

## Proposal for modification of the section 5a of the Europass Mobility according to ECVET criteria<sup>1</sup>

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This article focuses on one aim of the project: namely, to provide suggestions for the modification of section 5.a. of the Europass Mobility, wherein there can be described skills and competences that have been acquired in the course of a mobility. The goal of this proposal is a better linkage of the Europass Mobility with ECVET. Nevertheless, this article may also be of interest for readers who want to get some ideas about the “learning outcome”-oriented description of knowledge, skills and abilities in the Europass Mobility. A part of these suggestions have been provided by the Polish partner and some elements have been added by the project coordinators. It has been discussed with the ECMO partners and finally reworked by the project coordinators.

### 1. “Learning outcome”-orientation in the Europass Mobility

At present, section 5 of the Europass Mobility allows transparent documentation of skills and competences acquired abroad. Compared to this, an ECVET-compatible documentation offers more, inasmuch as it allows the transfer of learning outcomes from one qualification system to another. In this way, mobility projects gain additional value: learning results acquired abroad will not only be documented but will also be validated, and will be able to be recognized and integrated into the qualifications pathway which a learner is undertaking in his/her home country.

In mobility projects, clear agreements are needed as to what exactly should be learned by the trainee during the mobility. ECVET criteria focus on knowledge, skills and competences which should be documented as learning outcomes that have been acquired during a mobility. The European Qualification Framework (EQF) adds the description of competence levels, which makes it easier to compare national qualification levels and to come to an agreement on which competence level a trainee should be trained up to during a mobility project.

Through the formulation of standards that are based on “outcomes” it is possible to grant formal qualifications as a result of validation processes, and thus to achieve all that was expected from Europass Mobility.

“Learning outcome”-oriented documentation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired in a mobility project is a challenging but important task. The stakeholders involved, however, do not necessarily have to be familiar with the educational systems in Europe in order to manage this task. There are several tools in existence that can support the process of setting up a learning agreement, and of documenting and recognizing acquired competences that are described as “learning outcomes”. For these tasks, the VQTS matrices, “learning outcome”-oriented standards, or training curricula for specific occupational areas can all be used.

In the case where a VQTS matrix has already been developed for the specific profession in question, it is recommended that this matrix be used, as it represents an important tool that can support the process of competence-description. VQTS Competence Matrices describe learning outcomes for specific occupational areas.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a contribution in the publication: "ECVET meets EUROPASS mobility. Documenting learning outcomes in mobilities". The appendices that are quoted here are related to this publication ([http://www.na-bibb.de/uploads/tx\\_ttproducts/datasheet/impuls\\_45\\_web.pdf](http://www.na-bibb.de/uploads/tx_ttproducts/datasheet/impuls_45_web.pdf), accessed: 19.11.2012).

<sup>2</sup> For more information see: <http://www.vocationalqualification.net/vqts/> (accessed 19.07.2012)

Since the competences are already formulated as learning outcomes, they can be used for the learning agreement. This tool is also very suitable for the documentation of the development of competences, as the learning outcomes described in it are classified in competence levels. It is therefore possible to categorize the competence level of a trainee before the mobility starts, to agree upon a competence level that it is expected will have been achieved once the mobility has been completed, and to give this expectation a fixed form in the learning agreement. There also exists the possibility of developing a VQTS matrix for the specific occupational area concerned. Here, however, it is recommended that experts from the specific field be involved, who have experience of “learning outcome”-oriented description of skills and competences.

However, it is not necessary to develop a VQTS matrix, as other tools can be used as well.

Standards within the specific profession concerned, which are formulated as learning outcomes and already exist for some occupations, can also be used as a basis for mutual understanding. These standards can be used as effectively as can VQTS matrices for setting up a learning agreement and for documenting learning outcomes.

In the case where these aforementioned tools are not available, there also exists the possibility of using existing training curricula and of rewording the competences to be acquired in the mobility as learning outcomes, in collaboration with the hosting and sending institutions.

Even if formulating competences as learning outcomes requires some time and effort, it is not as complicated as it sounds. Moreover, it makes the results of a mobility more transparent for the parties involved and makes a filled-in Europass Mobility more comprehensible for the trainee and the potential employers who study it.

We suggest that the supporting guidelines be consulted (see Appendix 2), which describe organizing all phases of a mobility project according to ECVET criteria, when working with the Europass Mobility. The guidelines can support trainers, teachers, entrepreneurs and individuals all around Europe in filling out the Europass Mobility according to the latest and current European developments in the field of Vocational Education and Training.

The acquired knowledge, skills and competences can and should be described in a manner which is “learning outcome”-oriented in the existing Europass Mobility. The present article, however, offers proposals for modifying the Europass Mobility in such a way as to make it correspond more closely to the ECVET criteria.

## **2. Proposal for modification of section 5a of the Europass Mobility according to ECVET criteria**

The following proposal is based on the case where “learning outcome”-oriented standards for a specific occupational area are already in existence. However, it is applicable also to other cases. It was provided by the Polish partner and was reworked by the project coordinators.

In different European countries various requirements for the evaluation and documentation of competences and qualifications already exist.

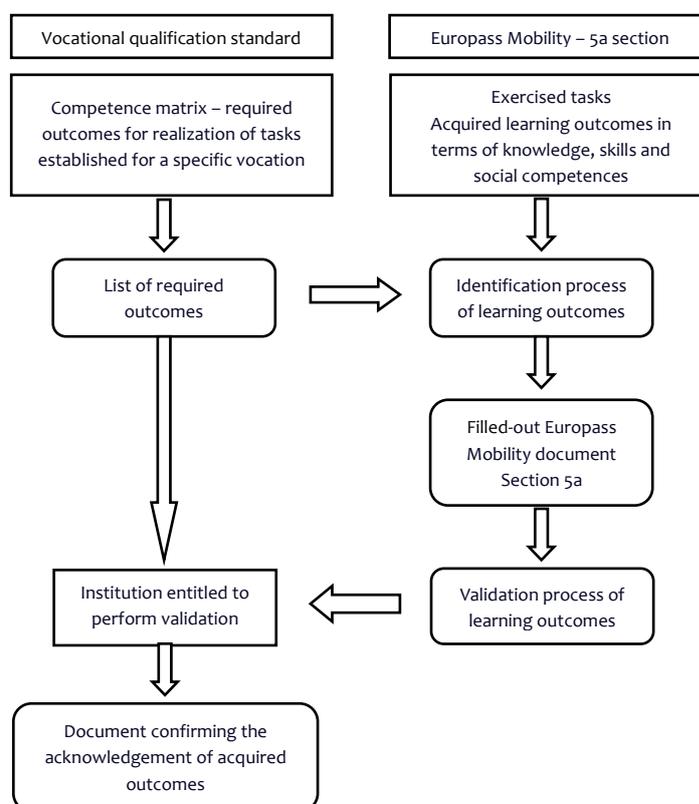
The ECMO Project contributes to the realization of European Union statements concerning the connection of transparency instruments and the development of existing instruments – to apply them in a practical way and to achieve coherence and unification. The recommendations for the modification of section 5.a. of the Europass Mobility can be discussed with the decision-makers so as to achieve a better linkage between the Europass Mobility and ECVET.

The proposal for the modification of section 5a of the Europass Mobility was pilot-tested in mobility projects in the hotel and gastronomy sector and was discussed with all relevant actors involved in mobilities.

The Europass Mobility document should become one of the component elements of a lifelong learning system, and its structure should be such that it can be used to transfer those validated learning results which were achieved outside the formal educational system into the formal qualification system and those learning results which were achieved abroad into the home educational system.

It is essential that the learning outcomes achieved by the learners should possess credibility. Research concerning the use of the Europass Mobility document has revealed that the modules describing qualifications and skills are presently only rarely filled out, because of their general structure and the complicated guidelines for their use. The modified section 5a is directed towards a simplification of this use, and towards creating a more transparent structure and clearer guidelines related to the description of the respective elements. As a result, the document will be able to serve as a multipurpose instrument for transparency of qualifications for all European users. These results will also support the development of competence-description systems in the context of the EQF, and the development of educational programmes based on learning outcomes, including the recognition of social competences and of the results of informal and non-formal learning.

Diagram for Filling Out Section 5a



The starting point for this proposal is the vocational qualification standard, defined in terms of learning outcomes, on the basis of existing standards (already existing for some vocations), curricula and examination requirements). The available qualification standards include competence matrices, where the required competences are assigned to the tasks that are described for a specific vocation, these being, ideally, described in terms of learning outcomes. A list of learning outcomes (in terms of knowledge, skills and competences) can form the basis for filling out section 5a in the Europass Mobility.

A list of possible learning outcomes for each field of section 5a, which might possibly be achieved within each specific occupational field, could be developed. After such lists were developed, they could be implemented as an online tool with a drop-down menu wherein learning outcomes could be selected. Such lists could then be used for setting up a learning agreement, in collaboration between the sending and the hosting institution, so as to supervise the mobility process and document learning results.

It should also be possible to add further tasks or learning outcomes, which would not be listed.

This solution attracted support from the companies and trainers that are organizing mobilities. A drop-down list would make the job of these stakeholders, who are directly involved in mobilities, easier. Furthermore these stakeholders would save time when preparing a Europass Mobility, which is an important point, especially for companies. The Europass Mobility would then be filled out more professionally and would have an added value for the trainee on the labour market.

However, even if such competence lists were implemented as an online tool, the collaboration of the sending and the hosting organization to set up an individualized learning agreement and to document the acquired learning outcomes would still remain very important.

On the other hand, the implementation of this proposal would require intensive development work in order to figure out tasks and competence outcomes for each vocational area. VET-experts and professionals from each occupational field could work together to develop a list of important tasks and learning outcomes which might possibly be achieved during a mobility. Another possible way of creating a database of learning outcomes is a bottom-up approach. Learning outcomes acquired during mobility projects could be documented and listed on a database by the organizing institution. It would naturally be settled in the national context where the mobility takes place.

However, this database would necessarily grow with time, and filling out the Europass Mobility would be easier for the actors involved, as a list of possible learning outcomes could be consulted. Another approach could be to encourage cooperating associations to develop lists of tasks and learning outcomes in their vocational area. An intuitive and transparent process of documenting learning outcomes in the context of mobilities, which shows the added value of these projects, could be a factor which would increase the attractiveness of carrying out mobilities in those sectors where comprehensive lists had already been developed.

A person taking part in educational activities (for example an apprenticeship or an internship), and for whom the Europass Mobility document is filled out, thereby has a specific set of tasks to accomplish, which are defined for a specific vocation according to a specific standard. Each task described in this standard has the required outcomes connected to it. Thus the identification process of acquired outcomes will focus on the comparison of standard requirements with the assessment of the task achievement process. In the case where it so happens that certain tasks are performed and fulfilled which lie outside the ambit of the regulations contained in the standard, the outcomes acquired through these tasks could be filled in in the field “other skills and competences acquired”. This field should be retained in the modified Europass Mobility, because it has been emphasized by organizations involved in mobilities that unexpected outcomes have often been observed in a mobility project which cannot be allocated to any of the existing categories.

Such a structure, regardless of the subjectivity of the evaluation of the results achieved, will be compatible with the standard. The filled-in Europass Mobility document should become a topic of validation. An authorized institution can then acknowledge (completely or in part) the outcomes achieved, based on the standards.

This process will be considerably facilitated by connecting the respective outcomes to ECVET points in vocational standards. The points could be automatically generated and summed up in section 5a. The validation process is finalized by issuing the document confirming the acquired learning outcomes. In the context of ECVET, the allocation of credit points was discussed in the ECMO project consortium. The result of the discussion was that it is hard to allocate credit points, since national qualification standards mostly have different approaches. Moreover, mobilities (e.g. in the hotel and gastronomy sector) very often last about 2-3 weeks, which makes it complicated to allocate credit points. However, it was proposed that the mobility periods could possibly be rewarded by time credits for education in the home institution (e.g. 1 Year = 60 credit points). For the validation and recognition of learning outcomes in the home institution, it is not in every case necessary to award ECVET points. The most important aspect is the learning outcome orientation when filling out the Europass Mobility. Nevertheless, the possibility of awarding credit points should at least be available. It is especially meaningful in countries where a system of credit points in vocational education is already well established, as for example in Finland. Awarding credit points is not at present the priority in Germany. Those of the actors involved who come from the home country, where recognition and validation can take place, should come to an agreement about whether or not credit points should be awarded and, if it is agreed that they should be, about just how many ECVET points could be awarded for each of the acquired learning outcomes.

The structure of the Europass Mobility should not be changed. The modifications should concern only an adjustment of the description of skills and competences to the EQF and should serve only to supplement each of the fields of the section with a wider explanation of the formulation of its content.

It is proposed to modify the heading of section 5.a of the Europass Mobility so as to make it read: **“DESCRIPTION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES (SKILLS AND COMPETENCES) ACQUIRED DURING THE EUROPASS MOBILITY EXPERIENCE (No)”** and to supplement the part “(29a)” with “title of unit(s) of learning outcomes”. It is important to direct the attention of those stakeholders who assess, recognize and validate the acquired skills and competences to learning outcomes, instead of merely using general phrases to describe tasks and competences. The list of tasks and skills and competences for each vocational field that can be acquired during the mobility would, as mentioned earlier, support this perspective. In the case where the unit(s) of learning outcomes refer to a formal qualification acquired in the home country, the title of the qualification from the home country should be written out, information about the occupational field, the learning field and the relevant ordinances should be given, and the EQF level of the qualification should be characterized.

In view of the fact that, in the EQF context, the competences are defined in terms of responsibility and autonomy, and the line between organizational and social skills becomes thin, we propose to join the fields 33a and 34a and to make out of them a joint field: “organizational and social skills and competences acquired (if not included under “Job-related skills and competences”).

It must also be stressed that social skills and competences can be relevant to different extents for the trainees. In some cases these competences are already included in job-related competences, as, for example, in the VQTS matrices. As soft skills are becoming more and more relevant, a possibility of documenting them separately should certainly be provided.

More generally, it is proposed that, in the case where certain categories, such as “organizational and social skills and competences acquired” or “other skills”, are not relevant for a trainee, these categories should not appear in the finished Europass Mobility. In this way, this instrument becomes more flexible and the

persons involved do not have to have a bad conscience when they leave a category empty – which could be a disadvantage for the trainee.

It is also proposed to add a second drop-down menu to assess each task and competence according to the level of autonomy of the trainee. The categories here could be: “participative observation of the activity”, “Execution under direct and/or continuous supervision”, “Execution under indirect and/or discontinuous supervision with limited autonomy” and “Independent execution”. For the skills and competences acquired, categories like “meets expectations”, “good”, “very good” and “excellent” could be used. If a task has not been carried out, or a competence has not been acquired, it should be neither listed nor signalled in the form of a negative assessment.

The proposed model of the document structure includes the description of social competences based on the vocational standard as well as on the EQF.

The final proposed modification is to add two further rows for signatures in connection with the process of validation and recognition of learning outcomes. This idea was appraised positively by stakeholders, who pointed out the simplification that it brings, i.e. that the Europass can thereby be used for validation and recognition and no additional documents would be needed for this purpose.

The proposal for the modification of the Europass Mobility is presented below. In Appendix 8 there can be found a database for filling out the respective modules of section 5a, based on the vocation “professional caterer” in the context of the Polish educational system and divided into basic and higher education.

### 3. Proposal for the structure of section 5a in Europass Mobility

5.a DESCRIPTION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES (SKILLS AND COMPETENCES) ACQUIRED DURING THE EUROPASS MOBILITY EXPERIENCE (No)			
	Activities/ tasks carried out / Title of unit(s) of learning outcomes (1)	Credits (2)	Level of autonomy (3)
(29a) (*)			
		Sum credits	
(30a)	Job-related skills and competences acquired – he/she:	Credits (4)	Competence level (5)
		Sum credits	
(31a)	Language skills and competences acquired (if not included under 'Job-related skills and competences') – he/she:	Credits (4)	Competence level (5)
		Sum credits	
(32a)	Computer skills and competences acquired (if not included under 'Job-related skills and competences') – he/she:	Credits (4)	Competence level (5)
		Sum credits	
(33a)	Organizational and social skills and competences acquired (if not included under 'Job-related skills and competences') – he/she:	Credits (4)	Competence level (5)

				Sum credits			
Other skills and competences acquired – he/she:				Credits (4)		Competence level (5)	
(34a)							
				Sum credits			
				Total sum credits:			
Date				Signature (person in charge of assessment in the hosting institution)		Signature (holder of the Europass Mobility)	
(35a) <sup>(*)</sup>	dd	mm	rrrr	(36a) <sup>(*)</sup>		(37a) <sup>(*)</sup>	
Date				Result of Validation (6)		Signature (Representative of the institution in charge of validation, home country)	
(36a)	dd	mm	rrrr	(37a)		(38a)	
Date				(if applicable) Result of recognition (7)		(if applicable) Signature (Representative of the respective competent body, home country)	
(39a)	dd	mm	rrrr	(40a)		(41a)	
<p>NB : This table is not valid without the signatures of the mentor and of the holder of the Europass Mobility.            Sections marked with an asterisk are mandatory.</p>							

### Footnotes

- (1) Here, an element can be selected, or a list of tasks and activities can be consulted (when developed). In the case where the unit(s) of learning outcomes refer to a formal qualification acquired in the home country, the title of the qualification from the home country should be written out, information about the occupational field, the learning field and the relevant ordinances should be given, and the EQF level of the qualification should be characterized. Only good outcomes should be documented. In the case where a trainee has not performed a specific task in a way which merits a “good” assessment, this task should simply not be documented. .
- (2) Here, credit points for tasks and activities can be allocated. The actors involved in recognition and validation in the home country have to figure out if and how many points can be rewarded. This could be done with the use of time periods (e.g. 1 year = 60 credit points). For the recognizing and validating of learning results, the rewarding of credit points is not needed in every case.
- (3) In this field, the level of autonomy can be selected. Four levels are proposed: “participative observation of the activity”, “Execution under direct and/or continuous supervision”, “Execution under indirect and/or discontinuous supervision with limited autonomy” and “Independent execution”.
- (4) Here, credit points for acquired competences can be allocated. The actors involved in recognition and validation in the home country have to reach an agreement about the relevance of credit points. In the case where it is decided that credit points will be rewarded, the institutions involved have to figure out how many points can be rewarded. This could be done using time periods (e.g. 1 year = 60 credit points). For recognizing and validating learning results rewarding of credit points is not needed in every case.
- (5) In this field the competence level can be selected. The categories for the competence level can be developed by the institutions involved in the mobility. For example, a distinction could be made between “meets expectations”, “good”, “very good” and “excellent”. As “bad” results should not be documented, positive categories alone must be formulated.
- (6) In this field the validation results can be listed.
- (7) In this field the recognition results can be described, if applicable.

#### 4. Lists of learning outcomes

A list of learning outcomes is a practical tool for all actors involved in mobility projects. The organizing institutions can use this compilation for an agreement concerning what the trainees should learn in the mobility phase. The trainees thereby also acquire an initial idea of what they are expected to do and to learn when they go abroad. These lists could also be used for filling out the Europass Mobility after the mobility phase.

Such lists already exist for some branches as in the case of mechatronics (VQTS matrices), cook (ECVET-Tour), etc. In the ECMO project a competence-matrix for “professional caterer” (Appendix 1) was developed. Such compilations are always influenced by the respective national educational systems of the countries that are involved in the development.

For the field of “professional caterer” a database was developed for filling out the respective modules in the Europass Mobility (see Appendix 8).

This is a competence list based on the Polish educational system, with a distinction drawn between general and higher education. This list can be used very effectively in cases where Poland is involved in a mobility project taking place in the catering sector. However, it can also be used in different national systems, since the tasks carried out, the activities, and the acquired competences are often comparable.

#### 5. Europass Mobility according to ECVET criteria

There is appended a Europass Mobility that has been filled out according to the recommendations from the ECMO Project (see Appendix 7)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Translation of the German ECMO example retrieved from: <http://www.europass-info.de/fileadmin/pdf/europass-mobilitaet-beispiel-ecmo-17130-1KQJ.pdf> (accessed: 10.10.2012)