

Operational guidelines for the construction of Learning Outcomes and units (deliverable no. 3)



ECVET system for No borders in tourism hospitality European Training and Work

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1. Introduction

These guidelines aim to explain some key concepts and to provide guidance and illustrations for the construction of Learning Outcomes and units in ECVET system

This document is intended for the use of the partners of the LdV project NET-WORK engaging in the experimentation and in the implementation of ECVET in vocational training pathways in the sector of tourism and hospitality management (reception areas in hotels and alternative lodging structures).

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2. Key concepts

2.1. Learning Outcomes

Learning Outcomes are statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process.¹

Generally speaking, Learning Outcomes may be acquired through a variety of learning pathways, modes of delivery (school-based, in-company, etc.), in different learning contexts (formal, non-formal and informal) or settings (i.e. country, education and training system ...).

Learning Outcomes can be used for various purposes such as to establish descriptors of qualification frameworks, define qualifications, design curricula, assessment, etc.

Learning Outcomes can be set out in various levels of detail depending on their purpose and context in the process of designing qualifications.

There are different approaches to identifying and describing Learning Outcomes using the terminology and descriptors existing in the different qualifications systems.

Learning Outcomes are described using the terminology and descriptors existing in the different qualifications systems. The European definition of Learning Outcomes (see before) uses the terms of knowledge, skills and competence as the common denominator that fits with the diversity of approaches to describing Learning Outcomes.

¹ See: Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework - EQF. 2008
(<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:111:0001:0007:EN:PDF>)

ECVET does not provide a template or a taxonomy concerning the format of Learning Outcomes descriptions. However, it is essential in implementing ECVET to ensure that Learning Outcomes for qualifications and units are clearly identified and described to enable mutual understanding and comparability between outcomes as described in one setting or context and those described in another setting or context.

In order to help the mutual understanding among partners and to facilitate the construction of a comparative picture it may be advisable to use grids and templates coming from “Trans-national comparative matrix” (deliverable no. 2.3), “Analytical description of the professional qualifications to be tested in the experimentation” (deliverable no. 2.4) and the WP3 document “Sharing and validation of the description modalities for the Learning Outcomes and units=Analysis Tool”.

These tools allow us

- to highlight the similarities between Learning Outcomes within the different qualifications
- to make the difference between Learning Outcomes visible
- to compare qualifications across the qualifications systems

in order to describe, to classify, and to gather the Learning Outcomes to create Units.

Learning Outcomes can be used as a basis to identify whether what the learner has achieved in one learning setting or context is comparable to what s/he is expected to have achieved in another setting or context. This is possible because Learning Outcomes are not dependent on the learning process or the learning context in which they have been achieved.

2.2. Units

A unit is a component of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of Learning Outcomes (described in terms of knowledge, skills and competence) that can be assessed and validated.

Units enable the progressive achievement of qualifications through transfer and accumulation of Learning Outcomes. They are subject to assessment and validation which verify and record that the learner has achieved the Learning Outcomes expected.

The units may be common to several qualifications or specific to one particular qualification. They are accumulated according to the requirements for achieving qualifications. These requirements may be more or less restrictive depending on the tradition and practice of the qualifications system.

Since each unit is documented and the Learning Outcomes it contains can be assessed and validated, the learners can either progressively accumulate Learning Outcomes in view of achieving a qualification or obtain recognition for their Learning Outcomes achieved in other contexts without new assessment (i.e. units can be transferred).

In countries where qualifications are not designed in terms of units or where they do not allow for accumulation of units, it is possible to use ECVET for mobility purposes, by creating units used ONLY for mobility. These units can then be transferred and the Learning Outcomes will be validated by exempting the learner from the corresponding part of the education and training pathway in the home institution.

Units should be constructed and organised in a coherent way with regard to the overall qualification, grouping the Learning Outcomes in such a way as to identify the outcomes that relate to each other. This can be either because they relate to the same set of occupational activities (e.g. reading and implementing plans; maintenance of machines; etc.) or the same field of knowledge, skills or competence in learning (e.g. competence in foreign language; etc.).

The same Learning Outcomes should not be assessed twice. Therefore they do not normally form part of different units. However, in some cases it may be necessary to define some knowledge, skills and competence that are related to all or a group of units. For example those concerning health and safety; environmental protection; hygiene; or key competences. Even if these Learning Outcomes are common or transversal they should be clearly identified in the unit description.

In some systems, units are defined as part of the qualification standard. They are hence defined at the central level by competent institutions in charge of developing qualifications (e.g. ministries, sectorial organisations), but they are often defined in the framework of national or trans-national networks by the partners involved.

This cooperative approach ensures that units are suitable for the purpose of transfer from one system to another.

In formal education and training systems units can contribute in determining the content and the structure of the programmes, though the education or training programmes are composed of different learning activities, objectives, contents, assessment methods and materials. The relationships between units and these sets of learning activities depend on the qualifications system.

There is no ideal size for a unit.

Some systems use units that are relatively small in size. This means that they combine a small



number of Learning Outcomes.

Advantages:

- units can be obtained in a rather short time of learning and therefore are particularly suitable for geographical mobility.
- they can also be suitable for adult learners who combine learning and employment or learners who are at risk of dropping out from longer programmes.

Disadvantages:

- because of the greater number of units in a qualification, this approach implies putting in place a large number of assessments.
- fragmentation of qualifications and of assessment may make it more difficult to identify whether the learner can combine all the knowledge, skills and competence in a more complex manner.

Other systems conceive of units as large sets of Learning Outcomes and typically qualifications would only contain a relatively small number of units.

Advantages:

- assessment of a larger unit enables learners to demonstrate their capacity to combine knowledge, skills and competence in view of delivering a more complex service or a product.
- the number of summative assessments is small.

Disadvantages:

- more substantial amount of learning activities is required to prepare for a unit. Hence it may be difficult to achieve a full unit in the context of short transnational mobility period.
- the duration of learning activities preparing for the unit may be too substantial for learners outside initial VET to be able to benefit from accumulation.



The size of units will therefore depend on the practice in the qualifications system and also on the purpose of the unit.

For example units that are designed to be meaningful on the labour market (for example as partial qualifications) are likely to be large.

On the other hand, if units are designed specifically for mobility purposes or if they are designed for specific target groups such as adults they may be smaller.

In the framework of the ECVET programme, partnerships should provide that the Learning Outcomes of a unit achieved in different contexts in the home setting are comparable to those of a unit in the host setting.

Therefore, in the current ECVET project, the partnership should improve effective approaches to identifying comparability of Learning Outcomes in units across the different countries / systems.

2.3. Points

ECVET points are a numerical representation of the overall weight of Learning Outcomes in a qualification and of the relative weight of units in relation to the qualification.

Together with units, descriptions of Learning Outcomes, information about the level of qualifications, ECVET points can support the understanding of a qualification.

The number of points allocated to a qualification, together with other specifications, can indicate for example, that the scope of the qualification is narrow or broad.

The number of points allocated to a unit provides the learner with information concerning the relative weight of what s/he has accumulated already. It also provides the learner with information concerning what remains to be achieved.

Allocation of ECVET points to a qualification (and therefore to a unit within a qualification) is based on a convention according to which 60 points are allocated to the Learning Outcomes expected to be achieved in a year of formal full time VET.

It is possible that the same qualification can be prepared through various programmes. Therefore ECVET allocates points to qualifications and not to education and training programmes.

However, to decide on the number of points allocated to a qualification, one formal learning programme is chosen as a point of reference.



It is up to the competent institutions in charge of designing qualifications to decide which specific programme will be chosen as a point of reference (e.g., the initial VET or the most common programme).

However, as in the current NET-WORK project, it is up to the partnership to identify the programme to be used in the first instance as a point of reference in order to build up a shared model.

The duration of the selected reference programme together with the convention on ECVET points will give the number of points allocated to the qualification.

From the total number of points allocated to a qualification each unit is allocated a number of points based on its relative weight within the qualification.

The relative weight of a unit is established using one or a combination of these approaches:

- *the complexity, scope and volume of Learning Outcomes in the unit*

This approach is based on evaluating the complexity, scope and volume of knowledge, skills and competence in a unit with regard to those in the qualification. It can be based on indicators such as the level of performance for assessment of Learning Outcomes. For example: the body of technical, technological, scientific and general knowledge that have to be mobilized in order to execute the skills and competences expected; the number of procedures or methods to follow, the complexity of combinations of these procedures or methods; the variety and complexity of material and documentation resources to use.

- *the effort necessary for a learner to acquire the knowledge, skills and competence required for the unit.*

This method of allocating ECVET points is based on the training programme taken as a point of reference and on the estimation of learners' effort (which can be also translated as workload or notional learning time) to achieve the expected Learning Outcomes.

- *the relative importance of the Learning Outcomes which constitute the unit for labour market participation, for progression to other qualification levels or for social integration;*

This method of allocating ECVET points is based on how different actors "value" the

different units which are part of the qualification. For example some units may be core to the professional profile that the qualification leads to. It can be decided that such core units would have a higher number of points than the others. It is also possible that some units would enable progression to other qualification levels (e.g. general knowledge, skills and competence to enable progression to higher education).

Allocation of ECVET points is normally part of the design of qualifications and units.

The successful achievement of a qualification or of a unit triggers the awarding of the associated points, independently of the actual time required to achieve them.

Hence when a learner satisfies the criteria for a unit or a qualification, meaning s/he has achieved the expected Learning Outcomes and these have been assessed and validated, s/he is awarded the corresponding ECVET points.

Usually the transfer of a unit entails the transfer of the corresponding points so that they are included when the transferred Learning Outcomes are recognised, in accordance with the national or regional rule

In line with the ECVET Recommendation, the transfer of credit concerns the validation and recognition of Learning Outcomes assessed in a different context.

The transcription of ECVET points in personal transcripts accompanies this process but ECVET points are not the subject of credit transfer.

Similarly the process of accumulation concerns the assessed and validated Learning Outcomes and not the ECVET points.

3. Operational indications

The analysis of the training profiles has allowed us - in a previous phase of the project (PW2) - to construct and validate a framework of shared Macro competences, and to produce a further chart of knowledge, skills and competences connected with each macro competence (KCS Framework).

On the basis of the definitions and indications illustrated at point 2 (*Key Concepts*), the construction of the Learning Outcomes and related Units could proceed according to the following outline:

3.1. Assumption of the macro competences validated in PW2 as reference Units for the description of the Training Paths used by the partners in the document *“WP 3 Sharing and validation of the description modalities for the Learning Outcomes and units . ANALYSIS TOOL”*.

The Units to be used could, therefore, be the following:

- ① To handle (and/or coordinate) the operational running of the reception department
- ② To inform guests and advise them about services and events in the local environment
- ③ To maintain efficient communication and to collaborate with other departments in the hotel
- ④ To choose appropriate ways for organizing his/her own and, as necessary, staff activities in the reception department
- ⑤ To perform financial assignments, execute commercial activities and ensure quality control of the services and work conducted

It could be useful to provide two distinct Units of type ①, to distinguish the various levers of Learning Outcomes that can be attributed to the functions of an operator (① A) and to those of a planner-coordinator (① B)

3.2. Attribution to the individual Units of the modules presented in the description of the Training Paths following a grid (see Specification for the description of selected profiles Modules - Units grid Tool 1) in which the various components are listed by module according to the relationship KSC. For example:

UNIT ④ To choose appropriate ways for organizing his/her own and, as necessary, staff activities in the reception department				
Partner	N. Mod.	Knowledge S/he Knows	skills	Competence S/he is able to..
PT	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - complaint management and problem-solving techniques - techniques of conflict resolution 	Makes opportune, appropriate and effective decisions in the more complex situations of everyday work or in the case of complaints, billing problems, debt collection difficulties, inadequate behaviour of customers, etc	analyse the most common complaints and propose general procedures for problem solving

3.3. This ordering can be done:

- in an initial phase, distinctly for each Training Path
- in a second phase, by collating and synthesising the results by Unit of all the paths described by the partners.

In this way a preliminary outline can be obtained of the Learning Outcomes, some of which are fully shared by all the Training Paths, others which can be shared with certain adjustments, and probably even a certain number which can be shared only partially or not at all.

3.4. As a consequence, one could proceed to a further comparison of the Learning Outcomes with respect to the KCS FRAMEWORK, in order to functionally connect the outline defined by the examination of the professional figures (KCS Framework) with that defined by the sequence of Training Paths.

In this way, therefore, it should be possible to identify precisely a wide range of



learning outputs effectively referable as a whole both to the convergences of the professional figures examined in the various Partner countries and to the shared results of the training paths.

- 3.5. The development of this setup will offer, at the same time, the tools for activating the recognition of the Units, within the limits of the various functional prospects for the application of the ECVET system (facilitation of mobility within training paths and/or definition of agreed upon methods of evaluation/validation, of all or part of such paths).