

Your Country: **The Netherlands**

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## **0. INTRODUCTION**

This text is based on the comprehensive work of Ruud Duvekot for an international comparison of education in general and VPL and qualification frameworks for a project of the United Nations - Unesco. The findings then were checked against the opinion of Hans Hautvast, general manager of the largest trade unions training organization FNV Formaat, a re-integration entrepreneur representing both jobseekers and employers, Rogier van Huijstee and Rigo van Raai and checked in a Dutch linkedin discussion group.

In this text both VPL and APL will be used. VPL on one hand, because it is internationally used and is closer to the actual goals achievable by recognition systems, APL because it is closer to the actual Dutch translation and closer to the actual practice in our country were the focus is on qualification more the validation or recognition (the summative in stead of formative approach).

## **1. NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEM**

The Dutch education system combines a unified education system, regulated by central laws, with decentralized administration and management of schools. Overall responsibility for the public-private education system lies with the State, represented by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, and the legislative power of the Dutch Parliament. The Ministry is headed by a Minister. Two State Secretaries (junior ministers) are also appointed for parts of educational and for cultural policy.

The central government controls education by means of laws and regulations in accordance with the provisions laid down in the Constitution. The prime responsibilities of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science relate to the structuring and funding of the system, the management of publicly run institutions, inspection and examination procedures and financial aid to students. Control may be exercised by imposing qualitative or quantitative standards for the educational process in schools and/or for the results they produce, and by means of arrangements for the allocation of financial and other resources, and the imposition of conditions to be met by schools. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science lays down conditions, especially in primary and secondary education, relating to the types of schools that can exist, the length of courses, compulsory and optional school subjects, the minimum and maximum number of lessons to be given and their length, the norms for class division, the examination syllabus and national examinations, and standards of competence, salaries, status and teaching hours of teaching staff. The Ministry does not set up schools, but does

determine norms for their establishment. These conditions apply to both public and private education (Eurydice, Cedefop, ETF, 2003).

### **CREBO and CROHO**

A guaranteed standard of higher education, and alignment with the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area, is maintained through a national system of legal regulation and quality assurance, in the form of accreditation. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is responsible for legislation pertaining to education and the agriculture and public health ministries play an important role in monitoring the content of study programmes in their respective fields. Quality assurance is carried out through a system of accreditation, administered by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO, [Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie](http://www.nuffic.nl)) ([www.nuffic.nl](http://www.nuffic.nl)).

All courses in the 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 the 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 recognizes 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.

### **Adult education**

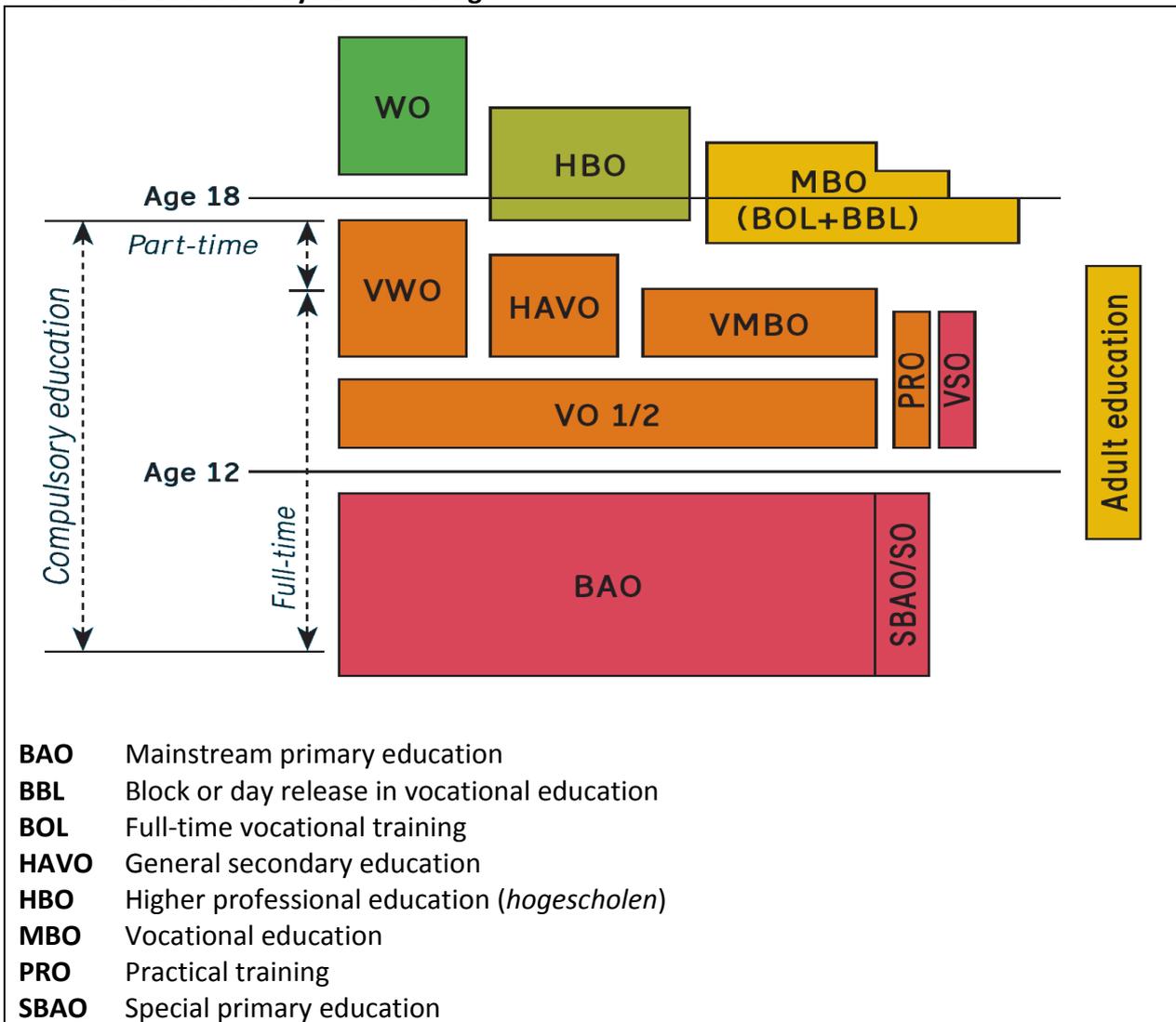
Adult education is geared to people over 18 whose goal it is to qualify for work and prepare for further training. Adults who are unemployed or wish to re-enter the labour market are primarily targeted. In general, adult education can be divided into three parts:

- The education which comes under the 1996 Adult and Vocational Education Act (Wet educatie en beroepsopleiding – WEB) and is provided at the ROCs: basic adult education and general secondary education for adults. Participants in general secondary education for adults must have completed compulsory education to be admitted. Additional requirements may possibly be imposed, depending on the type of education.
- The training of unemployed adults, financed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, does not have any national structure for recognition and examination. The focus is on recognition by the regional business community. The main purpose of the specific training, which comes under the Manpower Services Act (Wet op de

arbeidsvoorziening) from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, is to strengthen the position of disadvantaged groups on the labour market.

- Part-time vocational education and in-service training schemes. Internal training in enterprises is not organised in any consistent way. The learning routes are highly heterogeneous and recognised by enterprises (not nationally). Quite a lot of private training providers are active in the market of continuing (vocational) training, of which 200 are formally recognised training institutes. They have the right to provide training programmes that fit the requirements of the national qualification structure and participants therefore can obtain a nationally recognised diploma. The most significant forms of part-time vocational education subsidised by the government are part-time MBO and part-time HBO. The participants generally attend these alongside their work.

**The Dutch education system in a diagram**



<b>SO</b>	Special education
<b>VMBO</b>	Pre-vocational secondary education
<b>VO</b>	Secondary education
<b>VSO</b>	Secondary special education
<b>VWO</b>	Pre-university education
<b>WO</b>	University education

**Figure 1 The Dutch educational system**

Source: Dutch Ministry of Education (2006)

### ***Learning outcomes & the national qualifications system***

One of the essential changes ensuing from the Bologna process is the use of learning outcomes to describe study programmes and their components. With a view to the national and international mobility of students and graduates, it is important to have a clear picture of the knowledge and skills mastered by someone holding a particular diploma. The description of study programmes based on the Dublin descriptors allows for an objective comparison.

VET and HE are based on a learning outcomes approach in theory. This is called the competence-base of VET or HE in which all national standards embedded in VET & HE 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.

The Netherlands has, like each EU-memberstate, to be able to link its National Qualifications System by the end of 2011 to the European Qualifications Framework. At the moment there is however not an explicate National Qualifications Framework in the Netherlands. There is a working group installed 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 for more detail) are measured against the eight EQF-levels to give more transparency to the Dutch qualifications in the European learning-arena.

## **2. LIFELONG LEARNING POLICY & LEGISLATION on RECOGNITION of PRIOR LEARNING**

With the publication of *De Fles is Half Vol!* ("The glass is half full!") in 2000, a first step towards lifelong learning using Accreditation of Prior Learning (VPL; EVC or *Erkenning van Verworven Competenties* in Dutch) was taken in the Netherlands. A national VPL working group formulated a broad vision on VPL and the implementation process. VPL 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 VPL and to learn from the existing practice, the government established the Knowledge Centre VPL (*Kenniscentrum EVC*) in 2001. The Knowledge Centre's goal is to, on the basis of collecting practical examples, promote the use of VPL in the labour market and take VPL to a higher qualitative level. It became clear that there were many situations in which VPL 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 VPL were seen mainly at the sector level.

Over the years 2005-2007, the Dutch government invested nearly EUR 40 million in VPL at upper secondary and higher vocational education levels, in developing a regional infrastructure and in promoting VPL. 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, of Economic Affairs, of Integration and of Finances were all involved.

In the implementation strategy, management and practice come together. At management level educational institutions were encouraged to implement VPL institution-wide. They signed agreements with the government to carry out a certain number of VPL 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 VPL.

### **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 for this goal, with or without a formal VPL-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 so important because it allows certificates to be provided from which social rights can be derived. It also prevents that a distinction can be made in 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 EVC 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 degree (VWO) and can only enter vocational higher education if (s)he possesses an academic upper secondary education degree (HAVO or VWO) or a post-secondary vocational degree (MBO). However, students who do not fulfill these requirements and are older than 21 years old can be admitted to higher education via the colloquium doctum (admittance research). Each higher education institute is left free to set their own requirements for the colloquium doctum per faculty.

While initiatives regarding VPL 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 VPL (SER, 2002).

An exception to these decentralised policies of VPL 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, they enable non-certified individuals 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 individualized study programme may be offered either before they start with 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 VPL. Government and social partners focused on creating favourable circumstances for developing and implementing VPL 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 in the belief that this would speed up the process of implementing VPL.

November 2006 a covenant based on the “European Common Principles for Recognition and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Competences” was signed by various parties who are involved in developing and executing VPL-procedures. These national actors, including VPL providers, employers and accreditation bodies, have collaborated to develop a quality code for APL. The covenant is a contributing factor to three objectives linked to APL:

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

The covenant resulted in five principles which were agreed upon through a consultation process among all stakeholders:

- The use of the code is voluntary, but the signatory parties are dedicating themselves to promoting the use of the Quality code for APL. Making its use mandatory would detract from the motivation to work with the APL-code.
- Everyone who starts with an APL-procedure should 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. Custom work is the standard.
- Every APL-procedure ends with an APL-report. This report states that the individual has documentation of the competences possessed. 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 available for potential APL candidates.
- The competences of the people supervising these procedures and performing the assessment are documented. Only professionals can be supervisors and assessors.

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

1. the Dutch Quality Code functions properly,
2. the quality of the providers differ too much in the implementation of the assessments,
3. the outcomes of the assessments (*‘Ervaringscertificaten’*) are not easily transferable between the providers.

The minister therefore took control over the APL-process for a period of three years. It is intended that during this period the bottlenecks in the process should be overcome.

### **National policy**

With the change of focus to the quality-assurance of APL in 2006, the Dutch government started to stimulate and subsidize the development of a national infrastructure for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (EVC in Dutch; APL in English). For this reason the Interdepartmental Project Unit for Learning & Working (PLW) was set up to support and strengthen the work of the existing Knowledge centre on APL. 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. EVC is used to assess and recognise prior learning competences.

The key element of the PLW approach is the development of regional partnerships (government, schools 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 develops competences to meet the needs of the labour market. There are currently 47 such partnerships.

A grants scheme has been set up to increase the intake of adults in HBO by promoting prior learning assessment and recognition (EVC), and made-to-measure 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 programmes combining work and study 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 of stimulating Recognition of Prior Learning is to achieve a sustainable regional infrastructure for lifelong learning (regional partnerships, training and employment helpdesks, training databases) and to put in place a total of 125 000 EVC 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.

### **3. RECOGNITION PRACTICES – ROUTES FROM LEARNING TO CERTIFICATION**

‘Validation of prior learning’ has two main paths, a summative and a formative one (Duvekot, et al. 2005). In the Netherlands the official EU-definition of learning outcomes is used: “learning outcomes are the set of knowledge, skills, and/or competences an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process, either formal, non-formal or informal” (CEDEFOP 2008).

The summative approach aims at an overview of competences, recognition and valuation. Its goal is certification, where individuals seek this goal. When ‘valuing learning’ goes one step further and includes practical learning and/or personal competence-development, we call this the formative approach. This approach is pro-active and aims at development by designing a personal career and development path.

At this moment the commonly used term is Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL). In Dutch this is '*de Erkenning van Verworven Competenties (EVC)*'. The authorities, as well as the social partners and the schools prefer this term because this approach mainly focuses on the summative effects of recognizing and assessing prior learning. The most important element in an APL-strategy is the assessment of the competences that are collected in a portfolio with the goal of getting exemptions or a diploma, referring to a specific standard. The portfolio is in this context mainly a showcase of only the competences that matter for the standard itself; all the other personal competences are irrelevant. The choice for a specific standard is in practice more steered by the availability of an actual standard than by a free, personal choice. This is because most of the times a school - as the keeper of the standard(s) - tends to look more to the best chance of success when measured against any given standard than to the best match of a standard and personal ambitions. So, in effect, APL is more standard-steered, and as most standards are kept by schools (upper secondary and higher vocational levels) also strongly school-steered.

With Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) the primary focus lies on the identification and recognition of the competences that someone might have obtained in any period in his/her life and in any kind of learning environment. In Dutch this is '*de Herkenning van Verworven Competenties* (Stienstra 2008). In this context the portfolio consists of all personal learning experiences. Only after collecting all the relevant, personal competences together with their proof, a choice is made by the person. In this way the personal ambitions are better articulated and depending on the personal goal a specific choice for the kind of accreditation or validation is made. RPL, therefore is more personal steered and might involve not only summative but also formative goals.

It is interesting to see that, in analogy with the Anglo-Saxon learning culture, in the Netherlands also a shift occurs in the focus of lifelong learning strategies towards the Recognition of Prior Learning. This is due to the growing awareness on the real societal problematic, namely how to make people invest in themselves if the necessary infrastructure is available (funds, methods, instruments and functions). With RPL 'the job might be done' in a bottom-up way. RPL is more and more seen as the real matchmaker with the more top-down strategy of APL.

When looking at both terms - RPL and APL - VPL stands for the process of Valuation of Prior Learning (VPL). VPL embodies the necessity to make top-down processes such as APL meet the bottom-up process of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). If combined APL and RPL are constituting the integral or even holistic process of Valuation of Prior Learning. So, VPL is the real designation of developing, implementing and embedding lifelong learning in society, in the Learning Society so to say; VPL is for the sake of citizens as well as providers and organisations (profit, non-profit, voluntary work, labour-agencies, communities, etc). VPL is able to manage in a flexible way the diversity of goals all these parties and partners have in making use of lifelong learning strategies.

### ***Role of the formal education and training sector, including providers***

Dutch educational institutions are being encouraged to develop and implement VPL. The Knowledge Centre VPL is researching assessment methods and quality tools and is helping institutions to implement these. For the VET-sector, nearly every Regional Training Centre (ROC) now has an APL-service and is striving to improve the quality of this service. For HE, HBO institutions also implement APL. Both private and public-sector institutions can offer APL if they are registered as an APL-provider with the Knowledge Centre and adhere to the quality code.

In higher education, the autonomous institutions decide for themselves how to use the results of APL-procedures. The government plays no part in this, but does ensure that the procedures meet quality assurance standards.

### ***Role of existing information, advice and guidance networks / institutions***

Based on experience to date, a number of recommendations can be made in relation to raising awareness of the usefulness of APL and the marketing of APL. An efficient approach focussed on the marketing of 'the APL product' is an essential prerequisite for building up the relationship between APL-providers and APL-candidates effectively. It is wise to invest in marketing and in the preparation of information campaigns. Good use can be made of the contacts that are already present in the educational institutions and on sectoral levels with other stakeholders like training funds.

As an on-line service APL is more developed in portals. In these portals APL is marketed in an effective way by showing the broad potential of people's learning outcomes so far. This is done through selfscans on the level of professional standards. Outcomes of these selfscans give clues to people on which cognitive and which professional level they might function if they would organise the accreditation of their prior learning.

(<http://www.lerenenwerken.nl/check-ervaringscertificaat-en-ervaringsprofiel>).

At macro level, the motivational role of the government and social partners has been far from exhausted. More space and stimulus should be created than is now the case in legislation and regulations, which not only remove bottlenecks in the utilisation of APL but also help to create favourable preconditions.

### ***Validation in the private sector and the role of private sector actors***

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

The construction sector offers a good example of a broad APL function geared for both summative and formative effects. Since 2006, the Construction Industry Collective Labour Agreement (*CAO BouwnijverHEd*) has provided in career tracks for employers and employees. In this Construction & Infra career 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, custom work, 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).

Outflow and outplacement of personnel also a benefit of 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, APL can offer both development and qualification. Likewise, in mergers and reorganisations, APL offers development and qualifications to find the right place for personnel, whether internally or externally.

As shown above, 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:

- Collaboration between companies and educational establishments is essential to ensure work-based learning can be customised following the APL 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 APL 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 APL in Human Resource Development. On the other hand, increased formulation of demands is needed from organisations/businesses in order to help anchor APL 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 competences within the 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 to be developed, emerges.
- Research is needed into the added value of APL, among other things focussed on its economic, financial and social effects.
- There must be greater integration of APL into HR policy and practice. This integration is aimed at enhancing employability and mobility, increasing voluntary participation in APL and working towards achievable goals regarding certification, development and career enhancement. The development of a motivating personnel policy with APL as a built-in tool can be a significant factor that distinguishes a company from its competitors. However, practical experience shows that a company has to offer its personnel a great deal of freedom of choice in order to make APL a success factor in employee throughflow.

### **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. Without all the volunteers the civil society wouldn't function properly, let alone the public and private sectors that constitute.

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 sponsors also 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 citizen participation in policy making processes.

According to a recent report on Volunteering in the EU, the Dutch procedures for the certification of skills and competences are rarely used in the field of volunteering due to the associated high costs 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. MOVISIE (knowledge centre for the volunteering sector) currently received funding to develop a system of APL for volunteers.

<b>4. NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING ENVIRONMENT</b> <b>5. METHODOLOGICAL EXPERIENCES</b>
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The main process-steps of VPL (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 VPL 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. The perspectives of both organisations and individuals in the VPL-process are thus described in the following table. (Duvekot 2009a, Duvekot 2009b).

There is a number of basic principles underlying VPL:

- VPL 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) competences 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.

- But recognition also means valuing competences acquired elsewhere than in a working environment and/or used in other environments (such as voluntary work, private life).
- VPL is not a goal in itself. It contributes to the desire to develop individuals and to strengthen human capital management within companies. It is an important means for realising permanent labour market suitability and deployment potential.
- For people already employed, skills can be developed which these individuals do not yet have, but which both they and their employers regard as necessary. In such cases, VPL 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 is formulated.
- 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. VPL procedures enable identifying existing skills and qualifications in order to be able to come to determine the investments needed in training.
- VPL procedures enable the visualisation 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. VPL can also improve the match between education and the labour market. This particularly applies in the case of skills-related training.
- The VPL 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 VPL can be highlighted in the following figure in which the different steps to be taken in the process of VPL for the organisation are described:

[see the other page]

## The steps in the VPL-process

### APL in 5 phases and 10 steps

APL phase	APL step + demand	Action organization	Contribution from knowledge infrastructure
<b>I. Preparation</b>	<b>1. awareness</b> <i>what is the need for investing in human capital?</i>	formulation of the mission of the organisation APL pilot decision	APL information materials workplace visit employability scan advising on approach
	<b>2. determine learning objectives</b> <i>what learning objectives are relevant for the organisation?</i>	establish ambitions and learning objectives strength/weakness analysis organisation	model for strength/weakness analysis
<b>II. Identification</b>	<b>3. determination of organisational or personal profile</b> <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
	<b>4. retrospection</b> <i>how to describe and document acquired competences</i>	guidance for completion of portfolio by employees portfolio counselling	portfolio counselling training
<b>III. Accreditation &amp; valuation</b>	<b>5. standard setting</b> <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
	<b>6. valuation</b> <i>how to value the assessment?</i>	portfolio assessment internal assessors	training of assessors assessment, incl. drafting advising on certification and/or career opportunities
	<b>7. accreditation</b> <i>how to accredit?</i>	cashing in on certification opportunities	counselling to certifying institution
<b>V. Development</b>	<b>8. prospective</b> <i>How to put personal development plans (POP) into action</i>	building on career opportunity advice in POP arrangements on custom work	follow-up advice offer for custom work
	<b>9. working on POPs</b> <i>custom-made development/learning</i>	POP into action	delivery of custom work
<b>V. Implementation</b>	<b>10. structural implementation</b> <i>evaluation of pilot; how APL can be systematically incorporated into the organisation policy?</i>	evaluation of APL pilot embed APL in HRM, including financing promulgate (new) organisational policy employees administer portfolio	accreditation of assessors (internal/external) APL quality control procedure

Source: Duvekot et al, 2007.

### ***Awareness-raising and recruitment***

Raising awareness of the necessity and opportunities of lifelong learning for individuals in any given context is the heart of the process of Valuing Learning. Without this learning will remain school- or company-steered and cannot effectively be based on individual motivation and ambition.

Regional one-stop-offices were set up to actively promote the use of APL in the Netherlands. 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 aim is that any individual can enter these local one-stop-offices to gain guidance on their own development process. Companies are offered tailor-made solutions to human resource issues and all regional partners play a part in implementation.

### ***Provision of guidance and support***

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

In Phase III Self-assessment is the crucial element because without this a person can only partially become co-maker of his/her personal development.

There are different instruments available for this kind of self-assessment, for instance the Swiss CH-Q instrument. (CH-Q = Schweizer Qualificationsbuch; Schuur, et al, 2003). It is an integral system for Valuation of Prior Learning. It consists of a broad package of services: portfolio, (self-) assessment, career-planning, action-planning, quality-control and accompanying training programmes.

In general tools like CH-Q 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-makship by:

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

For further support in the process the role of the assessor is vital for starting up personal development in any kind of form. Reliable assessment is the matchmaker between a portfolio, including a personal action plan, and the specific development steps advised by the assessor.

In any given model for Valuing Learning an assessment-policy has three functions: (1) raising levels of achievement, (2) measuring this achievement reliably and (3) organising the assessment cost-effectively.

Assessment in this broad context is the judgement of evidence submitted for a specific purpose; it is therefore an act of measurement. It requires two things: evidence and a standard scale. (Ecclestone, 1994). Evidence is provided with the portfolio (or showcase) of the candidate. The standard that will be met, depends on the specific objective of the candidate. This means that the role of the assessor is all the more crucial because this professional has to be flexible with regard to the many objectives in order to be able to provide a custom-oriented validation and/or valuation. On top of that the professional should be able to use dialogue-based assessment forms. On the basis of the advice of such an assessor further steps for personal development will be set in motion.

The choice of a certain assessor role therefore largely depends on the objective of the assessment, which can vary greatly. Assessments for formal recognition of competences with certificates or exemptions for accredited training programmes demand the involvement of an assessor from an institution offering competence-based accreditation and adequate measures to guarantee the quality of the assessor. Assessments for accrediting competences at the company or institution level or merely to acquire insight into someone's competences do not require the involvement of an institution offering competence-based certification. In these cases, the assessor is also often a colleague, supervisor or the individual himself.

In order to guarantee good 'quality' of the assessor on the one hand and prevent a new qualitycontrol-bureaucracy on the other hand, it is recommended to formulate a 'quality-light' procedure for Validation-procedures. A further advantage of a 'quality-light' procedure is that it is highly cost-effective and therefore very accessible to candidates. Possibilities for organising 'quality-light' are:

- any assessor should first design and fill in his/her own portfolio and personal actionplan; only then they can be given entrance to assessor-trainings,
- a professional register for assessors should guarantee their competences and professionalism,
- every two years a new assessor accreditation should guarantee professionalism by ensuring assessor quality. Assessor quality can be maintained by means of refresher and updating courses. This new accreditation could be carried out by an official national agency, and tripartite governing (authorities and social partners),
- quality of assessors implies being able to refer to a standard for assessors: this standard is developed in many EU-projects and already available; it only needs a European frame and national application.

### ***Costs to individuals***

APL 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).

It can be mentioned that the individual user, when APL isn't funded by the government or the social partners, can fiscally extract the costs for APL. APL is fiscally considered as costs for learning. All costs above EUR 500 are tax-deductable.

In general one can say that prices for an APL-procedure vary between € 500,-- up to € 3.000,--.

### ***Initiatives focused on specific target groups***

The government is concentrating its efforts on adult workers and jobseekers with no higher education qualifications. There is particular potential for growth in the number of people with secondary vocational (MBO) qualifications who, after working for a few years, decide to take a higher professional (HBO) course. Some of these people will attend approved institutions, which have a long history of training large numbers of workers, but there is also an important role here for government-funded institutions. The aim is that by 2011, 10 000 more people between the ages of 27 and 40 should be taking HBO courses (in either government-funded or nongovernment-funded institutions) than in 2007. In the past year agreements have been made in nearly all regions of the Netherlands between the government, the business community and educational institutions on the numbers of employees undergoing training. These agreements concern programmes combining work and study (MBO and HBO) and EVC schemes.

Following the economic crisis, both the government and social partners joined forces to strengthen the use of APL for workers that are in danger of losing their job. It is possible for these workers to benefit from subsidised APL through local offices. Local authorities, social partners, job-agencies and relevant education-institutes are all located at local offices. In a sense this is an approach of creating a local community that is capable of finding integral solutions of personal labour-problems by using the instrumentation of APL.

APL in the Netherlands consists of two specific instruments, both of which are subsidised if someone is in danger of losing a job:

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; the portfolio is referred to a specific 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 only a dossier-portfolio or a showcase of the relevant learning outcomes to be referred to the specific standard. This form can be called *Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)*.
2. The '*Ervaringsprofiel*'. This is a set-up for a generic, personal portfolio. It is formative oriented and aims at a validation of all the generic competences of a candidate. It advises on the possible opportunities for accreditation or 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)*.

## 6. VALUING LEARNING. RECOGNITION IN RELATION TO SAME STANDARDS AND REFERENCES AS THE FORMAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM?

Just as in most European educational systems, the study workload in the Netherlands is measured in ECTS (European Credit Transfer and accumulation System) credits:

- Student workload is the notional time an average student needs to achieve the objectives of a program. This includes lectures, seminars, assignments, laboratory work, independent study and exams.
- A student's workload (both contact hours, and hours spent studying and preparing assignments) is measured in ECTS credits, whereby under Dutch law one credit represents 28 hours of work.
- 60 credits represent the workload of a full-time study year. Consequently, to complete the required learning outcomes of a full cycle (full-time, one-year program) a student is expected to spend 1.680 hours of work yearly.
- Every student has to complete 30 ECTS per semester.
- The ECTS credit system is useful to compare / evaluate different universities, programs, courses, modules, dissertations or even students' qualifications.
- Credits are awarded only after the completion of the course/program.

The governing principles of describing, documenting and crediting prior learning is in general rather supply/dominated. This means that qualifications in VET and HE (only bachelors of professional universities-HBO) are translated into competences and for each qualification put into an VPL-procedure. A candidate who wants to reflect with his/her prior learning outcomes on a qualification, has to fill in a portfolio (showcase) in which he can demonstrate how his learning experiences match with the competences in the qualification he has chosen. In an assessment he is judged and he gets a report stating which exemptions he can get if he turns to the awarding body (the exam committee) of the school or university.

Transfer of the credits obtained in one qualification-programme is not officially possible since every qualification has its own commission that constitutes the content of the qualification. Only restricted sectoral-level or domains competences from different qualifications can be transferred, for instance in the domain of teacher-training where the general competences can be transferred from a programme to become a teacher in English language and culture to one in French or German language and culture. The same goes for other strongly related sectors or domains such as in economics and social work.

### **Qualifications requirements**

In general there is no standard or qualification for assessors in the Netherlands.

There are ideas to create a standard for assessors which entails a system with standards and quality-assurance. An accreditation scheme for assessors should also be applied:

Standards: the quality of assessors should be evaluated on the basis of a national standard for assessors, including a training course for assessors. This national standard (for internal company and external assessors) still has to be formulated.

Quality assurance for assessment centres: in order to qualify for their accreditation, assessors must work at assessment centres which apply a quality care system and are thus covered by the necessary quality assurance for APL procedures. The internal quality care system is regularly inspected by external auditors. Relevant activities could include forms of quality care which can also be applied in the context of ISO or EFQM. They must also agree to be subjected to external quality controls. External quality controls include:

- National quality monitoring by independent researchers.
- Checks by the education inspectorate in the case of state-funded assessment centres.

Accreditation scheme for assessors: the application and enforcement of the quality assurance and accreditation of assessors is monitored on a tripartite basis which allows for an evaluation that is independent of sectoral or departmental interests, or the interests of professional groups or training institutes. It is important to study how this shared responsibility can be most efficiently organised and implemented. The enforcement of the following is of key importance:

- The quality of the assessment standards used. The national qualification structure for professional education is a standard that is already recognised. The quality of other standards will primarily be measured against the civil effect of a certificate that is issued on the basis of such a standard
- the quality of the assessment procedures
- the quality of the assessors
- the quality of the organisation and the allocation of responsibilities if an organisation is also pursuing goals which could affect the quality of the APL procedures

The accreditation of assessors is extended following a new quality assessment as described above. The intensity and costs of the accreditation procedure should be proportional to the aims of the procedure and the benefits that can be obtained through APL procedures.

## 7. WHAT IS THE IMPACT?

### **Quantitative impact**

In 2009 a total number of 15.700 *Ervaringscertificaten* was realized (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 APL in the Netherlands can be divided into two groups:

1. User groups at MBO-levels (VET; EQF-equivalents of levels 1-4)
2. User groups at HBO-level (HE; EQF-equivalents of levels 5-7)

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 figures at 31 December 2009 were: 47 regional and local projects were funded; from a target (in total) of 17 541, 11 513 APL procedures or *Ervaringscertificaten* were carried out – 65.6 % of the target (ECBO 2010). Together with 2.146 *Ervaringscertificaten* provided for in other non-subsidized 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). The figures at 31 December 2008 were: 15 HBO-universities were funded; from a target of (in total) 3 975, 2 263 APL-procedures or *Ervaringscertificaten* were carried out – 56.9 % of the target (ECBO 2009). The figures for 2009 show a decline in absolute numbers to 2.041 *Ervaringscertificaten* in higher education (Sijstermans 2010; Kans et al 2010).

The number of people applying for a qualification in the coming years - especially in the context of the economic crisis in which it becomes apparent that a qualification might be an assurance for employability – is expected to rise substantially for all economic sectors. For the education and healthcare sectors the numbers are expected to be the highest. Concerning qualification levels, a rise is expected on all levels, but especially on the level of associate degrees (two-year cycle in HE) and in sectoral standards. (Kans et al 2010).

### **Evidence of benefits to individuals**

In the context of learning and working, a VPL-procedure is to be introduced to assess and recognise the competences (both vocational and general) of a candidate in relation to the standards (finishing levels) of an MBO or HBO qualification. This summative assessment may result in a certificate, diploma or exemption being issued by an educational institution. A formative assessment (i.e. not VPL, strictly speaking) tends to be used in the context of career development with the aim of identifying training needs and adjusting training programmes accordingly.

The benefits of VPL are considered high, especially when the VPL-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 was described on the organisation levels of profit-, non-profit- and voluntary organisations. 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).

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

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"> <li>resources</li> <li>• allocation of human resources</li> <li>• increasing awareness of own competences</li> <li>• getting qualified by work experience</li> <li>• obtaining better qualifications</li> <li>• improving knowledge and skills</li> <li>• shorten educational routes</li> <li>• better earnings</li> <li>• cost reduction on training</li> <li>• transparency in time and costs for the individuals</li> <li>• obtaining European certificates</li> <li>• opportunity for the individual to continue studies</li> <li>• more insight in the individuals own competences</li> <li>• increasing individual value on the labour-market</li> <li>• more time efficient course completion</li> <li>• enrolment in courses by “new” target groups</li> <li>• verify and validate professional knowledge</li> <li>• protecting legal professional titles</li> <li>• remain employable</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>competences / strengths / weaknesses</li> <li>• increased value on labour market</li> <li>• stimulation of learning</li> <li>• individualised learning paths</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>partners</li> <li>• Involvement in social life</li> <li>• Employability</li> <li>• Increase value of handicapped, retired and seniors for society</li> <li>• Career and personal development</li> <li>• Develop young people</li> </ul>

### ***Benefits to organisations***

The benefits of APL are considered high, especially when the APL-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 was described on the organisation levels of profit-, non-profit- and voluntary organisations. 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).

Aims and (potential) benefits to organisations working in the profit-making sector	Aims and (potential) benefits to organisations working in the non-profit sector	Aims and (potential) Benefits to organisations working in the voluntary sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a minimum standard for computer knowledge</li> <li>• make knowledge predictable, measurable and comparative</li> <li>• qualification of personnel</li> <li>• dealing with personal issues and with human resources</li> <li>• validation in the branch</li> <li>• finding best qualified personnel</li> <li>• effectiveness: less education needs, less absence and leave</li> <li>• less time for training</li> <li>• knowing about best fitting roles for employees</li> <li>• finding highly motivated and qualified employees willing to keep on learning</li> <li>• financial support for reintegration on the labour market</li> <li>• legibility of developed competencies in the organisation improves the image of the organisation.</li> <li>• accounting educational needs of the enterprise</li> <li>• accounting human capital in the organisation</li> <li>• increasing participation of employees in education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidance and counselling</li> <li>• Placement networks</li> <li>• Benefit from on the job training</li> <li>• Competence analysis</li> <li>• Qualification for special functions</li> <li>• Increasing involvement of universities in lifelong learning</li> <li>• Reduction of teacher shortage</li> <li>• Safeguarding valid qualifications</li> <li>• Social empowerment</li> <li>• Reduction of shortages on the labour market</li> <li>• Time saving educational route</li> <li>• Attracting more students</li> <li>• Improve quality</li> <li>• Increase motivation of employees</li> <li>• Saving money by planning tailor-made training</li> <li>• Career development</li> <li>• Ensure professional quality</li> <li>• Qualifying unskilled nurses</li> <li>• Increasing numbers of qualified employees</li> <li>• Increasing transparency, comparability and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase number of students for education</li> <li>• Improve quality of volunteer (cultural – historical knowledge)</li> <li>• Increase HRM quality</li> <li>• New segment of volunteers</li> <li>• Social &amp; summative benefits</li> <li>• Positive awareness of competences</li> <li>• Improve social learning</li> <li>• Importance of learning at work</li> <li>• Marketing the learning arena</li> <li>• Study circles</li> <li>• Increase employability</li> <li>• Qualification through professional organisation</li> <li>• Sectoral qualification system, independently from education and institutes</li> <li>• Development of volunteer sector</li> <li>• New skilled employee</li> <li>• Improved skills as volunteer</li> </ul>

Aims and (potential) benefits to organisations working in the (profit-making) sector	Aims and (potential) benefits to organisations working in the non-profit sector	Aims and (potential) Benefits to organisations working in the voluntary sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• more highly educated employees</li> <li>• develop tailor-made training</li> <li>• raising competence levels at lower costs</li> <li>• more efficiently take care of the total competence</li> <li>• better adjustment to needs among the personnel</li> <li>• obtain a precise definition of the employees knowledge development</li> <li>• get each employee more active in his/her own competence development</li> <li>• organisation will know their competence pool better (HC-accounting)</li> <li>• basis for future planning of company policy</li> <li>• tailored training of employees</li> <li>• lowering costs of competence development</li> <li>• saving costs at national level</li> <li>• lowering costs of training</li> <li>• meeting industry needs</li> <li>• avoid duplication</li> <li>• flexibility of training</li> <li>• develop manufacturing up skilling programme</li> <li>• offer entrepreneurs an opportunity for obtaining the qualification</li> <li>• international recognition</li> <li>• more effective training</li> <li>• conform to European</li> </ul>	<p>transferability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extend adults educational opportunities</li> <li>• Developing more appropriate ways of access to formal education</li> <li>• Widening the independency and autonomy of schools</li> <li>• Strengthen ties between education and organisations/companies</li> <li>• Connecting theoretical educational forms with practical experiences</li> <li>• Using more effective work based learning</li> <li>• Standardising non-specific field aspects of assessment</li> <li>• Gain formal certification for learning that has already taken place</li> <li>• Decreasing student drop out</li> <li>• Make education more accessible</li> <li>• Transfer informal learning into the formal setting enabling certification</li> <li>• Have a greater number of qualified workers</li> <li>• Facilitate greater participation in further education</li> </ul>	

Aims and (potential) benefits to organisations working in the (profit-making) sector	Aims and (potential) benefits to organisations working in the non-profit sector	Aims and (potential) Benefits to organisations working in the voluntary sector
<p>legislation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enable small traders to acquire qualification without completion of formal education</li> <li>• verifying applicants competence</li> <li>• qualification control in a profession</li> <li>• meeting European quality certificates</li> <li>• recognition for the individual</li> <li>• Student retention: make education more accessible and appealing for workers</li> <li>• Avoid redundancies</li> <li>• Measuring competencies to new jobs</li> </ul>		

## 8. CHALLENGES & SWOT

### **Challenges**

The active participation of individuals in decisions about form and content of lifelong learning and the implementation of lifelong learning strategies becomes a clearer perspective and paves the way for supporting personalized (lifelong) learning, including a plan for comprehensive cooperation in the lifelong learning-arena'. The desired effects of VPL in this sense should in the near future focus more strongly on:

- 1 improving opportunities for empowerment and deployment: improved empowerment and deployment of individual talent is the most important motivation underlying VPL. It increases the opportunities for the individual on the labour market by highlighting the competences he or she already has and how these competences can be deployed and strengthened. This can apply both to those already in employment and to job-seekers. For employers, the emphasis lies on improving the employability-policy for deployability of employees within the organisation.
- 2 To create a demand-led labour market: improving the match between the learning system and the labour system is essential for the organisation of VPL. In order to improve deployability, labour market functions must be expressed in terms of competences. These competences must in turn be linked to a demand for learning. The learning system must be receptive, transparent, flexible and demand-led in order to be able to provide the customised approach required.
- 3 To make learning more flexible: the recognition of informally and non-formally acquired competences will boost people's desire to keep on learning, i.e. will promote lifelong learning, since the accreditation of competences can lead directly to an award of or exemptions for qualifications. The recognition approach can also make visible or recognisable existing competences and qualifications within or outside the labour process. This promotes the transparency of the many opportunities for learning. The learning individual will not only want to learn in a customer-oriented fashion but will also know better than now how, what and when to learn, and why he is learning.
- 4 To optimise other forms of learning: other learning environments and forms of learning must be formulated and/or utilised more effectively, since VPL also shows which learning environment and/or form of learning is best for a particular individual. This could include (combinations of) on the job training, mentoring/tutoring, independent learning, distance learning, and so on. The recognition of competences and qualifications will inevitably lead to an adjustment of the existing qualification structure in professional education. The existing description of exit qualifications in the current qualification structure for professional education does not always tie in with the competences required on the labour market.

Of utmost importance is the building-up of an evaluation framework for qualitative and quantitative evaluation of progress and practice of VPL in the Netherlands. Following up on the

EU Guidelines on Validation of Non-formal and Informal learning an evaluation framework has to take account of:

*VPL-systems should respect the legitimate interests of stakeholders and seek a balanced participation:*

This principle can best be understood by the following statements:

- a) *Validation* reveals the real human potential on the basis of the analysis and valuation of personal competencies;
- b) *Validation* is the process of (a) assessing and validating personal competences within the social-economic context and (b) offering a personal development-strategy;
- c) *Validation* focuses on the individual perspective and makes the (public and private) system customer-driven for the sake of personal development;
- f) Organisations benefit from *Validation* since individuals develop within their context.
- g) a validation-process in general consists of five phases:
  - o commitment and awareness of the value of one's competencies,
  - o recognition of personal competencies,
  - o valuation and/or validation of these competencies,
  - o (advice on the) development of one's competencies and finally
  - o structurally embedding this competence-based development process into a personal or organisation steered and owned policy.

*The process of validation must be impartial and avoid conflicts of interest:*

Impartiality can only be guaranteed if an assessment is carried out by at least two independent assessors. These assessors should not be in positions where they might benefit financially from the development of the candidate's competencies. Neither should assessors be employed from the same organisation as the individual that is being assessed. In the case of self-assessment and self-diagnostics, instruments should be free of charge with a 'no strings attached' assurance. Every citizen should have access to these instruments.

*The professional competences of those who carry out assessments must be assured:*

The basis for a programme for professionalization is laid by the two main routes as described in the European Guidelines for the Validation of non-formal and informal learning. These two routes point out the main directions that Valuing Lifelong Learning can show to target groups: summative or formative development. It is even possible to follow a third route in a combination of summative and formative oriented lifelong learning. It's up to the key players in lifelong learning to help make the match between target groups and the learning system: the teachers, guiders and tutors from the field of empowerment.

The professionals in the APL-process should be not only the assessors but also the guiders and the advisors; moreover they should be recruited from both the business and the education world.

The content of professionalization (on a European scale?) should include:

- a) An integral (international) training-programme for lifelong learning-advisors, assessors and guiders

- b) A professional register for lifelong learning- & APL-professionals (advisors, assessors and guiders), including maintenance of competence profiles for these professionals
- c) Internationally recognised certification of lifelong learning- & APL-professionals
- d) International conferences to facilitate European communities of these professionals and to offer yearly update/upgrade programmes for the professionals
- e) National expert groups and/or communities
- f) External evaluation of national or sectoral approaches
- g) A European training programme for 'self management of competencies' incl. EU-portfolio (formats)
- h) Advice on sustainable embedding the programme in initial education and training and in human resource-systems

### ***SWOT-analysis of Dutch practice in volunteering, VPL & HE***

#### **Strong points**

The advantages of APL concerning competences and abilities developed by volunteers are:

- learning becomes a personal reality and possibility,
- the nature of the voluntary work is recognized by certification-institutes,
- organizations are able to describe their need for competences: the organization gets to know which competences the volunteers working there have and which they have to develop,
- organizations are able to promote voluntary work and attract more volunteers,
- organizations are able to modernize their services to members,
- helping the process of self-developing forward and increasing of the personal confidence of some volunteers,
- universities offering access to (bachelor-)degrees by means of VPL are the universities that are working on being a lifelong long learning-university,
- volunteers who have had their prior learning validated can be exempted from following certain formal training courses (formal training is required in particular in relation to working safely with children, dealing with disabilities, communication skills),
- organisations get a better image for attracting new volunteers,
- universities and volunteer organisations that are able to link their 'competence-buildings', are strengthening the development of volunteers as well as the professionals within their organisations.

The surplus of projects in relation to the aim of a better employability of volunteers can be seen in:

- volunteers get also employability-changes through their voluntary work; the recognition of voluntary experiences can lead to an improvement of the position of the labour market,
- volunteer organizations can focus more accurately on selection of volunteers,
- universities can innovate their processes (and programmes) more efficiently and effectively.

## Weak points

Improvements of the voluntary work in general and VPL in particular are possible through:

- raising awareness,
- getting commitment from employers and the legislators,
- recognition of learning by other (professional) groups,
- more support for individuals at national level to design a portfolio model to meet their own needs,
- cooperation with schools for vocational education and training costs a lot energy and time,
- cooperation on HE-levels is even more difficult to organize, let alone acceptable to academics,
- lots of time will have to be spent on training and raising awareness of the volunteer organisations and the universities to be able to understand each others' languages' and 'competence buildings'.

Resistance the sector faces:

- teachers from schools and institutes; they don't like it that other persons get control over the learning/certification process. Especially the certification is their domain,
- connecting non-formal education in the voluntary sector to the public learning system,
- experience gained through voluntary work is often not taken seriously,
- the procedure takes a lot of time, so organizations have to calculate this before getting started,
- structural financing the procedure,
- cultural: *is voluntary work real work?*

## Opportunities

The opportunities that may be 'captured' in volunteering are:

- general societal circumstances (demographic, social and economic) are favourable for investing in people,
- getting recognition for voluntary work as a certifiable learning ground,
- integral cooperation of volunteer organizations and universities in guidance of volunteers,
- raising awareness amongst social partners and authorities,
- the general profile of the competences gained through voluntary work in the Netherlands has been raised, with wider recognition of the efforts made, and skills and knowledge of volunteers,
- making organizations based on the voluntary principle more attractive for people.

The social and economic trends that may be tied up with volunteer work are:

- making it part of secondary school-curriculum,
- making it a means to get work experience and/or more satisfaction from labour,
- greater identification at the national level of which competencies are required in which sectors and on which levels.

## **Threats**

The obstacles to overcome are:

- the development of the labour market: with shortages on the labour market the available surplus for recruitment gets too small,
- strategic: volunteers and their 'employers' are difficult to get committed to learning,
- generating a new division in labour: those who can learn and those who (think they) cannot,
- more focus should be put on cooperation with the employers of volunteers,
- Academic arrogance on non-formal learning results.

The troubles coming from institutional, law, social, cultural context are:

- recognition of voluntary work as being a true learning experience that can even be certificated,
- ridiculising learning in the sense that learning can be done anywhere but still has to be quality assured,
- there is no national framework that makes the recognition of voluntary work possible,
- there is more involvement needed of the Dutch government to improve dissemination,
- the lack of extra funding to support subsidies for the costs of infrastructural change which is required by companies and organizations introducing the validation of informal learning,
- the lack of cooperation between the government and social partners in this policy area the one hand and between different educational levels within the system on the other, creation of a separate certification-body for voluntary work.

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