

POLICY DOCUMENT ON NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

Why this Policy Document?

An effective approach to themes such as safety, social involvement, learning to belong in a society, norms and values, support in raising families and promoting voluntary work...? These things are only possible when education is involved. These social questions demand joint action from government and organisations, in particular educational organisations.

This Policy Document, in which we prove the above statement, is of importance to policy makers, civil servants working at different levels within government, politicians, management teams, and staff of organisations involved in both formal and non-formal education. In this paper, The Platform Non-formal Adult Education will pay particular attention to non-formal education, the form of education which plays a special role in the promotion of participation in the community and society as a whole.

At present, non-formal education is once again in the spotlight; in 2001 the Dutch parliament passed a motion, which calls for a policy regarding non-formal education. In addition, the European Commission, in its Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, emphasised the importance of co-operation between the formal and non-formal education sectors. The National Unesco Commission also subscribes to this opinion.

Despite all this, the position of non-formal education in the Netherlands is unclear; since the introduction of basic adult education no single ministry has been responsible for the non-formal education sector. This is because this form of education falls principally under the jurisdiction of decentralised policy and local councils are free to decide their own policies on non-formal education. This current practice makes it clear that local councils tend to include only formal education in their educational programmes and that the national government does not have a clear overall picture of how non-formal education is developing, let alone develop a consistent policy on the matter.

One of the purposes of this Policy Document is to encourage re-consideration of the local and national policy in the field of broad-based adult education, in which the creation of conditions for effective co-operation between formal and informal education is an important objective.

Non-formal education

People are constantly learning, in every situation. Alongside the familiar, formal diploma-based system of education, is a whole range of educational activities in numerous forms and settings. If this involves an intentional and systematic learning process, then it can be defined as non-formal education (as opposed to *informal education* which occurs daily without conscious and systematic organisation). Non-formal education can take place at an individual and a collective level. Written courses and radio and television programmes are usually aimed at the individual learner. However, this Policy Document is limited to collective, intentional and systematic learning processes. These take place in:

- a. institutions such as adult education centres; community centres and centres for training and advice, in which the organisation of non-formal education is the central activity
- b. institutions in which non-formal education is an important activity, for example socio-cultural work; environmental organisations; organisations concerned with women and the elderly; immigrant organisations; volunteer organisations etc. In these institutions education is one element in a broader spectrum of activities. For example, when we refer to socio-cultural work we make a distinction between functions such as leisure, an opportunity to meet people, social support and personal development. Personal development is something which falls into the category of non-formal education.

In summary, the important elements of non-formal education are as follows:

- non-diploma-focused (in the sense that the diploma is regarded as an objective in itself or a passport to further education)
- systematic and intentional learning processes
- individual and collective
- principal (or at least important) component of an organisation.

The social importance of non-formal education

We live in an actively learning society. Education is being increasingly used as an instrument to realise broad social objectives. Within the formal education sector, this mainly means learning in order to obtain an entry-level qualification for paid work, and learning whilst in a job. Non-formal learning processes can also lead to joining the job market, but in addition, are also often part of a broader programme, such as, for example, rural renewal; social action projects; sustainability projects; neighbour watch etc. This type of learning process is linked to a current social issue. “That what has been learnt” can be directly applied, and doesn’t remain simply theory.

Thus, in non-formal education there is a strong emphasis on other functions, namely:

- participation in society
- prevention
- personal development
- social cohesion
- re-integration in society and labour market

Later in this Policy Document these functions will be further explored through concrete examples in order to illustrate the importance of non-formal education. Non-formal education has its own independent place in the whole field of education, but it also more and more often a link in a chain of activities. Before outlining the examples, the terms “chain approach” and “chain co-operation” will be clarified, as they are central to the theme.

Non-formal education and chain co-operation

Within the chain approach, institutions for non-formal education work together with partner organisations on the basis of a contract of co-operation or work protocol. Together, the partners try to provide answers to particular social questions (see examples). Each partner has its own contribution and responsibility, based on their particular area of expertise. Together they form a chain of inter-dependent links striving to arrive at satisfactory results. The partners agree on how the co-operation will be managed, by means of a chain director or project leader, for example. This person keeps the links of the chain together in order to assure quality.

Institutions for non-formal education are increasingly using this chain approach in projects with the formal education sector (ROCs) and other disciplines such as community education; care providers; libraries; social work etc. They also work together with social organisations, institutions which assist with re-entering the workforce, and trade and industry.

The specific expertise which non-formal education brings to the chain is its easy accessibility: due to its low threshold and specific method it can reach groups which, for formal education and other institutions, are difficult to reach. Some of these people find pleasure in learning in non-formal education and consequently become motivated to begin a course within an institution for formal education, such as ROC. Non-formal education helps make vague plans for learning concrete and steers them in a positive direction. In addition, one of the strong points of non-formal education is its ability to create a meeting point for various people and cultures. This aids the learning process and assists social cohesion.

Examples of non-formal education as a link in the chain

Reintegration into society and the labour market

In our society, the question of whether one has a job or is unemployed has serious consequences regarding not only income but also social contact and the opportunity to gain knowledge and experience. In many cities, non-formal education institutions are involved in programmes for reintegration in society and labour market. They provide accessible educational activities for immigrants and Dutch nationals who, for one reason or another, are unemployed. These activities are often the first step on the road to further participation in the form of volunteer work, further training or a job.

Community care

Currently, steps are being taken to 'community care', in which an attempt is made to reintegrate specific groups, such as the handicapped, the elderly, ex-psychiatric patients and ex-delinquents into the community by, among other things, having them live in "ordinary" neighbourhoods. Non-formal education helps with this socialisation by:

- offering courses which deal with doing housekeeping independently (cooking, washing, using appliances, household budgeting and computer skills)
- making general evening classes accessible to these specific groups
- working with people who live near or are involved with these groups on awareness and image issues, through education, discussion and debate.

Intercultural learning and cultural assimilation

Our society demands that we learn to live together in harmony with different cultures in highly-populated areas. This is not always easy. Institutions for non-formal education often contribute to cultural assimilation programmes and to the dialogue between different social groups. Non-formal education is a good partner which both develops and provides (parts of) educational programmes suitable for newcomers and people who have been in the country for some time. For example, they provide language training together with social orientation and link these to everyday concerns (such as housekeeping, raising children, work, education, volunteer work) and to the life-path perspective of the people concerned.

Computer skills

People who have a job do most of their learning at work. It was through this method of learning that most people learned the skills necessary to use the internet. However, not everyone has the computer skills required to use the new technology. People who do not have a job are particularly likely to be lacking these skills. The fast pace of technology can also cause problems for the elderly. In fact, a large percentage of the elderly are computer illiterate. Research has shown that only 25% of people over 55 can use a PC and the internet. Education centres, "Senior Web", libraries, clubs and institutions for the elderly and ROCs are working hard to change this situation, sometimes with the help of the private sector.

In various places in Holland, chain co-operation is the approach to computer literacy being used. The tasks and responsibilities of each partner, from selection to after-care, are jointly assigned and made clear. Participation in these courses also provides the elderly with new social contacts, which in turn has an effect on the much-desired social cohesion.

Education for the elderly

The elderly these days want to be able to do more than just simple word processing. They have broad educational requirements, focused on personal development, participation in community life and

prevention. Themes such as biography, finding a balance in life, spiritual issues, safety, health, dealing with dementia, living independently, dealing with the household budget, local history, and inheritance rights are all important to them. Institutions for non-formal education can provide easy access to these.

Voluntary work

Volunteers are the cement which hold our society together. However, those in charge of voluntary work and the volunteers themselves need to increase their expertise and develop their skills (including social skills) because the work they do is often complex. The government and local councils promote voluntary work by means of special measures which offers benefits to volunteers. One of the aspects of these 'stimulation measures' is regulation is of course offering the opportunity to increase your expertise. Non-formal education offers local, tailor-made help with this to volunteers. They offer different types of training, including courses in leadership, courses in publicity and public relations, and courses in management, administration and organisation. There are also courses for (and in collaboration with) neighbourhood councils, groups concerned with people unable to work for health reasons, client councils, community colleges etc. In this way, institutions for non-formal education contribute to an active social middle-ground, through providing tailor-made prepares people for complex work as volunteers.

Health education

Providing education and a platform for discussion about health issues helps in the prevention of accidents in and near the home. Prevention is also an important issue when it comes to mental health: paying attention to lifestyle, diet, exercise, ways of dealing with stress and finding a balance within oneself are all ways of making people healthier. From a social point of view, it is also a cost-saving activity. Due to work pressure and/or work methods in the health care sector, adequate attention is not always paid to prevention. Organisations for non-formal education, on the other hand, are skilled in work methods which can be used in this kind of prevention work. In some instances, care providers and organisations for non-formal education work together to develop activities, a co-operation which has obvious benefits.

Support with raising families

It is tempting to leave the tasks of raising children and developing their characters to institutions for formal education. Nevertheless, it is ultimately the responsibility of the family. If necessary, parents can receive help with this by means of courses, information evenings, and discussions about "raising children these days". For example, in the Community School-Projects (Brede Schoolprojecten), institutions for non-formal education fulfil a role with regard to parents and pupils: parents and members of the community are directly involved in the school (parent participation) and provide courses in raising children.

Values and norms

In today's secular society, many people are reconsidering how they live their lives; through pondering big and small ethical questions, through the way in which they make personal choices and through trying to develop their own life-vision. Both young and old are reconsidering (implicitly or explicitly) values and norms, the way people interact with one another and the balance between personal and public responsibility. The government is also eager to stimulate a debate on the issue of values and norms. Institutions for non-formal education are particularly suited to contributing to these social questions, through, for example, courses, lectures or the organisation of public debates.

Active Citizenship

Politics and political parties are currently under fire. Many people are becoming increasingly irritated, critical and emotional. At the same time, a paradox is taking place: while the trend in the economy and

society is towards globalisation, the individual is becoming more concerned about local issues. It seems this is a result of the rise of local political parties, neighbourhood and community councils and an increasing interest in local and regional history.

Institutions for non-formal education are using this trend to their advantage by organising public debates about important local issues (for example, security, quality of life, urban and rural development); offering courses for neighbourhood and community councils; and providing courses in local history. They also offer courses in political participation, for example, the political education of current and future councillors.

Environmental education and sustainability

In the issue of the environment the whole question of sustainable development is gaining increasing importance. Climate change has made people aware that the issue is a real one and that something must be done in order to prevent permanent damage to the environment, as well as reverse damage already done.

Education in the form of awareness-raising and finding sustainable solutions, for example, the increase in the use of renewable energy, is crucial. Centres for environmental education, along with other institutions for education fulfil an important social role in this respect.

Language courses

Obviously, knowledge of foreign languages is vital for the Netherlands' position within Europe. In addition, language is an important instrument of cultural exchange and adds to one's sense of being "a European citizen or a world citizen".

Together, the education centres in the Netherlands form the largest institute for foreign languages in the country, not only in terms of numbers registered but also the diversity of languages which are offered at various levels. Learning the language itself is often combined with learning about the people and culture involved. These language courses also act as social meeting points and therefore also strengthen social cohesion.

Art and culture

The government has prioritised the promotion of cultural participation. Institutions for non-formal education offer various programmes in the area of art appreciation, which involve learning to understand and enjoy various art forms. They also offer courses in more active art forms (music, theatre, painting, dance, sculpture etc), which are useful when it comes to creating a cultural identity and can help in understanding and appreciating other cultures. They also greatly increase social cohesion. In this way, centres for the arts and education centres contribute greatly to cultural participation.

The above-mentioned examples illustrate that institutions for non-formal education can play an important role in tackling current social issues. In many places in the Netherlands, non-formal education already plays a very concrete role and is successfully involved in themes such as social participation, reintegration into the labour market, prevention, personal development and social cohesion. However, in practice, there are significant differences from one local council to another.

The role of government and local authorities

Unfortunately, it would seem that, when compared with countries such as Germany, Sweden and Belgium, the Netherlands is lacking when it comes to policy making for non-formal education. Until the 1980's there was substantial activity in this area, at that time mostly entitled 'vormingswerk' or training. But with the introduction and implementation of the Act on Basic Adult Education, the socio-cultural dimension of adult education diminished (of course there were differences in various local councils). Some councils managed to use subsidies creatively within the framework of a broad local

education plan, in such a way that they succeeded in giving a place to both formal and non-formal education and allowed one to compliment the other. These councils try, by means of integrated work methods, to avoid the exclusion of particular groups such as the elderly, those receiving social benefits, illiterate people and immigrant women. Some councils, on the other hand, are of the opinion that their responsibilities with regard to providing education begin and end with formal basic adult education. Nothing could be further from the truth, as must be evident from the examples outlined above. If we are to be successful, there are many groups and issues in society which must be allowed to benefit from non-formal education.

When it comes to the issues of lifewide and lifelong learning, councils must play the role of director. After all, the government earmarks the funding and, to a great extent, structures the formal education. Non-formal education, however, is the domain of local and regional councils who decide on policy themselves but do not have the earmarked money to fund it at their disposal. This means that when it comes to non-formal education, local councils have responsibility. We are of the opinion that the time has come for the government to give a clear signal that non-formal education is of great importance both alongside and in co-operation with formal education. Both the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport increasingly recognise the importance of a structural positioning of non-formal education. It is now up to the local councils to create a concrete policy on this.

What needs to happen?

It is important that good practices around the above-mentioned themes are put forward into the arena because it is through becoming familiar with existing good practices that both people involved in education and civil servants will get on the right path.

In addition, the methodical knowhow must be brought up to the required standards. This creates a challenge for third-level education and national centres such as National Institute for Care and Welfare NIZW and National Centre for Innovation in Education CINOP. The provincial support organisations, united in their Association VSB, could also pay more attention to the socio-cultural aspect of non-formal education.

The most important point is that local councils develop an education policy that is broader than merely basic adult education. For this, an integrated vision and approach, which will bring departments and funding together, is necessary. Local councils are ready to meet the challenge of the issue of local education in an interactive manner. To that end, they must work together with various social organisations and institutions. In situations where councils are interactively developing a new social policy, there is a good opportunity to include a broad policy on education.

The socio-cultural aspect of adult education in the Netherlands is in need of strong impetus!

Conclusions and recommendations

1. Institutes for non-formal education offer an essential contribution to the tackling of urgent social issues.
2. Organisations for non-formal education are particularly skilled at contributing when it is a case of chain co-operation with institutes for formal education and other partners.
3. The government and local councils must develop a broader vision on the issue of education, in which they stimulate co-operation between institutes for formal and non-formal education by providing the right organisational and financial conditions for this to happen.
4. Local councils have a leading role to play in the question of integral education and organising the process of identification and development of learning-questions in co-operation with local institutions and organisations.
5. It is necessary to record and publicise current good practice regarding chain co-operation.
6. The issue of skills training for education workers should be treated as a matter of urgency.

The Platform Non-formal Adult Education

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