

The application of Learning Outcomes within a transnational work placement

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Introduction

The objective of this report and its accompanying resources is to provide **a framework for defining Learning Outcomes for transnational mobility activity**. The report sets out to explain

- what a Learning Outcome is, within the context of short term European work placements for lower level vocational learners;
- how realistic, appropriate and achievable Learning Outcomes can be identified and described;
- why a clear definition of Learning Outcomes is important, in terms of ensuring a high quality and positive learning experience for participants, and the sending and hosting organisations involved.

It is our intention that the framework can be applied within different European contexts.

1 The [ECVET](#)¹ framework sits as a backdrop to the report. The SEPLO partnership was set up as a result of a jointly recognised need to provide further support and guidance to the key stakeholders involved in transnational mobility, in order to simplify and demystify the ECVET framework, within the context they are working in². We have seen a resistance to engaging with the ECVET framework and a lack of understanding of how to engage with the framework and the potential benefits an engagement might bring.

2 In the report, we have explored some of the perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of engaging with ECVET, using [real examples](#) and anecdotes to illustrate this. All partners have carried out research in order to present the national context within which they operate, and how vocational courses for lower level learners are designed and assessed, which we have summarised here. Examining examples of [EQF](#)³ Level 2/3 vocational qualifications in each context, we

3 have looked at commonalities and differences when defining Learning Outcomes, in terms of how the Learning Outcomes are described and how they nest within the overall qualification and the profile of units that a qualification might include.

4 This background work has helped us to better understand the context of setting Learning Outcomes, when working with transnational partners. In order to create a common understanding between partners, we have provided straightforward and accessible guidance for identifying and/or defining suitable Learning Outcomes that will be transferable within different national contexts.

5 We recognise that in order to simplify and demystify the process, we need to distil the key elements and present these in a straightforward and accessible way. Therefore, whilst the full report provides background to the work we have done, and may be useful and informative to some, we have also ensured that all resources appended can be downloaded as standalone documents to be used to support the process of defining Learning Outcomes.

¹ The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training.

² That is the provision of short term, European work placements for lower level vocational learners.

³ European Qualifications Framework.

Background



The SEPLO partnership is comprised of five partners, based in 5 partner countries across Europe; [Alfmed](#), based in Perpignan (France); [Centre for Vocational Education Lolland Falster](#) (Celf), based in Lolland Falster (Denmark); [Euricon](#), based in Maastricht (Netherlands); [European Grants International Academy](#) (EGInA), based in Foligno (Italy) and [REY Europe](#), based in London (UK).

We all have different experiences of organising transnational mobility placements for vocational learners, which contribute to their course of study in their home country. We all have a specific focus on vocational learning, using European work based mobility placements as an opportunity to gain sector specific and tangible work experience. Through the mobility opportunities, vocational learners can develop both their professional and personal competences (or soft skills).

We have all recognised the potential that ECVET has to support us to strengthen the quality of our mobility activity. It can be used as a framework for dialogue between hosting and sending partners, making it easier to define the objectives of a placement. It can be used as a tool to strengthen the understanding between partners. At organisational level, for vocational colleges, it is an opportunity to integrate mobility placements into the curriculum, as an accredited component of a vocational course.

It gives transparency and clarity to the learning experience and enables learners to clearly understand the learning objectives that they are working towards, and record their achievements in this context. This can support them to recognise the value of their work based learning experience and relate it directly to their course of study. It provides them with a transcript of learning and evidence of their achievements whilst on placements. The documentation of their learning whilst on placement, can contribute to their career development and onward progression. It gives learners a tangible record of their learning, and support for structured reflection which has the potential to aid the development of CVs and job interview content in the future.

We recognise the barriers that exist, in terms of implementing ECVET. Through our engagement with both vocational colleges and awarding bodies within our national contexts, we have identified a lack of knowledge, awareness and usage at implementation level. There seems to be a lack of engagement, enthusiasm and interest in applying the framework within transnational mobility activity. It is seen as an add-on, which is cumbersome, and requires additional paperwork.

In order to encourage organisations to engage with the ECVET framework, we need to make it accessible and relevant. It is almost as if the words 'ECVET Framework' should be stripped back, so as not to alienate our audience, and instead, we are able to present practical tools and resources that support the defining and evidencing of Learning Outcomes within a placement which are useful and easy to use. That they adhere to the principles of the ECVET framework is less important to the end user than whether they improve the quality of the learning experience. In this way, we intend to use the principles of ECVET when designing our tools, but minimise references to the ECVET language and terminology in their presentation, instead using user-friendly and accessible language.

2

National context

It is important to bear in mind, when working in partnerships across different European countries, that each national context is different. This is evidenced by the 'Application of [Learning Outcome Approaches across Europe – a comparative Study](#)' produced by CEDEFOP (the CEDEFOP Comparative Study) which reveals the diversity of uses of the approaches being applied and highlights the complexity of implementing learning-outcomes-centred policies and developing appropriate strategies at both systemic and subsystemic levels. There is a disparity in the way vocational courses are assessed, and whether assessment is exam, coursework or competency based. The way ECVET is implemented and how it aligns to vocational curricula in each country is different. This makes for a challenging context for partners to initiate a dialogue and develop a project with the intention of using a framework that can be applied within different national contexts.

We have provided a snapshot of the national contexts in each of our partner countries, which has been compiled from partner research and references to existing work in this area, such as the 'ECVET in Europe' CEDEFOP monitoring report. We also carried out interviews with a number of accrediting bodies in each national context to ascertain their awareness and engagement with ECVET and to find out to what extent they envisaged ECVET becoming an integrated component of their vocational courses.



Denmark

*The CEDEFOP Comparative Study reports that 'Learning Outcomes in the Danish national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (NQF) and the qualifications framework for higher education has made a positive contribution to lifelong learning and mobility. The focus on and definition of knowledge, skills and competences is seen to aid comparability between sectors and fields, and also with other European countries, at least in HE. It is less so in VET because the high number of specific professions (over 300) continues to make geographic mobility and changing career difficult.'*⁴

National guidelines for implementing ECVET have been developed in Denmark and a formal decision has been taken to use ECVET for transnational mobility placements within VET schools. A work placement abroad is recognised as part of a VET qualification.

The ECVET toolkit is implemented in the Danish VET system for ingoing and outgoing mobility. The responsibility for validating and recognising the obtained during a mobility placement sits with the VET provider. The VET provider is therefore identified as the

⁴ CEDEFOP(2016) Application of Learning Outcomes approaches across Europe: a comparative study.

accrediting body, when it comes to learning whilst on a mobility placement, and there is no option for external accreditation.

Basic VET programmes (EQF 2-3), have been developed for unemployed young people below the age of 30. They last 3-4 years, are focussed on practical skills and support young people to access the labour market. 75% of the programme is work based and 25% school based. The training programme is set and assessed by the College.



In France, lifelong learning is a national obligation. It includes Initial Vocational Training (IVT), apprenticeships and subsequent training; Vocational Educational Training (VET), for young people and adults already engaged in the labour market.

The government, local authorities, social partners each contribute their own characteristics and objectives, policies, training and funding.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for initial guidance and counselling. Other Ministries are responsible for the professional continuing guidance such as Ministry of employment, Ministry of Agriculture or the Ministry of Industry.

Regional councils are responsible for the implementation of vocational training: IVT and VET.

The last law N°2005-380 April 23rd on the future direction of vocational schools aims to:

- ⇒ Reduce disparities in the acquisition of a common core competences by insuring more individualized paths for learners
- ⇒ Prepare young people for employment by a better understanding companies' needs and the labour market structure
- ⇒ Make schools more effective by introducing language learning and IT from primary level

Since 2002, the responsibility for coordinating vocational training policy and action sits at regional level.

Although the school system as well as the development of diplomas is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, the awarding bodies for vocational qualifications are the Regional education authorities (Académies) under the national authority of the Ministry of Education. Sector relevant professionals contribute to the State design of the diplomas via consultative professional commissions (employers, employees, public authorities, teachers).

VET schools are accredited at regional level. Any assessment of learning which involves professional practice (ie work based learning) is undertaken by teachers and businesses

representatives. The diploma is issued by a final panel/jury on which business members also sit.

In France the VET pathway consists only of level EQF 3 and 4. It involves participants of 16-18 years old. No French qualification corresponds to the first two levels of the EQF, as the lowest level qualifications listed on the RNCP (Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles) (Level V) have been aligned to Level 3 of the EQF.

All vocational courses include a training in a professional environment, in order to better prepare young people for employment; The duration of this compulsory Work Based Learning (WBL) varies from 12 to 22 weeks over a 2 to 3 year time period. Regular assessments of this WBL is carried out jointly with the host company. This assessment is taken into account in the final award of the diploma and is done through an internship report made by the student as well as an interview and a theoretical case study. Public authorities strongly encourage employers to send tutors for 'tutor training' as they believe WBL has been considered as an important part of the curriculum. This training provides tutors with an understanding of the regulations governing alternative, out of classroom training and providing the basis for the development of a training program and its evaluation.

*The CEDEFOP Comparative Study notes that France has been developing its approach to implementing policies on Learning Outcomes over a long period with compulsory education structured around a foundation (socle) of key competences. 'The introduction of validation of non-formal and informal learning and experience that has been enabled by the longstanding competence-based approach to VET. This is a good example of a system where the term 'Learning Outcomes' has not existed in legislation until recently, but has nevertheless become a building block of VET practice.'*⁵

France, as regards its VET system, is engaged in a steady process of integration of transparency tools via the diligent involvement of VET stakeholders who regularly test and pilot these transparency tools, often in the framework of European partnerships and study projects, in order to master the tools and to eventually enhance them. The French State itself has fully embarked on this European transparency journey by submitting its NQF referencing report [to the EQF] as early as **October 2010**. ECVET mobility has been officially recognized in France since 2010, under the Decree issued by the French Ministry of Education. National guidelines as well as an ECVET community of practice has been developed. The main aim of this strategic decision was to allow the assessment, validation and recognition of Learning Outcomes, alongside a series of common European tools and instruments able to support quality in mobility, and integrate the Learning Outcomes acquired into the National Diploma.

Another decree (décret) of **June 2014** states that part of the vocational training can take place in a European country. Assessment of the Learning Outcomes achieved abroad can be recognised following validation by a jury. A corresponding ministerial decree (arrêté) of June 2014 created a cross cutting (transversal) optional mobility unit for all vocational baccalaureates. The unit covers professional and general Learning

⁵ CEDEFOP(2016) Application of Learning Outcomes approaches across Europe: a comparative study.

Outcomes which should be achieved through a training period abroad. Those Learning Outcomes are described and assessment requirements are also defined: the professional Learning Outcomes must be assessed abroad while the general ones are assessed in France. In 2015, a new certificate (attestation) was introduced to issue to graduates of vocational baccalaureates who will have passed the mobility unit, in order to validate their learning thus enabling a new approach to recognizing mobility training periods, to be achieved in a European context.

All VET curricula are described in units, therefore the French system is aligned on the ECVET principles, which supports the implementation of ECVET mobilities. Nevertheless VET / ECVET mobility is not widely spread in France because of a lack of information and technical understanding of its implementation. Foreign language level of French students involved in vocational courses also represents a consistent barrier.

In the context of initial, school based vocational education, there is continuous and unitised assessment, which is led by the school. Assessment can be written, or during controlled practical exercises, and the assessment is set by teachers. Students are also required to write a final exam, which is assessed by a jury.



In Italy, the CEDEFOP Comparative Study notes, 'the 'cultural shift' to Learning Outcomes approaches is also characterised by high-level complexity, requiring significant learning among relevant actors, especially teachers, without which implementation remains formal and does not become sustainable.'

VET providers in Italy are actively involved in transnational mobility activity. In order to recognise and validate learning acquired during a transnational mobility, training providers are required to define units of Learning Outcomes for mobility placements.

Thanks to the recent reform 'La Buona Scuola', it has now become compulsory in the Italian educational system to introduce a Work Based Learning (WBL) experience for students for the last three years of high school (400 hrs in three years). This reform was aimed to fill the skills gap that has strongly affected the Italian education system (and ultimately the Italian labour market). The reform was necessary to better connect VET and labour market, strengthen the relevance of VET and support the transition from VET to work.

In this context, a good example of how Learning Outcomes are defined for mobility placements comes from Istituto Tecnico Economico Feliciano Scarpellini, located in Foligno. This institute has adopted ECVET and has so far started a process which will lead to the full alignment of the documental system of local work based learning and transnational mobility. Thus, the process for assessing Learning Outcomes acquired during local work based learning and that for transnational mobility will be the same.

In this example, Learning Outcomes are defined through a number of documents; a **timetable**, an **agreement** (written between the school represented by its principal and the legal representative of the companies/associations/public bodies and all businesses involved); a **commitment form** (a documents where participants declare that they are aware of the rules and will respect them) and **Attendance register**; an Evaluation sheet – transversal competencies (signed by the tutor, to evaluate the acquisition of soft skills, such as relational skills, problem solving skills, team work skills etc) a **student evaluation sheet of the placement**; a **Professional competences evaluation sheet** (signed by the hosting company); a **Certificate of attendance**.

Most VET and HE structures are aligned to ECVET principles and curricula is designed with a framework of units and Learning Outcomes. There is a growing interest in ECVET and developing a credit system, which is compatible with ECVET.

Vocational training institutions are accredited at regional level, according to specific criteria established in agreement with the State. We have seen examples of vocational institutions that have sought and obtained permission from the regional authority to recognise the internship period abroad as an integrated component of their professional course.

Those Colleges we have engaged with have fed back that they see the integration of ECVET and recognition of Learning Outcomes acquired as part of a mobility placement as an asset, which adds value in terms of professionalisation and improved competencies for learners. An example of this can be found in the experience of 'Istituto Omnicomprensivo Dante Alighieri', in Nocera Umbra (province of Perugia). The school took part in a project called 'I-Meet', during which students had a transnational mobility in Spain, which focussed on religious tourism. Through the project, Learning Outcomes were developed as an addition to students' curriculum activity. In this way, the mobility was integrated and it was clear how it complemented and enriched the core curriculum, and supported the professionalization of students. By doing this, the students involved were awarded school credits for their participation in the project. The institute has since been able to build on this learning, in a follow up project which focussed on the broader sector of Tourism.

The issues associated with implementing ECVET include: challenges of using language that is widely understood within host companies and transparency in the assessment of different levels of acquired competencies.

Assessment of vocational courses combines both continuous assessment (throughout the year and at the end of the year) and a final State examination, at the end of the course. Techniques for continuous assessment tends to be grouped in three areas; oral assessment (interview), written or theory based assessment, and practical assessment of competencies, typically in a simulated setting. Teachers play a lead role area of continuous assessment.



Netherlands

The CEDEFOP Comparative Study reports that the Netherlands has a well established process for VET that involves broad partnerships among government, education institutions and their sector organisations and social partner organisations of almost all labour market sectors. They are all interactively involved in the entire process of implementing Learning Outcomes although the report notes that this can mean changes are time consuming.

The Netherlands Association of VET Colleges represents all government-funded colleges for secondary vocational education and training and adult education. It plays a major role in the remodelling of vocational education to be competence-based. The importance of competence-based education in the Netherlands, is evidenced by the seven competence requirements (covering interpersonal, pedagogic, content and didactics, organizational, cooperating with colleagues, cooperating with external school partners, reflection and development), which have been set for teachers in primary, secondary and vocational education since 2006.

The development of VET programmes is decentralized. VET providers are responsible for organising their programmes, and are able to work autonomously to design vocational education which responds to sector and regional needs. National VET law provides a broad framework that outlines some key considerations at system level.

Our research has shown that VET institutions are at very different stages with regards to their internationalisation. Whilst international mobility is part of the VET system, it is not compulsory. There is limited engagement with international mobility, and placements tend to be designed for courses that have an international element and lend themselves to a mobility activity (for example travel and tourism or cultural studies), rather than being explored more broadly across a wider range of vocational areas.

Many colleges offer international mobilities as part of their “excellence” programme to students who excel, or offer mobilities via an Internationalisation Office within the college. In other instances international mobilities are integral to a specific course or qualification. According to statistics for 2011-2014, 5.1% of VET graduates in 2013 had been abroad for a work placement of at least 2 weeks duration, and 0.6% had been abroad for a study-related activity for at least two weeks ([EP NUFFIC](#), 2016). This means that a total of 5,7% of VET graduates in 2013 experienced international mobility, which falls just short of the 2020 benchmark of 6% set in the Bruges Communiqué ([European Commission](#), 2010).

There is limited incoming mobility activity, and a lack of recognition of the benefits of reciprocal activity, and opportunities to learn through hosting international VET students in Colleges in the Netherlands.

Examination of vocational courses is all completed within the College, to guarantee an objective and standardised method of assessment. It involves a combination of nationally set exams and assessment within the College.

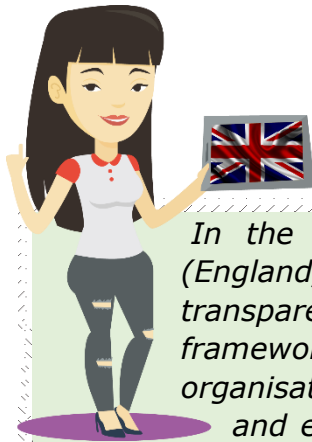
Exams are (mostly) purchased from an external examinations body, and so assessment criteria is already set, and is not flexible. There are mandatory national exams in Dutch and Maths for all VET programmes.

Assessment of school and work based courses tends to take place at the end of the course or training programme. The VET provider will be involved in designing the final assessment of learning; this could involve a simulation, proof of competence or a written test. Often, an aptitude test is selected, which could involve a simulation exercise or observations of work based activities in order to assess the student's competencies. The law stipulates that the training provider must be involved in the assessment process.

Therefore, there is little opportunity, within the current system, to have qualifying work placements abroad. Some Colleges carry out examination abroad, but due to additional legal requirements many are unwilling to do so.

Dutch colleges are flexible in their approaches to (international) mobility and often develop their own documentation, including work placement agreements and assessment forms. The Cingel College, whom we approached as part of our research, explained their approach to integrating work placements with focus on the development-oriented units, rather than the qualification-bearing units. The SEPLO team also approached the Horizon College, which has been involved in developing various toolkits and training modules using ECVET and promoting international mobility. They are currently working on a college-wide approach to preparing, executing and validating mobilities. In both colleges, the students are assessed whilst on their work placement by the host organisation and the school.

Since 2015, 13 ECVET pilots have been carried out in Dutch VET. Four of these pilots have been documented and are available via the [Dutch ECVET website](#). One of the ECVET pilots involved a group of adult pedicurists who already possessed a version of a pedicurist qualification and wanted to improve that to the highest level of Medical Pedicurist. This pilot did not involve international mobility, but rather individually tailored trainings. [Another ECVET pilot](#) focussed on the recognition of skills learned by flex/temp workers during temping jobs (i.e. packaging food, in the stock room or in the kitchen), also no international mobility. Interestingly, [in documentation explaining ECVET](#), 5 (future) uses are mentioned, of which the last point is international mobility, indicating that ECVET is largely being used in different contexts in the Netherlands – more focus is laid on the recognition of skills through partial or complete diplomas to assist those with an unsure footing in the labour market, and to adapt to the fast-changing pace of the contemporary labour market.



United Kingdom

In the UK, with administration devolved to four constituent countries (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales), creating coherence and transparency can be challenging. The Scottish credit and qualifications framework (SCQF) being distinct, has a broad partnership of stakeholder organisations that manages a forum to bring together the partners with sectors and employers. However VET has been competence based in the UK for about two decades resulting in a more explicit reference to Learning Outcomes, for example in curriculum and assessment.

There are more than 160 bodies that have the power to award qualifications in the UK. These are regulated by Ofqual (England), CCEA (Northern Ireland), SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) and DCELLS (Wales). All qualifications are linked to the Qualifications Credit Framework (QCF), which means they are standardised in terms of the level of achievement and credit can be transferred between courses. The QCF qualifications offer flexibility in terms of delivery and assessment methodologies used. This means a training provider can select an awarding body whose approach to course delivery and assessment most suits their learners.

Qualifications that follow the QCF are made up of units. Units achieved can contribute to more than one qualification, even if it has been taken with a different awarding organisation. Learners can either obtain one or more individual units or a whole qualification. Flexible units of learning can be tailored to specific learner needs and interests and facilitate the development of essential skills and relevant understanding and knowledge.

National occupational standards are developed by sector skills councils (SSCs) that are independent and employer-led UK-wide organisations that are licensed by the government through the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES). The UK Sector Skills Councils (SSC) play an important role in defining the skills needs and standards within their industry. SSCs are employer led skills organisations and they work with over 550,000 employers to ensure that the views of employers are articulated and heard by those making skills policy and that skills needs and standards are recognised. Vocational training provision is aligned to this so that it responds to industry needs and produces a work force that is ready to work.

The instrument that structures the design of standards, qualifications and the accreditation and provision of courses is the qualifications and credit framework (QCF) designed to include a wide range of vocational and other qualifications. In December 2014, a decision was published to remove the QCF rules so that 'high quality vocational qualifications can be designed around the needs of employers, rather than the prescriptive set of QCF rules'. This example illustrates the debates about the different aspects and uses of Learning Outcomes related to the labour market, sectoral needs

and to learners' immediate and longer-term needs. It brings into play the issue of balance between short-term and longer-term labour market needs, as represented in the characteristics of qualifications, and the need for learners to acquire qualifications that will give them the grounding on which to build throughout their working life.

Each vocational course unit is comprised of a number of Learning Outcomes. The Learning Outcomes are defined by the awarding body. The outcomes are similar across different awarding bodies, although they may be worded differently. Assessment is continuous. Different awarding bodies have different assessment criteria, ranging from task based exercises, controlled practical demonstrations, exam/multiple choice exams and portfolios of evidence. There is a requirement for assessment to be internally assessed, by teachers or trainers within the training organisation. Internal assessors mark students work in alignment with assessment criteria that is set by the awarding body. The training organisation will have a system in place for standardisation/internal verification and a sample of work is externally verified by the awarding body.

In the context of work based learning, the training organisation assessor will visit the work place, and the employer does play a role in the assessment of learning achieved (which may include providing evidence to support an assessment decision). Assessment is competency based.

Awarding bodies recognise Learning Outcomes achieved outside their own programmes at their own discretion and there is no legislative framework to enable the automatic recognition of Learning Outcomes obtained abroad.

The UK has mapped the QCF onto the European Qualifications Framework. Whether credit transfer (using ECVET methodology) is allowed or not depends on the completed qualification and the institution in which the qualification was acquired.

Most of the awarding bodies that we contacted as part of our research insisted that all evidence of learning must be gathered within the UK. Others were open to the idea of Learning Outcome acquisition through a mobility placement. In this case, they stipulated that methods of evidencing and recording learning would need to be closely scrutinised.



Assessment body criteria: what have we learnt?

The context in which assessment bodies operate ranges across our partner countries, with mandates set at national, local and regional level. Vocational colleges have varying degrees of autonomy within which they are able to integrate work based learning (and specifically transnational mobility) as an accredited component of an initial vocational training course. Some VET providers can decide whether or not to recognise credit achieved abroad. Within other qualification systems, permission has to be sought at national/regional level, which can be more complicated.

In the context of our partner countries, work based learning is slowly being introduced as a compulsory element of the curriculum. It is helpful to consider how local work based learning is monitored and assessed, and whether this approach can be translated into a process of assessment for transnational mobility. In the example of Italy, we have seen the reverse to be true; that the approach developed for recording, assessing and validating learning whilst on a transnational mobility (using the ECVET framework) has been adopted as an approach for recording and validating learning within a local work placement setting.

The accompanying person role is key, as they will likely be trained and have a good understanding of assessment requirements in the home country. In countries where assessment is limited to exam or practical exercises within a controlled setting, there is limited or no option for a transnational mobility to be credit bearing. It is helpful, however, to consider how the ECVET framework can be used to provide a structure for learning, outside of the formal components of the curriculum.

When embarking on the development of a mobility project, as part of the development phase, it is helpful for a college to consider the following questions, which are also illustrated within **Identifying and Developing Learning Outcomes for a transnational work placement** (*Annex 3*).

Who has responsibility for defining and developing Learning Outcomes?

- ➔ If this responsibility sits within the College/VET training provider, is there scope for a transnational mobility unit?

Is work based learning an assessed component of the vocational course?

If yes

- How is it assessed? By whom? When?
- Could this role be played by an accompanying person, in the context of a transnational mobility?
- What guidance for evidencing learning in a work based setting already exist?
- (How) could these be applied in a transnational mobility context?

If no

- Are there prescribed Learning Outcomes for the vocational course?
- Could some of these be selected for participants to work towards during a mobility placement?
- Could placement specific Learning Outcomes be developed in order to provide structure to the work placement? How will achievement be evidenced/recorded?

ECVET: What are the benefits and what are the challenges?

From the information gathered across the countries in our partnership, it is evident that the operating context differs greatly. There is potential for ECVET to be integrated into mobility activity, but it is challenging for partners operating in different contexts to align their work to a different system.



As a group, using our different perspectives, we have undertaken a 'SWOT analysis', to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of our engagement with ECVET. We have captured some anecdotal, real life examples that we brought together to illustrate the points we discussed, that are drawn from across our 5 partner countries. *Please refer to Annex 1.*

Whilst there is a central drive from the European Commission for the ECVET framework to be integrated into mobility activity, at organisational

level this proves challenging. Training providers need to be able to understand their partner country context and to present their own. In some cases, existing Learning Outcomes from a vocational qualification can be mapped onto placement activity and in others, where Learning Outcomes exist, but are not appropriate or relevant, new outcomes need to be developed and written up. This process is time consuming, and can be perceived as an add-on, which involves extra paperwork for minimal added value. This feedback has been echoed across a range of training providers in our partner countries.

It is imperative that tools to support the integration of ECVET are relevant and add value to the placement experience without overburdening the staff involved. The tools that we are developing through the 'SEPLO' project will enable the key actors to use the ECVET methodology in a way that makes sense and enhances placement quality, by providing guidance and templates that sit easily with the different stages of placement development. We use the phrase 'Learning by Stealth' as we wish not to place the emphasis on the ECVET language and terminology, which has the potential to alienate, but will focus instead on developing tools which use the principles of the ECVET framework and are designed to explicitly support constructive and structured dialogue between the key mobility actors.



Learning Outcomes

ECVET provides a framework and a set of technical components that can be used at each stage of the design, development and delivery of a transnational mobility. It is essential that clearly defined Learning Outcomes are identified, in order for the other technical components to be facilitated.

What is a Learning Outcome?

The official ECVET definition of a unit of is **'A component of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence that can be assessed and validated.'**

A simple definition of Learning Outcome could perhaps be **'the result we expect to see after a learning experience'**, in terms of the knowledge, skills and competence a learner has acquired.

The way Learning Outcomes are presented, structured and defined varies across Europe.

- In EU policy Learning Outcomes are defined as statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do after completing a learning process.
- In the European Qualifications Framework they are defined as knowledge, skills and 'competence' where the latter means attitude and behaviour.

The CEDEFOP Comparative Study notes that the overall implementation environment for Learning Outcomes is greatly influenced by the existence or the activity of employer organisations or sector skills bodies. These may have a mandate to analyse and anticipate the skills needs of specific sectors and make efforts to define occupational standards, which can be translated into learning-outcomes-based qualifications. For instance, the UK has national occupational standards developed by the 18 sector skills councils (SSCs) and five sector skills bodies (SSBs) which are independent. The existence of employer-led agencies representing the skills needs of sectors, and the existence of occupational profiles developed by them, have a major impact not only on the way qualifications are defined but also on their capacity to influence institutional training programme planning. In an increasing number of countries, employers' skills needs have a significant influence on quality assurance and programme accreditation bodies and, through this, they can make use of Learning Outcomes approaches an important criterion for programme evaluation.

Written descriptions of Learning Outcomes may not necessarily translate in the same way across different national contexts. As part of our research, project partners undertook national research to gather information on Learning Outcomes for a Level 2/3 vocational course in hospitality & catering, in order to have a common point of comparison. This helped us to understand how units of Learning Outcomes are defined and grouped. We considered how this could be translated in terms of the feasibility of mapping Learning Outcomes onto a short-term mobility placement.

In our **Examples of Learning Outcomes for a Level 2/3 hospitality and catering course** (*Annex 2*), we have grouped units together in thematic areas:



Food preparation



Table setting



Customer service



Soft skills development



Careers development

At a glance, we can see how differently courses are defined across different countries. Although we may be looking at the vocational field and level of qualification, the way Learning Outcomes are described varies hugely.

Therefore, when working with a transnational mobility partner, we cannot assume that we are 'on the same page' when defining outcomes. As thematic areas, any one of these groups of Learning Outcomes could potentially be mapped onto a transnational mobility placement.

It is important that mobility partners reach a common understanding of what they mean by the terms they use within their project and what learning they would like participants to acquire during the learning period. By defining clear Learning Outcomes for the placement, participants will also have a better understanding of what they will learn whilst they are abroad⁶. A discussion between partners will ascertain exactly what the intended learning is, with specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and tangible objectives and a clear idea of how these could be measured.

⁶ 'Getting the credit they deserve: How to recognise achievements during European mobility periods' UK National Agency, Oct 2015

Owing to the wide range of education systems across Europe, VET programmes with the same name can be misleading. There are many variables, which can mean the content of the course can be quite different. By using specific wording to describe Learning Outcomes, the comparability of different qualifications can be improved. The Learning Outcomes describe what the learner knows, understands and is able to do, on completion of a learning process. Often the words 'able to do' are included in the description of the Learning Outcome, in order to demonstrate this.

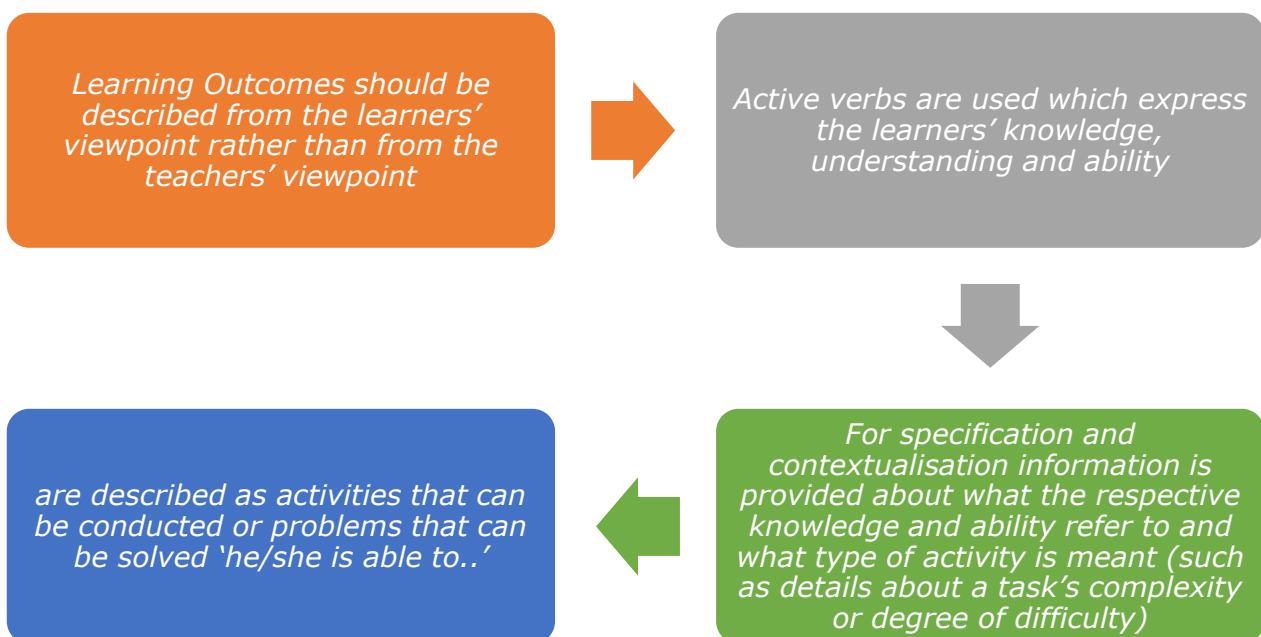
Each unit of a course comprises a set of Learning Outcomes, which all have a specific connection. It may be that they are connected because they relate to a specialisation (accounting, health & safety etc) or they could relate to a defined professional task (Preparing shellfish, blow drying hair etc).

It should be possible to assess each Learning Outcome within a unit, in order to cumulatively grade the acquired knowledge, skills and competences within a unit independently from other units within the course.

In cases where a learning outcome-orientated description has not yet been developed for a qualification, mobility partners can work together to prepare one. It could also be the case that the intended learning sits outside of the units of the vocational course, in which case, new mobility specific Learning Outcomes can be developed. This can be a really helpful process for relationship building and developing a common understanding of the aims and objectives for the placement.

In order to do this, it is advisable to identify the core tasks and activities for the placement. For a short-term placement, it makes sense just to focus on the units or parts of units which are suitable for the mobility placement.

Certain principles should be borne in mind when formulating Learning Outcomes⁷:



⁷ Let's Go Europe! Guidelines for the application of ECVET in the course of mobility periods in VET; Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture, Austria March 2012

The variance between qualification systems across Europe need to be taken into account when designing a placement, and carrying out an initial dialogue between partners. In many systems, there are rules in place as to whether Learning Outcomes can be transferred from one country to another or from a non-formal/informal learning context to a formal qualification context.

In general, the nature of Learning Outcomes can be grouped into three main possibilities:

1. The qualification system uses units of Learning Outcomes. Credit achieved during a mobility placement can be aligned to a full/part of an existing unit of the vocational course. Therefore the achievement during the mobility can be recognised on the learner's return to their College.
2. The qualification system does not use units or the existing units cannot be mapped onto a mobility placement. In some cases, Colleges may be able to create a specific 'unit for mobility', and develop their own and/or include some specific, relevant Learning Outcomes from the full qualification.

The unit achieved abroad could be recognised as additional credit and an enhancement to the qualification they are studying.⁸

The process of identifying suitable Learning Outcomes

Our initial goal was to support learners to gain transferable course credits whilst on a mobility placement (using the ECVET framework). It quickly became clear that this would not be possible/relevant across all of the countries that we are working in.

We have therefore developed a process for defining Learning Outcomes that could be used to achieve credit transfer but will, in most cases, be used to define a clear set of learning objectives for a transnational mobility placement, and look at how learning can be evidenced and recorded.

Following our analysis of learning criteria of vocational courses in different countries, we have observed a common starting point for identifying relevant units to be carried out on a mobility:

Those that involve practical tasks are most suited to a mobility placement. If the Learning Outcomes relate to a practical task, it is easier to map this onto a placement job description and to translate for host organisation staff and learners themselves; 'by being able to carry out a new set of activity, set of tasks when they have completed the unit, learners can fully appreciate what they have learnt abroad.'⁹ It is also easier to design an assessment approach and enable assessment to take place at the work place, by adopting methods such as observation or simulation, which can take place out of the classroom setting.

⁸ ECVET users guide (Using ECVET for geographical mobility)

⁹ Useful guidelines on Units of Learning Outcomes for ECVET in the context of geographical mobility in the framework of partnerships.

It may be that the work placement offers the opportunity for learners to develop a skill that they are less able to gain practical experience of in their home country. For example, one UK College chose to focus on 'preparing and cooking shellfish' for their learners in Spain, where many restaurants offered a range of seafood dishes. This area of focus was identified during the second year of the partnership, once the College had a better understanding of the work available at the placements.

A process of negotiation with the host partner is required, in order to ascertain whether it is viable for participants to be working towards these outcomes whilst they are on placement.

If the course contains a 'work experience' unit (or similar), this can potentially be carried out during mobility placement. We have seen strong examples where Colleges have incorporated aspects of the unit into the preparatory and debrief activities. For example, carrying out interviews and researching the company they will be hosted by.

Learning Outcomes could also relate to soft skills development – such as team work, communication or problem solving. Whilst these areas of learning may not always feed directly into a vocational course of study, it is likely that these skills will contribute to the learner's professional development and workplace readiness. If clear Learning Outcomes are created for this aspect of learning, this gives the participants a clear goal to work towards in terms of personal development in these areas, and tangible outcomes that they can refer to. These can be recorded in using Europass documentation.

When developing a Learning Outcomes framework for placement activity, the following questions should be considered:

a) What do you want the student to learn?



- The students' vocational course of study and the activities of the placement both need to be taken into account
- What is the purpose of the placement? To enhance technical skills in vocational area/to gain work experience/to focus on soft skills development?
- The outcomes set must be realistic within the timeframes and activities of the placement

b) How will learning be described?



- Outcomes must be clear, and easy to understand for learner, hosting and sending organisations
- In order to ensure that there is a common understanding between all actors involved in the mobility, outcomes should be broken down into Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Tangible ('SMART') goals.

c) How will learning be evidenced?



- Who will assess the learner's achievements, how and when?
- What evidence do you expect to see and how should it be presented?
- What type of evidence gathering is feasible and appropriate within the context of a mobility placement (taking into account language barriers and time constraints, for example)
- It is important that the guidelines for evidencing learning are set before the placement starts. Those involved should know from the outset what evidence to gather, when to gather it and how it should be recorded.
- What guidance should be in place to ensure that the evidence gathered is reliable and fair?
- Is the assessment methodology relevant to the Learning Outcomes set for the placement?

Evaluation

It is important that progress towards the Learning Outcome is captured over the course of the placement.

Some questions to bear in mind at the end of placement evaluation:

- Have Learning Outcomes been achieved? If not, why not?
- Were they realistic in the context of the placement?
- Did participants receive adequate support and guidance?
- Were the evidencing templates fit for purpose?
- Did each stakeholder understand their role?
- How will learning be fed back into the development and design of future mobility activity?

Use of the ECVET framework is most suited to partners who are committed to working together in the longer term. Hosting partners will become more familiar with the vocational qualification, the qualification system within which it sits and any restrictions that this may bring. They will know what to expect in terms of the learner profile and the level of support they require.

Sending partners will have a better understanding of what a placement can offer, how best to prepare their learners for the placement and what is realistic and achievable in terms of attaining Learning Outcomes and evidencing attainment.

Through ongoing evaluation, the process for defining Learning Outcomes, and evidencing learning can be refined.



Conclusion

It was our intention to design a 'common Learning Outcomes framework' that could be applied across our partner countries and beyond. We have seen that the countries involved are at different stages of integrating Learning Outcomes and recognising both work based learning, and transnational mobility as an accredited component of a vocational course.

In Denmark and France, we have seen specific examples of an optional mobility unit being developed to capture the Learning Outcomes to be achieved on placement, and how these will be assessed. In Denmark, a work placement abroad is recognised as part of a VET qualification and the responsibility for validating and recognising the Learning Outcomes obtained during a mobility placement sits with the VET provider.

In France, a ministerial decree in 2014 created a cross cutting (transversal) optional mobility unit for all vocational baccalaureates. The unit covers professional and general Learning Outcomes which should be achieved through a training period abroad. Those Learning Outcomes are described and assessment requirements are also defined: the professional Learning Outcomes must be assessed abroad while the general ones are assessed in France. In 2015, a new certificate (attestation) was introduced to issue to graduates of vocational baccalaureates who will have passed the mobility unit, in order to validate their learning thus enabling a new approach to recognizing mobility training periods, to be achieved in a European context.

In Italy, 'La Buona Scuola' reform has meant that work based learning (at local level) is now compulsory for all vocational students. As assessment processes are developed for local work based learning, there is an opportunity to align the Learning Outcomes acquired during local work based learning to transnational mobility. There has been a cultural shift to Learning Outcomes approaches, which has been characterised by high level complexity, requiring significant learning amongst relevant actors.

In the Netherlands, approaches to assessment on vocational courses are inflexible, and it therefore difficult to consider formal assessment abroad. The law stipulates that the training provider must be involved in the assessment process and exams are mostly purchased from an external examination body, and so assessment criteria is already set. One College described their approach to integrating work placements with a focus on development-orientated units rather than a focus on credit bearing units.

In the UK, vocational courses address both soft skills development and professional competences that are both accredited as part of the qualification. A work experience unit is also incorporated into the course. A varied approach to ongoing assessment means there is real potential for learning to be assessed whilst on placement, but the accompanying person would be key to this process.

The variability of different approaches does make it a challenge to create an overarching framework, so instead we have developed a tool that will help shape and guide the process of identifying and developing Learning Outcomes, which we hope can be applied in a range of contexts. As we develop our resources we keep realistic and immediate next steps in mind, to function as a stepping stone towards better use of the ECVET

framework, rather than ambitious long-term goals of full alignment to ECVET and credit bearing Learning Outcomes

We must also bear in mind the lens through which each of our partners approaches this project and the development of resources. We have seen that all country contexts are different. Whilst we will endeavour to make our resources relevant to all partner countries involved, the materials being produced will inextricably be influenced by the country producing it.

There are many benefits to using ECVET that aren't directly linked to assessment and the achievement of credit bearing Learning Outcomes, as detailed in this report and evidenced in our SWOT analysis. Our goal within the SEPLO project is to simplify the evidencing process for Learning Outcomes, to demystify the framework and make it more accessible to users. It is therefore important that our starting point is the real context that we are working within, rather than the aspirational end goal of ECVET.

What we provide must be relevant, useful and practically applicable within our national contexts. It should be something that users can pick up and use easily and immediately, in order to familiarise themselves with the process. Once training providers are confident with the process and can see how it working within the context of their transnational mobility activity, they are then in a position to start to navigate and move towards an alignment with formal assessment processes within their vocational system.

Our research has shown that the power of the employer is rising, in terms of their role in vocational curriculum development and the integration of compulsory work experience within vocational courses. ECVET has the potential to play an even stronger role in structuring work placements and capturing tangible Learning Outcomes that reflect the contribution that transnational mobility placements make to strengthening the European labour market.

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