



How to motivate marginalised groups towards lifelong learning

Relevancy of lifelong learning

The concept of lifelong learning is highly relevant when it can serve as a mechanism which can offer marginalised groups such as migrants a second chance to attain the form of education that fits the talents of the individual. But as we are dealing with adults who are mostly working or trying to find work the concept of lifelong learning has to be integrated with working or seeking work. In our experience a combination of learning and working, especially gaining access to work or to more rewarding work while learning is a very attractive route for migrants.

In our professional experience we have seen numerous examples of people taking up unskilled labour to meet the financial demands of their families including parts of the family that live abroad and depend on the income of the relative in the Netherlands. This in itself leaves very little time and energy for educational efforts.

Integration of education in the working life

Lifelong learning should have a broader scope than just acquiring the competences that are needed to fulfill a particular job. On the other hand post initial education has to be integrated in the working life of migrants. The Netherlands still has a fairly extensive system of programmes aimed at reintegration of unemployed individuals. But the paradoxical situation is that people when they are receiving unemployment benefits are not permitted to follow education to earn better qualifications.

In this way the Dutch welfare system pursues only short goal interests, namely getting the person as soon as possible (back) to some form of paid labour, instead of using the period of unemployment as a springboard for higher qualifications and as such for a better job.

We believe that schools and businesses should form partnerships and provide joint funding of training programmes and education. Individuals re-entering the labour market after a period of absence could choose to forego part of their benefit payment in exchange for a training or workplace experience. The government could fund programmes that cross industry boundaries or are particularly innovative.

Especially for disadvantaged groups like migrants the knife would thus cut both ways. People would have, in the framework of post initial learning the opportunity to receive the forms of education that they have missed out during earlier stages of their lives but which fit their individual capabilities. And they gain access, thanks to their improved educational qualifications to more rewarding jobs.

Skills and knowledge acquired outside formal education should also be put to use within the educational curriculum. People who have migrated or have fled their country of birth have all kinds of experiences and knowledges that should be recognized as relevant and should be given their place within the educational route.