



**Case Study**  
**VNFL-IFL in The Netherlands**  
**A case study from the FIRE DEPARTMENT (2010)**

**The case study, the story**

**VPL at the Fire Department, The Netherlands**

Due to a **legal necessity** since a change in the national law in 2006, fire-fighters in the Netherlands have to leave work after 20 years of active service in fire fighting and risk management. For effectively helping the 2<sup>nd</sup> career of these fire fighters, the fire department developed and implemented an APL-experiment in order to be able to help the mobility of departing fire workers from work-to-work, into a new (office) position within or outside the fire department.

In the **1<sup>st</sup> pilot** in 2008-2009 in the region of *Zuid-Holland zuid* in the Netherlands the vision, commitment and instruments were developed and tested for starting up a competence-oriented pathway for career-development of fire fighters.

In the **2<sup>nd</sup> pilot** of 2009-2010 on a national level a group of 25 fire workers at workers level and at managers level implemented the tested instruments and procedure for the recognition of their prior learning and filling in new career-paths. In this way they got an effective view on their career-plans.

The evaluation of both pilots was positive. The next step now is to implement the developed process and procedure on national level.

The **background of the target group** is that, after their secondary general education they started working in the fire department and were in-company trained during their service years. Because of the obligation to move to other employment after 20 years of active service, in the fire-service, they need to make transparent their

	<p>acquired competences (their ‘fire-competences’) to the outside world in the sense of being able to link these competences to national qualifications, and on that basis also to link them to further career opportunities. The accreditation of prior learning literally means documenting, valuing and translating their personal competences and experiences to more transparent competence-standards of VET and Higher Education. In this way they can show more easily how their competences might be transferred to other working contexts.</p> <p>The <b>results of the national experiment</b> for the pilot group meant that they were guided towards a national vocational qualification on MBO-3* and MBO-4* levels. (the two highest levels of upper secondary vocational education). Also levels 5 (associate degree) and 6 (bachelor) in higher education are involved in the matchmaking-process of the competences of the fire fighters.</p> <p><b>Sustainability</b> of these results and the new personnel policy are first of all safeguarded by the Training fund of local communities and municipalities (A&amp;O Fonds Gemeenten). On top of the Training fund, the network of the NVBR (Dutch Union of Fire-department and Calamities; <i>Nederlandse Vereniging voor Brandweer en Rampenbestrijding</i>) is taking responsibility for the national implementation of the mission and the tested instruments for the sake of the career-development of departing firefighters.</p> <p>* “MBO-3 and MBO-4” are unofficially equivalent with EQF-levels 3 and 4.</p>
<p><b><u>The context</u></b></p> <p>In which sector is it taking place?  In which organisation is it taking place?  The background to the case study/ a  <i>landscape of the case study</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Web links to institution/ organisation website or</li> <li>- A brief institutional profile: a few lines of presentation or explanation of the organisation’s function &amp; purpose – number of staff etc...its involvement with RPNF-IFL</li> </ul> <p>The new personnel policy, focusing on the validation of the acquired competences of the firefighters, was initiated at the Fire Department of Dordrecht (Veiligheidsregio ZHZ) and was part of a 1<sup>st</sup> project aiming at the development of a Human Resource Strategy with Personal Development as a most important issue. After successful implementation in the Fire Department of Dordrecht, the A+O Fonds Gemeenten (= training fund for local communities and municipalities) provided the opportunity for a broader pilot in several Fire Departments in the Netherlands.</p> <p>The target-group of 25 fire fighters who were selected for the pilot came from several Fire Departments of Rotterdam, Utrecht, Woerden, Apeldoorn, Limburg Zuid and Dordrecht.</p> <p>The Fire department in the Netherlands is regionally organised in local brigades, either of professional fire fighters and their supporting offices (bigger cities) or of voluntary fire fighters. There are more than 400 brigades and more than 30.000 persons in the Netherlands. 30% of the personnel is</p>

	<p>professional; 70 % is voluntary.</p> <p>The new Law stimulated an innovative way of dealing pro-actively with the career planning of fire fighters. A 1<sup>st</sup> pilot was regionally activated (in the Fire Department of Dordrecht); the 2<sup>nd</sup> pilot was a national pilot. The aim was to establish a new personnel policy in which the Accreditation of the fire fighters Prior learning was the cornerstone.</p> <p><b>Weblinks:</b>  <b>The network of organisations in fire-fighting and calamities: <a href="http://www.nvbr.nl">www.nvbr.nl</a>:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- On the acreeer policy:  <a href="http://www.nvbr.nl/algemene_onderdelen/bovenbalk/zoeken/@8417/artikelen_tweede/">http://www.nvbr.nl/algemene_onderdelen/bovenbalk/zoeken/@8417/artikelen_tweede/</a></li> </ul> <p><b>The training find of the local communities and city councils: <a href="http://www.aeno.nl">www.aeno.nl</a>:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A movie of the people who were involved in teh career-planning pilots:  <a href="http://www.loopbaanladder.nl/index.php?id=68http://">http://www.loopbaanladder.nl/index.php?id=68http://</a></li> <li>- Information on the competence-based process: <a href="http://www.aeno.nl/brandweer/projecten/pilot-loopbaanassessment-portfolio-en-etc.html">http://www.aeno.nl/brandweer/projecten/pilot-loopbaanassessment-portfolio-en-etc.html</a></li> <li>- How to start up the personnel policy for your own brigade:  <a href="http://www.aeno.nl/fileadmin/Brandweer/Documenten/produkten_loopbaanbeleid.pdf">http://www.aeno.nl/fileadmin/Brandweer/Documenten/produkten_loopbaanbeleid.pdf</a></li> </ul> <p><b>The fire-department's academy (Brandweeracademie: <a href="http://www.nifv.nl">www.nifv.nl</a>.</b></p>
<p><u>People</u></p> <p><b>VNFL-IFL candidate (s):</b> who is s/he? His/her history (personal/ professional/ educational)? Aims and professional/ personal project? Why the VNFL-IFL?</p> <p><b>AND/OR</b></p> <p><b>VNFL-IFL advisers/ staff: tutors:</b> their experience, training, willingness, involvement, their place in the</p>	<p><b>1. Stakeholders involvement in the pilot:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The (financing) training fund <i>A+O Gemeenten</i> sees the positive effects of empowering in the Fire Departments as the Fire Workers take more responsibility and are actually taking steps towards a career outside the Fire Department. As for the VPL-procedures itself the training fund thinks the (short-time) costs are high but also sees the positive effects and the long-term profit.</li> <li>- The employers (fire department) see the project as value-for-money because of the high rate of success in guidance. The employers want to implement the approach sustainable.</li> <li>- The trade unions are ambiguous: they see the positive effects but have some trouble with the official policy of the government to prevent fire workers working longer than 20 years in this hard work. They would rather like to</li> </ul>

<p>organisation? How do they interact with the VNFL-IFL candidate (s)? With the evaluators/ assessors/jurys?</p> <p><b>AND/OR</b></p> <p><b>The assessors/ evaluators:</b> their experience in VNFL-IFL, willingness, role/ responsibilities in the organisation/ institution? Their relationship with the advisers?</p> <p><u>The relationships/ interactions</u></p> <p>What does the case study show about the interactions between all the actors? Any external actors showing up in the case study?</p> <p><u>To sum up: the process</u></p> <p>How, what, when, how often? What happens, who sets the scene, who does the talking, what writing takes place etc... What part (active, passive?) takes the candidate in the process?</p>	<p>present the policy as a choice to the fire workers themselves: staying in or out.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- External advisors, for developing the instruments: JE Consultancy.</li> </ul> <p><b>2. Costs and benefits:</b></p> <p>For each fire worker: 16 hours individual guidance (price per hour estimated 100 euro) and 1500-2000 euro for the APL-procedure.</p> <p>Benefits: value for money is possible in a sustainable process when the guidance is internal and the procedure is at normal rates (approx. 1250 euro).</p> <p><b>3. Quality assurance:</b></p> <p>The APL-procedure is carried out under the APL-quality-code in the Netherlands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The goal of APL is to define, evaluate and accredit individual competencies.</li> <li>- APL primarily answers to the need of the individual. Entitlements and arrangements are clearly defined and guaranteed.</li> <li>- Procedures and instruments are reliable and based on solid standards.</li> <li>- Assessors and supervisors are competent, impartial and independent.</li> <li>- The quality of the APL procedure is guaranteed and is being improved on an ongoing basis.</li> </ul> <p>See: <a href="http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/apl-english">http://www.kenniscentrumevc.nl/apl-english</a> .</p> <p><b>4. the procedure:</b></p> <p>The procedure consists of 3 steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. intake-assessment: testing the personal career so far: this is a diagnostic tool for self-assessment of the fire fighter. It shows the competences developed (formal, non-formal and informal) while working. It also gives an indication of the competence-level.</li> <li>2. portfolio-training: the next step is actively documenting the competences and filling in a personal portfolio incl. a personal development plan. The main focus of this training is to enable individuals to manage their own careers, articulate their own development needs and build up their own competencies. Education and vocational training should respond to this, becoming more flexible and demand-driven. Formal systems such as qualification structures and vocational education will then have less of a prescriptive function in terms of personal</li> </ol>
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<p><b>AND/OR</b></p>	<p>development, and serve more as a reference framework and repertoire within which there is individual choice. These formal systems retain a function as pegs for defining the direction and level of personal development and the relevant external communication with employers, mediators, referrers, schools, etc.</p>
<p><b><u>Tools</u></b></p> <p>What are they, what role do they have, who develop them? How are they used? How important are they?</p>	<p>3. the 3<sup>rd</sup> step is acquiring the ‘Ervaringscertificaat’, which is the formal advice on the value of the competences in someone’s portfolio measured against a qualification standard. This certificate has an official status in the Netherlands. This status is safeguarded by the APL-quality-code. With this certificate the fire fighter can get access to VET or Higher Education in a shortened programme or a dual programme (combining learning and working).</p> <p><b>5. Evidence of results:</b></p> <p>All fire workers in the national pilot are linked to a new job opportunity with a qualification in sight in different sectors: social work, metalektro, entrepreneurship, education sector/instructor, etc.</p> <p><b>5. The candidate’s stories</b></p> <p>All fire workers are linked to a new job opportunity with a qualification in sight in different sectors: education, social work, metalektro</p> <p>a. Opinions of the candidate’s:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Formal certificate on MBO-level gives more self esteem</li> <li>○ Useful because you don’t have to take lessons for things that you already know</li> <li>○ Making a portfolio for a certain study/level/occupation is a lot of work</li> <li>○ It is difficult to make a “cross-over” from the qualifications in one profession (as a Fire fighter) tot another profession (for example social work)</li> <li>○ There is still a lot to be learned, also at the schools and VPL-providers</li> </ul> <p>b. An overview of the results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The fire workers are empowered</li> <li>○ The fire workers know what they are worth in terms of formal education</li> <li>○ The fire fighters are more aware of their qualities and abilities</li> </ul>

	<p>c. A listing of created opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ New career-opportunities; a socially acceptable way of moving from work-to-work; demonstrating the fire-department as a ‘good’ employer; proving that APL helps for the mobility of people’s careers with the assistance of the education-sector.</li> </ul> <p><b>Tools and procedure:</b> As described above the tools that are developed, tested and implemented are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. intake and self-assessment (‘Loopbaantest’)</li> <li>2. portfolio training</li> <li>3. ‘experience-certificate (‘ervaringscertificaat’) giving access to qualification standards.</li> </ol>
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<p><b>SWOT of the case-study</b></p>	<p><b>Strengths:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Setting up the vision and the instruments in two subsequent pilot-projects.</li> <li>- Creating broad commitment and involving all stakeholders.</li> <li>- Realising transparent results in the pilots: individual stories, role models and showing the value of the organisation as a learning organisation.</li> <li>- Innovative character: real implementation of all the developed principles on the validation of prior learning</li> </ul> <p><b>Weaknesses:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reality that validation of prior learning is especially in the interest of the individual; this means that the education sector with its qualifications has to have an open mind concerning the acceptance of informal and non-formal acquired competences.</li> <li>- it takes a lot of investment (time and money) to build up the infrastructure for making effective use of people’s prior learning for empowerment, qualifications and employability.</li> </ul> <p><b>Opportunities:</b></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- linking validation to career-opportunities, sustainable employability, strategies for mobility (work-to-work)</li><li>- linking validation to innovation of the organisation (in this case the personnel policy of the fire-department) and its internal 'academy' and training programmes.</li></ul> <p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- quality-assurance: the APL quality-code brings extra bureaucracy into the process.</li><li>- Acceptance of non-formal and informal acquired competences in VET and higher education.</li></ul>
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