

NEWS FROM THE NETHERLANDS

Like in some other countries, secondary science school teaching in the Netherlands currently faces particular demands to implement changes and innovate towards more adequate programs that prepare students for both General Society and Higher Education

- Curriculum in force

Nowadays, students in Upper Secondary Education have to select four “Profiles” of which two are of a natural science nature, i.e. “Nature & Health” and “Nature & Technology”. Students who complete the latter program have access to all of the more demanding science streams in Higher Education (Both Higher Vocational and University Education). It should be mentioned also, that our students have to select from Higher General Education (HAVO- which ideally prepares for Higher Vocational) and Pre University (VWO) which ideally prepares for University studies.

- Program innovations
 - Innovations 2007-2010

The revision activities that are underway currently will be executed in two consecutive stages. First, so called Renovation Committees for respectively Chemistry, Biology and Physics are in the process of constructing examination programs that will be issued shortly and will come into force starting August 2007 and last until August 2010. This stage has been called: “Small Maintenance”. The Minister for Education and Sciences invited these committees to come up –eventually- with new examination programs characterised by (a) not too much change - content wise- compared to the existing examination programs, (b) a promotion for teachers to use student relevant contexts to develop their understanding of scientific concepts and (c) a promotion for students to experience in science classes more of the interrelated nature among the –natural- sciences.

- Innovations beyond 2010

The Ministry for Education and Science nominated two additional Committees, a so called Science Profile Committee as well as a Society Profile Committee, for the “Extended Maintenance” stage - the years beyond 2010. These committees recently delivered –jointly- a “Concept Advice” which is now in debate among the “whole” science education community. The Concept Advice recommends:

- limiting the number of ‘Profiles’ to two main ones, a Science as well as a Society Profile. Furthermore, the committees recommend to offer students within these two sections a variety of streams which have become acknowledged by particular sections in Higher Education as being an adequate preparation for their particular type of Higher Education. By using particular packages of modules in addition to a basic package which is common for all students in either the Science or the Society Profile
- serious investigation of an additional module for students who would like to postpone as long as possible the making of a definite choice for one of the two Profiles. This experimental Profile Science/Society will serve the brightest students, in the future
- inclusion of , for all Science Profile students, a particular subject “Society” and, for all Society Profile students, a particular subject “Science”. Of course, the idea here is to prepare all students sufficiently for becoming well informed citizens
- An advice to first carefully try out newly designed programs before implementing them on a nation-wide scale.

From the first reactions one could conclude that the Minister for Education and Sciences who –officially speaking- has not yet received the Concept Advice is not pleased at all with the content of this Concept Advice. The majority of the representatives in the educational field however are basically in favour of the recommendations made by the committees. The explanation for this difference in opinion probably is that the Concept Advice is probably

rather drastic with regard to its financial consequences for the National Government but very encouraging to people who welcome the idea to start from a set of new educational concepts instead of using the usual “cheese slice approach” to produce new programmes from those already existing which usually brings about little real improvement.