



## **Work-package 4: Know-How-Transfer from VQTS-experiences**

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## I. MAP:ECVET meets VQTS

The project MAP:ECVET, as a project for the transfer of innovation, will develop a model of transparency and acknowledgement of qualifications for medical assistant professions. In this project, we will develop a matrix of competences which will enable the classification and give a clear definition of single, national (or in some cases even regional) initial and further education. The basis for the matrix will be the analysis of the results of former projects as well current discussion on ECVET and the European Qualification Framework.

This report, as part of „Work-package 4“, analyses the results of VQTS (Vocational Qualification Transfer System) according to their potential of being transferred to MAP:ECVET. The method used is a secondary analysis of experts' opinions. VQTS was elected a project of best practice by the European Commission. Therefore, it is recommended for further use and transfer of results.

General concerns which affect VQTS and MAP:ECVET do not lie within the scope of the projects at hand and therefore cannot be addressed by the project directly. They represent larger like

- the still insignificant scope of mobility in VET in general
- the negligible scope of mobility for certain target groups and institutions (esp. small institutions and companies)
- the missing motivation and interest for mobility
- insufficient political and sectoral support
- insufficient support of mobility in terms of public funding

These problems impede wide-spread implementation of mobility programmes and thus also affect schemes for transferring and recognising competences acquired during a stay abroad. Actually, some interview partners also posed the general question whether procedures for recognition would meet with sufficient interest given the status quo of mobility in general. "At the moment there is nearly no need for the competence portfolio because of the low rate of exchange of trainees. In future the competence portfolio can be a central document, if the amount of exchange will reach a critical rate and a critical number of different occupations have to be recognised“.

On the other hand, improved transfer and recognition of competences could also have a positive effect on the participation in mobility programmes.

Both mobility and the recognition of competences acquired during mobility, however, must be financed and the question who should bear these costs still remains open.

## II. Background and Aims of VQTS

The aim of the Leonardo da Vinci pilot project VQTS is to create a systematic procedure to ensure international transfer of vocational qualifications (in terms of competencies and skills) at secondary level in order to increase mobility in VET. Students / Apprentices should be able to use their qualifications - acquired in educational institutions or / and in companies - as a "common currency" throughout Europe.

The vocational field of "Mechanical Engineering" was selected as a model for developing and testing this procedure.

Based on the results of an analysis phase in which educational pathways and competences for the sector Mechanical Engineering as well as European and international instruments for transfer of qualifications were researched and compared, the partners of the project VQTS developed different procedures for a European transfer system of qualifications in the sector of Mechanical Engineering. Originally, all model procedures were to be tested for their applicability and acceptability in the partner countries. In the Copenhagen meeting of the partners, however, a joint decision was made to continue with only one model, the model developed by an Austrian-German working group within the project. The model is described in the document "Competence Certificate. Proposal for Implementation of an ECVET-Procedure developed within the framework of the VQTS Project" of June 2005, edited by Jörg Markowitsch and Karin Messerer for the VQTS Project Partnership.

Work packages serve to obtain feedback on the acceptance and usability of the mobility and qualification transfer procedure described in the document "Competence Certificate" and to compile recommendations for necessary or desirable adaptations from the point of view of different stakeholders in the partner countries. This evaluation phase should ensure that the VQTS model chosen is implementable in all partner countries and meets with a certain degree of acceptance so as to make support for the model and (voluntary) implementation likely. Furthermore, areas of adaptation and improvement may be identified.

### III. Feedback to the mobility procedure

#### III. 1 Feasibility

##### III.1.1 Applicability for the sending and the hosting institutions (schools, training centres, enterprises) and/or the students/apprentices?

In principal the mobility procedure described in the document "Competence Certificate", i.e. "the VQTS-procedure", is applicable for sending and hosting institutions in all countries which responded. On the whole the procedure corresponds to a large extent to procedures already in use in the partner countries. Comparable mobility procedures in LdV und Europass include the following points of the „learner“ (pupil, students, apprentices) and the institution he/she comes from

- Finding appropriate institutions
- „Letter of Intent“
- Matching of training needs in home country and training offered abroad
- Agreement concerning abroad training targets
- Certification of reached targets

There are, however, some limitations to the applicability of the procedure. These limitations concern first and foremost small institutions – small training institutions and particularly small companies for whom the procedure might be considered too "resource-demanding", too bureaucratic and too complicated. This could result in lack of participation in exchanges among small companies due to lack of resources.

On the other hand, the procedure is appreciated by many interviewees for being very complete and inclusive. Clearly, there is a tension between the benefit of having a comprehensive and detailed procedure at hand and the effort it takes in practice if this procedure is to be followed by all actors in transnational mobility.

##### III.1.2 Is it realistic that all the steps described will be implemented by all the institutions and persons involved?

Obstacles to implementing the VQTS mobility procedure are lack of resources and lack of experience: Large companies, educational institutions and vocational colleges are fully able to cope with all steps. Small companies would face some problems, and it is further difficult for them to allocate adequate resources, at both colleges and companies. The responsible institutions (chambers) should help especially the small companies to arrange the exchange of students/apprentices without additional effort/regulations.

Italian experts also point out that it is questionable whether all VET providers will be able to guarantee that the procedure will be followed, especially if they are not experienced in transnational exchange of students. Yet, this may not seem a problem if the procedure described is seen merely as a proposal or a recommendation as opposed to a prescription.

Dutch interviewees also buttress this view by demanding that the procedure should not be too extensive and bureaucratic. Instead it should be more simple and as practicable as possible. It should also be taken into account that not all

steps are necessary for a company involved in mobility of trainees. Special attention should be paid to the adequacy of the procedure for company training.

The "great amount of work" and the organisational and bureaucratic burden involved was also seen as a major challenge by Austrian experts.

Two consequences follow from this situation: the procedure should not be too complicated and demanding and certain actors like SMEs or inexperienced institutions need special support if their participation in transnational mobility schemes is to be enhanced.

German interviewees also point out that where elaborated procedures for mobility are already in use, it is questionable or even improbable that institutions will switch to the VQTS-procedure.

### III.1.3 Is the description of the mobility procedure complete? What are missing elements if any? What are recommended specific changes?

As has already been pointed out, the mobility procedure proposed is regarded as very complete and comprehensive. The following elements are identified as missing elements:

- The hosting institution should also be obliged to send an information package in the initial preparatory stage of the mobility;
- Requirements in the host country for a permit to stay as well as language requirements should be mentioned;
- The importance for institutions involved in mobility of having personal contacts to responsible persons in the hosting institution could be indicated.

The further definition of terminology used and the inclusion of a "multilingual glossary of necessary expressions for the procedure" was called for by several interviewees. German experts mainly ask for a clarification of responsibilities. Austrian interviewees call for an "agreement on a standardised translation of apprenticeship occupations (at least in English) as there exists a pronounced degree of differentiation regarding terminology within the EU".

The measurement and testing of the acquired competences is also not explained fully in the procedure yet. Open questions concerning this issue will be discussed below.

German interviewees are of the opinion that the Letter of Intent should be omitted since it is not necessary: "The responsibility for 'the interest' in exchange of students lies with the training institutions. Individual discussions without formal regulations between the training institutions are necessary (number of students, which students, area of training, duration...). Letter of intent is not necessary for that."

Concerning the mobility agreement (which was perceived as a useful tool in Austria), Austrian interviewees asked for further clarification concerning the following topics:

- Differentiation between work placement and a training abroad over a longer period, differentiation between school and apprenticeship training,
- Clarification whether ex-post or ex-ante description of knowledge, skills and competences: There seem to be two models for mapping out the knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired during transnational mobility:
  - 1) A definition can be carried out beforehand (ex-ante): This requires intensive information and coordination activities between the

sending and receiving institution. The set of competences to be acquired can be tailored to the individual student. This, however, also means an extensive effort on both sides. It seems unlikely, therefore that this procedure will be feasible, especially when apprenticeship training in (small) companies is concerned. (So perhaps the feasibility of this procedure is limited to big companies who have the necessary resources).

- 2) A rough definition of the requirements (what the mobile person should learn during the stay abroad) on which an ex-post recognition is base. This needs an approach of mutual trust between sending and receiving institution and flexibility on both sides.
- You have to find out how to include (local) branch specific knowledge („Spanish goldsmith“) without padding out the Matrix
- detailed definition of the involvement and obligations of young people,
- Explanations to the respective VET system, such as the grading system,
- guidelines for competences acquired/missed and competences to be recognised
- Since the future status of qualifications acquired by the mobile person until the point of departure must be anticipated when the mobility contract is concluded, this may bring about some uncertainties if a longer period of planning is foreseen (passing of exams etc.).
- sustainability of the acquired competences,
- handling of linguistic barriers (exam abroad),
- specification of the language in which the agreement is communicated,
- framework conditions, including responsibility for organisations (sickness insurance, accommodation, travel, financing agreements, etc.).

#### III.1.4 General Remarks and Recommendations concerning the VQTS-procedure

It is remarked that the model "is too heavily described from the educational institutions' points of view" and that "the trainees' points of view should also be reflected". As has already been pointed out there should also be a possibility to down-size the procedure and to implement "just the most important and simple steps" and to create "tailor-made solutions" for certain actors.

Experts demand that the "responsibilities of different institutions must be clarified further". This concerns primarily the different tasks and responsibilities of training institutions vs. accrediting bodies. In Germany training institutions can work towards more transparency of competences and qualifications while the accreditation and the award of entitlements remain with the qualified bodies (chambers).

The significance of the duration as well as the timing (within the education and training programme – this concerns the age, maturity and level of competence of the students/trainees – and within the school year) of the stay abroad for the feasibility and acceptance of mobility is underscored by interviewees from Germany and Austria.

Lead time for the preparation and organisation of mobility was also discussed as an important issue – especially for enterprises who expect high flexibility when sending trainees to another country. Schools on the contrary are used to and can accommodate lead times of about a year.

Acceptability of duration also depends on the type of student/trainee involved. In Austria there is only little interest in sending apprentices abroad over longer periods (a realistic period is one month). The reasons for this include, among others, lack of connections to groups at home, and mainly the fact that the company has to do without the worker while she or he is abroad. For students of vocational and technical schools on the secondary level II, these restrictions do not apply – in this case stays abroad of up to a semester were recommended. Thus optimum age and training and qualification level of the young people should be defined in the mobility agreement drawn up by the sending and hosting institutions.

### III.1.5 Role of the Competence Portfolio and the Mobility Agreement; Testing of the fulfilment of the Mobility Agreement

The role of the competence portfolio already touches upon the issue of the competence profile. The question to be discussed at this point is to what degree the Competence Portfolio and the Mobility Agreement should define competences prior and after the stay abroad. Obviously, strict requirements would alleviate concerns of companies but are not feasible in practice:

A "more detailed specification of the Competence Portfolio" was asked for by Dutch interviewees. From the viewpoint of a large Austrian enterprise, too, the competence portfolio should be defined in great detail and cover "what young people can [do – at the beginning of the mobility] and should do [- during the mobility]". There should be as much control over the whole process as possible so as to guarantee that time spent abroad will not be lost. For companies this could be ensured through a very detailed description in the Competence Portfolio and the Mobility Agreement.

From the viewpoint of Austrian schools, however, "it is highlighted that about three quarters of stays abroad are organised through already existing partnerships with foreign schools and their networks with companies on site. In addition, there is the risk of a certain degree of remoteness from reality: People 'would take any places of work placement or training in companies they can get'. This scarcity of vacancies for work placement contrasts with the anticipated and planable possibility of being sent abroad ("illusion of matching of supply and demand").

For Austrian as well as Hungarian interviewees the question of defining the competences to be acquired prior and during the mobility still needs to be discussed.

While the VQTS-procedure provides for an assessment of the mobility agreement at the time of return, there are "at least two diverging views" on how this should be done.

From the viewpoint of entrepreneurs, the training enterprise is entitled to examine the young person as it has invested its resources in the stay abroad. In theory, this procedure might even lead to young people being tested twice (abroad and at home). There is principal trust in internal networks but one of the questioned companies has made negative experiences with external training options (e.g. Czech Republic), for which reason a related testing of competences seems absolutely necessary. Mainly SMEs point towards their lack of related resources.

This view contrasts with the mutual-trust approach, where the certification from another country is perceived as being sufficient proof for successful attendance and where only formal aspects are checked (whether certificates are complete/positive). Companies advocating this view maintain that any competence deficits on the part of the young people would become obvious fairly soon after their return anyway. A realistic option for a way out of the dilemma, which was expressed at the workshop, is to include the very soft formulation that "the fulfilment of the agreement will be examined in an appropriate form", which should however be made clear already before departure. One alternative would be to introduce a self-assessment to be done by the young people (e.g. target-performance feedback form). This would allow a procedure that is both feasible in practice and useful at the same time, without giving rise to any administrative hurdles for those young people who are ready for mobility.

Thus it must be clarified "how where when and who measures the level of [the] acquired competences and what the procedure is if the learner does not acquire the necessary competences". A strategy of mutual trust with an ex-ante examination of the comparability of the competences taught in the hosting institution abroad can be contrasted with an ex-post examination of the student/trainee after her/his return. In practice, some kind of mutual trust will probably have to be involved for mobility to remain feasible and attractive to institutions and individuals.

### III.1.6 Information/Motivation/Preparation

The topic of transnational mobility always touches upon issues of unsatisfactory participation rates, especially for apprentices and other trainees in VET.

Austrian and Danish interviewees stress the fact that information, motivation and support of VET providers and individuals alike are an important prerequisite for transnational mobility. Thus, a preparatory phase should be accounted for in which the ground is laid for subsequent mobility activities:

"A preparation phase could be added to the mobility procedure. Trainees in vocational training programmes do not actively ask for mobility possibilities. Stakeholders in vocational training are considerably more afraid of heavy paper work load than stakeholders in the academic education field."

"In the first step of the VQTS model, it is assumed that school-children and apprentices submit an informal application. This requirement is not taken for granted from the viewpoint of practitioners; the necessity of a leading information strategy to boost demand is pinpointed. Teachers and the schools are seen as main multipliers in this process."

The dependence of the success of the VQTS mobility procedure upon public and sectoral support is also argued by Dutch interviewees.

Another question raised was how contacts between VET institutions could be fostered and networks for mobility set up. Another idea was to use existing European networks and information platforms like e.g. EURES.

### III.1.7 Open questions

- Consideration and participation of small companies
- Financing of mobility (both for institutions and individuals)
- Responsibilities for further coordination of the implementation the VQTS-procedure

- Lack of mobility of certain groups (e.g. apprentices)
- Discussion of the ultimate goal of migration of workers. Is it just political correct or an economical interest?
- Does the procedure fit in the system of ESF-financial support (labour-market participation and mobility of labour)?

### III. 2 Usability and acceptability

#### III.2.1 Is the description helpful, is there an added value to the procedures already in place?

The description of the mobility procedure was considered helpful, albeit there may be some difficulties in practice to adhere to it step-by-step.

As a model, however, it is a very useful tool for helping "the training institutions to arrange the exchange" and as an instrument which engenders transparency:

"The description is useful as it gives a clear picture of objectives and what-to-dos. It also describes the 'mobile person' fully. Education providers can register the outcome of the learning process, the mobile person has a good knowledge of his[/her] competences – his[/her] self-evaluation is up-to-date. Employers could have fair information on what can be required of the mobile person."

Most country reports agree that there is some added value of the VQTS-procedure which more or less is due to the comprehensiveness ("steps explained", added value when compared to mobility-pass and the inclusion of new elements which enhance transparency and foster quality control. The latter is ensured by the mobility contract concluded prior to the mobility and the verification of the competences afterwards.

However, as has already been indicated above, the procedure is nothing completely new: "For sending and hosting parties which have no prior experience from mobility projects, the model is a fine description. For others, it is 'old wine on new bottles'."

#### III.2.2 Are there any weak points?

The weak points of the procedure have already been mentioned. They are mainly the extensive administration and bureaucracy involved which might scare off institutions and potential mobile persons. In the Netherlands, "for accreditation usually a visit to the host country is needed. Institutions must be willing to invest time and money in training in another country." The problem of lacking expertise in the certification of competences is also mentioned.

#### III.2.3 Recommendations and points of attention when implementing the procedure

It was stressed in several country reports that current European developments must be closely monitored and the VQTS-procedure aligned with these developments if necessary.

The European Qualification Framework is one important development which will have implications for all kinds of qualification transfer schemes. The VQTS-procedure therefore needs to be positioned within the EQF – European Qualifications Framework. Connection of the Competence Certificate with other existing European documents should also be made clear.

For German interviewees "it should be clear, that the mobility procedure only makes sense, if the competence matrix is one on a European level. Otherwise regional practice with individual solutions and the EUROPASS documents (especially the Mobility pass) would have the same "added value".

Accessibility of the procedure could be enhanced via the internet: "Very important is the access via the internet; the procedure should be internet-based. No more paperwork than strictly necessary."

German experts perceive the competence matrix as the pivotal element of the procedure: "Really necessary is (in the future) the use of the competence matrix / competence portfolio as a basic document to identify and determine the contents for competence development independent from national curricula with their totally differing structures and ways of description of competences."

#### III.2.4 General recommendations

- "Organisational discipline is required".
- "Be careful with cultural influences; do not be tempted by putting 'technical' aspects of the procedure in first place. Hold on to the main lines."
- "All steps are valuable but 'Keep it simple!' Be aware of bureaucracy!"
- "In contracts possible risks and legal aspects should be regulated to minimize the legal liability of the receiving company."
- Make a check-list which can be ticked off.
- "See to it that it fits for company- and customer training."
- Add a contract template as a supplement which educational institutions can download and use to commit to trainee mobility including credit transfer with institutions in other countries.

## IV. Competence Matrix/Profile

### IV. 1 General feedback

With so many similar terms in use – Competence Area/Matrix/Profile/Portfolio/Certificate – even experts sometimes became confused. As with the detailed mobility procedure, the needs of enterprises should be taken into account: If the Matrix is too complicated, they will not be able to use it.

Hence it was recommended to improve the visualisation and use descriptions that can be understood more easily to prevent communication problems among companies and schools in the future.

#### IV.1.1 Does it make sense to create a Competence Matrix? What will be the added value?

The development of a Competence Matrix was deemed very positive and helpful in all countries since it would be a common instrument of understanding which could serve as a "conversion language" and enhance transparency.

As a spin-off of a Competence Matrix, the general enhancement of transparency and comparability was mentioned – also within VET-systems (not only vertical but also horizontal) and for employers. It was also considered positive that the Competence Matrix is far less abstract than other instruments like the EQF and that it is occupation-centred.

The effort involved in creating a Competence Matrix was also discussed, in particular with regard to possible returns: Does it really pay the effort when compared to the scope of mobility? Mobility and recognition of competences, however, are mutually dependent to a certain extent: On the one hand mobility is of course a precondition for any recognition scheme, on the other hand, the possibility of transferring competences from one country to the other is also expected to make mobility more attractive and thus perhaps enhance it.

### IV. 2 Feasibility

#### IV.2.1 Is it feasible to develop a list with areas of competences following the principles, i.e. context-related, degree of detail, differentiation between areas of competences, provision of useful examples, description in whole sentences?

The effort of developing the Competence Matrix strongly depends on the contents of the competence: The more exact/technical, the more easy. Another aspect with regard to a transnational Competence Matrix is the sector for which it is developed. For certain sectors which have great national idiosyncrasies and therefore are not easily comparable, the development of a common Competence Matrix across borders will not be feasible. For sectors which are used to working in a supra-national environment (e.g. railroad sector), a transnational Competence Matrix seems feasible.

Danish interviewees warned that comparisons should not be made between competence areas. "It is almost impossible to make comparisons between different competence areas. However, the risk is big that too much time will be spent on making comparisons when parties should agree on wording. Add to this that wording is not easy to translate and that disagreements on words and not con-

tent may arise. The traces from the Cedefop's comparison project are still there, even though the project phased out in 1993."

Austrian interviewees also highlight the differences in the VET systems as a hurdle for transnational comparability even within a Competence Matrix (as is the case e.g. for the apprenticeship system).

Aspects of insight and attitude (soft competences) as well as culture-related competences and personal social skills are missing. They should be added and defined precisely to prevent misunderstandings.

#### IV.2.2 Is it feasible to develop steps of competences following the principles, i.e. the suggested number of steps, flexibility, dimensions for differentiation between the steps?

The development of competence steps makes sense to the interview partners but is considered a challenge. The definition of 2-6 steps seem adequate. The challenge in defining steps of competences lies in the variety of possible pathways of competence development - from the individual level to country level.

German interviewees do not consider comparability of the development steps feasible between countries: "However, common steps of competence development (for further differentiation of the horizontal dimension) are not feasible with a European focus because of the different ways of competence development in the countries." Some Dutch interview partners are also very sceptical about a transnational agreement on steps, Austrian interview partners, on the other hand, assumed that transnational comparability would be possible – at least for certain sectors.

Recommendations for the development of the steps of competences focused on illustrating the steps:

- "Try to use areas of work for illustration."
- "Steps should be self-explanatory, use illustrative examples."
- Steps of competences should be formulated "clearly and concisely" in order to facilitate international comparability. At the beginning of the elaboration process of profiles there should therefore be a profile that is represented everywhere. Austrian interview partners assume "that the key tasks will be the same everywhere ('there exist several car types but, on the whole, they work in the same way')".
- Competence steps should be developed separately for the different competence areas. The use of a common grid or point of reference was not favoured by German interviewees: "Horizontal competence steps should not be based on a taxonomy. It is better to describe different areas of work which will represent the different competence level and effort."
- The "main direction for competence development" should be "the vertical one", according to German interview partners.
- Another recommendation was to align the Matrix and the steps of competences with the EQF where possible.

#### IV.2.3 Will the individual institutions involved in mobility be able to create a competence profile from a competence matrix?

The ability of individual institutions to create a Competence Profile from the Competence Matrix is doubted by some interviewees.

German interviewees, on the contrary, believe that the deduction of individual profiles would be fairly easy: For "creating" (showing the status of competence development of the student/apprentice) the trainers/Teachers should be responsible. Indicating the profile should take not more than two hours. Best way is to indicate by a 'local expert group' with participation of the student/apprentice: trainer / responsible person for training in the company, teacher and student/trainee."

The Danish feedback features a similar position: "The profiles should be prepared in community by several persons which implies that more days can be spent on this particular task. If individuals who are used to working together do the task, it would probably be done quicker and more easily."

Also the question was repeatedly posed whether the creation of Competence Profiles should not rather be the task of national bodies responsible for accreditation thus leading the discussion back to the issue of differing responsibilities between educational institutions, enterprises, and chambers and national bodies.

Recognition beyond the educational institution and comparability are important issues:

"All educational institutions and large companies can prepare profiles from a matrix. The question is how it will be rated."

"It should be possible to contact the organisation which is responsible for the final attainment targets in order to get on objective measure. If schools are autonomous in the decision there could be differences in interpretation."

#### IV.2.4 In the competence profiles, credit points will also be calculated. Is the procedure described feasible?

All countries consider the allocation of Credit Points important and the procedure described useful. In particular, the importance of credit points in face of European efforts to merge ECTS and ECVET are underscored by Austrian interview partners.

There was still considerable doubt on whether and/or how much the system of Credit Points is based on competences acquired (quality) or on time spent (quantity). This issue needs further clarification.

Additionally, matters of fairness – especially when it comes to different durations of study programmes in different countries – are brought up. Should the steps of competences be weighed in the same way everywhere? How to make sure that a student can not get around the minimum duration of training by using international Credit Points?

And what happens if there are no comparable steps of competences in the different national Competence Matrices?

Open questions also concern the procedure for the general distribution of credit points to the competence areas which is considered much more difficult than assigning credit points to steps of competences.

Additionally it was pointed out that credits do not measure everything. How something is done, for instance, – speed, reaction to disturbances, innovation etc. – cannot be illustrated through credit points.

In order to assign credit points, the national systems would also have to be adapted, since credit points are not used yet in the VET systems of the partner countries.

Also it is not clear if Credit Points can be forfeited (under which circumstances, why etc.).

#### IV.2.5 Who should be responsible for creating the Competence Matrix?

German interview partners argue that the Matrix is very complex and hence development must be done by experts at university level from the sector/occupation (specifically not by social scientists but by experts from the field).

Other countries favour a mixed group including teachers, employers, social partners, sectoral bodies, educational authorities etc. Danish interviewees advise that the experts involved should have knowledge of the interaction between learning, pedagogical development work and professional, technical development work.

Where work should start on the Competence Matrix is not unequivocal. German and Danish interview partners opt for an expert group on the transnational level. If they assume that the work of this international group will be taking off from possible matrices previously developed on the national (regional, sectoral) level is not clear.

Most interview partners argue that the development of the Matrix should take place on different levels so as to integrate all actors involved. Austrian interviewees call for a "broad consensus and content-related involvement during development also in the regional representations and mainly trade unions". They underscore that "sectoral levels (branches of industry) must be involved to safeguard subject-related correctness."

Dutch experts also buttress a process which includes different levels. There are different opinions, however, concerning the level from which the development process should be started: Some argue that the sectoral and national bodies should come first, others believe that it will be easier to develop a Matrix on the international level and then break it down to the national level since "matrices on a national level will turn out to be very difficult to compare".

Austrian interviewees point out that "it is in international co-ordination, in particular, that a conflict of interests may arise." The planned procedure to set up a workshop to reach agreement on the competence profile at the international level, or to obtain a matrix, has been considered useful.

### IV. 3 Usability and acceptance

#### IV.3.1 Will the institutions and persons involved in mobility (sending/hosting institution; students/apprentices) be able to use the competence matrix or the competence profile respectively?

The Competence Matrix and the Competence Profile res. seem useable. There were some doubts, however, whether the "end users" (educational institutions, companies, mobile young people) would be able to use it. Again the argument was brought to the fore that the Matrix was too complicated and required too much

effort in terms of paperwork. This is why German interview partners suggested supplementing the Matrix with guidelines for the end users.

#### IV.3.2 Would the interviewees consider using this matrix/profile as drafted in the Paper "Competence Certificate"?

The interviewees see some added value in the use of the Matrix/Profile in that it helps clarify the competences of individual mobile persons and evaluate the level they are at. It also contributes to transparency and common understanding and supports transnational mobility.

Quite a few interviewees point out that the Matrix in this current form would, however, will only be attractive if no comparable regional/national/sectoral recognition scheme is in place. Another precondition for use is user-friendliness.

#### IV. 4 Open questions and recommendations

- Austrian interview persons pointed out that the Matrix will have to be dynamic and will need periodic adaptation: "The matrix should be understood as a dynamic area in the training scheme and should allow responding to major changes (IT, Quality Assurance, etc.) and hide older aspects (drawing on the drawing board)."
- At present it is not clear who will be responsible for maintaining and updating the Matrix.
- Austrian experts also suggested the development of a meta-matrix covering not only occupational areas but entire sectors (from initial VET to tertiary education to cont VET). "In Austria, this matrix would have to cover not only apprenticeship training and HTL but also the programmes offered by the Universities of Applied Sciences (Fachhochschulen, FHs), possibly also subject-specific CVET offers. However it is feared that the FHs, in particular, lead to a very pronounced extension of the matrix, i.e. a categorisation of the competence levels has been identified as a point to be considered (if the levels are not sufficiently fine-tuned, they cannot cover apprenticeship and FH programmes jointly)."
- Developing a Guideline for handling the competence matrix/profile for end-users was recommended by German interviewees.
- The Matrix should include more soft skills (insight, attitude, social skills) and cultural competences.
- The final product should be an open matrix available "both as an Internet tool and in a hardcopy format to cater to the needs of companies where electronic data processing is not widely used."
- A general recommendation was to consider lobbying for the instrument. This will be necessary for a wide-spread implementation.

## V. Competence Portfolio / Competence Certificate

### V. 1 Contents and added-value

The contents of the Competence Portfolio / Competence Certificate are deemed sufficient to describe the competences of a mobile person. The added value of including the Competence Certificate is the detailed description of a person's competences.

The question – as with the procedure and the Matrix – arises whether in fact the Portfolio is too complete. Perhaps it should be reduced in certain cases to keep it simple and limit the paperwork. Otherwise, there will be too much time spent on collecting documents.

Even though, there were also recommendations to add documents to the Portfolio, namely motivation letters, culture-connected information, (inter)national language certificates or other extracurricular competences. It was also repeatedly pointed out that the already existing documents (like Europass-Portfolio or explanatory notes about the school or training) should be used. This should reduce and facilitate administration for sending and hosting organisation.

### V. 2 Area of application

Contradictory opinions were given concerning the primary area of application of the Competence Certificate. While the German interviewees argued that the Competence Certificate would not be needed to certify whole training programmes and saw its major added value in the certification of additional skills, of skills acquired through informal learning or of parts of training programmes in initial VET, the Danish interview partners contended that the Competence Certificate should only be used to certify whole training programmes leading to an occupational qualification and not for parts of training done abroad.

One question was the fundamental question of the actual need for a comprehensive Competence Portfolio at the moment with regard to still low participation in mobility.

### V. 3 Quality and acceptance

Other questions concerned the actual implementation and quality assurance of the portfolio. Danish interviewees pointed out that it was not clear who would monitor, issue and ensure the quality of the portfolio? This seems particularly important if the insufficient capabilities of many trainees even to prepare a simple CV are taken into account. So who will help trainees prepare the Portfolio and who will safeguard the quality of the documents?

As with the mobility procedure it was highlighted by Dutch interview partners that the sending/hosting institutions (schools, enterprises) should not be called upon to fill out the certificate but that this should be done by an appointed organisation on a superinstitutional level.

Small companies with several trainees may not be able or willing to fill out the Certificate. German interview partners point to the necessity of giving guidelines to teachers/trainers in the sending/hosting institutions in order to assist them in filling out the Competence Certificate.

#### V. 4 Recommendations

The following recommendations were made concerning the Competence Certificate/Portfolio:

- Up-dating of Portfolio must be organised.
- Keep it simple – not too much paperwork.
- Make it practical and fit for training in companies.
- Clarify dissemination.
- Test it.
- Do not double Europass portfolio.
- Include recognised (language) certificates as well as evidence of other competences acquired outside formal learning.

## VI. Summary of recommendations and open questions

### VI. 1 Mobility Procedure

- Argue why it does pay the effort: where elaborated procedures for mobility are already in use, why should institutions switch to the VQTS-procedure, also stays abroad are often organised through already existing partnerships, and remember that VQTS-procedure is nothing completely new
- In contracts framework conditions, possible risks and legal aspects should be regulated to minimize the legal liability of the receiving company, also detailed definition of the involvement and obligations of young people and guidelines for competences acquired/missed and competences to be recognised
- clarification whether ex-post or ex-ante-testing: strategy of mutual trust with an ex-ante examination of the comparability of the competences taught in the hosting institution abroad or ex-post examination of the student/trainee after returning.
- Financing of mobility (both for institutions and individuals), does the procedure fit in the system of ESF-financial support (labour-market participation and mobility of labour)?
- specification of the language in which the agreement is communicated,
- handling of linguistic barriers (exam abroad)
- Be careful with cultural influences
- do not be tempted by putting 'technical' aspects of the procedure in first place
- Keep it simple! Be aware of bureaucracy!
- Make a check-list which can be ticked off
- Don't underrate lead time for the preparation and organisation of mobility

### VI. 2 Competence Matrix/Profile

- Should making of Matrix start on transnational or international level? Conflict of international interests may arise.
- Matrix development must be done by experts or/and a mixed group (teachers, employers, social partners, sectoral bodies, educational authorities) or/and national bodies responsible for accreditation
- Matrix will have to be dynamic and will need periodic adaptation. Who will be (inter-)national responsible for maintaining and updating the Matrix?
- Which competences should be mentioned: individual competences (it does not matter where/how acquired) or typical competences of a branch or matching (inter)national curricula? Should the Matrix include soft skills and cultural competences?

- different tasks and responsibilities of training institutions vs. accrediting bodies must be clarified further
- align the Matrix and the steps of competences with the EQF where possible.
- differences in the VET systems as a hurdle for transnational comparability even within a Competence Matrix (as is the case e.g. for the apprenticeship system).
- Steps of competences should be formulated "clearly and concisely" in order to facilitate international comparability. At the beginning of the elaboration process of profiles there should therefore be a profile that is represented everywhere ('there exist several car types but, on the whole, they work in the same way').
- Steps should be self-explanatory, use illustrative examples.
- development of 2-6 competence steps seem adequate
- Easy to read guideline for handling the competence matrix/profile/Credit Points for end-users
- matrix available as an Internet tool and in a hardcopy format
- lobbying for the instrument necessary for a wide-spread implementation.
- further clarification how much the system of Credit Points is based on competences acquired (quality) or on time spent (quantity)
- how to deal with different durations of study programmes in different countries
- how to deal with characteristic know how for a country („spanish goldsmith“)
- who coordinates the procedure for the distribution of credit points

### VI. 3 Competence Portfolio / Competence Certificate

- fundamental question of the actual need for a comprehensive Competence Portfolio at the moment with regard to still low participation in mobility.
- Include recognised (language) certificates as well as evidence of other competences acquired outside formal learning.
- Do not double Europass portfolio.
- Up-dating of Portfolio must be organised.
- Make it practical, keep it simple – not too much “collecting documents”, carry out a pre-test.
- Clarify dissemination.