

magazine

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Editorialby the
European Commission**Miguel B. Santos****Future of ECVET -
Creating Evidence Criteria**

The ECVET Recommendation was launched almost a decade ago. The adoption of this instrument was fully carried out by sixteen Member States; eight are still testing some of the components (or using it partially) and four countries have not yet acted on it.

Nevertheless, the usefulness of the principles and tools is broader than the initial intention of the Recommendation. Through the years the ECVET was also used to ground VET system reforms (Finland), to help skills validation processes (The Netherlands), to support quality

delivery services (Sweden) and to frame credit systems (Portugal).

There is now an opportunity to plot and forecast the future of ECVET. The 2016 Skills Agenda scheduled a revision of the Recommendation. The ET 2020 goals and objectives are quite close and the new Multi Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2021-2027 is now being designed.

It is undeniable that ECVET remains a useful instrument and that the initial drives are fully valid. The format of its delivery to the Member

States and Partners may change or be different from the current one. In addition to the conclusions and points of view of the ECVET Governance bodies and meetings (Users' Group, Annual Forum, Network Meeting, Working Groups), the European Commission is conducting some preliminary studies to produce evidence-based criteria to help ground the future concept of ECVET.

The study *Instruments supporting the European Union vocational education and training (VET) policy* is about the interaction of VET instruments legally established at European level – EQAVET and ECVET – and the policy development at national and European level, carried out in compliance with Article 166 of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union. It also looks at how the VET-specific instruments interact with horizontal instruments such as EQF, Europass or the Validation Recommendation and other sector-specific instruments in the European Higher Education Area. The preliminary outcomes set eight potential scenarios for the future of the instruments: an enhanced status quo of the instruments; be-

coming part of wider VET strategy (one overarching recommendation); or to align to similar instruments in Higher Education are three of the settings envisaged.

A second study is meant to cover the *Vocational mobility in Europe: analysing provision, take-up and impact and reflecting on the way ahead*. It expects to collect and analyse information on VET mobility actions (excluding those supported by Erasmus+), benefitting European learners as well as teachers and trainers, either within or outside the EU. In addition it plans to analyse the impact of various forms of VET mobility (EU funded or not) on learners, teachers and trainers, VET providers, companies and systems, and will draw conclusions and develop a set of solid recommendations towards a EU support to VET mobility. The interim findings identified so far almost 140 mobility programmes or schemes outside Erasmus+, with the majority funded by national or regional public authorities, followed by EU financing (non Erasmus+).

In addition, CEDEFOP may help in these efforts to produce evi-

dence criteria to ground decisions. Its current study on *The Changing role and nature of VET in Europe*, aims to “take one step back” and get a deeper understanding of the various VET systems. This will in turn allow for a better grasp of the differences across Europe and will improve the perspective on change and development of VET.

All the three studies' final reports will be released by the autumn of 2018.

Gathering all these findings and conclusions and adding the perspective of several stakeholders brought to events such as the 2018 ECVET forum will set 2019 up as a stimulating and decisive year for the future of ECVET.

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The Annual ECVET Forum 2018:

14-15 June 2018, Sofia, Bulgaria

The Annual ECVET Form 2018

The Annual ECVET Forum is the biggest and most important event in the ECVET community's annual work programme. This year's theme was **'Using ECVET for long-duration mobility'**. Among the participants were many seasoned ECVET mobility practitioners as well as 'newcomers'; employers or VET learner mobility providers who have only just started using ECVET.

The Annual ECVET Forum 2018 was a one and a half day event attended by 153 participants from 30 countries (26 EU Members States, plus FYROM, Iceland, Norway and Turkey).

Among the 153 participants, there were:

- 53 National ECVET experts
- 19 ECVET Users' Group members
- 47 VET provider representatives
- 4 EU level stakeholders
- 17 representatives of employers and employer organisations
- 59 'newcomers' (less than 2 years' experience with ECVET)

The Annual ECVET Forum 2018 gave policy makers, employers and mobility providers an opportunity to:

- Better understand the value of the ECVET tools and principles for long-duration mobility;
- Discuss how ECVET can be further developed to better support their needs;
- Learn about relevant EU programmes and funding opportunities for long-duration mobility;
- Learn about challenges and success factors related to long-duration mobility;
- Hear about good practice examples of using ECVET for long-duration mobility;
- Introduce themselves and their best practices to colleagues and peers from other countries;
- Identify and speak to potential partners from other countries for long-duration mobility projects.

Day one of the Annual Forum commenced with the plenary presentations, followed by two workshop sessions. The main outcomes of these workshops were discussed in a plenary session which closed the first day of the event. On the second day, the Forum participants got actively involved in a project/idea incubator dedicated to the exchange of experience and knowledge

between employers, National Agencies and VET providers. All ECVET Annual Forum presentations are available on the ECVET Secretariat [website](#).

Why focus on long-duration mobility?

There are many challenges facing the education and training sector across Europe:

- There is a need for result-oriented education and training;
- There is big pressure on VET to have a rapid reaction to labour market, but due to rapid technological change, it is difficult to forecast the skills need. At the same time there is a demand to rapidly deliver skills for the labour market;
- This leads to pressure on efficiency and a need for lifelong learning, upskilling and reskilling, possibly through integrating IVET and CVET.

The ECVET principles will remain important in that context. Modularisation is a way to adapt qualifications in a relatively short time, and the validation and recognition of skills acquired in different learning contexts will remain an important tool in the context of upskilling and reskilling.

In 2017, the European Commission launched ErasmusPRO, a new dedi-

cated activity within the Erasmus+ programme to enhance long-duration (3-12 months) mobility, especially placements of apprentices abroad. As **Jan Varchola from DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion** stated in his welcome address, ErasmusPRO will open up the possibility for 50,000 additional young people to spend at least three months of their training in another Member State from 2018 to 2020. The new Erasmus programme proposed for 2021-2027 will increase the number of beneficiaries even further. The first proposal calls for doubling the programme's budget and opening Jean Monnet Action to the VET sector. This will make it possible to support three times as many beneficiaries as in the current financing period (up to 2.3 million people). 25.9 billion euros are earmarked for Education and Training, with about 20% of this sum reserved for VET mobility.

There are a couple of new possible elements in the Erasmus+ programme that are relevant for VET mobility:

- The reintroduction of mobility of workers in the labour market, which responds to the need for upskilling and reskilling adults;
- Opening up the international dimension for VET, hence individual mobility of learners and staff to countries outside Europe;
- The need to rebalance the mix between long duration and short duration with a goal of at least 20% long-duration mobility.

Long-duration mobility will make the question of validation and recognition of learning outcomes from mobility periods even more pertinent: in short-term mobility projects, recognition is seen as a useful add-on that enhances the value of mobility projects for the learner. Yet if recognition is not possible, a two to three-week absence from training in the home institution can be compensated without significantly extending the learning period. However, in long-duration mobility, without the



possibility of recognising learning outcomes acquired upon return, the training time would have to be extended by three months to a year. This would make mobility a lot less attractive for learners. Therefore, it is even more worthwhile to promote ECVET principles and tools to support this.

Examples of long-duration mobility projects

The National Danish PIU Scheme: Long-term mobility as an integral part of IVET in Denmark

The PIU (Praktik i Udlandet - placement abroad) scheme was launched in the 1990s as a solution to insufficient apprenticeship places available in Denmark. **Søren Kristensen**, a former director of the scheme and an external expert of the ECVET Secretariat, stated that at the time of development, placement abroad was seen as an opportunity to find apprenticeship places for Danish learners. The duration of placement abroad is between 6-7 months (on average) up to 2 years. It includes practical training at enterprises all around the globe, while theoretical training is delivered in Denmark. The practical training that apprentices carry out abroad is recognised and does not have to be repeated. PIU is financed by employers through an apprenticeship levy, which is obligatory if an employer has more than five employees.

PIU has 30 years of experience now; it has become an integral part of the Danish apprenticeship scheme. The rationale changed during the years; when the scheme was launched it was meant to combat the lack of apprenticeship places; at present it is more about acquiring skills that cannot be obtained in Denmark. The target group changed as well, from students who could not find placements, to those with an apprenticeship contract who want to acquire vocational skills allowing them to work in Danish companies' branches abroad or for companies in other countries.

The method of recognition is compatible with ECVET principles: the home and host institution (company) have a learning agreement. Monitoring (follow-up) takes place when students are abroad; also, assessment is carried out by the host enterprise. When students return to Denmark a validation process takes place in the VET school.

Challenges related to PIU include:

- Finding suitable placements abroad requires a lot of effort;
- Students abroad must be paid according to the regulations for apprentices in the host country, which may differ from the regulations in Denmark;



- Quality assurance (QA) of stays abroad;
- There are still difficulties in recruiting students for PIU. Going abroad for a period of several months or even years can be quite daunting for a young person. This could also become a serious challenge for ErasmusPRO.

To evaluate the PIU scheme, a longitudinal study with participants from 10-15 years ago was carried out, focussing on the impact of PIU. The study found that in the field of gastronomy, 75% of chefs currently active in Denmark went abroad to work or study, many of them as apprentices within the PIU scheme. The mobility was identified as a factor that contributed to the quality boost of Danish gastronomy in recent decades: the chefs took some of the important cuisine principles they learned abroad, merged it with Danish tradition and created something unique that turned out to be very successful.

Mobility for Airbus Apprentices (M4AA): A company-internal scheme

Airbus is an international company with branches in Germany, France, the UK and many other countries around the globe. As **Matthias Havekost**, head of Airbus training in Germany, and

Theo Wang (a French learner who did practical training in Germany) outlined, international mobility of staff is extremely important to Airbus: there are about 100 nationalities represented in Airbus companies. To be successful, people need to understand each other.

At Airbus, international mobility includes students and apprentices managed through the Mobility for Airbus Apprentices (M4AA) programme. There are roughly 500 places available per year, and candidates must undergo a selection process. The programme includes four steps:

- Step 1: One day in-house training related to role-play and stereotypes (intercultural awareness raising);
- Step 2: One week training that focuses on team-building in international groups. The training includes communication skills, learning how to support each other, building of trust, reaching common goals;
- Step 3: The work placement abroad. This is the most important step in terms of acquisition of skills for a profession. For example, the apprentice learns the difference between programme management in the different countries, or how the different parts of the production chain fit together. This step can last between 3 and 6 months.

- Step 4: Programme participants present their experiences from learning abroad to the new group of applicants.

In term of recognition, Airbus is in a privileged position as the mobility programme takes place within one company. The months spent abroad are fully recognised as part of the apprentices' training and they do not lose any time related to the work-based part of their apprenticeship. However, they may have to catch up with content related to the school-based part.

Workshop discussions

After the introductory presentations, the participants exchanged ideas on several topics related to the practical implementation of long-duration mobility projects. In five workshops, ten presentations of projects, programmes, tools and services related to long-duration mobility were held. A summary of these discussions is provided in the following sections.

Workshop 1: How to develop international partnerships for long duration mobility?

Elly van't Hof presented experiences from the NETINVET network.

NETINVET is a European network of VET providers in the international trade and transport & logistics sectors. Today, the network comprises 90 VET schools from 11 countries. It organises 600 VET mobilities per year. 10% of them are long-term mobilities of minimum 3 months.

NETINVET provides a quality approach based on quality charters and a label for VET centres and companies, shared references for vocational education and training in the fields of international trade and transport & logistics, a process going towards transfer and recognition of learning outcomes with ECVET, and tools to facilitate monitoring and implementation of mobility for network members.

The network is the result of two previous pilot projects (RECOMFOR & COMINTER). It was built from the beginning by a network of companies and schools. It took a lot of time to grow and become what it is today. The mutual trust established between the members through the pilot projects is one of the success factors of the network.

Francesco Tarantino presented the IFOM (Istituto per la Formazione, l'occupazione e la Mobilità) approach. IFOM is an Italian mobility provider organising both incoming and outgoing long-term mobility projects (over 250 projects to date). One of IFOM's objectives is to fight youth unemployment in Italy and close the skills gap.

Most of their programme participants are recent graduates who have not yet found a job. Mobility enables them to develop professionally and personally, improving their chances in the labour market. Teachers and educational staff are another target group of the project.

To create a national network, it is very valuable to get in touch with schools from the region. Most mobilities are some form of work placement. To broaden their base of schools in the region willing to host students from abroad, IFOM have a training course on work-based learning that they share with other schools interested in introducing work-based learning and hosting students (from Italy and abroad).

IFOM has also set up an international partnership of VET schools/regional authorities, intermediary organisations, companies and chambers of commerce/public bodies. In their experience, the following factors contribute to a successful partnership:

- Mutual trust;
- Transparency, especially about the learning outcomes that students are to achieve;

- Organisation of Skype interviews between the participants and company representatives;
- Thorough preparation of the students (for instance, youth workers and previous 'Erasmus' students can act as mentors and tutors);
- Use of new technologies (mobile phone applications for example).

IFOM uses the ECVET principles (transparency and mutual trust, common definition of learning outcomes, etc.) and the ECVET tools (Memorandum of Understanding, Learning Agreement, Transcript of Records).

The ensuing discussion revealed a couple of additional success factors for the development of successful partnerships for long-duration mobility projects:

- Long-term mobility demands more planning. It is more difficult to convince companies to take on students, it requires good language skills, and students need to be more mature.
- A step-by-step approach is necessary. Mobility providers should make sure everybody is well-informed throughout the entire period.
- It can be advantageous to try out short-term mobility before organising long-term mobility.

- VET providers should be aware of what learning outcomes students can achieve in specific companies. Ideally, these learning outcomes should be as close as possible to their curricula.
- For students, going on short-term mobility means learning *through* work, while long-term mobility means learning *to* work.
- The ECVET tools (Memorandum of Understanding, Learning Agreement, and transcript of records) are fit for mobility, but they need to be simplified. These documents should be merged and digitalised.

Workshop 2: How to quality assure the mobility process using digital tools and services?

Presenters: Andrea Lombardi, European Badge Alliance (EU); Paola Bolognini, Somex - Social Media in Exchanges (EU)

Andrea Lombardi presented the potential application of digital badges for the mobility periods. 'Open Badges' are visual representations of learning and achievement. They follow a world-wide standard to validate and recognise learning that happens anywhere: apart from the Badge name, they include a description, certain criteria, information on the issuer, evidence of the learning, the date issued, the applied standards, and respective tags. As they are full-



ly digital, they create new possibilities to manage them (storing, sharing, displaying). The European Badge Alliance aims to create a badge system for key competences in VET mobility. As such, they have common points with ECVET, as they both aim to make learning visible and recognised, they can be represented digitally and they both require a process for definition, achievement and validation of learning outcomes.

Paola Bolognini introduced the SoMEx app which was developed to support people taking part in mobility exchanges. It provides necessary information (e.g. travel itineraries, language and cultural information, evaluation and certification) and helped the project partners increase the number of mobility exchanges in the building sector. It was also used as a 'diary for apprentices'. The app is currently unavailable for public use. However, UAPME the owner of the app, are developing an open source version with the idea that by the end of the project many different destinations will be available, including a users' kit, pedagogical kit and a users' adhesion charter.

During the group discussions it was agreed that in light of digitalisation ECVET tools should be:

- More user-friendly for employers and others, relying on a common 'pool' of learning outcomes (as planned for ESCO), enabling hard and soft skills to be represented and recognised (e.g. by using a Portfolio);
- Connected, thus ensuring data portability in one single document or App;
- Secure: ensuring data protection, data ownership (ability to share), providing digital ID;
- Well-recognised by stakeholders and learners and visually attractive (like Open Badges);
- Well-supported at national level (support of national agencies, acceptance of digital signatures);
- Accessible for the less digitally competent and less well-connected population;



- Connected with other EU tools (via Europass).

Workshop 3: How to ensure validation and recognition of learning outcomes from long duration mobility?

Antonio Mir Montes, from the Xabec VET provider (ES) reported that Xabec has participated in an EU project with eight other schools from different EU countries. The schools were organising long term mobilities, but the main issue was the recognition of what students learned abroad. The first step was to create a list identifying the common learning outcomes in the curricula of the different schools. The list included 3,000 learning outcomes and none of them were completely alike. The second step was to bring together teachers from the partner schools from the same professional field (e.g. welding) so that they could define common learning outcomes in English. By splitting or merging learning outcomes in their curricula, nearly 50 common learning outcomes were agreed between the schools together with the employers.

Once the learning outcomes had been agreed, students were sent abroad for long term mobility. Teachers were sent to companies for observation which also helped to improve the understand-

ing between teachers and in-company trainers. However, it was found that learning outcomes and learning agreements need to be made more flexible as industrial sectors are exposed to rapid technological changes.

Miikka Kotilainen, from PUUARTISTI (FI) gave a presentation from the employers' point of view. PUUARTISTI is a small cabinet-making company with three employees and three trainees that produces high quality custom-made wooden furniture. PUUARTISTI trains apprentices, including students from other countries. While in PUUARTISTI, the apprentices learn about the Finnish culture and the processing of woods in Finland, while at the same time providing insights about wood processing in their countries. The learning takes place mostly in workshops which are as close as possible to customer projects. PUUARTISTI collaborates with a VET school, which takes charge of the administration and the assessment of apprentices. The company also participates in the assessment by validating the learning outcomes.

The following main points related to validation and recognition of learning outcomes emerged from the discussion:

- The tools used should be different for long and short-term mobility;

- Integration of mobility in curriculum/vocational pathway is important for recognition;
- Agreement on a joint simplified documentation and more transparency in learning outcomes is needed;
- Preparatory visits are useful;
- A common platform should be created for sharing ideas, questions and issues, with a glossary to facilitate the communication between companies and teachers;
- Business associations need to be involved;
- ECVET has to be explained in employer-friendly language;
- Learning outcomes need to be very clearly written;
- The learning agreement should be a living document online.

Workshop 4: How to set up effective collaboration between employers and VET providers?

Christoph Willi presented the approach of the **HLW Rankweil school in Austria** which is a VET provider in the field of hotel management and gastronomy. Their learners undertake internships which are 3 months long, and they can take place both in Austria and other European countries (Spain, France, Italy, UK – England and Scotland, Malta, Switzerland, etc). Students participating in the programme are supported both in the preparation and organisation of the mobility. This programme is financially supported with Erasmus+ funding. The programme started in 2002 and a yearly average turnout is 90 students.

HLW Rankweil has a long-term relationship with most of the employers, which ensures a mutual trust. When the school needs to find new partners, trust is an important factor since connections with new partners are often made through recommendations of the former partners. After the mobility period, students receive an evaluation from the host employer which shows the strengths and weaknesses of the

students and opportunities for improvement. During the mobility phase, teachers visit learners in companies as part of a quality assurance process. For mobility it is very important that a memorandum of understanding is signed which sets out all agreed conditions in writing. Equally important is constant communication with employers. HLW Rankweil is considering introducing mentors in hosting countries in the future to further support learners.

Mariah Debono, representing the Institute for Tourism Studies in Malta, presented a mobility project that offers students and staff the opportunity to gain experience abroad. For second-year students, the mobility phase can last up to 1 year, while staff mobility periods are limited to one week. The Institute for Tourism Studies has bilateral agreements with partners (hotels/universities) from various countries (ES, UK, FR). Their international internship office is in constant contact with partners via email, Skype and phone to ensure that everything is in order.

The ensuing discussion revealed additional success factors for the establishment of effective collaboration between employers and VET providers:

- It is important to establish a specific legal framework for defining the boundaries between schools and companies within the frame-

work of quality assurance control mechanisms;

- Networking to facilitate the search for potential employers;
- It is important to involve parents especially in those instances when potential mobility participants are younger than 18 years old;
- Organising pre-departure training to better prepare students for a new learning and living environment;
- The Learning Agreement should be more tailored to the needs of the company, while the learning plan should be drawn up by the students and based on their personal needs;
- The Memorandum of Understanding should limit the use of academic language as much as possible, to make the document more readable;
- Platforms for the exchange of experience between returning and future mobility participants should be established, as real-life examples explain better than other means.

Workshop 5: How to promote long duration mobility to students and apprentices?

Hélène Louis presented the pilot project EuroApp', which aimed to experiment with long-term mobility and identify possible obstacles and solutions. The project included 36 partners from 12 countries and led to 80 mobilities both in training centres and companies (most of them at EQF level 3-4).



During the implementation of the project the following obstacles were identified:

- At participant level: language barrier, although it was easily overcome; adaptation to new environment; budgetary issues, recognition of learning outcomes.
- At company level: administrative burden, but it did not restrict willingness to host again; based on French law, sending company must also provide social security for its employee during mobility phases.
- At project coordinator level: finding reliable partners with relevant experience; securing the employer of origin, as the employers continue to pay the apprentice's salary and social benefits.

It was also found that existing partnerships for short-term mobilities led to more effective cooperation for long-term mobility. As far as recognition is concerned, some participants had their learning outcomes recognised, while others had to take an exam before returning and some received certificates.

Claudio Novembre and Amanda Pellegrini gave an overview of the project 'Torno Subito', which aims at the improvement of human capital of young people, the development of professional networks, closing skills gaps and facilitating professional self-de-

termination of participants. The main success factors of the project are the establishment of international partner networks, the use of a youth-friendly language to address potential participants, the promotion of the project in social media, and the possibility of submitting all application documents online. The most common obstacles were language barriers and securing hosting partners.

The discussion and wrap-up session resulted in the following main conclusions:

- Memoranda of Understanding and Learning Agreements should be required for validation and recognition purposes.
- Mobility periods must be documented in advance so that there is more transparency in validation and recognition procedures.
- Validation and recognition might not be as important for graduates as for apprentices and learners who are motivated by the accumulation of learning outcomes.
- VET mobility concerns a younger population than the mobility in higher education, which creates certain obstacles to social integration and legal issues (for minors).
- Ensuring a comprehensive preparation of mobile learners in terms of expectations, practical information, travel arrangements, money management.

- Arriving learners should be supported by student organisations that organise socialisation activities (like Erasmus Student Network).

The benefit of mobility from the view of three students

Following the workshop sessions, three participants from France and Bulgaria representing different long-duration mobility programmes were asked to share their real-life stories and lessons learned through the mobility experience. As one of the students reported, the mobility experience was significant in terms of personal development. First, students learn about money management since they become financially independent for the first time in their life. Second, this type of experience teaches the techniques of adaptation to new work and living environments. Finally, students often face the challenge of different local cultures and work ethic that they must comprehend. According to learners, mobility periods also equipped them with professional skills, be it mastering of a design software application or a production of aircraft components.

'ECVET and mobility - Looking back at ECVET achievements so far and reflections on its role in the future' - Panel Discussion

The first day of the Forum concluded with a panel discussion focusing on what has been achieved so far by using ECVET principles and tools in mobility, specifically with regard to the benefits and challenges of using ECVET in long-duration mobility and how these challenges could be overcome. The discussion was led by the following panellists:

- Alfredo Garmendia, EFVET
- Agnes Roman, ETUC
- Matthias Havekost, Airbus
- Enrico Bressan, Eurochambers
- Helene Hamers, Cedefop
- Hanna Autere, National Agency for Education, Finland



The panel recognised that ECVET tools and principles are comprehensive and consistently make the learning pathways more flexible. Memorandum of Understanding, Learning Agreement (LA) and transcripts of records are valuable tools. At the same time, it is important to ensure that these tools use a clear and business-friendly language. In addition, panellists agreed that the LA should become a living document that would allow for recording the learner's progress during the mobility.

Also, it was noted that certain attention should be given to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) providing training to their employees. Support from the social partners and quality support is crucial for those companies that carry out training as SMEs are more susceptible to possible staff rotation.

Panellists also argued that ECVET tools alone are not sufficient to ensure quality of VET. It was noted that it is very important to monitor working conditions together with the social partners to ensure that mobility is not seen as an opportunity to get cheap labour but as an experience of shared learning.

ECVET could become even more important as VET is increasingly becoming the first choice for learners. In addition, VET learners should have the same opportunities to complete mobility phases as higher education students.

The participants also suggested that a modular approach would respond more quickly to the needs of the labour market. Instead of a whole qualification, missing skills could be acquired much faster through a module. ECVET can support both long- and short-term mobilities, in both traditional and online training environments.

Another topic that emerged was the desired balance between short- and long-duration mobilities. It was agreed



that both forms of training serve different purposes and that short-term placements could be a way to longer mobility periods.

Finally, it was discussed whether ECVET should be mandatory for long-duration mobility. Panellists agreed that while some ECVET tools and principles are more universally applicable than others (e.g. MoU, LA, transcripts of records, recognition principles), the set of applicable ECVET elements should be compatible with national systems.

Idea Incubator discussions

The second day of the Forum was dedicated to networking between employers, representatives of National Agencies and VET providers interested in long-duration mobility. The networking took place in the form of a 'Project/Idea Incubator'. The main objectives of this session were to present project ideas to potential partners and to discuss the main obstacles and ways to overcome them in different thematic areas. A total of eleven different topics were discussed and the following sections present a summary of the most important discussion points.

Collaboration with employers for long-term mobility of apprentices

Some employer representatives reported that companies are interested in devel-

oping both the hard and soft skills of their employees, which mobility programmes are prominent in providing. Companies are also interested in business development opportunities in foreign markets, so mobility placements can play a role in opening new markets and developing international partnerships.

It is reported that SMEs are more likely to take part in long-duration mobility if they already have experience of mobility. Other motivating factors for companies include tax incentives, the award of labels and certificates for the participation in the mobility programme, clear rules and regulation on social security, health insurance and remuneration of mobile learners.

Some successful strategies of targeting enterprises include involvement of social partners (especially sectoral organisations) and direct communication with human resources departments, which are usually responsible for all training initiatives.

Practical challenges of validating learning outcomes achieved in host country

It is important to identify common learning outcomes between the sending and hosting institutions, and to reach an agreement on learning outcomes to be acquired during the mobility phase. Ideally, the agreement should involve

both hosting and sending institutions, the student and accreditation bodies.

It may be useful to familiarise accreditation bodies with all the documentation (e.g. learning agreements, etc.) that can be used for the validation of learning outcomes acquired abroad. A checklist of requirements (approved by the accreditation bodies) for 'good' hosting companies can be developed, which can result in a list of 'approved companies' abroad.

International mobility

International mobility may be hampered by many practical obstacles, such as the need to obtain a visa and/or work permit, to deal with various insurance issues or vaccinations, etc.

One of the biggest challenges is also the development of international partnerships between schools and companies. This could be addressed by applying different strategies. Firstly, VET schools or companies could be approached through local chambers of commerce, embassies or other bodies. The second approach concerns teachers who can build relationships with local VET providers and companies in an effective way. Third, the advantages of multinational companies with office branches abroad can be exploited. Finally, individual funding schemes could support the individual search for relevant partners abroad.

Quality criteria and quality assurance of long duration mobility

Quality criteria and procedures differ across countries. However, several countries reported having certain accreditation or approval procedures in place: a checklist (DK); accreditation and registration of companies (NL); pre-mobility site visits to companies and company assessment by VET schools (EE); company visits during mobility period, tutors with pedagogical competences (IT, LV, HR, BG).

When agreeing on assessment procedures and requirements, it is important to distinguish assessment for summative vs. formative purposes. At the same time quality of the assessment needs to be ensured.

SMEs need a simple, unbureaucratic solution for assessor training, one that recognises the digital training opportunities for assessors. Agreement and implementation of the conditions for the assessment during mobility is a key element in the development of the partnership.

Digital tools should be promoted to the fullest possible extent, allowing prompt and frequent exchange of information (e.g. Erasmus Without Paper). Constant communication can be effectively maintained via the most popular messaging applications (e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook).

Motivating learners to take part in long-term mobility

The participants in the Forum have developed various ideas on how to better motivate learners to opt for long-term mobility. Firstly, it was suggested that short-term mobility could be a key to long-term mobility. In this regard, a penalty-free option for reducing the mobility period could be introduced. Potential long-term mobility participants find it particularly useful to hear real-life stories of former learners who have participated in mobility programmes. Pre-visits of the training sites should also be organised whenever possible to familiarise future learners with new environment.

Using ECVET for mobility in adult VET

First, it was argued that a clear rationale for such mobility should be defined. Second, it is important to work with the motivation of learners who may not feel very comfortable with the idea of going abroad. The mobility experience should be organised at the end of the

longer course period. One of the main obstacles was the search for partners interested in receiving such learners. It has also been difficult to find adequate funding for this type of mobility, as Erasmus+ funding is almost inaccessible, although there are cross-border networks of ESF projects working with mobility.

Using Europass documents for recognition or validation of learning outcomes

Although some participants appreciated the current structure of the Europass Mobility (EM) document, others missed a more detailed description of skills acquired during mobility. This disadvantage was taken up by one employer representative who explained that the EM document is not used in their company because the information provided is too generalised.

Most participants agreed that the digitisation of Europass documents would be of great benefit. It could foster the integration of two similar documents – the Learning Agreement (LA) and Europass Mobility (EM). As some argued, the EM was able to report on how the objectives set in the LA were achieved after the mobility period. Many of those involved in the implementation of mobility programmes would also welcome a possible reduction in paperwork that could be solved by digitising and merging documents.

Overcoming resistance to long-duration mobility

In general, it was argued that interest in long-duration mobility is higher in countries with poorer job prospects for graduates. Apart from the often-mentioned dissemination activities (peer exchange, introductory visits, etc.), recognition of learning was the most important motivation for learners to participate in long-duration mobility so that it is not seen as an interruption of a learning programme.

Planting the Seed for Long-Duration Mobility in Vocational Education and Training

Paul Guest, UK ECVET expert

On 26 June 2018, members of the UK ECVET Expert Team delivered a peer learning workshop for UK stakeholders involved in VET mobility. The goal of this one-day workshop was to facilitate discussion with those involved in delivering VET mobility programmes as the VET / mobility landscape changes. The workshop considered how we might more fully involve and prepare employers to play a role in VET mobility and how we might also respond to the European Commission's vision for delivering international work placements of a longer-duration, with new ErasmusPro funding targeting stays of between 3 and 12 months.

In a session entitled **Sowing the Seed**, Dr Andrew McCoshan (UK ECVET Expert) invited participants to consider the *additional* benefits of international work placements lasting 3-6 months, both for employers and for learners (in all cases, when talking of VET learners, we confirmed the importance of including apprentices). From a learner perspective, there was no shortage of benefits being highlighted with higher-level technical, language, personal development and intercultural skills each cited alongside improved employability, access to new networks and employment opportunities, and the ability to better understand the needs of industry through spending additional time in the workplace. Benefits for employers were considered from the perspective of those sending and receiving VET learners. For those sending, benefits include a greater return on investment through learners gaining a much broader understanding of industry requirements. For those receiving, benefits centre on the additional dividend brought forth by visiting learners in terms of new ideas, improvements to workplace practices and/or enhanced



intercultural understanding among existing employees. There is also the potential, for those receiving VET learners, to identify possible future employees, especially among recent graduates participating in long-duration mobility.

In a session entitled **Fertilisation**, Martyn Haines (UK ECVET Expert) invited participants to consider the challenges of short-and long-duration mobility for

different stakeholder audiences (learners, employers, VET providers, regulatory bodies). As with benefits, there was no shortage of challenges being highlighted with the usual inhibitors confirmed alongside one or two new thoughts and perspectives, as can be seen in figure 1. The results of the fertilisation activity were also adapted into a series of 15 questions (below), for participants to subsequently consider.



In a session entitled **Growth**, Iverene Bromfield (UK ECVET Expert) invited participants to consider the identified challenges, working from the series of questions that had been formed during the fertilisation stage and proposing possible solutions. In almost all cases, and in relatively limited time, participants were able to identify one or more means of progression, listing key actions and providing targeted recommendations, for specific stakeholder audiences, with a view to aiding the delivery of longer-duration mobility. Among these, the following points and recommendations were particularly noteworthy:

- consideration of the specific needs and situations of participants undertaking longer-duration mobility, such as funding and provision for return trips home during the mobility period [Q1];
- the value of co-creation - involving home and host staff as well as learners - when creating systems and procedures for documenting learning [Q2];
- the need to consider (and allow for) employer participation in advance planning visits to the hosting country [Q4];
- the continuation of National Agency dialogue with key national stakeholders (for example, Federation of Awarding Bodies, sector skills councils) with a view to ensuring the exchange of

knowledge and information on policies and practices [Q7, Q15];

- the need for home and host institutions to be fully aware/informed of their capacities/responsibilities for assessment, aligning this with the rules/expectations of the awarding body [Q8];
- the benefits of partnerships in delivering language training (for example, hosting language assistants or collaborating with local Universities) [Q9];
- the potential for developing a free-standing module on international work experience, specifically encompassing soft/transversal skills [Q11];
- the importance of multi-level activities (VET providers, intermediary

organisations, sector skills councils, professional bodies, Erasmus+ National Agency, ECVET Experts, past mobility participants) in promoting longer-duration mobility [Q12];

- the need for VET providers to normalise international work placements within existing course/programme provision [Q14].

In a final session entitled **Harvesting**, Paul Guest (UK ECVET Expert) brought together all that had been discussed and suggested prior to closing proceedings. Having been financed by the UK National Agency as a part of the annual workplan for the UK ECVET Expert Team, a commitment was made to continue promotion of the results of this peer learning workshop, addressing both UK and wider stakeholder audiences involved in the development and delivery of VET mobility programmes.

Participant feedback subsequently confirmed the value and importance of this peer learning event. It provided an opportunity to consider the benefits and challenges associated with longer-duration mobility and planted the *seed* for change through confirming potential solutions and identifying those actors expected to take the lead in delivering improvement and enhancement to existing policies and practices.



Peer Learning Activity: ECVET and validation of non- formal and informal learning: 17-18 May 2018, Roskilde, Denmark

ECVET Secretariat

This Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was dedicated to discussing links and synergies between ECVET and validation of non-formal and informal learning. The 2012 Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNIL)¹, encouraged Member States to put in place national arrangements for validation by 2018. These arrangements will enable individuals to increase the visibility and value of their knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside formal education and training: at work, at home or in voluntary activities.

The key objective of this PLA was to investigate the role – factual and potential – of ECVET in a validation context in Europe. In other words, to **discuss the use of ECVET principles for supporting the validation of non-formal and informal learning**, creating more open and flexible vocational education and training pathways and supporting the transfer of learning outcomes from one context to another.

ECVET and validation of non-formal and informal learning: shared principles and (potential) synergies

Both ECVET, which is based on a 2009 Council Recommendation, and the validation principles as expressed in the 2012 Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning build on the **key principle of learning outcomes**. This is a concept that has been explicitly promoted in the European policy agenda for education and training since 2004. Validation, then, ensures that they can be recognised (formally or socially) either in the con-

text of qualifications or in relation to for example occupational profiles on the labour market, whereas credit systems make it possible to transfer learning outcomes acquired in one context to another.

There are also other areas where synergies can be established. ECVET offers – in line with the EQF principles – a common way of describing learning outcomes reflecting ‘knowledge, skills and competence’. ECVET also stipulates the existence of so-called ‘complementary documents’ to support the transfer process (Memorandum of Understanding, Learning Agreement and Personal Transcript) for some of which European-level templates have been provided. In short, ECVET offers a technical framework for learning outcomes to be assessed in one learning context and then transferred, validated and recognized in another learning context. ECVET has an even broader scope than validation of non-formal and informal learning since it relates to formal learning but takes these other learning contexts – non-formal and

informal – into account as well. Thus, ECVET can provide a framework for combining ‘credit’ from validation of non-formal and informal learning and ‘credit’ from formal learning.

The **concept of units or groups of learning outcomes** is highly important in order to ensure **flexible pathways** (including the use of validation of non-formal and informal learning). ‘ECVET principles’ require qualifications to be composed of clearly defined groups of learning outcomes which should be capable of independent assessment. Components of qualifications (groups of learning outcomes, units, modules) can be used for two main purposes: to assess and validate groups of learning outcomes independently, and/or to structure an education and training programme.

The PLA provided an opportunity for all participants to learn from concrete examples about validation of formal, informal and non-formal learning and how ECVET principles can fit in this context. Examples from five different

¹ Throughout this article, the term ‘validation’ refers to validation of non-formal and informal learning.

countries were presented: Denmark (host country), Sweden, Netherlands, Austria, and France.

Recognition of prior learning in Denmark

In Denmark, validation of prior learning (formal, non-formal and informal) was introduced as a national practice in the Danish VET system in the early 2000s. In 2015, validation of prior learning was made mandatory for all adult learners (aged 25+). Validation of prior learning is accessible up to NQF level 6.

During the past years Denmark has reformed its VET system several times, in an attempt to make vocational education and training more attractive and thus address skills shortages. The most recent reform was the New Act on the Vocational Education (EUV) (2015) with focus on recognition of prior learning. It established two VET tracks: one for people under the age of 25 and one for people aged 25 and older. The aim of the EUV is to make VET more attractive for learners: recognition of prior learning is crucial for all adults as well as shortening the programs for those that want to get back to education.

The legislation and the formal framework have been set nationally, but the implementation is decentralized at the provider level. Validation is undertaken by vocational schools, and they are at liberty to choose whatever assessment methods they find appropriate in the specific context. Validation is undertaken as accreditation of prior learning in relation to a specific qualification, and accumulation is not possible.

Depending on their background, beneficiaries may complete an IVET-qualification in a considerably shorter period than those who enter IVET directly from lower secondary school. Learners are assessed according to the learning objectives of the IVET-programme, existing and missing learning outcomes



are identified, and an individualized learning plan is elaborated that takes into account prior learning. As all IVET in Denmark is alternance-based (apprenticeships), the learning plan usually consists of both theoretical and practical elements (placement periods), but learners with at least two years of relevant work experience may avoid placement periods altogether.

Reflections and points for further discussion

ECVET has the potential to play a key role in supporting the validation of prior learning and allowing flexibility and motivation from learning. ECVET – or rather ‘ECVET principles’ – may provide valuable inspiration in the continued efforts to streamline VET with a lifelong learning perspective (where validation is an essential ingredient). The examples presented at this PLA illustrated that even countries with a strong ‘holistic’ focus (such as in Austria) may use ECVET principles for systemic improvement, especially where low-skilled adults are concerned.

Participants thus concluded that validation procedures for adults should be designed under the assumption

that education and training is motivating and attractive for the adult learners when they:

- Acquire a better understanding of what competences they already possess and which they are going to acquire and develop further;
- Experience how their prior learning achieved in one context can contribute to the development of professional skills and competences; and
- Feel valued and recognised as an adult learner in their learning arrangement.

Effective validation methods also need to take into consideration how the outcome and benefits from a validation process can be used to boost the learner’s further learning and career. There are two aspects that are important here: Validation of prior learning can either have a direct positive effect on an individual’s employability, as it makes skills visible to employers. Validation can also have a more indirect effect, as it empowers the individual and helps to clarify certain possible routes of lifelong learning and career development

Key messages from the PLA

- **ECVET and validation** have a lot in common. Even where validation systems are not directly in compliance with ECVET, they may still possess various degrees of compatibility. ECVET principles may provide valuable inspiration in the continued efforts to streamline VET with a lifelong learning perspective (where validation is an essential ingredient). This may be less pronounced for the aspects that require fundamental systemic change, like a shift from 'holistic' to 'unit-based' VET provision, but even countries with a strong 'holistic' focus (e.g. Austria) may use ECVET principles for systemic improvement.
- **Validation is complementary** to the formal system. Validation pathways should be promoted as a complementary rather than competing pathway towards a qualification. Validation may allow obtaining a qualification through a shortened pathway, but not 'an easy pathway'.
- Validation arrangements differ greatly across countries, e.g. in terms of whether they include the offer of complementary training, or the validity of component certificates. This should be taken into account when comparing them.
- Validation should be **considered and implemented as part of a chain**: starting with information and screening and accompanied by guidance and (tailor-made) training offers. There is a strong need for **guidance** provided to learners.
- Putting flexible/individualised learning pathways where each learner has their individual study plan into practice implies a different mind-set of how we organise learning and poses new requirements to teacher training. Classroom training may need to accommodate very heterogeneous groups of learners (different ages, different levels of competence, etc.).
- Attention needs to be paid to the **quality of assessment/validation processes**, in particular with regard

to the methods/tools chosen for assessing prior learning, a sufficient amount of time dedicated to these processes, and the competences of assessors. Developing trust in validation processes is a key issue.

- Successful validation arrangements require the **involvement of a broad variety of relevant stakeholders**, including employers. This is a key condition for creating trust in these arrangements.

The PLA was attended by 33 participants in total: 26 representatives from 14 countries: AT, BG, CZ, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, LT, LV, MT, NL, SE, and the host country DK. In addition, participants included representatives of Cedefop, the European Commission (DG EMPL) and the ECVET Secretariat.

The presentations held at the PLA and the full PLA report can be downloaded from the ECVET Secretariat website: www.ecvet-secretariat.eu

Did you know the ECVET Secretariat offers ECVET expert support?



What is ECVET expert support?

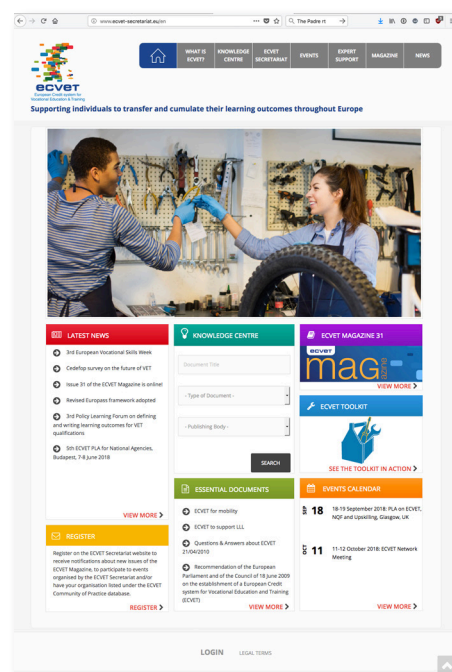
- The ECVET Secretariat works together with a network of experts across Europe to help you to discuss, understand and apply ECVET principles within the context of mobility and lifelong learning.
- This can include experts reviewing and providing comments on draft documents or attending and providing an active input into regional, national or project level conferences. For example, our experts have delivered presentations at national level conferences led by National Agencies and have attended and contributed to specific project meetings.

Who are the experts and how are they different to national ECVET experts?

- Our experts have a background in ECVET and VET policy on a European level for at least 5 years. They have in-depth knowledge of ECVET, mobility and other European tools (for instance EQF, EQAVET, Europass) and have worked with policymakers and project promoters for several years.
- The network of experts have an awareness of ECVET developments across several countries, and this can be really beneficial if you're running a European project.

What costs are involved and where can they travel?

- The support is completely free of charge and flexible around the needs of your organisation, your project's specific topic, or event topics. Our experts work with you to make sure that the experts can deliver support that is tailored to your needs.
- Our experts travel to wherever the help is needed. All costs are covered by the ECVET Secretariat.



Where can I find out more?

You can send an email to:
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For more information, visit: www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/expert-support



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