

European Inventory

on validation of informal and
non-formal learning



A European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning Netherlands

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ECOTEC

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1.0 Introduction

In the Netherlands, the term “EVC” (*Erkenning Verworven Competenties*- Recognition of Acquired Skills) is the term typically used for the validation of non-formal and informal learning and is closely linked to the discussion on competence-based learning¹. The validation can take the form of a formal exemption, a certificate, testimonial or diploma, or for example new career opportunities, admission to a certain education type/course, admission to a certain professional group, higher salary indication in a Collective Labour Agreement (CAO), etc.

Attention to validation of non-formal and informal learning increased in the Netherlands during the nineties and led to a non-regulated approach by the Dutch government in order to stimulate experimental pilots. Today, EVC has become more embedded into policy through the voluntary agreement of regions and sectoral branches with the Dutch government to carry out 20,000 recognition and validation procedures by 1 October 2007. Today, considerable attention is given to the question of how to assure the quality of the diverse set of EVC procedures available. However, the use of EVC is not yet commonplace in the Netherlands and development is not yet introduced on a very large scale².

¹ Colardyn, D. & Bjørnåvold, J. , *The learning continuity*, 2004. According to this report, there are more European countries in which the concept of informal and non-formal learning has been given a different name.

² 2008 Joint Interim Report of the Council and the Commission, Contribution of the Netherlands, April 2007

2.0 EVC in practice

2.1 Identified benefits of EVC

A wide range of benefits to EVC have been identified for the Netherlands as a country, as well as for individual beneficiaries. The stimulation of EVC brings the Netherlands closer towards achieving the goals set out in the Lisbon Agenda, by increasing the education level of the Dutch population and ensuring all can follow the approach of lifelong learning. It is important that in the Netherlands the average education level increases to ensure the competitiveness of the country and of Europe on the international market and to avoid a shortage of employees in certain sectors. In addition, employees and job seekers gain a stronger position on the labour market when their competences are translated through recognised diplomas. This leads to increased mobility on the labour market. Furthermore, EVC motivates and offers an individual the confidence to proceed with their education to gain a recognized diploma. It also brings cost reductions as it stimulates the setting-up of more efficient educational procedures by avoiding – ideally - individuals having to study for subjects they already know³.

The list in the box below provides an overview of possible benefits of EVC.

Possible benefits of EVC⁴

1. Recruitment and selection of staff can also take place among target groups without formal qualifications;
2. It can prevent personnel from leaving the company and can prevent disability (by ensuring employees do not work in hazardous situations without the necessary skills)
3. Career-development and upskilling are stimulated.
4. It leads to increased mobility on the labour market - both externally and within one employer.
5. EVC can serve as a useful controlled instrument for individual accomplishment. It motivates individuals to learn and to work.
6. It helps companies to define and describe their “human capital”, making it easier to describe it on the balance sheet.
7. It leads to a decrease in the time employees are absent from their work.
8. It increases the confidence of the participants. It motivates them to develop themselves further.

³ *Spelregels voor het meetellen van werkervaring bij erkende diploma's vastgelegd*, press release, 14-11-2006, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Retrieved 16/08/08: www.minocw.nl/persberichten/12030

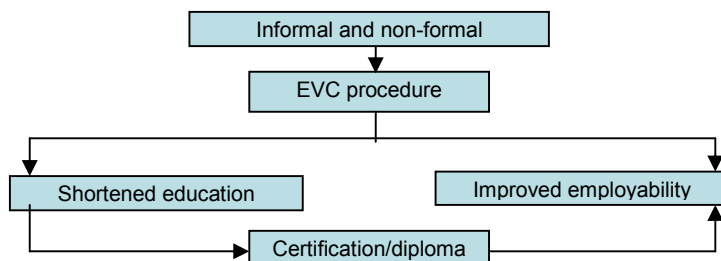
⁴ Duvekot, R, Kaemingk, E, Klarus, R, 2003, People learn anyway! The use of VPL on the Dutch labour market in *Opleiding & Ontwikkeling 11/2003*, pp.10-15

2.2 Methodology

EVC can serve several goals⁵:

1. **Qualification or education-focused:** EVC can be used to directly gain a certificate or diploma recognised by the Ministry of Education or lead to entry into an education institute (through admission and/or exemptions).
2. **Labour market focused:** EVC can be used to improve an individual's employability. The goal can be to gain recognition for competences needed for outplacement or reintegration, or to offer an inventory of competences by the employee to increase his or her career opportunities, or to offer an inventory of competences by the employer to increase internal mobility of its employees.

The figure below gives an overview of the goals of EVC:



Source: Thomas, E, van Broekhoven, S, Frietman, J, 2000, *EVC aan de poorten van het hoger onderwijs, handreiking voor de implementatie van EVC in hogescholen en universiteit, ITS*

The EVC-procedure generally consists of five phases⁶, for which responsibility primarily lies with the individual:

1. **Commitment and awareness of the value of one's competences – both by the individual and by the employer:** This phase focuses on raising awareness and setting the targets for EVC within the context of an organisation and for the individual involved (personal goal and personal development plans).
2. **Recognition of competences:** This phase involves the recognition of individual competences. The participant usually needs to compile a *portfolio*. This portfolio is meant to offer "authentic evidence" of available competences. Evidence can take the

⁵ Source: Thomas, E, van Broekhoven, S, Frietman, J, 2000, *EVC aan de poorten van het hoger onderwijs, handreiking voor de implementatie van EVC in hogescholen en universiteit, ITS*

⁶ The VPL model in short, Leonardo da Vinci programme, second phase 2000-2006

form of: a description of work experience, diplomas, statements from employers, references, papers, photos and/or any other material. It also often includes a self-assessment and a report wherein the candidate reflects on his or her competency levels⁷. This gathering of “evidence” can be done individually, but can also involve some supervision to ensure the participant gathers the evidence needed to compare his or her competences with a set standard. This standard can be company-specific, sector or branch-specific or national-specific. The guidelines for storing and presenting information in a portfolio differ significantly. For example, research in the higher education sector shows that in some cases extensive instructions or manuals are available while in other cases no information is available to support candidates.

- 3. Assessment of competences:** In the next phase, the content of the portfolio is assessed and when necessary followed up by an extra assessment. This can involve an interview, test, demonstration, presentation, but also – with respect to employees - observation during work. Assessors compare the competencies of the individual with the set standard. The result of this phase is either a successful, or an unsuccessful validation of competences - written down into an independent EVC report - depending on whether the individual's competences meet the required standard. The validation can take place on organisational, sectoral or national level in the form of specific sector, branch, company-specific or other certificates, part-certificates, diplomas or a career move. For example, in the higher education sector, the assessors put a proposal to the examination board⁸. It usually also includes an advice regarding possible follow-up steps to bring about further development⁹. This can take shape through advice on career-opportunities and/or study opportunities.
- 4. Further development of competences and advice on this:** The validation offers insight into an individual's available strong competences and missing competences, which offers a great opportunity for the individual to set up a personal development plan (POP). This plan can include possible learning activities, both in a formal and non-formal learning environment; a change in the working situation or a change of employment position, etc.
- 5. Embedding competence-based development process into a personal or organisation steered and owned policy:** The last phase focuses on the structural implementation of EVC in the training and personnel policy of an organisation. This

⁷ Schlusmans, K, Joosten-ten Brinke, D, van der Klink, M, 2005, *Accreditation of prior learning in higher education*, Sense publishers

⁸ Schlusmans, K, Joosten-ten Brinke, D, van der Klink, M, 2005, *Accreditation of prior learning in higher education*, Sense publishers

⁹ Werkgroep EVC/ Ministerie van Economische Zaken, *'The glass is half full!, a broad vision for the application of EVC'*, Den Haag, 2000

involves the evaluation of the results of the EVC-procedure(s) into the human resource management (HRM) of the organisation. By doing this, the organisation can turn its existing training and personnel policy into a competence-based lifelong learning policy.

An EVC-pathway incorporating all these stages is time-consuming and thus also expensive. Research on EVC in HE shows that in most cases the candidate needs 20 to 40 hours to compose their portfolio and to undergo the various assessment activities, while the assessors need approximately six to eight hours to assess one candidate¹⁰.

¹⁰ Schlusmans, K, Joosten-ten Brinke, D, van der Klink, M, 2005, *Accreditation of prior learning in higher education*, Sense publishers

3.0 Public Sector

3.1 Role of the Dutch government

The first discussions in the Netherlands on the importance of validating non-formal and informal learning (EVC) started with the establishment of a Commission on the Recognition of Informally Acquired Skills in 1993, which published in 1994 the report “Kwaliteiten Erkennen” (Recognising Informal Skills). The Dutch government responded positively to this report and decided to provide a set of instruments to assist EVC, including necessary development funding, with the main aim to make education more accessible for adults.

An EVC workgroup was set up in 1999 to investigate the future possibilities of EVC¹¹. Their 2000 report “The bottle is half full!” outlines their vision on EVC. The title emphasises the vision of the workgroup that EVC should not be used to highlight gaps in knowledge and skills, rather should build further on existing knowledge and skills¹². Subsequently, the Dutch government decided not to stipulate elaborate policies and regulations regarding EVC. The idea was that the market itself would find the best way to develop, implement and use EVC. Under the policy of “Stimulating and not regulating” (also referred to as “let a thousand flowers bloom” by the EVC Knowledge Centre) different education institutes, different sectors of industry and other stakeholders were given the opportunity to experiment with EVC without being immediately bound to any rules and expectations¹³.

Currently, the main unit of the Dutch government dealing with EVC is the Project Unit Learning & Working (2005-2007). This Project Unit is a joint initiative of the Ministries of Education and Social Affairs set up in March 2005 and will exist until January 2008. Its main aim is to stimulate the approach of lifelong learning among employers, employees, citizens, education institutes, public institutes, municipalities and other stakeholders¹⁴. One of the identified methods is EVC. As a result, a budget of €4.2 million has been made available in 2005 and €12.2 million in 2006 to promote the development of EVC.

¹¹ Duvekot, R, Schuur, K, Paulusse, J (editors), 2005, *The unfinished story of VPL, Valuation & Validation of prior learning in Europe's learning structures*

¹² Werkgroep EVC/ Ministerie van Economische Zaken, ‘*The glass is half full!, a broad vision for the application of EVC*’, Den Haag, 2000

¹³ Kaemingk, E, November 2006, *A quality code for APL, Identifying and accrediting a lifetime of learning*, Kenniscentrum EVC; Kaemingk, E, November 2006; *Openingsspeech Nationale EVC dag (14 November)*, Kenniscentrum EVC.

Retrieved 15 August: http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc_nl/cfc0755dbc64e15936aa56338bb1d0c7.php

¹⁴ *Leren & Werken*, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and Ministry of Social Affairs and employment. Retrieved 17 August 2007: <http://www.leren-werken.nl/exec/template/werken>

The following actions have been defined to promote the development of EVC in the Action Plan Enhancing Learning and Working 2005-2007 (Plan van aanpak Leren & Werken versterken 2005-2007)¹⁵:

- To establish contact with regional partners in four different regions in order to set up a structure for EVC, career advice and services. On the basis of these experiences, other regions will also be approached.
- To offer subsidies to education institutes to develop EVC. For example, in 2006/2007 the Project Unit Learning & Working established a temporary subsidy (in total €5.7 million available) to offer tertiary vocational education institutes the chance to start an EVC-focused project¹⁶.
- To approach new sectors to develop EVC opportunities and procedures.
- To develop a digital portfolio which is linked to Europass/NEC in agreement with the education field, student organisations, partners and the IB-group.
- To identify and remove barriers.
- The EVC Knowledge Centre will set up agreements with six sectors about the number of EVC procedures and CAO agreements.
- The EVC Knowledge Centre's website is important for disseminating information on EVC. Negotiation will take place with the Knowledge Centre to decide for the future where information on EVC will be stored.

One of the main aims of this Project Unit is to stimulate the development of an additional 50,000 EVC pathways by 2010 and 20,000 EVC pathways by 1 October 2007 (7,500 in 2006 and 12,500 in 2007)¹⁷. To realise this goal, the Project Unit works together with sectoral and regional partners who have committed to carrying out a certain number of EVC actions through a voluntary agreement with the Project Unit. At the moment, the Project Unit has agreed with 45 institutions their approach and a certain number of EVC applications to be processed. In total, the ambition of these organisations is to facilitate

¹⁵ *Plan van aanpak 2005-2007, Leren & Werken versterken*, 2005, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and Ministry of Social Affairs and employment

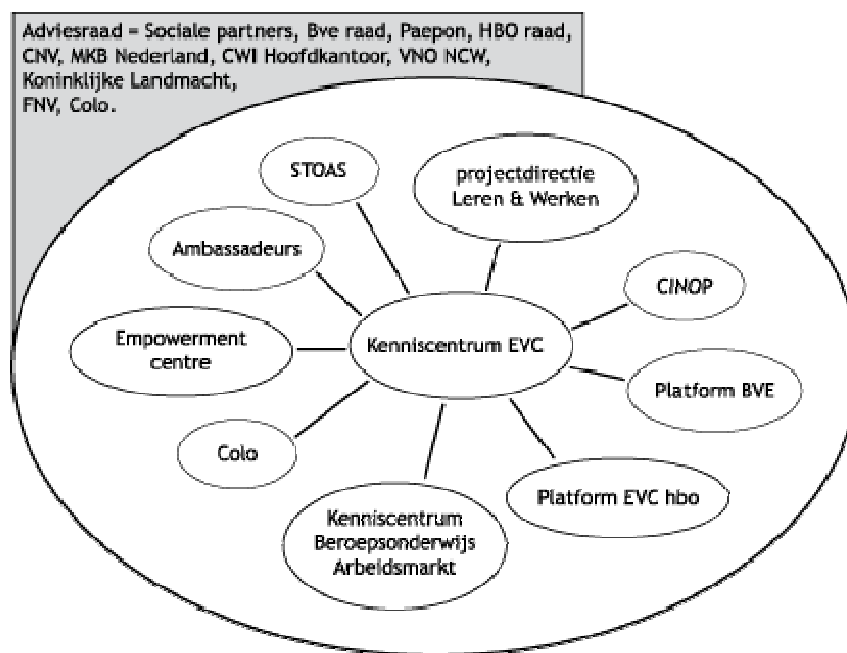
¹⁶ Website leren en werken, EVC. Retrieved 28 August 2007: <http://www.leren-werken.nl/exec/template/projecten/evc>

¹⁷ *Plan van aanpak 2005-2007, Leren & Werken versterken*, 2005, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and Ministry of Social Affairs and employment

23,117 new EVC procedures by 1 October 2007¹⁸. For information on the number of new EVC procedures which have been completed, please proceed to the section on EVC in practice, take-up rate.

3.2 The EVC Knowledge Centre

In 2000, one of the recommendations of the EVC workgroup was to set up a national knowledge centre. As a result, in 2001, with the financial resources of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and support from social partners and educational umbrella organisations, a consortium of three organisations (Cinop, CitoGroep and STOAS) was given the task to set-up the national knowledge centre (EVC Kenniscentrum)¹⁹. Currently, the Knowledge Centre is managed by Cinop, STOAS and KBA and works under the Project Unit Leren & Werken (Learning & Working) of both the Ministries of Education and Social Affairs. The figure below shows with which organisations the EVC Knowledge Centre cooperates.



Source: EVC Knowledge Centre, organisation. Retrieved 15 August 2007:
http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc_nl/97681e2cb32cbd4f13bbd0f565509e22.php

The EVC Knowledge Centre aims to collect and share knowledge and good practices on validation of prior learning in the Netherlands. It aims to stimulate the use of EVC practices

¹⁸ Westerhuis, A, Huisman, T, 2007, *Kwantitatieve monitoring duale en EVC trajecten, Projectdirectie Leren&Werken, resultaten derde peiling (1 February 2007)*, CINOP

¹⁹ Cinop, Citogroep and STOAS are private organisations, serving educational organisations. All three have experience with EVC.

by developing a sustainable infrastructure for the application of EVC in education and the labour market, in regions and in sectors.²⁰ To achieve these goals, the EVC Knowledge Centre is building and expanding its network of EVC-professionals who develop, improve and publicise new EVC methods.

3.3 Quality assurance of EVC: covenant on EVC quality code

The experimentation with EVC has led to a great number and very diverse set of EVC examples which demonstrate what works and what does not work. However, the great diversity has also led to confusion among users concerning the differences in quality of all these EVC procedures. As a result, in 2006, the Dutch government, social partners and other stakeholders decided to start a broad consultation process among all stakeholders to assist the development of a quality framework for the EVC procedure. This has led in the same year to the establishment of a “quality code” in a covenant signed by all relevant stakeholders: the Labour Foundation (Stichting van de Arbeid- national consultative body of social partners), Colo (Association of Centres of Expertise on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market), PAEPON (Platform of Accredited Private Educational Institutions), the Centre of Work and Income (CWI- Employment Agency), HBO-Council (Association of Universities of Applied Science), MBO-Council (Association of Vocational Education and Training Centres), AOC-Council (Council for Agricultural Education Centres), the Open University and the State Secretary of Education, Culture and Science on behalf of the State Secretary of Social Affairs and Employment²¹.

In the box below the main arrangements agreed in the covenant are summarised.

Summary of arrangements agreed in the covenant, 2006²²

1. The use of the EVC quality code is **voluntary**, but the signing parties are dedicating themselves to promote the use of EVC.
2. Everyone who starts with an EVC procedure agreed on the reasons for doing so. EVC is not a standard process but an individualised series of arrangements customised on the goal and use of EVC. **Customised work** is the standard.
3. Every EVC procedure ends with an **EVC report**. This makes EVC independent from the educational provider.
4. **Accredited EVC providers** are listed in a directory.
5. Only **professionals** can be supervisors and assessors.
6. The quality of the EVC procedures undergoes continuous **improvement**.

²⁰ Information taken from the website of the EVC Knowledge Centre,
http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc_nl/0fa86b8c18423aaabf228f9d157a6bdc.php

²¹ Notice that the universities are not included as a signed party in the agreement

²² Kaemingk, E, November 2006, *A quality code for APL, Identifying and accrediting a lifetime of learning*, Kenniscentrum EVC; Covenant “Een kwaliteitscode voor EVC” in *Staatscourant* 13 December 2006, nr.243/pag.26, OCW & SZW

The EVC code – agreed in the covenant - is based on research undertaken by the EVC Knowledge Centre; on European principles; on CH-Q (Swiss model for career counselling) and an existing private EVC quality code²³. It has been developed to make EVC more transparent; to make it clear what EVC entails and how EVC should be offered. The EVC code has not only been developed for the purpose of quality control but also to stimulate the development of collaborative partnerships between EVC-providers and the organisations where people work or organisations that help people with employment²⁴.

The EVC code safeguards the quality of EVC through an evaluation procedure of EVC-providers²⁵. Any EVC-provider is left free to develop their own EVC procedures, but their procedures are evaluated to examine whether they are in accordance with the EVC code. EVC-providers can check – before the official evaluation - through the use of a checklist whether their EVC procedures are in accordance with the EVC code²⁶. Then, the official evaluation is undertaken by the organisations KCE²⁷ and VBIs²⁸. Social partners in sectors and/or industries, SUWI chain partners²⁹ and professional organisations can choose their own evaluating organisation³⁰. When the evaluation is positive, an EVC-provider becomes officially registered as a recognized EVC-provider and their EVC-offer is published on websites on which potential clients search. In addition, recognised EVC-providers can make use of the relevant fiscal measures. Since January 2007 organisations who pay for an EVC-procedure undertaken by a recognized EVC-provider can receive a tax benefit of €300. Individuals who pay for their EVC-procedure can deduct the expenses from their taxes.³¹

The EVC Knowledge Centre is responsible for the above-explained EVC code until the end of 2007. Until that date, the Centre's tasks are to set up and publicize the register of

²³ Maes, M., May 2007, Powerpoint presentation: *EVC in the Netherlands & one stop shops*, EVC Knowledge Centre

²⁴ Kaemingk, E., November 2006, *A quality code for APL, Identifying and accrediting a lifetime of learning*, Kenniscentrum EVC

²⁵ Van Leeuwen, H., 2007, Powerpoint Presentation: *Kwaliteitsborging EVC procedures, EVC in het MBO*.

²⁶ Maes, M., May 2007, Powerpoint presentation: *EVC in the Netherlands & one stop shops*, EVC Knowledge Centre

²⁷ KCE (Kwaliteitscentrum Examinering-Quality Assurance Centre for Examinations) evaluates the quality of the exams of all vocational education programmes of institutions with a licence against the national standards.

²⁸ VBIs (Visiting and Evaluation Institutions) evaluate the program at the request of the institution in higher education. The NVAO (Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders) independently warrants the quality of higher education in the Netherlands and Flanders and reviews this external evaluation, undertaken by the VBIs.

²⁹ Suwi chain partners are involved in the implementation of social protection and labour reintegration measures.

³⁰ Kaemingk, E., November 2006, *A quality code for APL, Identifying and accrediting a lifetime of learning*, Kenniscentrum EVC

³¹ Directie Communicatie, Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, December 2006, *Belangrijkste maatregelen per 1 januari op het terrain van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid*, retrieved 15 August 2007:

http://home.szw.nl/actueel/dsp_persbericht.cfm?jaar=2006&link_id=109460; Knowledge Centre EVC, *fiscal benefits*, retrieved 15 August 2007: http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc_nl/16fbf9145faf2c5b2e960d50cef2acd1.php; *EVC-procedures fiscaal aftrekbaar*, EVC Knowledge Centre. Retrieved 16/08/07: www.kenniscentrumevc.nl

recognized EVC-providers; to develop sample EVC reports, portfolios and other EVC instruments; to produce a model methodology to evaluate the quality of supervisors and assessors; to research the effect and impact of the EVC code; to investigate whether the designation of evaluating organisations and the corresponding accreditation of EVC-providers under the responsibility of social partners, SUWI partners or professional organisations is actually happening; to investigate how the evaluating organisations proposed by the social partners are applying the EVC-code and standards; to have an impartial and independent evaluation performed of the quality model and the use of the EVC code; and to write recommendations on how to take EVC forward³².

3.4 EVC in higher education

3.4.1 Legal regulation of EVC in 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)³³.

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 fulfil 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 (in the OERs)³⁴.

3.4.2 Law of professions in education

An exception to the non-regulated and decentralized policy of EVC in the Netherlands is the law of professions in education (Wet Beroepen in het Onderwijs- BIO). This law was approved by the Dutch Parliament in January 2004 and stipulates the competences teachers and other educational workers need to possess. The main reason for setting up this law was the continued shortage of teachers in the educational sector, which needed to

³²Kaemingk, E, November 2006, *A quality code for APL, Identifying and accrediting a lifetime of learning*, Kenniscentrum EVC; Covenant “Een kwaliteitscode voor EVC” in *Staatscourant 13 December 2006, nr.243/pag.26*, OCW & SZW

³³ Thomas, E, van Broekhoven, S, Frietman, J, 2000, EVC aan de poorten van het hoger onderwijs, handreiking voor de implementatie van EVC in hogescholen en universiteit, ITS

³⁴ Thomas, E, van Broekhoven, S, Frietman, J, 2000, EVC aan de poorten van het hoger onderwijs, handreiking voor de implementatie van EVC in hogescholen en universiteit, ITS

be addressed. By stipulating the competences teachers need to possess, they enable non-certified individuals to start employment in the educational sector (so-called side-streamers). 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 district³⁵. 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 with their employment as a teacher or during their employment as a teacher³⁶.

3.4.3 Use of EVC in higher education

EVC is currently still mostly taking place in upper secondary/post secondary VET and to a much lesser extent in higher education, even though the gains there can be great. EVC in higher education – as stated in the policy document HOOP in 2000 - can lead to a reduction in the shortage of graduates as it encourages new target groups to participate in HE. These new target groups can be people coming back to the labour market after a period of absence; high educated foreigners; or workers who are willing to up-skill or change career by following a "shortened" education pathway³⁷.

Research shows that even though many higher education institutes are considering introducing EVC, actual implementation remains low. When higher education institutes apply EVC it is mostly through the offering of admission or exemptions, but not with the development and application of EVC-procedures as such. When EVC practices can be found, they also mostly take place in higher vocational institutes (hogescholen) and not in university education. Kink, Boon and Schlusmans (2003) assume that universities remain limited in their use of EVC because they are afraid of losing their quality status. Another reason mentioned by Schlusmans, Joosten-ten Brinke and van der Klink (2005) might be the fact that universities fear that EVC is not focused enough on knowledge acquisition, which forms one of the most important elements of university education. Vocational higher education institutes are far less focused on knowledge acquisition and focus more on the acquisition of skills and professional competencies which fits more closely with EVC. In university education competence-based thinking is not yet accepted on a broad scale.

³⁵ Schlusmans, K, Joosten-ten Brinke, D, van der Klink, M, 2005, *Accreditation of prior learning in higher education*, Sense publishers

³⁶ Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, The Hague

³⁷ Thomas, E, van Broekhoven, S, Frietman, J, 2000, EVC aan de poorten van het hoger onderwijs, handreiking voor de implementatie van EVC in hogescholen en universiteit, ITS

Instead the focus is on knowledge transfer and little value is attached to specific competences³⁸.

The table below offers an overview of the advantages and drawbacks of applying EVC in HE.

Advantages of EVC in HE	Drawbacks of EVC in HE
It attracts new target groups who have already gained competences elsewhere: it avoids “double education” and motivates the individual.	Fear of loss of quality and prestige of higher education
It can lead to a contribution to solving the shortage of HE graduates.	Fear of too little attention on basic knowledge
It offers an education institute more insight in the profile of a student and can thus offer more individual flexible learning pathways	Fear of moving towards competence-based thinking
It improves the position of higher education institutes in comparison to private educators as they become much better equipped to fulfil the needs of the labour market	Regular students could observe the students who enter education via EVC as unfair competition
	A substantial higher amount of student entries could lead to capacity problems

Source: Thomas, E, van Broekhoven, S, Frietman, J, 2000, EVC aan de poorten van het hoger onderwijs, handreiking voor de implementatie van EVC in hogescholen en universiteit, ITS

A small-scale investigation shows that the majority of the EVC-candidates in higher education were satisfied with their EVC-procedure. Also EVC-candidates with negative outcomes were often satisfied because the procedure resulted in a more realistic insight into their competency levels³⁹.

³⁸ Schlusmans, K, Joosten-ten Brinke, D, van der Klink, M, 2005, *Accreditation of prior learning in higher education*, Sense publishers

³⁹ Schlusmans, K, Joosten-ten Brinke, D, van der Klink, M, 2005, *Accreditation of prior learning in higher education*, Sense publishers

4.0 Private Sector

4.1 The role of social partners

The Dutch social partners, together with the Dutch government, play a steering role in the development of EVC on national level and play an essential role with respect to the development of EVC on sectoral level⁴⁰. This method of collaboration and sharing of responsibility is often referred to as the "Dutch poldermodel" or consensus-model.

One way of developing EVC on a sectoral level is by including it in Collective Labour Agreements (CAO) in different sectors. This way, employees are stimulated to improve their employability to strengthen their position on the labour market and employers gain an indication and better understanding of the competences of their employees. An investigation of sectoral schooling-agreements (2005) and the situation of training funds (2004) concludes however that only a few collective agreements contain agreements about EVC⁴¹. The EVC Knowledge Centre offers an overview of sectors where agreed CAO's include EVC: (1) retail in potatoes, vegetables and fruit; construction; (2) child care, (3) metal industry (4) legal assistance and, (5) welfare and social services⁴². These EVC agreements are often financed by the Training Funds (O&O funds) which have been set up to support the educational initiatives of employees. These Funds are financed by contributions from both the employees and employers. In sectors where no EVC agreements have been included in the CAOs, the employee is still very much dependent on the willingness of the employer to be involved⁴³.

In the text box below we offer an example of the retail sector in potatoes, vegetables and fruit.

Overview of EVC in the CAO retail sector in potatoes, vegetables and fruit⁴⁴

Every employee in the sector has the right to apply for an EVC procedure and can approach the O&O fund CKO in Den Hague regarding the organisation and finance of the procedure. The following requirements have been set:

⁴⁰ Beek, H. van & Duvekot, R. (2007) National Review of the Netherlands, VPL, March 2007

⁴¹ *Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications, evaluation report*, 2006, ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME and European Centre of enterprises with public participation and of enterprises of general economic interest

⁴² *EVC en cao's*, EVC Knowledge Centre. Retrieved 14/08/07: www.kenniscentrum.nl

⁴³ This particular information was given in a short telephone interview with Mr. R. Duvekot, director of the knowledge center EVC in Houten, the Netherlands.

⁴⁴ *EVC en cao's*, EVC Knowledge Centre. Retrieved 14/08/07: www.kenniscentrum.nl

Overview of EVC in the CAO retail sector in potatoes, vegetables and fruit⁴⁴

- The employee has the intention to start a course or education within the sector;
- The employer is informed;
- The employee and employer have filled in the available competences scan and developed the personal development plan (POP) of the employee;
- If the competences scan indicates that the employee fulfils all competences for a function mentioned in the CAO, the employee can ask for a certificate from a CKO-authorized educator. No salary demands can be raised.
- If the competences scan indicates that the employee does not fulfil all competences for a function mentioned in the CAO, the employee can join courses authorised by CKO (financed through subsidies);
- If the competences scan indicates that the employee fulfils all competences for a function mentioned in the CAO and this function is vacant, the employee receives primacy in the selection procedure; and
- If the competences scan indicates that the employee does not fulfil any of the competences for a function mentioned in the CAO, no demotion or salary reduction follows.

4.2 Examples of social partner involvement in EVC

In the welfare sector, a good example of social partner involvement in EVC is the organisation of, financing and evaluation of EVC-procedures by the organisation "FCB Dienstverleners in Arbeidsmarktvraagstukken" (Service in labour market issues). This organisation was set up by the social partners MOgroep, ABVAKABO FNV and CNV Publieke Zaken to support the sector welfare and social service, youth care and child care services to function optimally in a changing labour market and society.

In the period 2004-2006, FCB organised and financed 186 EVC-procedures in the child care sector to gain better insight:

- into the quality of EVC-procedures;
- into differences among EVC-providers; and
- to offer employers and employees experience with EVC-procedures.

What makes their involvement in EVC best practice, is the fact that they have undertaken

an in-depth evaluation of the organised EVC-procedures to shed light on the motivations and satisfaction of the EVC-candidates, the quality of the procedures, etc. in order to make recommendations for the future use of EVC in the sector. A useful outcome of their evaluation for example, is the fact that considerable differences among EVC-providers have been identified, especially in the field of valuing experience. At the moment, the practice of evaluating EVC-procedures and making recommendations for the future is not yet usual practice⁴⁵.

FCB continues to evaluate EVC-procedures, now in the sector Welfare and social service and Youth care, aiming to improve the quality of EVC-procedures. FCB also tries to stimulate the use of EVC-procedures by offering co-financing through the European Social Fund."⁴⁶

Another best practice example can be found in the technical sector within the branches installation techniques, mechanical engineering, electrical engineering and ICT. Kenteq is a centre of expertise on vocational education, training and the labour market and amongst others is responsible for the qualification structure of VET in the technical field. The centre is a recognized EVC-provider by the EVC Knowledge Centre. Kenteq started in 2001 with EVC to formalise qualifications of employees, because many of the employees in this sector work in a function above their formal qualification level. The strength of their EVC procedure is that the focus is on practical competences instead of formal vocational training and qualification standards. Together with the education institutes Noorderpoort college, Horizon College, ROC Gilde Opleiding and ROI Zuid-Oost they have identified practical competences for several functions.

Until 2004, Kenteq supported 201 EVC-candidates, but since then the numbers have increased greatly: 627 candidates in 2004, 455 candidates in 2005 and 650 candidates in 2006. Each EVC-candidate receives an APL-certificate through the Examinations Committee of Kenteq. This certificate has an official status of the branches and will be increasingly recognized by educational institutes. Another option is to gain a formal qualification. Employers can get a refund of their EVC-expenses (approximately €1,345 per candidate) through the three branch Training Funds (O&O fondsen) which are involved.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Evaluation EVC-procedures Leidsters Kinderopvang en Peuterspeelzalen 2004-2006*, FCB. Retrieved 18 August: http://www.fcbwijk.nl/upload/fcb.nl/downloads/dossiers/evc/20070183%20verkorte%20versie%20evaluatierapport_evc_ko_psz.doc

⁴⁶ Information provided by KVB by email 28/08/2007

⁴⁷ *EVC procedure installatietechniek*, Kenniscentrum EVC. Retrieved 18 August: http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc_nl/c2262b28d9982dcbe7b0fad68aa4cbdc.php; *Erkenning verworven competenties*,

4.3 Individual companies

The number of individual companies - particularly larger enterprises - that have set up EVC procedures for employees is increasing slowly. Many of these projects started with small pilots, eventually leading to full-scale integration of EVC in human resource procedures. Unfortunately no systematic and comprehensive overview of national level exists yet.

Some of the examples of organisations that have introduced EVC are: Friesland foods, Shell, Corus, H.J. Heinz B.V., Auping, Rockwool and BSN Glasspack⁴⁸. There is a belief in these companies that employees learn by doing and that certification helps both company and employee to indicate what competences are present (acquired in a formal, non-formal or informal way).

In the boxes below we offer an overview of some examples of EVC undertaken in individual companies.

Best practice example - Introducing EVC at H.J. Heinz B.V.⁴⁹

From September 2002 until June 2003 Heinz undertook an EVC pilot to externally legitimise internal knowledge and experience through EVC. For this, they investigated to what extent their internal training fitted with the legal qualifications to become a food technology expert level 2 (voedingsmiddelentechnoloog niveau 2). The location for the pilot was the small Foodservice division in Elst. The pilot working group developed several assessment techniques: portfolio, quick scan, criteria-oriented interview, 3 tests in the work place and 1 assignment.

In total, 28 employees have undergone an EVC-procedure, of which 3 candidates received a vocational MBO diploma level 1; 11 candidates received a vocational MBO diploma level 2 and 14 candidates only needed to follow a shortened education programme in order to receive the diploma (especially in computer usage and Dutch language skills). From these figures it becomes clear that Heinz internal training is closely linked to the MBO study food technology expert level 2.

Heinz management hopes to use EVC further in the future to prove the quality of their internal training and to offer leaders and employees a structural opening to discuss work and functioning. If all competences fit with the legal standard, certification is a next step. New pilots were set up in 2004-2006 in Baarn, De Ruijter, Nijmegen, Honig en Giessen and Hak.

Kenteq. Retrieved 18 August: <http://www.kenteq.nl/cms/publish/content/showpage.asp?pageid=48>; Information provided by Kenteq by email 21/08/2007

⁴⁸ Een jaar 'Passie & Rendement', Jaarverslag over 2003, EVC Kenniscentrum, 2004

⁴⁹ *Best practices*, Knowledge Centre EVC. Retrieved 18 August 2007:

http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/evc_nl/df0540f8c03df89b481894ed84bc088a.php

On average, the employees spent 34 hours on the EVC procedure. The unit leader (internal assessor) spent approximately 160 hours per person, the product leader 100 hours and the education manager 250 hours.

Best practice example – Reintegration through EVC at Nedcar⁵⁰

Nedcar, an organisation located in the south of the Netherlands, produces cars for several car companies. In the last few years, the organisation has undergone several reorganisations due to a reduction in demand. The maximum production capacity counts an annual production of 300,000 cars, but today the annual production is only 70,000 cars. From the 6,500 employment places, currently only 3,000 remain and since last year this number has had to be decreased further to 1300. In order to achieve this reduction in a sensitive manner, the company has set up together with the Province Limburg, the municipality Sittard-Geleen, CWI (employment agency), UWV (unemployment benefit agency) and several knowledge centres (social partners) and reintegration- and placement agencies, the 'MCA' which stands for Mobility Centre Automotive.

This Mobility Centre is involved in a unique cooperation with multiple parties to translate the competences of Nedcar employees into competences recognized in the labour market. Employees can volunteer for this procedure. In the first three months that the Centre was set up, 950 employees had already registered.

The cooperation technique ensures several steps: (1) The CWI (Employment Agency) tests the competences of the employees, subsequently (2) Kenteq (social partner knowledge centre) translates these competences in labour market competences and acknowledges these in an e-portfolio of the employee, then (3) the UWV and municipal social service help the employee into a new job or into education & training.

⁵⁰ Magazine, December 2006, Knowledge Centre EVC. Retrieved 18 August 2007: http://www.leren-werken.nl/html/documenten/parkstadlimburg_evc_magazine_dec2006.pdf

5.0 The Third sector

EVC is increasingly used in the volunteer sector, among others in sports clubs, scouting and the Red Cross. EVC is particularly used in this sector to show how volunteer work can contribute to the learning of an individual. This supports both the recruitment of new volunteers and offers “current” volunteers the possibility to validate the competences they have acquired⁵¹.

EVC-procedures are either set up within the individual volunteer organisation or through umbrella organisations. Movisie (a merger of among others NIZW and Civiq) is an umbrella organisation which started in 2001 with several EVC projects which have now led to a finalised EVC-procedure for Dutch volunteer organisations. The EVC certificate which the volunteer receives after finishing the procedure includes a maximum of 12 competences. These competences have been determined through consultation with volunteer organisations and are also based on EVC-procedures from other fields (education and the labour market)⁵².

Where EVC has been introduced by individual volunteer organisations, the quality is still relatively low. These projects mostly deal with identifying what competences exist in the volunteer sector and how they can be used, instead of formally recognising competences. Although it lacks professionalism, these are the first steps towards more mature EVC-procedures in voluntary work⁵³.

An example of an individual volunteer organisation which has started to implement EVC more professionally is the Dutch Scout Association in the Dutch province Gelderland. This organisation started with EVC in 1993 and in 1997 they developed a portfolio for volunteers in the Scout organisation. This raised a lot of questions: what competences should scouts have to do their job well, what can the scouts currently do and what are they missing? This led to the development of a core competence profile for the scout volunteer. Currently three profiles have been set up and have been developed further in cooperation with the SITO-test desk to gain external recognition. The Scout Association in Gelderland has also become a recognised internship provider for studies in sport and movement, SPW and SCW⁵⁴. The Project Unit Learning & Working is now in negotiation with the

⁵¹ Duvekot, R, Kaemingk, E, Klarus, R, 2003, People learn anyway! The use of VPL on the Dutch labour market in *Opleiding & Ontwikkeling* 11/2003, pp. 10-15

⁵² *Herkennen van competencies*, MOVISIE & CIVIQ. Retrieved 18 August: <http://www.civiq.nl/emc.asp?pageld=2104>

⁵³ Duvekot, R, Kaemingk, E, Klarus, R, 2003, People learn anyway! The use of VPL on the Dutch labour market in *Opleiding & Ontwikkeling* 11/2003, pp. 10-15

⁵⁴ *Extra sociale meerwaarde voor vrijwilligerswerk*, 2006, EVC Kenniscentrum. Retrieved 18 August 2007: http://www.scoutinggelderland.nl/images/stories/PDF/ssg_press.pdf

Scouting Gelderland and the Youth Council to offer them a subsidy to continue their EVC work⁵⁵.

Another example is the volunteer organisation Vrijwilligerscentrale Utrecht which has – in cooperation with the reintegration company BOA - developed a project “Practiceschool for females” which focuses on offering low-skilled females work experience in a volunteer organisation. They subsequently – through the use of EVC – identify the main competences that participants have learned during the internship to offer them more opportunities in the labour market⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ Ministry of Social Affairs and employment, information provided by email: 22/08/2007

⁵⁶ *Praktijkschool*, Vrijwilligerscentrale Utrecht. Retrieved 18 August 2007: <http://www.vrijwilligerscentrale-utrecht.nl/index.cfm?action=content&contentid=W8OD5WN9>

6.0 Take-up rate of EVC and the future

There are no large summary documents available yet with clear figures on the take-up rate of EVC within the Netherlands over the years. It is estimated that by 2002, approximately 6,000 persons within 500 organisations have followed an EVC procedure⁵⁷. The EVC Knowledge Centre estimates that the numbers have doubled since 2002 due to the rising popularity of EVC among employers and a spread of the use of EVC-procedures⁵⁸.

It is estimated that almost 40% of the EVC-procedures are aimed at providing individuals with a nationally recognised diploma; in approximately 30% of cases, concrete follow-up activities have been organised to further develop the individual's competences. The last 30% aims at the possibilities of promotion, the selection of staff or a division of tasks⁵⁹.

It is interesting to note that the majority of the EVC procedures are particularly aimed at competence level at upper secondary/post-secondary VET level (MBO). This is not only due to the fact that most labour market positions are placed at this level but also because of the availability of a ready-usable standard - the VET qualification structure which is based on competences. Such a standard based on competences is not available on tertiary VET level because each tertiary VET institute is left free to develop its own standard. For this reason, tertiary VET institutes mostly only apply EVC procedures to offer possible exemptions to new students.

Below we offer an overview of the number of EVC procedures started through agreements with the Project Unit Learning & Working, outside the Project Unit's agreements and some sector-specific information.

6.1 EVC procedures started through agreements with the Project Unit Learning & Working

As we have seen before, the Project Unit Learning & Working of the Dutch government has set itself the goal to stimulate the development of an additional 20,000 EVC procedures by 1 October 2007. To realise this goal, the Project Unit works together with

⁵⁷ Beek, H. van & Duvekot, R. (2007) National Review of the Netherlands, VPL, March 2007

⁵⁸ This particular information was given in a short telephone interview with Mr. R. Duvekot, director of the knowledge center EVC in Houten, the Netherlands.

⁵⁹ Duvekot, R, Kaemingk, E, Klarus, R, 2003, People learn anyway! The use of VPL on the Dutch labour market in *Opleiding & Ontwikkeling 11/2003, pp. 10-15*

sectoral and regional partners who have committed themselves to carrying out a certain number of EVC procedures through an agreement with the Project Unit.

At the moment, the Project Unit has agreed with 45 institutions a certain approach and a certain number of EVC applications to be processed. In total, the ambition of the organisations is to support 23,117 new EVC candidates, of which on 1 February 2007 only 4,149⁶⁰ (including extra actions outside the set ambitions) have been achieved. This means that almost 20% of the target had actually been achieved by 1 February 2007. When we compare the actual progress with the goal to establish 20,000 new EVC procedures, the percentage of EVC procedures carried out is only 21%⁶¹, which is worryingly low so close to the deadline. According to estimates, if the trend continues in the same way, only 51% of the promised EVC applications will actually be completed. Below an overview is given of the completed EVC procedures before 1 February 2007.

Table 6.1 EVC-procedures started before 1 February 2007 under the Project Unit Learning & Working, by EVC provider

EVC provider	Target	Number of EVC procedures carried out
Knowledge Centre EVC	3000	1.719
Rotterdam		370*
Eindhoven	1.070	210
Rivierenland	1.500	274
Groningen	870	265
Den Haag	1500	120
Construction	900	47
Achterhoek	1.250	80

⁶⁰ Interesting to note is that the majority of realised EVC procedures (70%) have been achieved by the EVC Knowledge Centre, the importance of other players in EVC remains thus small.

⁶¹ Westerhuis, A, Huisman, T, 2007, *Kwantitatieve monitoring duale en EVC trajecten, Projectdirectie Leren&Werken, resultaten derde peiling (1 February 2007)*, CINOP

Consumption goods	1.250	450
Green knowledge cooperation	950	80
Car body branch	350	131
Rijn Gouwe	500	13
NHN	650	0
HBA	330	33
Zeeland	500	63
Utrecht	500	1
Noordoost Brabant	500	1
Parkstad Limburg	500	116
Zwolle	500	95
Helmond	500	81
Total	21.270	4.149

Source: Westerhuis, A, Huisman, T, 2007, *Kwantitatieve monitoring duale en EVC trajecten, Projectdirectie Leren&Werken, resultaten derde peiling (1 February 2007), CINOP*

When examining the number of completed procedures more closely, it becomes apparent that of the actual procedures of which details are known (approximately half of the total number of procedures), the majority is developed in the context of vocational education (upper secondary level, MBO level 2) although in recent years the number of beneficiaries not officially registered education involved in EVC has increased (from 8% in 2006 to 18% in 2007 of EVC beneficiaries). The EVC procedure "assistant food processing technology" has been the most popular, followed by "chief of storage" and "knowledgeable assistant food processing technology 3". A difference can be noted between the preferences of male and female participants: for male participants, the most popular EVC procedure has been "assistant food processing technology" while for female participants the most popular EVC procedure has been "branch manager retail". According to statistical data gathered on the realised procedures, a typical Dutch EVC participant (62%) is male (81%) native Dutch (90%) and employed (84%). When examining the age of EVC beneficiaries the

majority of EVC participants are between the ages 30 and 49 (37% falls in the age-group 40-49 and 28% falls in the age-group 30-39)⁶².

6.2 Other EVC actions, carried out outside agreements with the Project Unit Learning & Working

The EVC Knowledge Centre estimates that in 2006 approximately 2,000 procedures have been started up and/or completed outside the agreements with the Project Unit Learning & Working. Of these, 66% have been set up to offer shortened education pathways to the individuals involved; 29% have been set up as part of HRM strategy and 5% due to both⁶³.

Table 6.2 Number of EVC-actions carried out outside the Project Unit Learning & Working in 2006, by EVC provider

EVC provider	Number of EVC procedures
Kenteq	603
AOC Oost	506
People in transfer	309
Friesland foods	224
LSBL	62
Heineken	52
NLW Logistiek Venray	43
Innovam	40
Leaf Holland	37
Schoevers	25
SH & M	24
Vrumona	24

⁶² Westerhuis, A, Huisman, T, 2007, Kwantitatieve monitoring duale en EVC trajecten, Projectdirectie Leren&Werken, resultaten derde peiling (1 February 2007), CINOP

⁶³ Some important EVC-providers could not provide figures yet and are thus not included in this total.

NC OI	20
Abbott Zwolle	17
Total	1986

Source: Monitor gebruik EVC in 2006, EVC Knowledge Centre. Retrieved 16/08/2007: www.kenniscentrumevc.nl

6.3 Sector-specific information

Within the health and social care sector, EVC is particularly used to find new competent employees⁶⁴. It is estimated that in this sector approximately 1,000 persons have undergone an EVC procedure and that this number will increase rapidly in the future⁶⁵. Within the metal sector, it is mentioned that EVC is predominantly used to up-skill current staff and to offer them further career opportunities⁶⁶. It is estimated that approximately 10% of the organisations in the metal and electronics sector (mostly large metal companies) already use EVC and 25% of the organisations in this branch believe that EVC will become an important part of their future HRM policy⁶⁷. In the building industry EVC is mostly used to help employees move on to related sectors⁶⁸.

6.4 Barriers for greater take-up of EVC

The following factors and circumstances are mentioned that can be seen as barriers to greater take-up of EVC⁶⁹:

- The lack of custom-made procedures in the learning process, whereas EVC is implying just that
- Lack of confidence of participants in the quality of the assessments.
- Fear of employers, that the recognition of competences will lead to more diplomas and through this to higher salary demands

⁶⁴ Duvekot, R, Kaemingk, E, Klarus, R, 2003, People learn anyway! The use of VPL on the Dutch labour market in *Opleiding & Ontwikkeling* 11/2003, pp.10-15

⁶⁵ Beek, H. van & Duvekot, R. (2007) National Review of the Netherlands, VPL, March 2007

⁶⁶ Duvekot, R, Kaemingk, E, Klarus, R, 2003, People learn anyway! The use of VPL on the Dutch labour market in *Opleiding & Ontwikkeling* 11/2003, pp.10-15

⁶⁷ Beek, H. van & Duvekot, R. (2007) National Review of the Netherlands, VPL, March 2007

⁶⁸ Duvekot, R, Kaemingk, E, Klarus, R, 2003, People learn anyway! The use of VPL on the Dutch labour market in *Opleiding & Ontwikkeling* 11/2003, pp.10-15

⁶⁹ Duvekot, R, Kaemingk, E, Klarus, R, 2003, People learn anyway! The use of VPL on the Dutch labour market in *Opleiding & Ontwikkeling* 11/2003, pp.10-15

- Fear of employers, that EVC will lead to recognition of competences of their employees leading to more competition to hire their employees.
- Rigid legislation that complicates flexible custom-made procedures.
- Lack of competence-based thinking in higher academic education, particularly in universities. A discussion is needed to understand “academic competences”: how can you recognize them and how do you assess if individuals possess them?

7.0 Conclusions

The Dutch government has taken since the 1990s a stimulating, not regulating approach towards EVC, in order to offer all stakeholders the chance to experiment, without immediately being bound to any rules and expectations. The EVC Knowledge Centre was set up in 2000 to study, accumulate and distribute information on these experiments and to ensure the different stakeholders would exchange information and expertise. Currently, the EVC Knowledge Centre is assigned to the Project Unit Learning & Working of the Ministries of Education and Social Affairs. This Unit has set itself the aim to stimulate the development of an additional 20,000 EVC procedures by 2007. To achieve this aim, they have signed covenants with different institutions to carry out a certain number of EVC-procedures. At the moment, the actual number of completed EVC procedures is behind the target, so it is questionable whether the aim will be achieved.

One of the latest developments in EVC in the Netherlands has been the development of a quality code in a covenant signed by all relevant stakeholders. The code has been set up for the following goals: to make EVC more transparent; to make it clear what EVC entails; and to show how EVC should be offered. The code safeguards the quality of EVC through an evaluation procedure of EVC-providers. When EVC-providers receive a positive evaluation they become a “recognised” EVC-provider. The EVC Knowledge Centre bears responsibility for the code and its implementation.

The EVC procedure consists of five phases: (1) commitment and awareness of the value of one’s competences, (2) recognition of competences, (3) assessment of competences, (4) further development of competences and advice and (5) embedding competence-based development process into a personal or organisation steered and owned policy. In the second phase of recognising competences, the participant typically needs to compile a portfolio showing “authentic evidence” of his or her competences. This portfolio is subsequently assessed in the fourth phase, often in combination with an interview, test, demonstration, presentation or observation during work. The crucial element is here that assessors assess the competences of the individual against a set standard. The assessment is then written up in an EVC report, possibly leading to a validation of competences through certificates, part-certificates, diplomas or a career move and advice on what follow-up steps should be taken regarding education and career opportunities.

EVC is particularly strong in upper secondary and post-secondary vocational education, possibly because these types of education are typically focused on the acquisition of skills and professional competences which fits well with EVC. In higher education, EVC is much

less commonly used, although increasingly HE institutes are trying to include more EVC in their policies, particularly regarding admission procedures and the offering of exemptions.

The Dutch social partners play a large role in the implementation of EVC in the Netherlands sector-wide. Different sectors in the Netherlands have included EVC in their Collective Labour Agreements (CAOs) and many Training Funds (O&O Fondsen) finance these EVC agreements. When an employee works in one of these sectors, they can request EVC, otherwise they are very much dependent on the willingness of the employer to cooperate.

Although no comprehensive overview exists, it seems that the number of individual companies – especially larger enterprises - involved in EVC is increasing slowly. The belief among employers is growing that employees learn by doing and that certification helps both the company and employee to indicate what competences are present.

In the third sector, EVC is either set up by individual volunteer organisations or umbrella organisations. Many projects are still very much in the start-up phase but some are developing rapidly in full-scale EVC-procedures. EVC is particularly used to show how volunteer work can contribute to someone's learning. It supports the recruitment of new volunteers and offers "current" volunteers a chance to validate their acquired competences.