

Activating ULLL by valuing learning in the sports sector

Dutch piloting for the VALUE-project

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Valuing Learning as a guiding principle

The underlying principle of lifelong learning is that *initial education is no longer enough for a lifetime social-economic career*. It is more important to develop your competencies (skills, knowledge, attitude & ambitions) throughout life by realising that 'your glass is already half filled' and by understanding that everyone always learns in every possible learning environment: formal (school) and non-formal or informal environments (working place, at home). In other words, lifelong learning above all means 'Valuing Learning', i.e. valuing *the Learning* that is constantly taking place and learning *the Valuing* in order to start up learning in an effective and efficient way.

Valuing Learning in this respect is the guiding principle for (designing) lifelong learning strategies. It is therefore crucial for activating & implementing *the fundamental principles underpinning validation*.

Practice shows that 'Valuing Learning' is a strong concept giving true evidence of the transition that's going on from the present knowledge society towards the (near) future learning society. Society changes to a learning society where the need for a good balance of power between the main stakeholders in lifelong learning (learning individuals, organisations and VET/HE¹) will be re-created and the learner gets a real say in lifelong learning.

The main changes are reflected on five levels:

- a. Economically aiming at getting and/or keeping a job (employability),
- b. Socially, aiming at motivation, reintegration, self-management of competencies and personal development (empowerment),
- c. Educationally, aiming at qualification, updating, upgrading, portfolio-enrichment by means of creating output-oriented standards (learning outcomes and learning made to measure),
- d. A fourth level on which the change is having its impact, can also be distinguished, the civil society, aiming at social activation, voluntary activities, societal awareness & reintegration and citizenship (activating citizenship),
- e. On the macro-level finally, authorities and social partners are responsible for organising the match between these levels by means of legislation, regulations, labour agreements, fiscal policy, training funds, etc.

'Valuing learning' as the guiding principle for lifelong learning strategies reflects the change towards a learning society in which the individual learner has and takes more responsibilities for his/her personal lifelong learning process. It also means that the individual learner changes the existing 'balance of power' in learning processes themselves because he/she will be co-steering lifelong learning with his/her own portfolio. In this portfolio, the learning outcomes that he/she has achieved are documented together with the relevant evidence. Such portfolios create a new balance within learning as a process and contribute to the individual's social identity; above all they can show the road to follow for personal development in the context of the organisation and the society.

The emphasis on learning outcomes is in line with the development of common structures of education and training across Europe and is associated with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and

¹ With VET/HE we encompass all forms of vocational education and training in EQF-levels 1-6 that are available in public and private learning systems and that can be used for the many purposes lifelong learning offers.

the European Qualification Framework (EQF). Thus Valuing Learning will contribute to the removal of barriers to the mobility of labour. At national level, learning outcomes are a central part of the modernisation of qualification systems and frameworks in order to stimulate economic development and promote social cohesion and citizenship.

The goals of 'Valuing Learning' are as follows²:

<i>Individual</i>	stimulating self-investment in learning; showing learning outcomes; building up a learning biography (portfolio)
<i>Organisation</i>	facilitating employees' self-investment and articulation of competencies; designing lifelong learning strategies in HRD
<i>ET/HE</i>	matching learning to real learning needs; offering learning-made-to-measure; focus on learning outcomes; facilitating lifelong learning strategies
<i>Civil Society</i>	activating citizenship; transparency of learning outcomes (competencies) in the civil society; linkages with other perspectives (qualification, careers)
<i>Macro-level</i>	responsible for creating favourable conditions for lifelong learning strategies

Important conditions for creating a learning society in which these benefits can come to full bloom are:

- A transparent, output-oriented knowledge infrastructure;
- Creating trust by focusing on the already available quality-system based on the judgement of the existing assessment processes used by schools, colleges and universities;
- A transparently structured education sector, that allows a flexible flow of participants from one layer of sector to another, both intra- as well as inter-sectoral;
- Universal, transparent and interchangeable procedures and reports on the competencies that have been valued;
- Close relations between educational institutions and their surroundings (enterprises, government institutions, institutions in the field of (re)integration of unemployed into the labour market);
- Creating possibilities for developing and executing individual tailor made learning paths;
- Facilities for financing flexible tailor made individual learning routes, such as an individual learning account;
- Clear communication to citizens about the technical and financial arrangements for education and 'valuing learning'.
- Development of an individual right for portfolio-assessment and career-advice.

Validation in the volunteering sector

The voluntary sector plays an active and vital role in the Dutch economy. The Dutch use two words to refer to voluntary action: *vrijwillig* (voluntary) and *vrijwilligerswerk* (volunteering). The Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports (VWS) defines "volunteering" as: work that is performed in an organised context and without obligation or pay for the benefit of other people or a community; volunteers may not depend upon their activities for their livelihood. No official qualifications exist for voluntary work. Voluntary work allows volunteers to develop formal and non-formal skills and qualifications, to improve specific qualities (mutual aid, altruism, cooperative spirit). Volunteering offers opportunities to learn and to acquire work experience and so become an active citizen. Assessing voluntary experiences in a professional perspective could be a way to bridge the gap between voluntary work and employment. Many volunteers have difficulties getting their experience valued by educational institutions of employers however. They mostly deal with identifying what competencies exist in the volunteer sector and how far we can go in official recognition.

2 Based on the outcomes of the Leonardo-researchproject 'VPL2' (NL/05/C/F/TH-81802) in: Duvekot, R.C., G. Scanlon, A. Charraud, K. Schuur, D. Coughlan, T. Nilsen-Mohn, J. Paulusse & R. Klarus (eds.) (2007). *Managing European diversity in lifelong learning. The many perspectives of the Valuation of Prior Learning in the European workplace.* Nijmegen/Vught/Amsterdam, HAN/EC-VPL/HvA.

According to the results of a longitudinal survey conducted by the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Office and the Central Bureau for Statistics, in 2008 approximately 5.3 million persons were occupied in some sort of volunteering in the Netherlands. The primary focus of this survey was on the amount of time contributed by volunteers.

The government provides recognition for volunteering by financing various volunteer organisations, establishing a temporary fund for local and provincial governments and including measures formulated in governmental policy papers (Duvekot et al 2009). The Dutch government also sponsors the National Compliment, an annual prize for the best volunteer project. Local-level recognitions involve a variety of programmes that are implemented by local volunteer centres and local governments. Examples of these programmes include local prizes recognising individual volunteers, volunteer organisations, volunteer projects, active citizenship participation in policy making processes.

Nevertheless, the Dutch procedures for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) are rarely used in the field of volunteering due to the associated high costs, lack of interest and simply a lack of information on the existing possibilities. However, some organisations award certificates to their volunteers, while there have also been experiments involving portfolios. These certificates are granted for instance through initiatives of the *Vrijwilligerscentrales* (on local levels) and by Scouting. MOVISIE (in their capacity as research institute for the voluntary sector) currently receives funding to develop a system of RPL for volunteers (GHK, 2010). Furthermore, most regular RPL procedures take account of valuable work experiences of the individual in the third sector.

Roadmap for Valuing Learning in the sports sector

In 2010 a project started in the sports sector to focus on valuing learning as a guiding principle for a multi-targeted focus on volunteers in the sports sector. The goals of this project are:

1. Stimulating the awareness of the sports-volunteer that their volunteering is worth to be valued,
2. Helping sports-organisations to articulate their need for competencies and embed this need in proactive competence-management,
3. Matching the already articulated demand for competencies in sports-volunteering and the supply of competencies in education/training within the sports sector and education-sectors.

Reaching out to these goals is planned as follows:

I. Valuing Formal Learning Outcomes

1. Matching qualifications from training-programmes between sports-unions.
Examples collected, now in preparation for dissemination.
Agreement on recognition of generic competences: January 2011.
Product: matrix with procedure for accrediting generic competences between sports-unions (*EVK-afspraken-1*).
2. Matching qualifications from training-programmes between sports-unions, VET-schools and higher education.
Examples being collected.
Agreement on recognition of generic competences covering generic competences in (1) direct sports-related training-programmes and (2) indirect related training-programmes (sectors of education, social work): May 2011.
Product: matrix with procedure for accrediting generic competences in crossovers between training-programmes of sports-unions and equivalent standards of VET-schools and universities (*EVK-afspraken-2*).
3. Matching international qualifications in sports.
Examples being collected.
Agreement based on linking sports-qualifications to the EQF: June 2011.
Product: reference-tool from NQFs to EQF.

II. Valuing formal, informal and non-formal Learning Outcomes

4. Matching competences, based on prior learning outcomes of a formal, informal and non-formal nature, is one step further than the preceding 3 programmes on RPL. In this programme the goal is to pilot groups of sports-volunteers in their process of getting to education-offers in VET and HE. The procedure is taking the following development-steps:

- a self-scan,
- an intake-procedure (assessment),
- a tailor-made learning-offer from VET/HE.

Piloting will take place with sports-volunteers in the summer of 2011.

The overall project-results will be finalized in Spring 2011.