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

Annual ECVET Forum 2013

Stay connected to implement ECVET

Prague - 13 - 14 June 2013

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The 2013 annual forum was organised by the European Commission with the support of the ECVET team.

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Context

The 2013 ECVET annual forum took place on June 13 and 14 in Prague. More than 300 VET policy-makers, VET providers, practitioners, social partners and representatives from sector organisations and regions met to build stronger relationships and to improve their knowledge of ECVET and the other European education instruments.

During the forum the ECVET team launched the online Communities of Practice portal which will help ECVET members to stay connected and support greater collaboration. The forum also provided an opportunity to present the up-dated ECVET website.

Underpinning the forum was the **widespread recognition that ECVET is working** - it has been successfully tested through many pilot projects and is used in a large number of mobility schemes. Increasingly Member States have established the necessary conditions for ECVET implementation. At a European level ECVET is linked to core initiatives such as the development of a European Area of Skills and Qualifications. At the national level ECVET is part of the evolution of VET systems and the revision of qualifications and education standards.

Over the last twelve months, the EC-VET network has continued to produce resources to assist policy makers, project leaders, competent authorities and VET designers in Member States. These resources include templates, which support the development of a learning agreement and Memorandum of Understanding, practical guidance and information on creating effective communication channels between partner organisations. In addition, the EC-VET team has organised peer learning activities, conferences and seminars which have helped National Coordination Points, national teams of ECVET experts and project organisers to share their experiences and find out more about how to implement ECVET.

ECVET is closely connected to the other European instruments and principles - together they enhance lifelong learning and increase mobility in Europe. EQF/NQFs, EQAVET, ECTS, Europass and the validation of non-formal and informal learning are all part of this process. **Central to the interactions and relationships between the European instruments is the increasing importance of the learning outcomes approach**.

The theme for the annual conference - **stay connected to implement ECVET** - reflected the importance of communications and networking in supporting the implementation of the ECVET Recommendation.

The ECVET forum provided an opportunity to exchange information, debate, learn, and network with policy makers, experts and practitioners from across Europe. Examples of good practices and the outcomes of debates on emerging strategies throughout Europe helped participants to develop their own approaches and policies.

The forum was divided into two thematic sessions, which were supported by workshops. These workshops addressed key issues relating to ECVET implementation. Each workshop was based on examples and reflections from those who had already used ECVET. Facilitators led the group discussions and participants chose and attended three workshops: two on the first day, and one on the second day. On the first day the forum focused on:

- the use of ECVET;
- stakeholders and ECVET;
- ECVET in the European VET context.

The second day focused on the resources for ECVET implementation and included a presentation on new developments from the ECVET team and a demonstration of the new website and "prototype" web platform for the ECVET Communities of Practice. ■

Welcome and introduction

Alison Crabb, Deputy Head of Unit B2 "Vocational training and adult education; Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig" (European Commission, DG Education and Culture) welcomed the more than 300 participants attending this forum in Prague. In Brussels last year there were 200 at the annual forum. This rise in participation is one sign of increasing interest in credit transfer in VET.

At the time of last year's forum, there was a feeling of hope that Europe was starting to overcome the crisis. The unemployment figures unfortunately do not yet show any positive signs. However **VET is still considered a key lever to overcome unemployment** and this is the reason why it remains so high on the political agenda. A great deal of attention is being directed towards VET as a way to overcome the crisis. For example, earlier this year the European Commission and Member States adopted so-called "Country Specific Recommendations" on reform for growth and jobs. Every year this focuses on helping Member States through financial and macro-economic reforms: but this year there was a greater focus on education and training, VET, skills and lifelong learning. Last year the European Commission launched *Rethinking Education*[1], which is very specific about VET and includes policy proposals for Member States and other stakeholders. This includes a very clear message about the importance of investing in VET. It also contains a very clear request to improve the recognition of skills and qualifications including those acquired outside the formal education and training sector. One way to improve recognition is to implement and use the different European instruments (e.g. the European Qualifications Framework, the European Quality Assurance Framework etc.) – these can all help people to move around Europe to where the jobs exist.

Progress in implementing the necessary conditions for ECVET flows from the concrete steps that have been made since last year. However the overall message is that more time is needed both by Member States and other stakeholders to implement ECVET. At the same time **a lot of initiatives are being developed and these are helping to put ECVET into practice.**

These initiatives increase collaboration across Europe, they develop new ideas and approaches and they provide ideas, which can be discussed and shared. They are bringing the implementation of ECVET a step forward.

This forum is a sharing and learning event, where each participant will take something from and bring something to the next two days. Together progress is making and this is an opportunity to move to the next level of collaboration through using the new online Communities of Practice. ◼

(1) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European economic and social committee and the committee of the regions, Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes, 2012.

Coffee table: ECVET is working!

The forum began with a discussion between Jakub Stárek from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in the Czech Republic, Alison Crabb from the European Commission, Ramona Carmen David Craescu from Cedefop, Susanne Klimmer who is an ECVET expert from Austria, Antti Rusko from the construction sector in Finland, Sirje Ellermaa who is a VET teacher from Estonia and Ave Vali who is a VET student in Estonia. During this discussion, participants were asked to consider questions and issues that could affect the further development of ECVET.

The discussion was introduced by the conference moderator and compere, Fiona Bibby. Fiona set the scene by acknowledging that ECVET had been working for four years and many ideas and processes had been tested. **Fiona invited each contributor to give some feedback from their sector and perspective. Contributors were invited to comment on the added value of ECVET and the challenges that have been faced**. This discus-

sion helped to set the scene for the nine workshops which took place later in the day.

Jakub Stárek: We would like to thank you all for coming in Prague. The ECVET Recommendation was adopted during the Czech presidency, so we're happy to celebrate ECVET 4th birthday in Prague. As I did not find any benchmarks in the ECVET Recommendation, I searched the child psychology and physiology literature to find out what a four year old child is supposed to know and be able to do. A four year old should be able to:

- increasingly compare tasks even those which are long term and less concrete;
- develop friendships with their peers (we can see a strong sense of cooperation in ECVET);
- find creative ways to complete a task (we can see creativity in every European instrument);
- understand the need to move without bumping into others (we can see cooperation between the different European instruments).

At the end of the chapter that I was reading, there was a warning that four year olds can lose their balance when jumping. So they (and we) need to be careful not to jump too high!

What I wanted to stress with this example is that we are still developing and discovering new opportunities in our environment. If we remain focused we probably will be successful. So I would like to say 'happy birthday' to ECVET and to wish you all an enjoyable and productive conference.

Ramona Carmen David Craescu: I am responsible for Cedefop's monitoring of ECVET and I would like to confirm that ECVET is a healthy baby. ECVET has led to many discussions and it has provided an opportunity for countries to bring stakeholders together to assess their own qualification system. Stakeholders do not always share the same opinions, but ECVET is slowly finding its place in the qualification systems in most Member States. ECVET is preferred as a flexible toolbox, rather than as a system. The strength of ECVET, as perceived by the countries, relies on its capacity to allow for flexibility and variation at system level.. ECVET's success is related to the introduction and use of learning outcomes. However, as Jakub Stárek said, at the moment we need to be careful not to jump too high. This is partly because credit points seem to be a critical issue (our monitoring shows that they are difficult to understand and implement). A child needs time to develop and to grow up.

Susanne Klimmer: I represent the practical side of ECVET as my organisation, IFA, is heavily involved in placements. Our task is to bring ECVET to companies and to schools. When I read the title of our discussion 'ECVET is working' I was doubtful. We are at the beginning of a process; we are just testing how it could work. When I talk to companies they seem interested as they want to help to improve their trainees' experience abroad, but they are afraid of the extra work that is required. It is our task to bring them tools which can reduce the bureaucratic aspects of ECVET.

Antti Rusko: From my perspective ECVET is helping recruitment. When I receive a job application from someone from abroad, I need to have an idea of what this person is able to do, his/her general knowledge and specific skills. For example, we have wood construction processes in Finland that are not used in Croatia or in Italy. We need to identify what candidates are able to do - it is not easy but ECVET could help to increase mobility.

Question from Alison Crabb: How did you first get involved in ECVET? And how did you find partners abroad?

Antti Rusko: We work with the National Board of Education and the City of Helsinki. The number of requests from international students continues to rise. In 2009, we received 11 students from Cork in Ireland where a credit system is used. It needed a lot of work from our staff to build the education program to fit with this request but it had a lasting benefit for both sides. We became in-

terested in the way that they built their education programme and decided to implement it in our organisation.

Sirje Ellermaa: I work in a training centre which is implementing projects that promote ECVET to colleagues and companies. We also send students abroad. The first experience we had was with Finland. When we started we compared learning outcomes and evaluation criteria to be sure that we were speaking about the same competences. We then started cooperating with Italy, Germany, France and Croatia. It was not easy because curricula and qualification standards differ in each country and the cultural differences are significant. Our experience demonstrated that transparency and trust are the most important issues for mobility.

Ramona Carmen David Craescu: This discussion is a good illustration of the different perspectives of the stakeholders involved in ECVET. It reveals how important it is to make use of the accumulated experience. As Alison Crabb said, ECVET is developing on two important levels: at a national level through changes to national systems, and at a micro level through the introduction of projects. Both levels have to be connected through examples of good practices. To carry the metaphor of the four year old child further, it is important to say that ECVET is not the only baby in the family. Some countries prefer to give priority to their NQF with links to the EQF for example - others focus on ECVET. ECVET needs to be connected to the other European instruments and be seen as just as important if we want to facilitate mutual recognition and the accumulation of learning.

Jakub Stárek: At the system level, the government of the Czech Republic decided to use ECVET to develop learning outcomes - it has been a priority for the last four years. Even though we, at a system level, consider ECVET an important tool, we recognise that there has been no direct demand from employers to implement ECVET. We try to convince them and we always show how ECVET could help them to meet their needs. For example we developed a national project called cooperative learning which introduced a dual system similar to the approach used in other countries such as Germany. We also use ECVET for domestic mobility between schools and companies. A systematic description of the learning outcomes helps schools and companies to understand the work that is completed by their partner organisation.

Alison Crabb: I would like to stress the new opportunities offered by the future programme *Erasmus for All*. A very important tool for VET is the Sector Skill Alliances as they help to identify the skills needed by companies. Pilot projects are already operating in four economic sectors: health, automobile industry, tourism, energy saving and sustainable construction. ∎

Plenary Discussion: towards a European Area of Skills and Qualifications

Daniela Ulicna, Principal Consultant, ICF GHK Consulting, introduced the topic about the European Area of Skills and Qualifications by asking participants how familiar they are with the European instruments and principles.
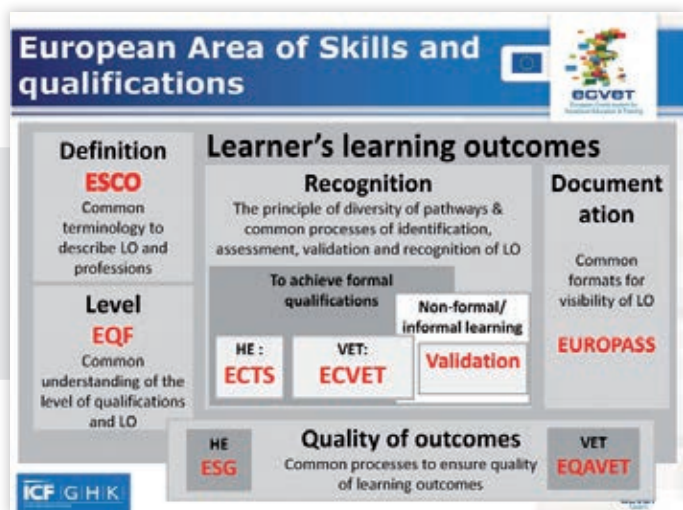
This slide can appear complex so it is important to understand what is behind the abbreviations. The following slide tries to explain the relationships.

The European Area for Skills and Qualifications is all about knowledge, skills and competences or in other words learning outcomes (at the centre of the diagram). We all acquire diversity of knowledge, skills and competences at school, at work or through leisure activities. In some situations we have to demonstrate and prove some of our abilities - for example in front of an employer. This is one of the roles that qualifications fulfil – they are a proof of achievement of certain learning outcomes.

This idea of making transparent what a person knows and is able to do is core to all the European instruments. Another common aim for all the instruments is the idea that people learn in a variety of situations and throughout life.

To start making learning outcomes transparent, one could start by the definition of the specific knowledge, skills and competence. The European standard terminology on occupations, skills, competences and qualifications (ESCO) is the European instrument that is linked to the definition of learning outcomes. It describes the key tasks of each profession/occupation and provides a common way to present expectations from a graduate or a job applicant (for example). It does not go into every detail of the profession but it defines the key aspects and gives the big picture of the job.

The second instrument is the EQF which describes the level of all qualifications. Used alongside each country's National Qualification Framework, it helps people to compare the level of a foreign qualification or a qualification from another system with the level of a national qualification in their own system. The EQF also sets out some basic principles on the design of qualifications and the use of learning outcomes.

The next set of European instruments focus on lifelong learning. These help, or will help, people to manage their entry or movement within the education system. Each of these instruments is concerned with processes, which lead to qualifications, assessment, validation and recognition. These processes include moving within the formal education system as well as the role of non-formal and informal learning in achieving qualifications. These instruments are ECTS for higher education, ECVET for VET and the Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning adopted in 2012. The principles of the latter can be combined with ECTS and ECVET.

To move within the education system and to move from education to employment, you need documents which show your achievement. This is the role of Europass as it corroborates your skills, knowledge and competences as well as the qualifications you have achieved.

Finally, we have the instruments which guarantee the quality of learning outcomes, ESG (European Standards and Guidelines) for higher education and EQAVET for VET. These instruments should guarantee that the learning outcomes that people achieve are relevant (for the labour market and the society more generally) and that they have been effectively achieved by everyone awarded a given qualification.

So everything is linked and each instrument is part of a coherent picture which supports citizens in Europe. By presenting all the instruments in one slide, I hoped to clarify their connections and show how each contributes to mobility, lifelong learning and transparency.

Snapshot - Discussion Panels

Following the presentation, the challenges and opportunities created by a European Area of Skills and Qualifications were discussed by Erik Hess (European Commission, DG Education and Culture); Sean Feerick (EQAVET Secretariat); Alain Bultot, Coordinator of the Belgian Team of ECVET Experts (BE-Fr); Siegfried Willems, Director of CINOP International Agency (the Netherlands) and Hanna Autere, Counsellor of Education, Finnish National Board of Education.

Some highlights from the discussion:

- The importance on how much has already been achieved in terms of cooperation between EQF, ECVET, ECTS and EQAVET ensuring a strong connection between the different instruments avoiding separate and uncoordinated development.

Each instrument has its own approach and roadmap for implementation. However they share some common ground where the **learning outcome approach** is a shared language and the key issue will be trust.

- **The learner and the lifelong learning perspective** are the two key points for cooperation. The learner is at the centre of the process because the objective in introducing and improving the European instruments is to support learners for their achievements to be recognised.

- As well as the central place given to the learner in the whole process, it seems very important **to focus on the needs of the labour market**. Looking those who are internationally mobile, it is only 1 – 2% of learners in each country. Introducing a unit-based approach to support this level of international mobility opens up more possibilities to create flexible learning pathways to higher education and faster routes to meet the needs of the labour market.

- The **key challenge with all these European instruments is how they are implemented in the different national contexts**. At a national level, Europe gives us an opportunity to modernise the systems but referring to national implementation, is necessary to balance between the development of a European standard or framework and the way it is implemented in a national context. **Two examples, Belgium and Finland**, illustrated how is possible to adapt to the national context.

- Implementing ECVET in Belgium brought stakeholders together created an environment where a real debate on how to design qualifications and how to write learning outcomes took place. At that point EQAVET appeared useful, and EQAVET was launch. Whichever instrument starts the process of reform, the links between all the instruments are so high that sooner or later all the other tools will be used because Member States need to offer a coherent system.

- Finland considered as ECVET friendly system with a learning outcomes approach for 15 years underlined additional benefits from implementing ECVET, not just for learners and VET providers, but also for the administration of the education system considering the implementation of ECVET as a pedagogical opportunity to discuss learning outcomes with teachers and trainers again and much more in-depth.

The fact that all these instruments are coordinated under the same roof brings synergies and there is no need to create new quality assurance system separately for ECVET, but rather use already existing quality assurance system. All the European instruments are being integrated into the qualification structure and they are not implemented separately.

Following the round-table discussion, nine parallel workshops were organised. Each participant attended two of the following workshops. ■

WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS OUTPUTS

Workshop 1: fostering geographical mobility

This workshop offered participants an opportunity to identify the benefits of ECVET and to reflect on how to best apply ECVET from the perspective of geographical mobility.

The workshop started with presentations of the 'Youth on the move toolkit' - YOMtool - a web-based platform which helps managers to simplify the organisation of transnational mobility projects and the 'NETECVET toolbox' links EC-VET principles to a mobility programme in order to support those who manage a mobility project. Following these two examples, participants discussed four questions:

1. What are the benefits of ECVET from the practitioners' and learners' point of view?

ECVET benefits from the practitioners' point of view

ECVET provided an opportunity to learn from different approaches, to become familiar with other European VET systems and to connect to VET systems in other countries.

In addition applying ECVET is a good way to get to know your own system better: how qualifications are developed, how units are designed etc. Using the ECVET tools (Memorandum of Understanding, partnership agreement, learning agreements etc.) creates a more structured and formal approach to VET. The development of learning outcomes and their assessment, validation, transfer and recognition supports the creation of this more formalised approach.

This formalisation of the process increases the quality of the time spent abroad: partnerships are strengthened; roles and responsibilities are clearer; earlier planning of mobility activities is possible; and there are higher expectations in relation to content, organisation and outcomes. In addition the transparency provided by ECVET helps to avoid any repetition of students' learning; it allows organisations to compare learners' progress and helps to clarify what has been achieved abroad. The use of learning outcomes makes it easier for the labour market to recognise time spent abroad. It facilitates entry into the labour market and strengthens the development of individual sectors.

One of the current limits to mobility is that some employers are not flexible enough and the recognition of achievement remains just an idea. The promotion and marketing of the idea of ECVET needs to be strengthened to ensure all stakeholders are informed and value learning which is achieved abroad.

ECVET benefits from the learners' point of view

The main benefit for learners is in relation to the quality of their mobility experience. Thanks to the formalised process based on ECVET tools, the learner can be clearer about what has been learnt. The transparency of learning outcomes allows recognition at home and minimises the duplication of assessment. As the learning outcomes can be

part of a National Qualification System, learners' experience abroad is included in their individual pathway; there is no risk of them 'losing time' by completing a mobility project.

ECVET enriches their personal competences and helps them to develop their soft skills – this is seen as a particular advantage. ECVET raises learners' confidence as they are clearer about the skills, competences and knowledge they are acquiring. With a more formalised mobility programme, the learner has a greater opportunity to enter the international labour market. ECVET mobility is on the way to being considered as 'normal or routine', and this fosters EU integration.

2. How can ECVET support learners' mobility?

With ECVET, learners receive more detailed information about the time they spend abroad. This transparency facilitates their preparation and increases their self-evaluation and reflection skills. This improves the quality of their mobility experience and enables them to capitalise on their learning.

As a formalised process, ECVET encourages students and employers to take things seriously – and it supports the willingness of learners to be mobile. Assessment is central to learners' mobility and the involvement of the host (receiving organisation) helps to support ECVET. In some situations, one of the barriers to overcome is the different assessment approaches used by partner organisations. Developing greater mutual trust is necessary in order to fully delegate learner assessment to the host organisation.

3. What are the tasks that need to be completed to use ECVET as part of a period of mobility?

The first task is to define what ECVET mobility really means for each partner organisation. In many ways establishing a connection to the EQF is a precondition for a successful ECVET mobility project. Another essential task is to involve all the stakeholders. Marketing, promoting, informing and convincing all the partners has to include the learners, competent bodies, employers, teachers and trainers. A specific effort must also be made to brief and train the teachers and trainers who are implementing ECVET.

It is also important to formalise the ECVET process by adapting any existing tools – this helps to build trust and strengthen the quality of partnerships. This adaptation will need to include the harmonisation of official documents and the formalisation of agreements. Agreements such as the Memorandum of Understanding, partnership agreements, and learning agreements need to be realistic, contain achievable goals and be signed by all those who are involved in the mobility project.

Developing an ECVET mobility project will require new documentation and approaches to be developed. This will include simple and easy-to-understand documents as these help to create strong partnerships. These documents could include information on:
- the validation and recognition of learners' achievement;
- the development of soft skills;
- the need for a curriculum based on learning outcomes;

- comparisons between the curricula offered by each partner organisation.

One of the biggest challenges in using ECVET as part of a period of mobility is gaining agreement on the assessment procedure. One approach is to design an assessment procedure which is based on a set of documented learning outcomes. This is then followed-up by interviews which include 'remote' assessment that allows the foreign partners to make the assessment. To reach this level of mutual trust, qualification authorities have to be convinced of the value of 'remote' assessment.

4. Which measures are necessary to secure the recognition and accreditation of learning outcomes obtained abroad?

The development of the Memorandum of Understanding and the learning agreement needs to involve employers - a bilateral agreement between the sending and hosting organisation is not enough. It is also important to clearly define the assessors' profile and identify who completes the assessment. And finally, it is worth considering how the learners' achievement will be recognised and included in the curriculum. It can also be helpful if VET providers and training centres are approved/accredited in order that they can recognise this achievement. **ECVET is an opportunity to share practice - it is not just a chance to travel, it is a learning experience**. Learners will want to capitalise on their achievements and this may mean they look for new pathways to higher education. ◾

Workshop 2: fostering lifelong learning

The objective of this workshop was the use of ECVET for lifelong learning - particularly in relation to the validation of previous achievements acquired in a range of contexts was the one of the topics to discussion. It offered participants an opportunity to discuss issues relating to the validation of non-formal and informal learning in order to facilitate admission to education and/or entry into the labour market.

The workshop started with some examples from the Netherlands which showed that ECVET can go beyond geographical mobility. The presentation highlighted case studies in three sectors:

- in the **health sector** with the development of a new formal qualification for care workers. The challenge was to respond to 20,000 people with Level 2 and 3 qualifications losing their job

and three employers who were offering 500 jobs which required a new Level 4 qualification based on units. The organisers were faced with a set of questions such as 'how to support re-integration into the labour market? how to support employees moving to a new job in the same or another sector?'

- in the **construction sector**, the challenge was to re- train employees who had three ECVET units from a non-formal carpentry qualification to enable them to work in the solar sector;

- in the **automotive sector**, there were 1,500 people unemployed. At the same time a new company needed employees trained in specific maintenance skills. The question being considered was 'how ECVET could be used to train employees?'

In each of the three case studies, it was important to get the right stakeholders on board. These stakeholders included the VET providers, employers, assessment centres and qualification designers. Each case study was driven by the needs of the labour market and was jointly funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs and employers. The workshop's objectives were to consider how to:

- connect the European instruments to support the implementing of ECVET for adult learners;

- use the European instruments to support lifelong learning;

- develop individualised education and training solutions which help individuals to enter the labour market;

- ensure learning is classified in line with one of the levels on the national qualification framework (and EQF).

The presentation was organised around a series of questions. Each looked at how ECVET could provide a solution to the three case studies.

Why should we try to connect ECVET, NQF, EQAVET and validation?

This would help to:

- support people to return to the labour market;
- support greater labour mobility;
- reduce costs in relation to time and money;
- enable learners to achieve the qualifications they need;
- strengthen more bespoke approaches to education and training.

**Why should we use the European instruments?**

This would help to:

- rethink how best to validate non-formal and informal learning (NFIL);
- develop further the national qualifications frameworks which help to make qualifications more transparent;
- support validation on the basis of learning outcomes;
- strengthen the use of ECVET which enables qualifications to be split into units.

Which methodology can be used to build ECVET units?

A methodology based on a triangulation with the needs of the labour market is a basic requirement.

This could be as follows:
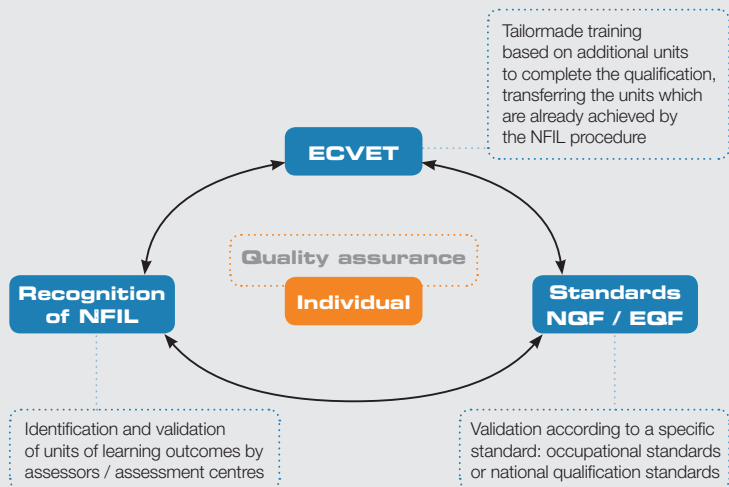
This methodology is based on:

- qualifications described in terms of the levels in the NQF/EQF;
- qualifications split into 6-8 ECVET units;
- units are used for validating previous learning outcomes;
- requests from individual learners;
- an education/training programme which is divided into ECVET units.

Workshop discussion

To consider the issues raised in the case studies in more depth, participants were invited to use their own experience of ECVET and lifelong learning to comment on the following three questions.

1. What do you think about when you speak about ECVET and lifelong learning?

The workshop participants identified the following connections:

- ECVET and lifelong learning mean permeability and employability;
- ECVET and lifelong learning open new possibilities for individuals. People can design their own pathway, chose modules from other qualifications, accumulate units including those based on informal, non-formal and formal learning;
- qualifications which are designed to integrate ECVET;
- ECVET and lifelong learning refer to the process of learning and support the idea of different learning styles, different ways of learning, and learning in different contexts;
- ECVET and lifelong learning can be particularly useful for some target groups of learners e.g. adults, those who leave school early and recent migrants.

2. How can ECVET contribute to the further development of validation and individualised training programmes?

The workshop participants stressed the importance of dividing qualifications into units. If qualifications are unit-based there is no need to change every part of a qualification (which takes years) when things need to be updated. There is also a possibility to combine units in different ways or take units from other qualifications. This saves time and responds to the needs of employers. A good example in the healthcare sector is the case of nursing assistants in Finland. Nurse assistants can be assigned a set of restricted tasks, which requires them to have completed only three of the units from the nursing qualification.

The question of time is relevant for training. The need for qualifications and training is driven by the demands of the labour market. To respond to this demand, design and deliver training can sometimes take many months; using existing ECVET units helps to fulfill this demand more quickly. Participants commented that there was little recognition of prior learning, and in many situations there was little trust in prior learning. Even when individuals had the required experience, they often had to take a course to have their prior learning recognised.

The learning outcome approach is crucial for employers. Even when ECVET does not mean much for companies, they understand the learning outcomes based approach. What is relevant for them is the result i.e. the learning outcomes are achieved. Even when a learner obtains 80% of a unit, this may be sufficient for an employer if the candidate has obtained the competences required.

As with all training, we need to consider the source of funding. In most situations formal education is paid by the ministry whereas training for adults is usually undertaken privately and employers and individuals cover the costs.

3. What are the necessary conditions to make ECVET for lifelong learning a success?

The workshop participants identified the following conditions:

- connections between the European instruments. Synergies with other initiatives (EQF, LLL, NFIL, EQAVET, Europass, ESCO) are needed in a country or a sector. These connections and synergies should include appropriate quality assurance arrangements;

- provide recognition and validation. These allow those who have been trained to easily transfer their skills and competences from one employer to another. This requires ongoing and continuing training to be linked to the formal qualification system and classified at the appropriate level in the qualification framework;

- occupational profiles need to be recognised within the qualification system. It is not sufficient for individual employers to design their own job profile, these need to be connected or based on occupational profiles as this enables individuals to transfer their learning to another company and use their experiences in another context;

- encouraging stakeholders to become involved in ECVET projects for lifelong learning. The roles of social partnership and the sectors are crucial, but it can be difficult for all the stakeholders to work together at a national level. This sometimes needs support at the political level and needs to include officials in social or employment ministries not just the education ministry;

- involving employers in the education system (particularly in the design of qualifications) as this helps to raise awareness and develop a shared concern and interest in lifelong learning;

- identifying new teaching and learning methods as this helps to create a learning environment which is more suitable for lifelong learning;

- identifying and allocating financial resources – including the availability of European funds;

- the use of learning outcomes alongside a quality assurance framework as these help to build trust. ◼

Workshop 3: ECVET implementation – the current state of play

The EU Recommendation established a roadmap for implementing ECVET. This said that 2013 was the year for ECVET's gradual implementation after more than three years of testing and development had shown some good results.

The ECVET Recommendation provides a general framework that can be adapted in many ways, depending on the needs and conditions of the national VET systems and the specific contexts in which it is applied. The flexibility of the arrangements permits its adaptability to the diverse nature of the VET systems in Europe. This means there isn't a single way of implementing ECVET. Within this framework, countries are in a position to use all or some of the components of ECVET for cross-country mobility or for both cross-country mobility and lifelong learning (as part of a set of broader VET reforms). In addition, some Member States are reflecting on ways of using ECVET to support the validation of non-formal and informal learning. However this seems to be causing confusion at a European level, and may call for streamlining ECVET in a national perspective.

The objectives of this workshop were to look at ECVET implementation from a system level and in relation to a number of other European instruments and principles to identify the challenges and possible way forward for ECVET's implementation.

The issues raised included:

- ECVET has been successfully tested in pilot projects and is working at the provider level. However Cedefop's three monitoring reports on ECVET's development show that the system level implementation across Europe is heterogeneous and not clear-cut. Any attempt to cluster countries according to their implementation of ECVET proves difficult due to the lack of a common understanding of what implementation implies (e.g. full implementation or elements of ECVET) and the difficulty in identifying changes which are due to ECVET rather than other on-going reforms. We can see countries that are moving towards implementation, other countries that are still in the experimentation phase and others that already have credit systems that could be compatible with ECVET. The state-of-play may also indicate that: even though the majority of countries report that legislation has been updated or is already in line with ECVET, a formal commitment to implement ECVET is still pending;

- the majority of countries with consolidated or traditional VET systems are more inclined to use ECVET for geographical mobility rather than lifelong learning;

- the majority of countries with a high level of ECVET readiness (credit systems in place, units based on learning outcomes, outcome-based qualifications etc.) may also be the ones which are most sceptical about ECVET and/or moving more slowly towards implementation;

- countries that have reformed their VET systems (e.g. some new Member States) have also moved more

quickly towards ECVET implementation. In these cases, it is still unclear if the reforms that are already underway will lead to ECVET implementation or more generally to the modernisation of VET systems;

- countries still face difficulties in linking ECVET with validation practices associated with non-formal and informal learning.

The workshop started with Ramona David's presentation of the preliminary results of Cedefop's survey on ECVET developments from mid-2012 to mid-2013 (the full results will be known and analysed before the end of 2013). The main aim of the survey was to understand whether or not ECVET finds its way within the national lifelong learning policies and in the national qualification systems. The data show that this is the case when ECVET is likely/expected to contribute to improving recognition and accumulation within the qualification system (in addition to geographical mobility).

Ten countries out of the 23 who had replied by May 2013 stated that they made a policy decision about ECVET (five have decided to develop a new credit system and five to adapt an existing system). The status of policy decision on ECVET across the 23 countries:

- **Member States developing new credit systems**: EE, HR, IS, CZ, PL;

- **Member States adapting existing credit systems**: BE – French Speaking Community, DK, FI, IE, LU;

- **Member States testing ECVET**: AT, CH, DE, FR, LT, LV, NL, TR.

Spain whose VET system allows accumulation and transfer, and Slovenia and

UK whose full credit system is compatible with ECVET, report that they will not adapt existing credit systems.

In conclusion, Cedefop highlighted two forms of ECVET implementation:

- A Europe-wide implementation triggered by the Leonardo da Vinci projects but not underpinned by policy decision at national level . This is:
  - a widespread part of geographical mobility projects;
  - without credits points;
  - without recognition, there are only partnerships between the hosting and sending institutions, but learning outcomes are re-assessed according to the home country's assessment standards.

- A slowly emerging ECVET implementation underpinned by policy making at national level which
  - is starting to develop in different ways;
  - aims at easing recognition and accumulation within the qualification systems;
  - is driven by an interest in applying units based on learning outcomes to qualifications.

Following the presentation, participants were asked to reflect on the following three questions:

1. How is ECVET implementation understood at your VET system level?

Across Europe implementation has different meanings and is seen differently by different players - for some it is a threat. In the workshop discussion, a range of examples were given e.g.

- in Germany and Austria, the dual system and units of learning outcomes do not easily fit together as training cannot easily be split into small units. When you look at the employment figures, the dual system seems to be the very effective. The use of ECVET, units and learning outcomes should be considered regarding this context.

- in Belgium, a system based on units of learning outcomes is considered to be very helpful. Skills are clearly described and it creates dialogue between employers and training institutions;

- in Spain, ECVET was tested using a bottom-up approach with established partners from Germany, France, Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands. The network was very successful;

- in Finland, the development of ECVET had advantages in many areas, but the best outcome has been the change in attitude and mind-set of teachers.

To sum up the discussions, ECVET is not really being implemented as a system but it is being used and practiced successfully for geographical mobility as part of a toolbox approach. ECVET needs to be integrated into the existing qualification systems and remain flexible. Implementation should be based on a choice of tools and not on a top-down mandatory system, unless a common legislative framework can be developed. Implementing ECVET requires the involvement of employers in defining programmes and developing a curriculum based on agreed employment needs. In the medium term, ECVET is expected to bring a higher social profile for VET and better qualifications including those which cover higher levels of study.

2. Why are national ECVET policies and strategies lagging behind when testing shows good signs?

Implementing the results of experimentation into national policy means a shift from a "top-down" approach to a "bottom-up" approach which takes time as there is resistance to change. In addition, there is a lack of mutual trust as assessment criteria differ in each country and there is no agreed methodology for designing learning outcomes – this all leads to a lack of consistency. There are many questions to answer e.g. who defines learning outcomes? Who owns or reviews the qualification? There are also many labels within the different frameworks: occupational standards, professional standards, vocational standards etc. Moreover, differences between countries' VET systems or in the definition of core competences represent a barrier at the national level for developing trust in relation to the recognition of achievement. So, even in countries where qualification systems are well established, institutions are reluctant to transfer and it is not a surprise that learning outcomes achieved abroad are not recognised if they are not assessed according to the local criteria. ECVET is supported by a policy decision but its application remains voluntary – it is up to the institutions themselves to decide whether to accept the transfer or not. In this context ECVET needs to find the right level for implementation.

During a discussion from the regional perspective, different points of views were expressed. Some said that at the national level, things were more complicated due to the broad spectrum of institutions and qualifications and the regional level might be more relevant (ownership of ECVET is regional in Spain and Italy). Others noted that in some countries, ECVET implementation differs between regions and some regions do not recognise each other's qualifications - consequently a national structure for recognising regional qualifications should be a first step before implementing ECVET.

At the sectoral level, it might be easier to achieve the transfer of learning outcomes as sectors are more uniform, share the same language and do not face the same trust issues.

3. How do you see the relationship between ECVET and the other European instruments such as validation, Europass, ECTS etc.?

ECVET is oriented towards learning outcomes whereas ECTS is time-oriented - this is a huge difference that makes the connection really difficult. Europass is especially important in relation to learning outcomes and it plays a major role in some countries - however there is a risk of overlapping with ECVET. A recommendation from the group is that one organisation should be responsible for organising all the European instruments. There was also a suggestion that ECVET and ECTS should be brought into one system at the point of entering university. ■

Workshop 4: the role of VET qualification designers in ECVET implementation

In this workshop the first step was to clarify the meaning of "VET qualification designer" under different national context and various VET and qualifications systems and, second, to analyse the VET qualification design process from the perspective of a decision-maker.

This workshop also aimed to identify the decision processes that act as a lever for promoting or otherwise to slow down the implementation of ECVET. In this regard, the workshop participants considered the following two questions.

1. How can a VET qualification designer support ECVET implementation?

The definition of a "qualification designer" is not mentioned in the Recommendation on ECVET, neither is it in any European level ECVET documentation. However, the Recommendation stresses that the term "Competent institution means an institution which is responsible for designing and awarding qualifications"[1]. The EU document so called "Get to know ECVET better"[2]

underlines the "design function", both for qualifications and ECVET elements. This means that the "design function" is crucial for the development and implementation of ECVET.

The identification of a VET designer depends on the country's VET system and/or of the qualification system(s) on where the qualification designers act. Qualification designers can act in any

(1) Recommendation of the EP and of the Council of 18 June 2009; annex 1
(2) Detailed guidance, answers to frequently asked questions and examples of good practice "Get to know ECVET better
– Questions and Answers – European Commission – February 2011

of the following contexts depending on the VET and qualifications system or framework of the country:

- at the national level (mainly ministries, national boards, authorities, chambers of commerce, sectoral boards, etc.);
- at the regional level (e.g. in Spain and Belgium);
- at a local an operational level (mainly VET providers).

In most of the countries represented in the workshop, the ministry of Education coordinates the work by setting the regulations and deciding on the system requirements. Qualification designers act mainly in national or sectoral authorities, boards or accredited VET providers (e.g. Finland). These bodies have flexibility in designing qualifications and selecting assessment criteria.

Their motive for including ECVET principles in the design of a qualification is correlated to their commitment in the development of mobility and mainly to support international or domestic mobility. In Denmark for example employers have funding for mobility and this reinforces their interest in including ECVET elements in the design of qualifications. A personal commitment from teachers and trainers - who can also be VET qualification designers - may play an important role in implementing the ECVET principles.

2. What are the regulatory and operational constraints to be considered when designing a qualification according to the ECVET specifications? How can these constraints be overcome?

The level where qualification designers act determines the constraints they face and affects the impact they have on the VET and qualifications system, in particular when it comes to the coordination with the awarding body. For example, in many national qualifications regulations it is not possible to recognise or validate learning outcomes which have been assessed abroad and to take into account these learning outcomes for awarding a qualification. In general, the final assessment is mandatory and undertaken at the end of a training programme and this is when the qualification is awarded.

A balance is needed between the ECVET framework and the national context. This requires each qualifications and VET system to be clear about the reasons for implementing ECVET in the national context. This allows suitable tools to be developed which can support the design of qualifications according to the ECVET specifications. There is no need to introduce all the elements of ECVET as such. Only those aspects, which meet the national strategic goals can be further developed. For example, in Denmark the motivation for using some aspects of ECVET relate to participation in the skills competitions – either those who performed well at these competitions want to try their skills abroad or those who wish to participate hope to gain additional skills by training abroad. In comparison, in Norway, the specific features of VET qualifications are decided at local level and this has resulted in greater flexibility. There may be one definition of ECVET, but its interpretation differs according to the VET and qualifications system.

It would help if the guidelines on how to implement and use ECVET principles were strengthened in order to support the design of qualifications with regard to the specific bundle of constraints which governs each system. ∎

Workshop 5: the role of VET providers in ECVET implementation

The discussions helped to identify how ECVET could benefit VET organisations and why their involvement in ECVET projects could add value to their existing activity.

Participants discussed the following three questions:

1. From the perspective of a VET centre manager, what could be the benefits of becoming more involved in ECVET?

A number of benefits were considered:

- the importance for students of getting their qualification recognised;
- the opportunity of VET providers and students learning from each other;
- the structure provided by ECVET;
- it makes the partnerships easier and quicker to organise;
- it facilitates communication and cooperation;
- it strengthens mutual trust between the institutions. This is both crucial and necessary because of the need to collect evidence of what the students have done (portfolio, video, photographs product);

- the quality of the work placement helps to improve the whole VET system. Furthermore, it helps students to become more aware of the rationale behind mobility.

ECVET does not just lead to mobility it also supports school improvement. Among these benefits is the opportunity to clarify and specify more clearly what is written in the national curricula. ECVET allows a better match between companies and schools, and it highlights the European dimension to education. Being involved in ECVET fosters international connections and strengthens good relationships among European countries. It gives VET centres the chance to improve their training. Hosting international students increases staff competences e.g. their foreign language skills. The benefits of ECVET can be summarised as 'ECVET strengthens the attractiveness of vocational schools and training'.

2. How does ECVET implementation change VET provision and delivery – including the impact on VET centres' roles and responsibilities?

The most important change relates to the development of an international dimension and this makes VET more attractive. In addition to the creation of mobility schemes, ECVET makes it possible to cooperate on teaching methodology and encourages teachers to become more involved and take more responsible for the qualification.

There was a range of views in relation to funding: some participants in the discussion felt that ECVET brought a lot of work and cost a lot whereas others saw ECVET is an opportunity to attract project funding.

3. What advice should be given to VET providers when they use ECVET for the first time?

Participants were able to offer a great deal of advice - based on their experiences. They suggested that those new to ECVET should:

- start slowly;

- not be afraid of it, it takes time;

- start with one qualification and then try to cover other qualifications;

- ask experts for advice;

- see ECVET as an opportunity. It can help to structure or restructure a course in a positive way and integrate it within the EU framework;

- rethink your course by focusing on learning outcomes;

- start with the grass-roots of your organisation as teachers are key to ECVET;

- ask colleagues for references and contacts and start networking at a national level first - then start at the international level;

- be transparent (about what is acquired through mobility) and assure quality (trust your partner);

- look for cooperation from the employment office and learn about good practices;

- share difficulties;

- and above all, establish a good relationship with your partner organisations. Don't forget the human side of the business relationship. Involve the whole partnership in your quality processes strategy definition, implementation, assessment and feedback. ■

Workshop 6:
the role of companies
in ECVET implementation

The workshop focused on the potential benefits of ECVET for enterprises and sectors.

Participants were invited to share their experiences and discuss the following three questions:

1. How will the implementation of ECVET as an instrument for lifelong learning benefit from the involvement of companies?

In one of the discussion groups, the first reaction from a representative of a large company was to look at 'How ECVET implementation could help the companies and not how companies could help ECVET implementation.' Companies expect ECVET to help them to recruit suitable staff and keep them working productively through updated skills. At the moment ECVET is too conceptual and far from easy to implement. Moreover there is a huge gap between companies and the education sector in relation to timescales: although the ECVET Recommendation has been in place in 2009, there are still disagreements about levels, about the meaning of skills etc. The challenge for companies is to keep people fully employed and productive – it is not just about learning. Today's concern is about how to keep companies in business and profitable. With a crisis facing industry, companies are losing money and consequently they are reluctant to send employees to be trained.

In response to this reaction, a representative from Cyprus illustrated how ECVET could, in some specific cases, help companies. If a company wins a tender, another local company is likely to have lost the contract and could see its staff move to the successful tenderer. With ECVET, the successful tenderer can avoid the interviews and comparisons of CVs because know they the skills, knowledge and competences the employees have. It can save time and money. Another example of where ECVET can support companies' needs was given. In Ireland for example, there is a large demand for staff with good IT skills – and there are not enough Irish people who are suitably qualified. They need to find these skills from other countries in Europe. **ECVET can help employers to understand the CVs - this increases mobility and employment**.

The workshop participants emphasised how ECVET benefits from the involvement of companies – not least because they provide work placements. Large companies also offer very good training programmes. But more than that, by explaining exactly what profile they need, companies help VET providers to translate employees' needs into tasks related to ECVET. In this way companies are involved in designing the curricula and qualifications and this helps the system to adapt to the needs of the company. In Finland for example any group of individuals responsible for designing a qualification would include two employers, two employees and two teachers.

The need to update skills quickly and respond to the labour market is a big challenge for training providers. A video in Ireland shows undergraduates that their knowledge when they enter a four year degree course will be obsolete when they finish their university studies. In many cases their future jobs do not yet exist. Companies can help to define the needs of the labour market much more quickly. One option is for companies in the same sector to work on the design of any new curriculum.

Employers could provide the ministry with a regular review of their immediate and future needs. This bottom-up approach already exists in some countries, but in other countries the company representatives are missing from these discussions.

2. What are the barriers to the involvement of companies and sectors in ECVET implementation? What approaches can be used to overcome these barriers?

The involvement of small and large companies is important for VET but how they become involved often depends on their size and their sector. There are particular difficulties for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) as the costs can be high and they can be impeded by the lack of human resources expertise.

Regardless of the company's size or sector there are some barriers to overcome. One of the first barriers is the language (terminology) used by companies and those in the education field. The education sector needs to create a common language or at least create the conditions for dialogue e.g. if we want to convince companies we should not speak of ECVET. There is a need to find a language company to describe operational issues using simple language and concepts, which will help companies. Another option is to train the learners/workers to use the technical words in relation to competences so when they are interviewed they explain their achievements in terms of learning outcomes. As ECVET's implementation requires time and resources, this is an obstacle for companies. The challenge for VET

providers is to demonstrate how involvement in ECVET offers a positive return on investment for a company. This could mean helping companies to recruit the right person for the right job with the right skills. If ECVET can do this, it will be a win-win situation.

Legal aspects were mentioned as a potential barrier in some contexts. There is a question about whether the public system or legislation allows the involvement of companies e.g. a VET provider in Iceland sent a group of trainees to Belgium. Because they were insured according to Icelandic rules the companies refused the trainees. In the chemical sector, there may be a minimum age for a traineeship. Enterprises like Skoda which have their own engineering systems and approaches may not want to train staff who subsequently move to another company. Confidentiality rules may have a role in limiting opportunities for trainees.

The final barrier related to companies who are looking for the ideal candidate. Some companies are waiting for finished and perfect "products" from the VET schools and do not want to be involved in their education. However these companies can still be involved in the design of the curriculum and qualifications. Listening and analysing the needs of these companies is important in order to understand the skills and competences needed by their staff.

To convince companies to be part of this process, the indirect benefits must be identified and made explicit. Some of these were discussed during the workshop e.g.:

- being part of ECVET demonstrates a commitment to community and social responsibility;

- when change takes a long time, ECVET can be an opportunity for quicker progress;

becoming involved in training new members of staff can increase employees' motivation and competence. For many businesses, their people are their greatest asset. In these situations employee engagement and motivation are crucial. Finding ways to engage their interest and develop their skills are part of a company's human resources strategy.

3. What are the 'selling arguments'? Why should companies care about a technical framework for the transfer, accumulation and recognition of units based on learning outcomes?

The workshop participants identified the following arguments that could be used to encourage employers to be more involved:

- it helps you and your sector if the VET providers supply good quality and up-to-date training;

- ECVET is an aid to effective recruitment;

- it gives employers an opportunity to protect their future because they are involved in shaping it;

- it helps to maintain a well-skilled and well-qualified workforce;

- it ensures employees (new and existing staff) have the right skills;

- it strengthens your role in Europe;

- it helps employers to recognise that without investment in training now, they will not have the right skills for the future. ◼

Workshop 7: the role of VET teachers and trainers in ECVET implementation

The objective was to understand why VET teachers/trainers become involved in ECVET projects and how the learning outcomes approach and qualifications described in units can affect their work and role.

This should help the subsequent piloting and implementation of ECVET projects.

1. What are the benefits for VET teachers and trainers who are involved in ECVET?

ECVET increases and widens teachers/trainers' experience of learning and teaching; it leads to a better knowledge of quality assurance including evaluation; it improves creativity; it strengthens mutual learning; it brings more opportunities to involve stakeholders; and it reinforces networking. Teachers and trainers are interested in the benefits for their learners. The workshop participants saw these benefits as important. For the learner this included an increase in the transparency of their qualifications and improved opportunities for employment. ECVET was seen as providing trainees with more knowledge of the expected learning outcomes, opportunities for progression, recognition of prior learning and a better understanding of how their training was certificated. All of this helps to motivate students. The existence of these benefits varies between VET teachers and depends on their involvement in the mobility projects.

2. How do the learning outcomes and units of learning outcomes approaches change the role and responsibilities of VET teachers/trainers?

ECVET increases the attractiveness of VET and at the same time it improves teachers/trainers' image of their job and status. ECVET helps teachers/trainers to get involved in working with competent bodies and encourages them to work in teams. ECVET can also mean new requirements for teachers and trainers. It is helpful if the learning outcomes approach has been part of their initial training as they need to understand learning outcomes before using ECVET. ECVET can lead to new responsibilities - often this means defining learning outcomes in the national curricula, implementing learning outcome-based evaluation, supporting the relationship between qualifications and learning outcomes, and integrating the learning outcomes into training courses. Using a learning outcomes approach enlarges the professional skills and knowledge of VET teachers/trainers.

Learning outcomes can be included gradually in the teaching process until the approach becomes a normal way of working. This encourages teachers/trainers to think about skills and competences rather than subjects. VET teachers/trainers can contribute to ECVET's implementation through their cooperation with other stakeholders. They can influence learners' mobility as well as guiding the whole ECVET system and process.

3. What advice could be given to VET teachers/trainers when they first start to use learning outcomes and ECVET?

The workshop participants had some advice for those who were new to EC-VET. This included:

- do not worry;
- ask for help;
- do not be afraid of a complicated system;
- just do your work as usual but include aspects of ECVET;
- participate in training about learning outcomes;
- try to use simple terminology when talking with stakeholders;
- work in teams;
- work on learning outcomes with your colleagues;
- share your experience of teaching;
- make use of the available tools;
- take part in a mobility programme for teachers/trainers. ∎

Workshop 8:
the role of regions
in ECVET implementation

This workshop aims at exchanging on the role that regions and local authorities can play in the implementation of ECVET and also on the role that other VET stakeholders such as companies and VET providers can play towards the local authorities.

Introduction

In Spain, the competence framework gives regions a role in designing up to 45% of the curricula, delivering training, organising courses and issuing certificates. Within this context, Catalunya designed its own VET curricula which is organised into professional modules (units based on learning outcomes). Catalunya has split the modules into more flexible and accessible training units, based on short units (30 to 60 hours). Training units are the smallest units which can be certified, and the learning outcomes and assessment are based on competences.

It also improved the international networking activity of the region through bilateral agreements (Belgium, France, Italy and UK) and led to the region's participation in many projects (ECVET Connexion, Recomfor, Opir and Euroclass Trucks). Finally, Catalunya established a decree to regulate the procedure for transfer and recognition of units of learning outcomes which have been achieved in a different system in another country. This decree is based on the ECVET Recommendation; it provides models for a Memorandum of Understanding and learning agreements, explains the role of the region and establishes the conditions for the recognition of learning outcomes.

In France, the Rhône-Alpes region promotes cooperation at two levels:

- within the region with all key stakeholders (companies and apprentices);
- with other European regions such as Catalunya, Lombardy, Baden-Wurt-temberg and Malopolska (a European Social Fund project)

The presentation of the Rhône-Alpes region focused on the strategy for developing European VET mobility among young people (1,400 apprentices has been abroad). It included a demonstration of the web-based platform (www.mobilitedesapprentis.rhonealpes.fr) which was set up in 2010. This is used by the eight partners and enables:

- apprentices in the Rhône-Alpes region to gain more experience abroad;
- constraints on international mobility to be lifted;
- partners involved in mobility to be brought together from across the region through a single point of contact.

At a European level, the platform allows the region to take part in several pilot projects, including the OPIR project. This is an inter-regional collaboration based on

FREREF (Regions in Action for Lifelong Learning). It brings together nine partners from five Member States and one silent partner (French-speaking Switzerland) and is coordinated by the Ministry of Education of the French Community of Belgium. It aimed to create a common language between those involved in the project, create tools to implement ECVET, and increase the transparency of certificates developed by the different partners. The evaluation of the project identified that:

- the concept is a good way to communicate and get beyond differences;
- confidence in the assessment system is a key factor for success;
- certificates must be understandable and transparent for apprentices and teachers;
- there must be a manageable number of assessments.

The workshop discussion were limited and focused on the following four questions:

1. What is the role that your region (or region in your partnership) plays in the national context of VET policy?

Regions and, in many situations, local authorities in Europe are important stakeholders in the implementation of ECVET. They provide an important bridge between central government and the local dimension. Some examples were given by the participants:

- in Italy, some regions are more involved than other in sharing practices in ECVET, even though structural funds from the European Commission go to each regions. They have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding;

- in the Netherlands - vocational schools/colleges are responsible for implementing ECVET. However the network of policy makers, and vocational trainers is very active;
- in Germany – things are decided at a local level. However learning outcomes need to be recognised throughout the country, but different regions (Länder) have different interests so this can be difficult.

2. How do some regions organise their bridging role between central/sectoral level of authorities and local authorities for purpose of linking qualification frameworks to ECVET?

During the discussion, a number of examples were provided by the participants – these helped to illustrate the range of ways in which regions could be involved:

- in Italy there are many local designated VET centres. They are coordinated at a regional level, and the regions are very active;
- in the Netherlands, ECVET is seen as needing a lot of bureaucracy. The regions can help to connect teachers and students and organise workshops and training;
- in France the role of the region depends on the type of qualification and where training takes place. Regions are the place to make the connections between teachers, students and other stakeholders.

It is hard work for the regional staff – as well as focusing on ECVET they are also interested in mobility. Many regions invest a lot of money and time in VET and

do need to see the benefits. However the results of this investment are clear when comparisons are made between today's qualifications and those of ten years ago.

3. How can regions in Europe work collaboratively across borders within the ECVET framework?

The workshop participants thought that regions could:

- develop and promote an external framework which demonstrates the transparency of the qualifications;
- have an intermediary role to liaise between the central and local systems;
- guarantee the quality of provision;
- ensure all the stakeholders are involved;
- create sustainable networks through EU funding.

4. How can VET players interact with local authorities within the ECVET framework?

The workshop participants recognised that in some countries (e.g. Italy and Spain) the regions have the key role. They can work together to find common solutions and help to ensure that ECVET is implemented. Regions can play a role in:

- connecting schools and companies;
- quality assurance in relation to mobility;
- facilitating and encouraging experimentation;
- re-designing qualifications which are based on learning outcomes. ∎

Workshop 9: learning outcomes as a common language

Within the context of all the European instruments, workshop 9 offered participants an opportunity to identify how the barriers that limit the use of learning outcomes can be overcome or removed.

Introduction

The idea of learning outcomes is found everywhere (ECVET, ECTS, formal and informal learning, as well as in quality insurance). As shown in Cedefop's 2012 research:

- learning outcome systems are more wide spread in Europe due to the recent curriculum reforms;
- labour market changes mean that curricula need to be frequently updated;
- several countries have a system based on competences but don't have ECVET in their VET system;
- it is difficult to be sure that the shift to the learning outcomes based system represents a "real change" rather than a "paper change".

There are barriers to implementation which relate to the fact that a learning outcomes system is dependent on how the VET system is organised, e.g.

- providers refuse to develop ECVET (teachers don't feel comfortable with it);

- qualification designers don't agree with the concept of learning outcomes and the connection to the EQF;

- the changes to the assessment process and the new ways of assessing trainees are difficult to be understood by assessors and labour market;

- changing the system to one which is based on learning outcomes is expensive.

Rethinking Education encourages the convergence of the European instruments in order to clarify and improve the progression opportunities available to learners. One of the central messages in Rethinking Education is the need to provide learners with opportunities for horizontal or vertical progression, and opportunities to acquire additional qualifications without wasting time and repeating their previous learning. Participants were asked to consider two main questions and look at how learning outcomes can be used as a common language.

1. Why do you think VET providers, examination bodies and other stakeholders are not using or are reluctant to use learning outcomes?

Participants raised the issue of the different definitions of learning outcomes and this made it difficult to get a coherent and shared view. Moreover, moving from a system based on the contents (inputs) to a system based on learning outcomes represented a cultural shift for the VET providers and teachers. Participants felt that a clear top-down approach was needed. Teachers could play a central role in involving parents and learners but only if they are coached and supported to take ownership of the approach. Providers and companies also have to understand the benefits of such an approach. And all the actors need assurance on the quality of any new system.

The views of the VET school and companies are different - their needs are not the same and they do not share a common language. However the really important question for both should be: did the trainee get an appropriate job for which they had been well-trained? Implementing a learning outcomes-based approach is not easy and many questions arise e.g. how to define learning outcomes? how much detail is needed? For example, the learning outcomes for the qualification for bakers in Austria are 14 pages long – in Finland they are 200 pages: what is the right size? what has to be included? is everything needed for the assessment? how are tacit and implied skills included in the learning outcomes?

Another important issue is that professional competences cannot easily be understood outside of a professional context, and that sometimes makes their inclusion in a set of learning outcomes difficult. The question of assessment is also significant: understanding how to make an assessment based on learning outcomes takes time. It also takes time for the teachers and assessors to agree how assessment should be undertaken.

2. What can we do to support further the use of learning outcomes to underpin ECVET and the other European instruments?

The participants wanted to be ambitious. They wanted professionals to be more involved in the process of writing learning outcomes – and these needed to be simple, translated into everyday language and relevant for the learner and employer. A set of updated learning outcomes, based on a transnational and sectoral approach would be helpful. In addition European level guideline would help to define learning outcomes in the same way, with the same level of detail, and encourage the use of a common language. Assessment needs to be made easy to understand as this encourages companies to be involved. For many participants, the assessment process is very important as it helps to promote and guarantee the quality of the system. ■

SESSION 2   **ECVET Communities of Practice - stay connected to each other**

The second day of the 2013 annual forum examined how we could 'stay connected to each other'. It built on the learning from the 2012 annual forum which had looked at creating ECVET's communities of practice[1].

The concept of a community of practice (communities of practice is a more accurate term in our context) can easily be applied to ECVET. Its focus (or domain) is implementation, and its communities are all those who are involved or interested in ECVET. Our practice relates to methods, materials, guides, tools and experiments relating to ECVET as well as our shared concerns and questions. The aim of our communities of practice is to help everyone to share, solve problems, contribute to ECVET and demonstrate how ECVET is working.

(1) Etienne Wenger defined the communities of practice as 'groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly'.
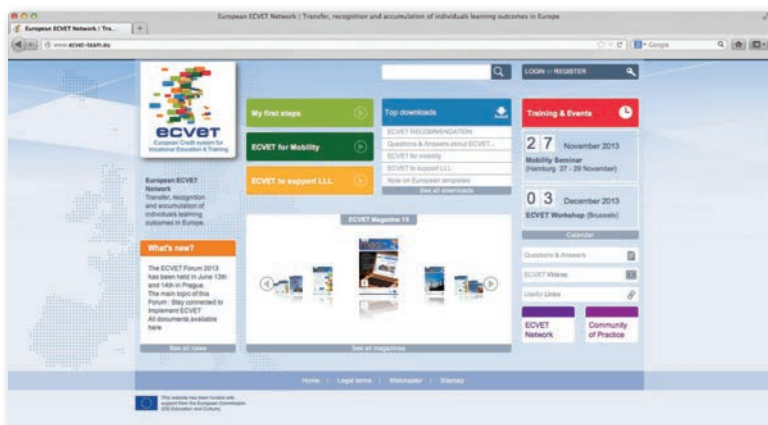
The new ECVET team website

The new website's concept

A comparison of the functions of the old and new ECVET team websites was made: as the old version was mainly meant to be a registration platform for members of the ECVET network, the new version aims at strengthening the implementation of ECVET, by supporting, informing and guiding people. This new concept has built on reflections and advice from the national experts and facilitators who experimented and tested this first version of the new website.

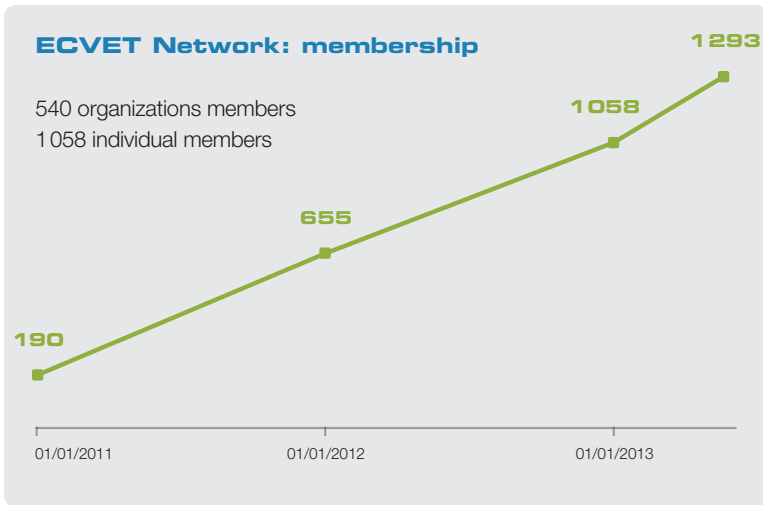## A useful and hands-on tool for newcomers...

This website is now open to everyone – whereas in the past some of the most interesting documents used to be restricted to members of the network only, now these documents are available to everyone. What's more is a wide range of links to other useful sites and quick comments and explanations appearing on many site icons, so you find out more about what you are about to click on.

A section "my first steps to ECVET" has been designed to give newcomers the opportunity to better understand ECVET, notably through a sub-section "ECVET on my own – how to explain ECVET?" that could be used by people to inform e.g. their organisations on what ECVET is about.

...as well as for people with higher ECVET knowledge

This new website also addresses to people with broader ECVET knowledge willing to use all the features available on the website. For instance resources on project methodology or advice on training approaches already tested are available.

A responsive webdesign

The new ECVET website will be available and adapted to the terminal you access the site with: all you need to do is to choose the adapted screen format. ■
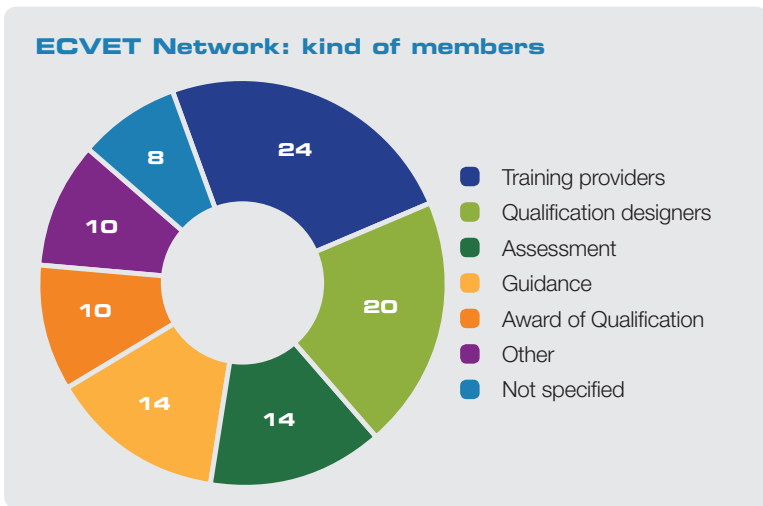
ECVET team news

The ECVET network continues to expand: and there has been a further increase in the membership since last year (+61 % in one year and +97 % in 1,5 year).

ECVET Network: membership

540 organizations members
1 058 individual members

190
655
1058
1293

01/01/2011   01/01/2012   01/01/2013

Source "ECVET Team may 2013"

The European ECVET network is quite well balanced considering the type of members. Statistics show a quarter of the network members are qualification designers or awarding bodies, another quarter are VET providers, a third are dedicated to assessment and guidance. The category "other" designates companies or organisations representing companies. The next objective is to get more people from companies and industry involved.

ECVET Network: kind of members

24
20
14
14
10
10
8

- Training providers
- Qualification designers
- Assessment
- Guidance
- Award of Qualification
- Other
- Not specified
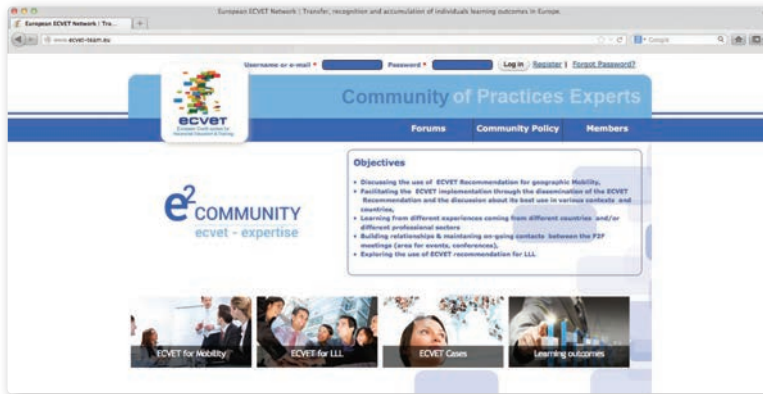
This Forum proved to be the most popular ECVET event, with over 300 participants attending. The Forum is a fine example of how dynamic this network is.

Source "ECVET Team may 2013"

The 'prototype' web platform

The following is a summary of the feedback from six weeks of testing. A task force of eight national experts and facilitators has been set up to build the prototype. They all met in February to define the goals and agree on the purpose of the portal and the discussion themes. The following three purposes:

- to support and facilitate ECVET implementation;
- to disseminate information about the ECVET Recommendation;
- to inform ECVET members about developments in other countries and sectors.

We also identified the eight themes which are shown at the bottom of the home page.

Decision was made to include an interactive forum, a charter setting out how the communities of practice would work and a separate area for ECVET members. Having agreed on what should be included, objectives were set for the six weeks of testing. In this phase of the development the aim was to:

- connect the ECVET experts and give them an opportunity to interact with each other;
- enable these experts to work in a collaborative way to explore possibilities, create opportunities and identify solutions to common problems;
- capture and share existing knowledge in order to help everyone to improve practice.

What did we achieve by the end of the testing phase?

The members' directory which connects the experts was set up. It is organised in a similar way fashion as Facebook with photographs encouraging people to network.

We found that the forum fosters dialogue. ECVET members, who may not have had the opportunity to frequently interact, are discussing shared interests and issues.

We have set up the advisory section so you can ask for advice from our community. The forum also has other features (these were not used during the testing phase) including the ability to create your own network, send private message to members and manage working groups.

We have two moderators (Segundo Gonzales and Tristan Reilly) who are helping to keep the conversations going. When a topic becomes particularly interesting or new information is available, they will move the item to the top of the discussion thread. They can also manage the discussions by splitting or creating topics and re-classify discussions. These forum features and the role of the moderators will help us to develop a private and professional network for the ECVET community. The platform is open to all ECVET members and we will add information from the annual forum's workshops in order to start the process of creating content.

And finally please do not forget to register. This is our communities of practice and we want everyone to get involved. ∎

The ECVET experts

Ute Haller-Block, Head of Unit, EA-CEA – Education and Culture Executive Agency, presented the teams of ECVET experts at national level. (Not to mix up with "ECVET team" which is a central service to support the Commission in the work around ECVET). The ECVET national expert teams are acting at national level and are managed by the National Agencies implementing the LLP.

I wonder if you have asked your family or friends if they know about ECVET. If you have asked – you have probably realised that they don't know much about ECVET as it is specialised and usually only known by those who work with VET qualifications. However, each year more people join our forum so we know that information about ECVET is spreading. There is still a huge amount of work to be done if we want to reach all the relevant VET organisations in Europe. ECVET is not as easy to explain as ECTS (the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System used in the higher education sector) because of the heterogeneity of VET systems. These differences are why we need teams of national experts who are well-informed about ECVET, and who can work with VET providers and sometimes the national or local authorities with responsibility for designing the VET curricula in line with the ECVET principles.

The national teams, based on the example of the ECTS Bologna experts, began their work in early 2012. Each team is managed by the respective National Agency in a country. Currently there are 200 ECVET experts and each of the 25 National Agencies identified their own experts. From 2014 onwards, the management of the ECVET expert team will be included in each National Agency's work programme. One of the key roles for all the ECVET experts is to engage with stakeholders as this creates a multiplier effect and enables ECVET to be much better known.

Each team is different and the scope of their activities varies according to country priorities. Some experts have just started working with ECVET whereas in other countries they have been in place for longer and have set up pilot projects and are working with competent bodies to design VET curricula. Some experts have organised national or system-level surveys on the use of ECVET; some have produced glossaries of ECVET terms and published guidance and articles on cross border learning. They have also worked closely with experts from other countries.

What is the next step? It is clear that the ECVET experts need to be trained. Even when ECVET is not the first priority in a national education system, experts can expect support from their national authorities. One of the significant benefits of national ECVET experts is the experience and knowledge they bring to our workshops and meetings – as they are really in touch with what is happening, they ensure our work is well-grounded and based on real practice. National Agencies and the European Commission have the responsibility to engage with the national authorities and secure their commitment. It is also important for the expert teams to be aware of the links with other European instruments and to promote these connections and synergies. In addition, they need to help VET providers see the links to the new programme (*Erasmus for All*) in order to develop new initiatives which can test ECVET mechanisms and include ECVET in mobility and lifelong learning projects.

Finally, **the ECVET experts have a role in building our communities of practice**. They can help us to create the right system where experts and others can easily find information on ECVET. **This will help the communities of practice become the 'place to go to' when anyone is looking for ECVET information**. ■

The Communities of practice are yours - creating the content of the web platform

After the presentations in the plenary session, seven parallel workshops were organised. Each involved one of the ECVET experts who had used the prototype web platform during the testing phase. In each workshop there was a short presentation of the website and an opportunity to ask questions on the platform. **In each workshop, participants were then asked to identify three topics (and any subtopics) that would be used to launch the ECVET communities of practice**. The decisions from each workshop were collated in order to identify **the most popular topics**.

The following four topics were selected:

• ECVET for mobility;

• ECVET for lifelong learning;

• ECVET case studies;

• writing learning outcomes.

Once the topics had been selected, participants were invited to identify sub topics and any relevant questions which should be posted on the platform.

Before discussing these questions, there were a number of enquiries about how the platform could be organised and structured. These enquiries related to how best to choose and present the sub topics. Would it be better to orga-

nise them according to a target group, chronologically or geographically?

A chronological approach (e.g. from the preparation phase to the evaluation of an ECVET project) seems more suitable for institutions. However as the communities of practice have a less formal structure, a thematic or topic-based approach could be better. A geographically approach could help to highlight differences between countries and systems. If things are organised in response to the needs of target groups it can be easier for stakeholders to find what they need. The workshop participants agreed that the best place for these discussions would be on the communities of practice.

Each workshop considered subtopics and questions for the portal. The following tables summarise per topic the discussions of all the workshops:

1. ECVET for mobility

Subtopics	Questions
Getting started (Memorandum of Understanding, learning agreement etc.)	Is mobility just one part of lifelong learning?
Quality assurance	How can I find partner organisations?
Documentation	How can I ensure assessment is accurate?
Erasmus for All	How do I write learning outcomes for mobility?
Examples of good practice	How can I get started – what should I do?
What to avoid	
Assessment	
Recognition and validation	
Lessons learnt	
Finance	

2. ECVET for lifelong learning

Subtopics	Questions
Non-formal and informal learning	How can I connect with ECTS and the National Qualifications Framework?
Recognition and validation	How can I organise a qualification into units?
Assessment for formal, non-formal and informal learning	How do I allocate points to units?
The labour market and other stakeholders	How do I make a unit relevant to employability?
Working with regional and national agencies	What is the best way to engage with employers?
Other European instruments	How do I persuade employers to participate?
Marketing and communication	Where can I find examples of good practice?
Supporting teachers and trainers	What documentation do I need to produce?

3. ECVET case studies

Subtopics	Questions
Sharing practice	What criteria should I use to identify good practice?
Peer learning and working together	How can the sectors support each other ?
Solutions to problems – "how to do it"	What follow up work can I expect once the pilot project is running?
The role of ECVET's national experts	What advice would you give to someone who is new to ECVET?

4. Writing learning outcomes

Subtopics	Questions
Describing skills, knowledge and competences	Which are more important – units or learning outcomes?
Defining learning outcomes	How can I get started – what problems will I meet ?
Links between units and learning outcomes	How can I connect learning outcomes to the European instruments including Europass?
Different approaches to writing learning outcomes	How do I ensure the learning outcomes can be assessed – and who should do this?
Sectoral perspectives	What do I need to do before I start writing learning outcomes (what are the pre-conditions for success)?

Following the working group discussions there was a short summary of the key features which would ensure the platform was a success. These were:

- the information on ECVET needs to be structured in an easy-to-use way;
- the forum has to be a place to ask questions and share doubts;

- it needs to help stakeholders to gain confidence and be assured that they are doing the right thing;
- as every question cannot be answered easily, there needs to be opportunities for detailed and in-depth discussions;
- the connections between topics should be clear and there needs to be links to other websites and access to the ECVET national experts;
- there should be easy access to European templates e.g. a Memorandum of Understanding;
- the portal needs to be moderated to ensure the validity and accuracy of any answers or responses;
- and of course to be successful, the forum must be active and well used by the ECVET members. ■

Feedback from the workshops

Philippe Perfetti, Deputy Director for Training and Employment (APCMA) identified in plenary some of the common issues which have arisen from the 27 workshops.

One of the discussion points raised in this forum was **to stay connected with each other**. How we approach common and shared issues, how to organise these connections, namely networks because finding a connection between the networks is really important to avoid developing the same things separately.

Sectors are places through which VET providers, companies, VET qualification designers can meet. Another place for connection are the regions. The annual forum is an important place for staying connected. The expansion in the number of participants is a good sign of the enlargement of ECVET community. It is crucial to transfer the energy of the annual forum to the communities of practices as this will also be an important place for making connections and keeping in touch.

The problems created by the economic crisis and the high rate of unemployment of young people has not decreased. This has led the ECVET community to begin to shift from geographical mobility to lifelong learning. **In all the workshops there was a frequent statement that ECVET should be driven by the needs of the labour market**.

There was also a call for more work on lifelong learning namely through geographical mobility and the economic crisis may be an opportunity to develop new ways of learning and encourage learners to be more mobile.

ECVET implementation is happening in Member States. **There are two fields which are encouraging the development and implementation of ECVET: learning outcomes and partnerships.**

Trust was a central focus; it first appeared alongside the question "can we trust the ECVET currency?" And then "How to develop trust, how to recognise and how to build on trust?" This issue of trust was related to evaluation considering a weak point: *how can I trust another organisation with the task of evaluation and taking account of my system?*

Now it is much easier to identify the stakeholders and what their roles are. Five years ago the discussion focused on "who am I?" "where am I?" "What is my role?" and "what can I do in this system?" Now every institution has a better understanding of the whole system and a clearer view of their role and the role of their partners.

Sharing some insights from the forum.

- ECVET is part of a whole system, and stakeholders are encouraged to consider all the elements of the system;
- the main challenge was not to implement ECVET per se, but to choose the best tool to implement and develop mobility. Compared to last year stakeholders are now much more able to focus on the right challenges and to identify the right ways to use ECVET;
- the importance of the language or terminology. ECVET gives an opportunity to develop the bridge between the different worlds, education and companies, using the learning outcomes tool to build up these bridges.

To conclude, never forget the motto used in the forum newspaper: you'll never walk alone. ∎

Conclusion from the European Commission

From the European Commission's perspective four main messages were addressed. Each of them will be followed up in the next few months:

- **Open learning pathways**. ECVET is opening up new pathways for learners. These pathways may take learners abroad; or they may ease the transfer from VET to higher education or from higher education to VET, from VET to the labour market or from the labour market to VET. The discussions in this forum have helped to understand how ECVET can contribute to supporting learners on all these different paths;

- **An appetite for convergence**. This idea was present in many workshops and it was discussed in the panel debate on the first day. There is an appetite for convergence and this is

being expressed with passion and conviction. As mentioned early in the annual forum, this discussion will start with a public consultation and a policy proposal on how to improve convergence;

- **Communicate the benefits**. The question is how to communicate the goals? Is it necessary to say that the goal is to apply ECVET, or to say that the goal is to make it easier for learners to accumulate, transfer and have recognised their learning? And why is ECVET a good thing for the learner but also for the labour market? On this point there is still a lot of work to do;

- **Evaluation and mainstreaming**. The independent evaluation of EC-VET will begin this autumn. This will encompass the wide range of work that has been done during the pilot

phase of ECVET and help to identify what to take to the next level. After the evaluation the Commission will report to the European Parliament and Member States. For a mainstreaming approach to happen it is necessary to get commitments from national authorities, aiming for an impact at the institutional level, and to get closer to users - the national expert teams can help with this. ∎