

“It’s Still Quite a Bit Puzzling...”: The Dutch Approach to Validation at NCOI University of Applied Sciences

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Introduction

Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) has a long history in The Netherlands. Initiated in the 1990s, it came to full bloom with the publication of the national VPL-policy in “The Glass is Half Full!” (MEZ, 2000). Since then, VPL systematics continued to evolve, including in higher education (Duvekot, et.al., 2024).

Since February 2020, NCOI University of Applied Sciences¹ has been involved in the National Experiment on Learning Outcomes in Higher Education Qualifications (Adviescommissie, 2014). The experiment aims at supporting adults more effectively in their lifelong development by making part-time higher education more compatible with people’s prior learning experiences and providing more differentiation and flexibility through learning outcomes and validating their prior learning.

Learning outcomes are important for valuing and recognizing what people have learned outside of the formal education environment, so that they can receive tailored learning within higher education (HE) programs. Learning outcomes and VPL are the key concepts in this experiment:

Learning outcomes are statements of what an individual should know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy (Cedefop, 2014).

VPL is learner-independent assessment of one's learning experiences and advice on further learning, with a view to achieving a desired learning effect (Duvekot, 2016).

This cohort analysis concerns a survey of 142 students (71 dual and 71 part-time students) on how to strengthen and improve flexible learning in HE. These students started a part-time or dual qualification program in 2022-2023 leading to associate’s degree (Ad) and bachelor-levels.²

The key question in this cohort analysis is whether students can effectively use a validation process that links their prior learning to the learning outcomes of higher education degrees and what this means for their learning and for NCOI's programming of Ad-level and bachelor qualifications.

In this essay, we first explain the design of NCOI’s validation process and the analysis-grid and then, using eight cases, we qualitatively analyze the practicing of VPL at NCOI. This analysis helps us reach conclusions and recommendations for structural

implementation of the validation process in the dual and part-time learning programs of NCOI's HE-qualifications.

NCOI's Validation Process

The validation process aims to determine whether students can demonstrate certain learning outcomes through presenting prior learning experiences at the start of their program. The motto is "what an individual student already knows and does no longer needs to be learned" (NCOI, n.d.). This allows the personal learning pathway to be flexible and tailored to the individual student's actual learning needs. With VPL, individual students only need to learn what is necessary and relevant. With this, the student's voice is listened to better in NCOI's flexible degree programs, and the program can better respond to individual student's learning needs.

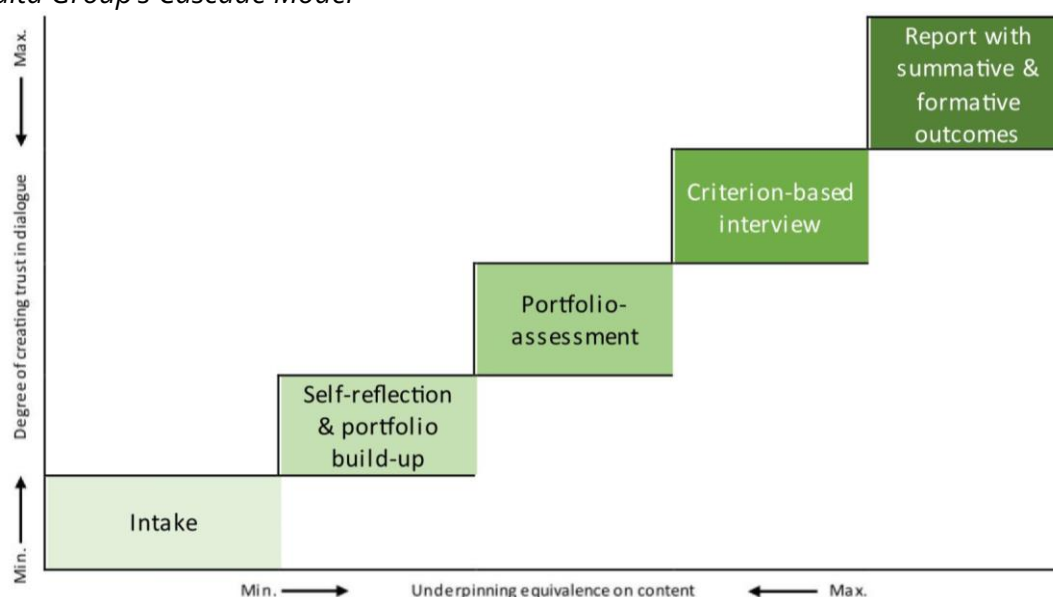
The validation process has a threefold purpose:

- a) *Personal reflection on the learning experiences* of students by raising their awareness of the value they already possess and how to articulate that value. We call this "assessment as learning," or reflective assessment. This kind of assessment considers **students themselves as active participants** in evaluating their own learning. It revolves around self-reflection, self-regulation, and developing metacognitive skills that help in planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's own learning. In which students become aware of the value they already possess and how to articulate that value.
- b) *Validate and assess what a person has already learned* through formal learning (qualifications), non-formal learning (schooling, certificates), and - above all - through informal learning in the workplace (occupational tasks, job duties, etc.). This assessment of learning avoids unnecessary education and speeds up achieving the desired outcome of learning.
- c) *Advice on the organization of further education is still needed* to achieve the qualification, also taking account of someone's learning style. This type of assessment focuses on **improving the learning process as it takes place**. The objective is to provide feedback that helps students and teachers adjust learning strategies. This is "assessment for learning."

Salta Group's Cascade Model

NCOI's validation process is organized according to Salta Group's cascade model, which consists of five parts: intake, self-reflection and portfolio build-up, portfolio assessment, criterion-based interview (CBI), and report (Figure 1). The cascade model is intended to create confidence in the quality of (a) the dialog between student, study coach, and assessor about what is already learned and assessable and what still needs to be learned, and in (b) substantiating the equivalence of the content of the student's portfolio with the content of the learning outcome(s) of the program in the successive steps.

Figure 1
Salta Group's Cascade Model



Source: Duvekot, et. al, 2024.

In this model, the roles of intakers (initial discussions with the student) and assessors (evaluation of the learning) are filled-in by the study coaches of Salta Group PE, in addition to their teaching tasks as study coach. A study coach is a subject matter expert in the program and has experience in the relevant professional practice. In the case of an assessment, the role of assessor is only assumed by the study coach if that person is not either the intaker or the teacher of the student.

Intake

The purpose of the intake is to advise the student on the potential Higher Education (HE)-value of the student's work and learning experiences related to the learning outcomes of the desired Ad- or bachelor-program. A student's potential HE-value is estimated but not assessed in the dialog with the intaker. The intaker only gives the indication or advice for a (potential) intake assessment based on the autonomous estimation on which learning outcomes could reflect successfully with their own learning experiences. For this, the intaker uses the list of indicators corresponding to the description of the learning outcomes. This HE-value is determined on *the comparability of the student's (professional) actions in critical authentic situations to the learning outcomes of the program*. A potential HE-value points out the likelihood of requesting a validation assessment for one or more learning outcomes (Duvekot, 2024).

We refer to this as *an enriched intake* because from the student's work and learning experiences, the best possible connection to the qualification standard is considered. This is *a more holistic intake* because the fit to the learning outcomes of the qualification is considered from the whole of the student's learning experiences.

Self-reflection and Portfolio

As soon as a potential and relevant HE-value is identified, the student's self-reflection is structured around collecting relevant evidence (professional products) of the student's knowledge and skills in a portfolio. Students have the opportunity to use guidance

moments with their study coach assigned to them within the program. These guidance moments focus on supporting students by clarifying the process steps of the validation assessment, answering questions, and helping students prepare for the assessment.

The evidence is provided with personal reflection in which the student substantiates the relationship between the evidence and the learning outcome(s). With this reflection form, the student reflects on the *situation*, the student's *tasks* and *outcome* in the situation, the *transfer* options from the action to similar, other situations, and its *theoretical* justification (Kraal & Heuvel, 2009).

Portfolio-assessment

After submitting the portfolio, the evidence with reflection is evaluated and assessed by an assessor. In this portfolio assessment, the assessor determines which parts of the portfolio are strong enough for validation and whether further questions need to be asked about other parts.

Criterion-based Interview (CBI)

After the portfolio-assessment, the assessor engages in a criterion-based interview (CBI) with the student about the questions the portfolio raised. This interview is designed to systematically assess the extent to which a student meets the indicators of the learning outcome, based on practical examples.

This interview is conducted with the 'green pencil' because the assessor asks critical questions about the parts of the portfolio for which there are still questions about whether they meet the indicators of the learning outcome(s). The green pencil in a CBI is a metaphor used to indicate that the assessor values only behaviors and examples that directly relate to the stated indicators of the learning outcome. It means that only relevant information that provides a clear justification for linking the content of the portfolio with the content and level of the learning outcome(s), as seen from the eyes of the student.

In a CBI, questions are asked according to the LSQ pattern of "listening-summarizing-questioning" and avoiding JOA (Judgments-Opinions-Advice). Thereby, the questioning has a stratification according to the VRAAQ-criteria (Variation, Relevance, Authenticity, Actuality and Quality), level criteria and content comparability of the student's portfolio. This stratification helps structure the CBI prepared from the portfolio-assessment around questions still needed for the assessor's truth-telling.

Through criterion-based questioning, the assessor may substantiate an appropriate rating and assess the student in a developmental manner on whether or not the presented evidence is equivalent to a learning outcome(s). The CBI and the portfolio assessment thus provide the foundation for a report describing the demonstrated learning outcome(s) and a recommendation on further learning in a tailored learning pathway appropriate for the student.

The Report

After the CBI, the assessor writes the assessment report. It describes which learning outcomes have been validated. If a learning outcome has not been demonstrated, developmental advice for further learning is articulated via an educational route (flexible and hybrid) or via work-based learning.

The report should be written from the perspective of the student's evidence and should indicate the connection to the learning outcomes achieved or to be achieved. This means that the report indicates whether and how the evidence meets the VRAAQ- and the level criteria, and the content of the learning outcome. The assessor reports what has been assessed (indicators, themes, actions, etc.), where these have been found in the portfolio or in the interview, what the student has already mastered with examples from portfolio and/or interview, and finally an overall conclusion on the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of the content of the learning outcome(s) in question.

The Examination Board

NCOI's examination board plays an essential role in the cascade model, namely that of assuring the validity of all steps taken within the model. This assurance depends on the confidence the examination board can have in the validation process. To this end, the assuring role focuses on:

- *The Education and Examination Regulations of NCOI* state that a validation assessment may be part of the dual and part-time Ad- and bachelor-programs.
- The examination board appoints assessors as examiners in the validation assessment. These assessors must previously be trained and certified in operating in a validation assessment through an internal assessor training.
- In the case where an assessor has submitted the validation assessment report for the first time as part of the certification process, the examination board assesses whether the report is of sufficient quality. Subsequent reports go along with the regular spot checks conducted by the examination board to ensure test quality.
- Calibration of assessments to increase inter-assessor reliability among assessors is done under the guidance of a member of the examination board.
- Finally, as with any form of examination within a program, the examination board also takes random samples to determine the required quality of the assessment process of the validation assessment, including the evidence provided by the student along with the documentation and reflection form.

The Analysis Grid Process

The analysis grid for examining the validation processes of students in the 2022-2023 cohort focuses on the four methods used by assessors to value the student's mastery of particular learning outcomes. Together, the four sub-analyses, document analysis, conditional analysis, content analysis and interpretive analysis, provide a solid foundation for examining the assessor's final judgment of the value that the student has demonstrated through the personal portfolio and that the assessor has actually found.

Document Analysis

The document analysis examined what evidence was provided by the student, how this evidence was used to demonstrate the equivalence (if any) of the personal learning experiences to the learning outcomes to be demonstrated, and the extent to which the evidence was convincing on its own or needed further clarification in the CBI to actually validate the student's 'claim for fame.' We call this the documentation value of the student's portfolio. This allowed us to determine in which process step this value of the student's documentation was established.

Conditional Analysis

The conditional analysis was conducted using the VRAAQ criteria (Table 1) and the level criteria ranging from simple and supervised acting through light-complex and semi-supervised to complex and autonomous acting in professional situations. These two sets of criteria were used to test whether the student's evidence was authentic and equivalent to the learning outcome(s).

The VRAAQ criteria (Klarus, 2002) have an important function in an assessment, as they serve as a guide for assessing behavior and competencies in a structured, objective, and reliable manner. They are used as a framework for the assessor to ascertain the truth-telling during the validation process whether the student's documentation is equivalent to the content of the learning outcome(s).

Table 1

The VRAAQ Criteria

VRAAQ criteria	Key question
Variation	Was the learning experience acquired in different situations/contexts?
Relevance	Does this evidence actually say something about mastery of the learning outcome, and can this evidence provide proof of one or more learning outcomes?
Authenticity	Is the documentation (evidence + reflection) demonstrably produced by the student himself and not by a colleague, Artificial Intelligence (AI), or someone else?
Actuality	How long ago was the evidence created and what does this say about the mastery of the learning outcome(s) now?
Quality	Does the documentation broadly and traceably meet the indicators, the description, and context of the learning outcome?

The level criteria establish whether the student's evidence is aligned with the three levels at which the learning outcome may have been described. These three levels are defined at different stages of the program: the first stage of the Ad or of the first year of the bachelor's degree, the main or intermediate stage, and the final stage or year with the graduation. Each level is based on criteria for the knowledge, skills, attitude, and integration required for each stage. The levels progress taxonomically from (level 1) simple and supervised acting through (level 2) light-complex and semi-supervised to (level 3) complex and autonomous acting in professional situations. (Bloom, 1956; Bulthuis, 2013, Fink, 2003; Miller, 1990).

Content Analysis

The content analysis focused on two questions related to the summative and formative connection between the personal learning experiences and the descriptors and stage of the learning outcome(s): (a) is the assessment clearly substantiated in terms of content, and (b) is the advice logical, consistent, and followable?

The summative assessment focuses on the validation of one's learning experiences against a yardstick to which the student wants or needs to commit. Such an assessment is retrospective and is limited to a valuation and possible recognition of personal learning experiences against the standard, i.e., the learning outcomes of the Ad or bachelor course. It is the assessment *of* learning.

The formative assessment aims to advise on a person's (continued) development after the assessment. Formative advising is prospective and developmental in nature. In this sense, it is the assessment *for* learning.

Interpretative Analysis

For the interpretative analysis, the so-called SAKOTE criteria (Table 2) were developed. The purpose of these criteria is to examine the extent to which assessment reports secure the connection between the student's portfolio of evidence and the qualification standard. These criteria are intended as a tool for the examination board to articulate its confidence in the report of the validation assessment.

SAKOTE stands for *self-awareness* of the student, the *AI-proofing* of the evidence, the degree of *integration of knowledge* into professional activities, the *level of action*, the *traceability* of the evidence, and the degree to which the *equivalence* of personal learning experiences and the content of learning outcomes is described.

Table 2

The SAKOTE Criteria

SAKOTE	Definition
Self-aware	The student demonstrates with the documentation and in the CBI the ability to raise 'one's own voice' realistically, concretely, and sincerely.
AI-proof	The documentation, combined with the CBI, shows that the learning experience(s) is/are authentic and demonstrably by the student, and therefore <i>AI-proof</i> .
Knowledge	The student's knowledge is demonstrable on its own or integrated into one's actions in the documentation, including any deepening thereof in the CBI.
On level	The documentation, possibly combined with information from the CBI, demonstrates that the student has mastered the learning outcome(s) at the required level.
Traceable	The student's evidence presents itself logically and consistently in telling the truth when it comes to articulating the reasoning to link the evidence to the content of the learning outcome(s).
Equivalent	The documentation, with the output of the interview, supports the equivalence of the student's learning experience(s) to the content and level of the learning outcome(s).

Duvekot, *et al*, 2024.

Eight Case Studies

The cohort analysis was accomplished through a qualitative study with eight cases as the *unit of analysis* (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2009). These cases were selected based on the intake reports of the cohort in which several students were advised to request a validation assessment based on their potential HE-value. From this group, eight students were selected for this cohort analysis: three students from the Ad Business Administration, one from the Bachelor of Architecture and four from the Bachelor of Business Administration. They claimed a total of 208 credits, of which 168 were honored in the assessment. One credit represents a course load of 28 hours, and a full year of study comprises 60 credits.

Document Analysis

The document analysis examined what evidence students provided, how the equivalence of this evidence to the learning outcomes could be demonstrated (or not), and to what extent the evidence was convincing or still needed to be examined in the CBI. The result of the document analysis is what we call the “documentation-value” of the student's portfolio. The cohort analysis examined the extent to which such documentation-value could be accurately and reliably translated to a personalized (further) learning program.

All cases went through the steps of the validation process, but which step was decisive in reaching a substantiated judgment varied. For seven out of eight cases, the evidence served to substantiate the students' *claim for fame*. With the evidence and reflection in their portfolio, students related their (professional) learning experiences to the learning outcomes. It was found to have high “documentation value” if the content of the portfolio could make an appropriate connection to the content of the learning outcome(s). Only in one case was the evidence and reasoning weak; this was caused by the fact that the employer only allowed the student to present secondary evidence so that no trade secrets would be revealed.

Although the assessment reports belonging to the eight cases were clear in their conclusions, their substantiation was meager. Hardly any examples were given of the HE value of the personal learning experiences that were equivalent to the content of learning outcomes. Nor was it made clear which components of the portfolio had already resulted in positive ratings in the portfolio assessment and which components had been addressed in the CBI. The reports were not uniformly completed, and there were significant differences between assessors' reporting styles.

This imbalance is a critical factor despite the fact that the final result of the assessments in the reports matched the students' estimated HE value. The question raised was whether the discrepancy between the quality of the evidence and the reporting of the assessment was caused by the evaluator's analysis in the portfolio assessment and the CBI, by the evidence and reasoning itself, or by the reporting format. In a closer assessment, the problem appeared to be the reporting format because the steps in the validation process were conducted in an orderly manner, and the assessors were adequately trained.

What then remains is the novelty of more holistic reporting. Assessing portfolios in a positive-critical manner with the green pencil, steering toward creating trust in assessors

within the assessment process rather than continuous monitoring of all process steps, and opening the learning outcomes of the program to student reflection (from the outside in) are key facets of this. In addition, it is clear that it is important that students are well-informed about how Salta's cascade model works and that assessors benefit from regularly conducting validation assessments.

Conditional Analysis

The conditional analysis was based on the assessment of the student's evidence through the VRAAQ- and level-criteria. This helped assess whether the student's evidence was authentic, current, multifaceted, and equivalent to the learning outcome(s).

By using the VRAAQ- and level criteria, the document-value assessment of the portfolios justified the students' claim for HE-value. However, the conditional analysis of evidence and accompanying reflection for this cohort-analysis gave a more convincing picture of the students' HE-value than the individual assessment-reports did. Thus, in this sub-analysis, reporting is also a weak link. For example, the reports hardly mentioned anything from the portfolio assessment results and, if some evidence was mentioned, this came out of the CBI's. It is the task of the assessors to describe all steps of the validation in the report and to fill in the format provided for the assessment clearly and with examples. However, this was not yet the case and deserves improvement.

Content analysis

The content analysis followed the literal text of the assessment reports. It can be argued that all eight reports were substandard in content and did not adequately reflect the true value of the students' portfolio, especially if the document analysis was considered.

Three cases did provide information about the value of the portfolio by describing examples of what had been discussed in the CBI. However, three other cases merely reported that the portfolio was adequate without providing examples or further explanation. And the last two cases did explain well the extent to which the content of the portfolio met the VRAAQ criteria including examples but then devoted little text and explanation to substantiating the outcome of the assessment.

Formative advising or providing feedback on what learning is missing and how to gain the missing learning outcomes was omitted, except for one case because all of the learning outcomes had been met. In other words, generally the reports lacked any formative advising.

SAKOTE

The SAKOTE criteria were used as a sub-analysis to assess the quality of the validation assessment:

- The degree of **self-awareness** was a good indicator to compare the student's self-value with the value of the learning outcome(s). The case studies did not demonstrate an over- or underestimation of the self-value by the students; most were able to accurately self-assess.
- There are few test forms suitable for assessing the **AI-proof** nature of evidence, and those in existence are not error-proof. However, the CBI process lends itself well to testing artificial Intelligence (AI) or other forms of external contributions by

engaging the interview. This provides a way to have the student respond to 'green' questioning, thus enabling the assessor to evaluate authenticity more easily.

- Assessing the **knowledge** integrated into students' professional actions proved questionable in the CBI. This questioning exposed what knowledge and insights the students had and how they had arrived at this knowledge.
- Whereas the level indicators were in principle sufficiently addressed within the validation assessment, the added value of the indicator "**at level**" within SAKOTE was that this criterion ensured the relevance and quality of the validation assessment.
- The examination of the **traceability** of evidence emphasized the value of the dialog in which the student brings in a substantiated *claim for fame* and the assessor questions this claim. Traceability is thus important to legitimize the value of the portfolio and relate it to the learning outcome(s).
- **Equivalence** is the most important criterion because it confirms the accountability of the result of the assessment. In all cases, this equivalence was accountable, regardless of where and how the student had acquired the formal learning outcome in prior formal, non-formal or informal learning experiences. The case studies also showed that the value of informal learning is significant and can indeed be tested in a quality-assured assessment process.

Experiences of Stakeholders

When asked, students indicated that they were happy with the validation-opportunity because their experiences were valued, which allowed them to accelerate in the program. They experienced that the study coaches contacted them quickly and supported them properly in preparing for the intake-step. Students also reported that the study coaches explained this step well and also gave useful advice on further steps in the validation process. The students indicated that this whole process takes a lot of time and that a proactive attitude on their part is needed to get the anticipated results.

Student Comments

- *The intake interview was fun and educational and the opportunity to validate really appeals to me.*
- *It is still exciting for me how to validate something properly; through the conversation with my study coach, clarification in this came.*
- *The study coach was super fine thinking with me about my options, going over each subject and giving me additional information and good advice!*
- *If you work, you already have certain experience and fine that it is appreciated.*
- *The conversation with the assessor was really a dialog and I felt like I was seen and heard.*

The study coaches also had positive experiences. They enjoyed making a difference for students by looking with them at what they already knew and did. Validation, they said, is especially successful for more experienced students. At the same time, the organizational process does not always run smoothly. Contacting students was sometimes difficult and the outcomes of the intakes were not always properly documented, thereby delaying the validation process.

Study Coach Comments

- *Really enjoy doing it because it is also meaningful to the students.*
- *The overall process is not always clear to me as a study coach.*
- *It will take some time getting used to, but together with the student we will figure it out.*

The assessors enjoyed calibrating their assessments because they are still searching for the best form and words to describe the assessment results. The dialogs with students provided much valuable information on which to build their final assessment. [on.] The combination of the reflection, evidence and the CBI ensured that the assessment in their eyes was valid and reliable. With the rise of AI, they valued this triangulation as a trust-building factor.

Assessor Comments

- *By discussing student evidence and arguments from the "green pencil" perspective, you can make a meaningful contribution to the validation of students' experiences.*
- *Validation is quite a lot of work and requires flight hours to arrive at a reasoned assessment.*

Examination boards were enthusiastic about the validation process. They build their confidence in the process primarily on the quality and experience of the assessors. They understand that gaining experience is important for assessors to achieve transparent reporting. Calibration helps assessors align and test outcomes against each other to create a unified process. The rationale for how the assessor arrives at a judgment and the role that the CBI plays in that process remains a focus for examination board members.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The main questions raised in this cohort analysis were: can students effectively exploit the validation process with the subsequent steps in Salta Group's cascade model? And what is the impact on their (further) learning and on NCOI's HE-programming?

Conclusions

The main conclusions of this cohort analysis are twofold:

1. The process of validation according to the cascade model is quality-assured. This trust is based on the quality of (a) the dialog between student and assessor about what is and isn't yet learned, (b) the quality of the content of the student's portfolio, and (c) the capacity of the assessors to link the students' documentation-value with the learning outcomes of HE-qualifications, therewith accounting for the transfer of documentation-value to accredited HE-value.
2. Students assessed on their potential HE-value as estimated at intake can successfully present this HE value in their documentation, be assessed and advised on it. Also, the outcome of the assessment can be well justified and secured within the program framework. However, the quality of the reporting of the outcomes of the assessment is still an area for improvement.

More specifically, the conclusions are:

- Salta Group's cascade model was underpinned by trained and certified intakers (study coaches) and assessors.
- The document analysis yields that for the majority of cases, a pre-judgment closely matched the estimations in the intakes and the final outcomes of the assessments.
- The combination of portfolio assessment and CBI in assessment was adequate because it allowed the student's voice to be heard and allowed the assessor to look at the portfolio more holistically, from the student's point of view or from the outside in to the content of the course rather than vice versa from the inside out.
- The VRAAQ and level criteria reinforced the students' *claim for fame* and enhanced the establishment of trust in their potential HE-value at the start of their study program.
- The level criteria were suitable for connecting the students' documentation-value effectively to the descriptors of the learning outcomes and thus also substantiating statements about meeting/not meeting the entire learning outcome.
- The role of the examination board in the validation process was of great importance. As the gatekeeper of the qualifying process, it was important that they understood how the student's learning pathway had been established and organized at the start. They also safeguarded the testing policy and processes of which the cascade model is an integral part.
- SAKOTE was useful for examination boards and NCOI's internal quality assurance approach to consider the validation process as a full-fledged testing instrument.

Areas for development were also noted:

1. Reporting is the 'Achilles' heel' in truth-telling in the validation assessment. The reports do not adequately and explicitly describe all components, including VRAAQ, level, content judgment and advice for further learning.
2. The evaluation of students and NCOI-staff show that the process could be improved with regard to information provision, planning, and turnaround times. The positive impact is not yet adequately communicated, so the number of students who may opt for validation assessment lags behind.

Recommendations

The recommendations are geared at improving and accelerating flexibility in Ad and bachelor programs:

1. Improve assessment-outcomes reporting by providing assessors with tips and examples on how to achieve a replicable assessment. Reports should be replicable and provide examples from the portfolio assessment and CBI of how a learning outcome was met.
2. Provide better information about the process steps of the assessment to eliminate unfamiliarity and cold feet among students.
3. Introduce the SAKOTE criteria to the program staff and examination boards. SAKOTE helps determine whether the assessment has been 'up to standard.' In addition, it provides a good framework for calibration sessions of the intakers (study coaches) and assessors to align in assessing the documentation value of students' portfolios and the substantiation of that value to program learning outcomes.

4. Working effectively with Salta Group's cascade model can also be useful during the continued learning process (throughtake) and at completion as a final assessment or outtake to evaluate the Ad or bachelor's degree. Integrating validation into the whole learning process is then the task.
5. Using *the green pencil* represents a shift in learning outcomes testing from an analytical to a more holistic approach and in integrating summative and formative assessment into testing policy. This shift will take time to get all professionals on board.
6. Have more sampling by the examination boards of validation assessment to increase confidence in the process and to advise assessors in developing the skills needed to assess responsibly and student-centered.

Follow-up

The validation assessment appears to be an effective effort in terms of time, cost and return because it expresses a valuation of who the student already is and who the student can become. It arguably prevents unnecessary instruction and puts the student at the center of the learning process, with all the accompanying motivational effects. Follow-up research is focused on whether students who follow an accelerated and – through validation - more customized learning pathway are more likely to enjoy their studies and have a higher likelihood of successful completion. This may have a positive effect on the image of NCOI's higher education offerings. The impact can also be positive for an employer because there are less absenteeism costs for an employee who, after all, takes less time to persist and graduate, and can also study through work-based learning.

A cost and benefit analysis is planned as a follow-up study to embed Salta Group's cascade model into NCOI's flexible, more personalized, and tailored programming. Specifically, a follow-up cohort analysis will analyze the impact of flexible validation on students' career formation. The impact of the cascade model on employers' motivation to invest in their human capital and the (arguably better) success rates of training programs will also be part of this subsequent cohort analysis

1 NCOI University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands is part of Salta Group 's division Professional Education. NCOI offers more than 1.250 qualifications and lifelong learning programs on VET-, Ad-, bachelor- and master-levels to yearly 20.000 students. <http://professional-education.nl/en>

2 The Ad-level corresponds to level 5 and the bachelor-level to level 6 of the European Qualification Framework. <https://europass.europa.eu/en/europass-digital-tools/european-qualifications-framework>

The difference between part-time and dual learning programs in higher education is that a part-time program is designed for students who cannot commit to full-time study, often due to work, family responsibilities, or other commitments. A dual learning program combines study with structured, mandatory work placements or apprenticeships directly related to the field of study.

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About the Authors

Ruud Duvekot



Prof. Dr. Ruud Duvekot (1960) studied Economic and Social History at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. His thesis 'Leren Waarderen' [Valuing Learning] (2016) analyzed the impact of validating prior (formal, non-formal and informal) learning experiences (VPL) on personalized learning, and the worlds of learning and working. At present his functions are: (1) director, Centre for Lifelong Learning Services (CL3S), (2) Professor 'Validation and Work-based Learning, NCOI University, the Netherlands, (3) Associate professor, Teacher-

training Faculty, Utrecht University of A.S., (4) UNESCO Research-Fellow, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Hamburg, Germany, (5) Chairperson, European Centre for Valuation of Prior Learning.

Madeleine Farla



Madeleine Farla-Machielsen: In my career, focusing on developing people based on their potential has been a central point. At the Salta Group, I have spent the past 14 years creating and offering accredited education for working individuals who seek further development in their careers or are searching for new challenges. Our approach emphasizes practical experience, allowing individuals to build upon what they already know. My educational background as a bachelor's in creative therapy, bachelor in pedagogy (with a secondary teaching qualification), and a Master's in Culture and Change, Educational Management has been invaluable in this endeavor.

Irma Kolkman



Irma Kolkman MSc: Over the past three years at Salta Group, I have focused on implementing educational innovations in higher (vocational) education for working professionals seeking career development or new challenges. One initiative has been the introduction of holistic validation at all courses at EQF levels 5 and 6. Prior to this, I spent 19 years in various roles within Salta Group, gaining extensive experience in areas such as policy making, accreditations of new and existing programmes, quality assurance, education management, examination and examination

boards. My educational background is in European Studies (Business Management) and Business Sciences (Business Administration).