

ECVET-STEP NEWSLETTER 1



Europe and ECVET: Big step.

Europe is losing its internal borders.

That may sound like a relatively obvious and trite statement, but its consequences are more profound than may appear at first.

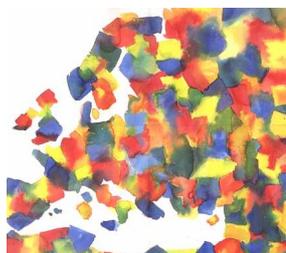
We are already used to goods produced anywhere on the continent, we don't pack passports when travelling around (although we still need to pack power adapters), and companies automatically look elsewhere in the EU for their business contacts.

University students have been a vanguard of this sea change. Through schemes like Erasmus they are returning to the traditional university life which consisted in attending courses with thinkers

and academics wherever they may be, before returning to their alma mater.

Arguably, this EU-enabled university mobility has a great competitor in the form of the internet. Young people can follow lectures and read academic papers from other European universities without leaving home.

However, there is another class of learners who can benefit from



European borders are becoming smudged

ECVET-STEP



Strengthening Training to Employment Pathways

borderless Europe without a challenge from the internet: those who want to acquire **practical training**. They need to get a hands-on experience, and there is no guarantee that the best practice can be found within the confines of their small country.

Borderless Europe is the best way to make sure that the best practice can spread quickly, to keep Europe competitive.

ECVET is a system enabling this spread. ECVET-STEP is a system enabling people adopt ECVET.

Highlights

- **Borderless exchange applies to learning too**
- **Universities are already on board**
- **For practical training it's even more important**
- **Mobility enables competitiveness**
- **ECVET enables mobility**
- **ECVET-STEP enables adoption of ECVET**

Inside this issue

What is ECVET and how STEP helps

ECVET is a Credit system for Vocational Education and Training.

It has been in existence for years, and is being implemented in all EU countries. Somewhere fast, somewhere more slowly.

This newsletter outlines

the main features of ECVET and **suggests how the new ECVET-STEP project can alleviate some bottlenecks potentially arising in adopting ECVET** as a crucial tool for Strengthening Training to Employment Pathways.

The ECVET-STEP project gathers partners from several European centers of excellence in systems design and vocational training. The project will provide organisations with a step-wise, quality-controlled approach in adopting ECVET.

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Lifelong learning as a strategic objective

European Union realises the crucial role that learning plays in creating knowledge-based Europe. It also realizes that lifelong learning is a necessary component of this.

It has enshrined these principles in a **strategic framework** for European cooperation in education and training up until 2020. It builds on the previous “Education and Training 2010” work programme.

Making lifelong learning a reality for all is not just an option, it is increasingly becoming a must. So it was upgraded to the status of an explicit *strategic objective*. The other three objectives are

- improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
- promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship

- enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training

It could be argued that while the other three are staples that always needed to be emphasized, the lifelong learning is relatively new, most immediately brought up by the technological progress of recent decades and the levels of specialization unseen before.

The next article outlines the need for lifelong learning and mobility in greater detail. ECVET-STEP’s primary *raison d’être* is not merely to fulfill some arbitrary “strategic objective” of the European Union and be done with it.

ECVET STEP exists because the strategic objective actually makes sense and is a goal worth pursuing even if there were not strategic objectives put in place.

Why lifelong learning?

Rapid change is not ubiquitous only in the technological setting, although there it may be the most salient. Also economic and organizational changes impose new demands for a Europe more responsive to the labour market’s requirements. Last but not least, the rapidly rising longevity of European population also provides a great demand. Especially since recent trends have started to add years to peoples’ lives not just on the inactive margin, but have especially increased

the active year span. (People are not necessarily living to be over a 100, but they do remain active until their 90s.)

It is therefore insufficient for policy makers to concentrate on educating and training the young.

Education and training systems have to be able to support and equip European citizens with knowledge, skills, and competences to fulfil three core objectives:

- meet the challenges of

Can you drive a tractor?

To give a specific illustration of the necessity of not just *acquiring* skills but also *managing* them, let us consider the typical question that used to be asked at an interview for a skilled job position: *Can you drive a tractor?*

At an age when labour was immobile and therefore only a handful potential candidates from the village, the question made sense. Half of the people could, half of them couldn’t. Today, agricultural labour markets are essentially continental, and small farmer in the centre of France uses seasonally a driver from, say, the Czech Republic. Or even Greece, to make the distance greater. The price of labour will not always be an issue, especially since there are already national wage mandates that reduce this flexibility.

To decide among the *many more* job applicants, the employer nowadays needs to know more.

How well do you drive the tractor? How skilled are you with towing various modern implements? Can you operate any modern instrumentation, such as GPS-based ploughing? Can you save fuel without sacrificing output quality? What strategies can you employ in order to minimize damaging encounter with wild-life in the field?

All these are skills that will not only make the employer more efficient, they will also help the worker who possesses them get a better match with the employer, and therefore a better paid job. For the worker who does not possess them it will then act as an increased motivation to get them.

Two observations are key about these additional questions, and they form the **basis for role of the ECVET-STEP project**.

- **They are very modular in nature.** Knowing how to minimize fuel is more or less independent from knowing how to tow specialized implements. Therefore, they can be acquired independently
- **Quality is difficult to ascertain.** The potential employer has no way of knowing how well the worker can execute them. Individual interviews would have to be very lengthy indeed, and even then different people would have different subjective opinions about quality standards achieved.

globally increasing competition;

- generate new skills, in order to respond to the nature of the new jobs,
- improve the adaptability and employability of adults already working in the labour market.

On this basis, therefore, the emphasis shifts from development of knowledge, skills and competences in the young to their continuous *refreshment* on the one hand and to *management*

of knowledge, skills and competences. The latter then has to be done both at the level of an employing organization as well as on the level of an individual.

So a whole array of stakeholders are involved: the central EU authorities as well as member states, education and training providers, employers, employees and the world of work, including, naturally, the VET policy makers.

The Two Steps of ECVET-STEP project

The main issues of ECVET implementation which the ECVET-STEP is tackling are the issues of **Modularity** and **Quality assurance**.

To address the first, ECVET-STEP will develop a framework for using **Reusable units of learning outcome** to underline the modular nature of ECVET and therefore help trans-European mobility. If learners do not have to acquire the whole qualification in one place but

can split it into more modules, they will travel more to places where acquisition of such modules is the best match for their needs.

To address the second, ECVET STEP will support organisations to follow a step-wise, quality-controlled approach in adopting ECVET.

The project will focus on the development of an ECVET **Capability Maturity Framework** (CMF) which

will allow VET-related organisations and individual actors across Europe, starting from the agricultural domain but ranging to other domains and sectors, to understand and reap the benefits of ECVET from their perspective as well as to track their performance and to assure and control the quality of the integration of the ECVET system into their existing processes and workflows

„The main issues that ECVET-STEP contributes towards adoption of ECVET are **Modularity** and **Quality assurance**.

All will include online tools to maximise usefulness.“

The main contributions of ECVET-STEP project

Online implementation tools

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What is Modularity?

Skills and practical training are not amorphous beings. Being able to do something properly involves many sub-skills. They can be acquired—and tested—independently. Individual modules of skills can even be acquired in different countries, promoting also mobility.

What is Quality assurance?

There are many ways to skin a cat. There are already National qualification systems in place in EU countries and some institutions may be hesitant to get involved in ECVET. The STEP project will deliver a step-wise sequence for accessing ECVET which will guarantee that ECVET advantages fill come to fruition. All in a Capability maturity framework.

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What is Capability maturity model?

CMM is a technical and cross-discipline methodology used to facilitate and refine software development processes and system improvement. CMM is a benchmark used to compare organizational processes. It is routinely applied to the fields of IT, commerce and government to facilitate business area processes. arnegie Mellon University (CMU), which is the CMM patent registrant, provides CMM oversight through its Software Engineering Institute. (*techopedia*)

Capability Maturity
Framework

Take the ECVET step!

This Newsletter's mission is to inform general and professional public about proceedings of the ECVET-STEP project
No. 539816-LLP-1-2013-1-GR-LEONARDO-LMP

This newsletter is published monthly. If you want to receive it electronically by email, please sign up on the website. (Archive of past issues is on the website.)

ECVET-STEP aims in making the best value of the ECVET system, facilitating the transfer, accumulation and recognition of credits and learning outcomes or competence acquired otherwise between countries, thus promoting mobility and lifelong learning.

ECVET-STEP's mission is to support European citizens and industry to "take the ECVET STEP": adopt and use ECVET through a stepwise, quality-controlled framework and online services for building knowledge-based employment for the 21st century... And beyond!

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Strengthening Training to
Employment Pathways



Lifelong
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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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