

Visies op HBO en beroepspraktijk : een exploratief onderzoek naar visies van experts op de toekomstige relatie van HBO en beroepspraktijk

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10 Summary

10.1 ESSENCE

This study aimed at providing insight into the views on some aspects of future relations between Higher Professional Education (HBO) and professional practice. To that end the following actions have been undertaken:

- a theoretical analysis and exploration;
- a sociometric preliminary examination aimed at defining a system of actions and the appointment of the group of informants;
- a survey research.

10.2 STARTING-POINT OF THE STUDY

The study had its point of departure in the contrast and the much-discussed area of tension between higher professional education and professional practice; both systems cannot exist without each other; they are strongly related, but their relationship is problematic and the subject of much discussion.

The systems have essential differences in task and purpose; they have different functions and time-orientations and the discussions about the relationship of the systems are polymorphic and numerous. Judging from a great many dissertations the problem of the link-up from education to work has its own character and is of great importance.

The image of the relationship between work and education as an isolated problem seems to be provoked by the publicity in the media, trade press, organisations and interest groups.

The whole range of verifiable points of view in this field, however, is rather limited, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Moreover a lot of time and energy has been invested in the discussions about and the improvement of the link-up from education to work (also because of regulations issued by the government). It is noticeable that neither these discussions nor research with reference to the relationship between and the changeover from education to work, have significantly contributed to further specifications of views and

expectations of experts in both systems. In particular investigations into the views of desired future relations between education and work are lacking.

10.3 AREAS OF RESEARCH

This study aimed at examining what education, labour-sector and intermediary organisations think of future relations between HBO and professional practice. In the theoretical part, which started from the supposition of a traditional contrast between the systems of educational practice and professional practice, the parties were mapped and sources of tension were identified.

This outline of ideas and expectations, concentrated on three main aspects, showed a multitude of divergent views of a polymorphic character.

Views on the quality of the output, on the relationship between education and work and on the future structure and organisation, are the main areas described and investigated in this study. The choice of these themes was made:

- on the basis of the results of previous research;
- after analysis of views on the functions of HBO;
- after determining that approaches of the qualification-concept repeatedly imply specific outlooks on the relationship between educational practice and professional practice.

The research is restricted to the province of Limburg and is concentrated on HBO.

10.4 CENTRAL QUESTIONS

The central questions applied to the specifications of the wishes, which experts in the three sectors attribute to a number of trends within three domains. The themes have been worked out in detail. Starting from the distinction between technical-instrumental and social-normative qualifications we have distinguished fourteen aspects under "quality".

The sub-sector "interaction" has been discussed starting from a number of characteristics of HBO and professional practice. The starting point with HBO is the degree of pro- or re-activity.

As far as professional practice is concerned the degree of professionalization and heterogeneity has been under discussion. The aspect "future development of the HBO-structure and organisation" has been discussed starting from the various views found in literature. Nine separate aspects of this theme have been described. Each time a number of possible developments has been formu-

lated after studying literature and in consultation with representatives of education, labour and intermediary organisations.

10.5 THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE RESEARCH

The group of respondents consisted of experts in the three sectors mentioned above. A socio-metric technique (position- and reputation-method) was used to decide which persons in Limburg were to be involved in the research on the ground of their reputation. A relevant actor was identified as someone who fulfils at least one of the two conditions:

The person in question must be connected with HBO in his/her job (position) and/or the person in question must have a certain expert knowledge in the field of the problematical changeover from HBO to professional practice.

A random check of 493 informants was carried out by means of the combined use of the position- and reputation-method. The reputation, seen through the eyes of others, and the position held by people within the three sectors, were the criteria on which the random check was based.

10.6 DATA-COMPILATION AND DATA-ANALYSIS

The random check of 493 persons resulted in 362 reactions.

The respondents could state their degree of preference for 87 items; moreover a set of questions with regard to their own involvement in the theme of research and a series of independent variables constituted the data-set for the research.

10.7 DIMENSIONALITY IN VIEWS AND EXPECTATIONS

Principal component-analysis was carried out to trace the latent structure of the variables presented. A 6-factor solution was chosen in which a further specification resulted in 13 concepts.

We came to the conclusion that the relevant actors use six quality-aspects, as well as three interaction-aspects and four structure-aspects.

The quality-aspects fit into the distinction between technical-instrumental and social-normative qualifications; the interaction-aspects fit into the distinction autonomous and dependent HBO.

The theme "structure" comprises two aspects indicating the flexibility of HBO (internal-external) and two aspects indicating the nature of education as HBO should provide (general education versus specific training). The dimensionality was invariable for experts with different sector-backgrounds and different educational backgrounds.

Accordingly the experts, who were consulted with regard to the facets of the changeover from HBO to professional practice, judge from the same "conceptual framework". Remarkable differences in the main lines on which judgement is based, could not be found.

10.8 SPECIFIED DIFFERENCES IN VIEW

Numerous dissertations on the changeover from education to work, suggest a gap between THE labour-system and THE education.

From this research it appears that the problem should be put in perspective and that the differences are not as fundamental as they frequently seem to be. Differences in view and expectations only arise in subsectors. The respondents who were consulted use the same conceptual framework, and the number of issues, in which differences in view were found, was limited.

In spite of the existence of identical conceptual framework, differential views could be seen. Thirteen concepts were used as measuring-instruments with which the views and differences in view were mapped. Differences could be explained as follows:

- The sectors in which respondents work. Respondents in the labour-sector and respondents in the educational sector differ significantly in their views on a certain number of points, both on the aspects of quality and also as far as interaction is concerned. In particular the attribution or non-attribution of a primate to the professional practice resulted in divergent opinions.
- The educational background (calculated by means of the triad: social-pedagogical/technical/clerical-judicial) accounted for many differences in view.
- The aspects accounting for the most frequent and the greatest difference in view, were related to the influence and involvement, which respondents ascribed to themselves in decision-making processes concerning the future of HBO.

From the order based on the scale-averages of the thirteen aspects, it appeared that interaction between education and professional practice in terms of an open dialogue is considered to be the most desirable solution. Autonomous HBO is regarded to be less desirable.

The quality-aspects "organisation/planning" and "independence" are also at the top of the list of priorities.

The communicative skills, as a quality-aspect are also given high preference. The aspects of structure submitted, both the internal and external flexibility and the general education versus specific training in HBO is regarded less desirable. The connections between the various aspects of judgement and the social-structural background-characteristics were also examined.

On the whole it appeared that there were few connections with these social-structural background-characteristics. Taking this into account along with the statement that certain relations only exist from the point of view of active participation in the discussions concerning policy, we may assume that we are dealing with competent people.

The experts differ in opinion on certain aspects, and they certainly don't agree on all the issues. Of the six quality-aspects it appears that "organisation/planning" and "management-techniques" were issues leading to divergent opinions.

Of the interaction-aspects it turns out that the independence of HBO results in a diversity of opinions. The "experts" are fairly in agreement on the aspects of structure. The "non-experts" differ in opinion about internal flexibility.

Finally the main conclusions have been summarized and classified according to the viewpoint originally chosen viz. "quality-interaction-structure".

Subsequently more attention was given to the traditional contrast between work and education. Moreover some implications for consultation between education and work were outlined and suggestions for follow-up of this research were formulated.

With this research we have tried to give the initial impetus to an inventory of views on three themes in the discussions on the future relationship between Higher Professional Education and professional practice in the province of Limburg.