

Keeping you informed about European Credit system for Vocational Education & Training

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Editorial

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European tools and principles need to be implemented in an integrated process

Over the last decade, Europe has started several initiatives to create a common European area for vocational education and training (VET). The context, especially following the current economic crisis, has been particularly challenging: an ageing population, increasing need for a well-qualified and properly skilled workforce, high unemployment rates, both for young people and seniors, fast technological change and a trend towards green skills.

Enhancing individuals' ability to learn, adapt and benefit from changing environments throughout life is crucial for innovation, increasing productivity, and individual development. This requires, among others, more flexible and indi-

vidualised learning paths, transparency and mutual trust to ease mobility, and the possibility to transfer and accumulate learning between different institutions and countries. European co-operation and national reforms are supportive of these objectives, whereas the common European tools and principles are at their core.

The European Credit system for VET (ECVET) together with EQF/NQF, EQAVET, ESCO, and the learning outcome orientation are parts of an integrated framework that promotes transparency and mutual trust between and within national education and training systems. Europass and validation of non-formal and informal learning provide a systematic

way to document and make individuals' knowledge, skills and competence visible; lifelong guidance plays a key role in helping people make well-informed learning and careers choices.

The European tools and principles have already lowered the barriers to citizens' mobility. Now as they are moving from conceptual development and a phase of early implementation to full application, their impact needs to be safeguarded and maximised. It is therefore necessary to ensure their consistency and ease interaction to reap the benefits of synergies at national and European levels.

Synergy is partly facilitated by systematic application of the principle of learning outcomes which underpins the tools. The learning outcomes approach is the basis on which a shared language between education, training and the labour market can be built. It also helps to create communication channels between different segments of the education and training systems. It helps people to have their learning validated and recognised, irrespective of the learning environment (formal, non-formal, informal).

ECVET requires that qualifications are described in terms of learning outcomes that will be then defined as units that might translate into credits of individuals. Learning outcomes recognised in form of 'credits' may be transferred and accumulated towards achieving a qualification. The description of qualifications in terms of learning outcomes is driven by the development of NQFs and their link to the EQF, as Cedefop's latest ECVET monitoring report (2012) shows.

In general, developments of NQFs tend to include discussions on aspects related to ECVET, such as the possibility to transfer learning outcomes and using units of learning outcomes to make this easier. Thus, the two processes (ECVET and NQF) are interlinked; but, unsurprisingly, most countries have given priority to establishing NQFs in recent years and only few have decided to link explicitly NQFs and credit systems. Some countries even underline that for the time being there is no plan to link NQFs and credit systems.

ECVET, like credit systems more generally, has also a role to play in promoting and supporting validation processes.

Both directly help citizens build their learning pathways and reflect changes and/or upgrades of their vocational profiles and qualifications (irrespective of where and how learning took place). Once validated, learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning should be recognised in form of 'credits' towards a full qualification. Most of the countries are either discussing how to better connect ECVET with the existing validation processes or consider that their validation system is related to ECVET.

For validation and ECVET to become a reality for Europe's citizens, they should be promoted and accompanied by guidance and counselling. Yet, no visible relationship exists between ECVET and guidance in most European countries. This is one of the challenges to be addressed in the process of ECVET implementation.

With over 20 million CVs created on-line and its portfolio of documents that help present and record learning outcomes, Europass should also allow the documentation of credits. The different documents provide an opportunity to reflect NQF and EQF qualification levels and/or credits in terms of national credit systems, ECVET and ECTS or (other) validated learning outcomes.

As ECTS – the European credit system for higher education – will define credits increasingly in terms of learning outcomes instead of inputs, interaction between ECTS and ECVET may be facilitated, and allow for greater permeability. The latest ECTS guide is focused on providing credits associated with learning outcomes. This might open up a door for the development of synergies between the two credit systems.

While, so far, the development of the European tools and principles has been a success in many ways, there is still a long way to go. To increase synergy and stronger convergence between the EU tools and principles for transparency and recognition, the European Commission is calling for a 'European area of skills and qualifications'. This new initiative (launched within *Rethinking education*) will provide an opportunity to better co-ordinate the tools. This will help citizens to better recognise their added value, simplify navigating into and through education and training systems, and increase their impact.



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ECVET in the context of lifelong learning:

Examples from the pilot projects

Introduction

In early 2012, the ECVET Users' group approved and published a document called *Using ECVET to support Lifelong learning*¹. This document presents several situations in which ECVET can be a useful tool to support the development, requalification or transitions of learners. These situations include:

1. Progressive accumulation of learning: The learner is accumulating credit progressively over time with possible disruptions in the learning path, but preparing for a single qualification. S/he experiences no change of pathway;

2. Changing the pathway and qualification within the same qualification system: The learner transfers and accumulates credit within the same qualification system and at the same level, from one qualification and pathway to another. This can be for example, from a qualification in one economic sector to a qualification in a related economic sector;

3. Changing the pathway and qualification from one system to another: The learner transfers and accumulates credit at the same level from one education or qualification sector to another. S/he can for example transfer a more narrow continuing VET qualification achieved through a public employment training programme towards a broader initial VET qualification that gives the person more opportunities;

4. Formalising achieved learning outcomes: The learner undergoes validation and recognition of learning outcomes achieved in non-formal or informal learning and the credit for these units is accumulated towards a qualification in a formal qualifications system together with formal learning;

5. Progressing or upgrading a qualification: The learner transfers and accumulates credit from a qualification at one level towards a qualification at another level. For example, s/he transfers from a post-secondary VET qualification towards a qualification in the same field in higher education.

These five situations were used as basis for the common work of the ECVET pilot projects in October 2012. The situations were used by the participants to explain what situations their projects address. The results of this exercise are presented below.

Note: the work of the project MENECEVET is not captured below as the project is mainly working on transnational mobility of students in initial VET.

Using ECVET for progressive accumulation of learning

This situation is present in the vision for ECVET implementation in the French speaking Community of Belgium, supported by the project **CPU-Europe**.

The CPU reform aims to enable young people to progressively accumulate units of learning outcomes. If a person drops out of an education pathway and wishes to return to it later, or if s/he moves to another region and changes



¹ Using ECVET to Support Lifelong Learning: Annotated examples of how ECVET can be used to support Lifelong Learning http://www.ecvet-projects.eu/Documents/ECVET_Lifelong_Learning_LLL_Final_Web_ISBN.pdf



The pilot projects met regularly for joint workshops

training institution, s/he can get recognition of his/her credited units. This is possible thanks to the fact that the units of learning outcomes are the same across the qualifications system.

The main rationale for using units in this context, as expressed in the CPU reform (see article in this issue of the ECVET magazine, is learners' motivation. The progressive achievement of units gives them information on where they are regarding their development and pathway and gives them short-term and mid-term objectives which are more concrete and hence more realistic than a final examination that takes place several years after a programme has been implemented.

Using ECVET to change pathway and qualification within the same system

The Maltese project (**VET-CCS**) develops a method to convert existing training programmes into unit-based qualifications that comply with the requirements of the Malta Qualifications Framework. The project analyses a sample of existing programmes/qualifications into unit-based qualifications where credit can be accumulated and transferred. Based on analysis of the status quo situation, it develops guidance for VET providers on how to design qualifications that are in line with ECVET specifications and with the requirements of the qualifications framework. It is important to note that in Malta VET providers have the competence to develop qualifications.

The final objective is to support the transfer of credit across qualifications in the Malta Qualifications Framework. This is expected to be supported by the use of common principles for the design and description of qualifications bringing transparency into qualification content.

Ultimately a person with a unit from one VET provider leading to qualification A for example should be able to receive recognition for a comparable unit of another provider, leading to a different qualification (B).

This situation is also present in the work of the project **ESy-CQ** (Germany, IT sector). Some of the IT qualifications on which this project is working have common units though they concern different professions. The project tools should help the transfer of these common units if a person wishes to change profession and re-qualify.

Using ECVET to changing the pathway and qualification from one system to another

The project **EASY Metal** (Germany) develops an approach to support transitions from pre-vocational training in Germany to the dual system (apprenticeship). Dual training constitutes the main VET system in Germany. It is based on nationally defined qualification requirements with strong competence of Chambers regarding the quality assurance, assessment and qualification award in this system. The firms hosting apprentices decide on important elements of learners training pathways, including the possibility to shorten the duration of training. Pre-vocational training is a sub-system of the German VET-system. It leads to the acquisition of competences that are part of the training but often not recognised when the person enters apprenticeship training.

The objective of the project is to support the recognition of learners' units achieved in pre-vocational training by companies that host them as apprentices. This would result in shortening of the apprenticeship duration or in focusing on other competencies during further training. This possibility is already legally possible but in practice it is scarcely used.

The main idea is that the transparency of the content of units, clarity over how the unit was assessed and definition of how the unit relates to the dual system qualification/training programme would support trust in pre-vocational training from the side of companies. They would then be more willing to shorten the apprenticeship training pathway, or deepen other aspects of the training programme.

Using ECVET to support formalisation of previously achieved learning outcomes

The two Italian projects are both tackling this type of situations.



Exchange of experiences on solutions developed

The project **CO.L.O.R** (Italy) pilots the mechanisms of ECVET in two sectors (construction sector and health and social care) with a view to facilitate the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The qualifications of certain Italian regions are already consistent with the learning outcomes approach. However, they need to be redesigned in terms of units. CO.L.O.R seeks to develop a methodology and a pilot set of units of learning outcomes that would be usable by the regions as standards to carry out validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The project **ICARE** (Italy, health care) also focuses on developing a methodology for supporting the recognition of competences of migrants. These competences can be achieved through informal and non-formal learning (but the project also concerns those competences achieved in another country through formal learning). The project devel-

oped unit-based assessments based on the Italian regional qualifications standards in the concerned professions. The idea is that the candidates could undergo the assessment and upon successful completion accumulate units towards to get exemption from part of the training programme leading to the full qualification (see article in this issue of the ECVET magazine).

Using ECVET to upgrade ones' qualification

This approach is core to the project 2get1care (Germany, education in the health professions). The project aims to explore the potential of using learning outcomes, units of learning outcomes and transcript of records to support transition at the interface between vocational and academic education in selected health professions (occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, physiotherapy). These professions are usually trained in vocational schools, but the trained therapists often wish to progress towards a higher education qualification. Moreover there is a need of higher educated therapists in clinics and for the research in the therapy sciences. In Germany the validation and recognition process of vocational training on higher education programs is regulated by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs. If the content of vocational training is documented in terms of learning outcomes in personal transcripts of records the process of validation and recognition can be much easier (see article in this issue of the ECVET magazine).

Conclusion

The joint discussion around these five scenarios showed that:

- These situations can indeed be used to structure the presentations of pathways and transitions;
- Each of the projects can compare the situation they are working on to at least one of the scenarios;
- The scenarios are useful to make one reflect concretely on the education and training pathway of an individual and the place of ECVET in this context.

CPU-Europe:

Certification based on units

(*Certification par Unités*)

Context

The project CPU-Europe accompanies the national reform of vocational education and training in the French speaking Community of Belgium¹. The main aim of this reform is to improve the completion rates of vocational education and training programmes and fight early school-leaving. The core principle is progressive valorisation of students' achievements and pedagogical staff are required to undertake remedial measures in case of students' shortcomings. This is combined with the ban of class repetition.

This CPU reform (*certification par unités* – meaning certification based on units) began in 2010 with work on redefining qualifications standards for four selected professions in terms of units of learning outcomes. Elements of the reform are explicitly inspired by European developments in the area of qualifications frameworks and credit systems. One of the steps in implementing this reform is the setting up of a dedicated team in the Ministry of Education and Research in charge of piloting the reform nationally. CPU-Europe is implemented by this unit. CPU-Europe activities bring a transnational dimension to this national reform. Through the project, the team from the French speaking Community of Belgium collects experience and insights from partner countries about their approaches to issues at the core of this reform. These are the issues at the core of ECVET, such as qualification design in terms of units, assessment of units, validation and recognition.

The seventh issue of the ECVET Magazine (2012) contains an introduction to the CPU-Europe project. This article provides an update on the state of play of the CPU reform as well as the CPU-Europe project.



Main principles of the CPU reform

- Each qualification is defined in terms of units of learning outcomes;
- The qualifications and the units are defined by a specific tripartite body with sectoral committees. Thus the qualifications' and units' standards are the same across the French speaking Community of Belgium;
- Units of learning outcomes are the basis for assessment, validation and recognition;
- Assessment takes place progressively – several units are assessed throughout each academic year;
- The units are designed to be achieved progressively, there is a certain order;
- The training centres are autonomous in deciding on how they organise the teaching and the programme to support successful achievement of the units;
- In case a student fails a unit, s/he cannot be asked to repeat the training from the beginning. The pedagogical team has to put in place remedial measures while maintaining the student in the same cohort of learners (to avoid demotivation and stigmatisation). The student will then pass another assessment for the same unit at a later stage;
- Upon successful achievement of the unit, the student receives an attestation of achievement (transcript of record). These will be issued using a common database which will also enable learners' progress to be tracked through the system and provide better information on the achievement of the results of the reform.

¹ Internet: <http://www.cpu.cfwb.be/>

State of play of CPU reform testing

The reform started to be piloted in the academic year 2011-2012 and the experimentation is continuing in 2012-2013. The pilot phase consists of qualifications preparing for the following four professions: car technician, car maintenance, aesthetician and hairdresser (only as from 2012-2013).

The piloting from the academic year 2011-2013 was evaluated by the inspection services². The text below synthesises the main findings.

Basic figures: In total 41 training centres (all the centres) took part in the evaluation of the implementation. The evaluation covered 186 teaching staff and 638 students.

The inspection report underlined the following strengths of the reform³:

- Cooperation between teaching teams and interdisciplinary work, including better links between theory and practice;
- Students' motivation: the experimentation shows that the achievement of a unit after a relatively short period of time does motivate students and corresponds better to their rapport with time. It also appears to strengthen their awareness of the different competences needed for a given profession;
- Development of formative assessments and of remedial measures by pedagogical teams;
- The qualification and unit standards are user-friendly;
- The use of common assessment standards harmonises the practice across training centres and pedagogical teams;
- Geographical mobility is facilitated by the use of units;
- Students are regularly informed of their progression and make more informed choices of their future careers.

At the same time the report identified a number of challenges. Some are due to the organisation of training in relation to units:

- It is important to ensure that the competences achieved in units from the early stages of training are re-activated during the rest of the programme as otherwise there is a risk of 'unlearning';
- In some cases it appears problematic to combine the themes taught in general education with the requirements of the professional qualification standard;
- The organisation in units requires a strict framework in terms of the teaching calendar. This restricts schools' flexibility in arranging ad-hoc and after-school activities.

Other difficulties are linked to the assessment of units:

- The introduction of several assessments takes time in terms of preparation and also communication of results;
- The fact that there are several assessments per academic year makes it difficult to ensure that the jury systematically comprises representatives of the labour market. It also creates a constraint for teaching staff who are often in charge of teaching several classes and sometimes several training centres;
- There is a need to prepare students to make these regular assessments more accepted and less stressful;
- The assessment indicators do not always capture knowledge and in some cases there are too many indicators.

The inspection continues monitoring the testing in all training centres taking part in 2012-2013. In parallel an external evaluation is being undertaken.

CPU-Europe

As stated earlier, the project CPU-Europe is used to inform the CPU reform with experience from partner countries. In 2011-2012, the team arranged two field visits: one to France and one to Luxembourg. Each visit focused on discussing key aspects of ongoing reforms of VET in the field of qualifications and organisation of training and assessment. During each visit the participants discuss the host country systems of VET from the point of view of ECVET principles: units, assessment, validation, recognition, points as well as accumulation and transfer. During each unit the team from the French speaking Community of Belgium meets the representatives of competent authorities, but also representatives from the sectors concerned by the CPU reform. Training centres are also visited.

Reports from these visits compare the partner countries' systems to the CPU reform and are available on the CPU-Europe web-site⁴.

PROJECT DATA:

Duration: 2011 – 2013

Leader: French speaking Community of Belgium

Partners: Ministry of Education Luxembourg (LU), Ministry of National Education France, National Association for Training in the Automobile service sector (ANFA), National VET institute Romania, Department of Education Catalonia Community.

² Service Général de l'Inspection (2012) Année scolaire 2011-2012 Observation de la mise en oeuvre de la CPU Rapport de synthèse.

³ Idem.

⁴ <http://www.cpu.cfwb.be/index.php?id=1332>

2get1care -

Addressing challenges in health care professions by supporting lifelong learning, interprofessional-ity, and competence based teaching and learning

Health care professions in Germany are currently undergoing a process of change and development caused by socio-demographic shifts as well as specific structural changes in the German social and healthcare system. Professionals working in these fields require not only occupation-specific competences, but also communicative and interprofessional competences. Furthermore, a tendency is emerging towards higher professionalisation in this field. Graduates of vocational schools must now be highly qualified in order to increase their chances of accessing higher education programmes and thus participating in lifelong learning. Health care professions are also characterised by a high degree of divergence and specialisation. Consequently, there are only limited possibilities for both geographical mobility and individual learner mobility between professions.

The aim of the '2get1care' project is to test the use of ECVET for supporting lifelong learning in four health care professions (occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, physiotherapy and geriatric care) in the North-Rhine Westphalia region of Germany. The project is being undertaken in the context of a European partnership. Using ECVET should allow the transfer of competences between health care professions to enable more flexibility for learners with regard to lifelong learning. It should also help to foster the acquisition of interprofessional competences and the implementation of competence based teaching and learning that is emphasised in the German 'Handlungskompetenz' (action competence) concept.



2get1care project partnership

The pilot phase of 2get1care was implemented by maxQ, a service provider within the German 'Berufsbildungswerk des DGB GmbH (bfw)', the lead partner of the project. MaxQ offers training and continuing education in health care professions at more than twelve locations in North Rhine-Westphalia. The 2get1care-project involves national and international partners:

- The national partners – the Hochschule Osnabrueck (university of applied sciences) and the Fachhochschule Bielefeld (university of applied sciences) – are supporting the lead partner in the development of the results and the evaluation of the project.
- The international partners (from AT, CZ and HU) will participate in the review of the project's results and the European partnership will be used to explore the possibility of making qualification components transferable across both national borders and professions.

Development of a common core curriculum based on the identification of common learning outcomes

It must be noted that the German VET-system is currently primarily based on learning content and input. The adoption of a competence-based approach and a shift to learning outcomes is now being more widely discussed and the concepts are gradually becoming more broadly accepted. However, units of learning outcomes currently do not exist and therefore, in the first instance, the training curricula of the four health care professions were adapted to ECVET principles (i.e. units of learning outcomes were designed within the project). Furthermore, a common core curriculum was developed for these professions based on the identification of common learning outcomes. The units of learning outcomes were defined on the basis of work processes and tasks which are typical of the particular professions. In units of the common core curriculum students of all four training programmes learn and work in mixed groups in order to foster the development of inter-professional competences. Additionally, a training concept for enhancing the competences of teachers in relation to learning outcomes orientation and competence based teaching and learning was developed based on ECVET principles.

Piloting, evaluation and revision

The core curriculum (and the teacher training course) was piloted during the course of the project and adequate teaching, learning and assessment methods were tested. The pilot phase of the common core curriculum began in September 2011 and was completed in November 2012. Since the inclusion of a revision phase was planned from the start of the project in order to learn from the pilot phase and improve the core curriculum, evaluation activities were carried out. The evaluation instruments used included: questionnaires completed by students participating in the pilot phase and control groups; focus groups with teachers; and feedback from the working group who designed the core curriculum and organised its implementation.

Lessons learned

The evaluation process is still ongoing, but some initial results are already available. In the pilot phase the following challenges and experiences have been identified that will be taken into account in the revision process:

- **Importance of clearly formulated learning outcomes:** In order to identify similar elements for the common core curriculum, the objectives and content of the four curricula were analysed. Based on this analysis, units were defined and learning outcomes were formulated. During this process it emerged that some topics that initially appeared to be similar (for example, because the objec-



High quality training for future professionals in social work and health care professions

tives were formulated in the same way), in fact required different formulations of learning outcomes. This is due to the fact that the framework for interpreting and applying knowledge can differ between different professions due to their specific context. This difference is revealed when formulating learning outcomes because this process requires specification of the level of complexity and also of the context in which an action is carried out. In this sense, the added value of ECVET can be seen in the enhanced transparency that leads to the clarification of similarities and differences.

- **Size of units:**

As a first step, 40 units were developed and described in terms of learning outcomes. Since it should be possible to assess the learning outcomes of each unit separately, carrying out assessment activities for each of the 40 units was not considered to be feasible. Instead, the decision was taken to organise these units into larger entities that are understood as units of learning outcomes according to the ECVET concept. These are referred to as 'modules' within the project. In the next phase of the project the learning outcomes related to the smaller entities will be analysed and revised in order to ensure coherency, and learning outcomes will be formulated for

each module based on the interplay of these learning outcomes. The specification of learning outcomes at module level is necessary in order to specify the assessment methods and criteria. Assessment will be carried out at module level, but the modules can be composed of two or more 'learning units'. Furthermore, the plan is to cluster the modules into five 'learning fields' according to their thematic focus (teamwork / team dialogues, interdisciplinary problem solving / cases, impact of society on therapy and health care, encountering people with different experiences, and other).

- **Assessment:**

Competence-based assessment methods have or will be developed for each module. These methods include, for example, written tests based on case studies, as well as simulations and observations of professional activities (such as simulations of care procedures). In general, case-based assessment seems to be very important in assessing complex learning outcomes on a module level. Assessing all learning outcomes separately is unnecessary since it is assumed that less complex learning outcomes are implicitly covered in the assessment of more complex learning outcomes. For example, knowledge of facts (e.g. regarding anatomy) will not be assessed separately. Instead, the application of such knowledge in a more complex situation (such as in care procedures), which requires different aspects of knowledge, skills and competence, will be assessed.

- **Teaching and learning:**

ECVET does not specify teaching and learning methods because it is related to qualifications and not to training programmes. However, since the units defined in the 2get1care project are also used as modules for structuring the learning process, a close link to teaching and learning can be identified. For example, unit descriptions also include proposals on teaching content and methods. Experience gained during the pilot phase shows that the definition of units of learning outcomes requires, and can simultaneously support, the application of learning outcomes oriented or competence-based methods of teaching and learning that are in line with the assessment procedures applied. However, preliminary results of the evaluation show that a high degree of effort is required to organise the common core curriculum because, for instance, teachers are required to cooperate in the preparation of their lessons in order to avoid repetition. It also has to be acknowledged that competence-based teaching requires a change in mind-set which may take some time. Another lesson learned is that greater effort needs to be made to ensure that students are cognizant of the knowledge, skills and competences they can expect, and are expected, to achieve.

As mentioned above, the core curriculum will be revised in the final phase of the project. The experience gained from the project so far shows that there are challenges in designing units of learning outcomes, but that these can be overcome. The organisational challenges faced when implementing the units of the common core curriculum seem to be more severe and will need further consideration.

Added value of ECVET in view of using ECVET for supporting lifelong learning

From the perspective of health professions, the formulation of learning outcomes seems to be the clearest and most direct added value of ECVET. They can be used as a reference point for both the design of adequate assessment, and for teaching and learning methods, thus enhancing the quality of education and training in this professional field. Transparent descriptions can also support (national and transnational) credit transfer and permeability from VET to higher education. However, there are limitations in the use of ECVET in this regard:

- Horizontal mobility: There are restrictions on credit transfer and the shortening of training programmes due to specific regulations in the field of healthcare professions.
- Vertical mobility (permeability): There are certain permeability arrangements already in place (such as accreditation of VET programmes by higher education institutions), and only up to 50 % of non-academic prior learning is recognised in higher education programmes.

Thus, the 2get1care project partnership considers specific elements and instruments of ECVET to be useful and these have already been integrated into the training curricula of the four health care professions and the common core curriculum. However, the question whether ECVET can and should be implemented as a system remains open. Due to the specific situation in the German VET-system, and in particular the highly regulated field of health care professions, a full implementation seems unlikely.

PROJECT DATA:

Duration: 2011-2013

Leader: Germany

Partners: Berufsbildungswerk des DGB GmbH, DE; University of applied sciences Osnabrueck - DE; University of applied sciences Bielefeld -DE; KTP – Association for Qualification at the Labour Market, CZ; Institute for Research on Qualifications and Training of the Austrian Economy, AT; GYEMSZI - National Institute for Quality- and Organizational Development in Healthcare and Medicines, HU.

FOCUS

An article by Anette Curth, ICF GHK

ICARE:

A recognition model to valorise competences of mobile workers in the health care sector

The ICARE project is now in the final stages of its two-year journey. ICARE used ECVET as a framework to develop a recognition model that is valid across borders in several steps: firstly, in a partnership between the Italian lead partners (Cefass and Fondazione Ikaros) and international partners from Poland, Germany and Romania, a matrix of competences was developed which makes it possible to compare the learning outcomes of five professions in the healthcare sector across the partner countries. On the basis of this matrix, an assessment method was piloted in all countries to ensure the learning outcomes can be assessed on an equal basis.

At the end of the process, the partners were able to develop a recognition model for prior learning that can be used by VET-providers, but also by competent institutions to formalise achieved learning outcomes and progress or upgrade a qualification. Hence, the model can be used during the training process, but also in a labour market context, helping to create new opportunities for mobile workers.

Using ECVET to develop a recognition model in the health care sector between four countries

Many workers in the field of personal and health care are mobile across Europe. A high number of workers have gained competences in their home country – in institutions or other formal settings, or by non-formal or informal ways of learning. These qualifications are an important asset for them, but are not necessarily officially recognised in the country they live in.

The Italian ICARE project aimed at setting up a method that helps with the recognition of the prior learning (formal, non-formal, informal) of health care workers in Italy (Lombardy region). It is based on the idea that by agreeing on com-



mon learning outcomes and common assessment methods, it will be easier for VET-providers and competent institutions to facilitate the formalisation of achieved learning outcomes, allowing them to define how to progress with learning, or upgrading a qualification.

The ICARE project had two main objectives:

- Firstly, it aimed at using ECVET to develop a recognition model to valorise mobile workers' previous learning outcomes in the field of health and personal care;
- Secondly, it aimed at establishing mutual trust among the partner countries involved (Italy, Romania, Germany, and Poland). Based on the results of the testing and experimenting undertaken, the national and international partners will sign a Memorandum of Understanding, setting the basis for cross-border cooperation in the upcoming years.

The ICARE competence matrix and the assessment process

The main impact envisaged at system level concerns the transparency of the qualification system underlying personal care and social work services, as well as the improvement of co-operation among partner countries. ICARE aims at providing a valid credit and evaluation system for recognising workers' professional expertise – including learning experiences in informal and non-formal contexts between partners.

The ICARE partners have developed a common matrix of competences. The matrix uses accurate descriptions and complete sentences enriched by examples; it describes learning outcomes distinguishing knowledge, skills and competences: but avoids uncoupling work tasks and global competences with cross-dispositions (attitudes). For example, 'showing compassion' or 'being creative', are important attitudes in vocational qualifications in the personal care sector, but when they are uncoupled from the work descriptions, the matrix entries can be quite redundant. The essential cross-disposition (attitude) should be included in the learning outcome's description itself.

The ICARE matrix also elaborates different levels of learning outcomes whenever they help to describe a professional profile. The levels are particularly important for learning outcomes shared by different profiles in different degrees. For instance, several learning outcomes are shared both by a socio-assistance assistant and a care operator; however the care operator's skills are considered to be much more complex than the ones required by the socio-assistance assistant. Therefore, learning outcomes are divided into different levels; the lower one is related to the socio-assistance assistant's profile and the higher one is related to the care operator's profile.

Assessment of key competences

The importance of 'attitudes' in care professions leads to the question of how these attitudes can be assessed. The project decided that attitudes should not be assessed as such, but again should be connected to daily actions and real situations. For instance, a care worker should understand the patients' situation and should be able to perform the necessary actions respecting the specific physical and psychological conditions of the patient. Therefore, assessment should be carried out with regard to 'almost real situations'.



Assessing learning outcomes to identify the gaps leading to a full qualification

In other words, while for the matrix, the different competences that belong to a specific work task have been analysed and distinguished, the assessment tasks synthesise them again to complete work tasks in 'almost real' situations. Consequently, the assessment takes place through a practical test related to these almost real situations. However, since these practical skills require theoretical knowledge as well, a short written test was also undertaken.

The testing/piloting phase was conducted in all partner countries. In Germany, tests were run for the family assistant, care operator and socio-assistance assistant profiles; in Poland for the dental assistant and babysitter profiles; in Romania for the care operator, family assistant and babysitter profiles. Across countries, about 30 test assessments were undertaken for the care operator and socio assistance profiles. For the assistant profiles (family assistant, babysitter, and dental assistant), 5 to 10 tests were conducted for each profile.

The results of the testing were positive; it turned out that indeed, as assumed and indicated by the competence matrix, similar learning outcomes could be stated across the Italian regions and in the different countries.

The ICARE recognition model: Examples of how to use it

Several scenarios are possible for the use of the ICARE recognition model.

For instance, an Italian worker could undertake the transition from qualification A to qualification B, when, as part of qualification A, s/he acquired parts of units of learning outcomes that are similar to the units of learning outcomes in qualification B. Credits can be transferred, and the pathway to qualification B can be shortened.

This also applies at the transnational level. For instance, a Polish worker holding a qualification as dental assistant (qualification A) comes to Italy. He undergoes the assessment process to find out how far his qualification can be compared to the Italian counterpart (qualification B). Once the existing competences are certified, s/he can start a training process to fill in the existing gaps and acquire the Italian qualification in a shorter period of time.

The ICARE recognition model can also help to facilitate the assessment and certification of non-formal and informal acquired competences, creating the basis for workers without a formal qualification to re-enter formal training pathways. For instance, a person who has worked as a family assistant in a private household without a formal certificate wishes to do the same work in an institution. To



The ICARE test consists of a practical and a theoretical part

get such a job, a formal qualification is required. With the ICARE model, the person can take the test to have her competences recognised and identify those learning outcomes that still have to be obtained. Through additional training units, s/he can fill the necessary gaps to obtain a formal qualification.

A third option of how to use the ICARE model is to facilitate the progression/upgrade from one qualification to another in the national Italian context. The matrix of competences developed for certain professional profiles includes learning outcomes for different levels of knowledge, skills and competences. As an example, a person who is working as a socio-assistant could gain a higher position in the organisation, but s/he does not necessarily hold the required qualification (care operator). In order to gain the higher level qualification, s/he is assessed according to the care operator test. Through the test, gaps are highlighted and training needs are identified.

The ICARE Memorandum of Understanding

To ensure that the recognition model can be applied to its full potential, training centres and competent institutions need to establish cooperation. They also need to commit to the manner of credit transfer and accumulation that underlies the ICARE model. Hence, to ensure sustainability,

ICARE developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that aims at the establishment of mutual trust among partners and defines how they will cooperate in the upcoming years.

The MoU contains:

- The final competence matrices amended according to the results of the testing phase;
- The ICARE assessment methodology shared by all partner countries during the testing phase;
- A declaration of the partners' willingness to:
 - » Accept each other's status as competent institutions;
 - » Accept each other's quality assurance, assessment, validation and recognition criteria and that the procedures are satisfactory for the purposes of credit transfer;
 - » Agree to the conditions for the operation of the partnership, such as objectives, duration and arrangements for reviewing the MoU;
 - » Agree to the comparability of the qualifications concerned for the purposes of credit transfer;
 - » Identify other actors and competent institutions that may be involved in the process concerned and their functions.

To share the projects' experiences and results, ICARE will also publish a set of methodological guidelines along with assessment tools and templates for ECVET documentation (i.e. MoU).

PROJECT DATA:

Duration: 2011-2013

Leader: Italy

Partners: Partners: Fondazione Ikaros, IT; Federsolidarieta confcooperative, IT; Associazione Nazionale Oltre le Frontiere CISL, IT; Fundacja Sic! Centrum Innowacji Społecznej, PL; TILS Romania SRL, RO; Consiliul National de Formare profesionala a adultilor, RO; VHS Cham, DE.

On 21 March 2013, the final event of ICARE will take place in Bergamo/Italy in the 'Papa Giovanni XXIII Conference Centre'.

News from the NETINVET project

Founded as a result of the pilot project RECOMFOR, the NETINVET network brings together training centres and companies in the sector of international trade in order to provide learners with mobility opportunities, while the quality of mobility is ensured by using ECVET. The network was launched two years ago in March 2011 during the RECOMFOR final conference and has been going strong since then, with 54 members as of January 2013.

Next step for NETINVET: mobility for teachers

During the network annual meeting in March 2012, discussions on future needs led to the conclusion that the operational levels of the participating schools should be informed on the 'practical do's and don'ts' of international exchange. Proper information should lead to better understanding and increased mobility. The following specific needs were identified:

- More exchange of information between involved professionals;
- More information on how to organise student exchanges;
- More information on the alignment of the theoretical content;
- More information on the alignment of the organisation of the work placement;
- Adoption of NETINVET tools.

The Leonardo da Vinci VETPRO action, created to support the mobility of VET professionals, could enable the network to meet all these needs. This is why the NETINVET steering committee responded to the VETPRO call for proposals 2013. The results of the call will be known in the spring.



Assessment and recognition of mobility

In November 2012, a survey on assessment, validation and recognition of mobility practices within the network has been conducted among partner training centres. The survey shows that from one context to another, there are different situations, with different expectations, for which different answers can be found. This diversity and the capacity to invent tailored answers are part of the assets of the network. Even though formal recognition of mobility is not yet fully efficient, it is noteworthy that each country is making some efforts to improve the situation and facilitate setting-up and recognition of mobility.

The 'life experience' that mobility represents for students (in terms of autonomy, sense of adaptability, cultural approaches, etc.) is undoubtedly a high benefit, but still, recognition in the academic pathway is the most important added value. The quotation of a headmaster who participated in the survey summarises this well:

'There are, undoubtedly, other ways of living the "life experience", either with other programs, [or] going abroad by themselves, but the fact of being able to do some of the training abroad and eventually be recognised is unique.'

More news

The website (Internet: <http://www.netinvet.eu>) has been improved and offers a new functionality. It is now possible to print personalised 'mobility certificates' for learners who have completed a mobility period. This certificate contains the main information about the mobility period (where, when, how long, etc.) and is automatically generated and sent by e-mail to the contact person.

NETINVET brings together stakeholders with interest in the VET community throughout Europe. Representatives of the network (members of the steering committee, teachers, headmasters, etc.) are regularly invited to take part in meetings in order to discuss the network, how it works, what its added value is, etc. The network has been presented in more than 10 European meetings in 2012, which means that hundreds of individuals know NETINVET. The network is quite often quoted as an example of positive networking practices.

FOCUS

An article by Monika Auzinger, 3s research laboratory

VET-CCS

Final dissemination conference

The VET-CCS project (Vocational Education and Training Credit Conversion System) held its final project dissemination conference on 22 February 2013 in Sliema, Malta. It was thus the first of the second generation of ECVET pilot projects to hold its final event. The conference was very well-attended: approximately 100 participants were present, among them many representatives from VET providers.

VET-CCS has at its core the development of a conversion process to change qualifications/courses from their traditional format to one which adheres to ECVET principles. This process was then tested on a total of 30 qualifications from four different VET providers. The selection of qualifications included both full VET courses and short VET courses ('awards') from a variety of different fields, such as: agribusiness, art & design, mechanical engineering, tourism, social care, as well as a group of international IT qualifications. Besides the NCFHE, the Maltese National Commission for Further and Higher Education, the four VET providers were core partners to the project, thus ensuring that the level of VET providers was actively involved in elaborating the methodology for this conversion process. Based on the methodology developed, and the experience gained from this 'conversion exercise', the *ECVET Conversion Manu-*



Participants at the final event

al was drawn up: it mainly addresses VET providers, and serves as a guideline for the description of qualifications according to ECVET principles.

ECVET conversion exercise - 'a steep learning curve for everyone'

Central element of the conference was the presentation of the ECVET conversion process and the ECVET Conversion Manual, the key elements of the VET-CCS project. Highlight of the conference was when the project partners (VET providers) presented their individual experience from

the conversion exercise – describing what went well, the advantages of the new structure of qualifications, but also any challenges encountered. As one presenter put it, this exercise represented ‘a steep learning curve for everyone’, acknowledging that the process required some effort. Not only was the process of conversion itself a time-consuming one, but the VET providers also needed to retrain their staff, in order to make sure they have the necessary expertise to carry out this task. Nevertheless, all partners were highly satisfied with the outcome and were convinced that this new system allows them to better and faster adapt their qualifications to changing labour market needs, and to improve the quality of their qualifications as a whole.

The conference concluded with a workshop session where participants had the opportunity to discuss the presented topics in small rounds, and to raise any questions towards ECVET and the ECVET Conversion Manual.

What's ahead?

While this was the final conference of the VET-CCS project, it is only the starting point of the ECVET implementation process in Malta. They hope that ECVET shall help to increase the attractiveness of vocational education and training, vis-à-vis higher education, and to ensure permeability between the systems.

Both presenters and the audience unanimously agreed that getting stakeholders on board is the key to success.



The next step is thus to create more public awareness, to reach even more VET providers, but also other stakeholders, such as parents, and employers - and to address each of these groups in their own language, not overburdening them with too much ‘ECVET jargon’.

The VET-CCS Conversion Manual, the final publication of the project, is about to be published and will be available for download from the project website (www.ecvetmalta.org.mt).

Save the date!

European Conference: National implementation of ECVET: Projects, instruments, challenges and solutions

The final event of the European pilot projects to a European audience will be held on 24-25 October 2013 in Brussels, MCE Conference Centre.

The event will be organised as a joint conference presenting the outcomes of three actions on ECVET testing and development on national level; implemented by the

European Commission and the EACEA:

- The ECVET pilot projects 2nd generation and the results of testing ECVET in several national contexts;
- The results of the NetECVET project; and
- The work and experiences of the national ECVET experts.



The ECVET Magazine is published five times per year and informs about the latest developments related to ECVET, the ECVET Network and the pilot projects.

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Any comments or suggestions regarding this or future issues should be submitted to the following address: contact@ecvet-projects.eu

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