

The AOb in brief

Algemene Onderwijsbond

The Algemene Onderwijsbond (General Union of Educational Personnel) is the largest trade union in the Dutch education sector. It looks after the interests of all staff in the education sector (membership is open to teachers, administrative and ancillary staff), ranging from primary education to colleges of higher education.

History

The history of the Algemene Onderwijsbond (AOB) dates back to 1842. Over 150 years ago a group of teachers decided to establish an organisation, the Nederlands Onderwijs Genootschap (Dutch Education Society), to look after the interests of members of the organisation and to improve the quality of education in the Netherlands. After it was founded, and as a result of mergers with other organisations, the society changed its name several times. The most recent merger took place in 1997 between the ABOP (General Union of Teachers) and the NGL (Dutch Association of Teachers). The AOB is the oldest trade union in the Netherlands and probably even in the entire world.

Largest trade union

Currently, the AOB has approximately 73,000 members and, as a result, has become the largest trade union in the Netherlands. It looks after the interests of all staff in the education sector, ranging from primary education to colleges of higher education. Teaching staff as well as ancillary staff can join the AOB.

A total number of nearly 300,000 people are employed in the Dutch education sector; 125,000 of whom belong to one union or another. The AOB organises approximately 60% of the trade unionists in the education sector.

General union

The AOB is a general union, i.e. it is not politically or religiously oriented. However, the union has four departments which represent the various religious and humanist movements in education.

Changes

Over the past ten years education in the Netherlands has changed substantially. This has affected the position of the AOb. Key concepts were and still are: decentralisation, deregulation, autonomy, increase in scale and privatisation. As a result, management and control of the schools have changed. Funding has played an important role in this respect. With the exception of primary education, schools are now responsible for the management of their own funds. The trade unions feel that even though innovations in the field of management and control offer schools much more freedom, the teaching staff do not always get what they are entitled to.

AOb's objectives

The AOb has two objectives:

- to preserve and to improve the working conditions of staff in the education sector.
- to improve the content and organisation of education and to promote professionalism.

AOb's activities

- to conclude Collective Labour Agreements ('CAO') with the Minister of Education to cover aspects such as wages and working hours;
- to further elaborate Collective Labour Agreements by making agreements about fringe benefits with the employers;
- to influence parliamentary decision-making and representation in all kinds of educational bodies and advisory councils;
- to provide services to its individual members by means of information and social and legal support in the case of labour disputes;
- to support its members by means of advice and training in employee participation.

The structure of the AOb

The offices

AOb's head office is located in the city of Utrecht and it has five district offices in Amsterdam, Deventer, Eindhoven, Groningen and Rotterdam. The head office is responsible for preparing and implementing the individual and collective promotion of interests and it provides services to its members. Schools and members can turn to these district offices with questions and for advice. In addition to providing services to AOb members, the regional offices also represent the AOb in consultations with school boards.

The association

The association's members can make decisions about union policies and working conditions and they can also participate in policy-making.

There are various ways to participate in the policy-making process:

- members can be consulted about negotiations **by school**;
- members can discuss local and national union policies in **district** groups;
- there are four **sectors**: primary education, secondary education, vocational education and higher education. These sectors discuss sector-related subjects;
- there are four **departments**: public-authority education, non-denominational private education, Protestant education and Catholic education. These departments discuss subjects which relate to their own identity;
- there are **special groups**: women, teachers of own language and own culture, homosexuals, young teachers, ancillary staff, heads and pensioners.

The association has a **central committee** which is elected by AOb members in the districts. Six members of the central committee make up the **executive committee**.

The **General Assembly** consists of representatives from districts, sectors, departments and groups and plays a key role in the decision-making process.

Union policies are set out during **the Conference**, which takes place once every three years.

FNV

The AOb is affiliated to the FNV, the largest trade union confederation in the Netherlands. The FNV occupies itself with income policy and social matters involving

employees. The FNV affiliates represent no less than 1.2 million members.

AOb's international policies

The AOb is affiliated to Education International (EI) and the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE). It is represented in the executive committees of EI and ETUCE and is actively involved in working groups and conferences. The AOb maintains bilateral contacts with a number of sister organisations within the European Union; these contacts are aimed at consultation and cooperation. The AOb cooperates with a number of unions in Central and Eastern Europe and it supports them in developing their democratic organisation and also helps them with transformation activities. To a limited extent the AOb is active in the field of development cooperation with unions in Third World countries. The AOb is also active in the field of development cooperation with unions in the Third World countries. A solidarity fund has been established for this purpose. Next to this resources AOb can participate through its confederation FNV in programmes for development cooperation for trade unions, funded by the Dutch government and, in the framework of a partnership agreement with NOVIB/Oxfam Holland, additional support can also be made available.

The AOb participates actively in the global campaign for Education for All and in campaigns and programmes for the eradication of child labour. Not only through projects and cooperation with teachers unions in the developing countries but also in seeking to mobilize the membership, schools and students to participate in campaigns and raise awareness on these fundamental global issues in education. Last but not least, AOb shows its solidarity and support with and for organisations and trade unionists in countries which suffer under suppression of fundamental human and trade union rights.