



# VALIDATION AND CERTIFICATION OF INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING IN THE NETHERLANDS



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## Validation and certification of informal learning in the Netherlands

The importance of lifelong learning is being recognised in the Netherlands for a few decades. This is supported by the rising number of people aged between 25 and 64 who are engaged in learning activities. In the Netherlands, there are two options to stimulate adult learning: schools can either develop their own ways and instruments for recognition and validation, or they can cooperate with EVC (recognition of previously acquired competences)-providers. The Experience certificate (Ervaringscertificaat EVC) describes one's abilities, knowledge and work experience. Especially when people have multiple years of work experience, a mismatch with their level of education can exist. They are competent to do task above the level which can be expected based on their education. It is possible to recognize this knowledge and skills using an certificate of competence which will strengthen people's position in the labour market.

An EVC procedure entails collecting data of someone's knowledge and skills. Evidence is assessed in relation to nationally recognised occupational standards. Relevant certificates and life/work experience all count towards the assessment. The collected evidence is then recorded in a certificate of competence. These certificates of competence can be used to create career mobility on the labour market. For example, an adult who wants to follow a vocational (MBO) or higher professional (HBO) training can use EVCs to gain exemption from parts of a new course and thus shorten their study time. Another positive effect of the certificate of competence, is that it provides learners with a clear overview of the occupational experience and level of performance. This helps to understand their own capabilities, which helps them to deploy their talents more effectively and know the kind of work that suits them. This will encourage them to opt for training in line with their current job or the career that they are aiming for in the future.

Applications for an EVC take place at a recognized EVC provider nearby, often an education institute but also a branch organization is possible. The costs of an EVC can (partly) be paid by the employer, or the local employment agency or local social services. The costs of an EVC are tax deductible.

### Support for learning and work

The programme Learn and work (Leren en werken) (only in Dutch), supported by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, exists since 2009. Its aim is to strengthen the connection between education, the training market, the job market and job opportunities. Focal points are to improve workplace learning (learning while working), career counselling and the use of the Experience certificate (Ervaringscertificaat EVC), describing one's abilities, knowledge and work experience. To better connect these fields there are one or more Learn and work counters in all 35 Labour market regions (Arbeidsmarktregio's) in the Netherlands. Regional

and local stakeholders are well informed about local labor market circumstances. They are able to provide, if necessary, custom-made support to unemployed people. This regional approach is the outcome of a process that started already in 2009 to create cooperation structures of stakeholders at the regional level in order to address unemployment issues.

### **The future: Edubadges and micro-credentials**

A new (and quickly developing) way in providing EVC's is by using edubadges and micro-credentials. Edubadges stand for a digital certificate providing students evidence for obtained knowledge and skills in a training. Edubadges can be obtained by both accredited formal education and informal non-accredited education. This is different to a micro-credential which is also proof of a learning outcome that a learner has acquired following a short learning experience. However, these learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent standards. The proof is also contained in a certified document that lists the name of the holder, the achieved learning outcomes, the assessment method, the awarding body and, where applicable, the qualifications framework level and the credits gained. Both edubadges and micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared, are portable and may be combined into larger credentials or qualifications. However, only micro-credentials are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards. Currently, a lot of research and testing is taking place in the Netherlands on using edubadges and micro-credentials.