

# magazine

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

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## Editorial

**Ellen Ipenburg-Tomesen**

While reading this, you are witnessing a new feature of the ECVET Magazine. From now on, for every issue a Member State representative of the ECVET Users' Group will be asked to write the editorial. And I feel very honoured to be the very first.

New developments are on the horizon for ECVET as well. Within the EU, the future of ECVET and other instruments is being discussed. One of the main questions is how to align the available instruments more. Another question is how to make them more effective and following this what would be the next step in implementing them. We are anxious to see what possible changes are awaiting us.

Meanwhile in the Netherlands the horizon is changing too. I think it is clear that we haven't managed to implement the total ECVET package nationwide. However, several projects to help peo-

ple upskill and reskill themselves are totally ECVET-proof, including the use of credits.

At the same time, we see that the ECVET principles have steadily found their way into our hearts and minds on several aspects. For example, memoranda of understanding are being used with regard to mobility. Secondly, we do have procedures to recognise and validate prior learning and work experience (although it is not centralised and somewhat complex). Also, there certainly is a focus on learning outcomes when it comes to mobility, but also with regards to our general vocational education and work-based learning. All-in all, we do have a competence-based VET system.

An even more promising development is the shift from the focus on initial learning to lifelong learning. Which means there will be a need for much

more flexibility within the educational system and a need for simple ways to recognise and validate what people know and what skills they possess. In the Netherlands we've recently adopted a national programme for lifelong learning. Vocational education will play a very important role in this. Now we are discussing the need for flexibility of our VET-system and we are experimenting, for example, with issuing VET-certificates for working people in specific sectors. In that quest for flexibility and adapting to changing demands, the ECVET principles come into picture. Even without people knowing it. You might be surprised that sometimes even the famous M-word (a.k.a. modules) is being mentioned.

Personally, I find it very interesting to think about how implementing the ECVET principles could help dropouts (or, early school leavers). I mean by organising the education process in units and learning outcomes; recognising and validating each and every step separately. First, it would help dropouts the moment they leave school: they won't have a diploma, but they will have another formal proof of what they know and what skills they possess. That allows them to show a future employer what they're capable of. Secondly, later in life, when they would like to return to education, they will have formal evidence of what they've already learnt. School can offer a tailored pathway which increases the chance of finishing

the qualification. Third, when they need to improve their labour market position after leaving school, they might have learned a lot from work or other experiences. To get that officially recognised and validated at some point, gives them a better chance to find an appropriate, higher level job.

In that sense I am really curious to see the results of the pilots with VET-testimonials in the Netherlands. We've just started them at several brave and innovative VET-schools. Students that leave school before finishing their full qualification will receive a formal document. It recognises and validates what they have learned so far, and what competences, or learning outcomes, they comprehend. Such a formal testimonial will be of value on the labour market.

The fact that ECVET isn't only relevant for mobility but also - maybe even more - for lifelong learning, upskilling and re-skilling, may still get some more prominence throughout the EU. Therefore, I am very pleased that the upcoming Annual ECVET Forum is covering this topic. We'd like to share some of the Dutch developments but also inspiring developments from other countries. May I point you to another very interesting feature of the Forum? Its location: right in the vibrating hip-and-happening Southbank area of the city of Rotterdam, the Netherlands. So, I hope to meet you at the upcoming Annual ECVET Forum on June 20-21!

## **Ellen Ipenburg-Tomesen**

Ministry of Education,  
Culture and Science,  
the Netherlands.

# The ECVET Users' Group visits Portugal

Helen Metcalfe, Programme Manager, ECVET Secretariat

The first ever European level ECVET event took place recently as the 24th ECVET Users' Group meeting was held in Lisbon, Portugal on 21-22 March 2019. This meeting presented an opportunity for ECVET Users' Group representatives to learn more about the recent updates to Portuguese VET policy and how ECVET principles are being used to upskill adults. The programme incorporated a visit to a nearby VET centre in Alverca, to see how the new VET policy works in practice.

The Portuguese VET system underwent two major changes in 2007 and 2017. Ana Cláudia Valente, Deputy Director of ANQEP, (National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training) provided an overview of the key changes that took place.

In 2007, the national qualification system was introduced. It aimed to:

- integrate general education, and between general education and professional training, in all VET pathways ensuring that the principle of double certification (a school and a professional certification) is possible in all routes;
- implement the recognition of prior learning; and
- ensure that VET qualifications meet the needs of the labour market.

The National Qualification Agency (now called ANQEP) was launched as well as the 'New Opportunity Initiative'. This had a target to get 50% of young people enrolled into VET courses and to qualify one million adults. New Opportunities Centres (now called Qualifica Centres) were introduced, with supporting tools including the National Qualifications Framework, National Catalogue of Qualifications and Individual Skills Handbook.



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**The overall objective is to have 20% of adults involved in lifelong learning by 2025**

Ten years later, the Portuguese Government introduced further updates designed to raise the skills level and address high rates of illiteracy. For example, in 2016 53% of the adult population had not completed upper-secondary education and 500 000 adults were illiterate. This meant that a large part of the population lacked basic skills and therefore were likely to have difficulties in accessing (or re-entering) the labour market. To address this, the Government introduced the national credit system for VET and the Qualifica Programme.

**For general education qualifications, partial qualifications do not have great value on their own. However, for VET qualifications, partial qualifications can be of value if an employer is looking for a specific job profile.**

As a result, the national qualification system was revised to adjust to the labour market and skills level in Portugal. As part of this, the national credit system was introduced to enable the accreditation of credit points to three qualification levels (levels 2, 4 and 5). The system is in line with ECVET principles and it is based on units of learning outcomes, which can be assessed and

validated separately. The national credit system means that learners can gain qualifications at their own pace. Qualifications are modularised, so units can be recognised and achieved in different learning contexts, and learners can transfer assessed learning outcomes.

**In the Portuguese system one unit can be either 25 hours or 50 hours. 25 hours of training correspond to 2.5 credit points.**

## Qualifica Programme and tools

The Qualifica Programme aims to improve the basic skills level and to create conditions for VET skills to better respond to labour market needs. It helps low-skilled adults to raise their level of qualifications and improve their access to the labour market. It also introduced tailored training pathways that are integrated within a recognition and validation process, thereby responding to the criteria set out in the **2016 Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults**. Besides low-skilled adults, the Qualifica Programme also targets unemployed people and NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training). Partnerships with local organisations and community groups help to reach out to specific hard-to-reach target groups.

The Qualifica Programme is implemented in Qualifica Centres, physical centres across Portugal where individuals can receive tailored support and guidance. Since the introduction of Qualifica Centres in 2017, 294 Qualifica Centres have been established across Portugal. They follow four general stages:

1. Enrolment
2. Diagnosis: individual profile analysis using various methods, e.g. curricular analysis, group and individual sessions, application of diagnosis tests, evaluation of their life path and professional experience, and individual knowledge

3. Information and orientation: support to identifying education and qualification needs and desires (PIC – individual project career), and provide the necessary information about education and training offers available
4. Personal guidance

## Qualifica Passport

The Qualifica Passport is an online tool that supports the transparency of learning during and after training. VET providers are responsible for entering data on all completed education and training units for each learner into their Passport. Individuals can have private access to their Qualifica Passport by creating a login. Individuals can then see the list of the education and training they have undertaken. They can also run a simulation to see how many and which units/modules they still need to acquire a certain qualification.

No one else has access to this information, however if a person has a job interview, she/he can grant the company temporal access to her/his Qualifica Passport.

## Recognition, validation and certification

Recognition, validation and certification are an important part of the Qualifica Programme. This is called the RVCC process and it is in line with the requirements of the **2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning**. The RVCC process has five main steps:

1. An individual applies for an academic or a professional RVCC process, or for both.
2. Diagnosis assessment: Qualifica Centre staff use different methods such as portfolio analysis, balance of competences, technical interview, and/or practical exercises and observation at the workplace to see what skills an individual has and what gaps, if any, they need to address.
3. Training: Qualifica Centre staff refer individuals to complete the neces-

## Alverca VET centre

The Alverca VET Centre is a generalist VET centre, located a short distance from Lisbon. It is affiliated to the IEFP (Institute for Employment and Vocational Training) and incorporates a Qualifica Centre. The Alverca VET Centre provides training to approximately 5,000 individuals per year. In 2018, more than 300 training groups were formed. The VET offer includes apprenticeship qualifications (double certification), adult education and training (double certification), 'Active Life' modular VET for learners under 29 years old and 'Active Life' modular VET for adult learners. Between 2017 and 2019 approximately 29,000 individuals were certified through the RVCC process (recognition, validation and certification).

Participants were interested to hear that some of the training needs highlighted via the diagnosis process, may require very small groups to be established and this can be really challenging to organise. Often there are very few learners with similar training requirements. This may mean that such individuals have to wait for some time before a training group can be formed.

sary training to address their gaps, if needed.

4. Validation session: individuals and Qualifica Centre staff discuss which competence unit will be validated.
5. Certification: a certification jury, composed of three trainers (two of which have not been involved in the process to date) and social partners can be represented in the jury. It decides on full or partial certification for the individual. In full certification, individuals are awarded a diploma. In partial certification, individuals are awarded a certificate and a Personal Qualification Plan is developed, which highlights the other units that need to be completed before a diploma can be awarded.

# Gaining insights on non-Erasmus+ VET mobility programmes/schemes across Europe

## Study on VET mobility in Europe: analysing provision, take-up and impact

Stephanie Oberheidt, Senior Managing Consultant at ICF

Attention is increasingly paid to VET mobility on both EU<sup>1</sup> and Member States agendas<sup>2</sup>. Challenges still persist at country level when it comes to ensuring quality and effectiveness of VET mobility. Another gap concerns the limited evidence-based research available on existing VET mobility programmes/schemes funded outside Erasmus+ in comparison to the breadth and availability of Erasmus+ centred comparative studies/data.

DG EMPL commissioned the present study in 2018 to gain insights on non-Erasmus+ VET mobility programmes/schemes within the 33 Erasmus+ programme countries<sup>3</sup>.

The study was also commissioned at a time when negotiations towards the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the next generations of EU programmes (including Erasmus+

successor) for 2021-27 had just started.

Against this background, the main purposes of the study were to help uncover the knowledge gap above, and at the same time, identify areas for action which both pan-European and national levels could explore in order to further the quality of VET mobility and effectiveness

across Europe. To feed into this, the study aimed to provide an overview of non-Erasmus+ VET mobility programme/schemes, their key features and perceived impacts at beneficiary level (i.e. learners, staff, organisations and beyond) as well as to identify key commonalities and differentiators with Erasmus+ VET mobility actions to ultimately feed into a set of conclusions and recommendations.

### Summary of study approach

The study was carried out between March 2018 and March 2019 and included four mutually reinforcing tasks as outlined below:



1 Considerable experience and knowledge exist in the area of VET mobility at the EU level resulting from more than two decades of dedicated attention and related actions.

2 As reflected in the remit of ECVET Secretariat for 2018-2019.

3 The 28 EU Member States (EU28), former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Iceland (IS), Liechtenstein (LI), Norway (NO) and Turkey (TR)

These tasks were ultimately complemented by targeted secondary analysis of selected Erasmus+ programme data and literature reviews.

The following considerations underpinned the methodological approach:

- Dealing with a landscape of very diverse programmes/schemes: whilst dedicated VET mobility programmes/schemes are relatively easy to identify, a key challenge for the study was that a lot of mobility in a VET context is carried out in the framework of non-dedicated ones (i.e. whereby mobility is just one of many possi-

ble activities that can be supported through the programmes/schemes).

- Establishing the scope of programmes/schemes outside Erasmus+: linked to the above was the difficulty of establishing accurate information on actual numbers of participants or just an overview of the scope of activities. It was anticipated that statistics on mobility might not be systematically collated for programmes/schemes that would be identified as part of the study.
- Assessing the impact at different levels (individuals, organisations and systems): the variety of programmes/schemes to be reviewed also meant

facing the risk of capturing limited or partial information from one programme/scheme to another. The identification of key respondents was also challenging as no comprehensive database of all individual participants in non-Erasmus+ VET mobility programmes/schemes exists in any of the 33 countries covered.

The study findings were informed by the following outputs: a mapping of non-Erasmus+ VET mobility programmes /schemes, 33 country factsheets, seven case studies, surveys complemented by a review of the literature and a review of selected Erasmus+ data.

## Key features of non-Erasmus+ VET mobility programmes/schemes identified

- 139 programmes/schemes were initially mapped and 45<sup>4</sup> were further reviewed through the country factsheets.
- The majority of identified programmes/schemes are:
  - cross-sectoral, without a specific sectoral focus; enterprise-led, naturally targeting specific sectors of VET;
  - in the field of IVET: only a few schemes targeting CVET were identified. Combined with previous evidence-based research, CVET mobility (outside Erasmus+) is rare and does not play any significant role in the overall picture of learning mobility in VET.
- Key findings on IVET programmes/schemes:
  - Programmes/schemes targeting young VET learners or graduates.
  - Work placement and exposure to real working environments is the most common form of VET mobility.
  - Most IVET programmes/schemes are financed by national/regional authorities, but there also are publicly funded programmes/schemes which rely on EU financing other than Erasmus+ (e.g. ESF, INTERREG, EaSI).
- Some programmes/schemes offer different features than those of Erasmus+ VET mobility actions, e.g. wider international footprint for Torno Subito, EDUFI placement, scholarships or longer-term mobilities (e.g. PIU).

## A great diversity of programmes/schemes across Europe

Findings confirm the diversity and the uneven distribution of non-Erasmus+ VET mobility programmes/schemes across the 33 countries. In most countries Erasmus+ emerges as the main programme supporting VET mobility. In three countries (Bulgaria, Hungary and Turkey), Erasmus+ appears to be the only programme supporting VET mobility.

## Definitions and policy approaches to VET mobility at country level

No explicit definition of VET mobility was found across the national legislation and/or other policy documents reviewed for the vast majority of countries considered. In a few cases, however, national-level legislation set regulations on the main elements to comply with when organising VET mobility (e.g. in Denmark, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Austria). More generally, reference to the need to support VET mobility actions is found, but most often in the form of general statements throughout national policy planning/implementation documents.

## Rationale for establishing non-Erasmus+ VET mobility programmes/schemes

Many programmes/schemes have a rationale outside of a VET-context, for example, in connection with relationships to neighbouring countries or “intercultural understanding” in general. Where aligned with VET policies, the rationale may relate to addressing the lack of VET placement opportunities or tackling youth unemployment rates at the national level. The extent to which those concerned have been successful in such areas could not be explored due to lack of data available.

4 Most of the programmes/schemes outlined in the country factsheets receive public funding, at least partially and are then implemented by ministries or other public authorities at either national or regional level (36 out of 45 schemes).

## Impacts on the programmes/schemes reviewed

Despite the limitations encountered in collating robust data in this area, findings suggest that the main types of impact (as reported at the individual and organisation levels) are very similar to those observed through Erasmus+ data. Those entail, for instance:

- improved personal skills and motivation,
- networking capacities of teachers and trainers,
- improved prestige of beneficiary VET schools, or
- opportunities to test new pedagogical approaches at the organisation level.

## Key strengths, success factors and obstacles

Several similarities between non-Erasmus+ and Erasmus+ VET mobility actions in terms of the key strengths, success factors and obstacles encountered were identified. In both cases, key strengths commonly relate to the positive impacts perceived at beneficiary level (individuals and organisation). Obstacles usually entail (not in specific order) financial constraints; administrative burden; language barriers; and difficulties finding appropriate partners abroad, jointly with employers' reluctance to engage in VET mobility.

Additional strengths and obstacles, more specific to those non-Erasmus+ VET mobility programmes/schemes reviewed, were also identified and served to feed into the conclusions and recommendations of the study.



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## Recommendations for future developments at EU and national level

Study findings reveal that favourable conditions to support more effective and quality VET mobility (i.e. both Erasmus+ and non-Erasmus+ funded) still need to be promoted. Possible options for actions at EU and/or national level<sup>5</sup> were identified in the following main areas:

- Enhancing knowledge-base and mutual learning measures on non-EU funded VET mobility initiatives (e.g. potential role for Eurodesk, Euroguidance, Cedefop mobility Scoreboard);
- Reinforcing statistical data and monitoring mechanisms (e.g. explore potential support from Euroguidance or Eurodesk; and support effective dialogue on the value of monitoring VET mobility schemes at national/regional level);

- Varying approaches to ensure transparency and recognition of VET mobility abroad (e.g. further promote/develop EU tools to support the quality of mobility, and organise mutual learning events and support dissemination of good practices at national level);
- Facing the complexity/opacity of EU funding opportunities (e.g. develop case studies to demonstrate complementarities and synergies between EU and non-EU funded VET mobility initiatives).

Several examples of non-Erasmus+ VET mobility programmes/schemes that could be considered at EU/national level to inform the development of existing programmes, minimise overlaps and/or foster synergies are also outlined in the study.

The study will be published in May 2019 on the DG EMPL website.

5 To minimise existing or potential overlaps and foster complementarities between non-Erasmus+ and Erasmus+ VET mobility programmes/schemes

# Key findings from a study on the influence and future direction of EQAVET and ECVET

Ali Zaidi, Senior Managing Consultant at ICF

In February 2019 the European Commission published a research report on the influence of the EQAVET and ECVET on VET policy developments, and how the two instruments could move forward in the post-2020 EU policy framework. The research was conducted by ICF SA and 3s Unternehmensberatung GmbH. It was based on interviews with over 80 national and European stakeholders in 26 countries, and workshops with EQAVET and ECVET experts in EU Member States. This short article discusses the main findings on the influence of ECVET and options for future implementation.

When the EQAVET and ECVET Recommendations were adopted in 2009 there was considerable turbulence caused by the economic crisis which affected both the demand for skills and the funding for VET systems. While the European economy has since recovered, in recent years there have also been new demands for VET systems caused by austerity measures, large migrant flows and the ongoing digital transformation of jobs.

As 2020 approaches - 10 years after EQAVET and ECVET were first introduced - the European Commission is carefully examining options for future developments to ensure that EU VET policies continue to meet the needs of the EU workforce. This includes commissioning research on EQAVET and ECVET to understand the following:

- How the instruments have influenced national developments in quality assurance and flexible vocational pathways; and
- Potential options for the future direction of the two instruments, to build on what has already taken place

while addressing gaps and ensuring the instruments are effectively aligned with other EU lifelong learning policy developments.

## Key findings on the influence of ECVET

The study found that the most substantial influence of ECVET has been on increasing the quality of learners' mobility experience. Most countries use ECVET tools such as Learning Agreements (LA) and Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) to document Learning Outcomes (LO) achieved during mobility. In some countries this has created a shift where LOs undertaken abroad can now contribute to a learner's VET qualification.

In a few countries it was found that ECVET has also contributed to developing more flexible vocational pathways. In countries such as Malta, Estonia and Latvia it has supported permeability between Higher Education (HE) and VET, while in Finland, which already has a flexible VET system, it has helped improve the recognition of education and training taking place outside the

formal system. In Ireland, Hungary and Portugal, ECVET principles have also been used to support learners from disadvantaged communities and/or who experience considerable barriers to learning. The principles used helps to accumulate LOs achieved in formal or non-formal and informal learning.

The study found, however, that few countries assess and certify units of LOs separately, to allow them to be gradually accumulated over time. This is despite the modularisation and unitisation of VET being common in most EU Member States. Some countries felt this was incompatible with the key characteristics of their VET qualifications which places a strong emphasis on achieving full qualifications. Some also felt it would increase the volume of learner assessments which would have a resource implication on their VET system.

Only a few countries used ECVET credit points to transfer assessed learning outcomes. In some countries, ECVET credit points are seen as incompatible with national systems which give

credits on the basis of notional learning time. Even countries which employ national credit point systems for VET programmes or ECTS<sup>6</sup> for mobility have not adopted ECVET points for mobility outcomes.

The study also found that ECVET plays an important role in underpinning other EU lifelong learning policy instruments. It provides a common 'language' for documenting LOs achieved through non-formal or informal learning, or learning achieved through Erasmus+ mobility experiences. It also encouraged EU Member States to describe qualifications in terms of learning outcomes, which is an important require-

ment for referencing to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

However, the study found that this relationship could be strengthened. While the study acknowledged there was a strong conceptual relationship between ECVET and Erasmus+, EQF, EQAVET and the validation of non-formal and informal learning, it felt the narrative about their linkages seemed to have become lost, or at least significantly weakened, in the last few years. This is also reflected in the perception among many national stakeholders that the implementation of these policy instruments at a national and EU-level was very much done in 'si-

los', i.e. without awareness of the activities that are ongoing with the other policy instruments.

### Options on the future implementation of ECVET

The study then identified and assessed five potential future options for ECVET. The options were selected to provide a diverse range of possible future developments for ECVET including a 'do nothing' option and options for expanding, limiting or discontinuing the instrument. The options are also not designed to be mutually-exclusive – some can be implemented concurrently.

#### Five options on the future implementation of ECVET

**Option 1 Enhanced status quo.** This involves keeping the same governance arrangements for the instrument but making minor changes to create a more flexible definition of ECVET points and repositioning the instrument as a set of principles of flexible learning pathways, rather than a 'system'.

#### Option 2 Embedding the functions of ECVET into other existing EU instruments and programmes.

In this option the ECVET 'brand' would be discontinued but the European Commission's work on flexible pathways would be taken forward through its work on implementing the EQF<sup>7</sup>, and the ECVET Memorandum of Understanding and Learning Agreement will be incorporated into Europass.

#### Option 3 ECVET principles become part of a broader European policy strategy framework for VET.

In this option an overarching recommendation would be introduced which covers quality assurance, flexibility, and recognition in VET. This would be governed by a single policy group with sub-groups to take forward actions for lifelong learning policy instruments.

#### Option 4 Align ECVET to similar instruments in HE.

In this option there would be a new recommendation on credit systems for HE and VET, which incorporate aspects of ECTS and ECVET. It would require the ECVET concept of units of learning outcomes and credit points to be re-defined.

#### Option 5 Establish a European framework for the transfer of learning achievements and flexible progression pathways.

In this option a recommendation would be introduced which proposes that EU Member States recognise and document unit achievement in formal or non-formal and informal learning and recognise them for access, admission and exemption. To aid trust, the framework would also specify syntax and language to be used to formulate learning outcomes.

6 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.

7 Annex V of the revised 2018 European Qualification Framework (EQF) Recommendation outlines principles for credit systems that are related to National Qualifications Framework (NQF) systems referenced to the EQF.

In the study each of the options was scored for their likely benefits, unintended consequences, feasibility to implement and their cost to EU Member States and the European Commission. This study found the option with the highest benefits was Option 5, followed by Option 4 and Option 3, respectively. However, both Option 5 and Option 4 have high implementation costs and are less feasible compared to other options. Both also have potentially high unintended consequences.

Consequently, the study proposed that Option 3 is the most effective option, combined with Option 2. This was felt to provide significant benefits in terms of increasing the synergy between ECVET and other lifelong learning policy instruments, while also addressing obvious weaknesses with ECVET. The option will also provide some efficiency savings and be feasible to implement.

The findings of the research report provide food for thought for the Euro-

pean Commission as it considers its next steps for the EQAVET and ECVET policy instruments. This includes what elements of the five options should be implemented and how they could be implemented effectively.

The full research report from the study has been published on the EUROPA platform and is available [here](#). The executive summary of the report is available in English and German.

# Boosting self-awareness, improving career choices and supporting labour market transition through skills audits

## A study for DG Employment

Anette Curth, Senior Technical Expert, ECVET Secretariat

In 2017 the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion commissioned a study on skills audit practices to feed into the context of several EU-level policy initiatives. The 2012 Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) and the 2016 Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways (UP) promote skills audits as one means to support individuals in professional transition periods. In both policy documents skills audits are suggested as a practice to identify and document knowledge, skills and competence of individuals.

### Study on skills audit practices in selected EU Member States

Skills audits are not only expected to help individuals make better informed decisions about career orientation, education or training, but also to prepare the recognition of prior learning from different learning contexts to bring people closer to the labour market. Skills Audits are expected to be instrumental for flexible VET pathways; for instance, they can prepare the validation of non-formal and informal learning and are the first step of an upskilling pathway for low-skilled/low-qualified groups.

However, there is limited evidence about the extent to which skills audits are used and what they entail in practice. Hence, the purpose of this study was to improve the knowledge base about skills audits and their current use and effectiveness.



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### Summary of study approach

The data for this study was collected in the period June 2017 – January 2018. The study covered 16 EU countries<sup>8</sup>

which were selected due to the breadth of skills audit practices identified through initial research and due to some links being identified between skills audits and processes for validation of non-formal

<sup>8</sup> Austria, Belgium (Belgium-nl, Belgium-fr), Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Luxemburg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and the UK

and informal learning being in place. The aim of the study was to identify the main types of skills audits currently used, the providers, methods and approaches, incl. the extent to which standards<sup>9</sup> are used as part of the process. To gather

a comprehensive picture, a broad diversity of skills audits for different target groups and purposes was analysed in detail. This meant that some relatively small scale and (in a country context) possibly marginal practices were in-

cluded in the analysis alongside large scale and established ones.

The data for the assignment was collected through a combination of methods as shown in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1. Overview of data collection methodology**



Source: ICF

### Is there a common understanding of skills audit?

The research shows that while there is a high number of practices that fall under the definition of skills audit as presented in the 2012 Council Recommendation on validation, the term 'skills audit' itself is not used in practice either in English or in direct translation into other languages. None of the 41 practices analysed is called a skills audit or equivalent translation. The terminology used more frequently is skills profiling, skills diagnostics, skills assessment or skills portfolio. Also, the term 'bilan de competences' in French is broadly used and sometimes also translated into other languages. Some countries prefer to use the term competence instead of the term skills ('competence check, competence assessment'). Sometimes a skills audit is part of the parcel of a larger validation process but designated with a specific term (other than validation).

### Are there common features to a skills audit practice?

Most skills audits have a common thread which consists of the following principles:

- In most cases the process is owned by the individual. This individual ownership results in one key outcome of a skills audit - better awareness of one's capabilities as a basis for making career decisions. Participation in the process is mostly voluntary yet some target groups are recommended or obliged to take part in a skills audit: for example, certain categories of unemployed people, or certain employee profiles if it involves a company-level initiative. In these cases, the skills audit may be owned by employers and Public Employment Services (PES) rather than the individual.
- Forms of assessment which combine narratives of past experiences, interviews, and self-assessment are frequently used. There is typically some form of self-assessment which can

be done on an individual basis or in a guided context. However, for some target groups, for example, people facing issues with literacy or with the language of the host country, support provided by trained counsellors is needed to help extract evidence from a person's narrative.

The use of these approaches is usually sufficient if the aim of the process is to improve self-awareness, inform future choice, or better present one's capabilities to an employer.

These forms of assessment can be combined with more rigorous and 'authentic' approaches such as observations and demonstrations under real-life conditions, tests, and work trials. This is especially the case when the individual receives certification for (units of) learning outcomes from prior learning.

The output from the process is often a portfolio, particularly in cases of more complex and in-depth skills audit practices. When the output is not a full-

<sup>9</sup> For instance: Standards related to the education and training system, sectoral/occupational standards, company specific standards, other quality standards etc.

ly-fledged portfolio, there is still some form of profile documentation such as a skills card or skills map. In some cases, the skills audit process leads directly to the certification of learning outcomes and the award of a partial or full qualification.

Where the skills audit is carried out together with a counsellor, this is typ-

ically accompanied by advice on 'next steps.' This may simply be advice on how the outcomes of the skills audit can be used, or, in the context of PES, the skills audit can be used as a basis to develop an individualised action plan. In the case of online assessment tools not supported by face-to-face counselling, skills audits typically lead to more general career suggestions.

## What are the main types of skills audit offered?

Based on the research the initiatives were clustered into four types according to the main purpose of a skills audit. Depending on the objective of the skills audit, the providers concerned, the role and use of standards and the choice of assessment methods will vary (see Figure 2 below).

**Figure 2. Overview of main types of skills audit**



Source: ICF

## What is the supply and demand of skills audits?

The study observed that, in the 16 countries researched, a broad variety of practices that fall under the definition of skills audit exist (as outlined in the 2012 Council Recommendation on VNFIL). Some are large scale and well established, sometimes targeting a very broad target group or not distinguishing between profiles of persons. Others are more focused, targeted specifically at certain profiles and sometimes local or small scale.

Many skills audits have more than one target group but some specialised practices that focus on a single target group have also been identified. For example, practices that target refugees/asylum seekers who require special adaptations due to challenges concerning the level of competence they possess in their host country language, as well as lack of documentation of past achievements. Another group of specialised practices can be found in the group of talent management strategies where skills audits are used to target a specific group of employees/professionals.

PES are a significant provider of skills audits, particularly to individuals falling under the third type of skills audit (labour market integration). Many PES use skills audits to profile jobseekers, help them shape their professional project and provide advice on future orientation, as well as to do specific job-matching. PES use a variety of practices, ranging from deep and relatively substantial processes such as those that are typically grouped under the name of 'bilan de competences' (or equivalent translation), to self-assessments using online tools which are much less resource intensive.

In many of the countries analysed, large scale and well-established practices have been found (AT, BE, DE, DK, FI, FR, HR, IT, NL, UK) alongside more small-scale provision. Practices that fall into the categories of skills au-

dit for self-development and skills audit for labour market integration are more frequently strongly established and are larger scale, while practices that concern talent management are typically smaller scale as they focus on specific companies.

There seems to be a low threshold regarding the financial accessibility of skills audits. Most practices that address target groups who may not have the means (financial or motivational) to pay for skills audits are either fully publicly funded or are offered at a reasonable cost. It is not uncommon that the same practice would be available free of charge as part of active labour market policies to jobseekers but at the same time made available for a fee to those who wish to use the service to help guide their career transition decisions. Yet, some beneficiaries report financial issues as a reason not to undertake a skills audit, especially where this entails a long process with several steps leading to a qualification. In those cases, costs can occur related to the ensuing training and certification.

The demand for skills audits is in many cases ensured or stimulated by the fact that the practices are integrated into another policy, for example, as part of an active labour market policy, refugee integration policy, or policy for youth guidance and orientation. In many cases there is a referral process through which a skills audit is recommended for an individual. However, for practices that are aimed at self-development, outreach strategies are also put in place directly by skills audit providers to reach individuals who may otherwise not come forward independently to access the services available to them.

## How effective are skills audits?

Existing evaluations as well as interviews carried out for this study show a positive effect of skills audits on the activation and motivation of beneficiaries. Skills audits are also reported as an important instrument through which

individuals gain an insight into their own skills and capabilities, thus increasing awareness of the individual's potential and triggering activation mechanisms. This is an important precondition for all other effects: It is through the positive effect on one's own self-image and the explicit articulation of their skills that people can formulate more mature career choices and decide on related education or training trajectories. It is also through this realisation that they can better present themselves in a job interview, thus improving their chances of securing a position. Those few evaluations that looked at the effects of skills audits on labour market transitions found a positive relationship (e.g. in FR, NL, BE fr or FI).

However, it also needs to be noted that:

- Most of the practices reviewed do not have strong evaluations and some do not even have basic data on the number or profile of users. Consequently, the study relied on more subjective judgements from the interviewees on the success of the measures analysed.
- Some practices have been found to work better for certain groups than others. Practices that rely strongly on a self-reflection process, and where the individual leads the process of articulation of his/her skills and competences - work better for those who already have a certain level of self-efficacy. Such self-efficacy is often associated with having achieved prior qualifications and/or having prior experience from the labour market. People with low levels of basic skills or insufficient language skills need processes/procedures that rely less on driving the process themselves. Similarly, tools that rely on IT tend to be more successful with people who already have the basic qualifications and skills levels to be comfortable in using them.
- Some skills audits are owned by employers and PES rather than the individual. Their effect on the individual

may be indirect as the organisations are the immediate users of the results (to improve their processes and services).

- The analysed skills audits often focus on labour market integration and/or educational advancement, yet our survey of providers suggests that less than 10% of the skills audit initiatives analysed lead to a partial or full qualification. Some, although by no means all, skills audits include an assessment of formal learning in addition to non-formal and informal learning based on qualification standards, and lead to certification. While this may not be the main aim of other skills audit procedures, or even appropriate for some target groups, it is nevertheless good practice that skills audits include these options, should users want to make use of them. This may be in the context of the skills audit itself, or by establishing connections between those audits and validation procedures that have those options in place or lead to relevant educational offers which would enable an individual to take the next steps to complete training or in career advancement. Effective referral procedures to appropriate providers are key in this regard.
- Another observation from the study is that not all skills audit procedures include follow-up plans. This raises important issues regarding the articulation between skills audits and validation initiatives: It will be important to ensure that those who undertake skills audits have routes available that enable them to progress into or within education and the labour market.

Overall, it can be noted that to be effective, skills audit practices need to accurately reflect the realities and constraints of the target groups:

- The practices that tend to rely more strongly on a self-driven process (possibly guided by an online assessment tool, rather than by a professional) are more likely to be used successfully by people who already have a good level of basic skills, and in particular, self-efficacy.
- Practices that are targeted at groups that have challenges with basic skills, host country language or who have low levels of self-awareness, confidence or motivation require stronger inputs from a counsellor. Successful practices targeting these groups are characterised by a process that is guided by a professional, require more contact hours and take longer to conclude.

### What future trends and innovations can be observed?

The analysis of skills audits also identified several trends that could be gaining importance in the future. These are:

- The future of work is expected to entail lower job security, and more changes throughout a career. Skills management will be needed to anticipate and prepare for change and career development, and thus skills audits are useful in that regard.
- Many of the examples analysed, particularly when they concern people who already have at least some level of qualification, assume that the underpinning need of individuals (and their employers) is to make

skills and competences visible; not necessarily to certify them. For many individuals and many situations of job search, such visibility is sufficient enough to empower them to take the next steps, and there is no need for a more formalised process of validation and certification. Moreover, not all qualifications are part of the regular education & training system. This is especially the case in highly specialised and fast-paced industries (e.g. IT and aviation).

- Recently, technology is increasingly being used as an intermediary solution. The use of technology to develop online portfolios which are easily storable (i.e. online), can have several layers of depth of information, and can have a process of external validation as well. Several initiatives using electronic badges have been identified by the study as potentially interesting solutions. Such badges make skills and competences visible in a very user-friendly format. They are motivating for the individuals, as there is a gamification element to collecting them. Badges enable individuals to show their skills in a rapid manner to potential employers (the function of the badge) but if needed, more information is stored in the badge about the actual skills, competences, and what one needs to demonstrate to receive the badge. Information on 'assessment', or on who observed the demonstration of the given skills/competences is also embedded in the badge. Interconnectivity between these tools and other portals for job search is another feature which means that more and more such tools are likely to be used in the future.

The study was published in early 2019 under the title 'Skills Audits: Tools to identify talent' and can be downloaded from the [DG EMPL webpage](#).

# Reversed peer learning activity:

## Learning and teaching in professional higher education (PHE)

Katarzyna Olszewska, ECVET Expert for Poland

An attempt to use the ECVET system (European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training) and qualifications to describe the study programme on a practical profile.

Poland is introducing a new Higher Education Law ("Ustawa 2.0"). The intention of this legislation is to support the development of a coherent system of higher education that includes a variety of institutions: research-intensive universities as well as practically-oriented universities and colleges (Universities of Applied Sciences).

The Polish higher education sector will play a very important role in the national strategy of "Responsible Development". Professional Higher Education programmes must prepare students and graduates to enter the labour market after graduation and be ready to deal with new challenges including the modernisation of training courses and programmes.

From 2015-2018 the University of Applied Sciences Elblag (PWSZ Elblag) launched "The Programme of Work Placements in State Universities of Applied Sciences" that piloted a model scheme of six-month apprenticeships for first cycle studies at universities of applied sciences. Practical experiences in the workplace help students to develop higher professional competences that are in line with the demands of the local labour market. Once it is backed up by legal regulations, the apprenticeship scheme could be implemented on

a broad scale, as a universal solution for all students enrolled in practical oriented study programmes. To integrate learning outcomes from work-based learning into the study programme, PWSZ Elblag decided to use ECVET principles.

### Using ECVET Principles

The project team consisted of seven experts from PWSZ Elblag, Lodz University of Technology, University of Applied Sciences Chelm, and the Deputy Director of the Central Examination Commission responsible for Vocational Education and Training. Their task was to use ECVET principles to describe learning outcomes from apprenticeships and integrate them into the study programme. Some members of this group were also involved in the creation and implementation of the Polish Qualification Framework and Integrated Qualification System. The Rector of PWSZ Elblag, Prof. Zbigniew Walczyk, was the leading expert. The project was supervised by a team of 15 experts which included representatives of employers' associations.

The results of the expert work carried out as part of this project were presented by Mr Tomasz Saryusz-Wolski at the EURASHE conference, *The Reversed Peer Learning Activity: Learning*

*and Teaching in Professional Higher Education (PHE)*, which took place at the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in Poland on 8 March 2019.

Mr Tomasz Saryusz-Wolski started by presenting the basic difference between the well-known ECTS system and the ECVET system, stating that ECVET provides additional value for professional higher education. The learning outcomes in ECTS are based on teaching modules or courses while learning outcomes in the ECVET system are based on professional tasks.

Yet, he stated that using ECVET principles for Professional Higher Education was challenging; describing learning outcomes that fulfil the requirements of Level 6 of the Polish Qualifications Framework as well as those of vocational education and adapting to the current needs of the labour market is no small task.

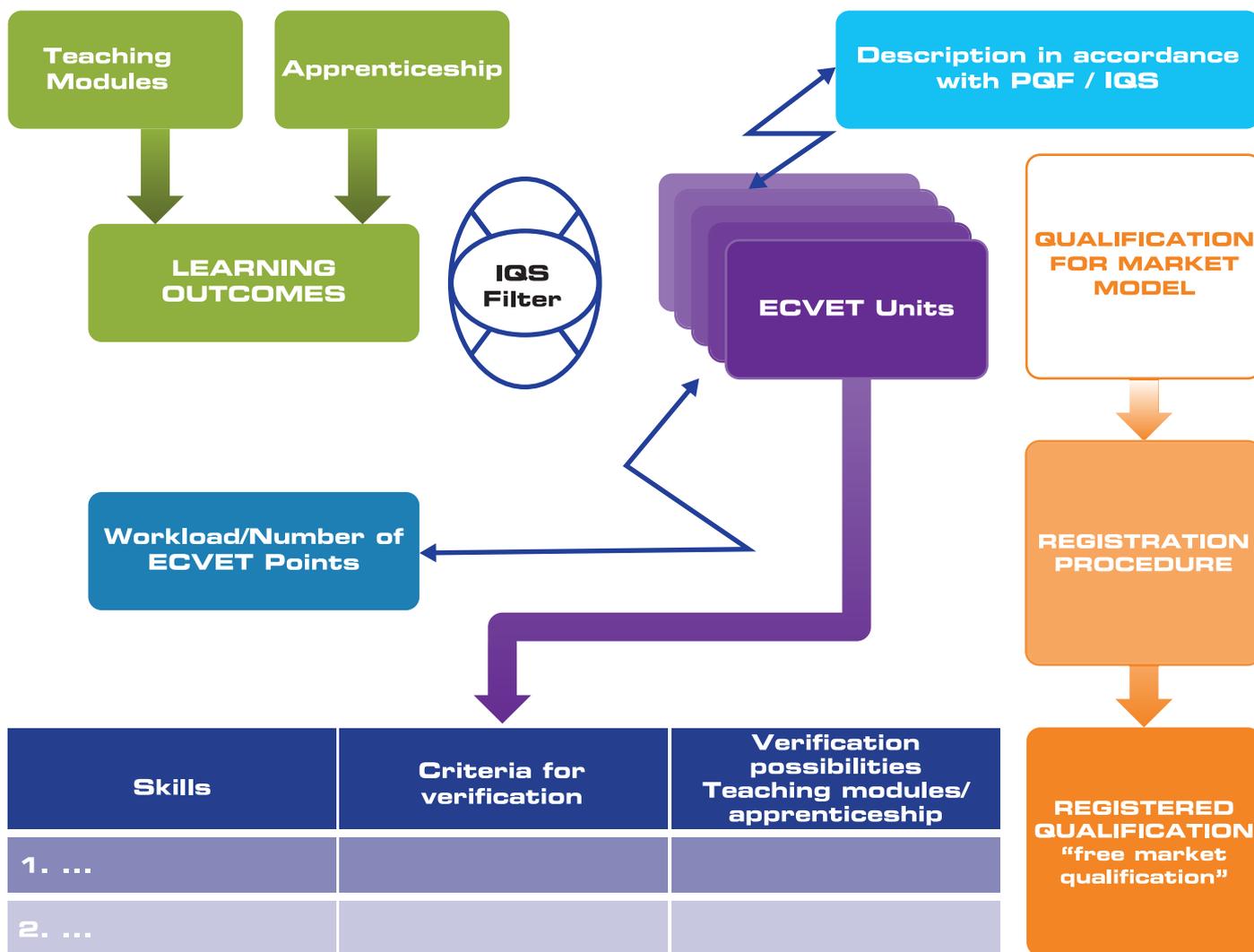
However, the project team found solutions. In the study fields selected for the project - administration, internal security and mechanical engineering - the units of learning outcomes were developed in accordance with ECVET principles and were designed in line with typical work tasks that students carry out during their apprenticeships.

The ECVET team developed a “university partial (vocational) qualification”, combining the learning outcomes from the Higher Education programme with

the learning outcomes arising from the performance of professional tasks during the apprenticeship, which are consistent with the description used

in the Polish Qualification Framework and Integrated Qualifications System (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Creation of units of ECVET learning outcomes and “university partial (vocational) qualification”**



**Outcomes**

The description of individual units of ECVET learning outcomes indicated the workload (in hours) necessary to acquire specific skills resulting from curriculum, training before starting the apprenticeships, performing tasks during the apprenticeship, and preparation

for validation as well as from validation itself. Upon completion, PWSZ Elblag can either issue a certification for individual units of learning outcomes, or for a set of units of learning outcomes that create the “university partial (vocational) qualification”.

After graduation, students that participated in the project will receive two certificates:

1. A university diploma of 1st cycle studies,
2. A certification of learning outcomes described according to the ECVET units.

This approach helped to improve the apprenticeship and study programme in two regards:

1. PWSZ Elblag was able to consolidate and better describe the learning outcomes already included in the curriculum, and introduce changes and modernisations where needed;
2. PWSZ Elblag introduced new learning outcomes related to work tasks which are necessary to acquire professional qualifications.

The ECVET team gained new and inspirational ideas on implementing the ECVET system in Higher Professional Education. Additionally, the discussions and joint experiences with companies where students carried out their apprenticeships proved to be an idea incubator on how to improve work-based learning for students in general.

At the end of the presentation, Mr Tomasz Saryusz-Wolski stressed that one of the most important learning

outcomes is the ability to learn without being taught. Moreover, the pilots were considered to be successful: it was found that the model of combining the typical Higher Education study programme with apprenticeships structured into units of learning outcomes developed according to the ECVET principles do increase the quality of Higher Professional Education - for the benefit of both the graduates and the labour market.

# One-year cross-border vocational education and training - Piloting future international sectoral qualifications with ECVET components

Andreas Diettrich and Franka Marie Herfurth, University of Rostock, Germany

The aim of the BBVET project – Boosting Business integration through joint Vocational Education and Training - was to pilot a one-year cross-border vocational training based on ECVET components and offered in two fields: Educational Technology (EdTech) and Mechatronics.

Six project partners from five South Baltic country regions in Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden jointly developed the first European one-year curricula, that consisted of a series of four consecutive mobilities. Each mobility lasted 10 weeks and were delivered in four different partner countries. The project was financed by the Interreg South Baltic Programme and embedded in the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. In total, 45 students successfully participated in the one-year cross-border BBVET training between January and December 2018.

## BBVET project partners:

- NetPort Science Park (Lead Partner), Sweden
- University of Rostock, Germany
- CELF (Centre for Vocational Education Lolland Falster), Denmark
- University of Szczecin, Poland
- Rietavas Tourism and Business Information Center, Lithuania
- Plunge Technology and Business School, Lithuania

Project website: [www.bbvvet.eu](http://www.bbvvet.eu)

Duration: 2016 – 2019

## Using ECVET tools for the BBVET training programme

The overall objective of the project was to boost businesses in the South Baltic region, support the EU-wide goal to increase the mobility rate in VET to 10%, as well as implement long-term cross-border mobilities in VET. To help achieve these objectives, the BBVET consortium used several technical components of ECVET:

- **The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** was used as the multilateral agreement between the participating partner institutions. The MoU was signed by all partners and gave detailed information about the parties involved, specifying the general agreements, dividing the responsibilities between the involved partners and setting out the measures for quality assurance. Furthermore, it specified aspects regarding the assessment of the learning outcomes as well as validation and recognition of learning outcomes.
- The project consortium used the ECVET template for the **Learning Agreement (LA)** and adjusted it for the project's specific purpose. The LA

served as the individual agreement between the participating student, the sending institution and the receiving institution. It specified the participating partner institutions, the duration of the mobility, information on the learning to be undertaken and the documentation of the student's progress. Based on what the partners had agreed on in the MoU, the LA specified the procedures for assessment and documentation as well as validation and recognition of achieved learning outcomes. For each mobility period, an individual LA was set up between the student and the institution involved (see figure below).

- **Europass Mobility** documents were used as a transcript of record.

## Comparison and cooperation

Transparency was a key aspect when developing the two VET curricula. Due to the high degree of innovation in this field, the curriculum for EdTech was developed as an add-on qualification that should be implemented on the EQF level 5 due to its connection to higher VET schools and universities that provided the training. The cross-border curriculum in Mechatronics in turn was based on a comparison of the already exist-

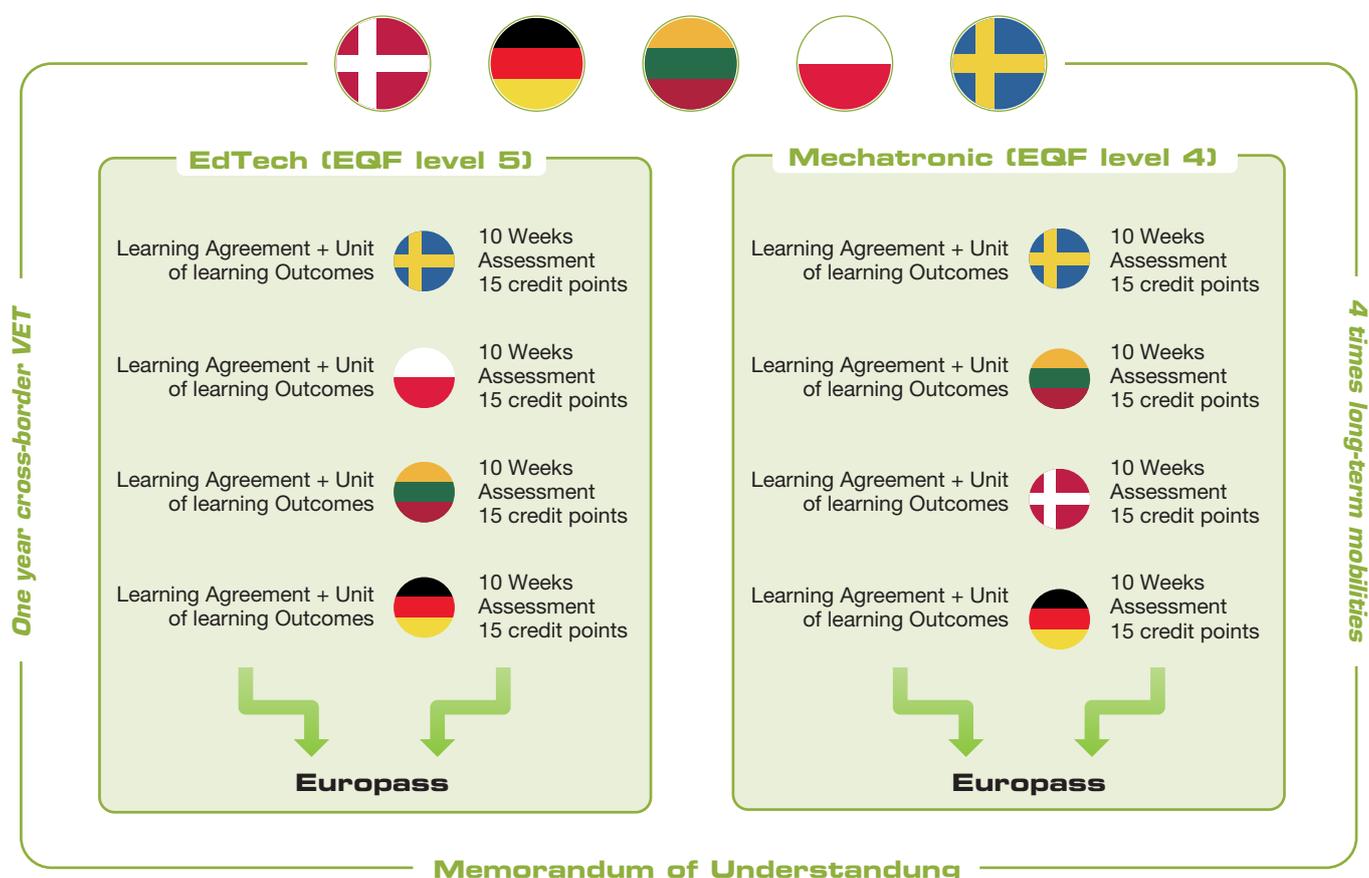
ing curricula in the participating partner countries, as an EQF level 4 qualification to match the structures of dual VET providers (VET schools and companies).

BBVET partners developed units of learning outcomes (ULO), with one unit for each of the four mobility periods. Each unit included the name of

the respective unit, the reference to the whole qualification (in terms of BBVET to EdTech or Mechatronics), identified the area of work tasks and included the respective NQF and EQF level. The core of the ULO was the presentation of the specific knowledge, skills and competences to be achieved during each cross-border mobility.

Project partners agreed that in each country the student would receive 1.5 credit points per week and that each credit point would reflect a workload of 27 hours. The entire BBVET curriculum for EdTech and for Mechatronics thus has a value of 60 credit points. Due to differences in credit systems across countries, credit points were not specified in the unit of learning outcomes.

## Structure of the BBVET one-year cross-border VET programme based on ECVET



### Successful implementation of the BBVET training with some challenges remaining

Of the technical components of ECVET, the part of the accumulation process (i.e. the assessment, validation and recognition of learning outcomes achieved) proved to be the most challenging one. The knowledge, skills and competences specified in the unit of learning outcomes (assigned to the respective EQF level

for the purpose of the project) were assessed and recorded separately in each host country. After the successful completion of the long-term mobility, the validation took place in the respective (home) countries. At the end of each mobility period, learners received a BBVET certificate.

Even though all these documents described above have been used during the piloting of the one-year European training, scepticism towards the learn-

ing achievements during cross-border mobility has remained. The German project partner reported that the German companies that allowed their apprentices to participate were still not convinced about the quality assurance. One reason for this might have been the fact that the documents set up ahead of the mobilities were not sufficiently used to continuously track whether the mobilities were implemented in line with what had been agreed. Moreover, students who participated in the BB-

VET training year and wanted to apply for a new job in Lithuania, added their BBVET certificates to their application. The Lithuanian companies however could not interpret the value of these certificates and requested a translation of the learning achievements into the Lithuanian language, in addition students had not been handed Europass documents.

Within the consortium, the project partners also stated that the assessments were carried out differently regarding workload and complexity.

### High-quality mobilities thanks to thorough preparation

Nevertheless, the project partners, associated partners as well as cooperation partners like schools and companies were all impressed by the high quality of the cross-border mobilities. The project consortium is convinced that the documents used and the technical components of ECVET were the main contributors to the high level of quality. The documents convey re-



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liability not only for the students, but also for the participating schools and companies, and also for the project consortium. The ECVET principles are considered a great opportunity to increase the flexibility of VET not only on a national level but also cross-border. In the understanding of lifelong learning, each piece of an individual's education puzzles needs to have

a value and needs to be recognised on a European level. In the BBVET project the consortium was able to prove that it is worth defining units of learning outcomes, providing Learning Agreements as well as agreeing on common quality standards within long-term mobilities with a Memorandum of Understanding.

# In-Company Learning Mobility and Quality Assurance Guidelines:

## Creating a community of practice and a quality label – EQAMOB&CO

Helen Gray - IDAN (IS), Susanne Klimmer – IFA (AT) and Sabine Weger – CMA France (FR)

Hosting and sending out apprentices can transform a workplace and create opportunities for the company team as well as for the learner.

Through the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership project called EQAMOB (European Quality Assurance for In-Company Learning Mobility for Apprentices), the Euro Apprenticeship Network (EAS) focused on strengthening the quality of in-company learning mobility for apprentices, companies and organisations. The project sought to provide a meaningful label for exemplary companies that host and send out apprentices/learners within Europe. The Euro Apprenticeship platform is coordinated by CMA, Assemblée permanente des Chambres de métiers et de l'artisanat, France. CMA physically maintains the platform, but it is the project-funded community of the Euro Apprenticeship partners and network that is responsible for the quality and aims of the platform.

### Why create a framework and label to award companies exemplary in in-company learning mobility?

The label has three main goals:

- to increase the value of investments in learning mobility for those com-



panies which send and host such apprentices;

- to attest to the quality both of preparing the training and the training period itself;
- to create a community of practice.

The purpose of this project was to build and strengthen the network. Through designing, testing, implementing and disseminating a framework for high-quality 'in-company learning mobility' pathways, this framework provides a structure for individual learning processes as well as a mutual concept of membership in a sustained community of practice.

### The three-step process of designing the EQAMOB&CO label

#### Step 1: Defining in-company learning mobility

Creating a shared, coherent definition of *in-company learning mobility* was an essential first step. The partners agreed on core criteria which were based on the definition of apprenticeship training adopted by the **European Alliance for Apprenticeship**:

*In-company learning mobility is an alternate training scheme in which the training occurs at a workplace (enterprise) as well as in school, with the enterprise playing an active role.*

Several other explanations about workplace learning and learning mobility were considered such as the multi-layered nature of workplace learning and its sensitivity to socio-cultural influences and varying limitations. Thus, workplace learning cannot be defined without providing additional context and meaning<sup>8</sup>. Workplaces should be regarded as having different approaches to learning such as restrictive or expansive **learning approaches**. Learning in the workplace must be understood in context and involves participation in a **community of practice** and finally 'learning mobility' abroad can be considered an **educative/didactic tool**.

Taking the above into consideration, the following definition of in-company learning mobility was set forth:

*In-company learning mobility consists of travelling to another country to gain a period of work experience (or of workplace learning). The objective of in-company learning mobility is to promote and enhance professional, international and transversal skills. Learning inside a work environment allows for learning in context. Furthermore, by situating practical experience in an intercultural context, abilities and opportunities are fostered for everyone involved to identify, question, and reflect on work practices and learning processes.*

### Step 2: Formulating quality recommendations and a quality framework for the label

Based on the above definition, the partners specified quality recommendations for all actors involved that would help them meet the expectations of 'in-company learning mobility'. In this effort, the Euro Apprenticeship network faced the same challenges as other networks: building a high-quality partnership.



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Among the numerous activities/capacities that often seem equally important for the successful organisation of high-quality mobility activities, the following four appear to be of utmost significance for the EQAMOB team, considering the project's aims of **enhancing professional, international and transversal skills** and **fostering the ability to identify and reflect on work practices and learning processes**:

1. The capacity to 'match' all players involved;
2. A concern for preparing and providing partners with clear, up-to-date information concerning requirements;
3. The ability to express objectives clearly and to recognise competencies acquired abroad;
4. The ability to evaluate placements in companies by taking into consideration the training focus of the trainees, the possible recognition of the training period and the competencies acquired abroad as part of the training in the home country.

EQAMOB elaborated on **quality assurance guidelines (QAG)** de-

scribing the process of granting the label to companies. The ECVET and EQAVET frameworks underpinned the quality guidelines combining the scheme with a thematic approach. For example, the ECVET principles are reflected in the requirement to agree on expected learning outcomes before the start of the placement and to assess and document learning outcomes achieved abroad. In order to guarantee that the label can be implemented in diverse national/local and sectoral contexts, the methodological approach called *design thinking* was used which focuses on the final user/the company.

### Step 3: Designing, releasing and applying the label

The label itself was eventually created in the form of a certificate and additional marketing material was made available. While awarding a company with a label is easy enough, however, lending value to the label and creating a brand is more complex. For the EQAMOB partners it is important not only to call attention to exemplary companies, but also to attract new companies to participate in in-company learning mobility. The EQAMOB partners encourage intermediate bodies and EAS mem-

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Billett Sarojni Choy (2013). Learning through Work: Emerging perspectives and new challenges. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, Vol. 25, Iss. 4, pp. 264 - 276.

bers to develop support for companies that invest in learning mobility and to publicise the quality of their work by presenting them with this recognition during peer meetings, awareness-raising events, etc.

#### How does it work?

To be recognised and act as an awarding organisation within a Euro Apprenticeship network, members are required (in an auto-evaluation process) to hand in documentation about their experience in organising and supporting in-company learning mobility. Members and future awarding bodies have the possibility in the registration form to upgrade to or directly become an awarding body with full access to the EQAMOB tools.

The application to be an awarding body is received, recorded and reviewed online. CMA and the EQAMOB&CO partners will check the application. If the application is not valid or has to be improved, the applicant is notified. If the application is accepted, then the applicant receives a positive notification with access to all resources online. CMA will issue the EQAMOB&CO charter to the awarding body.

The awarding body is responsible for mobilising sending companies, finding hosting companies/placements, monitoring the process, promoting and explaining the process and the label and what it entails for the company. If the company wishes to receive the label a review is conducted.

Assessment checklists are available online to serve as tools to help awarding bodies review potential companies. It should be noted that not all elements on the checklist are always applicable depending on the national context and situation of the awarding body. If the review is positive, the awarding body registers the company online, the company receives a certificate and access to the toolbox with EQAMOB&CO items for promotion (stickers, banners etc.)

To find out more about EQAMOB&CO and gain full access to available tools, marketing material and the label, so that your company can benefit from this rewarding platform for 'in-company learning mobility', please see [www.euroapprenticeship.eu](http://www.euroapprenticeship.eu).

# Annual ECVET Forum 2019: Using the ECVET principles to connect learning and working in tomorrow's labour market

ECVET Secretariat

The Netherlands volunteered to be the host country for this year's Annual ECVET Forum 2019. The Forum 2019 will discuss 'Using the ECVET principles to connect learning and working in tomorrow's labour market' - European, national, local and sectoral policies and initiatives. This year's venue will be in Rotterdam.

#### The topic of the Annual ECVET Forum 2019

The Annual ECVET Forum 2019 will explore two main aspects:

1. The practical use of the ECVET principles to connect learning and working in tomorrow's labour market, for instance:

- the concept of units (or groups) of learning outcomes to design innovative, up-to date and future-proof qualifications that respond to current as well as anticipated future labour market needs (at system level);
- the options of adding learning outcomes to existing qualifications to help workers to update and enrich their qualifications (at learner level);
- how to support low-skilled adults with work experiences to gain a labour-market relevant qualification by enabling validation of non-formal and informal learning (at learner level);
- enabling the transfer and accumulation of units of learning outcomes between different contexts of learning and working, to enhance the flexibility of VET systems (at system level);

2. The policy level of ECVET implementation, either European (e.g. through Sector Skills Alliances or Key Action 2 projects), or national, or regional, or local, or sectoral. Participants will discuss how to ensure sustainability, coherence and mainstreaming between or among those levels.

### The purpose of the Annual ECVET Forum 2019

The Annual ECVET Forum 2019 will be a place for discussion and exchange between policy makers and practitioners with experience in using ECVET to modernise their VET systems and connect learning and working. It will facilitate mutual learning and networking between the participants. The Forum will gather about 150 participants.

The Forum will give participants the opportunity to:

- understand what the ECVET principles are;

- get a deeper understanding of the challenges of tomorrow's labour market;
- gather ideas of how the ECVET principles can be used in the context of connecting learning and working in tomorrow's labour market;
- hear about good practice examples from different countries on EU, national, local and sectoral level;
- discuss the roles of different actors and stakeholders in connecting learning and working in tomorrow's labour market;
- discuss innovative ideas with peers from other countries.

### The programme of the Annual ECVET Forum 2019

The programme and the agenda will enable participants to:

- learn from other countries' experiences,
- discuss topics, examples and solutions that are of practical use to participants, and
- network between employers, policy makers, Erasmus+ National Agencies representatives and VET providers.

**The 1st day** will be dedicated to discussing examples of using the ECVET principles to connect learning and working for tomorrow's labour market. What are the main challenges and success factors, and the different levels of implementation?

**The 2nd day** will be dedicated to networking between employers, NAs and VET providers on 'skills needs of the future' in an 'Idea Incubator': participants will visit several stands where a volunteering host will present a project/idea/problem. After a short presentation, participants will be asked to offer their insights and feedback.

The ECVET Secretariat organises this Annual ECVET Forum 2019 on behalf of the European Commission / DG EMPL. If you have any questions, please contact the ECVET Secretariat [ECVET-Secretariat@icf.com](mailto:ECVET-Secretariat@icf.com)

We look forward to a fruitful meeting in Rotterdam!

## NEW! Webinar - ECVET for beginners

Participants with little prior experience or knowledge of ECVET will have the opportunity to take part in a webinar explaining the key ECVET principles. The webinar will take place one week prior to the Annual Forum, i.e. on **Wednesday, 12 June 2019**.

The one hour live online session would cover:

- A brief history to the policy context
- Challenges addressed by ECVET
- Key principles of ECVET
- Key elements of ECVET
- Key terms of ECVET
- Implementation of ECVET
- Sources of further information

Participants will receive more information and log-in credentials upon confirmation of their registration. The webinar will be recorded and will be **available on the ECVET Secretariat website**.



# Did you know the ECVET Secretariat offers ECVET expert support?

ECVET Secretariat

## What is ECVET expert support?

- The ECVET Secretariat works together with a network of experts across Europe to help you to discuss, understand and apply ECVET principles within the context of mobility and lifelong learning.
- This can include experts reviewing and providing comments on draft documents or attending and providing an active input into regional, national or project level conferences.
- The support is tailored to your country and/or institutional/sectoral context. Experts will work closely with your organisation to develop bespoke activities that fit your specific needs and demands.



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## Who are the experts and how are they different to national ECVET experts?

- Our experts have a background in ECVET and VET policy on a European level for at least 5 years. They have in-depth knowledge of ECVET, mobility and other European tools (for instance EQF, EQAVET, Europass) and have worked with policymakers and project promoters for several years.
- The network of experts have an awareness of ECVET developments across several countries, and this can be really beneficial if you're running a European project.

## Can you give me some examples of how ECVET Secretariat experts have supported organisations?

- In Latvia, ECVET Secretariat experts supported the Erasmus+ National

Agency to promote ECVET and provide stakeholders with a European perspective on ECVET implementation. The expert contributed to a national policy forum by presenting the European approaches to ECVET implementation and they contributed to a panel discussion with employers and ministry representatives.

- In Malta, ECVET Secretariat experts reviewed an ECVET Manual that the Erasmus+ National Agency drafted. The manual explained ECVET processes and elements and provided guidance on to employers, education providers and the general public. The ECVET Secretariat experts provided technical support and feedback on the contents.
- In Italy, an ECVET Secretariat expert attended a project meeting for the VECTOR-Tourism project to discuss how learning outcomes and units of learning outcomes can be used

in curriculum development. Read more about this in **ECVET Magazine Issue 28** to find out more.

## What costs are involved and where can they travel?

- The support is completely free of charge and flexible to your specific needs.
- Our experts travel to wherever the help is needed. All costs are covered by the ECVET Secretariat.

## Where can I find out more?

You can send an email to:  
[ECVET-Secretariat@icf.com](mailto:ECVET-Secretariat@icf.com)

For more information, visit: [www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/expert-support](http://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/expert-support)



The ECVET Magazine is published three times per year and informs about the latest ECVET developments. Previous issues of the ECVET Magazine are available for download on the website of the ECVET Secretariat: <http://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu>

Any comments or suggestions regarding this or future issues can be submitted to the following address: [ECVET-Secretariat@icf.com](mailto:ECVET-Secretariat@icf.com)

