

About technical education, the government and the regional labour market

Mr. Ferdinand van Kampen is a mechanical engineer. As a technician, he has managed several companies for many years. But he has also always had a strong commitment to technical vocational education. "For without good technical education," he adds, "companies cannot grow. Companies need people who have more than just a good technical basis. They must also constantly be curious about new developments, prepare for them, have the courage to be an entrepreneur and an innovator." That is quite a bit. Two years ago, Mr. van Kampen received and accepted the offer to become director of the Techniekcollege Zuid-Limburg (Technology College of South Limburg). A collaboration of two schools in the south of The Netherlands. The editors of DECP spoke to Mr. van Kampen.



Technology is the basis

"The time that curricula could remain unchanged for ten years is long gone.", according to Mr. van Kampen. "Companies that keep their heads above the water and grow have to deal with constant changes. Production systems are becoming more and more complex. Digitisation and data processing are becoming increasingly important. This has consequences for the competencies you require from employees". Does today's world still seem to be that of a few decades ago? Van Kampen is a firm believer in that: "In many aspects, today's world is the same as in the prehistoric times. People built huts, now houses. They made carts, now cars. The art of printing was the opening to the large-scale provision of information. We still do all this. Only with more developed resources and instruments. And by more cooperation with other knowledge carriers. But technology remains the basis for many processes".

In touch with people from companies

What does this mean for the technical vocational education? Van Kampen: "Two things. We are dealing with curricula that are fixed for a large part. The government is responsible for that. It is determined by law. So, we need to meet a number of basic requirements. In the past, curricula were 100% fixed in learning outcomes and their examination. Those were the same everywhere. But in the last decades, schools and companies have managed to ensure that the government allows us 20-30% freedom within the curricula. And we make use of that freedom.

The companies are our customers

We even stretch it a bit when necessary. That brings me to the second element: we are constantly in touch with people from companies. Of course, we have an official professional field committee. It consists of managers and technicians of approximately 10 companies from the region. I consider them as our customers. With many companies, we have agreements on internships to encourage students to learn in practice. This always involves a mentor. Our teachers have a

large degree of freedom to agree with the companies what the internship assignments will look like. In this way, they are automatically kept up to date with new developments in companies. In addition, some of our teachers are 'hybrid'. They work part of the time in a company. In addition, they teach 2 or 3 days at our school."

Everybody benefits

So, you could say that the VISTA college is in the middle of the regional labour market? "Definitely", says Van Kampen. "The companies are our customers. Our students will find work there after their graduation. It is therefore in our interest to ensure that they are prepared as well as possible for their professional future. In turn, it is in the interest of the companies that their new employees quickly contribute to their productivity and, in the long term, also to their innovative capacity.

The teachers run their work as a company

Because our teachers, to a large extent, are the owners of the educational processes, they run their work as a company. Entrepreneurs recognize and appreciate that. At the end of the day, everyone benefits."

Lifelong learning is not a punishment

And what is the role of the government? Van Kampen is clear on this matter. "Look, you may want to do everything yourself. But you really need each other. The government provides the preconditions for good technical vocational education. That is their job. In turn, we work together with companies in the region to shape that education as well as possible. And to have

it move along with constant changes in the competence needs. This applies to new students, but also for employees. It is not without reason that we speak of 'lifelong learning'. This is not a punishment, but part of the work. We must make sure that the infrastructure is suitable to this end. The government regularly reviews us by means of audits. The auditors will look especially to the quality of the 'finished product'. What is the yield of our education? This is more important than the mere processes. We are the entrepreneurs in these processes."



Mr. Ferdinand van Kampen:

'Entrepreneurship in the technical vocational education'

