

# VET Internship Pact 2023 - 2027



Youth organisation for vocational education (JOB MBO)



Professional association of trainers in VET (BVMBO)



MBO Council



Dutch Council for Training and Education (NRTO)



VNO-NCW



MKB-Nederland



Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG)



Foundation for Cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (SBB)



CNV Onderwijs



CNV Jongeren



Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV)



FNV Young & United



General education union AOb



Federation of professional associations in education (FvOv)



Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW)



Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW)

# Introduction

**Learning in practice is an indispensable element of all vocational education and training (VET) programmes.<sup>1</sup> During practice, students develop skills and motivation to enter the world of work after gaining a qualification. Learning in practice is a journey of discovery, both for career changers and for young people entering straight from secondary school. Through an internship or apprenticeship, they become acquainted with a new professional field and a new role, gaining new experiences and developing their professional identity under supervision.**

We, youth organisation for vocational education JOB MBO, professional association of trainers in VET (BVMBO), the MBO Council, the Dutch Council for Training and Education (NRTO), VNO-NCW, MKB-Nederland, the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG), the Foundation for Cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (SBB), CNV Onderwijs and CNV Jongeren, the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV) and FNV Young & United, general education union AOb, federation of professional associations in education FvOv, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW), are committed to ensuring that all students receive an internship or apprenticeship with excellent support and enabling conditions, including appropriate remuneration for the internship. We attach great value to equal treatment for all students in the award of internships and apprenticeships and will make every effort to ensure that students feel welcome and are treated equally at their work placement company and within the sector. Internship discrimination<sup>2</sup> is unacceptable.

By means of this internship pact, we are making agreements in this context and committing ourselves to contributing to these shared aims in a concrete way. We will immediately start acting in the spirit of the pact.

The internship pact focuses on four themes:

- **Improving internship supervision**
- **Eliminating internship discrimination**
- **Providing sufficient internships**
- **Offering appropriate remuneration**

On top of the arrangements we have already agreed for internships, for example in a practical vocational training protocol, collective employment agreement or service document, we are also committing ourselves to the agreements set out in this internship pact. We will incorporate these into the documents, agreements and working methods already in place.

## Collaboration

This internship pact has ambitious goals that no single partner can achieve alone. Close collaboration with and contributions from all partners, including regional and sector partners, are necessary. The internship pact is an important step towards that, because by signing it we are committing ourselves to informing and mobilising the regional and sector grassroots organisations. Publicly funded VET schools will take the initiative to make regional agreements with internal and external stakeholders about interventions, policy and measures to achieve the aims set out in the internship pact.<sup>3</sup>

## Monitoring and adjustments

Each theme in the internship pact will be fleshed out into objectives, concrete measures and indicators that we will monitor jointly; because we consider it important to know whether we are delivering on our promises, whether they are resulting in a change in behaviour and whether we are achieving our objectives. We want to learn about the effects of policy and actions from the internship pact in order to improve internships for VET students. This requires clarifying where we stand, monitoring the implementation of actions and making adjustments where necessary.

We will do so in line with existing indicators as far as possible. We will conduct a baseline measurement in 2023, which we will use to determine the current status with regard to the objectives and indicators or jointly decide on new objectives (quantifiable and otherwise). The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science will take the lead in establishing joint monitoring and ensuring the involvement of students. During the first two years of the

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<sup>1</sup> Unless specifically stated otherwise, in the internship pact we are referring to all forms of practical vocational training, in both publicly funded and non-publicly funded VET.

<sup>2</sup> Internship discrimination is treating a student or students differently or disadvantaging or excluding them on the basis of personal or other characteristics. Discrimination on the following grounds is prohibited by law; religion, belief, political opinion, race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, marital status, disability or chronic illness and/or age.

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<sup>3</sup> VET schools should involve local authorities and antidiscrimination services in planning how to tackle internship discrimination.

internship pact, the effects of the measures will be studied and monitored. If, after two years, it is found that no positive change has been initiated, the measures will be reconsidered, with legislation and regulations not being ruled out. In 2027, we will jointly take stock and refine the internship pact with all the signatories.

## Improving internship supervision

### Objective 1: A rise in the number of students who are satisfied about the support they receive from the school and from the work placement company during their internships.<sup>4</sup>

- Internship supervision by the school is just as important as internship supervision by the work placement company. Teachers, practical vocational training supervisors and coordinators and other education professionals have an important role to play in supporting students before, during and after their internships. VET schools commit to further professionalising their internship policies and the implementation of those policies, with the aim of ensuring that all students feel properly informed, seen and supported in preparations for and during the internship. And all internship supervisors at VET schools are able to act adequately and appropriately in order to achieve the following:
  - a comprehensive handover to the work placement company for students requiring additional support;
  - tailored support for students with special educational needs;
  - prevention and action in the event of internship discrimination;
  - action in the event of any (suspicion of) improper use of interns as employees.
- Optimising the supervision of the student during the internship period requires good contact between the work placement company, the supervisor at the school and the student. The benefits of personal contact are that students are more likely to appreciate the support they receive and that employers have a clearly identified contact person at the school. For these reasons, the basic principle is that for each internship, there should be at least three separate contact moments between the school, the student and the work placement company, of which at least one at the

location of the work placement company. For the other two contact moments, the school, the student and the work placement company can decide between them how the contact should take place.

- In exceptional situations, three contact moments or physical contact moments may not be possible or desirable. In such cases, schools may deviate from this requirement. We trust in the professional judgement of the school to take the right decision in the student's interest in this regard and to only exercise this option in exceptional circumstances.
- An additional benefit of having at least three contact moments between the school, the work placement company and the student is that it allows representatives of the school and the work placement company to get to know each other better. This personal contact makes it easier to hold 'difficult' conversations between the work placement company and the school, for example about internship discrimination, and at an earlier stage.
- These arrangements are laid down in the internship agreement in accordance with the practical vocational training protocol. In this way, the arrangements become part of the internship policy of each VET school and represent clear commitments on the part of the student and work placement company in their internship agreement.
- Work placement companies also commit to improving the supervision of students. The work placement company participates in three contact moments with the school and the intern about the internship. Together with the school, it arranges one contact moment at the company premises.
- SBB is committed to improving basic support for new and more experienced practical trainers. SBB, schools and employers will catalogue the resources already available from SBB, the market and from sector/ training and development funds and why they will or will not be utilised. Where necessary and possible, SBB will extend support for practical trainers and draw the attention of work placement companies to the training options offered by the other parties. In doing so, SBB will listen to the wishes of practical trainers, in order to give them the best possible support.
- Career orientation and guidance helps VET students choose the right courses and prepare them for the labour market. A commitment to career planning and guidance is therefore part of the Agenda for VET.

<sup>4</sup> Indicator JOB monitor.

# Eliminating internship discrimination

## Objective 2: A reduction in internship discrimination in VET. We will build up knowledge about recognising, preventing and tackling discrimination.

- Education professionals recognise that internship discrimination is a problem, know effective interventions and deploy them and feel supported by the management of the educational institution.
- Work placement companies actively work to prevent internship discrimination and to create a socially safe work environment.
- SBB assists work placement companies in this regard and intervenes with work placement companies in the event of discrimination.
- Students know who they can approach at school if they experience internship discrimination and feel more supported by school.

It is time for a large and visible step forward in combatting internship discrimination. Preventing and combatting internship discrimination and ensuring an inclusive work environment will become part of the regular work process of government, work placement companies and schools. By means of the internship pact, the signatories are committing themselves to fighting discrimination and prejudice. Students will notice a difference thanks to this internship pact.

Eliminating internship discrimination comprises three pillars<sup>5</sup>:

1. Setting ethical standards
2. Designing the system so as to prevent and combat internship discrimination
3. Tackling internship discrimination

The three pillars will be addressed simultaneously because the measures within them reinforce one another and should be seen in conjunction.

### 1 Setting ethical standards

- Discrimination is against the law in the Netherlands and is never the fault of the student. The root of the problem lies in power differentials and, sometimes

unconscious, prejudices within society. We do not want young people to encounter socially unsafe situations in the places they go to learn and develop professionally.

- We will actively combat internship discrimination and ensure a safe atmosphere for learning and working. We all understand the importance of diversity and inclusion within our organisations. We will communicate that understanding within our organisations and towards our grassroots. We recognise that setting this ethical standard will contribute to the prevention of discrimination. The highest levels of the organisation have an important role to play in this regard.<sup>6</sup>
- As signatories to the pact, we need to set an example. Through our conduct within our organisations and our actions in recruiting, selecting, supervising and assessing students in their internships, we are demonstrating our commitment to the fair and safe treatment of students.
- As government, businesses, schools and students, we can hold each other to account regarding our efforts and the need to set an example. One reason for doing so is to jointly learn, so that we really do improve the internship market and achieve a reduction in internship discrimination.
- By means of the legislative proposal on the monitoring of equal opportunities in recruitment and selection<sup>7</sup> and by tightening up the SBB's accreditation regulations (see below), we are setting the ethical standard that discrimination is prohibited and undesirable and that work placement companies must have policies to ensure a socially safe learning environment in order to create equal opportunities in internships.
- We will encourage and organise knowledge-sharing between schools, work placement companies and industry bodies.

### 2 Designing the system to prevent and combat internship discrimination

- Every student has the right to a safe introduction to the labour market. Internship discrimination is unacceptable. We are joining forces to eliminate internship discrimination together. We will not shy away from taking uncomfortable measures. The most important thing is identifying what can actually work.
- In various places, schools and companies are already gaining experience with objectively matching students

<sup>5</sup> We will also make use of existing measures in, inter alia, the Labour Market Discrimination Action Plan and the Further Integration in the Labour Market Work Agenda (TK 29544, no. 1119 Labour Market Action Plan 2022-2025: Equal Opportunities for All).

<sup>6</sup> Preventing and addressing VET internship discrimination: what might work? (p. 16) KIS, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> TK 35673, no. 2 Monitoring of Equal Opportunities in Recruitment and Selection Act. Still being debated in parliament.

with internships. Research by Platform Inclusion & Community (KIS) suggests that this is a promising measure for preventing internship discrimination<sup>8</sup>. Internship matching prevents students from facing exclusion in their search for an internship.

- We are therefore adding this promising new instrument to our joint approach to internship discrimination. Internship matching is an element of the total package we are agreeing in the internship pact to prevent internship discrimination and improve the quality of internships.
- Its introduction will be a joint learning process. It calls for substantially increased efforts from all partners. Internship matching demands a different way of working on the part of teaching teams and work placement companies. We are opting for an ambitious and realistic implementation strategy, in which we will be trying out different variants. This calls for a programme-based approach in which all parties have a visible role.
- We will monitor whether the measure is working and make adjustments where necessary. We will be looking at the implementation of the measure, and at the effectiveness of the measure as such within the overall package of measures. The goal is for all students to have a safe introduction to the labour market. We will jointly monitor the achievement of this aim and hold each other to account for our efforts.
- We are starting with a substantial step. The new approach will therefore take effect in every school right from the outset. We will start with a vanguard of companies and teaching teams who will facilitate this and have the ambition to keep on growing their number. MKB Nederland and VNO-NCW are calling on work placement companies to embrace this initiative.
- We have opted for first-year BOL (school-based vocational training) students because they are usually young students who are making their first acquaintance with the labour market. For them we have an extra responsibility to make that start a successful one.
- Within all the variants we are trying out, matching will be based on the student's learning objective and competencies and what the work placement company can offer. Matching will not be based on the personality or personal characteristics of the student. The company will not hold an interview with the matched students to see if they 'click'.
- The success of the measure will depend on effective collaboration between SSB, the school, the work placement company and the student. An important enabling condition is that schools know their students and their work placement companies well and that the schools are able to find their way to the participating companies (the vanguard). Students will receive support in drawing up their learning objectives and will be thoroughly prepared for the internship by the school.
- Students can always choose to look for an internship themselves, including in the first year. Students who want to do so will coordinate their efforts with the school. Companies are and remain responsible for who is present in their workplace. Companies and students can always approach the school if they feel that the matched internship is not appropriate, giving reasons why. In that case, the school will seek a solution together with the student.
- We will devote particular attention to internship matching during the mid-term evaluation of the Agenda for VET and the internship pact in 2025. We will monitor and optimise the effectiveness of the measure. The initiative from business around open hiring is also a promising one with regard to an accessible labour market and we are following it with great interest.
- The mid-term evaluation will give us initial insights into whether the instrument works, doesn't work or works in particular cases. Based on that information, we can then make adjustments to the implementation of the measure, or to the measure as such within the overall package of measures. A safe introduction to the labour market for students is paramount, not the instruments devised to contribute to that.
- The business community will work to embed internship discrimination as a permanent theme in business operations and HR policy. It will do so, *inter alia*, by providing good information and sharing best practices.
- Sectors can play an important role in this regard.
- One of the roles of the internship supervisor is to tell the student before and during the internship how the student can recognise internship discrimination and report it to the school, and how the school will deal with it. The supervisor, representing the school, will remain in dialogue with the student in order to monitor how they are doing in their internship.
- Schools are responsible for informing education professionals about the escalation procedure when a student comes to them with a case. Internship supervisors at school will engage in professional

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8 KIS (2021). *Preventing and addressing VET internship discrimination: what might work?*

development (see also ‘Improving internship supervision’) and build up expertise to recognise, prevent and address internship discrimination. As a result, they will feel competent to hold ‘difficult conversations’ with students and work placement companies.

- Internship supervisors will discuss the school’s vision of preventing internship discrimination with work placement companies. They will take work placement companies to task if signals of internship discrimination are received from students.
- Each VET school must have an easy-to-reach reporting point where students can report internship discrimination and improper use of interns and obtain support and after-care – for example, the accessible complaints facility<sup>9</sup>.
- All VET schools will encourage students to report internship discrimination and improper use of interns. In the event of such a report, students will always be given the option of an alternative internship<sup>10</sup>. Schools will ensure that students know who they can contact at the school to report internship discrimination, which steps the education professional will undertake and that students have the option of an alternative internship without incurring any study delay, for example via a roadmap.
- Schools will also ensure that students know who they can contact outside the school to report internship discrimination if they do not feel safe enough to do so at school. Students can submit a report outside the school to a regional antidiscrimination service, which can subsequently support them<sup>11</sup>. Schools will inform students that they can also seek advice from the Confidential Inspector of the Inspectorate of Education.
- SBB is responsible for promoting the quality of work placement companies. A (socially) safe learning environment, free from internship discrimination, is an important part of that. We are tightening the rules on accreditation by making explicit the condition that a

relevant internship is available for each student in socially safe circumstances and by specifying that the internship must be free from circumstances that might be detrimental to the student’s personal interests, including circumstances involving discrimination but also other inappropriate behaviour such as sexual or other harassment, aggression and bullying.

- As part of the accreditation conditions, SBB will discuss with the work placement company how they put equal opportunities in recruitment and selection into practice and prevent discrimination and other inappropriate behaviour in the workplace. The work placement company will also be reminded of legislation and regulations such as occupational health and safety legislation and the Monitoring of Equal Opportunities in Recruitment and Selection bill sponsored by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, which gives the Netherlands Labour Authority a supervisory role.
- Work experience supervisors at work placement companies will be equipped for inclusive employership, in order to be able to recognise, prevent and address discrimination. Work placement companies will recruit and select interns in a fair manner and create a safe atmosphere in the workplace. SBB will offer all the work placement companies the opportunity to further develop to that end. For this purpose, SBB will build up expertise about the requirements pursuant to the Monitoring of Equal Opportunities in Recruitment and Selection bill, about internship discrimination and about effective interventions. In doing so, it will draw on the knowledge and expertise of other organisations. SBB advisers will take work placement companies to task if signals of discrimination are observed (see also ‘Tackling discrimination’).
- We will use and develop knowledge and expertise about combating internship discrimination. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science will facilitate a national support centre for VET schools to make this knowledge and expertise available, for example in order to develop a route map or escalation ladder. Organisations with specialist expertise in the field of, for example, LGBTQIA+ students or students with support needs will be involved so that they can share this specific knowledge and expertise.

<sup>9</sup> VET schools can link the reporting points to the accessible facility that each VET institution will be required to have with the introduction of the Legal Protection of VET Students (improvement) Act (1 August 2023) in order to refer students with complaints and objections to the appropriate committee. Alongside this referring role, the accessible facility may also perform a supporting role.

<sup>10</sup> Schools have a statutory obligation to offer an alternative internship if the competent authority and SBB determine that the proper execution of the practical vocational training will not be possible (article 7.2.9, paragraph 2 of the Adult and Vocational Education Act).

<sup>11</sup> Students can also report internship discrimination to the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights or the police. An antidiscrimination agency can support a student in submitting a report to these organisations.

### 3 Tackling discrimination

- We consider following up reports of discrimination to be essential in establishing students’ confidence in education and the labour market and we will make

sure that all reports are followed up<sup>12</sup>.

- In the first instance, students should report signals of discrimination to their school. Schools will develop a regional working method for following up reports, support and after-care for the student and tackling discrimination<sup>13</sup>. In doing so, schools will draw on the insights from the research by KIS into student perspectives on reporting internship discrimination<sup>14</sup>.
- In response to the report, a three-way dialogue will take place between the student, the work placement company and the school<sup>15</sup>. If the dialogue gives cause to do so, the school will report internship discrimination and/or (socially) unsafe environment for students to the SBB complaints desk. SBB will conduct an investigation. For the duration of the investigation, accreditation may be suspended and, in partnership with the school or schools, any other interns with the work placement company may be offered alternative internships. Based on the results of the investigation (in which all sides will have the right to be heard), SBB may decide to revoke accreditation. SBB will build up the required expertise in this connection. SBB will provide clarity and insight into the complaints procedure for internship discrimination so that all parties know what SBB is able to do.
- The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, SBB and supervisory bodies including the Netherlands Labour Authority and the Inspectorate of Education will conduct a dialogue about sharing signals and decisions about internship discrimination.
- VET schools should record all reports and signals from students about accredited work placement companies and pass them on to SBB<sup>16</sup>, even if no action is requested from SBB. SBB will record all reports and submit an anonymised summary annually to the

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12 *Unequal opportunities in the internship market: Research into objectively determined and experienced internship discrimination in VET in Utrecht*. 8. Verwey-Jonker Institute, 202

13 *The school can request assistance from the national support centre for VET schools or, depending on the regional arrangements, from the regional antidiscrimination agency, escalate directly to SBB, submit a report to the police or present the case to the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights, if the student is in agreement.*

14 *The research will be completed in early 2023. The results will then be published on the KIS website.*

15 *In this process, the school should always consider whether a three-way dialogue between the student, the work placement company and the school is safe for the student. If the student does not feel comfortable being present at the discussion, the school will hold a discussion with the work placement company in response to the report.*

16 *The student will be asked for permission before reports are forwarded. Signals are to be anonymised so that they cannot be traced back to the student.*

Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the SBB student forum and the sectors. SBB will use that information to monitor the quality of work placement companies and support work placement companies in preventing and combating internship discrimination.

## Providing sufficient internships

### Objective 3: Reducing the shortage of internships.

- It is very important that there should be an internship for every student. The internship is an essential part of the course, during which students learn in practice and acquire skills for the labour market. Without an internship, students cannot complete their educational programmes.
- Employers and SBB will together make efforts to ensure that sufficient high-quality and accessible internships and apprenticeships are available.
- Within the *Kansrijk opleiden* (Promising training) working method, schools and businesses will jointly ensure that the student is offered a promising educational programme.
- It is crucial that the offering on Stagemarkt and Leerbanenmarkt is up to date. This is the responsibility of businesses and SBB. SBB will systematically follow up the internships and apprenticeships action plan, learning from the experiences with the action plan to date.
- SBB will develop a picture of the supply and demand for internships and apprenticeships. Sectors, employers and SBB will share examples of good practice in resolving bottlenecks in the availability of internships.
- The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science will support companies in supervising students with dual-track (BBL) apprenticeships through the subsidy scheme for practice-based learning. The scheme is currently being evaluated. It is a legal requirement that this be done every five years. Insights from the evaluation will be used to decide whether the subsidy scheme should be continued in its current form or whether there are reasons to make substantive changes or end the scheme. In our view, extending the scheme is the obvious course of action. In the event of a positive evaluation, the current resources will be deployed for a follow-up scheme lasting five years (see also the Agenda for VET).

- We will focus on providing information about the subsidy scheme for practice-based learning and strive to pay out the maximum amount of €2700 per practical training centre. For this reason, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is exploring whether the amount of the practical learning subsidy can be better matched to the number of expected BBL (dual-track) students.
- We recognise that an intern differs from a regular employee. During practical vocational training, BOL (school-based) and BBL (dual-track) students do not just work, they also learn. The work placement company makes sure there is sufficient space to learn during the internship and that the company is not dependent on the use of interns as it would be of employees.
- We will make sure good information is provided to companies and students about the rules and agreements around practical vocational training and about how reports of improper use of interns and internship discrimination may be submitted. As a result, the rights and obligations will also be clear to students. The practical vocational training protocol and arrangements as laid down in the practical vocational training agreement are the starting point.
- As agreed in the Agenda for VET, we will be launching a BBL offensive – among other things by drawing attention in the regional mobility team (RMT) to training options for workers and jobseekers via BBL (dual track programmes), VET certificates and certificates of acquired skills.
- We will therefore make sure that in 2023 all students receive an expenses allowance that at least covers all the costs in euros that a student is required to incur (by the company or under the law) in order to be able to complete an internship with the company (including travel costs if these are not reimbursed in another manner and a Certificate of Good Conduct). The work placement company will pay this expenses allowance.
- On top of the expenses allowance, we will encourage public/semi-public and private employers with the expected amount for VET students in the context of the subsidy for practice-based learning. The amount to be paid out per student will be guided by the maximum subsidy under this scheme. We affirm the importance of an appropriate and stable level of remuneration for BOL internships and of making relevant arrangements in all collective employment agreements. The social partners will take the lead in reaching agreement in the Netherlands Labour Foundation about a recommendation on this point.
- By means of this internship pact, we want to contribute to the equal treatment of all students in the Netherlands. Our basic assumption is therefore that when arrangements are made about internship remuneration in collective employment agreements, these should be the same for all students.
- We will all highlight the importance of appropriate internship remuneration, so that companies that do not fall under a collective implement agreement also understand the expectation of offering remuneration to their students.
- We commit to ensuring that all dual-track (BBL) students, in addition to an expenses allowance, receive a labour contract and a wage that is at least commensurate with the statutory amounts<sup>18</sup>.
- Students on accelerated dual-track programmes also have a right to appropriate remuneration. Such students often have diverse backgrounds and they are not covered by a statutory minimum number of practical vocational training hours. The student and the work placement company (and where relevant the benefits agency) will therefore determine what an appropriate level of remuneration is.
- Under no circumstances is it permissible to require payment for offering a student an internship.

## Offering appropriate remuneration

**Objective 4: Each student receives appropriate remuneration for the internship. This is at least enough to cover all expenses. In addition, each collective employment agreement sets out arrangements<sup>17</sup> for appropriate internship remuneration.**

- We consider it important that students receive appropriate remuneration and do not have to incur additional expenses for their internships.

<sup>17</sup> Some collective employment agreements only contain arrangements for employees. In this case, an annex to the collective employment agreement will be provided. This will have the same value as the collective employment agreement itself.

<sup>18</sup> Depending on the situation, the minimum youth wage decree or the minimum wage regulations apply.



# The VET internship pact 2023-2027 was signed on 14 February 2023 in The Hague by:



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