



## **Skilled-Mobile-European Master Plus**

Final Report

Public Part

## Project information

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## Executive Summary

The European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) is a European instrument to foster transnational mobility in vocational education and training. It has been developed by Member States of the European Union in cooperation with the European Commission.

In 2008, the European Commission issued a call for proposal to finance projects under the lifelong learning action program whose aim was to test the implementation of the ECVET process. As a result, SME MASTER Plus and ten other European pilot projects were selected.

SME MASTER Plus is based on the outcomes of the European pilot project SME Master from 2007 where some of the principles of ECVET were already tested at a very early stage. As a result SME Master established a unit- and learning-outcome-based display of the master craftsperson qualification in bakery, called learning outcome matrix. However, due to a very limited time frame, this prior project did not reach the point of practical implementation.

For this reason the partners of the former SME Master project – which are all competent and/or intermediary institutions in the field of master craftsperson education and active members of the European platform Euro-Apprenticeship which aims at enhancing mobility in VET – decided to apply for a follow-up project to develop a complete and functional ECVET-system. The scope of work was broadened and new partner organizations were attracted.

Since all partners considered the establishment of transnational mobility programs as an important part of the vocational education and training of apprentices and master craftsperson trainees in skilled craft sectors, the main objective of the new project was the enhancement of transnational mobility within master craftsperson education on the basis of trustful partnerships and the achievement of a positive long-term effect on the mobility rate in initial vocational education and training (IVET). Furthermore, the project focused on the implementation of an international network of master craftsperson training providers.

After the three years project period the partnership developed a so-called ECVET-toolbox covering the main instruments and principles of the ECVET recommendation including:

- Learning outcome matrices for the master craftsperson qualifications in bakery, hairdressing, joinery / cabinetmaking and floristry,
- a Memorandum of Understanding, to implement institutional mobility-partnerships between competent institutions,
- templates for Learning Agreement and Personal Transcript, for individual mobility projects,
- a checklist for each step of the mobility process

The complete ECVET-toolbox, including guidelines with instruction how to use the above mentioned tools, can be downloaded from the project website: [www.sme-master.eu](http://www.sme-master.eu) under the rubric results.

All these instruments support competent institutions, such as chambers of skilled crafts, as well as providers of master craftsperson training programs:

- in the practical implementation of ECVET,
- in facilitating mutual recognition of individually acquired learning achievements,
- in increasing learner's mobility rate,
- in strengthening cooperation with international partners on the basis of mutual trust,

and thus contribute to the concept of lifelong learning.

The feasibility of these tools has been already tested in real mobility exchanges and adjusted on the basis of the feedback gained by the sending and receiving organizations as well as the participants.

Also for the future – after the project time- further mobility exchanges are already planned and the project partners will try to establish a permanent mobility exchange rate between each other. Also first ideas between the partners have been brought up in order to transfer the ECVET-toolbox to other sectors.

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# 1. Project Objectives

Within the framework of SME MASTER Plus, the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH) has joined forces with the Association of French Chambers of Crafts and Trades (APCMA), the Norwegian Craft Trades Organization (Mesterbrev), the Austrian Institute for Training Research in Trade and Industry (ibw) and the Slovenian Chamber of Crafts and Trades (OSZ) to pilot the opportunities for using ECVET within the scope of training leading to the qualification of master craftsperson.

Given the fact that international competences are becoming increasingly important in the light of a continually rising number of skilled craft companies with foreign trade contacts, one of the aims is to make an active contribution towards the “internationalization” of the master craftsperson qualification.

Secondly, there is also an expectation that a positive effect will be exerted on the rate of mobility in IVET, where the figure is currently approximately 3% (of all apprentices and students in IVET) and where efforts are taken to increase this quota to 6% by 2020 in accordance with a new European benchmark. Experience shows that entrepreneurs who have themselves completed periods of learning or work abroad are convinced of the added value transnational mobility can deliver and support the learning mobility of their trainees to a greater degree.

In Germany alone around 50,000 skilled craft companies currently have business relations abroad, and this is also a tendency which is rising. The consequence is that company work and business processes are requiring international competences to a greater degree. Notwithstanding this, transnational mobility needs to be able to offer specific added value for all those involved within the scope of company-based initial and continuing vocational education and training if it is to meet with the broadest possible acceptance amongst the various VET stakeholders. This applies to companies as well as to their employees and apprentices.

The benefits are obvious. Periods of working and learning spent abroad offer an outstanding opportunity for companies to provide their apprentices and staff with both international and intercultural training. Secondly, mobility projects provide a vehicle via which skilled workers are sometimes able to establish business contacts abroad and thus tap into new markets. In addition to this, the integration of mobility phases into training provision enables companies to present themselves as attractive employers to high-ability young people. At a time when there is an impending shortage of skilled workers, this helps companies to acquire and motivate good trainees and skilled workers and obtain longer-term loyalty.

For young people, the acquisition of international and intercultural competences is an important prerequisite for a successful working life. The best way of obtaining these competences and of securing an edge over other applicants on the labor market is via a period of learning and/or work abroad. Alongside more detailed knowledge of foreign languages, mobility projects provide a framework in which young people can learn new work techniques and procedures and new forms of company and work organization as well as familiarizing themselves with new products.

To foster and support the mobility for people in master craftsperson training, SME MASTER Plus developed an ECVET-toolbox, including the testing during real mobility exchanges.

The concrete objectives of the project have been therefore:

- developing an ECVET-Tool-box and a users' guide, building upon the results of the project SME Master from 2007. This implies the finalization of the learning outcome matrix on the baker master craftsperson qualification, the development of a template for a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), a learning agreement as well as a personal transcript,
- transferring the method to develop an ECVET-Tool-box for three other sectors (woodworking/joinery, hairdressing, floristry), supporting sector organizations to establish their own toolbox,
- testing the toolboxes in practice.

For the testing in practice, the project partners provided suitable partner companies, schools or training centers abroad. With the developed tools agreements between the home and host institution could be made regarding competences to be imparted.

## 2. Project Approach

As mentioned before, the **main objective of the project was the enhancement of transnational mobility** within master craftsperson education on the basis of trustful partnerships.

However, in practice mutual ignorance of VET programs and their learning contents represents a major obstacle for the implementation of transnational mobility. Therefore mobility requires the use of transparency instruments because transparency constitutes a key prerequisite for transnational mobility.

With ECVET it is possible to present qualifications in a more transparent manner. This in turn creates the operational basis for more cross-border mobility in VET. If therefore two potential partner institutions want to offer mobility stays to their apprentices or students, they need to find a 'common language' first.

Therefore, at the outset, the project was faced with the question of how the various master craftsperson qualifications can be depicted in a generally comprehensible manner. The **first stage involved collecting and systemizing the relevant benchmark data** for this purpose:

- designation/title of the qualification,
- reference level within the National and/or European Qualifications Framework (if already available)/ISCED level,
- legal foundations,
- access requirements,
- competent bodies/institutions responsible for the qualification,
- information on the examination modalities,
- duration of training,
- information on the course of training.

This introductory summary, which can be extended as required, was supplemented by a **list of all occupations in which a master craftsperson qualification can be achieved in the five partner countries**. Although this represented a compilation of initial basic information on the various master craftsperson qualifications, it was not yet possible to make information visible on the learning outcomes imparted within the framework of a certain master craftsperson training course.

The next stage of work undertaken involved implementing the learning outcome oriented presentation of the learning content pursued by ECVET. The methodological basis here is the so-called **learning outcomes matrix**, in which all knowledge, skills and competences imparted in the five partner countries within the scope of master craftsperson training courses have been listed in structured form. The aim is for the learning outcomes matrix to serve as a vehicle for creating the necessary transparency for the organization, implementation and follow-up of the transnational placement. Occupational experts from the skilled craft chambers and associations first of all identified so-called learning units.

In accordance with the ECVET Recommendation, a **unit of learning outcomes** forms a meaningful set of knowledge, skills and competences and thus a coherent and logical component of a qualification. In the case of SME MASTER Plus, one unit encompasses various competences or learning outcomes which are necessary for the execution of core work tasks within a certain field of master craftsperson activity.

Depending on the occupation, this enabled the identification of between 10 and 18 units which in exceptional cases correspond with the respective course modules of the partner countries. Although this is also due to the differing form of the courses in the partner countries, the main reasons are methodological in nature. Whereas didactic principles often dictate that course modules are divided into theory and practice, such as Parts I and II of the master craftsperson examination in Germany or Slovenia, the aim is for learning units to include equal amounts of theory and practice. The scope of a unit depends in turn upon the complexity of the field of activity.

Furthermore, every country was additionally given the possibility to formulate **country-specific units**. These are units which also form a part of the national qualification.

Based on national curricula but also taking into account work and business processes that are typical for the occupations under study, in a further step the contents were formulated down to the smallest detail and in a holistic manner in the form of **learning outcomes**.

This means that in the SME MASTER Plus project a deliberate decision was made against subdividing learning contents into the three EQF descriptors knowledge, skills and competence. Hence it was possible to prevent redundancies as well as allocation problems, particularly between the descriptors 'skills' and 'competence'. In addition, this holistic approach largely meets the principle of professional competence and capacity.

To additionally visualize the learner's competence development, learning outcomes were presented in the form of successive steps of learning outcomes. This progressive presentation of learning outcomes primarily serves the purpose of promoting learning mobility. In this way it is possible to visualize a learner's performance level whilst he/she is still taking part in the training program, which in turn makes it easier to outline the contents of individual mobility projects. The number of learning outcome steps is linked with the learning outcome's complexity.

As a result it may happen, for example, that a (less complex) learning outcome does not need to be subdivided into steps, whereas several steps can be defined for another (more complex) learning outcome. In addition, two learning outcomes can also be listed 'in parallel', which means they are not in a progressive relation to one other but are on the same learning level. Both can, however, be the preliminary phase of another learning outcome/ other learning outcomes.

To ensure that the learning outcome matrix is as easy to read as possible, the units and learning outcomes are largely described without stating any technical details or other specifications. This also means that a learning outcome matrix cannot replace the national curriculum. Therefore it may be necessary to add national specifications

to units and also individual learning outcomes in complementary **annexes**, such as specific working techniques, the use of specific tools, materials, etc.

According to the ECVET Recommendation, **ECVET credit points** aim to give additional information in numeric form about a learning unit's relative weight in relation to the entire qualification. For this reason, a pragmatic interim solution was chosen at first where credit points were to fulfill the function of a proportional indicator. Based on expert interviews, the project partners spread the total number of ECVET credit points (100 = 100%) separately over the various units of learning outcomes in order to visualize a unit's 'relative weight' in relation to the master craftsperson qualification in the respective partner country. Although this allowed conclusions - even though only to a limited extent - to be drawn on the different weighting of a unit in the various master craftsperson programs, this did not reveal any actual added value for the promotion of mobility projects. In addition some doubts were raised about the validity of the results of the subjective approach of expert interviews. Therefore this procedure was also abandoned (at least for the time being) although the 'proportional approach' seems more suited for VET than orientation towards the workload.

In order to test the developed tools in practice and build up sustainable partnerships, the partners had to develop several documents like a partnership agreement (Memorandum of Understanding, MoU), learning agreement and personal transcript.

Partnership agreements between two or more organizations responsible for master craftsperson examinations and/or training in their home countries constitute a further core element of ECVET.

Such a **partnership agreement (Memorandum of Understanding)** maps out the operational framework of a mobility partnership, covering such aspects as tasks and obligations of the respective institution in its capacity as home or host organization, opportunities for monitoring, evaluating, recognizing and where appropriate certifying learning performance, issues of quality assurance etc. An appropriate guide, which has recommendation status, has been developed for this purpose and includes such elements as a **mobility checklist** for the preparation, execution and follow-up of mobility projects.

Various templates for the implementation of mobility projects have also been drawn up:

- learning agreements,
- personal transcripts,
- recommendations for the assessment and validation of learning outcomes,
- certificates for participants and host institutions.

Alongside information on learners and their training course, **learning agreements** list the learning outcomes to be acquired within the scope of the mobility project. These need to be agreed in advance between the learner, the home institution and the host institution. Learning outcomes actually acquired are ascertained by the host institution within the framework of an assessment and documented in a **personal transcript**. This document is validated and recognized by the home institution following completion of the mobility project. The ultimate plan is for the EUROPASS

Mobility to be used for the documentation of learning outcomes acquired abroad. A further option is for the home institution to issue certificates of participation.

No standardized procedure has been developed within the scope of SME MASTER Plus for the **assessment of learning outcomes**. Only general recommendations have been issued. The reason for this is that each partner country already has its own principles, methods and instruments in place for the identification and assessment of competences or learning outcomes, and these can also be deployed within the scope of ECVET. Notwithstanding this, it is important that the relevant methods and instruments which an institution intends to use within the framework of a mobility partnership are made transparent to and accepted by the partner institution. In addition to this, bilateral agreement should be reached regarding assessment criteria.

The function of an assessment is to serve as an element for securing the quality of mobility projects rather than to replace a national examination or parts of an examination. The introduction of an assessment also fosters mutual trust between the various institutions involved in an international mobility partnership.

During the **second phase of the project**, all instruments were practically tested within the scope of various mobility projects in the fields of bakery and hairdressing between Germany, France and Slovenia.

#### The following mobility projects were organised during the project:

- 4 Hairdressers from Ljubljana (SI) to St. Malo (FR) (14-25/02/2011). The mobility exchange was organized by the OZS, Srednja frizerska skola Ljubljana; the French Federation of Hairdressers, the Skilled craft chamber Ille-et-Vilaine and their training centre in St. Malo. OZS was responsible for the financing and coordination in the frame of a LEONARDO DA VINCI project.
- 4 Hairdressers from St. Malo (FR) to Ljubljana (SI) (14-27/03/2011). The mobility exchange was organised by the OZS, Srednja frizerska skola Ljubljana; the French Federation of Hairdressers, the skilled craft chamber Ille-et-Vilaine and their training centre in St. Malo. APCMA was responsible for the financing and coordination in the frame of a LEONARDO DA VINCI project.
- 1 Baker from Ljubljana (SI) to Munich (DE). The placement was organized by the OZS and the skilled craft chamber in Munich. The financing was guaranteed by OZS via a LEONARDO DA VINCI project.
- 1 Baker from Ljubljana (SI) to Rouen (FR) the 4th-17th/04/2011. Organizations involved were OZS and INBP (National Baker and Pastry baker institute) in coordination with APCMA. APCMA was responsible for the financing and coordination in the frame of a LEONARDO DA VINCI project.

#### The mobility projects were organized in the following way :

(Example of the mobility exchange in hairdressing between Slovenia and France):

A short feedback questionnaire was elaborated by APCMA in order to collect the feedback from organization involved.

### **FEEDBACK test phase SME MASTER Plus ECVET tools**

*Feedback from institution (name):*  
*Mobility concerned by the testing: (sector, countries (from ... to), dates and duration, number of participants, particularities ....)*  
*What are the institutions / persons involved in the testing and how:*

#### **1/ Structure of the templates**

*The headings of MoU and LA are easy to understand?*  
*If some wording is not clear, please explain what and why? Did you come up with other solutions?*  
*Are there items which should be changed (order, form, layout, etc.) to improve the structure?*  
*If yes, please explain:*

#### **2/ Content of the information collected**

*The information collected with the template was pertinent and sufficient for the quality of the evaluation process? Are there some items to add? If yes please explain:*  
*Did you develop or use other tools or documents in addition? If yes please explain:*

#### **3/ Mobility checklist**

*All steps of implementation are recorded. Are there some items to add? If yes please explain:*

The mobility checklist summarizing the steps and tools in order to conduct a mobility action in the frame of ECVET was sent out to the facilitators of the mobility projects. Templates of Memorandum of understanding (MoU), Learning agreement (LA) and Personal transcript (PT) were also provided. Two meetings, one preparatory and one evaluation meeting were held with the French organizers in order to check the use of the tools and collect feedback.

The test and feedback about the test concentrated on the mobility project for hairdressers because it included sending and hosting and partnership based on reciprocity. Two meetings, one preparatory and one evaluation meeting were held in France. The test followed the 3 phases of mobility organization step by step

- Before
- During
- After

Besides the use of MoU, LA and PT templates, additional tools were elaborated by the partners in order to guarantee the quality of the mobility projects for the beneficiaries and companies involved. This shows the involvement of the stakeholders to test ECVET as a methodological approach for transnational learning

and recognition of qualifications and to integrate mobility successfully into the training courses of master qualification.

A presentation about ECVET and the project itself for all actors involved were necessary. The following topics have been developed in these presentations:

- What is ECVET,
- Implementation of ECVET,
- mobility for learners and the purpose of the mobility,
- organization of a vocational training abroad,
- how to convince the employers,
- planning the identification and selection of candidates.

A procedure in 12 steps explaining how to inform the learners, select applicants and associate the salon managers to the mobility action and its purpose were developed. A “learner’s application file” was developed by the Saint Malo pedagogical team. The applicants file was completed during an interview with the applicant by the teachers, but also by the applicant itself.

Elements of the selection process and the identification and negotiation of learning goals were combined after the testing in order to produce one operational applicants file including:

- information about the learner’s professional project (presented by the applicant),
- the applicant’s learning stand in relation to the ECVET matrix units (expertise of the teachers),
- the applicant’s learning goals

A sending/host company booklet was also elaborated. This tool was mainly helpful for the participants. It includes photographs of salons and hairdresser teams that send and host the learners. It has been used by all the salons involved and proved to facilitating identification and involvement of the partners: who is responsible, where does the placement take place, what does it look like etc.

Comments from organization involved in implementation:

*The project was presented to all the trainees attending the second year of the Brevet de Maîtrise Coiffeur. Nine were interested in it. After discussion with the employers eight were candidates and after time planning only seven were applying.*

*They were all volunteers positioned by the pedagogical team in reference to the national curriculum. The choice was made in accordance with the employers’ final decision to give a leave and an assessment was made on the basis of motivation, competences and capacity to adapt to a new context.*

*The application dossier was composed of a CV, Europass, letter of motivation, ECVET matrix positioning. There was an interview with the professional trainers based on French units A, B and C of the Brevet de Maîtrise III.*

*On the basis of this data, the selection committee discussed the applications and classified the candidates.*

*An official announcement was made and a ranking was established. The salon manager was informed accordingly by post.*

*The selection of the Slovenian trainees was different. They were no longer in a learning process. The exchange proved to be fruitful for both sides though not completely in line with the original goal. Special attention should be given to the way each country delivers the Crafts master title and this should appear clearly at the time the Memorandum of Understanding is signed by partner institutions.*

Next step was the identification / negotiation of the learning goals for each candidate and the formalization in the learning agreement. The pedagogical teams of the sending partner checked where candidates “stand” before the placement: positioning of the candidate in the course of the master craftsman training, name of the units already followed, name of trainers, assessment of initial motivation, behavior, regularity during training - and further comments about the progress in training.

A French contract sheet (*contrat pédagogique*) was used for a detailed presentation of the units or parts of the units (matrix based) which should be followed during the mobility, its contents and the learning outcomes expected. This document states clearly the main and additional or secondary learning goals. It also includes identification of the methods to be applied at each step of the process and the final assessment. It was also used to facilitate the finalization of learning agreement.

The partner handed out a program which describes the full learning process and program in the host training center and the company to the participants. It gives also a description of the chosen method(s) to be applied before (when arriving), during and at the end of the mobility (full learning process).

In parallel, the organizer / facilitator had to plan and organize the financing and insurance (liability, maintenance of social security and work accident insurance) during the mobility period. A language and cultural / professional preparation was organized. The use of a LEONARDO contract plus the contract between sending and host company, certificate of attendance by the host company, evaluation report by the trainee, preparation and signature of EUROPASS mobility are mostly overlapping the ECVET tools, but could not be avoided.

*Comments from organization involved:*

*The English teacher was in charge of the cultural and linguistic preparation using interactive tools, videos, documents, books and oral practice. A vocational trainer was in charge of the pedagogical preparation according to every candidate's goal. A professional English/French dictionary proved to be most useful to exchange with the Slovenian trainees. The pedagogical team felt that a French/Slovenian interpreter could have been the best solution to overcome linguistic barriers.*

*The school trainer in charge of employers presented individually the project to sending companies and asked sending salons to host Slovenian trainees. A positive answer was given by all. A full presentation of the project and its goals was made in January 2011 at the IFA, vocational training center in Saint Malo (FR)*

*Individual learning program:*

*The pedagogical team prepared the vocational training program for the Slovenian trainees including cultural activities, visits of salons, visit of the region.*

*Important adjustments had to be made because the Slovenian expectations covered a wide range of professional goals and the training had to be done in two weeks only. The team also lacked some information about the technical capacities of the trainees.*

When participant arrived in the host country they were again “positioned” by the hosting teacher in order to be able to assess later the progress achieved during the mobility (difference of level of competences before and after the mobility). An assessment grid (follow-up and assessment booklet for teachers) was elaborated and handed out to the teachers in charge of assessment. It was meant as a step by step evaluation of the full learning outcome and the process to achieve it.

*Comments from organization involved:*

*Daily telephone contacts with trainees and salons were kept running through the 2-week-training period and the appropriate complementary SME MASTER Plus tools were used.*

*The working tempo was definitely very different for the Slovenians as a result of national and cultural working attitudes such as breaks, starting hour in the morning, performing a task and taking a break. The initial program was consequently lightened and managing of the group was reduced. As it was difficult to have them perform on regular clients, models were invited in order to have them work. French managers were also somehow disappointed noticing sometimes lack of personal investment and interest.*

*Furthermore, the internet and NTIC tools proved to be absolutely necessary to train the Slovenians in English because they understood English but lacked professional vocabulary. The differences in level among the Slovenian participants proofed to be an additional difficulty that was solved by having an individual approach of the learning process.*

The Assessment Grid and its results as well as the "Learner's daily report and assessment" are the tools to be used to fill in the personal transcript. Originally there were two different kind of tools, the "Follow up and assessment booklet" and the "Learner's daily report" stating a day to day report of the full learning situation and its context. For practical purposes all these tools have been combined in one single shuttle booklet, the "Learner's daily report and assessment" in order to reduce and simplify the number of various documents. To promote the mobility a SME MASTER Plus certificate was delivered to the participants and the host companies. A Leonardo certificate of attendance and an EUROPASS Mobility was signed by the host companies and delivered to the participants.

*Comments from organization involved:*

*The assessment methods as indicated in the Learning Agreement were applied at the beginning and at the end of the training period. They were much more detailed in order to judge more easily differences in a short training period.*

*A blog of French trainees was created for the period abroad. Certificates were issued in favor of salons participating to the exchange and there was a TV report FR3 on the French and Slovenian trainees in salons under the umbrella of "mobility for apprentices". There was a positive media impact for the Vocational training center in Saint Malo.*

*The project results were considered as very positive by all the participants and stakeholders from personal and professional point of view even though the training period was not long enough to develop new competences but it was an opportunity for openings in the craft.*

*The Slovenian trainees were satisfied of their visit considering French schools as very well equipped in technical and professional material.*

*The French trainees attended a Vidal Sassoon center which is a well-known British hairdressing school in all Europe.*

*Benefits for the partners*

*A strong group dynamics and synergy among pedagogical teams. Salons were recognized as important partners of the learning process.*

*Human, linguistic, cultural and professional exchanges were considered as very interesting.*

## **Dissemination**

To reach satisfying project results, dissemination activities have been running in the same way as the project management and the quality assurance during the entire project time. A final conference with 100 participants took place in the beginning of 2012 in Berlin. This conference has been organized together with other German organizations engaged in ECVET pilot projects in order to reach more attention and a higher amount of participants.

All in all, during the last three years, SME MASTER Plus has been presented and discussed within 45 conferences, workshops, seminars or expert meetings. For 2012 already 5 conferences with a presentation of SME MASTER Plus are foreseen. Furthermore 14 articles or other publications about the project have been printed out and a documentary about the mobility exchange between Slovenia and France has been broadcast by the French TV.

Several information and training sessions within all the partner countries took place at national level to guarantee valorization.

### 3. Project Outcomes & Results

The **first part of the project** outcomes are the developed instruments which can be all downloaded on the project website: [www.sme-master.eu](http://www.sme-master.eu) under the rubric "project results". Due to the fact that the project partners had to discuss and fine-tune these instruments at national level with their experts, the most of the documents are not only provided as originally foreseen in the project proposal in English but also in at least one other language – depending on the partners involved in the mobility exchange.

#### **The following outcomes are provided on the project website:**

- Guidelines – background information and explanation of using the developed ECVET-tools (EN, DE, FR)
- Overview of master craftsperson qualification in AT, DE, FR, NO and SL (EN)
- Learning outcome matrices for the master craftsperson qualifications in bakery, joinery / cabinetmaking, hairdressing (all in EN, DE, FR) and floristry (EN, FR)
- Template Unit 1-6 (common part of the learning outcome matrix for all professions) (EN, DE)
- Annex to the learning outcome matrix for country specific information (EN, DE)
- Memorandum of Understanding (EN, DE, FR)
- Learning agreement & personal transcript (EN, FR)
- Mobility checklist (EN, DE, FR)

Nevertheless, the questions of using ECVET points as foreseen by the European Commission could not be solved during the project time. The partners agreed on another model of using the points as indicator.

#### **ECVET Points**

The introduction of credit points proved problematic from the outset. According to the ECVET Recommendation, credit points should provide additional information in numerical form on the relative weighting of a learning unit compared to the whole of the qualification. SME MASTER Plus was unable to comply with the convention proposed in the ECVET Recommendation that 60 credit points should be awarded for one year within a formal learning context due to the fact that in some partner countries a significant part of the master craftsperson qualification is acquired via a

non-formal route, meaning that there is a considerable deviation between the formal periods of learning.

The development of a system to establish a ratio between these non-formal and formal learning elements would have been beyond the framework of the project. For this reason, the initial decision was taken to adopt a pragmatic "interim solution" whereby the plan was merely to accord credit points the function of a percentile indicator rather than basing them on a certain workload. The total number of credit points (100) was separately distributed across the various units of learning outcomes by the project partners on the basis of expert surveys in order to provide a means of visualizing the "relative weighting" of a learning unit compared to the master craftsperson qualification in the respective partner country. Although this permitted conclusions to be drawn as to the different weighting of a learning unit within the various master craftsperson training courses, albeit to a limited extent, no actual added value for the support of mobility projects became discernable. In addition to this, doubts were raised at an early stage with regard to the validity of the results of the subjective approach adopted by the expert surveys. For this reason, this approach was also abandoned.

Due to the fact that no credit point system for master craftsperson training is currently in place in any of the partner countries, no account at all was taken of a further function of credit points (planned in the ECVET Recommendation), namely accumulation and transfer to the domestic learning context. Notwithstanding this, as soon as credit points are introduced or as soon as countries which already operate a credit point system wish to make use of this system they may be applied. In such a case, however, the awarding of the points must take place according to the stipulations of and under the exclusive responsibility of the competent bodies within the relevant country.

During the **second phase of the project**, all instruments were practically tested within the scope of various mobility projects in the fields of baker and hairdresser between Germany, France and Slovenia. Further tests focusing on the area of floristry are planned between Norway and France for 2012 but will be not finished within the project time. Results up until now show that most of the instruments developed are capable of practical deployment.

As a result of the mobility action in hairdressing between Saint Malo and Ljubljana the partners have been able to test the ECVET matrix for hairdressers under positive working conditions. This first test needed a very important volume of oral and written exchanges in order to ensure that all the procedures were clearly understood by school officials, trainers, salon managers and learners.

The four basic documents as decided by the SME MASTER Plus partners, that is to say, the check list, the memorandum of understanding, the learning agreement and the personal transcript fulfilled their goal and their functioning proved to be satisfying. Practice and experimentation showed also that the additional tools were necessary to facilitate the action itself and the assessment process. As a result of this testing of complementary tools it was suggested to combine them in three major additional tools, the "Learner's application dossier", the "Sending/hosting enterprise booklet" and the "Learner's daily report and assessment".

To further simplify the number and use of tools it is suggested that the partners examine the possibility to use one single Learning agreement Leonardo/SME MASTER Plus.

### **General project results after testing the SME MASTER Plus ECVET-toolbox**

The organizers of mobility projects view the improved legibility of the various master craftsperson qualifications provided by the learning outcomes matrix in a particularly positive light. Learning outcomes are especially useful to occupational practitioners in according easier access to the qualifications contents of a foreign master craftsperson qualification and thus facilitating the identification of content intersections which can in turn form the basis for mobility projects. Notwithstanding this, it must be said that this approach needs some getting used to. A complete abandonment of input oriented standards in the representation of learning and training processes, especially with regard to learning times but also in respect of a fixed learning venue, tends to be viewed critically.

Concerning the use of the matrix some structural decisions have been coming up useful. SME MASTER Plus does not split learning outcomes into its components, this ensures that readability is enhanced and redundancies are avoided. It is vital that the partners in the mobility process agree on a specific procedure in order to ensure that the descriptions of qualifications can actually be compared. It is also recommended to jointly define elements which occur in both qualifications. The closer the descriptions are, the easier it is to discover common aspects and differences in the contents of qualifications.

The definition of units of learning outcomes is also of major importance. Here an agreement regarding 'width' and 'depth' should also be reached with the mobility partner. Work in the SME MASTER Plus project has revealed that it is preferable to define the units first and then formulate the relevant learning outcomes. The definitions should not focus exclusively on the curriculum but more on the specific activities associated with the qualification.

The curriculum acts rather as a 'translation' into teaching contents of the learning outcomes which are connected with the units. The number of units will largely depend on the complexity of the qualification but should range between 10 and 20. Both too many and too few units can be contrary to the intention of transparency, which is pursued by structuring the qualification into these elements.

The presentation of learning outcomes as well as units of learning outcomes in a learning outcome matrix has proven very useful in the course of SME MASTER Plus. The representation of the 'learning outcome development' in particular has a decisive advantage especially regarding the learners' mobility: the representation can be used to present learning outcomes which the learner must have achieved when acquiring the overall qualification as well as to demonstrate 'interim learning outcomes'. This can clarify a mobile learner's status of knowledge/skills/competence when going abroad at a certain time of his/her VET career. This will facilitate communication between the mobility partners.

The documents suggested as part of ECVET - the memorandum of understanding, learning agreement, and personal transcript - are well suited to lay down in writing all agreements between the sending and host institution as well as with the learner. Nevertheless, the drawing up of partnership agreements (memorandum of understanding) is considered to be time consuming but necessary. Notwithstanding this, the administrative effort involved is only perceived as being worthwhile if there also is a readiness between educational and training institutions to implement mobility projects on a regular basis. There is, however, usually a lack of capacity on the part of the competent bodies and the training institutions in this respect. Learning agreements and personal transcripts of records are viewed as useful tools for securing the quality of a mobility project. They create a safe basis for all involved partners and contribute to the acceptance of mobility projects in the learning context of the home country.

Both home and host institutions also viewed the introduction of an assessment positively. It was pointed out that the principle of proportionality needed to be maintained with regard to the scope of principles. Mobility projects which are of short duration (approximately up to three weeks) may not require any assessment, whereas medium to long term periods of learning spent abroad make it necessary to undertake a more extensive recording of learning outcomes. A flexible approach should be chosen in this regard.

Regarding the recognition and transfer of units and learning outcomes, ECVET clashes with national rules as far as a binding credit transfer to national exams, or parts of exams, is concerned. The mobility exchanges have shown that the recognition of periods of learning and learning contents, by contrast, has proven to be unproblematic. Therefore a flexible approach is recommended here.

The mobility checklist was particularly viewed as useful by companies which have had either very little or no experience of mobility projects. Like a number of the other tools developed within the scope of the project, however, this instrument is not a component of the ECVET Recommendation.

On the whole, work with SME MASTER Plus suggests that ECVET can form a sound basis for organizing and implementing medium- to long-term mobility projects in particular. Thanks to the tools which comprise the ECVET 'toolbox' it is possible to clearly improve the quality of mobility projects. Even though not all ECVET principles can be implemented in practice, the key elements - units and learning outcomes - enhance the transparency and comprehensibility of qualifications.

## 4. Partnerships

The main partnership of the SME MASTER Plus project consists of:

- ZDH (Germany) as national representative body of the German skilled crafts sector and umbrella organization of the chambers of skilled craft, which are the awarding bodies of master craftsperson qualification. In cooperation with its members and research institutes it elaborates state recognized training regulations in VET.
- ibw (Austria) has carried out several ECVET-related projects at national and European level and has taken over respective advisory tasks for ministries and employers' organizations. Moreover, ibw has been involved in working groups on ECVET at European level.
- APCM (France) is a public organization representing as an umbrella organization the interests of skilled craft companies in France. APCM is competent certifying body for the master craftsperson certification. Organization of validation is fully placed under its authority.
- Mesterbrev (Norway) is the national body for certification and accreditation of masters of skilled crafts in Norway.
- OZS (Slovenia) provides apprenticeship, assistant and foreman exams to maintain a high level of knowledge in Slovenia.
- FNCF (France) is an important employers' union in the sector of hairdressing in France.

The majority of the partners are so called competent institutions in VET, cooperating for years in various European and bilateral projects. All of them are public bodies or authorities responsible for qualification in the skilled crafts sector and correspond to the criteria of the funding program.

They have the institutional legitimacy and the technical capacity to cover all the operational functions which are specific to ECVET, namely:

- technical principles of ECVET,
- evaluation of achieved learning outcomes,
- validation, recognition and transfer of learning outcomes.

The partners are VET providers or VET provider networks regulating bodies and able to mobilize training institutions for the implementation of ECVET and mobility projects. Furthermore they have the capacities to disseminate the results, transfer them in a national context and offering training / information sessions about recognition and transparency issue to their members (chambers of skilled craft, VET providers, training centers etc.).

An advantage of the project has been that the core partners APCM, ZDH, ibw and Mesterbrev have been working together already in the SME Master project in 2007. Therefore it was easier to find agreements, understandings and to integrate the new partners OZS and FNCF, since FNCF has been already included in SME MASTER as external expert and OZS has been working already together with several of the core partners in other ECVET projects.

Originally also another partner, KOC Nederlands, was involved in the hairdressing sector in the beginning of the project. After one year KOC left the project and FNCF took over all the tasks and responsibilities for the hairdressing working group and provided all results as mentioned in the original proposal, including the organization of mobility exchanges.

Next to the project partners a lot of opinions from other organizations, institutions, associations, training schools, experts etc. had influence on the project development since the project has been disseminated during the last three years during 45 conferences and workshops.

Especially other important national experts have been consulted for feedback to reach optimal project results. These experts on national level have been very helpful in checking the descriptions of the learning outcomes matrices and the usability for mobility exchanges. Some important institutions have been:

- Wirtschaftskammer Niederoesterreich (AT)
- Landesinnungsverband des bayerischen Bäckerhandwerks (DE)
- Landesinnungsverband des bayerischen Friseurhandwerks (DE)
- Handwerkskammer Duesseldorf (DE)
- CAPEB (FR)
- CNBF (FR)
- INBP (FR)
- FNFF (FR)
- interflora norway (NO)
- Veia State College in floristry and gardening (NO)
- School for Horticulture and Visual Art Celje (SI)
- Vocational school for designing Maribor
- Institute of Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training

Furthermore, national and European umbrella organizations have been included for political discussions, feedback and support on dissemination on the wider level. Especially the cooperation with UEAPME and the Federal Economic Chamber of Austria (WKÖ) has been very helpful.

Due to the inclusion of all the experts in VET on national and international level the project could help to spread out the topic "ECVET" in a much wider way as it has been done so far within the member states. Also for the future many chambers and experts have been explaining their interest to transfer the results of SME MASTER Plus to other sectors and use the developed tools in future mobility exchanges.

## 5. Plans for the Future

Even if some mobility exchanges have been taken place so far between the partner countries further exchanges are planned for the time after the project period. Mobility exchanges focusing on the area of floristry are planned e.g. between Norway and France for 2012. Their results and experiences can be used to develop the SME MASTER Plus tools even further.

Also an extension to other sectors, including further partner countries, has been discussed and the core partners agreed to continue to work closely together on this topic during the next years.

To reach the aim to enable multiplier activities in other organizations, sectors and countries continuous dissemination will be an essential factor also after the project time. Therefore disseminating activities will run also in the future. This includes the update of the website, presentations during events (5 are already planned for 2012) and the distribution of the project flyer to many stakeholders.

For example SME MASTER Plus will be introduced to the Euro-Apprenticeship-network ([www.euroapprenticeship.eu](http://www.euroapprenticeship.eu)), which covers relevant stakeholders from most EU member states, in June 2012. The project outcomes will also be introduced to network of mobility coaches "Training without borders" of the German chambers of skilled crafts and chambers of industry and commerce, as the mobility coaches are important promoters and facilitators of transnational mobility in initial and continuing VET.

## 6. Contribution to EU policies

The master craftsperson qualification belongs to the area of CVET and plays a significant role within skilled crafts companies and small and medium sized enterprises of several member-states of the European Union. It is an entrepreneurial qualification which covers such aspects as greater depth of skills, knowledge and competence in the respective trade area, economic aspects of running a business as well as teaching and training skills leading to the competence to pass on skills and knowledge to apprentices.

An enhancement and consolidation of transnational mobility for the purpose of learning and working will have several positive effects:

- The implementation of an international network of training providers and competent institutions in the area of CVET.
- A contribution to the internationalization of master craftsperson education through the implementation of the pedagogical concept "learning by leaving".
- As a master craftsperson who spent some time during his/her own training abroad might also be motivated to send apprentices abroad, it will have an impetus on transnational mobility in IVET

Partners of SME MASTER Plus are involved in the discussions about ECVET at national and European level. As competent and/or intermediary institutions they will also play an important role during the implementation of ECVET in their countries. In this process the partners are representing the interests and needs of the skilled craft sector which – amongst others – are

- the enhancement of transnational mobility in VET,
- the enhancement of participation in CVET.

Transnational mobility in VET is yet considered a key factor for the development of skills and training for craft companies and SMEs, in particular for the internationalization of enterprises. Mobility of apprentices is also a priority of the Leonardo strand of LLP and mentioned in the proposal of the European Commission for a European Small Business Act.

The Partners have been involved for years in supporting mobility and transnational cooperation for lifelong learning in the skilled crafts sector. As competent and/or intermediate bodies they support their networks of skilled craft chambers and training providers in order to foster cross-border mobility in VET.

Regarding the potential benefits of ECVET for crafts companies and SMEs, partners have to facilitate ECVET on the basis of concrete cross-border experiences. The partners will create a set of practical tools for competent institutions and training providers which

- facilitates mutual recognition of individually acquired learning achievements,
- supports the implementation of transnational mobility measures to increase the learner's mobility rate,

- strengthens cooperation between the relevant players on the basis of mutual trust,
- contributes to the concept of lifelong learning.

SME MASTER Plus may also take into account ongoing and future developments of the master craftsperson qualification profile in the partner countries.