

Criteria for improving recognizability of VET diplomas
on national level (R2)

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**“RELATE – PROMOTING THE RECOGNIZABILITY OF LEARNING OUTCOMES FROM VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TO HIGHER
EDUCATION”**
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1 Foreword

WP3 “*Sharing the results of former projects and summarizing key issues*” is a key work package for the development of the project’s core outcomes. Its results represent the basis for designing the methodologies and tools for the transfer of innovation. WP3 relies on desk research and field research to be performed in Estonia, Germany (Saxony) and Romania with the purpose to collect useful data about the partners’ previous projects on RPL, about the current status of RPL implementation from VET to HE in partner countries, on recognition criteria of VET diplomas.

This document is a transnational report presenting the research findings from all partners in the framework of WP3 on the *criteria for improving recognizability of VET diplomas at international level*. Within this project, non-traditional target groups refer to adult learners coming from AE and VET education.

As indicated in the application, this document is prerequisite of WPs 4-6, namely transfer and adaptation of results of former projects and summarized key issue, to German, Estonian and Romanian contexts.

This document represents the project third result and is part of the set of outcomes/deliverables for WP3.

2 Objective

This desk research was aimed to gather information and practice about criteria for improving recognizability of VET diplomas at international level. As explained above, these criteria will help the consortium to better understand realities in the targeted countries, adapt the outcomes for the transfer and perform a successful transfer.

3 Methodology

The desk research was achieved at national level, in Estonia, Germany and Romania, based on standardized template, discussed and agreed by all partners. The template and explanations on how to perform the research are included in the guidelines for partners on collecting data for WP3.

4 Findings

The research findings are rendered below, per partner country.

4.1 Issuing of VET diplomas

4.1.1 ISSUING OF VET DIPLOMAS IN ESTONIA

According to two legal documents: Kutseharidusstandard (Standard for VET) and Kutseõppeasutuse lõpudokumentide vormid, statuut ja väljaandmise kord (The forms, statute and regulation for issuing of graduation documents) the issuing of diplomas is organized as follows:

- Graduation diploma is a nationally recognized document, which proves the level of gained education. This diploma is issued by VET school.
- Graduation diploma can obtain also a qualification diploma.
- a personal Transcript is annexed to graduation diploma. Diploma can be used independently, but personal transcript cannot be used independently.
- The form of graduation diploma is set by law; therefore they are the same for all VET schools in Estonia.
- On the transcript, among other information there is list of learning outcomes according to the curriculum and the volume of these outcomes (credit points).
- The EQF level is mentioned on the graduation diploma.

These documents (graduation diploma, qualification diploma and personal transcript) are the basics for RPL from VET to HE.

But besides the issuing of learning outcomes of curricula are generally enough. Schools describe the learning outcomes of each module in their school curriculum. These Learning outcomes are not always written into the personal transcripts.

For RPL, VET and HE institutions compare the learning outcomes of each module and agree the content and volume of transferrable learning outcomes¹. If this cooperation doesn't exist between the VET and HE institutions and some students want to use RPL, the curricula are accessible in each school's website and the HE institution, which has to recognize prior learning can evaluate these. Sometimes HE contacts the VET school and discusses with relevant teachers or education managers the learning outcomes (e.g. level).

The goal of RPL in Estonia is:

- To value the competency of a person and provide equal opportunities for assessing and acknowledging it, regardless of the time, place and manner of acquiring the knowledge and skills;
- Support lifelong learning and flexibility between the education system and the labour market as well as within these;
- Improve access to education for people who are socially disadvantaged, broaden their opportunities to acquire an education and compete in the labour market, thus fostering the efficiency of utilizing individuals as a resource for society.

RPL makes it possible to consider:

- Prior studies in educational institutions;
- Knowledge, skills acquired through additional training or independent studies;
- Knowledge and skills acquired through professional and other experience.

4.1.2 ISSUING OF VET DIPLOMAS IN GERMANY

In Germany (Federal State of Saxony) the issuing of VET diplomas is organized by the Saxon Ministry of Educational Affairs (SMK). The design of VET diplomas for each school type is published each semester in the Ministerialblatt of SMK.

All public VET schools and also all private officially recognized VET schools have to download the scheme for VET diploma from SMK. It is therefore not allowed to adapt the VET diploma according to the school's opinion.

The design of VET diplomas is as diverse as the variety of VET courses in between the different federal states of Germany. But the introduction of "learning field concept" (Lernfeldkonzept) as a structural guideline from KMK (Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the federal states in the Federal Republic of Germany) for designing national framework

¹ See therefore Result 5: Process model of the cooperation between VET and HE institutions

curricula was the result of common decision of KMK in 1995, that lessons in VET should be generally activity oriented and not anymore organized in traditional subjects. The lessons should therefore be structured in learning fields, which are based on the fields of action in the targeting job.

This concept has been constantly introduced into most of the qualification curricula in Saxony as well. In pre-school teacher curricula it was introduced in 2004. Therefore the first VET diploma in this activity oriented qualification was issued in 2007 first. In difference to VET diplomas in the past, these new diplomas did not anymore mention subjects like pedagogy, psychology or arts, there was now written “to encourage and support education and development processes” or “to develop cultural-creative competencies and specially target to work with media”.

According to RPL this change of VET diplomas was conducive. Now it is slightly more transparent, which kind of content or competencies is meant by a mark on VET diplomas. However, the recognizing university will still need to have a look into the curricula to understand the terms and to consider the workload of each learning field. In pre-school-teachers curricula, for example, the workload diverse between different learning fields from 40 to 650 units. Besides, it needs to be mentioned that due to the great diversity of qualifications in Germany it is very difficult for Universities to use blanket recognition processes. In the area of pre-school-teachers it is at least less complicated, because of nearly similar curricula in 16 federal states. In other fields of action, like tourism, it is much more complicated. This results mostly in time-consuming individual recognition processes inside the universities. To improve the blanket RPL process it would be necessary to use common templates with descriptions of the learning outcomes additional to the VET diploma in the relevant qualification in each of the federal states of Germany or to establish cooperation between VET providers and universities. The use of these transcripts are recommended by the EU², but it not stated by law in Germany. Therefore few of the VET institutions use these documents to promote the recognizability of learning outcomes of their graduates. But, since the school year 2013/14 the EQF-Level have to be mentioned on VET diplomas in Germany, which is a small, but important step to promoting RPL.

² RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). Available for download under: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0011:0018:EN:PDF> (Date: 20.02.2014)

4.2 Instruments of improving recognizability of VET diplomas

Due to the fact, that issuing of VET diplomas is regulated by law in all Partner countries, the VET Institutions itself have no direct opportunity to improve the recognizability of these official Diplomas.

One of the means for achieving the latter is, according to the European Parliament's "Recommendation on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)"³, the conclusion of a Memorandum of Understanding between competent institutions (either at national or international level) and to issue transcript of records.

4.2.1 MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

The European Parliament's recommendation states that the following criteria shall be included in a Memorandum of Understanding:

"The MoU should confirm that the partners:

- accept each other's status as competent institutions,
- accept each other's quality assurance, assessment, validation and recognition criteria and procedures as satisfactory for the purposes of credit transfer,
- agree the conditions for the operation of the partnership, such as objectives, duration and arrangements for review of the MoU,
- agree on the comparability of qualifications concerned for the purposes of credit transfer, using the reference levels established by EQF,
- identify other actors and competent institutions that may be involved in the process concerned and their functions."⁴

For the improvement of RPL process at national level, it is thus necessary to define criteria for Memoranda Understanding which focuses on the promotion of permeability within one country, taking into account the special requirements for the recognition of learning outcomes in national qualification systems.

³ RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). Available for download under: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0011:0018:EN:PDF> (Date: 20.02.2013)

⁴ *ibid.*, p. C 155/16

To promote recognition at national level, the following criteria should be considered by the partners and be fulfilled by the time of signature of the Memorandum of Understanding:

The partners have to verify:

- their mutual interest in cooperation with the purpose of recognizing learning outcomes to motivate learners to pursue further education,
- the legal possibilities of recognition of learning outcomes regulated by national and / or regional law.
- who the relevant competent institutions are in order to assure the successful implementation of the recognition process. The term “Competent institutions” refers to institutions “responsible for designing and awarding qualifications or recognizing units or other functions linked to ECVET, such as allocation of ECVET points to qualifications and units, assessment, validation and recognition of learning outcomes, under the rules and practices of participating countries”⁵. If the relevant competent institutions do not belong to the partnership, the partners have to seek approval and permission of the recognition process by the competent institution.

The partners have to agree:

- on a set of learning outcomes of VET qualification a. which is recognized for HE qualification b. or
on a common methodology for describing and comparing learning outcomes,
- on common assessment standards,
- on a common procedure for recognizing learning outcomes and on a set of documents for student application.

4.2.2 TRANSCRIPT OF RECORDS

As it is mentioned in the ECVET documents⁶ and the statements of the Partner countries, the issuing of personal transcripts to document the performance of a student over a certain period of time is very useful, when it comes to RPL. This document lists the course units or modules taken,

⁵ from: European Commission, Directorate General Education and Culture (2011): **GET TO KNOW ECVET BETTER** - Questions and Answers, p. 34, available under: http://www.ecvet-team.eu/sites/default/files/ecvet_qna_web_21_04_2010_1.pdf (Date: 25.02.2014)

⁶ RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). Available for download under: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0011:0018:EN:PDF> (Date: 20.02.2014)

the credits gained, and the grades awarded. The Transcript of Records provides a standard format for recording all study activities carried out by students.

The issuing of the transcripts of records is done by the VET school. In Germany each VET institution can use its own template, but it has to be stated that it is more transparent in the RPL process if the same template is used among all VET institutions, like it is done in Estonia.

The EU recommends the use of common templates as well.

4.2.2.1 EUROPASS CERTIFICATE SUPPLEMENTS

The europass has its basis in the EU Council Resolution of 15 December 2004, which adopted the europass Framework Concept. The aim is for the five documents, which constitute the europass to assist the citizens of Europe in portraying their qualifications and competences in a transparent manner so as to enable them to present themselves better on their national labour market and on the European labour market. When learning outcomes achieved in one European country shall be recognized in another European country, the comparison of VET diplomas can be difficult.

This is an area where the europass Certificate Supplements⁷ can provide assistance. Certificate Supplements describe the country-specific standards relating to the respective training occupation and provide a brief summary of the knowledge, skills and competences acquired via the vocational education and training undertaken. They also include indications of the duration, nature and level of training and of the educational course via which such training can be achieved.

The europass Certificate Supplements can be used by anyone who has obtained the vocational qualification in question. Certificate Supplements are drawn up by the relevant authorities in each respective EU member state. In Germany, they are prepared by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) acting in conjunction with the social partners.

⁷ From Europass website available under: <http://www.europass-info.de/index.php?id=268> (Date: 26.06.2014)

5 List of abbreviations

RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
VET	Vocational Education and Training
HE	Higher Education
LO	Learning Outcomes
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
LA	Learning Agreement
ECVET	European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training
ECTS	European Credit Transferable System