



ECVET Peer Learning Seminar in Slovakia

Using ECVET Principles in Work Based Learning with Special Focus on Involvement of all relevant Stakeholders

9 – 10 October 2017, Bratislava

Participating countries: AT, BG, CZ, DE, HR, HU, PL, RO, SI, SK

Report from the PLA Seminar

Background

Recently, high-quality work-based learning is central to European education and training policies as a means of improving employability and increasing economic competitiveness, while stressing quality assurance and permeability of the systems.

In 2016, the European Commission adopted the New Skills Agenda for Europe, which highlights the European Commission's goals to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness. To achieve these goals, 10 initiatives were announced as steps "to make sure people acquire the skills they need to thrive both in the labour market and in wider society". Among the initiatives which aim at "making VET a first choice", plans include revision of the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) as well as the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET). Other initiatives are directed towards increased skills transparency and improvement of tools, which will allow Europeans to better document their learning paths and make informed decisions on their careers – the features which are embedded in the heart of ECVET.

Awareness about the ECVET principles among various stakeholders has become currently even more important in the light of launching the initiative ErasmusPro, which will support long-term international mobility of apprentices and requires tools to plan and document learning abroad towards its recognition and accumulation in the home institution.

Content

In this context, the seminar *Using ECVET Principles in Work Based Learning with Special Focus on Involvement of all relevant Stakeholders* took place on 9 – 10 October 2017 in Bratislava, as a part of the series of seminars organised by the Central-European Erasmus+ National Agencies. The seminar was realised in a positive and constructive atmosphere towards ECVET as well as other European transparency tools, keeping in mind challenges and obstacles of their use in different contexts.

The seminar centred on three key topics:

- 1. Promoting the LO approach in WBL – communication techniques on how to involve different stakeholders groups**
- 2. ECVET elements in WBL in geographical mobility, cross-border co-operation – exchange of experience**
- 3. ECVET in in-company training: how employers can use ECVET tools in training of their employees. Overcoming the distaste of employers for new innovative systems.**

Participants' expectations varied from using and formulation of learning outcomes, their recognition and transfer, utilisation of ECVET tools in different contexts, involvement and awareness of employers in using ECVET, recognition of learning outside the school, quality assurance, using ECVET principles in validation and recognition, exchange of good practice examples, etc.

In the introductory part, participants obtained an overview of recent developments and key concepts related to work-based learning. The year 2020 will become an important milestone to finish reflections and revisions of the EU legislation relating to EQF, Europass, ECVET and EQAVET. In ECVET, change of the concept of using ECVET in a similar way as ECTS is expected, but the main principles of transferability of learning outcomes and supporting mobility will remain.

The survey conducted by the Slovak team during the preparatory phase of the seminar aimed at the questions regarding three aspects of ECVET implementation: 1. participation of stakeholders, 2. qualifications and 3. forms of WBL provided in participating countries. Its results indicated some ideas and conclusions which were echoed also in presentations and discussions of participants, mainly the role of ECVET in interlinking schools and companies, as well as importance of employers involvement in understanding and using ECVET.

Topic 1: Promoting the LO approach in WBL – communication techniques on how to involve different stakeholders groups (how to facilitate involvement of different stakeholder groups, especially employers)

The presentations focused on main concepts relating to work-based learning (apprenticeships, school-based VET with on-the-job training periods, WBL that is integrated in a school-based programme) and the conditions as success factors of effective WBL identified as:

- National governance, legal framework, quality assurance;
- Securing enterprises' commitment based on the conviction on the return on investment that the WBL can deliver;
- Structured and continuous dialogue and systematic collaboration between stakeholders (networks of VET schools and employers);
- Guidance and support to learners, VET providers, enterprises (information, tool kits, information meetings, etc.);
- Learning outcomes approach (all WBL processes should have a clear pedagogical purpose, defined learning outcomes and specified objectives).

Several good practice examples were presented highlighting the results from international projects as well as system changes in national systems of education and training introducing dual education (Romania, Bulgaria) or using ECVET concepts (Czech Republic). The need of close cooperation between schools and companies in order to

define realistic and up-to-date labour market needs and incorporate them in the teaching/learning process was stressed.

Topic 2: ECVET elements in WBL in geographical mobility, cross-border cooperation – exchange of experience

This section presented international projects which focused at enhancing cooperation between main actors in VET, as well as implementation of the ECVET principles. The participants presented new ways of cooperation between schools and businesses (the Slovak consortium of secondary VET schools and enhanced local networking), direct involvement of companies in understanding and defining learning outcomes (Croatia) and development of joint curricula (Slovenia).

Topic 3: ECVET in in-company training: how employers can use ECVET tools in training of their employees. Overcoming the distaste of employers for new innovative systems.

The third thematic segment of the programme aimed at the key barrier which often hampers understanding between the world of education and business - different way of thinking and languages used by these two world. The good practice examples pointed out their strong points in overcoming barriers between these two worlds and bringing the business world's attention to applying ECVET elements in the business processed. They showed the necessity to find appropriate ways to remove these obstacles and barriers for the benefit of both parties – the “need for changing the system from a push of tools from education to the world of work into a pull situation of companies requiring and using education world tools in their processes”. The presented experiences confirmed the necessity of direct involvement of employers and explaining benefits of using ECVET and other tools, as well as their support in better understanding of the processes through trainings, promotion and communication of the concepts as well as creating support tools, such as handbook, databases, etc.

Workshops

Workshop 1 - Promoting the LO approach in WBL – communication techniques on how to involve different stakeholders groups (how to facilitate involvement of different stakeholder groups, especially employers)

In Workshop 1, participants discussed the role of all stakeholders in VET mobility projects and techniques and ways of better involving employers in VET mobility projects while taking into account areas where improvement is needed. Participants identified possible barriers and challenges which VET mobility projects face, including the need of further support for students' trainers and mentors in companies without pedagogical background, more active involvement of students in designing learning outcomes and clear communication between employers and teachers in setting realistic goals in mobility projects.

Benefits of the active role of employers in mobility and their direct participation in designing the content (LOs) and assessment procedures were confirmed. However, participants also stressed the necessity to find proper ways and language for marketing the

benefits of learning outcomes and international mobility of apprentices to companies and their staff involved in mobilities.

The discussion on the new long-term apprentices mobility programme ErasmusPro opened various questions which need to be considered, including relevance of the long-term mobility to IVET and the age of students, possible challenges in its smooth incorporation in the course of studies. Understanding the benefits of long-term mobility by employers of the sending country and easy transferability and appropriate assessment procedures were highlighted as a key for successful long-term mobility.

Workshop 2 - ECVET elements in WBL in geographical mobility, cross border co-operation – exchange of experience

The Workshop 2 pointed out various stages of implementation of WBL in the countries involved (from advanced apprenticeship to project and experimentation) and low mindset for WBL due to the lack of historical tradition, which results in considering secondary VET the “second choice” for pupils. International mobility is seen as an important element to cover gaps in technology or curricula, to obtain a qualification (or its part) and to support social inclusion of disadvantaged students.

ECVET is a tool to support mobility and its transparency in terms of using learning outcomes, as well as establishing common procedures; however, different levels of implementation of ECVET as well as other tools on national levels (e.g. missing NQFs, LOs in school curricula, qualification standards, etc.) lead to differences in recognition (especially in non-school environment).

Romania was presented as a good practice example: mobility is used as an incentive for NEETs; the Europass Supplement is issued together with the formal (school) certificate. Romania also pilots an independent recognition and validation agency.

Participants acknowledged the importance of the ECVET transparency tools (Memorandum of Understanding, Learning Agreement) to ensure the quality of the mobility actions as well as its assessment. In addition, the need to promote its better understanding and acceptance by the business world was highlighted.

Workshop 3 - ECVET in in-company training. How employers can use ECVET tools in training of their employees? Overcoming the distaste of employers for new innovative systems.

In the Workshop 3, discussion centred on the attitude of employers towards using ECVET in in-company training and reasons of their “distaste” to use ECVET.

Participants identified several reasons for which companies do not accept ECVET as a tool of transparency and transferability of training results, such as historical tradition, education systems, size of the companies and sectors, regulations, rapid changes and developments in the business world, etc. At the same time, they highlighted the importance of right communication and language to convince employers of ECVET benefits, simplification of practical use of the ECVET concept and involving companies in defining learning outcomes to overcome the clash of cultures between the school and work.

In the light of the upcoming technological changes, ECVET can be seen as an advantage for the companies in the future labour market as a tool to recognise skills and competences obtained in work experience and help to find proper employees.



The next peer-learning seminar will be organised in 2017 in Hungary.

Mgr. Ľubica Gáľlová

Bratislava, 30 October 2017