

DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION  
EDUCATION POLICY COMMITTEE

## Group of National Experts on the Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning

RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING  
COUNTRY NOTE FOR THE NETHERLANDS

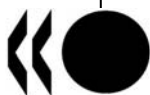
*This document is the Country Note produced for the Netherlands within the context of the EDPC activity on Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning. It is one in a series of 16 Country Notes prepared after a review visit – either Thematic Review or Comparative Policy Analysis or both – in each of the participating countries to this activity. This Country Note was prepared by the following team of experts: Margarida Abecasis, Hanne Shapiro and Miho Taguma; and is based on a study visit which took place on 26-30 March 2007, as well as background documents prepared to support the visit.*

*The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Netherlands, the OECD Secretariat or its member countries.*

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## RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

### List of RNFIL Country Notes

A series of 16 Country Notes were produced within the context of the EDPC activity on *Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning*. These Country Notes were prepared after a review visit – either a Thematic Review or Comparative Policy Analysis or both – to each of the countries participating in this activity. The series of notes is being made available on OLIS under the code EDU/EDPC/RNFIL(2008)2. The list of codes for individual country notes is detailed as follows:

- EDU/EDPC/RNFIL(2008)2/PART1 – Country Note – Australia
- EDU/EDPC/RNFIL(2008)2/PART2 – Country Note – Belgium (Flemish Community)
- EDU/EDPC/RNFIL(2008)2/PART3 – Country Note – Canada
- EDU/EDPC/RNFIL(2008)2/PART4 – Country Note – Chile
- EDU/EDPC/RNFIL(2008)2/PART5 – Country Note – Germany
- EDU/EDPC/RNFIL(2008)2/PART6 – Country Note – Hungary
- EDU/EDPC/RNFIL(2008)2/PART7 – Country Note – Ireland
- EDU/EDPC/RNFIL(2008)2/PART8 – Country Note – Italy
- EDU/EDPC/RNFIL(2008)2/PART9 – Country Note – Korea
- EDU/EDPC/RNFIL(2008)2/PART10 – Country Note – Mexico
- EDU/EDPC/RNFIL(2008)2/PART11 – Country Note – Netherlands
- EDU/EDPC/RNFIL(2008)2/PART12 – Country Note – Norway
- EDU/EDPC/RNFIL(2008)2/PART13 – Country Note – Slovenia
- EDU/EDPC/RNFIL(2008)2/PART14 – Country Note – South Africa
- EDU/EDPC/RNFIL(2008)2/PART15 – Country Note – Spain
- EDU/EDPC/RNFIL(2008)2/PART17 – Country Note – United Kingdom

All the 16 countries involved in a review visit, as well as 7 additional participating countries that decided not to be reviewed, provided a Country Background Report to the Secretariat in preparation for the visit and as background documentation for the preparation of the final International Synthesis Report [see EDU/EDPC/RNFIL(2008)1]. The different Country Background Reports and Country Notes will be provided in separate instalments in order to guarantee flexibility (for a given country the PART number will be the same). Please note that there is no EDU/EDPC/RNFIL(2008)2/PART16.

The final International Synthesis Report which will be prepared by the Secretariat will draw on both the Country Background Reports and the Country Notes.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

**BOL** (*Beroepsopleidende leerweg*) Vocational Training Pathway

**BBL** (*Beroepsbegeleidende Leerweg*) Block or Day Release Pathway; corresponds to the classic apprenticeship

**BVE** (*Beroepsonderwijs en Volwasseneneducatie*) Secondary Vocational Education and adult education

**CAO** Labour Market Collective Agreement

**CBR** Country Background Report

**CINOP** (*Centrum for Innovatie van Opleidingen*) – National Centre for Innovation in vocational education and adult and continuing education and training.

**COLO** (*Vereniging Kenniscentra Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven*) Association of Centres of Expertise on Vocational Education, Training and Labour Market

**CWI** (*Centrum voor Werk en Inkomen*) Centre for Work and Income

**EC** (Erkennen van Verwoven Competenties) Empowerment Centre

**EPL** Employment Protection Legislation

**EQUAL** EU Social Funds Programme

**ESF** European Social Funds

**EVC** (Erkennen van verworven competenties) RNFIL

**Fundeon** (Kenniscentrum beroepsonderwijs bouw & infra) KBB for the Building and Construction Sector

**GDP** Gross Domestic Product

**HAVO** (*Hoger Algemeen Voortgezet Onderwijs*) Senior General Secondary Education.

**HBO** (*Hoger Beroepsonderwijs*) Higher Professional Education

**KBB** (*Kenniscentrum Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven*) Centres of Expertise on Vocational Education, Training, and Labour Market - [organised on branch or sector level]

**KCE** (*Kwaliteits Centrum Examinering*) Examination Quality Centre

**Kenniscentrum EVC** (*Kenniscentrum Beroepsonderwijs Arbeidsmarkt*) Knowledge Centre for RNFIL

**MBO** (*Middelbaar Beroeps Onderwijs*) Senior Secondary Vocational Education

**NVAO** (*Nederlands Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie*) Netherlands-Flemish Accreditation Organisation

**O&O Funds** (*Opleidings- en Ontwikkelingsfonds*) Training and Development Funds under the labour market collective agreements

**OUNL** (*Open Universiteit Nederland*) Open University

**PAEPON** (*Platform van Aangewezen/Erkende Particuliere Onderwijsinstellingen*) Platform for Approved and Recognised Private Education Institutions in the Netherlands

**RAAK** Regional Attention and Action for Knowledge Innovation (regional development programme)

**RNFIL** Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

**ROC** (*Regionaal Opleidingscentrum*) Regional Education Centres

**SUWI** Framework Act for Carrying out Work and Income

**UWV** (*Uitvoeringsinstituut WerknemersVerzekeringen*) Employee Insurance Scheme Implementing Bodies

**VMBO** (*Vorbereidend Middelbaar Beroepsonderwijs*) Pre-vocational secondary education

**VWO** (*Vorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs*) University Preparatory Education

**WEB** (*Wet Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs*) Law on Adult and Vocational Education

**WIW** (*Wet inschakeling werkzoekenden*) Act of Involvement of the Unemployed

**WO** (*Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs*) University Education

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning is becoming high on the policy agenda in many OECD countries. In 1996, the OECD education ministers agreed to develop strategies for “lifelong learning for all”. The approach has been endorsed by ministers of labour, ministers of social affairs and the OECD Council at ministerial level. It is an approach whose importance may now be clearer than ever. Learning is a continuous process that takes place throughout life and in many settings. The concept of “from cradle to grave” includes formal, non-formal and informal learning. If learning is only recognised as the outcome of formal teaching, most of what is learnt is not recognised. From a policy point of view, when developing learning for economic and social benefits, this wider recognition of learning is clearly more effective. From the point of view of an individual, learning for its own sake may be sufficient for some but, for others, the recognition of learning outcomes may need to be incorporated into formal qualifications. The outcome of the whole process of recognition of non-formal and informal learning may bring benefits to the individual and the society.

2. How much evidence exists on the benefits of such recognition? Do governments know enough about the impact of national policies on such recognition? Under what conditions can such recognition be beneficial for all? To begin to answer these questions, a project entitled Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning was launched in 2006. The purposes, working methods, and issues for analysis are detailed in the project plan<sup>1</sup>.

3. The specific purposes of the Thematic Review (TR) strand of the project is to advance on understanding of stakeholder behaviour and to investigate what is working and not working with current practices. This TR Country Note should be read in conjunction with the Country Background Report (CBR) provided by the Dutch Authorities in preparation for the visit. The CBR contains a great deal of descriptive commentary and statistical information about the Dutch education and training system as well as observations on the process of recognising non-formal and informal learning.

4. The OECD team visited the Netherlands on 26-30 March 2007 and engaged in a full programme of visits and meetings arranged by the Dutch Steering Group. Annex 3 shows details of the programme and the participants in all of the meetings that took place. The study programme provided a very comprehensive overview of developments of EVC (*Erkennen van verworven competenties* = Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning = RNFIL) policies and practices, both from a sectoral, regional, institutional, individual, and system perspective. The richness in the background report as well as in the presentations given during the study visit contributed to the overall accomplishment of this analysis.

5. This Country Note has been prepared by the Rapporteur (Hanne Shapiro), the Expert (Margarida Abecasis) and the OECD leader of the review team (Miho Taguma). The review team would like to express their appreciation to the steering group, Mr. Dick Hagoort, Ms. B. Spit, Ms. Judith Meulenburg, Mr. Toon Janssen, and Ms. Lian Bastiaansen, the authors of the CBR, especially Kees Hagens who organised the visit, as well as a wide range of officials and individuals involved in the visit (Annex 3). The review team also would like to thank Mr. Justus de Hooge and Ms. Regina Kleingeld for their comments in the process of finalising this Country Note.

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<sup>1</sup> See EDU/EC(2005)17 (21 October 2005) or a summary at [www.oecd.org/edu/recognition](http://www.oecd.org/edu/recognition)

6. This Country Note on the Netherlands forms part of the OECD's Thematic Review of the Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning.

### **1.1 Policy contexts**

7. In 1996, the OECD education ministers agreed to develop strategies for 'lifelong learning for all', an approach endorsed by ministers of labour, ministers of social affairs and the OECD Council at ministerial level. The concept of 'from cradle to grave' includes formal, non-formal and informal learning. A broad consensus is emerging that countries need to find ways of recognising and valuing all learning, irrespective of where the learning takes place, if 'lifelong learning for all' is to be made a reality in the context of 21st century knowledge economies and open societies. How far have we come with this agenda?

### **1.2 Purpose**

8. The overall purpose of this OECD activity is to provide policy makers with useful options for generating effective, beneficial and equitable systems of recognising non-formal and informal learning by:

- Taking stock of existing institutional and technical arrangements.
- Developing indicators to measure the benefits and risks and collecting evidence on who benefits and who is at risk.
- Collecting evidence of what is working and what is not working within current systems; and
- Exploring effective, beneficial and equitable models based on the review of existing practices.

9. The focus of the activity is non-formal and informal learning settings. Nevertheless, it also covers the formal education sector where, for instance, the recognition of informal and non-formal learning provides a means of entry or re-entry into the formal education sector, or where a country has an overarching recognition system for overall competencies or learning outcomes, which covers formal, non-formal and informal settings.

### **1.3 Thematic Review**

10. The working methods consist of: 1) desk-based research and 2) two types of field research. The field research is composed of: a) Thematic Review and/or b) Collaborative Policy Analysis. The desk-based research aims at providing guidance for the preparation of a country background report; developing framework for data collection (qualitative and quantitative) and analysis. The purpose of the Thematic Review is to advance understanding of stakeholder behaviour and to investigate what is working and what is not working with current practices. The Collaborative Policy Analysis aims at allowing countries to test an idea in a small-scale, cost-contained, consultative manner.

11. As one of over 20 countries participating in this OECD activity, the Netherlands opted for a Thematic Review of its recognition system. A team of three experts subsequently visited Norway during the period 26-30 March 2007. The visit was organised and coordinated by the Dutch Ministry of Education, in consultation with the OECD Secretariat. This Country Note is based on the country background report prepared by the Dutch Ministry of Education, materials provided during the visit and interviews with key stakeholders, policy makers, academics and citizens both in the capital, and in the Rivierenland Region.

## 2. LIFELONG LEARNING POLICIES AND SYSTEMS IN THE NETHERLANDS

### 2.1 The education and training system and recent reforms

#### 2.1.1 Formal education

12. In the Netherlands, approximately 3.5 million pupils, students, and adults, pursue formal education programmes at differing levels. Education is compulsory for primary and secondary education from the age of 5 until 18 (has been extended to 18 since 2006). Secondary education begins at the age of 12. It integrates several levels and different education modalities; Pre-vocational Secondary Education (VMBO), Senior General Secondary Education (HAVO), Senior Vocational Education (MBO) and University Preparatory Education (VWO). VMBO programmes (four years) combine general and vocational education, after which pupils can continue in Senior Secondary Vocational Education (MBO). MBO courses last from one to four years. Vocational education has four sectors (economy, technical, service & health, and agricultural) and four qualification levels: assistant in training (level 1, equivalent to ISCED2), basis-vocational education (level 2, equivalent to ISCED3), professional education (level 3, equivalent to ISCED3), and middle management/specialist (level 4, equivalent to ISCED4) (OECD, 2004c).

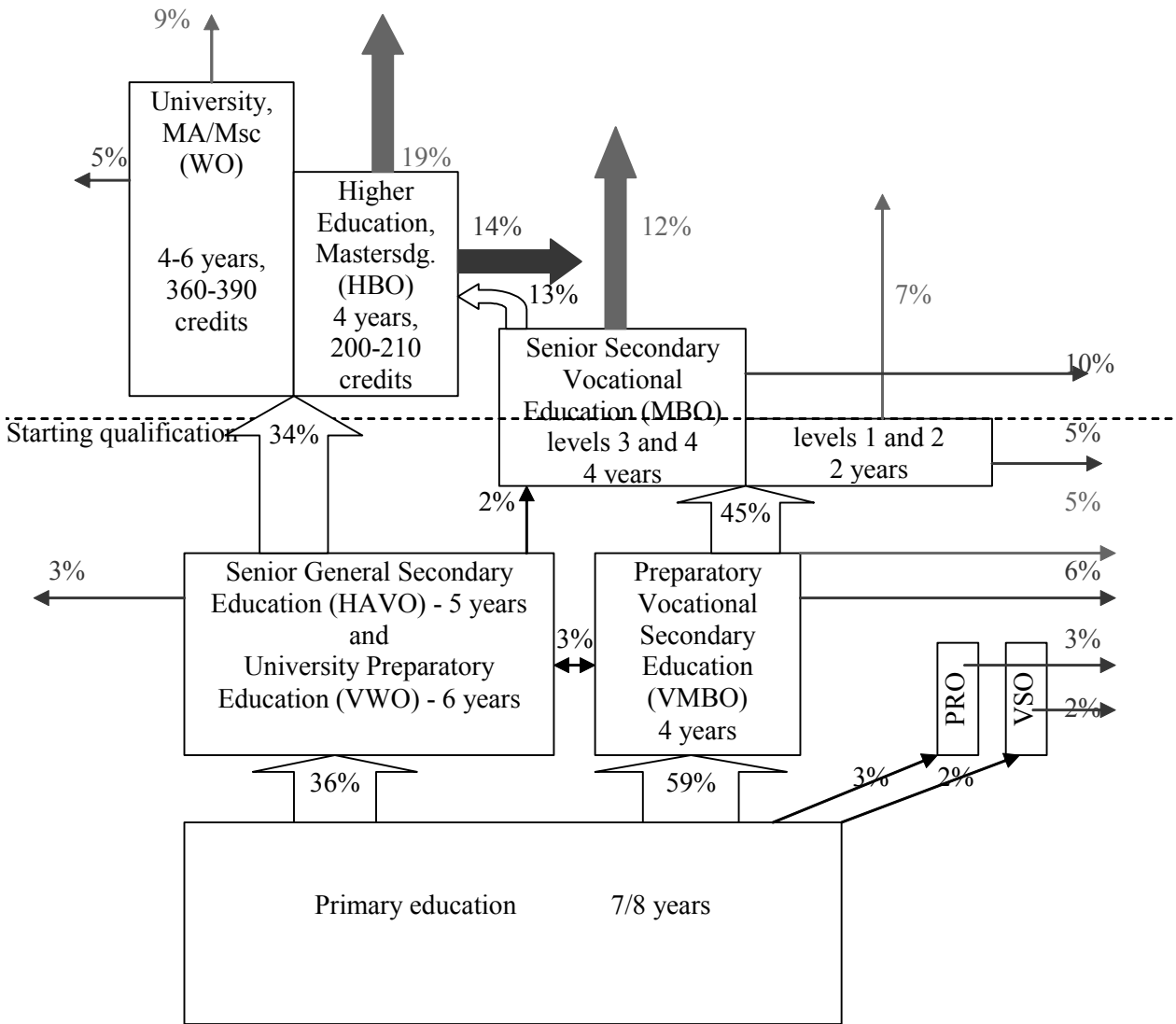
13. At MBO level, there are two pathways: the Vocational Training Pathway (BOL) and Block or Day Release (BBL). The BOL concentrates 80% of the course in the school and the remaining in the workplace whereas the BBL corresponds to the classic apprenticeship and concentrates at least 60% of the learning in the workplace, with around 4 days a week in the firm and one day in school. According to the CBR, upon completion of lower secondary education, participants of non-western origin show a preference for vocational routes at MBO schools. These immigrants represent an important share of the secondary vocational sector, and it is estimated that this share will increase in the coming years.

14. The Netherlands has a two-stringed system of higher education: Research-oriented Education (WO) traditionally offered by research universities, and Professional Higher Education (HBO) traditionally offered by institutions of professional education HBOs are primarily responsible for offering programmes of higher professional education. They prepare students for particular occupations. They include general institutions as well as institutions specialising in a specific occupational field such as agriculture, performing arts, or teaching. Graduates from both MBO level 4 and HAVO have access to HBO, and HAVO and the University Preparatory Education (VWO) gives access to Research University (WO).

15. Figure 2.1 illustrates the transition of students between different programmes within the current formal education system. The transition figures show that there is much room to improve permeability between MBO and higher education (HBO or WO) with a current figure of 13%.

16. With regard to the youth group the drop-out rate decreased from 2000- 2004, particularly in the age group from 15-19 years old. However, the students leaving the education system without a diploma from MBO still remains relatively high (15%).

Figure 2.1: The transition between different programmes in the formal education system in the Netherlands



- > stream between parts of the education system
- > leaving the education system with diplomas/certificates/degrees
- > leaving the education system without diplomas/certificates/degrees

Source: Rijnland Advies (2007)

17. There has been a significant increase in the percentage of the population with at least an upper-secondary qualification. Figures are 59% of those 55-64 year old, 69% of those 45-54 years old, 76% of

those 35-44 year old, and 81 % of those 25-34 years old, slightly above the OECD country mean (54, 64, 71, and 77, respectively), but well below typical benchmark countries for the Netherlands such as the Nordic countries, the USA, and Canada (OECD 2007d, Table A1.2.a).

### 2.1.2 Recent reforms in the formal education systems

18. To provide a better match between education and the labour market, competence-based MBO level qualifications are currently under implementation. A covenant was signed in October 2003 between the involved parties - the Vocational Education Council (COLO) and the Platform for Approved and Recognised Private Education Institutions in the Netherlands (PAEPON). Table 2.1 shows the conceptual framework to shift from the old qualifications to new qualifications.

**Table 2.1: New Conceptual Framework for MBO Education**

	Old	Problems	New
Qualification profiles	Detailed descriptions of tasks and clearly defined modules	Inflexible and no room for adaptation to specific regions	Broadly defined goals/outcomes, no process descriptions
Controlling mechanism	Measuring knowledge and skills	Lack of clarity about what constitutes knowledge and skills	Ability to cope with key problems/tasks in the job
What to learn?	Only knowledge and skills	No links with personal and technical abilities	Knowledge, skills, generic competences, attitude, ambition
How to learn?	Limited practicing of key tasks in real work settings	Not enough links between hands and mind. No real-life experience.	Structural change in amount of work/ learning settings

Source: COLO 2007

19. The new framework consists of 25 broad competences (Table 2.2). Specific qualification profiles will typically consist of a combination of several of those 25 competences. Each competence is divided into a number of more specific functional competences associated with a certain task. This is the basis for describing qualification profiles and curriculum. The aim of the new framework has been to better connect between work and education, by specifying the tasks and associated competences each qualification requires. There is a growing understanding that this may help overarch formal education and non-formal learning, with RNFIL as the bridge.

**Table 2.2: The New Competence Framework**

25 Competences	
1. Deciding and initiating action	2. Leading
3. Coaching	4. Caring and understanding
5. Cooperating and consulting	6. Adhering to principles and values
7. Relating and networking	8. Persuading and influencing
9. Presenting and communicating	10. Writing and reporting
11. Applying expertise	12. Applying technology
13. Analysing	14. Investigating and exploring
15. Creating and innovating	16. Learning
17. Planning and organising	18. Meeting customer expectations
19. Delivering results	20. Following instructions and procedures
21. Adapting and responding to change	22. Coping with pressure and setbacks
23. Showing the need for achievement	24. Entrepreneurial and commercial thinking
25. Acting businesslike	

Source: COLO 2007

20. At the HBO level there is a new initiative to meet labour market demands, especially from SMEs. The government is developing short-cycle (2-year) courses, *i.e.* associate degrees, to diversify qualifications (OECD 2007b). The pilots have started with courses of 120 ECTS. Since the pilots are based on credits, RNFIL could in the future be integrated. In this way programmes (the traditional course of 4 years and the short-cycle course of 2 years) can be accelerated by validating what the applicants know in the form of credits. The intended targets for the associate degrees are highly skilled employees and entrepreneurs.

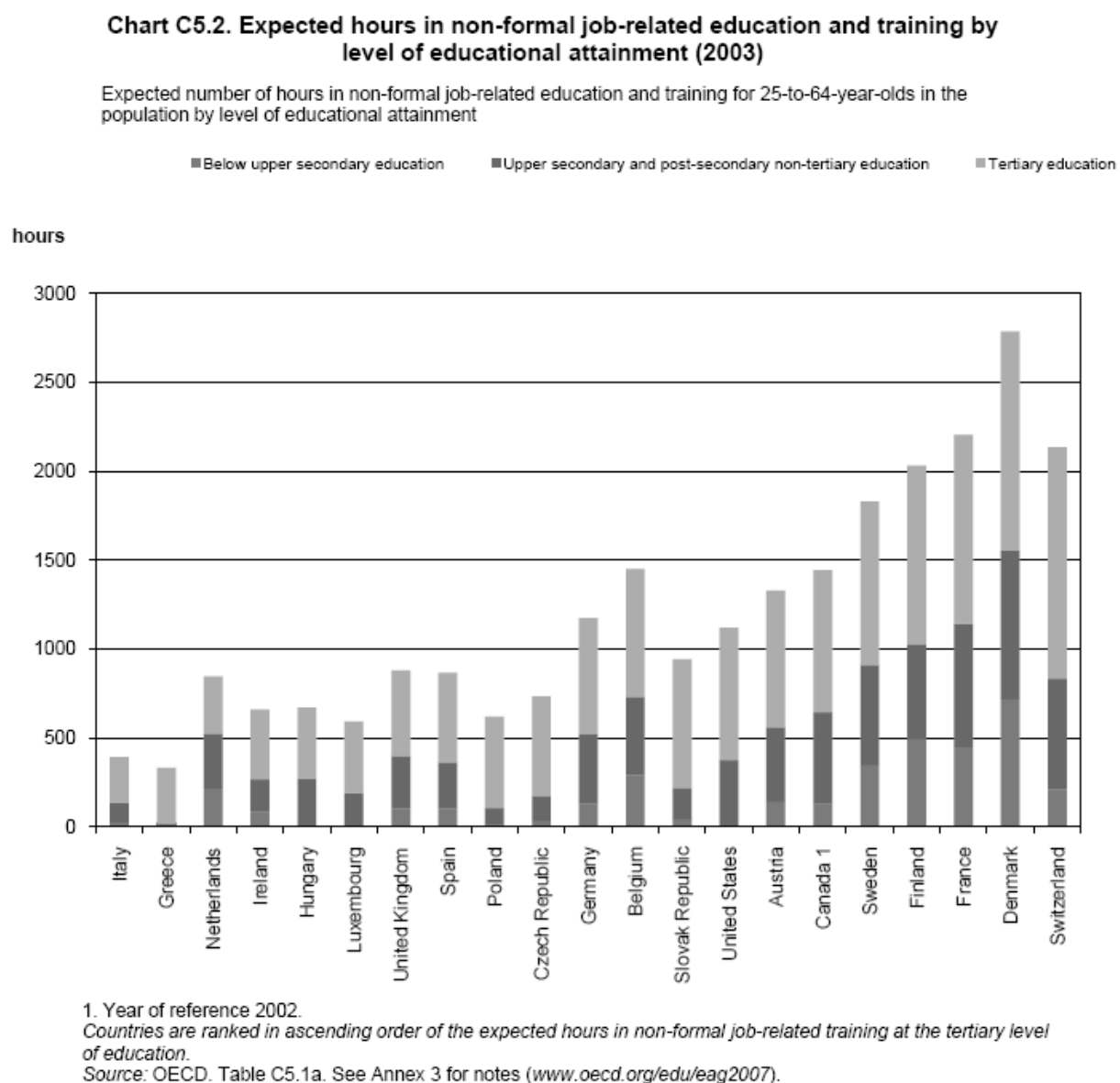
21. Another policy measure to address demands for more high skilled people was taken in 2004, when the government introduced the Knowledge Migrant Scheme in order to attract more knowledge workers to the Netherlands from the EU and elsewhere. In order to attract more students to higher education, a pilot has been initiated by the government, the Room for Talent (*Ruim baan voor talent*). Within that framework, higher education institutions are experimenting with the admission of students who do not meet the statutory requirements in terms of their level of secondary education, but can show that they have acquired other competences that correspond with the legally required entry level. These experiments are confined to higher professional education (HBO). Based on the outcomes of the experiments until September 2007, it is being discussed at the time of writing whether to introduce the flexible admission system for highly skilled immigrants.

### **2.1.3 Non-formal job related learning**

22. As estimated by the OECD, an individual in the Netherlands will spend about 300 hours in non-formal job-related learning during a typical working life whereas in Denmark, Finland, France and Switzerland, an individual is expected to spend more than 1 000 hours (OECD, 2007d).

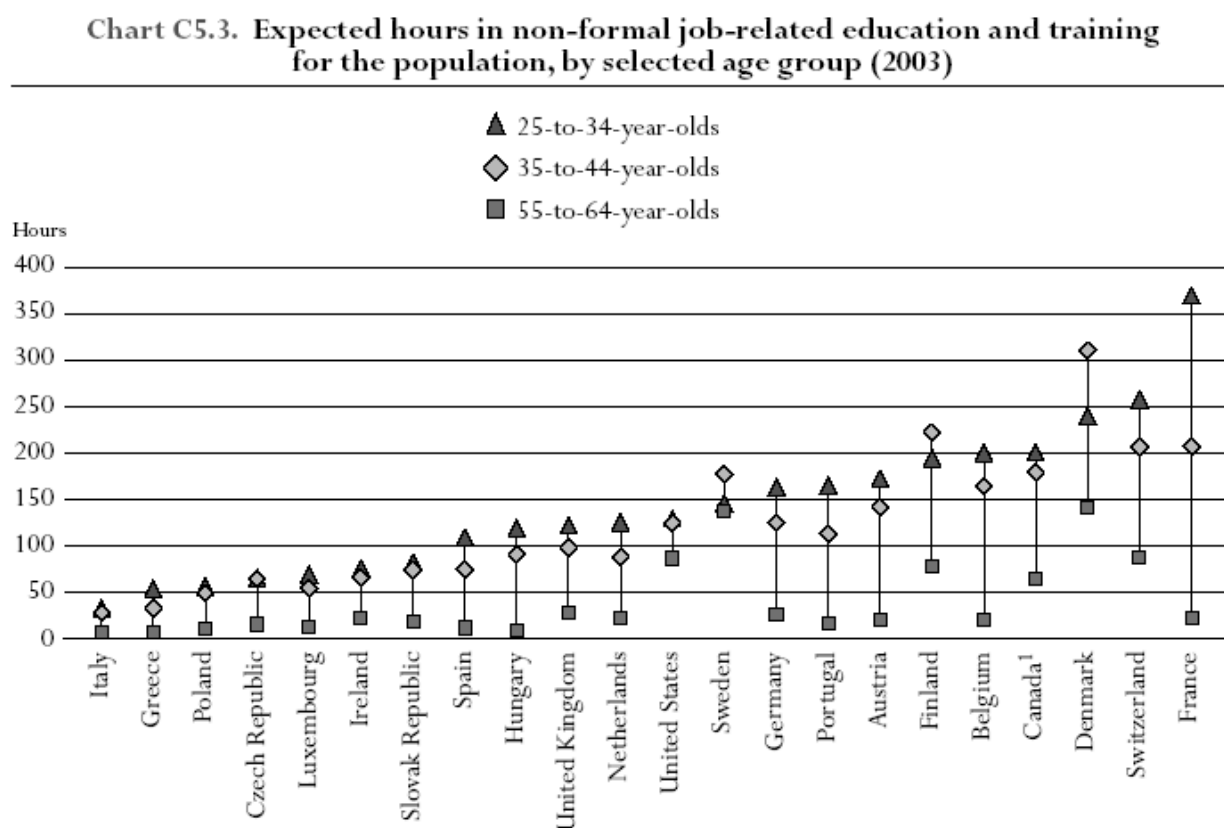
23. In many OECD countries, adults with higher levels of education attainment are more likely to participate in non-formal job-related training than adults with lower education attainment. In the Netherlands, however, adults with lower qualifications do participate almost as much as adults with higher qualifications (Figure 2.3). This of course needs to be interpreted with caution as it accounts for adults with at least upper secondary education and not for adults below upper secondary education.

Figure 2.2: Expected hours in non-formal job-related education and training, distributed by level of education attainment.



24. The estimates also point to the fact that men can expect to spend more hours in non-formal job-related training than women in the Netherlands. Furthermore, as Figure 2.3 shows, participation of the elderly is very low in the Netherlands compared to for example the Nordic countries and the USA.

Figure 2.3: Expected hours in non-formal job-related education and training, distributed by age.



1. Year of reference 2002.

Countries are ranked in ascending order of the expected hours in non-formal job-related education and training of the 25-34 age

Source OECD Education at a Glance 2006

25. One big challenge confronting the Dutch economy is to accelerate non-formal job-related learning regardless of age, gender and qualification level in the Netherlands, especially in the light of more knowledge intensity across all economic sectors, and especially among the low-skilled who have less than upper secondary education attainment.

Table 2.3: Low-skilled population in selected OECD countries by age and gender: distribution in percentage

	25-49		50-64	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
<b>NLD</b>	<b>27.7</b>	<b>29.1</b>	<b>35.3</b>	<b>53.5</b>
CHE	11.4	14.4	15.7	25.4
DEU	12.1	16.6	13.0	26.9
SWE	13.9	10.6	31.1	26.7
UK	10.8	14.3	21.9	30.2
USA	13.2	10.8	14.1	14.3
EU-19	26.1	27.3	38.5	50.1
OECD	28.9	30.3	38.3	44.5

\* Low skilled is defined as less than upper secondary education attainment.

Source: OECD (2006) economic survey, Netherlands, Table 3.4 (quoted as from OECD, *Education at a glance*)

## 2.2 Lifelong learning and RNFIL policies in the Netherlands

### 2.2.1 Evolution of RNFIL systems

26. In the early 1990s, the Dutch government intended to expand access to formal education in order to raise the qualification of the labour force- particularly the low qualified. This led to the establishment of the Commission on the 'Recognition of Informally Acquired Skills' (EVK) in 1993. The Commission published its report 'Recognising Informal Skills' in March 1994. This marked the launch of RNFIL (*Erkennen van verworven competenties* – EVC in Dutch). EVC (RNFIL) means in English "Recognising acquired competences". RNFIL emphasised the need to increase accessibility to education, traditionally based on formal qualifications or the award of certificates. The Cabinet endorsed the report, adopting the view that RNFIL could contribute to a more efficient training and labour market. The Cabinet agreed to provide the necessary seed funding, and various actors began elaborating RNFIL concepts and procedures, which were subsequently piloted. Thus, the evolution of RNFIL was from the start a bottom-up project rather than a structural approach.

27. In 1996, the Law on Adult and Vocational Education (WEB= *Wet Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs*) created the institutional framework for adult education in the Netherlands. In the legislation, the central government assumed the responsibility for the design of policies in this field. The implementation through education plans was delegated to the local authorities. A multitude of providers merged into the 40 Regional Education Centres (ROC). A Qualification Structure for Secondary Vocational Education (BVE) was introduced, and all schools had to set up the programs according to the goals formulated in the referred Structure.

28. In 1998, the policies of the new government placed great emphasis - and with that a strengthened focus - on RNFIL as a measure to creating more efficiency in education and training provision by making competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning visible through recognition. Following this, the STAR (committee of social partners) recommendations "Lifelong learning at work" (June 1998) made an important contribution to the further elaboration of the concept of lifelong learning.

### 2.2.2 The Lisbon Objectives and RNFIL

29. The policy decisions and processes since 1990s paved the way for a closer connect between formal education, non-formal and informal learning with RNFIL as a bridging instrument. To reach the goal of the Lisbon agenda (2000) for the Netherlands, a particular challenge is to up-skill the approximately 2 million people with no formal qualification above lower secondary education or less. This group represents about 1/5 of the workforce. Another challenge is to further develop and retain the highly skilled in the labour force to be competitive in the global market economies. It is against these challenges that lifelong learning policies have evolved with a strong political will.

30. In 2004, the Dutch government established a Plan of Action "Lifelong Learning". Its main aim was to raise participation rates in education and training. The plan stated that "all available competences should be deployed in the knowledge society Netherlands would like to become, especially by using certification of competences acquired by independent non-regular routes to qualification".

31. The relevant ministries stressed the importance of RNFIL as a component in lifelong learning policies, not only for the purposes of individual development, but also to support labour market developments.

32. The main instruments were:

- Developing learning and working routes so that individuals can combine work or job-seeking with learning and training activities; with RNFIL as an intended bridging mechanism.
- Creating learning and working desks on a regional basis. These would stimulate demands by supporting employees and job seekers in a comprehensive manner, giving them career advice and information on training opportunities and the recognition of competences and knowledge.
- Initiating an analysis on access and availability of financial instruments for lifelong learning, analysis of best practices, and the recent development of a two-year accelerated education programme in higher vocational education.

33. Targets set were:

- The number of persons undertaking an RNFIL procedure (assessment and training) should increase from 20 000 in 2006 to at least 50 000 in 2010.
- 50% of those undertaking a RNFIL procedure (assessment and training) should through this procedure obtain a legally acknowledged degree or certificate by validating an individual's actual skills, competences and knowledge against a given formal qualification.

### **2.3 RNFIL and the Dutch tripartite culture**

34. The evolution of RNFIL in the Netherlands is characterised by bottom-up and project-based innovations. Advantages include a strong ownership and solid base gradually built up on experience about what works and for whom. The strong role that sectors have played illustrates this point.

35. A systemic and close collaboration between the labour market and education institutions is a central concept of vocational education and training in the Netherlands. Each labour market sector has its own Centre of Expertise on Vocational Education, Training, and Labour Market (*KBB - Kenniscentrum Berroponderwijs Bedrijfsleven*). There are 18 KBBs at the time of writing. Each centre has a broad range of members representing employers and employees, and in most cases education institutions. The Ministry of Education sets the national standards for MBO schooling, but the KBB sets the goals and develops competence outcomes of the relevant education programs, the competence profiles for the sector, and the related qualifications. The umbrella organisation, COLO, was established in 1954, overseeing all the KBBs.

36. Training for the employed is supported by the Collective Labour Agreements (CAOs), and 10 of the 18 labour market sectors currently have included the provisions of RNFIL in the CAOs. Training is financed through funds reserved for training and/or research and development (the Training and Development Funds – the O&O funds). These sector or branch funds are covered by employers, who are levied on their personnel costs to the fund and can receive refunds for the training of their personnel. The funds are available for activities to increase employability, stimulate lifelong learning, and maintain sector-specific knowledge. About 40% of the Dutch enterprises are associated with one of the O&O funds, especially agriculture, industry, and catering. About two-thirds of these enterprises received subsidies from the funds.

## 2.4 Main governmental organisations for RNFIL arrangements

### 2.4.1 *The Project Directorate for Working and Learning*

37. To achieve the Plan of Action ‘Lifelong Learning’ (2004), a broad cross- ministerial initiative was taken to set up the Directorate for Working and Learning under the temporary regulation in 2005. The Directorate plays the steering role in developing RNFIL in the Netherlands. The objectives include stimulating and supporting different stakeholders such as employers, employees, citizens, education institutions, labour institutions, and municipalities, in order to make lifelong learning a reality.

38. The Project Directorate coordinates all the lifelong learning activities of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. The Directorate financially supports those projects that aim at promoting training and learning and developing RNFIL procedures. The first group of projects was launched in 2006. A total of 29 projects were selected and quantitative objectives were given for around 21 500 working and learning routes and 19 300 persons undertaking an RNFIL procedure. An external commission composed of three advisors is involved in the selection of the projects. Currently, a third group of projects is being launched.

39. New objectives established in 2006 are:

- To develop at least 20 000 extra learning and working routes for adults.
- To develop at least 10 000 RNFIL routes for adults (a tailored supplementary training program following an assessment with the purpose of obtaining a qualification).
- To further develop RNFIL courses in MBO schools (tailored supplementary education following an assessment).

40. To attain these new objectives, the Project Directorate has emphasised strengthening the regional partnerships between schools, social partners, and municipalities.

41. The Temporary Regulation on RNFIL was established to provide subventions to MBO schools, developing tailored programs building on RNFIL. The budget was 5.7 million euros. In addition, the Government note “Learning that Works” (September 2006) states its aim as the development of an extra 42 00 RNFIL routes. The Temporary Regulation on RNFIL was also established in the HBO sector by the Minister of Education in 2006 in order to increase the supply of learning and working routes at the level of professional higher education. The temporary regulation has been followed up by a subvention scheme for regional collaboration, with 6.8 million euros available.

### 2.4.2 *The Knowledge Centre EVC*

42. Another key actor for RNFIL in the Netherlands is the Knowledge Centre for RNFIL (*Kenniscentrum EVC*) launched in 2001. Currently it is financed by the Directorate for Learning and Working.

43. The main objective is to promote the use of RNFIL in the Netherlands through dissemination of information and good practice. The Ministries of Economic Affairs, Education, Culture & Science, and Social Affairs and Employment has financed the Knowledge Centre –initially for a period of four years (2001 - 2004). The Centre is also supported by the social partners and education umbrella organisations. The Knowledge Centre operates largely on the basis of cooperation between various network partners and on a bottom-up principle.

### **2.4.3 The Empowerment Foundation**

44. The Empowerment Foundation is another central organisation in the field of RNFIL. Originally set up under the EU Social Funds programme (EQUAL), its purpose is to give support to individualised labour market integration, lifelong learning, and civic participation for the unemployed and other vulnerable groupings.

45. During the past 10 years, a number of measures have been taken to strengthen active labour market policies. The Work and Income (Implementation Structure) Act adopted on 29 November 2001 provides the framework for the reintegration of the unemployed. Reorganisation resulted in a new supporting structure in which a large number of operational bodies and employment agencies were organised into Centres for Work and Income at the regional/local level. One of the main characteristics of this Act is a greater emphasis on work over income. In 2004, the Act on Work and Public Assistance was implemented. The main aim of that act was to activate those on public assistance to find work. Another aim was to make local authorities more responsible for active labour market policies. The above two Acts are the most important with regard to the reintegration of a potential labour force. While labour market reintegration services are to a large extent provided by private suppliers, the Foundation plays a critical role as to public intervention.

46. Nationally and internationally, the Foundation develops RNFIL instruments for persons with a relatively loose connection to the labour market, namely migrants, drop-outs, and re-enterers. The Foundation also develops methods, techniques, processes, and guidance systems, prepares training programs, trains trainers, and redesigns empowerment processes.

## **2.5 Policy pointers**

### *Strengths*

- RNFIL has evolved with a strong political will on the government's side, e.g. the establishment of the Commission on the 'Recognition of Informally Acquired Skills' in 1993, the publication of the report 'Recognising Informal Skills' by the Commission (1994), the launch of RNFIL (EVC), and the endorsement of the report by the Cabinet with a commitment to providing seed funding.
- Due to the Dutch bottom-up culture, numerous RNFIL pilots have been implemented in many different user contexts, and RNFIL has little by little gained momentum.
- The lifelong learning agenda was developed hand-in-hand with the MBO competence-based framework in line with the general developments of lifelong learning frameworks.
- A pilot is being implemented to provide accelerated HBO courses.
- The social partners have shown a strong commitment to RNFIL, and have included it in 10 of the 18 labour market sectors.

### *Weaknesses*

- There is no legal national framework on RNFIL apart from fiscal measures and subsidies, and thus there is a lack of structural uptake.
- The bottom-up approach may result in risks of reinventing the same wheel across different user contexts.

- The use of the competence-based qualification framework is limited to the MBO sector, and RNFIL is not sufficiently used to bridge the vocational and training sector (MBO) to the higher education sector (HBO/ WO).

*Policy recommendations and options*

47. The Netherlands is facing a socio-economic challenge to increase the qualified labour force. To respond to the challenge, the review team recommends that the government **design a mid-term strategy to effectively embed RNFIL in the education and training system, with an interdisciplinary approach, striking a balance between bottom-up initiatives and a national approach.**

48. To this end, the government has options to:

- Improve strategic planning to increase socio-economic policy impact. This may require inter-ministerial co-ordination. To this end, it will be important to extend the mandate of the Directorate for Learning and Working and the Knowledge Centre EVC with renewed missions.
- Stimulate the use of RNFIL in immigration policies, especially for high-skilled, to ensure their efficient integration in the labour market and the Dutch society at large.
- Plan a mid-term strategy to carefully set up a national qualification framework, respecting and building on the existing bottom-up practices in the country. In doing so, the government should embed the use of RNFIL into the framework in order to keep abreast of the European Qualification Framework.
- Support the further use of the MBO competence-based qualification framework as part of the RNFIL strategy. In addition, pilot creating competence-based HBO qualifications. This may facilitate adult learners to enter/re-enter MBOs and HBOs. The use of competence-based qualifications may help more adults return to education as by creating more efficient and flexible ways for them to enter/ re-enter education at a higher level, using RNFIL as a bridge.

### 3. FINANCING RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING IN THE NETHERLANDS

#### 3.1 Funding measures

49. Efficient financial instruments are central to ensure return on investment in lifelong learning policies/programmes. There are several funding sources to support the development and the uptake of RNFIL in the Netherlands:

- Public funding (Ministries, European Social Funds, and local authorities).
- Sectoral funding (sector-based training funding (the O&O Funds) and collective agreements).
- Private enterprise-based funding (mainly large enterprises).

50. The overall expenditure on RNFIL in the Netherlands in 2006 is EUR 58 000 000 (0.0104% of GDP), distributed as follows

**Table 3.1: Total Expenditure on RNFIL 2006**

Source of funds	Expenditure on recognition of non-formal and informal learning	% of GDP
Public	EUR 35 000 000	
Unions	EUR 8 750 000	
Private (other than individual) (employers)	EUR 8 750 000	
Individuals themselves		
<b>Total</b>	<b>EUR 52 500 000</b>	<b>0.0104%</b>

*Source:* Quoted in the CBR- Annex 1: Ministry of Social Affairs/Ministry of Education, Knowledge Centre EVC, CPB

#### 3.1.1 Public funding

51. Of the total public funding of EUR 35 000 000 there are two types of annual budgets concerned with RNFIL programmes:

- Budgets directly used for the development and implementation of RNFIL programmes; and
- Budgets to create conditions for all kinds of training for employees, of which RNFIL is a part.

52. Most of the budgets are allocated to developing the RNFIL routes at MBOs and HBOs, given that the estimated costs are high at EUR 45 000 for an institution to develop an RNFIL route itself.

53. The breakdown of the expenditure is:

- Subventions to HBO institutions (the Temporary Stimulus Regulation) - EUR 6 800 000
- Subventions to MBO schools (the Temporary Stimulus Regulation) - EUR 5 700 000

- Extra financing to develop 4200 routes at MBO schools (ESF) - EUR 21 000 000
- Knowledge Centre RNFIL - EUR 1 500 000.

54. Still, public funding for RNFIL only comprises a fraction of the overall public financing of all education and training in the Netherlands. The 2007 public budget expenditure for RNFIL shows that it is only 0.17% (Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2 : Expenditure on recognition of non formal and informal learning as a percentage of total education expenditure (whether public or not) – year 2007**

Expenditure on education	Expenditure on recognition (%)	Expenditure on all other educational activities (%)
EUR 30 263 120 000	0.1735%*	99.8265%*

\* Estimate

Source: State budget 2007, Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Education, CPB – quoted from the CBR

55. The total public financing for employee training amounted to EUR 357 800 000 in 2006, the CBR reports, including funding for:

- Project Directorate Learning and Working (2005 figures) - EUR 10 800 000.
- Tax deduction for employers (WVA) (2006) -EUR 229 000 000.
- Extra tax deduction for training activities of enterprises (2006) - EUR 40 000 000.
- Temporary stimulus regulation for learning and working routes (Ministry of Social Affairs) - EUR 33 000 000.
- European Social Fund (ESF) (2000-2006) training for employees and labour market integration for the unemployed - EUR 40 000 000.
- ESF EQUAL Empowerment Centre - EUR 5 000 000.

56. For 2007/2008, within the broader programme “Vocational education in business” (*Beroepsonderwijs in bedrijf*) the Ministries of Education, of Social Affairs and Employment, and of Economic Affairs, have budgeted with strengthened investment in the infrastructure for learning and working by an amount of in total EUR 229.5 million. The purpose is to build 7 000 tailor-made learning and working routes for youth and 20 000 for adults. Out of the total budget, EUR 115 million has been reserved for 2008.

57. The European Social Fund has until now played a pivotal role in stimulating lifelong learning, of which RNFIL can be a part. It is likely to diminish in the next ESF programme starting from January 2008. The government needs to start planning how to make financially sustainable the existing programmes currently financed by ESF.

58. The extra employer deduction of taxes for training activities has also been an incentive measure found in some OECD countries. And, this was a successful result of the Dutch practice of negotiating an agreement between the government and employers. Further tax deduction is found effective if it targets certain groups, such as especially at the MBO level.

### **3.1.2 The sectoral funds**

59. The inclusion of RNFIL in the sectoral collective agreements has increased over the years. This is another successful case of the Dutch strong culture of negotiation between employers and employees. The O&O sectoral funds also contribute to co-financing RNFIL. About 5% of the total O&O funds for education and training matters are estimated by the Knowledge Centre for RNFIL to specifically target RNFIL matters. In 2007, the CBR estimates that EUR 700 000 from the O&O funds specifically will be used for RNFIL.

### **3.1.3 Individuals**

60. The recent government's fiscal measure on tax deduction targeting individuals (starting January 2007) is a very innovative approach. However, to ensure efficient and equitable returns, the government needs to re-examine the target groups, either low-skilled and/or highly skilled. Otherwise, there is a risk of duplicating the 'learning beset learning' participation pattern and the highly skilled will actively use the deduction of RNFIL costs from their income. The fiscal measure may be reconsidered and may set conditions by qualification levels or income levels.

## **3.2 Result and benefits**

61. At this moment, the RNFIL in the Netherlands still needs public funding to support infrastructure and uptake of RNFIL. However, in the long-term, it needs to seek ways to operate some of their RNFIL systems in a self-financing way. In order to entice more funds for RNFIL not only from the government but also from other sources (such as education institutions, employers and individuals), the return on investment or positive impact of RNFIL needs to be better understood.

### **3.2.1 Results and benefits obtained by the government**

62. By January 2007 the Project Directorate for Learning and Working had succeeded in establishing:

- More than 37 regions and sectors leading to 19 870 RNFIL routes.
- 20 learning and working desks.
- 24 917 extra dual routes combining working and learning
- 37 regional or sectoral programmes of learning and working.
- The temporary Stimulation Regulation for HBO institutions (with subventions).
- The temporary Stimulation Regulation for MBO Institutions (with subventions).

63. What benefits have these achievements brought? The main objectives during the review visit for government were cited as:

- To increase employability of those having greater difficulties entering or re-entering the labour market, particularly the low-skilled.
- To promote more learning.

- To increase inter-sectoral mobility towards sectors with growing employment opportunities.
- To increase the qualification level of the overall population by making visible skills, knowledge and competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning settings, especially the upper secondary education level among those who have no qualifications beyond compulsory education, and the higher professional education level among working professionals.
- To increase the level of awareness of employers for the necessity of learning of employees.

64. Though the objectives are well defined, the review did not demonstrate any evidence of specific impacts or obtained benefits cited above. The Project Directorate for Learning and Working has recently initiated setting up a monitoring framework to compare targets and obtained results. CINOP (a Dutch expert centre on innovation in vocational training and adult and continuing training) is responsible for the monitoring on behalf of the Project Directorate. The monitoring framework provides basic building blocks for a further development of a monitoring system on RNFIL. There is, however, not at this stage sufficiently detailed data available to provide a fuller overview of RNFIL activities and their outcomes and impacts across the different contexts in which RNFIL is used.

### **3.2.2 Objectives and benefits for industry**

65. The main objectives or expected benefits for industry were reported as:

- Meeting the demands from the increasingly rapid technological changes and the competence requirements for the greater service and knowledge intensity in the labour market, not least in the context of an aging workforce.
- Coping with the growing competition for qualified labour and a low workforce retention rate, particularly in the declining industries.
- Promoting enterprise development into a learning organisation.

66. To this end, employers regard RNFIL as a means potentially able to:

- Provide more efficient ways to up-skill and to retain labour force in a sector or in a company.
- Increase the efficiency and flexibility of the human resources management within a company.
- Motivate employees, especially for older workers, for continuous career development.

67. In some sectors, employers take a collective approach and embed RNFIL in the collective agreement, seeing it as an incentive instrument to make their labour force better qualified and stay in the company/sector (Section 4 - Access).

68. To stimulate interest among employers in investing in RNFIL, a pilot has been taken to develop a methodology for measuring return on investment (ROI) for RNFIL. The Knowledge Centre has made agreements with an American organisation to adopt a current model developed to measure ROI in training to the context of RNFIL.

### **3.2.3 Objectives and benefits for individuals**

The main objectives for individuals (employed and unemployed) were reported by informants as:

- Improved employability of the employed, either to stay on the job or to change to another job or sector.
- Individual economic gains, because there is a direct link in the Netherlands between skills levels recognised as ‘formal qualifications’ and wages.
- Improved self-esteem (particularly for the low qualified).
- To find a job (for the unemployed).

69. At the individual level, some informants reported not only perceived positive effects, cited above, but also about hardships. Yet, evidence is still largely anecdotal. Almost all the interviewed participants reported about fellow workers who had dropped out of a procedure, because supplementary training was in most cases required to obtain a formal qualification.

### **3.3 Potential targets: Who could benefit the most?**

70. To ensure equitable outcomes from RNFIL, it is important to examine who could/should benefit the most. The Dutch Plan of Action ‘Lifelong Learning’ sets out a numerical target to increase the number of RNFIL participants to at least 50 000 per year in 2010 (See Section 2). Who should the government target? Currently, addressed by different policies, different target groups have been observed: low-skilled workers (e.g. Temporary Stimulation Regulation for MBOs), highly-skilled workers (e.g. Temporary Stimulation Regulation for HBOs), highly skilled immigrants specific (e.g. the Knowledge Migrant Scheme), and unemployed (e.g. the Empowerment Centre funded by the ESF). It is important to mainstream RNFIL in various practices. At the same time, however, it is important to create a critical mass to gain a high profile on the overall policy agenda. To this end, it is important to examine the potential targets with a macro socio-economic policy perspective both in the short and medium-term and in the long-term.

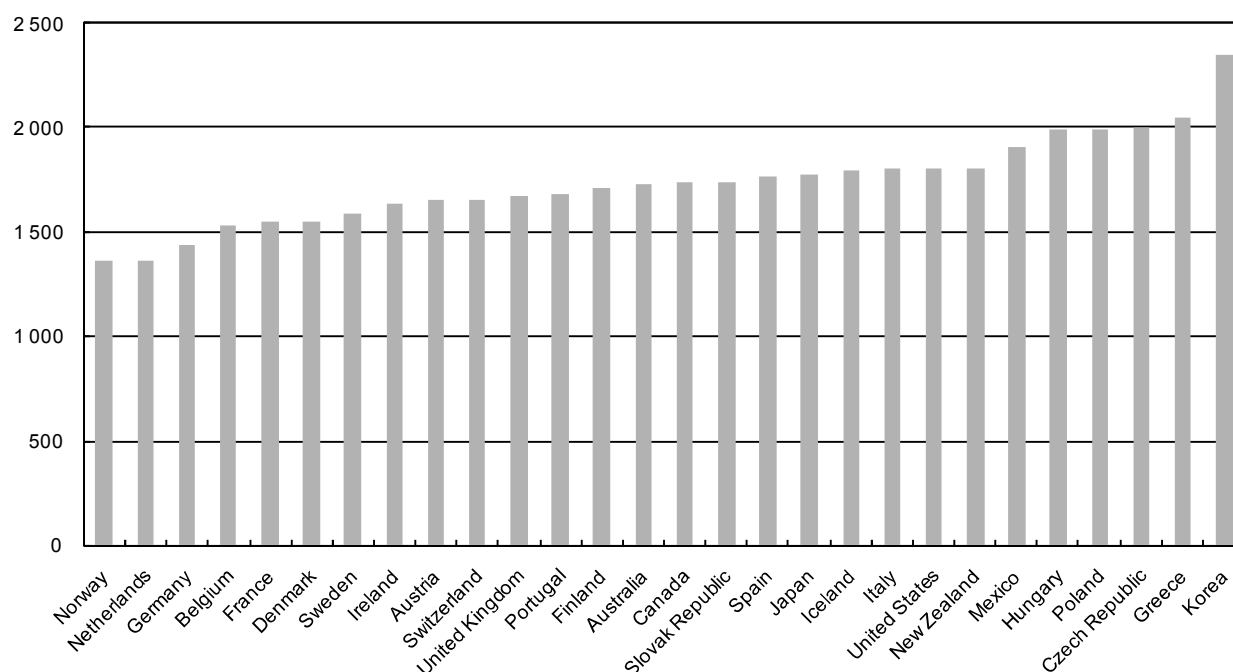
#### **3.3.1 Short-term and medium term needs**

71. Fair access to and equitable outcomes from the recognition of non-formal and informal learning require critical examination of who could benefit the most from the RNFIL and who is actually being served. The actual participation will be examined in Section 5. The socio-economic policies encourage, as short-term and medium term prioritisation of RNFIL, to target older workers and women, if the government seeks critical mass to respond to efficient labour policies; and highly skilled nationals and immigrants, to spur economic growth; and workers with a risk of lay-off and low-skilled immigrants, to strengthen social policies.

#### *Low labour utility - Older workers and women*

72. The OECD Economic Survey of the Netherlands (2005) reports that the Netherlands is finally going through the recovery phase, after having stagnated since the beginning of the decade. Although employment rates are relatively high, labour utilisation is held back by one of the shortest annual working times in the OECD, 1 367 hours in 2005 (Figure 4.1). The aforementioned Economic Survey points to low female working time and the low employment rate for older workers as main reasons for low labour utilisation. Therefore, RNFIL may be used as an instrument to allow women and older workers to be more actively engaged in the labour market.

Figure 3.1: Annual hours worked per person employed, 2005

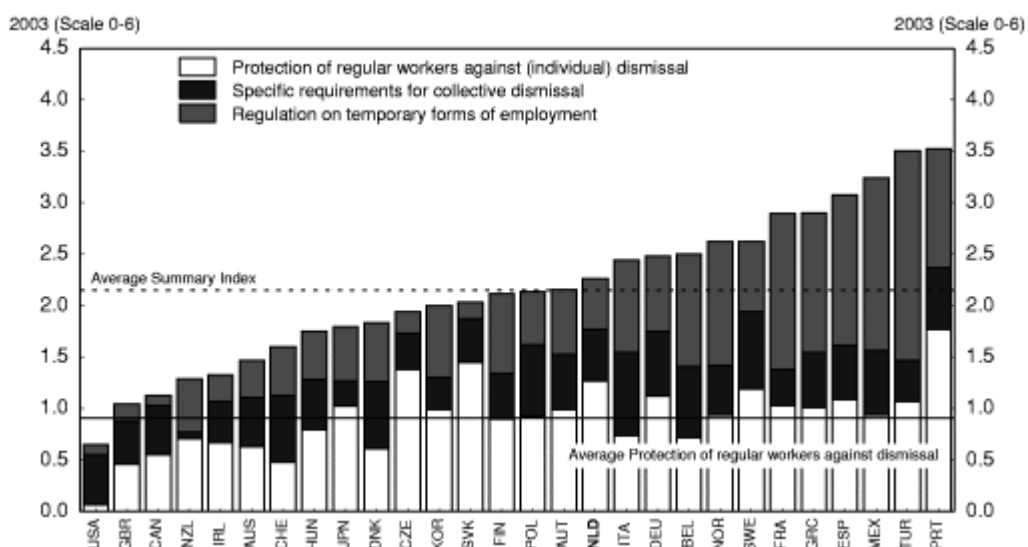


Source: OECD Employment Outlook (2006) - StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/075816831582>

### *Towards a more flexible and efficient labour market – Working professionals*

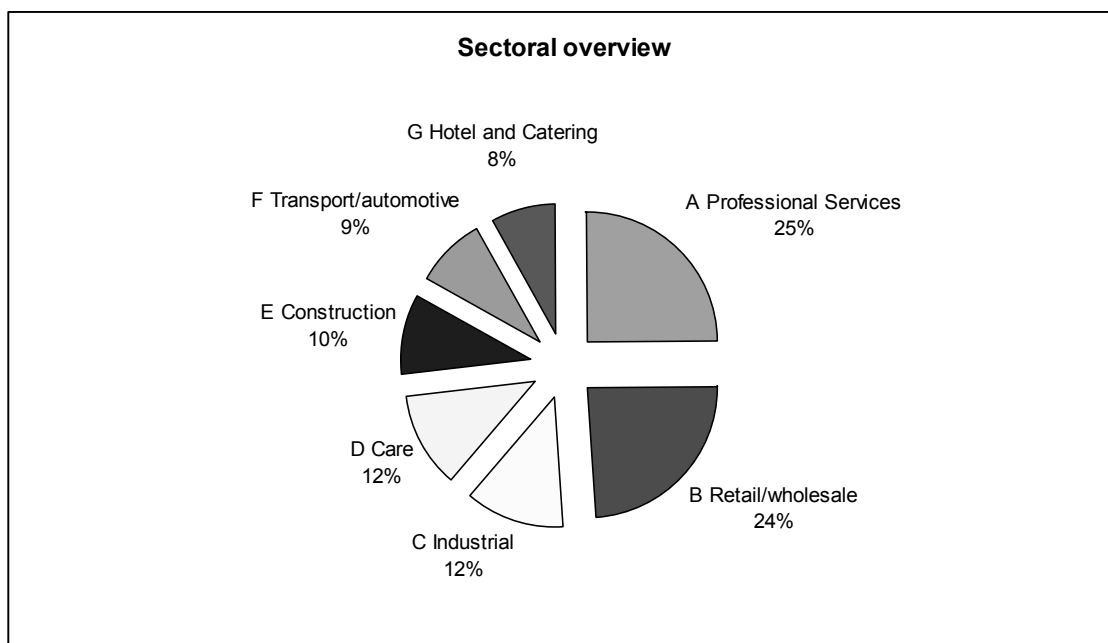
73. The Netherlands has a higher rate of protection of regular workers against dismissal than the OECD average (Figure 3.2). The Economic Survey recommended that the government further ease the strictness of the Employment Protection Legislation (EPL) regarding workers on regular contracts. As a consequence, the government needs to be aware that there may be more temporary workers in the following years to come. Finding a balance between flexibility and security in the Netherlands is likely to be part of a socio-economic agenda, and RNFIL may be used as a possible means to secure a smooth job change or remained employed.

**Figure 3.2: EPL on regular contracts is strict by international comparison  
Overall strictness of EPL in 2003**



Source: OECD Employment Outlook (2004)

74. Another aspect on job change is concerned with mobility from sector to sector. The Knowledge Centre for RNFIL (*Kenniscentrum EVC*) (2005) reports that approximately 8 million people were employed in various sectors in 2004. Figure 3.3 below shows employment for the main sectors (Figure 4.3). Services represent more than half of the national income, comprising finance, retail, banking and insurance services, transportation, retail and wholesale trade, distribution, and logistic. Industrial activity has, as in many other OECD countries, been affected by global sourcing. RNFIL may be an instrument to ease job mobility from declining sectors to service sectors- particularly for experienced workers who might have obtained competencies not formally recognised- yet applicable to another job or sector context.

**Figure 3.3: Distribution of Employment across Sectors of Economic Activity**

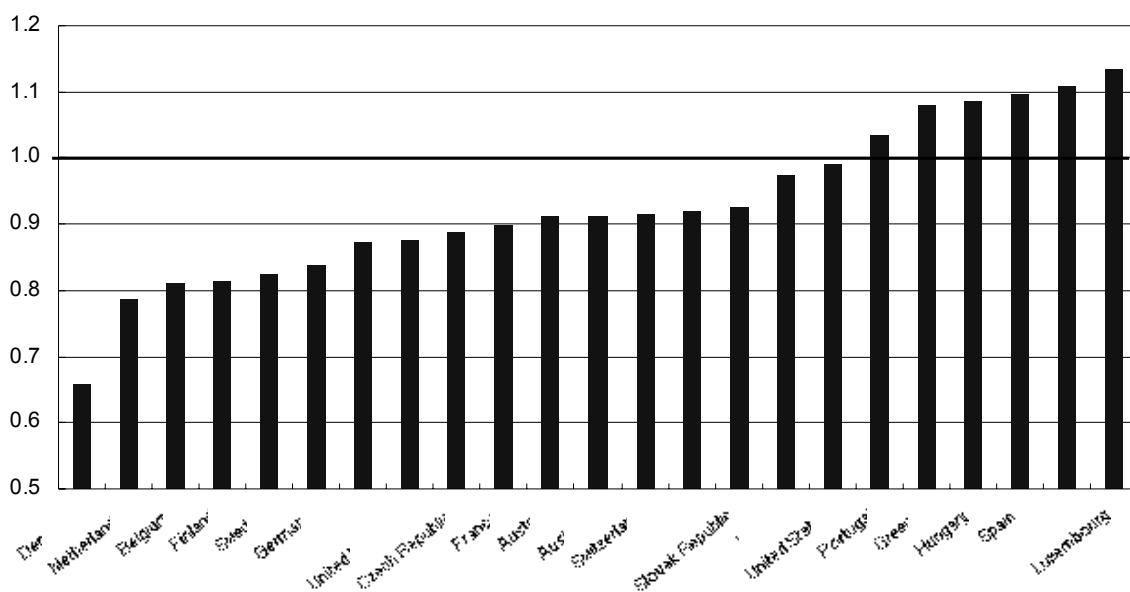
Source: Heijerman (2005).

*Knowledge migrant scheme and active job strategy - Highly skilled and low-skilled immigrants*

75. In 2006, the Netherlands had higher emigration than immigration. To balance off the brain/skills-drain situation, the government has implemented initiatives to attract more knowledge workers to the Netherlands from the EU and elsewhere, with the introduction of the Knowledge Migrant Scheme. Although the Netherlands has relatively low unemployment, it is not easy for immigrants - especially youth and women - to find a job, compared to the nationals. Figure 3.4 points out that the Netherlands has one of the lowest employment rates for immigrants compared to the native-born employment rate.

76. Figure 3.5 further illustrates that the majority of immigrants have less than upper-secondary education, while some OECD countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Norway, Mexico, and Korea receive more immigrants with tertiary education than low-educated immigrants. RNFIL may be a relevant tool to appropriately assess the competences of immigrants upon their arrival, instead of depending solely on the formal qualifications obtained in their home country. This may facilitate better integrate immigrants into the labour force and the Dutch society at large.

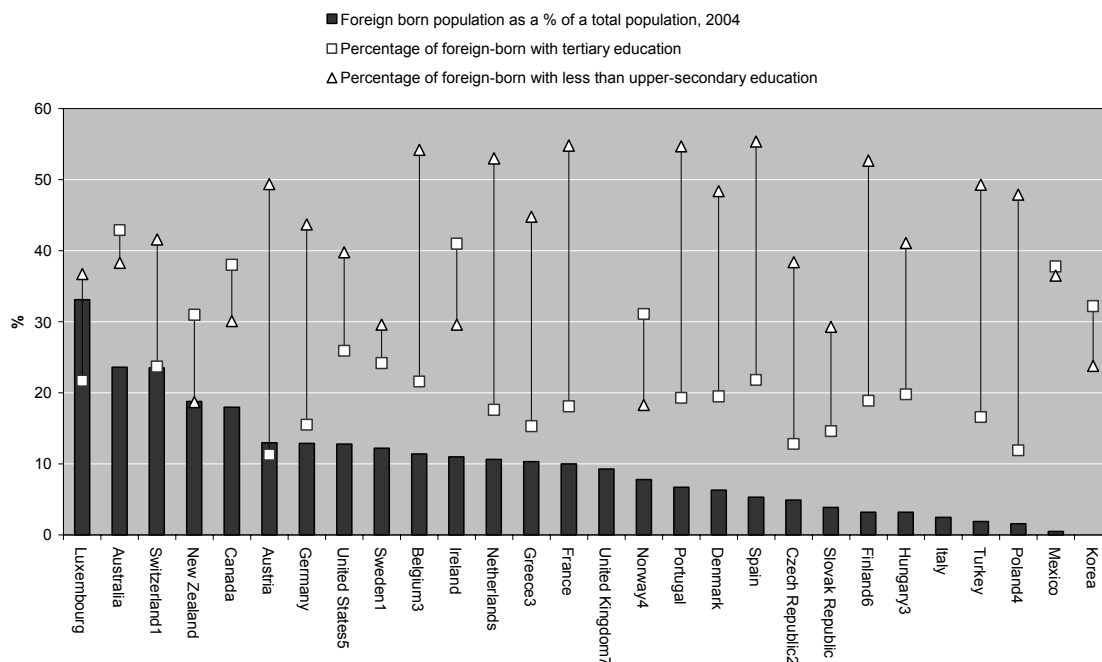
Figure 3.4: Foreign-born employment rate relative to native-born employment rate, percentage 2004



Source: OECD (2007a)

Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium, Finland, Sweden, Germany, Norway, United Kingdom, Czech Republic, France, Austria, Australia, Switzerland, Canada, Slovak Republic, Ireland, United States, Portugal, Greece, Hungary, Spain, Italy, Luxembourg.

Figure 3.5: Immigrant populations and their educational attainment (2002, 2004)  
All those over 15



Source: OECD (2007c)

### 3.3.2 *Future-oriented policy thinking*

77. In exploring who could benefit the most, it is important not only examine macro socio-economic policy pointers but also take a future-looking approach. A recent press release from the Statistics Netherlands (February 2007) reports on anticipated medium- to long-term challenges facing the Dutch society:

- Between 2007 and 2040, the potential labour force is anticipated to shrink by 1 million, and this development will increase in momentum in the near future.
- Since the early 1990s, the proportion of 50-65 year-olds has grown from 24 to 32%. This process is expected to continue until the early 2020s, when nearly 37% of the labour force will be 50 years or older.
- In the near future, the share of 60-65 year-olds will increase relatively rapidly. Through 2011, the number of people in the 60-65 year age group will increase by 175 000 to 1.1 million. Although they are potentially part of the labour force, only 1/5 of them are currently active.

78. The anticipated labour force development accentuates how critical it is that efficient lifelong learning policies and other complementary measures are in place not only to improve the immediate situation concerning an adequate skills supply, but also so that appropriate policy measures can be taken with a view to long-term labour utilisation. Challenges with the shrinking labour force and an ageing society are common to many OECD countries in the upcoming years.

79. With both short and medium-term and long-term policy perspectives, target groups for RNFIL by education and training policies should be strategically coordinated with macro socio-economic policies. And, such strategic plan needs to be adjusted in time with changing policy directions and socio-economic conditions of the country. Currently, RNFIL programmes targeted for older workers (+50), women, low-qualified workers and highly-skilled should be mutually supported with labour policies and economic policies, and RNFIL programmes for low-skilled immigrants and the unemployed should be supported by social policies. And, it is important for the education and training policies to prioritise target groups, considering the national policies and political conditions of the time.

## 3.4 **Policy pointers**

### *Strengths*

- The government has supported the development of RNFIL financially, focusing on developing the RNFIL infrastructure.
- The ESF funding has to a large extent supported the regional activities to finance the reintegration of the disadvantaged groups in the labour market and the civic society at large.
- The collective labour market agreements and the availability of the O&O funds have in many cases been a strong vehicle to drive participation in RNFIL in a more structural sense.
- The government has set up an initiative to monitor the number of RNFIL routes developed and to collect basic information about the users through the regional knowledge centres.

*Weaknesses*

- The knowledge infrastructure and the regional access points are vulnerable due to their temporary funding terminating at the end of 2007.
- The ESF funding, which has been central to many of the RNFIL activities, is likely to diminish in the next ESF programme period starting January 2008. And, no plan has been reported to replace the funds.
- There is variation in the amount of sectoral funds allocated, depending on the sector. In a regional context. There are no measures in place to link RNFIL and industry policies in a more systemic way at the regional level. The monitoring or information system is only at the infant stage and the current data collection methods are insufficient for a detailed analysis of user profiles, outcomes and impacts.
- RNFIL is still not widely known amongst the population and more specific amongst SME-companies.

*Policy recommendations and options*

80. In the Netherlands, RNFIL is still at the early stage of development and more public funding is expected to support developing the RNFIL infrastructure and stimulating uptake. To ensure public funding, returns on investment need to be clearly understood.

81. In addition, the country is moving into the second phase of the early development, *i.e.* it needs to start thinking of how to develop financially sustainable RNFIL models in the country in the long term. In doing so, models should consider different target groups. For instance, some RNFIL systems may take a co-financing model between the government, sectors and employers such as for low-qualified workers; others, between the education institutions and individuals for high-qualified working professionals; and others, between different ministries, local authorities for the unemployed.

82. To respond to the needs, the review team recommends that the government 1) diversify the sources of financing and target beneficiaries and 2) monitor developments and ensure solid capacity-building.

1. To diversify the sources of financing and target beneficiaries, the government has options to:
  - Highlight the use of RNFIL as an innovative means of developing and managing human resources for companies. The government should aim at situating RNFIL not only as a component of lifelong learning, but also as a potential means to spur productivity in companies. Subsequently this could increase private financing from companies.
  - Stimulate the use of RNFIL in tertiary education institutions. The government should stimulate the RNFIL supply at HBOs and universities as a means to reach non-traditional learners. This will respond to the government's aim to produce highly-skilled workforce and will meet the needs of the aging society where working professionals are coming back to learn at tertiary education institutions, which is observed in some OECD countries. In this case, the government can stimulate funding arrangements to be covered by education institutions, employers, and individuals.

- Use targeted financing instruments complementary to the newly implemented tax relief scheme for individuals. Additional tax relief or funding for the targeted groups could spur demand among the priority groups. This could be done through pilots in particular sectors concerning employees at a particular qualification level or companies beyond a certain size or yearly turn-over. There are pros and cons to targeted financial measures. In the Dutch situation with a low RNFIL take-up among older workers, the unemployed, women and immigrants, supplementary well-targeted funding could be used for a certain period to ensure a better balance between supply and demand (See Participation).
2. To monitor developments and ensure solid capacity-building, the government has options to:
- Further the monitoring framework not only to compare the numeric targets and obtained results but also to collect data on user profiles (age, gender, nationality, and employment status) and outcomes (if the user has gained a qualification or has dropped out during the courses; if dropped out, why; etc.)
  - Encourage policy research on financing models of RNFIL, cost-benefit models, and longitudinal research to examine benefits and outcomes of RNFIL for different categories of users.
  - Provide seed-funding to stimulate RNFIL providers (such as MBOs, HBOs, universities, enterprises and employment agencies) for pilot projects, studies, and networks with clear description of purposes and expected outcomes. Set up a framework which includes the criteria of critical factors for a sustainable RNFIL model so that providers may proactively seek alternative funding sources before the funding ends.

## 4 ACCESS AND COST ARRANGEMENTS

### 4.1. Where can RNFIL be accessed? How much does it cost?

83. There are two different levels to examine access to RNFIL: access as infrastructure and access in real terms, *i.e.* costs. In the Netherlands, RNFIL access points are mainly offered at secondary education institutions (MBOs). They can be also accessed at tertiary education institutions (HBOs and one university) and in regions, but at marginal. This is coherent with the policy objective, *i.e.* to level up the workforce by providing opportunities for low-skilled adults to obtain secondary education qualifications.

84. The current costs arrangements may vary depending on levels, institutions, and the individual's status (student, employed, unemployed, etc.). On 1 January 2007, the government announced the fiscal measure that all participants for RNFIL will be able to deduct documented (an invoice from a recognised RNFIL supplier) costs of RNFIL procedures from their taxable income and, therefore, by definition, direct costs are not the barrier to access RNFIL in the Netherlands. However, since the current target group is adult working professionals, the government needs to consider other costs such as opportunity costs and the costs to complete training to obtain a qualification followed by RNFIL.

### 4.2 Access and costs at MBOs

85. Access to RNFIL procedures has until now mostly been confined to MBO schools including Regional Education Centres (ROCs). Currently, the MBOs can automatically become suppliers of RNFIL procedures upon application. Of the existing 70 MBO schools, most of them practise RNFIL as part of admission procedures to the school, but the provision of RNFIL training routes is limited. MBOs are hardly engaged in non-formal adult education and training and, therefore, access to RNFIL by definition is limited. There is no direct access for adults to reach RNFIL at MBOs in spite the wide distribution of MBO level schools. The current access arrangements require intermediaries such as employers, employee organisations, and regional networks for adult learners.

86. The industry sector advisory training bodies (KBBs) play a leading role in providing access to those outside formal education. The employer and employee led organisations collaborate with MBO schools - at times schools that are specialised to serve a particular sector. This sectoral approach has led to some large-scale practices, funded through different arrangements; the training and development funds under the labour market collective agreements (O&O funds), the European Social Funds (EFS), the government's seed money, and also through enterprise funding or a combination of these funding measures. Although the O&O funds are available for RNFIL in most sectors, actual practices and uptake of RNFIL differ from sector to sector. Some sectors set up special agreements for specific target groups such as women, employees with a low level of education, and immigrants. Others, such as the construction sector, take a comprehensive approach to advancing RNFIL for all potential beneficiaries within the sector. The review visit gave the opportunity to be presented with an in-depth account of the uptake of RNFIL in the construction sector (Box 4.1).

**Box 4.1: The Fundeon, a KBB, advances RNFIL in the construction sector**

The Construction Sector in the Netherlands employs more than 200 000 people. The sector comprises both small family-run businesses as well as large enterprises. The sector is faced with increasing demands for productivity concerning the whole range of sub-sectors from designing blueprints to building processes and finishing. Also the use of new materials and ICT has led to new skills requirements in the sector. This is a challenge for the sector, the majority of the employees in the sector being low-skilled. Sector representatives estimate that 20% of employees in the sector only have a MBO level 1 qualification, and approximately 45% have level 2.

Enterprises in the sector find it increasingly difficult to attract and retain employees because of the 'image' the sector has. The sector is affected by an aging workforce, which makes the whole issue of skills a critical factor. Therefore, the sector has taken steps through the collective agreements (CAOs) to raise the skills levels of their workforce through a combination of RNFIL and training, targeting the MBO skills levels 2, 3, and 4. Since 2006, the building and construction sector has included arrangements concerning RNFIL in its collective agreements, giving workers a right to an RNFIL route aiming at professional certification. This is financed by the O&O funds, including training for up to 10 days. The agreement also gives each employee the right to be assessed every five years.

The sector delivers 24 qualifications, comprising approximately 80 profiles. In total it covers 750 specialisations. It is therefore a complex and time-consuming task to cover the entire range of specialisations with RNFIL procedures. The initiative first started out as a pilot in the region of Eindhoven (30 persons) and the Northern Netherlands (approximately 400 persons). Benefits were observed from the start. An employee in his early forties used to work as a bricklayer. As a result of health problems he was no longer able to carry out the physically requiring job. The pilot offered him an RNFIL procedure with relevant training in order to change his career to that of a foreman of the construction site. The RNFIL assessed the training period he needed to be four months. It was an intensive period of studying, also in the week-ends, working, and also having family responsibilities. RNFIL has also been implemented in the Finishing sub-sector with positive results.

The accumulated success stories that emerged from the pilot led the Fundeon to decide to structurally scale the practice up to the national level in 2005. Of approximately 300 persons working at Fundeon, 80 employees joined the initiative to raise awareness among enterprises all over the Netherlands. The initiative has involved a total of 2500 persons as RNFIL candidates, of which 900 have gone through an RNFIL procedure so far. The sector budgeted 86 000 euros, financed from the O&O funds, to cover the costs of RNFIL including indirect costs for individuals.

The next step for the sector is to transfer the practice to other training institutions in order to create critical mass nationally.

87. Sectors seeking collaboration with schools or forming broader partnerships are supported by the Directorate for Working and Learning. Of the 20 pilots in the first pilot phase, 8 projects have been supported as a sectoral approach, such as the aforementioned construction, automobile industry, food, agriculture, and crafts projects. The pilots selected by the Project Directorate last from 6 months to more than a year.

88. The Knowledge Centre estimates that RNFIL procedures carried out by the sectoral organisations (KBBs) cost an average of approximately EUR 1000 to EUR 1250 per participant, which includes the costs of assessment and recognition of the results. Corus estimates EUR 4600 (Table 4.1) as RNFIL costs at the MBO 4 level. An estimate is also made for an entire programme, both with and without RNFIL.

**Table 4.1: EVC-policy in money**

MBO level 4, costs in EUR 1000	Without RNFIL	With RNFIL
Leave of absence	12	2
Study costs	10	1.4
RNFIL costs	-	4.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>8</b>

Average of valued competences = 82%

Source: Corus, Nov. 2004

89. The estimates are based on a working professional who takes a leave to study. Whether he/she goes through RNFIL or not makes a difference in total costs. If the person does not participate in an RNFIL procedure, the cost will be 2.75 times as high. This is due to the high opportunity cost and the high costs of the study programme (EUR 12 000 and 10 000 respectively). Therefore, the investment in RNFIL (EUR 4600) proves to be a good cost-saver, and thus can be expected to yield higher returns on investment.

90. The actual price and access to information about costs is likely to affect participation. Although some cost arrangements are known by individual providers, there is still little evidence that the individual cost arrangements are known among potential participants at large. Also, there is almost no information to date on the efficiency and equity of the financing instruments for different target groups and purposes. Informants interviewed explicitly stated that the lack of transparency concerning costs and financing options was likely to inhibit participation of some groups and access created by some potential users.

#### **4.2.1 Access at HBOs and at a university**

91. At the time of the review visit, 7 995 RNFIL routes in HBO had been created. HBOs are currently engaged in piloting activity concerning RNFIL. The CBR reports that the current legislation concerning the approval of an RNFIL HBO route in a new course area, once the same course has been accredited as an ordinary course, is bureaucratic. This may be one of the factors that could demotivate higher education institutions from developing new HBO routes in new topic areas despite latent demand. In the university sector, only one institution provides access to RNFIL (the Open University). The current objective is for RNFIL to be implemented throughout the university's programmes by September 2007. A primary incentive for HBOs and universities to become RNFIL suppliers is to seize new market opportunities as the number of traditional students (the 18 to 24-year olds) gradually decreases.

#### *HBOs*

92. Under the current temporary funding legislation for HBOs, thirteen institutions have applied for funding to develop RNFIL routes. One incentive for HBOs to provide RNFIL is to form partnerships with firms, thus reaching non-traditional learners while at the same time responding to the need of the firms for providing staff training. The *Hogeschool van Amsterdam* provides a good illustration. It offers HBO qualifications in different professions. There are 30 000 students, of which 25 000 are full time and 5 000 are part-time (the lifelong learner). The institution offers RNFIL as an instrument of admission procedures and also as a way to obtain exemptions from parts of a study programme. It has partnered with a number of firms and organisations in order to expand its lifelong learning provision capacities. Partners include FME (metal-electro sector), *ABvaKabo* (trade union civil services), *Fortis* (banking), and *Landmacht* (Army). Building on this network, and funded by the government as a pilot, the target is set for 2007 to have 1 000 applicants participate in RNFIL at a cost of EUR 950 each. To this end the *Hogeshcool* set up an institutional strategy and established the Central Centre for RNFIL.

93. The target cost per person (EUR 950) seems relatively reasonable compared to the practices at other HBOs. A recent research study (*Schlusmans et al, 2006*) presents nine case studies in the HBO sector and finds that the costs vary considerably, ranging from EUR 750 to EUR 2 000. It also finds that candidates use between 20-40 hours to compose their portfolio. The time used by assessors varies between 6-8 hours, and in most cases a career counsellor was also involved. The difference comes from whether there is a fixed price for the whole procedure regardless of the outcome or a fixed price for every single credit point received by the candidate. The costs of one year of college study at the *Hogeschool van Amsterdam* are estimated for cases with and without the use of RNFIL (Table 4.2). One year college without RNFIL may cost EUR 8000 to EUR 18 000 for the shortest to the longest, respectively. The cost analysis sheds light on the weight of the opportunity costs, which justifies the benefits of RNFIL.

**Table 4.2: General HBO-level costs at the Hogeschool van Amsterdam**

<b>1. One year college without RNFIL, minimum variant</b>	
20 days of classroom training in a 40 week period, @ EUR 300 per workday (leave of absence):	EUR 6000
College fee	EUR 1500
study materials, travel expenses	EUR 500
<b>Total costs for one year HBO, minimum, without RNFIL</b>	<b>EUR 8000</b>
<b>2. One year college without RNFIL, maximum variant</b>	
40 days of classroom training in a 40 week period, @ EUR 400 per workday (leave of absence):	EUR 16 000
College fee	EUR 1500
study materials, travel expenses	EUR 500
<b>Total costs for one year HBO, maximum, without RNFIL</b>	<b>EUR 18 000</b>
<b>3. One year college with RNFIL, minimum or maximum variant</b>	
RNFIL procedure	EUR 950
leave of absence	0
College fee	0
study materials, travel expenses	0
<b>Total costs for one year HBO</b>	<b>EUR 950</b>

Source: The Dutch Country Background Report for RNFIL (2007)

#### *The university sector*

94. The Open University (OUNL) uses RNFIL as an instrument for admission and exemption. It offers both bachelor and master's degrees and about 270 short courses. The OUNL has 18 study centres, of which 6 are situated in Flanders. The University aims at delivering attractive education programmes for adults. As part of this, the OUNL provides students with a personal study plan on the basis of previously earned certificates, diplomas, and relevant work experiences. In 2005 the university educated 18 474 students, of which almost half (44%) studied while working for 35-40 hours per week.

95. To address the shortage of teachers, the government attempted to provide incentives to those working professionals with other occupations to switch to a teaching profession by allowing them to gain the certificate with an individualised bachelor-level study program. To this end, RNFIL is made a legal obligation as a gateway to a personalised learning route. Using this legal framework, the OUNL plays an important role in producing teachers by offering alternative routes - shorter and less costly - to the occupation. Although there was no information on the average time it takes for a candidate to prepare an RNFIL portfolio, the average time used by assessors is estimated at 12 hours per candidate. Costs of EUR 2000 are covered by the employer. This kind of legislative arrangement does not yet exist elsewhere than in the teaching profession; however discussions have started about applying the framework to the health care and engineering sectors. More generally, a genuine access to higher education is limited by not

providing sufficiently attractive alternative and accelerated routes on the basis of an RNFIL procedure. Schlusmans (Schlusmans et al 2006) however also reports about internal institutional factors that seem to impede a wider use of RNFIL in higher education that can open up for new student populations.

#### **4.2.2 Access and costs with a regional approach**

96. At the regional level, access is offered through regional authorities. The regional approach is characterised by the government steering role and collaboration with schools and industries. In addition to supporting sectoral RNFIL developments, the Project Directorate for Working and Learning has been the main driver for developing and supporting initiatives regionally. There have been two rounds of pilots financed and supported by the Project Directorate. In the first round, as mentioned above, both regional and sectoral projects were supported. In the second round, regional projects have been prioritised: of the 12 pilots selected, 10 were regional and 2 were sectoral. This does not imply that the government is neglecting the importance of the sectoral dimension to RNFIL. On the contrary, the government aims to embed a sectoral dimension in the regional RNFIL projects in order to stimulate regional economic development and transition.

97. Local authorities and the Ministry of Social Affairs share the responsibility for the unemployed and other disadvantaged groups in the labour market. Technical arrangements are organised by the Employee Insurance Scheme Implementing Bodies (UVWs - *Uitvoering Werknemersverzekeringen*), a government agency of the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the Centres for Work and Income (CWIs - *Centra voor Werk en Inkomen*), agencies of the local authorities. Both UVWs and CWIs are responsible for the (re-)integration of the unemployed. The funding for the reintegration of the unemployed is regulated by two acts: the Framework Act for Carrying out Work and Income (SUWI) and the Act of Involvement of the Unemployed (WIW). The first act regulates the reintegration funding initiated by the UVWs for the long-term unemployed and the disabled. The latter regulates the funding for reintegration activities by local authorities and CWIs.

98. The Ministry of Social Affairs funds both kinds of activities. Reintegration activities may in part be composed of education and training activities involving the use of RNFIL. The reintegration of these groups is put on a call for tender and carried out by private reintegration firms. These may not necessarily be informed of RNFIL, and therefore the target beneficiaries may come to lack information. Furthermore, the monitoring measures on performance for these private reintegration services may be such that they do not encourage the use of RNFIL in cases where it could have been appropriate.

99. If regions are to play a structural role in reintegration of those on public social benefits, it is pivotal to calibrate a transversal policy agenda specific to the involved regions across social policies, labour market policies, and lifelong learning policies. The study visit observed an example of how different actors at the regional level have provided a one-stop-shop entry for reintegration services through the establishment of a regional learning and working desk. The Rivierenland Region reports that approximately 500 persons have gone through an RNFIL procedure through their regional desk, and most of them were adults (Box 4.2).

#### Box 4.2: The experiences of the Rivierenland Region

In Rivierenland, the responsibility for the reintegration of the socially disadvantaged is shared among many different organisations: municipalities, Centres for Work and Income (CWI), Chambers of Commerce (UWV), local schools, and the *lander*.

In 2004, the first trials were made to explore whether RNFIL could help dropout students or persons who could not obtain jobs on ordinary conditions to find a job. The result showed that RNFIL was a valid instrument for opening up job opportunities for the disadvantaged, but it did not at first lead to a more unified and transparent access to RNFIL.

Seed money through the action programme RAAK changed the picture. The programme provided the framework and opened up central actors to a wider discussion and focus on why an integrated approach to RNFIL was necessary to reach the targeted disadvantaged group. It also became clear to the organisations that they could not do it effectively on an individual basis.

To increase the use of RNFIL and learning and working routes in firms, the 'Desk for Advice to Employers' (Werkgevers Adviespunt, Rivierenland) was launched. Its aim was to collectively approach employers in order to assess their needs concerning skills and training. In this project, 12 advisers visit particularly SMEs so as to provide more demand-led and customer-oriented services and in order to stimulate latent demand. Some of these advisers come from commercial organisations.

Funded by the European Social Funds (EQUAL), the national initiative Empowerment RNFIL was launched. The initiative connects national and regional activities with financing in the Region Rivierenland collaboration between nine municipalities). The Centre for Work and Income (Centra voor Werk en Inkomen), the Desk for Advice to Employers (Werkgevers adviespunt), the social services (Social Dienst Tiel), Lander, and the Regional Education Centre (ROC) Rivor, are other central actors. They formed a regional expert group that coaches the RNFIL process among key stakeholders in the region. Other objectives of the expert group include:

- To analyse if an RNFIL route is relevant to interested potential participants.
- To ensure quality and transparency for all participants.
- To increase ease of access, the "Desk for Learning and Working" was created as a one-stop-shop, starting operations in early 2007. Its main objectives are to provide jobseekers, persons on social benefits, and school dropouts, with relevant information about education and training options, and to eventually help them find a job.

### 4.3 Policy pointers

#### *Strengths*

- RNFIL has evolved strongly embedded in an institutional context, mostly at the MBO level.
- There are bottom-up good practices such as regionally-based projects targeting the unemployed or sector-initiated collective agreement practices covering RNFIL. The government is aiming at scaling up such practices to a large-scale good practice model.

#### *Weaknesses*

- There is no direct access for those who are out of the formal education sector, except for those who have intermediaries such as large-scale employers, sectoral social partners and regional employment reactivation service agencies. This makes it hard for low-skilled workers in SMEs to access RNFIL at MBOs.

- The availability of RNFIL routes at tertiary education is still very limited. Therefore, there is very limited access to meet the needs for highly-skilled.
- At the HBO level, RNFIL is primarily used for admissions and not so much as a means to provide credits to shorten the course or an exemption from some examinations towards a HBO qualification. This may be a disincentive for experienced working professionals who already gained basic knowledge and skills, equivalent to the courses.
- There is almost no access in the university sector, except the Open University.
- The collective agreement covering RNFIL is not universal. RNFIL uptake varies from sector to sector and from company to company. Therefore, many initiatives lack critical mass.

*Policy recommendations and options*

100. The Netherlands is currently facing a socio-economic challenge to increase the qualified labour force at all levels: low-skilled and highly-skilled. 1) To respond to the challenge, the review team recommends that the government stimulate RNFIL suppliers and 2) facilitate up-scaling of good systems and practices.

1. To stimulate RNFIL suppliers, the government has options to:
  - Take a coordinating role to ensure that potential RNFIL suppliers have sufficient knowledge about RNFIL funding arrangements.
  - Stimulate initiatives in the university sector to use RNFIL as part of admission policies and as a way to shorten the courses to give incentives to working professionals.
2. To facilitate up-scaling of good systems and practices, the government has options to:
  - Act as a knowledge broker among sectors or regions to avoid inefficient use of funding and duplication of efforts. Sector-led good practices can be transferred to other sectors, and region-based good systems may be shared among other regions.
  - Document successful sector models and regional good practice, and converge into a model where both a sector and a region are involved. This may help strengthen the official rationale of RNFIL by linking it to regional economic policies.

## 5. PARTICIPATION

### 5.1 Data on participation

101. Who is actually being served? For an efficient policy design and implementation, it is critical to be informed of actual participation and compare it with target groups (Section 2 and 3), and access points (Section 4).

102. The draft *Monitor Postinitieel* results and the accounts during the interviews was able to point to a general participation pattern. Of the 36 regional knowledge centres where the information was collected, 14 had information on RNFIL. The total number of RNFIL participants was reported to be 20 432 in 2006 (the draft report of the *Monitor Postinitieel*, 2007). In most regions, dominant RNFIL users were 40-49-year old male persons of national origin. Although the education level varies from region to region, the average qualifications level was MBO 2 to 3. Given that the main RNFIL providers are MBO education institutions, this is not surprising.

103. In the Dutch case with a serious need to improve labour utilisation for women (Section 2), information by gender should be collected. Of the aforementioned 20 432 participants, 345 were women. In some regions there was no female participation, but in one region (Achterhoek) participation by women exceeded considerably that of men (The draft report of the *Monitor Postinitieel*, 2007). In Achterhoek, of the total of 80 participants, 57 (71%) were women and 23 (29%) were men. Of the overall total of 345 female participants, only 7 were immigrant women. To examine why certain regions have higher female participants, other types of information also need to be collected, such as the main industry of the region, types of qualifications (e.g. nursing, social workers, etc.)

### 5.2 Purposes for participation

104. The available data do not account for the reasons for participation and the outcomes of participation. However, individual accounts and case studies in the CBR give some insights into who these participants are and what their rationales are for them to undertake RNFIL. They are mainly low-skilled mid-carrier male workers working in sectors that are actively investing its time and funding in RNFIL or supported by their employers that are multinational large companies. The main objective for the sectors and the companies to support this is to up-skill and empower its workforce and to ensure job change of their employees as a preventive measure for lay-offs. Despite the fact that the employers encourage RNFIL uptake, there are still barriers to participation as well as a risk of dropping out during the course of completing the training course before actually obtaining a qualification. The highly-skilled also participates in RNFIL, but very marginal at the time of writing.

#### 5.2.1 *Upskilling the low-skilled and ensuring job change: food and drink sector*

105. The food and drink sector has a total of 94 500 employees: 250 companies have more than 100 employees, corresponding to 17.2% of the industry, and there are 600 companies with from 2 to 100 employees. The food and drink sector exports half of its production and is thus highly globalised. Advanced logistics and packaging and intensive use of ICT in the whole production cycle have been Dutch sector responses to remaining competitive. EU regulations on hygiene and intensified demands to quality

control are factors that have also contributed to industry demands for higher and different sorts of skills among their workforce, also among the traditionally low-skilled.

106. In the food and drink sector, different models of RNFIL have evolved among major companies since 1995 (Table 5.1). The purpose has been to further firm-internal mobility and flexibility by raising the qualifications levels of the workforce in the sector. Participation in RNFIL has been growing since 1995. A total of 2 729 procedures have been carried out at the time of the review visit, mainly at the low-skilled level.

**Table 5.1: Overview of RNFIL in the food and drink industry.**

1995	1997	1998	2002	2003	2005/2006
Mead Johnson: Employees experience that they already control some parts of traditional professional training courses. MH wishes to legitimise their (internal) company training programmes. (15 RNFILs)	Aequor and SOL develop at sectoral level their RNFIL process and provide information & support to companies.	Reorganisation Friesland Foods (FCDF): Employees need to acquire formal certificates in order to be more flexible. (start 12 RNFILs)	C&C companies wish to actualise their Cocoa and Chocolate manual. Public-private cooperation. (pilot 15 RNFILs)	Some big companies start small scale RNFIL projects, supported by ESF funding. (57 RNFILs)	The use of RNFIL increases. Professional schools improve their RNFIL process. Private training companies discover RNFIL. The government supports RNFIL with national programmes.

Source Background presentational notes, review visit, KBB :Food and Drink Sector

107. One potential risk of using RNFIL for low-skilled employees is that RNFIL may be perceived as a selection mechanism for employers rather than a way to encourage learning. The use of RNFIL within firms that employ low-skilled requires particularly careful planning and communication from top management in order to succeed, as it was pointed out by different informants. At the institutional level, lack of personalised routes may form an additional barrier to participation of the low-skilled. By definition, education and training institutions do not offer RNFIL routes on a client-oriented or tailor-made basis for working professionals. The routes are mostly built upon existing regular training programmes, rather than being adapted to the individual purposes and contexts. Extra attention is required to increase the uptake of the low-skilled who have often had negative education experiences in the past.

108. RNFIL is not only used to address skills demands, but also as a response to emerging changes. Multinational companies, pressured to restructure divisions exposed to global competition, attempt to respond proactively as part of their social corporate responsibility. The human resource managers from Heineken and Coca Cola acknowledged that RNFIL is an effective tool in a period of restructuring and lay-offs to help employees in the transition to other jobs or sectors. RNFIL is in this context perceived as an instrument that contributes to the internal market efficiency within the sector as a whole. Furthermore, it is also a means to ease potential tension between employers and employees and employee representatives in a situation of lay-offs. An illustrative example of the use of RNFIL was provided from the automotive industries, which were recently affected by global competition. In this context, RNFIL was used as a measure in proactive industrial restructuring through a public-private partnership. (Box 5.1).

### **Box 5.1: Mobility Centre**

Many sectors in the Netherlands have been affected by global specialisation. A case in point is that of the automotive industry, where the closure of a major production plant affected 2000 workers.

A Mobility Centre was created to alleviate the effects of large scale restructuring by helping the affected workers into new employment. The Centre was the result of a joint effort between all the main stakeholders, namely the Centre for Work and Income, the Trade Unions, the Employer's Association, and the KBB. The centre was set up on an intermediary basis with 25 employees, and was funded by internal plant funds and the EU Community Regional Funds.

The centre developed RNFIL procedures targeting the affected workers. Most of the laid-off workers went through RNFIL procedures so as to improve their employment opportunities through the recognition of skills and competences they had acquired through their employment and in other ways.

The outcome was that more than 50% of those employees that had gone through the procedure found a new job, mainly in related sectors and in the same region.

### **5.2.2 Empowering the low-skilled in the SMEs: bakery**

109. In the Netherlands as in many other OECD countries, SMEs are seen as vital to economic prosperity. Yet, enterprise size and - more importantly - enterprise sector are the two major parameters governing whether the employer sees learning as the key to success, and thus whether learning opportunities are available to employees. In SMEs, participation in RNFIL and training can be observed more markedly in sectors where formal qualifications are valued, where apprenticeship practices have traditionally been in place, and where the funding measures (such as O&O funds) exist for RNFIL or training.

110. An SME in the bakery sector highlights a case where the role and values of the owner of the bakery were pivotal in convincing almost all of the employees (140 persons) in the company to go through RNFIL to better cope with recent technological changes at the shop floor level (Box 5.2).

### **Box 5.2: RNFIL at Bakker Wiltink**

The profiles of employees in the bakery are diverse, some with certificates and diplomas in food technology and others with working experiences in different occupations. The gap between these groups has widened little-by-little over the years, not least due to the implementation of new technology in the bakery. The employer therefore felt a growing need for up-grading the competences of his employees to close the gap. The employer looked for solutions. He felt that it was not a question of offering traditional courses to the employees, but something different. At that time, he came across an article on learning at work. This led him to discussions with two training institutions that then designed the whole process.

The institutions agreed to design a programme for all workers without a professional qualification up to Level One in food technology. The employees could obtain a recognised diploma with the use of RNFIL. The programme included the training of two internal assessors. All the employees working at this level received a diploma or a certificate of participation. The programme was funded by the sectoral funds (O&O), complemented by the ESF funds. Currently, a training programme for middle management has been implemented as part of the human resource policy in the firm.

### **5.2.3 Retaining the high-skilled: metallurgical sector**

111. All sectors are confronted with demands for upskilling their workforce. The technical sectors and the knowledge intensive business services are particularly affected, not least due to use of ICT. To retain

highly educated employees, employers must provide incentives that can spur career development for experienced employees. A pilot in the metallurgical sector illustrates this (Box 5.3).

**Box 5.3: The metallurgical sector**

A sector project began in 2001, involving 45 employees working as highly skilled (*i.e.* equivalent to HBO level) but without formal HBO qualifications. The project was based on collaboration between the employers' organisation for metallurgy and three HBO institutions: Amsterdam, Eindhoven, and Enschede. Competence standards were for mechanical engineering and business administration.

There are two assessment phases. During the first phase, interviews take place with information about the candidates and the workplace, in order to examine whether the job functions match those of an HBO level qualification. The second phase can consist of various kinds of assessment methods as the basis for a personalised study route. Assignments given during on-the-job training are collected in a personal portfolio.

All the costs are covered by the employer. Assessing and recognising competences is estimated to cost approximately EUR 2050 per person. The training followed may cost about EUR 5500 per year per person. The O&O funds may offer € 2300 per person per year for a maximum of two years.

*Source: Schlusmans et al 2006*

### **5.3 Participation and assessment instruments**

112. Assessment methods may affect participation. By definition, there are formative and summative purposes of RNFIL assessment with different instruments to serve the purposes (Figure 5.2). Each instrument should be used to fit for a purpose, carefully examining the target groups and the expected outcomes as a result of RNFIL. If the target group is low-skilled adults and the purpose is to get them go back to learning, an instrument, which serves a formative purpose and lessens physiological barriers, may best fit for them - such as interviews, portfolios, observation and self-evaluation. The choice of the instrument, however, needs careful costing plan, which needs to be also considered when designing a RNFIL assessment policy.

**Table 5.1: Assessment purposes and instruments of RNFIL**

Formative use		Summative use	
Instruments	Countries	Instruments	Countries
Interview	AUS, Chile, DNK, IRL, NLD, NOR (dialogue-based), South Africa	Written exams/e-testing	AUS, AUT, Chile, CZE, DNK, GRC, HUN, IRL, MEX, Slovenia, South Africa, KOR, ESP, GBR
Portfolio/e-portfolio	AUS, Chile, CZE, DNK, IRL, MEX, NLD, NOR, GBR	Practical exams/ Skills tests/ Demonstration	AUT, BEL, Chile, DNK, HUN, MEX, NOR, Slovenia, South Africa, ESP, GBR
Observation	AUS, Chile, NLD, ESP	Oralexams	DNK, GRC, MEX, Slovenia, South Africa
Self-evaluation	BEL, GRC, ESP	Declarative/ Portfolio/ E-portfolio	HUN, IRL, NLD, NOR, Slovenia, ESP, ITL
		Simulations	Chile, DNK, NLD, ESP
		Project evaluation	GRC, IRL, MEX
		Interview	IRL, NLD (criterion-directed)
		Multiple choice exams	Chile, GRC
		Group evaluation/debate	GRC, South Africa

Source: Preliminary findings from the RNFIL Country Background Reports available as of 10 September 2007.

113. In the Netherlands, a portfolio is mainly used. The use is not yet fully explored as a means to personalise learning pathways in a formative sense. For instance, several participants reported that the preparation required a lot of time and energy and their peer workers have given up during the course of the preparation. There may be a way to develop different portfolio procedures for a formative purpose and a summative purpose. When the purpose is to encourage the low-skilled to uptake further learning, the portfolio procedure can be less rigorous, whereas when the purpose is to give a qualification entirely based on the results of RNFIL, the procedure can be rigorous and thorough.

114. Another potential way of personalising the portfolio instrument is to integrate the use of ICT. Some OECD countries link RNFIL to e-learning and e-guidance to respond to certain needs of professional workers for flexible learning. And, there is an increasing use of e-portfolios to record 'learning assets' in a personalised way (for example, in Denmark), and to ease updating of the personal portfolio and maintain it with a lifelong learning perspective. The use of ICT may also help disseminate information about RNFIL. The review team was informed that web services concerning RNFIL have been set up as part of the operations of the Knowledge Centre. However, the team did not find any evidence of actively applying the ICT to RNFIL in order to personalise learning for adults in the Netherlands.

## 5.4 Policy pointers

### *Strengths*

- The government has set a clear goal for participation (*i.e.* at least 50 000 in 2010) and for completion (*i.e.* 50% of success rate).

- Data on participation, although not detailed yet, has started being collected.
- Enthusiastic employers, sectors, and school managers adopt RNFIL in their practices and attempt to spread the benefits of RNFIL by word of mouth.
- Web services concerning RNFIL have been set up as part of the operations of the Knowledge Centre.

#### *Weaknesses*

- Participation rates are currently low (estimated at 20 000 to 30 000 per year). Participation is particularly low among those target groups most likely to benefit from RNFIL. The current representative users are low-skilled late mid-career (aged 40-49) males of national origin.
- There are a significant number of dropouts during the course of an RNFIL procedure. This is likely due to lack of flexibility in the total RNFIL procedure. The government needs to reconsider the use of appropriate assessment instruments, examining the target groups and purposes of RNFIL.
- There are also a significant number of dropouts during the supplementary training to obtain a qualification because the training may require considerable duration. Clear incentives need to be communicated to individuals in order to motivate them until they actually obtain a target qualification.
- The use of ICT still lags behind many advanced OECD countries in learning/teaching, recording of learning outcomes, and disseminating information.
- Outreach strategies are in general under-developed and not well targeted to different audiences.
- For the unemployed, there is a serious lack of knowledge about RNFIL among intermediaries, especially private employment reintegration service agencies.
- Costs arrangements are not transparent to the individual user.

#### *Policy recommendations and policy options*

115. The government has set numeric goals for the number of participants (50 000 per year in 2010) and for the success rate to complete a diploma (50% of the participants). To reach the goals, the review team recommends the government 1) re-examine if outreach measures to reach prioritised target groups are effective and 2) link RNFIL to more personalised and flexible learning.

1. To re-examine if outreach measures to reach prioritised target groups are effective, the government has options to:
  - Among the several groups that the government currently targets or identified potential beneficiaries, prioritise a few groups and develop a consolidated action programme for them: e.g. low-skilled working adults, the unemployed, the highly-skilled, older workers (+50), immigrants, women, etc. The effective outreach strategies may vary from group to group.
  - Launch targeted information campaigns to stimulate demands among potential users by communicating actual benefits brought by participating in RNFIL. Choose an appropriate

channels of communication: *e.g.* if the target users are low-skilled workers, short easy-to-understand mass media campaign will work, containing only basic information such as RNFIL costs, procedures, and expected outcomes. If the target group is the highly skilled, it is likely to be critical to advance the use of web-based information channels.

- Re-examine the current policy of ‘Work First’ and explore if the use of RNFIL can be integrated in the contractual conditions for the sub-contracted private reintegration service agencies to ensure outreach to the unemployed.
  - Link a RNFIL policy with career guidance and information policy, especially for the low-skilled, and mainstream these policies hand-in-hand.
2. To link RNFIL to more personalised and flexible learning, the government has options to:
- Provide pilot funding to RNFIL suppliers to develop individualised learning routes tailored for different groups such as the unemployed, the employed low-skilled, the highly-skilled, women, or the older workers (+50) who the government prioritises the most at the time.
  - Pilot e-learning and e-portfolio methods to stimulate the development of more flexible and more individualised RNFIL learning pathways targeted for highly-skilled working professionals.
  - Encourage HBO institutions to build credit-based qualification framework. This will allow translation of RNFIL into credits and, therefore, enable shortening the course. This will be a strong incentive for working adults as it will lessen the direct costs as well opportunity costs. As a result, this will create personalised learning pathways at HBOs.

## 6. IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

### 6.1 Quality Code - EVC

116. The question of quality in the RNFIL system is central to the current debates and represents a critical point for expanding access and gaining trust by all stakeholders. A response to the issue of quality in the Netherlands well reflects its bottom-up culture.

117. RNFIL arrangements do not at this stage function as an efficient means of recognition across providers of education and training, a key reason being the myriads of RNFIL methods available. Many stakeholders have been concerned that such diversity would result in a lack of transparency, and thus a lack of trust and legitimacy among potential users, unless a way was found for users in advance of a procedure to be informed about the quality of the whole process. To strike a balance between widening access and ensuring quality, an initiative to develop some quality framework commenced in 2002. This is also related to the issue of increasing participation. Creating a climate of trust between providers and users is a precondition to participation in RNFIL.

118. In 2003, research work was undertaken by the Knowledge Centre to take stock of existing knowledge from the different experiences of RNFIL implemented since the late 1990s either by firms, sectors, or regions. The aim was to analyse the notion of quality for the different stakeholders. Subsequently, in 2004 a draft Quality Code was prepared by the Knowledge Centre and elaborated with the involvement of all key stakeholders. The drafting was also heavily impacted by international developments, not least brought forward by the European dialogue on the Common European Principles of RNFIL (May 2004 - [www.acc.eu.org/uploads/CommonPrinciplesValidation.doc](http://www.acc.eu.org/uploads/CommonPrinciplesValidation.doc) ) and the Swiss quality model for career counselling CH-Q ([www.ch-q.ch](http://www.ch-q.ch)). The social partners have been a driving force to elaborate quality arrangements, since RNFIL has grown into a measure included in several labour market collective agreements (CAOs). In 2005 the Dutch Cabinet and the social partners decided to make the Code a covenant for RNFIL, and the Code was signed by all key stakeholders at the end of 2006.

119. The Quality Code is a comprehensive framework containing information on RNFIL procedures, technical arrangements, and accreditation of suppliers, assessors, and advisers (Box 6.1).

### Box 6.1: The Quality Code

The National covenant of the Quality Code was signed in 2006 by all national stakeholders, including the following:

- National governmental entities - the State Secretary for Education, Culture and Science on behalf of the State Secretary of Social Affairs and Employment.
- National public entities - The Centre for Work and Income.
- National entities of the education and training sectors - the Netherlands Association of Vocational Education and Training Centres; Colo, the Association of Centres of Expertise on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market; the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences; Paepon, the Platform of Accredited Private Education Institutions.
- Education providers - Open University.
- Social partners – The Labour Foundation.

The main objectives for using the Quality Code are:

- To develop quality standards for assessing the providers.
- To develop quality procedures, portfolio formats, recognition reports, and other technical instruments for RNFIL.
- To develop guidelines for the accreditation of advisers and assessors.

The Knowledge Centre carried out the task of developing standards for assessing the providers, in conjunction with the evaluating organisations responsible for the external evaluation and accreditation such as the HBO Council, the KCE, and the NAVO.

A handbook for the main users of the Code is under development.

120. The process of implementing the code was in its start-up phase at the time of the OECD review visit. The implementation is widely viewed as a major step forward to creating transparency and trust and as a common platform for any future developments of RNFIL. But there are also a number of issues not yet solved with the agreement on the Quality Code, as brought forward by some experts. Most importantly, the Quality Code will not in itself solve the question concerning reporting formats. This is because RNFIL providers within the framework of the quality code are free to choose methodologies. There is therefore no common systemic approach to documenting the outcomes of the RNFIL procedures in place. This is viewed as critical to transparency and thus to the mobility of skills, and as leading to the reinvention of the same wheels. A greater degree of commonality concerning the documentation of the outcomes of a recognition procedure is a topic of debate that emerged several times during the study visit.

121. Concerns were also raised among informants that the Quality Code at this stage has not sufficiently foreseen training arrangements for assessors. The quality of competences among assessors and advisers is not *per se* solved by implementing the code. In sectors with rapid technological change and subsequent changes in work processes and services and/or in forefront companies, it takes considerable expertise in job task analysis if the assessment is to correspond to the genuine competences of the individual. The estimated training period is only one and a half to two days. This is likely to be insufficient to build that competence base among assessors. Within a sectoral context, a model has evolved which

makes use of both an assessor from an education and training institution and an industry assessor, as exemplified in the Food and Drink sector (Table 5.1). This mixed model is viewed by some sector representatives as being of much higher quality and thereby more effective. The disadvantage is, however, that it is likely to be more costly either to the firm or the individual than a model with only one assessor.

## **6.2 Handbook of the Quality Code**

122. The Knowledge Centre for RNFIL has undertaken the creation of a Handbook on RNFIL to support the practical implementation of RNFIL according to some common quality criteria. At the stage of the review it was therefore uncertain the extent to which the Handbook in combination with the Quality Guide would help mainstream RNFIL.

## **6.3 Accreditation of the RNFIL suppliers**

123. All public and private institutions that wish to operate as accredited suppliers have to go through an accreditation procedure by an independent reviewing organisation that will author an accreditation report with eventual comments on areas of improvement. The accreditation process is managed by the KCE (*Kwaliteits Centrum voor Examinering*). At HBO level, accreditation is carried out by the VBIs appointed by NVAO. For RNFIL taking place under the supervision of the sectors, the sectors may appoint an organisation to carry out the review. Once accredited, institutions will according to the Code undergo regular evaluations to ensure that procedures are up to standards.

124. All organisations that supply RNFIL and use the Code will be 'recognised suppliers'. Once recognised, institutions will be listed in the "Registrar of recognised RNFIL suppliers". Employers can apply to the tax collector's office for a subsidy of EUR 300 for individuals undergoing an RNFIL undertaken by an accredited supplier.

125. At the time of the review, approximately 55 providers had applied to be recognised as accredited providers. More than 2000 RNFIL procedures (40 different professions per provider) were under examination, and the number of providers was expected to rapidly increase. The Knowledge Centre for RNFIL has estimated that 100-150 providers will be accredited in 2007. A mid-term challenge may arise as to whether to provide enough access (RNFIL routes) or to make sure all RNFIL providers have undergone an accreditation procedure. Accreditation procedures that are not bureaucratic or too expensive are therefore central. At the individual level, formalised quality measures do not in themselves guarantee ease of choice. Guidance and career measures both external and firm-internal are central components of RNFIL if individuals are to be informed users of RNFIL. This will be the case particularly for low-skilled users not in the habit of selecting between apparently similar offers of education and training. Web based information services, though valuable to some user groups, will not be a sufficient instrument for all target groups. To stimulate up-take and development of quality, funding for RNFIL could follow the individual, as some informants suggested. In this way providers will be put under competitive pressure to offer attractive learning pathways and to offer greater flexibility in time and place for the individual.

## **6.4 Link to quality teaching and learning**

126. In most cases, individuals prepare a 'portfolio' for RNFIL at MBO schools. At the end of an RNFIL procedure, individuals receive by definition a report that states their competences in relation to the nationally recognised professional qualification standard and their career objectives. Participants can then exchange the received credit with a certificate or diploma. This thereby allows making the link between formal, non-formal, and informal learning.

127. However, obtaining a certificate or diploma solely on non-formal and informal learning outcomes is not the standard procedure. Often, a certificate or diploma also requires some supplementary education

or training. The whole process – *i.e.* an individual prepares a portfolio, an assessor (or assessors) prepares a report, and a school provides further education and training - is most often unclear in terms of time, assessment methods, contents, and pedagogy. This often impacts motivation negatively. The complementary studies after an RNFIL procedure could be a major factor leading to a high dropout rate, as suggested by some RNFIL participants.

128. Although RNFIL is used in a summative way - as a means to obtain a qualification in most cases - it has evolved for other purposes. Examples include preparing for a better paid career option or alleviating the adverse effects of lay-offs in the large multinational companies. An observation of currently evolving practices points to an inherent risk of the development of a dual track for RNFIL with one set in formal education institutions and another in the industrial context of large globalised firms that have their own competence agenda. If this were to be the case, the approach taken to implement the Quality Code across various stakeholders could be an influential factor in preventing such a scenario from emerging. The enabling role of the Directorate for Working and Learning, the Knowledge Centre, and the Empowerment Centre, should not be underestimated in this respect.

129. The Knowledge Centre intends to evaluate the initial implementation of the Code and present the result in August 2007 as a basis for the final structure of the Quality Code.

## 6.5 Policy pointers

### *Strengths*

- The development of the Quality Code involves all central actors with a bottom-up approach. This approach provides some form of guarantee that institutions that are accredited to provide RNFIL procedures will adhere to the standards. To ensure its implementation, a user guide (the Handbook for the Quality Code) is being prepared.
- The use of RNFIL evolved in different ways for different purposes, which adds richness and value to the use of RNFIL.

### *Weaknesses*

- Despite the carefully organised process of consensus-building concerning the Quality Code, the basis for implementation is still fragile. There is not enough trust in the quality of RNFIL among potential users (both individuals and providers), and there is no forum or systemic communication for RNFIL providers to improve quality (their practices).
- There is a risk of giving disincentives to potential RNFIL providers if the process for accreditation becomes burdensome. Complexity in accreditation procedures is also likely to raise costs. Therefore there could be budgetary considerations to be taken to balance the amount of public funding used to ensure quality against the amount of money used to expand the scope of the initiative.

### *Policy recommendations and policy options*

130. The issue of quality assurance is critical in building mutual trust and establishing value for the qualifications gained through RNFIL. To improve the quality of RNFIL systems, the review team recommends that the government set up a quality assurance and quality enhancement mechanism.

131. To this end, the government has options to:

- Set up a list of accredited providers as bona fide providers, and make this accessible in the public domain through appropriate channels.
- Boost market responsiveness and competition among providers accredited to provide RNFIL or applying for accreditation. Once the market evolves, competition among providers may improve quality. It may lessen the bureaucratic process of accreditation and inspection if quality is not solely dependent on the Quality Code.
- Launch an external evaluation of the implementation of the Quality Code and associated procedures in the mid-term. The objectives would be to examine if the Quality Code serves its purpose of being a useful methodology for RNFIL providers. Key questions may include: Has the Quality Code and its associated methodologies led to more transparency among users and intermediaries? Are the procedures for accreditation sufficiently efficient to avoid big delays in accreditation procedures and eventual hidden costs? What is happening in the market in terms of those institutions not accredited and the users of their services?
- Develop a quality peer-learning system with a set of indicators that RNFIL suppliers can use on a voluntary basis. Institutions can learn from each other by comparing practice. In this way, institutions with the highest performance scores could be used as a model for quality development across similar education sectors.

## 7. SUMMARY OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND OPTIONS

132. Today, the Dutch economy is a highly globalised and dynamic economy. The Netherlands, like other OECD countries, is faced with challenges of an aging workforce and short- and long-term demands for higher and different skills levels in the population, also concerning more generic skills. Durable responses have to be found both for economic reasons and social cohesive purposes in order to accommodate those at the fringe of the labour market, such as immigrants, older workers, women, and the unemployed, so the Dutch society can continue to prosper.

133. To cope with these challenges, the development of RNFIL processes and instruments has been strongly embedded in policy discourses on the ‘knowledge economy’ and ‘lifelong learning’. Since 2000, the objectives of the Lisbon Agenda have provided further momentum to national debates on lifelong learning, not least with regard to the recent development of the Quality Code, inspired by the EU initiatives in that direction.

134. Policy makers should address at least five major challenges:

1. How to develop effective RNFIL policies.
2. How to finance and develop sustainable RNFIL systems.
3. How to improve access.
4. How to ensure participation.
5. How to establish legitimacy by improving quality.

### *1. Developing effective RNFIL policies*

135. The Netherlands is facing a socio-economic challenge to increase the qualified labour force. To respond to the challenge, RNFIL has evolved with a strong political will from the top together with a numerous initiatives from the bottom with a strong sectoral leadership, which represents the Dutch policy-making culture. New reforms such as the development of the MBO competence-based qualification and the provision of shorter courses at HBOs provide good conditions for RNFIL to be embedded into the overall lifelong learning policy. It is time for government to take stock of existing initiatives and embed them into a overall RNFIL policy which is consistent with and complementary to national education reforms with a mid-term strategy.

136. The review team recommends that the government design a mid-term strategy to effectively embed RNFIL in the education and training system, with an interdisciplinary approach, striking a balance between bottom-up initiatives and a national approach.

137. To this end, the government has options to:

- Improve strategic planning to increase socio-economic policy impact. This may require inter-ministerial co-ordination. To this end, it will be important to extend the mandate of the Directorate for Learning and Working and the Knowledge Centre EVC with renewed missions.
- Stimulate the use of RNFIL in immigration policies, especially for high-skilled, to ensure their efficient integration in the labour market and the Dutch society at large.
- Plan a mid-term strategy to carefully set up a national qualification framework, respecting and building on the existing bottom-up practices in the country. In doing so, the government should embed the use of RNFIL into the framework in order to keep abreast of the European Qualification Framework.
- Support the further use of the MBO competence-based qualification framework as part of the RNFIL strategy. In addition, pilot creating competence-based HBO qualifications. This may facilitate adult learners to enter/re-enter MBOs and HBOs. The use of competence-based qualifications may help more adults return to education as by creating more efficient and flexible ways for them to enter/ re-enter education at a higher level, using RNFIL as a bridge.

## *2. Financing and developing sustainable RNFIL systems*

138. In the Netherlands, RNFIL is still at the early stage of development and more public funding is expected to support developing the RNFIL infrastructure and stimulating uptake. The country has invested a total of EUR 52 500 000 (0.0104% of GDP) in RNFIL in 2006, of which the government expenditure was EUR 35 000 000.

139. The Project Directorate for Working and Learning, established to advance inter-ministerial coordination on lifelong learning, plays a pivotal role in developing the RNFIL infrastructure, and numerous pilots have been undertaken with support from the Project Directorate. The Directorate was built on temporary funding with the original mandate terminating in 2007. The mandate was renewed by the new government based on some evidence of positive results. For instance, the Directorate's method of working, which more open to external partners, has been highly appreciated by main stakeholders such as local and regional authorities, educational institutions, enterprises, and employment services. Second, the Directorate's approach to inter-ministerial cooperation has proven to be successful. Third, as is the case in any policy implementation, the policy has to be seen with some expected impact time lag. And, therefore, the Directorate is expected to play a key role, with more time given, in stimulating regional cooperation and promoting adult learning. The new action plan will focus on: strengthening regional cooperation; targeting sectors with labour shortage (caring and technical industries); targeting working young people without lower-secondary education diplomas; making an education provision flexible by furthering RNFIL; and making the provision transparent.

140. The projects targeted for the unemployed have benefited heavily from the European Social Funds, but it is likely to diminish in the next programme period starting January 2008. The current financial situation for RNFIL puts pressure on the government to move from a publicly funded pilot culture to a stage where self-sustainable RNFIL models emerge.

141. To respond to the pressure, the review team recommends that the government 1) diversify the sources of financing and target beneficiaries and 2) monitor developments and ensure solid capacity-building.

1. To diversify the sources of financing and target beneficiaries, the government has options to:

- Highlight the use of RNFIL as an innovative means of developing and managing human resources for companies. The government should aim at situating RNFIL not only as a component of lifelong learning, but also as a potential means to spur productivity in companies. Subsequently this could increase private financing from companies.
- Stimulate the use of RNFIL in tertiary education institutions. The government should stimulate the RNFIL supply at HBOs and universities as a means to reach non-traditional learners. This will respond to the government's aim to produce highly-skilled workforce and will meet the needs of the aging society where working professionals are coming back to learn at tertiary education institutions, which is observed in some OECD countries. In this case, the government can stimulate funding arrangements to be covered by education institutions, employers, and individuals.
- Use targeted financing instruments complementary to the newly implemented tax relief scheme for individuals. Additional tax relief or funding for the targeted groups could spur demand among the priority groups. This could be done through pilots in particular sectors concerning employees at a particular qualification level or companies beyond a certain size or yearly turn-over. There are pros and cons to targeted financial measures. In the Dutch situation with a low RNFIL take-up among older workers, the unemployed, women and immigrants, supplementary well-targeted funding could be used for a certain period to ensure a better balance between supply and demand (See Participation).

2. To monitor developments and ensure solid capacity-building, the government has options to:

- Further the monitoring framework not only to compare the numeric targets and obtained results but also to collect data on user profiles (age, gender, nationality, and employment status) and outcomes (if the user has gained a qualification or has dropped out during the courses; if dropped out, why; etc.).
- Encourage policy research on financing models of RNFIL, cost-benefit models, and longitudinal research to examine benefits and outcomes of RNFIL for different categories of users.
- Provide seed-funding to stimulate RNFIL providers (such as MBOs, HBOs, universities, enterprises and employment agencies) for pilot projects, studies, and networks with clear description of purposes and expected outcomes. Set up a framework which includes the criteria of critical factors for a sustainable RNFIL model so that providers may proactively seek alternative funding sources before the funding ends.

### *3. Improving access*

142. Access points for RNFIL are heavily embedded in secondary education institutions. But the current government's target groups are adult working professionals or the unemployed who are outside formal education and do not have direct access to such institutions. In order to improve access, the government needs to make sure not only infrastructure exists at such education institutions but also there are intermediaries to bridge the link, such as employers, social partners, and regional authorities. Such intermediaries have played a pivotal role in improving access with a bottom-up approach in the Netherlands.

143. To respond to the challenge, the review team recommends that the government 1) stimulate RNFIL suppliers and 2) facilitate up-scaling of good systems and practices.

1. To stimulate RNFIL suppliers, the government has options to:
  - Take a coordinating role to ensure that potential RNFIL suppliers have sufficient knowledge about RNFIL funding arrangements.
  - Stimulate initiatives in the university sector to use RNFIL as part of admission policies and as a way to shorten the courses to give incentives to working professionals.
2. To facilitate up-scaling of good systems and practices, the government has options to:
  - Act as a knowledge broker among sectors or regions to avoid inefficient use of funding and duplication of efforts. Sector-led good practices can be transferred to other sectors, and region-based good systems may be shared among other regions.
  - Document successful sector models and regional good practice, and converge into a model where both a sector and a region are involved. This may help strengthen the official rationale of RNFIL by linking it to regional economic policies.

#### *4. Ensuring participation*

144. It is estimated that RNFIL participation is 20 000 to 30 000 yearly. The uptake of RNFIL among target beneficiaries is currently poor and there are many lessons to be drawn from the past years of experience. Reasons for low participation include lack of information about RNFIL in general and the benefits of RNFIL. The purposes for participation in RNFIL may vary among different target audiences. The government needs to stimulate not only supply but also demands among different target audiences and steer a good balance. The government has set numeric goals for the number of participants (50 000 per year in 2010) and for the success rate to complete a diploma (50% of the participants).

145. To reach the goals, the review team recommends the government 1) re-examine if outreach measures to reach prioritised target groups are effective and 2) link RNFIL to more personalised and flexible learning.

1. To re-examine if outreach measures to reach prioritised target groups are effective, the government has options to:
  - Among the several groups that the government currently targets or identified potential beneficiaries, prioritise a few groups and develop a consolidated action programme for them: *e.g.* low-skilled working adults, the unemployed, the highly-skilled, older workers (+50), immigrants, women, etc. The effective outreach strategies may vary from group to group.
  - Launch targeted information campaigns to stimulate demands among potential users by communicating actual benefits brought by participating in RNFIL. Choose an appropriate channels of communication: *e.g.* if the target users are low-skilled workers, short easy-to-understand mass media campaign will work, containing only basic information such as RNFIL costs, procedures, and expected outcomes. If the target group is the highly skilled, it is likely to be critical to advance the use of web-based information channels.

- Re-examine the current policy of ‘Work First’ and explore if the use of RNFIL can be integrated in the contractual conditions for the sub-contracted private reintegration service agencies to ensure outreach to the unemployed.
  - Link a RNFIL policy with career guidance and information policy, especially for the low-skilled, and mainstream these policies hand-in-hand.
2. To link RNFIL to more personalised and flexible learning, the government has options to:
- Providing pilot funding to RNFIL suppliers to develop individualised learning routes tailored for different groups such as the unemployed, the employed low-skilled, the highly-skilled, women, or the older workers (+50) who the government prioritises the most at the time.
  - Pilot e-learning and e-portfolio methods to stimulate the development of more flexible and more individualised RNFIL learning pathways targeted for highly-skilled working professionals.
  - Encourage HBO institutions to build credit-based qualification framework. This will allow translation of RNFIL into credits and, therefore, enable shortening the course. This will be a strong incentive for working adults as it will lessen the direct costs as well opportunity costs. As a result, this will create personalised learning pathways at HBOs.

#### *5. Establishing legitimacy by improving quality*

146. In the Netherlands, RNFIL has evolved with a numerous small-scale bottom-up initiatives. This has resulted in many different approaches to RNFIL, and this has impeded the perception of transparency and quality of RNFIL. In a recent response, a Quality Code has been developed with involvement of all key actors; yet there is concern about the further implementation process.

147. To improve the quality of RNFIL systems, the review team recommends that the government set up a quality assurance and quality enhancement mechanism.

148. To this end, the government has options to:

- Set up a list of accredited providers as bona fide providers, and make this accessible in the public domain through appropriate channels.
- Boost market responsiveness and competition among providers accredited to provide RNFIL or applying for accreditation. Once the market evolves, competition among providers may improve quality. It may lessen the bureaucratic process of accreditation and inspection if quality is not solely dependent on the Quality Code.
- Launch an external evaluation of the implementation of the Quality Code and associated procedures in the mid-term. The objectives would be to examine if the Quality Code serves its purpose of being a useful methodology for RNFIL providers. Key questions may include: Has the Quality Code and its associated methodologies led to more transparency among users and intermediaries? Are the procedures for accreditation sufficiently efficient to avoid big delays in accreditation procedures and eventual hidden costs? What is happening in the market in terms of those institutions not accredited and the users of their services?
- Develop a quality peer-learning system with a set of indicators that RNFIL suppliers can use on a voluntary basis. Institutions can learn from each other by comparing practice. In this way, institutions with the highest performance scores could be used as a model for quality development across similar education sector.

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**ANNEX 1: OECD REVIEW TEAM**

Ms. Hanne Shapiro, Centre Manager, Danish Technological Institute, Centre for Policy and Business Analysis.

Ms. Margarida Abecasis, Deputy Director, Department of Education and Scholarships, Gulbenkian Foundation.

Ms. Miho Taguma, Policy Analyst, Education and Training Policy Division, Directorate for Education, OECD

**ANNEX 2: NATIONAL COORDINATORS AND AUTHORS OF THE COUNTRY  
BACKGROUND REPORT**

***National Steering Committee***

Ms. Judith Meulenburg (Director, Project Directorate Learning and Working)

Mr. Toon Janssen (Project Directorate Learning and Working)

Ms. Lian Bastiaansen (Project Directorate Learning and Working)

Ms. B. Spit (Director, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Director Education)

Mr. Dick Hagoort (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, Director Labour Market)

***Background Report***

Mr. Kees Hagens (Rijnland Advies)

Ms. Hilde Kraaijvanger (Rijnland Advies)

Mr. Ton van den Hout (Rijnland Advies)

### **ANNEX 3: PROGRAMME OF THE VISIT**

#### **OECD country visit 26 - 30 March 2007**

##### **Monday 26 March**

Location: The Hague, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, Anna van Hannoverstraat

“Starting the visit, introduction”

The purpose of today is to answer the first questions of the OECD delegates about the country background report and to look ahead at the country visit.

13.30 Introduction

13.40 Headlines of the Country Background Report

14.00 Questions and answers

15.00 Looking ahead at the country visit

16.00 End

With:

- OECD
- Project Directorate Learning and Working (Lian Bastiaansen)
- Rijnland Advies (Kees Hagens, Hilde Kraaijvanger, Ton van den Hout)

##### **Tuesday 27 March**

9.30 - 12.00 (followed by lunch)

Location: Restaurant De Gouden Leeuw, Rijksweg 91, Laag Keppel.

“The Knowledge Centre EVC”

The Knowledge Centre EVC plays a crucial role in spreading knowledge about EVC and helping organisations to develop and implement EVC. It is also active in stimulating the quality of EVC and creating a national platform for discussing EVC and improving the quality of EVC.

9.30 Introduction

9.45 Presentation by the Knowledgecentre EVC.

- Short history of EVC in the Netherlands.
- Roles of relevant organisations.
- The role of the Knowledge Centre EVC.
- Views of the Knowledge Centre EVC on relevant developments.

11.00 Presentation by the Knowledge Centre EVC concerning the Quality Code EVC (goals, contents, partners). With:

- Knowledge Centre EVC (Erik Kaemingk)
- OECD
- Project Directorate Learning and Working (Lian Bastiaansen)
- Rijnland Advies (Kees Hagens, Hilde Kraaijvanger)

### **Tuesday 27 March**

Location: Bakker Wiltink, Plakhorstweg 2, Doetinchem.

“EVC in the food industry”

This afternoon we will examine the implementation of EVC as a tool for Human Resources Management, in the industrial sector. In the Netherlands, EVC is widespread and its use as an instrument in Human Resources Management is quite advanced in the food industry. A number of large enterprises in the food industry are implementing EVC. This afternoon we visit the factory of Bakker Wiltink. Bakker Wiltink produces bakery products. This enterprise has a lot of experience with developing and implementing EVC. Also, EVC is deeply integrated in the Human Resources policy of the company. Also several other major producers in the food sector will be present, to explain the use of EVC in their enterprises.

13.15 Arrival

13.30 Introduction

13.40 Recognition in the food industry (overview), Presentation by SOL/Aequor

14.00 Recognition in an individual enterprise (goals, development, implementation). Presentation by Henk Wiltink of Bakker Wiltink.

14.30 Two groups:

*Group 1:* individual workers in this enterprise, who have taken part in EVC (what were the benefits for the individual participants and assessors).

Participants: Groenhorstcollege, individual employees of Bakkerij Wiltink, Henk Wiltink

*Group 2:* Recognition as an element of human resource management; “Recognition of non-formal and informal learning is more effective than following courses”. Exchanging thoughts with representatives of enterprises in the food industry who have experience with EVC.

Participants: SOL, Coca Cola, Heineken, Project Directorate Learning and Working, Aequor

15.30 Reports of the group sessions. Discussion: important success factors and challenges.

16.00 End

With:

- Bakkerij Wiltink (Henk Wiltink)
- Bakkerij Wiltink (Jan Wicherink)
- Individual employees of Bakkerij Wiltink
- OECD
- Project Directorate Learning and Working (Lian Bastiaansen)
- SOL, an organisation that organises projects in the area of schooling in developing competences of workers and employers in the food industry. (Liesbeth Rutjes)
- Aequor, the knowledge centre for vocational training and labour market for the green sectors. Aequor sets the exam standards for vocational training, at the level of senior secondary vocational education for the green sectors. Also makes and executes EVC procedures (Ton Verhaeg)
- AOC Groenhorst College, the school that developed and carried out the EVC procedure, and external assessor (Frans Pelgröm)
- Coca Cola (Frank van Loon)
- Heineken (Robert van den Bogaard)
- Rijnland Advies (Kees Hagens, Hilde Kraaijvanger)

### **Wednesday 28 March**

10.00 - 12.30 (followed by lunch)

Location: Fundeon, Ceintuurbaan 2, 3847 LG Harderwijk, vergaderzaal ‘Harderwijk’ in het Confertentiecentrum

“Working meeting with national stakeholders in the field of education”

This morning, the OECD delegates meet the most important national stakeholders in EVC, in the academic field. Main issues will be: “how is EVC linked to occupational standards”, “EVC in senior secondary vocational education (MBO)” and “EVC in higher education (HBO and WO)”.

To give OECD the opportunity to gather the information, the programme is split up in two groups.

09.45 Arrival

10.00 Introduction

10.15 Two groups:

Group 1. Senior secondary vocational education, chair: Kees Hagens, Rijnland Advies

- How is EVC linked to occupational standards, presentation by Colo.
- Relevant issues.
- Quality of assessments and assessors.
- Financing EVC; finance is in many cases linked to finance of regular education. Could EVC be financed independently from regular education?
- “Over qualified” workers. During an EVC procedure, sometimes the participant turns out to be more qualified, than the exam terms of the corresponding diploma require. Should EVC compare existing competences to professional competence profiles, instead of to end terms/qualification profiles?

Participants: Colo, Kc EVC, MBO-raad, AOC-raad, PAEPON, KCE, Project Directorate Learning and Working, Rijnland Advies

Group 2. Higher Education, Chair: Ruud Duvekot, Hogeschool van Amsterdam

- How is EVC implemented at the level of higher education? What challenges must be met?
- Exchanging information with individual students in higher education who benefited from EVC.

Participants: HBO-raad, NVAO, Hogeschool van Amsterdam, Open Universiteit.

11.30 Plenary discussion: Views on challenges and factors for success.

12.30 End

With:

- Knowledge Centre EVC (Esther Murre)
- Project Directorate Learning and Working (Lian Bastiaansen)
- Colo, the national council of Knowledge centres for education and labour market. Each economic sector has it's own knowledge centre. A knowledge centre sets the exam standards for vocational training at the level of senior secondary vocational education. Knowledge centres make sure, that the exam standards meet the needs on the work floor. Most knowledge centres are involved in developing and providing EVC. (Janneke Voltman)

- HBO-raad, a council of institutions for higher education (Ad van Bommel)
- MBO-raad, a council of institutions (schools) for senior secondary vocational education (Pia Devenijns)
- AOC-raad, a council of institutions (schools) for senior secondary vocational education for branches in the sectors of agriculture and “green” sectors (Bram Loog)
- PAEPON, a council of commercial education institutions. A number of these institutions also provide EVC (mevr. E.M. Kleijberg)
- KCE, the national organisation for auditing the quality of exams in senior secondary vocational education (MBO). KCE is also the National organisation for auditing the quality of development and implementation of EVC on the MBO-level (Henk van Leeuwen)
- NVAO, this organisation has the same role as KCE, but for the Higher Education level (Henri Ponds)
- Hogeschool van Amsterdam, a school for higher education, which is actively developing EVC for Higher Education (Ruud Duvekot)
- Students in higher education, who have taken part in EVC (Gerrit van Tolij)
- Open Universiteit, an institution that offers distance learning at university-level. Also offers EVC (Desirée Joosten)
- Rijnland Advies (Hilde Kraaijvanger, Kees Hagens)

**Wednesday 28 March 13.30 - 16.00**

Location: Fundeon, Ceintuurbaan 2, 3847 LG Harderwijk, vergaderzaal ‘Harderwijk’ in het Conferentiecentrum

“Recognition in the construction sector”

The construction sector is a large sector, which has started development and implementation of EVC on a large scale.

13.15 Arrival

13.30 Meeting participants and assessors

- Talking to an individual participant (Ronald van Roekel).
- Talking to individual assessors (Cor Kuijpers, Henk van Hooff).
- Participants: Projectdirectorate Learning and Working, Fundeon, Rijnland Advies, individual participants, assessor.

14.30 EVC in the construction sector in the Netherlands

- Goals, plans, activities, presentation by Fundeon.
- First results, problems, solutions, presentation by Fundeon, with contributions of education institutions, the employers organisation and the labour unions.
- Discussion “Under which conditions can recognition be effective for all parties involved”, Chair: Rijnland Advies
- Participants: all (see below)

16.00 End

With:

- OECD
- Project Directorate Learning and Working (Lian Bastiaansen)
- Knowledge Centre EVC (Esther Murre)
- Fundeon, the knowledge centre for vocational training and labour market for the Construction sector. Fundeon sets the exam standards for vocational training at the level of senior secondary vocational education for the Construction sector. Fundeon is also involved in developing EVC methods and implementing EVC (Wouter Turpijn, Marian Lenshoek, Esther Hendriks, Timo Jansen, Paul Frankenhuizen)
- Bouwend Nederland, an employer’s organisation for the construction sector (Moniek Bom).
- Hout- en Bouwbond CNV, a labour union for the construction sector (Gijs Lokhorst)
- Assessors (Cor Kuijpers, Henk van Hooff)
- Individual participant (Ronald van Roekel)
- Rijnland Advies (Kees Hagens, Hilde Kraaijvanger)

#### **Thursday 29 March**

10.00 - 12.30 (followed by lunch)

Location: Leerwerkloket Werkgevers Adviespunt Rivierenland, Nieuwe Tielseweg 112a, 4001 JZ Tiel.

“The learning and working desk: EVC for the unemployed”

This morning, we look at EVC in the context of labour market integration of unemployed people. This kind of EVC is generally paid for by regional or local government. The target groups are unemployed persons, people with some distance to the labour market. This kind of EVC is important to examine during the working visit, because it differs in many ways from “sectorally initiated EVC”. Target groups, contents, purposes and challenges are different. Different, but not less important.

09.45 Arrival

10.00 Introduction

10.10 Recognition in the context of re-integrating unemployed persons into society/the labour market: the case of the region Rivierenland

- background, goals, financing, setup, presentation by Werkgeversadviespunt Rivierenland (Paul Bulterman)
- implementing EVC in the region Rivierenland, challenges and solutions. Presentation by Region Rivierenland and Werkgeversadviespunt Rivierenland (Peter Salet and Henk Peperkamp)

11.00 Talking to individual participants in EVC (what were the benefits for them?)

11.30 EVC for the unemployed: the general picture, presentation by the Empowerment Centre EVC (Rigo van Raaij)

- general state of affairs
- methods
- successes and failures

Questions, exchanging ideas by all organisations present.

12.30 End

With

- OECD
- Project Directorate Learning and Working (Lian Bastiaansen)
- Knowledge Centre EVC (Stieneke Boerma)
- Individual participants
- stg. Empowerment Centre EVC, an organisation that stimulates EVC in the working sphere of labour market integration (Rigo van Raai and Jana Eggert)
- Werkgeversadviespunt Rivierenland, a regional collaboration between CWI, municipalities (local government) and organisations for labour market integration in the region of Tiel (Paul Bulterman and Henk Peperkamp)
- Regio Rivierenland, a regional collaboration between municipalities (local governments) of a number of cities and towns in the region of Tiel (Peter Salet)
- ROC Rivor, a school for senior secondary vocational education (MBO) in the region of Tiel (Els Brendel)

- VNO/NCW Midden, a regional employers organisation for large businesses (Karin van Helden)
- MKB Oost NL, a regional employers organisation for small businesses (mevr. Groenendaal)
- Boaborea, an association of organisations for labour market integration of unemployed people (Ton de Kok)
- Rijnland Advies (Kees Hagens, Hilde Kraaijvanger)

**Thursday 29 March, 13.30 - 16.00**

Location: Leerwerkloket Werkgevers Adviespunt Rivierenland, Nieuwe Tielseweg 112a, 4001 JZ Tiel.

“Working meeting with national stakeholders in the economic and social field”

This afternoon, the OESO delegates meet the most important national stakeholders in EVC, in the field of economy and social policies. The main subjects are: the role of EVC in national and regional socio-economic policy.

13.15 Arrival

13.30 National social and economic policies

- Why was the Project Directorate Learning and Working created? Presentation by the Project Directorate Learning and Working (Lian Bastiaansen). Questions and discussion.
- National social and economic policies, target groups. Presentation by the Project Directorate Learning and Working (Lian Bastiaansen). Questions and discussion.

14.45 Implementing EVC in national socio-economic policies. Presentation by CWI (Tonnis van Ham). Questions and discussion.

15.15 Discussion: views of the stakeholders on the (possible) role of EVC in national and regional social and economic policy.

16.00 End.

With:

- Project Directorate learning and working (Lian Bastiaansen)
- Stichting van de Arbeid, a national council, in which employers organisations, labour unions and national government discuss issues regarding the labour market, education and economy (Paul van Kruining, Vakcentrale MHP)
- CWI, unemployed people must register at the CWI. CWI provides them with job vacancies, and can lead them to additional training, directed at finding work. CWI is involved in finding candidates for EVC-routes for unemployed people, aiming at re-integration in the labour process (helping unemployed people get a job) (Tonnis van Ham)

- UWV, the national organisation for administering employee insurances. When an employee loses his job, UWV pays this employee an allowance (Frans Roelofs)
- RWI, Counsel for Work and Income, a platform for deliberation between employers organisations, labour unions and municipalities, concerning labour market issues. RWI sees to harmonisation of actions at the national and regional level (Annemiek Woortman)
- FME CWM, the employers organisation for the technological-industrial sector (Willie Berentsen)
- Uneto-VNI, the employers organisation for civil and electrical engineering (Frank Bok)
- Bedrijvenbond, a labour union (Ineke van Oostveen-Roepers)
- Knowledge Centre EVC (Erik Kaemingk)
- Rijnland Advies (Kees Hagens, Hilde Kraaijvanger)

**Friday 30 March**

10.00 - 12.00

Location: the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, Anna van Hannoverstraat 4 2595 BJ Den Haag, room 1.02.

“Session for the OECD delegates”

Internal discussion by the OECD delegates, preparing the conclusions.

**Friday 30 March 13.30 - 16.00**

“OECD Conclusions”

The OECD delegates put forward their first conclusions on recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the Netherlands.

13.15 Arrival

13.30 Introduction

13.40 Conclusions. Presentation by the OECD delegates

16.00 End

With:

- OECD
- Project Directorate Learning and Working (Lian Bastiaansen, Toon Janssen, Judith Meulenburg - Director)
- Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, director Education (mw. B. Spit)

- Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, Director Labour Market (Dick Hagoort)
- Stichting van de Arbeid
- Knowledge Centre EVC (Erik Kaemingk)
- Rijnland Advies (Kees Hagens, Hilde Kraaijvanger)