

# magazine

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

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**editorial**by the  
European Commission**Detlef Eckert****ECVET Magazine: Editorial on the New Skills Agenda**

On 10 June 2016 Commission has adopted a Communication on a new and comprehensive Skills Agenda for Europe. Is there a need for yet another such initiative? There is. The skills challenge in Europe is serious: 65 million low qualified adults, 20% of adults have low literacy skills, 17% of 15-year olds underachieve in reading and 22% in mathematics. Comparison with such countries as the US, Canada or Japan is unforgiving: share of low qualified adults, share of population with low literacy and numeracy skills... Europe could do much better.

The challenge is wide, deep and multifaceted, and one single initiative, however ambitious, cannot be up to the task. Therefore the Commission proposes a Skills Agenda: a coordinated set of actions, some launched immediately and others to follow over the next years, to invert the trend and provide everybody in Europe with the opportunities to develop the right skills<sup>1</sup>.

Actions are organised around three priority areas, which are quite self-explanatory. We need more and better skills ("Improve the quality and relevance of

<sup>1</sup> All actions are presented on the [dedicated website](#)

skills formation”). We need to put the skills we develop to good use (“Make skills more visible and comparable”). We need to better understand what skills will be demanded to help people choose what skills to develop (“Improve skills intelligence and information for better career choices”).

Towards more and better skills, the first step is an appropriate level of basic skills – literacy, numeracy, digital skills – for everybody. It is therefore not surprising that one of the actions already proposed, together with the Communication, focuses on this: the proposal for a Skills Guarantee aims providing low qualified adults access to flexible tailored upskilling pathways to improve these skills or progress towards an upper secondary qualification. The ECVET principle of units of learning outcomes has proven effective in requalifying adult workers – this experience may provide valuable input to the design and implementation of upskilling pathways.

Another action accompanying the New Skills Agenda for Europe is a proposal to revise the European Qualification

**One crucial condition for making VET a pathway to excellence and a valid first choice for learners is that vocational pathways are open and flexible.**

Framework (EQF). The proposal seeks to further develop the EQF and make it more effective in facilitating understanding of national, international and third-country qualifications by employers, workers and learners. The initiative should thus contribute to a better use of available skills and qualifications for the benefit of individuals, the labour market and the economy. The relevance to ECVET work is obvious, because the new proposal is about qualifications – as it already was – and because it includes common principles for credit systems – which it didn’t. Countries are invited to apply these principles if they set up credit systems related to their qualification systems (which should be

referenced to the EQF levels on a regular basis). The annex on credit systems and the ECVET Recommendation are complementary, and coordination is a necessary condition for both implementation and development.

The New Skills Agenda indicates in which framework ECVET needs to develop: the modernisation of VET in Europe. Both young people and adults develop labour market relevant skills through VET, which is naturally called to play a major role in the Skills Agenda. One crucial condition for making VET a pathway to excellence and a valid first choice for learners is that vocational pathways are open and flexible. They need to adapt not only to the changing needs of the labour market, but to the variety of educational experiences and learning environments of young and adult learners. The ECVET experience with supporting flexible VET comes in handy and needs to be built upon. This will be the focus of the debate on the possible revision of ECVET – among other in the ECVET Forum 2016, which will take place on the 11th of October 2016 in Rome. Thank you in advance for any contribution to the debate. ■

**Detlef Eckert**

Director of Skills  
DG Employment, Social Affairs and  
Inclusion  
European Commission

# Assessment and transfer of prior learning in Danish VET

An article by Søren Kristensen, PhD (National ECVET expert, Denmark)

In Denmark, ECVET as a system for credit transfer is implemented only in connection with transnational learning mobility. However, individual key principles of the system have been an integral part of Danish VET well before the ECVET launch. A case in point is the recognition of learning outcomes acquired outside of a formal setting, where a system for the accreditation of prior learning – henceforth abbreviated APL – has been in operation since the turn of the millennium. A recent study has looked into practices of assessment and transfer in order to evaluate the validity and reliability of the methods and procedures, and extract recommendations on how they may be further improved.

## Some background

Danish initial vocational education and training (IVET) is organised as a dual system, where learners sign an apprenticeship-contract with an enterprise and spend the duration of their training programme alternating between periods in the enterprise and the vocational school. Contents of IVET-programmes are determined by the social partners, who in the so called *trade committees* (there is in principle one for each individual VET-programme) draw up a list of the competencies required in order to obtain a qualification within that particular field. For example, in the training programme to qualify as a chef there are 21 distinct competencies. These competencies are mainly technical (e.g. “plan prepare and arrange menus in accordance with principles of nutrition and carry out calculations of nutritional value in accordance with current legal requirements”), but also comprise personal competencies (e.g. “show creativity as well as initiative, responsibility and ability for learning”). Most programmes leading to full journeyman’s qualifications have a duration of between 3-4 years.

For any person above the age of 25 wishing to enter VET, the first step is an APL undertaken by a vocational school. The procedure – which is free of charge for the applicant – lasts between 1-10 days, and assesses the knowledge, skills and competences of the learner against the list of competencies provided for the national curriculum by the relevant trade committee. On the basis of this, an individual educational plan is prepared, which allows him or her to skip the parts already covered and achieve a qualification (apprenticeship) by completing only the parts still missing, through a combination of school-based learning and placement periods. This APL system was introduced well before the launch of ECVET on European level.

## The study

The study was an empirical pilot study following learners applying for APL in a vocational school, and it covered four vocational areas: chefs, hairdressers, clerical trades and child care assistants. It was conducted by the researchers Vibe Aarkrog and Bjarne Wahlgren



from the University of Aarhus, and focused on the validity and the reliability of the procedures. Another more general focus point was the conversion of learners’ practical experience into credit for knowledge-based parts of the programme: in other words, to what extent having the skills to perform a task in a specific situation (knowing *how*, or in ECVET terminology *is able to do*) also means that a learner has the required knowledge about the issues involved (knowing *that*) and can explain why this performance is necessary in a given circumstance, and not in another (knowing *why*, or what the learner *understands*).

## A mixture of methods ensures a valid assessment

It was a clear conclusion of the study that a combination of methods was required to correctly assess all learning outcomes and a learner's true level of competence. An assessment should include interviews as well as practical and written tests, each of which serves to throw light on particular aspects:

- The interview assesses the content and the amount of the learner's practical experiences, and covers technical as well as personal and social competences (knowledge, skills and competences);
- The practical test validates the information from the interview by demonstrating whether he or she is actually capable of solving one or more relevant tasks (knowing how), thereby eliciting relevant tacit knowledge (skills and competences);
- Finally, the written test assesses the amount of knowing that and knowing why that a learner possesses in relation to the competencies of the national curriculum (knowledge).

The study also compared different assessors' judgments of the same learner on three variables: level of knowledge, his or her performance in practical test situations, and the lacunae identified. The results of this was generally very positive - on all three variables, the assessors agreed on average on three out of four items, and after brief discussions, they were able to reach a compromise. Judging by the results of journeyman's tests, it seems that assessments generally are very suc-

cessful in identifying the relevant units of learning outcomes where the learner needs to improve in order to achieve a full qualification.

## Assessment standards need to reflect real-life work requirements

What the study also revealed, however, was a tendency for the standards of assessing to reflect a scholastic perception of good practice in carrying out the tasks related to competencies, rather than real, workplace-based requirements. Assessors – i.e. the teachers at the vocational schools who are in charge of the procedure – tended to ascribe a higher value to knowledge (knowing *that* and *why*) than skills and competences (knowing *how*). The key question here is: how much knowing that and knowing *why* is actually needed to function in a skilled position at a workplace? For example, does it really matter that you know the term “sautéed” as long as you are able to decide exactly how long the onions should be fried for a specific dish?

Another conclusion of the study is therefore that to ensure the reliability of the assessments, it is of vital importance that the assessment system possess a thorough understanding of the relation between the formally required competencies in the national curriculum and the competences used in a real workplace situation.

In relation to that, the study argues that the assessors' role cannot be filled by any vocational teacher. Assessors must have valid knowledge about the specific job functions within a given

occupation as well as about the contents of the national curriculum of the relevant IVET-programme, and must be able to relate learners' performances to this. Moreover, they must be able to transform the results of the assessment process into an adequate individual educational plan.

## Ensuring the transfer of learning outcomes

A number of developments – in particular the decreasing number of unskilled jobs, and immigration from countries outside the EU – combine to make the transfer of learning outcomes acquired in informal and non-formal contexts into the formal VET-system a factor of crucial importance to ensure Europe's competitiveness in the coming years. Through APL procedures, learners with skills and competences acquired outside of the formal system are able to build on these and obtain a full qualification with significant reduction in duration, thus making it much more attractive to embark on such a trajectory.

This study sheds light on how this is done in practice in the Danish VET-system. It concludes that it is possible to assess prior learning from other contexts with high validity and reliability, provided that the system acknowledges different ways of ascertaining knowing *that* and knowing *why*; that the assessments are based on a true appreciation of the competences required in real life workplace situations; and that assessors (in the Danish system: VET-teachers in charge of the procedure) are equipped with specific knowledge and competences to perform the task. ■

### Further reading:

Aarkrog, V. & Wahlgren, B. (2015): Fra faglært til faglært – realkompetence og pædagogik. Nationalt Center for Kompetenceudvikling, Aarhus Universitet, December 2014. (Danish only)

Aarkrog, V. & Wahlgren, B.: Assessment of Prior Learning in Adult Vocational Education and Training. In: *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training*, Vol 2, No1: 39-58.

# How Finland strengthened its learning outcomes-based approach

An article by Xavier Platteau (ECVET Secretariat)

The May 2016 Taitaja Skills Competitions in Seinäjoki (Finland) drew 200 visitors from more than 25 countries to a seminar showcasing the Finnish learning outcomes-based approach in the VET system. Interest was high among seminar participants as Finland is often considered at the vanguard in Europe when it comes to education and training and VET.<sup>1</sup>

## A long history

The first steps toward a learning outcomes-based approach were taken more than twenty years ago, when in 1994 modules and competence-based objectives replaced study units and subjects in the core curriculum of initial vocational qualifications. Since then, all reforms and initiatives in Finland aimed to further strengthen this approach, most notably:

- 1998 - legislation unifies the scope of VET. Vocational qualifications should last three years and include at least six months of on-the-job learning;
- 2004-2007 - development and clarification of the status of vocational qualifications;
- 2006 - "skills demonstrations" are introduced and a new assessment process focusing on practical work situations is integrated into vocational qualifications;
- 2009-2014 - a new qualification structure that is clearer and corresponds more to the needs of the labour market is developed; and

- 2015 - VET legislation is changed to allow allocation of competence points to vocational qualifications, in compliance with the principles of the ECVET Recommendation.

**In 2004 Finland launched the FINECVET national pilot project to develop and test ECVET, soon confirming that the Finnish system was already ECVET-friendly.**

## A necessary change

Implementing such an approach proved to be challenging for the different VET stakeholders. Shifting from a subject-based approach that is deeply embedded in the education system takes time. However, introducing and strengthening the learning outcomes based approach was essential to in-



crease the labour market relevance of VET. A common language between education and the workplace had to be established, and the quality and skills of the labour force had to be improved. Such an approach takes into account the diversification of learning environments and allows for the validation of prior learning outcomes.

## Partly influenced by ECVET

In 2004 Finland launched the FINECVET national pilot project to develop and test ECVET, soon confirming that the Finnish system was

<sup>1</sup> Based on the presentations of Hanna Autere (Finnish National Board of Education) and Seija Rasku (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture) at Taitaja2016 international seminar, 10th May 2016, Seinäjoki, Finland

already ECVET-friendly. Most of the requirements regarding transfer, accumulation and recognition of learning outcomes were already fulfilled. The project was a valuable tool in supporting the reform of the Finnish VET system, and established Finland as a pioneer in working with ECVET. This also provided significant impetus encouraging ECVET development at the European level.

**The project was a valuable tool in supporting the reform of the Finnish VET system, and established Finland as a pioneer in working with ECVET.**



**João Santos** (Deputy Head of Unit "VET, Apprenticeships and Adult Learning", European Commission's DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion) during Taitaja2016 international seminar  
*Source: Taitaja2016*

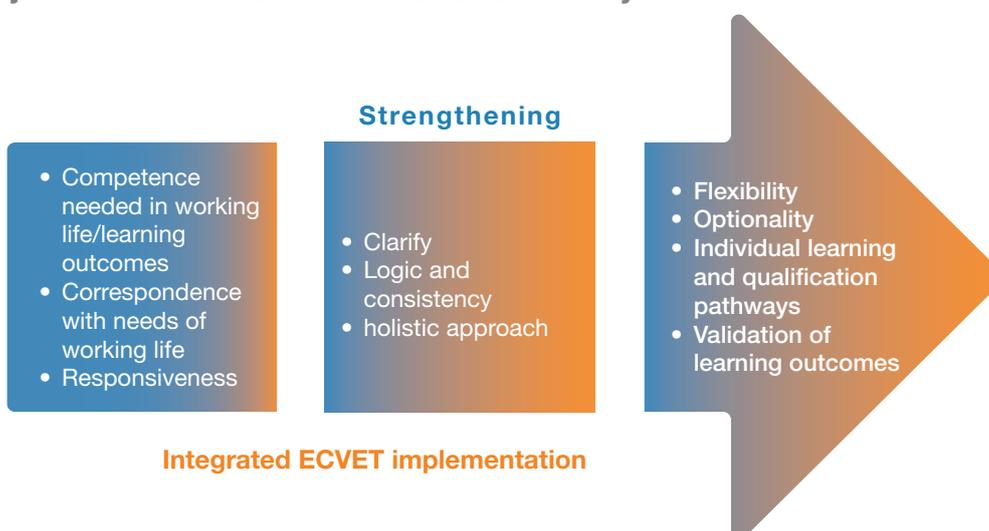


**João Santos** and **Michel Aribaud** visiting Taitaja2016 Skills Competitions  
*Source: Taitaja2016*

One of the challenges identified by the three-phase project was that there was no procedure to assign ECVET points to learning outcomes based qualifications with no specified scope. With the 2015 reform, ECVET points (called competence points in Finland) replaced credits, and the points are defined in line with the ECVET principles. Competence points are allocated to units of learning outcomes, and the complexity, significance and scope of the learning outcomes inside a unit are taken into account.

The VET reform which launched in August 2015 had the dual objectives of strengthening the learning outcomes-based approach and fully implementing ECVET. ■

## Political objectives of Finnish Qualification System



*Source: Hanna Autere, Taitaja2016 international seminar, 10th May 2016, Seinäjoki, Finland*

# Creating ECVET units of learning outcomes in the Czech Republic

An article by Helena Slivková (Centre for International Cooperation in Education), Martina Kaňáková and Miroslav Kadlec (National Institute for Education)

A gradual adoption of ECVET in the Czech Republic has been grounded on the proposal for ECVET implementation approved by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in 2012.

According to this strategy, ECVET implementation in initial education aims at increasing the significance of learners' mobility in order to make VET more attractive and to support its quality. In the areas of continuing education and recognition of learning outcomes, the proposal aims at broadening existing opportunities to obtain vocational qualifications registered in the National Register of Vocational Qualifications, and to use a credit system to support the recognition of learning outcomes gained both in the national and European settings.

Recent developments at the European level so far confirm the emphasis on quality, the necessity to involve employers' representatives and the need to define meaningful and high standard units of learning outcomes. Those have been created in three various contexts in the Czech Republic.

## Units for "national mobility"

ECVET is united with the idea of learners' mobility, usually in connection with an international project.

The intention to examine possibilities for "national mobility" was born as a result of discussions within the Czech ECVET coordination centre. Such possibilities were verified within the PO-SPOLU (TOGETHER) project. The main purpose of the project was to support cooperation among upper secondary technical schools and employers in order to deepen and improve the quality of on-the-job training, making students' transition to working life much easier.

**Technical schools saw benefit as ECVET helped them improve the quality of the on-the-job training. It made it especially easy for schools to clearly specify necessary workplace tasks and assessment criteria for the students.**

In the framework of the project, 82 units of learning outcomes were developed.



These units describe the aims and content of students' "national mobility" in cooperating companies. Schools and companies involved in the project also verified the assessment protocols, learning agreement, and personal record ("Europass Mobility").

Technical schools saw benefit as ECVET helped them improve the quality of the on-the-job training. It made it especially easy for schools to clearly specify necessary workplace tasks and assessment criteria for the students. Units corresponding to the common duration of student mobility abroad (14 – 30 days) proved to be the most suitable.

During the project, a two-round survey was sent to those schools that developed units of learning outcomes. The following potential risks were identified: the reluctance of some schools to share their own units of learning outcomes with other schools; the lack of a common perception on the significance, purpose and usability of units of a particular school; and difficulties in preparing units of learning outcomes of the correct size for both for national and international mobility (i.e. if a unit contains too many learning outcomes, pupils will not be able to achieve them in the planned mobility period, while if a unit is too small, almost no professional skills and competences will be acquired by pupils).

### **Units created for international mobility in the framework of the ERASMUS+ programme**

International mobility in VET has usually been realised in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme. The Centre for International Cooperation in Education (DZS) is in charge of the administration of the programme in the Czech Republic. Since 2014, the principles of ECVET have been used in the framework of Key action 1: Mobility projects in vocational education and training. ECVET was used by 43% of grant beneficiaries in 2014, by 75% in 2015, and by 94% so far in 2016.

This increase in the proportion of mobility projects using ECVET reflects the effort to enhance the quality of international mobility. The main interest lies in the progressive improvement of

the quality of learning outcomes units developed during these projects. The results of an analysis of about 200 units conducted by a team of ECVET experts in the DZS confirmed a varying quality of units. Among positive findings, the analysis found out that most units have the required content structure and that they apply to almost all VET programmes. The main problem identified lies within the formulation of learning outcomes.

**In 2013, the methodology to link the NSK and ECVET was developed. Learning outcomes in the NSK register are not grouped in units; however, individual vocational competences described in the standards can be interpreted as specific collections of competences.**

Both the analysis of units and research among grant beneficiaries suggest that unit creation contributes to an increase in overall quality of international mobility projects, and their utilisation helps to simplify the assessment, validation and recognition of mobility participants' learning outcomes.

### **Units for recognition of learning outcomes**

Next to the "school system" that provides students with full qualifications, new ways opened up to acquire vocational qualifications proposed and recognised by employers thanks to the introduction of the **National Register of Vocational Qualifications (NSK)** in 2006.

In 2013, the methodology to link the NSK and ECVET was developed. Learning outcomes in the NSK register are not grouped in units; however, individual vocational competences described in the standards can be interpreted as specific collections of competences.

There are two main preconditions on which the development of this methodology is based. First, vocational qualifications in the NSK could be described as combinations of units of learning outcomes. Second, learning outcomes units could harmonize with qualification standards of vocational competences, whether selected parts of individual competence or clusters of competences.

This methodology linking the NSK with ECVET was developed in order to use the full potential of the 18,000 individual vocational competences in the NSK Central database. The biggest challenge remains the formulation of adequate learning outcomes (in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences) on the basis of vocational competences formulated in the NSK using language easily understood by employers. ■

# Modularisation of VET programmes in Latvia

An article by Stephanie Oberheidt, Toms Feifs and Xavier Platteau (ECVET Secretariat)

Vocational education systems across the EU are undergoing reforms designed to enhance the quality of VET, develop ways to better respond to skills needs, and formalise stakeholder involvement. Latvia recently implemented these reforms.

## Policy context

The Education Development Guidelines 2014-2020<sup>1</sup> adopted in 2013 foresee the use of the EU Structural Funds for the development of modular education programmes that will increase the attractiveness (and actual participation) of VET by 2020.

An ESF project to develop a sectors' qualification system and increase both the effectiveness and quality of VET was implemented over the period from 2010 to 2015. It was led by the State Education Development Agency (VIAA). ESF financing was used by this project to:

- undertake research in 14 sectors and to develop their qualification structures;
- establish 12 sector experts' councils and develop their mandates;
- develop 61 occupational standards for core occupations;
- develop 56 modular VET programmes;
- improve the examination content and process and put the project results online<sup>2</sup>.

The sectoral research preceding the development of modular programmes was started in 2011. The actual work on the development of modular VET programmes began early in 2013 and was completed by the end of 2015.

## Rationale behind modularisation

As in many other European countries, modular VET programmes were developed to answer a need for more flexible VET; such programs can more promptly respond to the demands of each economic sector and occupations, and allow individuals to be more flexible in their education pathways.

More specifically, the modular approach in Latvia is expected to:

- shorten the period necessary for acquiring a new qualification;
- contribute to professional development by allowing learners to pursue particular modules or groups of modules (i.e., those who have done prior relevant learning would no longer need to repeat the whole programme);
- ensure that the acquisition of VET competences are based on attainable results; and



- increase the flexibility of learning as separate modules can be used in different combinations, depending on the objectives to be obtained by a particular programme.

## Development of modular programmes

External contractors, in cooperation with the National Centre for Education (VISC) and involving working groups consisting of VET teachers, sector representatives and working group lead, have developed 22 IVET and 34 CVET programmes built on a modular approach.

These modular programmes, covering 14 sectors of Latvia's economy and leading to particular VET qualifications, are presented in the form of modules'

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.lsa.lv/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/lzglitibasattistibaspatmatnostadnes.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [http://viaa.gov.lv/library/files/original/2\\_VISC\\_S.Valaine\\_konference\\_IP.pdf](http://viaa.gov.lv/library/files/original/2_VISC_S.Valaine_konference_IP.pdf)

maps. Each modular programme is structured in three parts – mandatory part, mandatory choice part and choice part. Further, each part can consist of general education topics and professional competences modules or module blocks.

Each modular VET programme is also described in terms of its objectives, knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired, procedures for the assessment of learning outcomes and further education opportunities. The professional competences modules specific to particular qualifications are also described in detail, including the aim of the module, competences to be developed, access requirements, assessment provisions and the placement on the particular module in the modules' map.

### Implementation of modular programmes

The approval and implementation of the modular VET programmes is ongoing. It is expected to include further involvement of the employers so as to foster a shared understanding about the modularisation of VET programmes, and training of teachers to work with these programmes.

### Employers

Early employer feedback suggest that the modular approach will have offer real advantages as employers are constantly seeking new qualifications to meet their changing needs. For example, the Vice-President of the company HansaMatrix explicitly expressed his appreciation for the modular approach as advantageous for addressing the fast changing needs of the labour market<sup>3</sup>.

The November 2014 Newsletter<sup>4</sup> of the 'Food processing and agriculture' Sectoral expert council also presents opinions of the sectors' experts on the newly developed modular programmes for these sectors. These characterise the new programmes as 'necessary', 'thought-through and adequate', 'transparent and logical' and 'fit for purpose'.

**"The SECs role is to raise the effectiveness and quality of VET by promoting cooperation between social partners, VET providers and sectoral organisations as they develop VET that is continuously updated to meet changing labour market needs"**

### VET providers involved

There are a number of VET institutions involved in the testing and implementation of modular programmes; for example, Priekuli Technical School (car service and agriculture), Smiltene Technical School (agriculture), Valmiera Technical School (metal industry), and Ogre Technical school (timber industry). These and several other schools have designed their programmes using the modular approach.

### Government

The government has recently approved the Cabinet of Ministers' Regulations<sup>5</sup> recommending that the provision of VET should better align with EQF, ECVET and EQAVET. This is likely to involve updates and development of occupational standards, requirements for vocational qualifications, and bringing exam content in line with the modular approach to education. Around 13 million euros (of which 11 million EUR from ESF funding) will be allocated to the development of:

- 160 occupational standards and basic requirements for vocational qualifications
- 184 modular VET programmes
- 80 teaching materials
- 210 vocational qualifications exam content<sup>6</sup>.

### Sector expert councils

As part of the comprehensive VET reform, Latvia has introduced Sector expert councils (SEC).

The SECs role is to raise the effectiveness and quality of VET by promoting cooperation between social partners, VET providers and sectoral organisations as they develop VET that is continuously updated to meet changing labour market needs.

The Latvian SECs consist of employer representatives and sectoral organisations, trade unions and government representatives. A total of 12 SECs who see themselves as liaisons between labour market needs and training organisations have been created. They promote modern, forward-look-

3 VIAA conference on ECVET developments of 16 December 2015: [http://viaa.gov.lv/lat/ek\\_izgl\\_programmas\\_iniciativas/erasmusplus/ecvet\\_aktivitate/ecvet\\_pasakumi/](http://viaa.gov.lv/lat/ek_izgl_programmas_iniciativas/erasmusplus/ecvet_aktivitate/ecvet_pasakumi/)

4 [http://www.nozaruekspertupadomes.lv/allfiles/files/ZinuLapa\\_NEP2014\\_Novembris.pdf](http://www.nozaruekspertupadomes.lv/allfiles/files/ZinuLapa_NEP2014_Novembris.pdf)

5 <http://www.esfondi.lv/izglitiba-prasmes-muzizglitiba>

6 <http://www.leta.lv/es/item/28A29715-E164-4111-BED8-C099F6BA7216/pr/>

ing vocational education through a clear and transparent system of Occupational Standards; and want to be the leading partner in promoting cooperation between employers, employees, educational institutions and public institutions.

SECs have legal status. The January 2015 amendments to the Latvian Vocational education law stipulate that it is the goal of SECs to 'promote VET effectiveness and quality of VET by promoting cooperation between state institutions, municipalities, employers and their organisations, trade unions, professionals to deal with human resource development issues and compliance of VET to labour market needs'. ■



Karin Luomi-Messerer (ECVET Secretariat) presenting during the PLA in Riga

*Source: Latvian Ministry of Education and Science*

Latvia hosted a peer learning activity (PLA) organised by the ECVET Secretariat in Riga on 26-27 May 2016. Latvia had expressed interest in the theme of “units, partial qualifications and full qualifications” covered by the PLA. The modularisation of the Latvian system and the role of Sector expert councils was discussed during the event.

More information including the presentations and a summary report on the event can be found on the ECVET Secretariat website [here](#).

# Using the principles of ECVET and EQF for the labour market: the success story of the YEBISU e.e. partnership

‘Face to face’ with André Huigens (Wellant College, the Netherlands, and partnership leader of YEBISU e.e.) and André Hertog (managing director of Irado, the Netherlands), by Pauline van den Bosch (ECVET Secretariat)

## Can you explain why YEBISU e.e. is a good example of ECVET for the labour market?

**Mr. André Huigens:** “The project is a partnership that can be seen as a community of practitioners. Twelve companies from eight countries and four educational institutes as well as a branch organization and researching institutes are members of this group.

“e.e.” stands for Empowers Employees. YEBISU is the story of a company working on their employees’ skills development. We strongly believe that this is essential for the future of companies. We can call it an ECVET experience but in reality it is all covered under the umbrella of the EQF. Actually we are convinced that you cannot implement ECVET, without the EQF”.

## The demand for this initiative came from companies. They see ECVET/ EQF as a solution for their human resource and labour market challenges. Can you explain this?

**Mr André Huigens:** “We started some years ago with the first YEBISU project.

It was on the initiative of Van der Spek group, a Dutch gardening company. Van der Spek group is still the leading company in the YEBISU history, but now we are exploiting and using the YEBISU principles and tools in other contexts, other companies and other levels as well. The most important result of the first YEBISU project was a common understanding concerning the EQF among the partners, which can serve as a basis for the development of units of learning outcomes. The reason that we look to Irado as an example for this interview is Irado’s focus on their lower level employees.

In our previous YEBISU project we developed a framework where we described the EQF descriptors for each level more in detail. So, not only in terms of knowledge, skills and competences; we went far beyond this. We also described the change, adaptability, range of work, flexibility etc. for each EQF level. The reason is that companies are convinced that these elements are often more important than just the skills and knowledge. We made this framework for entrepreneurial competences. We are now using both this framework and the ECVET principles (mainly the



**empowersemployees**

units of learning outcomes) in a very efficient way, which makes employees more competitive in the market”.

**Mr. André Hertog:** “I will explain it from our company’s point of view. Irado is a Dutch company; we collect garbage, maintain the public greens, and do street cleaning of the public space in parts of the Netherlands. We are relatively small and therefore vulnerable in an internationally operating market. Irado is a service provider for the cities, so it is in the interest of these cities to get our services for the lowest price. We continuously want to improve, develop and distinguish ourselves. For this reason, we started to develop all employees of Irado from service provider for the cities to partners in business. The biggest challenge is the experience

of learning in different contextual situations and handling the limitations of mental models.

To give some examples of what we do in terms of empowerment of employees: Irado trains unemployed people to adjust their work discipline in a way they can easier find a job. We provide training for those who are looking for a job. We also provide work for people with a barrier to the labour market because of a disability. This branch is changing fast. We require that our employees continuously adapt their working attitude and that they are aware of the core values of our company. Employees are working in a constantly changing context, which requires different type of skills and competences”.

**How does it work in practice? Do you use the concept of the Learning outcomes?**

**Mr. André Huigens:** “In the project, one of the steps was to do research concerning companies’ expectations

with regard to their employees’ behaviour. We came to the conclusion that it is all about intrapreneurial behavior. In Finland they were called the ‘hidden competences’. We worked this out in a profile and the companies translated our profile in a practical way in concrete units of learning outcomes. People are trained according to these units.”

**Mr. André Hertog:** “About 60% of the employees are handling their work on EQF level 1 and 2. Irado is working on Intrapreneurial skills, which can be seen as generic skills, professional skills and socio- emotional skills. Those can easily divided in ECVET units. For example: the employees of level 1 and 2 are trained in units with Dutch language skills to make sure they can read the safety and handling instructions of new machinery. They also train them in units with professional skills. All the employees at Irado follow a unit on social and emotional skills and competences. All these development/training sessions (divided in units) take place during working hours and we lead this process.

The result is not only that people gain professional skills; we see that people are now more conscious about themselves, about what they can learn and what they want to learn. It changes the way that people think and act. We notice that it contributes to better values within our organization. Employees are more responsible and feel ownership for what they do.”

**Do you feel this concept of units of learning outcomes is sufficient to understand each other, both between countries and as within one country between the labour market and educational institutes?**

**Mr. André Hertog:** “The language of the learning outcomes is the language of the companies. This might be the big difference between the labour market and educational institutes. The concept of units makes it easy to develop small learning units with outcomes based descriptors for training of the lower level workers. In this way we can see what

**The activities of the YEBISU e.e. partnership and its effect on the employers and employees**

- A framework for entrepreneurial behavior
- Profiles with learning outcomes for the competences
- 8 best practice cases



- Changing the way people think about themselves
- Changing the way people act
- Changing the way people lead, educate and learn

Source: PowerPoint presentation of YEBISU e.e. “What’s your story?”

our workers know, understand and are able to do, and it helps us with our recruitment practice. It also helps us identify what training is needed.

EQF is a common language for the YEBISU partners and it makes sure that we understand each other. For example, the partners fully understand each other when we speak about the level of certain professional profile, in a certain context. The ECVET concepts, like the units, are used for the individual development plans of the employees. We are expecting the VET institutes in our regions to carry out the validation and recognition of these individual learning units. We, as a company, have to take care of the accumulation in our job profiles. We are convinced that learning horizontally is as important or maybe even more important than vertical learning. This means development within the levels and not focusing from one level to a higher level as the VET institutions are accustomed to doing.”

**“The secret of its success is the intrinsic motivation, the involvement of the management and the theory of the learning organization together with the open dialogue between the YEBISU partners.”**

**Learning from your experiences, what is needed to make ECVET workable for the labour market and companies. What are the success factors?**

**Mr. André Hertog:** “The VET institutions should understand that learning in a training centre is not the only way to achieve knowledge, skills and competences. Learning can take place in all kinds of circumstances and contexts.

That makes employees more motivated for lifelong learning. I think that this is also one of the biggest challenges: to make employees more aware of their own role in the company. When employees are aware of their own involvement, they can connect themselves to team thinking, team learning and the overall mission of the company. This is what makes the companies in YEBISU more competitive compared to other companies. However, I have to admit that this is a slow process. It takes time. We started with this process in 2002.”

**Mr. André Huigens:** “The secret of its success is the intrinsic motivation, the involvement of the management and the theory of the learning organization together with the open dialogue between the YEBISU partners. For this the European instruments are a big help. Borderless learning is what the EQF, ECVET and its instruments are working for.” ■

Read more on the project's [website](#).

# Proposal for a Council Recommendation on establishing a 'Skills Guarantee'

## Examples of how ECVET can support re-qualification and upskilling of workers

An article by Pauline van den Bosch and Anette Curth (ECVET Secretariat)

Together with the launch of the 'New Skills Agenda' in June 2016, the European Commission made a proposal for a Council Recommendation on establishing a 'Skills Guarantee'. This proposal is now before the European Council for consultation and approval.<sup>1</sup>

The Skills Guarantee is geared at those persons not eligible for support under the Youth Guarantee; namely, adults more than 25 years of age. Once adopted by the Council, the 'Skills Guarantee' will encourage Member States to draw up a comprehensive action plan to offer low-qualified adults - those who have left initial education or training without completing upper secondary education (EQF 4) - access to upskilling pathways. Every person, according to their individual needs, should be offered the opportunity to acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills; and/or progress towards a qualification at EQF level 4.

To make sure this builds on a person's existing learning outcomes, it is suggested that the Skills Guarantee should comprise three steps:

- a skills assessment (or skills audit), enabling low-qualified adults to identify their existing skills and their need to upskill;
- the design and delivery of an education and training offer tailored to the specific situation of each individual, building on his/her existing skills;
- the validation and recognition of the skills acquired through the personalised upskilling pathway.

**Experience shows that ECVET can help when developing solutions to the requalification and upskilling of workers.**

In its capacity as a credit system based on learning outcomes, ECVET can help

facilitate the validation of non-formal and informal learning and the modular progression towards a qualification. Therefore, ECVET principles can be very valuable when putting a 'Skills Guarantee' in place.

Experience shows that ECVET can help when developing solutions to the requalification and upskilling of workers. Concrete examples from Member States were presented during the Annual ECVET Forum in Prague in 2013, and the Annual ECVET Forum 2015 in Barcelona. These examples show that ECVET principles can be used to help workers move from one job to another, or to retrain to keep their current job. ECVET can also help jobseekers find work, and can support the re-integration of drop-outs to the education and training system.

<sup>1</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224&langId=en>

## Three examples of using ECVET for the re-qualification and upskilling of workers

### Retraining and upskilling of workers in the nuclear sector

In the European nuclear industry, high-level safety concerns intrinsically linked to nuclear activities make the availability of a sufficient and well-qualified workforce crucial. The competence of this workforce must be up-to-date and this requires lifelong training schemes alongside the initial learning that takes place once someone gains employment. The sector is characterised by high mobility of workers with highly individual and flexible learning pathways; combining in-house and on-the-job training with learning periods in different organisations and countries is often necessary to acquire and maintain an appropriate level of competence. Finally, forecasts on the demand for nuclear experts suggest that it will be necessary to provide tailored training for professionals who initially have a non-nuclear background.

The ELINDER project ('European Learning Initiatives in Nuclear Decommissioning and Environmental Remediation') works on developing a learning outcomes based training system for both employers and employees in the nuclear decommissioning sector that offers options for transfer and accumulation.<sup>2</sup> Once implemented, this would help with both the requalification and the upskilling of workers.

### Recognition of units of learning outcomes leading to the achievement of formal certificates

STOOF, an employment centre for temporary workers in the Netherlands, has established a methodology of recognition of units of learning outcomes leading to the achievement of formal certificates. There were two pilots, one in the logistics sector, and one in the food processing industry, which targeted low skilled workers with a lot of job experiences, but no formal qualification.

The pilot in the logistics sector was carried out in collaboration with DHL. Through the pilot, temporary workers got the opportunity to obtain a certificate that is comparable to an MBO training at Level 1 (entry) or 2 (logistician). The pilot in the food industry was carried out at Marfo, a company which prepares packaged meals for high-volume consumers such as airlines or hospitals. Temporary workers work mainly as production workers packaging meals, but can also work in the warehouse or the kitchen. In the pilot, a group of 16 temporary workers achieved a certificate.<sup>3</sup>

### Second chance education for drop-outs

In several Jesuit Schools in Catalunya (Spain), **second chance education** is offered for young people that have dropped out of the education and training system. This follows a three step process not unlike the one proposed by the Skills Guarantee:

- 1 Training.** Young people are provided with the opportunity to take a preparatory course in a specific professional area (e.g. electricity) which includes general education subjects. Young people can either use the module to get closer to the labour market or to re-enter the VET system, and can then continue on to take the CFGM test which constitutes a middle grade/upper grade VET qualification.
- 2 Support And Counselling.** While the young people attend the courses, the Jesuits offer support to users and families in order to enhance personal and social competences.
- 3 Orientation.** Individual guidance is provided to explore possibilities of studies towards and after passing the CFGM test, including labour market information, how to look for a job, strengthening personal autonomy, etc.<sup>4</sup>

2 See: ECVET magazine Nr 20. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/ecvet-magazine-no-20-june-2014>

3 <http://www.stoof-online.nl/tools/ecvet/> (in Dutch language)

4 <http://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/system/files/documents/2973/presentation-ms-pilar-roguera.pdf>

## Critical success factors for using ECVET for retraining or upskilling adults

For some experts, key to the success of these pilots is to accept that learning takes place everywhere and not only in schools. Tuomo Vainikainen from TTS research, development and training institute in Finland, sees evidence that lifelong learning and personal development are much stronger when an employee can develop himself through training on the job where all learning outcomes are integrated in concrete work tasks, rather than by going back to school. "However, then we need good systems where competences that are acquired in another context than the school are recognized and validated", says Vainikainen.

Current examples show that pilots across Europe addressed three main target groups:

- **Skilled and high-skilled workers** who need to upgrade skills in their profession benefit from tailored training units, focusing on higher level skills that add value to their qualification;
- **Low-skilled job seekers** who need an opportunity to get validation and recognition for their professional skills acquired at the workplace, or benefit from improved social skills and competences to strengthen their professional attitude and behavior and increase their chances to find a job;
- Young people that **have dropped out of the education and training system** who are encouraged and better prepared to re-enter the educational system after taking a training unit to acquire basic skills.

According to Vainikainen, learners and employees have to develop ownership for their own career. This is a crucial element for the success of lifelong learning. Companies should support this, but they often do not have the resources or the pedagogical competences to do so. "This is where VET providers can help and support the companies", says Vainikainen.

However, this requires efficient partnerships. To make the 'Skills Guarantee' a reality in the Member States, close collaboration between all stakeholders – governmental institutions, social partners and education and training providers - would be required to develop and implement an action plan.

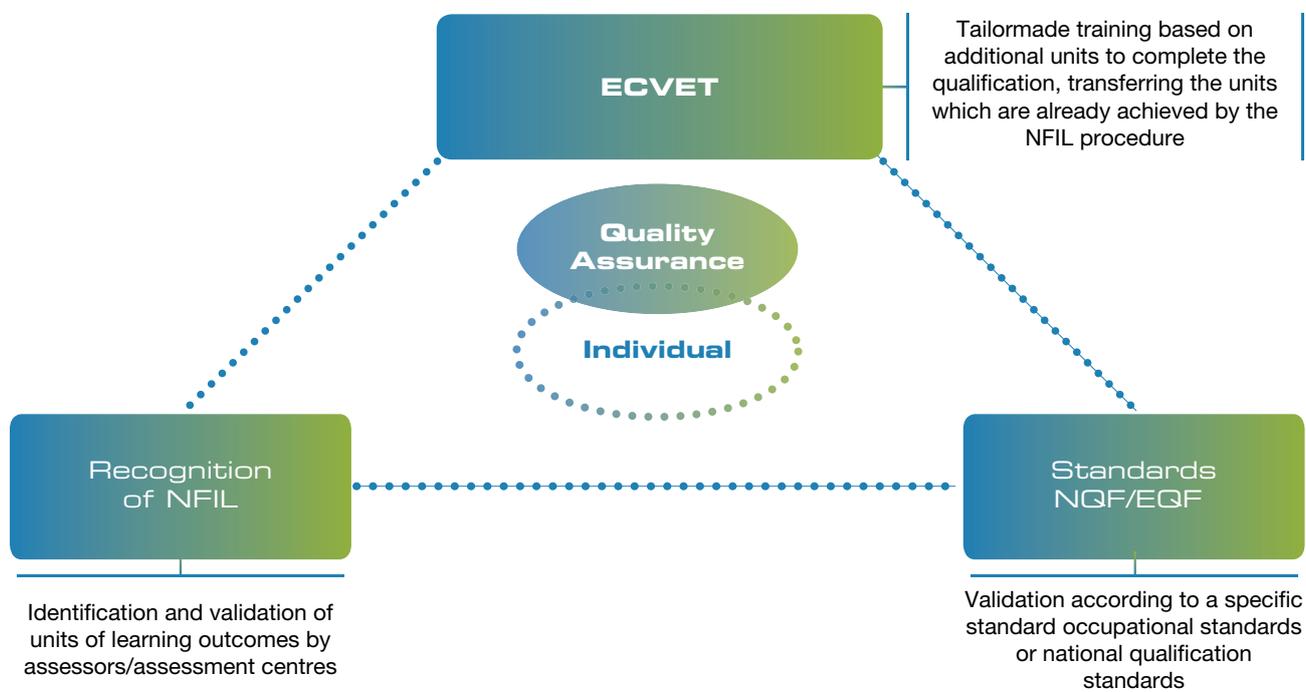
An analysis of the existing good practice of using ECVET for the re-qualification and upskilling of workers shows the following additional success factors:

1. **A demand driven approach**, where the labour market is closely involved in defining the learning outcomes that are necessary to achieve. This demand driven approach is resulting in a strong intrinsic motivation and ownership of both companies and employees;
2. The use of **units of learning outcomes**. Learning outcomes seem to be a helpful means to design flexible and individual learning pathways for workers and job seekers. Learning outcomes offer the possibility to train people in an efficient and effective way, tailored to the needs of the individual and the labour market. Learning

Outcomes are described in terms of the knowledge, skills and competences required by the labour market, thus focusing on learning output and not on standard training offers;

3. Opportunities to **validate all learning outcomes achieved by the individual**. It is not about the learning outcomes that are achieved via the training, but also the learning outcomes that an individual already has achieved via non-formal and informal ways. The effect is twofold: the individual avoids unnecessary training and frustration; and the employee's absence from the workplace to pursue education and training is reduced. The provision of a certificate for each unit is also considered a key success factor, as without certification units will have a much lower impact on society;
4. **Mutual trust** between institutions to facilitate validation and recognition. A collaboration between the labour market, education and training centres and certification bodies is important. The latter support in developing and/or in training of units of learning outcomes and in recognizing and validating learning outcomes;
5. **Flexible learning pathways**. This flexibility has to be organised in an efficient and effective way and be based on an agreed set of well-described and recognised learning outcomes;

**Figure 1: Analysis of the case studies during the workshop “ECVET for LLL”, ECVET forum 2013, Prague**



6. The **coherent use of the European transparency tools**. Not only ECVET, but also EQF, the validation of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL) and quality assurance (EQA-VET) are seen as valuable tools to support the implementation of ECVET. Figure 1 below shows that in a well-functioning system, these European tools are interrelated and that they cannot be seen separately. Units of learning outcomes include the skills and competences that are required by the labour market. These units are related to an NQF/EQF level to ensure transparency and permeability. The procedures for validation of NFIL offers the

opportunity to identify the learning outcomes that an individual already has achieved as well as any deficiencies. Learners are offered the possibility of achieving the remaining learning outcomes via training. The fact that units linked to the NQF/EQF are used offers the possibility for the individual to accumulate units for the purpose of obtaining a full qualification.

For Tuomo Vainikainen, the success factors for requalification and upskilling of adults can be reduced to three main elements. First, each individual needs to adopt an enhanced sense of ‘ownership’ for their career; second,

employers and VET providers need to collaborate closely to ensure training offers provide the right skills; and finally, validation of non-formal and informal learning needs to be offered on a broad basis. ‘These three elements are key to success in re-training and upskilling adults, and ECVET processes can help to put them in place’, says Vainikainen.

With a ‘Skills Guarantee’ Recommendation, requalification and upskilling of adults can be a strong focus for ECVET development in the years to come. The existing examples of how this was done in previous cases will serve as a basis to develop further concepts based on evidence of what works. ■

# The ECVET Secretariat

Since early 2016, the ECVET Secretariat provides support to the European Commission (DG EMPL) and the ECVET Network, taking care of the efficient organisation and management of the activities included in the ECVET Annual Work programme. We are committed to enhancing cooperation between the EU Member States and the Commission, facilitating mutual learning and ensuring dissemination of knowledge and experience about ECVET.

Our main responsibilities include:

- Supporting meetings of the ECVET governing bodies (ECVET User's Group, ECVET Working Group, ECVET Network) by organising the meetings and disseminating the outcomes;
- Supporting mutual learning within the wider ECVET Community of Practice through Peer Learning Activities and the Annual ECVET Forum (the 2016 Annual Forum will take place on 11 October 2016 in Rome);
- Providing expert support and input to the drafting of various policy documents and reports (analytical papers, background documents, guidance notes, synthesis reports, etc.);
- Communicating and disseminating news about ECVET and learning outcomes from events through the ECVET Magazine and the ECVET Secretariat [website](#).

## How the ECVET Secretariat can support your organisation

The ECVET Secretariat works with a network of international experts with broad experience in organising and managing ECVET projects, doing research on ECVET and related topics, and carrying out training and information sessions on ECVET and qualification design.

These experts are happy to offer tailored support to implementation bodies or stakeholders' organisations at the national, regional, European or sectoral level. For instance, they can:

- Support your national training, information and communication activities;

- Support national qualification bodies in developing an approach to designing qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes;
- Support your sectoral training, information and communication activities, be it at EU-Level (EU sectoral bodies) or at national level.

We are prepared to offer this as an ad-hoc service tailored to your country and/or your institutional or sectoral context. We will work closely with your organisation to develop bespoke activities that fit your specific needs and demands.

Please contact the ECVET Secretariat by [email](#) and we will get in touch with you!

**Save the date: 11 October 2016 - ECVET Annual Forum in Rome**  
**The 2016 Annual ECVET Forum will take place on 11 October in Rome in the Ergife Palace Hotel.**

The ECVET Community of Practice meets once a year to discuss and exchange experiences working with ECVET. The ECVET Annual Forum 2016 will welcome 250 participants, representing VET providers, national ECVET contact points, national ECVET experts, national Erasmus+ agencies, labour market and education and training stakeholders, social partners and policy makers from all European Member States.

The topic in focus will be **'Using ECVET to improve the quality, effectiveness, flexibility and attractiveness of VET'**. The Annual Forum will provide the opportunity to gather information from presentations, panel debates and plenary sessions, and to discuss this new information in workshops. The Annual Forum will also present testimonials from learners, workers and employers who will share experiences of how they benefit from ECVET.



If you would like to receive more information and an invitation to the event, please register to the ECVET Secretariat [website](#).

## ECVET News

### The German ECVET Label

The **German ECVET Label** is awarded by the National Agency at BIBB in Germany (NA at BIBB) to educational institutions, enterprises or vocational schools which organise international learning mobilities using ECVET elements. The award encourages and promotes the use of ECVET.

The first ECVET Label campaign was launched in the winter of 2015. All organisations involved in Erasmus+ mobility projects that used ECVET principles and elements during learning mobilities could apply. The selection criteria developed by NA BIBB and the German team of ECVET experts derive from the "Erasmus+ Vet Mobility Quality Commitment", the "ECVET Users Guide for Geographical Mobility" and the ECVET Toolkit.

After an evaluation process, 20 institutions received the ECVET Label, a plate which can be displayed in school buildings or offices. These institutions successfully demonstrated that they are using ECVET principles (e.g. descriptions of learning outcomes, mobility units) or ECVET instruments (Memorandum of Understanding, ECVET Learning Agreements) to ensure quality during all periods of mobilities.

### Promoting recognition of learning across ECVET and ECTS:

#### Malta's 4<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Referencing report

This year, Malta published the 4th edition of its Referencing Report. This document presents the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) and how it references the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), and introduces a simple understanding for both ECVET and ECTS. The first chapter defines a 'credit' to be equivalent to 25 hours of learning, whether ECTS or ECVET. The orientation and methodology of the learning experience may be different, but credits are assigned according to this same definition. This understanding has been reached following extensive consultation with key players in both VET and Higher education. While not removing all barriers to permeability, this decision will enable learners to move from VET to Higher Education up the qualifications framework with greater facility. The Referencing Report can be accessed [here](#).



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

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

