



## **1. Introduction**

This case study was undertaken as part of the ETUCE and EFEE project: *Recruitment and Retention in the Education Sector: A Matter of Social Dialogue*. The project case studies aim to provide an in-depth examination of the current situation regarding recruitment and retention of teachers in the education sector. The case studies examine three themes: i) recruitment and retention policies in the education sector; ii) challenges to the recruitment and retention of teachers from the perspective of the different social partners; and, iii) the social dialogue process around recruitment and retention.

The Netherlands was chosen as a case study because of its particular model of consensus decision-making characterised by tripartite consultations between employers' organisations, teacher unions and the Ministry of Education. Nevertheless, the challenges to the recruitment and retention of teachers are similar to other countries, for example, teacher shortages, issues around teachers' professionalism, and difficulties in attracting young entrants into the profession. The Netherlands makes an interesting case for reflection, due to its examinations of the key challenges in relation to the recruitment and retention of teachers, as well as to the efforts that are being made to address them through decentralised discussions.

During June 2012, semi-structured interviews were carried out in the Netherlands with representatives of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences; the General Education Union (hereafter referred to as AOb); and employers' organisations representing the primary and secondary education levels: the Primary Education Council (PO Raad) and the Secondary Education Council (VO Raad). During these interviews three broad themes were addressed, including: i) policies around teacher recruitment and retention and the role of

the organisation/institution therein; ii) perceived challenges to the recruitment and retention of teachers as well as what is being done to address them; and, iii) social dialogue in the Netherlands and current issues.

## **2. Context: Brief outline of Education system organisation in the Netherlands**

A distinct feature of the Dutch education system is 'the combination of a centralised education policy with decentralised administration and management of schools' (Eurydice 2010, p.1). Overall responsibility for the public-private education system in the Netherlands is borne by the government, represented through the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences, who is responsible for the structure and financing of early childhood -, primary - and secondary education. The Ministry creates the framework for good quality education. The administration and management of primary and secondary general and vocational education is decentralised; authority over publicly and privately run schools and their organisation is held locally at the municipal level.

Primary and secondary schools are governed by a competent authority or school board. The school board is responsible for the implementation and regulation of schools. Decentralisation has been a general trend in education policy over the last decade (Bal & de Jong 2007), in which much of the authority formally held by the government has been transferred to the school boards. Schools therefore are able to use their resources (financial and human) as they see fit, though remaining accountable to the central government for their performance and policies (ibid.) School boards are not only responsible for the recruitment and selection of teachers, but also for teachers' professional development and assessment.

Since 2006 the Ministry provides funding to primary schools in the form of block grants; a measure that was implemented to provide schools with greater autonomy over their spending on staff, materials and training. This system has been in place for secondary schools since 1996. The negotiation of teachers' salaries and working conditions are also decentralised to the school level, with the exception of primary education where the Minister still leads negotiations on these aspects. School boards are effectively responsible for the organisation of the profession, and negotiate with employee organisations about the working conditions of teachers. Unions have criticised the decentralisation of funding, claiming that schools increasingly spend funds on non-education related activities, rather than investing them in schools.

One of the essential characteristics of the Dutch education system is laid out in Article 23 of the Constitution: the 'freedom of education', whereby people have the right to establish schools and organise teaching based on religious, ideological or educational beliefs, though limited by qualitative norms set in educational legislation by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The freedom to organise teaching has resulted in the coexistence of both publicly and privately run schools in the Netherlands that are considered statutorily equal. Government expenditure is equally distributed between publicly and privately run schools. Approximately 70% of students attend privately managed schools.

### **2.1. Teachers**

Teachers in the Netherlands at the primary level complete a four-year course at an HBO institution and obtain the Bachelor of Education title, qualifying them to teach all subjects. Secondary and vocational education teachers are likewise trained at higher professional education (HBO) institutions and/or universities and obtain either Bachelor of Education (grade two qualification) or a Master of Education (grade one qualification) degree, and can take a further postgraduate teacher education course at the university level. Students specialise in specific subjects. Teachers with grade one qualifications may teach at all levels of secondary education.

Teachers' employments are either governed by public law (in case of public education) or by private law (in case of private education). Teachers in both public and independent (private) schools are paid according to the same salary scales. Qualifications and competences for teachers are set out the 2006 BIO act.

### **2.2. Social Partners**

There are a variety of teacher unions in the education sector. For teachers and education staff there is the General Education Union (Algemene Onderwijsbond – Aob), the Christian Teachers Union (CNV Onderwijs), and the Union for Workers in Vocational and Secondary Education (UnieNFTO).

All education sectors have their own employers' organisations, specifically employer councils at the primary (PO Raad), secondary (VO Raad), vocational education (MBO Raad) and higher education (HBO Raad) levels. Previously these separate education councils were organised collectively under an overarching structure (SBO).

## **3. Teachers' recruitment and retention in the education sector**

Teachers' recruitment is a responsibility of employers, represented by school boards. The government is not directly responsible for the recruitment of teachers, but have a political responsibility to ensure there are enough teachers and there is adequate entry into the profession. In times of teacher shortages, the central government may be questioned whether they create satisfactory conditions to recruit teachers and whether enough teachers are entering and completing teacher education programmes. Further questions are whether the government ensures enough funding to pay teachers, or whether salaries are too low to ensure that the profession is attractive enough for higher education graduates. These issues are addressed in discussions with the social partners.

Until recently the separate education councils were organised together under a sector-wide education board (*Sector Bestuur Onderwijsmarkt*) comprised of social partners. This structure was concerned with all education and labour questions, including teachers' shortages, diversity policies and mobility across sectors. According the General Education Union (AOB), sector-wide education board was dismantled, and negotiations with social partners at each level split up, because the different sectoral education councils claimed to be concerned with very diverse issues.

The Secondary Education Council (VO Raad) reported that while the schools are directly responsible for the recruitment and appointment of teachers, it is the Education Councils who are involved in the creation of adequate working conditions for teachers, negotiated with the unions, which are linked to the attraction and recruitment of teachers. The Secondary Education Council is also involved in monitoring the quality of the teaching staff, for example, the training of teachers.

An important agenda item for employer and employee organisations is the development of teachers' professional space (scope for professional development and career trajectories) with the aim of attracting and retaining teachers in the profession. One aim in the context of projects focused on professional space has been the stimulation of direct dialogue between employers and employees on these issues. Both the AOb and the Secondary Education Council consider that schools do not sufficiently support teachers' professional development. They argue that teachers should have the space and autonomy to make their own professional development choices and take initiatives regarding their professionalisation.

#### **4. Challenges for teachers' recruitment and retention**

The social partners and the Ministry of Education identified a series of challenges for teachers' recruitment and retention that are elaborated on below. Their positions on these issues and well as suggestions for tackling them are compared in the following sections. The main issues identified as challenges were: an aging teaching force and projected teacher shortages, particularly at the secondary level; the status of the profession and difficulties to attract teachers to lower levels of education; low teachers' qualifications and professionalisation.

##### **4.1. Teacher shortages**

Both the employers' organisation at the secondary level, the General Education Union (AOb) and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences referred to the projected teachers shortages in specific subjects (languages, mathematics and sciences) as the secondary education. These shortages which are expected to increase in 2015 particularly in the West of the Netherlands, are largely attributed to an aging teaching force: over the next years a large number of teachers is expected to retire that will need to be replaced, requiring adequate workforce planning as well as measures to attract new entrants into the profession (discussed in section 3.2 below).

Measures that employers have taken at the primary and secondary levels to address teachers' shortages have been to facilitate lateral entrants from other sectors, particularly at the secondary education level. While academically qualified, these teachers are unqualified to teach. According to the collective agreement, schools must ensure that unqualified teachers are fully trained within two years. The Secondary Education Councils supports introduction of lateral entrants as a measure to increase labour flexibility: 'Teacher shortages has resulted in employers being more open to the idea of appointing professionals who haven't been trained as teachers; a practice which has been borne out of necessity to

address shortages according to the employers. We however see it as important to break open the labour market and to maintain a fresh sector by encouraging other professionals to enter the profession, for example by employing someone from the banking sector to teach economy.'

The General Education Union (AOB) considers that measures to address teacher shortages, such as the lowering of qualifications to enter the teaching profession and the employment of unqualified teachers, is detrimental for the status of profession and education quality. They argue that these measures results in deprofessionalisation because it promotes teaching as an activity that anyone, regardless of their qualifications, can undertake. Reference was made by the AOB to projects such as *Teach First (Eerst de Klas)* to be launched in Autumn 2012 that aims to encourage university students to spend some time teaching before pursuing a career in business.

Both the Ministry of Education and the Secondary Education Council referred to the need for improved workforce planning. It was noted by the Secondary Education Council that employers have a tendency to employ unqualified teachers as a quick-fix solution to immediate annual shortages, which could be avoided by better forward planning. The Ministry added that the sense of urgency about teacher shortages at the school level should be heightened.

The AOB and Ministry of Education also referred to a lack of academically qualified teachers at the secondary education level. 'We consider there not to be only a quantitative shortage, but also a qualitative shortage, which is reflected through a steady decline in the level of teachers' qualifications. In the past most teachers at the secondary level had first-grade university degrees, or even PhDs, but nowadays most teachers have a higher professional education (HBO) degree' (AOB representative). AOB considers that the lowering of education qualifications has a negative impact on education quality.

An acute problem facing the primary sector is a reduction in the number of pupils as a result of declining birth rates: in some regions schools face pupil reductions of around 20 per cent, which is likely to persist until 2018. Both the primary education council and the AOB referred to an oversupply of teachers in some regions and the difficulty of young teachers coming out of teacher training colleges to find employment. Schools that do not want to take on full-time teachers, hire teachers on contract via employment agencies to avoid social security and pension costs, and thereby circumventing the collective agreement. The primary education council noted that strategies have not yet been developed to tackle these issues beyond proposals to merge schools and postpone funding reductions linked to student numbers. The Primary Education Council commented that rigid collective agreements limit the employment flexibility of schools. The AOB pointed to the limited mobility teachers between regions, but also limited upward mobility between sectors to address this problem.

#### **4.2. Attraction of teachers**

The social partners and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences referred to the status of the teaching profession as problematic for the attraction of teachers into the profession. 'The profession is seen as low-paid, work-intensive, demanding, and with little autonomy and opportunity for career development' (Secondary Education Council

representative). AOb similarly commented that: 'low pay, a lack of teachers' autonomy and teachers' evaluation based on students' performance makes the profession very unattractive as a career choice, and which is detrimental to the profession in the long term' (AOb representative).

Measures to improve the attractiveness of the profession include: investing into teachers' professional development and giving teachers more space and autonomy in which to exercise their profession, which are initiatives strongly supported by both employers and employee organisations. Secondary schools boards have received extra funds from the Ministry for the development of career opportunities: promoting teachers to higher functions and salary scales with the aim of strengthening the profession, as well as attracting and retaining teachers.

The Ministry of Education representative noted: 'a key problem is the career perspectives for teachers: clearer career development steps with bigger responsibilities and higher salary grades. We do discuss these issues, but it is a budgetary question. We think that young teachers do not enter the profession because of a lack of a career trajectory in which they can grow. Another side of this problem is that the best qualified and education teachers also have a tendency to leave the profession. It's also up to schools to make decisions about how to retain their teachers, for example by setting up research pools where teachers can undertake part-time research next to their teaching practice.'

A measure proposed by the teachers' union, that has been successful at the higher education level, is increasing teachers' qualifications standards. 'Raising the qualifications standards means that the short term impact will be an increase in teachers' shortages but in the longer term the effect is very beneficial. This creates a difficult policy choice: immediate effects or long-term benefits' (AOb representative). The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences agrees that ideally all teachers should have Master level qualifications to increase the education sectors labour competitiveness, but referred to a lack of funding to finance a concomitant rise in salaries that would result from increased education qualifications. 'If you increase the education level of teachers to master degrees you also have to be able to prove that this increases student outcomes, but we can't prove this. We do however invest in teachers' professional development' (Ministry of Education representative).

One of the major challenges to teachers' recruitment and retention noted by both the union and the Ministry is the non-adjustment of teachers' salaries to inflation since 2008 resulting in a wage gap of around 10 per cent.

Both the Primary Education Council and the teachers' union AOb referred to the difficulty in attracting male teachers into the primary level. While initiatives have been implemented to encourage male teachers to enter the profession, the proportion of female teachers at the primary level is still around 80 per cent.

#### **4.3 Teacher retention**

Concerning teacher retention, a major challenge referred to by the social partners is the retention of young entrants. The Ministry of Education and the education councils referred

to the development of induction programmes and peer-review systems to support teachers entering the profession.

For many entrants into the profession the workload is demanding. In secondary education there have been agreements between social partners on the reduction of teaching hours by 20 per cent for starting teachers during their first year of employment, thereby creating space and time for them to grow into their jobs. Additional measures to relieve demanding workloads for teachers have been: working in teams particularly in disadvantaged schools; and adjusting lesson plans by alternating teaching hours.

The retention of elderly teachers has been an issue of contention between the social partners: employers consider that teachers who remain at a school for a longer time do not develop and would prefer to see more money spent on younger teachers, whereas unions consider that employers are largely concerned with reducing costs by replacing older teachers.

## **5. Social dialogue**

The social partners and the Ministry of Education all consider the Dutch social dialogue system, based on consensus decision making, as generally favourable. The Ministry of Education representative stated: 'In terms of the collective agreement and the social-dialogue system we consider ourselves quite exceptional in the Netherlands. We have the tendency to discuss a policy proposal with the social partners until we seek a consensus. Since we are a small country with little regional differences, this helps to facilitate these consultations.' The Secondary Education Council noted: 'in the Netherlands unions negotiate on behalf of all employees and not only on behalf of their members. This is an important difference with other countries.' The AOb commented: 'If partners are part of decision-making then they are also more likely to commit themselves to the outcomes. Talking about what is desirable is crucial.'

Structural policy consultations do not take place between the social partners and the government; discussions between them are informal because the government is no longer a collective agreement partner. Before the decentralisation of education funding and responsibilities to the school level, the Ministry was still responsible for collective agreement negotiations with the unions about teachers' working conditions. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science representative commented that: 'the government has distanced itself from teacher recruitment and retention; we are involved financially in that we have to reduce education budgets, which is effectively decided by the Ministry of Finance.'

The Secondary Education Council commented on negotiations with the unions: 'It has been difficult to reach a consensus with the social partners on issues such as the status of the profession, as the unions tend to place a large emphasis on salaries. We are in the middle of collective agreement negotiations, and one of the most important reasons why it has stranded is due to the fact that the social partners do not trust one another. This is a particularly strong feature in the education sector.'

The AOb commented on social dialogue with employers: 'a long-standing discussion between employers and unions is what should be included in a collective agreement: very often the employers find that the school head should develop these policies individually, whereas we have the tendency to want official agreements on these matters. There is a strong resistance from the employers to having decisions set out in a collective agreement because we are meddling with what they consider their business. These issues include teachers' professional space and deprofessionalisation. The current dialogue has however stranded on the topic of finances.'

The AOb cited the Teachers' Covenant of 2008, a tripartite agreement between the government, unions and employers with measures to improve the working conditions and remuneration of teachers, as a successful example of social dialogue. As part of this Covenant an action plan was developed to tackle the teacher shortage and improve the position and quality of teachers. The AOb stated: 'The government has encountered a very complex problem as a result of the decentralisation of funding and responsibilities. School boards must organise the teaching profession themselves, but during the last years the parliament has raised questions about teachers' shortages and the unattractiveness of the profession. The government however doesn't possess the policy instruments to be able to do anything about it. A very successful measure included in the Covenant set up with the former Minister, were teachers' study scholarships that resulted in a lot of professional training activities and enthusiasm from teachers. This measure was only possible through bilateral discussions, because it received support from the Ministry. Tripartite discussions are often more fruitful from our perspective.'

At the primary level the education council commented on the need for collective agreement based on more school autonomy. Currently, primary sector wages are still determined by the ministry and working conditions by the sector employers and trade unions.

Concerning a European level social dialogue, the AOb suggested the development of professional standards at European level, but noted that this is a challenging process because it is regulated very differently in each country as well is the difficulties presented in identify the employers' role in each European country. The AOb added: 'In the Netherlands these roles are defined and implemented to an extreme through the decentralisation process. The appointment and dismissal of teachers is a responsibility of the education inspectorate or an overarching body in many countries, and not at the school level as in the Netherlands.'