

magazine

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



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Editorial

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As you know, ECVET is going through its first evaluation exercise, at a time when a consultation is open on a wide ranging initiative on skills and qualifications. By the time this is published, both the evaluation and the consultation will be closed, but it is worth exploring what the ECVET projects might say about the issues they raise.

Leaving the technical questions to the evaluation team, we might have a look at the main objectives of ECVET, and see whether projects are helping out on that front. ECVET is for instance supposed to facilitate the development of flexible and individualised pathways. That is a very high level aim, and individual projects may have addressed only some of its many dimensions.

One dimension is the choice among a variety of specialisations – sometimes learners acknowledge too late that they have not taken the best road. This is addressed by the project 2get1care, which among other created options for students to follow an inter-professional common core curriculum before deciding on specialisations in the health care sector. Validating prior learning is a crucial factor for flexible opportunities, and several ECVET projects have ad-

ressed this, among other ESyCQ for the recognition of commercial competences developed on the job, CO.L.O.R. focusing on the recognition of skills of workers and in particular migrants, EASYMetal facilitating the transfers of learning outcome based credit within the VET system.

Geographic mobility is what most people think about when it comes to flexible pathways. Supporting mobile workers was the objective of the project ICARE, which used ECVET as a framework to develop a recognition model in the personal and social care sector valid across borders.

A major concept for ECVET in its pursuit of flexibility is the unit of learning outcomes, which can be assessed in one setting and transferred to another. This lay at the core of all projects, including in some aimed at an impact on the VET system. The project CPU-Europe supported a new process to define (and revise) qualifications standards (and standards of units of learning outcomes) by tripartite sectoral entities in the French speaking community of Belgium, which has re-defined VET qualifications based on units of learning outcomes that can be accumulated. In France, the project MENEVET show how to improve the descriptions of qualifications standards, providing input to the updating of the national guide for the design of VET qualifications.

This cursory and fragmented review already suggests that projects have addressed issues – validation of prior learning, recognition of qualifications across countries, raised in the open consultation on the European Area of Skills and Qualifications. Other examples could be added. The involvement of employers in the design of learning outcome based qualifications was a defining feature in particular of the projects EASYMetal and CO.LO.R., to make

sure that training units are based on actual work processes in their respective business sectors. The conversion of existing VET qualifications into learning outcome based qualifications was the result of the project VET-CCS, in close coordination with the Maltese Qualifications Framework.

Practical guidance and support to teachers and VET-providers was an important part of the work of several projects as well. The inter-professional core curriculum developed by the project 2get1care for four healthcare professions goes into operational detail and supports teaching activities – the project also a training course for teachers and trainers to help them to adapt their teaching methods to these changes. The project VET-CCS developed a manual to provide guidance to VET-providers in adopting units of learning outcomes in their courses.

In Malta and the French Community of Belgium, comprehensive VET reforms supported by the ECVET projects VET-CCS and CPU-Europe, have led to generalised skill passports: every learner needs to have a document which is regularly updated and contains not only their formal qualifications, but also informally acquired skills and outcomes of lifelong learning.

The above is simply to recognise that ECVET pilot projects have indeed addressed relevant issues and have provided suggestions, models and inspiration that will remain relevant in the future of ECVET, as it will be defined following its evaluation in the framework of the European Area of Skills and Qualifications. For this they deserve the gratitude of the European VET policy community.

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Results from the ECVET pilot projects and recommendations for further ECVET practice across Europe

An Article by Karin Luomi-Messerer and Monika Auzinger, 3s

In addition to their individual aims and objectives in the national context, the eight pilot projects funded under the call from 2010 were also expected to feed into the general development of ECVET as a tool and an instrument at the EU level. Therefore, their results and experiences should feed into more generic recommendations on how to use ECVET in the context of mobility and lifelong learning. Yet, the systemic conditions which influence ECVET implementation at the national level are very diverse, and the solutions found by the projects are not applicable to every national context, system or sub-system. Still, a set of general recommendations can be distilled –specific recommendations on how to work with each of the ECVET technical specifications, but also recommendations on how to set up projects and further exercises to use ECVET in practice. This article highlights a number of them.¹

The eight projects funded under the 2010 call for proposals to test ECVET were designed to address specific issues and to respond to different needs. The solutions and tools developed refer to a wide range of aspects in relation to the transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes in the national lifelong learning context.

Most of the projects started with the design of **units of learning outcomes** and some of them also developed **specific methods for describing qualifications or units according to ECVET principles**. One of the central ideas of ECVET is that the units of learning outcomes achieved in one setting are assessed and then, after successful assessment, transferred to another setting. Since assessment is a core prerequisite for validation and recognition, several projects developed **specific methods and procedures for assessment**, each suitable for their pre-defined aims and objectives. Some projects also worked on **partnership documents** for supporting the transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes. Additionally, **guidelines or recom-**



mendations were developed for further supporting ECVET implementation.

The following table provides an overview of the projects' main aims and key results. It also lists the tools developed by the projects. These can be found on the projects' websites, but also in the toolbox of the **ECVET pilot projects website**.

Table 1: Overview of projects' main aims and key results/tools

Country	Project	Sectors/ qualifications addressed	Main aims	Key results/tools
BE-fr	GPU Europe	Motor vehicles, hospitality-catering and beauty therapy / secondary education	Providing support to the national implementation of ECVET (national 'GPU' reform – 'certification based on units') in five vocational qualifications in secondary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation of peer learning activities and field visits to partner countries on ECVET technical specifications; • Preparation of a summary note of each visit that sums up the main learning points and the comparison with the system being put in place under the national GPU reform; • Informing the ministry in charge about the experience of European partner countries.
DE	2get1care	Healthcare professions: speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and geriatric care	Enhancing transparency and transferability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curricula of vocational qualifications in four healthcare specialisations offered at one training institution based on ECVET principles; • Common core curriculum to foster the development of inter-professional competences; • Specific training concept, based on ECVET principles for enhancing the competences of teachers in their work with learning outcomes.
DE	EASYMetal	Metal sector	Encouraging mobility between different training schemes at the interface of preparatory vocational training and dual vocational training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four units of learning outcomes covering the first training year of seven qualifications in the metal sector; • Conceptual procedure for developing units of learning outcomes; • Procedure for assessment of performance, for calculating ECVET points and for credit transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes.
DE	ESyCQ	Commerce and IT training	Facilitating transfer of prior learning (formal, non-formal or informal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Equivalence matrix' of six qualifications (logistics manager, office manager / office administrator, office assistant, management assistant in IT-systems, IT-assistant, and certified network-administrator) providing a summary of the breadth and depth of the individual fields of activity within the qualifications and of their relations to each another; • Units of learning outcomes for all six qualifications; • Integration into an electronic text platform for testing the units of learning outcomes (CEMES competence assessment procedure).
FR	MENEVET	Main upper-secondary leaving VET qualifications (BAC PRO - vocational baccalaureate, EQF level 4)	Supporting recognition of learning outcomes achieved during the international mobility of learners in initial VET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations on the writing of vocational qualifications and the allocation of points; • Recommendations on the organisational and operational provisions necessary for recognition of learning outcomes achieved and assessed abroad as part of a vocational qualification <p>(based on comparison of the ECVET Recommendation and its principles with the regulatory framework and guidelines for qualification design and award in France).</p>

¹ These recommendations are developed based on analyses of project reports as well as on observations made during seminars and monitoring visits. They were not discussed and agreed on with project representatives and therefore reflect the point of view of the authors only.

Country	Project	Sectors/ qualifications addressed	Main aims	Key results/tools
IT	CO.L.O.R.	Healthcare and construction / EQF level 3	Facilitating validation of non-formal and informal learning in the context of migration (regional and transnational)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Methodology and a template for describing units of learning outcomes that enables the assessment of knowledge, skills and competence; Units of learning outcomes for the qualifications healthcare operator and construction operator; Testing guidelines (incl. assessment activities and methods); Memorandum of Understanding (in which partners committed to continue testing the units developed and to design and test modular competence-based training pathways).
IT	ICARE	Personal care professions (outside of the recognition framework for regulated professions): care operator, socio-assistance assistant, dental assistant, family assistant/ caregiver, babysitter	Facilitating recognition of learning outcomes of migrant workers (acquired in other countries or through non-formal and informal learning)	<p>The ICARE tools – including, for each of the five professional profiles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Matrices of competences (units of learning outcomes); Standard tests (practical and theoretical ones) to be used when assessing acquired competences (with particular regard to those acquired in informal and non-formal contexts); A table of correspondences enabling the assignment of ECVET points in coherence with the relevant matrix of competences, and for starting the formal recognition process; A methodology for the assessment of learning outcomes.
MT	VET-CCS	30 different VET courses in various fields	Supporting national VET providers to become 'ECVET ready' in view of accumulation of credit throughout the entire VET learning pathway	<p>The ECVET Conversion Manual (developed based on experiences from a piloting exercise) – including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main background information on the requirements for the implementation of ECVET in VET qualifications; the templates to be used; guidelines highlighting the steps to be followed in the conversion of qualifications according to the standards specified for ECVET, as well as recommendations on how to deal with possible challenges.

Source: Analysis of the projects' work and results by ICF GHK and 3s



Source: ICF GHK, 2014.

The results of the projects are certainly not limited to tools. They have also contributed in different ways to the national implementation of ECVET, for example, by accelerating **reflection on the existing system and procedures**, by supporting **capacity building** (e.g. through peer learning activities and dissemination events) and strengthening the knowledge base on ECVET principles and implications or by establishing **networks** and **partnerships** for the further implementation of ECVET (see the article on the pilot projects' national conferences).

Recommendations regarding the technical specifications of ECVET

It is important to acknowledge that these methods and tools developed do not provide a ready-made solution for the implementation of ECVET for supporting lifelong learning in another context. In fact, one needs to be aware of the variety of issues, regulations and frameworks which influence the way ECVET can be used – in particular when it comes to the technical tools and components. Still, the results developed by the ECVET projects can be considered as a starting point for reflecting on how ECVET could be implemented or how the use of these tools could provide solutions to specific problems or needs in another context. A set of guidelines and recommendations are outlined below.

Fit for purpose

In line with the points stated above, the first recommendation to give is a very generic but nonetheless very important one. The implementation of ECVET and its technical components has to fit the specific context, and needs to be adapted to the aims and purposes for using ECVET. These aims and purposes need to be clarified and made explicit before using them as the basis for designing the ECVET-specific components.

Units of learning outcomes

Learning outcomes (i.e. transparent descriptions of qualifications) are seen as the core benefit of ECVET implementation. Similar to the 1st generation ECVET pilot projects, several of the 2nd generation ECVET pilot projects determined units of learning outcomes on the basis of complete work assignments, work processes/tasks, areas of work, and fields of action or fields of competence which are typical of the particular profession. Thus, when units of learning outcomes have to be designed for the purpose of ECVET implementation, it is recommended to reflect on the potential added value of using this approach.

Assessment

In ECVET, assessment is a precondition for validation and recognition. However, the specific role of assessment and the approach used (methods and procedures) differ according to the purpose for using ECVET. It is recommended to address the following question when designing the assessment approach: How does assessment have to be conducted in the specific context and what kind of quality criteria have to be applied in order to achieve trust and to facilitate transfer and, if applicable, the accumulation of learning outcomes?

ECVET points

The type of approach chosen for the use of ECVET points in the context of lifelong learning (e.g. method for calculation and allocation to units and qualifications) mainly depends on how they are used in the specific (national) context. When ECVET points are used it is recommended to reflect on whether they should be allocated to qualifications and units only or also to individual (or groups of) learning outcomes.



Information presented in unit descriptions

The ECVET Recommendation suggests that the description of a unit should include the title of the unit and of the qualification to which the unit relates, the EQF/NQF level of the qualification, the ECVET points associated with the unit, the learning outcomes contained in the unit, the procedures and criteria for assessment and, where relevant, the validity in time of the unit. However, experience from the projects shows that the kind of information that is actually presented in unit descriptions depends on the purpose for which the units are used. Some additional information is usually provided when units are to be used at the same time as learning modules or in case the recognition of learning outcomes acquired in non-formal or informal learning contexts is addressed. Again, it is recommended to reflect on the purpose of unit descriptions in order to decide on their structure and content.

Documentation

The ECVET key documents (Memorandum of Understanding, Learning Agreement, Learners' Personal Transcript) can also be important in the context of lifelong learning:

- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) can be used for enhancing commitment and common understanding regarding credit transfer. Setting up a MoU for lifelong learning may be particularly useful in situations where it is expected or desired that the pathway created by credit transfer and accumulation will be used by a larger number of learners: so as to avoid analysing each case on an individual basis. However, in situations where other forms of agreements (explicit or implicit) exist, such formalisation may not be necessary.

- The use of the Learning Agreement in the context of lifelong learning could be relevant when the pathway the learner will follow is clear. But it is not applicable when the pathway is changed on an ad-hoc basis (e.g. drop-outs).
- The Learner's Personal Transcript seems to be of particular importance in the lifelong learning context. By documenting all individual learning, it can be used like a 'backpack' over lifetime and, thus, could serve as the main document for supporting credit accumulation and credit transfer as well as for formalising learning outcomes achieved in non-formal or informal settings. It is indispensable for the learner to have documents which record his/her achievements – learning outcomes and qualifications - in a transparent manner: ideally according to previously agreed standards (EQF/NQF).

Thus, it is recommended to reflect on whether any existing agreements or documents could sufficiently fulfil (or could be easily adapted to fulfil) the purpose of the ECVET key documents or what added value could be achieved by introducing ECVET-specific documents. Particular attention should be paid to the documentation of learning outcomes achieved by an individual.

Validation and recognition

Validation and recognition can be handled differently according to the context of ECVET application (e.g. regarding necessary activities or steps to be taken or distribution of responsibilities). Recognition of learning outcomes assessed in another context requires the consent and acceptance of responsible authorities. Thus, when using ECVET in the context of lifelong learning, it is of particular importance



Source: ICF GHK, 2014.

to involve and closely cooperate with competent authorities (i.e. those who design, award, or recognise qualifications). This is also necessary when using ECVET in the context of mobility and in case national regulations have to be adapted to provide the possibility to recognise learning outcomes assessed abroad. However, it can be observed that in some countries or contexts there is more flexibility on the recognition of learning outcomes acquired during (short) training periods abroad than regarding the transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes acquired in the context of lifelong learning. It is therefore recommended to identify the competent authorities that have to be involved and engage them as early as possible in the process in order to ensure that recognition can be achieved.

Recommendations related to general questions about how to use ECVET in practice

Beside the questions of how to approach the ECVET technical specifications, some more general questions also need to be clarified before designing and putting in practice further project exercises on how to use ECVET. From the projects' experiences, the following recommendations can be distilled.

Clearly identify for which problems ECVET can provide a solution and develop evidence

It can be observed that the projects endeavoured to respond to a variety of needs. In order to successfully implement ECVET and to have broad stakeholder commitment and support, it is necessary to clearly present the added value of ECVET. ECVET implementation should neither be

an end in itself nor complicate peoples' lives, but provide added value to them. Thus, it is recommended to clearly identify the problem(s) for which ECVET could provide a solution and to develop relevant evidence (e.g. based on feasibility studies or pilot projects).

Develop a common understanding and cooperation

In order to agree on the added value of ECVET in a specific context it is a prerequisite that a common understanding of ECVET-related issues among competent authorities and other relevant stakeholders is created. This includes capacity building activities as well as the dissemination of good practices and the development or adoption of shared procedures and tools.

Establish commitment for using ECVET at policy level

Commitment from (national) policy level is of particular importance for convincing VET providers to get involved. Otherwise they might be reluctant to invest their resources (time, money) in the implementation of ECVET.

Provide guidelines and support

One of the main challenges of ECVET implementation is the amount of work that often needs to be invested at the beginning. This is in particular true for countries/contexts that are rather far away from being 'ECVET-ready'. For example, in cases where learning outcomes are not used in the specific system or sub-system, resources are needed to develop such transparent descriptions. Guidelines and examples can help support these processes.

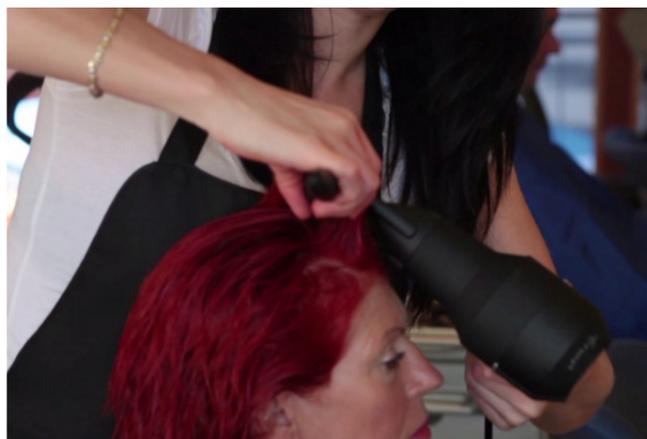
Create synergies and coherence with other tools and principles

On a systemic level, ECVET principles can play a key role in implementing other reforms and tools, such as qualifications frameworks and validation of non-formal and informal learning. When permeability between VET and HE is aimed for, the link between ECVET and ECTS also needs to be addressed. In order to ensure coherence in the development and implementation of different tools and principles, a coordinated approach is necessary. This can also help to bundle resources and create synergies.

More information: Please consult the [brochure with information on the pilot projects](#) that was prepared for the Joint ECVET conference in October 2013.



Source: ICF GHK, 2014.



Source: ICF GHK, 2014.

Results from the ECVET pilot projects and impulses for national implementation

An article by Anette Curth, ICF GHK¹

One of the main objectives of the eight ECVET pilot projects 2011-2014 was to contribute to the national implementation of ECVET. However, they all came from very different starting positions: the projects VET-CCS and CPU-Europe in Malta and the French Community of Belgium were implemented by governmental institutions and connected to comprehensive VET-reforms; the French project ME-NECVET was implemented by the Ministry of Education, with the aim of testing the compatibility of the existing regulatory framework for the design and description of French qualifications with the ECVET technical specifications; the Italian project CO.L.O.R was implemented by ISFOL, a national centre of VET-expertise, and was designed to support greater coherence in the Italian VET system; and the German projects EASYMetal, 2get1care, and ESyCQ and the Italian project ICARE were instead driven by practitioners who developed solutions and recommended them to the competent institutions for implementation at the systemic level. This article briefly summarises the suggestions, models, impulses and contributions of the projects to the national implementation of ECVET.

The CPU-reform and the CPU-Europe project in Belgium-fr

In the French-speaking Community of Belgium, a comprehensive VET-reform is currently on-going. Since the introduction of the reform, programmes and qualifications will be based on units, and will be certified by units ('Certification par unites - CPU'). The main aim of this approach is to ensure that learners are continuously motivated by marking their progress in the programme through the achievement of units. The qualification standards based on units will be common to all VET schools in the country. While schools maintain their autonomy in the design of curricula and use of teaching methods, they are required to use these standards as the basis for curriculum development and assessment. When gaps in their knowledge, skills and competence are identified these should be addressed through remedial measures immediately by the pedagogical staff.



Source: ICF GHK, 2014.

'CPU' was introduced to the VET system of the French-speaking Community of Belgium to support a reduction in the number of drop-outs from VET and provide a framework supporting re-integration. The motto of the reform is

¹ This article is based on the information in the projects' final reports and in a previous article in the brochure distributed during the pilot projects' final conference (<http://www.ecvet-projects.eu/Documents/Seminars/ECVET%20Brochure%20October%202013%20web%20ready%20orgb.pdf>). Beyond this, it represents the views of the author.



Source: ICF GHK, 2014.

to reward achievement rather than to sanction failure. In the past, young people in VET pathways who failed the end-of-year exam were required to repeat the entire year and accumulated delay, which often resulted in demotivation and disengagement. Similarly, when drop-outs wished to return to education and training with another provider, they often had to start from the beginning, since there were no common grounds based on which one school could recognise what the person learned in another school.

Each year students achieve around three units of learning outcomes. The programme is designed so that they achieve the units progressively during the academic year (not all at once, at the end of the year). In line with the idea to abolish the sanction of failure, the reform forbids repetition of a year of studies. If students fail the assessment for a unit, they redo the assessment for the failed unit when being assessed for the next unit. To keep track of the individual's achievements, each student receives a training plan at the beginning of their pathway. Throughout the students' learning path, his/her competence transcript is regularly updated.

The project CPU Europe contributed to the above described reforms by organising peer learning and informing the ministry in charge about the experience of European partner countries that also have unit-based qualifications.

The final conference of the project in November 2013 was organised by the National Lifelong Learning Agency of the French-speaking Community of Belgium. During the well-attended event, it was stated that VET should offer qualifications that are of high quality and attract young people with diverse profiles to help improve the image and attractiveness of VET in the region. With the CPU-reform, drop-out rates are expected to decrease: which will ultimately help reduce youth unemployment rates.

The VET-CCS project and its contribution to implementing the European transparency instruments in Malta

Malta has already taken significant steps to create the necessary conditions for introducing ECVET in its VET system. In 2007, the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) was launched, featuring eight levels of qualifications mapped to the EQF. ECVET was promoted early on, as a tool to both encourage and facilitate students' mobility and lifelong learning in the vocational education and training sector.

VET-CCS was coordinated by the Malta Qualification Council (MQC), the responsible institution for the development and implementation of ECVET in Malta; hence, it was conceived as a top-down project. By involving five large VET providers in the project - the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), Clear Dimension Ltd, Institute of Tourism Studies, Employment and Training Corporation, and Korporazzjoni Tax-Xoghol u Tahrig - VET-CCS succeeded in involving important stakeholders and a wide range of qualifications from different fields.

Moreover, the institutions had the chance to have a say in the development of the conversion method and adapt their own qualifications in the process. This has generated practice-oriented experience for different areas of study and different qualifications.

The other main advantages of the VET-CCS project include the existent synergies between several on-going implementation processes of the European transparency instruments in Malta. ECVET is for example, mentioned at various points in the latest update of the referencing report of the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF). The future allocation of qualifications to MQF-levels will be carried out by using a revised version of the currently used template, asking for the description of learning outcomes in terms of knowledge,

skills and competence, which has been developed as part of the VET-CCS project.

During the final project conference in January 2013 (see **ECVET magazine issue 13**), it was stated that the development of a method to convert national VET qualifications to the ECVET system can be seen as an important step to fully implement the MQF and create the necessary conditions for using ECVET on a broad scale.

The MENEVET project and its contribution to adaptations in the regulatory framework for VET-qualifications in France

The MENEVET project examined how the principles of ECVET relate to the current design of French vocational qualifications (vocational diplomas). French qualifications are based on units; each diploma requires general units alongside specific vocational units. Access to qualifications through formal learning as well as through informal or non-formal learning is already possible in France, based on the 'recognition of prior learning scheme'. Unit-based assessment is possible as well, but – due to the principle of the wholeness of the qualification – this cannot lead to a partial award of the diploma.

The main aim was to promote the transnational mobility of students by developing recommendations about the organisational and operational provisions necessary to facilitate the recognition of learning outcomes achieved and assessed abroad as part of a vocational qualification. This would include recommendations about the design of vocational qualifications and the allocation of points.

The project focused on the French Ministry of Education's flagship vocational qualification, namely the baccalauréat professionnel (level IV in the French system/corresponding to EQF level 4). MENEVET found that the existing regulatory framework for the design and description of French qualifications is mostly well aligned with the ECVET technical specifications (units, learning outcomes, assessment, validation and recognition). However, the way in which the qualifications are currently described could be simplified and made more consistent to improve their legibility.

Regarding the possible use of ECVET points, the project evaluated two possibilities: using the workload approach to assign points to units or transposing the actual French system used to express the relative weights of units.² None of the approaches was considered satisfactory and of added value compared to the existing situation.

Regarding the recognition of learning outcomes achieved during mobility, two options were identified:

- One option is to carry out a continuous assessment (for part of a unit) abroad. This assessment leads to the recognition of learning outcomes assessed in the certification process (i.e. the part of the unit concerned is not assessed a second time). In such cases, the assessment abroad must satisfy certain conditions which were defined. In particular, it has to concern those learning outcomes defined in the French qualification standard.
- An optional unit could be introduced to BAC PRO qualifications certifying learners' 'mobility competence' acquired via mobility in a professional context. The learning outcomes for this unit were identified as well as the criteria and conditions for their assessment. Therefore, in addition to learning new technical skills and competence while abroad, learners would also have the possibility to gain recognition for the more 'soft' skills acquired.

These two options are not mutually exclusive – on the contrary, they can be combined. Both require certain adjustments to the existing regulatory framework (decrees). Upon completion of the project, the Ministry of National Education committed itself to implementing these evolutions, and drafted a roadmap for progression. At the final event of the project in April 2013, the Ministry of Education stated that they are in the process of finalising the statutory texts that will make mobility initiatives 'for the purposes of certification' possible. The texts will gradually be submitted to the advisory bodies. The first stage will concern the optional mobility unit: a decree by which the unit is created, together with any appendices relating to the framework and the terms of assessment will be outlined. The decree will support regional education authorities in the implementation of mobility initiatives for the purposes of certification. It will be accompanied by information and training for regional education authorities and practical tools.

Innovative solutions developed by three practitioner-led projects in Germany: EASYMetal, ESyCQ and 2get1care

Rooted in the German Vocational Training Act, a profession in Germany is seen and evaluated as an overall professional competence to be used to make decisions and take action. In line with this, qualifications are seen as holistic; they cannot be split up into units or modules. The law does not foresee an accumulation/transfer of training units to the overall qualification. Similar to France, qualifications are seen as 'holistic' and a certificate is only awarded if the person has passed a final exam.

These features of the German dual system are not very 'ECVET-friendly' from the outset. However, the three pilot projects with lead partners from Germany (EASYMetal, 2get1care and ESyCQ) saw added value in testing ECVET to improve permeability within the system, and facilitate the recognition of competences between learning environments.

The project **EASYMetal** addressed the recognition of units of learning outcomes between the pre-vocational system and the dual system. In Germany, young people who do not find a training place in the apprenticeship system often take up preparatory VET courses, which are mainly school-based. These courses result in the acquisition of certain learning outcomes which would be relevant for the actual apprenticeship in the dual system. However, when students are able to secure a placement in the dual system, they usually have to start from the beginning since there is no procedure in place which enables the recognition of the previously acquired learning outcomes.

The project developed tools, using ECVET, to enable this recognition in the dual system. They built on the fact that

the German Vocational Training Act³ does not foresee an accumulation/transfer of training units to the overall qualification, but allows for the recognition of previously completed training for the current period of training.

Since VET in the dual system in Germany is based on a private contract between the company and the trainee, crediting is at the discretion of the training companies. Companies can reduce the duration of the training period of an individual trainee if they trust the quality of the prior learning and the assessment documented in a transcript of records. Trainee and training institutions are required to submit a joint application to the competent authority – these qualifications involve regulation by the Chamber of Crafts and the Chamber of Industry and Commerce – and this may result in shortening a training period up to a year.

However, in practice this is rarely done. Feedback from training companies acquired through interviews and a seminar confirmed that the recognition of learning outcomes across different learning fields depends on trust. Trust can be established by transparency as well as through common quality standards and the involvement of highly acknowledged institutions, such as the Chambers. Since the regional Chambers support the approach developed by EASYMetal and recommend it to companies and training providers, it can be stated that the project contributed significantly to the improvement of trust between the players involved at this interface.

The project **2get1care** tested ECVET in the field of changing training pathways in health care professions. The project tested permeability within VET-qualifications, but also between higher education and VET.



Source: ICF GHK, 2014.



Source: ICF GHK, 2014.

² In the French system each unit has a certain 'weight' expressed by a number (coefficient). The grade the learner obtains from each assessment is multiplied by this 'weight' (coefficient) which leads to points. All the points obtained are then summed. To be finally awarded the unit, the learner must obtain at least half of the maximum possible score.

³ German Vocational Training Act, Section 7: Recognition of previous training for the current period of training.



Due to the high degree of specialisation in health care professions in Germany, there are only limited possibilities for permeability for learners and graduates so far. 2get1care aimed to use ECVET - in particular the description of curricula in terms of learning outcomes - to enhance transparency and provide insight into the similarities and differences between curricula, as well as to facilitate the recognition of prior learning at higher education institutions. Designing curricula based on ECVET principles and the development of a further teacher training course also aimed to foster the implementation of competence based teaching and learning that is emphasised in the German concept of 'Handlungskompetenz' (action competence).

The following lessons learned from the project can be highlighted:

- From the perspective of health professions, the formulation of learning outcomes seems to be the most direct added value of ECVET. Learning outcomes that are formulated in a clear way and which specify the level of complexity as well as the context in which an activity is carried out, can enhance transparency and provide insight into similarities and differences between curricula.
- Learning outcomes 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. The preparation and involvement of teachers and students is a prerequisite for successful implementation.
- In order to support credit transfer and permeability from VET to higher education, it is of crucial importance to involve representatives from higher education in the design of the curriculum. Thus, it can be ensured that a 'common language' is used and shared with the 'receiving' institutions.

During the 2get1 care final conference in November 2013, it was stated that during the last few years, the adoption of a competence-based approach and a shift towards learning outcomes were more widely discussed in the German VET system and the concepts are gradually becoming more accepted. The 2get1care project contributed to enrich these experiences by identifying the ECVET elements that provide the most added value, in view of using ECVET in a more systematic manner in the highly regulated field of health care.

Similar to the EASYMetal project, the **ESyCQ project** also used the available options for the recognition of prior learning in the German VET system as a starting point. The recognition **of previously completed training for the current period of training** that is stipulated in the German Vocational Training Act is also potentially interesting from the point of view of training providers. Once clarity is established about the conditions of assessment, validation and recognition of prior learning (e.g. from non-formal and informal contexts), training providers can offer certified assessment methods and/or courses to fill the gaps that were identified through the assessment.

The ESyCQ project (led by a training provider) was based on the observation that many people in the ICT and trade sector acquire and continuously update their professional knowledge, skills and competences through learning on the job, without ever following a formal training programme. Consequently, they have the professional capabilities required, but not the corresponding formal qualifications. The project developed a solution to test one's learning outcomes against a set of standards. The aim of this transparency tool is to facilitate the recognition of learning outcomes in view of achieving a formal qualification.

To establish trust for the assessment method and testing platform, ESyCQ has established cooperation with the local competent institution, the Chamber of Commerce (IHK Cottbus), which is familiar with and uses the test platform in other contexts. ESyCQ recommends that the Chamber agrees to implement the test developed by the project and offer it to candidates who aim to take an external test to achieve a specific qualification. Based on the outcomes of the testing, the Chamber can decide individually to what degree the test results of the candidates can be recognised as a requirement for the participation in the official (final) exam as offered to candidates who have extensive working experience in the specific professional field. For instance, the units of learning outcomes passed could be validated and hence allow for a categorisation of the professional experience and competence of the learner.

ICARE and CO.L.O.R: Impulses from two projects supporting greater coherence in the Italian VET system

The Italian VET system is rather complex and fragmented. The Regions and Autonomous Provinces have exclusive legislative power over vocational education and training for delivering vocational qualifications, with the exception of VET as part of compulsory education, where the Regions must comply with minimum standards and rules established at the national level. This means that for many qualifications and competences, there are no national standards and qualifications issued by Regions and Provinces cannot be automatically recognised across Italy.

Both Italian projects – ICARE and CO.L.O.R - perceived ECVET as a means to support the process toward greater

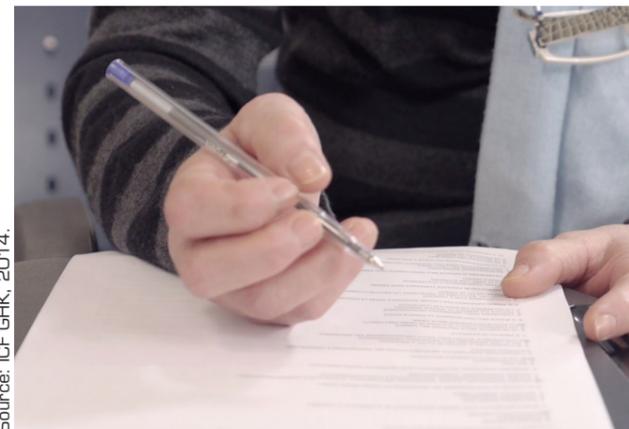
coherence in the Italian VET system and aimed to improve the situation of mobile workers.

The project CO.L.O.R brought together several Italian Regional Authorities as well as other key stakeholders in two sectors, health care and construction. All partners were engaged in the development of the methodology for the transfer of units. They confirmed the feasibility of competence-based assessments and agreed to take the work further. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed which formalised the commitment to continue testing the units developed and to design and test modular competence-based training pathways. The final project conference in April 2013 showed that the methodology for describing, assessing and validating units of learning outcomes developed through the CO.L.O.R project is expected to contribute to reforms of the qualifications system: further improving national coherence in VET.

The ICARE project tried to create impulses for greater transparency and permeability in the Italian VET system: and eventually, the recognition of learning outcomes acquired in other contexts by using the ECVET framework.

The transnational partners participating in the ICARE project found that the use of learning outcomes creates transparency across regions and countries. VET providers and competent institutions in different countries and Italian regions can use the ICARE matrix of competences to identify commonalities between qualifications. With a common assessment method, prior learning can be tested and validated according to a competence-based approach. Each learning outcome (part of a unit of learning outcomes) is assessed individually, through the simulation of a real work situation and a theoretical test. Gaps can be identified, and an individual training plan can be set up: in view of shortening the training path leading to the full qualification. However, the regional authority awards the qualification on the basis of a summative final exam organised by the VET provider. Modular and flexible training courses are rarely available. This for the moment poses an obstacle to the full implementation of the recognition model.

During the final conference of the project in March 2013, the new decree on the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning introduced in Italy in January 2013 was discussed. The decree emphasises the need for concrete tools and methods to facilitate the recognition of prior learning. Consequently, an increasing interest from VET providers and competent institutions in the methodology developed by the project is expected.



The contribution of ECVET to individuals, businesses, VET providers and VET systems in general

An article by Daniela Uličná and Anette Curth, ICF GHK¹

After several years of testing and development in pilot projects, it is now time to have a look at the benefits of ECVET from a broader perspective. How can ECVET support learners, businesses, VET providers and VET systems in general? This article lines out some of the benefits of ECVET and gives some concrete example gathered from the context of the pilot projects. Although the examples are not always based on real cases², the projects have proven through testing that they are realistic - within the existing conditions of current VET systems. However, in practice, this depends on whether or not ECVET is implemented beyond the context of a particular project. In short: although the examples are realistic and the solutions are possible, in most cases this is not yet mainstream practice.

Many employers today expect recruits to communicate with international clients and customers or cope with technical specifications in a foreign language. In plenty of businesses, it has become commonplace to work with peers from different cultural backgrounds. Spending a study period abroad should contribute to building such aptitudes.

Companies need people to adapt to changing processes, products and technologies. Professionals need to continue updating and upgrading their skills, and might even be asked to upgrade their formal qualifications. The commitment to continue learning during one's career is a key factor of success in a competitive environment. Lifelong learning is a pre-condition for professional development, career progression or career change. It facilitates continued employability, but also personal satisfaction.

During a lifetime aspirations evolve. When young people are 15, 16 or a bit older, they choose an education pathway. This pathway should open up rather than narrow down the op-

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning to help acquire a formal qualification

Maria works as a care assistant for families, nursing elderly relatives. She has several years of experience, but does not have a formal qualification in this area. Maria wishes to change her work environment; instead of working for families in private homes, she would now prefer to work with elderly people in a nursing home. She realises that potential employers require a formal qualification. Therefore, she undergoes a procedure for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and – thanks to her practical experience - achieves credit for several units that form this qualification. However, since she never attended formal training, Maria does not perform as well on the units related to theoretical knowledge. Due a recognition model based on ECVET principles, she can accumulate the units already acquired with additional formal training, thus significantly shortening her training programme; and eventually achieve the full qualification.

¹ This article is based on work completed to provide input to a resource document which the European Commission has made available to the national ECVET implementation bodies.

² Where concrete persons are mentioned, either their names have been changed or they represent ideal or typical cases



Source: ICF GHK, 2014.

portunities ahead of them. People should be able to change or progress depending on their ambitions, capabilities and needs rather than being locked in a certain track that leads them to disappointment or failure. Therefore, education and training systems should be able to accommodate changes without sending people back to 'square zero'.

How does the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) fit into this picture? It is a framework to design national or institutional mechanisms for recognition, transfer and accumulation of credit. In ECVET, credit corresponds to assessed learning outcomes. It captures what people have learned independent of where they have learned it. ECVET helps people acquire vocational qualifications recognising what they have learned in the past, shortening the training periods or diversifying the learning process. It can also apply to international mobility exchanges, transition from VET to higher education and vice-versa, continuous training or recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

How can ECVET support learners?

People learn in a variety of institutions: training centres, companies, practical workshops, project work on their own, etc. The context in which people learn can also vary: from the formal curriculum of the institution where they are regularly registered as learners, to work-placement in a company, international exchange, non-formal learning programme, informal learning on the job, etc. Throughout their career, people need to produce evidence of the skills and competences they have acquired on various occasions – sometimes even a long time after they have left the education system. The use of ECVET will help learners to gain recognition for what they have learned already – covering a broad range of learning venues and learning contexts.

Certification by units to support early school leavers' return to formal education

Mathieu, a Belgian student, has left school early to work in a garage. After a while, he realises he is not very well paid and his chances to move up in his job are small. This situation would improve with a formal qualification. During his formal training in a vocational school, Mathieu has already acquired four out of the six units of learning outcomes that are necessary to acquire a formal qualification. After a VET-reform that took place in the French speaking community of Belgium, training for car mechanics was organised around those units, and Mathieu was given a validated 'passport' recording the units he acquired. Upon his re-entry to formal education, these four units were recognised. He returns to school to acquire the missing two units. No training content is required to be repeated. After he successfully passed the assessment of the final two units, Mathieu is granted a full formal qualification as a car mechanic.

The core principle of ECVET is recognition, transfer and accumulation of a person's knowledge, skills and competence – in short, their learning outcomes. Therefore, learners can continue building on what they know and are able to do. What matters is that they have achieved the expected learning outcomes³, not how and where they achieved these. For instance, some learning outcomes can be achieved through formal learning, while others through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Consequently, ECVET can help learners achieving a qualification through different pathways: formal learning, combining formal learning and other modes of learning, recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

For example, if a learner drops out of his/her training pathway, s/he has often already achieved some units of learn-

ing outcomes. These are documented and the learner is awarded corresponding credit. If s/he decides to return to education and training, all or some of the credit can be recognised even if the learner decides to return to a different programme/ pathway. As a result, if the person knows and is able to do things that are relevant to the qualification being prepared, s/he does not have to start from the beginning.

Many countries and training institutions already use ECVET for learners' mobility; when the learner goes abroad, the use of units of learning outcomes helps to create transparency. The learner knows exactly what s/he is expected to learn in the foreign company or training centre. The receiving institution has a clearer view on what they should prepare the learner for; and what newly achieved knowledge, skills and competence they should assess. On return, the home institution has evidence of what the learner has learned abroad. This can be recognised as part of his/her qualification or programme⁴.

The same mechanism can be used between a training centre and a company that hosts the learner for a traineeship or period of work-based learning.

Martin is a German student aiming to become a cook. He takes part in a mobility project and goes to Belgium. Since cooks are trained in the dual system in Germany, the two providers responsible for his education – a training company and a VET-school – agreed beforehand with the Belgian host institution that in Belgium, Martin would complete a two-week mobility unit where he would learn how to work with fresh fish, mussels and shells. Martin is assessed in the Belgian VET-school and it is stated that he successfully passed the mobility unit.

The training period abroad is recognised at home with regard to two aspects: firstly, the time Martin spent in Belgium is part of the official duration of his training and does not have to be repeated. Secondly, the assessment has a formative role – although Martin cannot accumulate units of learning outcomes, his teachers and trainers at home will take his learning into account. The content of Martin's mobility period was clarified beforehand, and together with the assessment, they have a good understanding of what he did and achieved abroad. Hence, when 'working with fresh fish and mussels' comes up as part of the training curriculum, they know that Martin can either carry out work on a higher level, or skip that part of the training and spend time on something else.

What can ECVET offer to businesses?

One of the aims of ECVET, together with other European instruments, is to ensure that people leave education and training well qualified and adaptable.

Having international experience is an asset for many professions today. It responds to the demand for people who can work in an international context. It also helps people develop adaptability. Using ECVET will make it easier to enable larger numbers of VET learners to study abroad and have the learning outcomes acquired during the mobility period recognised.

Moreover, using ECVET to recognise periods of work-based learning can help ensure that VET graduates master the theory as well as the practice of their professions.

ECVET also makes it easier for companies to understand the qualifications of job applicants. The definition of learning outcomes takes the profession as the point of departure. It reflects the tasks and processes of the profession and its context. It therefore facilitates recruitment.

Compensating the shortage of skilled workers by finding someone with an exact skills match

A small family owned-enterprise seeks to hire an experienced plumber. They have put out a job advert, but no suitable candidates have applied. They then get in touch with the Public Employment Services (PES), without success – as qualified plumbers are scarce. However, in a personal consultation the PES asks about the exact job profile of the candidate and it turns out the company is looking for someone to take over small, but time-consuming repair jobs with private customers, so that the specialists can concentrate on bigger jobs, which require more planning skills.

Among its candidates, the PES finds Karol, a job seeker with a transcript of records that proves he has worked in the industry and has the necessary skills to carry out small repair jobs in private homes. The company studies his transcript of records and through the transparent description of learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and competences, they decide that Karol, although not formally qualified, should be up to the job. Karol is hired for a probationary period, and since he does well with the jobs given, the company offers him a permanent position.

The same features of ECVET support discussions between labour market representatives and education and training authorities and institutions. Using learning outcomes makes it easier to define the expectations for a given profession and develop qualifications. The use of units and modules can make it easier to adjust programmes to respond to evolving labour market needs and the specificities of a certain region or industry. This can be done without multiplying the number of qualifications, whilst ensuring the coherence of minimum requirements across the territory or the sector; it is much easier for a VET provider to adjust a module or a unit rather than develop a new programme.

How can ECVET benefit VET providers?

VET providers are responsible for organising the international mobility of learners. Frequently, they also have the responsibility to ensure that this exchange is of sufficient quality. This includes the quality of the learning experience.

These elements of ECVET support quality assurance of mobility:

- The home and the host institution agree on what learning outcomes should be achieved by the learner while s/he is abroad. This means that all three parties have a common understanding of the objectives of the stay abroad;
- These objectives are documented in a learning agreement;
- At the end of the mobility period, the learner is assessed. The results of the assessment are documented;
- The home institution therefore knows what progress the person has made while abroad. This is supported by evidence of that achievement.

As a result, it is easier for the home institution to plan and recognise the mobility of learners. This is particularly true for longer periods of stay abroad.

The same can be said about use of ECVET for a period of work-based learning. These processes also help ensure the quality of traineeships or other forms of practical learning in companies.

Using a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) among training institutions can facilitate the procedures for arranging mobility between institutions. The MoU defines the

framework conditions in which exchanges will take place and the responsibilities of each party. It clarifies the expectations and requirements of each institution. The exchange preceding the definition of the MoU helps install mutual trust.

Finally, the use of units and documentation of learners' credit facilitate the recognition of learning outcomes when a person wants to transfer from another programme. The transparency of the learner's past achievements makes it easier for the VET provider to position the learner in a programme.

Do you want to learn more about ECVET?

The European Commission together with the ECVET Users' Group which brings together representatives of all Member States as well as stakeholders, published the following documents on ECVET:

- **Get to Know ECVET Better – Questions and Answers;** In a questions and answers format this document explains the technical features of ECVET. The technical specifications are illustrated with examples.
- **Using ECVET for Geographical Mobility;** This document shows how ECVET can be used to support geographical mobility. It provides tips for ensuring the quality of mobility using ECVET.
- **Using ECVET to support Lifelong Learning;** This publication illustrates different scenarios in which ECVET can be used outside initial vocation education and training.

Cedefop regularly publishes monitoring reports on the implementation of ECVET⁵ at the national level. Cedefop also published a document on the conditions that are necessary at system level in order to implement ECVET⁶.

Additional sources:

- Web-site of the ECVET Team on which you can register to be a member of the ECVET Network and where you can find the ECVET Community of Practice: <http://www.ecvet-team.eu/>
- The ECVET toolkit provides support for integrating ECVET into mobility practice: <http://www.ecvet-toolkit.eu/>
- Web-site of ECVET pilot projects that were financed by the European Commission in the period 2008-2014: <http://www.ecvet-projects.eu/>

⁴ Home institution is the institution where the learner is regularly registered. Host institution is the institution that hosts the learner during his/her mobility period.

⁵ Cedefop publications on ECVET can be downloaded here: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/projects/european-credit-system-for-vocational-education-and-training/index.aspx>

⁶ Cedefop (2012) Necessary conditions for ECVET implementation <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/19848.aspx>



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