

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

Annual ECVET Forum 2014

Trusting skills and qualifications
in the Europe of tomorrow

Vienna - 30 - 31 October 2014



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Context

The 2014 ECVET Annual Forum took place on October 30 and 31 in Vienna. More than 300 vocational education and training (VET) policy-makers, VET providers, practitioners, social partners and representatives from sector organisations met to build stronger relationships and to improve their understanding of how the ECVET principles are being used.

The Forum was organised in three sections:

- **taking stock to move to the future**
 - this was an opportunity to explore where progress had been made in implementing the ECVET principles; to share these experiences; and to highlight the successes, strengths and challenges of the relevant processes at the national and European levels;
- **preparing for the future** - between taking stock and discussing what comes next for ECVET, the second session of the Forum offered a time for reflection and exchange of information on current practice;
- **engaging with the future** - this was an opportunity to discuss potential future developments over the short and long term.

Since the 2013 Annual Forum in Prague, the ECVET team has produced resources to assist policy makers, project leaders, competent authorities, VET designers in Member States and representatives from stakeholder organisations. In addition, the ECVET team has organised peer learning activities, conferences and seminars which have helped National Coordination Points, national teams of ECVET experts and project organisers to share their ex-



periences and find out more about how to implement the ECVET principles. The Forum provided an opportunity for many of these experiences and resources to be shared and discussed.

The theme for the Forum - **trusting skills and qualifications in the Europe of tomorrow** - reflected the importance of developing high quality and relevant

VET qualifications. The discussions were based on the widespread recognition that the ECVET principles were being used in a wide range of contexts in order to meet different national or system level needs. The workshops and presentations provided an opportunity to identify and reflect on these different approaches and think about the future. ■

Welcome and introduction



Mr Hanspeter Huber, on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs in Austria opened the Annual Forum.

Speaking on behalf of the Minister, Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek, he highlighted Austria's long tradition in providing high quality VET and emphasised a number of characteristics which had influenced the success of the national system:

- Austria has a low level of youth unemployment as a result of its Dual system and the important role of VET schools. Over 80% of 16 years olds are in one form of VET - either the Dual system or a VET school;
- the national VET system is used in all nine provinces in Austria and it provides the basis for organising learners' international mobility with more than 25 countries;
- VET trainers are required to have relevant professional experience;
- there is close cooperation between organisations in the VET system, the economy and social partners.

Mr Huber encouraged participants to work on:

- ensuring ECVET is a central element in mobility as this will help to secure the quality of the arrangements;
- developing the long term goal of making ECVET usable in all qualifications;
- the validation of non-formal and informal learning and the role that ECVET can play in supporting this goal.

Mr Huber's introduction concluded with support for the ECVET principles and a hope that the discussions and reflections would be positive and productive.



Mr Antonio Silva Mendes, Director of Vocational Education and Training in the European Commission, also welcomed everyone to the Forum.

He outlined the context for VET and the challenges that need to be addressed by the ECVET principles. He began by emphasising the importance of listening to the views of students and the need to ensure that ECVET provided a strong link between education and the labour market. With more than 25 million unemployed and 80 million people with low skills in Europe it was important to remember that not all learners can reach university level study. This means there was a need to address the twin challenges of increasing the quality of learning at all levels, and helping individuals to improve quickly the quality of their skills.

With 14 million young people not in education, employment or training (NEETS) in Europe, there were clear signs that young people feel their needs were not being properly addressed by their

governments. This means more action was required to:

- increase the flexibility of VET;
- increase the amount of permeability between VET and higher education (including greater collaboration between ECVET and ECTS);
- address the mismatch between the outcomes of VET and the needs of the labour market (there are two million vacancies in Europe);
- improve the image of VET to avoid any suggestion of second class learning.

There were many initiatives at the European and national/system level but there were not enough links between them e.g. were there clear connections between the work of different sectors; different European instruments such as Europass and ECVET; sector skills alliances and ECVET; different credit systems; the ideas in the EASQ etc. And in many of these initiatives there was a need to think more about the role of the private sector - the European Alliance for Apprenticeships was one area where this had already been considered.

Mr Antonio Silva Mendes concluded by emphasising that the problems faced by Europe's VET systems had to be addressed in partnership. For this to happen there was a need for concrete outcomes, proposals and results from the Forum discussions. He encouraged the participants to develop and consider specific actions which could help to strengthen the VET systems in Europe. ■

SESSION 1 Taking Stock to Move to the Future

Setting the scene: Experience gained from ECVET

The morning of the first day focused on identifying and discussing participants' experiences of ECVET.

The discussions began with reflections from an institutional ; research; business and administrative perspective.

Organised in a round-table plenary style, **Carlo Scatoli** (European Commission), **Ramona David-Craescu** (Cedefop), **Hugues Pouzin** from the Confédération française du commerce interentreprises (France), and **Külli All** from the Ministry of Education and Research (Estonia) considered what they had learnt from their involvement with the ECVET Recommendation and the lessons that had been learnt so far.

Carlo Scatoli highlighted two issues in relation to ECVET's evaluation:

- ECVET's success in supporting mobility. This success was based on the use of the learning outcomes approach;
- ECVET support for lifelong learning through VET system reform and a move towards greater flexibility. The use of units of learning outcomes had helped to develop more individualised pathways which respond to learners' needs.

Ramona David-Craescu explained some of the key findings from Cedefop's annual monitoring of how Member States had applied the ECVET principles and emphasised that:

- it is important to acknowledge that units and modules based on credit were being used before the development of the ECVET Recommendation. In these situations, and in those countries with strong apprenticeship models, VET reform has not included a further move towards the ECVET principles;

- it is also important to acknowledge that the concept of "units of learning outcomes" is differently understood and applied - whereas some countries have or develop qualification units, others have or develop programme units. Despite the differences in understanding all countries report a widespread use of outcome based approaches.

Külli All explained how the VET system in Estonia had been reformed on the basis of the learning outcomes approach. This was creating greater flexibility and strengthening the quality of outcomes.

Hugues Pouzin illustrated how the ECVET principles had been used to develop geographical mobility at a European level through the creation of the NETINVET network. This network has helped entrepreneurs to understand the skills and competences needed by young people and apprentices to enhance their integration into the world of work.

Following the introductory comments each member of the panel say more about particular topics of interest to the Annual Forum. **Carlo Scatoli explained 'how ECVET fits with the other instruments at the European level'**.

He argued that:

- Europass and ECVET both support mobility and are therefore complementary. In particular, ECVET helped better preparing learner mobility;



- ECVET was an integral part of a comprehensive framework for mobility and lifelong learning, along with such tools national qualification frameworks which have emerged in recent years. These developments had made national systems more flexible and qualifications more responsive to changes in the labour market and technology.

For Külli All the reform of the Estonian VET system had been based on connections between the European instruments in particular that ECVET was connected to the Estonian national qualification framework (NQF) and the

national quality assurance framework (developed and aligned with the EQA-VET framework) as the aims of reform included strengthening the quality of mobility and the quality of VET.

Ramona David-Craescu commented on the links between ECVET and ECTS and their respective uses:

- ECVET has become the main approach for supporting quality in international mobility in VET but it should be noted that the ECVET Recommendation applies to all VET qualification including those at Levels 5 and 6;
- the Recommendation invites Member States to apply ECVET to all types and

levels of VET - it is not just an instrument to support international mobility but it is also an instrument to reform qualifications to support transfer and recognition within national qualification systems. ECVET can be used to support learners at Level 5 and 6 even though this training is often positioned as part of the higher education sector;

- there is a discussion to be had on whether to use ECVET and ECTS to describe higher level qualifications. There is a zone of uncertainty in many systems when looking at Level 5 qualifications - this is developing alongside a move from ECVET to ECTS.

Carlo Scatoli also discussed the links between ECVET and ECTS, which should be seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive instrument. For instance, with reference to programmes leading to EQF Level 5 qualifications, one or the other or indeed both could be helpful: ECVET can be used for mobility and the design of a unit based qualification structure and ECTS can be used for recognition of the final qualification, namely if its holders wish to move to a higher education programme.

The round-table participants commented on the lessons that have been learnt in the last year. For Külli All, there had been big changes in Estonia. All the VET curricula had changed and they were now based on learning outcomes; a set of evaluation criteria for learning outcomes had been defined; credit points for VET had been introduced; and the flexibility and the quality of outcomes in the VET system had increased. However, despite this progress, there was a need for more support in relation to:

- the inclusion of ECVET in the legislation;
- supporting teachers and trainers. Even though ECVET has been integrated into the Estonian curricula, the creation of learning outcomes was a new way of working. The VET teachers and trainers were being trained but nobody knew if the new approach would work as it was difficult to ensure consistency in defining learning outcomes;
- the reform process had not been easy for teachers. A lot had been expected from teachers as they had to explain the reforms to their students at the same time as introducing new ways of working. There was still a lot of work to be done.

For Hugues Pouzin, the last year had seen:

- on-going work to reform continuing VET for adults in France. This is in line with ECVET and includes the validation of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL);
- an increasing recognition that mobility was part of the VET reform process

and provided an important stimulus for raising the quality of VET. The need to validate and recognise the results/outcomes of mobility and integrate them into the learner's record of progress had led to a greater focus on quality;

- a need for simpler administration structures e.g. the Memorandum of Understanding procedures had to be simplified and designed to meet the needs of stakeholders;
- the use of ECVET based diplomas provide an excellent opportunity for young job searchers to document their qualifications.

Carlo Scatoli concluded this opening discussion by commenting that a clear signal from the last year concerned the need for greater cooperation between the European instruments to better meet the needs of learners and the labour market. ■

WORKSHOPS DISCUSSIONS OUTPUTS

After the first plenary session the participants attended a workshop session about the same topic - Taking Stock to move to the Future. The session comprised a series of parallel workshops – in each of which the same topics were considered.



The first discussion was based on the results from the pre-forum questionnaire spread among the participants before arriving to Vienna.

This questionnaire had identified the most tangible results and the impact of ECVET as follow:

- there are different levels of knowledge about ECVET across Europe. Sometimes ECVET is seen as controversial; in some countries it is not well known; and in other countries the national policy supports the ECVET principles but practitioners are unaware of ECVET;
- **the main impact of ECVET is at the European level rather than the national level;** it is at the operational level rather than the policy level; and it is mostly affecting learners' mobility rather than VET systems and qualification systems. At a European level, ECVET is well established and easy to use but it is difficult to put it into a

national system and context. There are many pilot projects using mobility but they have not had an impact at the system level. To implement the ECVET principles greater account needs to be taken of national VET systems;

- more needs to be done to build awareness. In many situations practitioners apply the ECVET principles without realising it. In some national systems it is not always clear how ECVET works and what it can offer;
- ECVET has had an impact on developing approaches based on learning outcomes. However It is often difficult to attribute system change to ECVET as there are other policy drivers which lead to national developments;
- ECVET has increased the quality of learners' mobility but points and credit transfer are rarely used. The ECVET documents have helped to increase the recognition of learning outcomes acquired during period of mobility. Young people have felt more confident when

travelling abroad because of ECVET and it has helped to motivate them. The challenge facing many pilot project organisers is how to improve the quality of assessment in the hosting organisation;

- there are concerns about the quality and low number of mobility projects. There are a number of questions to consider such as 'can ECVET have an impact on the number of learners who are mobile?' and 'how can we use ECVET to encourage more VET schools to engage in high quality mobility projects?'
- the ECVET principles can support lifelong learning. At the moment there is too great a focus on geographical mobility – there is a need to move to a broader perspective. **It is important to develop ECVET as a way of promoting and recognising lifelong learning** – this requires the development of tools with this focus. In addition the ECVET principles can help disadvantaged learners to gain recognition for their achievements;

- the ECVET principles can be used to develop new curricula and qualifications based on learning outcomes. This requires quality assurance issues to be addressed in a systematic way;
- the ECVET principles can be used to raise the quality of in-company training/work-based learning through a clear description of the contents of a programme and learning outcomes;
- ECVET and the other European instruments need to be promoted as a set of tools which can help to solve problems – they need to be seen as part of a total solution.

The second area for discussion was the ECVET evaluation published in June. Each discussion group considered whether there were any big issues that had been missed.

The main comments from the different workshops discussions were:

- the evaluation does not highlight the links between different European instruments within the context of mobility and lifelong learning. The evaluation report has not provided examples and guidance on how to link the European instruments and bring synergies;
- a lack of clarity on the mobility issue. There are a number of views on the usefulness of ECVET for mobility (although mobility works without ECVET) - as it is a lot of work for learners to spend a short time abroad. On the other hand learners' experiences are positive and the use of learning outcomes makes comparisons easier.
- the evaluation needed to focus more on ECVET content. The bureaucratic processes are not clear to all users e.g. the Memorandum of Understanding is

an umbrella document which is used in some countries by the ministries, in others it is used by VET schools; personal transcripts refer to many different documents which are not used in the same context; but the learning agreements seem to be more important as they increase the quality of learners' mobility programmes.

- the ECVET evaluation should have had a greater focus on analysing adult education.



The third area for discussion was lessons that had been learnt in implementing the ECVET principles and the key conditions for success.

The main comments from the workshop discussions were:

- the transparency instruments are a positive outcome of European cooperation. However the 'clear' mission of ECVET has not been realised; ECVET is not a priority issue for stakeholders or policy officials. More support for combining the European instruments is needed;
- to complete an analysis of ECVET's added value is necessary as this will help to decide if ECVET is still desirable;

- the toolkit for ECVET exists but is not certain about the next steps. It is necessary a clear 'road map';
- the national approach to ECVET depends on policy decisions that affect the national qualification system. ECVET is still a new idea outside the context of mobility. Take things slowly and the pace of implementation has to be adjusted to meet national needs and circumstances;
- in some countries there are different systems at work reason for some participants to think there was value in creating a national policy;
- difficulties arise from identifying and describing precise learning outcomes. ECVET points are considered to be less important at the moment. **The focus should be content and a more consistent method for developing learning outcomes. This includes developing standards and clarifying how learning outcomes can be used.** One way to engage with this process is to develop a better understanding of what is required in each job. In this context the Sector Skills Alliances can play a role;
- how to overcome the consequences of different approaches to designing learning outcomes was a point of the discussion. There is a need of sufficient level of detail in order to make comparisons but there isn't a consistent understanding of the purpose and use that is made of learning outcomes across Member States. Learning outcomes can include transversal competences – but there is a question as to whether they should be included. It is not possible to validate soft skills if they are not in the qualifications profiles described by the learning outcomes. This leaves with a problem of how these skills can be assessed.

- there was a request to take the 'credit' out of ECVET. Credit points can cause a lot of confusion and create controversy in the European discussion - however they can create trust. It is important for systems and sectors to decide what they want to do with credit points;
- a single credit system at the national level (ECTS-ECVET) may be needed to create something which works at all levels of VET. ECVET and ECTS do not necessarily have to be merged. But on national level an integrated approach is important to enhance permeability.



The fourth area for discussion was the involvement of stakeholders.

ECVET has not been the success story that was expected. At the moment there are many observers who are not willing to join the process. Thinking about the needs of stakeholders it is important to focus on the problems facing VET and potential solutions - not the ECVET instruments. This means that it should be identify problems and look to see how the European instruments can provide support and solutions. It is convenient to recognise that sometimes it is better not to use ECVET as it is just a tool – it should only be used when it is relevant

and it solves or addresses the problem. It is not something that should be 'sold'. In this context the participants identified the following issues and questions from the perspective of stakeholders:

- employers are the main stakeholders but gaining their involvement is hard. There is a resistance because employers are looking for a holistic approach to VET; and they do not always support ECVET. In some countries the idea of units is not supported as it is seen as leading to the fragmentation of VET qualifications. In other countries the level of trust placed in diplomas and qualifications is weak, and therefore employers have little interest in ECVET principles;
- identifying good practices is important as part of a process of communicating how the ECVET principles can be used to address stakeholders' problems. In this context more support to explain the added value of ECVET and better guidance is needed;
- in relation to the governance of ECVET, there is a need to streamline and simplify the communication. This means the need to write for the general reader and learner and not focus only on experts;
- ECVET can support teachers to develop more person-centred approaches to learning. There is growing interest from VET practitioners in systems that allow transfer and deliver quality but it have not done enough to engage them in the process. For teachers ECVET brings more work – and so much of the material is in English that there is an additional task of understanding a second or third language. There is a need to provide more training for VET teachers;
- ECVET is helping learners – most of the benefits are being realised by students

(e.g. those who were previously excluded from mobility programmes have become involved; students' motivation has increased; ECVET brings transparency and flexibility in relation to their learning etc.). However very few students benefit and there is a need to strengthen access to mobility as some sectors are rarely involved;

- ECVET often needs greater levels of cooperation between government ministries. Currently the success of ECVET depends largely on the commitment of individual project coordinators, mediators and national agencies - the competent bodies are not always closely involved and they appear to lack commitment;
- there is a lack of political commitment to the ECVET principles. Consequently ECVET's implementation has been a 'bottom-up' process. At some point, individual governments have to step in if ECVET is going to be implemented;
- there is not enough trust between Member States in relation to learning outcomes and VET qualifications. This leads to a protectionist approach which hinders further development;
- **policy makers, practitioners and experts are looking for guidelines on how to combine ECVET with others European instruments;**
- there are problems in assessing learners' competences in a consistent and reliable way. There is a need to train more assessors in order to improve the understanding of what standards are required in order for someone to have met the learning outcomes. This is a particular problem when Member States or VET providers strengthen their approach to the recognition of prior learning. ■

SESSION 2 Preparing for the Future

Keynote presentation



Mr Borhène Chakroun from UNESCO in his keynote speech looked at global developments in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and how these compared to trends in Europe.

The focus of his presentation was the study 'World Reference Levels for Learning Outcomes – the use of level descriptors in the 21st century' where he highlighted the work of UNESCO's third international congress on TVET which had identified the need to develop international guidelines on quality assurance for the recognition of qualifications based on learning outcomes, and a set of world reference levels for learning outcomes.

This led to the commissioning of a global study which considered regional qualification frameworks (e.g. the EQF, the Southern African Development Community – SADC, the Association of South-East Asian Nations - ASEAN, etc.) and how qualifications were developed and recognised.

The focus was learning outcomes and the study considered the extent to which there was a **global trend towards a common language based on skills**

and competences. The study's main findings, in the field of learning, were that there was convergence in relation to:

- the use of learning outcomes based on knowledge, skills and competences in the creation and use of qualification frameworks. There was considerable agreement in relation to the definition of knowledge and skills but there was no convergence on the definition of competence;
- the importance of using learning outcomes as the basis for assessment and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. However there were few examples where this had been put into practice;
- the absence of credit as the basis for recognising mobility within the regional structures. Many frameworks were at an early stage of development – and even though the EQF was well advanced things were moving slowly. It was clear that the regional frameworks can speak to each other and there was considerable value in sharing experiences and knowledge.

For UNESCO all forms of mobility were important. It was worth reflecting that there are more than 240 million economic migrants and this number is growing. This is leading to skills and talent gaps across the globe; greater mobility of employment with questions about the relevance of training and qualifications programmes based solely on national models and architecture rather than international requirements; the internationalisation of education and

training; the growing use of sector recognised awards rather than national qualifications; and the difficulty in pursuing lifelong learning opportunities when qualifications are not recognised across national boundaries.

UNESCO's study on 'World Reference Levels for Learning Outcomes – the use of level descriptors in the 21st century' had set itself the task of looking at two research questions:

- what are the convergences and divergences across level descriptors used in different types of qualification frameworks, and other contexts?
- what are the key terms associated with level descriptors and how are they defined?

The study looked at the development of World Reference Levels (WRL) – these were seen as a set of hierarchical statements which used learning outcomes to describe levels of achievements across different types of learning. These WRLs:

- provide a reference point and contribute to a common language and approach to using learning outcomes;
- provide a transparency tool which helps to make learning and the recognition of learning more transparent across countries and regions;
- facilitate recognition by having a direct impact on the recognition of qualifications and learning at a global level;
- fulfill a normative role where the WRLs become a "global standard" against which countries and regions benchmark their systems. ■

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS

Setting the scene: views from the ECVET Users Group



A second round table discussion to look at the implementation of the ECVET principles from the perspective of the ECVET Users Group⁽¹⁾ took place.

The focus for this round table was to prepare for the future - it enabled members of the Users Group **to identify the strategies that had succeeded; to share points of views about what is needed to prepare for the future;** and to comment on the current state of play in relation to the implementation of the ECVET principles. Each of the participants (Eduard Staudecker, Barbara Kelly, Manuela Bonacci, Piotr Bartosiak, and Philippe Perfetti) was invited to discuss the following questions:

Question: from your perspective, what are the main challenges and barriers that VET systems have to overcome?

Eduard Staudecker commented on Austria's national ECVET strategy. This had been developed to:

- enhance the attractiveness of VET;
- enhance the quality of mobility programmes; and
- recognise at the national level those learning outcomes which had been achieved during a period of mobility.

(1) The ECVET Users Group is the policy cooperation group that pursues coherence in the implementation and development of ECVET. It includes representatives of national authorities, social partners and stakeholders, as well as Cedefop and ETF.

In addition, the national strategy has helped to increase permeability between VET and higher education. In this context, the question on how best to handle qualifications at EQF Level 5 is very interesting - as there are many options and possible approaches; and each of them is worth considering. However at a European level, it was necessary to take a more pragmatic approach. It does not seem possible to have a uniform and standardised system in Europe as there are many national ways to implement the ECVET principles. As it did not seem sensible to harmonise systems in Europe, it was better to work with the clusters of countries which had been identified by Cedefop as having similar characteristics.

Barbara Kelly from Ireland explained the gradual evolution in the development of their national approach. Initially Ireland had created a national framework which had an impact on the whole VET system. Learning outcomes came next through the development of the NQF. The idea of learning outcomes was well developed and widely understood in the Irish context. In the Irish VET system we have units and credits and we feel we have covered the basics. But we know we need to do more, particularly in relation to the further development of VET providers' relationships with industry. We need a more employment related system instead of a system which is based on boundaries that stop just outside the VET school. We need more fluidity in order to support greater national mobility - particularly between VET and higher education. We know that we need to talk more about higher VET. One of our recent developments has been the creation of one national agency which covers quality

assurance and qualifications in both VET and higher education. This should help to improve permeability in our system.

Philippe Perfetti from UEAPME (the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) reminded everyone of the principle of subsidiarity in relation to education. In this context UEAPME was working on a project related to higher VET as their organisation sees a need to build bridges between traditional and higher VET. The monitoring work from Cedefop had shown most countries had decided not to implement ECVET for qualifications and training at Level 5 and above. This was something that needed to be challenged and more work was needed to break down the walls between VET and higher education.

Manuela Bonacci explained that there was a lot to be done in relation to VET and higher education at the national level in Italy. There had been considerable progress in developing the learning outcomes approach but more work was needed to develop trust between institutions. While permeability between VET and higher education was an important aim, it was not the only one – and there was a need to support vulnerable groups and learners.

Question: what do you think is the next priority for ECVET?

Barbara Kelly commented that it was often when change happened that you looked at things differently. In the Irish national context, mobility was becoming more important, and a more integrated approach (to the European instruments and the VET-higher education relation-

ship) was needed. The focus had to be on accreditation and the decisions about which organisations can offer training and qualifications – we should recognise that ECVET and ECTS are different and they seek to do different things.

Manuela Bonacci stressed the need to involve all the relevant stakeholders, including VET practitioners, in the redesign of national systems. The focus should be on working with teachers to help them to value the move away from curriculum-driven programmes based on inputs towards the outcome-based approach which recognised what learners know, understand and can do.

Eduard Staudecker repeated his request to stop the discussion on points in order to spend more time on dialogue between institutions (e.g. those in the VET and higher education sectors). Learning outcomes were more important than points as the outcome-based approach should be the basis for creating mutual trust.

Philippe Perfetti reflected on how much the sector had changed. When, ten years ago, there was a drive to create an EU credit system for VET the designers were not sure how things would develop. Now we need to stop and think whether we still have this aim. ECVET has become a powerful way to develop mutual trust, quality in mobility, permeability etc. But do we want an EU credit system for VET – if we do, we have to move forward and take the next steps. The focus, if we wanted to add value to what already exists, was to find better connections between the various European instruments.

Question: I have heard several times that ECTS does not use learning outcomes. Is this correct?

Philippe Perfetti: Unfortunately the same words are used but we do not mean the same thing. In the ECVET environment, learning outcomes are based on what the learner can demonstrate in terms of their knowledge, skills and understanding. ECTS does not just consider the body of knowledge and a set of capabilities acquired by the learner, it also considers time spent in training or assigned to a unit or module - this is not the case for ECVET.

Barbara Kelly: We should recognise that the higher education has its own complexities and challenges. We know we need to do more to strengthen mobility in VET but the higher education with their use of ECTS also has a long way to go. Both systems can learn a lot from each other as each is addressing similar issues e.g. quality assurance is high on the agenda for both VET and higher education in Ireland.

Question: how do you see the development of cooperation between ECVET and ECTS?

Barbara Kelly: The EQF covers both VET and higher education. I would not suggest merging ECVET and ECTS, but at the national level we need to find ways to integrate credit systems in order to create a seamless system for learners. We need a holistic approach at the national level.

Manuela Bonacci: When we started to develop the EQF, ECVET we talked about the importance of transparency. This is still the case – transparency for

learners matters. As ECVET and ECTS have the learning outcome approach in common, there is more that we can do at the national level. I agree with Eduard Staudecker that we need to stop talking about points - what matters is credit. And in this area we need to move forward.

Barbara Kelly: In Ireland we have a ten level qualification framework and this offers a comprehensive system across VET and higher education. I think we need to have integrated systems which cover all levels of learning. We need to develop and use a common language.

Question: We have talked a lot about higher VET, what can ECVET offer those with learning disabilities or those who are taking lower level qualifications?

This question arose because there is a need for the European transparency instruments to offer something for all learners.

Eduard Staudecker: This group of learners is extremely important and their needs have to be addressed. There can be a danger that we focus too much on Levels 4 and higher VET – and we need to avoid the risk of this perception.

Question: does the panel have any reflections on the two approaches to defining units: for ECVET the focus is on qualifications; in higher education the focus is on the curriculum.

Philippe Perfetti. I think we all recognise that sometimes the higher education sector does not have strong enough links to the labour market. But this is not

always the case; there are many professionally oriented programmes linked to labour market. I think we need a series of experiments in higher VET – we need to test things out with ECVET and ECTS and see what solutions are developed.

To finish the round table discussion everyone made comments on what should be the focus for ECVET in the near future as following:

- we should acknowledge that ECVET can be implemented in many different ways at the national level. This diversity of approaches should be supported as a unified approach or harmonisation is not possible. This diversity also applies to the question of ECVET points;
- ECVET and ECTS do not have to be merged. But at the national level it is important to create an integrated approach to enhance permeability;
- as learning outcomes are the ‘common currency’ this should be the focus of support;
- ECVET (and the other European transparency instruments) have the potential for supporting people with learning disabilities and those from vulnerable groups. These groups of learners should not be forgotten as we focus on higher level VET. ■

Question and answer session with the European Commission



During the morning of the first day, all the participants were invited to submit a question to colleagues from the European Commission. These were collected and the Forum moderator, Fiona Bibby, selected questions at random.

To respond to the questions four colleagues from the European Commission joined Fiona on the stage. Representing different areas of policy in the Commission, the questions were answered by João Santos (representing the Education and Vocational Training Unit); Carlo Scatoli (representing ECVET); Koen Bois d'Enghien (representing EQAVET) and Felix Rohn (representing Erasmus+ and the Sector Skills Alliances).

Question: how does EUROPASS support ECVET?

Carlo Scatoli explained how EUROPASS and ECVET both support learners, in particular mobile learners. As EUROPASS is due to be revised in 2015, this provides an opportunity for greater coordination between the two European instruments, with a view to a

comprehensive framework to improve the preparation of mobility experiences and document the skills and competences developed by learners during those experiences.

Question: how do you see cooperation developing between ECVET and ECTS?

Carlo Scatoli said it had to be recognised that ECVET and ECTS have different approaches: ECTS was created for students taking part in an Erasmus exchange in order that they could receive recognition for their learning when they returned home; and ECVET was created to support VET learners who undertake short term mobility and want their learning to be recognised. Despite the differences, there are areas where convergence can happen. Both systems promote a concept of credit based on learning outcomes, and it will become clearer with the forthcoming revised ECTS users' guide. There are technical problems which have to be solved (e.g. how to respond to overlapping qualifications and training at EQF Level 5) and rules for cooperation will need to be defined.

Question: what is the scope of cooperation between ECVET, EQF and EQAVET? And which of these instruments should take the lead?

João Santos explained that it is not really a question of one instrument taking

the lead – all of them have their role to play. And the characteristics and aims of the European Area for Skills and Qualifications (EASQ) is to create a framework, based on learning outcomes, that brings together all the European instruments to order to increase their coherence. We should not forget that these instruments support a greater purpose, namely to have qualifications based on learning outcomes and achievements recognised irrespective of where and when they were demonstrated.

From a more operational perspective, **Koen Bois d'Enghien** reminded everyone of the conclusions from EQAVET's external evaluation last year and the measures that had been taken as a result of the findings. As one of the conclusions was the need for better links between EQAVET and other European instruments, a joint working group between ECVET and EQAVET had been established. With representatives from national organisations and European stakeholders, the joint group is looking at what lessons can be learnt from cooperation. The working group's conclusions will be finalised around April 2015, and their conclusions will be presented during the EQAVET Forum in June 2015 and discussed by the ECVET Users Group in May 2015.

Question: how can ECVET support sustainable long term mobility? Do you think short term mobility is just cosmetic?

Carlo Scatoli noted that most mobility experiences in VET were part of a Leonardo da Vinci project which includes three, four or five weeks abroad. However ECVET can also sustain long term mobility. Mobility within programmes

that lead to qualifications at EQF Level 5 often provide longer periods of time abroad - and as mentioned earlier sometimes these schemes use ECVET to support mobility, though they may use ECTS for the final qualification.

João Santos commented that ECVET supports lifelong learning as well as geographical mobility. This is an issue that was highlighted in the external evaluation of ECVET. For many countries ECVET has been used to support lifelong learning as it is a way to structure qualifications, and the use of learning outcomes and units makes it easier to validate non-formal and informal learning.

Question: what plans have been made to support mobility in the Erasmus + programme?

Felix Rohn explained that the second call for projects under Erasmus+ programme was published in early October 2014. Under Erasmus + it is possible to organise mobility projects in the same way as under the former programmes (e.g. Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus, Grundtvig etc.) with one exception concerning those people that are on the labour market, may they be employed or unemployed. Under the Leonardo da Vinci programme, it was possible to organise mobility for people on the labour market. This target group is not eligible any more for Erasmus+ mobility as it is now much better funded through the European Social Fund.

João Santos talked about the future of the Erasmus + programme in relation to the new structure of the European Commission. He reminded the Forum participants that **VET and adult education will move from DG Education and Culture to DG Employment.** The

Erasmus+ programme will continue to be managed by DG Education and Culture, and the percentage of the funds allocated to VET and Adult learning will not change. However **in the future, the policy guidance on these sectors will come from DG Employment.**

Question: in relation to the Sector Skills Alliances, are there any projects which include the automobile sector?

Felix Rohn: Yes. there is a pilot Sector Skills Alliance on-going that started beginning 2013 and is developing continuing training modules for the workforce in automotive manufacturing.

Question: what is the role of the Erasmus + national agencies in relation to the national authorities?

Felix Rohn commented that stakeholders have different responsibilities at national level. Usually national agencies are responsible for managing projects and the national authorities are responsible for the VET system e.g. when a Sector Skills Alliance is working on a new curricula they may be working with national agencies. However when it comes to formal recognition, project partners usually have to apply to the national authorities because recognition takes place at the national level. Obviously the national agencies can provide feedback and advice to the national authorities in relation to the work that has been done by the partnership; they can send reports in order to influence and speed up decisions, but the decisions usually rest with the national authorities. ■

The Market Place : an opportunity to look at successful ECVET practice



The afternoon of the second day provided an opportunity for participants to look at, and discuss some ECVET projects. The eight thematic rooms ('hubs') focused on different issues gave a chance to the participants to choose according to their needs and interests.

Hub 1: ECVET in 45 minutes

This session provided an opportunity for those who are new to ECVET to learn about the principles and technical specifications. There was also an opportunity for participant to ask question and share doubts and concerns. The discussions focused on the ECVET principles and how they could be used to support various aspects of VET e.g. the transfer of achievement; the recognition of learners' achievement; the development of qualifications based on units of learning outcomes; and the design of learning outcomes which can be assessed in terms of skills, knowledge and competence.

The discussions looked at the following description of the ECVET principles:

The ECVET principles can be used to enable recognition and accumulation of

a person's knowledge, skills and competence (their learning outcomes) with a view to achieving a qualification. What matters is that the expected learning outcomes are achieved by learners (young or adults) in accordance with the qualification's requirements, not how and where they are achieved. This means that ECVET can be used to recognise learning outcomes achieved in formal, non-formal or informal settings. These learning outcomes can be accumulated and taken into account for the award of the qualification. In addition, the ECVET principles can be used to support learner mobility by making the transfer and recognition of learning outcomes achieved abroad possible. The ECVET Recommendation provides a set of technical guidelines which make the principles operational including the description of qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes with associated points and a transfer process.

Hub 2: Erasmus+

This session was organised in partnership with the European Commission and EACEA (the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency). It was designed to support potential project promoters and partner organisation who were interested in the opportunities offered by the ERASMUS+ programme. It is a single, integrated programme covering Education, Training, Youth and Sport from 2014 to 2020.

It promotes:

- the use of ICT tools and the open access to educational materials, documents and media (OER – open education resources; MOOCs – mass on-line, open access courses);
- more synergies through different fields of education, training and youth;
- multilingualism;
- equity and inclusion;
- protection and safety of participants;
- EU transparency and recognition tools.

It includes three key actions:

Key Action 1 (KA1) - Learning mobility for individuals

- staff mobility, in particular teachers, trainers, school leaders and youth workers;
- mobility for higher education students, vocational education and training students;
- master degree schemes;
- mobility for higher education for EU and non-EU beneficiaries;
- volunteering and youth exchanges.

Key Action 2 (KA2) - Cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices

- strategic partnerships between education/training or youth organisations and other relevant actors;
- large scale partnerships between education and training establishments and the world of work including Knowledge Alliances and Sector Skills Alliances;
- IT-platforms including e-Twinning and EPALe (e-Platform for Adult Learning in Europe)
- co-operation with third countries and a focus on neighbourhood countries.

Key Action 3 (KA3) Support for policy reform

- Open Method of Coordination;
- EU instruments: valorisation and implementation;
- policy dialogue with stakeholders, third countries and international organisations.

In 2015 the priorities for VET under the Erasmus + programme are: work-based learning in VET; labour-market relevance, reducing skills mismatches and shortages; and through skills monitoring, alignment with regional strategies and curricula adaptation.

Hub 3: National teams of ECVET expert

This session was designed for the ECVET expert teams. There were a number of short presentations to explained the range and type of activity that had been completed during the year.

- **Slovenia** had organised a residential event for ECVET expert teams from six countries (Austria, Croatia, Romania, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovenia). The two day event aimed to develop closer regional cooperation by identifying common issues and potential joint projects;
- **France and Belgium** have identified similarities and differences in their national



VET systems. The aims of this reflection were to develop more ECVET-based opportunities for learners taking lower level VET qualifications; make mobility easier; and support the production of common documents. The output from this work will be published in an ECVET toolkit;

- **France and Belgium (French speaking community)** have produced a joint leaflet on 'What employers need to know about ECVET' – the focus is on improving VET quality by using the ECVET principles;
- in **Belgium** there will be a new initiative from November 2014 which focuses on developing a better understanding of mobility in the three parts of the country;
- **Bulgaria** has developed guidance for young people on the connections between ECVET and EQF with a view to improving the quality of mobility projects. In addition the team has organised a conference for young people in order to produce new ideas and insights for promoting ECVET to companies; providing information on mobility to VET schools; and encouraging training partners to enhance the qualifications offered to young people;
- **the UK** uses the ECVET principles as a means of supporting mobility projects and for improving the quality of structured learning. The team has focused on using the European instruments to improve the recognition of learners' achievement;
- **Turkey's** national team was established in 2014. ECVET is part of the VET curricula and will be used to integrate informal and non-formal learning in 2015. The team organised two seminars to support this development and raise awareness;

- in **The Netherlands** the team found ECVET's implementation started well but it beginning to stall. This happened because the development process had not fully taken account of the needs of practitioners. Without them having the experience of defining and writing learning outcomes, it was hard to make progress. The ECVET expert team organised school-based workshops to help practitioners and introduced a one-week study visit to Finland and Estonia for Dutch VET teachers. This gave the VET teachers experience of seeing learning outcomes being used in practice and provided new ways of using ECVET in the context of blended learning.

Hub 4: Sector based projects

The session looked at how a sectoral approach can be used in ECVET. There were presentations from five projects and an opportunity to discuss each project's organisation and main outputs.

- euVET portal [www.euVETsupport.com] focused on the creation of an online portal to support the practical application of EQF and ECVET in the **logistics sector**. The project produced a matrix for recognising prior learning; a set of learning materials; some easy-to-use and understand examples of where and how the EQF and ECVET can be used;
- **Innovative coaching for 50 +** project [<http://www.ic50plus.eu/about/>] looked at recognising older learners' prior achievement. The project developed a matrix which analysed a 100 hour training programme. This matrix can support lifelong learning or adult training. It includes ways to use ECVET

to recognise prior achievement and highlights how easy it is to use ECVET when there are learning outcomes and learning descriptions;

- **Icare** project [<http://www.icareproject.eu/>] supports the identification of training needs in **the social and health care sector**. The demand for professionals to work in this sector is increasing and many potential recruits do not have the right qualifications. To help those who want to move to the sector, including those from other countries, there is a need to assess existing competences. This enables potential recruits to complete a shortened training programme to acquire the 'missing' competences and gain the required qualification more quickly. The project produced a test for identifying which competences had been acquired and what extra training was needed. The test was piloted in different countries to ensure it was effective and operated as planned;
- **Corporate Social Responsibility** [www.isq.pt, www.rso-matrix.com and www.csr-matrix.com] project has developed a Tool Kit, which includes a qualification matrix and a structured approach to the recognition of prior learning. These can be used to support trainers who are working in the CSR field;
- the **transport/know-in** [www.know-in.eu] project looked at the European road **transport industry**. In this sector managers are often responsible for organising deliveries across large areas of Europe; managing a large number of staff; and ensuring the timely and safe delivery of high value cargoes. The project produced a multilingual matrix of qualifications relevant to the sector;

a structured approach to the recognition of prior learning; training materials which could be used by people 'on the road'; and a self-assessment tool which helped individuals to identify gaps in their learning which could form the basis of a self-training programme.

Following the presentations, the discussions focused on **useful tips and hints** for those seeking **to develop and implement ECVET projects**.

- it helps to start the work by developing a qualification matrix – this should be completed before considering any training curricula;
- spend time ensuring everyone understands what is meant by the concepts (e.g. ECVET, learning outcomes, and the recognition of prior learning etc.) Developing this common language saves a lot of time later on, and avoids unnecessary delays and confusion;
- use the experience of other projects;
- if you plan to develop a new training programme, it is easier to start by considering qualifications;
- start by defining the things that you have in common – this is more productive than focusing on what is different and how systems differ;
- ensure everyone is clear about which needs are being met. If this cannot be done, the project's results will not be sustainable;
- make sure partner organisations and key stakeholders (including any policy makers) are committed to the project before you start;
- be aware that once the project is finished, enthusiasm can lapse and it will be hard to restart things. This 'valley of death' needs to be planned for and you need to agree how to re-motivate everyone before you fall into this 'valley'.

Hub 5: Networks

The session included three ten minutes presentations on each network's key ideas and activities. The participants then met with representatives from each network to discuss their own priorities and future plans.

The three networks were:

- **NETINVET** [<http://www.netinvet.eu/network>] began in 2006. Originally it aimed to develop a uniform European diploma to support transparency for young people involved in mobility. The network includes training centres and companies which offer programmes in the field of international trade, and the trade and services sector. It provides the partner organisations with a platform and network where they can exchange ideas, develop learning agreements and strengthen mutual trust
- **NetECVET** [<http://netecvet.com/>] was originally developed as a way of crea-



ting a toolbox to support mobility programmes. This toolbox is available of the website and is up-dated regularly to show new developments in mobility. The network was based on 14 national agencies for lifelong learning programmes. The approach was one that focused on developing support materials arising from actual practice, rather than working on the formal implementation of the ECVET principles in Member States.

- **Euro Apprenticeship Network** [<http://www.euroapprenticeship.eu/en/home.html>] focuses on transnational mobility for apprentices in partnership with companies (employers). The network operates its own label system; provides a web platform for partner organisations; and involves more than 350 partners. The network has continued to thrive after the initial funding for the project was spent. The network's activities take account of different apprenticeship arrangements across member States – it is now looking at how to operate a virtual mobility programme which is based on the e-twinning ideas used in EU programmes.

Hub 6: ECVET for geographical mobility

This session gave potential project promoters information about how the ECVET principles can be used to improve the quality and effectiveness of geographical VET mobility. ECVET is one of several European instruments designed to make qualifications systems more easily understood, transparent and flexible throughout the EU in order to support more mobility for workers and learners.

The Recommendation describes ECVET as a technical framework for the transfer, recognition and, where appropriate, accumulation of individuals' learning outcomes with a view to achieving a qualification. In this context, to make the ECVET principles work, there is a need for:

- qualifications to be described in terms of units of learning outcomes with associated points;
- a transfer and accumulation process;
- complementary documents such as learning agreements, transcripts of records and an ECVET users' guide.

The session began with a short presentation on the key issues affecting geographical mobility e.g. learning agreements; learning outcomes; units; recognition; transfer etc. Following this presentation there were a number of small group discussions which enabled the participants to look at the key issues and consider how they could work in their context.

Hub 7: Projects which are not sector based

This session looked at the following projects:

Project 1: Brace yourself – an initiative in initial VET mobility

This is a Leonardo da Vinci funded project which looked at mobility for learners taking an EQF Level 3 qualification. The project considered mobility which was in line with the EQF and EQAVET principles and took account of the four stages of the quality assurance cycle in the EQAVET Recommendation (plan, implement, evaluate and review). The project led to the development of units based on learning

outcomes - one unit focused on transversal skills and the other unit focused on job-specific skills. The team developed assessment grids which could be used to assess the two units. The project was designed to:

- meet the needs of the labour market;
- look at whether the four countries involved in the project had the same competences and arrangements for the two units;
- look at whether the validation of achievement could be undertaken in the host country. At the moment assessment takes place in the host country and validation is in the home country. The project considered whether there could be different and more efficient ways of doing this.

Project 2: EQF meets ECVET **[<http://www.easped.eu/en>]**

A Leonardo da Vinci funded project under the Transfer of Innovation initiative. The project is not yet complete. It is aiming to look at recognition for non-formal VET programmes that are based on EQF Levels 1-3 qualifications. The team is interested in looking at learners who have some strengths and skills even though they may not meet all the learning outcomes described in a qualification. In these situations it is possible for learners to have some skills at a higher level than is required by the qualification. The project is looking at the issue of partial achievement and has designed learning outcomes for VET programmes at Level 1 and 2. Two certification models have been developed and tested with a view to creating a diploma that includes units at higher levels than the level of the qualification.



Project 3: Managing work in co-operatives

Co-operatives are organised on a different set of business principles to those used in private sector companies and limited liability companies. They have a different ethos and way of working. While many co-operatives aim to make a profit; others have a broader set of aims and objectives. In this context this project developed competences for top managers working in co-operatives. The project sought to create:

- a profile for the managers which would be widely recognised in different countries and contexts;
- a common method for evaluating managerial skills acquired through formal and informal learning;
- an assessment model based on a reflective journal. The managers participated in a mobility programme based on learning outcomes; and the assessment strategy focused on the acquisition

of these learning outcomes as shown through their completion of the reflective journal.

The discussions on the project focused on how the project team:

- motivated top managers to participate in a mobility programme?
- ensured that assessors were trained or qualified to complete this type of assessment?

Project 4: Skills Bank

This project created a data-base of skills and qualifications which are compatible with ECVET, EQF and the ESCO. These skills and competences can be used as the basis for careers guidance and for the recognition of prior learning. The forum participants had three questions on the project:

- what communications strategy and actions are used to ensure the wider public know about the Skills Bank?

- what are the characteristics that distinguish the Skills Bank from other databases?
- can the Skills Bank be simplified in order to reach a wider audience?

Hub 8: ECVET for lifelong learning

This session was in two parts. The first discussion focused on how the ECVET principles can contribute to supporting the creation of more flexible learning pathways. The participants identified the following issues:

- ECVET can help to formalise learning experiences that are acquired outside the formal system;
- assessment is an important part of this formalisation of learners' achievement and the ECVET principles provide a framework for assessment and validation;
- to assure quality, assessments have to be comparable in terms of the stan-

dards and processes/methods that are used. This means it is important to be clear about who is defining the standards and setting the processes;

- using the ECVET principles as the way to recognise prior learning provides an easy link to the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- there is a need to decide whether to focus on the benefits of ECVET or the benefits of learners' outcomes. The participants agreed that it was more important for stakeholders to hear about learning outcomes and this should be the focus of stakeholder communication;
- it is important to recognise that there are different understandings of the term 'qualification'. In a working environment it is taken to mean that people are qualified for a certain job; in the education field it is understood as a 'formal diploma';
- 'soft skills' are important for employers. The learning outcomes approach can support their acquisition but there is a debate to be had on how confident we are about their assessment in different contexts;
- it is worth recognising that assessment is not an objective process. However we can increase objectivity through the further training of teachers and assessors.

The second set of discussions focused on the needs of employers in relation to lifelong learning. Their interest is not just in connection with competences and skills; it is also related to the complexity of the system and who has responsibility for assessing individuals' achievement. In many countries it is difficult to get a job without the appropriate qualification. Learners know that employers expect a

formal diploma – usually arising from the completion of a formal learning pathway. Achieving the same qualification through a pathway that includes non-formal or informal learning is a significant issue in some contexts. The discussion looked at how the ECVET principles could contribute to finding a solution. The following issues were raised:

- the question about who is defining assessment standards has to be addressed. When a learner has acquired the expected learning outcomes in a non-formal or informal way, the VET system has to make sure that these achievements are comparable to those acquired through a formal pathway. In VET systems with examinations or other formal assessments, there needs to be ways to support learners' preparation for these procedures;
- **the ECVET principles can help to formalise all types of learning.** In addition the principles can help to ensure that non-formal and informal learning prepares learners for more than one job. One way of doing this is through the development of a 'transversal unit' which is included in several qualifications;
- **the assessment of soft skills is complex;** it is often difficult and it can be seen as too subjective. These challenges are often greater when assessing soft skills that are acquired through a non-formal or informal learning process. Despite the challenges, the ECVET principles can help by using learning outcomes to describe the competences relating to soft skills;
- in some countries and occupations qualifications are based on legislation and therefore a formal diploma is needed. However this is not always the situation

e.g. in the retail industry, people may be hired because of their experience.

At the end of the session, there were comments relating to the value of non-formal and informal learning. These included a reminder of the importance of giving learners opportunities. **If we put the learner at the centre of the process, it will help us to produce systems that are transparent, easily understood and fair for everybody.** It is not enough to develop and use the ECVET principles just to support mobility – we need to use the principles more extensively and in broader contexts. ■

SESSION 3 Engaging with the future

Setting the scene: what the future might hold?

The morning of the second day began with the final round table discussion.

During this plenary discussion Pasqualino Mare (ETF), Ramona David-Craescu (Cedefop), Dominique Faivre-Pierret (ANFA's Deputy General Director) and Wolfgang Kreher (Land of Hessen in Germany) offered their thoughts on how ECVET could be developed through the following questions:



How in the light of the evaluation and your experiences of using the ECVET principles, do you see ECVET developing in the next two or three years?

Pasqualino Mare: As many colleagues know ETF works in countries outside the European Union and tries to use the European instruments to support our work. From this perspective, there is one measure that should be done. So far ECVET has been used mainly at project level, but it is time for Member States to implement the ECVET principles in their national qualifications frameworks; implement units of learning outcomes; and implement ECVET at the national level. We know what all the technical aspects of ECVET have been tested in projects; it now has to be implemented at the policy level. European money is not enough to

ensure the long-term mobility of students across Europe - these funds will always be limited. If mobility of VET students is not supported with national funds, it will not work and ECVET will never be fully implemented.

Ramona David-Craescu: Permeability, mobility, credit points etc. are not new issues (they have been being discussed since 2002 when the first European-level meeting was organised in relation to the creation of a European credit system for VET; the question for all of us 'is whether ECVET has come to a standstill – are we just moving around in circles'. If this is what is happening we need to think about how to break out of this circle. In considering the next steps we need to reflect on whether ECVET has fulfilled its potential and broken down the walls in

the education sector. Has it facilitated mobility; created individual pathways in education and training; and led to better connections between education/training and the labour market. If this hasn't been done, how can ECVET fulfil this potential? The existing national credit systems have shown that they work. As we move forward we need to think more about the learner and how ECVET and other credit systems can provide more benefits and be fairer to the learner.

Wolfgang Kreher: We should proceed at speed with our VET reforms. In all our work we need to remember that we have two main customers – the learners and employers. The employers want qualified people and learners want qualifications that enable them to enter employment or further training. ECVET is a good model to create courses and programmes in terms of learning outcomes, but it has to be combined with quality assurance mechanisms in order to ensure recognition. We have to develop closer cooperation in the implementation of the European instruments; and combine learning outcomes and assessment strategies with quality assurance mechanisms.

Dominique Faivre-Pierret: From a company and sector perspective, I am quite optimistic about ECVET. The European instruments are different pieces of a puzzle and they are being put together to create a picture of the education and training systems that we want and need. In France we have many of the pieces in place: we have validation of prior learning; most certificates have been put into a modular structure etc. In our sector (as with many other sectors) we have created a personal learning account - this enables all employees to record their learning and qualifications

in a consistent way. From 2015 every French employee in our sector will use this 'learning account' which is financed by the companies. This will support our objective of enabling every employee who achieves a particular level of skill and competence to have the chance to move to the next level. This initiative is one of many in the sector which aims to strengthen employability, support sustainable companies and increase employment opportunities. The difficulty we face is how to make sure employees understand and use this instrument. We need to position our communications correctly and focus on company sustainability and employment. If this is done well, implementation will follow as the European instruments will meet the needs of companies.

Question: how could the implied cooperation between the European instruments be achieved and be made more concrete?

Ramona David-Craescu: Coordination and cooperation between the instruments needs to take place at the national level - and this is what some countries are already doing. Policy makers are already using lessons from the European level and implementing them in the context of national needs and circumstances. The ways in which the instruments are used differs in Member States – but there is evidence that synergies are being created at the national level.

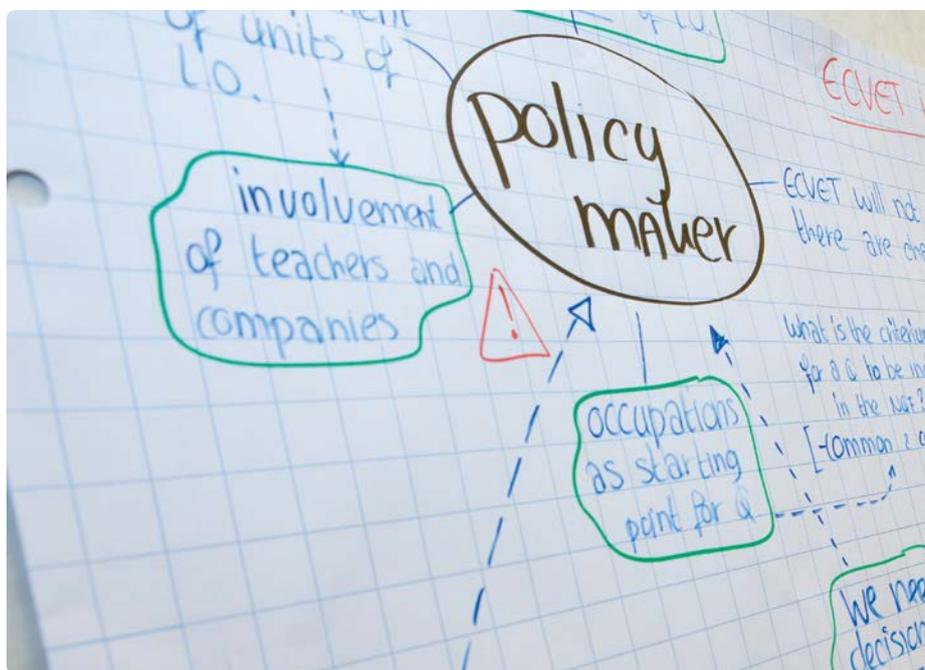
Wolfgang Kreher: The importance of the national level has to be underlined. However in this Forum we are looking at the European instruments and maybe the *European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Competences* (ESCO) can help <https://ec.europa.eu/esco/home>.

Dominique Faivre-Pierret: We have heard a lot about aligning ECVET and ECTS. From a company's perspective the focus is not just about recruiting staff with low levels of qualifications; it is also about managers. This means we have to look at higher education and look for synergies. Companies have strong connections with qualifications: they understand and use them. With ESCO (the multilingual classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupation) it is more difficult for companies to assess blocks of learning outcomes and understand what they mean. From our perspective the new ESCO tool adds too much complexity for companies.

Pasqualino Mare: The real strength and potential of ECVET is in its use for validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning. Units of learning outcome have the ability to be used for this type of learning and in some countries this is critical e.g. in Morocco 40 per cent of national activity takes place in the informal economy. To support the whole economy, it is important to recognise people are gaining skills and competences which can be used for qualifications which help them to move into the formal economy.

Ramona David-Craescu: It is clear in all the evaluations that the European instruments are adjusted to the national contexts and implemented differently across Europe. Therefore, to safeguard the original aim of the European instruments i.e. increase transparency and mobility at the European level, it is becoming more urgent to work towards a common, clear, coherent point of reference. ■

WORKSHOPS DISCUSSIONS OUTPUTS



Each of the nine workshops looked at the same two questions.

These focused on possible futures for ECVET.

The first question looked at the immediate issues – within the next two or three years. The second question allowed for more free thinking as it considered possible scenarios over the next ten years. As with all discussions about the future, many of the comments focused on ‘what would be desirable’ and ‘what was more likely.’

It can be difficult to distinguish between these categories as participants saw the same issue from different perspectives and from their national context.

Discussion on how can we strengthen the use of the ECVET principles in the short term?

The following key points summarise the discussion in all nine workshop groups.

1. Promote and improve the communication about ECVET

- to improve the effectiveness of ECVET, there has to be a more effective communication strategy which goes beyond ECVET for mobility. We should not underestimate the size of this challenge because it is clear that even policy makers don't know about

ECVET. Promotion and communication have to be undertaken in simpler, more understandable terms – simplification is essential when working with a wide range of policy makers and stakeholders at the national or system level;

- policy makers and stakeholders (such as those in chambers and representative organisations for employers) need to be involved in directly communicating with companies - including small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). The communications need to be tailored to respond to the interests and priorities of employees, employers, learners, teachers and trainers in the light of their particular needs;
 - for ECVET to work for companies it needs to be simplified (both in terms of the processes and the documentation). We know that companies are rarely part of the ECVET discussion: to encourage them to be more involved, ECVET has to meet their needs and be appreciated as a solution to the challenges they face;
 - responsibility for the dissemination of effective practice based on projects should rest with all the stakeholders – this would help to make the results from the pilot phase more transparent and better known.
- #### 2. Financial support is needed
- as with all initiatives finance is important. However finance alone will not be enough to inform and influence policy makers, representatives from industry and the labour market;

- additional funding would help to support the ECVET expert teams. Initially the first round of financial support came from the European Commission – since 2014 the arrangements have changed and this has put pressure on these teams. More European level support will be needed to continue to support this initiative;
- there is a need to provide time and funding to support the training of VET teachers.

3. ECVET at the system level

- there is a need for a full audit and analysis of the ideas that have been trialled and tested in the ECVET pilot projects;
- for the ECVET principles to be adopted there is a need for full commitment at a policy level. At the moment too much is left to projects;
- central to using the ECVET principles is the need to design a qualification system based on learning outcomes. In those countries/systems where there is agreement to design qualifications in this way, the ECVET expert teams can provide help and guidance if they are supported.

4. A more specific and sustainable approach

- the ECVET principles are more easily implemented when there is a legal framework in place. Sometimes ECVET is seen as an abstract construct that is a long way from meeting actual needs. To make it more viable, it needs to be broken into more concrete and tan-

gible components. **ECVET is not something that can be implemented without a clearer understanding of how the instruments and principles solve problems and challenges in national contexts;**

- some participants argued that we should stop using the word ‘ECVET;’ We should focus on the bigger picture which seeks to reform VET in order that training better meets the needs of the labour market and learners. The ECVET principles can contribute to this vision and can be used to respond to system or national needs;
- to make ECVET sustainable we need to show that it is a long term project which benefits future generations and makes it possible to create a system which can respond to change. We should acknowledge that there is a lot of pressure on policy makers to decide whether to adopt ECVET. And we know that the European funding will not last forever.

5. Permeability

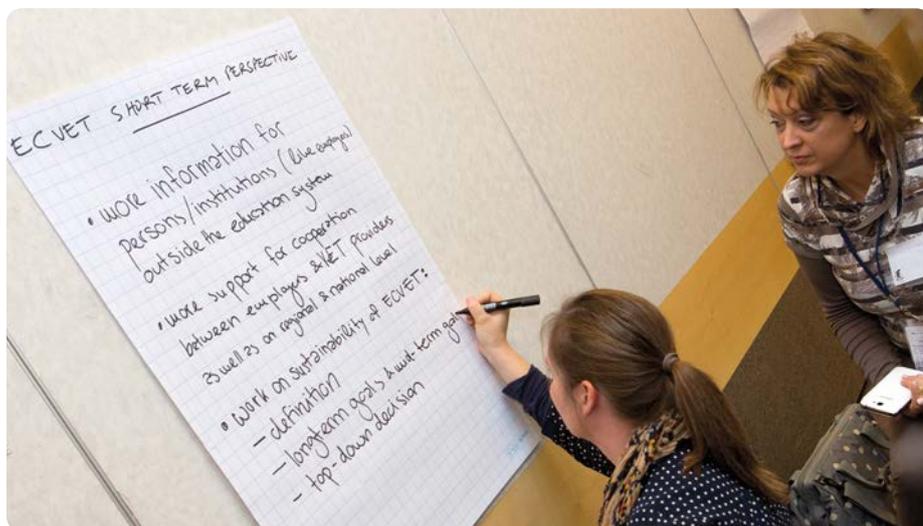
The ability to move from one context to another and have your achievements valued and recognised is very attractive to learners. The potential for ECVET to support this process is significant but it is not happening. Even in some countries where units have been devised, permeability is not working in the way that we expect. We need to understand why it is not working; the barriers that need to be overcome; and the new strategies we need to put in place.

6. ECVET and other European instruments

- in the coming years policy makers and system designers will want to look at creating greater synergy between the European instruments – the European Area of Skills and Qualifications (EASQ) has already identified this as a priority. We need to start this process by finding out what has already been learnt in Member States; and we need to share our experiences;
- the European instruments, in particular the European Qualifications Framework, only really make sense when they are implemented together;
- a greater focus on the needs of companies and learner would help us to see how the European instruments can be used together. In a company context, we should also look to see how greater use can be made of ESCO;
- we should give ourselves some flexibility – while it currently looks as if greater connectivity is needed between the European instruments, we should also ensure each of them can be used by themselves. As the future can't be foreseen we need to ensure this flexibility.

7. A clear statement on the use of ECVET

- at the moment there is not enough clarity on the priority areas for ECVET. For some it is about the benefits for students with special needs; for others it is about employability and lifelong learning; and in other contexts



ECVET is seen as an instrument which supports the needs of the labour market. The focus is not clear – but what is clear is that ECVET is much more than mobility. Limiting the messages to mobility will, and does, hinder its use;

- ECVET can be a way to reform the curricula in order to focus more on learners and employers. If this is the priority, then we should say this;
- whatever is decided about priorities and purposes, we should make the results of the pilot projects more visible and we should highlight the impact of using the ECVET principles.

8. What would help

- when we consider how to support the adoption of the ECVET principles, it is worth considering the governance arrangements for other European instruments. The EQF has a high-level Advisory Group; this is missing in ECVET and it could make a big contribution to promoting the agenda;
- if policy makers at the system or national level are reluctant to use the ECVET

principles, we could look at working more closely with the sectors in strategic partnerships. We should start this sectoral approach where there is the greatest demand on the labour market. This could include the production of guidance on how to use learning outcomes in a sector based approach;

- greater clarity on how to assure quality in the development and assessment of learning outcomes.

Discussion on how the ECVET principles can help to address emerging trends in education?

Each seminar began with an outline of the following **five key trends in education**:

- the idea of leaving school and moving to work (and remaining with one employer for many years) is diminishing;
- open and on-line technologies have the potential to allow individuals to learn anywhere, anytime, through any device, with the support of anyone;

- the internationalisation of education;
- the requirement for higher levels of skills;
- the mismatch between the skills people have and those that employers value.

For each of the trends, the workshop discussions included ideas on how the ECVET principles could be part of any solution.

Key trend 1 - the idea of leaving school and moving to work (and remaining with one employer for many years) is diminishing.

Following an explanation of this key trend and how it was affecting VET systems, there was a discussion on the question - 'what could be the contribution from ECVET'. The following ideas were suggested:

- ECVET can provide ways to improve entrepreneurship learning (e.g. preparing student to "learn to learn"; to develop their self-learning skills and the skills required re-invent themselves etc.);
- by describing achievements in terms of skills, competences and knowledge, ECVET benefits young workers, those entering the labour market and those wishing to move to other employers;
- in a changing world lifelong learning is critical. ECVET provides a way to strengthen the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL) and this supports lifelong learning. ECVET can be used to validate experiences at work and professional development gained in the work place through in-house training.

Key trend 2 - open and on-line technologies have the potential to allow individuals to learn anywhere, any-time, through any device, with the support of anyone

Without doubt the move to strengthen open and on-line learning will have an impact on more traditional ways of learning. The workshops discussed the contribution from ECVET to this trend and the following ideas were suggested:

- a personal record ('skills card') is needed to capture information on individuals' achievement. This could be online;
- learners who participate in MOOCs (mass on-line open courses) may start to look to the ECVET principles as a way of having their learning recognised;
- IT-based descriptions of learning outcomes provide easier access to information about training. This can be done without compromising national regulations and expectations. This can lead to training becoming closer to the needs and demands of the labour market;
- ECVET can re-enforce the quality assurance of on-line learning.

Key trend 3 - the internationalisation of education

The pressure from the internationalisation of education will lead to increased competition between VET providers - this can help to improve the quality and flexibility of VET. In response to the question on 'what could be the contribution from ECVET', the following ideas were suggested:

- learning outcomes will become the basis for assessment and validation, and be seen as a tool to support the modernisation of qualifications;
- ECVET could help to create common learning outcomes at a global level with regional specifications;
- ECVET could provide information on assessment and be used to recognise prior learning. This would support individuals who wish to move from one country to another.

Key trend 4 - the requirement for higher levels of skills

In response to the question on 'what could be the contribution from ECVET', the following ideas were suggested:

- ECVET can set clear expectations about the competences that are required for individual jobs. The learning outcomes approach can be used as the basis for designing higher educational programmes and training;

- to support the process of identifying what skills are needed in the future, the ECVET principles can support skills analysis, as well as identifying the needs of the labour market.

In one workshop, participants described their vision of the future. In all Member States there will be learning outcomes that make VET more responsive to the needs of the labour market. The learning outcomes approach will increase the permeability between VET and higher education. When all qualifications are described in terms of learning outcomes, learners are able to pick and mix the units that they want to make up their individualised, more flexible qualification.

Key trend 5 - the mismatch between the skills people have and those that employers value

The participants noted that some trends already exist, e.g. the demographic



changes will make it more difficult for employers in the service sector to meet their skills needs. It is possible that in ten years few people will want to work in some aspects of the service sector. We need to think how to recognise the competences of recent migrants. In a fast changing world we need teachers to update their competences and be more explicit about what they do to support learners to acquire the skills employers want. This will require much closer cooperation between VET schools and companies, and clearer job profiles. This trend is likely to bring more pressure on VET schools to strengthen their professional partnerships with organisations in the private and public sectors. This would help them to secure greater access to advanced technology and company resources.

In response to the question on 'what could be the contribution from ECVET', the following ideas were suggested:

- there is a need for a modular curricula which includes opportunities for training providers to create modules which respond more quickly to company needs;
- there are many studies on skills mismatches. One of the best measures to bridge the gap is through work-based training. But high quality of work-based learning needs to be quality assured and ECVET can support this;
- learners need guidance which is relevant and realistic in a changing world – career guidance is often too general. Learners need specific support to make good choices and more information on learning outcomes can help them to organise and plan their own learning. ■



In each workshop discussion, a set of conclusions were prepared.

These set out a vision for ECVET over the next ten years and take account of the emerging trends in education and the labour market. The following is a summary of the conclusions from the workshops:

- there is a need to create a stronger position for ECVET in relation to life-long learning;
- policy measures (top-down actions) cannot be successful by themselves. We need the experience of practice (bottom-up decisions and activities) to ensure VET responds to emerging education trends;
- encourage the links between ECVET with other European instruments;
- ECVET cannot do everything – but it can help with the development of skills and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning;
- there is a need for a clear view of what the European Commission will do to support VET systems to respond to the emerging trends;
- in a changing world it is even more important to have clear pathways for learners to improve their skills and acquire higher level skills;
- ECVET can support on-line learning systems by developing quality control mechanisms;
- creating clear learning outcomes helps to address the skills mismatch at a European level and supports VET providers to meet labour market needs;
- increasingly individuals will be more mobile during their career. ECVET can be used to create longer term mobility programmes which help individuals prepare for this new changing world of work.

Observer's feedback

As in previous years, the 2014 Annual Forum appointed an external observer to comment and review the proceedings.

This helps to give an external perspective on the discussions and provides an opportunity for reflection.

This year the Forum's observer was **Isabelle Le Mouillour** from the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (Das Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung - BIBB) in Germany. Isabelle attended many of the workshops and participated in all plenary sessions. From these experiences Isabelle had a number of observations:

- we tend to forget that **VET provision includes an emotional element**, and teachers and learners want to be engaged at the emotional level. When I attended the workshop on 'ECVET in 45 minutes' I was reminded of just how important it was to get emotionally involved. Our narratives have to be more than a list of technical specifications;
- there are a lot of expectations for ECVET - it is seen as a way to solve the quality issues associated with mobility; to promote lifelong learning; to meet the needs and expectations of all learners, including those unemployed etc. But ECVET is not a panacea for all the questions and problems in VET - we need to be more focused. This we can do by **coming back to**



the three core ECVET principles: transfer, validation and recognition.

For ECVET to be relevant for all VET issues, we need to acknowledge more prominently that learning outcomes are at the core;

- we need to be aware that when we talk about learning outcomes we may not always mean the same e.g. in car mechanics, learning outcomes refer to competences in Germany, yet in Greece we would be talking about skills, knowledge and competences. These differences mean it can be easier for people to talk about systems or even vocational profiles at large rather than the details of learning outcomes. This matters when we are engaged in mobility programmes: For mobility to develop further, we need to know how other countries define their learning outcomes. There are many

discussions on how to write learning outcomes - often at a policy level - the outcomes of these discussions need to be communicated and checked against the needs of all labour market stakeholders (employability issues) and education/training stakeholders (pedagogical and didactical requirements). It should lead to the production of guidance which helps all those involved in mobility projects;

- in the world of ECTS, change is happening. Higher education institutes are developing closer connections to the labour market; individual higher education institutions are looking in ECVET's direction to gain greater insight and a different perspective on how they can engage with employers. New developments are taking place in many countries particularly in the area of applied sciences. Many higher edu-

cation institutions are using the VET approach to developing their higher level VET qualifications;

- I am not convinced that the question of points matters. ECTS and ECVET have different histories; transition and permeability are critical to learners. If we have to think about whether learning outcomes or points are more important, I would favour learning outcomes. However something is missing - and this is the validation of achievements. **We do not talk enough about validation.** Although there is a recommendation on validation⁽¹⁾, we need to do more to validate VET learners' achievements to enable access to the labour market and further training opportunities;
- during the Forum the idea of a European qualification profile was raised. We need to think more about this concept because when we speak about learning outcomes and qualifications we need to have a better understanding of what we mean. However we should reflect that one of the strengths of the European VET area lies in the diversity of VET programmes: people are trained in different ways even if when they acquired similar qualifications;
- finally I have a few comments at the European level. The first is to emphasise the importance of national quality assurance systems – we all have our own approach to quality in education and, on the whole, we are all blinded to our own systems. Secondly I am of

the opinion that it is acceptable that ECVET is implemented differently across Member States while relying on shared principles. Higher education institutions have introduced ECTS in their own ways and this does not seem to be a problem. Thirdly we should recognise that ECVET needs a strong commitment at the political level and, as for EQF, decisions are needed by policy makers. And fourthly, I

think we need to do more to support trainers and employers as they can be the champions and supporters of ECVET, and they can bring pressure to bear on policy makers. Going back to my first point, we should not forget the power of emotions and narratives in these discussions and if ECVET works for trainers and employers, it is far more likely to be adopted by policy makers. ■

There have been **a lot of new ideas in the last two days**, and I would like to suggest some key messages. These are my reflections informed by the myriad of discussions that have taken place. So, in no particular order, these are my thoughts on the 2014 Annual Forum:

- The stage is ready for ECVET but nobody has been informed about 'the play'. The actors are ready but the lack of advertising and awareness has meant the audience has stayed away;
- we should not choose between ECVET and ECTS. However we do need one credit system which focuses on learning outcomes;
- it is still not clear what we mean when we talk about synergy between the European instruments;
- ECVET is important for VET mobility - in relation to permeability, transparency, trust, attractiveness etc. We should not be expected to focus on the technical issues, it should be an ordinary and everyday part of our work;
- we need greater involvement from policy makers at the national and regional level and from employers/sectors levels. To get this involvement we need to show that ECVET provides answers to their current problems and challenges;
- teachers and trainers need more support to write and use learning outcomes;
- if the EQF advisory group is an effective way of engaging with senior policy makers, why don't we have a similar arrangement for ECVET;
- we need to strengthen the networking and peer-learning activities that take place between the national ECVET teams;
- more work is needed on validation. ECVET is running very slowly on this issue - this should be addressed as validation is central to the effective operation of any qualifications system and lifelong learning.

(1) The Council's Recommendation on non-formal and informal learning can be accessed at [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)).

Conclusions

by João Santos of the European Commission

It may be helpful to look back on the development of a credit system in VET. The idea first arose in 2002 and it took seven years to adopt the Recommendation. After five years we know more about implementation. The Commission will soon prepare its report on progress taking into due account your thoughts and contributions.

If we think about the principles behind ECVET, it is clear there have been different degrees of implementation and interpretations. This is the right moment for us to 'stop and think'. We need to ask ourselves whether the principles are still relevant e.g.

- the concept of units based on learning outcome: is this still valid?
- the principle of accumulation and ECVET's applicability to all forms of learning: is this still pertinent?



We should ask ourselves these questions because reality changes over time. And we need to ensure we have the right tools for the future, which may not be the ones that reflect the aspirations we had 12 years ago.

Over the last few months we have received the external evaluation and the most recent monitoring report from Cedefop. These confirm that ECVET supports learners' mobility, as well as reforms in VET with reference in particular to the structure of qualifications. I think everybody recognises the potential value of ECVET but 17 countries have EC-

VET on hold while eight are testing the principles. The political agreement of all Member States which adopted the ECVET Recommendation in 2009 has not been turned into practice everywhere. There is therefore a long way ahead, and based on the discussions that I had the opportunity to join in this Forum I will try to formulate some thoughts on how to engage on this way ahead:

- we need to keep in mind that the work of the Commission is bound by the Treaty, and the implementation is made at the national level. However there is plenty of room for common reflection about how the ECVET

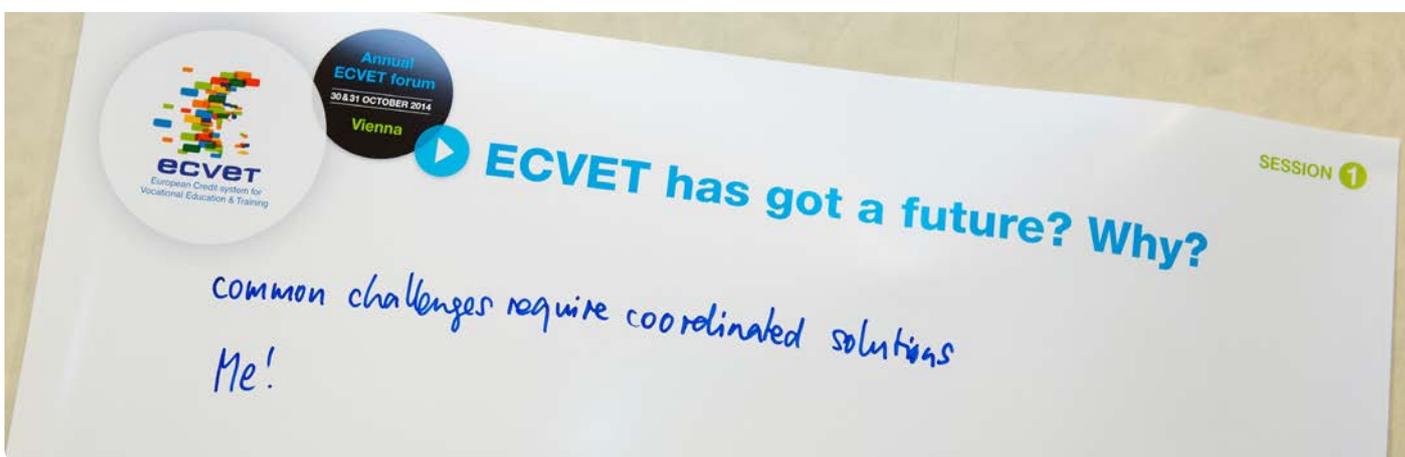
principles provide solutions to national or system-level challenges, about quality assurance mechanisms; the way in which learning outcomes are described; sharing examples of best practises at the system level: promoting the added value of ECVET at the national level;

- some analysts say that the education sector has not evolved a great deal over the decades. It has maintained a traditional delivery method where learners are often passive players with teachers and trainers playing the active role. Traditionally students have learnt in classrooms and on textbooks, taken exams and had their learning validated through an external process. This model is rapidly evolving; the huge amount of online information and the blurring

of boundaries between the education sectors (schools, higher education, VET, informal learning etc.) is changing learners' expectations as well as the role they play in the learning process. Critically we need to find ways of recognising this breadth of learning that people engage with in their everyday experiences, be they formal informal or non-formal, and document them in a transparent way. If we cannot find a way to do this, there is a risk that the value of formal qualifications will be eroded, because they do not fully translate what the person knows and is capable of doing.. By designing qualifications in terms of modules of learning outcomes (ECVET proposal), this process of validating and assessing skills developed outside the formal system becomes much easier;

- This means that the role of teachers and trainers will need to change. They need to be able to facilitate learning and find ways to help learners to achieve their potential in many different contexts. ECVET gives systems an opportunity to recognise skills and knowledge acquired in a wide range of situations. Its structured approach, based on units of learning outcomes supports both initial VET and lifelong learning;
- with a new Commission, there are bound to be changes at the European level. As I mentioned earlier VET and adult learning will move to DG Employment. At this point in the process we are not sure of all the implications of this move. ■







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