ECVET

maGazine

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

Special Issue: Joint ECVET Conference
24-25 October 2013

ecveT
European Credit system for
Vocational Education & Training

Education and Training

EACEA
Education, Audiovisual & Culture
Executive Agency

Education and Culture DG
Lifelong Learning Programme

‘Member States are now more committed than ever to increase the mobility of VET learners. They have set the target of 6% of all learners in initial VET to complete a study period abroad by 2020. ECVET can help to achieve this goal.’

Xavier Prats Monné,
Deputy Director-General for Education and
Culture at the European Commission

‘Implementation happens on national level. There is a need to train national ECVET-experts and to develop more opportunities to meet and learn from each other’.

Ute Haller Block,
Head of Unit at The European Commission, EACEA

‘Now that we see how ECVET can work, broader national strategies are needed which create a link between all the European transparency instruments’.

Carlo Scatoli,
Policy Officer at the European Commission, DG EAC

‘The ECVET pilot projects show that there is a need to work on the interface between policy, projects and mainstream practice.’

Allison Crabb,
Deputy Head of Unit at the European Commission, DG EAC

The European Credit Point System for Vocational Education and Training Testing and development between 2009 and 2013

Article by Anette Curth and Daniela Uličná, (ICF GHK)

Since the European Parliament and the Council adopted the Recommendation in June 2009 many activities have been launched to test and develop ECVET in practice. The Council and the European Parliament have placed a strong emphasis on the necessity to experiment and test ECVET, through, among others initiatives, the establishment of pilot projects. In 2008, the European Commission issued a call for proposals to finance international partnerships under the Lifelong Learning Programme, whose aim was to test the implementation of the ECVET process in the context of learners' geographical mobility. As a result, eleven pilot projects were selected.[1]

In 2010, the European Commission issued a new call for proposals to finance a new generation of pilot projects under the Lifelong Learning Programme. This time, the focus was on piloting the national implementation of ECVET; however, transnational partners from at least three other countries had to be involved. This new generation of eight pilot projects is seen as an important part of Member States' efforts to create the necessary conditions to develop and test measures for the gradual implementation of ECVET.

In parallel, two other broad actions supporting the national implementation of ECVET were launched:

- The National Teams of ECVET Experts, who's aim is to support the national implementation of ECVET by advising and working with VET actors and practitioners in their countries;
- The NetECVET network of LLP National Agencies that developed an online tool to support ECVET mobility.

Moreover, a large amount of project-based testing was done by mobility projects funded through the 'Leonardo da Vinci' programme.[2] Between 2007 and 2013, about 300 ECVET projects have been carried out, supported by EU-funding - which is to be seen as a massive investment.

The experiences made, challenges encountered and solutions identified during the testing phase were presented during a joint conference on 24-25 October 2013 in Brussels.

Over one day and half, the event aimed to share the results of the pilot projects, the NetECVET network and the National Teams of ECVET experts among each other as well as with a broader audience of policy makers, experts and practitioners. Tools and information – first and foremost the ECVET toolkit and the ECVET community of practice – were distributed.

Besides facilitating networking between experts and practitioners, the event also aimed to encourage practitioners and stakeholders to carry on working with ECVET - ultimately facilitating its system level implementation.

Reaching a milestone and taking stock of what was achieved

The conference marks a milestone in the journey regarding the implementation of ECVET. In 2014 – hence, five years after the adoption of the ECVET Recommendation - the Commission will report to the European Parliament and the Council on the results of the testing and assessment of actions taken at Member State level. This may result in a review and adaptation of the Technical Specifications on ECVET as described in the Annexes to the Recommendation.

Interest in the conference was high; the event attracted 293 participants from 32 countries.

The general spirit towards ECVET as a concept and a system was very positive. Many participants stated that, after several years of testing, developing and discussing challenges, they are now convinced that ECVET can offer added value to what already exists in their systems. Many also saw that ECVET can make a contribution to solving several problems related to transferring learning outcomes from one learning context to another. The discussions showed the growing understanding of the ECVET principles. The 'ECVET vocabulary' is becoming better and better understood and certain common language is becoming stabilised.

3 Available at : http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/6118_en.pdf
4 The next issue will be published in January 2014.

Moreover, the high interest in the event – taking place only four months after the Annual ECVET Forum in June – shows that the ECVET community of practice is growing rapidly.

Progress regarding national implementation

It was clear from the beginning that the actual use of ECVET would have to happen at the national level.

Since 2011, CEDEFOP has monitored the progress of ECVET implementation in the countries with annual reports. In the January 2013 issue,[3] several Member States report that progress has been made, but there is still reluctance from institutions in certifying units and modules at the national level. This hampers the introduction of a comprehensive and sustainable credit transfer system. The overall opinion of national authorities is that a sustainable ECVET requires more commitment at the national level.

There were at the end of 2012[4]:

- Nine countries/regions that already have a national education and training credit system. One of these nine countries/regions is currently adjusting its system to ECVET, while there are no such developments in the remaining eight;
- Ten countries/regions that use ECVET as part of the modernisation of their national VET system;
- Nine countries/regions that are currently testing the relevance of ECVET for their VET or lifelong learning systems; and
- Eighteen countries/regions that made no decision yet on the role ECVET could play.

However, the use of ECVET needs to be adapted to the specific systemic conditions. The transferability from one case and context to another is not possible without putting work into an adaptation phase. Moreover, countries need to make a decision about what exactly they would like to achieve with ECVET – improve the quality of learners' mobility, facilitate the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, or transfer credit from one learning context to another– is it one of these goals, or many of them?

The pilot projects CPU-Europe (BE-fr), MEN-ECVET (FR) and VET-CCS (MT) and the work of the National teams of ECVET experts (for example, in Germany and Croatia) present examples that illustrate (elements of) a national strategy to implementing ECVET. However, there are still many European countries where the decisions about how ECVET will be used remain unclear.

In a panel discussion during the conference, the drivers and success factors that convinced governments and stakeholders to get involved and promote reforms at the national level were discussed by representatives of five countries (BE-fr, DE, FR, IT and SE). The examples presented varied from one country to another, depending on the national contexts.

It was concluded that four types of VET systems and contexts can be distinguished.

- VET systems characterised by a broad diversity of actors and sub systems (e.g. Italy);
- VET systems with a high level of centralisation complemented by a high level of freedom of certification (through various competent authorities), e.g. France;
- VET systems with a high level of decentralisation, e.g. with regions or even municipalities having the power to manage training and providers (e.g. Sweden and Belgium);
- VET systems based on the dual system with a strong involvement of social partners and companies (e.g. Germany).

The **motivations of key actors** in the system are crucial to the success of ECVET. These need to be related to **clear policy decisions** on ECVET. In those countries where systemic changes have been introduced, the political vision for improving the quality of the VET system lies at the bottom of the decisions taken. This political vision should be shared by the main stakeholders before starting consultations to start the implementation of ECVET. This political vision responds to real needs in the countries (e.g., improving transition in the system, or decreasing the number of early school leavers).

For some countries, the fact that there is the EU recommendation turned out to be a success factor, together with European Commission funding which enabled the production of tangible results.

The panellists formulated their dreams and wishes for the future:

- At EU level, greater coherence between all EU transparency instruments should be achieved;
- At the national level, the sustainability of the projects results and transfer to system level should be aimed at;
- Clear political statements from national governments to speed up the implementation are needed;
- Dissemination activities should be improved. Currently, it can be quite hard to find the correct information;
- In practice, using ECVET for mobility should not be an exception, but a standard;
- Teachers and practitioners should be encouraged to use ECVET even if there is no policy. If they think it is a useful instrument which should be brought forward, they need to take the steering wheel, be proactive, take action and decide in which direction to go;
- Lastly and most importantly, participants to the panel were hoping the work developed by ECVET stakeholders will reach the target group – meaning the learners – and that it will enable the development of smooth mobility pathways, and support young people to enter the labour market.

However, it was also stated that ECVET is still a relatively new instrument. Only four years have passed since the adoption of the recommendation and tangible results have already been observed and shared. There is a great deal of evidence that ECVET has great potential and can be applied in many contexts – this is a good basis to proceed from.

5

Key Messages

The following key messages can be summarised:

We have seen many examples proving that ECVET can work

The examples presented at the conference varied from preventing early school leaving, recognising non-formal and informal learning, to improving the quality of international mobility. National implementation requires national authorities/organisations to make a strategic decision about what they want to use ECVET for. In other words: What problems do we have, and how can ECVET contribute to solving them?

Now that we see that it can work, we need to implement solutions at the system level

So far, the implantation of ECVET has been a bottom-up process that was very much driven by practitioners. But there is a lot of practical experience to build on. There are solutions that should be continued in a sustainable way. Some countries already present examples of how system level initiatives can synthesise and build on the experience of a series projects. In other countries, there is still a need for a clearer system level framework to take the next steps regarding implementation.

We need to ensure further buy-in from stakeholders

The added value of ECVET and its potential to help solve existing problems needs to be further communicated to stakeholders to ensure they get on board and help promote ECVET.

We need to further convince, encourage and empower practitioners to use the tools developed

Practitioners do not need to wait until there is a top-level decision to take action. They can and should be drivers of the process. Experience shows that in most countries at least some aspects of ECVET can already be used in the framework of existing systems.

More attention should be given to including learners in the process

Whilst the learner is essentially at the heart of ECVET, and the added value of the instrument should be proven through its benefits to the learner, concrete examples are still scarce. The instrument is not yet rooted in practice.

ECVET has made an important contribution to the shift to learning outcomes in VET

However, this needs to be transformed into a shared, consistent and trusted learning outcomes approach. This includes the development of learning outcomes based training and assessment. We are for the moment, still relatively far from a coherent approach.

### We need to develop a culture of recognition that embraces diversity

There will always be differences in the formulations of learning outcomes and there will always be differences in the expected learning outcomes related to a qualification. But the core of most VET qualifications across Europe is very similar. Therefore, recognition should be possible and encouraged - despite the differences.

We need to ensure greater coherence between the European transparency instruments and national frameworks

The European transparency tools complement each other. They should inspire national frameworks that work for the learner and enable education and training to offer a high quality service to citizens across countries, educational levels and learning contexts. Competent institutions should seek to overcome entrenched positions and work together towards common goals, which are to support the learners.

We are building up our expertise on ECVET and the rest of the instruments

The high interest in the conference and the quality of the discussions shows that the 'community of practice' is growing, and the understanding of ECVET and its 'sister' instruments is advancing. There are more and more people with well-informed opinions and a wealth and diversity of experiences with ECVET.
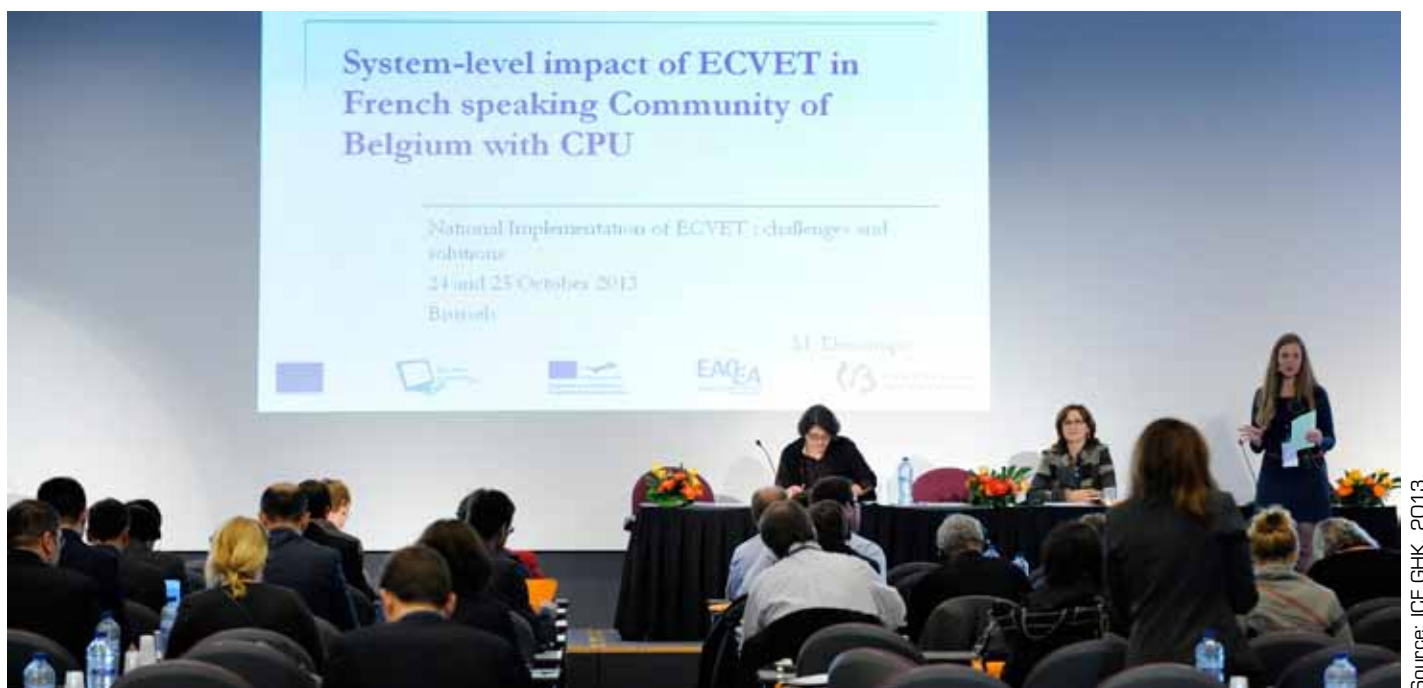
Conclusions and next steps

ECVET has a contribution to make to students' mobility as well as to lifelong learning. It can improve the quality of students' mobility and it can support lifelong learning by supporting people in transition between jobs, countries, educational levels and professions, through validation and recognition of prior learning.

The testing phase has brought about a wealth of experience, tools and methods of how to use ECVET. There is now a demand to take the implementation to the next level – by practitioners and policy makers in the countries, and with support from national stakeholders. The future Erasmus + programme will have around 40 % more funding available than the previous programme and will support experiences abroad for about 650 000 VET students – huge room for the application of ECVET.

There is a need for Member States to further work on the interface between policy, projects and mainstream practice - gateways between these strands should be created and this should happen in the context of a broader national strategy. This strategy should create a link between all the European transparency instruments (EQF, ECTS, ECVET, EQAVET, Europass) and should focus on the quality of VET as such. Erasmus Plus can provide support, as it is not only about mobility, but also focuses on strategic partnerships as may be established by countries to create synergies between the European transparency instruments.

From the European perspective, this is important to underline; such synergies would be in line with the development at European level. The Commission is now launching a public consultation on how to move from the current generation of transparency instruments to a coherent and coordinated provision of services that will generate a European Area of Skills and Qualifications: an area where people can move trusting that their competences and qualifications will be understood, appreciated and recognised. Greater coherence between the different instruments and services is the first step – any development of ECVET needs to be seen in this perspective.

Different applications of ECVET: Synthesis of the results of ECVET pilot projects

Article by Daniela Uličná, Anette Curth (ICF GHK) and Karin Luomi-Messerer (3s)

One of the main goals of the conference was to present the results of the ECVET pilot projects. This was done through five workshops. The examples for credit transfer and accumulation presented in these workshops varied from using ECVET to preventing early school leaving, recognising non-formal and informal learning, to improving the quality of international mobility.

One of the main topics discussed at the conference was: **National implementation requires national authorities/organisations to make a strategic decision about what they want to use ECVET for. In other words: What needs do we have, and how can ECVET contribute to solving them?**

Each of the eight projects funded under the 2010 call for proposals to test ECVET was designed by their promoters to address specific issues and to respond to different needs in the national context. The projects were also designed to fit very different regulatory and institutional contexts.

The needs addressed by the projects

The projects endeavoured to respond to a variety of needs. They strived to help their VET systems evolve, or were looking for ways in which sub-systems can better accommodate the demand for the recognition of learning outcomes of different target groups. Examples of situations the projects were trying to address:

- Young people are demotivated by the fact that they have to repeat a year in a VET programme due to failing certain subjects. A lack of motivation results in dropping out;

- Professionals in certain sectors learn on the job without achieving formal qualifications. They may need such qualifications when changing employers or positions;
- Young people study in a programme, but when they transfer into a different programme they have to start from the beginning even though they possess relevant knowledge, skills and competence. This unnecessarily extends the duration of their training;
- Personnel in certain sectors are often not formally qualified or have foreign qualifications that are not recognised in the formal system or in the labour market. This hinders people from evolving in their professional roles and taking up other positions;
- VET providers in a given system do not have the tools to develop qualifications based on the principles of ECVET, though this is required by the National Qualifications Framework in the specific country;
- The rules for VET providers in another system are not clear on how international mobility could be recognised towards the existing units of learning outcomes.

Table 1 opposite gives a short overview of the main motivations of each project to work with ECVET.

Table 1: Overview of projects' main motivations

Project	Main issue being addressed
2get1care	Due to the high degree of specialisation in health care professions in Germany, there are only limited possibilities for learners and graduates to change pathways and transfer between professions. The project aimed to use ECVET - in particular the description of curricula in terms of learning outcomes - to enhance transparency and provide insight into the similarities and differences between curricula, as well as to facilitate the recognition of prior learning at higher education institutions. Designing curricula based on ECVET principles and the development of a further teacher training course should also help to foster the implementation of competence based teaching and learning that is emphasised in the German 'Handlungskompetenz' (action competence) concept.
CO.L.O.R	The VET system in Italy is highly fragmented with many competent authorities involved. An on-going reform aims to bring greater coherence to the minimum standards expected. However, the qualification requirements still differ from one region to another. This can pose difficulties for mobile workers and hinder them from re-qualifying or updating their qualifications. To facilitate transparency and coherence, tools to support the recognition and accumulation of units of learning outcomes are being promoted at national level. The project aimed to use ECVET as an opportunity to engage different authorities in a concrete feasibility test of these principles on the ground.
CPU Europe	The French speaking Community of Belgium has a high rate of dropping out from VET and also a high rate of class repetition. This project is an element of a much broader reform of VET that aims to improve the quality of VET qualifications and programmes and to improve the completion rates. The main aim of the certification by units (CPU) is to address early school leaving by recognising what has been achieved, rather than penalising errors and gaps. In addition, CPU aims to organise internal mobility between various training providers to facilitate the students' pathway. The CPU reform is aligned with the ECVET technical specifications.
EASYMetal	In Germany, young people who do not manage to enter the apprenticeship system often take up preparatory VET courses. These courses result in the acquisition of certain learning outcomes. When they are able to secure a placement in the dual system, they usually have to start from the beginning. The legal framework gives companies the possibility to recognise what was learned in the preparatory system, but in practice this is rarely done. The project developed tools, using ECVET, to enable this recognition in the dual system.
ESyCQ	Many people in the ICT and trade sector acquire and continuously update their professional knowledge, skills and competences through learning on the job, without ever following a formal training programme. Consequently, they have the professional capabilities required, but not the corresponding formal qualifications. The project developed a solution to test one's learning outcomes against a set of standards. The aim of this transparency tool is to facilitate the recognition of learning outcomes in view of achieving a formal qualification.
I CARE	A significant share of the workforce in the health and social care sector in Italy is migrant workers. Many of them do not hold the formal qualifications that correspond to the specific professions. The project developed an approach, based on ECVET, that enables the assessment of learning outcomes (independent of how they were achieved) in view of accumulating units to receive the full qualification.
MEN-ECVET	In France, VET qualifications designed and awarded by the Ministry of Education have many features that are already comparable to the ECVET principles. The Ministry has decided to mainly use ECVET as an instrument to support the transnational mobility of VET students. Consequently, the project examined the feasibility of using ECVET for mobility in the context of the existing regulatory framework. The aim of the project was to provide feasible solutions to allow the assessment of learning outcomes abroad and then validation and recognition.
VET-CCS	In Malta, VET providers have very high levels of autonomy. In addition to delivering the training, they are responsible for designing and awarding qualifications. The introduction of the Malta Qualifications Framework was simultaneous to the introduction of the national implementation of ECVET. The VET-CCS project developed a manual for VET providers to use credit as part of their qualifications.

Source: ICF GHK analysis of pilot projects

Systemic context of the eight pilot projects

Another point discussed at the conference was the question of the transferability of solutions.

Participants found it interesting to learn about concrete steps to use ECVET undertaken in other countries, and to get information about concrete experiences of projects and providers using it. However, they also stated that the use of this information for their own work and the practical transferability was not immediately apparent.

The application of the framework ECVET offers is highly dependent on the context and very system specific. This is also reflected in the pilot projects. The solutions proposed by the eight projects respond to specific system-level features. These vary greatly when it comes to 'ECVET-readiness'. Some of the systems in which the projects were working were already highly comparable to the ECVET technical specifications, while others, on the other hand, were in a very different starting situation. For example:

- When it comes to the use of units in the VET system concerned, only the project MEN-ECVET worked with qualifications already defined in terms of units of learning outcomes. The projects CPU Europe and VET-CCS operated in a context where units were being introduced. For the remaining projects, the use of units in the VET system or sub-system was not established.
- Similarly, the possibilities for learners to accumulate learning outcomes according to system level rules var-

ied greatly. For the project EASYMetal, the legal possibility of accumulation between pre-vocational training and apprenticeships exists on the level of the contract between training companies and their apprentices. In the case of the project MEN ECVET, the accumulation of units of learning outcomes or even parts of units, is made possible through the process of continuous assessment. The project CPU Europe was implemented in a context where the accumulation of units was being piloted. In a number of projects the principle of accumulation was not formally in place at the time of experimentation.

- The possibilities for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning to achieve qualifications also differ. In Italy (CO.L.O.R and I CARE), the existence of such procedures varies from one region to another.[1] In France (MEN ECVET) and the French speaking Community of Belgium (CPU Europe), it is rather well established. In Malta (VET-CCS) it is possible according to the framework and it is progressively being developed. In Germany (2get1care, EASYMetal, ESyCQ), such recognition does not concern parts of qualifications. It is only possible in most sub-systems to pass the assessment for the whole qualification without formal preparation.
- Finally, the projects worked in very different contexts when it comes to the division or sharing of responsibilities between VET providers and system-level authorities. From a rather centralised context in France (MEN-ECVET), to a much more decentralised context in Malta (VET CCS), the projects worked along a continuum of different levels of autonomy and divisions of responsibilities.

1 With the new legislative decree nr.13 entered into force on the 16th of January 2013, Italy is attempting to establish a national framework for the recognition and validation of competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts.

Table 2 gives a short overview of the main contextual features of each project.

Table 2: Main features of systems in which the projects intervened

Project	System or sub-system	Units of LO	Accumulation of units of LO	Recognition of NFIL	Autonomy of VET providers with regard to recognition
2get1care	Initial VET (school-based, health care) in Germany	VET system is based on learning content and input; a competence-based approach and a shift to learning outcomes are discussed and are becoming gradually more accepted.	Limited possibilities (recognition/credit transfer is regulated by occupational law)	Limited possibilities (recognition/credit transfer is regulated by occupational law)	Providers award qualifications based on occupational law, but have some room for manoeuvring to decide on transfer and accumulation internally
CO.L.O.R	Continuous VET in Italy	Not existent in most qualifications	Not existent in most qualifications	Depends on regions/ competent authorities	Very low
CPU Europe	Initial VET in the French speaking Community of Belgium	Introduced by the new reform	Introduced by the new reform	Already possible	High. The reform introduces requirements for recognition and homogeneity of minimum standards
EASYMetal	Prevocational and dual system in Germany	Not existent in dual VET (strong resistance to the idea of units)	Not existent	Recognition of preparatory courses is possible on the basis of a contract between a training company and an apprentice (reduction of training period)	Low - Recognition is the competence of Chambers
ESyCQ	Continuous VET in Germany (IT sector)	Not existent	Not existent	Not developed	Low - Recognition is the competence of Chambers
I CARE	Continuous VET in Italy (social care sector)	Not existent in most qualifications	Not existent	In principle possible, but tools missing	Very low
MEN-ECVET	Initial VET in France	Already existent	Already partly existent	Well developed	Limited to specific situations (continuous assessment and work-based learning)
VET-CCS	Both initial and continuous VET in Malta	Being introduced through the NQF and ECVET implementation	Also being introduced through the NQF and ECVET implementation	Being implemented	Very high – providers often award their own qualifications

Source: ICF GHK own analysis

Working with the ECVET technical specifications under different systemic conditions

The pilot projects presented their solutions in five different workshops. Whilst three workshops were designed around scenarios of credit transfer and accumulation, two workshops addressed the system-level and provider level impact of ECVET.

Workshop 1: Using ECVET to help young people complete qualifications

The projects EASYMetal and CPU-Europe used ECVET to tackle problems with early school leaving and transition from school to VET.

CPU (certification by units) is the name of one strand of a comprehensive VET-reform in the French speaking Community of Belgium; introducing comprehensive changes to VET qualifications and programmes by using ECVET principles. Programmes and qualifications will now be based on units of learning outcomes. The main aim of this approach is to ensure that learners are continuously motivated by marking their progress in the programme through the achievement of units. When gaps in their knowledge skills and competence are identified these should be addressed through remedial measures immediately by the pedagogical staff. The motto of the reform is to reward achievement rather than to sanction failure.

The project EASYMetal developed and tested methods and tools to enhance transparency and permeability at the interface between pre-vocational training and vocational training in Germany. By making learning outcomes obtained in a pre-vocational training year comparable to learning outcomes that are part of full qualifications in the metal industry, permeability between those different learning schemes is made easier.

In line with the training regulations, training companies can decide whether they can grant credit for the learning outcomes acquired in the prevocational system in the form of shortening the training period and avoiding repetition.

In the discussions following the workshops, it was stated that:

- There is a role for ECVET in preventing as well as addressing early school leaving;
- Seeing how one is progressing in his/her learning, gives learners the motivation to continue. They stay in the learning programme;
- It also enables them to gain recognition for their 'backpack' of assessed and documented learning outcomes if they drop out or move on;
- But to do so, the units of learning outcomes must be comprehensible to all actors in the system.

Workshop 2: Using ECVET to recognise prior learning

The projects CO.L.O.R and I CARE used ECVET to develop solutions to transfer and recognise prior learning from formal, non-formal and informal contexts.

The CO.L.O.R project needs to be seen in the context of the on-going reforms of the qualifications system and vocational education and training in Italy. In 2011 an agreement between state-regions established a National Repertory of VET Qualifications at EQF levels 3 and 4. In this repertory all qualifications are described using a common format, including for the definition of knowledge, skills and competence. These measures constitute progressive steps towards making VET in Italy more transparent and supporting the recognition of learning outcomes independent of where they were achieved. The project CO.L.O.R developed a methodology and a template for describing units of learning outcomes that enables the assessment of knowledge, skills

and competence independent of how people learnt these. This helps people without qualifications, or with low qualifications to gain validation and recognition for competences acquired outside of the formal education sector - through non-formal or informal learning.

The I CARE project used ECVET as a framework to develop a recognition model for mobile workers in the personal and social care sector: valid across borders. A partnership between the Italian lead partners and international partners from Poland, Germany and Romania (VET-providers and competent institutions) was set up. The partners then developed a matrix of competences which makes it possible to compare the learning outcomes of five qualifications from the personal and social care sector across the partner countries – independent from the learning context. An assessment method was piloted in all countries to make sure the learning outcomes can be assessed on an equal basis. At the end of the process, a recognition model for prior learning was developed to be used by VET-providers, but also by competent institutions to formalise achieved learning outcomes and progress or upgrade a qualification.

Both project presenters stated:

* Having passed the assessment for one or several units develops persons' awareness of their own capacities. This is empowering;
* An assessment based on work-tasks makes it possible for learners to clearly relate their everyday work with the education system and the qualifications;
* There is a need for (unit-based) standards to carry out recognition. The standards from the qualification system should be fit for this purpose.

Workshop 3: Using ECVET to upgrade qualifications or to re-qualify

The projects ESyCQ and I CARE used ECVET to create more opportunities for the learner to gain recognition for prior learning – in view of upgrading a qualification or re-qualifying. For both projects the assessment of prior learning plays a decisive role to help the learner identify what is already there and what still needs to be achieved.

The ESyCQ project focused on the design of a specific method of assessment of acquired units of learning outcomes by using a competence database. The tool helps to assess the knowledge of the learner, including non-formally and informally acquired knowledge. A competence matrix was developed, which shows that in the selected six qualifications (logistics manager, office manager / office administrator, office assistant, management assistant in IT-systems, IT-Assistant, certified network-administrator), competences overlap. A learner receives confirmation that learning outcomes acquired during a previous training phase which did not lead to a full qualification or through work practice, might be relevant for the qualification that is currently aimed at.

The I CARE project used ECVET as a framework to develop a recognition model for mobile workers in the personal and social care sector. The project partners developed a matrix of competences which makes it possible to compare the learning outcomes of five qualifications from the personal and social care sector across the partner coun-

tries – independent from the learning context. An assessment method was piloted which helps to identify the gaps and missing learning outcomes needed to acquire a full qualification, and take up further learning. At the end of the process, I CARE developed a recognition model for prior learning that can be used by VET-providers to offer learners more targeted training, but also by competent institutions to formalise achieved learning outcomes and progress or upgrade a qualification.

The following main conclusions were derived from this workshop:

- When people see what skills they have and what they need to gain via an assessment of prior learning, they are motivated to complete their activities;
- If a learner has acquired learning outcomes through work practice or informal learning, s/he often knows how to do things in practice (practical experience), but does not necessarily know why (theoretical knowledge). This aspect can be gained through formal learning;
- To ensure that units of learning outcomes are meaningful and can be recognised by different organisations (chambers, employers, education providers), these stakeholders need to be involved in the consultation process;
- Units are a transparency tool. When presented clearly, they make the content of qualifications more transparent.

Workshop 4: System-level impact of ECVET

This workshop presented the role ECVET has played in two countries (FR and BE-fr) in order to implement changes in the organisation of qualifications at system level.

The French project MEN-ECVET compared the ECVET Recommendation and its principles with the regulatory framework and guidelines for designing and awarding qualifications concerning the French Vocational Baccalaureate (BAC PRO). The project examined how ECVET could be used in the context of BAC PRO qualifications and how the existing regulatory framework could be improved to facilitate the recognition of learning outcomes achieved abroad by using ECVET. The project found that the existing regulatory framework is mostly well aligned with the ECVET technical specifications (units, learning outcomes, assessment, validation and recognition). The project also found that the way in which the qualifications of the Ministry of National Education are currently described could be simplified and made more consistent to improve their legibility. Several recommendations were made that could help update the French guide for the design of VET qualifications.

The options for the recognition of learning outcomes achieved during mobility were identified as well – by recognising units (or parts of units) that have been assessed abroad, or by introducing a new 'mobility competence'

to BAC PRO qualifications. Both options require certain adjustments to the existing regulatory framework; on completion of the project, the Ministry of National Education committed to making these changes.

CPU (certification by units) is the name of one strand of the reform of VET in the French speaking Community of Belgium. In September 2011 the reform began piloting. The pilot phase has so far concerned four qualifications (mechatronic, car technician, beautician, and hairdresser). In the future, qualification standards based on units will be common to all VET schools in the country. While schools maintain their autonomy in the design of curricula and use of teaching methods, they are required to use these standards as the basis for curriculum development and assessment. Each year students achieve around three units of learning outcomes. The programme is designed so that they achieve the units progressively during the academic year. The reform forbids the repetition of a year of studies. If students fail an assessment for a unit, the pedagogical staff have to put in place remedial measures. Students then repeat the assessment for the failed unit when being assessed for the next unit. Each student receives a training plan at the beginning of their pathway and his/her competence transcript is updated.

During the discussion the following was highlighted by participants:

- The system-level impact implies the use of units of learning outcomes, accumulation and transfer procedures based on assessment, validation and recognition;
- Just because a system has units and learning outcomes, it does not mean that it will automatically facilitate transfer and accumulation. There is a need for certain flexibility around assessment, validation and recognition;
- In practice, for the system level change to happen, ECVET requires a pedagogical revolution – training has to be restructured, and methods have to be adapted;
- Learning outcomes for general education (language, mathematics, science, etc.) can also be expressed in units of learning and assessed in a vocational context or separately.

Workshop 5: VET provider-level impact of ECVET

The projects VET-CCS and 2get1care developed solutions for VET providers wishing to work with ECVET.

The project VET-CCS developed a method for Maltese-VET providers to convert VET qualifications which have a large amount of competence in designing qualifications and training courses. VET-CCS sees ECVET as a means to define clear learning outcomes for courses; design training programmes which are relevant to industry; provide individualised, tailored and flexible training programmes; improve co-operation with other institutions (national and transnational); and improve the management of learners' mobility. The project has developed and tested a step-by-step procedure that clarifies how VET-providers can convert their qualifications/courses so that they are compatible with the ECVET technical specifications. Thirty VET-qualifications were chosen to include both full VET qualifications as well as short VET courses at different NQF levels. These short courses were selected so that that a learner can combine them in order to accumulate ECVET points in view of obtaining a full VET qualification. Based on the methodologies developed and tested, a Conversion Manual has been developed. The manual provides guidelines and a step-by-step procedure to help VET-providers in Malta and beyond with converting their courses to ECVET-compatibility.

The project 2get1care uses ECVET to allow the transfer of competences for learners who want to change pathways or professions. The project partnership adapted the train-

ing curricula of four health care professions offered by a specific training provider to ECVET principles. The units of learning outcomes were identified on the basis of tasks and work processes which are typical of the particular professions and used as modules for structuring the learning process. A common core curriculum was developed for these professions based on the identification of common learning outcomes. Students of all four training programmes learn and work in mixed groups to foster the development of inter-professional competences.

The participants in the workshop highlighted that:

- The final use of tools and solutions will require training educators;
- The development of curricula based on learning outcomes' units should reflect work-related activities;
- There needs to be a process for updating curricula to ensure that the new requirements of the labour market are constantly being taken on board;
- To improve permeability, one has to bring both VET and higher education to the table together. The language and 'common currency' of learning outcomes should make this easier.

Conclusions and lessons learned

The pilot projects showed that ECVET can serve a variety of purposes and respond to different needs. It can offer solutions to a range of target groups - not all of which are described above. The projects' experiences illustrate the diversity of situations that can be at least partially improved by the use of ECVET.

Depending on the starting point of the system and the issues to be tackled, ECVET principles can be used with more or less adaptations.

Several projects also show the complementarities between ECVET and other instruments in the area of qualifications systems. This concerns particularly the complementarity with qualifications frameworks (CPU Europe and VET CCS) and validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning (CO.L.O.R, I CARE, ESyCQ). In the project 2get-1care, the descriptions of units of learning outcomes or modules was constructed with a close link to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) in higher education, to facilitate transfer between both levels of edu-

cation – which is not unusual for students in health care professions in Germany. To facilitate lifelong learning the learning outcomes were a core element of all the solutions proposed and the different instruments needed to be used in a coordinated manner.

To facilitate and support lifelong learning across all levels of education, different instruments are needed. They unfold their full potential if they are applied in a coordinated way. Learning outcomes are at the centre, and quality assurance plays an important role in establishing trust, e.g. regarding assessment and certification.

Another element of the work of the pilot projects was that they were specifically asked to focus on supporting national implementation. Several of the projects (CPU Europe, MEN ECVET, VET-CCS) were very closely linked to national developments. They were led by authorities that are in a position to implement the solutions identified. These projects were able to influence broader national developments about the use of ECVET. The manual developed by VET-CCS became the reference tool for developing qualifications based units and credit in Malta. The recommendations of the project MEN- ECVET are being examined within the Ministry of Education and are expected to result in adaptations to certain texts. The findings of the project CPU-Europe influenced certain decisions about the national implementation of ECVET. The discussions that took place in the framework of CPU Europe also had the effect of exemplifying the international dimension of the CPU reform for a range of stakeholders.

Other projects – EASYMetal, I CARE, ESyCQ, 2get1care, and CO.L.O.R - instead followed a bottom-up approach. This has been typical for ECVET so far – the implementation process was very much driven by practitioners and stakeholders. However, after gaining much practical experience, the solutions should be continued in a sustainable way. Countries like Belgium, Malta and France have already presented examples of how system level initiatives can synthesise and build on the experience of a series of projects. In other countries, there is still a need for a clearer system level framework to take the next steps regarding implementation.

Moreover, the added value of ECVET and its potential to help solve existing problems, needs to be further communicated to stakeholders to ensure they are on board and helping to promote ECVET.

The activities of the national teams of ECVET experts

Article by Anette Curth, (ICF GHK)

25 National Agencies of the Lifelong Learning Programme[1] have established National Teams of ECVET Experts in their respective country. The purpose of these Teams is to promote and further develop the adoption, the application and the use of ECVET in their countries. In doing so, they support the relevant actors involved in Vocational Education and Training on a national level to ensure the best use of ECVET tools. Nearly 150 out of 200 appointed ECVET experts were present at the conference, using the opportunity to share experiences and expand their network.

Aims of the action

The National Teams of ECVET experts have been launched in early 2012 to multiply the information and advice on ECVET on national level by counselling practitioners in VET competent bodies and VET authorities. When the experts were appointed, many countries could already build on significant experience with ECVET pilot projects and 'Leonardo'-funded mobility projects that used ECVET. Hence, the Experts could utilise lessons learned in projects and disseminated on national and European level.[2] A need to synthesise these results and build on them to develop sustainable solutions was perceived. As multipliers and promoters, the ECVET experts contributed to this aim.

Within the two years of experience since the National Experts started their work, some key activities emerged of how they can concretely contribute to the national implementation of ECVET:

Source: ICF GHK, 2013.

- Support the broad dissemination and use of ECVET by spreading information;
- Support national projects and practitioners working with ECVET; and
- Support competent institutions in developing manners of using ECVET for the validation and recognition of learning outcomes acquired in different learning contexts – in accordance with national rules and regulations.

In short, the national experts can broaden the spectrum of multipliers with knowledge and understanding of ECVET and can support testing and development on national level.

Specific strategies for the dissemination and implementation of ECVET at national level were planned and various types

---

1 Austria, Belgium (FR), Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom.

2 e.g. In the brochure about the results of the pilot projects' 2008-2012: http://www.ecvet-projects.eu/Documents/Seminars/ECVET_Brochure_singlepages_allthesame.pdf

of activities were organised by the countries. At the conference, National ECVET experts from four different countries – Germany, Denmark, Croatia and the UK – presented their activities as an example of the activities implemented on national level.

Experiences from four countries

Gunnar Binda reported that **Germany** has a team of 13 national ECVET experts. Together with the National ECVET contact point that has been established by German authorities, these experts concentrate on promoting ECVET for the transnational mobility of students through networking and information events. Aim is to increase the number of ECVET mobility projects. To reach this aim, he sees the need to provide targeted information to three main target groups: companies, teachers and trainers, and students.

As to companies, the experience of the German experts shows many that many businesses initially see ECVET as too bureaucratic and time-consuming procedure. However, when presented with the benefits of ECVET in a consultation, they change their attitude. To increase leverage, the involvement of students who underline their interest in credit transfer and accumulation has turned out very helpful. Another important target group are teachers and trainers – to be able to work with the learning outcomes approach, they need to adapt or change their teaching methods. Here, training is needed, supported by tools tailored for application in the German system.

For Gunnar Binda, Regional Mobility Agencies would be an efficient means to support regional providers in organising ECVET mobility – in decentralised systems like Germany, it

is very beneficial when local and regional authorities get involved.

For **Denmark,** Soren Kristensen reported that the ECVET experts' activities included a general conference and targeted seminars, as well as guest appearances at national and regional VET events. From their experience, it proved to be difficult to get people to participate in one-day seminars dedicated to ECVET. Hence, the experts decided to undertake individual visits to authorities and providers, which turned out to be a very successful concept.

Like in Germany, in Denmark it was decided to use ECVET for the geographical mobility of learners only for the moment. Denmark has a recognition procedure applied since the 1990s, which is based on the logic of recognition as well and hence quite similar to ECVET. Therefore, it has been relatively easy to introduce ECVET.

However, the definition of key concepts such as knowledge/skills/competences is slightly different in the national context. Therefore, it was important to develop tailored information material – especially for companies. Existing ECVET materials are too voluminous and abstract; the ECVET experts in Denmark thus often choose easier descriptions and simpler definitions when communicating ECVET to the people.

Kristensen underlined that it also needs to be pointed out that ECVET is closely related to the actual curriculum – still, students should not be sent abroad to learn the same thing they could learn at home. It is beneficial if the stay abroad helps to add new learning outcomes to the training.

Nino Buic who presented the Croatian activities stated that even though Croatia joined the EU member only very recently in July 2013, the country was active in ECVET implementation since 2009 already – through schools participating in ECVET mobility projects. Similar to the other countries presenting, Croatia concentrates on implementing ECVET in the context of geographical mobility as well for the moment.

When preparing for EU Membership, **Croatia** planned the implementation of ECVET as a parallel process to developing a National Qualification Framework. However, questions emerged. The concept of credit was new and needed to be 'translated' to the country-specific conditions. To achieve sustainability, the Croatian experts understood that it is essential to consider the particularities of the national education system. To ensure that ECVET can 'grow' in a country, it needs to be rooted in the national system. To support this process, the ECVET experts invested in capacity building

and organized numerous workshops, seminars and dissemination events for different target groups – an important one being teachers. An ECVET brochure and leaflet was translated and a dedicated website was set up.

ECVET expert Andrew McCoshan reported that mobility is the main focus for the implementation of ECVET **in the UK** as well. The UK team of ECVET experts concentrated on raising awareness by carrying out events, providing one-on-one support to practitioners; and distributing information and guidance matching the needs of UK stakeholders. For the promotion of ECVET, it is very helpful that the concept of learning outcomes is already common practice in the UK. What raises questions is the concept of assessment being carried out abroad – currently; it is a precondition for recognition that the assessor holds a certain UK qualification.

The experts often encountered the perception that ECVET was a ready-made system; a standard, certificate or label to obtain. Hence, the experts noted that the general concept that lies at the core of ECVET is not fully understood yet by practitioners and stakeholders.

How the ECVET experts helped to address key issues with ECVET implementation

The conference showed that there is a need to further work on the interface between policy, projects and mainstream practice - gateways between these strands should be created; and this should happen in the context of a broader national strategy. This strategy should create a link between the European transparency instruments, and should focus on the quality of VET as such.

The national experts contributed significantly to paving the way towards such strategies.

- They addressed a large variety of stakeholders on policy level: European, national and regional authorities; decision makers involved in education and training; VET experts; school authorities; non-governmental organisations working in the field of ECVET; employers and employers' organisations; social partners; and last but not least the business sector;
- They provided target support to practitioners to empower them in using ECVET and embedding it deeper into common practice;
- They were working towards greater coherence between the European transparency instruments and national frameworks: The experts were specifically asked to en-

sure the coherency of all European instruments for transparency of learning outcomes (such as EQF, EQAVET, ECTS, Europass), and advise on how they are interconnected. Moreover, the experts were asked to promote the development and use of ECVET as part of a broader lifelong learning approach which is an element of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.
- They helped to make the solutions developed more sustainable by acting as important links between policy and practice, and helping to 'translate' ideas from practice to policy - and the other way around.
- They helped to dissemination of information about ECVET and experiences with it by actively supporting the national efforts in the awareness-raising activities, the creation/publication of information material (website, leaflets, etc.);
- In short, they helped to build up practical expertise on ECVET and the rest of the instruments.

The high interest in the conference and the quality of the discussions shows that the 'community of practice' is growing, and the understanding of ECVET and its 'sister' instruments is advancing. There are more and more people with well-informed opinions and a wealth and diversity of experiences with ECVET.

To a significant extent, this is an achievement of the National ECVET experts' work to date.

References

Websites of the National Agencies of Lifelong Learning, introducing the ECVET experts and their national focus of work: **http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/national_en.htm**

19

The NetECVET workshops

Article by Sibilla Drews, National LLP Agency, Germany

Behind the NetECVET network is a group of 14 National Agencies for the Lifelong Learning Programme (Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Turkey and the UK); coordinated by the German National Agency. The network promotes ECVET in the context of transnational mobility and supports the implementation process in the Member States through a bottom-up approach. It addresses VET practitioners and supports and guides them in the application of ECVET.

Over a period of two years, NetECVET carried out workshops across Europe to share experiences and collect good practice about how to work with ECVET in the context of learners' mobility. This resulted in the development of the ECVET toolkit (see box).

The ECVET toolkit

The ECVET toolkit is a website accessible for everybody who would like to work with ECVET in practice. It helps systematically through the most important steps associated with the planning, delivery and follow-up of ECVET in geographical mobility and contains a wealth of tools ready to use – from templates for Learning Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding to matrixes which help VET-providers in different countries to identify common learning outcomes.

Moreover, it contains a section that describes ECVET, its added-value and history so far, and a section that looks more generally at how to prepare for ECVET and how to work with different national and international partnership models. Moreover, it provides an insight into the main quality concepts in ECVET, and relates these to the four steps of the EQAVET quality cycle.

The toolkit is meant to be a starting point and designed to provide support for the learning process that one needs to embark upon with the various ECVET mobility actors in your respective countries, regions, networks and institutions.

http://www.ecvet-toolkit.eu/site/home

At the joint ECVET conference, NetECVET organised six workshops. Guest speakers shared their experiences in how to work with the ECVET technical specifications – step by step - to improve learners' mobility.

The examples presented in the workshops and the key recommendations are presented below.

Workshop 1: How to get started

At the planning stage, it is important to know which elements of ECVET can be implemented independently by a VET provider, and which elements might require the participation of other actors and institutions.

In some countries, the process of implementing ECVET in geographical mobility might require relatively few changes

to existing practice, with mechanisms already in place for the recognition of mobility-related learning outcomes. In other countries, this can be a complex process that requires the participation of many different actors and institutions.

The project 'TourBO' presented an example of how to consider the preconditions for the successful implementation of ECVET at the institutional level as well as the range of actors involved in implementing ECVET in geographical mobility. It showed how a common understanding of the added value of ECVET has developed among the partners.

The project's aims were to improve regional vocational education, training and quality and to increase work mobility through standardised qualifications in the tourism sector. The target groups included individuals who were already working in tourism but lacking a formal qualification, individuals with formal qualifications in another field looking to change their profession and those with qualifications in tourism looking for higher education. The special challenge was the accreditation of internships in VET.

As a German university of applied sciences was involved in the project, it was necessary to find a way in which learning outcomes acquired in VET could be recognised in the higher education programme and vice versa. Learning outcomes and overlapping areas were identified and ECTS and ECVET points compared.

The project's outcome was a new professional training 'Recreation Assistant' containing seven modules and placing emphasis on direct guest contact. The training has overlapping areas with other qualifications and professional trainings in the tourism and hospitality sector.

The project
TourBO (http://www.tourbo.eu): Partners from Germany, Austria, Hungary and Slovenia developed a training course in the tourism sector based on already existing IVET and CVET courses and focused on the demand of the sector.

Contact:
Tourismusschulen Salzburg Klessheim, Österreich
Direktor Magister - Dr. Franz Heffeter
Tel: + 43 6628 512630
E-mail: fheffeter@ts-salzburg.at
www.ts-salzburg.at

Source: ICF GHK, 2013.

Workshop 2: Building partnerships

Both national and international partnerships play a crucial role in implementing ECVET. They form the backbone of the implementation. However, one of the main challenges is the broad range of bodies that are involved in the qualification systems of the different countries in Europe.

The project 'EVOC' gave an example of the necessary steps education and training providers have to take when they want to implement ECVET as a part of their mobility process.

At first, it is important to be familiar with the ECVET actors in both the sending (national partners) and receiving countries (international partners). Then it will be possible to map the roles and responsibilities of each partner in the sending and receiving countries. This leads to gaining and maintaining the trust of all partners.

However, partnerships must be aware that the type of institutions which need to be involved differs across countries. For example, in Finland, the VET college (provider) is responsible for assessment and assessment abroad can be accepted; in other countries additional authorities might have to be involved.

The project developed a unit of qualification in childcare, which is accepted by partner institutes and can be transferred from one country to another. All the mobility projects of the coordinator, OMNIA, now follow the ECVET logic. Teachers still need guidance and advice, but in general they are familiar with the procedure.

A strong piece of advice to all ECVET beginners was: when building the partnerships and planning the student mobility, begin with the actual working tasks and learning outcomes and not only with the core content of the curricula and it is important to work in networks.

The project
'EVOC' (http://evoc.fi): Partners from Finland, Germany and Sweden developed a unit of qualification in childcare, which is accepted by partner institutes and can be transferred from one country to another.

> **Contact:**
> Omnia, The Joint Authority of Education in Espoo Region
> International Coordinator
> Tel. +358 46 851 5022
> **E-mail: Maarit.Saarenkylä@omnia.fi**

Workshop 3a: Description and development of (units of) learning outcomes

The description of qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes is one of the main elements of ECVET. However, not all qualifications are designed in this way and units designed in different contexts can be quite different (for example, in terms of the range of learning outcomes comprised or their complexity, the concepts and categories used for formulating learning outcomes or the purposes, functions and target groups of such descriptions).

The project 'EURIAC' presented how the units of learning outcomes were identified and agreed between the partners and different actors. The project created a European class concept that provides VET students with opportunities to achieve transparent and recognisable knowledge, skills, and competences gained in an international learning context.

'Learning outcomes as passport to the European labour market' was the slogan of the presentation.

The European class was designed as a stand-alone educational unit to be integrated into any European vocational education and training programme in industrial automation. It can also be offered as a separate course for adults in vocational education.

The added value identified by the project partners was manifold: the shift to learning outcomes increased the students' self-confidence and engagement in and control of his/her learning process. At the institutional level, international cooperation using ECVET provides bench marking and quality assurance opportunities for national VET.

The recommendations from the project coordinator were to: 1) involve your VET teachers from day one and establish mutual understanding of the difference between learning outcomes and learning input; also, 2) establish mutual understanding of the term 'competence'; after that, 3) decide on a mutual terminology to be used for describing learning outcomes – i.e. active verbs that describe observable action that can be measured; then, 4) agree on the sufficient level of detail necessary for describing learning outcomes to support VET teachers, avoiding misunderstandings, but still keeping the units open enough to allow for technical development; 5) design a pragmatic template for the units of learning outcomes including information such as work processes, work tasks, learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and competences and level of difficulty; and above all, 6) keep an open mind, be patient and flexible!

The project
'EURIAC' (http://www.euriac.eu): Partners from Sweden, Germany, Finland, Spain, The Netherlands and Switzerland developed a European class concept that provides VET students with opportunities to achieve transparent and recognisable knowledge, skills, and competences in an international learning context.

> **Contact:**
> Kungsbacka Municipality
> Andreas Mårtensson
> **E-mail: andreas.martensson@kungsbacka.se**
> **http://www.kungsbacka.se**
>
> Elof Lindälvs Gymnasium
> Pernilla Öhberg
> **E-mail: pernilla.ohberg@kungsbacka.se**
> **http://www.eloflindalvsgymnasium.se**

Workshop 3b: Description and development of (units of) learning outcomes

This workshop focused on the same topic as Workshop 3a: design and development of (units of) learning outcomes and brought together experiences from both the 'EQUFAS' project (2007-2009) and the 'YEBISU' partnership (2010-2012).

'EQUFAS' involved the comparison of different qualifications systems and frameworks within the European agricultural sector, highlighting commonalities and differences and targeting the development of a common competence-based learning framework.

'YEBISU' brought together a broad range of European partners from the landscaping and gardening sectors, including VET actors, hosting a series of meetings and events that allowed for the building and sharing of knowledge on European tools, instruments and processes relevant to life-long learning (EQF, ECVET, Learning Outcomes); YEBISU partners reflected on past project successes and sought to improve and enhance understanding, including within the workplace.

Workshop activity centred on three core themes, namely:

- How ECVET relates to EQF. A trend was observed in many projects, to isolate ECVET as a single instrument, yet build on the experiences of EQUFAS and YEBISU. The complementary nature of all such recognition and transparency tools and instruments (EQF, ECVET, Europass, etc.) was highlighted;
- Targeting learning outcomes that are neutral to the learning environment: discussion centred on the importance of learning outcomes that are in line with a particular level of the NQF/EQF, irrespective of the learning environment or type of learning, with descriptions that are clear and understandable amongst the learner cohort;
- Matching learning outcomes to qualification structures: active discussion took place in terms of the need for, and value of, referencing learning outcomes to specific NQF/EQF levels and questions were raised about how to categorise units where knowledge, skills and competences exist at different (multiple) levels, with some suggesting that 'in order to define a level, we need a context'; a broader conclusion was that 'ECVET could be useful in describing not only vocational, but also transversal competences'.

The projects

'EQUFAS' (http://www.equfas.com): Partners from the Netherlands, Spain, Finland, Austria, Greece and Estonia targeted the development of a common competence-based learning framework for the agricultural sector and an assessment tool for levels 1 to 4.

'YEBISU' (http://www.yebisu.nl): Partners from the Netherlands, France and Germany and silent partners from Finland, Hungary, Estonia and Belgium built a learning community in which European tools and instruments (EQF, ECVET, learning outcomes) were discussed alongside life-long learning in a company setting. YEBISU partners further tested the previously-developed EQUFAS assessment tool, extending this to include level 5, exchanged employees and experimented with workplace learning with a view to validating the benefits for both employers and employees.

> **Contact (for both projects):**
> Wellantcollege
> André Huigens
> **E-mail: a.huigens@wellant.nl**
> **http://www.wellant.nl**

Workshop 4: Assessment, validation and recognition

One of the core ideas of ECVET is that units of learning outcomes achieved in one setting are assessed and then, after successful assessment, transferred to another setting. In this context, credit is understood as assessed learning outcomes.

Source: ICF GHK, 2013.

The learner must demonstrate their achievement of the required learning outcomes in an assessment process. There can be one or several assessments during the mobility period depending on the duration and the initial agreement.

The project 'TRIFT' provided an example of the entire process and included: who assessed the learners; how the learning outcomes were assessed and in what context (including where); and how the assessed learning outcomes were validated and recognised.

The TRIFT project developed a competence matrix for the field of foreign trade which allowed the mapping of competences into competence areas and competence development steps. The partners described competence profiles for the different VET-courses in their own countries. The matrix consists of seven different competence areas, each of them sub-divided into three to five steps of competence development, which illustrate the progression from novice to expert level.

Furthermore, the competence matrix was tested through internships between the partners' countries. The increase in competences was proved by outcome-orientated methods of assessment. Internships with a duration of eight weeks were organised and implemented. TRIFT used an e-portfolio approach: amongst other things, the interns had to prepare bi-weekly reports. The students perceived these reports as very positive. They made them reflect on what they had done and achieved during their internships. Every student received a TRIFT certificate at the end of his or her internship.

Assessment was carried out from three perspectives: company, teacher and intern.

a. Intern: two rounds of self-assessment. The students' self-evaluation however, was not included in the grading;
b. Company: assessment of the internship;
c. Teacher: assessment of the project and of the work-based competences on the basis of the weekly reports.

The project
'TRIFT' (**http://www.trift.eu**): Partners from Germany, Bulgaria, Sweden, the UK and France developed a competence matrix for the field of foreign trade.

> **Contact:**
> Bezirksregierung Köln / Regional Authority
> Government of Cologne
> EU-Geschäftsstelle / EU-Agency
> **http://www.brk.nrw.de/europa**

Workshop 5: Quality assurance

ECVET supports quality in mobility. However, to ensure continuous improvement, the use of ECVET for geographical mobility must also be underpinned by quality assurance (QA) procedures. This relates to the ECVET mobility of individual learners as well as to the ECVET partnership.

The four-step procedure of the EQAVET quality circle (planning – implementation – evaluation – review) can be applied to specific mobility experience and to ECVET partnerships.

The mobility project 'F.A.N.T.E.' demonstrated which quality assurance tools were used during the different phases at the two different levels (mobility of individual learners and the ECVET partnership).

F.A.N.T.E. stands for 'Fostering and Teaching Entrepreneurship'. It is a mobility project dedicated to young students in IVET within the age of 16-18 in the field of culinary arts and tourist services.

The project has experimented with all ECVET components based on the EQAVET quality cycle.

Three bilateral Memoranda of Understanding were signed with intermediary partners. They state the responsibilities and roles of each partner involved along with experimentation and identification of the basic rules for the assessment and recognition of learning outcomes. However, it was difficult to involve the competent authorities in the partner countries, and even in Italy.

First, units of learning outcomes were identified based on local training standards and according to the needs of the labour markets. The method, validation and recognition process was shared and agreed with international partners and the competent body in Italy. Assessment was the most complicated component. F.A.N.T.E. translated the existing assessment system into ECVET by putting a new assessment grid on top of the existing one which had to be kept.

After the first year (50 mobilities) a review was carried out with the assistance of the Italian national group of experts and the regional administration. Few adjustments to the assessment questionnaire were needed. Mid and long term evaluations followed.

One of the biggest problems encountered was the lack of cooperation of the competent authorities abroad. Also, the fact that mobility periods were one way and not exchanges turned out to be problematic. ECVET experimentation can hardly be successful without reciprocal exchange.

Finally, the lack of finance proved to be another problem. ECVET has multiple effects on the organisation of mobility and generally VET providers are not economically strong enough to face that without additional resources. The problems were not easy to handle, but could be solved.

The project

'FANTE': Partners from Malta, Germany and Spain received students from Italy in compulsory education and training between 16 and 18 years old.

Contact:
AFP COLLINE ASTIGIANE Scarl
Reg. San Rocco 74
Tel +39 0141 954079
Contact person: Mr. Matteo Gazzarata
E-mail: Matteo.gazzarata@virgilio.it

Source: ICF GHK, 2013.