

Hand to the plow

Final report of the steering committee "Work in the vineyard"

Presented to the General Synod of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands by
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Content

Introduction	2
Nine key decisions	4
Statement of reasons for the key decisions	5

Introduction

N.B. This memorandum succeeds the memorandum "Past the turn-out, the tracks and the railroad ties" of November 2008. At some points in this memorandum knowledge of "Past the turn-out" is presumed and is being referred to this memorandum or to its supplements.

In November 2008 the General Synod discussed the 12 key decisions presented to her by the Steering Committee Work in the Vineyard (further: the Steering Committee) in the report "Past the turn-out, the tracks and the railroad ties". The synod-discussion was followed by an intensive exchange of views with various levels in the country. Based on all reactions the Steering Committee again presents the synod with key decisions. The formulation connects closely with the key decisions in "Past the turn-out". Only the key decisions 10, 11 and 12 have not been picked up again in connection with the consultation in the synod, pending the result of the evaluation of the Church Order. These key decisions will be discussed by the synod in combination with these results in November of this year. In the statement of reasons for the key decisions here suggested will be reacted to the considerations of the Steering Committee, with observation of the various reactions.

Before displaying the in view of the Steering Committee necessary key decisions the Committee wants to bring back to memory what the issue is here. The immediate cause is in the problems of the small congregations in relation to the new compensation-system, which was introduced when the Protestant Church in the Netherlands was shaped. A "broad study committee" was asked to investigate the future of the vicar within the united church and also to take along the position of the religious worker. From the start it became clear that several, but mutually connected, questions ask for a solution in view of the church in the 21st century. It is good to outline these questions again briefly in view of the important decision-making the synod is facing.

The continually relapsing membership confronts the church with the question if the handed down structures are still adequate to adapt to the developments in church and society. Many congregations have trouble holding their head above the water and have increasing problems to find office-bearers and volunteers to keep the church-work going. This also puts pressure on management-quality of the over-local organizations. The church herewith faces the question how to prepare in time for a sneaky hollow-out of the management. The decreasing financial resources of congregations lead to the increasing necessity to appoint vicars on a part-time basis. This sooner or later leads to bleakness of the professional support of the congregations and of the church as a whole. And if in future only part-time-appointments for vicars are possible, the attractiveness of the profession is undermined which will have consequences for the number of young people choosing the education to become vicar. Another consequence is a further isolation of vicars (which is often enough a one-person-position) because there is no more time for over-local work and because local congregations are not prepared to offer their own vicar, whose time is poorly proportioned, that opportunity. This process leads as well to an increasing desolation of congregations with regard to each other.

Furthermore there are regions in the country where there are not enough vicars to officiate in the local congregations. This increases the pressure on the granting of preaching-mandate to religious workers who are not or insufficiently equipped for that.

Because religious workers are not authorized to administer the sacraments, the granting of preaching-mandates puts pressure on the unity of Word and Sacraments. Under pressure of congregations sometimes religious workers are known to proceed to administration of Baptism and Eucharist-celebration. This situation is also the consequence of a lingering discussion on (the admission to) the profession of vicar and the position of religious worker within our church. With regard to the religious workers, highly trained people, there is additionally the often unsettled legal status. As a result these people choose a job outside the church after a while; herewith a lot of expertise and enthusiasm gets lost for the church.

For some time now the question about career development (through guidance and education) and quality control on the practice of profession for vicars and religious workers is raised within the church. As far as it exists, it is cut up, in many cases it does not meet the requirements which are set in present society and it is not recorded. This is in the first place damaging to those involved. Annually about 10 vicars have to be pulled out, almost always preceded by a long and exhausting process which is damaging for the congregation, the vicar and his or her direct environment. Much time, energy, quality and experience is lost that way, to the detriment of the church as a whole.

Fortunately in many other cases pulling out can be prevented, but than as well timely signalling and professional approach of the tensions, conflicts, obstructed work-situation or worn-out preachers is missing.

The devotion of office-bearers and volunteers in many places in our church is cause for great gratitude. It is uplifting to know how many people bring sacrifices with time and money to the church. In many places is worked with confidence and enthusiasm on tomorrow's church. The Steering Committee is convinced that the resilience and inspiration are heart-warming.

Nevertheless the Steering Committee becomes more and more convinced that the church as a whole is organizationally unequipped to meet the challenges she is facing. Although the acute or for the future imminent lack of money seems to be the greatest cause for concern, the Steering Committee is of the opinion that a deeper situated problem is concealed. Structure and working method of the church are not tailored to the strongly changing position of the church in society, the composition and involvement of her membership and the necessary care for her professional staff. Therefore now is the moment to bring about a structural and cultural change. During the upcoming 15 years half of the present number of vicars will take leave of the profession. Processes of change will have to be handled carefully, but nevertheless energetically. Dedication of the Steering Committee is to offer space and direction. Now is the time to veer round in order to have enough time for realization of the necessary changes.

Nine key decisions

I. On solidarity

1. A necessary element of being church is solidarity. This regards solidarity of congregations for congregations. In this connection the existing solidarity-contribution will be increased from € 5 to € 10 per confessing member. In this way an amount of € 9 million becomes available. This amount is for the major part (€ 7 million) available for support to congregations to fulfil their main tasks: pastoral care, diaconal work, and apostolate. The remaining € 2 million is available for categorical pastoral care, migrant-churches, youth work as such.
2. Financial support to congregations is tied to strict conditions, which are checked by an independent committee of volunteers. Particularly cooperation in any form with other congregation(s) will be a condition.
3. The possibilities to and forms of cooperation between local congregations will be increased where necessary. Congregations can, except for church-orderly exceptions, determine themselves with which congregation(s) they wish to cooperate.

II. On career-development

4. An income-system for vicars will be established with three overlapping scales. Transition to the next scale will become dependant of testable development of talents.
 - I. After completion of a study and admittance to the profession follows one year as starting vicar with obligatory work guidance.
 - II. In principle follows after this year a period of at least four to six years in the same congregation. During this period obligatory in-service training takes place as part of permanent education.
 - III. After the obligatory in-service training can be started with obtaining the post-master-degree, which is also part of the assessment for promotion to the highest income-scale.

III. On vicar/religious worker and the associations

5. Each vicar and religious worker is responsible to spend a part of her/his working hours outside of the own congregation, in service of the church as a whole, within the private region or nationally. Hereby are taken into accounts requests to those involved, personal preferences, capacities, expertise and development-wishes.
6. Vicars and religious workers are linked to the own congregation and are obligatory part of a cooperative for vicars and religious workers, according to the way this has been arranged for vicars in the present Church Order (Ordinance 4.18). This cooperative is responsible for the professional theological guidance of congregations within a certain department of the in the Church Order mentioned core duties of a vicar, who as a primus inter pares monitors the continuity and quality of the cooperative. Furthermore she/he promotes the growing-capacities and developing opportunities of the vicars and religious workers in the cooperative.
7. On the level of the present General Classical Assembly a "pastor pastorum" is appointed, comparable with the present position of the Regional Advisor of the Classical Assemblies. This "pastor pastorum" guides the presidents of the cooperatives, conducts assessment interviews with vicars and religious workers if necessary and is trusted representative of the consistories in his/her region.

IV. On religious workers

8. Religious workers with a completed Higher Vocational Education in theology are appointed in administration, except those to whom key decision 9 applies. They are not ordained and can not obtain preaching mandate anymore. They are employees and principally have access as regular advisors to all meetings of the professional organization which appointed her/him.
9. Religious workers with a completed Higher Vocational Education in theology who, in view of the local situation, have been asked to do the work of a vicar, can be admitted to the profession of vicar. However only after an assessment of suitability has taken place and homiletic and liturgical extra-training has been completed. They work, being in the profession, always under supervision of the vicar-mentor from the cooperative. They are attached to the income-scale for starting vicars and do not have the possibility to take a post-master-education, unless by achieving the academic degree in theology. This admission to the profession of vicar applies for life.

Statement of reasons for policy topics

Statement of reasons for key decisions 1 and 2

These decisions are based on and explained in the report of the taskforce Solidarity, annex 3.1 of the memorandum "Past the turn-out". With regard to the division of means the committee presumes on second thought € 7 million for support to congregations, of which € 0,5 million for the congregations that actively want to preserve and contribute to the Lutheran tradition and € 2 million for categorical pastoral work, migrant churches, youth work and such.

Statement of reasons for key decision 3

In supplement 5 of "Past the turn-out" examples are given of alternative forms of cooperation of congregations which are impossible within the current Church Order, but leave the basic structure of the Church Order unimpaired. The Steering Committee advocates a broad palette of possibilities and various degrees of independence and cooperation. A further consequence in the framework of the evaluation of the Church Order is recommended urgently. The present possibilities with their strict limits are increasingly insufficient. When more possibilities with more liquid limits develop there is more room for differentiation.

In the large cities as well as in the smaller communities the Church Order is in some ways sooner an obstruction than a means to advance the living and working of the congregation. For many Evangelic-Lutheran congregations we can speak of an acute problem because of the reduction in membership, the large distance between the congregations, the issuing of rules for numbers of consistory-members and the basic requirements for a theoretical vicar-strength. Presently the Evangelical-Lutheran Synod is developing a way of thinking for the future, in which new ways are searched. These new ways may also be of service for other congregations.

Statement of reasons for key decision 4

The Steering Committee did not consider the career development of the vicar-spiritual caretaker. Only the career of the congregation-vicar is under discussion here.

Every theologian educated according to the present academic rules which has been ordained in profession by the church and have been called upon by a congregation, is by ordainment bound to that congregation in full rights of the profession of vicar. In the first year the vicar receives work-guidance of an experienced vicar-work-mentor. At the end of the year an evaluation-interview is held between vicar, work-mentor, team leader of the cooperative (see further on) and the church council. In an ultimate and exceptional case the conclusion could be that it is unwise to continue the association of this vicar with this congregation. In that case the church is instructed to look for another congregation or to examine in which way the career of the starting vicar can be continued elsewhere within the church.

If the exceptional situation does not apply, the starting vicar continues to be attached to the same congregation in principle for a period of four to six years.

On post-master-specialization and Permanent Education

In the present situation the permanent education (further PE) is composed of three parts, namely

- Work guidance in the 1st year of the vicar ship
- Obligatory in-service training, in the first five years of vicar ship. The obligatory in-service training consists now of 7 courses of 3 days at the seminary.
- Study-leave, every five years for three months. PE measures 17,5 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) in a period of five years (this corresponds with a study load of 65 days).

According to the Steering Committee this composition can be reconstructed into a system of PE, which joins up with the proposed career development of the vicar.

I. Work guidance 1st year of vicar ship

After ordaining in the first congregation – or installation – follows a year as starting vicar. Personal coaching and counseling from the regional church will be focused during this year on letting the starting vicar grow into the profession, also in view of the meaning of the profession for the place and meaning of the church in society.

II. Obligatory in-service training

The obligatory in-service training is dominated by the support as vicar in the first congregation. Historically this in-service training has always been looked upon as completion of the generic applying training. Nature and purpose for this in-service training is:

- a. Rethinking and reflection on the work of vicar within congregation, church and as representative of the church in society in view of integration of person, profession and job;
- b. Practice aimed and experience directed in-service training in view of the job of vicar in full width (generalization), as a result including the necessary capacities for making the church present in society.

- c. Embedding of the starting vicar in the width of the church and in the circle of colleagues in view of the mutual responsibility for the spiritual management of the church and for an inspiring presence of the church in society.
 - In principle the vicar can only be called upon and ordained in the next work situation after completion of this in-service training.
 - During this in-service training the elementary vicar can take his bearings for her/his need for further training or specialization.

III. Continued permanent education

This further permanent education is a right and duty for all vicars. The realization begins a number of years after the completion of the obligatory in-service training in consultation with the team-leader of the cooperative. PE has three aspects:

- a. Generic training. The objective is what every elementary vicar and religious worker need to be able to function on basic level. At request of the church specific courses can be part of this training. This is both offer and demand-driven.
- b. Specific training, deepening on facets, development of special capacities and forms of specialization.
- c. Remediation programs in order to force back deficiencies in the practise of profession. This section is mainly guided.

The Steering Committee proposes to rebuild the existing system of work guidance, obligatory in-service training and study-leave into an integrated system of PE, as outlined before. This adds to previous proposals of the Steering Committee: guidance in the first year and evaluation assessments and progress monitoring during the entire career. PE is an adequate and necessary instrument in the framework of the career counselling proposed by the Steering Committee.

Although the Steering Committee does not look upon it as her task to indicate the size and financing of this PE, she would like to add the following. The work guidance and the obligatory in-service training could be less in the future, because they can be combined with the guidance and support of starting vicars within the work communities. In the conception of the Steering Committee for example thinks it necessary both from the view of cost control as well as from the view of specialization to limit the obligatory in-service training to the 2nd, 3rd and 4th year of the professional practise and have the further PE starting in the 8th year. The work guidance and the obligatory in-service training for starting vicars could be paid in accordance with the available regulation. Courses or continuation schooling which follow could be chargeable to the parties involved. In connection with the available regulation for study leave the permanent education can be stimulated by taking into the compensation-regulation that in accordance with the financial resources the church board will contribute substantially to paying the costs, provided that the realization of the Permanent Education is based on the development-interviews held with the team-leader of the cooperative.

In "Past the turn-out" the Steering Committee did not relate the post-master-specialization to a form of PE. The Steering Committee perceives the specialization to have another character than permanent education for the following reasons:

- I. The specialization is an incentive for vicars to develop themselves, if desired also outside of their own specialism. Herewith the inspiration and quality of the professional are increased. This specialization leaves unimpaired that in principle the vicar is working as a generalist within a congregation.
- II. The specialization broadens the orientation of the vicar and therewith of the church as a whole. This is also for the benefit of the social reputation of profession and church.
- III. The specialization can be chosen broadly. The specialization should also be beneficial to the quality of the church as social organization. For example it could be dogmatics or public administration or musicology.
- IV. The specialization is therefore relatively separate from the distribution of tasks within the cooperative in view of the over-local work or support on elements of local congregations.

Obtaining a post-master-degree can be a stipulation for a number of further to be determined positions and roles within the church. It is not the exclusive condition for promotion to the highest compensation-scale. This promotion can also be justified by other considerations. It is therefore of importance that objective criteria are established and an independent office is founded to apply these criteria.

N.B.:

- * It is obvious to compare the writing of a dissertation in the vicarage with obtaining a post-master-degree.
- * The Steering Committee looks upon the obtaining of a post-master-degree as part of the normal professional development of a vicar. However, no vicar can be obliged to obtain a post-master-degree.
- * An integrated package for PE should be developed for the religious workers as well.

The specialization suggested by the Steering Committee can be started after the obligatory in-service training and could for example take place in the 5th – 7th year of vicar ship. It can also be done later.

Various aspects of this post-master should be elaborated further:

- I. There are no statutes or calibration standards for the size of a post-master-study. It is therefore obvious that the PThU¹, after consultation with the Policy Committee Vicars, presents proposals after a comparing research of post-master-educations elsewhere.
- II. For financing nothing has been arranged yet. The initial solution of the Steering Committee that specialization can be paid from the study leave does no longer persist in the light of the PE-proposal. The cost of a post-master-education for instance is estimated to be € 15.000. (In the academic world numbers are mentioned between € 5000 and € 20.000.) Based on 40 proponents per annum in a period of 10 years it can be expected that 30-35 young vicars start this post-master-education, which results in an amount of € 450.000 - € 500.000. Herewith the following is relevant:
 - a. A substantial contribution of the vicar is obvious, because a step in compensation follows. Also voluntary in-service training at this level in other sectors of society demands a considerable contribution of the course member.
 - b. Support from the church or the local congregation is reasonable and can be given in many ways: they can take a part of the cost for their account, provide an interest-free loan etceteras, one thing and another attached with conditions as continuation of a career within the church and such.

In the short term there is no need to provide a decisive answer. In future there is enough opportunity to come to proposals in consultation with BCP², BNP³ and PThU.

Statement of reasons for key decisions 6 and 8

The religious worker with Higher Vocational Education will enter into paid employment of the professional organization which appointed her or him. The legal status of all those in the profession of vicar remains unaltered. There is no choice to implement (central) employer-ship for vicars.

The choice for the cooperative of vicars is based on Ordinance 4.18. Exactly because this cooperative is mentioned in the Church Order it is appropriate to take the matter up seriously. The cooperative is now open for religious workers as well. The question has been raised from various sides why this existing instrument is not being used. At the same time is acknowledged that in many cases there is much left to be desired in the operation of the cooperatives, not in the least because of the possibility to retract from it with impunity, which many vicars do. It will therefore be necessary to develop a sanction-instrument for those who refuse to give shape to the cooperative to which they belong by virtue of the decision of the classical board.

In construction of the cooperatives the existing teams of vicars have to be taken into account. It became clear to the Steering Committee that there is a growing awareness amongst vicars and religious workers for the purpose and need of working in a team, but such work-teams can not be enforced. Cooperatives should not be confused with teams.

Besides, the cooperatives have too large sizes in order to be able to function as such teams, but they are of importance for the amicable maintenance of vicars and religious workers, to prevent isolation and in order to make use of each others specializations and experiences. The cooperative is also the place where in mutual responsibility can be searched how to shape the presence of the church in society, how vacant congregations or colleagues with very small jobs can be supported.

Regarding the essential size of the obligatory cooperatives the Steering Committee keeps to 15 to 20 persons, vicars and religious workers (this is in most cases in deviation of the present size).

The cooperative is under management of a vicar who is responsible for continuity, guards the reached agreements and the progress of the cooperative in view of the mutual responsibility. This includes the preparation of the work plan of the cooperative and the consultation with congregations on special support from the cooperative or the support of vacant congregations. In addition the chairman of the cooperative is coach of the members of the cooperative. As coach of the cooperative she/he promotes the growing and developing capacities of the vicars and religious workers in the cooperative; at least once a year she or he has a progress interview with the members of the cooperative.

¹ PThU = Protestant Theological University.

² BCP is in translation PCV = Policy Committee Vicars. A committee appointed by the General Synod, which is responsible for the legal status of the vicars, for example for their compensation and benefits etceteras.

³ BNP is in translation UDV = Union of Dutch Vicars.

N.B. In clarification of the position of chairman of the cooperative it is of importance that it is not a *function*, but a *role*, which is occupied for a determined period, after which re-appointment is possible. But it is also possible to put the role down after one or more periods, without loss of face or feeling of degradation. Special responsibilities are attached to the role, but it is not connected with a compensation increase.

Obviously the chairman will have to be relieved for a part of her/his appointment for the duties that have to be accomplished. To give an impression based on a size of 20 people in a cooperative, which regularly assembles once a month for one part-time we can make the following estimate of the time involved on an annual basis.

Assemblies with preparation	25 part-times
Annual progress interviews	20 part-times
Total:	45 part-times

Rounded off upwards and taking vacations into account this boils down to a maximum of half a day per week. We take it that the chairman executes this task without funding, since key decision 5 postulates that vicars are obliged to work as well in service of the church as a whole.

In the upcoming period will have to be investigated how much time is reasonably necessary for a chairman within a number of pilot-projects to be started up with cooperatives as intended here. Leading should be that the chairmen to be appointed are no luxury within a shrinking church, but a necessity in the adjustment of structure and working method of the church to the changed circumstances.

Apart from that the cooperative does not harm the relation between vicar and his or her church board. In this relation the job evaluation takes place. A job evaluation is about the mutual functioning and in completeness of vicar (or religious worker) and consistory. It requires a policy and year-work-plan established by the church council and an annual report written by the vicar on his or her activities. The Steering Committee is of the opinion that these three documents should be obligatory for each church council to which a vicar or religious worker is connected. Only with these instruments vicar and church council can question one and other on functioning, cooperation, workload, priorities and task-setting. In view of the opposition to the term job evaluation can be chosen for the term "annual work interview".

In the Church Order the composition of the cooperative is not related to the forming of a ring association of (area-) congregations, see Ordinance 4-17. Therefore it is not relevant for the forming of a cooperative if the congregations have some kind of cooperation.

N.B. The cooperatives as meant in Ordinance 4-18 and as described before should not be confused with teams. In view of the quality and development of the religious work in a certain region the forming of teams can be desirable. The classical board can play an active part here. The pastor pastorum is a vital link here. A team is focussed on the combined execution of tasks of vicars and religious workers in their field of activity. A team is realized when the congregations to which the vicars and religious workers concerned belong decide to cooperate and come to an agreement on the nature of this cooperation. Although the classical assembly plays a pro-active role, the choice to build a team is made "from the bottom". (Parts of) cooperatives can grow out to a team. A cooperative is in relation to a team a simpler form of cooperation, which, if the congregations concerned decide to do so, can grow to a 'stronger' form of cooperation: the team.

Statement of reasons for key decision 7

An important motive for the suggestions of the Steering Committee is the care for quality of vicar and religious worker, also related to the task of the church in society, during the period of practise of profession. At the same time the proposals are inspired by the care for functioning and well being of vicar and religious worker. The care for quality, functioning and well being is now cut into pieces (Church council, visitation, job guidance), often does not meet the quality standards which should be set and is not recorded. According to the Steering Committee it is important that the national church in future will have a clear responsibility on this point. Key figure in this religious responsibility is the so called "pastor pastorum". This figure is situated in the present level of the General Classical Assembly. In the evaluation of the Church Order the position of the pastor pastorum is calibrated again in relation to the RACV⁴ RACA (Regional Advisor Classical Assemblies). This pastor pastorum has the ability to lead from a serving role. It is about serving leadership. In order to fulfil this key role it is of importance that she or he does not operate isolated, but imbedded in a national structure for care and quality. The Steering Committee does not make further proposals on this embedding at this moment.

The pastor pastorum keeps in regular contact with the chairmen of the cooperatives within her/his department. The pastor pastorum does assessment interviews with the vicars and religious workers of the cooperatives with a later to be determined frequency or if necessary. The assessment is in the scope of wellbeing and the quality of

⁴ RACV is in translation RACA = Regional Advisor Classical Assemblies

the work of the vicars and religious workers. The pastor pastorum has no power to interfere, but to signal. The pastor pastorum is co-responsible on behalf of the church for wellbeing and the quality of her vicars and religious workers.

In order to make the figure of pastor pastorum a success it is important that there is a relation of trust between her/him and the consistories in her/his department. It is important that the church council can turn to the pastor pastorum if the relationship with the vicar stagnates. On the other hand she/he needs to be able to engage in conversation with the consistory if the vicar experiences a hitch in her/his relationship with the church council.

Statement of reasons for key decision 9

In the previous report, 'Past the turn-out' the key decision 8 remained unclear. It was not clear if this was about a transition measure in order to admit serving religious workers 'doing the work of a vicar' into the profession or that it was meant to be a permanent construction. In the latter case it is to be anticipated that HVO-theologians⁵ start their studies at a HVO-organization⁶ with the perspective of the office of vicar as assistant minister. This way a sneak route would be created anyway. How will the Steering Committee ensure that the figure of assistant minister is only an option under strict conditions in special circumstances, was the question.

The Steering Committee proposes to extend the profession of vicar or HVO-theologians as a permanent construction for extraordinary cases, if required by the local situation.

In view of the extraordinary local character the Steering Group dismisses the possibility to let a HVO-student choose the study-result "assistant minister" during the course. The graduated religious worker will have to find a job within the church as religious worker. She or he can be "called to the profession of vicar" after having worked at a certain position for at least two years, if required by the local situation subsequently followed by a route of suitability assessment and additional training. The installation in the profession follows after established suitability and completion of the additional training. She/he will be called assistant minister.

Religious workers called to the profession of vicar will have to take an extra study-route on top of the HVO qualifications, where attention is given to exegetic abilities and biblical-theological insight in order to develop the hermeneutic, homiletic and liturgical competences further. HVO-organizations, the Protestant Theological University (PThU) and the Protestant church will have to cooperate in ascertaining of competences and level of the HVO theologians to be allowed into the office of vicar.

The costs for this extra training are chargeable to the professional assembly appointing the assistant minister. It is self evident that the professional assembly appointing the assistant minister is also charged for the enrolment contribution.

Transfer to another congregation within the church is only possible with the explicit approbation of the classical assembly involved having to assess if the appointment of an assistant minister is desirable in this case and if justice is done to its extraordinary character.

The assistant minister always works under supervision of a vicar who is supervisor. She or he will not operate as a vicar outside of the own classical assembly without the knowledge of this mentor.

The assistant minister is not only a possibility in small congregations. The assistant minister is also possible where the HVO theologian does a vicar's job. That can be also in cities, regions and at national level, for example as a diaconal minister. Criteria are taking the lead (in a congregation or a specialized job) and officiating in worship.

⁵ HVO-theologians = theologians with Higher Vocational Education

⁶ HVO-organization = organization offering Higher Vocational Education