



European Federation
of Building
and Woodworkers



Bricklaying Qualifications, Work and VET in Europe **(Bricklayer)**

Final Report

Public Part

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Executive Summary

This document is intended to give you a clear understanding of the European project entitled "Bricklayer". It is directed at those interested in the development of the construction sector and, more specifically, in Vocational Education and Training (VET) in construction, as well as at stakeholders from other sectors.

The Bricklayer project is funded under the Leonardo Da Vinci stream within the framework of the Lifelong Learning programme. Therefore, it is co-financed by the European Union. The project extends over 24 months, from December 2008 to November 2010.

Twelve partners from eight countries, including the two sectoral social partner organisations from the European Construction sector, EFBWW and FIEC, are involved in the project. Some partners are training institutes, others are social partner organisations and scientists from universities and institutes. All partners are familiar with the sector and experienced in VET policy and practice.

The project contributes to European activities in the area of VET and focuses on one specific occupation (bricklaying). However, it will also provide information of benefit to other sectors beyond construction.

The overall aim of the project is to facilitate the recognition of qualifications and competences in relation to bricklaying by enhancing their transparency and comparability, thereby increasing the effective mobility and quality of labour across Europe. A key precondition for recognition of qualifications is the establishment of 'zones of mutual trust', i.e. a mutual understanding of qualifications concerning their nature, content, regulation and value in the labour market. A key aim of the study is to identify 'zones of mutual trust' as a precondition for mutual recognition.

In this respect, the main target groups were: the construction social partners at national and European levels; and institutions involved in the regulation and development of VET qualifications as well as those providing VET. Further target groups included: government and local authority organisations concerned with VET; VET researchers and experts; professional, practitioner and other construction organisations.

The project design

In the first phase of the project eight national context reports were produced based on an in-depth analysis of VET for bricklayers, the institutional frameworks and working practices, including expectations regarding future changes. The research was based on a conceptual framework which guided all research activities. The methodology used and the resulting framework for the comparative assessment of bricklaying qualifications is of relevance to other sectors too.

Based on the national context reports a synthesis report was drafted which identifies important similarities and differences across bricklaying qualifications and VET systems. These were explored further in the second phase of the study and provided useful information for discussions on the value of the European Qualification Framework (EQF).

Another important aim of the project, critical for the mutual recognition of qualifications, was to facilitate a network of key stakeholders. We seek to sustain the contacts, created during the project, over the long term.

Furthermore, the main findings of the project will continue to be on the agenda of the European sectoral Social Dialogue, in order to ensure an adequate follow-up with the involvement of the national social partners as well as with other stakeholders concerned.

The construction sector is not only a sector in motion in terms of markets and technology, but also in terms of qualifications and therefore, VET structures. The website may be used as a platform for the dissemination of information as well as for facilitating discussions between stakeholders.

It is intended that the research instruments and conceptual framework may be adapted for future research activities, also in relation to other sectors. To this end, we would invite you to visit the project website and to evaluate the different reports and tools.

Details of the website: www.bricklayer-llp.eu

For further information about the project, please contact: rgehring@efbh.be

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1. Project Objectives

The overall aim of the project was to further the recognition of qualifications and competences in relation to bricklaying by enhancing their transparency and comparability, thereby increasing the effective mobility and quality of labour across Europe. It did so by elucidating the cultural embeddedness of qualifications and competences within the broader institutional framework as well as their operationalisation at firm and site levels, thus enhancing understanding of the significance of bricklaying qualifications in practice.

In doing so, the project in its connotative aspects aimed at the improvement of networking between stakeholders active in the area of VET in the construction sector.

Furthermore, the study sought to evaluate the practical value of key European instruments in the field of VET, i.e. the European Qualification Framework (EQF) and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). These instruments are based on general, theoretical concepts (such as knowledge, skill and competence) which are understood and operationalised differently in national VET systems and in relation to different sectors and occupations. In our project, through an in-depth analysis of the similarities and differences of the qualifications and VET for bricklayers, we also addressed the possibilities for and obstacles to the implementation of these instruments.

These aspects can also contribute to the EU discussions on the further use and development of the above-mentioned EU instruments and therefore be of value to other occupations and sectors.

The specific objectives of the Bricklayer project were to:

1. Develop a framework for the comparative assessment of bricklaying qualifications, to be of relevance to other occupations and, therefore also for other sectors;
2. Assess and compare the nature, content and regulation of different qualifications and VET for bricklaying in 8 EU countries (Belgium, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, England, Poland and France), representing diverse VET and labour market systems;
3. Identify the learning processes whereby qualifications are acquired in each country, including non-formal and informal learning;
4. Describe the place and status of bricklaying within the sector, the qualifications, skills, competences and knowledge required of bricklayers, social and technological changes affecting these, and different bricklaying job profiles in each country;
5. Relate bricklaying qualifications to the respective national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) (where applicable) and assess possibilities, means and problems concerning implementation of EQF/ECVET and the emerging sectoral framework in relation to bricklaying, including the development of zones of mutual trust;
6. Develop proposals for discussion by the European construction Social Partners with their national members regarding a possible agreement concerning the mutual recognition of qualifications;
7. Build on the active participation of European and national social partners in the sector, facilitate networking with key stakeholders, and disseminate the findings widely within and across countries, as a central strategy for gradually building up the involvement of key target users.

2. Project Approach

The project examined the nature and content of bricklaying qualifications in 8 EU countries (Belgium, England, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and Poland), based on macro and micro-level investigation, including the different learning pathways (formal and informal), the associated curricula and job profiles.

The project was based on the active participation of European and national social partners, crucial to the application of EQF and ECVET to particular occupations, which relies on re-interpretation at sector and occupational levels.

A critical element of the study was the involvement of stakeholders. Thus, a number of activities at various stages of the project were designed to obtain their feedback. Two events for a broader audience were organized to discuss the findings of the study. A seminar was held after the finalisation of the synthesis report and a conference took place at which the final report and recommendations were presented and discussed. Additionally, contacts with other countries (not directly involved in the project) as well as with other projects have been established.

The project had 6 distinct Work Packages:

1. the *development of a framework*, involving only steering group partners (www.bricklayer-llp.be) (3 months).
2. *macro-level investigation* involving the consortium, focussing on assessing the institutional framework for bricklaying qualifications and VET in 8 countries and preparation of contextual national reports. The WP included a consortium meeting, review of relevant information and literature, and key stakeholder interviews (4 months).
3. *formative evaluation* to compare and draw together contextual reports, involving the consortium and including a seminar with key players. An interim synthesis report and a checklist of questions for the micro-level phase have been produced by the core research group (4 months).
4. *a micro-level investigation* of bricklayers' qualifications, skills, competences and knowledge within firms and training providers, and the social and technological changes affecting these. The WP outputs are: a focus group in each country and visits by core research group members, and 8 national bricklaying reports (6 months).
5. *summative evaluation*, comparing and drawing together the various national reports, linking bricklaying qualifications to national vocational qualification frameworks (where applicable), EQF, ECVET and the emerging sectoral qualification framework. Proposals regarding a possible agreement on mutual recognition of qualifications and a draft synthesis report were prepared by the core research group and presented to the consortium for discussion and agreement (5 months).
6. *dissemination*, engaging social partners and VET institutions through a conference to discuss the final report (2 months).

The project encompassed an internal evaluation, carried out by a professional consultant, who was also project partner.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The outputs of the project are:

- A framework for the assessment of bricklaying qualifications of relevance to other sectors and occupations.
- National context reports on the institutional framework of VET and qualifications in bricklaying (produced during the first phase).
- A transnational synthesis report drawing out differences and similarities.
- National bricklaying reports based on micro-level investigation of firms and training providers identifying the detailed components of bricklaying qualifications and job profiles of bricklayers as well as current and expected changes (including the result of the national context reports).
- A trans-national evaluation of the ways in which bricklaying qualifications can be aligned with national frameworks (where applicable), a possible European sectoral framework, EQF and ECVET.
- Proposals for discussion of a possible agreement on trans-national recognition of bricklaying qualifications, including through establishing zones of mutual trust and identifying both possibilities and difficulties.

All these documents are available on the project webpage.

We consider the added value of the project and its follow-up activities to be:

- for the VET institutions involved: information from the different countries will enable them to improve their own curricula and qualifications.
- better conditions to network between stakeholders (mainly training institutes) from different countries engaged in VET for bricklayers
- the strategy and instruments developed may be adopted by other countries, should the national social partners so wish.
- the general project strategy and methodology may be applied to other sectors.

A key output is the framework for the comparative assessment of qualifications for a particular occupation, that of bricklaying, designed to enhance their transparency and mutual recognition nationally and cross-nationally, as well to facilitate transferability. (See the conceptual framework – www.bricklayer-llp.eu)

The framework is designed to:

- facilitate the understanding of qualifications and VET systems for bricklaying across European countries, including associated curricula, formal and informal learning processes, and job profiles of bricklayers in the labour market.
- identify similarities and differences in relation to qualifications and VET systems for bricklaying
- enhance their transparency and mutual recognition nationally and cross-nationally

The creation of networks of stakeholders was considered crucial in connection with the lasting impact of the project. National focus groups therefore played an important role in this respect, as well as the two seminars. Stakeholders from countries not directly involved in the project and from different horizons took part in both these seminars. The development of enduring networks was facilitated by the two European sectoral social partner organisations, EFBWW and FIEC (see chapter 4 of this report). Their feedback and input to the key documents, including the framework, the final report, and the proposals for discussion regarding possible agreement concerning mutual recognition of qualifications constituted a significant added value.

The first seminar took place on 22 October 2009. This was attended by stakeholders from countries across Europe (the 8 partner countries plus Lithuania, Croatia and Hungary) and included representatives of a range of organisations concerned with VET (social partners, training providers, regulatory bodies). The seminar included workshops focussing on some of the key issues identified : the definition of what a bricklayer is; the nature of VET underpinning bricklaying qualifications; and the scope of activities of bricklayers in the labour market. In addition, project partners presented findings from the macro-level investigation of the study and the draft synthesis report. It produced a valuable discussion and the synthesis report has been revised in the light of this.

The final seminar took place on 25 October 2010. Thirteen European countries were represented at the seminar. Participants included VET practitioners and academics as well as representatives from Social Partner organisations, the European Commission, CEDEFOP, and other European institutions. The transnational synthesis report and the recommendation for facilitating the mutual recognition of bricklaying qualifications were presented. The relationship and possible conjunction with another Leonardo Da Vinci project (SQF-CON), dealing with the sectoral application of the EQF, was also addressed.

The key findings of the project, as outlined in the transnational synthesis report (see Website) include:

Distinctions between countries can be made in terms of the type of bricklayer, i.e. whether bricklaying is defined as a trade or an occupation; the mode, length and content of VET associated with qualifications; and the status and scope of activities of bricklayers in the labour market. Countries fall into two broad groups: those with an occupational conception of bricklaying, based on comprehensive VET aimed at developing competences within a broadly defined occupational field (Germany, Denmark, Belgium, Poland, France, Netherlands); and those which are largely trade-based and concerned with the performance of employer-defined tasks (England, Italy). There is however considerable variation within those groups (and within countries) and any generalisation should be resisted.

The research identified three generic groupings of bricklaying VET (Brockmann et al. 2010):

- Group One: A trade under pressure (England and Italy)
- Group Two: The school-based system (Poland)
- Group Three: The dual approach to VET (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany and the Netherlands)

One of the key outcomes of the research is a proposal for establishing mutual recognition of European bricklaying qualifications which examines the prospects for creating a common framework for comparison of qualifications within the EQF. Because of broad similarities between them, the process of establishing mutual recognition between Groups Two and Three appears relatively straightforward, while the integration of Group One presents a greater challenge, albeit not an insurmountable one. The present paper discusses the two models underlying the different VET approaches (occupation and trade) in the wider context of labour market and VET developments.

The findings have been presented at a number of academic conferences and other meetings as well as in several publications:

Project webpage

Bricklayer-LLP-eu

International Labour Process Conference, Edinburgh, 6-8 April 2009

'From Trade and Job to Occupation: the changing status of the European bricklayer', paper presented by M. Brockmann, L. Clarke and C. Winch

Industrial Relations in Europe Conference, Istanbul, 22-24 July 2009

'From Trade and Job to Occupation: the changing status of the European bricklayer', paper presented by M. Brockmann, L. Clarke and C. Winch

INAP (International Network on Innovative Apprenticeship) Conference, Turin, 17-18 September 2009

'The EQF and apprenticeship: the case of bricklaying', paper presented by M. Brockmann, L. Clarke and C. Winch

SQF-CON Conference in Brussels, 1. October 2009

Presentation of the conceptual framework of the LDV project Bricklayer; Linda Clarke

ETUC Working Party on Life Long Learning, Brussels 10 May 2010

Presentation of the conceptual framework and the intermediate results, presented by L. Clarke

National Coordination Points (UK) – Event on 10 February 2010

Presentation by L. Clarke

European Social Dialogue for the Construction Sector

Regularly reporting and presentation of deliverables at Working Party and Plenary meetings

Article for CLR News 1/2010

Michaela Brockmann, Linda Clarke, Christopher Winch – Bricklaying qualifications, work and VET in Europe

Article for two Danish publications (“Mureren” = the bricklayer and “Licitationen” = a newspaper)

Written by Sidse Buch and Flemming Jensen

Construction Labour Research Institute

Presentation of the final brochure at the institutes webpage;

http://www.clr-news.org/CLR-Studies/Bricklaying_qualifications_final%20report.pdf

Byggeriets Uddannelse - Danish training institute for Bricklayer

The training institute took the project results on their webpage.

Bulgarian Social Partner Organisations in the Construction Industry

Planning to translate the Transnational Synthesis Report

4. Partnerships

For all European projects the quality of the consortium is an extremely important aspect of quality assurance.

- The Consortium of the Bricklayer project consisted of 12 partners:
- Two training institutes (Belgium and Italy)
- Four social partner organisations; two at the European level and two at the national level (Poland and Denmark)
- Five research organisations/universities with experts in VET (Germany, France, Netherlands and two from the UK)
- One authority in VET from the UK

All project partners are experts in the field of VET and most of them have had lead responsibility or participated in numerous EU projects before. All partners are familiar with the construction sector, either at the national or the European level or both.

The European Construction Industry Federation, FIEC, has 34 national member federations in 29 countries, whilst the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW) has 75 affiliated unions in 31 countries. The sectoral social partners are critical to the implementation of the EQF and ECVET, above all in facilitating mutual recognition of qualifications. As they are involved in different VET institutions, some paritarian, as well as in training workshops and work places and on sites, they are important intermediaries for the dissemination of the results at the micro-level.

The European sectoral social partners were able to disseminate the results on a regular basis on internal and joint meetings, i.e. the regular Social Dialogue meetings (both working party on VET and plenary meetings takes place twice a year).

As planned in the project design, the participation of other stakeholders as potential partners in this project and its follow-up activities could be achieved, but to a limited extent. With respect to the dissemination of the project results our target groups included: national social partners, governmental and local authority organisations concerned with VET; VET researchers and experts; and professionals, practitioners and other construction organisations.

Partly, the target groups were directly involved in the project through the focus groups, the seminar and the final conference. Some were interviewed in relation to the macro- and company- level studies. Mutual visits between VET training centres from some countries also took place.

5. Plans for the Future

As already described in other chapters of this report, the project included following up ongoing activities. Some of these activities are targeted to stakeholders other than those directly involved in the project. Therefore, any on-going activities will depend on the interest these arouse among other stakeholder groups. Therefore the widest possible dissemination of the findings will be ensured.

The framework and the cross-national results of the research have been published and are therefore available to other institutions. The results of the project are now available to national VET institutions and other actors.

The European sectoral social partner organisations are one warrantor for the dissemination of information. They have provided their national affiliates with the final project results, i.e. the transnational synthesis report (available in seven languages) and the final brochure (EN only).

The European partner organisations, in collaboration with the participating researchers, will examine how to improve possible pathways for the further development of zones of mutual trust, based on the EQF. This will be undertaken by the European sectoral social partner working group on vocational training which will provide the European social partner organisations with information on the ongoing use of the results, to feed into further activities. Based on common assessments and positions, the European sectoral social partner organisations will provide the respective national stakeholders with this information.

Additionally the project outcomes will be available for other sector activities connected to EQF and ECVET. In this respect the two main European inter-sectoral social partners organisations have been involved and were informed respectively provided with all deliverables of the project.

The European sectoral Social partners organisations have close relations with the European Institute for Construction Labour Research (CLR). This network of researchers and practitioners across Europe, has already published the results of the project (newsletter and webpage) and will be a guarantee for continuous debate on open and new questions.

During the various meetings contacts to VET institutes from other countries than the ones involved in the project have been established. With the further dissemination of the project results in electronic and printed version and in different languages more links with similar interested bodies will also be developed.

The academic partners will simplify the conceptual framework to make it easier adaptable. This will certainly increase the interest from other sectors for similar initiatives. They will also continue in presenting papers on the research at conferences and seminars and seeking to publish them.

6. Contribution to EU policies

We believe that the Bricklayer project has contributed to EU policies in different areas and on a very practical level. Education is not an area which is directly influenced by the EU in terms of regulation and law setting. However, the EU promotes co-operation between member states and provides instruments for enhanced co-operation to also pave the way for a common labour market and workers flexibility. Especially for the field of Vocational Education and Training important instruments have been developed aimed at fostering mutual recognition of existing qualifications, i. e. the EQF and the ECVET. Currently, increasing attention is being paid to the application of these tools in certain economic sectors, including for example the sector studies on future skills or implementation projects.

However, these general instruments (EQF, ECVET) and the concepts underlying them cannot be implemented only through top-down approaches. Practical approaches have also to be developed to pave the way for successful implementation and also to identify possible shortcomings in design, which policy makers are able to correct.

In this respect, the Bricklayer project represents a bottom up approach to use and to check the above mentioned EU tools in the field of VET. It also contributes to EU policies directed at fostering the mobility of workers and fighting an unregulated European labour market. Therefore, the project contributes directly to the (old) Lisbon-strategy.

In what ways can the construction industry contribute?

Within the EU, the construction industry employs over 14 million workers and contributes to nearly 10% of the EU27 GDP. It is an industry sensitive to changes – economic, social and technological - affecting work organization and the skills required and necessitating a constant reassessment of qualifications. The rise in non-standard forms of employment – including subcontracting, self-employment and agency work - can be of concern for the development of qualifications and work-based training schemes. The sector is marked by widespread non-formal and informal on-the-job learning and a high level of labour mobility.

The changes and developments observed within the construction industry may also be indicative of changes in other sectors. Construction is thus of particular importance to the Lisbon strategy. Establishing 'zones of mutual trust' has been seen as a pre-condition for EQF implementation and for improving the quality and mobility of labour across Europe. However, given the divergence of qualifications and VET across Europe, achieving recognition of qualifications will be a challenging process. Our project confirmed that the diversity ranges from highly formalised 'input'-oriented systems (e.g. in Denmark or Germany) to much more flexible outcomes-based systems (the UK). There is a diverse range of VET in terms of governance, location, scope of activities, and knowledge requirements. While bricklaying in Germanic countries centres on a comprehensive notion of *Beruf* and a broad knowledge base, in England it is confined to a much narrower range of tasks with minimal underpinning knowledge. On the other hand the micro level research of our project has shown that the discrepancies at workplace level are lower than expected. This result shows the need for further research regarding the paths of non-formal and informal learning and the use of migrant labour.

The project, taking into account the remarkable differences between the participating countries, and on different levels, make some practical proposals how to facilitate mutual recognition of bricklaying qualifications in 8 EU countries. It therefore also contributed to the EU policies on VET in an area, where so far only little progress has made.

Through the particular design of the project, based on a selection of countries representing a wide diversity of VET and labour market systems (Anglo-Saxon, Benelux, Mediterranean, Germanic, Scandinavian and East European), the framework and methodology is of relevance to other countries and contributes therefore to the EU's role as a facilitator of cooperation.

