



## **YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE NETHERLANDS**

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## **1 INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>**

The purpose of this paper is twofold. Firstly, in section 2, we give a description of youth unemployment in the Netherlands. What is the size of the problem both in terms of incidence and duration? Which groups of young people are affected most by unemployment? And finally: how do the level and duration of youth unemployment compare with other countries?

The second purpose of the paper is to give a review of Dutch policies to fight youth unemployment (section 3). A major policy initiative that has been launched only recently, is the Taskforce Against Youth Unemployment. It combines a large number of measures aimed at reducing youth unemployment and promoting training and education for young people. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment will present this Taskforce in more detail during the Peer Review. Therefore, in this paper this initiative is only briefly discussed, despite the fact that it is the key element in current Dutch policy. We can already say here that not enough information is available to evaluate the impact of the Taskforce on youth unemployment. Furthermore, the Taskforce has not been in operation long enough to assess the effects on youth unemployment.

The final section of the paper contains the conclusions and some concluding remarks.

## **2 LEVEL, DURATION AND STRUCTURE**

During 1996-2004, the youth unemployment rate is roughly twice as high as the overall unemployment rate (table 2.1). However, this ratio between the youth rate and the overall rate has gone up during this period. If we look at the share of the long-term unemployed (defined as longer than one year in unemployment) in total unemployed, we get the opposite result. The share of long-term unemployment is much lower for younger people than for total unemployment. Furthermore, the ratio between the youth share and the overall share has declined during the period 1996-2004. For young people it has halved.

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<sup>1</sup> Adjusted version of a paper presented at the Peer Review: Youth Employment Task Force, The Hague, April 28-29. The peer review was organized by IES, OSB and BICEPS in cooperation with the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment on behalf of the European Commission.

*Table 2.1 Unemployment rate and share of long-term unemployment: 15-24 years old and 15-65 years old (1996-2004)*

	Unemployment rate a)			Share of long-term unemployed b)		
	15-24 years	15-65 years	Youth rate divided by overall rate	15-24 years	15-65 years	Youth share divided by overall share
2004	13.3	6.4	2.1	11.6	35.7	0.32
2003	10.6	5.3	2.0	9.4	29.8	0.32
2002	8.5	4.1	2.1	4.8	32.4	0.15
2001	7.4	3.4	2.2	10.0	35.6	0.28
2000	6.7	3.8	1.8	13.0	43.6	0.30
1999	7.5	4.3	1.7	18.8	50.2	0.37
1998	8.6	5.1	1.7	22.5	54.0	0.42
1997	10.2	6.6	1.5	24.1	52.0	0.46
1996	12.7	7.5	1.7	22.7	50.2	0.45

Source: CBS.

- a) *Included both the unemployed registered at the public employment service and the ones not registered.*
- b) *Based on the unemployed registered at the public employment service. The long term unemployed are unemployed for more than 1 year.*

On the basis of table 2.1, one is inclined to conclude that youth unemployment is not a big problem. The youth unemployment rate is considerably higher than the overall unemployment rate, but this is a normal pattern. Unemployment is primarily a social problem when people remain unemployed for a long time. However, table 2.1 indicates that long-term unemployment does not often occur among young people. However, it should be noted that data on the share of long-term unemployment are only available for unemployed registering at the employment offices. Particularly for people who are not entitled to an unemployment benefit, the incentive to register is limited and may decrease with unemployment duration. As entitlement criteria for benefits have become stricter, the diminishing share of long term unemployed could be influenced by this. Particularly for young people it has become more difficult to get an unemployment benefit or social assistance. Therefore, the decrease in long-term unemployment may partially be due to a growth of those not being registered.

As table 2.2 shows, in addition to the 97,000 unemployed, in 2003, 53,000 young people were neither in the labour force nor at school. About one quarter of this group are disabled. It is quite possible that among the remaining group a considerable part can be seen as hidden unemployment. Only one third of this group indicated that they do not participate in the labour market because they are full-time occupied with family care. Probably, low-educated, females and young people from non-Dutch origin are over-represented among the inactive.

*Table 2.2 Breakdown of youth (15-24) not in employment and not in school (2003)*

Category	Number (percentage of population)
Population	1,316,000 (100 %)
Employed	818,000 ( 62 %)
In school and no job	348,000 ( 26 %)
Unemployed	97,000 ( 7 %)
Inactive	53,000 ( 4 %)

*Source: Labour Force Survey.*

So far, the official definition of youth unemployment according to the Dutch Statistical Office has been used (indicator). Direct availability for a job of at least 12 hours per week and active job search are the most important criteria to call a person unemployed. Only one-third of the young unemployed is registered at the Centres for Work and Income (CWI), the employment offices (indicator II, see table 2.3). However, this figure deviates from the numbers provided by the CWI (indicator IV), although the relative increase in both indicators is almost the same (increase by factor 2 between 2002 and 2004). This increase is sharper than the increase in official unemployment (increase by a factor of 1.5). The latter indicator has a similar increase between 2002 and 2004 to the increase in the number of unemployment benefits for young people (indicator III). However, from year to year there are important differences. According to indicators I and II, the relative increase from 2003 to 2004 is similar to the relative change from 2002 to 2003. Indicator IV even points to accelerating growth. Only the number of unemployment benefits points to a declining growth in unemployment. On the whole, there is little evidence for a slow-down in youth unemployment growth.

*Table 2.3 Various categories of youth unemployed (15-24), 2002-2004*

Category	Official definition (I)	Registered unemployment (II)	Number of unemployment benefits (III)	Number of people without a job according to the CWI (IV)
2004	119,000	43,000	48,250	53,000
2003	97,000	32,000	46,870	37,000
2002	79,000	21,000	34,700	27,000

*Sources: CBS, UWV, CWI.*

Table 2.4 gives unemployment rates for a number of groups within youth unemployment. From the table we conclude that unemployment rates are particularly high for young people of non-Western origin. The rate is more than twice as high as for young people from Dutch origin. For males it is even three times as high. There is also a marked difference in unemployment rates between the categories 15-19 and 20-24 years. Among the youngest group unemployment is twice as high compared to the 'older' group. At least to some extent the differences in unemployment rates between the older and the younger group and between the ethnic groups have to do with education. On the whole, table 2.4 confirms that unemployment rates are higher the lower education is. However, there is one exception. This is the high unemployment rate among high educated male youngsters. Maybe this is a statistical artefact caused by the fact that this a very small group in the labour force. It is also possible, however, that it refers to students who are trying to find a job while following their study.

*Table 2.4 Unemployment rates for different categories of youth, 2003*

	Female	Male	Total
<b>Education a)</b>			
Low education	11.1	11.1	11.1
Secondary education	6.3	6.1	6.2
High education	5.2	14.5	8.9
<b>Ethnic origin</b>			
Dutch origin	9.6	8.6	9.1
Foreign origin, Western	12.8	14.6	13.8
Foreign origin, Non-Western	16.5	24.3	20.6
<b>Age</b>			
15-19	17.8	14.0	15.7
20-24	8.0	9.2	8.6

Source: Labour Force Survey.

a) 2002.

Because education plays an important role for job perspectives, policy has defined a sort of minimum qualification level, the so-called starting qualification, which should be attained by as many youngsters who leave the educational system as possible. However, in 2002, more than half of the unemployed (56%) in the age group 15-22 have not attained this level. Also for those employed in this age group this percentage is high, namely 47%<sup>2</sup>, which illustrates that they are also in a vulnerable position. To compare: the proportion of those employed without this starting level in the age group 25-64 is around 20%. A crucial background for youngsters not attaining the starting level is that they start with an educational course which can lead to this qualification, but that they drop out before attaining this.

Among the European OECD countries the Netherlands had the lowest youth unemployment rate in 2003 (table 2.5). However, if the countries are ranked according to the share of long-term unemployment, the Netherlands takes place

<sup>2</sup> Part of this group may be students in secondary education who have a part-time job and who will finish initial education at a higher level than they have now. So in this sense, this percentage could somewhat over-rate the low level of education of this group.

5. The table also shows that there is a clear link between the overall unemployment rate and the youth unemployment rate. The Netherlands has the lowest overall unemployment rate. The connection means that the youth unemployment rate in the Netherlands could rise to higher rates if the overall labour market situation worsened.

*Table 2.5 Youth unemployment rates and shares of youth longer unemployed than 6 months and one year respectively (2003)*

	Overall unemployment rate (%)	Youth unemployment rate (15-24, %)	Share of young unemployed > 6 months unemployed (%)
Belgium	7.7	19.0	47
Denmark	5.5	9.8	28
Germany	9.4	10.6	n.a.
Finland	9.3	21.6	29
Greece	9.1	25.1	67
Great Britain	4.9	11.5	25
Hungary	5.9	13.4	45
Ireland	4.5	7.6	n.a.
Italy	8.7	26.3	70
Netherlands	3.6	6.6	34
Norway	4.5	11.7	14
Austria	4.7	7.5	n.a.
Poland	20.0	43	61
Portugal	6.8	14.6	43
Spain	11.4	22.7	41
Czech Republic	7.8	17.6	51
Sweden	5.8	13.8	18
Switzerland	4.2	8.6	n.a.

*Source: OECD; based on combination of young unemployed > 6 months: Eurostat data (4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2003).*

### **3 POLICIES**

#### **3.1 A LONG-TERM PLAN TO TACKLE YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE ROLE OF THE TASKFORCE YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN IT**

During the 1980s when the youth unemployment rate reached a peak of well over 20 percent, the feeling was that the government had reacted too late. The fear was that starting one's career in the labour market as long-term unemployed will have negative effects on job chances later during one's work life. Even the phrase 'lost generation' was mentioned<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, when youth unemployment began to increase again after 2000, the government took action in order to prevent massive youth unemployment. In 2003 a plan was developed to tackle youth unemployment. In line with the guidelines of the European Employment Strategy, the Dutch government aims at offering each young person a job or a training position before six months in unemployment are reached. Furthermore, according to the Lisbon target, by 2010, the number of young people leaving school without a starting qualification level should be halved. This level is comparable with a diploma of the second step in secondary education.

The plan contains 31 action points, among them:

- a.* reducing early school-leaving without a diploma;
- b.* reinforcing job mediation for young unemployed by the CWI (the employment offices). This includes specific acquisition among employers of vacancies which are suitable for young (low-educated) unemployed, specific job fairs for this target group and a specific entry for this target group at the website;
- c.* making the ESF programme for the Netherlands more accessible for projects in the field of youth employment and training. Ways to attain this goal are making employers, but also municipalities, more aware about possibilities in this area (e.g. by establishing a specific ESF help desk for this aim). Moreover, the plan describes the start of procedures to allow the use of statutory sectoral training funds in cooperation with ESF-co-financing (which was previously not allowed). The job acquisition of CWI is also mentioned as a potential project for co-finance with ESF;
- d.* inviting the social partners to consider the possibility of introducing pay for low-skilled young people at the level of the statutory minimum youth wage

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<sup>3</sup> Looking afterwards, this fear seems somewhat over-rated. Present participation rates of the group 35-44 are not showing signs of a "cohort effect" of problematic entrance.

(most pay systems agreed upon in collective agreements start at higher wage levels);

- e. increasing the number of apprenticeship training places. One way mentioned to attain this goal is to (re)install so called common training activities (GOAs) which can act as employer for the apprentices, while at the same time individual employers in the region can hire in these apprentices, which contains less risks for them than fully employing them as apprentices. Another example mentioned to increase apprenticeship places is to stimulate public authorities to include conditions about offering apprenticeship places when, for example, they commission infrastructural projects. Another option is further development and recognition of apprenticeship places in so called “simulation companies”;
- f. streamlining and improving the careers in initial (vocational) education. This includes smoothing the steps from lower secondary education to intermediate vocational education, developing tools for the recognition of practically acquired competences to avoid unnecessary theoretical “school-type” ways of learning if these competences can also be attained by practical experience in an (apprenticeship) job, and incorporating more incentives in the financing of schools to avoid early exit<sup>4</sup>;
- g. the introduction of a special taskforce to act as a catalyst for the implementation of the plan and its action points.

According to the working plans of the Taskforce for 2004 and 2005 it displays a variety of activities. Improving the cooperation between (local) actors is a key objective. This is crucial because for nearly all of the action points mentioned above, other actors are involved or already working on these issues. The Taskforce aims at acting as a catalyst and stimulating factor to increase the efforts in these directions and streamline the cooperation between actors. Examples from the working plans are:

- Regional initiatives to create jobs, internships and apprenticeship places for young people. At regional level some city councillors have committed themselves to be ambassador to lobby for this goal. Both commitment sessions as well as action days are organised to bring together regional actors like representatives of companies, employer organisations, CWI and vocational school.
- Account managers of the Taskforce support regional Centres for Reporting and Coordination to prevent early school leaving (RMCs) in drawing up plans for improvement for their region.

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4 In the working plans for 2004 and 2005 a related idea has evolved towards the development of a so-called “passport for the young” which reflects their competences and could act as a stimulating basis for further training.

- Central Points for information and reporting of problems about internship, apprenticeship places and jobs have been initiated at employers organisations (*Jongactief*), and the CWI (*Leerbaan alarmlijn*). Moreover, together with several actors, an information point for young people and their parents about internships and apprenticeship places has been initiated (*Stageinformatiepunt, STIP*).

It is too early to say whether the plan and the role of the Taskforce in it, are successful. From the available figures on the youth unemployment rate and the share of long-term unemployed youth we do not yet observe a trend break in 2004. But it will be easier to judge the impact of the approach after this year.

In the next section we concentrate on two elements in youth policies: active labour market policies and policies reducing the number of young people leaving school without a starter's qualification.

### **3.2 ACTIVE LABOUR MARKET POLICIES**

Active labour market policies specifically aimed at reducing youth unemployment date back to the 1980s, when the Netherlands faced unemployment rates for young people over 20 per cent. However, gradually the tendency is to work with general measures, which can, in principle, be applied to all age groups. However, still a number of specific policies for young people exist. In this section we deal with:

- a. Lessons from the international evaluation literature.
- b. Experiences with Dutch youth measures in the past.
- c. The current youth measures and the application of some general active policies to young people.

#### ***Lessons from the international evaluation literature***

What can we learn from the international evaluation literature concerning active labour market policies? De Koning et al (2005) made a review of evaluation studies covering some 130 studies. From these studies there is convincing evidence that:

- a. incentives for jobseekers (sanctions, job search monitoring and bonuses), job counselling and placement subsidies for regular jobs are effective;
- b. job creation schemes tend to have a small effect on the chance of getting a regular job. There is even a possibility that chances are reduced;
- c. training is an effective reintegration instrument for older unemployed;
- d. training is an *ineffective* instrument for young unemployed.

The latter is of course a serious drawback for attempts to fight youth unemployment with training measures. One of the reasons might be that the training offered to the young people is too similar to the type of education that made them leave school early. Another possibility is that training has been applied to young people who already had a sufficient level of education.

### *Youth measures from the past*

Table 3.1 presents some Dutch measures from the past. Most of them are job creation measures. The results of these job creation schemes for the young seem to be somewhat more positive than the negative picture for job creation schemes in general which came out of the international literature. Probably these types of measures – if successful at all – are most suitable for this target group.

*Table 3.1 Active measures from the past specifically aimed at young people*

Measure	Content	Period	Evaluation
Job creation measure in the public sector (WVM)	Wage-subsidy for employers in case of hiring long-term unemployed youth for temporary (6-12 months) additional work	1983-1990	Displacement effects are relatively small (probably less than 25 per cent). Approximately 50 percent of the employers and the young people involved think that the future labour market opportunities for the participants have improved (De Koning and Stolk (1984)).
Subsidised temporary work (JOB scheme)	Wage-subsidy for employers in case of hiring long-term unemployed youth through a TEMP agency (maximum hiring period of 1 year)	1984-1990 (on a national scale: 1988-1990)	About 50% of the JOB scheme-jobs are additional employment for the target group. More than half of the participants have a regular job afterwards. About half of the participants expects that JOB has improved their chances of finding work in the future (De Koning and others (1988 and 1989))
First Phase of Activating Labour market policy for the Young (AAJ)	Counseling and preparation activities to help young unemployed (less than 6 months unemployed) to find a job or training place	1992-1997	A very small part of the target group is reached. If they are reached only a small part attributes their finding of a job to the AAJ-activities. Net effect is 3% (De Koning and others, 1994).
Youth guaranteed jobs plan (JWG)	Job creation scheme for young people that become unemployed for longer than six months. Later included in a general job creation scheme (WIW)	1992-1997 (in 1998 included in general job creation scheme WIW)	The scheme is meant to reach all long term young unemployed, but only succeeds in reaching about two-thirds. A majority of roughly 60-70% of ex-participants has a job some time afterwards. Net effects are estimated at about 18% (Olieman and others, 1996).

### *Current measures*

Although the tendency is towards measures that are open to all unemployed, there are still measures specifically developed for young people (some are presented in table 3.2). Most of these measures are in an experimental phase and have started in the framework of, or with support of the Taskforce. Because most of these actions have recently started, it is far too early to say something about results. This applies to the following measures: Youth development and experience raising positions (JOB), Work First Trajectories and the O&O Youth model.

The fiscal facility for apprenticeship places has existed for some time. Some older evaluations indicate that the effectiveness is not high, but this facility is probably more a reflection of the fact that the government also feels a certain responsibility for this type of training.

There are also specific projects for young people under the ESF framework. Increasing the number of apprentices is one of the priorities. However, information about results and effects is also lacking here.

*Table 3.2 Examples of current active (experimental) measures specifically aimed at young people*

Youth development and experience-raising positions (JOP)	Job creation scheme for young people that are longer than six months unemployed.	Experiment running until January 1 2007	No evaluation results available
Work First Trajectories	Increasingly, unemployed people asking for social assistance benefits are directly put to work in low-paid subsidised jobs. The fact that the work is simple and low-paid is supposed to give an incentive to look for a regular job	Started quite recently in a number of municipalities	Some municipalities (for example Groningen) report successes of the work first approach.

Subsidy for practical component apprenticeship training	Since 1996 employers receive a tax deduction for providing contracts to apprenticeships. Before that date employers could receive a subsidy which was implemented by the PES.	1996-now	Although there is some discussion about the research methodology used, the general conclusion seems to be that the stimulating effects of the fiscal facility are low (EIM, 1997 and Rekenkamer, 1998)
O&O youth model	Trajectories for unemployed young in which they are prepared for an apprenticeship place including a guarantee for a job afterwards (cooperation between various actors, including municipalities and sectoral training funds)	Experiments which have started in September 2004	No evaluation results available
Projects subsidised by ESF	Employment and training projects, often in cooperation with the social partners	Current programme period: 2000-2006	No evaluation results available

Recently, the WVA measure can also be applied to young people. This measure offers employers a subsidy of 1.500 euro when they hire an unemployed person who has no starting qualification, and provide them with training to reach this level. However, so far only 39 companies have used this scheme for, in total, some 300 workers. Although most of these workers are young, the number is too low to make much difference in the labour market. On the basis of a current evaluation study, more will become known about the reasons and what can be done to increase the number of users.

Many of the funds for reintegration have been decentralised to municipalities. They have much freedom in the way they spend these funds. This includes instruments like counselling, training and job creation. These (local) instruments will be applied to all unemployed, including the young. Table 3.2 shows some recent initiatives also involving municipalities which are more specifically

targeted to the young, but such exclusive targeting seems to be more the exception than the rule<sup>5</sup>.

### **3.3 POLICIES FIGHTING EARLY SCHOOL-LEAVING**

It is well known that people do better in the labour market the higher their education is (Gelderblom and De Koning, forthcoming). The higher one's education is, the higher the chance to participate, the higher the chance to get a job and the lower the chance to become unemployed. This is true for the whole working life. More education also pays off in terms of higher pay and higher productivity. Furthermore, there are also non-market revenues such as a better health and a more active social participation (see for example De Koning and others, 2003; Haveman and Wolfe, 1984 and Wolfe and Haveman, 2002). Although education and training later during life could make up for low initial investment in human capital, the reality is that the higher one's initial education is, the higher the participation in continuous training. Figures from the Dutch OSA labour supply panel show that training participation among the higher educated is at least 1.5 times higher than for lower educated.

Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that young people leave education with a starter's qualification. This is an important focus point for present Dutch government policy. In order to improve institutional awareness and procedures around early exit, regional reporting and coordination centres (RMCs) for early school leave have been installed. A recent evaluation of these centres (Glaude and Verbeek, 2004) showed that they have contributed to the availability and efficient use of monitoring and signalling information about early exit and to cooperation between regional actors, and have helped to improve the awareness and commitment to this issue. However, the evaluation also recognises that there is still a long way to go. Another example of policy initiatives for reducing the number of those without a starting qualification is the earlier mentioned fiscal facility for employers if they train such a worker (WVA). However, even if these types of institutions and measures were to be further enlarged and extended, there will still remain a group for whom the starting qualification will be difficult to achieve, because the theoretical component will be too demanding, or because they very much dislike traditional school-type of learning. More practical and individualised training approaches will be necessary to help this group to improve their qualifications. However, in regular initial vocational education the trend has been towards defining (higher) levels of minimally-required "theoretical" skills, although recently some changes have taken place in the sense

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<sup>5</sup> A study by Heijkoop, Schut and Quist (2004) concludes that only few municipalities have developed a coherent policy programme to fight youth unemployment.

that new initiatives have been started to (re)develop very practically-oriented pathways. In this respect, it has been a loss that, in recent years, the infrastructure of specific training centres for unemployed and other target groups (Centra Vakopleiding, centres for vocational training) has been lost, which specialised in these type of approaches.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

On the one hand there is reason to say that the problem of Dutch youth unemployment should not be exaggerated. The youth unemployment rate is still relatively low, certainly if we take an international perspective. On the other hand, with regard to the proportion of long term unemployed, the Netherlands is not among the “best”. Moreover, if overall unemployment rates were to rise, the young would be among the most vulnerable groups. It is also true that a considerable part of the young leave school without a starting qualification. We know that these people are not only at high risk of unemployment at a young age. They also remain vulnerable to unemployment and inactivity throughout their life. Therefore, it is a good initiative to develop a comprehensive policy programme to fight youth unemployment and to reduce early school leaving.

Experiences with labour market policies in the past show that training measures seem to be less effective for the young compared with their effectiveness for older unemployed. Experiences with job creation schemes seem to be somewhat more positive. However the move on to a regular job afterwards must be a central focus point for these types of measures. Although some experiments have started with new types of active measures in the framework of the plan against youth unemployment, most of the activities of the Taskforce focus on streamlining and supporting initiatives by bringing together (local) actors. It is too early to judge the impact of the plan against youth unemployment from the Taskforce.

Even if policies will be intensified and made more effective, some early school-leaving will be hardly unavoidable. This group will be vulnerable and will remain in danger of becoming unemployed. Experiences with a fiscal incentive to compensate training costs for employers when recruiting such a group are not encouraging, so this has not yet proved a way to improve their position by making them more attractive to employers. Sending them back to school will also not always be a logical solution. In practice this will mean they have to go back to the type of schools they left (and disliked or did not “fit in”, for example because the education was too theoretical, or with too few options to follow more individualised learning pathways). An alternative could be to start an apprenticeship, in which attending school is only for a limited proportion of time. However, apprenticeship places turn out to be very sensitive for the business cycle, so in times of high youth unemployment rates, the supply of places will be

limited. Experiences with (fiscal) stimuli of apprenticeship places also show that these tools have clear limitations in increasing the number of places. An alternative would be to (re)install a specific training infrastructure like the former Centra Vakopleiding, which offered practical courses with strongly individualised learning pathways. Further development of competences required in practical work is another alternative.

Also important is to target the youth policies better. Not try to reach the total group of youngsters, but only those without a starting qualification and those who are at high risk of getting long term unemployed. Some measures in the past had very low net effects because of a very broad targeting. Early identification of the groups with the highest risks is crucial to carry out such targeting.

On several places in the paper we had to conclude that no evaluation results were available about recent youth policies. This conclusion generally applies to current labour market policies in the Netherlands. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment has acknowledged this omission and is going to nominate an advisory commission consisting of researchers from the academic world. This commission will then come up with recommendations for a new programme for evaluation research.

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