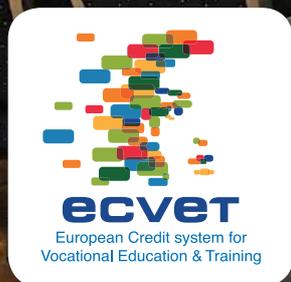


magazine

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The ECVET Magazine is produced with support from the European Commission's DG for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion. The views expressed in it do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Commission, which cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of this information.

Editorialby the
European Commission**Miguel B. Santos****ECVET and ErasmusPRO**

This is the first year that Erasmus+ has a specific activity for long duration mobility, called ErasmusPRO. In the next three years, ErasmusPRO is expected to support around 50,000 placements abroad of European VET learners and recent graduates. The work placement frameworks should last from 3 to 12 months. The call is currently open until 1 February 2018.

This ambitious goal will present tough challenges, but there are opportunities for significant added value for learners, VET providers and companies. Long term mobility boosts learners' employability through new

professional skills and linguistic competence, while sustained partnerships between organisations trigger innovation and encourage development of improved teaching methods and learning materials.

It should be noted that ErasmusPRO won't involve any more complex procedures: applicant organisations can send one single application for all their projects, including short and long mobility projects. As well, the activity envisages staff's advanced preparatory visits (APV) to organise *in loco* the learners' mobility period with companies and VET institutions.

In this sense the contribution and usefulness of ECVET is decisive and highly desirable.

According to the ECVET Recommendation the application of principles and instruments is the key element for a successful mobility. The first set of recommendations clearly states a mission to “*promote the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (‘ECVET’)... in order to facilitate trans-national mobility and the recognition of learning outcomes in VET and borderless lifelong learning*”. In the framework of ErasmusPRO, the use of ECVET elements (e.g. learning outcomes

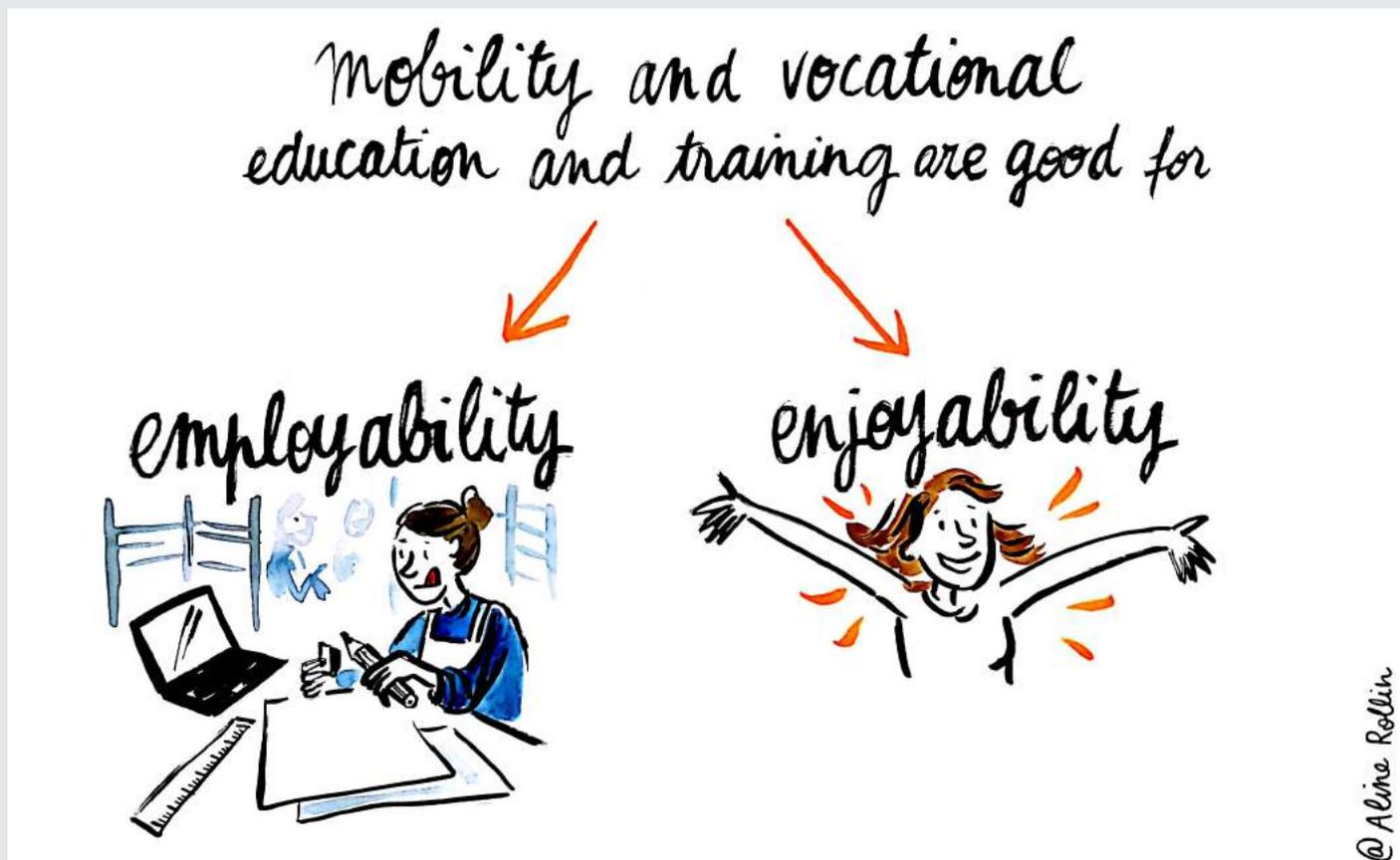
organised in units, transfer and accumulation of units of learning outcomes, partnerships, ECVET points, Learning agreement, Memorandum of Understanding) can prove very valuable in the preparation, monitoring and follow-up of the learning period abroad.

For the ECVET Community (Users Group Members, National Experts, trainers, VET providers and companies, each at their level) it is a major responsibility to cooperate with applicants and National Agencies to turn this new activity into a reality for learners and a successful European achievement.

I therefore encourage all the ECVET Community to endorse and facilitate ErasmusPRO in their countries in the next couple of months. ErasmusPRO and ECVET have a common objective: helping vocational learners develop the right skills. 50 000 in work placement abroad until 2020 – let’s make it real. ■

Miguel B. Santos

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The Annual ECVET Forum 2017: The role of ECVET to inspire action towards more flexible vocational pathways

19-20 October 2017, St. Paul's Bay, Malta

This year's Annual ECVET Forum brought together 150 policy makers, National Coordinators, National ECVET experts and labour market stakeholders. From 19-20 October in Malta these experts met to discuss how ECVET can be used to inspire national reforms or other measures towards more flexible vocational pathways.

System changes have taken place since 2009, as shown in the 2015 Cedefop monitoring report on implementing ECVET across EU, EFTA and EEA countries:

- 16 countries/regions have credit systems compatible with ECVET;
- 4 countries are working towards ECVET-compatible systems;
- 9 countries are currently testing one or more ECVET technical components; and
- 7 countries do not have credit systems and ECVET-related initiatives are at project level rather than system-level¹.

22 presentations from 18 countries dealt with these reforms which were then discussed in two series of five workshops.

Preparing the future of VET in Europe 2020-30

Hélène Hamers from Cedefop opened the conference by presenting the first findings from a Cedefop research study on 'The changing role of VET in Europe'. This study seeks to capture the developments and changes in vo-



ccational education and training during the past 20 years (1995 – 2015) in order to gain insights on how it might develop in the future.

VET has changed substantially during the last two decades, and is still changing. One can see that more and more school-based training is focused on practical learning and that VET provision is more diversified. There is better permeability towards higher education, new VET pathways for adults,

and an increased use of learning outcomes approaches. At the same time, one can observe the lines blurring between IVET and CVET as well as VET and general education, dissolving the traditional distinction between education and training subsectors.

Key challenges of the future will encompass both demographic aspects and technological changes. Demographic aspects including an ageing workforce, together with a declining

¹ ECVET in Europe Monitoring Report (Cedefop, 2015).

population of young people, and migration. Several countries undertake considerable efforts to make VET more attractive for young learners, e.g. by creating permeable pathways towards higher education. Technological changes can make it necessary for people to re-skill in order to qualify for changed job profiles. Skills systems need to become more flexible in responding to changing skills and labour market needs. Some jobs will become obsolete, while new ones will emerge in the future. This means that the anticipation of skills needs will become more and more important.



ECVET has a role to play at various levels, as it calls for the structuring of qualifications into units of learning outcomes that can be transferred and accumulated to other contexts. Smaller specialisation units within a qualification might allow faster adaptation of the education and training offer to changing labour market needs and technologies, and transfer and accumulation allow for an individual to adapt more quickly to changing labour market demands.

ECVET in Malta

The host country, Malta, can be considered one of the early adopters of ECVET. Godfrey Vella, Chairman of the National Commission of Further and Higher Education (NCFHW) in Malta pointed out that the implementation of ECVET in Malta has progressed a lot: The Maltese Qualifications Framework (MQF) has been mapped to the EQF by the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE), who is responsible for ECVET. Programmes designed at levels 1 to 4 use ECVET and programmes at level 5 and above use ECTS. Within the Maltese system, one credit is the equivalent to 25 hours of learning time and five hours of this must be real contact

or in a practical situation. Programmes are designed by percentages: 40% should consist of practical competences, 40% underpinning knowledge (theory), and 20% key competence ('transferable skills').

ECVET has been introduced into VET subjects for students in secondary education (ages 11 – 16) in the topics of hospitality, health and social care, IT and agribusiness. These courses have all been designed with learning outcomes and the programmes have ECVET principles at their heart.

ECVET is used for mobility too in Malta. Given the size and nature of the country, it is important for learners to have the opportunity to be mobile and for their learning to be recognised in other geographical contexts. Institutions in Malta use the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and Learning Agreement (LA). The LA must state the LOs, duration, quality and responsibilities for different parties. The LA is also used in lifelong learning so that learning can be modular. The Europass templates, specifically the Diploma Supplement and Learning Transcript, are widely used by institutions in Malta

so that the learning can be recognised and 'carried' to other countries. The Institute of Tourism Studies in Malta have a 'scientific committee' in place that incorporates the wider stakeholders in program development. The 'scientific committee' is institutionalised via legislation and brings together representatives from the Institute of Tourism Studies, airports, hotels and cruise liners. They meet 3 to 4 times a year. During each scientific committee meeting, they review the courses, credits, LO and competences required by each learner. The stakeholders are aware of ECVET terminology and ensure that they meet the needs of the tourism industry.

Moreover, in Malta, the scope of ECVET has been extended to the validation of non-formal and informal learning: an area that is complex, but of particular concern. As a next step, it will be important to more actively show labour market stakeholders what ECVET is and how it can be used. All stakeholders need to understand that the purpose of ECVET is not limited to education and training; it also offers value by making learning outcomes visible to employers.



ECVET in Finland

Kirsi Lounela from Vocational Education Centre Sedu presented the main features of the comprehensive VET reform that took place in Finland.

The underlying principle of the new Finnish VET system is what the students learn and what they are able to do, not where and how the learning is acquired. Flexibility, optionality and validation are the cornerstones of the Finnish system and they are fully compatible with ECVET principles. Units are created with learning outcomes and each unit is assessed in working life situations by VET providers. Qualifications are based on units, and individuals can complete a whole qualification or use the unit approach to update their skills. This is most often used when an employer wants an employee to update their skills / knowledge areas and it is helpful for migrants or other people who are facing life challenges (e.g. students who are at risk of dropping out) as they can study small units over time. Students are assessed by VET teachers and a person from industry.

Guidance and support is required for students to guide them through the different possible pathways. This is available in a variety of different places via the workplace and/or school. Coaching and counselling is an influential part of teacher training and it is an accepted part of their role. Individual learning plans are created so that learners can start to learn whenever they want to. They are individually tailored to each student. Prior learning is recognised so that the individual learning plan can allow the student to acquire the missing competences. Students can have LO assessed and recognised no matter where they are gained. LO are not based on time spent but on the competencies gained. Recognition of prior learning became law in Finland in 2016.

Using ECVET in long term mobility in Malta

Two Maltese students from the tourism industry reported on what they learned during a one year international internship in London. Job descriptions, learning agreements and job contracts were used, and the Maltese Institute of Tourism Studies checked in advance that the learning outcomes requested by the school were covered by the host institutions (i.e. companies). The students highlighted that the advantages of using ECVET relate to having more structured system (in terms of required learning outcomes) and improvement in the quality of the internships.

From the students' point of view, their main gains from the internships were maturity ("one learns to speak up more, open up more"), and a broader perspective, as working in Malta and working abroad refers to different standards. One student described the one-year internship (in an advertising company) as a fantastic experience as she had the opportunity to do various jobs in different departments. Although it was challenging in the beginning:

"it is very difficult to start when you do not know what is expected from you", at the end of the internship she felt "grown-up", with a stronger sense of responsibility. The other student did her internship performing different tourism services. She confirmed that the main competences acquired included an increased sense of independence and an ability to solve problems.

In relation to the question, *how did you know that you are progressing against the learning agreement*, both students responded that there was a formal procedure – they had to submit an appraisal report every 2-3 months to the ITS Board and discuss with mentors what needed to be improved and what was done well.

Experiences from Vocational Education Centre Sedu suggest that there are four types of learners who have individual needs:

- **‘Sprinters’** – they have prior learning recognised, they are motivated to speed up and already have lots of skills. Practitioners have an important role in identifying the gaps in their learning;
- **‘Orienteers’**- these are often searching for specific check points but have many challenges in life that affect the possibility for learning and their ability to meet the qualification requirements. Short term learning mobility often helps these students to find their pathway;
- **Duathlonists** – these types of learners often combine study and work;
- **‘Cross-country skiers’** – these learners have a hands-on work based approach.

The national tools in Finland as well as ECVET help to support these different types of learners as learning is flexible and meets several needs. Moreover, the new VET law brings together learning opportunities for adult and young learners, and boundaries between I-VET and C-VET are dissolving. ECVET has helped to implement this approach via different tools and approaches and

it has helped to promote and support its importance.

Workshops on how ECVET can help to boost employability

In workshops related to five different topics, other countries also presented examples of how they used ECVET to make VET learning pathways more flexible and boost learners’ employability.

Workshop 1 - Boosting employability by ... designing qualifications in terms of clearly defined groups of learning outcomes

This workshop had four presentations of national reform initiatives of VET-systems that worked with a design involving the division of qualifications into smaller entities (units or modules). Each of these examples had a slightly different main focus which pinpointed some of the advantages of this approach in terms of boosting employability by ensuring a more flexible and updated VET-provision.

In *Latvia*, a recent reform has seen the introduction of a modularized VET-system, where a qualification is now composed of 15-20 modules, each of which is divided into smaller components. The modules thus consist of a core of mandatory components, a

list of optional components and finally some free choice components. The division into modules with “optional” and “free choice” components allows for more individualized learning pathways within a qualification, and offers better opportunities for vocational schools to adapt curricula to local and regional labour markets.

In *Malta*, a credit-based system consisting of units allows a high degree of permeability between VET, higher education (HE) and general education. One (1) unit corresponds to 25 hours of learning, and these may be grouped or self-standing (self-standing units are known as “awards”). A learner may thus transfer relevant units acquired in one context to another, which allows him or her to move seamlessly within the education and training system, facilitating educational choices and pathways.

In *Croatia*, current efforts to modernize the VET-system have resulted in a unit-based structure, and so far 800 units have been developed for a total of 19 qualifications. The reform – which wasn’t guided by ECVET, but turned out to be fully compatible with this – has brought Croatian VET closer to the demands of the labour market, as the unit-structure has made it much easier to liaise with employers to update contents of VET, as this can be done on a unit-by-unit basis rather than having to deal with the full curriculum.

In the *French-speaking part of Belgium*, VET-qualifications have been structured into modules to allow more flexibility in what was formerly a very rigid system. Previously, learners in VET were tested at the end of the year and passed or failed according to the outcomes of one exam. This meant that learners who failed the first year had to repeat the whole year, and thus delay their entry on to the labour market. By dividing qualifications into smaller entities (5-6 modules over a duration of two years)



which are tested individually over the year, the problem of learners having to repeat a year has been resolved.

The discussions in the group revolved around two basic challenges associated with designing VET-qualifications in groups of learning outcomes. The first of these concerned the ideal size of these entities, as some countries operated with a high number of smaller units, whereas others preferred larger modules (e.g. in the case of Denmark, this meant just two modules for each qualification). The second challenge was concerned with the practical difficulties associated with organising teaching in a flexible system with many smaller components and individualized pathways, as this could make it difficult to form classes of a size that is economically and pedagogically viable.

Workshop 2 - Boosting employability by ... assessment of individual groups of learning outcomes and documentation of the results

This workshop started with a brief outline on how ECVET has succeeded in creating a common language between the different stakeholders involved in assessment: 'units of learning outcomes' now seems to be a shared concept. Four countries gave insight to

their experiences as well as challenges they have faced.

Slovenia is in the process of designing assessment in apprenticeship programmes. It is seen as important to involve chambers in the process of assessment and also in developing a system of monitoring students' performance (during on-the-job training). There are also plans to integrate the assessment related to apprenticeships within the existing unified final assessment (of school-based VET model). In formative assessment a priority will be set on the communication between student, mentor and teacher (this is still work in progress).

In *Estonia*, educational reforms were carried out in the last years which strengthened the link between education and the labour market. One of the major difficulties with assessment of learning outcomes was that while teachers intend to perform formative assessment, they still use summative approaches; the transition will take time. In terms of documentation, graduates are provided with transcripts of records.

The unit-based approach was recently introduced in *Bulgaria* (upon

amendment of the VET Act in the last 3 years). The model of units of learning outcomes used by the so-called State Educational Standards includes assessment tools and assessment criteria. However, as in the case of *Estonia*, it was confirmed that training teachers (as well as other stakeholders) to use the approach will take a lot of time.

In the *Czech Republic*, the reform of the national VET system includes a proposal to involve ECVET. One important issue concerns the introduction of 'partial qualifications' in the Czech educational system, which may save time for the learner who aims at acquiring a professional qualification. This is based on the concept of units of learning outcomes that are separately assessed. It was highlighted that the acquisition of partial qualifications (for example, during on-the-job training) works better at bigger companies as they have a higher degree of specialisation. In comparison, for smaller companies, an apprentice would need more holistic knowledge – a combination of several partial qualifications. Quality assurance of assessment is secured mainly through the accreditation of assessment institutions.

In the group discussions, the question about common language and assessment was raised. While the involvement of employers in the assessment was generally appreciated by everybody, it was also stated that in school teachers assess students according to what they have learned; and in the company supervisors assess them according to what students have done. It was highlighted that still there is a need to explain to company supervisors what learning outcomes are as they think in terms of products and benefits.

A representative from SKODA explained that a certificate makes it easier for a graduate first starting with the company; i.e. a certificate makes the person employable. However, once the gradu-





ate has entered, the quality assurance is on the spot where a person shows what he/she is able to do. According to some workshop participants, a VET-school must prepare the student for all types of possible employers; on the other hand, big companies may ask schools for the development of specific curricula. For example, SKODA has its own vocational school, which is state certified (covers 60% of the national curriculum) with SKODA defines the remaining 40%.

It was also discussed that assessment methods need to be adapted depending on whether students are young people or adults, or persons with migration background. For example, if assessment is based on a written portfolio, what is assessed is the writing skills of the person, not the practical skills. A combination of assessment methods would be the best solution.

Workshop 3 – Boosting employability by ... accumulating groups of learning outcomes to achieve a full qualification

The ECVET recommendation acknowledges that learning takes place in different countries and contexts (formal as well as non-formal and informal). Ideally, units of learning outcomes from

these different learning contexts would be accounted for when accumulating the full set of learning outcomes for a certain qualification. The processes for recognition and accumulation must respect national (or regional) legislation.

In *Ireland*, a (full) qualification can be achieved solely through the accumulation of units or modules. The Common Award System (CAS) was introduced at levels 1 to 6 of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications. It replaced 5 previous systems and is based on having a common format (specification) and a credit system. It operates through the accumulation of minor awards to achieve a major award (full qualification). CAS is a system of national award standards which education and training providers use to develop their own programmes, which are submitted to QQI for validation and can be approved for up to 5 years. With this system, specific sectoral approaches are possible. Taking the example of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), award standards were developed at levels 4, 5 and 6. Providers have validated programmes for major awards and/or minor awards at these levels. During the piloting process, challenges were encountered, especially related to level 4. QQI will therefore review L4-6 award standards.

In *France*, new types of modules ('*blocs de compétences*') and related accumulation options were introduced as a tool to ensure more flexible career pathways. The concept of *blocs de compétences* (competence blocks) is seen as useful to ensure a diversity of access routes to vocational qualifications, and instrumental to ensure a continuum between initial and continuing vocational training. *Blocs de compétences* are therefore underpinned by legislation² and integrated into the National Register of Professional Qualifications (RNCP) in France.

In *Hungary*, accumulation is possible in both mobility and lifelong learning. In mobility, recognition operates at an institutional level based on the agreement between partner institutions about LOs and criteria and forms of assessment. Validation and recognition by the competent 'home' institution depend on the successful assessment of learning outcomes by the competent 'hosting' institution, in accordance with the agreed procedures and quality assurance criteria.

In lifelong learning in Hungary, modular approaches are in place, allowing learners to accumulate modules to achieve a given qualification. All the NVQR qualifications are built up from modules. The module is a component of the qualification which describes a coherent set of knowledge, skill, methodological, social and personal competence requirements.

It should be noted that the concept of learning outcomes is not used in Hungarian VET. Instead, they use professional and social methods as well as personal competences. There is a credit system, but it is not compulsory. The Act on Vocational Training declares the responsibility of head of VET institution for validation and recognition of learning outcomes acquired through work

2 Loi du 5 mars 2014 relative à la formation professionnelle, à l'emploi et à la démocratie sociale et le décret du 2 octobre 2014

experience or in any other non-formal and informal learning context. The goal is to give an individual the opportunity to 'formalise' the learning outcomes they possess.

A recent initiative in Sweden created 'VET packages'. As Sweden does not work with units of learning outcomes, this initiative aimed to develop smaller components of VET qualifications that can be recognised. The idea is to identify parts of existing VET courses that can lead to partial qualifications which later can be accumulated and lead to full qualifications.

The rationale for this initiative is that many young people are not eligible for admission to upper secondary education (almost 17% of the age cohort in 2016); many learners do not complete upper secondary education or achieve a full qualification; and there are high levels of newly arrived immigrants. This can potentially lead to a high number of low-skilled people, and high unemployment rates. At the same time, there is a shortage of qualified labour in Sweden.

The units are currently piloted in adult education (e.g. with migrants and refugees), and in introductory VET programmes (e.g. with youth not eligible

for upper secondary school). The packages will be presented to the Government in December, when further steps will be determined.

The workshop participants concluded that accumulation of groups of learning outcomes can indeed be a boosting factor to employability when full qualification is not required. Thus, the need for full qualification can be a barrier. Moreover, when individuals are aware of their competencies, they are in a better position to search and find a job that is suited to their skills. Involving employers in the assessment process can also boost employability. Yet, a common language and terminology (agreed between national stakeholders, and at international and national levels) is required to make it more efficient.

Some participants recognised that the ECVET community has been discussing these barriers for many years; ECVET needs the political will in order for the required changes to have a chance.

Workshop 4 – Boosting employability by ... transferring Groups of LO between different qualification systems

In this workshop, several options of transferring groups of learning outcomes between different qualification systems were discussed.

In Norway, ECVET has helped to determine and make flexible pathways possible and to create opportunities for transferable learning outcomes. The Norwegian government's ambition is to develop labour-market-relevant, up-to-date, flexible and customised training. They want flexible pathways for learners so that qualifications can adapt to learners' unique pace of learning or their life situations. The government also wants learning outcomes to be documented successfully so they can be transferred and validated across geographical boundaries. The involvement of all social partners in this process is key.

To do this they have promoted company-based training (by seeing the demands that employers have) and focused on targeting certain demographic groups – young adults, drop outs, those with low education or basic skills and those who do not have Norwegian language skills. The Ministry of Education has developed modules within units of learning outcomes. They have defined groups of learning outcomes within a qualification. Learning outcomes are assessed and documented. Each module is assessed, documented and validated. Learning outcomes can be achieved in different contexts; for example, many refugees have skills from non-formal and informal learning and they are given credit for this.

Every adult who has not finished their upper secondary school education has the right to gain qualifications for free. Recognition of prior learning is conducted in a four-phase process: guidance, mapping, assessment and documentation. Validation of non-formal and informal learning uses the same four phases and Europass can



help this process in terms of recording and documenting achievements and skills/competencies. Once an adult has achieved all required modules they can register their craft.

In *Italy*, a new law was introduced in 2012 establishing lifelong learning as a right. It was based on the concepts of transparency, recognition and accumulation and put importance on the learning contexts. In 2015, the 'Good School' reform was introduced. Its aim was to improve schools and to provide a direct link to the labour market. It also had implications for digitalisation in schools, to keep pace with the changing world, and to help teachers and students to identify needed skills.

ECVET has facilitated different pathways, units of learning outcomes as part of the qualification that is carried out in different settings (e.g. school and work place), and accumulation of different learning outcomes at different times. The objective for 2017 is to involve 1.5 million students in this initiative. 87% of schools have developed activities and 90% of students are involved.

In *Poland*, three reforms since 2009 have gradually introduced learning outcomes and units. An integrated qualification system was introduced, bringing together formal qualifications, regulated 'market' qualifications and 'non-formal' (not regulated) qualifications. The new law creates greater order within the field of qualifications, and a common terminology to support mutual trust and transferability. It also defines common approaches to market qualifications by establishing specific procedures and quality assurance rules, thus allowing comparability and transferability. Standards governing those institutions responsible for validation and articulation of market qualifications were introduced, and links to



the Polish Qualification Framework and qualification register were established.

Poland have trained key stakeholders so that they understand key terms. A dictionary has been developed and stakeholder events and seminars on NFIL and RPL have been organised; this will help ensure that qualifications can be recognised across Poland. The construction of market qualifications supports transferability as they are often smaller qualifications, which are more flexible and easier to achieve. They are made up of units of LOs and they all have standardised descriptions – units, PQF, validation, workload to achieve LOs. Qualification providers are encouraged to use units already available and to compare these to qualifications in different countries, thus making it easier to transfer.

In the *United Kingdom*, the PEARL project was started by the UK team of ECVET Experts as a series of information sharing events with other countries³. The aim was to look at how ECVET worked in practice across different countries. PEARL concluded that there is a need to extend the reach of VET mobility beyond the existing community, language is key, and continued support and guidance to

employers and all stakeholders is important. In addition, continued PLA activities and peer collaboration activities are important to share experiences and support ongoing and new practices. Knowledge and capacity are needed to make this happen, and the lack of political buy-in to ECVET in some countries makes ECVET hard to implement.

Following the presentations, participants discussed that transfer of prior learning makes sense not only for the individual learner, but also from a broader economic perspective. Unfortunately, there is often mistrust in the process from different parties. Flexibility and political will is important, particularly around the complementarity between different tools and products. Language is key when communicating with all stakeholders. Simplicity is important to ensure everyone speaks the same 'language'.

Learning outcomes could be simplified in the future – there is a dream for a 'universal' unit that all stakeholders can easily understand. Currently, transferable skills often need to be teased out of different units. Simplification is key to increase use and efficiency, and trust between partners is paramount.

³ See article in [ECVET Magazine No 29](#).

Workshop 5 – Boosting employability by ... involving labour market stakeholders in designing or updating qualifications

The ECVET recommendation invites Member States to ‘support the development of national and European partnerships and networks involving institutions and authorities responsible for qualifications and diplomas, VET providers, social partners and other relevant stakeholders dedicated to trialling, implementing and promoting ECVET’. It further asks to ensure that stakeholders have access to information and guidance for using ECVET.

In a mobility context this is important in view of developing units of learning outcomes for mobility projects – especially where there is a work-based learning component included that requires the placement of learners in companies.

In a lifelong learning context, this involves the development and update of qualifications. Stakeholder involvement in the design and update of modules and units of learning outcomes is a necessity to ensure VET systems respond adequately to the needs of the labour market. All VET systems have regulations in place for systematically reviewing and updating the content of qualifications. Labour market stakeholders are usually involved in this process, although to a different extent.

In *Romania*, the VET system is predominantly school-based. A reform is under way to ensure a higher percentage of work-based learning. Meanwhile, Romanian mobility providers often try to integrate work-based learning into mobility projects. Such projects have high participation rates in Romania, so there is a case for the development of bespoke tools to facilitate the collaboration between all parties involved.

An example of a mobility support tool is TRIALOG, a user-friendly application for mobile devices (smartphones and tablets), designed to support the communication between teachers, tutors and students before, during and after a mobility experience. The TRIALOG app has two main components: WBLT, a work based learning tool, and WBTT, a work based teaching tool. These two components are specifically designed to support the differing needs of students and teachers/tutors: while it helps students to fully benefit from their learning activity, it helps teachers and tutors across countries to collaborate effectively. TRIALOG aims to support the whole mobility process: the preparation before the mobility, the agreement of learning outcomes during the mobility and the visibility of the skills acquired by students during the internship. As such, it helps to prepare the recognition of learning outcomes.

In *Portugal*, a project was developed that focused on involving employers in the training of learners in the textile sector. A partnership with the three biggest associations in the textile sector was set up. The textile sector is a major industry in Portugal, and is very relevant to the Portuguese economy. However, production declined in the last 20 years and many qualified workers left the sector, leading to a skills shortage. Currently, the industry works with many low-skilled, low-qualified workers, who expect immediate jobs rather than comprehensive multi-year training.

In that context, the project ‘La Perla’ was set up. It included workplace-based training within the company (800 hours spread over 6 months). Lacking a fully developed Qualification Framework, the training content followed the Portuguese ‘training catalogue’. The course addressed low-skilled adults, and did not require any knowledge previous

knowledge or training. The participating companies committed to hiring the trainees following the training, wherever possible. The project is regarded as a good practice example of linking the short-term needs of the industry with a more long-term view on developing a skilled labour force.

In countries with a strong tradition of delivering VET in the form of WBL and apprenticeships at the work place, employer representatives, trade unions and VET providers are usually strongly involved in designing qualifications. Employers deliver a large part of the training and therefore have a direct insight into curricula. In *Germany*, for example, whenever employers feel that a certain curriculum is outdated, employer representatives have a framework in place to report it. The review and updating of qualifications is initiated by a request from industry/sectoral stakeholders and chambers to the responsible ministry, which commissions the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) to address this request. Before the process of negotiations is started, a decision is made on whether a new profession should be introduced or an existing one updated.

The entire process takes about eight months, and includes the development of assessment criteria. Employers are directly involved in the assessment of their trainees, and assessment happens at the work place. The assessment process may be validated by an external assessor.

In countries where VET is mostly school-based, employer engagement may be less intensive. However, as the *Latvian* case shows, some employers are keen to get more involved. They witness fast changes regarding the required learning outcomes related to a qualification, and are not always happy with the level of skills boasted by graduates from VET schools – partly



related to the fact that VET providers may not always be equipped with up-to-date machinery, tools and technology. The example from Latvia shows how employers and VET providers can work together in a regional consortium to ensure up-to-date VET qualifications.

Panel discussion with employers

Following the workshops, three employers (Malta Tourism Authority, HansaMatrix and ŠKODA Academy), were asked to share their experiences with ECVET in a panel, and answer questions submitted by the plenary. It was discussed that while employer engagement is key to any high-quality VET system, policy makers, representatives from the education and training system and employers do not seem to speak the language and thus often do not understand one another. While policy makers and E&T representatives focus on the quality of the system and the benefits for the individual, employers must focus on their business. To be convinced, they need arguments that make the 'business case'. This duality has to be overcome, for example by setting up

consortia, working groups and committees that include 'early adopters' among the employers that can help to 'translate' between the parties and find the right arguments.

What has ECVET helped us to achieve that far? What is needed to take it to the next level?

On the second day of the conference, participants discussed achievements to date, and how to take ECVET to the next level. There was agreement that a lot has been done already, but there are still many areas for growth. For instance, there is still a need to discuss and exchange ideas about how ECVET can be of benefit to students, learners and employers.

Some important topics emerged from the final discussions. One of them was employer engagement: the main points raised focused on how employers can best be convinced of the high quality of the training by VET providers. It was felt that now is the time to work with employers, starting with those employers/sectors that have the greatest need of workers. Resources and success stories could be shared;

for example, France has considerable experience in working with HR managers.

Another topic that emerged was support to teachers, especially in the context of VET mobility. There is a need for cooperation between employers, unions and schools to discuss units of learning outcomes related to work placements that are part of learner mobility. Three-partite committees could discuss learning outcomes with respect to specific sectors, maintaining a focus on the needs of the learner.

ECVET principles and the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) was also discussed. It is a key challenge to bring the slow-to-evolve education system up to speed with the fast-changing labour market. VNFIL would help in that regard. There is a need for more and better marketing tools. Employers should also be involved in the process of validation of informal and non-formal learning, and there should be a full endorsement of learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning by employers. There was talk about taking a sectoral approach as progress could be achieved more easily in sectors with high skills demand (e.g. crafts sector).

At European policy level a large discussion on the future of vocational training is taking place, with a number of high-level meetings and conferences relating to this issue in the works. There will also be a study conducted on the instruments supporting the European Union vocational education and training (VET) policy (EQAVET and ECVET), and their influence on national policy.

Bulgaria has the presidency of the European Union up to June 2018. **The Annual ECVET Forum will take place on 14-15 June in Bulgaria. ■**

Using ECVET principles in work-based learning with special focus on involvement of all relevant stakeholders

Peer Learning Seminar in Bratislava, October 2017

An article by Mgr. Ľubica Gálová, Slovak National Team of ECVET Experts,
SAAIC - Slovak Academic Association for International Cooperation

As part of seminar series organised by the Central-European Erasmus+ National Agencies, a Peer Learning Seminar on using ECVET principles in work-based learning (WBL) with special focus on involvement of all relevant stakeholders took place on 9 and 10 October 2017 in Bratislava. The seminar was organised around three topics: promoting the learning outcomes approach in WBL; ECVET elements in WBL in geographical mobility; and how employers can train their employees using ECVET tools. Representatives from AT, BG, CZ, DE, HR, HU, PL, RO, SI and SK participated in the seminar.

Background

High-quality work-based learning is now central to European education and training policies as a means of improving employability and increasing economic competitiveness, while stressing quality assurance and permeability of the systems.

In 2016, the European Commission adopted the New Skills Agenda for Europe, which highlights the Commission's goals to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness. To achieve these goals, 10 initiatives were announced as steps "to make sure people acquire the skills they need to thrive both in the labour market and in wider society". Plans to revise ECVET and EQAVET are among the many initiatives aimed at "making VET a first choice". Other initiatives are directed towards increased skills transparency and improvement of tools, which will allow Europeans to better document their learning paths

and make informed decisions on their careers – the features which are embedded in the heart of ECVET.

Awareness about the ECVET principles among various stakeholders has become even more important following the launch of the ErasmusPro initiative, which will support long-term international mobility of apprentices. ErasmusPro requires tools to plan and document learning abroad towards its recognition and accumulation in the home institution.

Content

Participants' expectations varied from using and formulation of learning outcomes, their recognition and transfer, utilisation of ECVET tools in different contexts, involvement and awareness of employers in using ECVET, recognition of learning outside the school, quality assurance, using ECVET principles in validation and recognition, exchange of good practice examples, etc.

In the introductory part of the seminar, participants obtained an overview of recent developments and key concepts related to work-based learning. The year 2020 will be an important milestone for finishing reflections on and revisions of the EU legislation relating to EQF, Europass, ECVET and EQAVET. For ECVET, a change of the concept of using ECVET in a similar way as ECTS is expected, but the main principles of transferability of learning outcomes and supporting mobility will remain.

The survey conducted by the Slovak team during the preparatory phase of the seminar aimed at the questions regarding three aspects of ECVET implementation: participation of stakeholders; qualifications; and forms of WBL provided in participating countries. The results indicated some ideas and conclusions which were echoed in presentations and discussions among participants, mainly the role of ECVET

in interlinking schools and companies, as well as the importance of employer involvement in understanding and using ECVET.

Topic 1 - Promoting the learning outcomes approach in WBL: communication techniques on how to involve different stakeholders groups

The presentations focused on main concepts relating to WBL (apprenticeships, school-based VET with on-the-job training periods, WBL that is integrated in a school-based programme) and the conditions as success factors of effective WBL identified as:

- National governance, legal framework, quality assurance;
- Securing enterprises' commitment based on the conviction of the return on investment that the WBL can deliver;
- Structured and continuous dialogue and systematic collaboration between stakeholders (networks of VET schools and employers);
- Guidance and support to learners, VET providers, enterprises (information, tool kits, information meetings, etc.);
- Learning outcomes approach (all WBL processes should have a clear pedagogical purpose, defined learning outcomes and specified objectives).

Several good practice examples were presented highlighting the results from international projects as well as changes in national education and training systems introducing dual education (Romania, Bulgaria) or using ECVET concepts (Czech Republic). The need for close cooperation between schools and companies in order to define realistic and up-to-date labour market needs and incorporate them in the teaching/learning process was stressed.

Workshop participants identified possible barriers and challenges which VET mobility projects face, including the need for further support for students' trainers and mentors in companies without pedagogical background, more active involvement of students in designing learning outcomes and clear communication between employers and teachers in setting realistic goals for mobility projects.

Benefits of the active role of employers in mobility and their direct participation in designing the content (LOs) and assessment procedures were confirmed. However, participants also stressed the necessity to find proper ways and language for marketing the benefits of learning outcomes and international mobility of apprentices to companies and their staff involved in mobilities.

The discussion on the new long-term apprentice mobility programme ErasmusPro opened various questions which need to be considered, including relevance of the long-term mobility to IVET and the age of students, possible challenges in its smooth incorporation in the course of studies. Understanding the benefits of long-term mobility by employers of the sending country, easy transferability and appropriate assessment procedures were highlighted as key for successful long-term mobility.

Topic 2 - ECVET elements in WBL in geographical mobility, cross-border co-operation: exchange of experience

Several international projects focusing on enhancing cooperation between main actors in VET and ECVET implementation were presented:

- new ways of cooperation between schools and businesses (the Slovak consortium of secondary

VET schools and enhanced local networking);

- direct involvement of companies in understanding and defining learning outcomes (Croatia); and
- development of joint curricula (Slovenia).

Workshop 2 pointed out various stages of implementation of WBL in the countries involved (from advanced apprenticeship to project and experimentation) and low mindset for WBL due to the lack of historical tradition, which results in considering secondary VET the "second choice" for pupils. International mobility is seen as an important element to cover gaps in technology or curricula, to obtain a qualification (or its part) and to support social inclusion of disadvantaged students.

ECVET is a tool to support mobility and its transparency in terms of using learning outcomes as well as establishing common procedures. However, different levels of implementation of ECVET and other tools on national levels (e.g. missing NQFs, LOs in school curricula, qualification standards, etc.) lead to differences in recognition (especially in non-school environments).

Romania was presented as a good practice example; mobility is used as an incentive for NEETs, and the Euro-pass Supplement is issued together with the formal (school) certificate. Romania also pilots an independent recognition and validation agency.

Participants acknowledged the importance of the ECVET transparency tools (Memorandum of Understanding, Learning Agreement) to ensure the quality of the mobility actions as well as its assessment. In addition, the need to promote its better understanding and acceptance by the business world was highlighted.

Topic 3 - ECVET for in-company training: how employers can use ECVET tools in training of their employees and overcoming the distaste of employers for innovative systems

The third topic was aimed at the key barrier which often hampers understanding between the world of education and business: the different way of thinking and languages used by these two worlds. The good practice examples pointed out their strong points in overcoming barriers between these two worlds and bringing the business world's attention to applying ECVET elements. They showed the necessity to find appropriate ways to remove these obstacles and barriers for the benefit of both par-

ties – the “need for changing the system from a push of tools from education to the world of work into a pull situation of companies requiring and using education world tools in their processes”. The presentation examples confirmed how necessary it is to encourage direct involvement of employers while explaining to them the benefits of using ECVET and other tools. Further, employers require support to better understand the processes through training, promotion and communication of the concepts. Support tools, such as handbook, databases, etc., must also be created.

Participants identified several reasons why companies do not accept ECVET as a tool of transparency and transferability of training results, including historical tradition,

education systems, size of the companies and sectors, regulations, rapid changes and developments in the business world, etc. At the same time, they highlighted the importance of clear communication and language to convince employers of ECVET benefits, simplification of practical use of the ECVET concept and involving companies in defining learning outcomes to overcome the clash of cultures between school and work.

In light of the upcoming technological changes, ECVET can be seen as an advantage for the companies as a tool to recognise skills and competences obtained through work experience, thus helping them find proper employees in the future labour market. ■



3rd Austrian ECVET Conference -

'ECVET success stories'

An article by Julia Fellingner and Karin Luomi-Messerer (3s, ECVET Secretariat)

This year's national ECVET conference – organised by the Austrian National Agency for Erasmus+ Education in cooperation with the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education - was held in Vienna on November 6th. It focussed on the most recent developments regarding the Austrian ECVET strategy, highlighting best practice examples. The conference attracted 120 representatives from Austrian institutions, VET schools and companies, as well as participants from the Czech Republic, Italy, Lithuania, and Luxembourg.

The Agenda featured presentations and input from the Ministry of Education's Department for Vocational Education and Training, numerous national ECVET experts and experts from the Austrian National Coordination Point for the NQF. The conference was finalised with awards handed to successful users of ECVET, the so-called 'ECVET Success Stories' and a Q&A session with the honourees.

ECVET in Austria - Status Quo and Outlook

The conference was opened by **Christian Dorninger**, Director-General for VET and Adult Education at the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, and **Ernst Gesslbauer**, head of the National Agency Erasmus+ Education at the OeAD. Mr. Dorninger emphasised the importance of transparency instruments such as ECVET and the NQF/EQF for enhancing the visibility and transferability of VET qualifications and thus for lifelong learning and employability. Mr. Gesslbauer referred to the growing number of transnational VET mobility projects making use of ECVET principles and tools. He thanked the colleagues at the ECVET contact point and the team of national ECVET experts for their support for these projects.

Eduard Staudecker from the Policy Department for School and Quality Development at the Director-General for VET and Adult Education (Federal Ministry of Education) presented the status quo of the ECVET implementation in Austria. He emphasised the importance of ECVET and other European initiatives for the Austrian qualifications system. One of the goals of the Austrian ECVET strategy was to increase efficiency and quality of mobility abroad. Thanks to Erasmus+ as a 'driver', posi-

tive interim results have been achieved. The same is true for the learning-outcome orientation of VET qualifications. Some initiatives have also been started regarding the use of ECVET-principles for lifelong learning (e.g. in the context of recognition of prior learning from VET in HE or the validation of non-formal and informal learning in healthcare professions). New goals include the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning and the use of ECVET as a 'currency' for CVET. Mr. Stau-



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decker also discussed next steps in the years to come. In 2018, a new tool for supporting the organisation of compulsory internships based on ECVET principles will be made available for mobility practitioners at VET schools and colleges. This tool is expected to improve the dialogue between schools and companies, and to facilitate the documentation of tasks to be carried out during the internships and of competences achieved in one final 'internship portfolio'. He also announced the introduction of ECVET points for the last two years of VET colleges (EQF level 5). In the long run, ECVET points should function as a 'currency for vocational competences'. As with ECTS, the points should display the workload, and add up to 60 points per year of full-time education and training. This should further facilitate mobility internationally and between sectors, as well as aid the specification of lifelong learning goals in CVET.

Progress: Learning Outcome Orientation and NQF Classifications

Karin Luomi-Messerer, member of the team of national ECVET experts, presented the outcomes of a recent study investigating the implementation status of the orientation towards

learning outcomes for describing VET qualifications in Austria. This up-to-date information seeks to contribute to a strengthened understanding and trust between different areas of VET for facilitating the transfer of learning outcomes, and for further developing the orientation towards learning outcomes within the respective areas. The study clearly shows that progress has been made in this regard in all areas of VET (including school-based VET, apprenticeship qualifications, VET for healthcare professions and adult education as well as 'higher VET'). European initiatives (especially ECVET, EQF and validation of non-formal and informal learning) are considered as important drivers for these developments. The results of the study are published in a brochure with examples from different VET qualifications. These examples illustrate that the way learning outcomes are described and structured, the concepts used, and the underlying models vary considerably across the different areas of VET.

Karl Andrew Müllner from the Austrian National Coordination Point for the NQF at the OeAD gave an overview of the current state of the NQF implementation in Austria and presented the mapping of the first qualifications to the NQF.

As of November 2017, the NQF-Register (www.qualifikationsregister.at) includes the following qualification types: NQF/EQF level 4: apprenticeship diplomas and VET school qualifications; NQF/EQF level 5: VET colleges (Colleges for Higher Vocational Education and Training); and EQF/NQF level 6: 'Ingenieur'-qualification (VET qualification from outside higher education). Currently, structures and procedures are being developed for mapping non-formal qualifications to the NQF.

'Learning from practice'

Sabine Tritscher-Archan, member of the team of national ECVET experts, presented the outcomes of a project on the use of 'ECVET in practice' (as applied in selected Erasmus+ projects). The project aimed at collecting experiences in which ECVET principles and tools are used to identify needs for improving the services provided by national ECVET experts, and at learning from experience in order to feed into the further development of the Austrian ECVET strategy. The outcomes clearly show that ECVET principles and tools are used to a varying extent. Learning outcomes are the core elements but practitioners face challenges in formulating learning outcomes to be achieved and assessed during mobility abroad; units are rarely defined and ECVET points are not used at all, because at this time they have no relevance in the Austrian VET system. Regarding ECVET documents, Learning Agreements are commonly used in ECVET-based mobility projects; the Memorandum of Understanding and the Personal Transcript are not widely used, and there is still a lack of clarity as to which documents are needed for which purpose. In general, many users would opt for a reduction of documents and the associated bureaucratic burden. The 'learning from practice' exercise shows that the use of ECVET elements is generally considered as improving the structuring and planning of internships abroad and thus their quality. More support through

workshops and services (such as the provision of support to foster the understanding and improve the formulation of learning outcomes and the provision of good-practice examples) will help to further increase the beneficial aspects of ECVET.

ECVET Success Stories

Renate Kanovsky-Wintermann (member of the team of national ECVET experts) introduced the idea of highlighting good-practice examples of the use of ECVET in Erasmus+ projects. Project coordinators and beneficiaries had been invited to share their experiences, to submit their 'ECVET Success Stories' and to highlight how the use of ECVET principles and tools has contributed to the success of their projects. Eleven projects were selected and Mr. Dorninger personally presented the 'ECVET Success Story Certificates' in a ceremony at the conference. **Susanne Klimmer** and **Dieter Wlcek** (members of the team of national ECVET experts) presented the individual projects and their outstanding features:

Using ECVET for mobility:

- WI'MO Klagenfurt (College for Higher Vocational Education in Business and Fashion) showed a high commitment to improving mobility projects using

ECVET, by concluding Memoranda of Understanding and Learning Agreements and designing a very detailed and well-structured evaluation sheet.

- HAK Ybbs (College for Higher Vocational Education in Business and Commerce) was highlighted thanks to their use of ECVET forms for initiating first mobility projects for internships. The content of their ECVET-documents was considered very well-structured and well-prepared.
- HLUW Yspertal (College for Higher Vocational Education in Environment and Business) was featured twice. First, for their exact description of the students' competences in the process of planning internships in order to raise the quality of these internships; this allowed companies to give the students more specific and sophisticated tasks. The detailed competence description was done by the students themselves with the help from the respective subject teachers. Second, the school was also praised for using ECVET in the planning and initiating phases for internships.
- HLW des Kärntner Caritasverbandes (College for Higher Vocational Education in Social Services Management) was recognized for outstanding quality management of internships, having created guidelines for internships

using ECVET tools, which led to 100 % of students completing their internships abroad.

- Klub der Köche Kärnten (Regional Association of Cooks) defined very spot-on Learning Agreements, so that internships would include more high-quality tasks. ECVET was used as a trust-building tool.
- Kurt Mann Bäckerei (Austrian Bakery and Confectionary Chain) started a partnership with the Chamber of Crafts Berlin, and used ECVET for application forms for high-quality internships. Learning outcomes are very clearly described in the Learning Agreement. A previous intern is taking the role of multiplier by sharing his experience.
- SPAR AG (Retail Chain) is using ECVET for extensive support of mobility projects, including the ECVET Learning Agreement as well as Memoranda of Understanding. ECVET is used as a means of quality assurance.
- Tourismsschulen Klessheim (College for Higher Vocational Education in Tourism) was awarded a 'success story certificate' for their project 'Klessheim goes Europe'. The school made extensive use of ECVET tools with respect to curriculum and NQF with a very detailed description of learning outcomes. This made it possible to find a suitable school abroad for a partnership.

Using ECVET for lifelong learning:

- FH St. Pölten (University of Applied Science) and HTL St. Pölten (College for Higher Vocational Education in Technology) received the award for the conclusion of a Memorandum of Understanding for facilitating the transfer of learning outcomes. Graduates of the Higher VET College can now shorten their studies at the higher education institution by up to one year, depending on the learning outcomes achieved and the respective study programme.



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- The association 'Auxilium' was awarded for their project 'From Push to Pull: ECVET and transparency instruments go Business', which aimed to encourage companies to make use of the opportunities offered through ECVET for modern human resource management. The project has developed a handbook and an 'ECVET goes Business' training course.

Outlook

Christian Dorninger concluded the meeting by paying tribute to the efforts

and commitment of the award winners. He also pointed to the opportunities of exchange and cooperation presenting themselves during the period of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second semester of 2018.

The next national ECVET conference will be held in 2019. It will be interesting to see how the use of ECVET principles continues to develop in the future and to take stock again in two years.

Documentation online

The conference programme, all presentations and further documents as well as photos from the event are available online: <https://bildung.erasmusplus.at/de/aktuelles/artikel/2017/11/rueckblick-3-nationale-ecvet-konferenz-vom-6112017/>

Growing success for the second European Vocational Skills Week

Building on the success of the first edition, over 1500 activities were organised as part of the second European Vocational Skills – almost twice as many activities in comparison to the first edition – which took place from 20 to 24 November 2017. In addition, over 1000 attendees gathered in Brussels to participate to some of the smajor events that took place in the Belgian capital.

The growing success of the European Vocational Skills Week goes in hand with the fact that VET is increasingly attractive: over 110 million Europeans have already benefited from VET. One of the objective of the European Vocational Skills Week is to promote VET as a first choice rather than a last resort and to make VET a pathway to excellence. The goal was to reach 1 million people across Europe.



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While many events took place all over the 28 EU member states and beyond (45 countries involved in total) at local, regional and national level, several European level events took place in Brussels; the VET conference on 'Pro-

moting the Vocational Skills Agenda', the Business-Education Summit held in the context of the European Pact for Youth, and the closing event showcasing the results of the Week and including an awards ceremony.



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