

A Dutch Case Study on *Trade Union Volunteers*

This case of Dutch trade union volunteers shows how the validation of prior learning can play a vital role in the voluntary sector, especially to make competences in the voluntary sector better recognizable and easier to monitor and validated, also on the different levels in Dutch higher education. Most importantly this case shows the perspectives and above all, the obstacles to overcome!

ABVAKABO-FNV is a trade union in the Dutch public sector with more than 400.000 members. Its group of trade union volunteers is some 13,000 members strong. Alongside their regular work, they volunteer in a range of competency profiles, performing tasks for the trade union in positions such as trade union consultant, career counsellor, participation council member and trade union school instructor.

These volunteer positions are set out in competency profiles that can be compared with specific VET/HE diplomas (standards). This process of comparing competences can be evaluated by means of a validation-procedure. The degree to which the outcome of this procedure leads to a certification or a shortened career track is a matter to be worked out between the volunteer and the accrediting VET-school or university.

A pilot in 2007 with a VET-school and a professional university showed the ways of working of such a validation-process, although they failed to prove the link between the learning results of the voluntary work and the bachelor levels of the university. The function profiles of the trade union volunteers were described in terms of the referring competences of the most comparable competencies in bachelor-programmes from economics, education and social work:

Function profiles	Policy advisor	Negotiator	General manager	Service manager	Press officer	Trainer	coach
Bachelor							
Economics:							
Public administration							
Communication							
Event management							
Fiscal-legal management							
Law							
Personel management							
Education							
Social work							

The procedure functioned properly and focused on linking functions and standards:

1. Training of trade union careerguiders to guide the volunteers
2. Creating two main perspectives: summative & formative
3. Intake of the volunteers
4. Work by the volunteers: filling in a showcase with their voluntary work experiences
5. Assessing the showcase by the Hogeschool
6. Result: an invitation for a validated 'claim for fame'
7. Intake-assessment and start of bachelor-programme

The outcomes of this procedure were:

- 45 candidates for a VET-level-4 or bachelor (level 6)
- 10 pulled out before step 3 (intake)
- 8 pulled out after step 3

value

VOLUNTEERING & LIFELONG LEARNING
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- 27 made it to step 5
- 6 invited for a validated 'claim for fame' (step 6)
- 2 started a VET-level-4 programme (step 7) & 2 started a bachelor (step 7)

What went wrong?

1. Difficulty of procedure: bureaucratic, time-consuming
2. Unbalanced partnership
3. Education-arrogance
4. Too Education-steered

Successes:

1. Initial enthusiasm of candidates
2. Training of Portfolio-guidance by (internal) tradeunion volunteers

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