

# Access *into* & transition *between* credit-systems in the Netherlands

Background-report on “Credit-systems for lifelong learning, CS3L”

Ruud Duvekot and Marieke Hanekamp  
*Cofora*, The Netherlands

## Introduction

Vocational training is highly influenced by the cultural traditions of the state. This explains why economically similar countries may have created very dissimilar vocational training systems. These systems, with their different principles, activities and capacities provide the context for procedures and/or models of credit-transfer as far as they exist or are planned in the various countries.

If the strategy of the European Union is to be followed, the European Creditsystem for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) should be extended to serve as a Credit System for Lifelong Learning (CS3L). The fact that credit-systems can carry out this function is supported by OECD-research in which “credit-transfer” was found to be one of the five most effective instruments for the improvement of conditions for lifelong learning.

The CS3L-project is planned as a study on credit systems<sup>1</sup> in four countries. The research goal is to find out, if and how models of credit transfer take effect at the interfaces “access” - into the qualification system<sup>2</sup> - and “transition” - within the qualification system/between qualification subsystems - in the selected countries.

The project is coordinated by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB). Research on the German context will be carried out by BIBB. Besides Germany the project includes the Netherlands, Denmark and Scotland.

This report on the Netherlands is prepared by *Cofora*, a research & training centre situated in Arnhem, the Netherlands. Lifelong Learning as a strategy for empowerment and employability in the Learning Society is at the heart of *Cofora*'s work.

### *General aims and objectives of the background reports*

The central research questions focus on the identification and systematization of credit transfer in the above mentioned countries. At the core of the project are those procedures and models of crediting learning outcomes which are under development and/or already implemented in Denmark, the Netherlands, Scotland and Germany. For each country the methodological-conceptual

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1 The term credit-system is understood as “an instrument designed to enable the accumulation of learning outcomes (...) and facilitate their transfer from one setting to another for validation and recognition” (CEDEFOP-Terminology, 2008).

2 The term “qualification system” is understood as “all activities related to the recognition of learning outcomes and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society” (CEDEFOP-Terminology of European education and training policy, 2008).

foundations, the institutional framework conditions and the de-facto-use of those above mentioned models and procedures will be described.

Matters of particular interest are such models and procedures of crediting learning outcomes targeting two “interfaces” of the countries’ qualification systems: “Access” into the qualification system and “transition” within the qualification system/between qualification subsystems.

The two interfaces are defined as follows:

- “Access” refers to conditions, circumstances or requirements governing admittance to and participation in initial training (e.g. from vocational preparation into initial training)
- “Transition” describes the move within the qualification system (e.g. within “vocation families” (integration of former “drop outs”), from school based training into dual training) and / or from one qualification subsystem into another (e.g. from initial training to further qualification, from initial training to academic training). At both interfaces challenges and framework conditions for credit transfer might differ from country to country. The tenderer should describe in the appraisal which interfaces are of particular significance in the selected country.

#### *The Dutch background report: aims and perspectives*

How can credit-systems take effect at the interfaces ‘access into the qualification system’ and ‘transition between qualification subsystems’? This backgroundreport for the Dutch country-study aims at tackling this question by exploring, questioning and analyzing the state of the art and the future in the Netherlands concerning these two ‘interfaces’.

The Dutch country-case will be part of the comparative analysis with simultaneously implemented country-studies from other countries. This analysis is expected to support and to point at possibilities and opportunities for the further development of a German credit-system that is compatible with ECVET and that can be implemented in the German training-system.

The objective of this report is a country-case of the Netherlands that will highlight the Dutch road – *so far* – of developing and implementing a learning outcomes-approach in (EQF- and ECVET-inspired) credit-systems in Vocational Education and Training and in Higher Education.

This ‘*Dutch case*’ will, apart from the quantitative and qualitative aspects, also make transparent how top down influences from European Union, the Dutch government and the Dutch ‘*polder model*’ with the social partners constructively interact with individual centered learning and validation practices that are managed at local, regional and sectoral level. When linked, these top-down and bottom-up processes are strengthened for the sake of individuals and activating lifelong learning.

With validation practices we include the growing practice of accrediting non-formal and informal learning outcomes in the learning system. In the Netherlands this accreditation is quality-assured by *de Kwaliteitscode EVC (the Qualitycode for APL)*. This development was (and still is) stimulated by the European policy as presented in the *European Guidelines for the Validation of non-formal and informal learning*. Whether this is also a stimulating development for lifelong strategies of individuals and organisations is another question to be answered in this report.

The Dutch experiences can be helpful in creating a sustainable lifelong learning culture in the Netherlands itself as well as in other countries. Researching the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the interfaces ‘access’ and ‘transition’ can come up with the answers for opening up credit-transfer within and between credit-systems and making them compatible. Existing and new credit-systems will benefit from the outcomes of this research in this background report.

## 1. The VET system as part of the Dutch education system

The Dutch educational system is very different to other national systems. It may be even confusing to many. Here's a history and a guide — from child's first class right up to masters degrees. In this way the VET system can be seen and analysed within the totality of the Dutch education system.

### 1.1 Brief history of Dutch (vocational) education and training

Vocational Education and Training as such is an integral part of the Dutch education system. Its credit system with the interfaces access and transition can only be understood properly within this wider, integral context and in its historical origins. In this paragraph the historical development of the VET system is described.

#### *Starting up VET*

Abolishment of the guilds at the end of the eighteenth century broke the strictly regulated system of learning wide open. From then on, anyone was free to practice the professions formerly protected by the guilds. After the fall of guild education, private initiatives took over professional training. Different societies for welfare and the promotion of general benefits saw the improvement of public education as the basis for civil education of the citizenry, and as such, for the betterment of society. One of this society's activities was setting up the model schools (Reulen & Rosmalen, 2003). These societies saw the dawn of later educational legislation regulating public responsibility for general basic education, and, still later, professional training as well. Professionally-oriented education, however, received little if any attention until the end of the nineteenth century. While there were fleeting initiatives for work schools, where, for example, older orphans were "placed" with artisans and craftsmen (Lis et al., 1985), these did not fit into the dominant image of general basic education followed by the teachings of a master. The hole that had been left by the disappearance of the guild educations was never filled. Even as late as 1872, the Dutch government did not consider it its job to organize education: “...state professional education is unjustified and ill-advised. Unjustified, because in the treatment of the Act the States-General agreed that the practical education would be left to the workshops.” (Goudswaard, 1981)

Professional training in the traditional society was dominated and driven by employers and practice-based learning, and happened largely within the professional column. Although charitable institutions and organizations did provide for an early form of institutionalised professional education, the most powerful relationship of authority was and remained that of employer and employee. Object and target group were primarily limited to young people being worked into the professional group; a certain initial and input-dominated education with a summative effect was sufficient. Employee mobility was irrelevant. Access to basic education was dominated by economic factors.

From 1850 on, the industrialization process in the Netherlands continued, but only towards the end of the nineteenth century did the transition to industrial production definitively take hold.

Developments in professional training follow this same timeline. It was only in 1891 that existing private professional education received state funding for the first time. Participants continued to express an overwhelming preference for full-time education. The first intermediate-level technical schools were set up around 1900, although this form of professional education did not catch on until later. Only in the early part of the twentieth century, when the trade schools increased in number, did the state's need for more authority arise (Knippenberg, 1986).

### *1919: the milestone for vocational education*

The year 1919 is the milestone in the development of institutionalised professional training, when the state's role was definitively regulated in the *Nijverheidsonderwijswet* (Industrial, Technical and Domestic Science Training Act), a compromise between state involvement and free development of technical education. The act acknowledged that professional education was something that the government should be involved in, but granted school boards a large amount of freedom in determining content. The objectives were to create some order in the forms of professional education and to provide some integration of professional and general education (Boekholt & De Booy, 1987). The act allowed for the apprenticeship system as an alternative for full-time professional education, thereby for the first time giving the Netherlands an education system in which all forms of education were regulated by law and subsidised, while the performance of the education was provided both by government schools and private institutions. The underlying premise remained that the government had to restrict itself to subsidization. In practice, the government bore some 70% of the costs of industrial education.

### *Recovery and reconstruction after 1945*

After World War II, as part of the policy geared towards "recovery and reconstruction" the government made a definitive shift towards support of professional education. Modern production processes demanded increasingly high knowledge and insight on the part of working people. Professional education primarily served to provide educated personnel with technical qualifications. For personnel with low education or no education, the emphasis was on "socializing", or adapting mentality to modern labour relationships (Liagre Böhl, 1981). Consequently, in the First Industrialization Memorandum (*Nota*, 1949), expansion and improvement of industrial education was the key focus:

*“In addition to the problem that a large number of young people pursue no further education after elementary school, there is the fact that of those who do, a relatively small number of them seek out training for a profession in industry.”*

Beginning in 1945, growth in professional education picked up rapidly, this primarily in technical full-time education and the apprenticeship system. At the same time, the compulsory school attendance period increased, from seven years (ages 6-13) in 1921, to eight years in 1950, nine years (ages 6-15) in 1971, and finally ten years in 1975 (Techniek, 2003). The apprenticeship system also expanded. It was organised by sector or professional category in a single national body with a tripartite structure. In this body, the employer and employee organizations of each industrial sector worked together closely under government supervision. They were responsible for the practical programmes and the examination & testing. In 1954, the national bodies united into a centralized body of national industrial training associations, the *Centraal Orgaan van de Landelijke Opleidingsorganen van het bedrijfsleven* (Bakker, 2001).

As the reconstruction drew to a close, the time was right to give the education a broader significance than a basic educational programme based on discipline and industrial production. The Secondary Education Act of 1968 (colloquially known as the “*Mammoth Act*”) provided this (Karstanje, 1987). General and professional education complemented each other and offered options for vertical and horizontal mobility. The “*Mammoth Act*” also included intermediate professional education, or MBO (*middelbaar beroepsonderwijs*). But general basic education was a higher priority, and the connection with professionally-oriented vocational education still left much to be desired. This became known as “the hole in the Mammoth Act,” and was only filled in the nineteen-eighties by the shift from socio-cultural to socio-economic educational objectives.

The industrial era saw the rise of the knowledge infrastructure. Educational legislation reaffirmed the dominant relationship between employers and knowledge infrastructure. The individual gained the prospect of a disciplined learning function based on economic necessity. Professional training was input-oriented based on officially earned, initial qualifications within one professional column. Continuing education increased in importance. Mobility of employees was not stimulated. Summative effect via continuing education within the professional column was a central focus.

By the beginning of the nineteen-eighties, the discussion of the structure of professional training was fully focused on connecting with the needs of the labour market, and the work of the successive commissions in the nineteen-eighties and nineties must be seen in that light.

### *Wagner Commission*

At the beginning of the nineteen-eighties, the vision of the societal role of education was being re-evaluated. For decades, the emphasis had been on participation in general basic education. But a large percentage of the working population did not have vocational diplomas. Moreover, labour organizations found the qualifications of professional training outdated. This, in combination with the economic decline of the early eighties, was sufficient reason to re-evaluate the place and function of education and the connection with the labour market (Luiten van Zanden, 1997). This re-evaluation was initiated in 1981 by two advisory commissions chaired by G.A. Wagner. Their mission was to envision a cure for the looming breakdown process of industry in those years (Dellen, 1984). The issue of connection with the labour market concentrated on the search by organizations for workers trained to deal with modern technology. One way that it was hoped this could be achieved was by generating an intake of young school-leavers. Industry looked to the educational sector with high hopes, only to find that it had withdrawn into its own world of *the pedagogical province* (Knippenberg & Van der Ham, 1993). Additionally, it was clear that anyone who was seriously interested in working on knowledge innovation would also have to invest in the education of the existing work force, but there were not enough offerings of continuing education or in-service trainings to meet the demand.

To solve these problems, the Commission set itself a number of basic goals. General secondary education should no longer be a final educational level, and a period of practical learning had to be a condition for obtaining a professional qualification. Additionally, the lack of facilities for on-the-job learning by employees and other adults had to be remedied. The Commission considered the two-track structure of the apprenticeship system as an ideal model to achieve these goals. Pedagogically, this was based on the combination of working and learning. The intention was to create this dual model by introducing a dual final phase in MBO (intermediate professional education) and HBO (higher professional education). The model was also set up to give the social partners a considerable degree of authority in matters such as content, performance and examination standards at these educational levels.

The new standard became a (starting) professional qualification at the primary apprenticeship level or comparable level. But despite this, the plans of Wagner and his commission were put on ice for several years. The Commission met with a great deal of resistance from the educational sector, in which the belief prevailed that full-time education as it was already offered enough support for the confrontation with work in practice.

### *Rauwenhoff Commission*

But things were not quiet on the dual track front for long. The need for on-the-job schooling for employees grew explosively, and as it did, it was primarily private initiatives that responded to the

demand. An advisory commission for education and the labour market (*Adviescommissie Onderwijs en Arbeidsmarkt*) was set up to address how the public education sector could take part in on-the-job training and schooling, and the adjustments that would have to be made in the infrastructure to provide it. The commission was also to make proposals for implementing authority of the social partners in professional training (*Adviescommissie*, 1990).

While economically there was some impetus for innovation, the efforts were devoted to improving existing production processes (Uitterhoeve, 1990). Intensification of knowledge was largely thanks to the rise of computing. The economic growth was primarily generated through increased deployment of cheap labour. Falling wages and a mass influx of women into part-time jobs were major factors (Report, 1993). Work became more demanding, and in response, efforts in education intensified. But many of the new requirements could only be learned independently on the job, and this informal learning was still not taken seriously. Only organised education was considered an appropriate instrument.

With this in mind, the Rauwenhoff Commission proposed a three-pronged remedy. Social partners, government and the educational sector would have to encourage all the “under-educated” and assist them in obtaining a starting qualification. Secondly, professional training and higher education would be given a dual end phase, for a fluid transition from school to work. Finally, schools and companies would have to compile educational content via “co-makship.” A school had to offer both initial education and follow-up education. But the commission did not address the educational value of practical learning, leaving this as a matter for a subsequent commission.

### *Dualization Commission*

When the Dualization Commission was convened in 1992, under the chairmanship of Christiaan van Veen, the social partners and educational parties had already signed covenants on the dualization and strengthening of the practical component in educational programmes. The Commission’s task was to implement the proposed option for MBO and higher education to, in the future, allow the educational programme to be completed with a dual track (*Commissie Dualisering*, 1993). The Commission concluded that the mismatch observed by Wagner and Rauwenhoff between labour market and education no longer existed; the imbalances (too many students with a general education and too few with professional training) had largely disappeared. Professional education had become more market-oriented, and the social partners, via the *Landelijke Organen Beroepsonderwijs* (National Vocational Education Bodies), had been given an influence on the setting of the final attainment levels in MBO.

The Commission considered professional training, in practical terms, equivalent to practical learning: “Professional training is learning by practice up to a level of mastery of practical and cognitive skills, internalizing the standards and values of a particular profession or job cluster and learning to work reflexively.” Additionally, the Commission stated that employees must have the capacity and the will to continue learning. In this perspective, lifelong learning had everything to do with a labour system that allowed room for the needs of the individual. With this, the Commission was far ahead of its time in terms of developments in professional education. Great strides were made with the Commission, among them that the learner was identified as an actor, practice was recognized as a learning environment and professional training had to go hand in hand with lifelong learning.

### *Wijnen Commission*

Before the ink was even dry on the Van Veen report, the next commission was ready in waiting. In 1993, the Commission on *Erkenning Verworven Kwalificaties* (“Valuation of Acquired Qualifications”) launched under the chairmanship of Prof. Wynand Wijnen. There was a will on the part of the political sector to make education more accessible to adults. Results of educational programmes,

schooling or other forms of qualification were too obscure, and as a result, there was a need to know how an individual's non-formal qualifications could be valued. The Wijnen Commission was given questions relating to better utilization of learning processes both in and out of school, and on strengthening the impact of on-the-job learning on the labour market.

The most significant conclusion of the report *Kwaliteiten erkennen* (“Recognizing qualities”) (Wijnen 1994) was that a system recognizing individual non-formal and/or non-fixed qualifications was feasible and needed. And so, “EVK” was born: the *erkenning van elders verworven kwalificaties* (EVK), or validation of qualifications earned elsewhere, the premise being the official qualification or certification of educational tracks participated in previously (whether or not completed).

The cabinet greeted this report with enthusiasm. EVK could make a useful contribution to the operation of the labour market and education market. EVK would improve the transparency of the “education market” and the connection of the educational sector with the current competency level on the labour market. Another important aspect was that EVK would offer people with a low educational level, or no educational level, a realistic opportunity to have their “hands-on learning” recognized. Implementation had to be a good fit with existing structures, and the interested parties would have to pay the implementation costs. The government would provide instruments for EVK, including development funding. Schools, job centres, companies and other parties picked up EVK and ran with it. But there was a lack of adequate support, and the initial enthusiasm ebbed.

#### *From EVK to EVC (APL)*

After a brief lull, the government kicked things back into gear in 1998 with the national action programme *Een leven lang leren* (A lifetime of learning): “The workplace needs to be used more as a place of learning. The experiences gained must be made visible as independently acquired competencies. The cabinet wishes to promote this by setting up a system by which knowledge acquired elsewhere (that is, outside of the educational system) can be tested and accredited” (*Actie Programma*, 1998). This was an important step towards expanding on the EVK concept to the valuation of learning experiences acquired outside of the formal educational system. These experiences gained in the workplace would be revealed, and then tested and accredited; with this, the K became a C (*competenties*, or competencies) and since then, the system has been referred to as *erkenning van verworven competencies* (EVC in Dutch, or APL (“Accreditation of Prior Learning”) in English).

The social partners also made an important contribution to this shift towards competency-based professional training, by differentiating between a number of employability segments within which APL could be functional:

- for job-seekers and employed persons without a basic qualification, APL could remove the hurdle to that basic level by accrediting what these persons already had in terms of competencies or those they had acquired by other means;
- for job-seekers and employed persons with a basic qualification, APL could provide directed reinforcement or retention of the desired qualifications and career opportunities (STAR, 1998).

In the meantime, the 1995 *Adult and Vocational Education Act* had fulfilled an important requirement for more openness and flexibility in professional training (WEB, 1996). Adult education and professional education were brought together in ROCs (*Regionale Opleidingencentra*, or Regional Training Centres) with a single standard, the national qualification structure. In this situation, learning and working would go together under the term “enjoyability” or all opportunities to invest in yourself in relation to the organization within which you function.

## 1.2 Overview of the education-system, including the VET-system

After this brief history the present education system can be described. With this – history and present system – the stage is set for exploring the interfaces access and transition into the credit system of this education system in the Netherlands.

### *Pre-primary education*

The Netherlands has no formal pre-primary educational provision. From the age of four onwards, children attend primary school. Although the mandatory school age is 5, almost all children (98%) begin school at age four. For children under the age of four there is no formal educational provision, but there are various childcare facilities available outside the education system.

The following organised facilities are available:

- Playgroups: these groups are open to all children aged 2 to 4 years, and are the most popular form of pre-primary provision. Children usually attend the playgroups twice a week, about 2-3 hours per visit. The main aim of the playgroups is to allow children to meet and play with other children and to stimulate their development. At the national level, no educational goals have been defined for playgroups. Most playgroups are subsidised by local government, but income-related parental contributions are often also demanded.
- Pre-schools: an increasing number of playgroups offer development stimulation programmes and have a more educational focus. These so-called 'pre-schools' are particularly intended for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (children of parents with low levels of education), with the central aim of preventing and mitigating educational deficiencies, particularly in the domain of language development.
- Day nurseries: the day nurseries cater for children aged from 6 weeks to 4 years. They are open on weekdays from around 8.00 to 18.00 hours. The main function of the day nurseries is to take care of children in order to allow parents to work. They provide daily care for children and opportunities to meet and play with other children. The responsibility for childcare facilities as a policy area has recently been transferred from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

### *Primary education*

Primary education in the Netherlands comprises general primary education, special primary education and (secondary) special education. The primary education programme consists of eight years for education, from the age of four until the age of twelve. Compulsory education starts at the age of five, but children can attend primary school from the age of four. In the school year, 2008/2009 there are 6910 primary schools for 1,550,000 pupils. These include public-authority and denominational schools. Besides these, there is a small number of private schools not financed by the government. Public authority schools are open to all children, no matter what their denomination or philosophy of life may be. Public authority schools do not work on the basis of a denomination or philosophy of life. These schools are mostly run by the local authorities, a school board, a foundation or by a legal person appointed by the city council. About one third of all children go to public authority schools. Denominational schools are run as an association, of which parents can become members, or as a foundation. There are all sorts of denominational schools. Most of these schools are Roman Catholic or Protestant. In addition, there are Jewish, Islamic, Hindu and humanistic schools, and so called 'free schools' that base their education on the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner. And, there are schools that organise their education according to certain pedagogical principles, such as *Montessori*, *Jenaplan*, *Dalton* and *Freinet* schools (these can be either public-authority or denominational schools). There is also non-denominational private education, which

does not depart from a special philosophy of life. About two thirds of all children go to denominational schools.

For pupils who require specialized care and support, there is special (primary) education and secondary special education. In 1998, schools for children with learning and behavioural difficulties (LOM) and children with moderate learning difficulties (MLK) were converted to schools for special primary education (SBAO). These schools fall under the legislation of primary education.

### *Secondary education*

On average, children are 12 years of age when they enter secondary education. In the school year 2008/2009 there are 1146 secondary schools that cater for 935,000 pupils. Secondary education encompasses schools providing pre-university education (VWO), general secondary education (HAVO), pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO) and practical training (pro). VMBO comprises four learning pathways:

- the basic vocational programme (BL);
- the middle-management vocational programme (KL);
- the combined theoretical and vocational programme (GL);
- the theoretical programme (TL).

VMBO students can receive additional support through learning support programmes (LWOO). After VMBO, at an average age of 18, students may transfer to vocational education (MBO).

Those who have completed the theoretical programme can also choose to transfer to HAVO. HAVO is intended as preparation for higher professional education (HBO). VWO is intended to prepare students for research-oriented education (WO). In practice, however, VWO graduates also transfer to HBO. The school types differ in terms of the duration of their programmes: VMBO takes 4 years, HAVO 5 years and VWO 6 years.

Secondary schools have completed the implementation of two major educational innovations: the innovation of upper secondary education and the introduction of VMBO.

In the 1999/2000 school year, a new structure for the second stage of HAVO and VWO education was introduced. All HAVO and VWO schools introduced set subject combinations and the concept of independent study in the last two/three course year (years four and five for HAVO, and years four, five, six for VWO).

In 1998 VBO and MAVO were combined into VMBO. At the same time, the learning support departments (LWOO) were given a more definite shape. In 1998 VBO was incorporated into the learning support departments. In addition, practical training programmes (pro) were initiated. With the conversion of practical training programmes and the learning support departments, special secondary education has been incorporated into mainstream secondary education. On 28 May 1998, an Act was implemented which required all SVO/LOM (for children with learning and behavioural difficulties) and SVO/MLK (for children with moderate learning difficulties) schools either to merge with a mainstream secondary school, or to convert to a practical training institution (pro) or a special education centre (OPDC).

### *Vocational education (MBO)*

Since 1 January 1998 all adult and vocational education institutions have been incorporated in regional training centres (ROCs).

Vocational education has four sectors (economy, technical, service & health and agricultural sector) and four qualification levels: assistant in training (level 1), basis-vocational education (level 2), professional education (level 3) and middle management / specialists (level 4). Higher Vocational

Education is level 5. In the upcoming years the government wants to stimulate people to get into higher education (HBO or WO). More than 50 % should follow higher education in 5 till 10 years.

In the year 2008/2009 a total of 515,000 persons followed senior secondary vocational education, of which 172,000 BBL and 343,000 BOL. The absolute number of participants following adult education was 51,000.

### *Higher education*

Higher education in the Netherlands has a binary structure. It is composed of higher professional or vocational education (HBO or *hogescholen*) and research-oriented education (WO). These types of education are provided by *hogescholen* and universities respectively. As of 2008, there are 41 *hogescholen* and 13 universities. There is also one establishment providing open higher distance education, the Open University of the Netherlands. In addition there are number of approved private institutions and institutes for international education.

The private institutions include several theological colleges, the University for Humanist Studies and Nijenrode University (business education). The international education colleges include the Institute of Social Science (ISS), International Institute for Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation (ITC), Institute for Urban Housing and Development Studies (IHS), and the Institute for Water Education (IHE).

Higher professional education is extremely diverse: courses lead to some 250 different qualifications for a wide range of occupations in various areas of society. There are both broad and specialist courses. There are large *hogescholen* offering a wide variety of courses in many different sectors and medium-sized and small colleges offering a small assortment in one sector only. Administrative mergers have reduced the number of *hogescholen* from almost 350 in the mid-1980s to 41 in 2007. Programmes are divided into seven sectors: Education, Engineering & Technology, Healthcare, Economics, Behaviour & Society, Language & Culture, and Agriculture & the Natural Environment. The last sector falls under the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV).

Since 1993, the universities of applied sciences or *hogescholen* and research universities have been governed by the same legislation: the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW). This Act permits the institutions a large measure of freedom in the way they organize their teaching and other matters to meet changing demands. The universities of applied sciences are responsible for the programming and quality of the courses they provide. Quality control is exercised by the institutions themselves and by external experts. With effect from 1 September 2003, the Education Inspectorate's external quality assurance dossier has been transferred to the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). The NVAO took over two tasks of the Education Inspectorate: a) the follow-up to old style reviews previously approved by the Education Inspectorate, the so-called evaluation of administrative processing, and b) the follow-up to reviews conducted from 2003 on.

In order to be able to link up with international developments, the Bachelor's - Master's degree structure was introduced in the 2002/03 academic year. The Bachelor programs comprise of 180 ECTS, which amounts to three years of full-time study. The Masters programs take 1 year (60 ECTS) to 2 years (120 ECTS).

### **1.3 The main characteristics of the VET system and the structure of qualifications**

VMBO comprises four programmes: a basic vocational programme (BL), a middlemanagement programme (KL), a combined programme (GL) and a theoretical programme (TL, comparable to the

former MAVO). VMBO students can receive additional support through learning support programmes (LWOO). After VMBO, at an average age of 16, students may transfer to secondary vocational education (MBO).

In the Netherlands, the WEB (the 1995 *Adult and Vocational Education Act*) currently distinguishes five types of programmes at four different qualification levels for the MBO.

Sector-specific bodies ('landelijke organen voor het beroepsonderwijs' nowadays named Knowledge Centers) developed skill standards for all the programmes in their sector. Each programme is governed by one set of skill standards, which is referred to as an 'exit qualification'. Jointly, these exit qualifications and skill standards are referred to as the 'National Qualification Structure' (NQS).

Each exit qualification can in principle be achieved through one of two pathways:

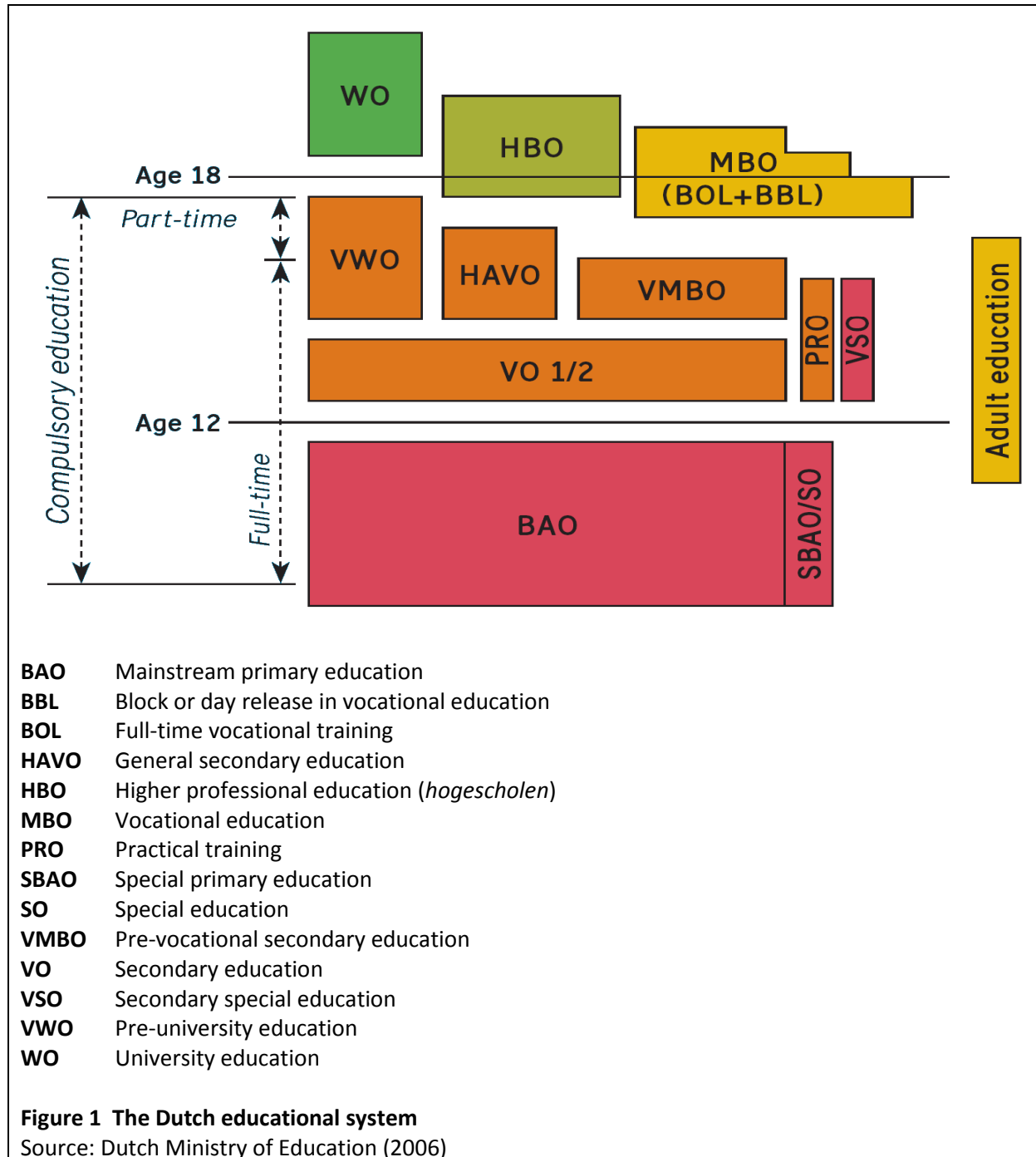
1. A vocational training pathway (BOL; in fact the continuation of MBO, primarily school-based, but including a work-based [so-called internship] component of at least 20%)
2. An apprenticeship-training pathway (BBL including a work-based component of 60% or more).

MBO comprises a vocational training programme (BOL) and a block or day release programme (BBL). Within the BBL practical work is most important (minimal 60% of the time) and within the BOL this is between 20 and 60%. BOL can be done fulltime (VT) or part-time (DT) – less than 850 hours educational programme - be done. There are four qualification levels:

- assistant Worker (level 1)
- basic vocational training (level 2)
- professional training (level 3)
- middle management and specialized training (level 4).

The programmes last a maximum of 4 years.

## 1.4 The Dutch education system in a diagram



## 1.5 The interfaces at work: “entrance” into initial training and “access” into HE

Formal entrance and access are organised for VET and HE in different procedures.

For VET:

- level 1: no admittance requirements
- level 2: requirement of level VMBO-BL, or for some programmes - older than 16 years

- level 3: a diploma of a lower level of VET or a diploma of 2<sup>nd</sup> education (VMBO-KL or higher)
- level 4: a diploma of a lower level of VET or a diploma of 2<sup>nd</sup> education (VMBO-TL or higher)

For HE:

The minimum admission requirement for HBO is either a HAVO school diploma or a level-4 MBO diploma. For admission to both types of higher education, pupils are required to have completed at least one of the subject clusters that fulfils the requirements for the higher education programme in question. A quota (*numerus fixus*) applies to admission to certain programmes, primarily in the medical sciences, and places are allocated using a weighted lottery.

For admission to all master's programmes, a bachelor's degree in one or more specified disciplines is required, in some cases in combination with other requirements. Graduates with an HBO bachelor's may have to complete additional requirements for admission to a WO master's programme.

### 1.6 The other “interfaces” that become apparent

For different levels of VET:

- Entrance when older than 16 or 18 (in most cases) according to adult education norms.
- Everyone without a formal starting qualification (MBO-2) has the right to obtain this qualification for free.
- People who don't have the acquired level for entering a specific programme can turn to private funded training; in most sectors there is money available for this training via sectoral Labour Agreements; this funds are positioned in sectoral training funds.

For HE:

If a candidate for admittance does not meet the entry requirements but will be 21 years or over at the start of the course, he can take the 21+ test. The aim of this test is to find out whether he has the appropriate knowledge and skills to follow the course of his choice, even though he doesn't have the required qualifications. The test is on the subjects general knowledge, Dutch language and English language; required level is HAVO-5 (2<sup>nd</sup> education).

### 1.7 The procedures implemented for crediting prior learning

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

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

Thanks to APL, in sectors such as the care sector and education sector, recruitment and selection of personnel is increasingly happening among target groups without the formal requirements. APL is also functional in areas such as retention of personnel and attrition and disability prevention.

Employees in the construction sector are being offered new career opportunities based on competency recognition and comparison with adjacent sectors. The next step is to promote mobility and upgrading of personnel. In particular, providing sitting personnel with “refresher courses” can be structured efficiently around a good picture of existing competencies. Outflow and outplacement of personnel also benefit. The military, for example, has a high proportion of employees with fixed-term appointments. To be more successful at replacing these employees on the labour market, APL can offer both development and qualification. Likewise, in mergers and reorganizations, APL offers development and qualifications to find the right place for personnel, whether internally or externally.

### **1.8 The main challenges and influences at the moment**

The Netherlands face numerous challenges in the transition from the industrial economy to the knowledge society. The main challenges are:

- Ageing of the workforce. Within 5-10 years traditional recruitment won't be able to fill in the gap of the pensioned people. This has consequences involving organisations and the costs of, for example, pensions, health care and care for the elderly.
- The need for upskilling the workforce. The shortage of higher (vocational) educated people is rising. The percentage of higher educated workers will have to rise from 21% in 2000 to 31% in 2010. Those levels are for upper secondary VET-levels staying the same: 40% and for low- or unskilled labour dropping from 39% to 29% (Genabeek et al 2007).
- The need for attracting migrants. It is estimated that the Netherlands faces a structural shortage of labour power in 2050 of almost 300.000 full-time equivalents. Only by starting now with attracting migrants (esp. from level 3 upwards) this problem can be solved (Berkhout et al 2007).

These labour market challenges have their effects on VET and HE:

- VET has to be able to accommodate adult learners in bigger numbers.
- VET has to be able to offer more customer-friendly and flexible learning.
- HE has the same challenge to offer more customer-friendly and flexible learning.
- Personalising learning is a topic: give the learners themselves more power to selfregulate their need for learning.

The development of competence-based education in Dutch VET has raised an innovative challenge for both teachers and policy-makers at all levels in the system. However, it should be recognised that the concepts of competence and competence-based education have been in use for a long time in education and human performance technology. Competence-based education is seen as an alternative for working with qualifications and qualification structures, as has been the case in Dutch VET during the last 20-25 years. In fact, both approaches are based on the same assumptions: qualifications and competencies are both derived from job analysis and forecasting techniques and are both used as input for curriculum development and for assessment of learning outputs.

## 2. Origins of credit-transfer

### 2.1. ECTS in the Netherlands

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

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

The starting point of the Dutch system for credit points was in 1982, when university education underwent a major transformation under the law '*Twee Fasen Structuur*' (The Two Tier System). The main change of the law was that all study programmes should to be restructured into a curriculum of four years (with a few exceptions: for instance, medicine, dentistry and philosophy). Besides the uniform duration of all courses, the law *Twee Fasen Structuur* stated that “the university statute can determine the conditions of the estimation of the student workload” (art. 24bis). This university statute regulated that all studies should be organised so that each programme consisted of 6800 hours (i.e. 1700 hours per year) of work for students. It was advised that use be made of a credit point system that corresponded with this student workload.

The Dutch Qualifications Framework does not seem to entail new information. Yet it has some significant ramifications for higher education. The main features are outlined below.

#### *Learning outcomes*

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

#### *Quality assurance*

A good system of quality assurance ensures that graduates have acquired the knowledge, skills and attitude that are set down as the learning outcomes of the programme concerned. In the Netherlands, the accreditation of higher education programmes is performed by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO). All accredited programmes, quality assessment reports, accreditation decisions and the accreditation/assessment frameworks are available on the NVAO website ([www.nvaio.net](http://www.nvaio.net)).

### *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)*

Institutions are required to indicate the amount of time students spend on each programme and programme component. The study load is expressed in ECTS credits. A full year of study (1680 hours) accounts for 60 ECTS credits. The general scope of each type of higher education programme in the Netherlands, as well as any exceptions, are laid down in the Dutch Higher Education Act, article 7.4. In addition to a credit system, the ECTS also provides guidelines for obtaining information about study programmes and the organisation of credit transfers when transferring from one institution to another (see the “User’s Guide 2009”, [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide_en.pdf)). Implementation of all elements of the ECTS within the higher education institutions is considered important to bolster student mobility.

### *Diploma Supplement*

The Diploma Supplement, in accordance with the model agreed at the European level, describes the exit level and the learning outcomes of a study programme. It also specifies the higher level to which the diploma grants access. It is formulated in Dutch and English and is issued automatically by the educational institution to all its graduates, free of charge. The Diploma Supplement is not only of paramount importance in order to be admitted to a subsequent study programme at another educational institution, but also when applying for jobs.

## **2.2 BAMA Policy in the Netherlands**

In early 2002, the Dutch parliament approved the change in the Law on Higher Education and Research (WHW). From the academic year 2002/03 onwards, Dutch Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have been able to award Bachelor and Master’s degrees. At the same time, a new law concerning the introduction of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) was approved, replacing the national credit point system. The Dutch government accepts the introduction of the BAMA system as an essential condition for a modern and internationally oriented higher education system. The BAMA system is expected to make the Dutch higher education system more flexible and open, making it easier for Dutch students to study abroad as well as allowing foreign students to enter the Dutch system.

While the universities are generally on track with their development of BAMA, the *hogescholen* find it more difficult to adjust their education system. Since the HEIs themselves are responsible for the implementation of the BAMA system, there exists great variation between and within them. For example, some HEIs have a great influence over the process of innovation in curriculum, whereas others place this responsibility on the directors of the education programmes.

The introduction of BAMA has been a more radical process in the universities than in the *hogescholen*. While the complete university system and programmes needed to be revised, the *hogescholen* have only had to expand their education programmes (Van der Wende & Lub, 2001). Since the previous education system in the *hogescholen* was quite similar to a bachelor programme, the changes made were relatively limited. In university systems, however, the conversion of four-year programmes into three-year bachelor’s and one-year master’s has had a greater impact.

Clearly, the process of policy development is different in both types of HEI with regard to involvement and contents. One of the reasons for this difference is the strong international orientation of the universities. While the universities consult and imitate the educational systems of their international partners, the *hogescholen* focus more on national legislation (Van der Wende & Lub, 2001). Since this national legislation has only just been developed completely, the policy development within *hogescholen* continues slowly.

A final important note that indicates a difference between the two kinds of HEI is the fact that ‘post-initial’ *hogeschool*-master’s are currently not financed by the state.[1] Until these master’s programmes are accredited according to European accreditation rules and fulfil the policy rules that universities applied in composing their master’s programmes, *hogeschool*-master’s will not be publicly funded. In order to change this situation, *hogescholen* will have to make some effort. This may even mean closer cooperation with their partners on a national and international level.

### 2.3 Challenges for the future

In the Dutch discussion on the future of higher education, a few topics are related to credits and (the measurement of) the workload of students:

#### *Strengthening quality management*

At the start of 1995, the Minister of Education, with the VSNU (Association of Cooperating Dutch Universities), the HBO Council (Association of Dutch Professional Universities) and two student organisations, set up the working programme ‘Quality and Study Ease’, to improve education and to make it easier to study. The basic assumption is the responsibility of universities and professional universities for good educational programmes, in combination with guarantees for the quality of education for students. The institution must guarantee students that they will not face barriers in finishing the studies within the duration of the course. But perhaps, the discussion has moved too far to the side of ‘study ease’. Students take on the average less hours on a credit point than is set. In universities – and also at the national level – this has to be taken as a serious problem.

#### *Student centred learning: Competencies and student portfolios*

In each department of Dutch universities, and especially of the professional universities, a discussion has started on student centred learning in relation to competency-based learning. In this rapid changing society, it is not sufficient to test only the knowledge base of students, but at the end of the course students have to have acquired a set of well described competencies and should be able to act as a ‘reflective practitioner’. Now, the normal situation will be that during a course students sit their examinations, which – after good results – give them credit points. Often the examinations test mainly the capability to reproduce knowledge, and are not developed to test if a student has made progress in competencies. Only in a few places a transition is taking place from traditional testing into an assessment culture. In the University of Maastricht, which started in the 70s as a new university with a new educational concept, in some departments student assessments are performed (Dochy & Segers 1999). Also, the University of Professional Education of Amsterdam and the University of Utrecht offer courses for faculty on the subject of student assessment by way of portfolios. In other universities, similar initiatives are on the way. Dochy and Segers warn that the introduction of student’s performance assessment leads to new psychometric pitfalls, if an assessment leads directly to a decision ‘yes/no credit points’. The quality of the assessment has to be very high, otherwise there are no guarantees for accountability of the results and, with that, no guarantee for the quality of the student’s results. A solution can be found in a change in a basic assumption of the European way to measure the workload: study time needed for preparation, time in class, self study and exams and assessments. If the credits (as in the USA) do not involve time for examinations and assessments, new opportunities arise to innovate the curriculum.

#### *Vouchers*

Since 1993, in Sweden, the funding of institutions of higher education has been based on both the number of students and of the number of credits that students have earned (Bauer 2000). In the White Book of the Dutch Minister of Education concerning higher education for the period 2000–

2004 (HOOP 2000), new experiments are announced to make a combination between the study results of students and the funding of the institutions of higher education. The experiments are to be situated in higher professional education (HBO) and should combine credit points gained at a certain institution and the funding the institution will receive. The funding formula can facilitate this kind of flexibility by introducing different moments of subsidizing between enrolment and graduation. Now institutions only receive payments after the final graduation of students. However, it is not expected that a new system will become operative in the near future. Only very small experiments have started and little support from the side of the universities has been heard so far.

#### *Flexibility: A second chance?*

When the credit point system was introduced at universities (often in combination with modularisation of the curriculum), one of the goals was to make it easier to introduce new programmes and modules and to give more opportunities for students to switch from one course to another without having to start all over again. In the evaluation of these goals at the University of Amsterdam, it turned out that the new system had brought some flexibility, but the results were limited (Oostwoud Wijdenes 1993). Now, there might come a second chance to make use of the credit point systems potential to make the programmes more flexible. We shall sum up a few examples of the new flexibility in higher education:

- Major-minor programmes: In most universities, students have the opportunity to choose a major and a minor. A major programme could consist of 120 to 150 ECTS and the minor of 30 to 60 ECTS credits. But, many other options are possible.
- Co-operation between universities and professional universities: Some combinations of institutions have started to smooth the transfer of students from professional university to university by offering students the opportunity to earn credits at the other institution that count for their graduation at the professional university.
- Bologna declaration: The Bologna declaration has stimulated the discussion of the uniform course duration of four year. With the introduction of the bachelor and masters diploma and the system of accreditation, the flexibility in pathways through European higher education will increase.

### **3. Methodological-conceptual foundations**

#### **3.1. Learning outcomes**

Lifelong learning is about making use of personal competencies. Everyone should be aware that people are always learning everywhere, and above all, not always in a conscious or self-chosen learning situation. The degree in which individuals and the knowledge society consciously build on this is still strongly underexposed and under-utilised. In the knowledge society, the focus is or should be on the individual learning process. A complicating factor in dealing with this focus is that the formal procedures of teaching, training and assessment describe only a very limited part of the individual learning potential or competencies. Competencies acquired in informal and non-formal situations are also essential for optimal performance on the labour market or in social functions. This complexity of individual learning and the opportunities it offers for the knowledge society were recognised in 1995 in the White Paper of the European Commission “*Towards the Learning Society*” (EC 1995). While learning within the formal systems for education and training is a distinguishing factor of a modern society, learning that takes place outside this sphere is much more difficult to identify and value. “Lifelong Learning” was proposed as a central organising concept and “Valuing Learning” became one of the key messages (EC 2001). ‘Valuing learning’ stands for the process of recognising participation in and outcomes of formal or non-formal learning, in order to raise

awareness of its intrinsic worth and to reward learning. With the proposals of the Commission, the invisibility of all sorts of learning processes was effectively problematised. This problem was related to all levels of the individual (different employability-potential, knowledge and application levels) and society (international, national, regional, local, sectoral and organisation).

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

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

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

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

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

When looking at both terms – RPL and APL - VPL stands for the process of Valuation of Prior Learning (VPL). VPL embodies the necessity to make top-down processes such as APL meet the bottom-up process of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). If combined APL and RPL are constituting the integral or even holistic process of Valuation of Prior Learning. So, VPL is the real designation of developing, implementing and embedding lifelong learning in society, in the Learning Society so to say; VPL is for

the sake of citizens as well as providers and organisations (profit, non-profit, voluntary work, labour-agencies, communities, etc). VPL is able to manage in a flexible way the diversity of goals all these parties and partners have in making use of lifelong learning strategies.

### 3.2 Linking learning outcomes

- VET is based on a learning outcomes approach in theory. This is called the competence-base of VET in which all national standards embedded in VET are formulated in terms of competences. At this moment (early 2010), the last step in turning VET into a competence-based learning system, has been blocked temporarily by the parliament, due to a certain lack of commitment in VET-schools. Implementation of a competence-based approach of VET has been delayed till August 2011 to gain more time and therewith more commitment from the VET-teachers.
- At the moment there is no national Qualification Framework in the Netherlands. There is however a working group installed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences to work on setting up a National Coordination Point for translating Dutch qualifications to the EQF. This means that the 14 Dutch levels (4 VMBO; 2 HAVO-VWO; 4 MBO; 4 HO) are measured against the 8 EQF-levels to give more transparency to the Dutch qualifications in the European learning-arena.
- The governing principles of describing, documenting and crediting prior learning is in general rather supply/dominated. This means that qualifications in VET and HE (only bachelors of professional universities-HBO) are translated into competences and for each qualification put into an APL-procedure. A candidate who wants to reflect with his/her prior learning outcomes on a qualification, has to fill in a portfolio (showcase) in which he can demonstrate how his learning experiences match with the competences in the qualification he has chosen. In an assessment he is judged and he gets a report stating which exemptions he can get if he turns to the awarding body (the exam committee) of the school or university.
- Transfer of the credits obtained in one qualification-programme is officially not possible since every qualification has its own commission that constitutes the content of the qualification. Only on a restricted sectoral-level or domains competences from different qualifications can be transferred, for instance in the domain of teacher-training where the general competences can be transferred from a programme to become a teacher in English to one in French or German. The same goes for other strongly related sectors or domains such as in economics and social work.
- Connections between existing methodological-conceptual frameworks and current processes and initiatives at European level only exist in the present state of the art concerning credit-transfer in the ECTS and in following up the European Principles and Guidelines on Validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- The main conceptual challenges and obstacles in putting the credit system into practice are:
  - o *An assessment standard aiming at 'civil effect'*. Assessment standards must meet the requirements of validity, acceptance, feasibility and functionality. Standards must be the 'property' of employer and employee. Correspondence with existing national qualification structures for vocational training should be sought. This offers the best possible assurance of the civil effects of qualifications acquired through prior learning assessment procedures, ranging from admissions to and exemptions from particular training courses, to further steps in the career development path. This will help education systems to open up and to respond quickly to required changes. For example, the design of standards for assessment is increasingly competence-driven. The standards are linked both to the competence requirements of professional practice and to the content of the supply of education and training. Cross-sector competencies important to employability can also be defined. The capacity to define these assessment standards will also encourage the development of course-independent tests and examinations. The existing tests are rarely course-independent. Finally,

the development of a recognition procedure for assessors creates confidence in the value of the accreditation procedure.

An important condition to create such an open situation is that the standards are made more industry-driven. The labour market should preferably decide for itself which competencies are required for accreditation as a practitioner in a particular profession. This relates not only to knowledge but also to skills and attitudes. In this case, the accreditation must be integrated into the corporate strategy. Only by focusing on formative goals this usage of civil effect as a means and not an end in itself, can be a powerful tool in turning learning into a lifelong learning-facilitator of one's employability and empowerment.

- *Quality assurances of the assessment procedures.* In most countries, the government is directly or indirectly responsible for assuring the quality of the assessment standard. The quality of the standard can be controlled by establishing procedures for standard development and by using a programme of requirements for the design of standards (or qualification structures). The key quality criteria are validity, acceptance, functionality, transparency and comparability of structures.

The quality of prior learning assessment affects various parties with an interest in the assessment results. The government must supervise or regulate the quality (validity, reliability and fairness) of the assessment results. It can delegate these responsibilities to third parties, but remains answerable for quality supervision. The design of the quality assurance system could include an auditing of the assessment centres' internal quality assurance systems (as in the case of ISO certification), together with a system of random investigations of the validity and reliability of assessment results, conducted by independent research institutes. Criteria for the quality of assessment results can be drawn from the general requirements for assessment: validity and reliability. Naturally, both concepts must be operationalised specifically for prior learning assessment procedures.

- *Accessibility of procedures.* Prior learning assessment procedures must be accessible to individuals and companies. Accessibility is determined by the recognition and acceptance of the accreditation. It is also determined by the accessibility of the organisations that implement the assessment procedures and their affordability. Access to competence recognition systems is determined by the features of the system itself and by the availability of financial resources. Decentralised supply of assessments increases the accessibility of the system. 'Decentralised' refers to the regional distribution of prior learning assessment and implementation of the procedures at the employee's place of work or training course.

Another condition for accessibility is that the system is workable and efficient for users. Time-consuming and bureaucratic procedures are disastrous to accessibility. The funding of prior learning assessment procedures is a fundamental condition for the use of the system. A decentralised and workable system that nevertheless costs the users too much will reduce access to the procedures.

## 4. Institutional framework conditions

### 4.1 Mechanisms of coordination

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

The central government controls education by means of laws and regulations in accordance with the provisions laid down in the Constitution. The prime responsibilities of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science relate to the structuring and funding of the system, the management of publicly run institutions, inspection and examination procedures and financial aid to students. Control may be exercised by imposing qualitative or quantitative standards for the educational process in schools and/or for the results they produce, and by means of arrangements for the allocation of financial and other resources, and the imposition of conditions to be met by schools. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science lays down conditions, especially in primary and secondary education, relating to the types of schools that can exist, the length of courses, compulsory and optional school subjects, the minimum and maximum number of lessons to be given and their length, the norms for class division, the examination syllabus and national examinations, and standards of competence, salaries, status and teaching hours of teaching staff. The Ministry does not set up schools, but does determine norms for their establishment. These conditions apply to both public and private education (Eurydice, Cedefop, ETF, 2003).

#### *CREBO and CROHO*

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

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

All accredited programmes in the higher education are listed in the Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes (CROHO, Centraal Register Opleidingen Hoger Onderwijs). Besides the accreditation of degree programmes, the Netherlands has a system by which the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science recognizes higher education institutions by conferring on them the status of either ‘funded’ or ‘approved’ (Eurydice, Cedefop, ETF, 2003). ‘Funded’ indicates that the institution is fully financed by the government while ‘approved’ indicates that the institution does

not receive funds from the government and has to rely on its own sources of funding. All programmes must be accredited and registered in CROHO.

#### *Quality Code APL*

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

- Increasing the accessibility of APL. Clarifying what APL is and how APL must be offered.
- Providing transparency. Allowing better comparison of different APL procedures.
- Guaranteeing civil effect.

The covenant resulted from a broad consultation process among all stakeholders, concedes five main arrangements that the parties agreed upon:

- The use of the code is voluntary, but the signing parties are dedicating themselves to promote the use of the Quality code for APL. Making its use mandatory would detract from the motivation to work with the APL-code.
- Everyone who starts with an APL-procedure agreed on the reasons for doing so. APL is not a standard process but an individualized series of arrangements customized on the goal and use of APL. Custom work is the standard.
- Every APL-procedure ends with an APL-report. This report states that the individual had documentation of the competencies he possesses. This makes APL something independent of the educational provider.
- Accredited APL providers are listed in an APL database. This database contains information about all the APL procedures that are useful for potential APL candidates.
- The competencies of the people supervising these procedures and performing the assessment are documented. Only professionals can be supervisors and assessors .

#### **4.2 Financial structure**

Funding for all levels and types of education comes for pupils up to the age of 16, in principle, entirely out of central government funds. These scholars only have to pay for the costs to cover the purchase of books and teaching materials and travel. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science administers almost all central government expenditure on education, while the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries funds agricultural education. Funding is provided to public and private establishments according to the same criteria. Public and private primary schools and schools for special education (primary and secondary) receive funding to cover staffing costs, operation and accommodation. Vocational education courses are funded on the basis of the number of students per course/learning pathway and on the number of certificates awarded per institution. The Student Finance Act 2000 applies to students in tertiary education who are under the age of 34 and began their studies before the age of 30. It also applies to students in full-time secondary vocational education. Every student in these categories is entitled to a non-means-tested basic grant, which can be supplemented depending on the parents’ income. The size of the grant (and supplementary grant) depends on the type of education (tertiary education or adult/vocational education) and on whether or not the student is living away from the parental home (Eurydice, Cedefop, ETF, 2003).

APL is financed in different ways by different stakeholders. Training Funds often finance agreements about EVC. Both employees and employers pay a small amount of their incomes to these sector

funds, which have originally been set up to support educational initiatives for employees (Duvekot et al, 2005).

The Dutch government extended a tax facility (January 2007) to APL purchasers. In order to qualify for this tax scheme, the APL purchaser must be able to submit an invoice from an accredited APL procedure. The employer or employee receives €300 back on tax. A lot of APL providers became interested in becoming accredited by the Quality code, because of the tax facility. Estimated is that an APL procedure for level 3 and 4 (Vocational education) costs between €800 and €1300. For higher vocational education this is between €1000 and €1500 (Duvekot et al, 2007).

### 4.3 Credit regulations and/or assessment rules

Eurydice, Cedefop and ETF gave in 2003 an overview of the structure of Education, Vocational Training and Adult Education Systems in the Netherlands. A summary of their overview is given in this paragraph.

#### *Pre-primary education*

From the age of four onwards, children attend primary school. Outside the formal education system there are, however, childcare facilities for younger children. There is no formal assessment of pupils in the childcare sector. A childcare quality assurance project was launched in 1999 with funding from the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. A certificate has been introduced, which is awarded by an independent body to childcare organisations that satisfy national standards. This enables such organisations systematically to monitor and upgrade the quality of their care. Participation is voluntary, but possession of a certificate makes an organisation more attractive to potential clients. The first certificates were awarded in spring 1999.

#### *Compulsory education*

Compulsory education is laid down in the Compulsory Education Act. Every child must attend school full-time from the first school day of the month following his/her fifth birthday; however, nearly all children attend school from the age of four. Compulsory schooling lasts either 12 years fulltime (5 to 17 years old), or full-time from the age of five until the end of the school year in which the pupil reaches the age of 16 followed by part-time compulsory schooling until the age of 18 (the age of majority).

The assessment of pupils' academic performance in all subjects is continuous; it is carried out at regular intervals (usually twice during the year and once at the end of it) by the teacher on the basis of all (oral and written) work accomplished during the school year. A scale of 1-10 is used for awarding marks. A score of 1 is extremely poor, while 10 is given for excellence. Pupils' individual progress is recorded in school reports. No certificates or diplomas are awarded to primary school leavers, but pupils do receive a school report, which the head teacher draws up in consultation with the teachers. This describes their individual level of achievement and potential and advises on further study. Parents receive a copy of the report, but are not obliged to follow the advice on further study.

#### *Post-compulsory general and vocational secondary education*

The second stage of secondary education is partly compulsory, partly post-compulsory and encompasses the 4th and 5th years of HAVO and the 4th to 6th years of VWO. This period of pre-tertiary education (VHO) follows on from basic secondary education. Pre-university education (VWO) is for pupils aged 12-18 years and last six years. It consists of a first stage (three years) and a second stage (three years). There are three types of VWO school: the "atheneum", the "gymnasium" (where

Greek and Latin are compulsory) and the "lyceum" (a combination of "atheneum" and "gymnasium"). Senior general secondary education (HAVO) lasts five years and is for pupils aged 12-17 years. Like VWO, it consists of a first stage (three years) and a second stage (two years).

Pupils' progress is continuously assessed in oral and written tests. The results of assessment carried out during the year are taken into account in end-of-year assessment. HAVO and VWO are rounded off with an examination. Both tests and examinations are compulsory. The school-leaving examinations are in two parts: A national examination held in the final year and a component organised by the school, known as the school exam.

#### *Vocational secondary education*

The aim of secondary vocational education, as defined in the Adult and Vocational Education Act, is to provide both theoretical instruction and practical training in preparation for the practice of a wide range of occupations for which a vocational qualification is necessary or useful. It also furthers the general education and personal development of students and helps them to play an active part in society. The age of the participants in vocational education ranges from 16 to 64 (including adult vocational education), however, 95% of the participants in the main pathway (BOL – *beroepsopleidende leerweg*; full time) is under 22.

The Kenniscentra Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven (*national bodies for vocational education*) are responsible for the exit qualifications. Pupils who pass a partial examination of a secondary vocational education course receive a leaving certificate. After the pupil has passed all the tests for the secondary vocational education course, the certificates are replaced by the diploma (Diploma middelbaar beroepsonderwijs).

#### *Tertiary education*

Tertiary education comprises higher professional education (HBO) and university education (WO). These types of education are provided by *Hogescholen* ("hogescholen") and universities respectively. Not later than at the end of the first year of enrolment in the propaedeutic part of a full time or dual course programme, the institution advises students as to whether they should continue their course within the bachelor programme or not. This advice may or may not be optional. After four years the final examinations are held. Successful candidates are awarded a certificate listing the subjects in which they were examined. Students abandoning their courses before the final examinations receive a transcript indicating how much of the course they have completed and which interim examinations ("tentamens") they have passed.

A separate examining board is set up for each study programme to conduct the examinations and organise and coordinate the interim examinations. The faculty council draws up the teaching and examination regulations after consulting the relevant examining board and study programme committee. Students who pass the final examinations are awarded a certificate listing the different parts of the examination and, where appropriate, the professional qualification obtained.

#### *Continuing education and training for adults*

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

- The education which comes under the 1996 Adult and Vocational Education Act (Wet educatie en beroepsonderwijs – WEB) and is provided at the ROCs: basic adult education and general secondary education for adults. Participants in general secondary education for

- adults must have completed compulsory education to be admitted. Additional requirements may possibly be imposed, depending on the type of education.
- The training of unemployed adults, financed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, does not have any national structure for recognition and examination. The focus is on recognition by the regional business community. The main purpose of the specific training, which comes under the Manpower Services Act (Wet op de arbeidsvoorziening) from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, is to strengthen the position of disadvantaged groups on the labour market.
  - Part-time vocational education and inservice training schemes. Internal training in enterprises is not organised in any consistent way. The learning routes are highly heterogeneous and recognised by enterprises (not nationally). Quite a lot of private training providers are active in the market of continuing (vocational) training, of which 200 are formally recognised training institutes. They have the right to provide training programmes that fit the requirements of the national qualification structure and participants therefore can obtain a nationally recognised diploma. The most significant forms of part-time vocational education subsidised by the government are part-time MBO and part-time HBO. The participants generally attend these alongside their work.

For basic adult education, there are no specific requirements. Adult education has a separate qualification structure (Kwalificatiestructuur Educatie – KSE) distinguishing six levels: self-reliance level (redzaamheidsniveau), threshold level (drempelniveau), basic level (basisniveau), initial 1 level (start-1-niveau), initial 2 level (start-2-niveau), advanced level (voortgezet niveau). The ‘threshold qualification’ provides access to ‘assistant training’ (level 1). The ‘basic qualification’ provides access to ‘basic trade practitioner training’ (level 2). ‘Initial 1’ qualifications provide access to ‘training for trade professionals’ and ‘middle-management professional training’ (levels 3 and 4). The ‘initial 2’ qualifications provide access to HBO. The ‘advanced qualification’ provides access to university education.

Within the qualification structure for Dutch as a second language (NT2), there are five levels:

- NT2 1 Students have a very elementary knowledge of Dutch, sufficient at the very most for referral to an NT2 course at level 2.
- NT2 2 Students have a sufficient knowledge of Dutch to get by in Dutch society and cope with a vocational education course at assistant level or a manpower training course or training in the workplace at an equivalent level.
- NT2 3 Students have a sufficient knowledge of Dutch to cope with a secondary vocational education course at basic vocational or professional training level or a manpower training course or training in the workplace at an equivalent level.
- NT2 4 Students have a sufficient knowledge of Dutch to take a secondary vocational education course at middle-management or specialist level or enrol at a university or college of higher professional education.
- NT2 5 Students have a sufficient mastery of Dutch to be able to speak it fluently with very little trace of an accent. The Minister may stipulate by ministerial order what falls into the category of courses providing a broad basic education and courses aimed at fostering self-reliance. No other provisions are laid down concerning the precise nature of the courses to be provided within these categories.

#### *APL-procedures*

To participate in an APL-procedure, an employee normally has to have 3 to 5 years of experience in the sector he or she is working on. The general goal is to validate the competences that employees have learned by working. In some collective labour agreements (e.g. metal industry), employees have been given the right to participate in APL. 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.

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 educational 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 on projects that have been worked on.

In almost all APL-procedures, the examination is executed by representatives of a regional vocational training centre (ROC). Most companies try to follow the formal regulations, described in the Law on education and vocational training (WEB). It is valued as important, while employees receive a certificate or diploma with national value. Starting up APL within companies is mostly a matter of summative assessment. Formative valuation however is rapidly emerging. Although several companies have set up APL-procedures for employees in the last couple of years, a systematic and comprehensive overview on a national level is not available. Well-known companies that have introduced APL in their human resource management are: Corus, Heinz, Auping, Rockwool, Shell and BSN Glassplack (Kenniscentrum EVC 2004).

#### **4.4 Subsystems**

The use of APL strongly differs between sectors depending on the specific needs for learning. The healthcare sector mostly wants to solve the problem of getting new, competent employees, in metal and process industry this goes for the moving on and upskilling of staff, and in the building industry the problem of moving on to related sectors. Since the end of the 1990's, quite some industry sectors (e.g. house painting industry, meat industry, construction industry, process industry and the care sector), have set up initiatives regarding EVC on their (sector) level. In most cases social partners, sector organisations and regional vocational training institutes (ROC's) are involved in setting up EVC procedures.

In the process industry people work for example with the VAPRO system, while in marketing NIMA is a well-known subsystem.

#### **4.5 Target groups**

The focus in the Netherlands is especially on the motivation of those with little or no education to participate in lifelong learning. This means that the process is to be made as accessible and flexible as possible for the individual to find the exact opportunity in relation to his/her need for continuing and further education and training (Coughlan et al. 2007). For example, students who are dyslexic have the legal right to make an adjusted exam (Article 55, eindexamenbesluit, final exam decision).

#### **4.6 Stakeholders and their responsibility**

The Dutch tradition is traditionally dominated by the 'polder-model', i.e. a model in which on national and sectoral levels and even on organisational level tripartite negotiations take place. Harmonisation is the key word in the Dutch way of designing, implementing and innovating society,

i.c. the learning system. The government and the social partners concluded already in 2000 that APL was one of the main solutions encountering the needs of the knowledge society (Duvekot 2009). There are several stakeholders to identify in the process.

#### *Government*

Eurydice, Cedefop and ETF describe the role of the central Government in the Netherlands as ‘control(ling) education by means of laws and regulations in accordance with the provisions laid down in the Constitution’ (2003). The prime responsibilities of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science relate to the structuring and funding of the system, the management of publicly run institutions, inspection and examination procedures and financial aid to students. The Ministry determines norms for the establishment of schools both in public and private education. Funding for all levels and types of education comes, in principle, entirely out of central government funds.

#### *Provinces*

The role of the provinces according to managing education and its content is limited. They are required to perform supervisory and jurisdictional duties. This includes tasks relating to supervising the sufficient provision of public and private primary and secondary education, and organizing training and adult education activities.

#### *Local authorities*

The administration and management of schools of primary and secondary general and vocational education is locally organized (Eurydice, Cedefop, ETF, 2003). The municipal authorities have a dual role: they are both the local authorities for all schools in the area (whether publicly or privately run) and the competent authorities – in effect the school boards – for the publicly run schools. They also ensure compliance with the Compulsory Education Act. At primary level, their tasks include planning and coordinating accommodation, facilities and material provision, and appointing additional staff. At secondary level, the municipalities have a statutory responsibility to ensure maximum use of buildings; furthermore, they act in this area almost exclusively as competent authorities.

#### *Schools*

All schools, both public and private, are governed by a legally recognized competent authority (school board). The tasks and responsibilities of the day-to-day management of public and private schools are very similar. They include decisions with regard to the curriculum, the choice of teaching materials, the establishment of the school plan, timetable (lessons per compulsory or optional subject), the appointment and dismissal of head teachers, teachers and non-teaching staff, the admission and expulsion of pupils, the use of school buildings, school hours and the management of financial resources and arrangements for their administration.

It is the school, i.c. the head teacher, who is responsible for the planning and implementation of policy with regard to teaching. Schools decide what sort of teaching or training methods are used, based on general rules concerning compulsory subjects and minimum teaching periods and the recommended number of hours (Eurydice, Cedefop, ETF, 2003).

#### *Social partners*

The social partners in the Netherlands negotiate traditionally with the government about all aspects concerning the regulation of the labour market. This includes a division of responsibilities of the learning market; initial education and training of jobseekers are the primary responsibility of the government and the training of employees is the primary responsibility of the social partners. This

therefore also affects the introduction of APL-systematics for employees and job-seekers (Eurydice, Cedefop, ETF, 2003).

#### *Colo*

At sectoral level, social partners are represented in the board of Colo, the association of national vocational education bodies ([www.colo.nl](http://www.colo.nl)). Colo has a tripartite board consisting of representatives from employers, employees and the national vocational education bodies (laid down in the statutes of the association). See the diagram for the responsibilities of the various actors with regard to vocational education and training. Social partners are specifically responsible for defining and updating the occupational profiles, which form the basis of the qualification profiles. At regional level, most regional training centres (ROC) have a representation of social partners in their supervisory board. More and more, social partners are involved in or take initiatives at branch or local level by stimulating cooperation between education and training and trade and industry. The leading notion is to improve the relation between the demand and supply of labour force and skilled personnel.

#### *Trade Unions*

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

#### *Employer organisations*

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

#### *Training funds*

Sector trainingfunds often take the initiative for APL. For instance in collective labour agreements the social partners agree in specific sectors that trainingfunds can be used for the valuation of personal competences of employees. Sometimes they even agree on using the fund for giving learningvouchers to the employees. The trainingfund provides the portfolio models, internal assessors and guidance. Since the end of the 1990's, quite some industry sectors (e.g. house painting industry, meat industry, construction industry, process industry and the care sector), have set up initiatives regarding APL on their (sector) level. In most cases social partners, sector organisations and regional vocational training institutes (ROC's) are involved in setting up APL procedures.

#### *Regulations*

There hardly exist laws and regulations regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Netherlands. While initiatives regarding APL are primarily paces in the hands of interest bodies, social partners and sector organisations, the Dutch government has chosen a bottom-up method for the stimulation and implementation of APL (SER, 2002). An exception to the decentralized policies of APL in The Netherlands is “*De Wet Beroepen in het Onderwijs (BIO)*” (the Law of Professions in Education). The law was approved by the Parliament in January 2004 and obliges workers in the educational sector to work on their employability after they've graduated and started working. On a national level, standards are going to be formulated to certify that teachers dispose of necessary qualifications (Duvekot et al, 2005).

## 5. Practical use

In the years 2005-2007, the national government invested nearly 40 million Euro in APL at upper secondary and higher vocational education levels, in developing a regional infrastructure and in promoting APL. This policy was put forward in the working plan for 2005-2007 *Strengthening Learning and Working* (PLW 2005). The ministries of Education, Culture and Science, of Social Affairs and Employment, of Agriculture and Nature Management, of Economic Affairs, of Integration and of Finances were involved.

In the implementation strategy, management and practice come together. At management level educational institutions were encouraged to implement APL institution-wide. They signed agreements with the government to realise a certain number of APL procedures within one or two years and to guarantee a minimum quality standard of these procedures. Practices already in use for some years were spread and the quality-issue of the procedures was raised. To strengthen the promotion of APL by the already since 2001 existing Dutch Knowledge Centre on APL, regional one-stop-offices were set up also to actively promote the use of APL. It is a big step forward that all local partners in education and labour market are working more and more together and attune their procedures. The aim is that any individual can enter these local one-stop-offices to be guided in their development process. Companies are offered tailor-made solutions for their questions relating to human resources and all regional partners take their share to realise it.

Some projects at sectoral level are subsidised by national government as well to promote APL and work together with regional networks and educational institutions at any educational level. Although not all targets have been met within the given period of time, the investment policy of government still continues for the coming years. Creating an infrastructure for APL, or starting the implementation of APL in an educational institution takes more time than predicted. In recent years however, the stimulation policy has brought about a lot of energy, encouraged many new actors to offer and promote APL, and has made APL more known amongst a bigger group of institutions and individuals. Certainly, all these activities contribute to the realisation of lifelong learning for individuals and in society.

In the years since 2007, the ministries of Education, Culture and Science, and of Social Affairs and Employment have continued to jointly promote lifelong learning by also focusing APL. Themes have been among others learning & working programmes in the technical and health care sectors, 60.000 extra learning & working programmes for employees and job seekers older than 23 years old, and extra programmes for long term unemployed and young workers between 18 and 23 years old without basic qualification

In 2009 a total number of 9.207 APL-procedures was scored at the levels VET and HE (PLW 2009).

Looking at the main targets of APL within these numbers (more than one target is possible for each APL-procedure) (Dungen, et al, 2007):

- 54% is used for shortening learning programmes,
- 51% is aiming at exemptions,
- 44% is looking for qualification or certification,
- 40% focuses on career-development,
- 12% seeks a validation of the portfolio itself.

## 6. Perspectives

The general question is: *does the present discussion about ECVET have an influence on existing procedures for crediting learning outcomes in the Netherlands?*

In general the answer to this question for the Netherlands is no. As is known, each EU-memberstate has to be able to link its National Qualifications Framework by the end of 2011 to the European Qualifications Framework. The Netherlands is working on this task but doesn't consider it as a priority for education-policy. There will probably be not more available at the end of 2011 than a very generic translation-device for linking the Dutch levels to the EQF. The Netherlands distinguishes 14 national levels: 4 VMBO, 2 VO, 4 VET and 4 HE, where the EQF only has 8 levels. This low priority to the EQF also affects the further implementation of ECVET in the Netherlands.

Apart from this low priority on implementing the learning outcomes-approach as propagated by the EQF-initiative however, there is a theoretical issue rising in the Netherlands on the question how to activate APL as an effective instrument for facilitating lifelong learning that appeals to the citizen and other stakeholders.

The above question emphasises the need to broaden access to VET and HE and includes also the necessity of strengthening the transferability of competences between organisations on the basis of a learning outcomes-approach. With this question in mind, INHolland University is developing a model for describing and analyzing the roles and responsibilities of the main stakeholders in achieving their goals in the lifelong learning-arena. In this model APL functions as a matchmaker between the learning needs of the learning individual<sup>3</sup>, the learning system<sup>4</sup> and the labour system<sup>5</sup>. Crucial in this is acknowledging the added value of the self-managing role of the learning individual in making lifelong learning work. (Duvekot 2010)

APL features three main actors, organised in the LifeLong Learning triangle, or the '*L3-triangle*': the learning individual, the learning system and the labour system. APL is the matchmaker between these three actors. This interaction (or matchmaking) is based on the recognition, valuation, accreditation and activation/re-activation of an individual's potential, with respect to goals, opportunities, perspectives and contexts in and from the learning system and the labour system. The macro-level of governmental authorities and social partners facilitates the interaction in the '*L3-triangle*' with laws, regulations and seed money. The '*L3-triangle*' highlights learning processes with a summative and/or formative intention. The mutual relationships between the actors determinate the mode of APL. These modes relate to the roles of the actors in decision-making on content and structure of the learning processes, ranging from initial professional training to human resource development in the workplace. Together these processes constitute the overall structure for lifelong learning strategies that might differ in their goals and context but are always sharing APL as a matchmaker. The '*L3-triangle*' in this perspective can be seen as the playing field for lifelong learning strategies. Its constituent parts are the individual, the organisation and the school with their respective responsibilities: self-management of competencies, competence management and competence-based curricula and guiding tools. The balance of power is flexible, and is dependent on goal and context of learning (Duvekot 2006).

<sup>3</sup> The learning individual is the adult who, after initial education, needs or wishes to keep on investing in learning.

<sup>4</sup> The learning system consists of initial and adult (vocational and higher) education and training.

<sup>5</sup> The labour system is the social and economic structure of society. It comprises labour, labour market and social infrastructure.

APL-systematics help out when it comes to flexibilising and personalising learning and making use of personal contexts for further development or lifelong learning. APL works in three modes:

1. The *generic* mode focuses on systematically linking competences embedded in national standards with competences embedded in function profiles of human resource management at – profit, not-for-profit or voluntary work - organisation levels. This leads to conversion-tables of the exchangeability of competences in professional (VET and HE-standards) and functional competence profiles (function-descriptors). This mode supports both other modes of APL.
2. The *summative* approach of APL offers a direct and formal procedure for accrediting all learning experiences of an individual to a professional level and a specific standard in a national qualifications structure. It aims at an overview of competences for purposes of recognition and validation. Its focus is on certification or qualification where individuals seek this goal.
3. When APL goes one step further than validation and includes further learning, this is the *formative* mode, aiming at time- and cost-effective personal development within someone’s working context. APL links competences from function profiles of organisations with the competences from personal profiles. APL formative is a more informal procedure for accrediting learning experiences of an individual in relation to a specific functional level within a human resources management-system of any organisation active in the labour-system: profit, not-for-profit, civil society or voluntary work. Making *formative* steps entails especially updating, upgrading or side-grading trajectories.

In order to be able to describe and analyse on the one hand the different modes of APL in practice and on the other hand the roles and responsibilities of the three main stakeholders in achieving their goals in the lifelong learning-arena, it is essential to capture the reality of APL in its different modes. For this reason the following research model is presented. In this model APL functions as matchmaker between the learning needs of the learning individual, the learning system and the labour system. Working with the model will provide the material for analysing and explaining the social phenomena that occur when APL is used as a link between the aims and the normative frameworks of these three stakeholders. Questions regarding the support and promotion of effective learning and personal development, instrumented by the APL-modes can be answered and turned into interventions into the ways of working with APL as a matchmaker in one of the modes.

## 7. list of interviews, working phase II

### 7.1 Interface Access

1. VET1: mr. Bert van de Pol, BGA Nederland
2. VET2: mrs. Ellen Klatter, Consortium Beroepsonderwijs
3. HE: mr. Wiebo Spoelstra, INHolland University
4. Private learning sector: mrs. Anna Bakker, managing director of PAEPON, branche organisation of the private learning sector
5. Ministry of Education, Culture & Sciences: mr. Ype Akkerm,an, directorate Knowledge and Innovation
6. Profit: mr. Wim Kalis, managing director Stichting Scholing en werkgelegenheid Meubel
7. Non-profit: mrs. Jeanette van de Bunte, Police Academy
8. Voluntary work: Mr. Jo Peeters, Scouting Gelderland
9. Job allocation: mr. Sjoerd Stienstra, HPB Advice and Finance

### 7.1 Interface Transition

1. VET1: mr. Hans Winkel, Nova College
2. VET2: mrs. Pia Deveneyns, MBO-raad
3. HE: mr. Paul Herfs, Utrecht University
4. Private learning sector: mrs. Margret de Blanken, INHolland Academy
5. Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality: mr. Jan Guerand, project-directorate learning & working
6. Profit: mrs. Ciska Raadgever, RaboBank
7. Non-profit: mrs. Caroline van Rekum, Calibris
8. Voluntary work: mrs. Maribi Gomez, managing director Vrijwilligerscentrale Amsterdam
9. Job allocation: mr. Martin Hensema, UWV Groningen

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Eurybase - Descriptions of National Education Systems and Policies  
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Kenniscentra Beroepsopleidingen Arbeidsmarkt – Knowledge centre Vocational training Labour market.  
<http://www.kenniscentrum-ba.nl/>

Kenniscentrum EVC - the Knowledge Centre APL  
[www.kenniscentrumevc.nl](http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl)

Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschappen – Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.  
<http://www.minocw.nl/actueel/beleidsonderzoeken/index.html>

NVAO, Nederlands- Vlaamse accreditatieorganisatie - Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders  
[www.nvao.net](http://www.nvao.net)

Nuffic- Organisation for International Cooperation in Higher Education  
[www.nuffic.nl](http://www.nuffic.nl)

Access *into* & transition *between* credit-systems in the Netherlands  
Background-report on “Credit-systems for lifelong learning, CS3L”

Ruud Duvekot and Marieke Hanekamp



Velperbinnensingel 9  
6811 BP Arnhem  
026 4460570 (Tel)  
026 4461794 (Fax)

Projectdirectie Leren en Werken – *Projectmanagement of Learning and Working*  
[www.leren-werken.nl](http://www.leren-werken.nl)

Gebruikshandleiding ECTS - *User's Guide European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)*  
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