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

Netherlands - By Cohen Zoon  
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## **1.0 VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING IN NETHERLANDS**

*By Cohen Zoon (ECORYS Netherlands)*

### **1.1 Introduction**

In the previous years, there has been increased attention relating non-formal and informal learning in The Netherlands. During the 1990's the first national policy outlines were presented, following from the attention that was already given to the concept of lifelong learning. Nowadays, several branches and companies have started initiatives in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In the Netherlands, EVC (Erkenning Verworven Competenties – Recognition of Acquired Skills) is the term used for the validation of non-formal or informal learning<sup>1</sup>. Where the abbreviation EVC is used in this paper, we intend to say validation of non-formal or informal learning.

In the first paragraph, initiatives regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning in The Netherlands will be described. Most initiatives are taking place at a decentralized level. Sub-national and sectoral organisations are indeed stimulated by the national government to implement procedures, but it remains a matter of free choice for these organizations to start initiatives and to design procedures. Nevertheless, several industry branches and companies have set up initiatives to link the competences that employees have learned by doing with formal qualification structures. Also voluntary organisations gradually start working on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

In the third paragraph, the responsibilities of the stakeholders of EVC are described. We'll see that sectoral organisations hold the key for stimulating EVC. The end of the paper consists of the concluding remarks.

### **1.2 Review of existing initiatives: Public Sector**

While the Dutch government has decided to take a bottom-up approach regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning, there are not many direct initiatives taken by national bodies (primarily ministries). Several policy outlines have been made, but since the beginning of 2001, most responsibility has been placed in the hands of the Kenniscentrum EVC (EVC Knowledge Centre). The role of the government, ministries and the Knowledge Centre will be further described in the following chapter, which deals with stakeholders' responsibilities.

While there is a clear qualification structure on the level of lower vocational education and training (MBO), most of the EVC-initiatives have been introduced on this level. EVC is

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

perceived as a tool for stimulating economic effects. The perspective is that it enhances transparency on the labour market and increases the efficiency of the certification of skills and competences. Long-term formal education is replaced by a quick scan of people's abilities to fulfill tasks and to formalize them. As a result, employers do not have to wait for an indication of the competences of their workers<sup>2</sup>. Because economic profits are expected from EVC, the responsibility for it is placed in the hands of the Ministry of Economic Affairs. This ministry has not formulated strict rules and regulations, but a couple of preconditions instead, which sectoral organisations and employers may use as a guideline for setting up EVC procedures:

- Existence of facilities for assessment-procedures;
- Accessibility towards the procedures;
- System for quality-assurance of the procedures;
- Practical qualification standards;
- Stimulating financial and judicial framework;
- Facilitative (inter) national framework;
- Effectiveness and efficiency calculation;

The main reason for the position of the Ministry of Economic Affairs is the typical Dutch way to set up these kinds of initiatives. In the so-called *poldermodel*, social partners and other parties cooperate on a sub-national and sectoral level to arrange policy outlines. National governmental bodies are reticent towards initiatives like EVC.

An exception to the decentralized policies of EVC in The Netherlands is the *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've graduated and started working. On a national level, standards are going to be formulated to certify that teachers dispose of necessary qualifications<sup>3</sup>.

The main reason to set up this law is the shortage of labour the educational sector, which had to be dealt with. While there is a lack of certificated people, the government tries to make it attractive to people with certain qualifications, to start working in the sector (so-called side streamers). Qualifications learned apart from the formal pathways are recognized through an assessment procedure. If a person's competences meet the qualification structure, he or she is able to work on a job in the educational sector directly. For those who fail to meet certain competences, a training program may be offered first.

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<sup>2</sup> Werkgroep EVC, *De fles is halfvol! Een brede visie op de benutting van EVC*, Ministry of Economic Affairs, 2000

<sup>3</sup> Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, The Hague

### 1.3 Review of existing initiatives: Private Sector

#### 1.3.1 Industry sectors

Since the end of the 1990's, a number of industrial sectors (e.g. house painting industry, meat industry, construction industry, process industry and the care sector). Have set up initiatives regarding EVC on their (sectoral) level. In most cases social partners, sectoral organisations and regional vocational training institutes (ROC's) are involved in setting up EVC-procedures. The Dutch government stimulates these initiatives through the EVC Knowledge Centre.

To participate in an EVC-project, an employee normally has to have around 3 to 5 years of experience in the sector they are working in. The general goal is to validate the competences that employees have learned, by doing them. In some collective labour agreements (e.g. metal industry), employees have been given the right to participate in EVC. In these cases, the employer is formally obliged to help the employee to participate. In practice though, the employee is very much dependent on the willingness of the employer to be involved<sup>4</sup>.

In most cases, an intake meeting/interview with the employee is held first. On the basis of this intake, examiners decide whether the individual is able to participate in an exam or assessment procedure directly. In case not, the individual is offered education or training for improving his or her competences. Afterwards he or she is asked to participate in an exam-procedure for certification of qualifications. In some cases the individual makes a portfolio in which experience is presented by a sum of certificates, notes and projects that have been worked on.

Often, informally acquired competences are matched with procedures, which are part of the Wet Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs (Law on Education and Vocational Training). An examining board produces its own qualification standards<sup>5</sup> in cooperation with representatives of the sectoral organizations. In almost all EVC-procedures the examining board contains representatives of a ROC<sup>6</sup>. It's very much a summative validation process, which focuses on the recognition of competences that were learned after a certain period.

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<sup>4</sup> This particular information was given in a short telephone interview with Mr. R. Duvekot, director of the knowledge center EVC in Houten, the Netherlands.

<sup>5</sup> EVC Kenniscentrum, *Alle hens aan EVC, de verankering van EVC in elke context, jaarplan 2004*, p. 11

<sup>6</sup> Source: Knowledge Center EVC [www.kenniscentrumevc.nl](http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl) / Ministry of Economic Affairs, [www.minez.nl](http://www.minez.nl)

**Best practice example –Introducing EVC in the health care sector: Flexis<sup>7</sup>**

Flexis is an initiative of the Opleidings- en Ontwikkelingsfonds (Education and Development Fund) in the health care sector. The goal of the initiative is to stimulate employees on different levels in the health care sector to work on a basis of formally recognized qualifications. The initiative is a good practice example of EVC. It shows some of the possibilities for both employees and employers. The different projects around Flexis have the following aspects in common:

It focuses on specific groups who (only) dispose of competences that were learned by doing;

- Flexible routes towards learning possibilities, which means the most effective way in which EVC can be recognized;
- Intense cooperation between different regional bodies: schools, training centres, and employment exchange offices;
- A possibility for new types of recruitment: people without formal qualifications, but good competences, may be offered a job during or after following an EVC-program.

Best practice example - Introducing EVC in the Dutch installation sector<sup>8</sup>

Around 40% of the employees in this sector are not formally qualified for the job they have. LOB Intechnum, a sectoral interest organisation, started EVC to formalize the qualifications of employees. The strength of the project is the focus on practical competences instead of formal vocational training standards. Together with an ROC and a private training company, the practical qualifications for several jobs have been identified. Individuals have to work at least 5 years to participate in the EVC-project. After an interview, a portfolio will be made. On the basis of this and another in-depth interview, the interviewer (a representative of ROC) decides whether the employee has shown enough competences for a formalisation of their qualifications. If this is not the case, the individual is offered a training to improve competences; 27 people have been given a certificate since the project started in 2001.

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<sup>7</sup> Education and Development Fund of the health care sector and Flexis ([www.flexis.nl](http://www.flexis.nl))

<sup>8</sup> Knowledge Center EVC

### 1.3.2 *Individual companies*

Although several individual companies have set up EVC-procedures for employees in the last couple of years, a systematic and comprehensive overview on a national level is not available yet. Some of the examples of organisations that have introduced EVC are: Shell, Corus, H.J. Heinz B.V., Auping, Rockwool and BSN Glasspack<sup>9</sup>. 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).

Like in the industry sectors, most EVC-procedures in companies start with an intake-interview, which is arranged by a representative of the human resources/education department. In some cases the individual is asked to make a portfolio. An overview of all experience and expertise of the person is made. On the basis of the portfolio, an examining board will visit the workplace where the employee is asked to fulfill some related tasks. If the employee has shown that they have the required competences, a certificate is provided. Sometimes, the manager of an employee may be involved in the process of recognizing competences. He may be asked for specific background information regarding the competences of the employee.

Another procedure is to make an indication of the competences of the individual directly during the interview. Again, a manager may offer help. If the interviewer assumes that the competences of the individual meet the necessary qualifications, an examination will take place (some weeks after the interview). In case the competences of the employee are not sufficient for a direct examination procedure, a training course is offered to increase competences.

In most EVC-procedures, the examination is executed by representatives; from the regional vocational training centre (ROC). Most companies try to follow the formal regulations, described in the Law on education and vocational training (Wet Educatie en Beroepsopdracht; WEB). It is valued as important, whilst employees receive a certificate with national value. EVC within companies is mostly a matter of summative assessment. Formative validation hardly takes place.

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<sup>9</sup> Een jaar 'Passie & Rendement', Jaarverslag over 2003, EVC Kenniscentrum, 2004

**Best practice example - Introducing EVC at H.J. Heinz B.V.<sup>10</sup>**

Certificates with both a sectoral and national value have been introduced among the employees of Heinz. The new qualification structure is connected with the national regulations in the Wet Educatie Beroepsonderwijs. Heinz hopes to motivate employees to reflect in a better way and to adapt to necessary changes quicker. The employer also strives for more employability among its employees. The translation from informal to formal qualifications has been executed through cooperation with a ROC. Employees have been asked to participate by making a portfolio, which consists of a list of 80 tasks. An employee indicates which tasks he has fulfilled in the last couple of years. Afterwards a 'criteria-focused interview' will be held for a better understanding of a person's competences. An assessment follows, in which the employee executes several tasks. Both an internal and external examiner (ROC), value the employee's competences. From 2001 to 2003, 32 employees attained the EVC-procedure at H.J. Heinz B.V. Half of them were given a certificate directly. The others had to follow a short training program. Heinz B.V. won the national EVC-award in 2003.

**Best practice example - Introducing EVC at BSN Glasspack<sup>11</sup>**

EVC has been introduced to strengthen the market position of BSN Glasspack. While there is no formal education that covers the competences necessary for the production process, BSNGlasspack decided to set up its own educational program. Learning goals have been matched with the regulations, regarding the qualification structure in the Wet Educatie Beroepsonderwijs (Law on Vocational Training and Education). BSNGlasspack turned around the common EVC-procedure. First the production tasks were described, then the educational program was developed. After the program was set up, employees were able to fulfil more tasks on different levels. EVC at BSN Glasspack has become an educational program that is connected with the personal development plan of employees. Through both e-learning and the execution of practical tasks, a personal coach coordinates the process of an employee. If an employee is able to take an exam, the ROC is asked to start the procedure. Around 150 employees have participated in EVC-projects so far. The results will be presented in 2004.

1.3.3 *General output of EVC*

In the so-called EVC-monitor 2001-2002<sup>12</sup>, the output<sup>13</sup> of EVC has been measured on a national and sectoral level. While EVC is a relatively new concept, outputs are hard to measure precisely and particularly qualitative. Monitoring of indication was made in The Netherlands; around 6000 people from f 500 organisations have participated in an EVC-

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<sup>10</sup> Een jaar 'Passie & Rendement', Jaarverslag over 2003, EVC Kenniscentrum, 2004

<sup>11</sup> Knowledge Center EVC; best practices ([www.kenniscentrumevc.nl](http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl))

<sup>12</sup> Hövels, B. & Romijn, C. *EVC-monitor 2001-2002*, kenniscentrum EVC, 2003

<sup>13</sup> See also: Verhaar, C. H. A., *Wat kan EVC opleveren?: Onderzoek naar het rendement van EVC in de Nederlandse praktijk anno 2002*, Lemma, 2002

project<sup>14</sup>. The knowledge centre EVC estimates that, because of the rising popularity with employers and a spread of the use of EVC-procedures around employment exchange and the reintegration market, the numbers have increased with 50% since 2002<sup>15</sup>. More qualitative material shows that HR-departments have started to use EVC-techniques to work on the employability of employees (sometimes through competence management<sup>16</sup>). Although most employers have not seen a strong increase in the productivity of their organization, they feel there is commitment of the personnel as well as consciousness regarding competences that are necessary for the execution of tasks. Employees have been given a certificate and say they have gained self-confidence.

#### **1.4 Review of existing initiatives: The Third Sector**

The knowledge centre EVC states in its work plan for 2004: *‘There are 3.000.000 volunteers in the Netherlands. These people acquire all kinds of non-formal competences during their activities. These may be relevant according to the development of their individual working lives. The development of individual working lives can be designed inside and outside voluntary organisations’*<sup>17</sup>.

It should be stressed that, as far as there are concrete initiatives to formalize non-formal learning in the voluntary sector, this takes place either within the organisations themselves or the umbrella organization for voluntary work: CIVIQ. The first developments started at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since 2001, the Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sport is monitoring and stimulating the process through a project in cooperation with the knowledge centre on EVC, CIVIQ and NIZW (Dutch Institute for Care and Welfare).

In the beginning, the project was aimed to analyze the feasibility of EVC in the voluntary sector. Currently, the focus is more on the development of concrete instruments and developing commitment among the voluntary organisations of CIVIQ. There already has been a general competence profile developed for the competences acquired in voluntary work. This will be officially launched in 2005.

In 2002, CINOP published the study ‘Vrijwilligers en EVC’ (Volunteers and EVC) in which the present and future role of EVC towards voluntary work is presented. Some examples of EVC and voluntary work were published. In the health care sector it seems possible to shorten the period a student is studying for his or her degree. Through an EVC-procedure he or she can show that some competences are already learned during voluntary activities. Another

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<sup>14</sup> Duvekot, R., Kaemingk, E., Klarus, R. *Leren doe je toch, het gebruik van EVC op de arbeidsmarkt*, Opleiding en Ontwikkeling, 2003

<sup>15</sup> This particular information was given in a short telephone interview with Mr. R. Duvekot, director of the knowledge center EVC in Houten, the Netherlands.

<sup>16</sup> A good example can be found in the HR-policies at Shell. The HR-department tries to make employees conscious of the (individual) possibilities to work on their employability.

<sup>17</sup> EVC Kenniscentrum, *Alle hens aan EVC, de verankering van EVC in elke context, jaarplan 2004*.

example is the national Scout Association (Jamboree)<sup>18</sup>. The Association has developed instruments for its members to report competences that were learned during scouting activities as leaders, team leaders and group guides on curriculum vitae. Finally, some educational bodies in The Netherlands recognize competences that were learned during voluntary work. In some cases credits or exemptions are given<sup>19</sup>. In most of the described cases, portfolios are used for measuring the competences that individuals have acquired during voluntary activities.

According to a study published in June 2003<sup>20</sup>, several Dutch voluntary organisations have started to introduce EVC procedures. The quality of these procedures is still quite low. It's a matter of *talking* on competences instead of *recognition* of competences. Sometimes certificates are given to volunteers or portfolio procedures are followed. Although it lacks professionalism, these are the first steps towards more mature EVC-procedures in voluntary work.

One such example is the Netherlands Institute for Care and Welfare (NIZW) and CIVIQ (the national volunteer umbrella organisation) are since 2001 running a project called EVC and volunteer work: the main aim is to develop a recognition system for the voluntary sector. The Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sports is financing this project. This year we developed a general competence profile for the competences acquired in volunteer work. We already did some pre-testing and it will be launched during this year.

Most voluntary organisations seem to be positive when it comes to the effects of EVC. They expect that increasing numbers of people may start working as a volunteer, particularly if competences are formalized, which strengthens the position on the labor market. In other words, voluntary organisations themselves expect to profit from the introduction of EVC.

It seems clear that in the upcoming years, more attention will be given to the validation of non-formal and informal learning in voluntary work. An important aim for CIVIQ and NIZW, EVC and the Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sport is to increase the quality of EVC procedures in voluntary organisations. This seems to be both in the interest of lifelong learning as well as voluntary work itself<sup>21</sup>.

In the yearbook 2004<sup>22</sup>, the knowledge centre on EVC, presents an article on the current developments with regard to EVC in voluntary work. It covers an explanation of the chances

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<sup>18</sup> The Dutch Red Cross makes use of EVC for volunteers as well.

<sup>19</sup> Nafzger, J. 'Vrijwilligers en EVC, verkenning van het EVC-potentieel in vrijwilligerswerk, CINOP, 2002

<sup>20</sup> Dam, E. & Frietman, J. 'Wenselijkheid en haalbaarheid van het erkennen van competenties van vrijwilligers', Kenniscentrum Beroepsopleiding Arbeidsmarkt, June 2003

<sup>21</sup> See also: *Vrijwilligers en EVC – een globale verkenning van de stand van zaken in een aantal Europese landen*, Nederlands Instituut voor Zorg en Welzijn (NIZW), 2002

<sup>22</sup> Duvekot, R & Brouwer, J., *Het brede perspectief van EVC, jaarboek 2004*, Kenniscentrum EVC, Utrecht, 2004 (Chapter 7 by M. van Houten & E. Hofman, *EVC in het vrijwilligerswerk*)

for voluntary work to implement an instrument like EVC. According to the authors, the conditions seem to be there to come up with a system in which competences of volunteers are recognized. It is believed that recognizing competences of volunteers may be of great value for society at large.

On the other hand, the authors also stress that there is still a lot of work that needs to be done. The voluntary sector itself has to clarify the added value when it comes to EVC among volunteers. Nowadays, there is a very strong focus on the activities of voluntary organisations instead of how their goals can be achieved. Providing information to employers on selecting volunteers for jobs should be improved.

## **1.5 Stakeholders' responsibilities**

### **1.5.1 Dutch government**

There exist hardly any laws and regulations regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning in The Netherlands. While initiatives regarding EVC are primarily placed in the hands of interest bodies, social partners and sectoral organisations, the Dutch government has chosen a bottom-up method for the stimulation and implementation of EVC<sup>23</sup>.

The appearance of the report 'Kwaliteiten Erkennen' (Recognizing Informal Skills), which was written by the Commission on the Recognition of Informally Acquired Skills in 1994, was the general start for placing the validation of non-formal and informal learning (EVC) on the Dutch policy agenda. EVC is aimed to establish a basis for life long learning and employability. 'The concept refers to the process of validation of acquired competences, by identification and validation, resulting – if appropriate – in recognition of competencies'<sup>24</sup>.

During the end of the 1990's, the Dutch government focused their attention on the recognition of EVC. The general view has been that the concept should be decentralized (to sectoral industry levels) and output-oriented<sup>25</sup>. EVC was seen as a tool for strengthening the ties between labour and education and as a solution for problems around shortages on some parts of the labour market. For EVC the government has nowadays a budget of €3.4 million.

An EVC workgroup was set up to investigate the future possibilities of the concept. Their outline was published in 2000, under the title '*The bottle is half full!*'<sup>26</sup>. The title is based on the assumption that EVC must build further on existing knowledge and skills, instead of focusing on present lacks regarding skills and knowledge.

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<sup>23</sup> SER, '*Het nieuwe leren: advies over een leven lang leren in de kenniseconomie*', 2002

<sup>24</sup> Colardyn, D. & Bjørnåvold, J. , *The learning continuity*, 2004. According to this report, there are more European countries in which there are no references made according to informal and non-formal learning.

<sup>25</sup> SER, '*Het nieuwe leren: advies over een leven lang leren in de kenniseconomie*', 2002

<sup>26</sup> Werkgroep EVC/ Ministerie van Economische Zaken, '*De fles is half vol!*', Den Haag, 2000

### *1.5.2 Ministry of Economic Affairs*

Due to expected economic advantages of EVC, which were described in the overview of existing initiatives, the ministry of Economic Affairs has been given the responsibility for the implementation of EVC on the Dutch labour market. The ministry works closely with three other ministries.

### *1.5.3 Ministry of Education, Culture and Science*

Through the *Wet Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs (WEB)* (Law on Education and Vocational Training), the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science determines and controls qualification structures. EVC-procedures often follow these structures for formally recognized certificates. Another, more specific reason for this Ministry to concentrate on EVC, is the shortage of labour in the educational sector. People with the required competences, but without formal qualifications have been given a chance to start working in this sector. Tools have been developed to recognize people's non-formal and informal competences.

### *1.5.4 Ministry of Work and Social Affairs*

A special 'SZW Agency' of the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs is occupied with the coordination of subsidies from the European Social Fund (ESF). ESF-regulations try to stimulate initiatives of sectoral organisations and employers to formalize non-formal and informal learning among employees. To attend subsidies, these organisations have to write a work plan for the SZW Agency.

### *1.5.5 Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sport*

The Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sport is planning to set up initiatives regarding EVC in the third sector for the following years. Matching acquired competences during voluntary work with formal qualifications. The ministry doesn't participate in the National Knowledge Centre EVC.

### *1.5.6 Sociaal Economische Raad (SER) (Social Economic Advisory Board)*

The general role of the SER is to advise the Dutch government on social-economic trends and initiatives. In 2002, the SER published a report<sup>27</sup> in which the importance of initiatives on the field of EVC was emphasized. According to the SER, the most important goals are to make people more employable on the labour market and to establish a better match between labour market and educational initiatives.

### *1.5.7 Kenniscentrum EVC (Knowledge Centre EVC)*

One of the recommendations of the EVC workgroup was to set up a national knowledge centre. With the financial resources of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Ministry of

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<sup>27</sup> SER, 'Het nieuwe leren: advies over een leven lang leren in de kenniseconomie', 2002

Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the social partners, a consortium of three organisations (Cinop, CitoGroep and STOAS) was given the task to start the national knowledge centre (EVC Kenniscentrum) in 2001<sup>28</sup>. Since 2005, the Knowledge Centre has been put under management of CINOP with STOAS and the Ministry of Agriculture as members of the Steering Group. The centre works closely with COLO (Centraal Orgaan van de Landelijke Opleidingsorganen van het Bedrijfsleven).

The main goal of the centre is to stimulate the implementation of methods in all sectors of the Dutch labour market and to signalize trends and developments regarding EVC. The centre cooperates and informs network-partners (mainly interest groups of professions or industries<sup>29</sup>) about standards and good practices. In general, the national knowledge centre functions as an independent validation body for non-formal and informal learning in The Netherlands.

#### *1.5.8 Centraal Orgaan van de Landelijke Opleidingsorganen van het Bedrijfsleven (COLO)*

COLO is a platform for sectoral knowledge centres on vocational training. The goal is to link qualifications in vocational training with necessary competences on the labour market. Because of the specific intermediary position between labour market and education, the sectoral knowledge centres develop and determine for a large part the qualifications for vocational education in The Netherlands. These qualifications often function as a guideline for EVC. Individual knowledge, skills and attitudes (competencies) of employees are matched with standards taken from the qualification structure. COLO has become the independent standard setting body<sup>30</sup> for non-formal and informal learning in The Netherlands.

#### *1.5.9 Labour Unions*

A central role is played by the labour unions. Through collective labour agreements, these parties have introduced EVC in several sectors. The goal is to have employees work on employability, so their position becomes stronger on the labour market.

#### *1.5.10 Employer organisations*

Most employer organisations are in favour of EVC. Certification leads to an indication and better understanding of the qualifications of employees. Through collective labour agreements, employer organisations make agreements about EVC as well.

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<sup>28</sup> Cinop, Citogroep and STOAS are private organisations, serving educational organisations. All three have experience with EVC.

<sup>29</sup> M. van Dungen, 'Kenniscentrum EVC opgericht', *Cinoptiek.*, 2001, nr. 3 ; p. 6-7

<sup>30</sup> Colardyn, D. & Bjørnåvold, J. *The learning continuity*, 2004. According to this report, there are more European countries in which there are no references made according to informal and non-formal learning. See also <http://www.colo.nl>

### *1.5.11 Opleidings & Ontwikkelingsfondsen (O&O fondsen)*

The agreements about EVC are often financed by the Education & Development Funds (Opleidings- en Ontwikkelingsfondsen). Both employee's and employers pay a small amount of their incomes to these sectoral funds, which have originally been set up to support educational initiatives for employees<sup>31</sup>.

## **1.6 Conclusions**

National, governmental initiatives regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning have primarily taken place during the end of the 1990's. From then on, the Dutch government has taken a bottom-up vision regarding EVC. This led to the start of the Kenniscentrum EVC (National Knowledge Centre) in 2001, which is aimed to support and coordinate the implementation of non-formal and informal learning in The Netherlands. The centre functions as the primary body for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

On both the level of industrial sectors and the individual companies, initiatives regarding EVC have been taken in the last couple of years. Labour unions, employer organisations and the Education and Development Funds have a stimulating role regarding the implementation of EVC. Employees themselves have a relative weak position in claiming access to EVC-procedures; they're dependent on the decision-making of the employer. In most cases the employer pays for the EVC-procedures. A donation from the Education and Development Funds sometimes takes place. Both employees and employers pay a small amount of their incomes to these funds.

Procedures in industry sectors and companies start in most cases with an intake interview. Following from that, a portfolio procedure or assessment is followed. A combination of these activities is a possibility as well. Summative assessment occurs more often than formative assessment.

To strive for a broad recognition of competences (sectoral and national), regulations are followed; in particular the Wet op Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs (Law on Education and Vocational Training). Representatives of ROC's (Regional Development Centres) are mostly asked to participate in the examiners board.

While we deal with a relatively new concept, the output of EVC is not that clear yet. Nevertheless, both employees and employers seem to be enthusiastic about the possibilities and first outcomes.

In the third sector, the first initiatives have been set up recently. In the last two years, several research and policy documents have been published that underline the possibilities of EVC for both the volunteers as well as the third sector itself. Volunteers may use the formalization of their competences in career-development. The voluntary sector may become more

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<sup>31</sup> Hövels, B. en Romijn, C., *Implementatie van EVC: rendement, toegankelijkheid en knelpunten, deelrapportage bij de EVC monitor 2001-2002*. Kenniscentrum EVC.

attractive in itself as well. The Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sport, the Knowledge centre on EVC, CIVIQ and NIZW monitor and stimulate the developments on EVC in the voluntary sector. They have developed a general competence profile for the competences acquired in volunteer work, which will be launched in 2005.

Currently, EVC in The Netherlands is entering a transition phase. More and more enterprises have integrated EVC in general HRM-policies. This is a sign that, in the following years, the focus is going to be much more on structural processes instead of incidental activities. After all the steps that have been taken, it is essential to emphasize the structural implementation of EVC. If a structural perspective is not going to be developed, there seems to be a chance that the validation of non-formal and informal learning becomes a one-day-fly.

Mr. Ruud Duvekot, director of the Knowledge Centre EVC mentions the following points of attention for the next couple of years:

- Structural integration of EVC at the HRM-departments of individual companies;
- Tearing down barriers. EVC is a general process that spreads across the borders of organisations, regions and qualifications.
- Increasing the responsibility of employees themselves for taking initiatives regarding EVC. It's not only the employer who should introduce EVC in an organization.
- Initiatives of social partners and local public bodies should be stimulated. The national bodies (Ministries) should give as much freedom to the validation of non-formal and informal learning on these levels as possible. EVC is a local and sectoral aspect.
- Structural financial resources for implementing EVC (not only incidental resources) have to be facilitated.
- A quality indication for EVC-procedures should be developed. Enterprises wish to know what outputs can be expected.