

Summary of advisory report 28

LIFELONG LEARNING

Lifelong learning is a theme that is high on the political agenda. The Knowledge Debate has given it a major boost. Attention appears to focus mainly on the 'taught' forms of lifelong learning: refresher training, in-service training and retraining.

The Advisory Council for Science and Technology Policy (AWT) draws attention to two points that are in danger of remaining underexposed in the debate on lifelong learning:

- 1) working is a form of learning and that should have greater recognition, and
- 2) lifelong learning must have an impact on the system of initial education.

Recognition of qualifications gained

At work, people can acquire knowledge and experience equal to, and sometimes even more comprehensive than, the knowledge and experience they can acquire in formal education. In general, this work experience does not produce recognition visible to outsiders, which is the case - in the form of diplomas and titles - via the path of formal education. In a number of branches of industry there are procedures for awarding an official certificate to people who have no diplomas but who do have work experience. In the lower and upper secondary vocational education sector as well as in adult education, projects are also being developed for recognising qualifications acquired in practice (EVK). The Council is in favour of as many branches as possible creating EVK systems, and of the various sectors of education utilising the possibilities for EVK to the full. The government can act to encourage this. In this way the two paths to achieving a given level of knowledge, via 'school' and/or via work, will be treated as equal. The recognition of work experience should also open up the opportunity for experts to be able to teach. This will certainly benefit initial education, because the line separating theory and practice will become less distinct. In higher education this is already possible, but not yet in lower and upper secondary vocational education where it can be of great importance.

Initial education: more combinations of working and learning

'School-type' lifelong learning covers initial and post-initial education. In the debate on lifelong learning initial education is in danger of remaining neglected. In a culture in which lifelong learning has become established in all sections of society, initial and post-initial education are closely interwoven. This interrelationship has two consequences.

First of all, it is possible in some cases to create shorter routes alongside the existing educational tracks both in secondary and in higher education. The shorter routes can form a step up to subsequent courses, but they can also provide a first step towards paid work, while the door to returning to education is left open. The 'short initial, work, return to education' route is an alternative to 'taking one qualification on top of another'. Applied to the principle of 'Higher Education for Many', more variety in routes both as regards the length of time taken to complete a course of study, as well as orientation and level, could result in *Multiple Forms of Higher Education*.

In the second place, the transition from learning to work can be made smoother. There are already various forms of education in which working and learning are combined. The Council is particularly taken with the SME route in higher professional education (HBO). But there are more opportunities for combining work and study. This requires the duration of financial assistance for students being disconnected from the time taken to complete a course of study. The Council recommends including the possibility of this 'disconnection' in the planned review

of the system of student grants and loans.

The combination of working and learning can, however, also be imitated 'in school'. In that case, the education would be problem-based, i.e. education in which groups of students solve problems and themselves gather the information necessary to do so. The Council recommends that the Education Minister use part of the study facilitation fund for higher education to provide an additional boost - where practical - for the introduction of problem-based education.

