
Methodology of allocation of ECVET points to units of learning outcomes and qualifications

**LEONARDO DA VINCI TRANSFER OF INNOVATION PROJECT
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OF PROFESSIONAL PERMEABILITY AND GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY”
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For more information on the project “PROPER CHANCE” go to our website
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1. FOREWORD

This document was written by the institutions participating in the LdV Transfer of Innovation Project “PROPER CHANCE”. It is one of the major objectives of the project to develop common standards for the assessment of learning outcomes for the sector of health and social care in Italy, Belgium and Germany. This will be the basis for future cooperation and mutual understanding to promote professional permeability and mobility for workers in the aforementioned field. The document shows the steps, how the project partners tried to allocate ECVET points to the descriptions of learning outcomes.

It is the objective of this document:

- to provide an overview of the attempts that have been undertaken to allocate ECVET points to the descriptions of learning outcomes in the field of health and social care, and
- to promote reasons why the partners decided not to use any methodology of allocation of ECVET points.

The description of Learning Outcomes did become a common norm, the mediator, between the different partners, i.e. training providers, for the implementation of mobility or permeability. They shall as well promote the mutual trust between employees and training centres. They are described within the document “Methodology of description of activity-oriented and competence-based learning outcomes in units according to the recommendations for ECVET and EQF, including informal and non-formal learning”.

2. USE OF TERMINOLOGY

The *use of terminology* in this document is based on the definitions given in the “RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (ECVET) (2008/C 111/01)”:

ECVET points provide complementary information about qualifications and units in numerical form. They have no value independent of the acquired learning outcomes for the particular qualification to which they refer and they reflect the achievement and accumulation of units.

Learning outcomes means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.

‘Knowledge’ means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.

‘Skills’ means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).

‘Competence’ means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

This definition in the EQF recommendation does not differentiate between professional and personal competences. Within our project, however, for this guideline the above mentioned definition will be split into two parts for defining the following terms, as it is essential for the description of learning outcomes as intended by the project participants:

‘Professional Competence’ means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development.

‘Personal Competence’ is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy [in the context of the European Qualifications Framework]. It comprises personal, social and/or methodological abilities.

A **‘Unit of Learning outcomes’** is, according to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of ECVET, “a component of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence, that can be assessed and validated”. For further explanation of the project’s and this document’s approach, it is also essential to define and differentiate the following terms:

The term **‘ECVET credits’** is used within this document and among the project partners as the summary of the description of learning outcomes, that is documented in order to become validated and recognized.

‘Key activity’ is defined as an integrated group of professional competences, which are in their entirety necessary to perform a task relevant to the job profile. The key activities of one profession must together cover all activities for the performance of a profession, regardless of its application context.

3. EXISTING RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) (2009/C 155/02):

ECVET points should be provided according to the “relative weight of a unit of learning outcomes, with regard to the qualification, should be established according to the following criteria or to a combination thereof:

1. 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,
2. The complexity, scope and volume of learning outcomes in the unit,
3. The effort necessary for a learner to acquire the knowledge, skills and competence required for the unit.”

To enable a common approach for the use of ECVET points, a convention is used according to which 60 points are allocated to the learning outcomes expected to be achieved in a year of formal full time VET.

4. ATTEMPTS UNDERTAKEN

In order to allocate ECVET points, we made different attempts. None of those did lead us towards a common agreement.

First attempt:

Providing ECVET points according to 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”.

Asset:

The ECVET points could provide a clear idea about the usability of the qualification on the labour market as well as for the individual development.

Problems:

1. The importance for the labour market might change rather rapidly according to the development of the techniques and instruments used.
2. The importance for the progression to other qualifications can change as well quite fast, if new qualification programs are developed and it would not support the idea of flexible learning pathways.
3. The importance for social integration would not always go along with the importance of the labour market, as different skills are required.
4. It couldn't be found a basis for translating qualitative criteria into quantitative criteria – as to find a basis for “1” point or “2” points?
5. For all three aspects authoritative criteria could not be found.

Conclusion:

The partners could not agree on a common methodology that could evaluate the „relative importance“ labour market participation, for progression to other qualification levels or for social integration and which could possibly be integrated by the project partners within the project duration and the project budget and that would be agreed by the stakeholders of the field within the three countries.

Second attempt:

Providing ECVET points according to the complexity, scope and volume of learning outcomes in the unit.

Asset:

That method would be coherent with the spiral progression of a trainee/student, e.g. cleaning would be worth less points than sterilizing medical instruments.

Problems:

1. What would be reliable descriptors for complexity?
2. How to find reliable descriptors for the scope?
3. How can the “volume” of learning outcomes be measured?
4. How to compare technical, cognitive skills and tasks?

Conclusion:

The partners could not find a common approach that could evaluate the complexity, scope and volume of learning outcomes within a unit and that would be accepted by the stakeholders within the three countries.

Third attempt:

Providing ECVET points according to the effort necessary for a learner to acquire the knowledge, skills and competence required for the unit.

Asset:

The project partners tried to use the same logic as in the ECTS, who allocate a point for a (rough) evaluation of the global amount of time demanded to the student to get the L.O.. One point would represent a certain amount of time spent by the student in all his learning activities (in classes, in internship, autonomous work, and assessment). Within the ECVET recommendation an amount of 60 credits per year in education is given.

Because this system is similar for higher education, it would be quite easy to convince the stakeholders as it would provide as well a good basis for comparison with learning outcomes of higher education.

Problems:

The project partners had to discover, that different institutions are allowed to deliver same or similar certificates (or diplomas) but have different duration of studies. This has several possible explanations (and many situations combine the different explanations).

1. The use of different curriculums or standards: This is particularly visible on the transnational level. The problem here comes from the fact that similar or same learning outcomes can be translated in different concrete programs. So, even with comparable, transparent L.O., the length is different. Using the tool “ECVET credit” on the basis of the length would have had the effect of standardize the didactics of teaching teams: a tool for transparency would so become a constraint against the work of the teachers.
2. Because of variety in pedagogical approaches: As a more fundamental version of the same argument, it is normal and recognized that different institutions demand different duration to allow student to acquire L.O. Some training centers use learning by doing pedagogy, while others rely more on the learning in a team, etc... They can aim for the same L.O., but will do it with different durations (even small differences would invalidate the system of duration-based points).
3. Finally, the differences in duration can arise from the fact that different institutions address to different target groups, adapting the duration of the training or courses to the needs of the specific persons they train. Allocate points on the duration would so include a subjective aspect into the definition of the point. It could even lead to a paradox situation: L.O. acquired by weaker groups would value more points than the same L.O. acquired by other groups.
4. Learning outcomes can be as well achieved by non-formal and informal learning, which won't be comparable by the time used within training sessions.

Conclusion:

To allocate the ECVET-credits according to the duration would be incoherent. The objective of our project being to help disadvantaged people to get access to work, developing a tool that reduces training opportunities would be counterproductive. Therefore we could not agree on this methodology.

5. RESULT

Therefore all three attempts, that were recommended within the “ECVET recommendation” were not accepted by the project partners and their stakeholders.

The project partners took into account as well the “ Guidelines for describing units of learning outcomes“, developed at the BIBB and presented on the homepage of the „EU-ECVET team“, which is not using ECVET points as well, even though this document is to be used for mobilities.

From the EU-ECVET Team no recommendations about the implementation of ECVET points are provided, that could offer an orientation.

Within a discussion with ECVET experts (e.g. Mr. Schäfer from ECVET-Team Germany) the project partners the information was given, that the allocation of ECVET-points is a problem for other projects too and that so far no reliable allocation process has been developed.

Furthermore, the Belgian project partners were informed during a discussion with national expert (of ECVET Belgian team) that they shouldn't try to find a methodology on allocating ECVET-points, since it's a competence of policy makers and since a high level expert group was pointed out as responsive to build such a methodology (which has not been done until the end of the project duration).

As result of this process the partners agreed on not to give any ECVET points, but to provide the “Legal Framework” and the “Duration” of the qualification.

Example from the German Learning outcome description for “Eldery care”:

Legal Framework:

- *Curriculum valid for the federal state of Saxony: Sächsisches Staatsministerium für Kultus (Hrsg.): Lehrpläne für die Berufsfachschule: Altenpfleger/Altenpflegerin, Fachlicher Bereich, Klassenstufen 1 bis 3, August 2003*
- *Law for Practicing Geriatric Nursing: Gesetz über die Berufe in der Altenpflege (Altenpflegegesetz - AltPflG) vom 17.11.2000, zuletzt geändert am 20. Dezember 2011*
- *Training and Assessment Regulations for the profession „Geriatric Nurse“: Ausbildungs- und Prüfungsverordnung für den Beruf der Altenpflegerin und des Altenpflegers (Altenpflege-Ausbildungs- und Prüfungsverordnung - AltPflAPrV) vom 26. November 2002, zuletzt geändert am 6. Dezember 2011*

Duration of training:

- *3 school years: 2.340 hours (à 45 minuts) of school and 2.500 hours (à 60 minutes) of practical training*