

**Good practice  
in validation of learning outcomes**

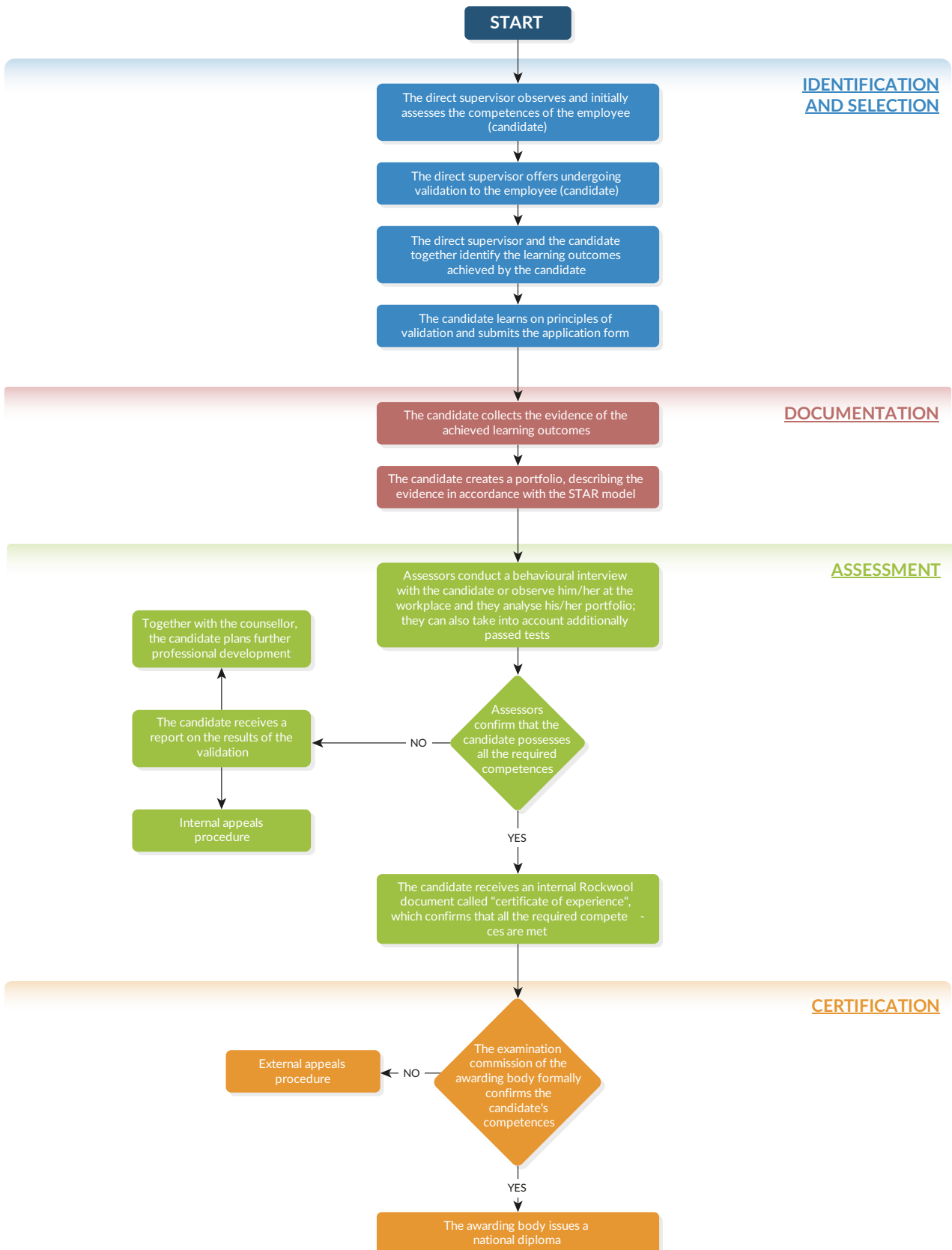
Netherlands

**Qualification "Process A operator"**



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## 1. Country, institution name

- Netherlands
- Rockwool

## 2. Institution website

<https://www.rockwool.nl>

## 3. Qualifications

Process a Operator

Level 2 of the Netherlands Qualifications Framework – NLQF

(in Dutch: Nederlands Kwalificatieraamwerk)

Level 2 of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

## 4. Short description of the validation process

Comment

This good practice describes the validation process conducted by Rockwool, an insulation manufacturer, in collaboration with awarding bodies, which for years have been the regional education centers of ROC Leeuwenborgh and ROC Arcus College, and which merged to become the Techniek College in Rotterdam.

This is an example of a situation where a private company, with an advanced policy of improving the competences and qualifications of its employees, decided to perform most of the validation process itself, working together with an awarding body where the candidate is able to receive a qualification that is honored outside of Rockwool.

In this case, the validation process includes the following steps:

- identification and selection,
- documentation,
- assessment,
- certification.

The first three stages are conducted by Rockwool. At the certification stage, the candidate presents an internal certificate issued by Rockwool to the awarding body to obtain an official document that is valid throughout the country (a diploma or part of a diploma, known as a certificate).

It should be noted that in the case of Rockwool, validation is understood in a broad sense. In addition to the validation leading to an official diploma, this concept also includes two less formal forms:

1. assessment of professional competences,
2. validation of transversal competences, addressed to young workers and workers with special needs (which involves a support programme for such persons, provided in cooperation with work centres and municipalities).

However, these two variations of validation only lead to the issuing of internal Rockwool certificates.

This good practice examines a validation process leading to an official diploma or certificate, which requires a very reliable qualification quality assurance process. It is worth mentioning, however, that this validation process is practically identical to the process of the internal assessment of professional competences.

The qualification “Process a Operator” was developed for employees who can perform (under supervision) tasks at different stages of the production process and therefore can operate different equipment. a person with this qualification can easily change jobs and assume new tasks within Rockwool depending on his/her

interests, abilities and experience. He/she is expected to be aware of the consequences of these activities, the risks involved, and to know the principles of occupational health and safety as well as environmental protection.

## 5. Detailed description of the validation process

### 5.1 Identification and selection

The identification of a candidate's competences is conducted as part of the annual employee evaluation, during which the direct superior discusses possible development paths with the employee. When the supervisor determines that a subordinate has acquired the appropriate learning outcomes, he/she is offered the opportunity to undergo validation.

This means that the supervisor, in identifying an employee's learning outcomes, also selects candidates for validation.

However, it should be added that informal identification of learning outcomes also takes place at Rockwool through discussions with colleagues who have already qualified as Process Operators.

A candidate who chooses to undergo the process is familiarised with the principles of validation and then completes an application form.

### 5.2 Documentation

The validation takes into account a variety of types of evidence of the competences that need to be collected and described before entering the assessment phase. The STAR model (situation, task, action, result) is the recommended method to be used by the candidates. By using this model, the candidate should present: 1) the professional situation facing the candidate; 2) the task that was to be performed; 3) the actions taken, and 4) the results of those actions.

The portfolio prepared by the candidate should be structured. In addition to evidence about possessed competences and descriptions of the tasks performed in accordance with the STAR model, the portfolio includes, among others, a justification for undergoing validation and a CV with a description of professional and educational goals. The preparation of the candidate's portfolio is supported by a counsellor. This can be a properly prepared superior or an HR department employee.

### 5.3 Assessment

The assessment is usually conducted by a committee consisting of two Rockwool assessors.

To assess the learning outcomes, the assessors use a STAR-based behavioural interview or workplace observation and analyse the candidate's portfolio. They may also have the candidate take a theoretical test with a reading speed test.

After the assessment, the assessors prepare a detailed analysis of the candidate's performance against the average performance of other employees – using the online tool “360 degree spotlight” (a type of the 360 degree feedback), as well as a full assessment of the employee's competences, which is called the “certificate of experience”, showing the achieved competences in relation to the applicable qualification standards.

### 5.4 Certification

As a result of the assessment, the candidate receives a detailed report on the validation. This report is the aforementioned internal document – the certificate of experience.

The candidate then can submit this certificate to a chosen vocational school. An examination commission appointed by the school then formally confirms the candidate's competences in the form of a national

diploma or certificate (i.e. a partial diploma).

National diplomas and certificates for the “Process a Operator” are issued by the Techniek College in Rotterdam.

### **Appeals and further pathways**

It is possible to appeal the decision of the assessors as well as the decision of the institution issuing the diploma or certificate. The appeals procedure is described in the section on quality assurance.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that after validation, the employee can – either alone or with the help of a counsellor – plan further professional development, choose a career model (horizontal, vertical or outside the company) and, as a result, continue learning.

## **6. Validation methods**

The following methods are used for validation by Rockwool:

- behavioural interview (based on the STAR model),
- analysis of evidence and statements (portfolio),
- observation in real-life conditions,
- theoretical test.

### **Behavioural interview (based on STAR)**

This method is used first at the identification stage. However, it is also the basic method used for assessment.

### **Analysis of evidence and statements (portfolio)**

This method is initially used as early as in the identification stage, when the employee and his/her supervisor jointly summarise the results of the professional profiling activities in the STAR model.

However, the method is used primarily in the assessment stage, where it has a supplementary character. The evidence gathered at the documentation stage includes: photographs, video recordings, documents, supervisor's assessments, reports from meetings attended by the candidate, test results, reports on performed work, etc.

### **Observation in real-life conditions**

This method is used in the assessment stage as an additional one and may replace the behavioural interview. It includes observations of typical, regularly performed employee activities. As part of the observation, commission members may ask the candidate questions.

### **Theoretical test**

Additionally, the employee undergoes a theoretical test combined with a reading speed test. This is used, among others, to determine the candidate's general level of knowledge. The result of the test is not a required element for the commission to make an assessment, but is supplementary.

## **7. Validation results**

As a result of the validation, the candidate can attain:

- the entire qualification,
- part of the qualification – this is the basis for further development; in order to attain the entire qualification, the candidate must take on further learning.

As already mentioned, the assessment results in the receipt of an internal certificate of experience (which is a detailed validation report) from Rockwool, which is the basis for receiving a national diploma or part of a diploma (i.e. a certificate) issued by the Techniek College of Rotterdam.

Importantly, in all cases, employees are encouraged to continue their development, including participation in educational and training courses, to acquire additional competences needed for successive qualifications.

In addition, in the case of the validation of transversal competences (intended for young workers and those with special needs), validation may also result in the confirmation of a set of learning outcomes, however, it is only relevant internally to acquire future Rockwool certificates.

## 8. Human resources

Each person involved in the validation process at Rockwool must:

- have a diploma at level 5 of the European Qualifications Framework or demonstrate achievement and competence at this level,
- have professional experience in the company (preferably at least 5 years),
- be professionally active in production processes.

Additionally, **advisors who are direct superiors** are periodically trained in the field of human resources management.

**Counsellors supporting candidates in the validation process** are also qualified employees of the HR department.

**Assessors**, on the other hand, must meet two additional conditions:

- completion of training in candidate assessment procedures and assessment tools,
- periodically repeat training to update competences in candidate assessment.

## 9. Organizational and material conditions

Validation takes place at the workplace, so the equipment and tools of the assessed candidate are available on site. However, for the purposes of performing the validation, also needed are:

- a computer,
- meeting room,
- the Hucama 360 degree online feedback tool,
- Internet access.

## 10. Quality assurance

One important aspect of Rockwool's quality assurance of validation is compliance with the principles set forth in the Dutch **quality code for validation** – a covenant introduced the code, adopted jointly by the government (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science), employers, trade unions and educational institutions. The most important principles state:

- Validation is a process that is as individualised as possible, focused on the purpose and usefulness of validation;
- Validation is a process independent of training;
- Each validation process ends with a validation report that confirms the competences of the candidate;
- Counsellors and assessors can only be persons with the specific competences needed to perform these tasks;

- The quality of validation is continuously improved, both at the level of validation institutions and the principles themselves.

The principle of the independence of validation from training was particularly emphasised. Within the framework of accreditation, validation institutions must, among other things, sign a statement (in the form of a checklist) that validation is a process independent of the other services provided by these institutions, such as education, training, career guidance, etc.

The second important aspect is the provision of the **appeals process**. The possibility of filing an appeal is available for both the validation phase within Rockwool as well as the certification process within the external institution.

The aforementioned quality code of validation as well as the statements are instruments for the quality control of validation at the central administration level.

In the case of an internal appeals procedure (i.e. of a decision of the Rockwool assessors), the candidate presents the matter to his/her immediate supervisor to work out a mutually agreed solution. If this fails, the employee refers the matter to the HR Director, who is also responsible for validation issues. The director discusses the matter with all persons concerned and on this basis, makes a decision on behalf of Rockwool.

In the case of an external appeals procedure (i.e. at the institution issuing certificates and diplomas), the general procedures adopted by these types of institutions apply. Usually, appeals in such institutions are decided by appeals or examination boards, which review all the material relating to the case and, if necessary, invite both parties to an interview in order to arrive at a binding decision.

## 11. Financing

In accordance with Rockwool's premises, employee training and validation processes are a profitable investment. These activities are therefore largely financed by the employer. An employee with a minimum of 3 years of experience can spend 75% of his working time on validation.

In 2004 and 2012, the average number of hours allocated per employee to validation were added in order to calculate the costs of validation, as were the costs of courses and training.

In 2004, the result for validation was 112 hours, which cost the employer about 6800 euros, and in 2012, it was 62 hours, valued at 1350 euros and 450 euros of tax. In the case of the validation of transversal competences (intended for young workers and those with special needs), the result was 80 hours, which cost 3200 euros. In comparison, an average of 950 hours were allocated per employee for courses and employee training, valued at 55000 euros.

For many years the Dutch government subsidised vocational training and validation in private institutions. Today, it focusses only on the quality control of validation, with its development stimulated by tax relief relating to the costs of validation incurred by the companies providing it.

## 12. Context of good practice

Rockwool's validation activities take place within the framework of the national system of the validation of learning outcomes acquired in non-formal education and informal learning. This system began operating in 1998, and over time has developed a three-stage approach to validation:

1. the recognition of prior learning – a formal procedure leading to the recognition of learning outcomes based on a portfolio,
2. the confirmation of prior learning – a formal procedure confirming the possession of learning outcomes based on qualifications standards,



3. the validation of prior learning – in addition to the two forms mentioned above, any validation of an informal nature that links learning outcomes to an individual's professional development, professional mobility, etc.

The formal basis for validation is the above mentioned covenant including the quality code for validation and the 8-level Dutch Qualifications Framework, which allows each qualification to be assigned to an appropriate level. The body responsible for developing and implementing the framework is the National Coordination Point.

An important context for Rockwool's validation is its firm basis in a network of cooperation among employees, managers, human resources departments, persons working in production, vocational education and training institutions, the local city council and labour offices. Moreover, Rockwool continuously adapts the validation of learning outcomes to the standards set by external awarding bodies.

It is worth adding that Rockwool has received two awards in recent years for its validation initiatives: the European Validation Prize (2013) and the Global VPL Prize (2014).

## Comments

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### The validation process

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#### **the validation process**

Rockwool experts use the term “validation of prior learning” (VPL), which refers to non-formal and informal learning. It is often found in sources describing the Dutch solutions in English. In Poland, we refer to the validation process as “validation of learning outcomes”, as it may encompass all knowledge, skills and social competences (including those attained in formal education).