pathways and the world of work;
- it must contribute to the employability of both the employed and the unemployed (which, in the SER's view, includes job-seekers – whether or not they are entitled to benefits –, people re-entering the workforce, the partly disabled and those returning after a career break);
- it must effectively prevent certain groups from ending up disadvantaged by offering tailor-made acclimatisation and adult education programmes, by helping refugees to update professional competencies acquired elsewhere and bring them up to Dutch standards, and by helping them to obtain starting qualifications.

With these factors in mind, it is important to know that training and employability are among the highlights of the main recommendations made by employers and employees during the collective negotiations in 2001, as set out in the Labour Foundation's recommendations on *More is required (Er is meer nodig)*. The aim is to improve the financial position of employees and to encourage their broad (and permanent) employability. The SER also took notice of the installation of the Impetus for Vocational Education and Training Steering Committee after the Autumn Consultations between the Cabinet and the Labour Foundation on 4 December 2000. The purpose of the steering committee is "to arrive at a commonly held understanding of the

need to facilitate and identify instruments for the various training activities in the branches/sectors of the economy”.

The policy memorandum Steering a course for BVE

The SER subscribes to the policy objectives that the Minister of Education, Culture and Science has set out in the policy memorandum *Steering a course for BVE*. The core of the policy still consists of the objectives identified in the Vocational and Adult Education Act (WEB). The tone of the policy memorandum is positive and constructive, making a positive contribution to the image of the BVE sector. The SER believes that this is highly important, in part owing to the problems that both the labour market and the BVE sector itself is encountering in finding employees. The SER is less satisfied with the integrated, broadly formulated nature of the policy memorandum, as it fails to adequately describe existing problems, the policy measures that the Minister believes are called for and what he believes will ultimately be achieved. In its advisory report, the SER therefore analyses a number of themes covered in the policy memorandum, comments on them and arrives at a number of recommendations. These are summarised in the section below. Before doing so, however, the SER would draw attention to a few aspects that transcend the separate themes.

Responsibilities pile up for ROCs

The tasks and responsibilities which have piled up for educational institutions (the ROCs and specialised trade schools) are putting tremendous pressure on them and may cause them to face a number of dilemmas; for example they have to be both regional and international in outlook, cater for the labour market and improve the position of disadvantaged groups, offer tailor-made services and ensure that disappointing success rates improve, serve a broad spectrum of different parties (including quite heterogeneous target groups) and learn to deal with various sources of funding, some of them private and some public. To complicate matters even more, no main priorities appear to have been set and there is no timeframe within which these institutions must have achieved their goals. Nor is there enough concern about the change in culture that the ROCs will have to make to function properly in the new system. The SER urges the Minister to make the objectives more operational and quantifiable, and to set a realistic timeframe for the innovations he envisages.

Evaluating the WEB

The SER finds it odd that the Minister has not timed his request for an opinion on *Steering a course for BVE* to run parallel to the evaluation of the Vocational and Adult Education Act (WEB) that is presently being carried out and whose results should be available in mid-2001. The Cabinet's response is likely to be published in September or October 2001. The SER believes that it

is very likely that the results of the WEB evaluation will throw new light on the subjects covered within the context of the Minister's request. It would therefore wish to be given the opportunity to comment on the WEB evaluation and the Cabinet's response to this evaluation.

Lifelong learning

The SER would also ask, with a view to the rising knowledge-based economy, that the growing importance of lifelong learning be given greater emphasis in the BVE sector. The ROCs are facing the challenge of offering a very heterogeneous group of students a suitable supply of courses and programmes. In its advisory report, which focuses specifically on the BVE sector, the SER only looks briefly at a related problem, i.e. the accessibility and quality of such courses and programmes and the present distribution of responsibility, which is inadequate to cope with this trend. The SER would wish to go into this important topic in more detail at another time, pending the results of the WEB evaluation, the Cabinet project focusing on the effectiveness of the training market, and the request for an opinion on lifelong learning in employment that the Cabinet has announced. When it finally does so, the SER believes it will be necessary to look comprehensively at all types of education and training for different groups – including those in employment, current and potential job-seekers (whether or not they are entitled to benefits), those re-entering the workforce, those who have taken a career break and the partly disabled, as well as at the possibility of people without starting qualifications to obtain them as yet. For the time being, the SER trusts that central government will increasingly shoulder some of the responsibility for developing and facilitating an educational system that promotes lifelong learning.

Interactive process

The SER has a very positive opinion about the interactive way Steering a course for BVE was developed and is now being elaborated, in part based on the recommendations of the Education Council and the SER. It considers this important because co-ordination will be required to meet the challenges facing the BVE sector. The SER believes that the Minister must maintain his dialogue with those in the field when setting out his policy principles. It also recommends that the Minister ask the SER's opinion of his strategic policy views on the BVE sector from time to time, in a procedure similar to that used for the Higher Education and Research Plan (HOOP). It may be worth considering whether this procedure should be made mandatory for the BVE sector, as it is for higher education and research.

Inter-ministerial co-ordination

In the SER's opinion, the Minister's focus of attention in his policy memorandum remains firmly on the BVE sector. Because this is a sector that interfaces with so many others, however, and those other sectors are ones that will furthermore be increasing in significance as the knowledge-based economy expands and employability becomes a permanent matter of concern, the SER believes it will be important for the various ministries to co-ordinate their policy efforts properly and come to firm agreements. It would therefore praise efforts by the Minister to continue taking the lead in co-ordinating national policy more closely.

3. Conclusions

Managing and taking responsibility

The SER generally supports the Minister's views on some of the future administrative and organisational aspects of the BVE sector, specifically with respect to further decentralising policy implementation. It would also urge the Minister to pay closer attention to central government's task of safeguarding the national framework as he reviews his policy memorandum.

One of the key elements of the policy memorandum is how best to encourage the ROCs to improve their quality and accessibility while not losing sight of their effectiveness and success rate. For the Minister, much can be achieved by boosting the status of the student (see the paragraph on Quality below) and improving collaboration between the parties. In that connection, the SER has recommended that the terms "accountability" and "communication" or "collaboration" be defined more closely and used uniformly.

Speaking in general, the SER does not see that *Steering a course for BVE* presents an unambiguous and well-considered management model for the BVE of the future. It would ask the Minister to state precisely what degree of competition and regulation the Minister is proposing for the BVE sector, and to what extent the sector is to be demand-driven and market forces will be given free play, in part within the context of central government's responsibility for the sector. Nor does it see an answer to the question of whether the necessary conditions for such things as "incentives", "voting with their feet" and "checks and balances" have been created.

Considering the social trends affecting the BVE sector, the SER would wish to see further thought being given to the degree to which tools for leveraging market forces, competition, a demand-driven system and government regulation can be effective for the BVE sector's various functions and under what conditions. It is not unlikely in the SER's view that these elements will have to take on a different form in initial education than in acclimatisation programmes, adult education and retraining, in-service training and refresher training for those in employment and for the unemployed. It refers in this connection to the various target groups that the sector serves and the varying position of the ROC (supply) with respect to its target groups (demand: students, local authorities and companies).

The Minister makes few specific suggestions regarding ways to boost the incentives for ROCs. His proposal to set up regional advisory councils does not have the SER's support, partly because multiple bodies with public accountability should not be organised from the top down.

One way to encourage the ROCs to improve quality would be to initiate a process of communication and dialogue about quality and success rate with local authorities, employers' associations and trade unions, companies, students, parents and other educational institutions. This process of "accountability" would be based on a quality performance report and be mandatory for the ROCs. The Education Inspectorate can file a report on the matter afterwards. Institutions will also be encouraged to aim for better quality and accessibility if they are required to report directly to the Minister. Larger ROCs might, for example, be required to report on a certain number of specified topics (for example in their annual reports).

In keeping with previous views expressed by the SER, it is important that the vocational and adult education sector continues to acknowledge the importance of its regional function. The SER would, however, emphasise that the national context must continue to prevail, and that central government must be responsible for it. The policy model presented in the WEB – which assumes that parties within networks will collaborate and take the initiative and that they will be committed to the policy intentions – has not been widely adopted, and the SER had already identified this as a transitional problem. The SER has also listed more structural conditions for collaboration as envisaged (proper information systems, proper quality control). Government should also facilitate and encourage collaboration between the parties and ensure that each one knows precisely what its responsibilities are. The SER believes that there is room for improvement on all these points.

The SER shares the Minister's view that the macro-effectiveness test presently applied (which assesses whether training is actually meeting needs in the national and regional labour markets) does not actually work in the field and can therefore be replaced. However, the SER does believe it is necessary to require the institutions to meet certain conditions when they exercise their freedom to set up new programmes. With respect to *existing programmes*, the institutions should analyse the macro-effectiveness of all the various programmes for themselves and in consultation with one another, and make choices where required. The SER also proposes having an independent body, such as the Education-Labour Market Advisory Committee (ACOA) or the Education Inspectorate, test programmes (using the proper instruments) on their macro-efficiency on a regular basis and discuss the results with the institutions. As a last resort, and with the autonomy of the institutions being respected, the Minister would still have the option of intervening on the basis of macro-effectiveness considerations.

With respect to *smaller* programmes, the SER believes that the process of *prior* testing must be reinforced, as there would otherwise be a danger of

such programmes being cancelled. The SER's idea would be to require the Minister's explicit consent, with consideration being given to the programmes being offered on a national level.

The SER would also remind the Minister that it recommended taking a closer look at the financial incentives in the new financing system for the vocational guidance pathway (BBL), so as to avoid referrals based on improper grounds¹.

To encourage flexibility in educational pathways, the SER would also argue in favour of expanding the number of intake periods by reconsidering the annual tallying date of 1 October. This should not, however, result in a disproportionately large administrative burden for the institutions themselves.

Another crucial point is whether the new financing system offers the institutions enough incentives to improve efficiency while still maintaining standards of quality and efficacy. The SER would like to see a system whereby the institutions were obliged to commit themselves more to improving the quality of education and training.

The SER also recommends introducing greater transparency in the financing channels for the BVE sector (for example by introducing a system of reporting on contract activities and on the expenditure of public funds for public purposes in their financial reports).

Finally, the SER supports the move towards proportional supervision under the conditions set out in the policy memorandum. It assumes that institutions, by engaging in self-evaluation, will pursue a more transparent policy. One useful tool in this endeavour would be to identify quantifiable goals. Transparency must precede any fruitful discussion between the institutions and their partners in the social arena; it can also serve to ease monitoring by the Inspectorate.

Quality

The SER has tailored its comments on the quality of education to match the aspects covered by *Steering a course for BVE*². Its conclusion is that collaboration is needed between all the parties concerned in order to develop an all-round quality strategy within and for senior secondary vocational education. Such collaboration is all the more necessary because *Steering a course for BVE* links

1 SER advisory report *Flexibiliteit in leerwegen*, publication no. 99/08, The Hague, 18 June 1999, pp. 85-88.

2 Based in part on the reports filed by the Education Inspectorate for the year 1999.

improvements in quality with the interaction between the institutions and their users, i.e. the students and the consumers of education. In that respect, the communication between those involved and the decision-makers must meet high standards. Various official instruments at different levels are at issue here. With respect to communication between the student and the institution, the instrument involved is the intake procedure and the counselling provided at the start of the process; based on the student's suitability, the type of programme (BOL or BBL) and subject are selected. The next step is to draw up an educational contract and (together with the training company) an occupational practice training contract. It may very well be that consultations with the student council will play an increasing role in the near future. At national and sector level, organised trade and industry is discussing the national qualification structure with institutions. At regional level, the institutions are discussing occupational training practice and the setting up of technology centres with national bodies and employers. And at local level, the institutions are communicating with local authorities, companies and sectors about their internal and external success rate, based on their quality performance reports. The SER has observed that none of these instruments is being deployed adequately to improve the quality of education, and as a result the intentions set out in the WEB to revitalise education have been left vague. In the SER's view, one important basic principle is that the position of the students must be reinforced (by introducing a student council, by giving the educational contract more practical significance and by more demand-driven financing). Institutions will have to become more responsive and sensitive to demand. Their external partners should hold them accountable for the quality of their product. They themselves should pursue a more transparent policy, expressed, for example, in well-formulated annual reports and quality performance reports that are set up according to a fixed standard and made available to all those involved, and which will enable those directly concerned (including pupils and parents) to form an opinion on the quality of the institution and its programmes.

The SER believes that the transition to the third generation of attainment targets linked to core competencies must be accelerated. Institutions must exploit the flexibility of the qualification structure. The SER would also propose exploring whether the unprescribed teaching time within the qualification structure (the compulsory subjects of the programme) can be usefully extended to take account of innovative and regional developments.

Region-specific concerns also form part of occupational practice training. As far as this type of practical training is concerned, institutions should ensure that they use accredited training companies. One matter of great concern is the need to improve the supervision provided by the educational institution.

One very controversial issue is the entirely unsatisfactory quality of the examinations. The SER expects the joint *Examinations Working Party* set up by the COLO (the Central Office of the National Bodies for Vocational Education) and the Council for Vocational and Adult Education (the BVE Council) to make great strides and to soon come up with permanent solutions to this problem. The SER believes that the examinations should be comparable across the country and recommends setting up national “item databanks” for theory exams and practical tests that have clear-cut evaluation criteria, with external examiners from the sector playing a role. It must be possible for every provider of accredited vocational education to have access to the examination components set on a national level. The quality of the examinations and proper compliance with the procedures must be also be monitored by an independent body.

The SER supports the Cabinet’s efforts to establish a statutory 1000-hours standard. It also agrees that a guideline of this kind, intended to improve quality (including the new instructional formats and the use of ICT) must be accompanied by demonstrable improvements for students. It is the SER’s opinion that the use of ICT in education must be increased by a considerable margin and that the Cabinet’s support is indispensable in this endeavour.

Quality can best be served by having proper management at institutional and programme level. The SER does not believe that the policy-making and self-correcting authority of institutional management should be called into question. The same applies to the quality of the teaching staff. The system will live or die by the professionalism of its teachers. That is why the SER believes that a modern, decentralised policy on employment terms should be introduced, that up-to-date working conditions must be offered and that investments must be made in the employability of staff. Such benefits should also accrue to those moving into the profession from trade and industry. The SER applauds the Cabinet’s efforts to open up the labour market for teachers, but would comment that this must not lead to the requirements for teaching staff being lowered (as has already happened in certain cases).

In our export economy, internationalisation is contributing to improvements in quality. The SER believes that instruction in modern foreign languages is a requirement for internationalisation. A knowledge of foreign languages should therefore become a more prominent element in the attainment targets than it currently is. In general, it would be a good idea to compare the way the Dutch qualification structure is developing and the programme model linked to it with developments abroad.

Access

There are many facets to the question of access in the BVE sector. In official terms, access is not barred in any way, but in reality there are numerous barriers that prevent people from enrolling. One important requirement is to ensure continuity between the various levels. Since access is open, institutions should be required to tailor their services to give each student a good chance of obtaining a qualification. The SER believes it is important for those who do not have a starting qualification to obtain that qualification as yet. Determining specific tasks (for example with respect to high-risk pupils, the disabled or ethnic minorities) can help to amend policy in good time. In actual practice, however, the results can sometimes disappoint. For example, the participation rate of ethnic minorities in the BBL pathway has declined. The SER believes that this is unacceptable and that institutions and training companies must make considerable improvements on this point.

Access is equally problematical for other categories, for example older employees or people who are (temporarily) out of work and intend to re-enter the workforce at a later, unidentified point in time. The SER believes that systematic investigation of the circumstances that impede access is important, and that steps must be taken to eliminate these impediments. It also agrees with the intention of setting up an EVC assessment centre (EVC = competencies acquired elsewhere) and the acknowledgement and use of EVCs to provide tailor-made education.

The physical aspects of access must also be closely considered, in the SER's view. Two important factors are opening hours and the degree to which buildings are designed for multifunctional use. Buildings should be easy to get to and accessible for the disabled. They should provide the facilities that students actually need, for example individual workstations and rooms where group activities can take place. The SER believes that the impetus to access provided by ICT is highly significant. By using ICT, institutions can link up students with other networks and open up remote access to students. Institutions should also make efforts to keep in touch with the social and economic trends affecting their immediate environment and, thus, with other relevant networks. The institutions themselves should encourage and direct learning by means of an integrated ICT infrastructure.

Effectiveness

In *Setting a course for BVE*, the concepts of effectiveness and efficacy are closely intertwined. The SER believes it to be important that the institutions, as members of the BVE Council, agree on a joint policy agenda and that each one chooses the goals that it wishes to achieve within that context and based on its own considerations. Effectiveness will be well served by having clear-cut priorities.

It is the SER's belief that reinforcing the quality of institutional management and improving management information (including information on trends among students and consumers) will help to make the institutions better able to implement their own policy agenda and design their courses and programmes to be more effective. Effectiveness will also be well served by openness: the institutions will have to enter into a dialogue with the most important parties in their immediate social environment.

Success rate

The SER urges the institutions to collect the information they require to arrive at a proper assessment of their internal success rate (preferably in the form of a pupil performance monitoring system). Such information can provide a systematic basis for drafting a policy of prevention. The SER would point out the importance of tailor-made work, more flexible educational pathways, more internal flexibility, modular teaching, component qualifications and practical training, all of which it recommends as means of keeping high-risk pupils on track.

It is also important with respect to the external success rate that students are given a chance early on to try their hand in the field. The SER believes that at regional level, closer collaboration is required within sectors between the institutions and organised trade and industry and companies in order to align courses and programmes more closely with the relevant professions and to improve the image of these professions.

Appendix

Abbreviations

BVE	The sector of senior secondary vocational education and adult education
BBL	Vocational guidance pathway
BOL	Vocational educational pathway
MBO	Senior secondary vocational education
ROC	Regional Educational Centre
SER	Social and Economic Council
WEB	Vocational and Adult Education Act

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