

**Be-TWIN 2 ECTS-ECVET:
BUILDING BRIDGES AND OVERCOMING DIFFERENCES**

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**BUILDING
BRIDGES
AND
OVERCOMING
DIFFERENCES**

**Work Package 2
Background research and needs analysis**

Result 13: Final Comparative Research Report

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Background

The final comparative report builds on country overviews and in-depth case studies focusing on permeability¹ between VET and Higher Education (HE) in three partner countries.

The report is prepared by 3s research laboratory (Austria) with the contributions of 'Fondazione Giacomo Rumor Centro Produttività Veneto' – CPV and 'Ufficio Scolastico Regionale per il Veneto' - USRV (Italy), Albeda College and the Centre of Expertise 'Kenniscentrum Handel' – KCH (Netherlands).

The description of national approaches is based on several indicators including:

- ⇒ state of affairs of implementation of ECTS, ECVET in the partner countries
- ⇒ role of learning outcomes in VET and HE
- ⇒ prerequisites for permeability (relevant legislation, main features of qualification design in VET and HE, etc.)
- ⇒ quantitative data on permeability
- ⇒ stakeholder involvement (state institutions, VET and HE providers, labour market)
- ⇒ transnational collaboration
- ⇒ applicability of the Be-Twin methodology

The current report provides an overview on the similarities and differences between VET and HE subsystems in the three partner countries. The main findings are highlighted in sections 1-7.

Subsequently, the report arrives to general conclusions about success factors and constraints in the application of permeability mechanisms in the selected countries (section 8). The conclusions are also based on discussions that took place during the II° Steering and Advisory Committee Meeting, hold in Vienna, 6th -7th June 2013.

1. Current state of affairs of implementation of ECTS and ECVET

1.1 ECTS

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) has already been implemented in Austria, Italy and the Netherlands. The basis to award ECTS is student workload only and the standard measure for one ECTS is 25 hours in Austria and Italy and 28 hours in the Netherlands.

Although the learning outcomes approach has been formally adopted in all three countries (as a result of the Bologna process) its application does not yet reveal any uniform system.

1.2 ECVET

The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) is not implemented in either of the partner countries. Nevertheless, there are pilot projects

¹ In this report, the term 'permeability' refers to transit routes and pathways within and between Higher Education and VET and between the labour market and both systems. Be-TWIN Methodological guide (2010): ECVET-ECTS: Building bridges and overcoming differences, Pp.6.

applying ECVET, for example in Austria, such projects support geographical mobility in VET.

2. National legislation on qualification design in VET and Higher Education 4

2.1 Educational pathways in VET

In Austria, Italy and the Netherlands there is a diversity of pathways within VET. In Austria, school-based education includes VET schools (BMS) and VET colleges (BHS). They are attended after the eight year of schooling and the course of study lasts from three to four years for VET schools and five years for VET colleges. Furthermore, there is a special form of VET colleges (Kollegs), which last for two years and provide post-secondary VET courses to people without I-VET qualification (i.e. graduates of academic secondary schools).

In Italy, school-based VET includes I-VET regional courses (three-to-four years), which are organised by the regions and autonomous provinces and technical and vocational institutes (five years). Similarly to the case of Austrian Kollegs, in Italy there are post-secondary VET courses, which also last for two years and are provided by Higher Technical Institutes (ITS). Apprenticeship training (which combines company training and school education) is offered in Austria and Italy.

In the Netherlands, VET courses (MBO) are offered at four different training levels i.e. assistant, basic vocational, professional and middle-management training. For each VET course there are two learning pathways: vocational training (BOL) where practical training takes up between 20% and 60% of the course; and block or day release (BBL) where practical training takes up more than 60% of the course.

2.2 Educational pathways in HE

While in Italy HE programmes are offered only at universities, in Austria and the Netherlands there is a distinction between universities and universities of applied sciences.

Currently, Short Cycle HE programmes (according to the Dublin Descriptors) are offered only in the Netherlands. The Associate Degree (AD) programme is a two-year programme within a four-year professional bachelor programme. It is provided by the universities of applied sciences (HBO) and the training level is between VET level 4 and bachelor. AD programme is linked to EQF level 5.

2.3 Routes for VET graduates to enter into HE

The most frequent routes for VET graduates to enter into HE are as follows:

- ⇒ In Austria, graduates of VET colleges are holders of a double qualification, the so-called 'VET college *Reifeprüfung* certificate and VET diploma'. Their *Reifeprüfung* (upper secondary school leaving certificate) provides a direct access to higher education. Of note is that the VET college qualification is linked to EQF level 5.
- ⇒ In Italy, graduates of technical and vocational institutes are holders of upper secondary school leaving certificates and can directly access HE. Graduates

of ITS foundations can also access HE - they are provided with Higher Technician Diploma, which is linked to EQF level 5.

- ⇒ In the Netherlands, MBO level 4 certificate (middle-management training) provides access to bachelor programmes.

Alternative routes for VET graduates to access HE (universities and universities of applied sciences) were reported only for Austria. Graduates of apprenticeship training and VET schools have to complete the so-called '*Berufsaufstiegsprüfung*' (BRP) or '*Studienberechtigungsprüfung*' (SBP). The first case refers to a special VET-diploma examination providing general access to higher education for all disciplines. The second case refers to a higher education entrance examination, which can be passed only for a specific study course.

In addition, universities of applied sciences in Austria have specific admission regulations, which provide access to study programmes without upper secondary exam school leaving exam, but with relevant professional experience. The regulation applies mostly to apprentices and graduates of VET schools.

2.4. Recent legislative reforms related to qualification design in VET and HE

Legislative reforms in Austria, Italy and the Netherlands, introducing learning outcomes approach, share a common pattern i.e. they could not lead to a unique reform involving all educational systems and subsystems.

In 2004 the Austrian Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (bmu) introduced VET educational standards in order to ensure the comparability and quality of training. In June 2010, bmu published a 'Guide for the design of competence-based and learning outcome oriented curricula for VET colleges and secondary training colleges' and the first curricula in this format have been made available.

During the last decade all segments of the Italian VET system have been reformed by several legislative acts. Ministerial Decree 2008 contains the general rules related to the reorganisation of the entire system including the establishment of Higher Technician Institutes (ITS). According to the Decree², these institutes are constituted as joint foundations comprised by a technical/professional upper secondary institute, training organisation (accredited by the Region for higher training), enterprise belonging to the productive sector covered by the Higher Technical Institute, university department/research institute and a local body. Of note is that in Italy, due to the existence of twenty-one regional authorities, the recognition of qualifications and learning outcomes from one region to another is still critical, although national standards exist. In this context, regulations from 2011 onwards³ provide for a more efficient and homogeneous national qualifications system based on learning outcomes.

² Prime Minister Decree n. 86/08 'Linee guida per la riorganizzazione del sistema di istruzione e formazione tecnica superiore e la costituzione degli Istituti Tecnici Superiori' (Guidelines for reorganising higher technical education and training and establishing higher technical institutes);

³ Inter-ministerial Decree of September 07 2011, (General rules concerning Diplomas of higher technical institutes and national reference profiles, skills assessment and certification); Decree-Law n. 5/2012 converted into law n. 35/2012, art. 52 (Simplification and promotion measures for technical-professional education and higher technical institutes) and Decree February 07, 2013 "Guidelines Art. 52, paragraphs 1 and 2 of Law no. 35 converted into Law of April, 04 2012 containing measures for simplification and promotion of vocational technical education and of the Higher Technical Institutes;

In 2006 the Dutch universities of applied sciences (HBO) piloted the AD programme in order to address the labour market shortage of people educated between MBO level 4 (linked to EQF 4) and bachelor degree (linked to EQF 6).

Since 2006-2007, several pilot rounds have been organised to gain experience with this new type of qualification. The final decision on the form of the qualification is foreseen for September 2013.

3. Quantitative data regarding permeability

Quantitative data on permeability is available for Austria and the Netherlands. Data on admission at HEIs is collected nationwide and it provides information on the educational backgrounds of the entrants.

In Austria, data on exemption is not centrally collected, but is available for individual HEIs. It refers to exemption from one to two semesters of a study programme at universities of applied sciences.

4. Main features of qualification design in VET and Higher Education

As already mentioned, learning outcomes approach in VET and HE curricula has been gradually implemented in all three countries. Noteworthy is that the degree of implementation differs not only between, but also within VET and HE.

4.1 Learning outcomes approach in VET curricula

Originally, curricula in Austria were largely written in terms of input orientation. However, in the course of NQF development, there have been considerable efforts to achieve a more pronounced learning outcomes orientation. This process is still ongoing. The introduction of educational standards in VET builds the basis for the shift towards competence and learning outcome orientation. Curricula of VET schools and colleges are not structured into units of learning outcomes, they are holistic descriptions, which differentiate between three types of competences (i.e. generic, occupation-specific and social and personal) and describe learners' increase in competences as desired by the end of learning.

In Italy, the implementation of learning outcomes approach in VET curricula is still fragmented. A system based on modular qualification (ECVET model) is partially adopted. Some subsystems provide opportunities for achieving partial qualifications after the assessment of prior learning or accumulation of units, changing from one pathway to another.

Currently, VET occupational profiles in the Netherlands are being revised - learning outcomes are not explicitly defined. This could be related to the fact that the national qualifications framework refer to competences rather than learning outcomes i.e. 'competence' is used as an overarching concept, addressing a person's ability to use - in a self-directed way - knowledge, skills, attitudes and other personal, social and methodological capacities at work or in study situations and for professional and personal development.⁴ Currently, there is a shift from competence-based to skills-based learning.

⁴ EQF Newsletter, December 2011, p.5

A common characteristic of the national VET systems in the observed countries is that they are not yet ECVET 'ready'. A common feature is also the involvement of labour market in the development of curricula. For example, in Austria in so-called curriculum committees, teachers and experts of the Ministry of Education and the economy develop draft curricula for the respective subjects.

In Italy, enterprises are founding member of the ITS foundations. Enterprises' representatives are also member of the Technical Scientific Committee – an internal body of the foundation, formulating proposals and recommendations on study programmes. In the Netherlands, Centres of Expertise cooperate with social partners (employers, employees, branch organisations, schools) in the development of qualification dossiers under the mandate of the Ministry of Education. The Centres of Expertise prepare the qualification dossiers and submit them to the National Coordination Point (NCP) for approval by the Minister of Education.

4.2 Learning outcomes approach in HE curricula

In Austria, a qualification profile is the basis for HE study programmes and it describes the expected learning outcomes for the whole study programme. Curricula are structured in modules (which are described in terms of learning outcomes); however, the use of this concept differs between HEIs.

In Italy, university programmes are formally structured into modules, in practice, however, they are still influenced by the subject-based approach.

The implementation of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework in the Netherlands requires from the HEIs that the learning outcomes achieved by the student in terms of knowledge, skills and other competences are described and reflected in the diploma supplement.

The involvement of labour market actors in the design of curricula of university study programmes is limited for all three countries.

In Austria and the Netherlands, labour market actors play a more significant and systematic role in the development of curricula for universities of applied sciences.

5. Transnational collaboration

Examples of transnational collaboration were reported for Austria and Italy. Austrian graduates of VET colleges have access to higher education institutions in other countries and in some cases also exemptions are granted, for example based on the collaboration between the Austrian Centre for Studies and Technology Transfer Weiz (Studien- & Technologie Transfer Zentrum Weiz) and the German University of Applied Sciences Mittweida (Hochschule Mittweida). In the case of Italy, transnational collaboration was piloted within the framework of the Leonardo da Vinci project 'Be-Twin I' (2009-2012) - a predecessor of the current project.

6. Prerequisites for permeability (exemption and/or full equivalence)

6.1 Examples for successful country practices

In Austria, Italy and the Netherlands, prerequisites for access to higher education through validation of prior learning and work experience in VET were

related to national legislation, partnerships/cooperation between VET and HE as well as bottom-up activities. Examples include:

Cooperation between Austrian VET colleges and universities of applied sciences can support exemption (reduction of HE study duration with up to two semesters/one year). Equivalences between the respective learning outcomes are discussed on the basis of curricula. Given that study programmes at UAS are structured into modules, exemption can be related to whole modules (i.e. graduates of the VET college may enter directly into the second or third semester of a bachelor programme) or parts of modules (recognition of single courses). In the case of exemption from whole modules, there is no need for additional assessment procedures i.e. the assessment performed by the VET college are deemed sufficient. Exemption from parts of modules may include additional assessment.

Agreement between ITS foundations and HEIs in Italy provides for the recognition of credits and therefore reduction of study duration. The recognition of credits includes additional assessment procedures.

Bi-lateral cooperation between VET institutions and universities of applied sciences (HBO) in an Associate Degree programme. AD programmes are actually developed on a mutual basis, involving both – the VET institution and the respective university of applied sciences.

Currently, credit systems do not play an important role in supporting permeability between VET and higher education in the selected countries. In the examples described, permeability mechanisms make use of ECTS only.

6.2 Success factors

In general, success factors refer to the existence of long-term cooperation between VET and HEIs, which generates trust and provides for shared responsibility expressed also in the development of programmes on a mutual basis.

7. Challenges and constraints

Due to the gradual and still on-going implementation of learning outcomes in the selected countries (there is no unique reform involving all educational systems and subsystems), the degree of implementation differs not only between, but also within VET and HE. This creates difficulties in comparing curricula. Evidences from country specific practices show that there is not a systematic approach in proceedings related to comparing curricula, which emphasizes the importance of the informal character of the partnerships between VET and HEIs.

Another challenge relates to the difference between formal regulations and practical implementation of the learning outcomes approach. In Italy, for example, curricula in VET and HE are still influenced by the subject-based approach although the necessary regulations are in place.

In some of the countries (Austria, Italy) there are reservations concerning the immediate transfer of modules from VET to higher education. This relates to the so-called ‘scientific view’ i.e. the content taught in the first semester of a HE programme may correspond to content taught in the final year of a VET programme, however, at a HEI, there is a scientific view on the subject, which makes a ‘qualitative difference’. This perception shared by some teachers at HEIs may influence recognition of learning outcomes of prior learning.

8. General conclusions – applicability of Be-Twin methodology

Using Be-TWIN methodology could support the development of learning-outcomes oriented curricula in VET and higher education, the revision and/or actualisation of learning pathways and the development of a common language between the world of education and the world of work. However, in Austria, Italy and the Netherlands there is still need to:

- ⇒ develop procedures and instruments to identify and assess learning outcomes in VET and HE,
- ⇒ identify equivalence of learning outcomes from VET and HE,
- ⇒ clarify what equivalence really means and when (under what conditions) learning outcomes from VET and HE can actually be perceived as equivalent.

Findings from the case studies show that the overlapping between VET and higher education sectors (particularly at EQF level 5) is gradually increasing. In this context, the permeability from higher education to VET is gaining importance⁵ and it relates to the acquirement of relevant job experience and having better job opportunities. For example, in Italy it is observed an increase in the number of students with academic degrees entering into ITS study programmes.

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ANNEX

Comparative overview

	Austria	Italy	The Netherlands
ECTS	1 ECTS = 25h	1 ECTS = 25h	1 ECTS = 28h
ECVET	not implemented yet	not implemented yet	not implemented yet
IVET forms	VET school (2-4 years) VET college (5 years) Kolleg (2 years) Apprenticeship (2-4 years)	Regional I-VET (3-4 years) Technical Institutes (5 y.) Vocational Institutes (5 y.) ITS foundations (2 years) Apprenticeship	VET courses (MBO) level 1: assistant level 2: basic vocational level 3: professional level 4: middle-management
HE forms	UAS, universities	universities	AD programme (EQF level 5) UAS (HBO), universities
Most frequent routes from VET to HE	VET college double qualification (EQF 5)	Technical/vocational institute leaving certificate; ITS Higher Technician Diploma (EQF 5)	MBO level 4 certificate (EQF level 4)
Alternative routes	mostly for apprentices and VET school graduates	no	no
Legislative reforms	2004, 2010: VET standards and related initiatives	2008: Guidelines for establishing ITS foundations	2006: piloting of AD programmes at HBO (EQF level 5)
Quantitative data on permeability	nationwide: admission, access individual UAS: exemption	no	nationwide: admission, access
LO in VET curricula	gradually implemented	gradually implemented; modular qualifications – partially adopted	revision of occupational pro
ECVET	Not yet	Not yet	Not yet
Labour market involvement	yes, curricula commissions for VET schools & colleges	yes, in the commissions of ITS foundations	yes, centres of expertise cooperate with employers
LO in HE curricula	gradual implementation of LO in modules of qualification profiles	modularisation of courses, but subject-based approach- is still in use	n.a.
Involvement of labour market actors	yes, in particular, the case of UAS	no	yes in the case of HBO

	Austria	Italy	The Netherlands
Inter-country permeability	general access for VET college graduates at HE in other countries; exemption in some cases	Pilot project (Be-Twin I)	n.a.
Prerequisites for VET-HE permeability	Cooperation between VET colleges and UAS (exemption)	Agreement between ITS foundations and HEIs (recognition of credits)	Bilateral cooperation between VET and HEIs (AD programmes)
Recognition of learning outcomes of prior learning	equivalence of learning outcomes is based on comparison of curricula	n.a.	AD is a higher education degree (Short cycle Higher Education), within the First Cycle (Bachelor).
Role of credit system	limited; use of ECTS only	limited; use of ECTS only	limited; use of ECTS only
Acceptance of assessment	No additional assessment, UAS accept VET college final certificate	Additional assessment needed	No additional assessment.
Applicability of Be-TWIN methodology	Limited for the moment	Revision and actualisation of training pathways in VET and HE	Development of common languages between the world of education and the world of work

Source (Be-TWIN 2 – WP2: Background research and needs analysis)