

The world of EVC

The application of EVC in the Netherlands in four spheres

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The Recognition of Competencies Acquired Elsewhere (*Erkenning van Verworven Competenties*, "EVC") has many forms, procedures and applications. This is logical, as EVC can be deployed within a wide range of objectives, from personal certification to an integrated HR approach at organization level, from individual career development to sectoral training policy, etc.

To help distinguish the wood from the trees, the dutch Kenniscentrum EVC describes the main application areas or 'spheres' of EVC in this article. This description provides an explanation of the functions of EVC, making the widely deployable world of EVC more accessible for the individual and the organization.

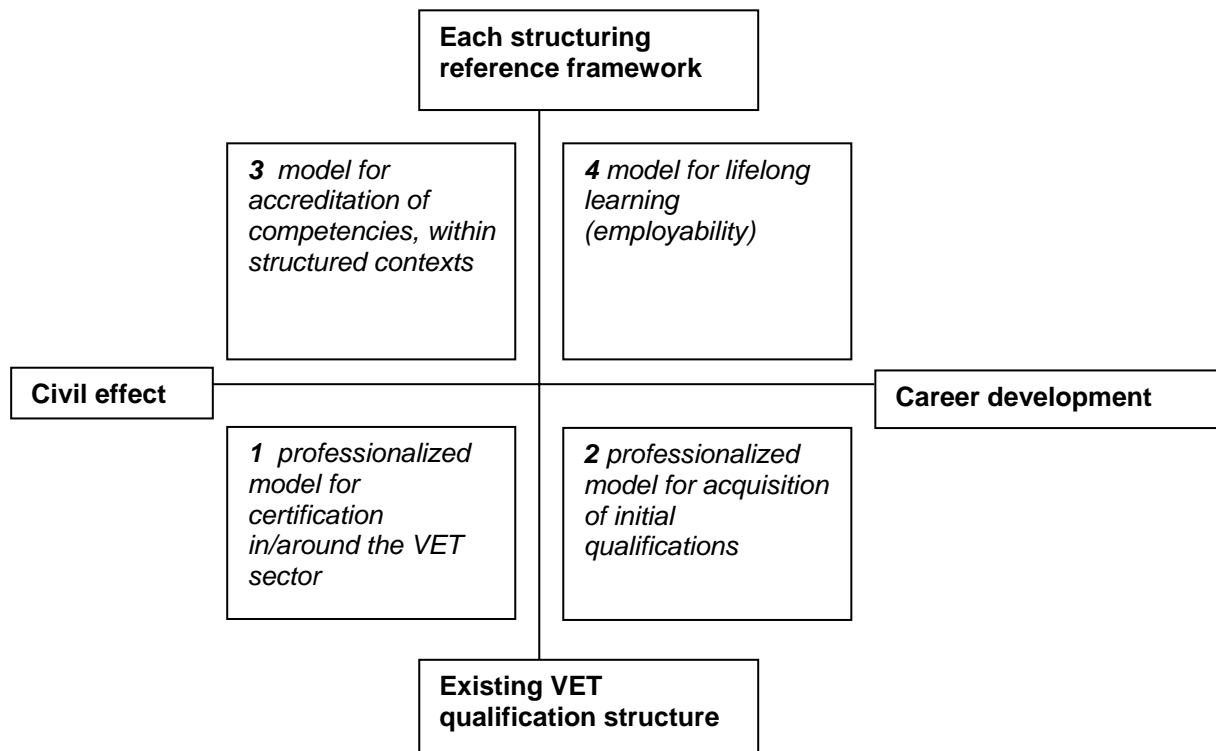
The basis of the description is a survey of the opinions of the various parties responsible for the 'EVC building': the government and both sides of industry; suppliers and users; other parties in the system. This survey shows that EVC, under various designations and with a variety of aims, can assist in improving people's deployability quite rapidly.

Structure of the EVC world

Despite all the differences, we can define a structure on both the demand and supply sides within the broad field of EVC services. The structuring of the various forms of EVC is based on two leitmotifs that run through all EVC applications:

1. *The objective*: what effect or return is aimed for? Is it a matter of narrow EVC, i.e. aimed at the certification of a person's competencies on the basis of recognition and accreditation, or do broad EVC aims play a part? In that case, it is not just a matter of certification, but more about personal development or career development.
2. *The context*: what benchmark is applied? There is one major benchmark, KSB (the Quality Structure for Vocational Education). In addition, industries, schools, colleges, companies and the employment centres also apply their own standards, or even a number of standards. The purpose of a standard is to provide people at a particular level and within a particular environment with a guideline for the path they should follow in society.

Interpreting these two lines as a pair of axes, that gives four fields in which EVC can be used to serve a particular goal within a particular context. We call these four fields the "four spheres of EVC".



The four spheres of EVC (Kenniscentrum EVC 2003)

Typology of the EVC world

A short typology of the four spheres produces the following description:

1. *EVC as professionalized model for certification in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector*

EVC's function in this sphere is aimed primarily at providing diplomas or (partial) certificates in the context of KSB.

The two most important forms in which EVC occurs:

- traditional exemption policy based on previously acquired qualifications, which looks only at prior education and the relevant certificates;
- exemption policy based on broader evidence; competencies acquired non-formally or informally are also assessed.

A proper quality of certification is the primary benchmark, as it must be *recognized* and *accredited* on the responsibility of the EVC provider (the certifying educational institution). The goals that applicants aim to achieve by obtaining certificates, and whether certification is the best way to reach these goals, are not the provider's primary concern. In sphere 1, the provider supplies a good quality product: certificates and diplomas for competencies acquired elsewhere.

Development is offered in this sphere by providing a (customized) educational package.

Key questions on sphere 1 are:

- Is informal learning evaluated against the standards generously or metrically?
- What are the conditions and possibilities under which individuals have access to certification, and how can these conditions be improved?
- How do providers deal with existing differences in the appropriateness and quality of assessment?

2. *EVC as model for acquisition of initial qualifications*

EVC's function in this sphere focuses on the contribution made by accreditation and certification to obtaining or retaining employment. Forms that occur in this sphere are:

- Recognition and accreditation of competencies that have been acquired (formally and informally) in the context of the occupation pursued by the candidate. The procedure and tools used are tailored as far as possible to the individual work environment.
- Recognition and accreditation of competencies that have been acquired (formally and informally) in the context of the occupation that the candidate intends to pursue. The procedure and tools used are tailored to the future work environment.

The proper progress of the process and the deployment and use of EVC tools are tailored to the employment goal envisaged by the candidate. The competencies in question in that context are tailored to that objective. These are certificates (or partial certificates) from KSB and may also be other competencies (including behavioural and/or physical competencies) provided that they match the occupational profile.

Providers are frequently employers and/or jobfinding organizations. Providers select and design the way in which the whole process is shaped, and within that process educational institutes act as suppliers of all or part of the services.

Development is provided by offering customized forms of both formal learning and informal (workplace) learning.

Key questions on sphere 2 are:

- How do educational institutions fare as service providers within the progress of the providers' process?
- Is there scope for a generous interpretation of qualification requirements?
- How is the quality of certification enforced?
- Does EVC fit into companies' HR cycles or jobfinding agencies' procedures?

3. *EVC as model for accreditation of competencies, within structured contexts*

EVC's function in this sphere is aimed primarily at the accreditation of competencies (provision of diplomas, certificates or partial certificates) outside the context of KSB.

People acquire competencies that cannot be related to KSB in a variety of ways, in formal and informal learning and/or in work situations. Higher vocational education and university education are examples, but company schools and voluntary organizations with a high professional content (sports associations etc.) work with accreditation of competencies based on other standards.

A proper quality of certification is the primary benchmark, as it must be *recognized* and *accredited* on the responsibility of the EVC provider (the certifying educational institution). Here again, the goals that applicants aim to achieve by obtaining certificates, and whether certification is the best way to reach these goals, are not the provider's primary concern. In sphere 3, the provider supplies a good quality product: certificates and diplomas for competencies acquired elsewhere.

Development is offered in this sphere by providing a (customized) educational package.

The key question in sphere 3 is how quality and accessibility are organized with reference to standards other than those set by KSB.

4. *EVC as model for lifelong learning*

The fourth sphere may be viewed as the integrated model within which the other three spheres are subsumed. 'Lifelong learning' outlines the situation of members of our society who are engaged a process of continuous self-development in line with their own development requirements on the one hand and the demands of their environment on the other.

Sphere 4 shows us the enterprising individual who is working to develop himself or herself continuously and in that process makes use of the facilities provided for the recognition and accreditation of the competences that he or she has acquired personally or professionally. And also

uses them to make it clear what he or she has to offer to employment organizations and other collaborative efforts.

The forms in which this sphere emerges are supplied by providers (employment organizations, headhunters for senior posts, employability coaching) who guide individuals in the development of their portfolios. Where necessary, teachers and trainers act to certify competencies (sphere 3). The characteristic feature of sphere 4 is that the development programme is determined and controlled by the person in question. While institutions facilitate and provide support, they do not set the direction.

Key questions on sphere 4 are:

- How to deal with changes in standard-setting?
- How can quality be made visible?
- How is access to accreditation, recognition and development (a knowledge infrastructure) organized?
- What financial and other resources are available to the individual?

What next?

The purpose of this model is to provide a description that can serve as a basis for recommendations on:

- resolving problem issues within the four application areas of EVC;
- demonstrating that bridges can in fact be built between these four application areas; and
- breaking down the divisions between the four application areas in order to accelerate the introduction of EVC to and for the employment market in the Netherlands.

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