



Synthesis Report

ECVET Pilot Projects 7th Seminar: Validation and Recognition

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1 INTRODUCTION

As part of the project cooperation activities, representatives from the eleven ECVET pilot projects met in Vienna on 24-25 February 2011 for their seventh meeting. The main theme of this seminar is validation and recognition learning outcomes using ECVET. It relates to the discussions that have already taken place on the topic of assessment of learning outcomes (see the note on assessment that resulted from the Barcelona and Prague seminars).¹

The aim of the 1.5 - Day seminar was to foster discussion about the projects' approaches to validation and recognition. On Day 1, after a general introduction to the topic, two projects presented their approaches to the subject.

The afternoon of the first day was dedicated to a workshop session. The group split up and in each workshop three more projects presented their approach. Examples from the projects were discussed, taking into account the framework of the educational system in the respective countries. To round up the discussions, the workshop facilitators, provided a template which sketches situations of mobility in different systems (with units, without units, holistic etc.), in order to distillate typical cases for validation and recognition (See annex). On day 2, these model cases were discussed in a plenary session.

2 VALIDATION AND RECOGNITION

Validation of learning outcomes is defined in the ECVET Recommendation as follows: *Validation of learning outcomes' means the process of confirming that certain assessed learning outcomes achieved by a learner correspond to specific outcomes which may be required for a unit or a qualification.*

Validation is preceded by assessment. The two form a chain that can be 'unpicked' as follows:

- The assessment identifies the learning outcomes the person has achieved. In practice this means, for example, that the assessor(s) observes that the learner performs certain tasks with high proficiency or that s/he has good knowledge of a given areas, etc.
- The assessor(s) document these learning outcomes. For example, the assessor can provide a description of the strong points and the weak points of learners' performance with regard to the given task (using as basis the expected learning outcomes description), or the assessor can complete an assessment grid which contains certain criteria describing learner's performance. In some cases the assessor can also recommend that the person passes the assessment or that they achieve a certain grade.
- The person in charge of the validation takes stock of assessor's judgement. They compare the identified learning outcomes with the expected learning outcomes.

¹ <http://www.ecvet-projects.eu/Documents/Note%20on%20assessment%20revised.pdf>

- If the expected learning outcomes are met at the required level (of proficiency, autonomy, etc.) then the assessment is validated. This can mean that the learner is given a grade or that s/he is awarded a 'pass'.

The ECVET Recommendation defines the recognition of learning outcomes in the following manner:

Recognition of learning outcomes' means the process of attesting officially achieved learning outcomes through the awarding of units or qualifications.

Recognition builds on the two processes (assessment and validation) described above. In the recognition phase:

- The learner receives an official confirmation of the fact that they have achieved the given learning outcomes, unit or qualification.
- This can mean that they receive a certificate or that the unit or learning outcomes are recorded in their official transcript of record.

Sometimes the recognition phase may entail that the person/institution in charge of recognition verifies that the process of assessment and validation have taken place according to the existing rules and that there are no irregularities.

2.1 Key issues for validation and recognition with regard to ECVET

When it comes to using ECVET for mobility, this chain of processes is particularly important because the learner is assessed in another institution and in another system (and country) than the system where s/he will achieve the full qualification.

The process of assessment, validation and recognition is the basis for credit transfer in ECVET. It is important to note that validation is a distinct process from assessment, because that enables home institutions to take into account learner's learning outcomes when they have been assessed abroad.

During mobility:

- Learners' learning outcomes are assessed abroad in the host institutions. Several pilot projects are putting in place documents such as assessment grids to ensure that the host institution can easily record the result of assessment and the extent to which the learner has received expected learning outcomes.
- They are validated in the home institution, based on the evidence about the assessment that took place abroad.
- The recognition also takes place in the home institution or in the home system. Recognition takes place at a later stage than validation, if, for example, there is a need to achieve and assess other learning outcomes in view of achieving the qualification/unit.

2.2 Main difficulties encountered

While according to the definitions cited above the validation and recognition when using ECVET should concern learning outcomes, it is, for the moment, not always possible to base the validation on learning outcomes. In fact, it seems from the discussions among the ECVET pilot projects but also in other groups, that validation can take these main forms:

- Validate the learning period: in other words when the learner returns s/he is not asked to repeat the parts of the education and training programme. For this it is often not in particular necessary for the home institution to have a record of

learning outcomes achieved abroad. This form of validation is possible when the mobility period is short and when there is little risk that the learner will have missed on crucial aspects of the education and training process.

In this case it is possible to make the desired learning outcomes visible for the learner and the teachers and validate that indeed the desired learning outcomes have been reached after the person returns from mobility, but without a real possibility to translate the validation process into an 'act' that would have a clear meaning from the point of view of learners' learning pathway or progression.

The question that could be asked is whether and how the identification and use of learning outcomes can be useful in this context.

- Validate the learning period as on-the-job learning activity: many projects currently envisage that the mobility abroad will take place within an enterprise (this has a also number of practical advantages that are unrelated to validation) and will be validated as part of learners' compulsory on-the-job learning period. It is common that the requirements in terms of on-the-job learning periods in school-based systems are defined not in terms of learning outcomes but rather in terms of duration (typically number of weeks). Several projects envisage validating the learning periods abroad as part of these required weeks of on-the-job learning.

As above, the same question about the usefulness of learning outcomes in this context can be asked.

- Validate the assessment of learning outcomes carried out abroad as one of several continuous assessments that will lead to the achievement of a unit. Given the short duration of mobility but also because of the fact that sometimes the national rules are rather strict in terms of when and how assessment has to take place, pilot projects envisage to validate the assessment abroad as one of several formative assessments that can lead to achievement of a unit or where it can be required that an additional final assessment for the unit or qualification is made. In this case it is indeed the learning outcomes achieved abroad that are validated (not just the learning period).
- Validate the assessment of learning outcomes abroad as a full unit: this appears as a possibility in several systems which already use units and where there is certain flexibility with regard to the choice of units. Consequently learners can choose units (possibly with certain restrictions) that suit their pathway. It also requires that the duration of mobility is rather long and that the units are not too big. In this case the validation and recognition is fully based on the assessment of learning outcomes abroad.

The above options outline different approaches to how validation can be done in ECVET pilot projects within the current constraints of the qualifications systems in which they operate. As it appears from the above in some cases the link with the use of learning outcomes is clearer than in others.

It is likely that, depending on the approach followed, the need for evidence about assessment outcomes and the tasks/activities around assessment will not be the same. This will also have some impact on the preparation of ECVET mobility and the work that is to be done before hand in terms of learning agreements and MoUs.

2.3 Examples of pilot projects' approaches to validation and recognition

VaLOGReg: Mutual trust as basis for validation and recognition

Different countries and regions are represented in the VaLOGReg project (i.e. BE, DE, FR and LU). Therefore, what will be tested at regional level might serve as an example for the implementation of ECVET at European level.

Two-thirds of the VaLOGReg project has been implemented to date. Since the mobility phase is not finalised yet, the question of validation and recognition of learning outcomes achieved abroad still needs to be completed - no major obstacles are being foreseen, since learning content is about 90% the same.

Ensuring mutual trust is considered as an essential precondition to validation and recognition by the VaLOGReg partners: Companies' representatives, experts and pupils are invited to visit the training place in advance in order to guarantee transparency and foster confidence between the partners. In experts' meetings it is ensured in advance that the learning outcomes in the different partners' countries correspond to each other. A Questions and Answers document related to the mobility of pupils is also produced by the VaLOGReg partners in order to clarify any practical issues, such as the responsibility of institution for bearing travel costs etc.

According to VaLOGReg, validation should be seen as a set of tools. The pedagogue is one of the key factors for the validation of learning outcomes. When the learner is back from abroad, interviews will be set up to discuss the benefits of the mobility. However, the learner will not be assessed a second time when he/she is back to the home institution. The aim is to recognise the L.O within the regular curriculum and not as a complement. Both the L.O and the learning period are recognised.

In the final phase of the project, the potential problems related to the validation and recognition of L.O will be identified.

VaLOGreg gathers three partners' countries which systems are organised in units (BE, FR, LU). However, the Belgian units are not organised on the same basis than the French and Luxemburg units. The German system is not based on units at all. Despite these differences, it is possible to test the assessment, validation and recognition of Learning Outcomes. Nevertheless, the validation and recognition processes vary - depending on the partners who organise the mobility period.

It is difficult for VaLOGReg, though, to go beyond the stage of acknowledgement of Learning Outcomes and move to recognition of Learning Outcomes.

ASSET: Tools and guidelines

The **ASSET** project briefly presented the units of L.O open to mobility prior to detailing the validation and recognition processes. ASSET developed detailed guidelines defining how a unit should be assessed, as well as assessment grids and marking guidelines. These different tools set the evaluation and validation conditions applied by ASSET. In addition, these tools ensure quality assurance and mutual trust among partners. At national level, they also guarantee the use of similar criteria within a class, between a group experiencing mobility and another completing the unit of L.O in the home institution.

The question of recognition is addressed in the MoU. The different partners of the ASSET project provided a description of their qualification and identified where the units of L.O open to mobility were located in their qualification. For example, for the FR partner, unit 4 established by the ASSET project is located in three different modules while unit 1 corresponds to one single module. In this case, unit 1 is easier to recognise for the FR partner than unit 4. According to ASSET, validation and recognition are two different steps and can be inter-linked more or less easily depending on where the unit is located in the qualification.

Assessment and validation can easily be integrated by the training centres. Recognition of units of L.O. acquired abroad can also be easily implemented at an operational level. However, validation and recognition of units of L.O acquired abroad might take longer at institutional level given the organisation of the qualification.

In the ASSET project, the initiative comes from the training centres and social partners are invited to give their opinion. The implementation of ECVET at operational level prepares for the implementation of ECVET at institutional level.

SME Master: Legal and pedagogical requirements

The representative of the SME Master project reminded the participants that there are already (common minimum) quality standards for recognition of mobility periods in place - at least the time spent abroad will be recognized (e.g. German law states that one third of the time of training - usually nine months - can be spent abroad).

In Germany, the validation and examination of qualifications is regulated by the law. After a three-year period of education, there is a holistic examination. No partial examination is foreseen. A learner who has spent a period abroad cannot be exempted from examination or from a part of examination, he will be assessed again.

Apart from that, according to the SME Master experience, recognition is not what makes ECVET-mobility interesting – learning s.th. new and spending time abroad is what makes it appealing to students. Recognition is a surplus.

In the SME Master project, the mobility phase is only about to begin, so there are no concrete experiences yet. The training centres are very interested. The Chamber of Trade as a leading partner is quite independent in its decisions regarding recognition and validation since it is the competent authority. So he is confident that solutions will be found. He is afraid, though, that not whole units can be recognized, since they may not fit in the national system and vice versa. Anyway, the length of the stay abroad also affects the assessment.

In a nutshell, he sees the limitations to validation and recognition in three aspects: 1) The legal point of view (legal basis of VET), 2) The pedagogical point of view (do learning outcomes fit into didactics and structure of qualification, is mobility period in the right place and in the right time corridor during whole training period), 3) The systemic aspect (national systems).

Despite that, ECVET offers added value since it shows a roadmap to flexible learning pathways.

Participants added that legal and systemic conditions cannot be changed very quickly, but the pedagogical judgement of study visits can.

Be-TWIN: Validation of Learning Outcomes as part of a unit

Enrico Bessan from Be-TWIN presented a Case Study that took place between French and German learners in the plastic industry. Two modules have been implemented: One module in France on plastics converters to be delivered by the CFI training Centre, and one common module in Germany on Communication and English language competences to be delivered by BASF training Centre.

The learning outcomes here are validated as part of a unit: French students which pass the assessment at the end of the exchange, will be awarded 4.5 ECVET points at the end of the exchange, the French students will be assessed abroad by a teacher as part of a unit belonging to their training. Thus, when the students will pass the final exam, the points earned will be added to the total and will contribute to the award of their Diploma.

Choosing 'Communication in English language' as the topic to be validated after study visits may not seem the obvious thing to do in a study visit addressing trainees in the plastic industry. But, due legal regulations, partners found that it was the only learning outcome which could be assessed independently from the training schedule.

In that context, it is important to note that up to date, in the countries involved 90% of mobility currently takes place outside a formal context as a way to avoid conflict with legal regulations. The complexity of legal regulations is also the main reason why partners in Be-TWIN are interested in ECVET – it might be a possible way to find solutions to the complexity of legal preconditions in the different countries.

AEROVET: Recognition of training units and recognition of occupational units

In AEROVET, the presenters differentiated between two aspects of validation and recognition: Recognition & validation within the project (as training units) and recognition as part of the qualification (as occupational units).

Within the project, special mobility units have been developed. The transcript of records of the learning outcome relates to the performed mobility unit. These mobility units are a necessary but not sufficient contribution on apprentices' way to a competent worker – even more important than the parts is the ability to combine these parts contextualised. Validation happens by a kind of evaluation task under surveillance of the trainer/teacher and/or an expert-worker. When successful, a recognition certificate is delivered.

Recognition as part of the qualification depends on the compatibility of training schemes and qualification requirements in the participating countries. High overlapping not only in work but also in apprenticeship between Germany, France and UK have been stated – this leads to good preconditions for the recognition of Learning Outcomes in the respective qualifications. Overlapping was less obvious with the respective Spanish qualification – in such case learning outcomes acquired in other countries should be certified separately, e. g. as in-house certificates.

It also must be noted that a unit is not a unit everywhere. In host and home country, skills and competences may be differently allocated.

AEROVET stated that in the aeronautic industry, though it seems to be a perfect surrounding for ECVET at first glance, massive conflicts with standards and regulations on different levels (different national standards, different company standards, different producer standards etc.) have been experienced.

RECOMFOR: Developing a network of competent institutions and training centres

RECOMFOR created a network of training centres and companies to organise mobility. The MoU is signed between the network and the different partners. It is the responsibility of the partners to check with their competent institutions whether they agree with the MoU. The 'membership agreement', which is signed between the home and host institutions, establishes the principle of faith in the assessment carried out by the host institution. Training centres are asked to comply with quality charts: this allows a certain monitoring from the competent institutions.

Assessment, validation and recognition are the responsibility of each partner and is inferred from the MoU, and will thus differ from one partner to another. For example, in Romania, validation and recognition will be organised at school level.

In order to guarantee the sustainability of the network set up under the RECOMFOR project, an association 'NetinVet' has been created. NetinVet's Steering Committee (composed of representatives of competent institutions and training centres) and Scientific Committee (composed of competent institutions) will also allow adjustments, if necessary. To be part of NetinVet, training centres has to pay an annual fee (around € 700).

CREDCHEM – Mobility as incremental part of training documented in EUROPASS

CREDCHEM has identified three indicators of success for the CREDCHEM project: 1) ECVET will be used as a tool to manage mobility in the chemical sector; 2) the approach developed by CREDCHEM will be sustainable and will last after the end of the project/funding; and 3) the approach developed by CREDCHEM will also be applied to national developments.

In CREDCHEM, mobility is an integrated part of the training. There are 8 different learning venues in the CREDCHEM partnership. The mobility exchanges will take place from September 2011. The learning venues have been visited by the teachers and have been 'validated'. Differences between these learning venues matter a lot. For instance, in Germany, the vocational system is dual as to learning venues (Schools and companies) while in Slovakia, the system is school-based only. In case of a mobility exchange between a school-based and a dual system, the student originated from the school-based system will be placed in training centres and not in companies (as companies are not able to provide training on a full unit). The CREDCHEM partners indicated that the ECVET recommendation did not make any distinction between training centres and companies. However, in practice, there is a difference.

In order to identify the legal basis of validation and recognition, CREDCHEM explored the framework of VET systems of the partner countries, asking the following questions:

- Is there an official decision on implementing ECVET in the national system?
- Is the system unit-based (modularized)?
- Is the system based on the accumulation of LO?
- Is it foreseen to implement an accumulation function?
- Do the CREDCHEM units cover parts of the respective training programme?
- Is the CREDCHEM mobility abroad validated and recognized?

On this basis, it can be decided on which level and by what actors validation and recognition will take place. Using this framework, the project found that in none of CREDCHEM partners' countries there was a decision to implement ECVET at national level; none of the countries are working with points and credits yet; none of the systems are organised in modules; and in none of the countries there is an accumulation function foreseen.

Nevertheless, it is foreseen that validation takes place incrementally (mobility is part of the training) and the learning outcomes will be documented by EUROPASS (f.e. additional qualifications).

In Germany, a working group has been running for a year to determine as to what extent Germany wanted to implement ECVET. A paper, endorsed by the German Ministry of Education and Research, establishes that ECVET will be used in Germany in the framework on trans-national mobility only; and that mobility is part of the training. Therefore, validation and recognition is part of the training system.

This follows a German regulation which is in place since 2005 and stipulates that 1/3rd of the training (up to nine months) can be carried out abroad. However, only 2% of the learners take advantage of this provision.

Germany is not an accumulation-based system. Learners are trained in the perspective of a vocation (i.e. being operational on the labour market). Being sent to a company abroad is often seen as an opportunity to test what has been learnt instead of learning/acquiring an additional unit of L.O. The implementation of ECVET in Germany will bring added-value as it will allow validation and recognition of a training period through on-the-job-learning.

CAPE-SV: Common grid for recognition and main constraints faced

The method developed by CAPE-SV aims at understanding the progress needed to go from one EQF level to another, from one job profile to another. The project is based on two different experiments: 1) Lightning technicians who work on a common job-profile, but for which the partners offer qualifications on different EQF level; 2) two different job-profiles based on qualifications of the same EQF level.

In CAPE-SV, partners have agreed on a common grid for recognition, based on the following items:

- Chronological phases related to work process;
- Work units connected to phases;
- Common system to describe learning outcomes;
- Description of expected results, assessment criteria and procedures from the point of view of the receiving institution;
- Definition of role profiles connected to qualifications;
- Transversal units independent from work process.

Nevertheless, full recognition has been difficult to realize up to date. The main constraints in the first example is that the unit of LO has transversal aspects as well as technical aspects – some countries will only recognize the transversal part of the unit, because it is the purpose of the mobility in their qualification. For others, both aspects are part of the learning outcome. As to the second example it has been found that the main constraints are restricted access to the qualification and a different public addressed.

2.4 Summary of the discussion on the project presentations

There are different stages of recognition:

- Recognition of the time
- Recognition that LO is already learned, and is not to be repeated
- Recognition that LO is not to be tested again

In countries where units are in place, it is difficult to find units in other countries that are equal or comparable. This must be the first aim of a mobility project. It is also important to identify adequate corridors for mobility periods – what do social partners and ministries aim at when they design qualifications or revise existing ones.

As a summary, it can be stated that the participants found recognition to pose more problems than validation. Assessment procedures also affect recognition. National regulations are the most viable factor. In an attempt to distillate typical cases for validation and recognition, several scenarios for different situations and systemic conditions (with units, without units, holistic etc.) have been discussed.

For instance, in a situation of short term mobility, where units are in place at national level, and the learner achieves LO that correspond to a part of a unit, the learner would typically be assessed by representatives from both the host and the home country, the learning outcomes would be mentioned in the Europass and recognition would be possible (e.g. BE-TWIN).

In a holistic system (France, Germany, Austria and Slovenia), no assessment happens during a training programme, only a final examination takes place. Here the mobile learner will have to be assessed (examined) again in his/her final exam. Still, his/her learning outcomes can be validated and recognized. A partial formative assessment can be done following mobility (the learner writes a report, the report is checked, the learner receives a Transcript of Records). As to recognition, the sending organisation can issue a document signed by host and home comp. institution.

In a situation, where the unit of learning outcomes achieved abroad is not part of the qualification aimed at in the home country, recognition is still possible: simply by competent institutions of home and host country issuing a joint certificate stating that they recognize the learning outcomes.

Another string of discussion showed that several projects are using validation and recognition to document learning processes, but not for accumulation as such. Thus, it was concluded that validation and recognition can be formative and/or summative.

2.5 Items for further discussion

- As to recognition, ECEVT pilot projects are required to work within the constraints of existing legal regulations. It would be interesting to draw a matrix showing which systems allow for which sort of recognition.
- ECVET has to be tested / implemented in systems that are quite complex and maybe not ready for it. In some contexts, the links between operational and institutional level or between practical and institutional level are missing. It should be further discussed how these missing links can be put into place.
- It should also be reflected on the type of infrastructure needed to guarantee the implementation of ECVET once the different pilot projects finish.