



## Useful Guidelines on Units of Learning Outcomes for ECVET in the context of geographical mobility in the framework of partnerships

Note: These guidelines are the result of the joint work of eleven ECVET pilot projects<sup>1</sup>. The initial ideas for the guidelines were produced during the technical seminar in Berlin (October 2009). The guidelines were then written up and again consulted with the projects.

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide useful hints and ideas for those who will want to engage in implementing ECVET in the context of geographical mobility of learners.

As expressed in the title, these guidelines refer to cases of credit transfer in the framework of geographical (and more specifically international) mobility within established partnerships. Credit transfer and accumulation using ECVET can also take place in other contexts (for example permeability across qualifications sub-systems)<sup>2</sup> and outside partnerships. And though some of the guidelines written here may also be useful for these contexts, they are not directly applicable.

### Projects participating in formulation of these guidelines:

Aerovet, Be-TWIN, CAPE-SV, Credchem, ECVET Asset, M.O.T.O, N.E.T.Work, OPIR, Recomfor, SME Master Plus, VaLOGreg

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the projects and their joint activities see the web-site: [www.ecvet-projects.eu](http://www.ecvet-projects.eu)

<sup>2</sup> See the Figure 1 on different contexts for credit transfer and accumulation in the ECVET Bulletin November 2009 Issue (3) : <http://www.ecvet-projects.eu/Bulletins/ArchivedBulletin.aspx?id=6>

# 1 TRANSPARENCY OF THE QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEMS IN THE PARTNER COUNTRIES

## Guideline:

Provide the partner institutions from other countries/ systems with a short explanation/ description of the qualifications system in your country/context.

## Further information:

For the qualification concerned (i.e. the one being prepared by the learners who will undergo a mobility period) inform your partners about/ provide them with:

- Reference to the EQF level of the qualification
- A translation of the title
- The core activities/tasks the qualification typically prepares for
- The labour market context (in terms of functions/ positions/ occupations) in which the qualification is typically used

For the qualifications system concerned inform your partners about/ provide them with:

- Information about how qualifications in that system are structured – are they designed in terms of units or not? Are qualifications based on programmes/curricula or are they independent of a programme/curriculum and based on standards?

If the qualification is already described in terms of units, provide your partners with:

- The list of titles of units in the qualification
- Information about what forms the basis of each unit: is each unit related to an activity/set of tasks on the work place? Is it based on a set of learning activities?

## 2 IDENTIFYING UNITS TO BE USED IN THE CONTEXT OF GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY

**Guideline:** To use ECVET for mobility it is not necessary to ex ante structure the whole qualification in terms of units. Similarly it is not necessary that the partnership agrees on comparability or equivalence of all units. It may be sufficient to reach an agreement on one or a few units, those that will be achieved abroad during the geographical mobility.

### **Explanation:**

Depending on the needs and ambitions of the partnership, credit transfer agreement using ECVET can be put in place regarding one, several or all units in a qualification.

While some ECVET pilot projects are working on agreeing only a smaller set of units (e.g. ECVET Asset) others are working on units for the whole qualification (e.g. Recomfor, OPIR).

The argument of those promoting the first approach is that:

- In the context of mobility learners can only achieve a limited number of learning outcomes (one or a few units) and hence it is not necessary to agree all the rest.
- Some learning outcomes (e.g. those related to security) are not suitable for being achieved abroad where the rules may differ but also where learners may not perfectly master the language of the country (which does not prevent them from learning other practical aspects)

The argument for those promoting the second type of approach is that:

- Once the comparability/ equivalence of several/all units has been agreed the training centres have the freedom to decide/agree on which units will they use for the mobility periods.

### 3 THE CONTENT OF UNITS – HOW DO UNITS STRUCTURE THE QUALIFICATION?

**Guideline:** The use of occupational activities/working tasks as the basis for agreeing on the comparability or equivalence of units, or the design of common units, has a number of advantages (see below) and makes reaching an agreement among partners easier.

#### **Explanation:**

Different qualifications systems use different vocabulary and approaches to designing and describing their qualifications. From the experience of the ECVET pilot projects it is clear that discussing the occupational activities/working tasks for which the qualification prepares, rather than the qualification standard or the curriculum, makes it easier to identify commonalities among the systems.

This approach also provides more detail about the profile of the person holding the qualification than the occupational profile, for which the qualification prepares, alone.

The ECVET pilot projects use different methods to identify these activities/ tasks: the experts extract this information from the qualification standard (if it is already there) or they can use empirical methods such as analysis of work processes or expert workshop interviews.

#### **Related observation:**

The use of occupational activities/ working tasks as basis for units makes it also easier to agree/define the **assessment criteria**.

When a unit is linked to an activity/set of tasks, its content is transparent and easily understood by a variety of **stakeholders** – such as employers but also learners.

By being able to carry out a new activity/set of tasks when they have completed the unit, **learners** can fully appreciate what they have learnt abroad.

## 4 THE SIZE OF UNITS IN THE CONTEXT OF GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY

**Guideline:** Partnerships that wish to use ECVET for geographical mobility need to reflect on the feasibility of achieving a unit in the context of a limited duration – that of the mobility period.

### **Explanation:**

The ECVET Recommendation gives no indication about the size of units. This can vary greatly from one qualification system to another.

However, when preparing units/ agreeing their equivalence in view of a mobility exchange, the size of the unit(s) needs to fit the duration of the mobility period. This means that it has to be feasible for a learner to achieve the learning outcomes during a given period.

Therefore units that are too big (i.e. they contain a very large or complex set of learning outcomes) may be difficult to use in the context of transnational mobility – unless the duration of the mobility is adapted.

Depending on the rules in the qualifications system, it may still be possible to validate learners' learning outcomes achieved during a mobility period even if these do not correspond to a full unit in the home system: for example through exemption from the corresponding continuing assessment examination.

## 5 UNITS AND ASSESSMENT

### **Guideline:**

The use of occupational activities/working tasks as the basis of units facilitates the assessment abroad.

### **Explanation:**

Referring to activities/ tasks makes the assessment criteria easily understood to assessors from different backgrounds and countries.

It also makes it easier to design assessment approaches based on methods such as observation or simulation which can be more adapted to assessment abroad where the learner does not always master (fully) the language of the country or the language of instruction.

Finally, it facilitates assessment on the workplace which may be one context for mobility periods.

### **Guideline:**

The size of a unit (the number of learning outcomes) is related to the complexity of assessment and vice-versa. Therefore the partnerships working in the context of geographical mobility should bear in mind the feasibility of the assessment abroad when thinking about the content and consequently the size of unit(s).

### **Explanation:**

If the unit is too big, contains a great number of learning outcomes, it may be necessary to assess them in a quite complex assessment approach or through more than one assessment means. Depending on the duration of the mobility period the feasibility of a more complex assessment needs to be considered.

## 6 VALIDATION AND RECOGNITION OF UNITS

### **Guideline:**

Each partner needs to reflect, from the beginning, on how the unit will be validated and recognised in the context of their qualifications system. What for will the validation and recognition take? How will this impact learners pathway?

In the context of geographical mobility validation can take the form of:

- Exemption from an assessment in the home system; or
- Exemption from a part of the training programme in the home system

The unit can be recognised as equivalent to a unit in the home system, as equivalent to a part of the qualification in the home system, or as part of optional choices (if the qualifications standard provides this possibility).

### **Explanation:**

To ensure validation and recognition of the unit, a link between the unit designed/described in the partnership and the standards in the different qualifications systems has to be made.

The content of the unit that will be achieved during the geographical mobility period should either be equivalent to parts of the qualification standard in the home system or it should be possible that the unit is recognised as part of the options (if the system enables the use of options).

## 7 DESCRIBING UNITS IN VIEW OF TRANSNATIONAL TRANSPARENCY

### Guideline:

Make sure that the title of the unit is clear and reflects the content of the unit.

When designing common units, make sure that their description is understandable to a range of actors from different countries who are familiar with the specific occupational context.

### Explanation:

Several ECVET projects are working on designing common units rather than agreeing equivalence between units existing in their national contexts.

In such case they should make sure that the unit description will be understandable to a range of actors – especially the institutions who will be in charge of recognising the unit but also the learners and employers.

A quality assurance process could be put in place whereby the partnership asks experts/persons from outside the partnership (these can be teachers or employers) to read the unit and confirm that its content is clearly expressed. This could also provide the partners with indication of the amount of detail need.

### Guideline:

The description of the unit should reflect these elements: knowledge, skills and competence. This does not mean that the format of describing knowledge separately from skills and separately from competence needs to be adopted. This is up to the partnership to decide.

### Explanation:

Some ECVET projects adopt the approach of differentiating between knowledge, skills and competence (e.g. OPIR) while others do not make this difference explicit (e.g. SME Master Plus).

Those in favour of the first approach highlight that such differentiation creates further clarity and transparency on the content of the unit.

Those in favour of the second approach say that describing knowledge, skills and competence separately leads to overlap in the descriptions. They also note that this





distinction is somewhat artificial and that what is necessary, from the point of view of assessment, is the combination of all.