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European Inventory on Validation of Non- formal and Informal Learning 2010

Country Report: Netherlands

By Ruud Duvekot

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Project management by GHK Consulting (Manuel Souto Otero and Jo Hawley).

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1 NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

1.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

With the publication of *De Fles is Half Vol!* ("The glass is half full!") in 2000, a first step towards lifelong learning using the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL; EVC or *Erkenning van Verworven Competenties* in Dutch) was taken in the Netherlands. A national working group on EVC formulated a broad vision on EVC and the implementation process. EVC had to bridge the gap between the education supply and the demand on the labour market side. The challenge was to connect these two worlds via the learner, on the one hand by converting learning experiences into certificates or diplomas, and on the other by allowing for the development of competences in a career context (Werkgroep EVC 2000).

To support this application of EVC and to learn from the existing practice, the government established the Kenniscentrum EVC (Knowledge Centre on Accreditation of Prior Learning) in 2001. The goal of this Kenniscentrum is to, on the basis of collecting practical examples, promote the use of EVC in the labour market and take EVC to a higher qualitative level. It became clear that there were many situations in which EVC could be used, but did not automatically lead to the desired effects (Duvekot, 2002; Verhaar, 2002; Van den Dungen, et al., 2003). Factors and circumstances that could have a negative impact include more restrictive legislation or regulations, fear of change, system failures, general conservatism or a too short-sighted view of the return on investment. On the other hand, the positive effects of EVC were seen mainly at the sector level.

Over the years 2005-2010, the Dutch government invested nearly EUR 100 million in lifelong learning including EVC at upper secondary and higher vocational education levels, in developing a regional infrastructure for learning and working and in promoting EVC (*Ervaringscertificaat*). This policy was put forward in the working plan for 2005-2007, *Strengthening Learning and Working*. The ministries of Education, Culture and Science, of Social Affairs and Employment, of Agriculture and Nature Management, and of Economic Affairs, were all involved.

In the implementation strategy, management and practice come together. At management level educational institutions were encouraged to implement EVC institution-wide. They signed agreements with the government to carry out a certain number of EVC procedures within one or two years and to guarantee a minimum quality standard of these procedures. Practices already in use for some years were disseminated and the quality-issue of the procedures was addressed by developing a national quality-code on EVC.

Legal Framework

There are no specific laws regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Netherlands. Validation is more embedded in existing laws in the education-sector.

There is however an informal right for citizens without a formal starting-qualification (equivalent of EQF-level 2) to obtain this level of qualification. He/she can enter any VET school and start a learning programme towards this goal, with or without a formal APL procedure.

Concerning the Vocational Education and Training-sector, the Law on Adult & Vocational Education (WEB, 1996) was the basis for developing a national standard for the recognition and certification of acquired skills in the VET-sector. In the classification scheme for developing the standards in the qualification structure of Dutch VET it was explicitly stated on the purpose of the qualification: "to facilitate recognition from elsewhere or previously acquired skills" (informal or non-formal learning). This qualification structure as a basis for assessing prior learning is therefore important because it allows certificates to be provided

from which social rights can be derived. It also prevents a distinction being made between quality of skills acquired on the basis of a formal learning and skills acquired on the basis of a learning pathway independent assessment (informal or non-formal learning). Both the results of formal and informal/non-formal prior learning are assessed through a system of independent assessment of learning pathways.

For Higher Education, the law "*Wet of het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek*" (WHW - law on higher education and scientific research) regulates the admission and exemption policy in higher education and stipulates the possibilities for RPL in higher education. Higher education institutes are left free to translate this regulation per study in the "*Onderwijs en examenreglementen*" (OERs - rules on education and exams). The WHW stipulates that a student can only enter academic higher education if (s)he possesses an academic upper secondary education certificate (VWO) and can at least enter vocational higher education if (s)he possesses an academic upper secondary education qualification (HAVO or VWO) or a post-secondary vocational degree (MBO). Apart from these formal requirements for certificates, students who do not fulfil these requirements and who are over 21 years old can also be admitted to higher education via the colloquium doctum (admittance research). Each higher education institute is left free to set its own requirements for the colloquium doctum per faculty (in the OERs).

EVC is primarily an instrument for awarding exemptions for higher education programmes. It can also be used for admittance to higher education. Adults aged over 21 who do not meet the formal entry requirements can undergo a formal procedure called the '21+test', which tests the required level in Dutch, English and the specific subject of the programme. There are a number of institutions which state that an EVC procedure can be used to replace this test.

It is important to note that Dutch higher education is a binary system of higher vocational education (HBO) and of universities (WO). EVC is embedded in higher vocational education but not in universities (academic levels; apart from the Open University).

Within higher vocational education, an important development is the introduction of the Associate Degree programmes. An Associate Degree programme is a two-year programme within the HBO-bachelor programme that leads to a new legally recognised qualification: the Associate Degree (AD). This education programme is intended for workers and students entering from MBO (Secondary Vocational Education). The association of small and medium-sized enterprises in the Netherlands strongly urged the introduction of this kind of programme. 57 pilots of AD programmes have been started and EVC is going to be introduced in these programmes.

While initiatives regarding EVC are primarily placed in the hands of interest bodies, social partners and sector organisations, the Dutch government has chosen a bottom-up method for the stimulation and implementation of EVC (SER, 2002).

An exception to these decentralised policies of EVC in The Netherlands is "*De Wet Beroepen in het Onderwijs (BIO)*" (the Law of Professions in Education). The law was approved by the Parliament in January 2004 and obliges workers in the educational sector to work on their employability after they have graduated and started working. On a national level, standards are formulated to ensure that teachers have the necessary qualifications to practice. These standards comply with the official required qualifications for primary and secondary education. Teachers get the opportunity to build up professional dossiers in which they can prove their competences are up-to-date. These dossiers are being used in the integral personnel policy of the schools (the 'human resource management cycles'). (<http://www.lerarenweb.nl/lerarenweb-bekwaamHEd.html?sbl&artikelen&13>). The main reason for setting up this law was the continued shortage of teachers in the educational sector, which needed to be addressed. By stipulating the competences teachers need to

possess, non-certified individuals are able to start employment in the educational sector (so-called 'sidestreamers'). Qualifications gained outside of the formal pathways are recognised through an assessment procedure. This procedure is arranged by specific centres which assess candidates for various teacher education institutes in a district. If a person's competences meet the competence requirements, he or she can receive recognition and start as a teacher. For those who fail to meet certain competences, an individualised study programme may be offered either before they start their employment as a teacher or during their employment as a teacher.

National system

A national system for validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Dutch society was until 2006 focused on strengthening bottom-up usage of EVC. Government and social partners focused on creating favourable circumstances for developing and implementing EVC in as many contexts as possible: in work, in voluntary work, in reintegration and job-seeking, in education and training. This approach of 'role modelling by offering good practices' was managed by the *Kenniscentrum EVC* and focused on the change of the learning culture in general. (Duvekot 2005). From 2006 this approach changed into a focus on quality-assurance to increase the accessibility, transparency and to guarantee the summative effects by means of certification or qualification.

EVC in the Netherlands consists of two specific instruments:

1. The '*Ervaringscertificaat*'. This is the formal procedure in which a candidate can get accreditation of his/her learning outcomes. It is a summative approach; a portfolio is referred to a specific national qualification standard and the accreditation consists of a number of credits that can be cashed in at a qualifying institute or school. The portfolio therefore is a dossier-portfolio or a showcase of the relevant learning outcomes to be referred to at least one specific standard. This form can be called *Accreditation of Prior Learning* (EVC).
2. The '*Ervaringsprofiel*'. This procedure sets up a generic, personal portfolio. It was developed in the context of the economic crisis. It is formative approach aimed at validation of all the generic competences of a candidate. It advises on the possible opportunities for accreditation or personal development steps. It also points out what to do when a specific qualification or diploma is at stake. This form can be called *Recognition of Prior Learning* (RPL or in Dutch the informal HVC or *Herkennen van Verworven Competenties*).

National policy

With the change of focus to the quality-assurance of EVC in 2006, the Dutch government started to stimulate and subsidise the development of a national infrastructure for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. For this reason the Interdepartmental Project Unit for Learning & Working (PLW) was set up. The aim is (still) to boost adult learning in combination with work, without focusing specifically on one or more key skills, but rather on programmes combining work and study that lead to a qualification and better opportunities in the job market. The *Ervaringscertificaat* is used to assess and recognise prior learning competences.

The key element of the PLW approach is the development of regional partnerships (local government, educational institutions and the business community) to build a sustainable infrastructure for lifelong learning in the region. The parties to these partnerships recognise that it is in their own interests to work together to ensure that at a regional level the working population and job seekers develop competences to meet the needs of the labour market. There are currently 47 such partnerships. On a sectoral level there are seven partnerships. There is also one national initiative called "In Bedrijf" ("In Company") which is run by the

Public Employment Service (*UWV WERKbedrijf*), 121 municipalities and the 55 reintegration firms ('In bedrijf').

1.2 Relationship with the existing/ developing qualifications framework and information on standards used for validation

VET is based on a learning outcomes approach in theory. This is called the competence-base of VET in which all national standards embedded in VET are formulated in terms of competences. At this moment (early 2010), the last step in turning VET into a competence-based learning system has been blocked temporarily by the parliament, due to a certain lack of commitment in VET-schools. Implementation of a competence-based approach of VET has been delayed until August 2011, to gain more time and therewith more commitment from the VET-teachers.

All courses in vocational secondary education are entered in the Central Register of Vocational Courses (CREBO, *Centraal Register Beroepsopleidingen*). This register records which institutions provide which courses, what the exit qualifications are, which learning pathway is involved and which of the partial qualifications awarded are subject to external validation. It also indicates which courses are funded by the government and which bodies are authorised to validate examinations.

All accredited programmes in higher education are listed in the Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes (CROHO, *Centraal Register Opleidingen Hoger Onderwijs*). Besides the accreditation of degree programmes, the Netherlands has a system by which the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science recognises higher education institutions by conferring on them the status of either 'funded' or 'approved' (Eurydice, Cedefop, ETF, 2003). 'Funded' indicates that the institution is fully financed by the government while 'approved' indicates that the institution does not receive funds from the government and has to rely on its own sources of funding. All programmes must be accredited and registered in CROHO.

At the moment there is no National Qualifications Framework in the Netherlands. There is however a working group established by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences to work on setting up a National Coordination Point for translating Dutch qualifications to the EQF. This means that the 14 Dutch levels (4 VMBO; 2 HAVO-VWO; 4 MBO; 4 Higher education – see diagram of the Dutch education system in Annex 1 for more detail) are measured against the eight EQF-levels to give more transparency to the Dutch qualifications in the European learning-arena.

At present, the only connections between existing methodological-conceptual frameworks in the Netherlands and current processes and initiatives at European level are in relation to credit-transfer in the ECTS and the European Principles and Guidelines on Validation of non-formal and informal learning.

1.3 National institutional framework

The [Kenniscentrum](http://www.kenniscentrum.nl/)¹ was the main institution responsible for setting up the Quality Code for EVC (see section 5 for more detail of this Quality Code). Presently, the Ministry of Education is responsible for maintaining this Quality Code and overcoming the bottlenecks in the process. It is expected that in the future this responsibility will be taken over by an intermediate organisation or a conglomerate of such organisations.

Apart from this responsibility the further design and implementation of validation remains to be developed as a strongly labour-market driven process in which the government expects the social partners to take responsibility and steer the EVC-process.

¹ <http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/>

The present Quality Code especially strengthens the summative use (i.e. the qualification-approach) of EVC by linking personal portfolios to standards in VET or HE or branch qualifications. In this way EVC focuses on awarding exemptions and offers access to qualifications that are recognised on the labour market. This access both affects public funded as well as private funded education, as long as they supply national accredited standards in VET and HE.

1.4 Division of responsibilities (national, regional, local, provider level) according to the different aspects of validation

The many responsibilities in the EVC -process are divided amongst a diversity of stakeholders:

- Government

The government focuses on the infrastructure and on the quality of EVC and the EVC system. The government stimulates the use of EVC with a communication campaign (Ervaringscertificaat), subsidies for regional partnerships, a fiscal facility for EVC, the knowledge centre EVC, platforms with experts and companies, the regional learning and working desks, subsidies for the Ervaringscertificaat/Ervaringsprofiel during the economic crisis (2009-2011), research into the use, the success and failure factors and the effects of EVC.

- Social partners

The social partners in the Netherlands traditionally negotiate with the government on all aspects concerning the regulation of the labour market. This includes division of responsibilities in the learning market; initial education and training of jobseekers are the primary responsibility of the government and the training of employees is the primary responsibility of the social partners. This therefore also affects the introduction of APL-systems for employees and job-seekers (Eurydice, Cedefop, ETF, 2003). Social partners stimulate the use of EVC by collective labour agreements. Employees have the right to EVC in certain collective labour agreements. In collective labour agreements the social partners in specific sectors also agree that Training and Development funds can be used for the valuation of personal competences of employees. Sometimes they even agree on using the fund for giving learning vouchers to the employees. The Training and Development fund provides the portfolio models, internal assessors and guidance. Since the end of the 1990s, a number of industrial sectors (e.g. house painting industry, meat industry, construction industry, process industry and the care sector), have set up initiatives regarding EVC at their (sector) level. In most cases social partners, sector organisations and regional vocational training institutes (ROC's) are involved in setting up EVC procedures.

- Association of national vocational education bodies – Colo

Colo is the association of 17 Dutch National Centres of Expertise on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (KBBs). These 17 Centres of Expertise jointly represent more than 40 different branches of industry. Colo stimulates dynamic interaction between the labour market and vocational education and represents its members on local, regional, national and international levels. Furthermore, it is a platform for the Centres of Expertise to discuss and agree on common interests and share best practices. Centres of Expertise play an important role in the process of EVC [accreditation of prior learning (APL)] in the Netherlands. The qualification structure, developed by the Centres, is used as a basis for EVC procedures. Centres of Expertise provide EVC procedures and they can help those with an EVC certificate to finding suitable work placement positions, if additional training is required.

Colo has a tripartite board consisting of representatives from employers, employees and the national vocational education bodies (laid down in the statutes of the association). Social partners are specifically responsible for defining and updating the occupational profiles, which form the basis of the qualification profiles. At regional level, most regional training centres (ROC) have a representation of social partners in their supervisory board. More and more, social partners are involved in or undertake initiatives at branch or local level by stimulating cooperation between education and training and trade and industry. The leading notion is to improve the connection between the demand for and the supply of the labour force and skilled personnel.

In general all covenant partners (partners in the quality code – see section 5.1), including the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (HBO-raad), The Netherlands Association of Vocational Education and Training Centres (MBO-raad), The Council for Agricultural Education Centres (AOC-raad) and The Open University stimulate the use and the quality of the Ervaringscertificaat.

1.5 Examples of regional, local or EU funded initiatives

When the national Project Directorate Learning & Working was set up, it was decided that an unorthodox and dynamic approach was needed to achieve progress with *lifelong learning*. This also meant focusing on regional stimulation of the use of EVC. The region was and still is the key to the working method of the project directorate Learning & Working. Other policy areas and directorates are also opting for the region as the point of address to carry out policy. Since 2008 many agreements were made regarding the wider interest of strengthened regional cooperation to benefit the whole regional labour market and participation policy.

Regional cooperation between governments, UWV, educational institutions, employers and employees is considered vital for *lifelong learning*. The cooperation has taken off well, but must be expanded. (PLW 2008). The Project Directorate Learning & Working therefore faces two challenges in the 2008-2011 period:

1. Reinforcing regional cooperation
2. Stimulating cooperation in the regions where it is still lacking.

The focus was and still is on entering a dialogue with the region and reaching clear agreements and results. The regional project plans submitted are assessed critically. Learning & Working plays various roles in the implementation of these plans: steering, support, feedback and evaluation. There are currently 37 regional, 9 sectoral and 1 national covenant on *lifelong learning* active. Together these initiatives cover agreements for the period until 2011 on:

- 132 000 combinations of learning and working including around 50 000 EVC.

At least as important as these quantitative yields is that a foundation has been laid in the regions for lasting cooperation between employers, employees, job seekers, schools, benefits agencies and Centres of Expertise on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market [KBBs]. The partnerships have to be further expanded so that they can ultimately function independently.

At the end of 2009 the minister of Social Affairs confirmed with the Public Employment Service (*UWV WERKbedrijf*) the structural financing of regional *leerwerkloketten* (regional learning and working desks). They agreed on 30 regional *Werkpleinplusvestigingen* and 14 extra offices in regions with already existing covenants between different partners. (<http://project.lerenenwerken.nl/projecten>).

1.6 Link between validation and the existing / developing credit system, unit-based or modularised structure of qualifications

The governing principles of describing and documenting prior learning is in general rather supply-dominated. This means that qualifications in branches, VET and HE (only bachelors of professional universities-HBO) are translated into competences and for each qualification put into an APL-procedure. A candidate who wants to reflect his/her prior learning outcomes on a qualification, has to fill in a portfolio (showcase) in which s/he can demonstrate how his/her learning experiences match with the competences in the qualification s/he has chosen. In an assessment s/he is judged and gets a report (Certificate of Experience) stating all learning outcomes that match with the learning outcomes that are defined for the chosen qualification. With this Certificate of Experience (*ErvaringsCertificaat*) s/he can turn to an awarding body (the exam committee) of a school or university. In this way it becomes clear that the outcome of an EVC procedure is foremost an official advice for the candidate with which s/he can go to the awarding body. Only the awarding body is allowed to turn the advice into an official exemption. This awarding body can decide on exemptions in the learning programme. On the basis of these exemptions it is possible to achieve a (partial or full) qualification.

1.7 Funding framework

EVC is financed in different ways by different stakeholders. Sectoral Training and Development Funds often finance agreements on EVC. Both employees and employers pay a small amount of their incomes to these sector funds, which were originally set up to support educational initiatives for employees in the sector (Duvekot et al, 2005).

In January 2007, the Dutch government extended a tax facility to EVC applicants. In order to qualify for this tax scheme, the EVC applicant must be able to submit an invoice from an accredited APL procedure. The employer receives EUR 325 back on tax. A lot of EVC providers became interested in becoming accredited by the Quality code because of this tax facility. In 2007 an EVC procedure for level 3 and 4 (Vocational education) cost between EUR 800 and EUR 1 300. For higher vocational education this was between EUR 1 000 and EUR 1 500 (Duvekot et al, 2007).

In 2009 a new temporary measure was taken by the government because of the economic crisis. Employers who need to make redundancies because of the economic crisis can offer the employees concerned a procedure for an *Ervaringscertificaat* or an *Ervaringsprofiel*. The scheme is targeted at three different specific groups: young unemployed persons without a starting qualification, the unemployed, and employed people at risk of losing their jobs. For the young unemployed, only those who do not hold a Level 2 vocational qualification are eligible. The other two groups can use the measure to access qualifications up to the level of HBO, to support their mobility on the labour market. The cost of this procedure is subsidised by the UWV. The amount is limited to EUR 650 for an *Ervaringsprofiel* and EUR 1300 for an *Ervaringscertificaat*. Depending on the number of employees of the company, half of the costs are subsidised (more than 25 employees) or all costs (less than 25 employees) are subsidised. Some EUR 57 million is being made available for the scheme in 2009 - 2010 and an additional EUR 75 million for education and training of people at risk of redundancy.

A grants scheme has been set up to promote prior learning assessment and recognition (EVC) in higher education and tailor-made programmes for working and learning. In the past few years agreements have also been made in many parts of the Netherlands between the government, the business community and educational institutions (HBO institutions and regional training centres (ROCs)) on the numbers of employees undergoing training. These agreements concern work-based learning at MBO and HBO levels and EVC

schemes. The government has provided funding for these regional agreements through the Interdepartmental Project Unit for Learning & Working.

Key to the approach is to achieve a sustainable regional infrastructure for lifelong learning and to put in place a total of 130 000 (2005-2011) schemes and programmes combining work and study. The development of key competences is not a separate area of activity but forms part of the work-study programmes to be implemented as part of the PLW approach.

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1.8 Data on flows of beneficiaries

In 2009 a total number of 15 700 *Ervaringscertificaten* was realised (Kans et al 2010). This meant that in the period 2007-2009 the number of awarded *Ervaringscertificaten* has grown with more than 60%. These quantitative data on the actual use of EVC in the Netherlands can be divided into two groups:

1. User groups at MBO-levels
2. User groups at HBO-level.

The MBO user group uses the *Ervaringscertificaat* to obtain a diploma at an MBO-level, to get access to a MBO-diploma programme or to get access to and exemptions for an MBO-diploma-programme.

The HBO user group uses the *Ervaringscertificaat* to obtain access to and exemptions for an HBO-diploma-programme (bachelor-level).

The number of *Ervaringscertificaten* has increased during the last couple of years, from 9 900 in 2007 to 12 500 in 2008 and 15 700 in 2009. Factors that have stimulated demand for the *Ervaringscertificaat* are the interest of employees, government measures to stimulate demand and the interest of employers. The demand for the *Ervaringscertificaat* is expected to increase. For 2010 33 000 *Ervaringscertificaten* are expected (Ecorys, EVC gemeten, 2010).

Together with 2 146 *Ervaringscertificaten* provided for in other non-subsidised procedures a total number of 13 659 *Ervaringscertificaten* were realized in 2009 for the MBO users.

The HBO user group uses the *Ervaringscertificaat* to obtain access to and exemptions for an HBO-diploma-programme (bachelor-level).

In relation to the recent campaign to encourage EVC in the context of the crisis, the results already achieved mid-term are the realisation of 23 233 EVC trajectories at HBO level?. This is 46.6 % of the target of 49 849 trajectories for the period of 2009-2010.

2 ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The main process-steps of EVC (especially in the *Ervaringscertificaat*) and the different tasks and responsibilities are described and reviewed in the following sections of this report. The diversity of the application and implementation of EVC in practice in partnerships between organisations/companies and training or educational institutions (VET/HE) is directly linked to the tasks and responsibilities of individual users.

There are a number of basic principles underlying EVC :

- EVC recognises the fact that learning on the job or via other non-formal learning situations (learning through practical experience) can in principle deliver the same (professional) competencies as learning within formal (classroom-based) situations.
- Recognition means awarding certificates or diplomas on the basis of a generally recognised standard, such as the qualification structure for professional education. Obviously there are also other standards relating to the labour market which employers and employees regard as relevant. External legitimacy is the key requirement for recognition.
- Recognition also means valuing competences acquired outside the working environment and/or used in other environments (such as voluntary work, private life).
- EVC is not a goal in itself. It contributes to the desire to develop individuals and to strengthen human capital management within and between companies. It is an important means for realising permanent labour market suitability, deployment potential and can also lead to horizontal, vertical, inter-sector and intra-sector mobility or for developing a regional APL-infrastructure (regional one-stop-offices).
- For people already in employment, skills can be developed which these individuals do not yet have, but which both they and their employers regard as necessary. In such cases, EVC acts as a reliable yardstick for determining which skills and qualifications the individual employee already has. Based on this inventory, a tailor-made training or development path can be formulated.
- APL is related to formal standards by the use of the same required learning outcomes. Hence, the beneficiary is not obliged to continue his / her development in a formal learning programme. The beneficiary can stop after receiving the Certificate of Experience.
- Rational investment in training by companies and by society as a whole assumes an understanding of existing skills and qualifications, or the stock of skills and qualifications in the company, respectively. EVC procedures enable identifying existing skills and qualifications in order to be able to come to determine the investments needed in training creating more awareness for learning possibilities in informal and non-formal situations and a more work-based learning culture
- APL procedures enable the visualisation of the profitability of training by expressing the results of training efforts in terms of a general standard. As when calculating the value of other economic production factors, the identification of the value of skills and qualifications assumes a common and reliable standard in which this value is expressed.
- The provision of flexible or customised training courses assumes that we can gauge a person's existing skills level. EVC can also improve the match between education and the labour market. This particularly applies in the case of skills-related training.
- The EVC assessment is designed to assess professional and/or societal activities. The assessment results provide valuable feedback on the content and methods of the

formal learning paths. The training courses are given direct information about the degree to which they succeed in adequately preparing their students for professional practice. This effect is strengthened by the fact that a distinction is made between training and assessment.

These basic principles of EVC can be highlighted in the following figure in which the different steps to be taken in the process of EVC for the organisation are described.

The steps in the EVC -process in an organisation:

EVC in the organisation in 5 phases and 10 steps			
EVC phase	EVC step + demand	Action organization	Contribution from knowledge infrastructure
I. Preparation	1. awareness <i>what is the need for investing in human capital?</i>	formulation of the mission of the organisation EVC pilot decision	EVC information materials workplace visit employability scan advising on approach
	2. determine learning objectives <i>what learning objectives are relevant for the organisation?</i>	establish ambitions and learning objectives organise strength/weakness analysis	model for strength/weakness analysis
II. Identification	3. determination of organisational or personal profile <i>how do you determine the need for competences of an organisation?</i>	draft job profiles emulate profiles determine portfolio model	format for job or competency profiles portfolio model
	4. retrospection <i>how to describe and document acquired competences</i>	guidance for completion of portfolio by employees portfolio counselling	portfolio counselling training
III. Accreditation & evaluation	5. standard setting <i>what is the desired assessment standard?</i>	establish standard manage the process of self-assessment of the employees overview of career opportunities	advising tools/online tools general career advice
	6. evaluation <i>how to value the assessment?</i>	portfolio assessment internal assessors	training of assessors assessment, incl. drafting advising on certification and/or career opportunities
	7. accreditation <i>how to accredit?</i>	cashing in on certification opportunities	counselling to certifying institution
IV. Development	8. prospective <i>How to put personal development plans (PDP) into action</i>	building on career opportunity advice in PDP arrangements on? For customised work	follow-up advice offer of customised work
	9. working on PDPs <i>custom-made development/learning</i>	PDP into action	delivery of custom work

<p>V. Review</p>	<p>10. structural implementation <i>evaluation of pilot; how EVC can be systematically incorporated into the organisation policy?</i></p>	<p>evaluation of EVC pilot embed APL in HRM, including financing promulgate (new) organisational policy employees administer portfolio</p>	<p>accreditation of assessors (internal/external) EVC quality control procedure</p>
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Source: Duvekot et al, 2007.

The actual EVC procedure in the Netherlands always contains the same five steps:

1. Information and advice for the candidate, the employer or other organisation, etc.
2. Intake of the individual and making individual arrangements. The candidate makes the decision to start the EVC procedure or not.
3. Recognition of competences: portfolio (supported by the coach)
4. Validation of competences: assessment (by the assessors)
5. EVC report (*Ervaringscertificaat*): Description of results and accreditation (by the assessor)

This means that in the figure step seven (phase IV) and phase IV and V are not a part of the EVC-procedure but fulfil the promise of EVC as a process.

2.1 Role of the formal education and training sector, including providers

Dutch educational institutions are being encouraged to develop and implement EVC. The Kenniscentrum EVC is researching assessment methods and quality tools and is helping institutions to implement these. Both private and public-sector institutions can offer EVC if they are registered as an EVC provider with the Knowledge Centre and adhere to the quality code. 113 EVC providers are registered (25 HE-institutions, 43 VET institutions, 13 KBB's (centers of expertise in VET) and 32 private organisations (Ecorys, EVC gemeten, 2010).

In VET and Higher Education, the autonomous institutions decide for themselves how to use the results of EVC procedures (the extent to which these results lead to exemptions or a diploma). The government plays no part in this, but does ensure that the procedures meet quality assurance standards.

2.2 Role of existing information, advice and guidance networks / institutions

The Public Employment Services (UWV) and the municipalities have taken on the responsibility for the provision of guidance in relation to the many measures taken by the government and social partners at sectoral level, in the light of the economic crisis. This is shown for instance in the national initiative "In Bedrijf" ("In Company") in which the reintegration sector, municipalities and the UWV work together in providing information and offering guidance to the target groups of unemployed, people who are employed but at risk of losing their jobs and young drop-outs from the education system. In this initiative, employers are also informed about the opportunities of EVC.

As an on-line service, EVC is more developed in portals. In these portals EVC is marketed in an effective way by showing the broad potential of people's learning outcomes so far. This is done through self-scans on the level of professional standards. The outcomes of these self-scans give people an idea of which cognitive and professional level they might reach, if they were to prepare the accreditation of their prior learning. (<http://www.lerenenwerken.nl/check-ervaringscertificaat-en-ervaringsprofiel>).

There is also a network of 44 regional offices for learning & working, subsidised by the project unit Learning and Working. The regional learning and working offices were set up to

promote EVC. The aim is that any individual can enter these regional learning and working desks to obtain guidance on their own development process. Companies are offered tailor-made solutions to human resource issues and all regional partners play a part in the implementation of the offices.

Based on experience to date, a number of recommendations can be made in relation to raising awareness of the usefulness of EVC and the marketing of EVC. An efficient approach focussed on the marketing of 'the EVC product' is an essential prerequisite for building up the relationship between EVC -providers and APL-candidates effectively. Over the past three years an infrastructure for EVC has been built. It is wise to invest in marketing and in the preparation of information campaigns like the public campaign "Weet waar je staat, vraag je Ervaringscertificaat" ("Know where you stand, ask for your experience certificate") in 2008. With this successful publicity campaign the government wanted to convince employees and job seekers of the possibilities of EVC.

Good use can also be made of the contacts that are already present in the educational institutions and at sectoral levels with other stakeholders like those responsible for training funds.

2.3 Validation in the private sector and the role of private sector actors

Thanks to EVC, in sectors such as care and education, recruitment and selection of personnel is increasingly taking place among target groups without the formal requirements. EVC is also used to address formative issues such as retention of personnel or outplacement (from 'work to work') and employability.

The role of the private sector in EVC is related to activities such as financing and raising awareness within sectors and companies or acting as EVC-providers.

Training Funds often finance agreements on EVC. Both employees and employers pay a small amount of their incomes to these sector funds, which were originally set up to support educational initiatives for employees (Duvekot et al, 2005).

In addition, as noted above private sector institutions can offer EVC if they are registered as an EVC provider with the Knowledge Centre and adhere to the quality code. There are currently 32 private organisations (Ecorys, EVC gemeten, 2010) providing EVC.

The construction sector offers a good example of a broad EVC function geared for both summative and formative effects. Since 2006, the Construction Industry Collective Labour Agreement (*CAO Bouwnijverheid*) has provided in-career tracks for employers and employees. In this track, the employees are informed of their career opportunities within the sector. The most important goal is getting the right employee into the right place, and in so doing, to keep ambitious employees in the sector, prevent attrition due to disability and promote reintegration. Each track is individual, customised, and requires effort on the part of all parties involved. A collective determination is made of what focus on other work is required, what tests are called for and what education/training is the most appropriate. A consensus is also obtained on the arrangements on the time commitment and financing of the process (Duvekot 2006).

Another example of an initiative in the private sector – based on a collaboration between a company and trade unions – is the Philips Vocational Qualifications Programme.

The Vocational qualifications programme²

The Vocational Qualifications Programme (VQP) is a joint initiative of Philips Electronics Nederland and four trade unions. The project is for employees who are skilled in their current trade but who are unable to prove their skills because they have never followed (or never completed) a vocational training course.

VQP aims to bring employees up to basic qualification (WEB2_=?) level. This level is generally accepted in the Netherlands as the minimum requirement to be able to operate effectively in a rapidly changing labour market. In some parts of the country, more stringent demands now apply and the minimum requirement has been raised to WEB3. In response, a number of WEB3 courses have been incorporated into the VQP project.

The VQP training plan includes sector-recognised, dual training courses in the processing, metalwork and logistics industries.

The project was first incorporated into a Collective Labour Agreement (CAO) in 2004. The aim was to help around 2 400 experienced production workers to gain a sector-recognised diploma. By mid-2007, one thousand participants had entered the programme.

Outflow and outplacement of personnel also benefit from validation. For instance in the military there is a high proportion of employees with fixed-term appointments. To be more successful at placing these employees on the labour market, EVC can offer both development and qualification. Likewise, in mergers and reorganisations, EVC offers development and qualifications to find the right place for personnel, whether internally or externally.

As shown above (section 2.4), private sector stakeholders play an important role in the implementation of validation in the Netherlands. A number of key learning points can be identified from experience to date in this sector:

- Collaboration between companies and educational establishments is essential to ensure work-based learning can be customised following the EVC procedure. Companies have to facilitate and in particular provide guidance in workplace learning, and educational establishments must accept and value the workplace as a learning environment.
- Employees need to be as self-reliant and programme-independent as possible in the development of their personal development programmes following an EVC procedure. In this sense, it is up to the individual to make choices concerning the degree of self-determination or external direction within the development programme. These choices range between 100 % self-determination of the form and content of the programme (*empowerment*) and 0 % (*pampering*).
- A more customer-centred orientation of education institutions towards organisations/businesses is needed in order to help anchor EVC in Human Resource Development. On the other hand, increased formulation of demands is needed from organisations/businesses in order to help anchor EVC in the policy of educational institutions.
- Organisations/ companies must ensure that their formulation of demands is effective. Formulation of demands means that there is clarity concerning (1) the competences present within the organisation, and (2) the required competencies within the

² <http://www.hrn.philips.com/cv/>

framework of the organisational aims. A match can be made between (1) and (2), so that (3) the competency demands within the organisation and ultimately (4), an action plan for the validation and development of available competences, as well as those that need to be developed, emerges. Good examples of this integral approach are offered by companies like Rockwool, the personnel department of the ministry of Defence and on a sectoral level in the agricultural sector (AGF) and the building sector

- Research is needed into the added value of EVC, among other things focussed on its economic, financial and social effects and also the relation with other assessment systems (e.g. in-company, social, etc.).

2.4 Validation in the third sector and the role of third sector actors

The voluntary sector plays an active and vital role in the Dutch economy. The Dutch use two words to refer to voluntary action: *vrijwillig* (voluntary) and *vrijwilligerswerk* (volunteering). The Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports (VWS) defines “volunteering” as: work that is performed in an organised context and without obligation or pay for the benefit of other people or a community; volunteers may not depend upon their activities for their livelihood. No official qualifications exist for voluntary work.

Voluntary work allows volunteers to develop formal and non-formal skills and qualifications, to improve specific qualities (mutual aid, altruism, cooperative spirit). Volunteering offers opportunities to learn and to acquire work experience and so become an active citizen. Assessing voluntary experiences in a professional perspective could be a way to bridge the gap between voluntary work and employment. Many volunteers have difficulties getting their experience valued by educational institutions or employers however. They mostly deal with identifying what competences exist in the volunteer sector and how far we can go in official recognition.

According to the results of a longitudinal survey conducted by the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Office and the Central Bureau for Statistics, in 2008 approximately 5.3 million persons were occupied in some sort of volunteering in the Netherlands. The primary focus of this survey was on the amount of time contributed by volunteers.

The government provides recognition for volunteering by financing various volunteer organisations, establishing a temporary fund for local and provincial governments and including measures formulated in governmental policy papers (Duvekot et al 2009). The Dutch government also sponsors the National Compliment, an annual prize for the best volunteer project. Local-level recognitions involve a variety of programmes that are implemented by local volunteer centres and local governments. Examples of these programmes include local prizes recognising individual volunteers, volunteer organisations, volunteer projects, active citizenship participation in policy making processes.

Nevertheless, the Dutch procedures for the certification of skills and competences are rarely used in the field of volunteering due to the associated high costs, lack of interest and simply a lack of information on the existing possibilities. However, some organisations award certificates to their volunteers, while there have also been experiments involving portfolios. These certificates are granted for instance through initiatives of the *Vrijwilligerscentrales* (on local levels) and by the Scouts. MOVISIE (in their capacity as research institute for the voluntary sector), currently receives funding to develop a system of EVC for volunteers (GHK, 2010). Furthermore, most regular EVC procedures take account of valuable work experiences of the individual in the third sector.

2.5 Costs to organisations

As noted above (section 2.7), EVC is financed in different ways by different stakeholders. Training Funds often finance agreements on EVC. Both employees and employers pay a

small amount of their incomes to these sector funds, which were originally set up to support educational initiatives for employees (Duvekot et al, 2005).

A number of other general comments can be made in relation to the costs to organisations of implementing EVC:

- EVC is a commercial activity (when used in the framework of the quality code EVC). This means that public organisations cannot use their government funding for EVC (not a market price). Compensation for EVC (procedure, assessment) is possible through:
 - Subsidies for employers based on the legal arrangement described in section 2.7
 - Fiscal facilities (such as income tax relief on costs for education) for employees and unemployed persons looking for jobs.
- Many Collective Labour Agreements include a paragraph on compensation for employers and/or employees, using EVC.
- The bottom line remains, as stipulated with the publication of the national policy concerning EVC in the Netherlands in 2000 under the title of 'The glass is half full' : EVC is meant to prevent unnecessary learning; in this way any investment in an EVC procedure is about lowering the real costs of learning!

3 INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

Raising awareness of the necessity and opportunities of lifelong learning for individuals in any given context is at the heart of the process of Valuing Learning. Without this, learning will remain school- or company-led and cannot effectively be based on individuals' motivations and ambitions.

The project unit Learning and Working has subsidised regional partnerships to promote the use of APL. As part of these regional partnerships regional learning and working offices were set up. The aim is that any individual can enter these regional learning and working desks to obtain guidance on their own development process. Companies are offered tailor-made solutions to human resource issues and all regional partners play a part in the implementation of the offices.

It is a big step forward that all local partners in education and the labour market are working together more and attuning their procedures.

The project unit Learning and Working has also invested in a campaign to promote the *Ervaringscertificaat* among individuals and employers.

Social partners play an important role in the awareness-raising of employers and employees through Collective Labour Agreements and Training and Development Funds.

3.2 Provision of guidance and support

In Phase II of the figure showing the EVC-process, the portfolio is introduced as the red thread in the process. After learning targets have been set, the portfolio is designed and filled in; its content is assessed and advice is added on possible qualification and career opportunities; it is subsequently enriched by made-to-measure learning and finally the starting point of a new process in which new learning targets can be formulated. The portfolio is on the one hand both the starting as well as the end point of the individual

learning process. On the other hand any end point is again the starting point of a new learning process. This is called the 'portfolio-loop'.

Guidance of candidates for an EVC-procedure is essential to EVC as a process. In Phase III especially, self-assessment is the crucial element because without this a person can only partially become co-designer of his/her personal development. Guidance in this phase is offered in many ways: through personal advice, digital self-scans or guided training in which people are guided through their life experiences and therewith their learning outcomes or prior learning achievements.

There are different instruments available in the Netherlands for this kind of guided self-assessment, for instance the Swiss *CH-Q* instrument. (*CH-Q* = Schweizer Qualificationsbuch; Schuur, et al, 2003). It is an integral system for Validation of Prior Learning. It consists of a broad package of services: portfolio, (self-) assessment, career-planning, action-planning, quality-control and accompanying training programmes. Most instruments available are based on this method in which the self-management of competences is the cornerstone of the process.

In general these tools for guidance in relation to self-assessment aim at personal development or career-planning and/or creating flexibility and mobility of the individual learner to and on the labour-market. They create added value by revitalising individual responsibility or co-authorship by:

- providing the basis for goal-oriented development and career-planning,
- the stimulation of personal development,
- the support of self managed learning and acting,
- stimulating young people and adults to document continuously their professional- and personal development.

For further support in the process the roles of the guidance counsellor and of the assessor are vital for starting up personal development in any kind of form. Guidance is a responsibility of any EVC-provider in helping candidates to fill in their portfolio once a specific standard has been chosen. These guides get training in order to be able to guide candidates in a professional way through the procedure and give them advice on their opportunities.

Apart from this guidance, reliable assessment is the key to matching a portfolio, including a personal action plan, and the specific development steps advised by the assessor. In any given model for validating Learning an assessment-policy has three functions: (1) raising levels of achievement, (2) measuring this achievement reliably and (3) organising the assessment cost-effectively. It can also be the basis for advice and guidance on development.

The example below, of the use of EVC for fire-fighters, shows the importance of guidance in the validation process.

The EVC process used for fire department employees

By law fire-fighters in the Netherlands have to leave the fire service after 20 years of work. In 2009, the Dutch fire department began to use a national accreditation of prior learning (EVC) pilot project to help departing employees make the transition to a different job.

The project, which will continue until June 2010, was initially piloted with 15 employees of the fire service, 12 at middle management level (MBO-4) and 3 at employee-level (MBO-3). The participants were offered help in finding another job.

Those who were chosen for the pilot scheme had completed secondary general education and then

started working in the fire department. During their service years they received in-company training. The scheme helped them use the training and experience that they received during their career in the fire department to work towards a national qualification and further career opportunities.

Thus they were provided with guidance in order to undertake a national vocational qualification, at level MBO-3 and level MBO-4, (the two highest levels of upper secondary vocational education).

Each employee was given 16 hours of individual guidance, at an estimated cost of EUR 75 per hour. The cost of the EVC procedure was estimated at EUR 1 500-2 000.

The benefits to the participants are clear - gaining a nationally recognised qualification and thus a greater chance of gaining employment after leaving the fire service. The employer (the fire department) saw the project as value-for-money as there was a high success rate. It now intends to implement the approach throughout the service in the long term.

To ensure quality, the EVC-procedure is carried out under the Dutch EVC-quality code.

In terms of the results of the project, all fire workers are linked to a new job opportunity with a possible qualification in different sectors: education, social work, etc.

As the project ran from September 2009 – June 2010, it is yet to be as formally evaluated.

3.3 Costs to individuals

In addition to the information provided earlier in this report in sections 2.7 and 3.5, it can be mentioned that when EVC is not funded by the government or the social partners, the individual user can fiscally deduct the costs for EVC. EVC is fiscally considered as a cost for learning and all costs above EUR 500 are tax-deductible. Furthermore, both the *Ervaringscertificaat* and the *Ervaringsprofiel* are, during the economic crisis (2009 and 2010), subsidised if the beneficiary is in danger of losing his / her job.

3.4 Initiatives focused on specific target groups

Following the economic crisis, both the government and social partners joined forces to strengthen the use of EVC for workers that are in danger of losing their job. It is possible for these workers to benefit from subsidised EVC through so-called mobility centres. Local authorities, social partners, job-agencies and relevant education-institutes all work together to prevent unemployment. In a sense this is an approach of creating a local community that is capable of finding integral solutions of personal labour-problems, using EVC as the instrument. All these efforts come together in the national measure taken up for the target groups of young unemployed without a starting qualification, the unemployed and employed who are at risk of losing their jobs. See also paragraph 2.7 for further information in relation to this initiative.

3.5 Evidence of benefits to individuals

In the context of learning and working, an EVC procedure can be used to assess and recognise the competences (both vocational and general) of a candidate in relation to the standards (finishing levels) of an MBO (VET qualification), HBO (HE qualification in universities of applied science and the Open University) qualification. This assessment results in an *Ervaringscertificaat*, Certificate of Experience (CoE). This CoE can be used as an independent document that proves the value of the experiences measured in terms of a qualification. Candidates are free to choose what they want to do with their CoE and cannot be obliged to follow any education afterwards.

It can be used:

- as the basis for further informal or non formal development of the individual
- in the labour market for further career building

- for a qualification through a diploma when the individual has met all the required learning outcomes that were defined for this qualification
- as a document to get exemptions in education, if not all required learning outcomes were met and the individual does not wish to attend formal education and training again.

While the majority of providers (especially in HE) conduct in practice only a summative APL, a formative assessment (which some would not consider to be EVC, strictly speaking) can also be used in the context of career development with the aim of identifying training needs and adjusting training programmes accordingly.

The benefits of EVC are considered high, especially when the EVC -process not only covers summative but also formative effects. This stage however has not yet been reached. In a benchmark on European case studies??? (Duvekot et al 2007) a list of aims and (potential) benefits to individuals working for profit-, non-profit- and voluntary organisations was described. State of the art research shows that especially the summative aims and (potential) benefits at this moment are at the forefront of both organisations as well as individuals (Cofora 2010, Raai 2010, Sijstermans 2010), while further research on this theme by Profitwise was (at the time of writing) due to be published in late 2010. Some of the benefits to individuals are summarised in the table below.

Aims and (potential) Benefits to individuals working in the private (profit-making) sector	Aims and (potential) benefits to individuals working in the non-profit sector	Aims and (potential) Benefits to individuals working in the voluntary sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing confidence in own competence, more self-esteem • gain official qualification • broaden assignment possibilities, career development • employability- assurance through self-employment • being employed • better earnings • reintegration in the labour market • more job satisfaction as a result of a good match between individual competence and workplace demands • competences valued publicly • formal recognition • better access as a consequence of co-ownership (employers and education) in educational opportunities • visualising competences and skills for career development • empowerment on the labour-market • shortening study periods • increasing salaries • keeping stock of human resources • allocation of human resources • increasing awareness of own 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get civil recognition for experience, e.g. in army • Getting qualified for special tasks (leadership) or job (teacher) • Getting degree or exemption of part of study • Empowerment • Getting a job • (Higher) certification • Formal recognition • Learning is fun • Increased motivation (by exemptions) • self-esteem, • self-confidence • getting qualified • higher salary, able to get mortgage • permanent job • higher status & responsibilities • getting (partial) qualifications and diploma • find new job or maintain present one • entry into education at higher level • exemptions / shorter education • certification of competences • insight into own competences / 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start training at higher level • Get training and support of other members • Recognition in organisation • Improve self-esteem • Better employability • Professionalisation of in-company training • Social esteem of volunteers • Implicit recruitment • Get insight into competences of youth • More aware of background • Increased motivation and self-esteem • Increased ability to describe own competences • Learning made-to-measure • Ensure quality at all levels • Unskilled workers learning and qualifying as assistants • Advantage on labour-market • Time saving • Satisfaction • New relationships • Contact with business partners • Involvement in social life • Increase value of handicapped, retired and seniors for society

Aims and (potential) Benefits to individuals working in the private (profit-making) sector	Aims and (potential) benefits to individuals working in the non-profit sector	Aims and (potential) Benefits to individuals working in the voluntary sector
<p>competences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • getting qualified by work experience • obtaining better qualifications • improving knowledge and skills • shorten educational routes • better earnings • cost reduction on training • transparency in time and costs for the individuals • obtaining European certificates • opportunity for the individual to continue studies • more insight into the individuals own competences • increasing individual value on the labour-market • more time efficient course completion • enrolment in courses by “new” target groups • verify and validate professional knowledge • protecting legal professional titles • remain employable 	<p>strengths / weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased value on labour market • stimulation of learning • individualised learning paths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career and personal development • Develop young people

Source: Duvekot et al (2007)

4 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EVALUATION

4.1 Quality Assurance Framework

In November 2006 a covenant based on the “European Common Principles for Recognition and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Competencies” was signed by various parties who are involved in developing and executing EVC -procedures. This quality code covers all vocational degrees in VET (MBO) and HE (HBO). These national actors, including EVC providers, employers and accreditation bodies, have come together to develop a quality code for EVC, which covers all vocational degrees in VET (MBO) and HE (HBO). The covenant is a contributing factor to three objectives linked to the introduction of EVC:

- Increasing the accessibility of EVC: Clarifying what EVC is and how EVC must be offered;
- Providing transparency: Allowing better comparison of different EVC procedures;
- Guaranteeing summative effects by means of certification or qualification.

In early 2010 the Minister of Education took control of the execution of ‘the Quality Code EVC’. This followed a critical evaluation by the Inspectorate of Education of the quality of the accredited EVC providers (PLW 2009, IvO 2010). In this evaluation the quality of the 113 accredited EVC providers both on the levels of VET as well as of HE was regarded as insufficient. In general the conclusions of the evaluation were:

1. the Dutch Quality Code functions properly but there is a question of ownership. Specifically the decision about which organisations can inspect the providers of the *Ervaringscertificaat* needs to be regulated.
2. the quality of the providers differs too much in the implementation of the assessments,
3. the outcomes of the assessments (*'Ervaringscertificaten'*) are not easily transferable between the providers.

The State Secretary of Education, Culture and Science therefore took control of the EVC-process. It is intended that during a period of three years the bottlenecks in the process should be overcome.

The covenant resulted from a broad consultation process among all stakeholders and agreement by all parties on the following main arrangements:

- The use of the code is voluntary, but the signing parties dedicate themselves to promoting the use of the Quality code for APL.
- Everyone who commences an APL-procedure must agree on the reasons for doing so. APL is not a standard process but an individualised series of arrangements customised to the goal and use of APL. Customisation is the norm.
- Every APL-procedure ends with a standardised³ EVC report called *Ervaringscertificaat* (Certificate of Experience). This report states that the individual has documentation of the competencies he possesses. This makes APL something independent of the educational provider.
- Accredited APL providers are listed in an APL database. This database contains information about all the APL procedures that are useful for potential APL candidates.

4.2 Quality assurance systems / procedures

As noted above, the government has taken the lead on the national Quality Code for EVC which was adopted in 2006. In this code the criteria are mentioned for certified EVC-procedures; for the format of EVC reports, etc.

Over the next three years the aforementioned bottlenecks in the system need to be overcome:

1. the question of ownership - specifically the decision about which organisations can inspect the providers of the *Ervaringscertificaat* needs to be regulated;
2. the differing quality of the providers in the implementation of the assessments;
3. the fact that the outcomes of the assessments (*'Ervaringscertificaten'*) are not easily transferable between the providers.

The standards for EVC procedures are connected with the requirements in VET and HE. The examination committee has its own responsibility for awarding against the outcomes of an EVC –assessment. There are no official regulations for using the outcomes of an independent EVC procedure for composing a learning path for an individual student to obtain a degree and/or diploma. Except for the fact that institutions have to accept applicants for exemptions based on (evidence of) non-formally and formally acquired competences. There are no rules on limits concerning the amount of credits to be given based on an assessment. Thus, EVC procedures are developed on the basis of the competence standards of VET and HE (and in this way actually based on the expected learning outcomes in these standards), while implementing the national Quality Code for EVC.

³ Information on how this standardisation is achieved can be found on the website of the [Kenniscentrum EVC](#)

Other methods of ensuring the quality assurance include:

- Starting the implementation of EVC using pilots, followed by widening implementation by established procedures and the full use of assessments and other EVC instruments.
- Investing in developing the expertise of assessors, counsellors and other members of the staff in an EVC office.
- Separating the roles of assessor and counsellor (and other people involved in the preparation of the EVC -assessment).
- Current developments concerning the certification of assessors (there may in the near future be a national register and certification of individual assessors...).
- Information and acquisition by:
 - Liaising with employers (meeting, workshops, regional networks etc.).
 - 'Traditional' media like websites, brochures, flyers, magazines, 'open house days' et cetera).
- Regarding a possible study trajectory for an individual student (should he/she wish to enroll in a study programme) the examination committee is responsible for the 'tailor-made' study programme offered to the individual.
- The tax deduction for EVC can only be used on the condition that a certified EVC provider (quality code and EVC-register) is involved.

Thanks to the successful introduction of the EVC Quality Code there is now a better overview of the quality procedures applied to vocational competence-standards in VET and HE. The 113 recognised providers are included in the EVC Register, which clearly indicates to citizens and employers where they can have a customised procedure. The foundation for quality assurance of EVC has been laid and the government wants to further invest in this.

4.3 Evaluation framework

Apart from the monitoring and evaluation that is carried out under the Quality Code, concerning the quality of the accredited EVC-providers, there is no official framework for qualitative and quantitative evaluation of progress and practice of EVC in the Netherlands. However, following up on the EU Guidelines on Validation of Non-formal and Informal learning an evaluation framework is under construction and the results of the programmes supported by the project unit Learning & Working (under the Ministries of Education and Social Affairs) are monitored.

There is also research into the use of EVC (Ecorys, EVC gemeten, 2010). Research is now being done on the success and failure factors of the APL-market and the effects of EVC for the individual and the organisation.

EVC providers have been requested by the government to register the number of participants in EVC-procedures in the EVC-register.

5 ASSESSMENT METHODS

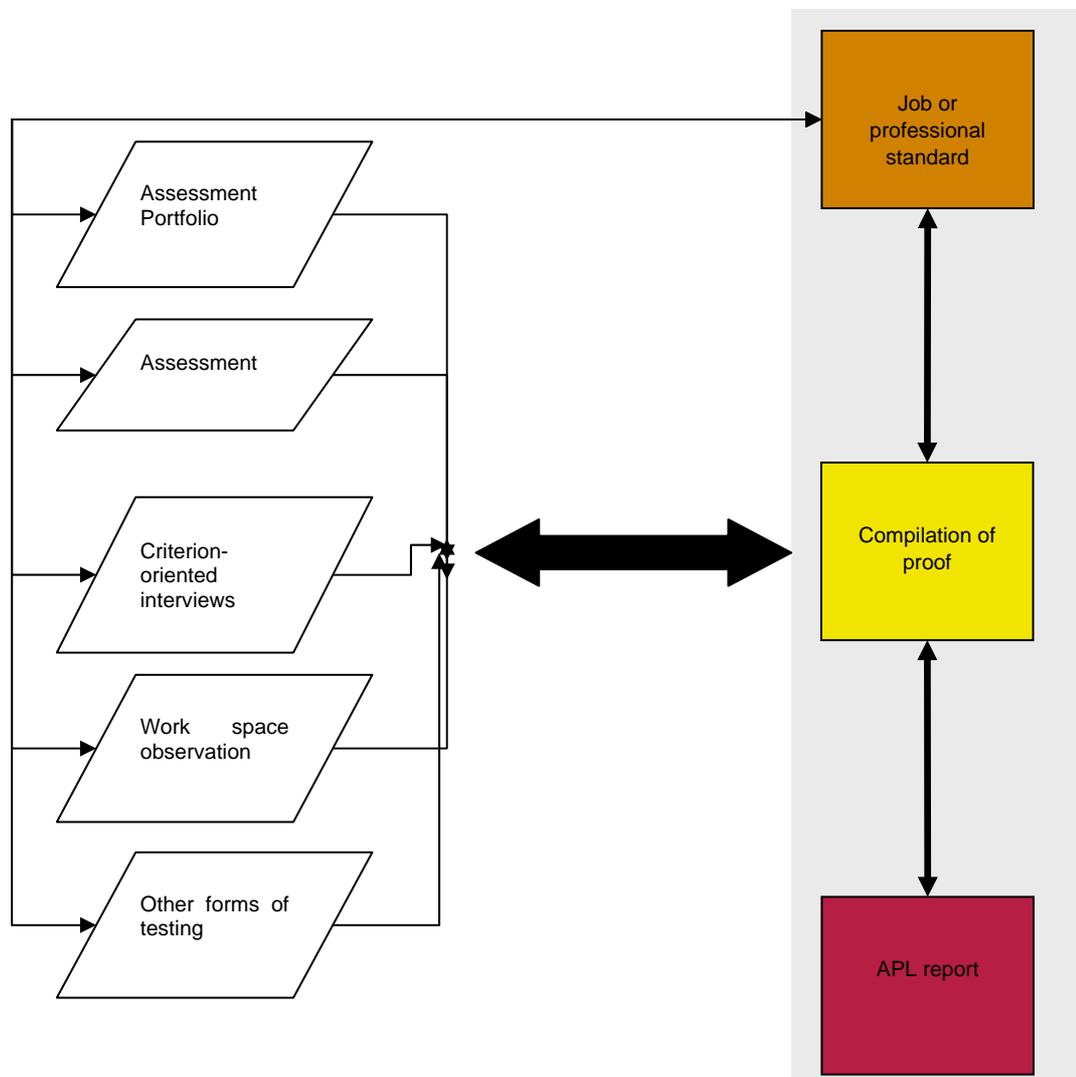
5.1 Methods used

An EVC procedure in the Netherlands always contains the same steps (Kenniscentrum EVC 2009):

1. Information and advice for the candidate, the employer or other organisation, etc.
2. Intake of the individual and making individual arrangements linked to the individual's defined career goals. The candidate decides on choice of qualification and whether to start the EVC procedure or not.
3. Recognition of competences: portfolio (supported by the coach)
4. Validation of competences: assessment (by the assessors)
5. EVC report: Description of results and accreditation (by the assessor), compared with the individual career goals, together with advice on further personal development in the direction of the individual defined career goals.

The basic assumption is that the candidate is accredited according to a suitable nationally recognised competency profile and is conducted properly and independently.

Usually, a mix of methods is used in EVC procedures because every situation and every individual is different. The model illustrated in the diagram below describes some examples of methods in a mix of methods that can be used in EVC procedures.



5.2 **Advantages and disadvantages of the methods used**

Questions are still raised on the comparability of assessments of informally acquired competences (EVC) and assessment in formal context (examination). The work of the supervisor and assessors is crucial in this light. Therefore, a lot of attention is paid to the competences of the independent supervisors and assessors, training and certification programmes for assessors and internal, regional or even sectoral attunement of assessment procedures. The quality of assessment is raised when the right mix of assessment methods is used, taking into account the aim, the characteristics of the target group and the competences to be assessed.

A successful system for 'EVC' - able to open up the traditional learning system - will at least have to comply with three conditions: assessment standards should aim at 'civil effect'; the quality assurance of the assessment procedure has to be efficient, clear and transparent; and, finally, access has to be easy for individuals. When these three conditions are met, *commitment* will develop fully and the balance between advantages and disadvantages of the assessment methods used will shift to the advantages.

6 VALIDATION PRACTITIONERS

6.1 Profile of validation practitioners

In general validation practitioners are recruited from different professional groups (teachers and trainers; counsellors public/private; personnel managers; etc.) They all get training programmes for the specific validation-responsibilities they are applying for. Practitioners are made up of:

- *assessors*: the professionals who assess individuals when they want to apply APL for summative purposes;
- *portfolio-guides*: the professionals who help people fill in their portfolio;
- *developers/advisors*: the professionals who develop APL-procedures based on national standards; they also advise on this.
- *teacher-trainers*: the professionals who train the assessors and guides.

6.2 Provision of training and support

The training of validation practitioners is offered by the official APL-providers. The training programmes are in general based on the following criteria. There is however no formal, national standard. Practitioners must (according to the quality code for APL):

1. Understand key concepts and benefits of EVC (and also when applicable of HVC, see section 2.1 under *Ervaringsprofiel*):
2. Review and analyse models of recognition and accreditation of prior learning
3. Analyse and develop the skills, knowledge and processes required to support EVC practice
4. Understand and apply the EVC process
5. Reflect on the impact of EVC on their professional learning, practice and their educational setting
6. Understand the organisation, management and marketing of EVC.

6.3 Qualifications requirements

As noted above, according to the quality code for EVC, only professionals can be EVC supervisors and assessors and their competences must be documented. Only after having proved that they meet the required competences for the job can they take on their role. Until now APL providers can choose their own methods in proving the capability of their APL workers. A study is currently being conducted by the Kenniscentrum EVC on whether this is appropriate or whether other accreditation forms are necessary and a more elaborated description of acquired competences is needed to ensure the sustainable quality of APL

In general there is no standard or qualification for assessors in the Netherlands. There are however several ideas to create a standard for assessors which entails a system with standards and quality-assurance. These options were already formulated in the national policy paper from 2000 of the *Werkgroep EVC* (The glass is half full) but have not yet been taken up. The main option is to enhance an accreditation scheme for assessors and to evaluate the quality of assessors on the basis of a national standard, including a training course for assessors. Such a national standard (for internal company and external assessors) has not yet been formulated. In practice the EVC providers have their own competence profiles for assessors. Due to the EVC Quality-code they are, however, all

obliged to use the same format for filling in the reports after the assessment. Therewith a certain degree of comparability and quality-assurance is maintained.

The option of an accreditation scheme for assessors could be monitored on a tripartite basis which would allow for an evaluation that is going to be independent of sectoral or departmental interests, or of the interests of professional groups or training institutes. The author would recommend that it is important to study how this shared responsibility can be most efficiently organised and implemented.

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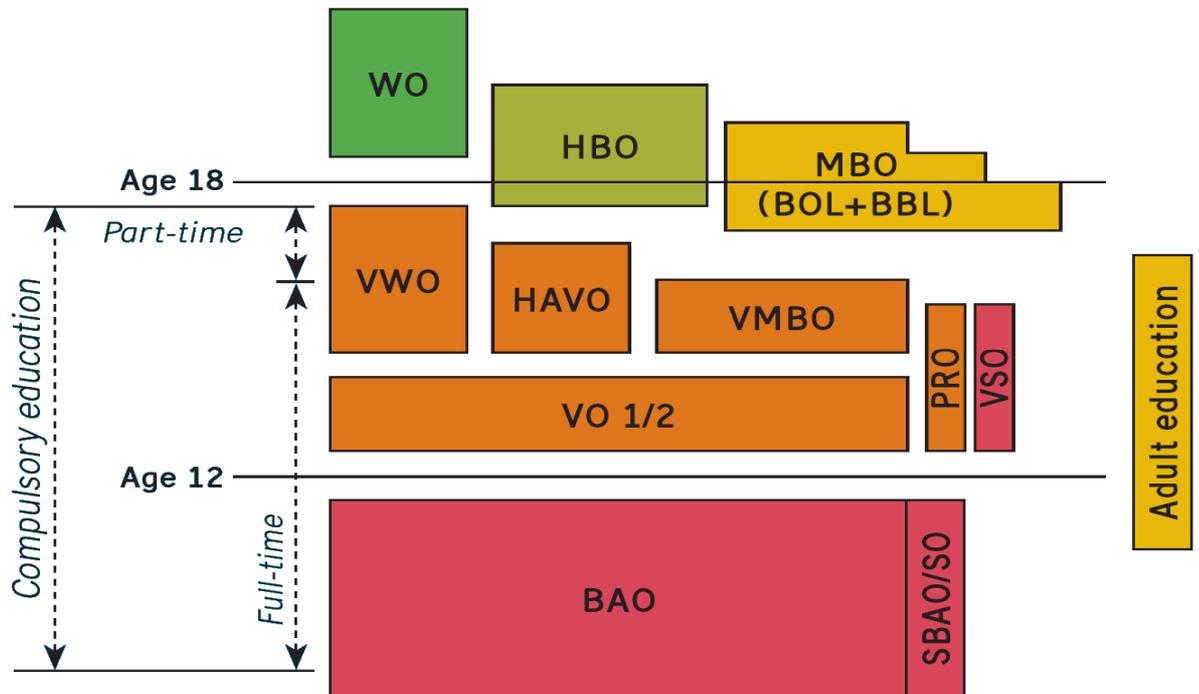
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8 ANNEX 1

The Dutch Education System



BAO	Mainstream primary education
BBL	Block or day release in vocational education
BOL	Full-time vocational training
HAVO	General secondary education
HBO	Higher professional education (hogescholen)
MBO	Vocational education
PRO	Practical training
SBAO	Special primary education
SO	Special education
VMBO	Pre-vocational secondary education
VO	Secondary education
VSO	Secondary special education
VWO	Pre-university education
WO	University education

Source: Dutch Ministry of Education (2006)