Introduction

Obstacles in accessing higher education often result in subsequent missed career opportunities. Some systems, such as the Dutch one, require students to make important choices at an early age, possibly hampering many from participating to higher education later on. Improving equity and access to higher education is necessary to give everybody the best opportunities on the labour market. Because today life-time employment with one employer is rarely possible, employability becomes more important than job security. A fairly recent tool to ensure people remain employable is the Valuation of Prior Learning (VPL). The case of the Netherlands becomes more important than job security. A fairly recent tool to ensure people remain employable through their lives is the Valuation of Prior Learning (VPL). The case of the Netherlands.

Ensuring Quality: The “AQL Quality Code”

The APL Quality Code is meant to ensure the quality of the valuation procedure:

1. The goal of APL is to define, evaluate and accredit individual competencies.
2. APL primarily answers to the need of the individual. Entitlements and arrangements are clearly defined and guaranteed.
3. Procedures and instruments are reliable and based on solid standards.
4. Assessors and supervisors are competent, impartial and independent.
5. The quality of the APL procedure is guaranteed and is being improved on an ongoing basis.

Each area has got specific details of implementation. Visiting agencies such as the Dutch VBIs, assess the quality of the procedure.

Valuation of Prior Learning: The Case of The Netherlands

VPL is a process for the formal recognition of learning through non- and informal process. It:

q Assesses and matches personal competencies within the social-economic context, incl. HE-system
q Offers a personal development-strategy
q Creates the learning triangle individual/organisation/learning system
q Also known as Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)
q More focus on a summative approach (see below)


Example of VPL in the Netherlands

Executive members of ABVA/KABO/FNV (trade unions) volunteer in several competency profiles for the trade union, in positions such as trade union consultant, career counsellor, participation council member, trade union school instructor, etc. These volunteer positions are set out in competency profiles that can be derived into MBO/HBO diplomas. The derivation process can be readily evaluated with a VPL procedure. The degree to which a VPL recommendation then leads to a certification or a career track has to be worked out between the individual and his or her organization.

(see: National Report Leonardo Project VPL2)

Conclusions: VPL and Access

Evidence suggests that VPL is more useful to ensure so-called “access with success”. VPL procedures do not allow to by-pass the Dutch existing streamlined system of education.

However, VPL has helped many drop-outs to return to study, thanks to credit exemptions. This has allowed them to successfully complete their educational path (in other words VPL is used to make education more efficient).

The HBO sector has expressed interest in allowing access to new students, but there is an issue of quality.

Discussion: What’s Next?

q As yet there is no national coverage of the reports because at tertiary level programmes are built in very different ways (no national standard): is the future a “VPL light” + a more specific VPL procedure?
q International issue: can a portfolio built abroad be accepted in-country?
q VPL contribution addresses better the issue of drop-outs rather than first access to tertiary education: two different ways (no national standard): is the future a...