

Regulated space

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The Education Council believes it is highly important that the right balance is struck between normalisation which aims to raise quality standards and ensuring the necessary variety in the Dutch education system. The government has a constitutional responsibility for the quality of education at the system level. However, schools need to have the scope to adapt to local circumstances, because only then will they be able to keep pace with future developments. To ensure normalisation as well as variety, the Education Council makes three recommendations that will strengthen the core function of education: the transfer of culture to the new generation.

Recommendation 1: ensure that investments are made with a view to the long term

Policy decisions should fall within a long-term view for education. This long-term view should include ideas on the broad purposes of education. When designing policy measures, it is important to be consistent in assessing what part they have in generating an individual and social return on the investment, but also what effects can be expected (positive and negative) throughout the entire educational column. An important part of this is gaining insight into the expected costs of policy in the short and the long term. The Education Council recommends that a policy assessment is developed, based on the existing policy analysis toolset. This kind of policy assessment can help reveal any blind spots and avoid any unintended side-effects. This can then be helpful in the further development of policies. Furthermore, results of the policy assessment may also help strengthen democratic control by parliament.

Recommendation 2: establish meaningful norms in crucial areas

The government should establish norms in crucial areas in order to strengthen the quality of education, but should also enforce these norms. Specifically, the Education Council is referring to areas of subject content, performance, examination and teacher training qualifications. Because these norms must be meaningful and attainable for those that have to work with them, it is important to invest in a common narrative on the value of these norms. At the same time, the Education Council calls for greater restraint in centralised legislation which, by seeking uniformity, would put the variety available in the system under pressure.

Recommendation 3: create scope and set requirements for professionalism

The aforementioned recommendations place demands on professionalism in the education sector. The Education Council believes that teachers and school leaders should be allowed to carry a large degree of responsibility within a regulated space. This regulated space would give schools a defined area in which they could operate, but they would also have the scope to shape education within this framework on the basis of their own vision on quality and how to achieve it. Strengthening the professionalism of education staff is a key part of this. The Education Council notes that accountability forms an integral part of professionalism. For schools, this means that they must render an account to their community on the efforts they have made and on the levels of educational attainment achieved in relation to the government framework, but also in relation to their own vision on educational quality.