

# VaLOGReg

Value Learning Outcomes in the Grande Region



N°3

## Information letter about the VaLOGReg project

3rd edition



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## Preface

Taking its inspiration from the ECTS system used in higher education, Europe invites its member states to implement a unit-based certification system in education and vocational training. In its “ECVET” recommendation, the European Parliament has given us only very general guidelines; the implementation of the system, its adaptation to local culture and needs as well as the organisation of different systems of education and vocational training are therefore going to require a lot of work. Participation in European projects like VaLOGReg thus turns out to be quintessential. Before committing an entire system to a reform, however, we need to experiment with the new tools and mechanisms.

Thus, if we are involved in no less than seven different ECVET projects, it is not because we want to be model students of the European Union, but rather because we consider this European tool an opportunity, a top priority in the framework that I am putting in place to reshape our qualifying education system.

I would like to rethink the economy of our education system. Rather than point out the students’ learning difficulties, we should adopt an approach that values the learning outcomes that have been achieved rather than punishes failure. In the long run, our goal is to create new learning perspectives and methods of certification for all our learners, be it youngsters in the early stages of their vocational training or more mature learners wishing to undergo vocational retraining. With this goal in mind, it is very important to me that this future implementation will be accessible to educational and professional development systems in Europe. What a waste it would be if our learners could not get their completed learning units certified outside of the French-speaking part of Belgium! Indeed, it needs to be emphasised that many European citizens did not wait for the implementation of these new European tools before they started crossing the borders. This explains why, in 2009-2010, no fewer than 877 young Luxembourg residents were enrolled in our qualifying secondary education system!

Mobility is thus a fact. VaLOGReg affects a considerable number of young people and I am eagerly awaiting the results of the projects. These results will allow us to make a number of improvements to our education system to make sure that the mobile component can be integrated even more efficiently.

**Marie-Dominique Simonet**

**Minister of Compulsory Education and Social Promotion**

## Mobility

Analysing from a theoretical point of view whether the principles and technical specifications of ECVET could constitute the key ingredients of mutual trust among the principal actors of the vocational training was not the only goal of the VaLOGReg project. It also focused on testing the real mobility of learners taking part in vocational training.

Below, you will find some statements made by learners and teachers who took part in the mobility between Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland, and Luxembourg. In the next newsletter, we will cover the mobility between Lorraine and the French-speaking part of Belgium.

The feedback given by the learners and teachers is mixed as far as the realisation of the project is concerned. We can thus observe that many learners consider the mobility a very positive experience, based on their answers to the question: "What was your overall impression of the project?"

"I found the project very interesting and well worth the effort of participating. We saw different things; we clearly saw that things were different here: the school was much bigger, with a different learner mentality, a different culture. In class, we immediately struck up a conversation, we could immediately start working. The classes were really great. In our system, there is usually a lot of variation, but here, everything was studied in depth. And even if we had already covered the same topic in Germany, we learned a lot, in more detail, and we re-encountered what we had already forgotten. It really was a great experience; I would do it again, no matter when, and I would recommend it to everybody." (apprentice from Trier)

"It was really interesting to experience a different system of vocational training. For me, the three weeks I spent in that school were enough for me to get a general impression and to learn something new." (apprentice from Dillingen)

However, the learners were critical of some aspects of the trial of ECVET during the mobility phase:

"When we returned, we had to catch up on what we had missed out on here during the three weeks that we spent in Trier. This was slightly problematic because we had missed out on rather important topics, such as "chassis", "suspension" and "wheels"." (apprentice from Esch)

"It is true that our classes in Germany went on during our absence; we were taken out of our own classes in the middle of important teaching units. I still remember that, when we left for Luxembourg, we were in the middle of learning about the integral traction system. Afterwards, there was even a test that we had to write immediately after our return because the teacher needed our grades. It was not terrible, but still, we had to write this test almost immediately after we had returned." (learner from Trier)

These statements indicate that certain preparatory elements of the project, such as the learning agreement which describes the learning objectives that should be achieved in the course of the mobility phase, have not produced the expected result. While this does not invalidate the effort put into the project as far as the creation of the principles and technical specifications of ECVET is concerned, it clearly shows that the adaptation to the operational

level requires a more consequential effort. This realisation is also reflected in the opinions of the teachers involved in the project:

“What we could improve next time is simply to choose a more appropriate moment for the mobility phase, so that the topics covered in both countries are the same, which might facilitate integration.”

The same realisation was also made by the learners:

“In the future, there are details that can easily be planned and specified in advance. Everything was really done at the last minute. If everything is sufficiently well-organised in advance, tests can be scheduled so that they do not clash with the project, and subjects can be specified even before the exchange so that the learners can simply pick up where they left off upon their return.” (learner from Trier)

Indeed, even though we proved throughout the project that the recognition of the learning outcomes in the Grande Region can indeed become a reality, we will need to organise the project more efficiently so that we can meet the following demand made by one of the apprentices from Esch:

“Personally, I think that the recognition of our learning objectives is more important than the broadening of one’s horizon.”



## VaLOGReg, a crazy project ?

Are the designers of the VaLOGReg project crazy?

This deliberately provocative question has to cross the observer's mind when he analyses the different experimental ECVET approaches currently in use. Indeed, except for VaLOGReg, all the ECVET pilot projects are based on the principle that the implementation of the European system can only be achieved through common learning units.

For supporters of the approach by learning units, the learners' mobility and, consequentially, the compatibility of their learning objectives with two systems is going to be assured by the fact that these objectives are regrouped in a unit which can be found in both systems and which is evaluated according to the same standards.

This approach demands that the participants in the ECVET project are able to modify their certification system so as to accommodate common learning units. The political consequence is that every competent authority has to start developing learning units and that at least some of these units have to be created at a European level. Eventually, the creation of European networks for one or more certification systems will be the logical and inevitable consequence of this implementation of ECVET.

In theory, the approach based on learning units seems to work very well, but the first results of certain pilot projects uncover a number of weaknesses. Indeed, one cannot guarantee that the competent authorities are willing to modify their certification system and to agree with the principle that some learning units have to be created conjointly with other partners. Indeed, every system has developed its own certification framework, which frequently takes into account the complex relationships between different

parties, and these parties may not necessarily be ready to have their prerogatives reduced for the benefit of a network which is bound to redefine their position.

Even if the collaborative creation of learning units can build mutual trust, it is not sufficient to assure the transfer or the certification of these units. The fact that all the learning objectives have been established and that the evaluation standards have been agreed upon does not automatically imply that an educational institution which is part of a system "A" is willing to trust another institution from system "B" to complete all the tasks defined in the set of specifications. A unit-based approach does not magically do away with all the obstacles in the development of mechanisms of certification and validation.

The attempt to implement an ECVET system without common learning units is therefore an idea worth considering. By adopting a realistic and pragmatic approach based on the political realities of the member states of the European Union, the creators of the VaLOGReg project are testing a method which entirely preserves the principle of subsidiarity in matters of certification and which meets the real needs of mobility in the Grande Region.

In this article, I would like to explain in more detail two cornerstones of the methods tested by the creators of VaLOGReg.

For them, the implementation of the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training is achieved above all through the development of methods to recognise and validate learning objectives. The goal is thus not the transfer of learning units, but the fact that the learner can have learning objectives certified and

validated in system “A” although they have been completed in system “B”. If the learning objectives are certified in system “A”, it does not really matter whether these objectives are combined into one single learning unit or spread across many different units. Furthermore, the creators of the project firmly believe that mutual trust is established as much by the transparency of the certification process and the comparison of the methods of evaluation as it is through an open mind towards the other systems.

Therefore, if the method encompasses a comparison of certification systems or job profiles, it is not with the aim to create identical learning units, but to verify if each participant has the same requirements and learning goals. The creators of the project thus insist on the compatibility of the project rather than its uniformity. Indeed, there would be no point in mobility if neighbouring countries were to teach an identical curriculum. However, mobility enriches a system if it recognizes and certifies learning objectives which are mutually compatible in 80 to 90 per cent of the cases. The innovative approach pioneered by the VaLOGReg project considers this difference as an advantage rather than a disadvantage.

After this first phase, the signing of the partnership agreement by the competent authorities is even more crucial than for any of the other ECVET pilot projects. It is a political decision through which the systems recognise each other and exempt those in charge of the validation and certification system from the obligation to verify the learning objectives.

The creation of tools and documentation that are explicit enough so that the methods of validation and certification used in the Grande Region allow a simple transfer of the learning objectives between different systems (which may not have coordinated their certification criteria) remains one of the biggest challenges for the VaLOGReg project.

**Alain Bultot,**

**European expert**

## The Partners :

Lycée technique d'Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg

Ministère de l'Education nationale et de la Formation professionnelle, Luxembourg

Ministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft, Weiterbildung und Kultur, Rheinland- Pfalz

Ministerium für Bildung, Saarland

Groupement d'intérêt public Formation Tout au Long de la Vie, France

Institut wallon de formation en alternance et des indépendants et petites et moyennes entreprises, Belgique



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