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

Examples of Good Practice - Scouting Gelderland, The Netherlands

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1.0 EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE - SCOUTING GELDERLAND (THE NETHERLANDS)

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1.1 Introduction

This case-study provides a description of a portfolio based model for validating informal learning gained during voluntary activity for scouting groups in Gelderland.

Scouting Gelderland is one of the regional offices for the support of Scouting and Guiding in the Netherlands, based in the province of Gelderland. Overall, 30 000 volunteers work for the Scouting in the Netherlands. The portfolio receives subsidies of the Province of Gelderland and additional funding for the CITO project by the Knowledge Centre on the Valuation of Prior Learning (Kenniscentrum EVC).

The profolio model has been developed and supported by a large partnership from Public/ State bodies, private organisations and Third Sector organisations, as summarised on the Table below.

Table 1 Partnership Scouting Gederland Validation initiatives

Sector	Names of organisation
Public/state bodies	Province of Gelderland, Civiq (used to be SVM), EVC Knowledge Centre, CITO (educational), OVDB (educational), CINOP, European Youth Programme
Private organisations	Institutions for vocational education
Voluntary organisations/NGOs/ other civil society organisations	Other volunteer organisations like the Red Cross, LAVA and Spectrum

1.2 Aims and objectives

There are four main reasons why Scouting Gelderland became involved in an initiative to validate non-formal learning:

1. Many Scouting Volunteers experience difficulties in achieving recognition for the experience they acquire during their volunteer work. Scouting Gelderland therefore wanted to recognise competences acquired by their volunteers in order to acknowledge their efforts;
2. It was felt that validation initiatives might make the volunteer work within the organisation more attractive for young people;
3. Scouting Gelderland also wanted to increase recognition not only of the work and efforts of individual volunteers, but also of the entire Scouting organisation. Because

of their validation initiative, the Scouting organisation is now taken much more seriously by education institutions for example.

4. There was a desire within the organisation to properly establish and document the skills expected from group leaders, taking into account the needs of their team members.

1.3 How was the project developed?

In 1998, the Scouting organisation in Gelderland decided to address the issue that their many volunteers were not given adequate recognition for the experience and expertise they gained while volunteering. Consequently, Scouting Gelderland worked together with SVM (Stichting Vrijwilligers Management), a national organisation for the support of volunteer work, to identify appropriate validation mechanisms. Due to a lack of time and resources, the project developed relatively slowly until 2003 when the project received funding from the province of Gelderland to develop a set of validation instruments. The aim was to develop instruments which could be easily transferred to other volunteer organisations and recognized in other sectors. At the same time the Civiq (Instituut vrijwillige inzet, which used to be SVM) received a subsidy from the Ministry of Health and Sports to set up a parallel project examining general competency profiles together with NIZW (Innovatie partner in zorg en welzijn). The two organisations now regularly have contact with Scouting Gelderland through feedback meetings, workshops and other meetings.

1.4 Policy background

In the Netherlands, there is a substantial amount of best practice in the area of the validation of informal and non-formal learning, but no ‘common practice’. The validation of informal learning is being more rapidly developed for people with high skills (university entry systems) and with very low skills (disadvantaged groups) and less developed for individuals with middle range skill levels. It was suggested that this policy area could benefit from greater support from the Dutch government, particularly as it was felt that the Netherlands had fallen behind in comparison to other European countries with respect to government initiatives in the field of validation of informal and non-formal learning.

1.5 Activities

The project of Scouting Gelderland involves the following activities:

1) Setting up of profiles

The organisation has developed three different competency profiles for volunteers – one for ‘leaders’, one for ‘team leaders’ and one for ‘group guides’. Profiles were built up through looking at the competencies held by current leaders, and discussions with volunteers about what support they would ideally like from a leader.

2) *Providing training*

Volunteers are not always aware of the extent of their skills and knowledge when building their profiles. Scouting Gelderland therefore uses training to raise awareness of these competencies. A Swiss model ‘the CH-Q (<http://www.ch-q.ch/>)’ has been used to develop this training. Scouting Gelderland found about this model through the Knowledge-centre, and adapted it to the Dutch context. The training consists of three steps:

- what am I good in?
- how should I formulate my expertise?
- where can I actually use it?

Training methods included work with the ‘Star’ methodology (looking at Situations, Tasks, types of Action and Results), and ‘quality cards’ which help people to establish what kind of qualities they have, and what qualities are needed in various professions.

3) *Developing the Portfolios*

Each volunteer receives a portfolio describing the tasks and competencies required for their position, and appropriate competencies to aspire towards in the future. The portfolio gives the volunteer the opportunity to provide evidence for all the skills that they have learnt, and encourages volunteers to describe their skills using terms which will be understandable by future employers and educational institutions.

4) *Becoming acknowledged as a “learn firm” (Erkenning van leerbedrijf) in the Netherlands*

In the Netherlands, institutions of professional education (beroepsopleiding) are able to send their students to ‘learning firms’ (see www.ovdb.nl) to continue their learning in different settings. Through their involvement in the validation of learning, many scouting groups in Gelderland have now become officially registered as ‘learning firms’ for students who need to gain experience with working with youngsters. This opens many doors for Scouting Gelderland for more cooperation with educational institutions in the future.

1.6 *How is learning assessed?*

The Scouting Gelderland initiative is centered around on a ‘portfolio based model’ which is currently being actively promoted by the Kenniscentrum EVC (Dutch Knowledge Centre on the Valuation of Prior Learning). The focus is on individuals – learners, job seekers, volunteers, citizens- as it is the Centres belief that you cannot have a dynamic field of life-long learning if individuals are not part of the process. This represents a shift from a policy focus on institutions and the relationships between them (governments, social partners, education institutes/private public learning centres) towards one based on individual needs and learning plans. The centre believes that with the right support people can develop their own learning models, and learning careers based on identifying current competencies and future competencies they would like to develop. The centre advocates the right for every individual to have a personal portfolio, and a biannual update of such a portfolio with an advisor if needed.

The centre feels that if you start with an individual based portfolio methodology, the rest of the learning process will follow automatically as individuals seek out training to build on their identified needs.

The key steps to building up a portfolio are:

- 1) Finding out what the individual would like to do with their life: identifying goals and setting ambitions
- 2) Offering competence descriptions for tasks the individual is already carrying out
- 3) Adding descriptions of competencies which are 'in the neighborhood' of these tasks and which relate to the individuals future aspirations. This is the phase where teachers, trainers, career guiders come in to identify the potential for development of each individual. The aim is to empower people rather than exclude them from progressing further, and sensitive assessment mechanisms are used to keep people in the learning system

Kenniscentrum EVC takes the view that assessment should be flexible, and based on criteria related interviews, tests and analysis of portfolios by third parties. They recognize however, that this can make it more difficult for portfolios to be recognized by other organisations and institutions, and that the current 'bottom up' development of methods of validation of informal learning in Netherlands could undermine the transferability of such forms of certification.

EVC see individual portfolios as a bridge between personal ambitions and competencies and the work floor. They feel that in many countries, training provision is perhaps adapting too much to the demands of employers rather than the demands of individuals whereas educational supply should make a match between the needs identified in individual portfolios and the demands of employers.

1.7 How was the project managed and monitored?

The project was managed by Scouting Gelderland, with various theme groups being set up for the daily management of activities, supervised by the staff of Scouting Gelderland (of which Jo Peeters is a member). Volunteers are also highly involved in the design and implementation of the activities. The monitoring committee consists of members of the Civiq, Knowledge Centre, Province of Gelderland, Colleague volunteer organisations, and two people from the education sector (OVDB- Knowledge Centre for learning in practise in health, welfare, sports and service and professional education institute).

There is relatively little quantitative information about take-up of these initiatives as yet, however:

- Tests have been undertaken involving 10 to 20 volunteers;
- 50 of the 200 Scouting Groups in the Province of Gelderland are in the process of becoming acknowledged as 'learning firms';

- approximately 30 students are currently gaining experience through Scouting volunteer work in Gelderland. On a national level, many more students are making use of it and many more Scouting Groups are involved because the Scouting organisations in the provinces of Overijssel, Zuid-Holland en Limburg are also involved in similar activities.

1.8 Working in partnership

Scouting Gelderland approached CITO (the Institute responsible for setting up exam procedures in professional/vocational education) to establish how to use ‘educational terminology’ in the setting up of the competence profile. The aim was to achieve a degree of objectivity when describing skills in order to escape ‘scouting jargon’ and ensure the transferability of competency profiles to other organisations and sectors. Funding for this cooperation was provided by the Knowledge-centre for the Acknowledgement of acquired competences (Erkenning van Verworven Competenties Kenniscentrum). Each year they subsidise programs after a selection procedure. Scouting Gelderland delivers competence documentation to CITO who in cooperation with volunteers through response groups translate the language into educational terminology. Scouting Gelderland's work with CITO has been funded by the Kenniscentrum EVC¹, the Dutch Knowledge Centre on the Valuation of Prior Learning.

1.9 Drawing from other European experience

Before developing their volunteer profile, Scouting Gelderland used their existing partnerships and networks to identify good practice and transferable activities from elsewhere in Europe. For example, the original idea for the ‘competency profile’ had already been implemented in the UK, Norway and Switzerland. The CH-Q model had already been piloted in Switzerland. Learning from elsewhere in Europe has helped to save ‘reinventing the wheel’, although it has been important to adapt tools to the specific national context. It was felt, for example, that the UK model for establishing competencies and acquiring promotions was too rigid to be used in the Netherlands.

¹ Kenniscentrum EVC has a mission to work with government, independent and non-profit making organisations to support the development of bottom up life long learning practices through the valuation of prior learning. The centre employs 7.5 FTE people (15 people in total) in addition to extra staff funding through Leonardo and ESF projects.

1.10 Outcomes

- **For the individuals**

There are many short term benefits for individuals who have done competency assessments whilst they are volunteering for Scouting Gelderland. For example, volunteers who have had their prior learning validated can be exempted from following certain formal training courses (formal training is required in particular in relation to working safely with children, dealing with disabilities, communication skills). It was also pointed out that having their skills validated had substantially increased the personal confidence of some volunteers.

When leaving Scouting, the volunteers mostly use their competency profiles to flow into education due to their overall young age profile.

We interviewed a volunteer who had had the following competencies validated through their work at Scouting Gelderland:

- a) Seminar organisation
- b) Leadership skills for working with children
- c) Programming/planning/flexibility/being creative
- d) Budgeting

She identified that having her learning validated had increased her motivation during her volunteering and other professional activities. She had been able to transfer the competence profiling technique to her other work as a social worker. In this context, the profiling of social worker competencies had allowed them to establish new dialogue with their manager in relation to the provision of training/education.

- **For the organisation**

The general profile of Scouting in the Netherlands has been raised, with wider recognition of the efforts made, and skills and knowledge of volunteers. The establishment of scouting groups as 'learning firms' has also given these groups a higher profile and greater recognition by educational institutions.

1.11 Sustainability

Once funding for the current project has finished, Scouting Gelderland will continue to disseminate and implement the project ideas. In addition, Scouting Gelderland has been approved for the pre-proposal stage of a Leonardo da Vinci (Brussels) project to continue their activities.

1.12 Transferability

Scouting Gelderland has successfully transferred its validation models to other organisations through cooperation with external organisations. This has been achieved through:

- cooperation with the members of the monitor committee of the project

- presentation of their project ideas to different conferences (for example educational conferences through the OVDB).
- the involvement of CINOP (Centre for the Innovation of Studies) in discussions concerning the development of the portfolios and related training
- volunteers spreading the model in other areas of their life²

1.13 Dissemination

The Scouting Gelderland project has been particularly strong at disseminating their activities within Europe. The organisation received funding through the European Programme Youth for a seminar that took place from the 20th until the 23rd of January in the Netherlands. Scouting and youth groups attended from Iceland, Norway, Hungary, Greece, Romania, Malta, Latvia, Poland, Sweden, UK, Denmark, Switzerland among others. This seminar involved sharing project results, explaining the instruments that had been developed and discussion and debate with international scouting groups. At the same time, Scouting Gelderland effectively linked up with a parallel seminar, “Bridges of Recognition” in Leuven in Belgium. The idea was developed to place a webcam and an internet access (video-conferencing) in the two seminars so that participants could communicate and build new contacts. Scouting Gelderland is also part of a European network for the exchange of experience also funded by the European Youth Programme. The countries involved are Finland, Netherlands, Belgium, Slovenia, Estonia and the UK.

Scouting Europe organises a European Conference every three years to develop a new European action plan. This conference took place last summer in Iceland and one of the priorities of the new action plan set up was the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

1.14 Success factors and barriers to be overcome

It was felt that the following factors have led to the success of the project:

- Cooperation with external organisations
- The involvement of the volunteers
- Good PR through the organisation of seminars, attending conferences and publishing in professional booklets (vakbladen)

Whereas the following four barriers were identified as preventing people from taking up the validation on offer by Scouting Gelderland:

² The volunteer we interviewed had been able to successfully transfer the competency portfolio technique to the social services organisation she works with.

1. Experience gained through Scouting is often not taken seriously. However this is currently changing because of the cooperation with CITO. The CITO logo on Scouting documentation has already made an important change.
2. Scouting still has an old-fashioned image and consequently does not attract many students to gain experience. However, as students become more enthusiastic about their internship within a Scouting group, they will attract new students;
3. It was felt that the Dutch government is not pushing the validation issue high enough on their agenda.
4. Many employers look negatively at scouting experience put on a CV. It will be important in the future for more networks to be built up with employers to show them the added value of experience acquired in volunteer organisations.

1.15 Looking to the future

When looking towards the future it was felt that the following factors could help support the further development of this type of activity:

At project level

1. More focus should be put on cooperation with employers
2. More assistance should be given to help volunteers how to put their Scouting experience on their CV. For example, the Scouting organisation in the UK has put a CV translator on their website. Netherlands should do the same. (See <http://www.scouts.org.uk/wps/portal/cmd/ad/.ps/X/.c/720/.ce/3307/.p/2907#3307> under Network)

At national policy level

1. More involvement of the Dutch government would improve dissemination.
2. Greater identification at the national level of which competencies are required in which sectors and on which levels.
3. More support for individuals to design a portfolio model to meet their own needs. Advice for portfolios, payment for external assessors etc. Advice on who should take different responsibilities.
4. It would be useful to have extra funding to support subsidies for the costs of infrastructural change which is required by companies and organizations introducing the validation of informal learning
5. More cooperation between the government and social partners in this policy area;
6. More cooperation between different educational levels within the system: there are currently barriers between different educational levels which prevent this type of activity from developing further. For example translating normal secondary school diplomas into competencies is difficult, particularly due to the lack of communication between the initial education system and the post/training system. Building communications mechanisms is a slow process, as it requires cultural change.

At EU policy level

1. EU policy makers should make instruments like EUROPASS more practical – an instrument that could be better adapted to national circumstances
2. There should be more support for a European knowledge network to communicate and transfer examples of practice between different learning cultures.

In conclusion, Scouting Gelderland has taken important first steps to obtain validation of the competences of their volunteers. They have organised large-scale activities and have been successful in finding appropriate partners to address the issue of validation and disseminated their work widely throughout Europe.

In the future, Scouting Gelderland is keen to continue their validation work. With respect to the issue of proportionality, it is important that Scouting Gelderland ensures that their validation activities do not only benefit a limited group of people –their volunteers- but also a wider range of people. It is too early to evaluate at this stage the overall effect of their activities, but the scale of their activities, their success in transferring their validation model to other organisations and the large scale dissemination of their activities, does indicate in the direction that their activities will have –in the longer term- a positive effect on the whole organisation and other volunteer organisations. It is crucial that in the near future, Scouting Gelderland monitors whether their validation activities make volunteer work for Scouting Gelderland more attractive and whether the entire organisation and other volunteer organisations receive greater recognition as learning settings and in their activities in general. If this is the case, the work of Scouting Gelderland will have a long lasting effect on the validation of volunteer work.