Manifesto for future-proof economic professional education in Rotterdam

July 2020
MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

The economy is everything! Economic processes in all sectors are rapidly changing. This raises the question of how economic professional education must be prepared for this. Is there a quantitative and qualitative imbalance between economic professional education and the labour market, and how can this be addressed? Two regional training centres and two universities of applied sciences in Rotterdam have commissioned us, an external Think Tank, for research and advice.

By means of round table discussions, data analysis, literature study, interviews, and progress discussions, we have shared various views with each other, which have been recorded in a comprehensive background study that will be published next autumn. It shows that the number of students in this domain is relatively large, even larger in higher professional education than in secondary vocational education. Moreover, economic professional education fulfils an emancipatory function on the road to societal success.

Even though regional training centres and universities of applied sciences serve students from very different starting levels, they are partly faced with the same substantive questions. One of these questions is what pedagogical and didactic approach is needed to achieve appropriate personal training for students who need to be prepared for a changing labour market. Another challenge is how secondary vocational education and higher education can work together more intensively, especially with regard to student progression.

The prospects for the future labour market for graduates of professional economic study programmes are difficult to assess. National projections from before the coronavirus pandemic indicated that on the one hand graduates of economic study programmes have less favourable opportunities on the labour market than graduates in other sectors such as (health)care, IT & Services, or engineering. On the other hand, the options open to these students are very flexible and they can switch to other sectors and professions relatively easier.

The Think Tank also notes that the economic study programmes currently form a fairly ‘haphazard quilt’ rather than a coordinated unity. In terms of content, the institutions can collaborate more and strengthen each other’s talents to jointly develop innovation of our education. That is why we, as Think Tank, advocate ‘free zones’, in which continuous learning tracks and crossovers between Hogeschool Rotterdam, Inholland, Zadkine en Albeda can be prolonged in cooperation with the business community.

Based on the analysis, we have formulated seven main recommendations, each including three underlying recommendations. A total of 21 recommendations. The Think Tank realises that, given the differences in rules and regulations, the regional training centres and universities of applied sciences are not used to working together. The key is to collaborate more from the point of view of content, to allow professionals more time and freedom for innovation of education, and to work together on a strategic vision of the study programmes on offer in relation to the changing labour market, based on regional data. This will make economic professional education future-proof, enabling students to find their way to the many sectors in which economics plays a meaningful and crucial role.

Ludo Baauw, Mai Elmar, Laamia Elyounoussi, Miriam Hoekstra, Barbara Kathmann en Marc van der Meer
Beweging is het enige onveranderlijke dat er bestaat. Dat regelt alles.

**JULES DEELDER (1940 - 2019)**

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Rotterdam is a city of unprecedented possibilities where the sound of piles can always be heard in the background. A city that is working hard on the future. Where dreams become reality, where the slogan ’Make It Happen’ is key, and for good reason. Rotterdam, a city where residents with 170 different nationalities feel at home, a city with a unique atmosphere and even its own sound, soundtrack010!

Rotterdam is also the place where young people invest in their future by enrolling in one of the study programmes that Rotterdam on the Meuse has to offer. Approximately 23,000 young people choose economic professional education. They start their studies, find friends for life and come into contact with various businesses with the higher purpose of developing themselves to the fullest and eventually finding a good job that will enable them to make a social contribution to the city.

Regional training centres Albeda and Zadkine offer secondary professional education in various disciplines, and Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences and Inholland University of Applied Sciences offer higher professional education. Educators and facilitators work with heart and soul on the personal and professional development of their students. At the same time, the regional training centres and universities of applied sciences do not only exist in different micro spheres with each their own systems and rules, but also offer educational programmes at very different levels. The differences between the institutions have not prevented the administrators from taking the initiative and jointly discussing the future of economic professional education.

The immediate motivation for this manifesto was a series of reports and studies on the alleged imbalance between economic study programmes and labour market demand. But there are also other issues, such as the degree of specialisation of study programmes, the guidance of students with diverse social and cultural backgrounds and establishing connections with the diminishing field of work. The current coronavirus pandemic accentuates many contrasting themes and will have a major impact on business processes in all sectors, from the port to healthcare. This raises new questions about the mission of economic professional education and the development of students.

The joint exploration of the future of economic professional education in Rotterdam creates public value. Instead of each institution inventing its own wheel, the administrators asked us to start an exploration as an independent, external Think Tank. The following question is central to this exploration:

“How do we create economic professional education that is both qualitatively and quantitatively future-proof?”

In this manifesto the Think Tank explores the challenges facing economic professional education in Rotterdam and the quantitative and qualitative characteristics that form the basis for these challenges. In this way it becomes clear what the city of Rotterdam needs and how the four institutions can meet these challenges. It is absolute progress that the schools jointly live up to their responsibility, share data and perspectives, meet each other to get to know each other’s worlds better, not to mention the transformative medium-term results that are within reach with targeted efforts. One thing is certain: together you achieve more than alone. The cost precedes the benefit!
FIVE CHALLENGES FOR ECONOMIC PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION ROTTERDAM

The number of students enrolled in economic study programmes is substantial. In Rotterdam more than 23,000 students are enrolled in such a study programme. In senior secondary vocational education (MBO), an economic study programme is the second most common choice, technology being the first. At universities of applied sciences, most students, at least half of them, choose an economic study programme.

Shifts in education

MBO students can earn an entrance qualification for the labour market. The schools work towards a triple objective: students obtain a diploma, work on their personal development and are being prepared to take up a position on the labour market. The economic domain is broad in scope. Within the regional training centres Albeda and Zadkine a shift is taking place from the trade & entrepreneurship domain to the economics and administration domain.

(please refer to bar graphs 1 and 2).

Secondary vocational education starts with reproductive learning, some students can consequently work with increased independence and reflective ability. Albeda and Zadkine are deliberating how to offer more room to experience the professional practice within existing regulation. To this end, new working relationships are being established with companies and institutions on industrial estates and shopping streets. One point of attention is the student drop-out rate in Rotterdam, which is higher than nationwide, and the future sustainability of the lower MBO levels. Research shows that the higher the level of education of graduates, the better their chances are on the labour market.
The question is what the regional training centres will do when the market demands for graduates changes rapidly. This is even more relevant because more than half of the economic students move on to higher education. A transition programme has been set up for this purpose. In recent years, many MBO students have also opted for a two-year higher education study programme: an Associate degree at the Rotterdam Academy, for example.

The Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences (RUAS) has a large volume of students who follow professional economic study programmes, both at Bachelor level and Associate degree level. In addition, RUAS offers a wide range of other types of study programmes outside the economic domain. The Business School offers diverse national and international economic study programmes, from Finance and Accountancy to Marketing Management. Marketing Management Students can for example specialise in so-called ‘communities’ such as ‘Creative Marketing and Sales’, ‘Global Marketing and Sales’, ‘Marketing of Social Business’ and ‘Sports Marketing and Management’. In addition, a solid digital foundation will be applied, in connection with substantive themes such as ethics, circular thinking, the purpose economy and new leadership.

Inholland has a smaller number of economic students in absolute numbers than RUAS. However, the study programmes of Inholland in Rotterdam are predominantly economic study programmes. Inholland’s corporate structure is also different: this institution pursues a joint policy in eight cities in the Randstad conurbation. Inholland offers, among other things, the economic study programme called Business Studies. Here, disciplines such as ‘organisational and human behaviour’ and ‘operations management’ are combined with elements such as learning skills, innovative and creative thinking, information and ‘media and technology’. They also offer room in the curriculum of the economic programme for students to make individual choices and design their own content, within the framework of the study programme competences.

The inflow of economic students in a bachelor study programme (RUAS and Inholland) has increased from 2015 to 2017 but has decreased slightly since 2018 (see graph 3).

**Quantitative projections**

Before the corona crisis, the National Labour Market Forecast 2024 of the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA) provided a relatively mediocre view of the future for graduates within the economics sector (see Figure 4), certainly in comparison with graduates from the Engineering & IT and Healthcare & Services sectors. Only bachelor students of Financial Management and Tax Law had average opportunities.

ROA had compared the career opportunities of graduates from economic professional education with graduates from the fields of Healthcare & Services, and Technology & IT. It appears that there are relatively many opportunities within the economic domain to work in another sector or in another professional group. Figure 4 illustrates this for some of secondary and higher education. As is obvious, students in management, business and human resources sciences have the broadest opportunities.

At present, technological developments are advancing further, both in the labour market and in education. The trend of digital teaching and remote guidance will likely be irreversible, although it is also clear that direct contact is needed to guide students and promote creativity. During previous periods of crisis, the inequality between levels of education increased, with the lowest educated students being hit the hardest. New uncertainties have now been added, for example, students in the hospitality industry, tourism, event management or administrative services. Young independent entrepreneurs are also vulnerable in these times.
These expectations for the future are given an extra dimension by the fact that some students - and this is often the case for students with a migration background - specifically opt for an economic study programme, because good job prospects and corresponding income are expected with this type of study programme. For example, the Macro Efficiency Committee speaks of ‘security seekers’, a group of students without strong intrinsic motivation or a clear vision of the future. The transfer from MBO to Associate Degree or to HBO and then to university is a promising route for them.

The emancipatory effect of choosing an economic study programme is weakened in two ways. On the one hand because the job prospects are less rosy and on the other hand because the drop-out rate of MBO students in this domain is high. Students dropping out and prolonged studies lead to high study debts, which are difficult to pay off if a good perspective is lacking. This is first and foremost a problem for the student, but it is also a social problem because public resources are not used effectively. In other sectors, such as education, healthcare and especially technology, there will be more demand for graduates. It is obvious that there are many labour market opportunities in the cross-pollination between different sectors.

The essence of the quantitative analysis is that we find that a relatively large number of students follow an economic professional study programme in Rotterdam. In the economic MBO programmes shrinkage and shifts in study orientation take place. This is where market forces have an effect. Within the MBO there is a shift from the domain of trade & entrepreneurship to the domain of business services. At the same time, the MBO drop-out rate in Rotterdam is higher than nationwide, and the future sustainability of the lower MBO levels also deserves attention.

The most recent labour market forecasts from ROA of December 2019 suggest that economic students are relatively less likely to find work in the labour market than in other sectors, and also that these students are more flexible to find work in other sectors. Should this be regulated? The Think Tank does not believe in the operation of a numerus fixus (enrolment restriction) for the economic study programmes, because of the administrative procedures and unpredictable student flows. However, the Think Tank does believe that better information for students and the introduction of crossovers are important to make better use of the opportunities on the labour market.

Qualitative developments

Size is not the only concern for the economic sector. The economic sector is highly dynamic in terms of content. In the current times of crisis, it has become clear that health issues and socio-economic relations are strongly intertwined and that a one-sided emphasis on profit maximisation creates too many vulnerabilities in economic and social processes. There is a need for a richer, more diversified ecosystem of businesses and services. This raises questions about whether and how the economic principles of sustainable business operations should be developed in various sectors (agri-food, construction, the port, logistics, technology, healthcare, et cetera). The increasing importance of ‘artificial intelligence’, ‘block chain’, ‘cryptocurrency’ and ‘big data’ also reinforce this movement and lead to new questions, for example, about the scale, security, ethics and sustainability of economic processes in companies and institutions. This changes the demand for workers, their knowledge, skills, and talent development.

The labour market is characterised by new patterns of internal and external flexibilisation, digitisation and entrepreneurship. In addition, since 2013, job growth in Rotterdam has been almost entirely due to temporary workers, temporary work, and freelance workers. A growing imbalance between education and the labour market is therefore not only quantitative, but even more so qualitative in nature.

For businesses, none of this is far in the future; they have an immediate need for employees with the right knowledge, skills, and motivation to respond to the latest developments. At regional training centres and universities of applied sciences they notice, on the one hand, that a lot is being invested in the connection with the labour market and, on the other hand, they are worried about the urgency of offering study programmes that meet this need. This leads to alternative initiatives. Businesses are starting their own niche-training. Is that bad news? Not necessarily. Businesses may have very specific needs, which they meet well with their own specialist training. Such training can be a follow-up to an MBO or HBO study programme offering a solid base. But we do see risks here. For example, a possible devaluation of MBO or HBO diplomas if internal training at businesses becomes more important. Moreover, there is little control over the quality of these programmes in the free sector. The didactic and pedagogical qualities of regional training centres and universities of applied sciences are indispensable for a high-quality inflow into the labour market, but are perhaps being underutilised.

The key point of our qualitative analysis is that the speed with which educational programmes develop should be increased and that there should be less isolation but more collaboration in Rotterdam. This means that routines and systems need to be adapted not only within, but also outside current organisations. Study programmes themselves remain responsible for linking the educational programme to the labour market.

Economic education should not only focus on the equilibrium analysis of neo-classical manuals or textbook bookkeeping, but should also consider the dynamics, bubbles, and crashes of economic processes. New economic roles and functions arise within chains of organisations, with all the consequences for the personal identity and social education of students. It is therefore not just a question of increasing prosperity, but of distributing it within the boundary conditions of nature and society, aimed at the welfare and well-being of citizens. This requires co-makership; other earning models, participatory decision-making structures, social and societal innovation and new forms of management, leadership and teaching.
Challenges for economic vocational education

The sum of these observations is that there are five challenges to economic professional education in Rotterdam for certain:

1. Numerous students at economic study programmes and a substantial drop-out rate. Relatively many secondary school students in Rotterdam choose an economic study programme (starting from prevocational secondary education (VMBO) to MBO or HBO, and from senior general secondary education (HAVO) to MBO or HBO) without them completely understanding the choice that they have made. It does not necessarily have to be the wrong study choice, but their motivation is by no means always intrinsically driven and they need time to find a suitable study route.

2. The labour market and structure of employment are changing. The fact that the labour market and employment are changing is nothing new. Various sectors have invented new earning models. As a result, businesses need graduates who can give tangible substance to multiple value creation, and can achieve social impact. However, the economic study programmes are still too fragmented, classic study programmes that are sometimes focused on one profession while the outside world works in a multidisciplinary way.

3. Businesses of all sizes have great concerns about the adaptivity of study programmes. For the study programme range as a whole, a clear logic seems to be lacking; the study programmes all came into being at a certain point in time and the macro-efficiency was tested at the start, but not systematically reviewed afterwards. The strategy can be set out much more strongly based on qualitative and quantitative data. Study programmes run the risk of missing the boat when it comes to ongoing innovations in the labour market. For example, the digitisation of work processes and related disruptions not only in the supply chains of businesses but also in consumer demand in trade and services.

4. The regional training centres and universities of applied sciences exist in completely different worlds with a firm divide that hinders cooperation. This is apparent from the structures of the two Central Registers (‘crebo’ and ‘croho’) as well as the varying, different rules for accountability with respect to the quality of education. For this reason, the educational institutions do not yet make sufficient use of the potential mutual collaboration. Everyone is inventing their own wheel in relative isolation and the knowledge development that takes place does not sufficiently circulate.

5. Teachers on average are up to their necks in difficulties and there is not enough freedom to try out innovations. We apply a reservation that the Think Tank did not study internal data on work pressure, burn-out and staff turnover, but nevertheless gained a firm impression that lecturers do not have the time to design the innovations they claim to aspire to. The standard routine is too much to cope with, therefore, it is not enough focus on a self-evident inquiring attitude to come up with a new design of lesson programmes with the accompanying exploration of possible learning outcomes.

In response to these five challenges, change in economic professional education is necessary now. In this manifesto, we propose to the administrators and the managers and lecturers of economic professional study programmes in Rotterdam that new ways of working should be developed to strengthen the content of education.

If regional training centres and universities of applied sciences do not respond with a more open attitude to the demands of the work field and the changing learning needs of students, the work field will not be provided in its need for new entrepreneurship and the knowledge and skills necessary for the future. This is not only serious, but also unnecessary, because the potential and will to create and exploit the much-needed expertise exists among students, institutions, and the professional field.

Not only the professional institutions, but also the government calls on the Think Tank to take measures that promote the innovative capacity of education. So far, certain rules and frameworks have not contributed to the right development at educational institutions to properly prepare students for their future. There is a need for a transition to a learning, cross-border, co-operating, and self-developing system that allows students to make the right choice in a rapidly changing labour market.
CHAPTER 3
FREE ZONES IN ROTTERDAM

To respond to a rapidly changing labour market in economic professional education in Rotterdam, the Think Tank sees opportunities for the establishment of so-called ‘Free Zones’. These are open spaces with increased degrees of freedom for curriculum renewal, funding, and collaboration, both within and between the regional training centres (ROC) and universities of applied sciences (UAS). By way of illustration, we describe three possible variants.

A joint free zone between secondary and higher education with a Double Degree

In the work sessions in preparation for writing this manifesto, a study was made of various forms of educational innovation. The Think Tank argues for new forms of education in a joint ‘free zone’ across the borders of the institutions, between ROC and UAS. The idea is that part of the MBO curriculum of economic study programmes will be combined with part of the HBO curriculum that ultimately leads to a double degree.

Three-quarters of MBO students who continue learning at an economic study programme in higher education have also completed an economic MBO study programme. This means that the knowledge and skills of similar economic study programmes at MBO year 4 and HBO year 1 partly overlap. Students could be enabled to complete these two years in a shorter period, for example 1 year, and complete them with a double degree: an MBO 4 degree and HBO propaedeutic degree (first-year certificate). It turns out that it is not so much the subject matter that is more difficult, but mainly the way in which students study at HBO which is different from MBO. The Think Tank therefore advises to invest extra in the method of studying at the university of applied sciences where time planning, and the identification of main lines and side issues are relevant.
A free zone between the economic domain and other domains, which translates to a Double Degree.

On the basis of future labour market forecasts, another variant is also conceivable. Economic students find their place in all kinds of sectors on the labour market. Everything is economics! For example, components within the economic MBO or HBO programme that complement MBO or HBO study programmes in another domain. In this way, free zones can be created where students can work together, for example, in crossovers of economics and ICT, economics and healthcare or economics and technology. This creates continuous learning tracks in which students transfer between various domains of the labour market.

For example, the collaboration between an MBO-study programme in metalworking and an economic HBO study programme (Bachelor or Associate Degree). Many MBO internship businesses need new customer insights based on new technologies such as robotic welding. This provides a starting point for a joint project. The added value of this free zone is that not only different disciplines meet (technology and economics), but also other kinds of talents, the ‘makers’ and ‘doers’ meet each other. When these students work together on future-oriented issues, real innovation can arise. This free zone would become even more fascinating if the ‘thinkers’ in Rotterdam, the university level (WO) students, were also involved.

A free zone between the economic domain and the professional practice

A third variant goes one step further than the free zones described above. In this variant, professional practice cooperates structurally with professional study programmes during part of the study programme. Both parties, professional practice and educational institution then manage the student’s learning process. The advantage of this free zone is that the practice does not need to be imitated, but that students immediately gain relevant and current experience in an organisation, several days a week. This is a different set-up than working in a project, doing an internship, a Minor course or graduation project. This is another form of education in which full-time MBO and HBO students continuously spend part of their education in professional practice. The degrees of freedom may vary. Students solve real, practical problems; they gain relevant experience and knowledge that is recognized by the professional institution.

To illustrate: with the increase in healthcare costs and a decrease in the number of healthcare professionals, the use of technology in healthcare is becoming increasingly important. For example, in this free zone an economic student works in a multidisciplinary team, physically at an ICT organisation. The assignment is to build a portal to support hospitals in exchanging patient information. This involves questions such as: how many hospital beds and what equipment is available, how will the logistics take place, who is going to pay what, how can claims be submitted to health insurers, what does the business case look like and how can we justify this approach?

One can also think of students who work in development projects in neighbour-hoods and districts, students who are active in international projects, or students who are working in a thrift shop or on a business park, for example. In all cases, a combination of work, new roles, whether in a team or not, and following a formal study programme can lead to relevant learning outcomes, which are then directly validated in professional practice.

An interesting development question is whether the business community can also be authorised to validate these results, the learning outcomes of students. The latter requires sensible procedural agreements, somewhat like the method of ‘training in a school’ in the Teacher Training study programme.
CHAPTER 4
SEVEN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE-PROOF ECONOMIC, PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION IN ROTTERDAM

In response to the problem definition and the five challenges outlined in this manifesto, the Think Tank calls on Rotterdam’s economic professional education (i.e. the lecturers, the management, the board, the professional field, the creative co-thinkers and counter-thinkers) to put into effect the following recommendations:

1. Create ‘Free Zones’

This first recommendation consists of three sections.

1.1 Create free zones

During our round table meetings we looked in detail at the possibilities of having increased degrees of freedom in the programme of economic professional education. The Think Tank is in favour of such free zones. After all, we have found that there are many obstacles. In the case of MBOs, we see obstacles in the regulations on teaching time, the restrictive Crebo structure, forced examinations and the ditto purchase of exams. Higher education indicates that it needs room in the current funding that does not yet facilitate a new form of cooperation with the business community. The system change from Crebo to Croho is also an obstacle. In a free zone, institutions can develop new licenses for innovative professional education.

1.2 Work with learning outcomes

In economic professional education there is a strong emphasis on classic forms of examination, especially in MBO. If it is the case that the economic processes are changing, then economic learning processes must also change. Students can gain a lot of knowledge and experience from this. Therefore, encourage their knowledge and experience to be arranged in terms of learning outcomes. In addition, this form of documentation provides opportunities for reflection on the learning objectives and learning outcomes, it also enables reconstruction of economic processes (backward learning) and underpins the possibilities of forecasting and development scenarios (forward learning).

1.3 Formative evaluation

If more attention is paid to learning outcomes and if students can have their external experiences validated by the school or by the professional practice itself, it is possible to achieve actual portfolio development. Eventually, the portfolio will be translated into a diploma. Such a working method also makes it possible to follow courses in other study programmes and have the outcome considered as well towards the learning outcomes. This also provides additional opportunities in terms of retraining and refresher courses.
2. Ensure a better coordination between content of the study programmes and market developments

Students work on a personal profile in which talents, skills and professional knowledge come together. To achieve this, the connection between education and business can be strengthened. Then there is more insight into mutual developments and study programmes can implement innovations that successfully prepare students for the labour market. The Think Tank stimulates the institutions in question to carry out the following activities at least:

2.1 Invest in the lower MBO levels, given their future vulnerability

It is expected that jobs in the economic sector at MBO 2 and MBO 3 level will change in nature. Extra supervision is desirable for these students; the credo here is: break through the norm of supervised teaching time, make maximum use of the teaching time and strengthen the learning process. The Think Tank strongly questions whether a further generalisation of education is appropriate advice for these students because these students are vulnerable and need guidance to learn a profession first. An extra learning impulse is probably useful here, as is guided learning in authentic educational situations. Some of these students will start their working careers, others will transfer to a follow-up study programme.

2.2 Create joint foundation years for MBO and merge economic Crebo programmes

For economic professional education at MBO levels 3 and 4, we recommend developing one or two mutual foundation years, based on which the specialisation studies are developed. All curricula include IT digitisation and aspects such as top service, business skills and language skills. This also means that space must be created in the current Crebo structure, which is characterised by substantial mutual relatedness. The Crebo is now too narrowly defined, making it insufficiently possible to build combinations: students must start their studies repeatedly. A broader basis would fit in well in view of student progression. The Think Tank therefore advises that the Crebo ‘Commerce & Entrepreneurship’ and the Crebo ‘Economics & Business Services’ should be merged, thus creating more room for students to develop and a better match with the demand of the labour market and the through-flow to higher education.

2.3 Increase the level of future readiness of higher education programme content

The existing Croho structure in higher education offers room for development. Use it to develop competences aimed at the necessary future skills. Promote that students are taught to think in and be proficient at economic models and forms of organisation in which not only profit maximisation is central, but also the balance about prosperity, welfare, and well-being. There are more forms of market operation and policymaking than just neoclassical theory. And only 21st century skills, complemented by beautiful, creative elements, without a substantial knowledge component are completely insufficient to be distinctive in a labour market in the economic domain and to maintain the emancipatory value of a diploma in this domain.

Digitisation changes work processes and increases the efficiency and flexibility of companies. This requires substantial knowledge of design and development of control processes, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, in addition to skills in dealing with the associated data and models. Our round table discussions show that many corporations have already started this digital transformation, but SMEs often lack the time or capacity to invest in it. Students can help SMEs to make optimal use of information technology to contribute to their digital transformation and sustainable growth.

This argues in favour of more in-depth knowledge creation combined with a new way of working through digitisation and technological growth, also in light of the discussion about circularity and futureproofing of our economic model. Also explore new possibilities such as ’artificial intelligence’ and ‘augmented reality’ and how these developments can be integrated into economic education, demonstrating concern for moral issues and social outcomes.

3. Strengthen the learning potential of educational professionals and thus the capacity of lecturer teams to design education, conduct research and practise reflection

Educational innovation is more likely if teachers take the ideas before them personally and are given time and opportunity to work on them. In principle, the collective labour agreements for MBO and HBO offer room for professional and personal development. At the same time, the Think Tank observes that lecturers are not nearly getting it done. Teachers from Albeda and Zadkine have jointly drawn up a vision document that requires further elaboration. The economic study programmes within higher education also mention a lack of time and money for professional development. The existing rules on the one hand make behaviour possible, but on the other hand they apparently also hinder it. People are reluctant to deal with innovation. There is therefore a need for educational leadership to allow lesson design, reflective working and learning to occur. Lecturers could become more familiar with the changing world. Here, too, we offer three pieces of advice.

3.1 Team-teaching with the professional practice

If lecturers are assigned across system boundaries (both in MBO and HBO, as well as in education and the professional field), pedagogical and didactical expertise can also be strengthened. Lecturers can, with or without the help of students, develop into experts in a field of study. It may be possible - more than at present - to make use of the involvement of businesses in the design and offering of teaching resources. Also organise inspiration sessions with lecturers who innovate enthusiastically and invite speakers from the business world. Have research centres, and centres of expertise for innovative craftsmanship work closely with the educational sector. These forms of team-teaching with the professional field promote the mutual use of the same language. Digitisation can be helpful in this respect.

3.2 Methodological innovation

Not infrequently, we find there is hesitation in the work culture, lack of professionalism and the lack of educational leadership across the board. There is no time to really develop or think about professionalisation. At the same time, we have spoken to people who point out that much more can be changed than people initially think, often it’s just a matter of starting with the right people; although a new initiative requires effort, commitment and persistence. Our advice is to take more time and space to innovate and learn from it. Make sure that innovation does not depend on a few colleagues who are open to it. Innovation should be embedded in the culture and structure of education. Develop methods to achieve educational innovation. Think up small and large experiments and evaluate them, organise the procedural feedback, and document what you do. Adopt a development approach so that study programme teams can move forward. Share knowledge with each other and work together.
3.3 Applying HRM policy as a means of support

The experiences we have studied show that external expertise and combination jobs give important impulses to educational teams in realising innovations. Therefore, develop the HRM policy and shape the careers of lecturers differently. Develop various roles and other forms of specialisation in lesson design, instruction, career guidance, testing, and give ‘early adopter’ instructors the opportunity. If mistakes are made, draw lessons from these and develop a constructive culture in which students and lecturers have a say.

4 Invest in the transfer of MBO to higher education to combat study delay and fully develop the students’ potential

Students have very different experiences as they follow the route from MBO to higher education. For some, it is a decisive step towards eventually obtaining an academic degree. For others it is a long route. For example, one of the students in the round table meetings typified all internships in MBO as a form of ‘extreme trial study’ to get to know the work field. For students who do not yet know exactly what they want to become, this route offers them the opportunity to reflect on their own skills and to determine: what am I good at, what motivates me? What else is possible? The transfer from MBO to HBO is an important issue, because a considerable number of students move on within this domain. How do HBO and MBO relate to each other? Are programmes stackable? Is there a full response to talent development at a higher level? The Think Tank offers three pieces of advice on this subject.

4.1 Develop the transfer module

Our analysis of related transfers shows that 74% of MBO students studying economics progress to HBO economic study programmes. Guidance for these students can be intensified, or part of the programme can be split for students who leave and start employment, and students who move on to higher education. HBO can partly link to MBO, so that at the start of higher education students do not have to repeat what they already know. Aspects such as learning to study and study motivation are precisely what is important. In all cases, there must be a good connection with developments in the business world.

Students from MBOs who want to continue their studies in higher education are asked to adopt a different learning culture in HBO, which is more abstract and based on models. This is sometimes confronting for students because their MBO knowledge and experience is not appealed to. A progression programme for the of MBO students that is too broad and relies purely on flexibility leads to dropping out and frustration. MBO students are used to a different way of studying. They do not know which information is important: “How should I select what is important? Is that the main theme of the book or is that what the lecturer says? Or, what’s in the PowerPoint?” These students must learn a study method, and thus distinguish between main and subsidiary issues.

The now developed transfer module tries to find an answer to these learning challenges. It makes it possible to further explore the choice of study programme, the link and degree of commitment to the study programme (including roles and specialisations) with a view to an Associate degree or a Bachelor degree as a path to continue on. Mentors, study career coaches and counselling interviews can be of added value here. The trick is to find the right tone, some students find it practical, others patronising.

4.2 Create crossovers for the non-related transfers

Approximately 13% of students with an MBO technology background and 11% with an MBO healthcare & welfare background are continuing their studies with a Bachelor Economics. Potentially, a separate educational programme can be created for this group. The Think Tank advises to realise cross-over programmes with ICT, healthcare, and technology. It is possible that the MBO group with a background in healthcare, now transferring to economics, can instead smoothly enter an Associate degree in Healthcare & Wellbeing. Develop continuous learning tracks for specific niches, identify the target groups, and together with MBO develop programmes that have a dual and hybrid character. These can also have a cross-over character, with attention for the reasoning of and collaboration with other disciplines. Make use of a target group approach, with figures and objectives and improve the timing. In all cases, promote modules for retraining and further education, think through the Associate degree structure and develop a programme for lifelong learning, so that students with work experience can rejoin later.

4.3 Prevent students drop-outs and guide switching students

The drop-out rate within MBO and from MBO to HBO is too high. Research why the percentage of students leaving an MBO study programme in Rotterdam prematurely is so much higher than nationwide, and initiate measures. Previously, there was an investment in the educational institutions in Rotterdam to stimulate the progression from MBO to several AD or HBO programmes; now the institutions are doing this on their own. On average, economic students switch more often to another study programme or institution. Encourage that switching becomes more flexible. Now, too many students still must start over, while this sometimes takes up an unnecessary amount of time and money. Offer them appropriate guidance.
5 Improve the data analysis and apply the information provision from secondary education and professional education differently

It is not yet very common in the educational sphere to systematically discuss which innovations are needed with a view to the future, based on new data. We recommend that relevant data on skills and knowledge from practice be made available to lecturer teams and that this be systematically discussed. This recommendation also has three dimensions:

5.1 Analyse common data in a regional datalab
The Think Tank advises the four professional educational institutions to set up a regional data centre together with a third party that has insight into the future developments of professions and jobs. Not only future developments per sector will be closely monitored here, but also the inflow, through-flow, and outflow of students in the Rotterdam region. The data centre will also address the required level of knowledge and skills and the required attitudes. This makes it possible to base quantitative and qualitative developments on regional developments, which are discussed per institution and per study programme. The discussion should become the standard within the study programmes instead of the exception. In addition, establish the macro-efficiency of the regional study programme offer every 3 or 4 years. In doing so, realise that not everything can be controlled or predicted, but have an eye for developments in the market, so that students can develop with appropriate focus.

5.2 Use quantitative and qualitative data to better inform students
Currently, relatively many students in Rotterdam opt for an economic study programme on the basis of an impression they have of the study programme or labour market opportunities, or because of the influence of their immediate environment or the information provided by the study programme or school in question. Often this does not go beyond the information about the study programme itself, and insight into a larger whole of different sectors is minimal. Recruitment campaigns in secondary education should reflect changes in professions and labour market opportunities in a broad perspective, across the economic spectrum and in relation to other sectors. In recruitment, alumni from various fields can be used to sketch a realistic perspective on the labour market.

5.3 Delve into quantitative and qualitative analysis
Available data on connecting from education to the labour market tends to focus on the number of job openings and the demand for replacements. This is very limited empirical material for innovation of education. The Think Tank therefore advises to conduct new research into the connection between education and the labour market for both MBO and HBO students. Based on job profiles and vacancy data, this new research should mainly focus on the required level of knowledge and skills. Also discuss the impact of digitisation in all professions and what it entails for career patterns.

6 Management: combine your strengths and show the government that flexibility and freedom are required to implement changes faster

6.1 Suitable financing
To actually be able to realise the free zones as set out in Chapter 3, the system needs scope for innovation. Public-private and public-private partnerships are easier to create with appropriate forms of financing. The Think Tank promotes the idea that students in a free zone receive adequate support and substantive guidance. If education really wants to be able to make a difference and give students a good start on the labour market, investments should therefore also be made in tutors, and lecturers; and internship supervisors for MBO and HBO. For example, for development time, and the opportunity to gain extensive experience in the business world and thus also to realise didactically new, activating concepts that fit the labour market.

6.2 Provide opportunities that support innovative forms of education
Public authorities should be called upon to support cross-border forms of cooperation. These can be forms where MBO and HBO jointly award a double degree in one programme or where other forms of education arise between private and public institutions. If professional study programmes really want to innovate, then the government must be more flexible in setting up new study programmes to meet the demands of the labour market. At present, it takes an average of two years to apply for a new study programme and a so-called ‘waterfall effect’ then arises. Education generally lags behind developments. Once education has caught up, the professional practice will have moved on. Conversely, by operating smartly, education can sort and give meaning to developments in the professional field. The Think Tank therefore advocates a condition-creating approach that facilitates rather than slows down innovation.

6.3 Strengthen joint knowledge infrastructure within the economic professional education
We have noticed that there are well-intentioned initiatives in MBO and HBO to improve education. The research centres of the universities of applied sciences are productive and the regional training centres also occasionally publish articles on the substantive course of the study programme in connection with the professional field. Nevertheless, development of new knowledge is fragmented and not shared. We must conclude that Rotterdam’s economic professional education is mostly left to its own devices, for example in the form of public-private partnership programmes. Promoting demand management and knowledge exchange is a national task for the government. This can only be achieved by arriving at a shared Research and Development agenda that relates to the content and development of economic professional education, as a result of which new developments are actively incorporated into the curriculum.
Prolong the collaboration between the four Rotterdam professional educational institutions

Over the past period, the four professional educational institutions have worked together to start a learning community. Data has been shared to get the best possible understanding of what characterises economic professional education in Rotterdam. We want to maintain and even intensify this method of cooperation!

7.1 Engage the regional business community to better match supply and demand

Intensify the cooperation between schools and the business community and also provide a good basis for regional coordination for both the needs of the work field and the supply of students. In MBO the macro-efficiency has been sharpened. In higher education, coordination with the professional field regarding the range of education on offer mainly takes place at the start of a new study programme. At which time, contact is primarily about one specific study programme. By means of structural exchange and co-creation, appropriate and interrelated considerations can be made, for example about the start, end, or modification of study programmes. Take into account the notion that labour market developments are volatile and that a 100% match between supply and demand is not only impossible but also undesirable. By doing this at the macro level, you avoid daily rates that adapt to every minor change in the labour market, while at the same management teams keep an eye on the structural development directions.

7.2 Jointly assess the regional educational range

Our advice for Inholland University of Applied Sciences, Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences, Albeda College and Zadkine is to jointly explore opportunities for working together more intensively and setting up new forms of education. If there is more cooperation in ‘Neue Kombinationen’ (after Schumpeter), then we may also be able to effect a bigger change in the innovation of education. And if, after a while, these new forms no longer work well or require adjustment: then promote the process of creative destruction. Therefore, assess the educative assortment regionally and collectively: what is on offer and by whom? What overlap can be eliminated by applying targeted specialisations, how can you facilitate each other? Now every school has its own education to offer; we challenge the four schools to make changes in this respect.

7.3 Share the experience of this economic exploration, also in relation to the next economy programme of Rotterdam city

The intensive exploration of the future of economic professional education, resulting in this manifesto, has recently been carried out. Share experiences, also within secondary education, professional education and academic education in Rotterdam and the surrounding municipalities, much like the R6 context and on a national scale. It is valuable to carry out similar explorations into technological education, healthcare education, et cetera, and to start discussions in educational organisations based on quantitative and qualitative data. This also offers the possibility of linking up with recovery programmes such as ‘Rijnmond werkt door’. This allows new opportunities to be created for young people and helps businesses to recruit motivated employees.
CHAPTER 5
IN CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A LEARNING, PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

If we review everything, we as Think Tank are even more convinced that this manifesto must be reflected in the transformation of the economic professional study programmes in Rotterdam. Only then can economic professional education remain future-proof.

The transformation requires different tempos, sometimes temporization is needed in order to accelerate afterwards. Some students follow the main track, others benefit from concentrated study or specialization. This calls for action on the part of the various parties involved, who can together arrive at new forms of learning and working through the exchange of knowledge and experiences. The professional educational institutions have taken the initiative to take joint responsibility to conduct this exploration. There are ample reasons to further develop the sound initiatives in economic professional education into a learning and ‘enriching’ educational community. Value what already exists, link to the innovations that have been initiated.

The debate on the emancipatory value of a diploma in the economic domain will receive more emphasis in view of the coronavirus pandemic. If we want to make our students in Rotterdam sufficiently resilient in the present and future time, we need to offer more scope for the further development of economic professional education. We cannot do this alone, but we can do it when professional educators and Rotterdam partners collaborate, with or without government assistance. Only then can we provide the 23,000 students in economic professional education in Rotterdam with the best possible future prospects.

THINK TANK

In 2019, the administrators of Zadkine, Inholland University of Applied Sciences, Albeda and Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences commissioned an independent Think Tank to provide insight into the possible imbalance between economic study programmes and labour market demand and asked one central question: How do we ensure that economic professional education in Rotterdam remains future-proof? The Think Tank consists of six members:

Ludo Baauw
CEO Intermax Group

Mai Elmar
• Director Cruise Port Rotterdam
• Chairman Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers, Rotterdam

Laamia Elyounoussi
Owner and Director of cleaning agency ‘Schone Zaak’

Miriam Hoekstra - van der Deen
• Director Airport Operations of Schiphol
• Member of the Supervisory Board Franciscus Hospital
• Chairman of the Advisory Board Albeda Rotterdam-The Hague Airport College

Barbara Kathmann
Vice-Mayor for Economy in Rotterdam

Marc van der Meer
• Honorary Professor Education and Labour Market
• Independent academic advisor for the sector Secondary Vocational Education