

ECVET Network Meeting 2018 – Thessaloniki, 11 – 12 October 2018

Summary report¹

The ECVET Network Meeting, including the 23rd Users' Group Meeting, took place on 11 to 12 October 2018 in Thessaloniki, Greece. The meeting was hosted at Cedefop's premises. The first day explored the latest findings on studies around the changing nature of VET, VET mobility schemes and VET instruments. In contrast, day 2 discussed practical aspects of training ECVET Experts in relation to long duration mobility and how best to engage with employers on long duration mobility.

Attendance

The meeting was attended by 82 individuals in total, spread as follows:

Country representatives: AT, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LU, LT, LV, MK, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, SE, SK, UK; in total: 68 individuals from 28 countries.

Stakeholders: Cedefop (5 individuals)

DG EMPL: João Santos, Koen Bois d'Enghien

ECVET Secretariat: Monika Auzinger, Anette Curth, Raffaella di Masi, Emmanuelle Meens, Helen Metcalfe, Karin Luomi-Messerer

ICF/contractor for studies commissioned by DG EMPL: Marcel Schnabel

Welcome

The meeting was opened by João Santos, European Commission, DG EMPL, and Loukas Zahilas, on behalf of Cedefop. Loukas highlighted that the work around credit transfer has been ongoing for some time and much progress has been made. The audience has also become much broader in scope over time. However many of the issues, challenges and topics discussed at the start of this work are still present.

João Santos welcomed participants to the Network meeting and introduced Koen Bois d'Enghien, who has replaced Miguel Santos (who has returned to his native Portugal) as coordinator of the ECVET file within the Commission. Koen is also the coordinator of the EQAVET file at the same time.

João Santos pointed out that we are living in interesting but also uncertain times, and the presence of some kind of fear towards what the future will bring. The challenges and 'threats' include climate change, AI (artificial intelligence), the future of work and the future role of skills, and the possibilities of a future trade war.

This should however not stop us in our efforts to try to move forward and continue preparing for the future. The European Commission and Cedefop have several studies running that deal with and explore some of these issues. Three very relevant studies were presented at this meeting.

Approval of the 22nd User's Group meeting report

The User's Group approved the report from the 22nd User's Group meeting, which took place on 13 June in Sofia Bulgaria, prior to the 2018 Annual Forum. There were no further comments on the report which was thus considered approved.

¹ The ECVET Secretariat sent out the PowerPoint presentations from the meeting in a separate e-mail (per download link) on 16 October 2018.

Changing nature and role of vocational education and training (VET) in Europe – update on progress

Anastasia Poulidou presented the latest findings of a study that Cedefop is undertaking on the 'Changing nature and role of VET in Europe'. This study explores what tomorrow holds for vocational education and training in Europe until 2035. This is a three year study that concludes in December 2018, and the work will be a foundation for Cedefop's work in 2019 and 2020.

The study explores six main interlinked themes:

1. The changing definition and conceptualisation of VET;
2. The external drivers influencing VET developments;
3. The role of traditional VET at upper secondary level;
4. VET from a lifelong learning perspective;
5. The role of VET at higher education levels;
6. Scenarios outlining alternative development paths for European VET in the 21st century.

The study has explored the potential future for VET and reviewed the changes that have taken place between 1990 and 2015. This includes the move towards competence based systems, work-based learning and learning outcomes as well as the growth of higher level VET.

IVET is usually linked to EQF levels 3 and 4 and this can be considered as the 'heartland' of VET. The study has observed that the number of VET learners has been declining since 2005 however there is a growth or stability in many countries. Specifically, three groups can be identified:

- Countries that have had a remarkable growth in VET (such as HU, PT, EL and ES), but this is from a low base;
- a moderate growth (for instance, AT, FI, NL and SE); and
- a significant or moderate decline (for instance, DE, FR and UK), but this is from a high baseline.

A key finding from the study is that there is a diversity of delivery and this can range from school-based VET, dual-apprenticeship based model and lifelong learning. Higher VET and VET permeability is broadening the concept of VET. This can be particularly seen in strengthening work based learning in higher education institutions. The study has also identified that there are issues and tensions in VET. This includes having a better balance between theory and practical skills and less 'dead ends' in VET pathways. They study also observed that higher level VET is a significant growth area but it requires more visibility.

As part of the study, a survey of 1 500 stakeholders took place between April to June 2018. VET stakeholders underlined the need for VET to have an enhanced responsiveness to labour market needs in the future. The study has developed three distinct scenarios for the future. This includes the pluralist VET scenario – 'Lifelong learning at the heart' – which broadens our understanding and conception of what is meant by VET. In this scenario, where there are different learning approaches and providers, so that VET students can select their studies around their specific needs. The emphasis will be on vocationally and labour market oriented learning at all levels and in all institutional settings. The is the distinctive VET scenario – 'Occupational and professional competence at the heart' – which seeks to strengthen the existing and dominant conception of VET as focussed on entry into occupations and professions. VET's position as a separate education and training sub-system with clearly defined providers and institutions is reaffirmed and strengthened. The third scenario is the special purpose (marginalised) VET scenario – 'Job-oriented training at the heart' which focuses on training for jobs and re-skilling and up-skilling for short and medium term labour market needs. This scenario narrows down the understanding and conception of VET. The scenarios have not been designed to predict the future but rather to inspire and provoke a debate on the on how different strategies can influence VET structure, content and outcomes in the coming years.

The final results of the study will be presented at a dedicated event during VET Skills Week in Vienna.²

Presentation of the recent EU VET policy developments

João Santos and Koen Bois d'Enghien presented recent EU VET policy developments in order to bring the group up to date with recent developments and interesting future initiatives and approaches.

João Santos presented the recent EU VET policy developments from the European Commission. This focused on preparing the future of EU cooperation on VET; Centres of Vocational Excellence and a reminder of the forthcoming European Vocational Skills Week.

Firstly, the preparation of the future of EU cooperation on VET builds on the existing Riga Conclusions (covering the period 2015 to 2020) and the common priorities at the centre of this. This includes work-based learning, quality assurance, access to training and qualifications for all, strengthening key competencies and VET teachers and training. The 2020 (and beyond) strategy is being prepared via a number of studies including the Cedefop 'Changing nature of VET' study, studies around VET quality and flexible learning pathways and vocational mobility (undertaken between 2017 and 2018), the Riga Monitoring Progress Report as well as the ACVT opinion. These elements will feed into the development of a proposal for education and training post-2020 and a strategic vision for VET in Europe.

VET should not be seen within isolation instead there is a need to work with other partners from the E&T sector. This is key for the new ambition for VET, which hopes to future proof VET for jobs and growth. The pillars for this include:

- Excellence – an integrated knowledge triangle between employers, universities and research
- Inclusion – broadening access
- Flexibility and responsiveness – VET being increasingly responsive to the labour market using modular curricula
- Efficiency and financing – cost sharing via contributions between public, private and even individual contributions and investments
- Quality and efficiency – the possibility of performance-based funding for VET
- International dimension – including mobility, international qualifications, evidence sharing and partnerships

João Santos also introduced the new initiative of Centres of Vocational Excellence. These will help to share best practices across Europe, particularly in relation to working with the labour market. It is anticipated that Centres of Vocational Excellence will help to anticipate the future skills needs and adapt curricula quickly. Resources will be made available from the Erasmus+ programme to support these activities.

Participants were also reminded to take part in the third [European VET Skills Week](#), which is taking place from 5 to 9 November 2018.

Koen Bois d'Enghien outlined that a new education package was launched by the European Commission in May 2018. This covers early childhood education, teaching and learning of languages and the automatic recognition of learning periods abroad which specifically covers HE and secondary level for the purpose of further studies (in the case of HE) or access to HE studies (in the case of upper secondary education). The final text of the forthcoming Council Recommendation is being discussed at the moment and it is expected that the proposed Recommendation will be adopted by the Council end of November 2018.

Lastly, Koen outlined the proposal for the tracking of VET and HE graduates. Member States have been requested to develop a graduate tracking system and a first expert group on graduate tracking data met

² [Vocational education and training in Europe – taking stock and looking ahead](#), 7 November 2018, Vienna

in October to foster mutual learning. A pilot survey on tracking HE graduates will take place across eight Member States and the first results are due in 2019.

Study on the instruments supporting the European Union vocational education and training (VET) policy – Update on progress

Monika Auzinger, ICF/3s, provided an update on this study's progress and draft final findings, following on from prior presentations at ECVET meetings and events in 2018.

The study aims to inform policy makers on the state of play and on feasible future options for VET instruments, namely ECVET and EQAVET. Specifically, the study is focusing on what aspects of the two instruments are more or less relevant. The research initially identified eight scenarios for the future of VET instruments, which have been reduced to four scenarios. These four scenarios are as follows:

1. Enhanced status quo:
 - The ECVET Recommendation would be revised to incorporate changes and to address obvious shortcomings, such as the use of credit points;
 - The eight principles for flexible VET learning pathways would be integrated into a revised ECVET Recommendation;
 - The ECVET branding would be maintained, but it would be repositioned as a set of principles instead of a credit system.
2. Subsuming ECVET into other existing EU instruments/programmes
 - There would not be a standalone ECVET Recommendation, but instead the objective of ECVET would be subsumed into other policy instruments;
 - ECVET tools would be developed and promoted under other EU initiatives. For example, the MoU and LA would be integrated into Erasmus+ and Europass and flexible learning pathways would be incorporated into EQAVET while the topic of credit systems would be further discussed within the EQF context.
3. Incorporating ECVET into a broader European policy strategy for VET
 - Both ECVET and EQAVET would be integrated under a single Recommendation, together with other Recommendations (E.g. Quality framework apprenticeships);
 - There would be a new Recommendation which would incorporate quality assurance, flexible pathways and recognition in VET as well as key concepts and units of learning outcomes;
 - There would be an overarching governance for policy groups and sub-groups;
 - This option could lead to the end of the ECVET branding.
4. The instruments are aligned to similar instruments in HE (ambition of more convergence between HE and VET):
 - This option would lead to convergence between HE and VET credit systems and ECVET instruments would be aligned with ECTS;
 - A new legal document would be adopted which would include the principles of flexible learning pathways. This would cover all education and training, not only VET;
 - The concepts of units of learning outcomes and credit points would be redefined and would be compatible with ECTS;
 - There would be a separate governance structure for the implementation of this option.

Group discussion on the different scenarios

Participants broke into four groups to discuss the different scenarios and their feasibility and likely effects on a national and European level. The main conclusions regarding each option are noted below.

Scenario 1

Participants mentioned that project promoters and other stakeholders have been implementing ECVET for some time and have developed knowledge of what ECVET is, what the principles are as well as how it works. Some participants expressed that it would be desirable to keep the brand and the concept as it to maintain consistency for project promoters. It was mentioned that the name could be made more user-friendly.

Scenario 2

Participants were positive about the integration of ECVET related tools into existing tools and initiatives, for example the MoU integrated into Europass. However, it was noted that the integration of ECVET into EQF as a credit system could take some time, especially for those countries who do not have an NQF in place.

Participants were also concerned that this option could lead to the technical components of ECVET being lost and this could be perceived by different stakeholders that ECVET, as an initiative, has failed. Furthermore, it was noted that ECVET branding has been quite successful at national level in some countries and if this option was taken forward then this progress would be lost.

Scenario 3

Participants agreed that this option is most in line with wider EU VET developments on VET policy and it offers the advantage of having one central 'point' for all EU VET initiatives. However, the ownership and governance were raised as areas of concerns as it is not clear who would 'own' ECVET and how the work will be taken forward. Therefore there is a risk that the work undertaken over the last ten years could be lost. Further clarification about the EU and national level resources would also be needed.

Scenario 4

Participants deemed scenario 4 as too ambitious as HE and VET system are very different. In addition, the credit system and use of credit points mentioned within the ECVET Recommendation is not really used. Therefore, participants felt that there is little reason to create a parallel with ECTS. However, it was raised that it could be helpful to have mutual learning between the two systems so that lessons could be shared on what works well, what not, and what are the lessons learnt for each initiative.

Lastly, participants stressed that for whichever option is taken forward it will be important to simplifying language and streamline and create synergies between initiatives where possible. The European Commission is now in a consultant process with Member States and stakeholders on which scenario could be taken forward. João Santos highlighted that the progress from ECVET and EQAVET would be integrated in the future.

Erasmus (+) – where we are and where are we heading to?

João Santos presented the figures of the Erasmus+ up to 2018 in terms of mobility of learners and staff. He then gave the participants a glimpse at the figures for Erasmus 2021-2027 and its ambitious programme.

In some countries, ECVET has had a big impact on the way the curriculum is being rewritten. However, the main impact ECVET has had in most Member States regards mobility – for learners and staff. While the duration of mobility programmes ranges from two weeks to 12 months, so far, the average mobility is of a short duration: 31 days.

Mobility programmes exist for both learners and for staff but, to date, mobility for staff has been neglected. This should be changed as VET staff can have a large impact on learning and be a positive influence on encouraging young people to take part in their own mobility experience.

Since 2013, Erasmus+ has aimed to send 650 000 learners, and 200 000 staff members on a mobility placement. So far, only 600 000 learners and less than 9 000 staff members have been on an EU funded mobility period. Between 2014 and 2018, 1.3 million learners could have benefitted from mobility if the Erasmus+ programme's budget had allowed for this.

Since 2017 and the launch of ErasmusPRO, long duration mobility has increased as opposed to short duration mobility. By 2020, 15% of mobility should be 'mid-length' programmes (of a duration of 3 to 6 months) or long duration mobility (more than 6 months).

The average mobility is very different across Member States. For example, mobility participants from Cyprus, Greece and Croatia usually take part in short duration mobility programmes (14 to 17 days). This is in contrast to mobility participants from Netherlands and Spain, who often take part in long duration mobility programmes, respectively 56 or 70 days in average.

When looking at the costs (including travel, organisation, daily allowance), long duration mobility is much more cost efficient per day than short duration mobility. For example, mobility placements lasting up to two weeks can cost up to 160 EUR per day whereas mobility placements that are longer than six months may cost only about 30 EUR per day.

The Erasmus+ mid-term evaluation collected evidence concerning VET learners' motivation to take part in mobility. While 79% of interviewees consider that gaining in technical, professional skills and competences is a key element of mobility, only 26% consider that the length of the training period is appropriate and therefore it can be surmised as learners want to take part in longer mobility periods.

The Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027 is worth 1279.4 billion EUR. From this global budget, the strand entitled "Cohesion and values" will receive 442.2 billion EUR. Within this, the sub-strand 'Investing in People, Social Cohesion and Values' will see its budget doubled from 14.7 billion EUR (until 2020) up to 30 billion EUR (from 2021 – 2027).

The next Erasmus programme's target is to have two million learners in mobility. Erasmus 2021-2027 will create parallels between VET and HE regarding mobility and it will create mobility for adult learners (i.e. upskilling and reskilling learners).

The current ways of submitting proposals for Erasmus+ mobility funding is very administrative and complex. The next programme period should see its procedures simplified to accommodate NGO and SME's needs and resources. It is hoped that this could encourage more organisations to access the funding and thus increase the take up of mobility.

Update on the Study on VET Mobility Schemes study

Marcel Schnabel, ICF, presented an update on the progress of the VET mobility schemes study. This looks at what mobility is taking place outside of Erasmus+ and what impact this has. The study is ongoing between January 2018 and December 2018 and it includes desk research, key informant interviews, surveys and case studies.

The research has identified 138 mobility programmes that are taking place outside of EU funded programmes. They are very diverse but they often focus on IVET and include work placements and apprenticeships, the majority are led by public authorities or other EU funds and they include some cross-sectoral schemes.

Out of the 138 programmes identified, 42 mobility programmes were selected for further analysis. Half of these (21) are led by a single country, 13 are bi-lateral and 8 are multi-lateral programmes. They rarely have links to employment policies however 11 of the programmes are linked to apprenticeship schemes. The majority are up to three months in duration, and some are up to six months, although there is lack of consistency on how duration is measured (for example, some mention that they are 'at least...' or 'up to...'). The programmes tend to focus on skill development for young people, on an individual level, and provide opportunities to exchange knowledge, on a system level. Cooperation and mutual learning are reoccurring themes. It is difficult to assess the average grant provided for this due to additional benefits often being provided however the study calculated that it may be around 807 EUR a month. There is a lack of information available for the quality assurance process and only 18 of these programmes have follow-up activities in place.

The key informant interviews have indicated that the programmes are implemented on national and local levels. These programmes often are more suitable for smaller companies, have some leeway and flexibility in the project implementation and on a policy level they can respond to national policies and priorities that may not be covered by Erasmus+ funding. Such programmes offer the advantages of giving learners and organisations more autonomy and less bureaucracy. However, there are often some limitation with disseminating information as organisations often cannot draw on larger networks and, in some cases, visa issues may arise due to the nature of the placements and travel.

There will 10 case studies developed covering six public schemes and four private led schemes. They will cover the success factors, barriers, individual and organisational level impact as well as system level impact.

Discussion on the update on the VET Mobility Schemes study

The discussion focused on the following areas:

- Fostering synergies between EU and non-EU funded projects
- Involving companies
- Mobility within teacher training
- Identifying and tracking non-Erasmus+ funding

Firstly, participants highlighted that Member States have different ways of fostering synergies between EU and non EU funded projects. It was highlighted that in the Saxony region of Germany there is a compulsory training course for VET teachers to inform them about mobility opportunities and encourages them to disseminate this information to their students. In addition, in Latvia their Erasmus+ Information events are also open to promoting non-Erasmus+ funded mobility opportunities, e.g. NordPlus Scheme, sharing of information on mobility funding possibilities in NordPlus, application procedure, deadlines, documents, etc.

Secondly, in terms of reaching out to companies different approaches have been used. In Germany, a project has been launched where each Chamber of Commerce has a dedicated person to support companies and liaise with schools. In addition, Germany has also launched a pilot programme for teachers, trainers and companies who are interested in mobility outside of the EU. This has received a lot of interest from companies. In addition, the Danish PIU programme has many projects that work with employers and unions. In contrast, in the Netherlands all companies that receive students must be certified and students can find out more information about employers (as well as other information) on a 'market place.' While there are often perceptions about involving employers, employers are often sending their own employees on mobility therefore there is a need for VET actors to understand the mobility activities employers are involved in as well as possibly recognising employees' achieved learning outcomes in the future or providing wider frameworks for logistical support.

Thirdly, participants were asked if it would be possible to include a compulsory period of mobility within teacher training. It was highlighted that in Germany, teachers are keen to participate to mobility projects, but they usually lack the capacity to be able to participate. Therefore, mobility for staff could be integrated into initial teacher training so that it would not impact their workload.

Lastly, participants discussed how non Erasmus+ programmes can be identified and tracked. This is very difficult to do in a number of Member States however three countries have established some practices to do this. In Finland the National Agency collects information from VET providers involved in Erasmus+ however they do not have information on schemes carried out by private companies. A similar method is used in the Netherlands as they too have information on the schools involved in projects carried out outside of Erasmus+ but they do not have information on schemes carried out by private institutions. Lastly, in Denmark as part of the PIU scheme they collect detailed statistics on VET mobility and the involvement of employers.

Using ECVET for long-duration mobility: Results from the Annual Forum in Bulgaria

Anette Curth, ECVET Secretariat, presented the outcomes from this year's Annual ECVET Forum in Sofia, Bulgaria. The event was attended by 153 participants from 30 different countries³. The objective of the event was to discuss the use of ECVET for long-duration mobility and to promote long-term mobility. The first plenary presentation featured the Danish PIU mobility scheme, while the second

³ 26 EU Member States, as well as FYROM, IS, NO and TR. Participants included 53 National ECVET experts; 47 VET provider representatives; 17 representatives of employers and employers' organisations; 19 ECVET Users' Group members and 4 EU-level stakeholders. 59 participants declared themselves as ECVET 'newcomers', i.e. indicating that they had less than two years' experience with ECVET.

plenary presentation featured the Airbus company with its M4AA mobility scheme (Mobility for Airbus Apprentices, carried out in Germany and France).

One of the core topics discussed at the Annual Forum were the key features of long-duration mobility, and how they differ from short-term mobility. Long-duration mobility requires more planning and a step-by-step approach. VET providers need to be aware of the type and volume of learning outcomes learners can achieve in specific companies. It is furthermore important to establish a specific legal framework for defining the tasks and responsibilities of schools and companies through QA mechanisms. One idea presented was that of a common 'pool' of learning outcomes.

The ECVET tools MoU and Learning Agreement are considered to play an especially important role in the context of long-duration mobility too. One of the emerging recommendations was that they should be required for validation and recognition purposes. While they are considered generally fit for long-duration mobility, a need for simplification was identified. The learning agreement could be more tailored to the needs of the training company, a learning plan should be drawn up by the learners on the basis on their personal needs. Documents should be as individual as possible and should be digitalized, wherever possible.

Support to learners in long-duration mobility should in particular incorporate/consider the following aspects:

- VET mobility concerns a younger population than mobility in HE; which creates certain obstacles to social integration and legal issues (for minors).
- The importance of involving parents especially in those instances when potential mobility participants are younger than 18 years old.
- For a learner, it can be advantageous to 'try out' short-term mobility before starting out on long-term mobility.
- The importance of organising pre-departure training to better prepare students for a new learning and living environment, in terms of expectations, practical information, travel arrangements and money management.
- Arriving learners should be supported by learners' organisations that organise social activities (like Erasmus Student Network in HE).
- Platforms for the exchange of experience between learners should be established - former mobile learners' experience can be a valuable asset.

ECVET and Qualification Frameworks – Results from the PLA in Scotland, UK

Frances Thom, ECVET Secretariat, presented a recap of the recent PLA that took place in Glasgow, Scotland, and was attended by 26 delegates from 15 different countries.

The PLA's key objective was to look at using ECVET principles and NQFs to facilitate the delivery of the Upskilling Pathways (UP) initiative, in particular to (a) examine practical approaches to linking units and partial qualifications to NQFs; and (b) explore approaches for using ECVET principles to design flexible programmes that support low-skilled adults. The use of ECVET principles can thereby support all three UP steps.

Frances then briefly summarized the country examples featured at the PLA, from UK - Scotland, Norway, Ireland, Poland and Hungary. The PLA also included a site visit to Glasgow Clyde College where teachers presented four examples of their flexible unitised provision, i.e. short tailored programmes that serve a specific purpose or target group.

Discussions during the workshops concluded that the use of learning outcomes might facilitate the delivery of skills assessment and the development and delivery of tailored learning provision for adult (UP step 1 and 2). However, with validation and recognition (UP step 3) was considered a more complex endeavor, implying additional costs and barriers in relation to what was permissible within each country's NQF and credit systems.

The PLA recommended the following further action:

- Encouraging further cross-fertilisation of information and ideas between policy actors and practitioners;
- Considering using terminology such as ‘components’ to avoid confusion due to different Member States interpretations of ‘units’, or ‘partial qualifications’.
- Developing the use of a more common and user-friendly language when discussing achievements and accumulation of learning with learners, employers and individuals/bodies not directly involved in NQF or ECVET.
- Bringing 'credit' back into the discussion for the next round of qualification policies.

ECVET work programme for 2018 and 2019

There are no further ECVET meetings foreseen for 2018, therefore the ECVET Network Meeting is the last scheduled meeting for this year.

The dates for the meetings and events in 2019 have been agreed with the European Commission, but the topics still need to be discussed. The table below outlines the proposed 2019 Work Programme.

Table 1.1 ECVET Work Programme 2019

Date	Type of meeting and location	Location	Notes
21 – 22 March	24th Users' Group meeting,	TBC	This may include a Study Visit, tbc
16 – 17 May	PLA1	Estonia	Topic TBC
20 – 21 June	Annual Forum	The Netherlands	ECVET for Lifelong Learning, TBC
19 – 20 September	PLA 2	Croatia	Topic TBC
7 – 8 November	ECVET Network meeting (inc.25 th UGM)	Brussels, Belgium	

National ECVET work programmes for 2018 and beyond

National coordinators were invited to say a few words about their national ECVET work programmes for 2018 and beyond and highlight any interesting events or work they are, or will be, undertaking. The table below provides an overview of what contributions were received.

Table 1.2 Highlighted National ECVET Activities

Country	Activities
Latvia	Under the Erasmus+ KA2 framework, a project, “ECVET-Enterprise” (http://qualityplacements.eu/), has been recently concluded in which people responsible for VET content, VET providers and employers have worked together on the implementation of ECVET in work-based learning. Furthermore, for the first time ECVET Info material has been prepared by Latvian ECVET team in the Latvian language, webinar training will be piloted, recorded and will be subsequently available online. In 2019 regional seminars will take place to raise awareness of ECVET.
UK	The UK team of ECVET experts are going to explore how people are implementing ECVET in practice and what steps need to be taken to help them, as well as proactively reaching out to employers.
Hungary	An international PLA was organised with the aim of exploring how international mobility practices using the learning outcomes approach can be applied to national apprenticeships. The different stakeholders shared practices on how the learning outcome approach can improve the quality of international mobility and beyond that improve national apprenticeships in as well. In addition, a tripartite national PLA is organised each year. In 2018, this explored learning habits of ‘Generation Z’, the competencies required by automation and digitalisation and how Erasmus+ projects, especially ErasmusPRO can enhance these competencies. Further activities will focus on the assessment and evaluation of learning outcomes as well as the

	further promotion of ErasmusPRO. Information on how to apply learning outcomes in mobility projects has also been published in English.
Poland	The National Agency will continue to promote ECVET to schools as well as advice sessions and one to one meetings. The Polish team is going to test the validation of learning outcomes through workshops and seminars. They will develop a publication on the work done on learning outcomes and the state of play of the implementation of ECVET principles in Poland. The National Agency are testing the use of webinars for delivering virtual training.
The Netherlands	There is ongoing work on how users use ECVET. By the end of 2018, a publication will be available on the outcomes of this work and the results will be disseminated. Current policy discussions are focusing around VET systems and the recognition of prior learning.
Austria	A conference will take place on 22 November 2018 on 'Higher VET.' The conference will explore the current state of play of higher VET in Europe and aims to achieve a common understanding of what higher VET is across Europe and explore future actions.

Day 2 – welcome

Anette Curth welcomed participants to the second day of the Network meeting and explained that the day would focus on practical issues.

A short icebreaker activity around 'Being an ECVET expert' explored what it means to individuals (who are directly involved e.g. as national ECVET experts or National Coordinator) or what it should mean for those who are not involved as national ECVET experts. Both groups agreed that ECVET experts act as a bridge between policy and practice and are able to disseminate information (including examples of good practice) to those on the ground. It was also mentioned that ECVET experts are seen as an 'ambassador' for ECVET. Those directly involved see ECVET experts as having an important role in supporting the developments in their country as well as having the advantage of being able to cooperate with others and offer insights to policy makers and practitioners about other areas of VET.

Training and support for ECVET Experts on long duration mobility (ErasmusPRO)

The Danish PIU scheme and what training and support they offer for ECVET experts was presented by Lars Møller Bentsen, National ECVET Coordinator, and Søren Kristensen, Danish ECVET expert.

The PIU scheme was introduced in 1992 to address the difficulties apprentices had to find training places in companies. At the same time, German companies were facing a lack of apprentices. It is financed by Danish employers (through a training levy). PIU is a legal framework that allows Danish apprentices to complete their company placements abroad. An apprentice can theoretically complete his or her entire in-company training in a company abroad and only do the school-based parts in Denmark in-between. Placements can be done worldwide, and there are approximately 1 600 participants per year (i.e. it is quite a substantial programme in the national context). The average duration of placement periods abroad is six to seven months and the age range of participants ranges from 18 to over 40 years old. Most participants are in their 20s.

Funding is guaranteed upon presentation of the training agreement/contract. Placements must be remunerated according to pay scales in the host country. PIU covers for travel and accommodation, but apprentices depend on a remuneration to live on, PIU does not cover this. If the apprentice does not have an apprenticeship contract with an employer in Denmark, it is up to the home school to decide whether a particular training place in a company abroad is appropriate. The placement will then be recognised as an integral part of the respective VET qualification. The approximate cost of the programme amounts to EUR 5 million per year.

The placements need to be remunerated. This is NOT first and foremost a matter of money. The two key reasons for this requirement are as follows. Firstly, there is a political aspect to it, in that they do not want to send their apprentices abroad to work for free. This is also to avoid any competition with national apprenticeship schemes. Denmark therefore insists that all placements are remunerated. The host country remuneration might be smaller than what learners would receive in Denmark, but there

are subsidies available to compensate for this. Secondly, this refers to the coverage through the employer's liability insurance. Separate insurance, if no employment contract is in place, could be very costly for the learner.

PIU coordinators form a network of experts. The key challenge for these experts lies in the identification of appropriate training places abroad. This, however, is something that is not easy to train/prepare for. The following aspects are considered particularly important in training and supporting the experts:

- Creating platforms for knowledge sharing. There are different types of meetings organised, such as an annual national gathering of experts, regional network meetings, or specific workshops.
- Knowledge provision: initiating targeted studies on specific issues (e.g. insurance, taxation, evaluations).
- Information material: to IVET learners and Danish and foreign employers.
- Templates for Learning Agreements and assessment forms.
- Support for formulation of learning objectives, including translations.
- Developing pedagogical practices (e.g. preparation).

Back in 1992, the vision was to reach 6 000 apprentices participating in PIU per year. In 2018, this figure still stands at 1 600 apprentices per year. This indicates that it has been difficult to significantly increase these numbers, and challenges still remain. It takes time for learners to get into the mindset of going abroad and to spark their interest. Many are still hesitant towards engaging in long-duration mobility.

As for future plans, they would like to work even more on supporting experts and practitioners in formulating learning objectives for long-duration mobility in a way so that they are understood, both by the learners and companies in particular.

Discussion on the PIU scheme

It was asked if the PIU scheme has any 'non-returners' however this has not arisen as yet. Some participants may wish to stay abroad once they have completed their qualification but many participants decide to stay in Denmark. In the case of zoo keepers, there are very few zoos in Denmark so there is a shortage of training placements. As a result, learners need to go abroad to zoos all over Europe to do their training.

Participants do not lag behind or have a larger chance of failing their exams upon their return. Their placements are fully recognised as part of their qualification and as a result, they do not need to do any additional training when returning. However, there is some self-selection in this as only those who are performing well will be encouraged to participate in a placement abroad.

In terms of planning their curriculum, the home school set the pre-conditions for placements and work with the host to ensure that these are filled. The host company is required to provide a description of tasks that the apprentice will perform abroad. Students are usually aged over 18 so they do not require an accompanying person.

In most cases, apprentices return to Denmark to take their final exams. There are some pilot projects with Germany where new approaches are being trialed. For example, in one project learners have additional school-based training in Germany and then obtain a dual qualification. In another project with Germany in the border region, apprentices only attend school in Denmark but will still be able to obtain a dual qualification.

There are sometimes language issues. However most apprentices will go to countries where they speak the language (e.g. English, German and Spanish). More than 20% of the total number of 1 600 apprentices go to Germany every year. Others go to the US, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand. The Danish experience is that language may be a barrier, especially at the beginning but learners often acclimatize after a while and cope well with the challenge.

There are very, very few dropouts as usually learners are really committed to undertaking a placement abroad. Even if there are problems, the learners tend to remain in placement. If there are dropouts, it

is mostly due to family issues. However, sometimes issues may arise when participants are in placement however these are few as trust and confidence is built up with the company and very precise information is provided on what training is required.

Long duration mobility and ECVET Experts discussions

Participants discussed what challenges ECVET experts face regarding long-duration mobility and what can be done to tackle these challenges and what type of support is needed and for whom.

The launch of ErasmusPRO is a game changer as it is expected that there will be an increase in applications in future years for long duration mobility. At the moment there are few countries with experience of working with long duration mobility however the National coordinators are anticipating a rise in questions and interest in this area in the future. For example, it is anticipated that there will be questions around the selection of suitable candidates for long duration mobility as well as the validation and recognition processes. In addition, there is a question that whether curricula could be adapted to long duration mobility.

Participants highlighted that there are a number of approaches that can be taken to address these challenges. On a practitioner level it is important to develop cooperation and trust with partners. Where possible, sending organisation should visit companies and explain to them what is required so that there is clarity around the placement objects. Sending organisations need to closely monitor the collection of evidence of learning outcomes. For example, learners can be invited to complete the development of diaries, videos and log books but they require clear guidance and training.

On a National Agency and wider level, ECVET documents can provide useful tools to help to continue the tasks between mobility and processes. These documents can be adapted to national levels into guidance documents. For example, in the Netherlands a handbook on long duration mobility is being developed and this will be available in 2019.

On an ECVET expert level, some countries continue to offer one-to-one meetings and workshops with practitioners (for example, in Macedonia). In the UK, they have established a 'Community of Practice' with the Mobility Charter Holders. They hold two meetings a year with this group and long duration mobility is a key topic. Participants also stressed that ECVET experts have a variety of backgrounds so it is key to use their strengths and networks so that their skills can be maximised.

ECVET Experts activities to support project promoters and employers with long duration mobility

Nicola Poultney, UK National Agency, and Paul Guest, a UK ECVET expert, presented their recent experience of working with project promoters and employers on the topic of long duration mobility.

In the UK, there has been a lot of interested in ErasmusPRO with 11 organisations involved in this at the moment. The team of 12 ECVET experts looked at enhanced assessment and recognition via the PEARL transnational activity, in 2017, and this led to some questions around how employers are involved in long duration mobility and what are the barriers to their involvement.

This resulted in a national event, called SEED⁴, being held in June 2018. The event aimed to look at employer experiences and engagement in long duration mobility as well as other external partnership working and to improve the ECVET experts' understanding of the employer perspective. However, it was very challenging to reach out to employers, even via funded KA1 projects, and the ECVET experts found that workplace challenges and day-to-day work is often the top priority for employers, particularly SMEs, and therefore attending full day events can be challenging.

The discussions at the event found that there are many challenges that exist for learners, employers, VET providers and regulatory authorities. For learners, the challenges can include the paperwork, language, financial resources and administration (e.g. for some learners they might even need to gain

⁴ See Issue 32 of the ECVET Magazine for further details of this event: http://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/system/files/magazines/en/ecvet_mag_32.pdf

passports). For employers, the challenges include the (lack of) predictability of the workplace, issues around payments and the cost of losing a worker (for those sending learners abroad) and practical issues around tax and insurance. For VET providers they may lack institutional support to be involved in mobility activities as well as trust and staff capacity issues around assessment and scheduling is important too so that it is not detrimental to the curricula delivery. Lastly, for regulatory authorities there are ongoing issues around quality assurance, documentation requirements as well as standards being up-held. The event highlighted that there are often some perceived barriers and all challenges are not necessarily fixed but importantly, project promoters are committed to addressing workable solutions.

The UK ECVET experts will take forward the results and they intend to deliver more targeted regional events in 2019, including through attendance at meetings and conferences where employers might already be present and through the use of existing employer networks and associations. Importantly, this event highlighted that it is important to focus on what practitioners and employers really need rather than what they are perceived to need.

Discussion on supporting project promoters and employers

Participants highlighted that more traditional ways of contacting employers often are not successful, therefore National Agencies and teams of ECVET experts need to find new and innovative methods to engage with employers. Some suggestions on how to do this included:

- Tailoring the content and the duration of the events around employers' needs and availability.
 - For example, steering away from day-long events (09.00 – 17.00) and moving towards shorter events or inputs (e.g. breakfast or lunchtime events).
- Sharing contacts and networks between ECVET Experts, external stakeholders and mobility projects to reach out to employers, and where possible to create a 'snowball effect';
- Attending the same events and conferences as employers; and
- Creating easier and more user-friendly messages and using jargon-free language.

Any other business

No further issues were raised.

Closing remarks

João Santos closed the Network Meeting by highlighting that the current challenge of the VET system is to enable and equip learners with the technical and soft skills they need to be resilient to the changing nature of the labour market.

João Santos highlighted that there is some uncertainty due to the forthcoming elections of the European Parliament, which could lead to a change of the current political panorama. Brexit also will bring changes in terms of budget available for the Multi Annual Financial Framework. However, discussions on a new strategic vision on Education & Training in Europe (following ET 2020) and the role of VET are ongoing.

The main principles of ECVET and the work undertaken over the last 10 years remain relevant and will be taken forward in the future. The ECVET principles of transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes play a key role in enabling VET systems to be flexible enough to tackle the challenges emerging from the labour market. In particular, the concept of (units of) learning outcomes is crucial in a lifelong learning perspective for up-skilling and re-skilling. In addition, ECVET principles are fundamental in assuring quality, especially in light of the anticipated increase of participants in the new Erasmus mobility programme. In terms of VET developments, the studies presented during the ECVET Network meeting will end in 2018 and the outcomes on the 'Changing nature and role of VET' study, delivered by Cedefop, will be presented during EU Skills Week in November (7/11, Vienna). All three studies presented during the meeting will deliver valuable information and evidence. This will feed into the discussions on how to move on in the future.



At the moment, the European Commission is closely working with the ACVT and will continue to do so in 2019. This discussion also includes the future of ECVET and EQAVET. Furthermore, there may be a ministerial meeting to develop a new communique on VET, which would incorporate the new framework. This should be expected for late 2019, or early 2020.

Annex 1 Participants list



23rd meeting of the ECVET Users Group - 3rd ECVET Network meeting

11 and 12 October 2018

Participants' list

Nr	First Name	Last Name	Organisation	ECVET Function(s)	Country
1	Audrey	Abela	NCFHE		Malta
2	Hans	Almgren	National Agency for Education	Users' Group Member	Sweden
3	Angeliki	Athanasouli	EOPPEP - National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocation Guidance		Greece
4	Laura	Austen	Léargas		Ireland
5	Hanna	Autere	National Agency for Education	Users' Group Member	Finland
6	Monika	Auzinger	3s Unternehmensberatung GmbH	ECVET Secretariat	EU
7	Aleksandra	Balchan-Wisniewska	Foundation for the Development of the Education System	ECVET Expert	Poland
8	Lars Møller	Bentsen	Agency for Science and Higher Education	ECVET National coordinator	Denmark
9	Michaela	Bogdanová	SAAC - NA Erasmus+ for Education and Training Sector		Slovakia
10	Koen	Bois d'Enghien	European Commission	European Commission	EU
11	Enrico	Bressan	Business Europe	Users' Group Member	EU