

**Accreditation of Prior Learning:  
A background report**

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January 2001

## Table of content

<b>1.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION TO THE ACCEPT-PROJECT.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	BACKGROUND .....	1
1.2	DEFINITION OF TERMS.....	3
1.3	AIM OF THE INVENTORY .....	5
1.4	FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS .....	5
1.5	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	6
1.6	ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT .....	6
<b>2.</b>	<b>APL IN THE NETHERLANDS.....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1	BACKGROUND .....	7
	2.1.1 <i>The national qualification structure</i> .....	8
	2.1.2 <i>Pilot projects</i> .....	9
	2.1.3 <i>EVC and lifelong learning</i> .....	10
	2.1.4 <i>EVC and shortages on the labour market</i> .....	11
2.2	A BASIC EVC MODEL.....	12
2.3	EVC IN HIGHER EDUCATION.....	15
2.4	EVC FOR PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES.....	20
	2.4.1 <i>EVC in the teaching profession</i> .....	20
	2.4.2 <i>EVC in the nursing profession</i> .....	25
2.5	DISCUSSION.....	26
<b>3.</b>	<b>APL IN THE UNITED STATES.....</b>	<b>28</b>
3.1	BACKGROUND .....	28
	3.1.1 <i>American Council on Education</i> .....	29
	3.1.2 <i>CAEL</i> .....	31
3.2	A BASIC APL MODEL .....	32
3.3	APL IN HIGHER EDUCATION .....	37
3.4	APL FOR PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES .....	41
3.5	DISCUSSION.....	42

<b>4. APL IN THE UNITED KINGDOM .....</b>	<b>44</b>
4.1 BACKGROUND .....	44
4.2 A BASIC MODEL .....	46
4.3 APL IN HIGHER EDUCATION .....	48
4.4 APL FOR PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES .....	52
4.4.1 <i>APL in the teaching profession</i> .....	52
4.4.2 <i>APL in the nursing profession</i> .....	58
4.5 DISCUSSION.....	62
<b>5. CONCLUDING REMARKS.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>ANNEX I<sup>A</sup> .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>ANNEX I<sup>B</sup> .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>ANNEX II .....</b>	<b>77</b>

## List of figures

FIGURE 1:	ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION.....	1
FIGURE 2:	FOCUS OF THE ACCEPT STUDY.....	2
FIGURE 3:	FRAMEWORK FOR CLASSIFYING APL PROJECTS.....	5
FIGURE 4:	HOW EVC COULD WORK.....	11
FIGURE 5:	A BASIC <i>EVC</i> MODEL.....	13
FIGURE 6:	THE NEED FOR <i>EVC</i> IN HIGHER PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION.....	15
FIGURE 7:	MAIN STEPS FOR FLEXIBLE RECRUITMENT OF TEACHERS.....	23
FIGURE 8:	STEPS FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF SPONSORED AND NON-SPONSORED PRIOR LEARNING	33
FIGURE 9:	QUALITY STANDARDS FOR PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT.....	41
FIGURE 10:	TYPES OF ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING.....	44
FIGURE 11:	OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN STEPS IN THE APL PROCESS.....	46



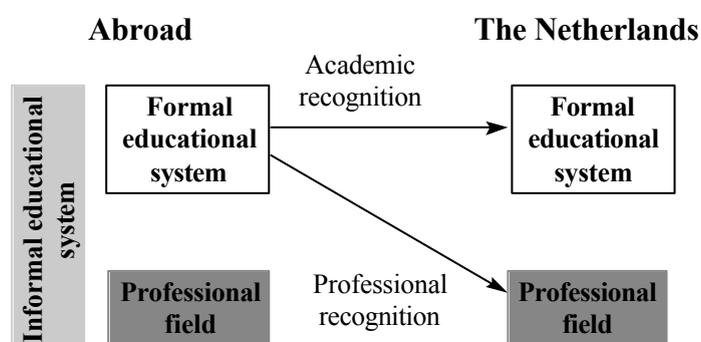
# 1. Introduction to the ACCEPT-project

## 1.1 Background

Today's society is often characterized as a learning society catering to the needs of a global economy. Lifelong learning has become essential to maintaining an employable workforce. It is essential that people continue learning after graduation. This learning can take place in various settings: formal education, private studies, online education, employment, in-service training, self-studies, et cetera. To encourage international mobility among the workforce it is important that all these forms of learning are recognized. It is envisaged that Europeans will one day be able to enter and leave education, training and work whenever they wish, moving between these arenas while receiving credit for the various competencies they develop along the way. An important prerequisite for the realization of this vision is the development of a flexible system for the international accreditation of prior learning or competencies.

International credential evaluation is an important part of such a system, but is not synonymous with it. International credential evaluators evaluate academic qualifications for the purpose of admission to further study (*academic recognition*) or work (*professional recognition*). It is now possible to indicate that someone has had work experience, or has been involved in other, more informal learning settings, but there is no methodology for assessing and accrediting the competencies developed in these situations. Current practice is limited to the evaluation of qualifications awarded upon successful completion of formal study programmes that are offered by nationally recognized or accredited educational institutions.

**Figure 1: Academic and professional recognition**

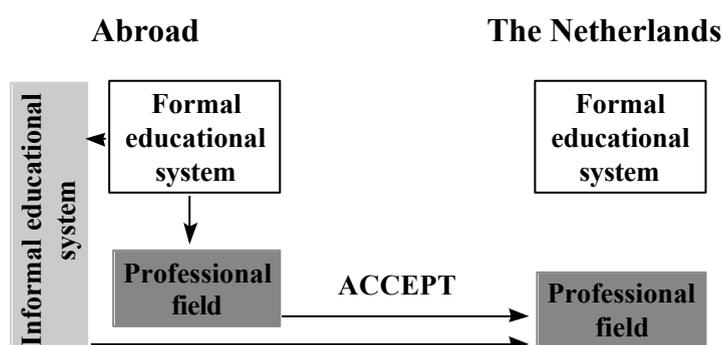


In the new century it is no longer acceptable to continue to restrict official recognition decisions - which are needed for permission to work in regulated professions - to formal diplomas. This is especially unacceptable if a candidate has been involved in numerous learning situations after graduation (e.g. work, in-service training, self-study). These learning experiences can compensate for differences in academic programmes, but as yet there is no accepted procedure for assessing and accrediting a foreign applicant's professional competencies.

For this reason, the Department for International Credential Evaluation of Nuffic in the Netherlands initiated a project in 1999 called ACCEPT: Accrediting Competencies acquired in Education, Professional Training and Employment. The project's main objective is to expand the methodology of international credential evaluation so that it can deal not only with formal study programmes and diplomas but also with competencies acquired through a variety of means. The focus of evaluation will thus change from a person's formal qualification or degree to the competencies the person has acquired in all the learning situations they have experienced (e.g. work, private education, self-study and/or course attendance). Both the applicant with a foreign diploma and the Dutch economy can benefit from such an expanded methodology that considers not just a person's diploma, but a person's competencies as a whole.

To limit the extent of the project, ACCEPT will --in first instance-- focus on the assessment and accreditation of competencies for the purpose of work and as such facilitate the access to the Dutch labour market for foreign professionals.

**Figure 2: Focus of the ACCEPT study**



The first phase of the ACCEPT project started in 1999 with an inventory. The present report presents the main findings of that inventory.

## 1.2 Definition of terms

Two important terms in this report are *accreditation of prior learning* and *competencies*. The following definitions are used in this report.

### Accreditation of prior learning

The generic term *accreditation of prior learning (APL)* refers to the assessment and accreditation of any form of learning that has taken place in the context of either formal or informal education or during work itself. There are two types of prior learning: prior certificated learning and prior experiential learning.

- *Accreditation of prior certificated learning (APCL)* refers to the assessment and accreditation of learning that has been formally assessed by a recognized or accredited educational institution (Anglia Polytechnic University, 1999).
- *Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)* refers to the assessment and accreditation of learning (e.g. through self-study, workshops, course attendance) that either has not been assessed or has been assessed by an educational institution that is not formally recognized or accredited. This includes learning acquired on the job as well as learning acquired through workshops or courses offered by non-accredited private institutions or providers of on-line distance education (Anglia Polytechnic University, 1999).

International credential evaluation forms part of the *accreditation of prior certificated learning (APCL)*. Credit is given for prior learning that has been certified by a recognized or accredited higher education institution abroad. Credential evaluators do not have the instruments they need for assessing and accrediting credentials awarded outside the formal system of education, or for assessing competencies acquired through daily work. This requires the *accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)*.

### Competencies

In the literature, the term *competencies* is defined in various manners. Klarus (1998, p.40) presents the following definition (translated from the Dutch):

*Competencies are the integrated or coherent set of cognitive and practical (social, technical and methodological) professional skills with which a given professional objective is reached or a product or result is produced.*

Klarus links the term ‘competency development’ with the term ‘qualification’. Competencies can be developed in various learning settings. It is not important how and where one has developed certain competencies as long as one meets the standard criteria. Competencies are assigned the status of a qualification if assessment shows that the standard criteria have been met. Assessment and education are two separate responsibilities. Klarus (1998, p.412) defines a qualification as *‘a standardized description of all the skill, knowledge and attitude required for the practice of a profession, further study and social functioning and which is legitimised by both social partners and the government’*.

Onstenk (1997) relates the term competencies to a person’s ability to solve professional problems.

*A competency is the structured, integrated ability to adequately perform work-related tasks and solve work-related problems. A competency has its own structure and is not merely a list of tasks or skills.*

Both Onstenk and Klarus define a competency as an ability to perform as a professional. This ability is a central subject of the ACCEPT study. The methodology that needs to be developed should ascertain whether the person who wishes to work in a given profession has developed the knowledge and practical skills and the personal qualities required for practising this profession in the Netherlands. It is not important where the competencies were developed as long as the standards are met.

For now, the term ‘competencies’ will be defined as:

*A cluster of knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable a person to carry out the tasks that form an important part of a specific profession, and to solve the core problems in that profession.*

Some might find this definition too task-oriented, but it suits the purpose of the ACCEPT study.

### 1.3 Aim of the inventory

The aim of the inventory was to gather information on how prior learning and/or competencies is currently being assessed and accredited in practice. The study is not limited to the Netherlands. Information was also gathered in the United States and in the United Kingdom, two countries with extensive experience in the accreditation of prior learning (APL).

The guiding research questions for the inventory were:

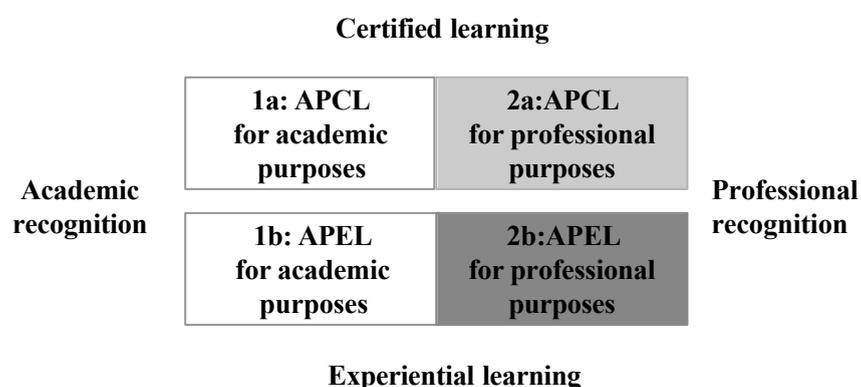
*Which models are currently being used for the assessment, accreditation and/or certification of prior learning and/or competencies?*

- a) What is the aim of these models?*
- b) For whom have they been developed?*
- c) Which steps can be distinguished and which instruments are being used?*
- d) Which assessment standards are being used?*
- e) How is quality assured?*
- f) What is the status and effect of the outcomes?*

### 1.4 Framework for analysis

In this report a distinction is made between projects that facilitate access to education (*APL for academic purposes*), and projects that facilitate access to the labour market (*APL for professional purposes*). As indicated before, two types of prior learning can be distinguished: *prior certificated learning (APCL)* and *prior experiential learning (APEL)*. Projects that can be classified in the last quadrant of figure three (APEL for professional purposes) are of most interest for the ACCEPT project. However, lessons can also be learned from projects with other aims.

**Figure 3: Framework for classifying APL projects**



In practice, it appears that the distinction between academic and professional purposes is not always clear-cut. Some projects are aimed at increasing the number of students in a specific study programme in order to cope with future labour shortages in that field. Nevertheless, the present report pays special attention to projects aimed at facilitating access to the labour market.

## **1.5 Research methodology**

The methods used to answer the research questions include document analysis, a review of the literature, surfing of the World Wide Web, study visits and interviews (in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands) A list of the institutions visited can be found in Annex I<sup>a</sup>.

To gather information on APL in the United States, a small study was commissioned which was carried out by a member of the World Education Services (WES) in New York. Besides document analysis, numerous American institutions were visited or contacted by phone or email (see Annex I<sup>b</sup>). And a workshop was attended by means of distance education (DePaul University, division of lifelong learning).

## **1.6 Organization of this report**

The remaining chapters will examine experiences with APL in the Netherlands (Chapter 2), the United States (Chapter 3) and the United Kingdom (Chapter 4). Each chapter starts with a kind of historical overview providing some necessary background information. Then attention is given to APL in practice, with a focus on the higher education sector. At the same time, examples are given of APL projects aimed at facilitating access to the labour market through APL. Each chapter concludes with a summary of the main steps and instruments being used for the assessment of prior learning. In Chapter 5 the findings are related to the main aim of the ACCEPT project and some general conclusions are drawn. It needs to be pointed out that the information in this report is not exhaustive. It does, however, provide a good overview of the present state of the art.

## 2. APL in the Netherlands

The Dutch term used to refer to accreditation of prior learning is *Erkennen van elders of informeel Verworven Kwalificaties (EVK)*, which roughly translated means ‘the recognition of qualifications gained somewhere else or in an informal setting’. Gradually, the term *kwalificaties* [qualifications] is being replaced by the term *competenties* [competencies]. In this chapter, the abbreviation *EVC* will be used to refer to the assessment and accreditation of prior learning and/or competencies.

### 2.1 Background

In the Netherlands, thoughts on *EVC* were first expressed in a report of the Ministry of Education entitled ‘*Blijven Leren*’ [‘Continue learning’], published in 1993. As a result of the enormous variety of subsidized and non-subsidized courses and study programmes in the Netherlands, it is difficult for employers and educational institutions – and also for individuals seeking education – to have a clear idea of the quality and level of the competencies that can be acquired. The government also expressed a wish to facilitate access to regular education programmes. The development of a national qualification structure and a policy regarding *EVC* are mentioned in the report as two possible options for making the Dutch education system more transparent and more accessible. The report also discusses a system of examining and testing a person’s competencies so that these can be certified in terms of the accepted diplomas and/or certificates (Ministry of Education and Science, 1993).

An advisory committee was set up to investigate whether a scheme for the assessment and accreditation of prior learning was desirable and possible (*Commissie Erkennen Verworven Kwalificaties*, EVK Committee). This committee reported favourably to the Minister in March 1994. In its report ‘*Kwaliteiten erkennen*’ [‘Recognition of Qualities’], the *EVK* Committee emphasizes that individuals can develop competencies outside formal study programmes, and that these should be compared with standards developed or legitimized by branch organizations or other social partners, and - where possible - accredited. To guarantee the civil effect of the outcome of an *EVC* process, the committee advises embedding the procedure in a regional infrastructure and recommends that the newly developed qualification structure be used as a frame of reference. Qualifications awarded after a successfully completed *EVC* procedure should be viewed no differently from a regular diploma or certificate (EVK Committee, 1994).

### 2.1.1 The national qualification structure

The national qualification structure occupies a central place in the Adult and Vocational Education Act (*Wet op Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs*), which came into effect in 1996. Its purpose is to improve the relationship between demand from the labour market and supply from the education sector. The structure has five levels, four of which are related to secondary vocational education. The fifth level is related to higher education and falls outside the responsibility of the national bodies for vocational education. This structure is legitimized by the social partners (representatives of labour, management and government) and defines learning outcomes in terms of the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes needed to obtain a certificate or qualification at secondary vocational level.

The fifth level has not been worked out at central level, but the Association of Universities of Professional Education (*HBO-raad*) has published guidelines for drafting study programme objectives that are derived from professional profiles legitimized by the social partners. A professional profile is supposed to describe what the labour market requires of graduates in a particular field – in other words, beginning professionals. On the basis of this profile, a study- programme profile is drafted which states the standards a graduate should achieve in order to earn the qualification (diploma). These standards can be defined in terms of competencies, however, this is not a national requirement. The study programme profile –stating the qualification requirements--is shared by all the universities of professional education offering a programme in that field for approximately 70 per cent. To some extent it is therefore fair to speak of national requirements. The study programme profile will be formally approved by the General Assembly of the Association and then placed in a public register. Departments offering that programme will then base their curricula on the profile.

The new system of quality assurance for higher professional education more or less forces the institutions to work on the development of national and institution-specific qualification requirements, since these are referred to specifically in the framework for quality assurance: *'The department (offering a particular study programme) has defined specific learning objectives that in terms of content are sufficiently consistent with the national and institution-specific qualification requirements defined for that programme.'* (HBO-raad, 1999, p.5). This means that eventually even the fifth level of the national qualification structure will be worked out in detail. And the various national task forces that are now drawing up study-programme profiles will have made the switch from thinking in terms of qualifications to thinking in terms of competencies. (Schlusmans e.a., 1999).

### 2.1.2 Pilot projects

Following the publication of the *EVK* Committee's report, pilot projects were set up in various fields of business. Most of these were related to qualifications at levels 2 to 4 of the Dutch qualification structure (secondary vocational education and training). The *EVC* procedures in most of these projects were derived from a basic *EVC* model that was developed by CINOP in the early 1990s (Klarus and Blokhuis, 1997). The model will be discussed in Section 2.2 of this chapter. Its developers were inspired by models used in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia.

In most cases the pilot projects involved collaboration between:

- a regional education centre (*Regionale Opleidingscentrum (ROC)*). These centres are responsible for advising and guiding candidates. They also carry out their own assessments.
- a national body for vocational education (*Landelijke Orgaan Beroepsonderwijs (LOB)*). This body is responsible for developing the assessment procedure.
- companies. They supply both the setting and the assessors for the practical assessment. (Klarus and Nieskens, 1997).

In general, one could say that the pilot projects were aimed at giving more people access to regular education so that qualified workers will be delivered in greater numbers to the labour market. In some branches, for example the construction industry and child care, pilot projects were initiated to increase the number of students enrolled in a specific programme and thus to respond to anticipated shortages on the labour market. Other projects were initiated by employers and/or branch organizations to increase the number of qualified employees, in some cases in response to new regulations. Examples of such projects can be found in the telecommunications branch, in civil engineering and construction, and in painting.

The assessment standards that were used were derived from the standards of the Dutch qualification structure. These are the same as the standards used by educational centres for their regular study programmes. In this way, the civil effect of an *EVC* procedure is guaranteed as much as possible. This civil effect can take the form of gaining access to a regular study programme, being exempted from certain requirements because credit was awarded for modules already completed, or earning the final qualification as though one had successfully completed a regular study programme.

Thomas and Frietman (1998), who conducted an inventory commissioned by the Ministry of Economic Affairs as part of the national action programme for *lifelong learning*<sup>1</sup>, report several critical factors influencing success or failure. It seems that practical obstructions form the biggest potential fail factor. In many *EVC* projects, the persons concerned indicated that the *EVC* procedures were very time-consuming and formed an administrative burden. Lack of support and lack of financial sources are, not surprisingly, two other factors that can hamper the success of a project. On the other hand, the win-win situation that characterizes *EVC* is clearly a success factor. Employer and employee both win; both benefit from good policies for career advancement (if the *EVC* project was initiated by an employer) or from effective training (if the project was initiated by an educational institution).

### 2.1.3 *EVC* and lifelong learning

In the lifelong learning national action programme, *EVC* is mentioned as an instrument for maintaining an employable workforce. ‘Young people who leave school without basic diplomas must have the opportunity to return to obtain these qualifications at a later stage. The most advantageous methods are those which would combine study with work, or would give recognition to knowledge and skills acquired outside school (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 1998, p. 9)’. In 1998, during its autumn deliberations, the cabinet suggested that the *EVC* system be developed further as an item on the employability agenda. The Ministry of Economic Affairs appointed a broad task force to develop a viewpoint on *EVC*. The task force presented its vision in early 2000, in a discussion paper called ‘*De fles is half vol*’ [‘The bottle is half-full.’] (Werkgroep *EVC*, 2000).

*EVC*, or the assessment and accreditation of prior learning and/or competencies, is seen as a good way to increase employability. Making better use of individual talents is one of the main reasons for working out the system in more detail.

‘Through accessible channels and without serious restraints - financial or otherwise - people have to be able to get recognition for competencies they have acquired outside formal education. This not only gives both employers and employees extra encouragement for lifelong learning, it also improves the link between education and the labour market because demand replaces supply as the central, determining factor. Competencies can lead directly to

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<sup>1</sup> The *lifelong learning* national action programme is an endeavor which originated from the Knowledge Debate (1996-1997).

certification, exemptions or diplomas; they can become part of staffing policy; and they can offer a people insight into their own employability,' (translated from Dutch) (Werkgroep EVC, 2000, p. 5).

The *EVC* 2000 task force says that to achieve this vision, attention must be given to:

- a) the civil effect of the results of competency assessments;
- b) the accessibility of the *EVC* assessment system;
- c) quality assurance regarding the procedure.

*EVC* is seen as useful not only for providing people with a basic qualification. The system can also be applied to extra training that people acquire over and above their basic qualification. Figure 4 shows clearly the fields in which *EVC* can play an important role --the so-called 'employability segments'.

**Figure 4:** How EVC could work (from *Werkgroep EVC*, 2000)



### 2.1.4 EVC and shortages on the labour market

In the education ministry's long-term plan known as the Higher education and Research Plan (*HOOP*) 2000, *EVC* is explicitly named as one of the ways of correcting the present and anticipated labour-market shortages of people with higher education. The Social-Economic Council (*Sociaal Economische Raad: SER*), in its advice preparatory to *HOOP*, wrote about a shortage of some 150,000 graduates of higher professional education between now and 2003. The council argued in favour of a two-track strategy for correcting such shortages. First, enrolments must be increased and student success rates improved by creating more flexibility in the routes to a degree. Secondly, more attention should be given to additional training for the existing professional workforce. In both respects,

*EVC* can play an important role. An *EVC* procedure can be used to draw up a list of the competencies a person already possesses. This helps the person to identify missing competencies, which can then be acquired along an individually designed path. Education becomes more flexible and demand-driven, thus making the prospect of extra training or re-training more attractive to the individual (Information Department of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science).

In the autumn of 1999 the Association of Universities of Professional Education (*HBO-Raad*) began a project known as *Flexibilisering* [‘Becoming/making more flexible’]. This project is supposed to help universities of professional education (*hogescholen*) acquire expertise in how to work in a way that is more demand-driven and market-oriented, thus enabling them to serve the new target groups. The project plans describes three themes, each of which has been translated into a sub-project. The themes are intake assessment, orientation to the market, and flexibility of the organization (HBO-Raad, 1999). The purpose of the ‘intake assessment’ subproject is to develop instruments for the assessment and accreditation of competencies developed in the past whereafter individualized study programmes can be developed and offered to the client. The initiators of the project are trying to be consistent with other projects aimed at developing assessment mechanisms, such as:

- the Educational Partnership Project (*Educatief Partnerschap: EPS*), see also Section 2.4.1;
- a study on the use of *EVC* in higher education which was commissioned by the education ministry (Thomas, van Broekhoven and Frietman, 2000), see also Section 2.3;
- and the study commissioned by the Ministry of Economic Affairs entitled ‘The bottle is half-full’ (Werkgroep *EVC*, 2000), see Section 2.1.3.

The introduction of what is known as ‘competence-oriented learning’, and its increasing popularity in higher education, has encouraged people to think about how competencies can be assessed. This educational philosophy, which makes competent performance as a practising professional the central issue, requires a more direct relationship between education and the labour market. Students must be better prepared for working in a rapidly changing, complex society in which a person must continue to learn (Schlusmans e.a., 1999).

## **2.2 A basic *EVC* model**

The basic model used in numerous Dutch pilot projects resembles the English model. Study visits were made to the United Kingdom in the early nineties to learn more about how the *accreditation of prior learning (APL)* works in practice.

The model has three basic steps (see Figure 5):

**1. Development and assessment of the portfolio:**

an inventory of work and learning experiences and a comparison of these experiences with the national qualification standards;

**2. Assessment tasks:**

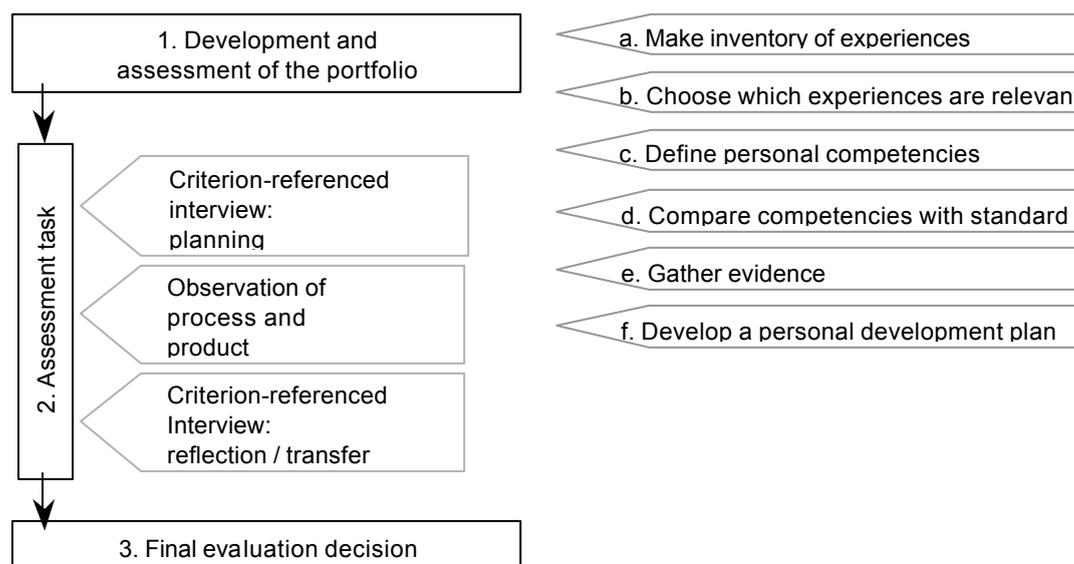
a practical assignment which includes the candidate being interviewed to assess his/her planning skills and his/her ability to reflect on the task performed or to transfer the task to another context.

At the same time the performance itself is observed and scored using a checklist, and - if applicable - the quality of the person's products is judged.

**3. Final evaluation decision:**

a decision as to whether or not a full or partial qualification can be awarded.

**Figure 5: A basic EVC model (derived from Klarus and Blokhuis (1997) and Klarus (1998))**



The steps will be explained in further detail below.

**1) Development and assessment of a portfolio**

A portfolio is a file containing an overview of a person's educational and professional career, as well as his/her leisure activities. The competencies acquired through these learning situations are compared with the requirements for a qualification, which may have been laid down in the national qualification structure.

## 2) Assessment tasks

All candidates are required to perform a task for the purpose of testing. This is an authentic task based on an analysis of the occupation. If possible, the task is performed at the workplace.

Candidates receive the assignments a few days before the test, which gives them the possibility to prepare at home. Since *EVC* is meant to determine whether a person is capable of performing certain tasks, it is not wrong that they are able to practise before the test. The precise questions that will be asked are not given in advance, however.

The candidate's ability to plan and to reflect on his/her performance are assessed with the help of a *structured criterion-referenced interview*, while the execution of the task is observed by the assessors.

### a) *Structured criterion-referenced interview*

The assessors interview the candidate on the basis of a *list of standardized criteria* in order to assess how he/she has planned and prepared for the task. The interview serves two purposes. First, it provides information about the professional skills of the candidate. Second, the assessor knows what to watch for as the assignment is being executed (e.g. is the chosen procedure safe).

At the end of the assignment the candidate is interviewed again. The purpose of the second interview is to assess whether the candidate can reflect accurately on the task that has just been performed and whether he/she is able to transfer the method of working to other situations in the same domain.

### b) *Observation*

The observation is carried out with help of an *observation checklist*, which is also based on the criteria for the national qualification. These criteria focus on:

- the preparation; does the candidate check whether he/she has all the necessary materials?;
- the process; does the candidate follow the correct sequence and use the right procedure?);  
and
- the completion; does the candidate perform the necessary follow-up procedures, such as performing maintenance tasks and tidying up the workplace?

The observation checklist lists all the activities that can be observed, and the assessors indicate whether they have observed them or not.

### 3) Total evaluation

The last step in the procedure is the evaluation of the assignment as a whole. Guidelines for weighing the various components have been developed and should be used by the assessors. If the result is a 'pass', the certificate for the full or partial qualification is awarded to the candidate or he/she is exempted from parts of the module in question.

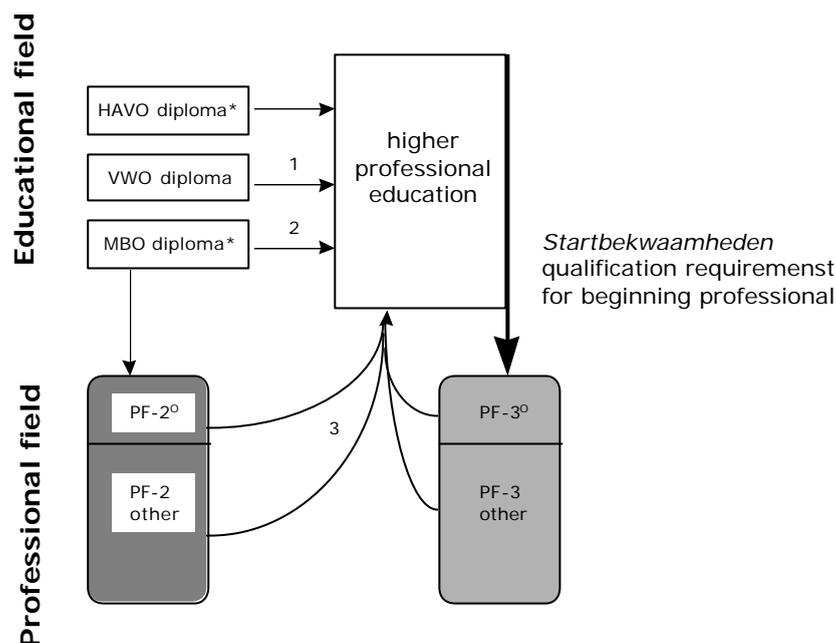
## 2.3 EVC in higher education

At present, *EVC* is gaining ground in the higher education sector. The Higher Education and Research Plan for the year 2000 (*HOOP 2000*) indicates that higher education should become more flexible and more demand-oriented in order to cope with existing and anticipated shortages of highly qualified people. *EVC* is mentioned as one of the instruments for dealing with this because it could make higher education more accessible and more attractive to certain groups of potential students by granting recognition for prior learning and by creating possibilities for individual learning pathways (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 1999a).

Thus far, the universities of professional education are ahead of the regular universities in developing *EVC* procedures and instruments. In the university sector there are still people who feel that academic competencies can only be developed between the walls of a university and nowhere else. It is probably only a matter of time before this changes, since more and more regular universities are working to develop dual learning pathways in which students work and learn at the same time (*Opleiding & Ontwikkeling* [Training & Development], March 2000).

Figure 6 presents *EVC* targets for a university of professional education.

**Figure 6: The need for *EVC* in higher professional education**



Explanation of symbols:

\* The traditional route

1, 2 Students with a *VWO* diploma or an *MBO* diploma in a relevant area could be partially exempted on the grounds that they acquired certain competencies in their prior education. Numerous *HBO* institutions have already developed these so-called '*versnelde leerroutes*' or fast tracks.

3 Professionals who enter or re-enter education

PF-2 Jobs at the secondary vocational level. 'PF-2<sup>o</sup>' refers to jobs at this level in the main field in which the *HBO* study programme educates students. 'PF-2 other' refers to jobs in a professionally related area.

PF-3 Jobs at the level of higher professional education. 'PF-3<sup>o</sup>' refers to the main jobs for which the study programme educates students. Some professionals who work in such jobs might never have earned a degree and wish to acquire one. 'PF-3 other' refers to jobs in a professionally related area. People who work in one job might prefer another job in the same general area, but they need to acquire the qualifications for it.

Traditionally students have enrolled in an *HBO* study programme in a field related to the subjects they learned for their *HAVO* or *MBO* diploma. (These routes have been marked with an \*.) *EVC* procedures need to be developed for applicants with a *VWO* diploma or with an *MBO* diploma in a different area, and for professionals who wish to go back to school to improve their qualifications. They might work in a profession for which a secondary vocational qualification is generally required (PF-2), or in a job that generally requires a higher professional qualification (PF-3).

Numerous higher education institutions have been working to develop instruments that provide insight into the competencies a person has acquired. They have done this either for *EVC* purposes or within the context of a new competence-oriented curriculum. Some of these initiatives will be discussed below, as will the general *EVC* model developed by ITS (Thomas *et al.*, 2000).

### **Aim**

Most of the activities of higher education institutions are focused on facilitating access to higher education by developing individual learning pathways. Through *EVC*, the competencies of an individual are compared with the competencies required of a certain type of professional at the start of his/her career. Exemptions are granted on the basis of competencies a candidate is found to possess (e.g. projects initiated by the *Christelijke Hogeschool Noord-Nederland*). In this way, because candidates can qualify for a profession more quickly, shortages on the labour market can be corrected. The education ministry's project to recruit teachers from the current workforce provides an example (see Section 2.4.1.) Not all projects are directed towards offering individual learning pathways. Some are restricted to granting exemption from a required internship or period of work experience, for example. This is the case for the co-op business studies programme of the *Hogeschool van Amsterdam*.

Besides for the award of credits in specific study programmes, *EVC* could also be used a) to test a person's general aptitude for following a higher education study programme, or b) to test a person's aptitude for working in a specific sector or professional domain (Thomas, *et al.*, 2000).

### **Target group**

The target group consists mainly of professionals who wish to acquire further qualifications in their own field, who are re-orienting to the labour market and seeking new qualifications, or who are looking for a job.

### **Steps and instruments**

The steps and instruments generally being used in *EVC* projects are the same in the higher education sector as in the sector of secondary vocational education. Thomas, *et al.* (2000) present a general model for *EVC* as the outcome of a study commissioned by the Dutch education ministry. The model has six phases, which will be discussed below. The model resembles the CINOP model discussed in Section 2.2.

### 1. **Providing information on *EVC* procedures and intake**

The three main activities that need to be carried out in this first phase are:

a) *Providing information for potential students*

Potential students need to be informed about the possibilities that *EVC* offers.

Information should be given about the purpose of *EVC*, about the procedure, and about how *EVC* results can be used. Pamphlets are one possibility.

b) *Application for an *EVC* claim*

The student must submit an application form for an *EVC* assessment. This becomes the basis of the portfolio that is put together at a later stage. The application form gives an overview of the applicant's prior learning experiences so that the *EVC* advisor can judge whether an *EVC* procedure is worth undertaking.

c) *Intake interview*

The student is then invited for an intake interview. Here the student is told more about the *EVC* process while the advisor uses the interview to gather more information about the student's personal objectives and his/her reasons for making the *EVC* claim. If the *EVC* is thought to be a viable option, the *EVC* advisor and the student agree on the competencies that will be defined in the portfolio.

### 2. **Selection of assessment standards**

The aim of the *EVC* claim should be identified, preferably before or during the intake interview. Generally, *EVC* is meant to demonstrate one of the following:

- a) the applicant's general aptitude for following a programme of higher education;
- b) the applicant's aptitude for working in a specific sector or professional domain, for example accountancy or education;
- c) that competencies developed in the past correspond with the requirements of the chosen study programme. An individual study programme or learning pathway is defined on the basis of the outcome of the *EVC* assessment.

### 3. **Development of a portfolio**

During the third phase, the student compiles a portfolio. The portfolio should provide insight into the competencies the person has already acquired, and evidence that this learning has taken place. In fact, this phase has the same steps as the general *EVC* model (see Figure 5).

#### 4. **Selection of additional test instruments**

Whether this phase needs to be carried out or not will depend on the outcome of the portfolio assessment. If there is sufficient evidence that the competencies have indeed been acquired as claimed, it is not necessary to ask the student to perform a task for assessment purposes. But if there is doubt, the assessors should choose one or more supplementary test instruments. For example they might require an essay, an interview, a simulation or an authentic task.

##### *Test of competence*

This instrument is used in nursing schools to assess the professional skills (competencies) that students have acquired during internships and/or practical periods.

##### *Development or assessment centre*

A development or assessment centre can work in any of several ways. One example is the assessment procedure developed by a group of teacher-training colleges in the east of the Netherlands. Their initiative is known as the *Educatief Oostelijk Samenwerkingsverband (EOS)* (EOS-projectgroep 'Bekwaam beoordelen', 2000). The centre assesses the competency level of students after completing an internship, for example, or of teachers who are re-entering the labour market after a period of absence. Among other things, candidates must prepare and present a lesson, and demonstrate their ability to work in a team to complete an assignment involving role play, and their ability to reflect on their own performance for purposes of self-assessment.

##### *Simulations*

Simulations can be used by a development or assessment centre, but can also be used separately. Generally, these are authentic assignments although they are carried out only in an educational environment and not on the job. Simulations are used to test certain specific competencies, such as the ability of a student-teacher to coach a pupil who has problems at home.

#### 5. **Recognition and certification**

During phase 3 and 4, a student's personal competency profile is compared with the competencies required for admission to or successful completion of a specific study programme. The assessors need to decide whether there is sufficient evidence to support the *EVC* claim. If the decision is favourable, the student receives credit in the form of exemptions from certain components of a study programme. The institution needs to decide how this credit will be recorded on the transcript of record. In some cases the applicant might receive a

certificate or diploma. However, in the United States and the United Kingdom, most institutions have specified a maximum amount of credit that may be awarded for prior learning and applied to earning a degree.

## 6. **Personal development plan**

If a student is admitted to a study programme with exemptions, a personal plan must be drafted describing how that student will earn his/her degree.

### **Assessment standards**

The assessment standards used will of course depend on the aim of the *EVC* claim (see above). However, in most cases the assessment standards will be derived from the study-programme profiles as defined nationally and from the content of the study programme offered by each separate institution. As indicated in Section 2.1.1, the fifth level of the Dutch qualification structure is nearing completion.

### **Quality assurance**

Quality assurance with regard to *EVC* assessment procedures is rapidly growing in importance. One reason for this is the guarantee that the outcome of the procedure has a civil effect which places heavy demands on both the standards and the procedure. These must be widely accepted and found reasonable. The *EVC* committee that was formed by the Ministry of Economic Affairs reported in its white paper ‘The bottle is half-full’ that one could expect (*Werkgroep EVC*, 2000):

- standards of competency to be defined for assessors;
- a system of quality assurance to be developed for assessment centres;
- a procedure to be adopted for accrediting assessors.

## **2.4 *EVC for professional purposes***

In this section, attention will be given to *EVC* projects that aim to facilitate access to the labour market through recognition and the accreditation of competencies acquired elsewhere. The projects were selected from the education sector and the nursing sector, two branches in which there are shortages on the current labour market.

### **2.4.1 *EVC in the teaching profession***

In the white paper *Maatwerk voor morgen: het perspectief van een open onderwijsarbeidsmarkt* [‘Custom tailoring for tomorrow: the prospects of an open job market in education’], the education

ministry explains how it plans to solve the problem of teacher shortages over the short term. The paper describes how as many teachers as possible will be recruited and encouraged to stay in their posts (addressing the issue of quantity), and how the issue of preserving educational quality in the midst of teacher shortages will be addressed (the issue of quality) (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 1999).

The white paper prompted initiatives designed to make both teacher-training programmes and the teaching profession itself more accessible. This is being done mainly by offering flexible educational pathways for other target groups. The project called *Educatief Partnerschap (EPS)*, [‘Educational Partnership’], which was initiated by the Dutch teacher-training institutes, is an example of admission requirements being made more flexible. The project initiated by the education ministry makes the recruitment of teachers for primary and secondary education more flexible. Both of these projects will be examined more closely below.

### **Educational Partnership**

The Educational Partnership project, which will be referred to here by its Dutch acronym *EPS*, resulted in 1999 in a plan for reform in which the teacher-training institutes describe how they intend to help relieve teacher shortages while at the same time renewing the content of teacher-training programmes. Each separate institute has since drafted its own plan for putting the proposed reforms into practice. There is also a plan for national coordination of the various efforts (*EPS*, 1999).

The leaders of *EPS* will direct six projects, and another eight projects will be conducted at the institutional level. The *EPS* leaders will provide some national coordination for these projects, however. For the present purposes of the ACCEPT project, the following two initiatives are the most interesting.

1. **Assessment and the use of a portfolio in the study programme** (in Dutch *assessment en portfolio in de opleiding*) is the name of a national project to develop instruments for recording the competencies of persons without a higher education diploma who wish to enter the teaching profession. It should be possible to translate the recommendation that results from the assessment procedure into a description of the individual learning pathway that the person can follow in order to qualify for the profession.
2. **Urgency programmes** is the name of a project conducted at the institutional level. Its purpose is to ensure that the institutions use a consistent method for translating the results of the

assessment procedure into an individual learning pathway. A person should be able to complete such a pathway in two to four years.

### **Flexible recruitment of primary- and secondary-school teachers**

While *EPS* has been developing procedures to facilitate access to teacher-training programmes, the education ministry has initiated a project that facilitates access to the labour market itself. Interim legislation will bring new kinds of graduates into the teaching profession. Graduates of universities of professional education (HBO) or university graduates with relevant experience will be able to take an aptitude test at a teacher-training institute. This will show what kind of additional training they need to become a teacher. The prospective teacher, the school where he or she is to work, and the teacher-training institute will then reach agreement on a compulsory two-year programme of training and supervision. In the meantime, the new teacher is given a temporary teaching post (teaching forms part of the two-year training programme). Upon successful completion of the programme, the graduate is awarded a teaching qualification equivalent to the standard one. (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 1999c).

Interim legislation was approved by parliament in May 2000. It prescribes that school boards receive enough money to cover the costs of assessing and training candidates. In future, the procedure described in the interim legislation could become a regular route to the teaching profession.

#### **Aim**

Besides relieving teacher shortages, the initiative should also make the teaching profession more attractive to people working in other sectors of the labour market. It offers people with different but relevant educational backgrounds and/or work experience an opportunity to work directly as part-time or full-time unqualified teachers. The current trend on the labour market by which people are moving more readily between jobs also requires alternative ways to enter the teaching profession (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 1999b)

#### **Target group**

The education ministry intends to make it easier for people who have experience outside the education system to become teachers. The candidates are graduates of universities of professional education (HBO) or university graduates with relevant experience.

Also foreign degree holders can be interested in this alternative route. However, the interim legislation stipulates that one needs a higher education diploma or equivalent. As a consequence, people whose

teacher qualification is not recognized as an equivalent to a Dutch degree can not ask for an aptitude test.

For six subjects in vocational schools, the law stipulates that skilled tradesmen who themselves have a vocational school diploma may qualify as teachers if an assessment has found them competent. The six subjects are construction, metalwork, electricity, automotive mechanics, installation, and cooking and baking (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2000a).

In the adult and vocational education sector there have been alternative routes for entering the labour market since the adoption in 1996 of the Adult and Vocational Education Act (*Wet op Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs*). But the education ministry wants to give these routes extra encouragement. The ministry is of the opinion that the social partners (representatives of government, management and labour) should make a contribution equal to its own in the development of schooling pathways (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2000a).

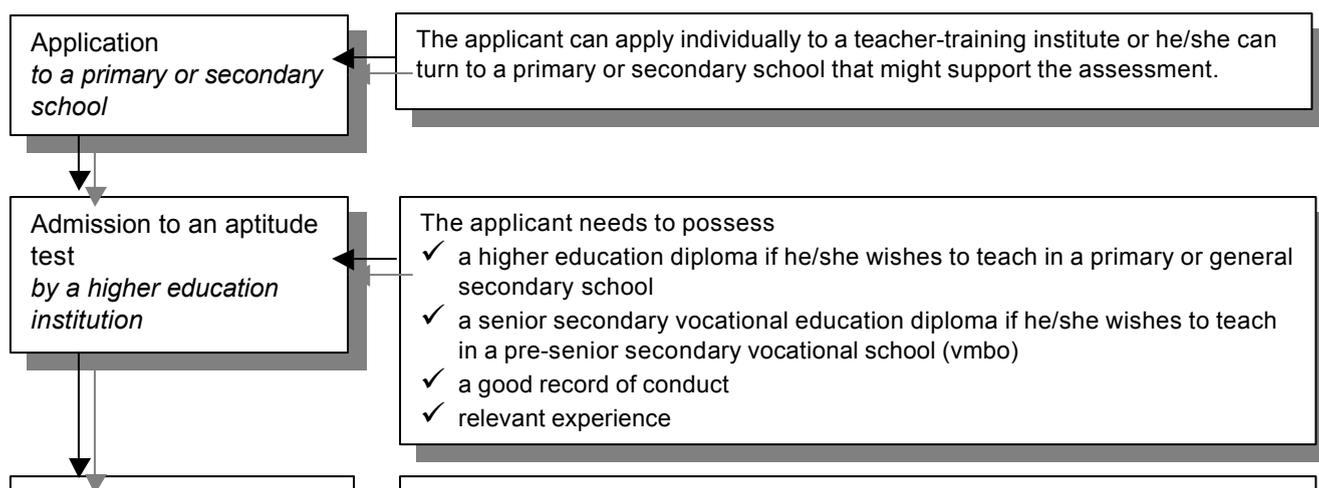
### Steps and instruments

The interim legislation describes the main steps a person without a regular teaching qualification should take in order to enter the teaching profession, but it does not give details about how an assessment should be carried out. Figure 7 presents the main steps.

For the pilot project, the STOAS research organization was asked to develop instruments and train assessors. STOAS has developed the following instruments:

- a list of core competencies for the aptitude test;
- a format for the portfolio, with instructions;
- validated assessment instruments, like for example guidelines for the criterion-based interviews, or an observation checklist;
- assignments or simulations.

**Figure 7: Main steps for flexible recruitment of teachers**



**Assessment Standards**

The core competencies used for the aptitude test are derived from the qualification standards of regular teacher-training programmes. So far these core competencies are not regulated by law. The partners involved in the assessment procedure (the school and the higher education institution responsible for the assessment) need to determine whether it will be possible within two years for the prospective teacher to bridge the gap between his or her competencies and the required qualification standards. If not, the prospective teacher is advised to enrol in a regular teacher-training programme Ministry of Education Culture and Science (2000b).

**Quality assurance**

To ensure that there is no drop in quality, the education ministry announced that there will be a new act of parliament (the Teaching Act) providing for a register of qualified teachers. The assessments themselves are now carried out by HBO institutions or universities that offer teacher-training programmes. In the future any institute or organization can apply for authorization to carry out assessments. The ministry, however, will see to it that the assessments are carried out in accordance with several general standards of quality.

### 2.4.2 EVC in the nursing profession

Initiatives have also been taken to increase access to the nursing profession, since healthcare is another sector that suffers from shortages of personnel. One example is the FLEXIS project (*Flexibele Leerroutes resulterend in Extra Instroom*) or translated from Dutch ‘Flexible learning pathways resulting in an extra influx (of personnel)’, which was initiated by two funding bodies concerned with the employment situation in hospitals and homes for the elderly. The main purpose of the FLEXIS project is to make it easier to recruit nurses by offering individualized, alternative routes to qualification. An initial study revealed that several alternative routes were already available in the healthcare sector, but that these were used mainly for the additional training of current staff. These learning pathways thus do not bring in new nurses. The project attempts to achieve an extra influx of nurses in three ways (ITS, 2000):

a) *Specific target groups*

These are persons who already possess at least some of the competencies required for providing care, but who for some reason are unwilling or unable to follow the regular route to qualification, for example because they are re-entering the labour market after a period of absence, or because they have acquired all the necessary competencies in their daily lives. *EVC* procedures can be used to determine what such a person can already do, and what they must still learn by following an individually tailored pathway.

b) *Flexible learning pathways*

These are routes to qualification that have been adapted to accommodate what a particular student needs to learn. A pathway can be adapted in terms of duration (shorter or longer), content and/or organizational structure. An *EVC* procedure is used to determine what the student still needs to learn.

c) *‘Learning region’*

To achieve effective links between the needs of the employers (hospitals and other institutions providing care), the knowledge of the target group, and the possibilities for flexible learning pathways, it is best to establish broad collaboration at a regional level. This is referred to as ‘a learning region’. It brings together representatives of the employing institutions, the institutions that train nurses, the regional educational centres, refugee organizations, agencies that specialize in *EVC*, etc.

At the end of 1999 the first call for project proposals was issued. Eventually 16 development projects were selected for funding. Most of them were aimed at qualification levels two, three and four. (The higher the level, the more responsibility for patients.) Only one project is aimed mainly at qualification level five, which is equivalent to a bachelor's degree in nursing. Four other projects involve level five along with the other, lower levels.

## **2.5 Discussion**

Although *EVC* first started in the secondary vocational education sector, it is currently gaining ground in the higher education sector as well. The importance of setting up *EVC* procedures is confirmed by national initiatives in the areas of employability, lifelong learning, and the introduction of competence-oriented learning. Nearly all of the *EVC* projects make at least some use of the basic *EVC* model. This means that several practices are becoming increasingly common: portfolio assessment, testing in authentic situations, and the drawing up of individual development plans on the basis of an *EVC* procedure.

Of particular interest in terms of ACCEPT is the project to recruit primary and secondary school teachers from the ranks of other types of workers. The instruments used in this project will be analyzed further.



### 3. APL in the United States

#### 3.1 Background

The United States is probably one of the most experienced countries with regard to *accreditation of prior learning (APL)*. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) defines *prior learning assessment (PLA)* as the process of defining, documenting, measuring, evaluating and granting credit for learning acquired through experience. Another term that is sometimes used in this respect is *recognition of extra-institutional learning*. The American Council on Education (ACE) defines extra-institutional learning as learning that is attained outside the sponsorship of legally authorized and appropriately accredited post-secondary education institutions. There are eight major types of experiential learning that may qualify for accreditation:

- work
- homemaking
- volunteer work
- non-credit learning in formal settings
- travel
- recreational activities and hobbies
- reading, viewing and listening (self-study), and
- discussion with experts.

Of these, work, non-credit learning in formal settings, and self-study are the experiences most commonly considered for possible academic credit.

Two other terms often used when an educational institution is discussing APL policy are *work-based learning* and *cooperative education programmes*. The latter are academic programmes that alternate between periods of learning in the classroom and periods of learning in the workplace. *Work-based learning* refers to a variety of instructional strategies that use a community site or workplace as a vehicle for learning and applying knowledge and skills in a planned course of study (Warren, 1999).

Research on APL within higher education started in the 1970s with studies that investigated the use of prior learning as a means of gaining access to higher education (Mulholland and Leith, 1998). At that time, colleges and universities were confronted with a) an increasing number of requests to assess the

learning of adult students gained outside an academic setting; b) an indication that the number of 18-year-old students would decrease dramatically in the coming years; and c) ideas that adult students would form an interesting clientele to replace the traditional student population (CAEL, 1998).

Two important organizations working in this field are the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL).

### **3.1.1 American Council on Education**

The American Council on Education (ACE), founded in 1918, is the association that coordinates the nation's higher education. ACE is dedicated to the belief that equal educational opportunity and a strong higher education system are essential cornerstones of a democratic society. ACE serves adult learners through three main programmes maintained by the Centre for Adult Learning and Educational Credentials (CALEC). These are the Military Programs, the Corporate Programs, and the GED (General Education Development) Testing Service.

#### **Military Programs**

Much of the groundwork for the accreditation of prior learning developed out of ACE's system for evaluating military courses taken by US servicemen in the post-World-War-II era. For more than 50 years now, ACE's Military Programs Department has been translating military courses and occupations into academic credit. In doing so, it helps service members and veterans use their military knowledge and experience to further their education and advance their careers. The results of the evaluation decisions are published in the Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services.

#### **Corporate Programs**

During the early 1970s, the Carnegie Commission on Non-traditional Study recommended that the principles applied by ACE in the evaluation of formal courses offered by the armed forces (known as Military Occupational Specialities) be extended to civilian organizations. In 1974, ACE's College Credit Recommendation Service (CREDIT) was initiated to help people obtain academic credit for learning acquired outside the sponsorship of colleges and universities. This is one of the Corporate Programs. The evaluation results are published in the National Guide to Educational Credit for Training Programs, which is distributed annually to college registrars and admissions officers throughout the United States.

The second Corporate Program is the Credit by Examination Program. This programme evaluates nationally standardized tests and the exams used for granting professional licenses and certificates to see whether their results reflect the same level of achievement as traditional college class work. If so, credit may be awarded for passing them. The results of these evaluations are published in the Guide to Educational Credit by Examination, which is also distributed to college and university officials on a regular basis. To give an example, a credit recommendation is presented in the box below. The model starts by providing information on the organization offering the courses in question. Then the course itself is described in the following terms: course title, location where the course is taught, length, dates, objective, learning outcome, instruction, and credit recommendation.

**An example (from Swinerton and Robinson, 1997, p.5):**

<b><i>Social Problems and Their Impact On the Workplace (Soc402)</i></b>	
<b>Location:</b>	Various locations throughout the United States
<b>Length:</b>	20 hours (5 weeks)
<b>Dates:</b>	September 1986 – present
<b>Objective:</b>	To gain insight and broaden the student perception of social problems affecting the workplace and to increase awareness of how the workplace can respond positively to them.
<b>Learning Outcome:</b>	Upon successful completion of this course, the student will be able to identify and analyze the causes, conditions, and consequences, and propose strategies to alleviate social problems in five specific areas: poverty, racism, sexism, drug/alcohol abuse, and illiteracy
<b>Instruction</b>	Major topics covered in the course are a sociological and systematic approach to problem analysis and solution via a seven-stage task force, experiential process. The course identifies six critical social problems that challenge the Workforce 2000 model and introduces six perspectives on social problems. Methods of instruction include discussion, classroom exercises, lecture, learner presentations, reports, observations, papers, homework assignments, and summary reports.
<b>Credit Recommendation:</b>	In the upper division baccalaureate degree category, 3 semester hours in Sociology or Business Administration.

Organizations offering a non-traditional course, examination or training programme can submit an application to ACE requesting a course review. After a preliminary investigation, an evaluation team is

brought together usually consisting of three faculty members with at least five years of teaching experience in their field of expertise and an understanding and appreciation of non-traditional learning. It is the task of the evaluators to determine whether the content of the course or examination is equivalent to what is currently being taught in the college or university classroom. If there is no direct link between the two, the evaluation team concentrates on the competencies that are demonstrated when a person passes the course or examination, and compares these with competencies acquired at a college or university. If college credit is indeed recommended, the course, examination or military training in question is listed in the appropriate guide (Schwartz and Swinnerton, 1995; ACE, undated).

### **GED Testing Service**

A third service offered by ACE-CALEC is the GED Testing Service. These tests are designed to measure the general academic skills and knowledge normally acquired through a four-year programme of high school study. In fact, nearly 15 percent of all high school diplomas issued each year in the United States are GEDs. About two-thirds of the people who take GED tests plan to continue their education and training at the post-secondary level.

### **3.1.2 CAEL**

Another central organization involved in APL is the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL). APL developments started with a pilot project which represented three years of collaboration between the Educational Testing Service and ten colleges. The project was also known as CAEL, for the Cooperative Assessment of Experiential Learning. It began by examining best practices relating to valid and reliable methods for assessing prior learning. This resulted in guidelines of good practice for the assessment of prior learning; recommendations regarding assessment methods and the training of faculty members and assessors; and suggestions for quality assurance in the administration of prior learning (CAEL, 1998).

The Council known as CAEL emerged from the pilot project. Its purpose is to develop materials for assessment programmes, to conduct training for staff involved in APL, and to sponsor research related to assessment. The Council's long experience in the field has resulted in principles and procedures for the assessment of experiential learning. A distinction is made between *sponsored* and *non-sponsored learning*. The first relates to learning that is planned and sponsored by a post-secondary institution, while non-sponsored learning is often an unplanned result of work or other life experiences. The most important difference relates to the fact that sponsored learning has the advantage of pre-planning. One

could say that the first term corresponds with prior certificated learning, while the second refers to prior experiential learning as defined in Chapter One. Whitaker (1989) discusses the steps that generally should be taken by an educational institution to assess both forms of learning (see Section 3.2).

Over time, the guidelines of good practice have evolved into the quality standards used by higher education institutions and accrediting bodies. These standards are discussed in detail in Section 3.3. CAEL has developed a web-based training programme together with the Office of Distance Learning at DePaul University in Illinois. This programme addresses most of the issues related to the evaluation of prior learning. It provides the basic tools by which individuals can develop the skills and procedures needed for assessing adults' prior learning. The course consists of five web-based workshops, each with four to six modules (see box).

<b>Workshop 1:</b>	Introduction to prior-learning assessment. Attention is given to three issues and their applications: the concepts of experiential learning, especially by adult learners; PLA quality standards; and the steps in the PLA process, especially articulation and planning.
<b>Workshop 2:</b>	Principles and standards of prior learning. Steps in the PLA process, paying special attention to evaluation, documentation and measurement.
<b>Workshop 3:</b>	Problems and issues related to prior-learning assessment.
<b>Workshop 4:</b>	Administration of prior-learning assessment.
<b>Workshop 5:</b>	Design of a PLA programme and/or PLA at the local institution.

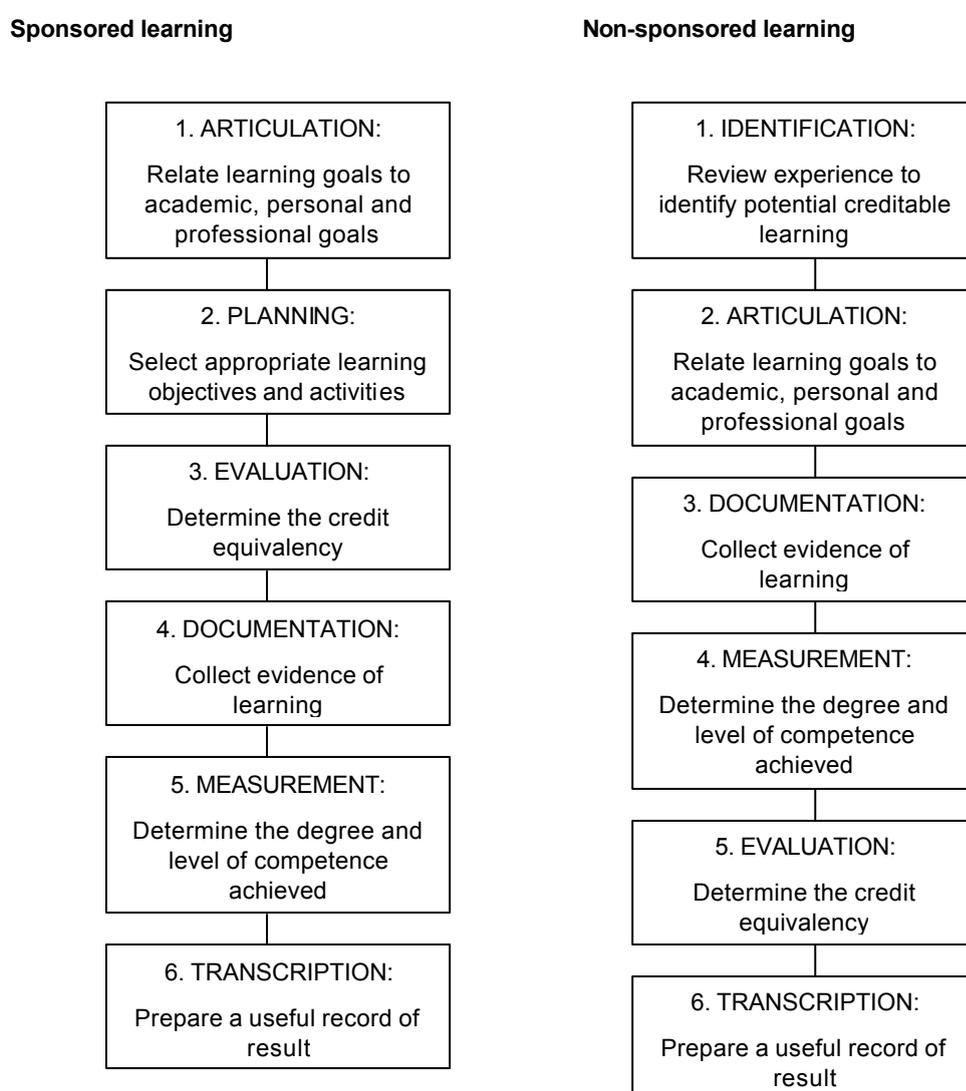
### 3.2 A basic APL model

Whitaker (1989) discusses two kinds of model that could help post-secondary educational institutions to assess experiential learning (see also Figure 8). He distinguishes between experiential learning that takes place under the guidance of an educational institution (*sponsored experiential learning*) and experiential learning that is an unplanned result of work or other life experiences (*non-sponsored learning*). The advantage of the first is that the learning activities that will take place outside the educational institution can be planned in advance, as can the method for measuring and evaluating the learning. In these cases an individual has enrolled in a study programme and is planning an internship or other experiential learning activity as part of that programme. The student and the educational

institution agree beforehand on specific learning objectives and the most appropriate learning activities. This is a different procedure from the assessment of non-sponsored learning, where individuals try to get credit for prior learning that has occurred before they enrolled in a study programme.

Figure 8 provides a schematic overview of the models for the assessment of sponsored and non-sponsored prior learning. The steps distinguished for the assessment of non-sponsored prior learning are most relevant for the purpose of the ACCEPT project, and will therefore be discussed in detail below.

**Figure 8: Steps for the assessment of sponsored and non-sponsored prior learning (from Whitaker, 1989)**



**1) Identification:**

The first critical step in the process of assessing prior experiential learning (non-sponsored learning) is to discover and to describe the college-level learning that may have resulted from these prior experiences. Helpful techniques to identify and relate relevant learning experiences include a time-line, a resumé, a work description and an autobiography. A portfolio is a useful instrument with which to petition for prior-learning assessment and to organize the evidence. It is important that students describe the learning in terms appropriate to the institution's curriculum and assessment procedures. As one of the quality criteria indicates, credit should be given for learning and not for experience alone. At the same time, an institution must have a policy regarding how long ago the learning took place if it is to be considered for credit. This policy must be as consistent as possible with the institution's standard practices for evaluating the transcripts of students who are transferring in or resuming their enrolment.

**2) Articulation**

Whereas the purpose of the first step is to identify potentially creditable learning, the purpose of the second step (*articulation*) is to determine how relevant the prior learning is to the chosen study programme. Determining that learning was at college level is not, by itself, a sufficient basis for granting college credit for it. Educational institutions must have developed principles and procedures to determine what type of learning or competence is creditable in the context of a specific degree programme. APL students should relate their prior learning to the programme objectives of the course in which they wish to enrol. They should reflect on what they have learned in practice, identify the gaps in their learning, and plan future learning on the basis of the outcome of the prior-learning assessment.

**3) Documentation**

The third step in the process is *documentation*. Students should provide the institution with evidence that the learning has indeed taken place. The documentation of prior learning comes in various forms (work samples, reports, certificates, diplomas, letters of reference, etc.). An educational institution should indicate what type of documentation is required for which type of learning. It is important to note that not all documentation provides evidence of learning; some merely describes experiences or a learning process. Assessors should take reasonable steps to ensure that the evidence submitted is accurate and authentic. It should be emphasized that the quality of the documentation is important and not the quantity. The learner is responsible for this

step, but the institution should help the learner to gather and present the documentation, for example through a portfolio course.

#### 4) **Measurement**

The assessment can take place as the evidence is submitted (*Step 4: measurement*). It should be determined how much has been learned and at which level of competence. The following requirements should be taken into account (Whitaker, 1989):

- Fit assessment method to the learning activity  
The assessment method being used should fit the character of the prior learning. In most cases a holistic method of expert judgement is required to determine the nature and level of the individual learning outcome. These include, for example, product assessment, essays, interviews and an oral examination.
- Fit assessment method to the learner  
The assessment techniques should be appropriate to the background of the learner. The assessment results should not be invalidated by a handicap, such as shyness or a speech impediment (or, as might be the case in the ACCEPT project, unfamiliarity with an assessment method).
- Utilize assessment as learning  
The assessment should form an integral part of the learning process as it is a useful learning experience for the student. It is important that the learner understand the nature and function of the assessment process.
- Ensure reliability  
Institutions should strive to ensure that an assessment is reliable (consistent). To improve consistency, more than one sample of learning should be examined and more than one assessor should be used. The assessors should strive to avoid any form of bias, discrimination or unconscious error in judging a candidate's performance or work.
- Ensure validity  
Institutions must make sure that the assessment is valid, that assessors measure what is intended. Validity will be improved if there are institutional guidelines as to what constitutes college-level learning, what type of learning is creditable, and what the objectives of experiential learning programmes are. It is easier to ensure validity if course outcomes have

been defined in competency-based terms. Assessors should seek more than one form of evidence and use more than one type of assessment to reach a valid judgement.

- Plan the process and train the assessors

All assessments should be carefully planned and the assessors should receive proper training, especially if assessment techniques such as role play, simulations and so on are used.

- State results objectively

The outcomes of the assessment should be objectively stated to avoid misinterpretation. Even though the assessment process may stress a subjective, holistic approach, it should be made explicit which specific learning objectives were identified, which competency levels were reached, and which standards were employed.

- Encourage supervised self-assessment

Self-assessment is an important aspect of the APL process, but it is not a sufficient basis for granting credit. It is important that the process of self-assessment be supervised and include appropriate steps to educate students about how to assume responsibility for their learning process and how to present evidence of their learning in such a way that it can be verified by faculty members before credit is awarded.

## 5) **Evaluation**

After determining what has been learned and at which level, it should be decided how many credits can be awarded as a result (*Step 5: evaluation*). An educational institution should determine the criteria for awarding credits. These may be based on existing competency statements, corresponding course content, degree requirements, or other means for judging the quality and relevance of the learning that has taken place outside the institution. It should also be decided who interprets and applies these criteria. In practice, there are many different arrangements and many different parties that can play a role, including faculty members, special assessors, and departmental or campus-wide committees. It is important that criteria are defined which are the same as criteria for the more traditional types of learning. It should not be more or less difficult to obtain credits via prior-learning assessment. The institution should publish its policies and procedures for granting credits for experiential learning. At the same time there should be provisions for a routine review of the award of credits ('a second opinion') and for appeal if there appears to be due cause.

Students should receive feedback after the evaluation. Deviations from the petitioned number of credits should be explained. The educational institution should develop appropriate mechanisms for helping the student to integrate the result of the prior-learning assessment into their future education. Whenever possible, plans for further sponsored learning should be based on this result.

#### 6) **Transcription**

The last step is merely an administrative one: transcription.

### **3.3 APL in higher education**

A majority of higher education institutions in the United States do not accept that prior learning or life experience can be worthy of academic credit. The reasons for this are varied. Many universities are selective in their admission policies and prefer students who have had appropriate academic preparation for the degree programmes offered at their institutions. Four of the larger private and state institutions surveyed for this study (New York University, and the Universities of Iowa, Kansas and Wisconsin) do not accept any form of non-academic experience as a way of earning credit towards a degree. Other institutions, however, have developed an APL policy and will award a certain amount of credit for previous learning as long as it is relevant to the chosen study programme.

In 1991 CAEL has conducted a nationwide survey among all accredited colleges and universities in the US to gather information on the use of APL within higher education institutions. Results show that 49 percent of the institutions reported that they offer opportunities for the assessment of prior learning. Of this group, almost all institutions (97%) said that the credits can be used at the undergraduate level, while a small proportion award credits at the graduate level (CAEL, undated).

#### **Aim**

The aim of the APL programmes developed by higher education institutions is to make it possible for adult learners to enrol as students, bringing with them credits for learning that has taken place in other environments. APL thus encourages lifelong learning.

#### **Target group**

The target group consists mainly of adult learners who wish to go back to school for various reasons: for example, because they dropped out of school earlier and now wish to earn their degree, or because they wish to make a career change requiring different qualifications. APL programmes are also open to foreign students who wish to receive credit for qualifications they earned in another country. Since

most APL programmes require that a student already be enrolled, it is difficult for foreign students who are not yet in the United States to gain enrolment on the basis of prior learning. Moreover, they need to be enrolled before they can get a residence permit as a student.

### **Steps and instruments**

The most widely accepted methods for assessing prior learning are standardized examinations and ‘institutional challenge examinations’ (95% and 80%, respectively). These are followed by evaluations of military programmes by the American Council on Education (ACE) (73%) and then by portfolio assessment (47%) (Keeton, 1997 cited by Warren, 1999). Keeton also indicates that many institutions have APL programmes that exist only in name or are not widely used by students. In the next three sections, attention will be given to standardized examinations, ‘institutional challenge examinations’ and portfolio assessment. The military programme evaluations conducted by ACE were discussed in Section 3.1.1.

#### *Standardized examinations*

As indicated above, the most common method for assessing prior learning is through standardized examinations. The American College Testing Program (ACT-PEP) and College Level Examination Program (CLEP) are both widely used by schools for the award of advanced placement credit and credit for prior learning.

- ACT-PEP offers a series of college-level examinations at test centres throughout the United States. Test description guides for each ACT-PEP examination are available for students, but must be purchased. Each test description contains an outline and sample questions. The results of ACT-PEP examinations are sent directly to students, but at a student’s request they can also be sent directly to the institution in which the student wishes to enrol.
- The College Board offers students the opportunity to obtain college credits through its College Level Examination Program (CLEP). Five general examinations cover what is usually taught in the first year of college. The examinations test general knowledge in the areas of mathematics, humanities, natural sciences, social sciences and history, and English composition. CLEP general exams can duplicate credit that students have earned elsewhere. In addition to five general examinations CLEP offers a wide selection of subject examinations that correspond to specific college courses.

### *Course challenge examinations*

Another method often used to award credit for prior learning is 'course challenge examination'. A student takes the equivalent of a final examination in a specific course. To be eligible for a course challenge, the student must generally be enrolled full-time in a higher education institution and must have completed at least one semester of study and earned at least six credits. A grade point average (GPA) of at least 2.0 appears to be the minimum required of students wishing to take a course challenge examination. The student must also receive an official transcript evaluation from an academic or prior-learning advisor, and the advisor must verify that the student is indeed eligible to 'challenge' that particular course.

In most cases, students are required to apply for a prior-learning programme. If their application is accepted, a faculty member or external consultant is asked to prepare an examination. The student is provided with a syllabus and has between 30 and 90 days to study for the examination. Upon completion of the examination, the results are assessed and graded. If the student has passed, the grade and number of credits are entered on the student's transcript in the same manner as credits earned in the classroom. Students must pay a fee for a course challenge examination, which in most cases is the same as the current tuition fee. Normally, a student may not challenge lower-level courses after completing higher-level courses in the same discipline and in no case may a student receive credit by examination in a course that is a prerequisite to a course for which the student has already received credit. Foreign students may fill foreign language requirements by taking challenge examinations in their native language. There are no restrictions on this.

### *Portfolio assessment*

Individual portfolio assessment is used in 47 per cent of cases. A portfolio is a formal written communication on the basis of which the student claims credit for prior learning. The specific requirements of a portfolio may vary from institution to institution, but generally it contains the following elements (CAEL, undated):

- clear identification and definition of the prior learning for which college credit is being requested. This takes the form of competency statements in specific areas of knowledge.
- a written explanation of how the prior learning relates to the study programme in which the student wishes to enrol, how the learning took place, and how it fits into the student's overall education and career plan;
- documentation that the student has actually acquired the learning; and

- a credit request specifying an exact number of credits for each subject or area.

### **Assessment standards**

The assessment standards that are used will depend on the aim of the APL process. Whitaker (1989) indicates that higher education institutions can use any of three different models to determine the number of credits that can be given:

- **College Course Model:**  
A student compares his/her prior learning to specific courses offered by the educational institution. In this model, the course objectives provide a set of indicators for assessing the learning and how many credits it is worth.
- **Block Credit Model:**  
This approach adopts a more holistic view of what constitutes creditable learning. A student's prior learning can rarely be matched with specific course objectives and therefore more general measures of breadth and depth should be used. The Block Credit Model judges a student's general breadth and depth of knowledge and compares it with the knowledge of a person who has graduated and is working in a particular field. For this purpose, the educational institution defines general assessment standards that relate to general higher education competencies.
- **Competency Model:**  
The Competency Model crosses boundaries by matching credit to a demonstration of skills and knowledge. An institution or department can define different types of competencies: for example, such multidisciplinary skills as writing or reasoning; such disciplinary skills as performing an historical analysis or interpreting ethical problems from the point of view of various ethical frameworks; or capabilities that reflect contexts relevant to adult experience and students' goals, such as the ability to resolve conflicts, organize people, or organize work.

### **Quality assurance**

CAEL has defined quality standards for the accreditation of prior learning. These are used by higher education institutions as well as accrediting bodies. Standards one to five relate to academic matters and standards six to ten to administrative matters (see Figure 9). In annex II, the ten standards are being described in detail.

**Figure 9: Quality standards for Prior Learning Assessment (from Whitaker, 1989)**

<b>Academic standards:</b>
1. Credit should be awarded only for learning, and not for experience
2. College credit should be awarded only for college-level learning
3. Credit should be awarded only for learning that has a balance, appropriate to the subject, between theory and practical application.
4. The determination of competence levels and of credit awards must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic experts.
5. Credit should be appropriate to the academic context in which it is accepted

<b>Administrative standards:</b>
6. Credit awards and their transcript entries should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.
7. Policies and procedures applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available.
8. Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.
9. All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should receive adequate training for the functions they perform, and there should be provision for continued professional development.
10. Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served and in the state of the assessment arts.

### **3.4 APL for professional purposes**

CAEL (1998) reports that professional associations started adopting APL practices for registration purposes in the late 1990s. Among these are the associations of architects, nurses and dieticians. Recent projects demonstrated that the academic and administrative standards published by CAEL can be used in a variety of settings. Professional organizations emphasize an outcome-based, practice-related approach to measuring competences in professional settings. ‘The guiding premise is that

competence must be *demonstrated and measured* if an individual worker or workforce is to be competitive' (CAEL, 1998, p.2).

The results of a survey among professional associations show that the associations currently rely primarily on multiple-choice examinations at entry (83%) and continuing education (85%). However, the figures show that growing importance is also attached to the future use of alternative assessment methods such as portfolio assessment, simulations and self-assessment. These are used in 31%, 29% and 23% of cases, respectively (Knapp and Associates International, Inc. cited by CAEL, 1998).

### **3.5 Discussion**

The United States has considerable experience with the accreditation of prior learning (APL), primarily for academic purposes. Although not all higher education institutions accept that prior learning or life experience is worthy of academic credit, a large number of institutions do have mechanisms that make it possible for learners to have their previous learning experiences evaluated. In most cases, the assessment criteria are derived directly from specific course objectives, or from the objectives of the study programme. The three most widely accepted methods are standardized examinations, institutional course challenge examinations, and the military programme evaluations of ACE. These methods are not competency-based. Individual portfolio assessment is in fourth place on the list of methods used for APL.

Long experience with APL has resulted in the definition of quality standards. Five of these are academic and five are administrative. These standards apply to APL for both academic and professional purposes. It is good to keep them in mind for the ACCEPT project.



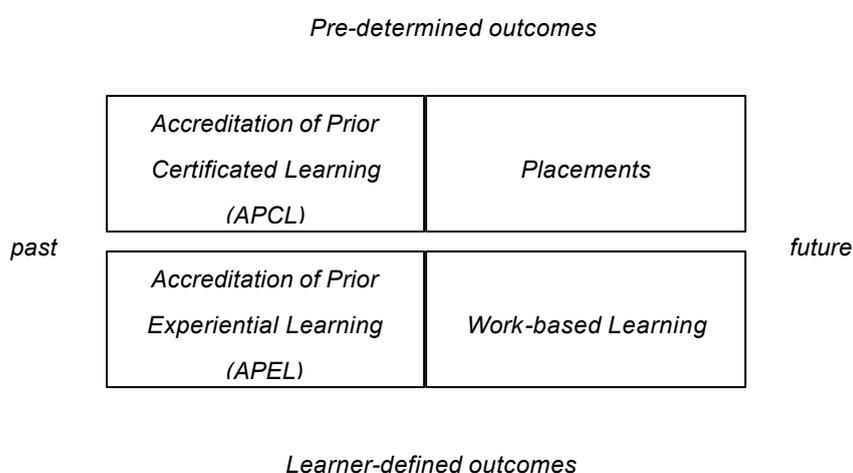
## 4. APL in the United Kingdom

### 4.1 Background

In the United Kingdom the concept of accreditation of prior learning was also introduced quite some time ago, primarily to widen access to education, including higher education. The generic term *accreditation of prior learning (APL)* is generally used for the award of credit on the basis of demonstrated learning that has occurred at some time in the past. As indicated before, it is an umbrella term covering both the accreditation of *certificated learning (APCL)* and the accreditation of *experiential learning (APEL)*.

Another term that is being used in the United Kingdom is, *accreditation of work-based learning (AWBL)*. This refers to the recognition of learning acquired through employment (paid or unpaid) or through training. It can be defined in a *retrospective sense*, as part of an APEL process to recognize what already has been learned in the workplace. Or it can be defined in a *prospective sense*, enabling students to claim credit for current and planned experience (Mullholand and Leith, 1998). The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) also makes a distinction between learning that already has taken place and learning that is yet to take place. The term *placements* is used to refer to future experiential learning with pre-defined outcomes, while *work-based learning* refers to future experiential learning with learner-defined outcomes (see also Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Types of accreditation of prior learning (from UCAS, undated)**



This corresponds with the distinction made by Withaker (1989) between sponsored experiential learning which is pre-planned, and non-sponsored experiential learning which has already occurred and should be assessed on a retrospective basis.

The assessment of existing competencies regardless of how or when they were acquired is the cornerstone of the National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (N/SVQs), which were introduced at the beginning of the 1980s. Later, the concept was applied in the higher education sector. The former Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) indicated that prior learning should be accredited provided that it can be assessed. APL formed the principle of CNAA's Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS).

A CAT system offers students opportunities for flexibility and mobility in their learning. Part of this lies in the fact that students can request recognition for learning that has already been completed elsewhere. This can be accredited and recognized within the context of a study programme. The CAT system of CNAA has made it possible for students to accumulate credits towards a degree. For a bachelor's degree, a total of 360 credits is required (120 at level 1, 120 at level 2 and 120 at level 3). One year of study at undergraduate level equals 1200 study hours, thus one credit point is equal to 10 hours of study.

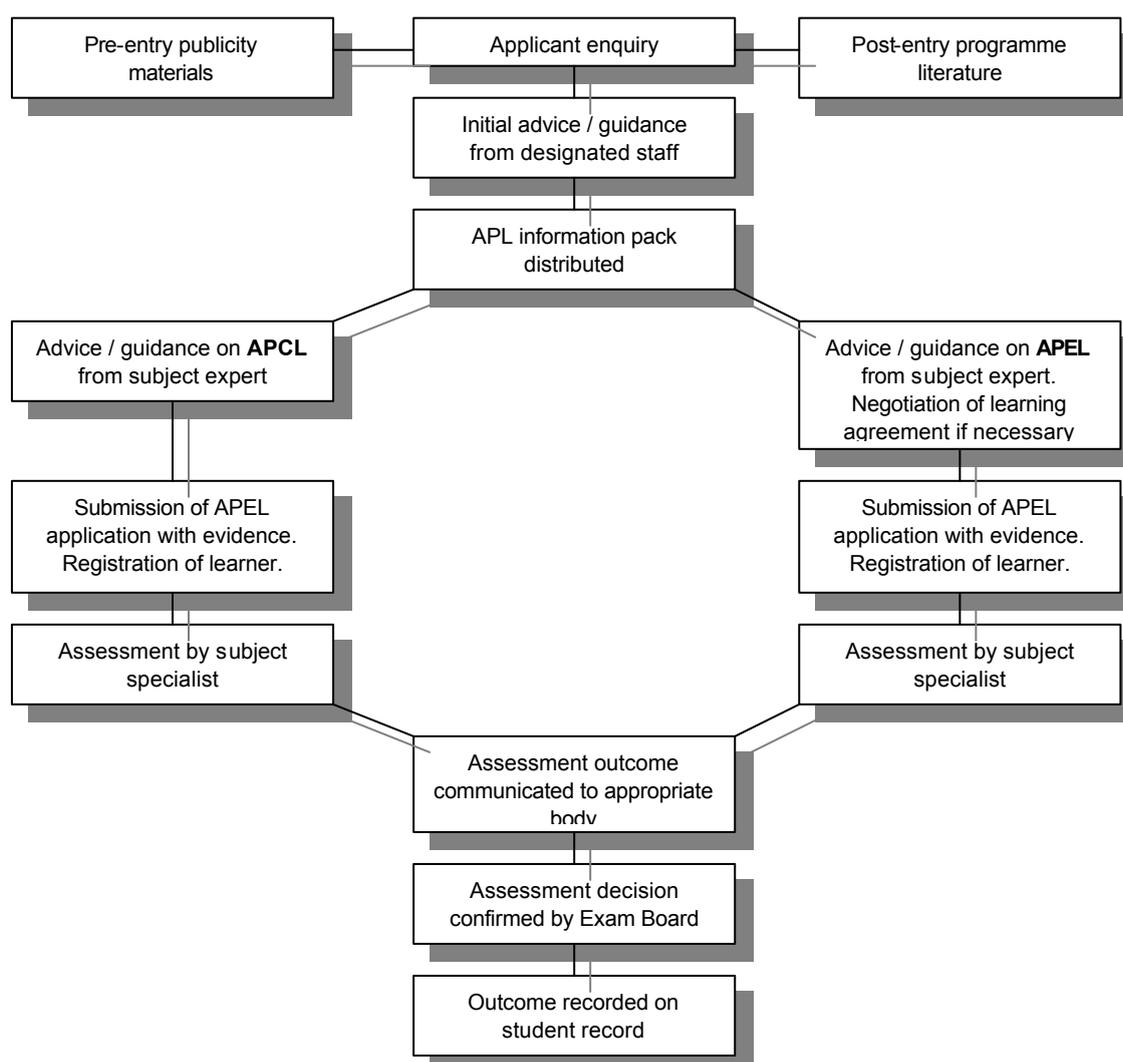
Various higher education CAT schemes have emerged from the CNAA model, and since the mid-1990s three mega-consortia have worked together to develop a uniform CAT system for the whole UK. These are the Higher Education Credit Initiative Wales (HECIW), the Northern Universities Consortia of Credit Accumulation and Transfer (NUCCAT), and the Southern England Consortia for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC). Their project was called the Inter Consortia Credit Agreement (InCCA). Its purpose was to create common standards and to achieve full transferability of credits throughout the country. The results were published in 1998 under the title *A Common Framework for Learning*.

The process for the assessment of prior learning depends to some extent on whether a person is claiming credit for certified learning or for experiential learning. The CNAA has rated numerous educational programmes offered by recognized awarding authorities, professional bodies and in-company training programmes. It has done so in terms of credits. If an individual has earned any one of these credit-rated qualifications, he/she will automatically receive the general credits awarded for that programme. If this is not the case, the claim will be assessed in the same way as an APEL claim. The main steps in the assessment process will be discussed in the section below.

## 4.2 A basic model

At present, a range of models are being used by higher education institutions in the United Kingdom. Figure 11 provides an overview of the formal procedures higher education institutions generally use to implement the APL process. It assumes that additional advice and guidance is available to students who submit an APL claim.

**Figure 11: Overview of the main steps in the APL process (from UCAS, undated)**



The main steps that should be taken by the student after he/she has decided to submit an APL claim are (CNAAB, 1990):

a) *Identify a potential study programme or award.*

The process starts with the identification of a study programme. The chosen study programme will offer a frame of reference for analysing prior experiences and the learning that has occurred as a result.

b) *Develop a portfolio.*

A portfolio is a collection of materials compiled by an individual to show which learning has been derived from prior experiences. The following activities need to be carried out:

- *Compile a comprehensive list of learning experiences.*

These experiences can be the result of work, education, home and family, leisure interests, voluntary work, etc.

- *Identify the learning gained from these experiences.*

This is a very important step, which involves careful examination and reflection. Students need to identify their knowledge (what do they know), their skills (what can they do), and other qualities that may be relevant for the study programme they have chosen.

- *Express the learning in learning statements which precisely indicate the nature and level of learning.*

A student is expected to make a specific claim for the learning that has already taken place. This claim should specify the content and level of the learning as precisely as possible. For example:

<p>The following is too general: 'I am able to collect and use relevant information.'</p>	<p>The following is far more acceptable: 'I have the ability to process and present relevant information. In particular: a) 'I know how to find relevant sources of information; b) 'I can discriminate between reliable and unreliable sources of information; c) 'I can extract relevant information from various types of sources, such as books, reports, the media, graphs, accounts; d) 'I can decide on the best way to present information for a variety of uses or purposes; e) 'I can present information effectively in the form of oral and written reports, graphs and statistical tables.'</p> <p>It identifies the knowledge the learner possesses and the type of tasks the learner is able to do. (CNAAL, 1990, p.15)</p>
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- *Collect evidence of the learning.*

The evidence can be divided into two categories: direct evidence and indirect evidence. The first includes project reports, case-study notes, conference papers, and work plans, while the second refers to statements from employers or clients, to documentation of courses a individual has followed, or to references.

- c) *Assessment of portfolio by subject specialists.*

Once a portfolio has been completed it is submitted to an assessment team (generally the portfolio is reviewed by more than one assessor). The assessors examine the evidence and, using a holistic approach, judge the number of credits that can be awarded. Normally an *assessment interview* is held and, if necessary, an assessor might ask a student to undertake an *assessment exercise*: e.g., an examination, a written assignment or a demonstration. The assessment criteria most commonly used are related to:

- authenticity (Did the applicant do what he/she claims?)
- quality (Has the learning reached an acceptable level?)
- currency (Is the knowledge still up-to-date?)
- sufficiency (Is there sufficient evidence to prove the learning?)

- d) *Final decision*

Assign credit points to the prior learning, subject to the approval of the Board of Examiners. Once this approval has been given, the applicant receives a certificate of credit indicating the number of general credits that have been earned.

### **4.3 APL in higher education**

The arrangements for APL vary from institution to institution. Full details can be found in their own published descriptions of their institutional policies and quality assurance frameworks. In 1996, UCAS conducted a survey among its affiliated institutions in order to learn more about current practice. In total, 37 higher education institutions replied. Of these, 26 had established at either central or faculty / departmental level a framework making it possible to admit people through APL.

#### **Aim**

Originally, APL was explored in connection with admission to educational institutions. It has the potential for widening access and making curricula more flexible, and it places a positive value on off-

campus learning. Over time, prior learning assessment has come to be used for gaining admission to more and more types of educational programme. Within the higher education sector, APL is used for:

- a) admission to the institution;
- b) direct entry into a second or subsequent year of a study programme;
- c) advanced standing (award of credit for specified modules within a study programme that do not necessarily occupy a full year) / exemptions from certain parts of a study programme (UCAS, undated). The maximum amount of credit awarded for prior learning varies from institution to institution. Some award up to one-third of the credits required, others about half, and still others grant exemption only for the first year.

When the purpose of the APL claim is *entry* into a higher education study programme, the APL advisor seeks to ensure that the evidence presented by the student is relevant to the proposed area of study and sufficient to indicate that the student has the general aptitude for undertaking the programme in question. This is especially important if the applicant is not presently a student. Such candidates are often unfamiliar both with the terminology that must be used in an APL claim and with the demands and processes of higher education providers.

When the purpose of the claim is *advanced standing with credit*, the process is likely to be more structured. (See also the section below on *steps and instruments*.)

Providers of adult education or further education offer short courses that help adult learners to identify prior learning that could increase their opportunities for education or employment.

### **Target group**

Various groups of learners can benefit from APL. The UCAS survey shows that the students who make use of APL are generally more mature. Sixteen higher education institutions report that their average APL/APEL applicant is 21 or older. Fourteen other institutions report an average age of 25 or older. A typical APL user falls into one of the following categories (UCAS, undated):

- unemployed people seeking recognition for past work or other achievements, either for entry into a higher education programme or advanced standing with credit towards an award;
- people with certificated or non-certificated work-based learning seeking credit for that learning towards a higher education award;
- people seeking to ‘top up’ an existing qualification. (A diploma plus employment and other learning experiences equals a degree.)

- people with overseas qualifications;
- drop-outs from higher education programmes who wish this learning to count towards another award.

For the purpose of the ACCEPT project it would be interesting to know more about how APL is used by students with foreign qualifications and/or work experience. The UCAS survey does not specifically address the issue of foreign qualifications. An interview with the APL coordinators of Anglia Polytechnic University suggested that the number of foreign applicants is rather small for practical reasons. APEL claims take quite some time to prepare, and foreign students need to be registered at a British institution before they can get a visa.

### **Steps and instruments**

The steps generally used by students preparing an APL claim were discussed in Section 4.2. The amount of effort required of the different parties involved (the student, the advisor and the assessors) depends on the complexity of the claim and its purpose. APL claims may involve the presentation of evidence of prior certificated learning, prior experiential learning, or a combination of the two. The preparation of an APL claim is for most individuals an unfamiliar and complicated process requiring guidance and advice. To ensure the objectivity and reliability of the process, it is good practice that the institution make sure that the person who offers advice and guidance to the student is not involved in the assessment itself. But for simple claims for which there is an institutional agreement regarding the number of credits that are generally being given for a specific programme (the so-called *credit-rated programmes*), this separation is not so important. An example of such a claim would be admission on the basis of a Higher National Diploma.

Both internal and external assessors are used for the assessment of prior learning. External assessors are often from the Board of Examiners that has to approve the final decision regarding the award of credit.

UCAS describes three main strands for APL:

a) *Transfer of credit already awarded*

This means direct transfer between similar programmes. This is possible if a learner presents evidence of having undertaken a study programme that is directly related to the new qualification and that is also recognized as falling under a CAT scheme accepted by the institution: e.g. a Higher National Diploma.

b) *Reallocation of credit*

This takes place when an applicant has received credit for prior learning that is not particularly relevant to the new qualification. In this context the terms *general credit* and *specific credit* are used. General credit is a total number of credits that could in principle be awarded for a period of learning. For example, a certificate normally awarded after one year of full-time study at a British university is said to be worth 120 credits. Specific credits are credits that can be properly applied towards the new qualification. The number of specific credits is therefore determined by the relevance of the prior learning to the planned new learning.

c) *First-time assessment*

This is the assessment of learning for which credits have never before been awarded. It is referred to as the accreditation of experiential or uncertified learning (APEL). This procedure is less common than ACPL (UCAS, undated).

### **Assessment standards**

The assessment standards are derived from the study programme and/or course objectives. If the aim of the claim is *entry* to a programme of higher education, it is easiest when an institution has defined the entry criteria for the study programme in terms of either personal skills and attributes or identified learning objectives. If the entry requirements are defined in terms of a number of credits earned or a score on an examination, it should first be clarified what this means in terms of the achievements of an individual learner.

In the case of advanced standing, the prior learning is matched to components of the intended study programme. Anglia Polytechnic University (APU), for example, uses a college course model for determining the number of credits; the course reference sheets are used as the frame of reference for the assessment of prior learning. Since it is not always possible to relate prior learning to specific APU modules, applicants may design their own modules with the help of an advisor. Of course these must be approved by the Accreditation & Approvals Committee (AAC) of the university.

### **Quality assurance**

Arrangements for APL vary from institution to institution. Full details on the APL process can be found in the published descriptions of an institution's guidelines and quality-assurance framework.

Organizations such as the SQA (the former SCOTVEC), EDEXCEL (the former BTEC) and various professional bodies have addressed these issues in relation to their own awards and quality systems.

The systems they have developed are helpful to institutions drafting their own quality-assurance guidelines. At the same time, consortia of higher educational institutions draft principles of good APL and APEL practice for the benefit of their members. These consortia include the Southern England Consortia for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC) and the Northern Universities Consortia of Credit Accumulation and Transfer (NaCCAT)

#### **4.4 APL for professional purposes**

In the sections below, attention will be given to two interesting APEL projects aimed at widening access to the labour market: one within the teaching profession and one within the nursing profession.

##### **4.4.1 APL in the teaching profession**

In 1997, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) in the United Kingdom set up an employment-based route to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) known as **the Graduate and Registered Teacher Programmes (GRTP)**. Their statutory basis is the Education (Teachers) (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations 1997, which came into force on 1 December 1997. The Teacher Training Agency (TTA) is responsible for running these programmes in England. (There is a separate scheme in Wales.)

##### **Aim**

The GRT programmes were initiated to cope with the perennial shortage of school teachers, especially in maths and science subjects. At the same time that schools could not find teachers, there were people who had the potential to become good teachers but were unable to enrol in a full-time, initial programme of teacher training. Older people who have worked in industry or in other professions can bring a wealth of experience to the classroom once they acquire the knowledge and skills they need to manage a classroom and give lessons. The GRTP is a flexible way of bringing people's skills up to the level of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). It is an employment-based model, which means the candidate must be working in a school.

##### **Target group**

The programmes are meant for people for whom a traditional teacher-training programme is not feasible because they are working. Some might have once received teacher training but they have never obtained a QTS, for example because they have taught in further education or in the independent sector, or they have been trained as a teacher abroad. Others might be working in schools as

classroom assistants, instructors, technicians or nurses, and want to become a teacher instead. Candidates must be over 24 unless they have a teaching diploma from another country.

The Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) enables people with a *first degree* to obtain a QTS. They are authorized by the TTA to work as a teacher while they are enrolled in an approved programme of teacher training designed for bringing a person up to QTS standards. Such a programme generally lasts one year although it can be shorter if the person's qualifications and experience warrant it. The minimum length is three months, however.

The Registered Teacher Programme (RTP) enables candidates with *two years of full-time higher education* (or its part-time equivalent) to obtain a QTS and, at the same time, to finish their degree. This normally takes two years, but in exceptional cases the programme might be shorter.

School teachers whose foreign diplomas do not qualify them for a QTS can obtain this status only through the employment-based GRTP courses or by enrolling in a traditional teacher-training programme. The length of the GRTP course depends on the person's knowledge and experience. Overseas candidates who do not have a qualification recognized as equivalent to a British first degree must enrol in an RTP course (provided the foreign qualification equals at least 240 CATS, which is two years of full-time higher education). To obtain a QTS, they need within a period of no more than two years to complete a degree course (earning 120 CATS at level 3) and to undertake teacher training.

Generally speaking, it is rather difficult for foreign candidates to participate in the GRTP programme. They need to find a job in a school first, since the GRTP courses are employment-based learning routes.

### **Steps and instruments**

A number of parties are involved in a GRTP programme: the TTA, a recommending body (e.g. an Initial Teacher Training (ITT) provider or a local education authority (LEA)), a school where the aspirant teacher is working, and the aspirant teacher him/herself.

The recommending body (RB) recommends trainees to the TTA and is responsible for:

- assessing the skills of the aspirant trainee and identifying the gaps in his/her training in relation to QTS standards;
- devising a training programme for reaching QTS standards, including plans for assessment;
- submitting the programme;

- taking responsibility for ensuring that the approved programme is delivered;
- monitoring and assessing the trainee's progress and keeping detailed records for the external assessor;
- administering and accounting for the grant paid by the TTA (up to GBP 4000 a year).

The TTA issues a teaching authorization on the basis of an application form submitted by a recommending body. The RB must submit a separate form for each trainee.

### 1) Needs assessment

The first step in the process is the identification of gaps, or 'needs assessment'. Ideally, the candidate is observed at work in the school over a period of 15 days. The QTS standards are used as a frame of reference (published in Annex A of Circular 4/98, DfEE, 1998). The University of North London calls this a **Skills Audit**. The aspirant trainee is assessed informally by colleagues in the school where he/she is working over the 15-day period. A university tutor spends one day making more formal observations in order to assess the candidate's professional needs. Where applicable, the trainee's subject knowledge is also audited against the standards of the ITT National Curriculum (published in Annex B-H of the Circular 4/98, DfEE, 1998).

The RB should record which standards have already been met, and provide evidence of the candidate's capacity for training. UNL has devised a so-called *Profile Booklet for the Assessment of Standards*, which students receive each year. The standards in this booklet were derived from the Circular. Additional evidence pertaining to the various standards may be supplied by the trainee, by the trainee's mentor in the school, or by his/her tutor.

### 2) The training programme

Following the needs assessment, the RB devises a training programme by which the candidate will be able to meet all the QTS standards by the time of the final assessment. The plan should specify the following:

- which external resources will be used, e.g. the school where the trainee is working, the accredited Initial Teacher Training (ITT) institution, the local education authority (LEA), subject networks, educational literature, etc.;
- how the trainee's progress will be assessed and recorded with supporting evidence for the external examiner;

- the overall assessment plan, including a timetable of what will be assessed, by whom, and when; and an indication of the training components and QTS standards to which the assessment relates. The RB is encouraged to use a range of assessment instruments, e.g. written assignments, research studies, structured and focussed observation, reflective reviews, etc.
- an indication of how the programme as a whole will be managed and monitored. A monitoring report should be made available to the external examiner.

The RB submits to the TTA the application form and the plan for the training programme. The TTA is supposed to approve or reject the application within 20 workdays. (In practice, this is impossible.) The aspirant trainee is authorized to work provisionally until 14 days after the TTA has notified the RB of its decision. If the application is approved, the aspirant candidate is authorized to work as unqualified teacher for the period of the training programme.

### 3) **Delivery of the training programme**

Generally, trainees work in a school for four days and go to the university for one day a week. For RTP students this is absolutely necessary, since they also need to earn 120 CATS at level 3 in order to obtain a degree (they have been exempted from 240 CATS, which equals two years of full-time higher education). The teaching skills of the trainees are assessed formatively on a regular basis (as specified in the training plan). The TTA encourages RBs to use a wide range of formative assessment instruments: written assignments, research papers, structured and focussed observation, reflective reviews, etc. At Bradford College students are asked to create the following record:

- subject knowledge portfolio (evidence against standards C, D and E, mainly collected at the college)
- ICT portfolio (evidence against standard B, mainly collected at the college)
- teaching file comprising plans for the medium and short term, results of evaluations and mentor meetings, and observations and feedback from staff members of the college and the school;
- pupil's records

The trainee has a mentor in the school where he/she is working and a tutor at Bradford College. The trainee and mentor meet every week, preferably after a lesson has been observed, to review

the trainee's general progress and to set targets. The college tutor pays monthly visits to the school to review the trainee's progress, to observe lessons, and to meet with the mentor and the trainee.

#### 4) **Final assessment**

At the end of the training period a suitably qualified assessor performs a final, summary assessment against the QTS standards. This is based on formal observations, interviews with both trainee and mentor, and assessment of the portfolio (which contains all kinds of evidence collected during the training period). If the RB is an accredited ITT provider, it uses its usual assessment procedures, including external moderation. If the RB is not an accredited institution, the TTA assigns an approved external assessor at the end of the programme. The external assessor:

- confers with those responsible for assessing the trainee's progress during the course of the programme (formative assessment);
- looks at the assessment records and the supporting evidence (e.g. lesson plans, pupils' records, observation reports);
- speaks to the trainee;
- directly observes at least two hours of the trainee's teaching;
- advises the RB on whether or not the trainee meets the required QTS standards.

If the standards have been reached, the RB notifies the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) by filling in a **QTS recommendation form**. A copy is sent to the TTA. RTP students must fulfil the degree requirements before they can be recommended for a QTS, since having a degree is a basic requirements for a QTS.

#### **Assessment standards**

The Standards for Qualified Teacher Status are used as a frame of reference (published in Annex A of the DfEE Circular 4/98). This Circular specifies the requirements for courses of Initial Teacher Training (ITT). Besides the general QTS standards, it specifies the standards of the ITT National Curriculum (published in Annex B-H).

Annex A	Standards for the Award of Qualified Teacher Status
Annex B	Initial teacher training National Curriculum for the use of information and communication technology in subject teaching
Annex C	Initial teacher training National Curriculum for primary English
Annex D	Initial teacher training National Curriculum for primary mathematics

Annex E	Initial teacher training National Curriculum for primary science
Annex F	Initial teacher training National Curriculum for secondary English
Annex G	Initial teacher training National Curriculum for secondary mathematics
Annex H	Initial teacher training National Curriculum for secondary science
Annex I	Requirements of all courses of initial teacher training

All GRTP candidates must meet the requirements of Annexes A and B. Primary school teachers need to meet the standards specified in Annexes C-E, while secondary school teachers must fulfil the standards specified in Annex F, G or H if they specialize in this subject.

The standards for the award of a QTS have been set out under four headings. Each heading contains a number of standards which in turn have been further divided into requirements. The standards relate to primary school teachers, secondary subject specialists, or both, or they specify additional requirements relating to early years. Student should meet the standards that are relevant for their course. The headings are:

- a) knowledge and understanding (Section A)
- b) planning, teaching and classroom management (Section B)
- c) monitoring, assessment, recording, reporting and accountability (Section C)
- d) other professional requirements (Section D)

### **Quality assurance**

The TTA is responsible for approving the proposed training plans submitted by the recommending bodies. In these plans the RB must indicate how the training programme will be monitored and reviewed. The TTA expects the RB to show that it recognizes the different roles played by those who monitor the quality of the programme, those who support and/or act as mentor to the trainee, and those who assess the progress, attainment and standards of the trainee (TTA, 1998).

In addition, the TTA has set up requirements for RBs. RBs may be:

- ITT providers accredited by the TTA to provide teacher training;
- other higher education institutions (HEIs);
- schools that are either publicly maintained or independent;
- local education authorities (LEAs);
- educational employment agencies, charitable institutions and other educational bodies;
- consortia of the above (TTA, 1998, p.4).

RBs that are not yet accredited ITT providers need to provide the TTA with additional information supporting their ability to fulfil the tasks of an RB (to perform a needs assessment, devise a training programme, submit an application form, monitor the progress of the student, and carry out the final assessment). Accredited ITT providers do not have to submit this information. These institutions are reviewed regularly as part of the national quality assurance system.

In addition, the TTA requests information about the school in which the candidate is employed. It must be assured that the school can provide the day-to-day support needed for training a teacher.

#### **4.4.2 APL in the nursing profession**

Another example of APL for professional purposes is found in the nursing sector. The English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (ENB) has established the **Framework for Continuing Professional Education**, which leads to the **Higher Award**.

##### **Aim**

The aim of the Framework is to support professional practice by offering a flexible and coherent system of continuing education which provides practitioners working in hospital and community settings with relevant learning opportunities which enable them to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. The Framework is based on an effective partnership between *practitioners, educational institutions, and managers*.

The ENB Framework and Higher Award is a way of meeting the requirements of the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (UKCC), which has said that practitioners should ‘take every reasonable opportunity to maintain and improve professional knowledge and competence’ (UKCC Code of Professional Conduct (1984)). Furthermore, the UKCC Post-Registration Education and Practice Project (PREPP) (1990) recommended that ‘all nurses, midwives and health visitors should demonstrate that they have maintained and developed their professional knowledge and competence’ and that ‘during the three years leading to periodic registration, all practitioners must complete a period of study or provide evidence of appropriate professional learning’. In 1991, the decision was taken to prepare for the full implementation of the recommendations presented in the PREPP.

The Framework can be used in two ways:

1. Practitioners can use the overall structure to plan their own professional development based on ten key characteristics (see below under assessment standards). They can do this together with their managers and an educational institution, or alone. The Professional Portfolio is a helpful instrument for identifying continuing educational needs and for incorporating assessed learning into the full range of learning.
2. Practitioners who want more formal recognition of their continuing education activities may choose to pursue the Board's Higher Award. They then need to register with a Board-approved College of Nursing or Midwifery/Health Studies. The Higher Award is a professional and academic award (at the level of a first honours degree). Practitioners use the Professional Portfolio together with modular courses offered by educational institutions in order to reach the learning objectives for the Higher Award.

### **Target group**

The Framework is open to all practitioners who are listed on the Professional Register of the UKCC. This means that foreign professionals can also apply once they have been registered. Nurses, midwives and health visitors who have completed their training and are registered in countries outside the United Kingdom need to apply for admission to the Professional Register maintained by the UKCC. The applications are considered on an individual basis. Sometimes, prior to registration, the professional is required to complete a period of supervised work and assessment. This is not a course, but it should be a track that is properly planned, perhaps under the guidance of the UKCC. Work experience can be obtained in a variety of places. The placement, however, should have the approval of the National Board. When the period of supervised work is finished, the supervisor writes a reference recommending that the person in question be registered with the UKCC. In general, it is not easy for foreign professional to find a placement suitable for this period of supervised work and assessment.

### **Steps and instruments**

As indicated above, the Framework can be used in two ways. The learning objectives of the Higher Award can be reached through a variety of education and training activities: self-study, in-service education, open and distance learning, or more traditional courses of education. The Framework makes use of a **Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS)** to enable practitioners to enter and leave the modular educational programme at times that suit them without losing credit for the learning achieved so far. A feature of CAT schemes is that they help practitioners to avoid unnecessary and costly repetitious learning. All assessed learning based on the ten key characteristics will be rewarded

with academic credit at the relevant level. These credits can be accumulated by practitioners who work towards the Higher Award.

Another integral part of the Framework and Higher Award is the Board's **Professional Portfolio**. This was launched in 1992 and its use by practitioners has since been documented. The Board's portfolio can be used for a variety of purposes (ENB, 1994):

- to demonstrate professional expertise;
- to collect evidence for the re-registration process;
- to organize one's own learning and to help one to identify personal goals and how these are to be achieved;
- to support a claim for accreditation of prior learning;
- to document learning in pursuit of the Board's Higher Award.

Generally speaking, the Framework consists of five steps that need to be taken by all parties involved: *the practitioners, the educational institutions, and the managers*. The steps to be taken by the practitioner are as follows (ENB, 1992):

1. Review:

The practitioners starts reviewing his/her achievements and expertise in relation to the ten characteristics. The Professional Portfolio is a very helpful instrument in this respect.

2. Contract:

Once the practitioner has decided to work towards the Higher Award, he/she, in consultation with his/her manager, enters into a contract with an educational institution, specifying the learning outcomes needed to achieve the objectives of the Higher Award. Practitioners who choose not to pursue the Higher Award but rather to use the overall Framework structure in order to reach certain personal goals, enter into a contract with their manager to participate in certain continuing education activities with agreed learning outcomes.

3. Delivery:

To reach the aims of the contract, all three partners are involved in delivering the learning activities. The practitioner participates in courses and other learning activities designed for either the Higher Award or for meeting broader requirements of the ten key characteristics. The practitioner is required to maintain a Professional Portfolio that creates a record of the learning activities undertaken.

4. Assessment:

Through assessment, the practitioners demonstrate that the learning objectives have been met. Assessment records are kept in the Professional Portfolio. If the practitioners are pursuing the Higher Award, the assessment is targeted against these standards.

5. Quality Assurance:

The last step in the process is quality assurance. Practitioners review their experiences on regular basis to ensure that their knowledge and expertise are relevant to what they are doing.

### **Assessment standards**

At the heart of the Framework and of the Higher Award are ten key characteristics. These represent the areas of skill, knowledge and expertise which correspond to the attributes practitioners need for working closely with patients and clients. Nurses, midwives and health visitors working in all practice settings must possess these attributes if they are to provide the quality of care needed for meeting the changing health care needs of the public.<sup>2</sup>

The characteristics are an established benchmark of clinical excellence (ENB, 1994). Numerous learning outcomes have been defined for each key characteristic. Professionals who have gained mastery of all ten key characteristics defined at the outcome level, and who have integrated these characteristics into their daily practice, receive the Higher Award. The ten key characteristics reflect the way the Professional Portfolio is organized. Each nurse, midwife or health visitor can reflect on the ten characteristics and plan an individual programme of professional development related to practice. In this way everyone can use the Framework to integrate and direct continuing education activities towards the achievement of the ten key characteristics.

### **Quality assurance**

The main purpose of the ENB is to approve educational institutions to conduct programmes leading to registration as a nurse, midwife or health visitor. In other words, ENB provides professional quality assurance of educational programmes conducted in nursing, midwifery and health visiting. The Board has set standards for higher education institutions and programmes (1997).

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.enb.org.uk/fha.htm>

## 4.5 Discussion

Accreditation of prior learning (APL) is firmly embedded in the higher education sector of the United Kingdom. It occupies a central place in the numerous *Credit Accumulation and Transfer Schemes (CATS)* that have been set up over time. An important purpose of the CAT schemes is to avoid unnecessary repetition of learning by allowing people to accumulate credits earned in various settings. A distinction is made between *accreditation of prior certificated learning* and *accreditation of prior experiential learning*. The assessment process for the second is generally more complicated, and fewer institutions have had experience with this process. The main steps in an APL process consist of choosing a potential study programme or award, developing a portfolio, having a subject specialist assess the portfolio, and waiting for the final decision.

Two important projects that use APL for widening access to the labour market have been discussed: one in the teaching profession and one in the nursing profession (midwifery and health visiting). Important instruments used in these projects are the skills audit (within the GRTP programme) and the portfolio (under the Framework for Continuing Professional Education, and in connection with the Higher Award of the ENB).



## 5. Concluding remarks

As indicated in Section 1.3 of this report, the aim of this inventory study was to gather information on how prior learning is currently being assessed and accredited in the Netherlands, the United States and the United Kingdom. Information is collected on APL (or *EVC*) models, APL assessment instruments, assessment standards and on quality assurance measures. As the report showed, countries have more experience with APL projects that aim to facilitate the access to (higher) education, than with APL project that facilitate the access to the labour market. However, interesting projects with a professional purpose were identified in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, respectively:

- A project initiated by the Dutch education ministry to recruit primary and secondary school teachers from the ranks of other types of workers (see section 2.4.1), in Dutch called *Zij-instroom leraren voortgezet en primair onderwijs* [‘Flexible recruitment of primary and secondary-school teachers’];
- The FLEXIS project, which was initiated by two Dutch funding bodies concerned with the employment situation in hospitals and homes for the elderly to increase access to the nursing profession (see Section 2.4.2.);
- The Graduate and Registered Teacher Programmes (GRTP) which were set up by the Department for Education and Employment in the United Kingdom as an employment-based rout to Qualified Teacher Status (see Section 4.4.1); and
- The Framework for Continuing Professional Education which can lead to the Higher Award, which was initiated by the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (ENB) (see Section 4.4.2).

The assessment instruments that are being used in these projects are: portfolios, skills audit, authentic assignments, observations, (criterion-referenced) interviews, and simulations. Most of these instruments are also being used in APL project with an academic purpose (facilitating admission to further study). All these instruments fall under the umbrella of ‘alternative assessment’ instruments. Educational institutions start using these instruments also for the assessment of regular students, especially when they have embraced a competence-oriented teaching philosophy. Important characteristics of the assessment culture are (Birenbaum and Dochy, 1996): an integration of assessment and instruction, a more active role of the students who have a direct responsibility in the assessment process, the use of a

variety of assessment tools to assess both the process and the product, assessment tasks are challenging, interesting and authentic, and the assessment outcome is not a single score but a student profile.

Portfolio assessment takes a central position in all APL projects. A portfolio is an inventory of a person's learning and work experiences, including a comparison of these experiences with a national or institutional standard (the assessment standards). The person who is being assessed is responsible for the development of the portfolio. Reflection by the candidate on how the prior experiences relates to either the study programme in which (s)he wishes to enroll (academic purpose), or to the profession that (s)he wishes to take up in the host country (professional purpose). The portfolio development and assessment is generally the first step in the APL assessment process. In addition, a variety of assessment tasks --preferably authentic assignments-- are being used before the final decision is taken on basis of which the candidate can start making his or her personal development plan.

Logical steps for an ACCEPT pilot project seem to be:

- 1) Portfolio development (by the person who is being assessed)
  - a) Make an inventory of experiences
  - b) Choose which experiences are relevant
  - c) Define personal competencies that have been developed out of these experiences
  - d) Gather evidence for the learning experiences
  - e) Compare the personal competencies with the assessment standards (reflect on how the prior learning relates to the assessment standards; what has already been achieved somewhere else, what is missing)
- 2) Portfolio assessment (by at least two assessors)
- 3) Additional assessment task(s), e.g. simulations, authentic assignments, assessment center.
  - a) Interview with candidate on how (s)he has prepared for the assignment. This interview is focused on the planning skills of the person who is being assessed.
  - b) Observation of the performance. The focus is on the process as well as on the quality of the product.
  - c) Self assessment by the candidate on his/her performance on the task.
  - d) Interview with candidate to assess his/her reflection and transfer skills.
- 4) Final decision by the assessors.

- 5) Development of a personal development plan by the candidate (on basis of the final decision of the assessors).

To guarantee that the outcome of the assessment procedure has a civil effect, it is important that certain quality assurance measures are being taken. First of all, it is important that the assessment standards that are being used have been legitimized by the social partners. To ensure the validity of the assessment process it is important that the assessors take part in a training course, and that standardized assessment instruments are being used, like a standard format for the portfolio, guidelines for the interviews, a standardized observation checklist. Other important aspects are (*Werkgroep EVC*, 2000):

- The definition of standards of competency for the assessors;
- The development of an accreditation system for assessors
- The development of a quality assurance system for assessment centers.

In addition, one should keep the quality standards developed by CAEL in the United States in mind, during an ACCEPT-pilot.



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## Annex I<sup>a</sup>

### ***Institutions and organizations contacted in the Netherlands and the United kingdom***

#### **The Netherlands**

##### *Organizations and institutions*

- CINOP, Marja van Dungen:  
To learn more about the implementation of *EVC* in the sector of secondary vocational education and adult education (*BVE*)
- STOAS, Ruud Klarus and Yvon Schuler:  
To learn more about the project initiated by the Dutch ministry of education to facilitate flexible recruitment of primary and secondary school teachers. STOAS was among others responsible for the development of the assessment instruments.
- University of Leiden, Harm Tillema:  
To learn more about the project initiated by the Dutch ministry of education to facilitate flexible recruitment of primary and secondary school teachers. The University of Leiden was responsible for the evaluation of the assessment instruments.
- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Simone Walvisch, Joop de Vries, Ben van Ree:  
To learn more about the interim legislation developed for the project initiated by the ministry to facilitate flexible recruitment of primary and secondary school teachers.
- Smets and Hover, Pieter Gransbergen  
To learn more about the *Flexibility programme*, and the project *Intake assessment* which is a part of this programme
- Ministry of Economic Affairs, Ruud Duvekot  
To learn more about the implementation of *EVC* projects in the *BVE*-sector and the activities carried out by the *Werkgroep EVC*.

- Educational Partnership project (EPS), Hubert Coonen  
To learn more about the *EPS* programme in general, and two initiative in specific: a) portfolio assessment and b) the urgency programmes

#### *Conferences and network meetings*

- Expert meeting (Round table conference) organized by the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs to discuss the concept report of the *Werkgroep EVC 'De fles is half vol'* [The bottle is half-full]  
21 March 2000
- Intake Assessment Conference, HBO-raad  
2000
- Expert meeting organized by ITS to present the preliminary results of the inventory study '*EVC aan de poorten van het Hoger Onderwijs*' [*EVC* for admission to higher education]  
9 June 2000
- Intake Assessment Network meeting, HBO-raad  
15 November 2000

#### **The United Kingdom**

- Bradford College, Barry Hobbs (Coordinator for Alternative Routes into Teaching)  
To learn more about the implementation of the Graduate and Registered Teacher Programme.  
9 March 2000
- University of North London, School of Education, INSET Office, Gill Venn, Programme Director for Continuing Professional Development (CDP)  
To learn more about the implementation of the Graduate and Registered Teacher Programme.  
10 March 2000
- English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (ENB), Hamza Aumeer, Education Officer  
To learn more about the Framework for Continuing Professional Educational and the Higher Award.  
10 March 2000



## Annex I<sup>b</sup>

### ***Institutions and organizations contacted in the United States***

- Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET)
- American University
- City University of New York
- Hawaii Pacific University
- Highline Community College, Des Moines WA
- Illinois Department of Professional Regulations
- Milwaukee Public School System
- New York Bureau of Examinations, Department of Personnel
- New York University
- New York University
- San Francisco State University
- Thomas Edison State College
- University of Illinois at Chicago
- University of Iowa
- University of Kansas
- University of Maine
- University of Maryland – University College
- University of Wisconsin-Madison
- University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction



## Annex II

### ***Quality standards for prior learning assessment (from Whitaker, 1989)***

#### **Academic standards**

**1) Credit should be awarded only for learning, not for experience.**

The distinction between experience and learning is a very important one. It is easier to quantify experience than it is to measure learning. However, one should realize that experience is an input, while learning is the output, and there are no guarantees that “x” amount of experience will result in “y” amount of learning. The learning result is also influenced by other variables, such as the capabilities of the student, the quality of the teacher, and the quality of the learning experience.

**2) College credit should be awarded only for college-level learning.**

This standard relates to two important aspects: a) whether the subject matter is appropriate for college-level credit, and b) whether the level of competence is sufficient for college-level credit. Applying this standard is a subjective process which could be subject to abuse. The danger is reduced, however, if it is used alongside the other three academic standards.

**3) Credit should be awarded only for learning that has a balance, appropriate to the subject, between theory and practical application.**

Experiential learning should be balanced by theoretic learning if college credit is to be awarded for it. An important requirement in this respect is that the student is able to transfer the knowledge and skills in question to a context other than the one in which they were acquired. It is important that the student can reflect on the theoretical and practical meaning of a certain issue.

**4) The determination of competence levels and of credit awards must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic experts.**

Expertise in the subject matter is required before an assessor can determine how much an individual knows about a given subject and how well. Academic expertise is needed for deciding on the award of credits: how many, in which subjects and at which level, and with or without additional requirements. Generally a faculty member is able to make both decisions.

**5) Credit should be appropriate to the academic context in which it is accepted.**

Credit should be awarded only for learning that fits into the chosen academic programme. This

means that in some cases it will depend on the study programme whether credit will be given or not.

### **Administrative standards**

- 6) **Credit awards and their transcript entries should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.**

At first glance, applying this standard seems to be merely an administrative matter. But in cases where the relationship between subject matter and academic curriculum is not straightforward, academic judgement is required.

- 7) **Policies and procedures applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available.**

The rules applied in the assessment of prior learning should be comprehensive, accessible and explicit. The educational institution should avoid misleading statements that encourage unrealistic expectations.

- 8) **Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.**

The fee charged for the assessment of prior learning should not be based solely on the outcome of the process. Also in traditional learning, the fee does not depend on whether a student passes or fails a course.

- 9) **All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should receive adequate training for the functions they perform, and there should be provision for their continued professional development.**

This standard is important not only for personnel working in the field of experiential learning, but also for personnel involved in the assessment of learning in traditional settings.

- 10) **Assessment programmes should be monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served and in the state of the assessment arts.**

Local reviews can take various forms. There are three major organizations that can provide information and advice regarding different areas of experiential learning: CAEL; the National Society for Internships and Experiential Education (NSIEE); and the Cooperative Education Association (CEA).