

## **Agreement between employers, employees and government**

### **Long-term approach to low literacy in society and in trade and industry**

**2007 - 2015**

#### **Whereas:**

- I. every individual must be able to read, write, and do sums in order to function in society and in the labour market, participate in both (and have the confidence to do so), and develop as a person;
- II. trends in the labour market require the participation of groups that are more or less marginalised or are at risk of becoming so;
- III. a literate labour force is crucial to a properly functioning economy capable of competing and anticipating future trends.

#### **Whereas the signatories wish to combat low literacy in society and in trade and industry, and:**

- A. the government, employers, and employees are each responsible in their own way for preventing and reducing low literacy;
- B. close cooperation between government, employers, and employees must be a vital part of any effective, long-term approach to low literacy;
- C. the problem of low literacy can only be solved in the long term if steps are taken both to prevent and reduce it;
- D. employers and employees are advised to tackle low literacy in trade and industry and to raise it as a topic of discussion in employer-employee consultations, in accordance with the recommendations of the Labour Foundation's "A Future for Low-Literate Individuals, A Job for Trade and Industry" (2007);
- E. an employee must have at least an entry-level qualification in order to participate in the employment process on a long-term basis;

**The signatories have agreed as follows:**

1. The government will do its utmost to ensure that by 2011, every pupil who leaves primary school will have sufficient literacy (reading and writing) and numeracy skills to enter secondary education. In order to determine whether a pupil leaving primary school has the necessary literacy and numeracy skills, a clearer description will be drawn up of the minimum level of literacy and numeracy that pupils must have attained by the end of primary school.
2. The government has set itself the aim of ensuring that after 2011, no further low-literate pupils leave the education system or enter the labour market. The aim is to ensure that from 2011 on, every young person who leaves the education system or enters the labour market has sufficient literacy and numeracy skills to grow in his or her work and to function in society.
3. The aim is to reduce the number of low-literate persons (currently approximately 1.5 million) by 60% to a maximum of 600,000 in 2015. In order to introduce the reduction in stages, efforts will be made to achieve half the target by 2011, with the number of low-literate persons standing at no more than 1.1 million by that year. This means maintaining the following aim: the percentage of Dutch people who have literacy or numeracy difficulties will be reduced from 10% to 4%.
4. The Labour Foundation [*Stichting van de Arbeid*] and the government have the aim of reducing the number of low-literate employed persons (currently approximately 420,000) by 60% in 2015 to no more than 168,000. In order to introduce the reduction in stages, efforts will be made to achieve half the target by 2011 (i.e. a reduction by 126,000 low-literate persons), with the number of low-literate employed persons standing at no more than 294,000 by that year.
5.
  - a. The Labour Foundation, employers (and their associations), trade unions, and the government will make a joint effort to track down and encourage low-literate employed persons to solve their literacy and numeracy problems. Businesses and institutions are urged to track down their low-literate employees and encourage them to enrol in a literacy programme. Employee representative bodies can also play a role in these efforts.
  - b. The national government will make an effort to cooperate with the Centre for Work and Income (CWI), the Social Security Agency (UWV) and the municipal authorities (for example via social services) to track down unemployed and jobless low-literate persons.
  - c. The national government will encourage the municipal authorities to track down low-literate persons during their joint consultations and to make arrangements with educational institutions on behalf of employed and unemployed low-literate persons.
6.
  - a. The government is responsible for ensuring access to and the availability of a sufficient range of educational opportunities for unemployed low-literate persons. The government and the social partners share responsibility for access to and the availability of a sufficient range of educational opportunities for employed low-literate persons. It is the government's responsibility to make literacy training opportunities available (as a basic requirement for an entry-level qualification); it is the responsibility of the parties representing trade and industry to cover the wage bill for employees who are absent in connection with literacy training.

- b. The Labour Foundation advises the parties to collective agreements to encourage low-literate employees to enrol in a literacy programme and to support them by means of arrangements laid down in collective agreements and through the Education & Training funds [*O&O-fondsen*].
  - c. The government and the Labour Foundation will encourage and inspire low-literate persons to make good use of the literacy training opportunities being offered to them.
  - d. The Labour Foundation will draw up a recommendation in which it calls on the parties to collective agreements to arrange decentralised coverage of the wage bill for employees absent in connection with literacy training.
7. The signatories will arrive at more detailed arrangements within the context of the present agreement. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science will take a leading role in this on behalf of the government.
- The detailed arrangements will focus on supporting measures and on intensifying the Low Literacy Plan of Attack 2006 – 2010 “*Involved from A to Z*”. These arrangements will involve a phased programme that the signatories will draw up jointly and that may include the following:
- tracking down low-literate employees and unemployed persons (recruitment strategies);
  - making literacy training arrangements with these low-literate persons and educational institutions (encouragement strategies);
  - seeing that there are a sufficient number of educational locations and teachers for low-literate employed and unemployed persons and that enough teaching material is developed;
  - the monitoring method. The government will see that the annual progress report on low literacy is continued. In support of the same, the Labour Foundation will monitor the relevant business efforts and results;
  - if necessary based on new, differentiated research data that will become available in 2008 from the Adult Literacy and Life Skills project, the target figures cited in the present agreement will be adjusted;
  - if necessary, the phased programme will be linked to the work of the Meijerink Committee regarding a clearer description of the minimum language and numeracy skills that pupils must have mastered by the end of primary school.
8. At their discretion, the signatories may call on the Reading & Writing Foundation [*Stichting Lezen & Schrijven*] as an expertise and information centre.

Thus agreed and signed in The Hague on 11 September 2007

*Labour Foundation*

B.E.M. Wientjes	A.M. Jongerius
On behalf of the national employers' associations	On behalf of the national trade union federations

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*Ministry of Education, Culture and Science*

J.M. van Bijsterveldt	S.A.M. Dijkma
State Secretary	State Secretary

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*Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment*

A. Aboutaleb  
State Secretary

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*Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport*

A. Rouvoet  
Minister for Youth and Family