



Getting the credit your learners deserve:

How to recognise achievements during European mobility periods

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1 Introduction

Maximising the value learners gain from time spent abroad – either studying or working – means ensuring that they get credit for what they achieve. For UK practitioners (VET training providers, including colleges) working with partners in other EU countries, a ready-made set of principles exists to help achieve this: the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET).

This short guide:

- provides the basic essentials for incorporating the ECVET principles into the design and delivery of periods when learners study or work in other EU countries (known as ‘mobility periods’);
- has been written to help practitioners who are new to ECVET but who have some mobility experience and now want to go further with their partnerships;
- mainly takes the perspective of colleges and training providers. Non-governmental organisations and small and medium-sized enterprises can get more information, and free help and support, from the UK National Team of ECVET Experts (www.ecvetexperts.org.uk).

If you are getting involved in European partnerships for the first time you will find useful information on the Leonardo da Vinci website (www.leonardo.org.uk) on how to find partners, how to access funding to meet with potential partners in addition to useful hints and tips on running a project.

What is ECVET?

- ECVET is a means of recognising learning in one country so that it counts towards a qualification in another.
- It provides a set of principles that can be applied flexibly in different countries and in different educational contexts.
- These principles act as a common language through which vocational education and training providers can better understand provision in other EU countries for the benefit of their learners.

Many of the principles of ECVET are already familiar to UK practitioners since they're based on describing provision and qualifications in terms of learning outcomes. Indeed, you may find that much of what you are already doing in your mobility periods is consistent with ECVET. What ECVET offers is a coherent set of principles, and a clear set of steps to help you implement them.

How does ECVET fit with EU and UK policy?

ECVET is one of a number of tools being adopted by EU countries in order to enable programmes and qualifications to be better understood and recognised across borders. You can find out more information on the ECVET Experts website: www.ecvetexperts.org.uk. UK government policy on ECVET is that it should be used to add value to work or study periods abroad. Other countries are also using ECVET as part of wider changes introduced to strengthen the use of learning outcomes and credits in their education and training systems.

How can ECVET be applied to mobility periods in Europe?

ECVET principles can:

- be applied to all types of mobility periods, ranging from two weeks to six months or more.
- be implemented progressively within a learning programme so that partners can learn from their experiences and as they develop trusting relationships with each other.

You can trial some of the principles on shorter term mobility periods and/or focus on one or two learning outcomes during a longer mobility period.

What are the benefits of ECVET?

ECVET can bring a range of benefits:

- Mobility becomes more attractive to learners as it leads to tangible outcomes
- Learners save time through the recognition of the learning completed abroad as they may no longer have to retake courses or examinations, or catch up on periods of learning
- Learners who acquire part of their qualification abroad are more attractive to employers
- The clarity and design of mobility periods is improved through the focus on learning outcomes
- Clear and simple mobility guidelines help to cut administrative cost and time
- Institutions establish productive long-term partnerships with their overseas counterparts which support learners gaining credit for learning abroad
- Practitioners in different countries can learn from one another in respect of the structure and design of learning outcomes, assessment methods etc.

Of course, ECVET also has some limitations. For example, it cannot tackle all of the obstacles of cross-border mobility, such as language barriers. It also requires greater commitment between partner institutions to make it work effectively. However, the use of

ECVET principles can deliver greater rewards for learners and more fruitful collaboration between providers.

Top tip: a head start for UK practitioners

Using ECVET for the first time can seem daunting. However, UK practitioners have several advantages: the long-standing use of learning outcomes, units and credits; the flexibilities available to providers; the experience of partnerships. All of these factors mean that UK providers are well positioned to make light work of the requirements. They also make them valuable partners for providers in other European countries seeking to add value to their learners' mobility periods.

2 The ECVET essentials

There are two sets of principles at the heart of ECVET:

- the use of learning outcomes and credit points
- the use of agreed assessment, validation and recognition procedures.

These sets of principles provide the added value of ECVET as they enable learning in one country to count towards a qualification in another.

Learning outcomes and credit points

Why are learning outcomes important?

- Learning outcomes are central to ECVET as they provide the “common language” which enables different education and training systems to “understand” each other.
- Without learning outcomes, partners sending students abroad would have to understand the curricula and pedagogy of host institutions and try to work out how they correspond to their own learning programmes.
- Learning outcomes shift the focus onto what is learned and away from how it is learned.
- They facilitate assessment and accreditation as they enable partners to discuss qualification requirements and to identify which parts of the qualifications being studied by the learners might be the target of mobility exchanges.

Defining learning outcomes

Across Europe there are different ways of defining learning outcomes.

- In EU policy learning outcomes are defined as statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do after completing a learning process. This will be familiar in the UK.
- In the European Qualifications Framework they are defined as knowledge, skills and “competence” where the latter means attitudes and behavior, which is slightly different and may not match the UK approach. Many EU countries have adopted the EU definitions, and so you may come across them.
- It is important that you reach a common understanding with your partners of what you mean by the terms used in your project and what you intend the learning during the mobility period to cover.

Organising learning outcomes

Within ECVET the way in which learning outcomes are grouped together into what are termed “units” plays an important role. Providers involved in mobility periods need to agree which “units” are to be the subject of mobility periods. These “units” may not match a unit or units within a UK qualification.

The ways in which learning outcomes are formulated and structured vary substantially from country to country. Most EU countries are working towards adapting a learning outcomes approach. Implementation in some countries and sectors is slow and not widespread. In addition not all countries use units or credit within their qualifications system. Clearly, if learning outcomes are structured in different ways in different countries providers will have to reconcile the differences.

The official ECVET definition of a unit of learning outcomes:

‘A component of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence that can be assessed and validated’.

Top Tip:

It is not necessary in many EU countries to have a structure based on learning outcomes for an entire qualification to apply the ECVET principles. A practical approach is to draw up a rough structure of the overall learning programme that the students are following and from this identify what will be covered in the mobility period. This would then allow UK providers to map this back to the relevant unit and qualification specifications.

What's the point of ECVET credit points?

In ECVET learning outcomes can be assigned credit points. This is similar to but not identical to the ‘credit value’ that is used in the UK within the QCF, SCQF and CQFW. The advantage of assigning credit points is that they can:

- help to indicate the relative size and/or importance of a given group (or “unit”) of learning outcomes within a learning program or qualification
- assist in the grouping of learning outcomes into meaningful “units”
- sometimes signal to learners the importance of their mobility period in the context of the qualification towards which they are working, though this depends on the approach to credit.

How do ECVET points relate to whole learning programmes?

At EU level, it has been agreed that 60 ECVET points are allocated to the learning outcomes expected to be achieved in a year of formal full-time VET. ECVET points are first of all allocated to the qualification as a whole. The sum total is then broken down into the units in accordance with their relative weight in relation to the qualification. For further details follow the links in the ‘Useful resources’ section.

A range of criteria can be used to determine the relative weight of a unit

- Labour market relevance
- Complexity, scope and volume of the learning outcomes included
- Effort required to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes/behaviours.

This approach to credit points differs to the UK model where credit is based on notional learning time and units are not assigned credit in accordance with their relative weight in relation to the qualification. Some countries however, like Finland, do use credit points in this way to identify the relative weight given to compulsory and optional components and programmes. However, since credit points are not yet commonly used in many countries' qualifications systems their use is not obligatory in ECVET. You can find more resources on this on www.ecvetexperts.org.uk

Assessment, validation and recognition

A key issue to be determined in mobility periods is how learning is to be assessed, validated and recognised. Assessment will be carried out in the host institution/country and validated/recognised as part of a qualification in the home institution/country. It is vital that these processes fit together so that a learner does not need to be reassessed once back at their home institution.

In particular:

- Partners need to make sure that, whatever assessment methods are used, the evidence they gather will be sufficient to satisfy the validation and recognition processes of the home country / organization.
- Partnerships should consult with the relevant awarding bodies and/or qualification authorities (known as “competent institutions” in ECVET documentation) to ensure that the way learners are assessed abroad is acceptable at home, and vice versa.
- Assessment methods may need to be adjusted in the host institution for visiting learners so that they are not completely different to the methods learners are used to. This will help to ensure that they are not disadvantaged. Where different methods are used, it is important that learners are fully briefed in advance. Assessments may be continuous or take place at the end of a placement, in which case a refreshment session may be needed on-site.

Top tip:

Satisfying the validation and recognition processes of another country/institution may require much discussion as to the type and scale of assessment, and its possible adjustment. There is normally some flexibility to adjust assessment tools although this will vary across qualifications in the UK. In some countries there is also flexibility at local level to determine assessment methods.

Useful definitions

Validation is the process by which the home institution confirms that what has been accomplished meets the expectations (i.e. "passes") in terms of learning outcomes.

Recognition is the formal process of issuing certification to state that the learning outcomes achieved are accepted as part of (or additional to) the target qualification.

3 Designing ECVET into mobility periods

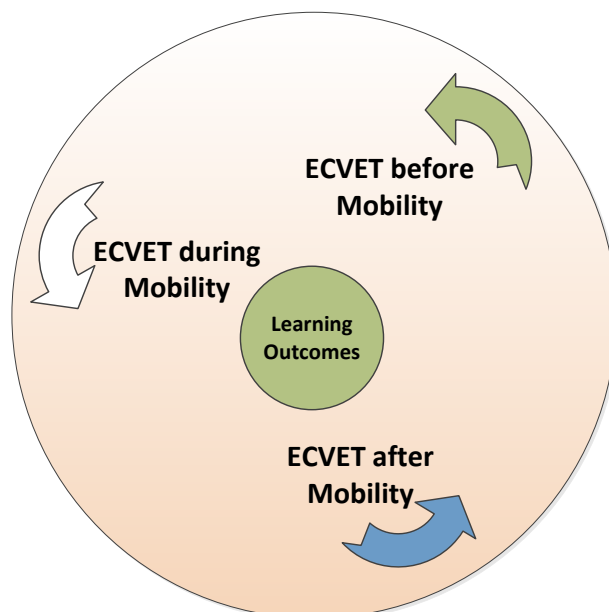
ECVET is just an extension of what you already do

Designing mobility periods using ECVET is essentially about extending what is already happening in your mobility periods:

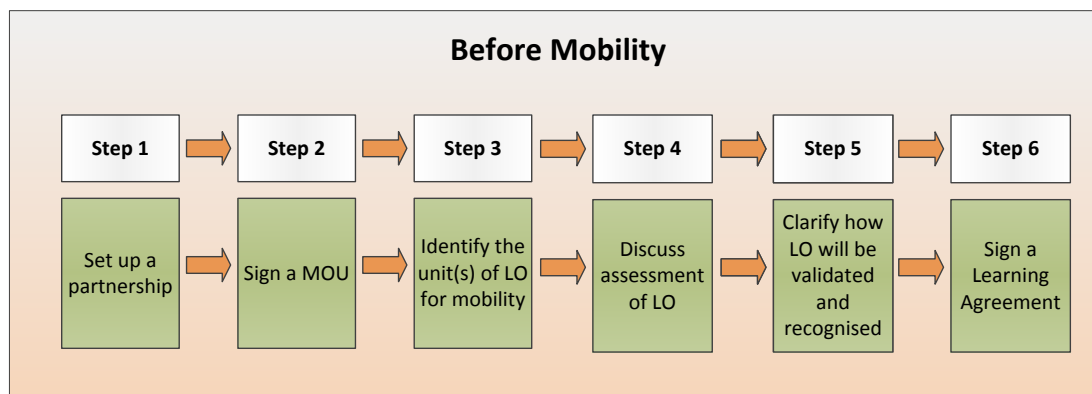
- You may find that you are already doing some of the tasks.
- Some of the documents you will already have as part of your mobility programme can provide the basis for the documentation you will need. You can read the Glossary of Terms on the ECVET Experts website: <http://www.ecvetexperts.org.uk/getting-started/>
- It might be a comparatively simple job to further develop what you're already doing in order to apply the principles fully.
- If you wish to put in place all the elements, you might prefer to do it progressively and trial certain aspects on a small scale first.

Required tasks

There are eight tasks to carry out - before, during and after the mobility period. See Annex A - Checklist for Using ECVET for transnational mobility. This will help to review the mobility period. Most work is required before a mobility period in order to prepare well.



Before the mobility period



Key task 1: developing the partnership

The first task is to make sure that your partnership is well-equipped to apply the ECVET principles. There are two elements to this:

1 Applying the ECVET principles requires more time, energy and commitment than other partnership arrangements where mobility periods are not accredited. In particular:

- there needs to be give-and-take about the knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired during a mobility period as it is difficult to ensure they are identical to those that would be acquired at home during the same period.
- detailed technical work is needed at the outset around learning outcomes and assessment to ensure a learning programme whilst abroad is able to deliver the desired learning outcomes to meet the requirements of the qualification.
- it is important to discuss and agree on what is essential and to plan how anything that is missed during the time abroad can be picked up at a later date. This should form part of the learning agreement between learners and their home and host institutions (see below).

2 It is necessary to involve "competent" institutions e.g. an awarding body. Competent institutions have different functions in qualification systems and in relation to ECVET. There are differences between EU Member States in the roles and functions of competent institutions. Partnerships will need to determine clearly the roles to be performed by different stakeholders in respect of the functions shown in the box below.

Top tip:

Although forging a partnership that delivers accredited mobility periods can be hard work, it also provides many learning opportunities. Partners can learn a lot about another country's approach to many aspects of teaching and learning. It is an important chance to learn, adopt and adapt good practice.

The roles required in ECVET

Design of ECVET elements:

- Description of qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes
- Allocation of ECVET points to qualifications and units
- Link between units of learning outcomes and the training programme
- Link between assessment/validation processes, the achievement of units of learning outcomes and the award of associated ECVET credit points.

Use of ECVET for accumulation and transfer:

- Practical use of learning outcomes and credit for mobility
- Establishment of learning agreements
- Assessment of learning outcomes and award of corresponding credit
- Recording of assessed learning outcomes and credit in personal transcripts
- Validation of learning outcomes and corresponding credit
- Awarded corresponding ECVET points to the learner
- Recognition of learning outcomes.

The roles required in ECVET

In the UK the qualifications frameworks and the associated regulations are quite well developed compared with many EU countries. The role of awarding bodies in the qualification system is different to most (if not all) other EU countries. In the UK they have the responsibility for developing regulated qualifications and for ensuring that the standards set out in each qualification are maintained and that the assessment of learners is valid and sufficient and has been properly quality assured. The knowledge and expertise of assessors and others and the appropriateness of the resources used are all part of this quality assurance. This will apply to all of the assessment/s for each qualification including any that is undertaken during a learner's time abroad. It may be helpful to alert the relevant awarding body at an early stage in your planning so that they are aware and may be able to offer guidance around the assessment of the learning during this time.

Top tip:

Different countries' administrative systems may be significantly different to those in the UK. It's important to communicate these differences to partners and to be patient at times!

Key task 2: agreeing the learning outcomes and credit points for the mobility period

Partners in different countries will need to take a detailed look at their respective qualifications and identify which learning outcomes could be addressed through the mobility period. This may require discussion and negotiation in order to establish shared understanding and agreement.

Comparing and contrasting the respective qualifications will identify where learning outcomes are identical, where they differ and where there may be gaps. Three potential scenarios may be encountered which have consequences for how the learning outcomes of the mobility period might be accredited, as shown below:

Nature of learning outcomes	Consequence
Learning outcomes in the mobility period are mainly consistent with those in the qualification.	All learning outcomes can in principle be considered for mobility periods.
Some learning outcomes differ.	Credit can be awarded for the consistent learning outcomes. For the additional outcomes learners can acquire extra competences to be recorded on a CV or in Europass.
All learning outcomes differ.	Credit cannot be awarded within the qualification. However, the additional competences can be recorded on a CV or in Europass.

Partners will work out the best strategy according to the structure of the qualifications and the duration of the mobility period in question. To help in this process, a number of questions can be asked:

- Will it be necessary to construct special units for the mobility period, for example, where units of learning outcomes are not yet built into qualifications?
- Will it be necessary to design a mobility period that leads to recognition and ECVET credit points which are additional to those required for the qualification?

Where practitioners are dealing with shorter mobility periods, for example two to three weeks' duration, they will need to work out which learning outcomes might feasibly be achieved.

Top tip:

Taking written descriptions of learning outcomes for granted is not a good idea! What may look the same on paper may actually be different. Partners should work together to analyse in detail what is actually meant.

It should be noted that UK practitioners may encounter situations where qualifications are not based on descriptions of learning outcomes. In these situations, partners can draft shared learning outcomes.

Whichever situation applies, learning outcomes need to be described in a clear and mutually acceptable way. The use of active verbs in the UK to describe learning outcomes is increasingly common in other European countries. To make sure that learning outcomes

mesh well with what happens in the workplace, it is a good idea to involve employers in describing them.

At this point, partners can also ascribe credit points to the learning outcomes which help to indicate their weight and importance relative to the rest of the learning programme.

Top tip:

Be accommodating of qualification structures. Sometimes the same result for learners can be achieved by a mobility period acting as an optional module in a qualification rather than trying to re-engineer compulsory components.

Key task 3: agreeing the assessment, validation and recognition processes

Alongside the agreement of learning outcomes and credit points, partners will need to agree the assessment, validation and recognition processes. Of these tasks, most discussion will probably be around assessment since there tends to be more flexibility for assessment processes to be designed at local level. Validation and recognition processes tend to be more fixed procedures of qualifications frameworks. Inevitably, the assessment methods are likely to be orientated around those of the host (receiving) institution, whilst the validation and recognition processes will be those of the home (sending) institution/country.

Partners should work out a range of aspects of assessment:

- Who will assess the learner?
- How will learning outcomes be assessed and in what context?
- When will the assessment take place?
- What evidence will be generated to show that the qualification learning outcomes have been met?
- What procedures will be used to ensure the quality of assessment?
- How will the results of the assessment be recorded?

Of vital importance is the issue of how necessary evidence will be gathered during the course of the learning programme. Tools such as learning diaries which help learners to document and reflect on their learning and/or work experience can be useful.

Top tip:

UK partners may find that in many European countries practitioners do not have the same degree of experience carrying out assessment in terms of learning outcomes. They may therefore be able to help partners with this task.

Key task 4: designing teaching and learning to achieve the learning outcomes

It is self-evident that the teaching and learning during a mobility period will need to deliver the desired learning outcomes. However, ensuring this should be made a specific task, especially where ECVET principles are being applied to existing mobility periods.

Partners will need to consider:

- the trade-offs that may need to be made between the desired learning outcomes and the realities of curriculum and timetabling
- how a learner will catch up on anything missed at home during a mobility period. This should be included in the learning agreements (see below).

Top tip:

You may find that not everything learned during a mobility period can contribute to the learning outcomes identified, due to the requirements of the qualification. However, they can still be recorded in other documents including the learner's CV.

Key task 5: preparing the necessary documentation

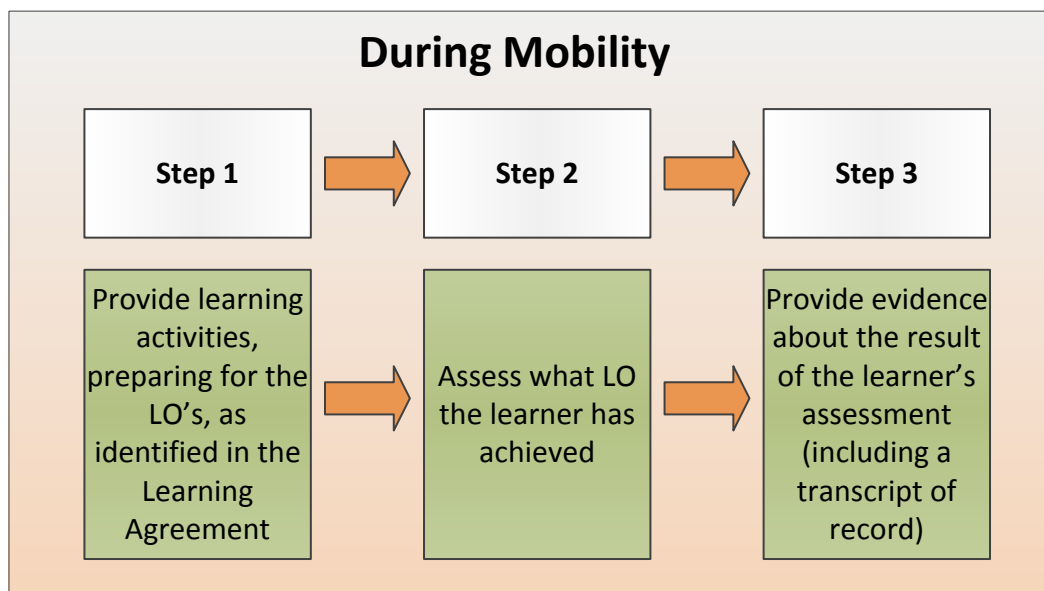
The agreements described above need to be recorded at two levels:

- At partnership level, a Memorandum of Understanding should be drawn up. This sets out the roles of partners and competent institutions, agreements with respect to learning outcomes, credit points and assessment, validation and recognition procedures. It also includes any issues related to teaching and learning that are relevant.
- At an individual level, a Learning Agreement is drafted which forms the basis for the learner's mobility period. The learning agreement should set out the purpose of the mobility period in terms of learning outcomes and how it contributes to the achievement of the qualification towards which the learner is working. They should also set out how the learner will be assessed and how their achievements will be recognised.

It is possible to develop/extend existing mobility documentation to deliver these requirements, as shown in Annex A.

You can find examples of Learning Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding at: <http://ecvet-projects.eu/ToolBox/Methodologies.aspx>

During the mobility period



Key task 6: assessing the achievement of learning outcomes

A key task to be carried out during the mobility period is the assessment of learners' achievements against the agreed learning outcomes. For many practitioners in other EU Member States conducting assessments in this way may be a new experience and they may benefit from working with their UK colleagues. Evidently, it will be important for the assessment processes to be in line with those set down in the Memorandum of Understanding and individual learning agreements. They will also need to meet any requirements of the relevant awarding body if the assessments are to be used towards achievement of a UK qualification.

Learners' achievements should be recorded in what is termed a "personal transcript" in the ECVET regulations. There are many examples of templates available to provide the evidence needed.

A range of templates, including a personal transcript, is available in the Austrian ECVET guide - *Let's Go Europe!*:

http://www.ecvet-info.at/sites/default/files/downloads/en/ECVET-Guidelines_March2012.pdf

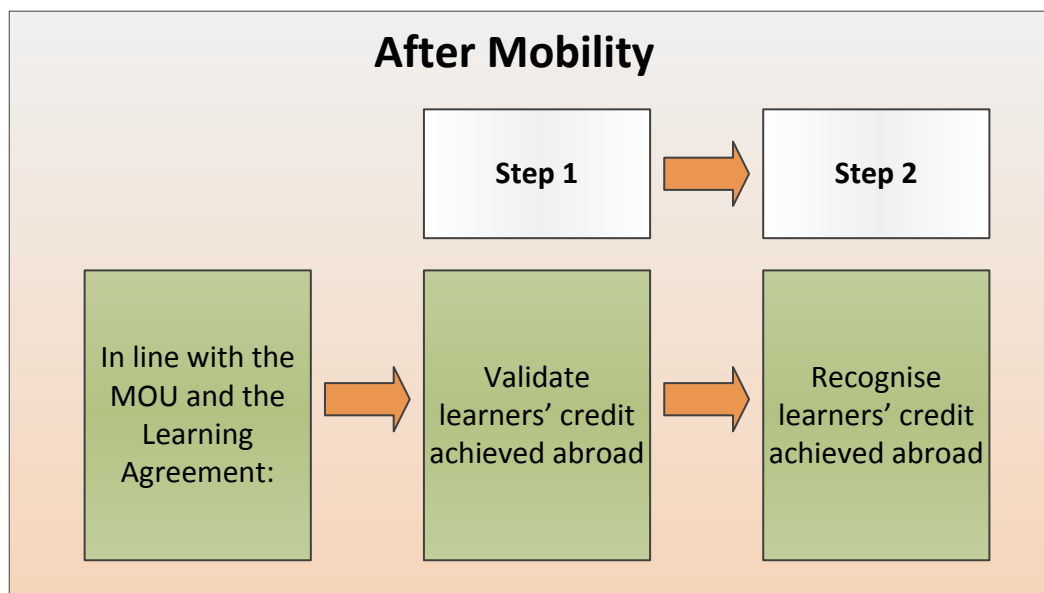
For an example of an assessment sheet, see Annex 6 of '*FINECVET as a pioneer*' at http://www.oph.fi/english/publications/publications/2012/finecvet_as_a_pioneer

Europass Mobility documentation may also be completed by learners in conjunction with home and host organisations and employers, as appropriate. It is strongly recommended that projects funded through the EU's Leonardo da Vinci Mobility programme use Europass to record experiences and achievements.

Top tip:

To satisfy the requirements and to ease the validation process the content of the personal transcript should match learning outcomes.

After the mobility period



Key task 7: validation and recognition

The final formal step required is to validate and recognise learners' achievements. For UK qualifications, these tasks will form part of the standard quality assurance processes required by the awarding body in order for them to award the qualification/unit certificate. These will normally relate to the internal and external verification of the assessments but other approaches may be in place depending on the qualification and/or the awarding body.

Key task 8: review

Once the formal elements of conducting a mobility period according to ECVET principles have been completed, partners can benefit from evaluating and reviewing the entire process in order to identify areas for improvement. Learner feedback should be an integral part of this process.

4 Useful resources

ECVET Experts:

Ecorys, as the UK National Agency for Leonardo, Transversal Study Visits and Grundvig, have gained funding from UK governments to work with the four ECVET National Contact Points in the UK and a pool of Experts. You can access the help and support of an ECVET Expert for free:

www.ecvetexperts.org.uk

European Commission

The European Commission's website on ECVET includes links to useful flyers and official documents.

http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/ecvet_en.htm

ECVET Support Team

The ECVET Support Team supports the European Commission to fulfill its ECVET-related obligations and allows Member States to achieve the objectives laid out in the Recommendations of the European Parliament and Council for implementing ECVET. The ECVET Team is managed by the French National Association for Automobile Training, the Chamber of Commerce, based in Paris, and the French Ministry of National Education.

www.ecvet-team.eu

ECVET Pilot Project

The European Commission funded a number of pilot projects in 2008 and 2010 to test and implement ECVET. The toolbox section of the website is really useful for template Memoranda of Understanding, Learning Agreements and other documents that the projects produced.

www.ecvet-projects.eu

NetECVET

Fourteen Lifelong Learning Programme National Agencies across Europe are working together to help people understand and implement ECVET. The Lifelong Learning Programme National Agency in Germany leads a project which aims to support practitioners of transnational mobility who are beginning to work with ECVET. The project will develop a toolbox that will help mobility projects in applying ECVET. The final version will be ready at the end of the project in 2013.

www.netecvet.com

Other useful websites:

Leonardo da Vinci Programme

The Leonardo programme supports vocational education and training activities across Europe, including mobility.

www.leonardo.org.uk

Europass

Europass is the European initiative designed to help make skills and experience understood when moving around Europe.

<http://www.ecctis.co.uk/europass/>

Thematic Networking

The UK National Agency for the Leonardo, Grundtvig and Transversal programmes has established four groups that look at cross cutting themes to the Lifelong Learning Programme. Thematic Networking Group 1 looks at transparency and recognition of qualifications, including informal and non-formal learning.

www.transversal.org.uk/thematicnetworking

Annex A – Checklist for Using ECVET for transnational mobility

This is useful for reviewing the use of ECVET in mobility.

Before the Mobility period:

- What are the functions, including the validation and recognition of learning outcomes that are covered by the partnership? Do you need to inform, or work with, any other organisations?
- Have you signed a Memoranda of Understanding with your partner(s)?
- Has the unit (s) of learning outcomes for the mobility been identified?
- Is it clear how this / these units relate to the learning outcomes of the qualification that the learner is preparing for?
- Does the host organisation agree with preparing and assisting the learner to achieve these learning outcomes?
- Are the learning outcomes linked to the assessment criteria?
- Is there trust that the assessment criteria will be used for the assessment to the highest possible quality standard?
- Are the assessment criteria understandable for the host and home organisation?
- Is it clear how learners' credit will be validated and recognised? Is the learner aware of how this will be done?
- Is there an agreement about how the host organisation will document the result of the assessment (assessment grid, written statement – in what languages?)
- Did the learner, home and host organisation sign a Learning Agreement? Does the Learning Agreement identify the learning outcomes to be achieved, detailing how these will be assessed and how learners' credit will be validated and recognised?

During the mobility period:

- Is the learner participating in learning activities that are relevant for the learning outcomes to be achieved?
- Are the teachers / assessors aware of the learning outcomes to be achieved by the learner?
- Are the assessors aware of the assessment criteria to be used to assess the learner? Do they know how to document the result of the assessment for the home organisation?

- Was the Learning Agreement respected during the assessment?
- Was the learner provided with the evidence about his/her assessment which will serve as a basis for the validation and recognition of credit?

After the mobility period:

- Based on the evidence of a learner's assessment in the host organisation, did the learner achieve the expected learning outcomes?
- If so, has his/her credit been validated (and recognised) in line with the Learning Agreement?
- Has the credit for (units of) learning outcomes achieved abroad been recorded in the learner's transcript of record?