

The quality of education is of prime importance. Is this quality being achieved effectively? Can education achieve better quality with the current level of resources? Is there an adequate awareness of effectivity in education, and is there sufficient knowledge of the cost of education at the practical level? In the Education Council's view, effectiveness is a valid approach, but not the only one. It is important to deploy public resources in the right measure in order to create the flexibility needed to achieve high-quality education, taught by skilled and motivated teachers.

Towards more effective education

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Background and problem outline

Society has high expectations of the education system, yet the yield it provides does not seem able to keep pace with these expectations. Furthermore, the cost of education has risen, and this has led in turn to a critical look at bureaucracy within educational institutions. The labour market for teachers is also increasingly tight, especially for certain subjects and in certain regions. These developments mean we must seek the increased effectivity of the education provided. In terms of this report, this means achieving an increase in the quality of the education (better and/or higher yields in the broadest sense) without using additional resources. The emphasis lies on the way the primary process (i.e. the educational process) is organised and the role of the teacher in this.

There is currently no empirical evidence available on how education can be made more effective. For this reason, the Education Council focuses in this report in particular on an important requirement: strengthening the awareness of effectivity. The possibilities for increasing the effectivity in education have been examined. Also examined were opportunities for cutting back bureaucracy and overheads, measures aimed at increasing the yield from schools, and the staffing and human resource management policies of schools.

Findings: there is little focus on effectivity

The scale of bureaucracy and overheads within schools has up till now only been measured against an averaged norm. There have been no comparisons between the performance of schools with widely divergent overhead spending patterns. It is therefore not realistic to expect that schools will make any effectivity gains in the short term. However, it is necessary to build up more knowledge on differences in bureaucracy and overheads between schools. By conducting benchmarking exercises, the educational performance can be easily measured against the money spent.

Increasing the yield provided by schools is the focus of much attention, both from policymakers and from the schools themselves. A variety of measures have been taken. The cost of these measures, however, is rarely the object of any explicit attention. Because of this, we do not know which of these measures contribute to more effective education.

There is a lot of scope for schools to decide how they deploy their staff. Within the framework of the collective bargaining agreements, they are free to decide what positions they need, what shape the job matrix will take, and what career and remuneration policies they will have. Certain agreements, such as those on the maximum number of teaching hours and non-teaching duties limit this freedom. These act as a hindrance in the search for more effective education.

In the past two decades, the government has provided many stimuli to improve the career prospects of teaching staff in primary, secondary and senior secondary vocational education (MBO). A lot of attention has also been devoted to the professionalisation of staffing and human resources management policy within these sectors of education. The necessary steps have been taken in both areas by schools, but there are still some snags. Staffing policy and human resources management policy deserve further attention in primary, secondary and senior secondary vocational education (MBO). Monitoring and appraising the individual performance of teaching staff is commonplace, but particularly in primary and senior secondary vocational education (MBO) the practice is still rarely linked to the attained level of educational performance. Furthermore, schools hardly ever attach consequences – either negative or positive – to their staff performance reviews.

Emphasis on educational quality in innovation

Striving for more effective education is certainly not yet commonplace in the sector. Teachers and schools take many initiatives to innovate and improve their education, yet effectiveness is given little attention in this process. Schools and teachers are primarily concerned with educational innovation and/or improvement. In practice, innovation often goes hand in hand with additional cost and additional people requirements. What is also apparent is that, particularly in primary and secondary education, there is generally little attention given to the organisational aspects of educational innovation. It may be possible to avoid additional costs by devoting more attention to changes in the school's organisation.

Low levels of cost-awareness as a result of lack of insight into costs

Based on the discussions held and a review of the literature, the Education Council notes that awareness of effectivity is low, particularly in primary and secondary education. One of the causes of this is a lack of insight into costs. There is little knowledge of the actual cost of education at the class level, group level or departmental level. There is often no knowledge of what a certain educational facility costs in terms of people and resources, and what the alternatives might be. There is also a lack of knowledge among school leaders and teachers about the time spent by teaching staff. Time accounting scarcely exists in the educational sector. Furthermore, teachers generally have a multitude of tasks. Given the enthusiasm that teachers have, any time that becomes available is usually quickly filled with other meaningful activities.

Current culture within education is a hindrance

The report also takes a look at some other, more deeply rooted factors that make it difficult to improve the effectiveness of education. First and foremost are the teachers, who want the best for their pupils. The Education Council considers this an essential characteristic of good education. But this should not be a reason to avoid discussion of cost considerations. More than any other branch of the economy, education enjoys a culture of equality. There is a strong preference for an organisation where 'everyone does the same job, everyone is equally skilled, and everyone earns the same'. In this type of culture, it is inappropriate to even mention the differences between members of the teaching staff, let alone utilise those differences. Measuring results is also often seen as a threat. This egalitarianism can therefore have drawbacks as well as benefits. It can, for example, lead to teachers feeling as though their efforts have not been recognised or appreciated. This is not beneficial for the job satisfaction of teachers. People who do not feel that their efforts are appreciated will not be well-motivated to work more effectively.

Another hindrance in the educational culture is that teachers (in all sectors, but particularly in secondary education) are rather individualistic in the way they work. Teachers see themselves as relatively autonomous, versatile professionals who are entirely responsible for the education of pupils in a given subject or in a given year. Teachers also make a clear-cut distinction between 'core responsibilities' (teaching and dealing with pupils) and 'other responsibilities'. Responsibilities that do not directly involve children, e.g. administrative tasks, are quickly regarded by teachers as unnecessary bureaucracy that distracts them from their actual work. It is difficult to motivate teachers to account for the time they spend and the tasks they perform, yet this is essential if we are to find out how the activities can be made more effective.

Because of the culture within education and the way the work of teachers is organised, measures that have increased effectiveness in other sectors have hardly had any effect in education. The culture probably also plays a role in the high workload experienced by many teachers. Teachers are well-motivated for teaching, but feel their efforts are underappreciated. The school management does not always have a good picture of the time teachers spend on their activities, and vice versa. Teachers primarily conduct their activities individually. A high work load is counter-productive to efforts to make education more effective. This calls for measures aimed at introducing some nuances into the culture and into the thinking on other complementary or alternative ways of organising the work.

Six ways to improve awareness of effectivity

Based on the available literature and on practical examples, the Education Council sees a number of interventions that strengthen the effectivity awareness in education in particular, thereby leading to more effective education:

- educational types with more opportunities for variation, such as larger groups of pupils, taught by more teachers with a variety of functions;
- professional staffing and human resource management with a focus on effective working;
- peer tutoring and cooperative learning;
- use of e-learning and information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching; and
- use of benchmarking, in particular following the lead provided by these comparisons.

1. Focused attention for effectivity in educational improvement and innovation

The recommendation is that teachers and schools could work in a more focused way on projects centred around one or more of the aforementioned interventions. Education innovation and organisational change could then receive attention in a coherent way within these projects. Projects like this would allow cost awareness in schools to grow and schools could build up their expertise in more effective education. Projects like this are also an important means of achieving cultural change within schools.

The Education Council recommends that the Minister indicates clearly which innovations have a higher priority, in accordance with the strategic quality agendas. More could be invested in these innovations; all other innovations would have to be budget-neutral.

All interventions must fall in line with initiatives that schools and teachers are currently already working on. This is an explicit choice by the Education Council, and one that will increase the chances of a broader uptake of the initiatives. Even though initiatives such as these are currently already being deployed, the Education Council believes it is important that the Minister provides a more targeted stimulus for such initiatives, with a stronger drive on cost-effectiveness.

2. Provide a stimulus for learning by variation and comparison

Effectivity must be found, and this can be done particularly well by comparing the costs and results of various approaches. The Education Council therefore calls for schools and other educational institutions to provide a stimulus for *more* variety within and among projects, so that schools can draw comparisons. This could be done, for example, by conducting several projects across various locations, with each project centring around a different intervention.

It goes without saying that the projects must be properly monitored and studied. The Education Council suggests that project proposals should be evaluated in two stages in order to save unnecessary work and expense. In the first stage, an outline project proposal is submitted for evaluation. After acceptance, the project can then be further detailed, including a comparative study proposal for monitoring and evaluation. Finally, the Education Council calls for specific attention to be given to the dissemination of the knowledge acquired on increasing the effectivity of education; this knowledge should be shared with ongoing training institutes, with teachers and with teacher training programmes. The responsibility for this could be assigned explicitly to one party, e.g. to a 'information centre for know how in educational effectivity' or to a research institute.

3. Provide a stimulus for the development of tools that offer insight into costs

Primary and secondary schools are not always able to work effectively because they often do not have insight into the costs they incur in providing the education. The Education Council recommends that tools be developed to afford insight into the costs in an accessible way. Good examples from the senior secondary vocational education (MBO) sector are the *Education Calculator (Onderwijscalculator)* and *Match4You*. This would enable schools and teams of teachers to think more systematically and in a more cost-aware way about the educational facilities used or wanted, and the teachers needed to provide such facilities. The government could provide a stimulus by developing user-friendly tools for the primary and secondary education sectors.

Within schools and other educational institutions, more work could be done to chart current spending. Time accounting is an essential element of this. For many other highly-skilled professionals, time accounting forms a standard part of their work. It would provide the teachers themselves, their colleagues and their managers with a picture of the actual deployment of people and resources. This would provide an impetus for the discussion of alternative resource deployment opportunities.

4. Anchor effectivity better in HRM policy

Good human resource management policy can contribute to more effective education. It allows the skills of teachers to be used better and more effectively. The Education Council recommends that the Minister provide schools and other educational institutions with a stimulus to professionalise their HRM policies. The following steps form part of that process:

- formulate clear criteria that show what the school considers important in terms of teacher performance, related to the objectives and vision of the school;

- ensure information is gained from a broad range of sources on the performance of teachers, both quantitatively (e.g. pupil performance) and qualitatively (e.g. results of satisfaction surveys and 360 degree feedback sessions);
- discuss and assess at fixed intervals the range of performance and evaluation data available for teacher performance based on the stated criteria; and
- follow up staff performance reviews, whether that be in the negative sense (address issues, mentor, train, transfer or dismissal) or in the positive sense (reward, offer further professionalisation opportunities and/or career progression opportunities).

The Education Council suggests that larger schools and educational institutions could place their HRM policy lower in the organisational structure, i.e. where most experience can be gained with better and more affordable alternatives. The financial responsibility for some aspects of HRM policy could also be placed lower in the organisation. This will create cost awareness at a lower level, and the process of weighing up various deployment opportunities against each other will become routine.

If the school has access to good tools to present yearly or half-yearly figures on educational yields and teacher performance, it would be possible to consider performance-based remuneration for teaching teams. Performance-based remuneration is a cost-effective way of encouraging schools and teachers to achieve better educational performance. It has a positive effect on the various types of educational results as well as on the enjoyment teachers get from their work. It can therefore contribute to more effective education.

5. Ask schools and educational institutions to render an annual account of their effectivity improvements

Schools and educational institutions should take a critical look at their spending on an annual basis. Where can we improve quality with the available resources? Schools could include this aspect in the account they render to the Education Inspectorate. The question of whether spending could be more effective receives little attention from the Inspectorate. The Education Council calls for this to be made an explicit part of the inspection process. This means that schools and educational institutions would have to show and prove that they have achieved the highest possible quality in their education with the budget that was available. They would also have to show what alternatives they rejected on grounds of effectivity. This would give a boost to the mutual learning process within and among schools in the search for more effective alternatives.

Further to this, the Education Council recommends for primary and secondary education and for senior secondary vocational education (MBO) that cost-sensitive benchmarks be established in the field of education and staffing. Benchmarking increases awareness of effectivity, it allows you to compare, and it contributes to the assessment of effectivity. Furthermore, benchmarking allows stakeholders to keep the school focused. Furthermore, schools should be given the opportunity not just to compare their performance with the average of all schools, but also with the average of the best performing schools.

The Education Council is also an advocate of asking schools to develop a *target profile* based on national benchmarks. This would include target figures, but preferably also a narrative describing the desired results. Schools would then have to render an account of their own performance compared to their own target profile.

6. Involve sector organisations, professional bodies and trades unions when raising awareness of effectivity

Sector organisations, professional bodies and trades unions could play a more active role in efforts towards increased awareness of the effectivity of education. The Minister could address this point to both sides of industry, and ask them to devote some attention to it. The employers and the employee representative organisations could include effectivity in the negotiation of collective agreements. For the primary and in particular the secondary education sector, the collective bargaining agreements include various stipulations that make efforts towards effectivity difficult or impossible, for example, rules on maximum daily teaching time, holiday and non-teaching duties. To work more effectively demands less tightly defined and more flexible terms of employments. Less tightly defined employment terms would give teams and departments more opportunities to find the best deployment of people and resources, and to utilise the learning opportunities for teachers that go hand in hand with this search process.