



ECVET Thematic Seminar: Tools for VET-learner mobility 3 and 4 October 2019, Brussels

Summary Report

The ECVET work programme 2019 included a ‘Thematic Seminar’ to discuss ‘Tools for VET learner mobility’. The seminar took place in Brussels on 3 and 4 October 2019 and brought together 40 participants from 22 countries¹. To kick off the discussions, the European Commission presented the EU level policy update.

EU level policy updates related to ECVET

Jan Varchola (Team leader at DG EMPL, Unit E3) welcomed the participants. He reminded them that the funding period of Erasmus+ will end in 2020. Regarding the new Erasmus programme, negotiations are proceeding well. Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen supports the idea of the European Parliament tripling the current Erasmus+ budget in the new funding period. However, the final decision has not yet been taken.

In his recent Parliament hearing, Commissioner-designate Nicolas Schmit from Luxembourg, highlighted the importance of VET for school-work transitions of young people, stressed the role of dual VET and work-based-learning, and the relevance of VET for labour market needs. He also recalled that wherever VET systems are strong, youth unemployment is low. The new funding period will put a focus on high quality VET, flexible learning pathways (possibly supported through individual learning accounts) and upskilling and reskilling of adults. Regarding ECVET, this means that all the topics addressed by ECVET are still very much in the focus.

In her [mission letter to Commissioner-designate Schmit](#), Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen referred explicitly to the implementation and update of the Skills Agenda. An overarching policy framework for the area of VET and lifelong learning is currently discussed; going together with a joint governance structure and monitoring framework. This would be in line with stakeholders’ views for the post-2020 period: Member States, social partners and others have called for a simplification and streamlining of tools already on earlier occasions.

In his welcoming words, **Koen Bois d’Enghien (DG EMPL, Unit E3)** summarised progress with ECVET implementation according to a recent study².

The following trends have been observed:

- An increase from 15 to 21 countries with unit-based or modular VET systems,
- An increase from 8 to 17 countries with credit systems, and
- Progress in the use of Learning Outcomes.

However, ECVET did not result in the development of a European credit system for VET (in the same way as ECTS for HE). This is a lesson to take on board for further development. According to the research, the main impact of ECVET is related to improving the VET learner

¹ The following Member States were represented: AT, BG, CY, CZ, EE, FI, FR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LV, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, TR and UK, as well as representatives from Cedefop, EfVET, the European Commission and the ECVET Secretariat.

² Study on EU VET instruments (EQAVET and ECVET), DG EMPL 2019.



mobility experience. The ECVET tools LA and MoU are used by almost all countries: 25 out of 28 countries are using these tools to support their mobility programmes.

Koen Bois d'Enghien further referred to the work undertaken by a working group of the ACVT³, to discuss options for the future of ECVET. In the first semester of 2019 the Working Group developed the following two options (which are not mutually exclusive):

- Option 1: develop ECVET as a tool supporting mobility to be mainstreamed in the new Erasmus Programme
- Option 2: Embed the functions of ECVET within other EU instruments: EQF, Europass, Erasmus programme, a possible overarching VET Recommendation

DG EMPL will further discuss with the Member States which options should be proposed as follow-up to the work that has been achieved already. However, it should be borne in mind that ECVET objectives and principles remain relevant and will be further pursued at Commission level, independently from the 'form' that ECVET will have in the future.

Carlo Scatoli (DG EMPL, Unit E2) provided an overview on recent developments in the field of Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL). He stated that the 2012 Council Recommendation is currently under evaluation and invited the participants to contribute to the ongoing 'Open consultation'-process.⁴

In general it can be said already that compared to the situation in 2012, there is a lot of progress, but also still room for improvement. Not all Member States have a reasonable spectrum of validation opportunities available, in a few these are still very limited, or only on offer for a limited segment of the population. For example, in many countries, validation requires 1-2 years of prior work experience, which leaves out everyone who has gained skills through e.g. youth work, youth experience etc. While any further development will only start after the evaluation, it will certainly bring forward the current position that validation opportunities should be available to all and promote mainstreaming of validation into general lifelong learning policy. Validation developments at EU level would also take into account the link to individual learning accounts, though they don't exist in many countries yet.

Public Employment Services (PES) who are a major actor in career guidance, could also become a key stakeholder in validation – there is strong interest from the PES side as well as from the VET side to collaborate more closely.

Key messages from the Thematic Seminar

As stated above, research showed that the main impact of ECVET is related to improving the VET learner mobility experience, and the ECVET tools LA and MoU are frequently used. The key objective of the seminar was to discuss lessons learnt from ten years of using the ECVET tools for VET learner mobility (Learning Agreement (LA), Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), and Personal Transcript), to help DG EMPL gather information for further discussion of these options and other ideas.

The ACVT has lined out possible options for the further development of the ECVET mobility tools (transforming current tools into one VET mobility tool supporting the new Erasmus programme, use the functions of ECVET within other EU instruments like Europass).

³ Advisory Committee on Vocational Training

⁴ Final beneficiaries of validation are invited to give feedback: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/initiatives/ares-2018-5123386/public-consultation_en



However, there are other aspects to consider, e.g. a possible digitalisation of the workflow, and an expansion of the use of European mobility tools to mobility programmes that use other funding sources than the Erasmus programme.

Consequently, the seminar focused on four main topics:

1. Similarities and differences across several Learning Agreement templates in use;
2. The requirements of a Learning Agreement template for the use in mobility outside of Erasmus+;
3. Digitalised workflow: Erasmus without paper in VET;
4. The new Europass, and how it can potentially support VET learner mobility.

Key messages from the discussions related to each of the topics are presented below.

Similarities and differences across several Learning Agreement templates

It emerged from the discussions that the Learning Agreement template is broadly used and generally considered indispensable. However, in practice users must solve a couple of dilemmas and take decisions on seven different aspects that will have an impact on the form they want to use:

- Purpose of the LA: Pedagogical and/or administrative;
- Target group: Education professionals vs. non-education professionals (learners, employers, parents);
- Nature of mobility: School stays vs. work placements;
- Learning environment: Dedicated vs. non-dedicated (how much control do you have over the learning process in an enterprise?);
- Duration: Short-term vs. long-term;
- Rationale: Recognition of required LO in the context of the national qualification vs. added value;
- Outcomes: intended outcomes vs. non-intended outcomes.

Hence it can be concluded that it is difficult to develop a one-fits-all template – adaptations depending on the context are almost unavoidable and will need to be factored in.

Requirements of a Learning Agreement template for the use in mobility outside of Erasmus+

Enhanced flexibility of the Learning Agreement template could theoretically help to use the LA in a context outside of Erasmus+. However

- most funding programmes come with a requirement to use programme-specific tools and templates, so there is a risk of duplicating work;
- the development of one integrated (digital) VET mobility tool supporting the new Erasmus programme would potentially make life easier for Erasmus mobility, but would probably not be accessible for mobility stakeholders outside Erasmus.

Digitalised workflow: Erasmus without paper in VET

There was a general agreement that a digitalised workflow is a ‘natural’ next step for VET learner mobility, especially as the VET-sector seems to be lagging behind the Higher Education Sector, where Erasmus without paper has already been introduced. Therefore, a digital mobility platform would be a good idea, in particular to ensure data transfer between the various documents (e.g. MoU, LA and PT), as this will save a lot of time. The key messages from the discussions can be summarised as follows:



- Currently, there is a lot of paperwork involved in organizing and implementing a mobility project, and alone for this reason, digitalisation is a worthwhile investment. ECVET components like the MoU and the LA could be integrated into a more comprehensive mobility Tool used for Erasmus+ projects. However, such a solution should also cover the [Online Linguistic Support \(OLS\)](#), as this is used in the assessment of improvements in foreign language proficiency during the stay abroad.
- Technically, it is perfectly feasible to construct a digital platform for mobility, but in any digital solution, usability and interoperability must be the paramount concerns – it should serve to make life easier for the users. However, we also need to be conscious of the fact that we cannot rely entirely on devices – the procedures of assessment, validation and recognition still need to be closely monitored, and quality must be maintained at all times. If digitalisation comes at the cost of this, it is not a positive development, even if it saves time and paper.
- We must include a GDPR-perspective into every step of the process. The introduction of electronic signatures can be a problem as there are costs related to this for the user. There are, however, other ways of protecting data and living up to the demands of the GDPR (e.g. by the use of passwords). Electronic signatures should therefore not be the main issue in the discussion about digital platforms.

The new Europass concept and how it can potentially support VET learner mobility

The new Europass (to be launched in Spring 2020) is much broader than the current Europass and will contain a strand on Digitally-Signed-Credentials, in addition to an E-profile, information related to skills and qualifications, and interoperability. A Europass digital credential can describe learning outcomes whether obtained through formal, non-formal and informal learning. A digital signature will guarantee the origin and integrity of the credential. In many ways, the information in the credentials would be similar to the information currently contained in a Learning Agreement, incl. validation/recognition by a competent institution. The participants agreed that these modernisations constitute a significant improvement for Europass as a tool to store credentials in the context of VET-learner mobility, but not a tool to organise the mobility process.

Note: This Flash report will be followed up by a more detailed synthesis report. The synthesis report will be available end of October 2019 and will be distributed among the ECVET Network. The report will also be made available on the [ECVET Secretariat webpage](#), together with further information material (background paper, presentations held at the seminar, etc.)