

magazine

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

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Edito



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of nostalgia. It is because they were important steps in the development and history of ECVET. Each meeting, as with other events that support the dissemination and implementation of the ECVET principles, has helped to establish and strengthen the ECVET community. I am proud that the ECVET Consortium team has been able to support each event with energy and passion.

The Barcelona forum was in keeping with the traditions and philosophy of ECVET as it provided an opportunity for VET stakeholders to understand better how the ECVET system works and to share their experiences. It also marked an important new development by bringing together almost 250 representatives from vocational training systems, experts from these systems, and stakeholders from an economic or social background. This forum was also different because it provided an opportunity to discuss how the users of training and certification systems are responding to the current and future economic realities facing employers and employees.



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ECVET: a matter of principles and values

This edition of the magazine is mainly devoted to the 2015 forum in Barcelona. This was the sixth and last annual forum organised by the ECVET Consortium team. The previous annual events were held in Paris, Madrid, Brussels, Prague and Vienna.

When I remind everyone about the five previous forums, it is not for reasons

Our discussions in Barcelona focused on the relationships between:

- the world of education and the economy;
- certification systems and employment;
- individual learners' aspirations and the collective purpose of qualification systems;

- the provision of training and the technical and economic requirements of companies;
- the need for skills and the design of certificates which show which skills learners have demonstrated.

During our debates we recognised that there were no ideal situations; there were no perfect models which matched the demands of the labour market with the supply of VET skills and qualifications. We noted the importance of relationships as a means of building bridges which strengthen dialogue and cooperation. These relationships help to create new approaches and better connections between training and the labour market. The ECVET principles were seen as one way to stimulate this dialogue and create the operational framework for matching supply and demand in the labour market. The forum demonstrated the value of organising structured discussions between stakeholders from the business and education worlds; and it identified how ECVET could support this dialogue. These working relationships need to be strengthened in order that close collaboration and discussion become an everyday part of the process of designing qualifications and VET programmes.

For many countries 2015 was a pivotal year in their implementation of ECVET. It marked the end of a process of developing a shared understanding of concepts; the mastery of the technical

specifications; and an opportunity to address many of the challenges associated with the complexity of training and qualification systems. 2015 was also the time to reflect on the progress that has been made in relation to ECVET and its connections with other European instruments such as the European Qualification Framework and Europass which each celebrated ten years of existence.

" ECVET is not just a concept; a set of principles; a technical device and a legal framework: it is also a set of values based on humanist principles. "

Over the last two years many 'ECVET initiatives' have been launched. These include the reform of qualification systems with new and ambitious legislative and regulatory arrangements. The activities of the ECVET Consortium team have been part of this trend. Increasingly information and awareness events have been replaced by activities which enable stakeholders to share their experiences; design new qualifications and systems based on the ECVET principles; and support authorities and institutions to develop their own approach to implementing ECVET.

The ECVET Consortium team events have included peer learning activities; customised seminars; and research

and development through the creation of European working groups under the auspices of the Commission.

2015 was also a pivotal year for the ECVET Consortium team which includes the branch of the automotive service sector (ANFA), the French Ministry of Education and the Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry. At the end of the year the ECVET team concluded its mandate with the European Commission. As the representative of the ECVET Consortium team's board, I would like to express my particular and warm thanks to the experts, technicians and staff whose commitment and skills have ensured the quality of the services provided by our team – the Barcelona forum was a perfect illustration of their commitment and expertise.

ECVET is not just a concept; a set of principles; a technical device and a legal framework: it is also a set of values based on humanist principles. It is important that we do not distort ECVET and that we remain faithful to the principles - even when it makes sense to take a few liberties with the technical specifications. Our current economic and social context and the human consequences of the current geopolitical situation remind us that we need to think in terms of values and principles. And we need to be pragmatic and design operational solutions which address the problems of today and tomorrow – these solutions will include ECVET. ■

ECVET ANNUAL FORUM - 5 November 2015 - Barcelona

Flexible qualifications for a changing labour market

Applying the ecvet principles to strengthen the development and use of the skills needed by the labour market

The subject of the 2015 Forum was ECVET and the labour market – how the use of ECVET principles and tools can support the economic actors and make the labour market more effective. E.g. how validated units of learning outcomes are used to recognise continuing VET, how the units approach makes qualifications more flexible in terms of adaptation to technology and economic evolution, as gradual qualification steps – and related wage increase – for apprentices.

This was addressed by listening to experiences and views from economic actors themselves, namely employers, chambers of commerce, workers, VET practitioners, learners, ECVET users' group members, ECVET national experts.



In the morning discussions

João Santos, Acting Head of Unit 'Vocational education training, apprenticeships and adult learning', DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission emphasised the importance of making closer connections between the labour market and VET, and the need for more interactions between teachers and trainers and companies. In this context he outlined developments in the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) and the European Youth Pact.

The EAfA platform offer opportunities for greater collaboration between governments and stakeholders such as business, social partners, chambers, vocational education and training (VET) providers, regional authorities, youth representatives and/or think tanks. The European Youth Pact focuses on three

strands of work:

- employment, integration and social advancement;
- education, training and mobility;
- reconciliation of family life and working life.

The European Commission's skills agenda, based on the promotion of 'skills development' was underlined as will be adopted next year. There will be an opportunity to access EU financial resources in each of the following three areas:

- anticipating future skill needs;
- the modernisation of VET systems;
- promoting greater recognition and transparency.

At the end of his introduction, two questions were highlighted for the Annual Forum:

- how can the labour market make better use of ECVET?
- how can ECVET contribute to curricula reform in order to respond to

economic and technological developments?

The first debate

This plenary session began with a video presentation (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7Dd2sAwPA>) from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Andreas Schleicher, Acting Director for the Directorate of Education and Skills and Special Advisor on Education Policy to the Secretary-General at OECD, presentation focused on:

- the need to develop new skills which improve individuals' productivity and business growth;
- an increasing mismatch between the skills that employers want and those offered by providers;
- the skills which are easy to teach and assess are also easy to deliver using technology – how should teachers and providers respond to this situation?
- the need to educate and train people for jobs that use technologies which have not yet been invented;
- the requirement for training providers should work with employers to design and deliver training that meets the needs of business.

Following the video presentation, there was a round table debate between:

- Mr Jordi García Viña, Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales (a member of Business Europe from Spain);
- Mrs Agnes Roman from the European Economic and Social Committee at the European Trade Union Confederation;

- Mr Jean-Louis Pailhoux, Human Resource Manager at Groupe Canon, France (a member of the European Association for People Management).

The discussions identified the following **emerging labour market trends**.

1

There was agreement that there was an **increasing mismatch between the skills required by employers and those which were developed by training providers** across Europe. The challenge was how do to address this mismatch. The participants noted:

- that the labour market requires higher levels of skills. The CEDEFOP's forecasts for 2025 show that almost 45% of employed people in the EU can expect to work in a highly-skilled job with almost as many people in medium-skilled employment. Just over one in ten jobs is expected to be of an elementary nature;
- there is an increasing mismatch between the skills that people have and the skills that employers demand across Europe. A high unemployment rate, especially among young people, coexists with over two million vacancies that cannot be filled. In September 2015, 4.540 million young persons (under the age of 25) were unemployed in the EU-28. There was a need to look at how these jobs can be made attractive to young people;
- there is an increasing mismatch between the skills that employers need and those which are developed by individuals through education and training. As Andreas Schleicher com-

mented 'the world economy does not pay you for what you know but for what you can do with what you know.' This changing expectation needs to be reflected in the type of training and education offered by the VET providers.

2

The influence of **technology evolution**:

- the impact of digitalisation on companies is dramatic. These changes are also affecting VET providers because the skills and knowledge which can be easily taught and assess are also easy to deliver using technology. Technology will continue to lead to more jobs which require low or medium levels of skills and competences to be out-sourced;
- the speed of technological changes is fast and this affects the types of job that currently exist, and will exist in the future.

3

The current and future **needs of individuals and the labour market**:

Many of the jobs that currently exist will disappear in the coming years. Experts predict that 50% of today's jobs will have disappeared by 2030. New jobs will be created but we do not yet know what these jobs will look like. We are in the position of having to educate and train people for jobs and technologies which have not yet been invented. The only way to respond to this situation is for the training providers to work much more closely with employers to design and deliver training that meets the current and future needs of business.

Training providers need to be aware of the tension between developing individuals' employability for today (to respond to the immediate needs of companies) and their future employability in order to anticipate those new jobs which will be developed. For those young people who are unemployed there is a need to provide training in those skills which help to increase immediate employability alongside the skills which can develop their resilience and adaptability.

4

The importance of **developing new ways to support learning:**

The economic world for companies is changing. Previously employers could think about having 2-3 years to retrain staff to adapt to new jobs and roles; to upgrade salaries in line with new responsibilities; and to make organisational changes. In today's market the time to implement change has been reduced significantly – even twelve months is considered a long time to manage reform and a staff retraining programme.

The speed of change continues to increase. This creates a significant challenge for the VET systems as change is slow and providers are currently unable to react quickly. To strengthen the VET systems' ability to respond more quickly there is a need to:

- understand the impact of new labour market trends and technologies;
- develop advice on job opportunities based on emerging data and trends;
- revise the VET curricula in response to emerging technologies.



In addition to changing the training for those entering the labour market, there is a need for existing staff to continue to be trained and re-trained at work. This is the best way to ensure they receive the ongoing development of their skills. However employers are unlikely to be able (or want to do) all the training and therefore partnerships with schools and VET providers are important. By working together employers' trainers and VET teachers can develop programmes, based on learning outcomes, which meet the needs of existing staff.

The second debate

The Annual Forum continued with a second round table debate. In this debate the focus was on the impact that strategic changes in the labour market were having on employers and individuals. The following participants contributed to this debate:

- Ms Marianna Georgallis, European Youth Forum
- Mr Enrico Bressan, Fondazione Centro Produttività Veneto (a member of Eurochambres from Italy)
- Mrs Laëtitia Beckers, European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

- Mr César Morcillo, Human Resource Manager, Groupe Pierre Le Goff, France
 - Mr Kevin Bonello, The Malta Union of Teachers, representing the European Trade Union Committee for Education
- Members of the panel acknowledge the impact that changes in the labour market were having on employers, and the need for VET systems to respond.

They identified three main concerns:

- **the need for VET systems to recognise and make transparent individuals' skills**

In order to support recruitment and retraining, VET systems need to be better at recognising what people can do, what they know and the skills they have already acquired. Greater transparency would help job seekers and employees as their skills and competences, often acquired in previous periods of employment, would be more easily recognised. This also helps to shorten training programmes as prior achievement can be used;

- **education should be seen as a right for learners**

There is a need for education in order to support employers and individuals, and because learners

have a right to high quality training. VET should provide basic and transversal skills, not only the competences that help individuals get their first job market. Education has to do more than respond to the immediate needs of the labour market;

- **the need for a joint approach**

We should recognise that very few employers want to take on responsibility for training – most employers want to work with VET providers. However they also want to ensure that decisions on the curriculum, assessment and training reflect their future needs. This is more likely to be achieved when there is a joint approach between employers, providers and other stakeholders. This includes dialogue on the design and content of qualifications.

Following the coffee break, **participants met in eight small groups to discuss** using the ECVET principles to meet the requirements of a changing labour market.

There were many different perspectives in relation to the needs of the labour market and consequently it was not possible to identify a single view of what was required from the VET system to support the labour market.

The existence of many labour markets, often in the same country, highlights the need for VET providers to respond to different demands. It is not easy to identify one set of labour market needs as these vary between sectors and between SMEs and large organisations.

It is important to recognise the speed with which the demands of a particular labour market can change e.g. in 2012 the construction sector in Spain was suffering from the economic and financial crisis. In this context potential employees were looking for general skills which would support their entry or re-entry to the sector; however employers/managers were looking for staff with expertise in building management and their focus was on providing on-the-job training for existing staff. This mismatch between the needs of potential staff and managers reflected the crisis that had hit the construction sector in Spain. For the VET providers, it was difficult to find a way of responding to these different labour market needs.

"By working together employers' trainers and VET teachers can develop programmes, based on learning outcomes, which meet the needs of existing staff."

The small group discussions identified the following features of labour markets e.g.

- employers are looking for individuals who can work autonomously and who are creative –these competences are essential for learners as they enhance employers' and businesses' ability to be flexible and respond to changing

work environments;

- although the current needs of the labour market have to be met, employers want VET providers to anticipate future developments. The labour market needs individuals who have received training in how "to learn to learn"; have transversal skills which enable them to move to new roles and new sectors; and have the ability to adapt to new circumstances. There was a debate about whether these competences could be taught and how these skills could be assessed.

The discussions looked at the following questions:

- **to what extent can VET providers keep up with the rate of change.**

There was agreement that it was not possible for VET providers to respond quickly enough to emerging priorities. The existing systems that collect information on what companies need are not quick enough to respond to changing requirements;

- how can VET providers give learners the skills they need to work in a range of contexts. In their initial VET programmes providers have to balance the needs of many stakeholders and different potential employers – things can be different for continuing VET when providers respond to the needs of an individual employer. This means that VET providers have to find a balance between teaching specific skills for an occupation or profession, and the general or transversal skills that enable learners to move from one work context to another;

• **how can ECVET contribute to meeting the needs of the labour market?** Within a context which recognised the value of the ECVET principles and the need for closer cooperation between the worlds of education and business, the following ideas were discussed:

- > units of learning outcomes can make the qualifications of applicants more transparent for employers. This is particularly useful when employers do not trust 'traditional' qualifications;
- > using learning outcomes is easy to understand when achievement is expressed as knowledge, skills and competences;
- > learning outcomes and units can help the labour market to define what it needs. The challenge is to make excellent connections between these labour market requirements and the units of learning outcomes;
- > sector based approaches are a valuable way to define the skills needed by employers and as a basis for designing qualifications;
- > ECVET can help to validate individuals prior learning and this enables VET providers to identify what 'learning gaps' need to be filled in order to award a full qualification. This is attractive to mature learners as it makes training shorter and more relevant;
- > when qualifications use common units there is a reduction in the number of learners who waste their time repeating previous learning;
- > quality assurance processes are important if VET providers and qualification designers want employers to trust the learning outcomes approach.



Conclusions

- The recognition of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL) has not been sufficiently developed. ECVET enables learners' NFIL achievement to be assessed which leads to the award of qualifications of equal value to those certificates gained through formal programmes. For many workers, the opportunity to accumulate units is important as salaries can be based on qualifications as part of a national or sectoral agreement. However a Cedefop survey has highlighted that in some systems certificates obtained through the validation of NFIL are not treated in the same way as certificates obtained by "normal assessment";
- The validation of learning outcomes is complicated as there are many different competent bodies in Europe. There is a need for clarity about which organisations (competent bodies) are able to recognise learning outcomes;
- Employers should have a role in assessing learners' practical and/or professional skills;
- ECVET points are not essential for all those who are involved in the VET

system - credits are seen as useful for education providers but employers prefer more accurate descriptions of learning outcomes.

The afternoon discussions

The session began with a series of testimonials highlighting the challenges facing the labour market and individuals – and considered some of the benefits of using the ECVET principles to respond to these challenges. The session included two videos from learners and presentations from:

- Dr Mihail Ceclan, European Commission, JRC Institute for Energy and Transport
- Ms Chantal Huinder, Stichting Opleiding en Ontwikkeling Flexbranche, The Netherlands
- Ms Pilar Roguera, Educational institution Centre Estudis Joan XXIII Catalonia, Spain

In the first presentation Dr Mihail Ceclan looked at how ECVET can help to bridge the gap between the demand and supply of employees in the nuclear sector. The human resource requirements in this

sector are significant and there is a need to employ individuals from non-nuclear industries and develop their knowledge and understanding of the sector. To meet the labour demands in the sector, the sector has used ECVET to:

- define job requirements in terms of knowledge, skills and competences;
- design unit based specialised qualifications in terms of learning outcomes;
- design modular training programmes;
- identifying prior learning and validate academic and formal learning which workers have gained in other contexts;
- develop tools for assessing, validating, recognising and accumulating learning outcomes;
- developing flexible learning pathways based on units of learning outcomes. This enables learners to complete only those parts of a qualification that they need. On average an ECVET based training pathway takes half the time that is needed to complete a full training programme.

Two questions were highlighted facing the sector and its approach:

- the lack of permeability between EQF Level 5 qualifications which are based on VET and higher education. This makes it more difficult for learners' achievement to be recognised and they are less able to accumulate learning outcomes and develop flexible career;
- there are few examples where the validation and recognition systems take full account of the knowledge, skills and competences acquired in non-formal or informal learning.

In the second presentation Ms Huinder

looked at how the ECVET principles can be used to help those employed by temporary agencies to have their competences recognised and transferred. Many people who work for temporary agencies take jobs which require low levels of skill and low levels of qualifications. They can become trapped in this situation – moving from one low-paid job to another. When employers are looking to recruit people with higher qualifications those with experience but few formal qualifications are disadvantaged. The ECVET principles are being used by the temporary agencies, in partnership with employers, to recognise their employees' skills and competences. ECVET is helping to describe the jobs that are taken by temporary workers in order to identify and design company-based training and educational tasks which enable individuals to demonstrate their skills and competences. These can then be assessed and the individual's achievement can be validated and recognised. This helps individuals to develop their employability skills and improve their chances in the labour market.

Three main challenges were underlined with using this approach:

- it can be difficult to divide the working time between productive work and practical learning. Sometimes the practical learning doesn't fit easily into the regular activities of the employer;
- there is a lack of shared understanding of the definitions of many of the competences acquired by temporary workers;
- the workers' achievements, once they are validated, need to be recognised through the award of a diploma

or a certificate for the unit of learning outcomes.

The third presentation looked at how the ECVET principles can be used to help learners who wish to repeat their education in order to improve their employability. Many learners drop out of education and subsequently decide to return to gain qualifications which can strengthen their chances of gaining worthwhile employment. Training for returners can focus on employability skills as well as basic and personal skills. For many students in this situation they are looking to use their learning from non-formal and informal contexts as this can support their achievement of a recognised qualification. Ms Roguera described how the ECVET principles were being used in this process. By working closely with the labour market it was possible to identify the qualifications and skills needed by local employers. This information could then be used to design tailored programmes for returning learners – these help individuals enter the labour market as they respond to the expectations of local employers.

Ms Roguera highlighted the following characteristics of this approach:

- in some sectors individual learners can use their prior experience more easily – this is because there is greater between qualifications at the same level;
- training has to be combined with personal tutoring, support and preparation for work;
- VET institutions that include programmes for those re-entering the labour market need good connections with local institutions that organise social programmes;

- to attract potential candidates there is a need for information about training to meet the need of the labour market to be widely disseminated.

Following the testimonials, the discussion groups looked at how ECVET offered solutions to meeting the challenges facing individuals and the labour market. The groups discussed the following issues:

- the involvement of labour market representatives was welcomed. However the complexity of the VET qualification systems makes it unrealistic for the discussion groups to easily and quickly identify new solutions;
- the ECVET system is based on employers being able to identify the skills they want and need. Given the difficulties of identifying future needs it may be better for VET schools to prepare learners to reach an agreed base-line of competence and for employers to further develop the learners' abilities and skills;
- there is a need for systems and funding that motivates employers to be involved in setting standards and defining expectations. This includes defining transversal competences in order to support employees to move within a sector;
- the move to learning outcomes was welcomed but the education sector has to do much more to inform employers of what this means and what is expected. There continues to be a significant issue about the communication of ECVET;
- given the speed with which employers need to respond in competitive markets, it may be better for training to

"The ECVET principles can be applied in different contexts. The range of possible applications includes small scale activities (...) to meet the needs of a particular company or more wide-ranging sectoral approaches which meet the needs of many employers."

- develop learners' competences/transversal skills to a higher level than the occupational specific competences as these can be improved by employers;
- education and training providers have to balance the needs of employers and the rights of individuals;
- in order to develop more flexible and faster learning pathways (through the recognition of prior learning) there is a need for quality assurance systems which are trusted by employers.

Conclusions

The ECVET principles can be applied in different contexts. The range of possible applications includes small scale activities such as continuing VET programmes to meet the needs of a particular company or more wide-ranging sectoral approaches which meet the needs of many employers.

Participants considered whether the ECVET principles could help to solve the problems facing the labour market. They concluded that this was possible. However the discussion emphasised the need to establish a national/regional/local/sectoral system if the education world expects or wants to use ECVET to help the labour market. There was agreement that experience could be used as the basis for awarding qualifications. To make this possible

the education world has to set up a system – only then will employers use it. This reflects a broader observation that it is not the job of employers to sort out the qualification system – they are in business; they are not education designers. The VET providers need to support them by organising the design of qualifications. A final roundtable discussion with representatives from each of the groups provided feedback on their discussions during the day. Their main messages were:

- ECVET works when there is a common language to define learning outcomes (sometimes the educational definition of learning outcomes differs from the sectoral approach);
- for the ECVET principles to succeed there is a need to gain commitment from stakeholders (e.g. union/industry/national authorities);
- for some employers the ECVET principles are simple and will help to improve employees' qualifications;
- when there are skills shortages employers can be expected to invest in staff qualifications;
- ECVET provides added value in a sectoral context because it enables individualised, flexible, personalised and progressive training which meets the needs of companies;
- as learning outcomes are the basis of qualifications, there is a need to set up



systems that make them understandable for employees and employers;

- units based on learning outcomes make qualifications more flexible. However to design and operate a flexible system, there are a number of preconditions that have to be put in place e.g. effective validation and recognition procedures;
- for SMEs it is essential to minimise bureaucracy especially in relation to mobility programmes;
- there is a need for transparency in order to create high levels of trust. This can be achieved through stronger networks.

Conclusions

1 ECVET is one way to find solutions to the issues facing the labour market.

2 There is a need for more involvement from employers and representatives from the world of work.

3 Involving sectors, branches and professional groups can provide new solutions.

4 The labour market would like the education/qualification world to become more flexible - not only in terms of creating more flexible ways to learn and recognise achievement, but also in terms of making qualifications more flexible.

5 There is a need to have a common language on learning outcomes – as the learning outcomes approach has become more widely used, the language employed needs to be simpler and clearer. ■

Credit systems: archaic or modern?¹



Michel Aribaud
ECVET TEAM

Before getting involved in developing and implementing ECVET in their own country, stakeholders who work for training providers and in the certification authorities are asking, with good reason, **what interest is there in a credit system?**

This is a question that has to be considered by those working in the training and qualifications system; those who are concerned with ensuring the best interests of learners are considered; and other stakeholders inside and outside the world of education and training.

The ECVET TEAM, the European Commission, numerous VET experts and project promoters who support ECVET have demonstrated that the virtues of an ECVET system are numerous and that the short term costs and efforts to support implementation are a worthwhile investment in the long term. These benefits arise because ECVET provides the technical framework to put into practice a set of principles which support learners e.g. recognised mobility; flexible training and qualifications pathways; validation of non-formal and informal learning etc.

At the same time, it is clear from Cedefop's monitoring that ECVET is developing slowly. This is in contrast to other credit systems which appear to be spreading rapidly. We often hear that ECTS has been adopted by almost all the universities and higher education institutions in Europe and beyond. Therefore, there is a great temptation to

accuse vocational training of taking too long to develop a credit system – compared to the higher education sector that has responded in record time.

There are other criticisms of ECVET. In particular, ECVET is described as complicated, difficult to understand and therefore complex to implement. This contrasts with ECTS which is seen as having simple principles with a pragmatic and easily applicable methodology. Another criticism concerns the ECVET principles which do not give priority to the question of 'points'. Experts and those with an interest in ECVET and its implementation often express great skepticism in relation to points and their value. The value of points is particularly suspect in the eyes of many from the academic community and other proponents of numerically-based credit systems. Indeed, for the latter, credit systems can only become a point system when they are based on learning/teaching time or workload: to pretend otherwise is to risk the system being described as a fantasy, a heresy or at best, inconsistent.

My questions, as a convinced promoter of ECVET, are:

- compared to other credit systems, could ECVET be obsolete before it is fully implemented?

¹ This is an excerpt from a forthcoming publication.

- when you look at the systems that are being used today (they are often presented as modern and efficient) are they making ECVET look old-fashioned and archaic?
- are the two approaches to credit points - time-based and workload-based – completely different. And can they be seen as being at the two ends of a spectrum?

I will try to answer these questions but first I think it is worth reflecting on which credit systems, including those that are based on ECTS, are modern and adapted to the contemporary issues of education and vocational training.

Credit systems: a very old story from America

The emergence of credit systems is an American phenomenon of the late nineteenth century. Specifically, during 1870-1880 the concept of 'credit-hour' emerged under the leadership of Charles William Eliot, Harvard University's president from 1869 to 1909. This was in response to the discrediting of the higher education examination system which was considered arbitrary and unequal. The goal of the designers of the 'credit hour' system was, at the time, to replace the existing review and selection system and introduce a rational and objective

system for deciding students' progress and issuing diplomas. From the beginning, this system was based on counting the study time spent by a student and was expressed in terms of points regardless of students' results. Originally in this system, one credit hour (or course credit, credit or unit) was defined as the time-based reference for measuring educational attainment in which one credit hour was approximately 12 hours of class or contact time. In addition, the 'Carnegie Unit' was introduced in 1906² and described as 120 hours of class or contact time with an instructor or teacher. The time-based approach was a way to standardise and organise educational programmes, outputs and university workload; and to structure and frame the academic year in terms of semesters, trimesters and so on. The focus was on organisation matters³. It then became a way to provide a standard time-based metric of student progress.

The system has evolved and credit hours or units now represent a mathematical summary of all the work that has been completed - they are not the same as the actual classroom contact or instructional hours. U.S. institutions use credit formulae and calculators (Carnegie Unit Calculators) to record all types of learning not just taught courses⁴.

The Carnegie Foundation comments that 'in the counting the fundamental criterion was the amount of time spent on a subject, not the result attained; if, for instance, a year's work in plane geometry would be covered by two weekly hours, the subject should be counted as only 2/5 of a unit'⁵.

The system is well established and is part of the culture and daily practice of students, teachers and educational institutions. It serves as a reference for:

- the management of courses and studies in operational terms (e.g. time allocated to a course, distribution of study throughout the year and curriculum etc.);
- issues relating to education (mandatory and optional points), finance and tax (student financial aid, faculty workload and salary, student grant credentials etc.)

In principle the credit system allows courses to be structured and learners' programme to be set using a scientific and rational approach to the organisation of work. But since its inception, the 'time-based credit system' has been criticised by many academics and other US experts as they consider time spent studying by a student does not guarantee the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Some authors consider that in such a system, students only think about accumulating

² <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/blog/the-carnegie-unit-revisited/>

³ Originally, the Carnegie Unit began with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, as part of Andrew Carnegie's plan to establish a free pension system for college faculty.

⁴ <http://www.ed.gov/international/usnei/edlite-index.html>

⁵ Dietrich Gerhard. 'The emergence of the credit system in American education considered as a problem of social and intellectual history', American Association of University Professors Bulletin, 1955. Cité par John Harris, Samford University, September 2002.

points regardless of the content of training or learning outcomes. Finally, the system does not ensure the recognition of credits from one university to another. Even though the American universities, in principle, recognise achievement from elsewhere, students often have to fulfil draconian conditions. Gradually these criticisms have led to questions about the conceptual basis and implementation of the system and some universities have abandoned 'the time based approach'. In its place they have designed curricula around student mastery of subject-specific competences which can happen as quickly or as slowly as students like.

ECTS: to merge the old with the new; or invent something for the future?

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) was introduced in 1989 in higher education, within the framework of the Erasmus programme. It was initially set up for credit transfer, namely to enable students to transfer credits they earned during their studies abroad from the host institution to their home institution and to consider these transferred credits towards their degree and diploma. The development and extension of ECTS are key objectives of the June 1999 Bologna Declaration and are closely linked to the development of the Bologna cycles and grades (BA, MA, PhD). Today, ECTS is presented as a 'learner centred sys-

tem for credit accumulation and transfer, based on the principle of transparency of the learning, teaching and assessment processes. Its objective is to facilitate the planning, delivery and evaluation of study programmes and student mobility by recognising learning achievements and qualifications and periods of learning'⁶. Thus, ECTS must be considered as an endogenous system whose functions are internal to education and training institutions. Outside the world of education nobody knows what ECTS is. The economic world, in particular, knows nothing about ECTS and, quickly loses interest.

The key characteristics of ECTS are well known. Credits in ECTS are defined in the 2009 ECTS User's Guide as 'ECTS credits are based on the workload students need in order to achieve expected learning outcomes [...]. Workload indicates the time students typically need to complete all learning activities [...] required to achieve the expected learning outcomes [...]. 60 ECTS credits are attached to the workload of a full-time year of formal learning (academic year) and the associated learning outcomes [...]. One credit corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of work'⁷.

The 2015 ECTS User's Guide provides a different definition of ECTS credits. 'ECTS Credits express the volume of learning based on the defined learning outcomes and their associated workload. 60 ECTS credits are allocated to

the learning outcomes and associated workload of a full time academic year or its equivalent [...].' Similarly there is a new definition of workload: 'Workload is an estimation of the time the individual typically needs to complete all learning activities such as lectures, seminars, projects [...] required to achieve the defined learning outcomes in formal learning environments. [...] It should be recognised that this represents the typical workload and that for individual students the actual time to achieve the learning outcomes will vary'.

The 2015 ECTS User's Guide considers ECTS in relation to lifelong learning and new and open learning opportunities. It stresses the fact that ECTS can be used in 'all lifelong learning contexts' including 'work based learning, self-directed learning, individual learning pathways' and even 'non-formal and informal learning'. However, the allocated credits are still based on the same premise: 'credits allocated for open learning and other modes of lifelong learning are based on the workload typically needed to achieve the defined outcomes'. ECTS is input oriented and based on a quantitative approach of the learning process. In this sense, ECTS belongs to the family of traditional credit systems.

There has been a change in the language which describes the principles and functions of ECTS. The reference to learning outcomes is much stronger

⁶ ECTS Users' Guide – 2015 – Publications Office of the European Union, 2015

⁷ ECTS Users' Guide – 2009 - Office for Official Publication of the European Communities, 2009

"ECVET is based on the principle of separating the learning process from the results that are assigned to this process and expressed in terms of learning outcomes."

today than it was in 2009. The 'shift to learning outcomes' in Europe and beyond, and the development of learning outcomes based on the EQF and NQF may explain this evolution of ETCS. Similarly, the ECVET principles have influenced thinking about ECTS (e.g. phrases and sentences in the ECTS User's Guide are almost identical to the 2009 ECVET Recommendation).

Despite tentative moves to modernise the system, ECTS is still fully based on the traditional concept of workload/time based credit points and can be seen as a European reflection of the US credit hour system. Why should this matter? If the system performs its functions, if users are satisfied with its implementation and if the quality of the various procedures is assured, everything is fine whatever the concepts. However at this point, it would be helpful to consider the effectiveness of the system nearly 30 years after its adoption.

The 2015 edition of 'Bologna with Student Eyes'⁸, produced by the European Students' Union (ESU), provides a comprehensive overview of the implementation of ECTS from the point of view of direct users. The findings are somewhat bleak and can be

summarised as follow: 'ECTS has been implemented in many countries, but often only superficially, without using workload and learning outcomes as the basis for awarding ECTS'.

What are the problems in applying ECTS? Learning outcomes and workload are rarely used and the allocation of ECTS credits is based on 'an arbitrary system'. 'The implementation [is] often superficial, where countries had simply translated the number of credits from their previous system to ECTS credits, sometimes by simply using a mathematical formula. '... in the cases where workload is used as the basis for allocating ECTS credits, it is often estimated incorrectly and unrealistically. For many countries, learning outcomes continue to be disregarded, their purpose is misunderstood, or they are developed incorrectly or half-heartedly'.

In fact 'over two-thirds of the [student] unions (27 of 38) stated that ECTS has been implemented and is in use in their respective countries, although only four agreed that they are very satisfied with its implementation' and students recommend that 'ECTS must be based on learning outcomes and workload in line with the ECTS Users' Guide'.

Twenty five years after its creation, ECTS has been adopted in many countries, but its correct implementation seems to be in limbo. For me, this is not a paradox. For higher education institutions, it is a pragmatic and calculated way of working. For instance, any higher education institution wanting to apply or participate in the 2014-2020 EU programme for education, training, youth and sport needs to have a valid Erasmus Charter for Higher Education. The Erasmus Charter guidelines state that 'the institution should apply an academic credit transfer system (ECTS or compatible system). When ECTS is used, the principles set out in the ECTS Users' Guide should be respected'⁹. In fact, it seems possible for higher education institutions to adopt ECTS in a cosmetic way in order to meet the Charter requirements. This could be without reforming, modify or adapting the curricula, programmes and, even less, the qualifications.

ECVET: is there something new in the world of credit systems?

ECVET is a young system (it has operated for six years) compared to the US credit hour system (150 years) and ECTS (27 years). However, as with ECTS, the ECVET main features are well known. 'ECVET is a technical framework for the transfer, recognition and, where appropriate, accumulation

⁸ Brussels, April 2015 by European Students' Union – ESU www.esu-online.org

⁹ http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/funding/2014/documents/annotated_guidelines_en.pdf

of individuals' learning outcomes with a view to achieving a qualification. ECVET tools and methodology comprise the description of qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes with associated points¹⁰. Points provide additional information on the relative weight of units in relation to the qualification, whatever the method used for allocating points to units and qualifications.

"An archetypal system of credits can be adopted formally, almost overnight, but its utility and effectiveness remain to be proven. I would argue that is better to give preference to a more demanding and qualitative approach, namely ECVET."

ECVET introduced a new paradigm in thinking about credit systems: units are stand-alone components of a qualification and they consist of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competences. Units are independent of any learning process or formal process of education or training. ECVET is based on the principle of separating the learning process (whatever its shape, institutional frame and organisation) from the results that are assigned to this process and expressed in terms of learning out-

comes. Units can be used to:

- organise qualifications (units are one way to divide existing qualifications into manageable blocks of learning outcomes) or;
- organise learning outcomes (units are one way to bring together a number of learning outcomes that provide the learner with a coherent block of learning outcomes)¹¹.

Adopting ECVET means that qualifications have to be (re-) structured into units which are independent, accumulative and 'joinable' in combinations that make sense. This is a challenge for the institutions responsible for qualifications and the procedures and processes associated with qualifications. The impact of implementing such a system can be significant depending on the condition of the qualification system to which ECVET is applied (e.g. how well developed is the learning outcomes approach). In addition, the ECVET principles have an impact on more traditional approaches e.g. when learning outcomes are only associated with formal learning processes. Unlike ECTS and other traditional systems, ECVET cannot be cosmetically and artificially applied to qualifications. This explains why the development and operational dissemination of ECVET takes so much time, and why the increasing number of systems that adopt the ECVET principles¹² base their approach on well-designed and robust solutions.

The methodological heart of ECVET is the structure of qualifications as these are based on units of learning outcomes. Once this structure is in place, the typical functions of any credit system (accumulation, transfer, validation etc.) are assumed by the units and not by points. The ECVET qualitative and outcome-oriented approach to credits is the reason why social partners and those in the economic and social world are interested in ECVET. For these stakeholders, ECVET is not an endogenous system but an instrument which has the potential to facilitate dialogue between VET institutions, learners, workers, the labour market and companies.

This is the fundamental difference between archetypal or traditional credit systems such as ECTS and more modern credit system such as ECVET. While some suggest or wish for a rapprochement or even a fusion between ECTS and ECVET, it is necessary to look carefully at the choices. An archetypal system of credits can be adopted formally, almost overnight, but its utility and effectiveness remain to be proven. I would argue that is better to give preference to a more demanding and qualitative approach, namely ECVET. This is a strategic question for the EU as it asks them to compare the short-term argument with the long term aims of an effective credit system. ■

¹⁰ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET).

¹¹ ECVET TEAM-Working group on assessment and validation of units of learning outcomes – Draft Guidance note – December 2015

¹² See CEDEFOP monitoring.

Hugues Pouzin - NetinVet President

Realising ECVET based mobility to respond to urgent needs of enterprises: the example of NETINVET



In the light of the globalisation of supply chains, internationalisation is crucial for small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) in the Wholesale and Transport & Logistics sector.

To enable SMEs to develop their business outside their country, specific formal and informal skills are requested from their employees which can be best obtained during a learning or working experience in a foreign country.

However, the certification of Vocational Education and Training (VET) is often not recognised from one country to another due to differences in the national education systems. To be able to transfer the learning outcomes and thus organise recognised mobility, NETINVET (www.netinvet.eu) developed two professional profiles corresponding to the logic of ECVET covering the sectors of International Trade and Transport & Logistics. The “International Trade Assistant” and “Eurotranslog” correspond both to level 5 of the EQF, establish common qualification references built-up in a modular way detailing clearly defined formal and informal learning outcomes.

These include school training and work-based learning in companies. Besides, NETINVET developed respective quality charters for VET centres and companies hosting apprentices which have to be accepted to become a member. They ensure the quality of the network by covering all relevant elements, from the preparation of the mobility, the period abroad to its evaluation. These tools ensure that the training received by the learner during mobility within the NETINVET network is recognised by the national VET system of the sending country.

NETINVET comprises today 7 European member states and around 70 VET centres. The strong relationship and the continuous exchange between the VET centres and the accredited companies established mutual trust enabling the network to provide qualified mobility opportunities to learners. ■

Slava Pevec Grm and Jens Bjornavold from Cedefop

Perspectives on CEDEFOP's policy learning forum on learning outcomes

This was Cedefop's first policy learning forum on the definition and writing of learning outcomes for VET qualifications and explored the way learning outcomes approaches are applied in initial IVET throughout Europe. The discussions focused on three initial VET qualifications from crafts, industry and service sectors: plumbing (heating and cooling); machine operator (CNC); and tourism/travel sales. Covering very different occupational areas, these three VET qualifications were selected to show the wide scope of knowledge, skills and competences covered by VET qualifications.

Recent research by Cedefop (e.g. The Application of Learning Outcomes Approaches across Europe, 2015) demonstrates that while the learning outcomes methodology is rapidly gaining ground across Europe, the diversity of interpretations and applications calls for more dialogue and sharing of experiences. This policy learning forum was one response to this need for mutual learning and provided an opportunity to exchange experiences.

During the policy learning forum participants were involved in an active process of dialogue and in both the plenary sessions and the working groups. The aim was to present as many national approaches as possible and provided a basis for identifying challenges and opportunities in this field. In their countries participants are directly involved in defining and writing learning outcomes.

The participants' discussions touched on the technical and terminology issues that are important for writing good learning outcomes. In addition the discussions looked at how to express the content and profile of a qualification and how the learning outcomes can be reviewed and renewed. The final plenary session brought together the findings of the discussions, and identified issues which could be addressed more systematically in the future e.g.

through the establishment of new forums or other forms of cooperation and policy support.

The forum showed there is a need for ongoing and systematic opportunities to share experiences and support mutual learning in this field – this means the creation of a community of practice which is supported by research. Cedefop, in close cooperation with the European Commission and Member States, will continue to support these processes. In 2016 an on-line European Handbook on the writing of learning outcomes will be produced and further research studies will be launched (e.g. on the relevance of learning outcomes as a way to encourage dialogue between education/training and the labour market).

Cedefop will organise a second policy learning forum on learning outcomes in September 2016. ■

For more information, visit the event page
www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/events/policy-learning-forum-definition-and-writing-learning-outcomes-vet

Perspectives on CEDEFOP's policy learning forum on learning outcomes



Richard Maniak,
member of the ECVET team

In September 2015 CEDEFOP organised a *Policy Learning Forum* on defining and writing learning outcomes for VET qualifications.

The forum (www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/learning-outcomes-be-discussed-cedefop-policy-learning-forum) brought together 50 participants from 25 countries, officials from the European Commission and ETF, and a representative from the ECVET team.

This forum was part of CEDEFOP's new approach to supporting Member States and social partners in the organisation of VET policies. This approach, begun in 2015, is based on comparative studies and subsequent analysis of the results. Information from these studies is being shared through European events, establishing working groups and other types of cooperation. This new approach has been developed in close cooperation with VET stakeholders.

The forum explored how the methodology for designing learning outcomes is understood and is being applied across Europe. Increasingly a learning outcomes approach is more widely used in Europe; however when you look at what this means in practice you quickly realise there are many different interpretations of learning outcomes and there are many different approaches to implementation. This forum provided an opportunity to discuss these differences – the debates during the two-day forum focused on the following four questions:

- how are learning outcomes expectations defined and articulated?
- what is the content and profile of intended learning outcomes?
- who are involved in the definition and articulation of learning outcomes?
- why has a particular approach been chosen and to what extent is this embedded in particular education and/or employment policies?

Prior to the forum each participant received detailed information on three occupations in different sectors: plumbing (heating and cooling), machine operator, and tourism/travel sales and services. In addition each participant was asked to complete an online questionnaire before joining the forum discussion.

The forum included a presentation on research findings and a series of workshops. During the seminar there was consensus on some of the fundamental questions e.g. the main reasons for using learning outcomes were agreed to be:

- improving learners' achievement;
- supporting training providers in clarifying the objectives of their programmes;
- strengthening the relevance and quality of qualifications in partnership with stakeholders from the labour market;
- facilitating assessment;
- providing a better basis for national and international comparisons.

There was also agreement on the inseparable link between how learning outcomes are defined and assessed. Despite the considerable amount of consensus there were different perspectives on how to address the challenges faced by those who are designing and implementing systems based on learning outcomes. Two different approaches to addressing these challenges were considered:

- the first was holistic and based on competences;
- the second was based on differentiation and a recognition that there could be different learning outcomes in different areas of learning.

The participants also highlighted the difficulty of relying on learning outcomes as the only way to describe the level of learners' achievement; the complexity of some activities; and the outcomes which are seen as a prerequisite for higher level study.

The feedback from researchers

Karin Luomi-Messerer (3s - http://3s.co.at/en/research_en) and Volker Rein (BIBB - <https://www.bibb.de/en/>) were invited to comment on the forum presentations and conclusions from the workshops.

Volker Rein underlined the ambiguity of the concept of 'competence' as defined in the EQF. This leads to multiple interpretations as shown by the examples which were discussed in the workshops. In some systems 'competence' is seen as a generalisation and is used to introduce the concept

of 'attitude' which is a prerequisite to learners demonstrating 'knowledge' and 'skills'. In other systems 'competence' is interpreted as the equivalent of 'skills'. These different interpretations create a major challenge for developing a shared understanding and comparison of qualifications between different systems – both inside one country's system and in a European context. Volker Rein also highlighted issues which should be considered when learning outcomes are defined and written for different purposes: e.g. to

- develop and evaluate training programmes;
- compare qualifications at the same level in different sectors;
- compare qualifications at different levels in the same sector (e.g. in vocational training and higher education);
- look at whether to include separate or integrated cross-cutting skills;
- decide on how much detail to include in the definition of learning outcomes;
- describe the differences between cognitive skills and problem solving;
- think about whether there are different expectations depending on the location of training (school based, work based learning);

Karin Luomi-Messerer considered whether it was ambitious to develop a universal approach to learning outcomes. For some the 'learning outcomes model' is creating a new language with its own vocabulary and grammar based on Bloom's taxonomy (www.edpsycinteractive.org/topics/cognition/bloom.html). For others it is just a revision of the approaches that already exist. The learning outcomes approach is a tool

to communicate what learners have achieved - it does not replace the need for communication between professionals, trainers and learners. This has to be part of the learning process particularly during assessment.

The next steps

The conclusions from the forum will be published in a CEDEFOP working paper. In addition the discussions confirmed participants' interest in a handbook on learning outcomes. This handbook is included in the EQF Advisory Group's 2016 programme of work. There was agreement that the work of the ECVET User's Group in relation to the construction of units for training, assessment, validation and the recognition of learning outcomes could be useful in supporting the production of this handbook. ■

Some ECVET initiatives in Cyprus



“Designing qualifications based on the ecvet principles and units of learning outcomes”

To support the implementation of ECVET, the National Agency¹ in Cyprus organised a successful two day seminar in Nicosia on 18 and 19 November 2015. The Agency staff worked with Cyprus’ ECVET Experts and two specialists from the European ECVET team: Michel Aribaud and Thierry Lefevvre. The seminar aimed to directly involve the participants in:

- designing two qualifications;
- describing these qualifications using units of learning outcomes;
- writing the assessment criteria for these qualifications.

The seminar was designed for educators/trainers working in institutions that are involved in writing and implementing the curricula. The seminar’s organisation provided many opportunities to work in small groups: during the first day participants worked on the design of the two chosen qualifications and on the descriptions of units of learning outcomes. During the second day participants worked on the assessment criteria for the two qualifications and looked at how to award points awarded for each unit of learning outcomes. The outcomes from the small group discussions were very

positive and realistic. This enabled the group to prepare a set of recommendations at the end of the seminar that were supported by all the participants, the Cyprus ECVET Experts, and the European ECVET team. These recommendations can be summarised as follows:

a) from the participants:

- to ensure the success of a seminar, the participants need to be actively involved;
- there is a need for all stakeholders to cooperate to ensure the successful modernisation of VET;
- a future ECVET seminar should aim to develop a full professional qualification. There should be the opportunity to go through all the steps in the design of a qualification.

¹ Foundation for the Management of European Lifelong Learning Programmes, www.llp.org.cy

b) from the ECVET Experts in Cyprus:

- there is a need for greater synergy between the VET stakeholders in Cyprus;
- the Authorities with responsible for the development of ECVET need to be informed about the gaps in the legislation and the decisions that need to be taken in order to successfully implement ECVET in Cyprus.

c) from the European ECVET team:

- it's essential that the representatives from companies are involved in the design of qualifications and the development of ECVET. All the stakeholders including the Ministry of Education and Culture, companies and VET providers should be involved in this exercise;
- to develop a professional qualification, the first step should be the design of the qualification and the second step should be the description of the units of learning outcomes;
- professional qualifications should be based on a system of standards which can be developed by working with international partners through mobility activities;
- in VET there is an emphasis on skills and competences because of their importance for professional qualifications.



The project **ECVET for Permeability and Transferability between the Non-Formal and Formal VET System (ECVET PERMIT)** aims to use the ECVET methodology to design VET curricula in the non-formal and formal VET systems. The project is working at a national and EU level to increase the permeability and transferability of learning outcomes which are achieved in different learning contexts.

This ERASMUS+ project is based on a partnership between organisations in Greece, Malta and Cyprus – the project promoter is the Intercollege in Nicosia (www.nic.intercollege.ac.cy/english-section/welcome-executive-director). ECVET PERMIT aims to apply the ECVET methodology of describing, assessing and validating learning outcomes to three non-formal technical occupations: electrician; plumber; and automotive mechanic. This process will enable the transfer of credits from the non-formal to the formal VET system to be tested, firstly in a national context and secondly at a European level.

The objectives and priorities for the Strategic Partnership include facilitating the validation of non-formal learning and supporting its permeability in formal education pathways. In this context the first ECVET PERMIT training and learning activity took place in Nicosia in April 2015. Fifteen VET instructors and administrators from Cyprus, Greece and Malta were able to attend the five day event which had the following objectives:

- to inform and train VET instructors on how to use the ECVET methodology and technical specifications;
- to introduce the ECVET training manual which is being developed by the consortium;
- to finalise the methodological guidelines for testing the ECVET model in a non-formal context. ■

For more information on the ECVET PERMIT project please visit:

<http://www.nic.intercollege.ac.cy/ecvetpermit>



ECVET Today and Tomorrow: a Peer Learning Activity Exploring VET assessment policies and practices in 6 European countries



Authors: Martyn Haines, Paul Guest, Frances Thom and Roger Hobbs (participating members of the UK ECVET Expert Team).

There are advantages to having newcomers join the class, as was the case in 2014 when the UK Erasmus+ National Agency for VET decided to extend its team of ECVET experts, asking members new and old to propose a programme of activities for 2015.

A peer learning activity (PLA) was subsequently agreed, to explore whether the validation, recognition and transfer of learning (achieved and assessed) during a period of geographical mobility was readily supported in VET systems, policies and practices.

With limited time and money, the UK team opted to focus the exercise on Scotland only with examples of good practice sought from within the Scottish VET community. Whilst a number of attempts were made to claim the good practice mantle, it was often difficult to ascribe complete success in terms of validation, recognition and transfer: whilst learning outcomes and/or units were being readily achieved in different host countries, the bulk of programmes and practices centred on arguably ‘soft’ or partial targets - for example, the use of a dedicated work experience unit with evidence assessed on the learner’s return and onsite assessment reliant on visiting assessors from the home institution.

At the same time, the UK Team extended the scope of the PLA, encouraging ECVET expert teams from other European countries to join their crusade under the heading “ECVET Today and Tomorrow”. Significant interest was

shown with the PLA eventually securing participation from experts in six European countries: Bulgaria, Malta, Iceland, Ireland, Slovenia and Scotland (UK).

Close to 20 expert participants came together during an initial workshop (Glasgow, May 2015) to agree on a common question set, centred on VET assessment and quality assurance practices. Over the summer, data was compiled, collected, analysed and summarised, with a view to enabling fuller discussion and exploration. During a second and final workshop (Valletta, December 2015), strengths and successes were confirmed in the different national systems, alongside areas requiring deeper effort and reinforced action if the delivery of high-quality (and cross border) vocational education and training is to be achieved successfully and completely.

As 2015 comes to close, so does the “ECVET Today and Tomorrow” PLA. Important, however, is the commitment of each of the participating expert teams to promoting and progressing the core conclusions with inputs and articles expected to be delivered to ECVET and VET stakeholder audiences in the early part of 2016.

"Close to 20 expert participants came together during an initial workshop to agree on a common question set, centred on VET assessment and quality assurance practices."

In the meantime, there is one core conclusion resulting from this brief yet important peer exchange action that is listed below alongside a series of common development needs and ambitions.

Firstly, it is important to underline that those involved in the PLA did not see 'officialdom' as a barrier to complete learning recognition for those undertaking a period of geographical mobility. The national VET systems in the six participating countries do not prohibit full recognition. However, there is a need to build trust, capacity, confidence and common understanding.

Beyond this, common areas for development centred on:

- the need for countries to create a single system of quality-assured VET mobility that is either self-regulated (by institutions) or regulated at national level (by government);
- the need to secure labour market input to the development of VET qualifications, driven by the development of national occupational standards;
- the need to continue to promote the value of geographical mobility to learners, through their active involvement in all stages of mobility (before, during, after);
- the need for convergence among existing European tools and instruments that support geographical mobility (for example, EQF, EQAVET, Europass);
- the need to build skills and capacity among those involved in the quality assurance of VET and VET mobility, building on existing principles, frameworks and good practices. ■



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