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“Transferring methods for validation of informal learning to VET institutions in the field of sustainable agriculture”

Proposals to the Nationals Qualification Agencies

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1. CONVERTING NON-FORMAL COURSES.

1.1. The aim of course.

Every partner defines their pilot course in their individual way because there are different conditions in every country. The main idea behind the course is, to identify how many people have already a lot of previous non-formal and informal knowledge and how this is possible to accredit and certificate. Accreditation/Certification from previous learning outcome is a very important and necessary step because people have to be able to prove their knowledge. These courses should help the participants to get easier an adequate job in the EU Member states after passing the exams, which is based on the proven knowledge that has been achieved.

1.2. Split up the different knowledge parts of the current course into units/elements/learning objects

While analysing the original information within the course it is (according to the NQF) helpful to split up the course into smaller parts of information that can be grouped together. Information with the same knowledge will be grouped together from Learning objects to elements and elements might be grouped together in Units. The elements can be seen as equivalents of courses in Universities, while the units can be seen as Modules. This makes accreditation/validation of courses easier later. Each of these parts of the course must be defined at the level of learning goals, as well as this objective can be checked, in the form in which evidence can be provided here.

- *defining of every knowledge - and learning object*
- *grouping of learning objects together to several elements*
- *grouping of several elements together to units*

It is also possible to prepare a competence catalogue to assess the prior learning expertise of the participants. Through this competence catalogue, which represents the main content of the course, the participants should make a authentic self-assessment. After working out the results the participants know where are there strengths and weaknesses, in other words they know where they have good knowledge and where they can improve their knowledge. This is a good way to start the whole process.

1.3. Define the average needed time for achieving knowledge to fulfil the requirements

Usually in Universities the workload of courses is given in ECTS (European credit transfer system) Points. Every ECTS usually stands for 25 hours of workload. So the course can be calculated (in university level) for a total of ECTS. Normally a typical course with 14 hours of attendance and 2 ECTS (=50 hours of workload) means that besides the attendance additional 36 hours of workload are expected (in average) by the participants to achieve the learning outcome of this course. The conversion into corresponding ECVET points here is not quite that simple, since the knowledge that is required for a participant to follow the course at all, can/should be with credited. Therefore, it is quite possible that a course with a duration of 2-3 months has the same amount of ECVET points as a course which lasts a year, without previous knowledge. In our particular case would, because of the mechanical and training technical need for prior knowledge probably correspond to a price of about 1 week and it 40h a ECVET points system of 2-3 points (in general it is assumed that a basic training of 1 year includes 60 ECVET points). This is a good starting-point to think about validation/accreditation from non-formal and informal learning output. This prior knowledge can be included into specific ECTS Points.

The main three important points to work out:

- Define time needed for learning and for realising proper work because just to read about a theme doesn't mean that you are able to do it.
- Calculate the total learning/exercise time of Units
- Calculate the time needed for whole course (split up in manageable time slots)

One way to implement those points is to work out different trainings modules with an umbrella theme and this will be separated in smaller units, which deal with more specific themes. For every themes, an amount of time will be calculated.

1.4. Define exam/assignment for each unit/element

In current non-formal or informal offers, there are no exams at the end of the course. Usually, the participants are handed out a certificate stating the main topics, which were discussed. This is not a very respectable way to show the knowledge of the participants. We recommend the ways to test the participants:

- oral exam
- written exam
- practical exam
- supervision at job

1.5. Calculate the given ECVET points according to country specific standards

The needs of certification about professional qualifications and labour mobility in Europe represent a requirement to establish a system of training credits recognized and accepted by all countries. This system would mean recognition of accreditation in a few countries on the other hand, allowing equally, to study in different countries with the security of their compatibility and recognition within the European Union. In Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 June 2009, a credit transfer system for vocational and educational training, the European Credits Vocational Education Transfer (ECVET), is established as a way in order to set homologation process and labour mobility in European Union. As only accredited Universities normally are allowed to use the official ECTS system, the ECVET system was introduced within Europe to make prior learning “comparable” in Europe. ECVET points are used to describe the gained knowledge. The ECVET system aims at the European Quality Framework Levels and applies some guidelines in the calculation how many ECVET points have to be calculated for a given knowledge.

Allocation of ECVET points to a qualification is based on using a convention according to which 60 points are allocated to the learning outcomes expected to be achieved in a year of formal full time VET. For a given qualification, one formal learning context is taken as a reference and on the basis of 60 points per year of formal full time VET, the total number of points is assigned to that qualification. In a number of European countries qualifications’ descriptions are independent of the education and training programme preparing for these qualifications. Furthermore, it is also possible that the same qualification can be prepared through various programmes. Therefore ECVET allocates points to qualifications and not to education and training programmes. However, to decide on the number of ECVET points allocated to a qualification, one formal learning programme is chosen as a point of reference. It is up to the competent institutions in charge of designing qualifications to decide which specific programme will be chosen as a point of reference (e.g. the initial VET or the most common programme). The duration of the selected reference programme together with the ECVET convention on ECVET points will give the number of ECVET points allocated to the qualification. Every country have specific standards according to the system, so for example in Germany a full VET training

for farmers take 2 days per week in the VET school and 3 days a week at a farm (dual system). Students are allowed to learn max 40 hours per week, 46 weeks a year (with 6 weeks of vacation per year). This means that the average learning time per year is 1.840 hours. When we allocate 60 ECVET points for a year full-time VET training, each ECVET point contains aprox. 30 hours of training. This 30 hours training on the free movement of workers in the EU can therefore be assigned with 1 ECVET point.

1.6. Prepare a document for participant that show exactly what learning objects / elements / units are fulfilled and what are not fulfilled

During the courses the participants achieves different learning outcome and if the participants archive positive results (for example by exams which are operated from authorised body) then the get a formal document (certificate) confirming the achievement of the described competencies. It is very necessary to prepare a detailed certificate that describes all the skills and competences the participant gained from the course. The detailed certificate will demonstrate the progress of learning outcomes, in terms of objects/elements/units, which the participant gained. With this document the participants can prove there knowledge if they have to. The Spanish authorities have already made this document with the title “Tutorial about Learning and Evaluation of Professional Certificate of Ecological Agriculture”.

2. VALIDATION OF NON FORMAL PREVIOUS LEARNING KNOWLEDGE

2.1. Searching for proper authority to contact and check for requirements

In every partner countries are different laws, solutions, chambers or institutions, which are responsible for education. So we have to respect that and work together with them and find solutions because the participants need to know who is the proper authority, where they get information about requirements and where the can check their documents.

In the project consortium the following possibilities were indicated as authority for validation:

- Government,
- University,
- Experts and
- Accreditation authority.

2.2. Steps of Validation/Accreditation

The accreditation of competencies and qualifications is done as a result of the four methods (oral exam, written exam, practical exam and supervision at job) to identify the quantity and type of competencies acquired by the participants. The handed in documents require additional check-ups like the different evaluations mentioned in Point 2.2.2

2.2.1. Counselling (help of advisors to collect documentations)

- Collect documentation (evidences)
 - Description of achieved learning objects (when, how, by whom...)
 - Evidences of applied work
 - Documents (hours of teaching, certification, experience...)
 - Assignment templates
 - Exam templates
- Discuss about possible achieved learning outcomes
- Prepare documentation for possible evaluation

2.2.2. Evaluation (help of committee)

- Viewing of handed in documentation
Authorised body should check all the documents from the participants and check if they fulfil all the requirements.
- Decision about proper method of evaluation (interviews, exam, evidences, check for competency at workplace...)
Decide how the knowledge from the participants should be evaluate
- Run proper activities

2.2.3. Accreditation/Certification

- Partly accreditation (additional needed objects are defined -> future training objects)
A certificate is handed out to the participants with all the results they have achieved during some courses. So they participants were able to show how many new knowledge they have achieved and what they will learn in future training objects.
- Total accreditation -> certificate or accreditation document to be handed out by Authority
They participants are able to prove there knowledge and can get an adequate job.

3. VALIDATION OF INFORMAL PREVIOUS LEARNING KNOWLEDGE

3.1. Searching for proper authority to contact and check for requirements

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4. CONCLUSION

First of all it is important to know that every partner defines their pilot course in their individual way because there are different requirements in every country. The following facts are general points, which are important for every country:

According to the Document R19 all Project Partners had organized Pilot Courses in the different countries for getting an overview about the current knowledge about recognition, validation and accreditation of prior learning outcomes. The results of the different pilot courses (more detailed information in R21) showed that there is a clear need for a process of evaluation and validation of prior (non-formal/informal) knowledge. The questionnaires from the pilot courses showed that it is very important to define who is responsible for any validation/evaluation require and decide about the best method in how to verify and certificate the knowledge For example European institutions which should have branches in every participating country to help speed up the communication with interested people as well as with universities/companies/governments. This valorization process has to be paid by the applicant and directly reduces the cost at institutions all over Europe, as they don't have to deal with validation of prior knowledge any more, but can rely on a Europe wide system for validation/certification (as it is used in industry already e.g, by ECQA for different job roles Europe/world wide). Additionally a lot of people don't have to take courses with knowledge that they already have, so also the time within the degrees can be shortened for several participants in the future and thus get the earlier to work.