

SME MASTER Plus



SME MASTER Plus

Testing the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) in the context of the Master Craftsperson Qualification

Guidelines



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1. Introduction

Transnational mobility as a core element of European educational cooperation

Promoting transnational mobility in initial and continuing vocational education and training (IVET and CVET) is a key goal of the Copenhagen process, which is about enhancing European cooperation in vocational education and training (VET). This becomes especially obvious in the [Europe 2020 strategy](#) - a European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth - which was adopted in 2010 and whose educational policy flagship initiative significantly bears the title [Youth on the Move](#). In this context, transnational mobility is explicitly understood as an efficient instrument with which young people can improve their employability, acquire new professional skills, and broaden their foreign language and intercultural competences.

Benefits of transnational mobility

However, to find as broad acceptance as possible, transnational mobility has to offer specific added value for all stakeholders within the framework of VET and CVET. This applies equally to companies, employees and trainees.

Companies, for example, will best meet the increased demands of a globalised world economy by employing internationally and interculturally experienced staff. Periods spent for learning and/or working abroad provide an excellent opportunity to qualify staff internationally. At the same time, mobility projects of the companies' own skilled workers also enable business contacts to be established abroad and new markets opened up. In addition, companies can present themselves as attractive employers. Especially in times of impending skilled labour shortage it is helpful to gain good trainees and skilled labour, motivate them and achieve their long-term loyalty.

For young people, the acquisition of international and intercultural skills is a major prerequisite for a successful professional career. The best way to acquire these skills and stand out from other candidates on the job market is a stay abroad. As well as improving foreign language command during stays abroad, young people learn about new work techniques and procedures, new forms of work and company organisation, and about new products. They get first-hand experience of what it means to learn, work and not least to be competitive in an international work environment. This is a unique wealth of experience which will be a benefit for young people in their future professional but also personal development.

Problems in the implementation of transnational mobility

The concrete implementation of transnational mobility in VET is however associated with considerable administrative and organisational efforts. The following needs to be done, for example:

find suitable educational institutions and partner companies abroad; conclude agreements between training and host institution about the skills taught; clarify insurance issues; apply for relevant funds; and much more. As a rule, there is a lack of appropriate counselling and support structures, but also of a corresponding system to facilitate the organisation, realisation and follow-up of mobility projects.

Another ‘obstacle to mobility’ is the lack of transparency of qualifications within the EU and their facilitated Europe-wide recognition. Barriers are due to differences in educational systems with different legal bases, responsibilities, educational profiles and procedures to assess and certify learning outcomes.

European transparency instruments

In order to make qualifications understandable across Europe for the future and accordingly to make it easier to spend phases of learning abroad, the European Commission recommended that the EU member states should apply a set of instruments for implementation in order to support the promotion of transnational mobility in IVET and CVET. These instruments are mutually dependent here. The key elements of this so-called ‘EU VET package’ are as follows:

- **[Europass documents](#)**. The standardised and Europe-wide uniform Europass documents comprise the Europass Curriculum Vitae (CV), the Europass Language Passport, the Europass Certificate Supplements and the [Europass Mobility](#)¹. These documents enable the EU citizens to document all the skills and qualifications they have acquired in the past - no matter in what way.
- **[European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning](#)** (EQF). The EQF is a European reference framework which links the different national qualifications systems across education sectors. In practice it acts as an ‘instrument of translation’ which makes national qualification profiles more understandable across Europe. On the one hand it supports learners and employees who want to complete periods of learning and/or work abroad. On the other, the EQF provides initial basic information for employers about an applicant’s qualification level.
- **[European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET](#)** (EQAVET). EQAVET is a reference instrument which supports EU member states in promoting and observing the continuous improvement of their VET systems by means of joint European benchmarks. The main objectives pursued with EQAVET include the enhancement of quality of VET within the EU

¹ Within the framework of the European initiative New Skills for New Jobs it is planned to further develop Europass Mobility in a skills passport, in which informally and non-formally acquired learning achievements will be documented.

and the creation of transparency and coherence and mutual trust between EU member states.

- [European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training](#) (ECVET, see Chapter 3)..

Piloting of ECVET

It is from ECVET in particular that major impetus is expected for the promotion of transnational mobility in VET. By 2012 ECVET is being piloted by EU member states on a voluntary basis. Then it will be implemented step by step. To support this process, since late 2008 the European Commission has funded [11 pilot projects](#) which will lead to the development of concrete suggestions to implement the application of ECVET in various areas of IVET and CVET.

Objectives of the SME MASTER Plus project

One of these pilot projects is [SME MASTER Plus](#), in which the [German Confederation of Skilled Crafts](#) (Zentralverband des Deutschen Handwerks or ZDH) in cooperation with partner institutions from [Austria](#), [France](#), [Norway](#) and [Slovenia](#) is piloting application within the framework of training for master craftsperson. The aim is to make an active contribution to the 'Europeanisation' of the master craftsperson qualification, as international skills are becoming increasingly important in respect to the continually growing number of skilled craft enterprises with foreign trade contacts. In addition it is envisioned that a positive long-term effect can be achieved on the mobility rate in IVET. Experience shows that master craftspersons who have completed periods of learning and/or work abroad tend to encourage their trainees' learning mobility more intensely.

SME MASTER Plus builds on the experiences of the European pilot project SME MASTER from 2007, where major findings were obtained about the practical application of ECVET for the first time.

The master craftsperson qualifications studied in SME MASTER Plus are:

- Master baker
- Master florist
- Master hairdresser
- Master joiner

2. Master Craftsperson Qualification

What is a master craftsperson?

The master craftsperson qualification is an entrepreneur's training in occupations in engineering, industry, trade and art. It is therefore a qualification profile of the CVET sector.

The title 'master craftsperson' – Meister (D), Maître d'artisan (F), Mester (NO), Mojster (Si) – is awarded upon successful completion of the master craftsperson examination. As a rule, admission to the master craftsperson examination requires successful completion of an IVET programme in a relevant occupation which demands formal training. Successful acquisition of the master craftsperson qualification enables holders, in particular, to manage an SME or a craft enterprise on a self-employed basis. Furthermore, a master craftsperson can also work as employee in an executive function in a company.

Master craftspersons are qualified to work in a specialist field of work and knowledge which is represented by the respective skilled craft. This field comprises - taking into account safety and health-related precautions - well-founded theoretical knowledge and practical skills in a skilled craft occupation. The master craftsperson training also helps develop the ability to integrate the latest findings into the individual qualification profile for exercising the occupation.

In short, due to their qualification, *master craftspersons* are

1. specialists in a specialised field of engineering, industry, trade and art,
2. IVET trainers at companies,
3. and entrepreneurs.

Core competences of the master craftsperson qualification

Basically the master craftsperson qualification comprises the following abilities and skills:

- the establishment and independent management of skilled crafts enterprises, with special consideration of occupation-related legal provisions, technical standards and acknowledged rules of technology,
- fulfilment of technical, commercial and business-related tasks with relevance for decision-making,

- personnel management and motivation,
- planning, organisation and implementation of the training of young skilled workers,
- designing of work and business processes at own responsibility according to the specifications of the respective customer order, as a rule the drafting, calculation, planning, conception and costing of customer orders and associated productive, technical and creative executions according to given quality standards
- adjustment of the product and service portfolio to changing national and international markets and technical standards,
- integration of new procedural, information and communication methods into own workflows and service offers.

Transnational mobility in the master craftsperson training

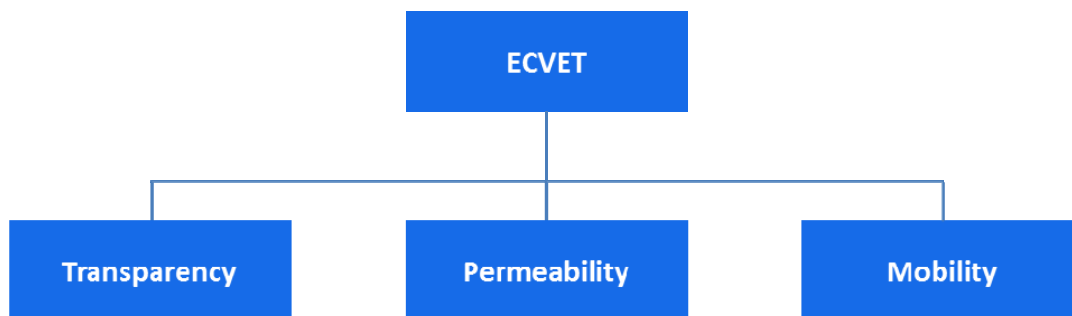
The growing demand for skilled workers with international know-how is not limited to globally active groups. Small and medium-sized companies are also increasingly active on international markets. In the mainly locally or regionally concentrated skilled crafts sector alone, for example, foreign trade relations have more than doubled over the past 20 years. This in turn has had the result that the companies' work and business processes increasingly necessitate the application of international skills. In skilled crafts enterprises this requirement first and foremost affects the company management, i.e. the master craftsperson.

To gather experience abroad during the master craftsperson training is essentially a traditional approach. Over many years, for example, there was the tradition that journeypersons went abroad for a period of up to three years to learn new innovative work techniques. It was only with the emergence of modern-day nation states and the associated national rules on VET in the skilled crafts sector in the 19th and early 20th century that the international aspect of master craftsperson training was pushed more and more into the background. To some extent ECVET offers the opportunity to link to the 'transnational tradition' of master craftsperson training.

3. European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)

On 9th April 2008 the proposal for a recommendation of the European Commission on the establishment of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) was published, which is to form the framework for improving the **transparency** of qualifications and facilitating the transfer of credits in Europe. The main objectives of ECVET are to promote **transnational mobility** of trainees and young skilled workers for educational purposes and improve **permeability** between national qualifications systems. This aims to actively contribute to implementing lifelong learning.

Figure 1: Main objectives of ECVET



It is of course also possible to conduct stays abroad within the framework of training programmes without applying ECVET. Learners can now already go abroad for a certain period to continue their VET programme there temporarily. **ECVET's added value** however is that it makes 'tools' available which aim to facilitate the implementation of mobility stays and the recognition of learning outcomes obtained abroad in the home country.

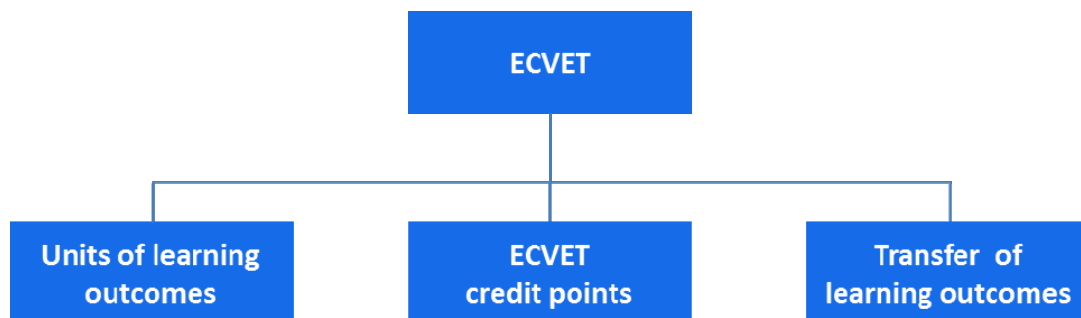
3.1 Principles and instruments of ECVET

ECVET is based on the principle of mutual trust and comprises a set of instruments which facilitate

- the learning outcome-oriented description of qualifications,
- the structuring of qualifications into so-called ‘units of learning outcomes’,
- the implementation of individual periods of learning abroad within the framework of institutional mobility partnerships between the offices responsible for VET and/or providers of programmes,
- as well as the assessment, recognition and transfer of learning outcomes acquired abroad.

In a slightly simplified form we could speak of **the three pillars of ECVET**.

Figure2 : Three pillars of ECVET



What are learning outcomes?

Similarly to the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF), ECVET builds on a learning outcome-oriented approach. However, whereas the EQF serves as an instrument of translation to relate qualifications across eight levels in the whole of Europe, ECVET is about assessing, recognising and awarding credits for individually acquired learning outcomes.

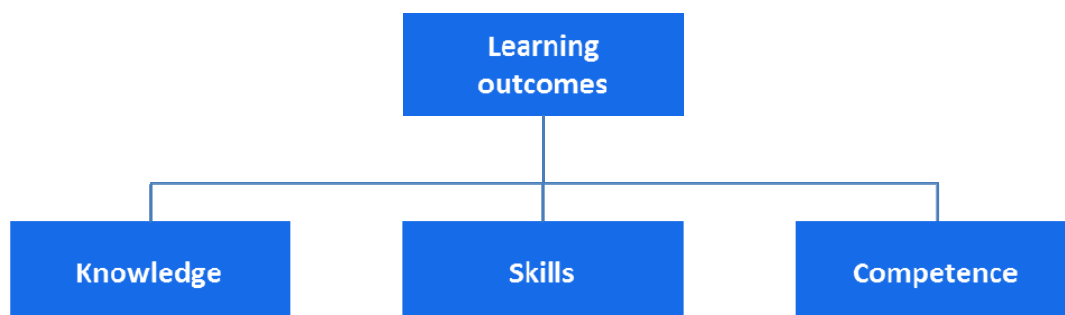
Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process and which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence (so-called EQF descriptors):

Knowledge means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. It 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 mean the ability to apply knowledge and to use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In context of the EQF, skills are described as cognitive and practical.

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.

Figure 3: Elements of learning outcomes



In the future, the description of a qualification will no longer be based only on input criteria but on identifiable learning outcomes. Consequently this outcome approach no longer primarily focuses on where and for how long someone has learned something but on what he is actually able to do at the end of an educational stage.

Ultimately learning outcomes are a type of European ‘educational Esperanto’ with which different qualifications from European education systems can become more understandable. In this way it is considerably easier to identify common denominators than by comparing existing national curricula, which fundamentally brings to light the differences.

The following must be taken into account when formulating learning outcomes:

- the use of active verbs,
- the specification and contextualisation of the active verb,
- the avoidance of vague formulations.

How are learning outcomes structured?

In ECVET, learning outcomes are pooled together in so-called units of learning outcomes. A unit of learning outcomes consists of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence that is necessary to fulfill a professional task at work.

According to the ECVET recommendation, the specification for a unit of learning outcomes includes the following information:

- the generic title of the unit,
- the generic title of the qualification (or qualifications) to which the unit relates, where applicable,
- the reference of the qualification according to the EQF
- the learning outcomes contained in the unit,
- the ECVET points associated with the unit.

The units that make up a qualification should be:

- legible and understandable,
- constructed and organised in a coherent way,
- constructed in a way that enables discrete assessment and validation of learning outcomes.

The total number of units a qualification comprises depends on the complexity of a qualification.

ECVET points

ECVET points are quantitative statements about the weight of a unit of learning outcomes with regard to the overall qualification. They describe in numerical form the 'overall weight' of learning outcomes in a qualification and the relative weight of individual units in relation to the overall qualification. Disconnected from the qualification and units to which ECVET credit points relate they have no value per se. According to the ECVET draft recommendation of the European Commission, 60 credit points equal a one-year stage of learning in a formal learning context.

But as none of the countries participating in the project uses points to transfer learning outcomes in the national context, ECVET-points will not be transferred within SME MASTER Plus.

3.2 Application of ECVET within the framework of transnational mobility

To successfully prepare and implement periods of learning abroad, all involved institutions and individuals first of all need to mutually clarify central aspects of the period of learning. The objective is that the learning outcomes acquired abroad can be recognised in the home country as part of the qualification. This makes it necessary to conclude prior agreements through which a climate of mutual trust is established.

In ECVET the following instruments are foreseen here:

- Memorandum of understanding
- Learning agreement

Memorandum of understanding

Memoranda of understanding (partnership agreements) form the institutional framework of mobility partnerships. These are voluntary agreements in which two or more institutions which are responsible for IVET and/or CVET in their home country (e.g. chambers, VET schools etc.) specify in what way learning outcomes assessed by one institution can be recognised by the partner institution.

A memorandum of understanding includes:

- the relevant contact information of all involved institutions (training companies, chambers, education centres, vocational schools, etc.),
- the functions and responsibilities of all institutions involved in the mobility partnership,
- criteria and procedures of assessment, validation, recognition and transfer of learning outcomes and learning units,
- criteria and procedures of quality assurance.

In this context, quality assurance is of special importance. Quality enhances the attractiveness of mobility projects and is therefore the key factor that contributes a sustainable increase in the participation of education providers and learners in transnational mobility in the future.

Learning agreement

The learning agreement is concluded between the home and hosting institutions and the individual who takes part in mobility measures. It specifies the particular conditions for an individual period of mobility.

The learning agreement should lay down the following:

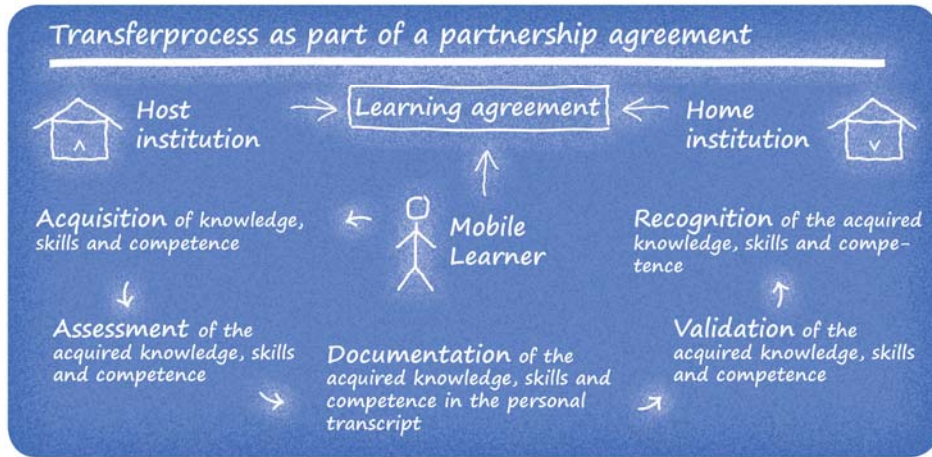
- data about the learner who is completing a mobility period,
- information about the training programme,
- information about home and hosting institution,
- the duration of the mobility period,
- learning outcomes expected to be achieved in the course of the mobility project,
- information about the assessment, validation and recognition of learning outcomes.

Transfer of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes acquired in the host country are then, in a three step transfer process recognised in the home country:

- **Assessment:** The learning outcomes achieved are assessed by the hosting institution in the host country. The assessment is recorded in a learner's personal transcript. This transcript is sent to the sending (home) institution after the mobility period.
- **Validation:** The home institution compares the personal transcript with the learning outcomes laid down in the learning agreement. Then it is examined if the identified learning outcomes can be accepted as part of the envisaged qualification.
- **Recognition:** Finally the learning outcomes acquired abroad are formally confirmed and recognised.

Figure 4: Transfer of learning outcomes within a mobility partnership



Source: 3s / ibw

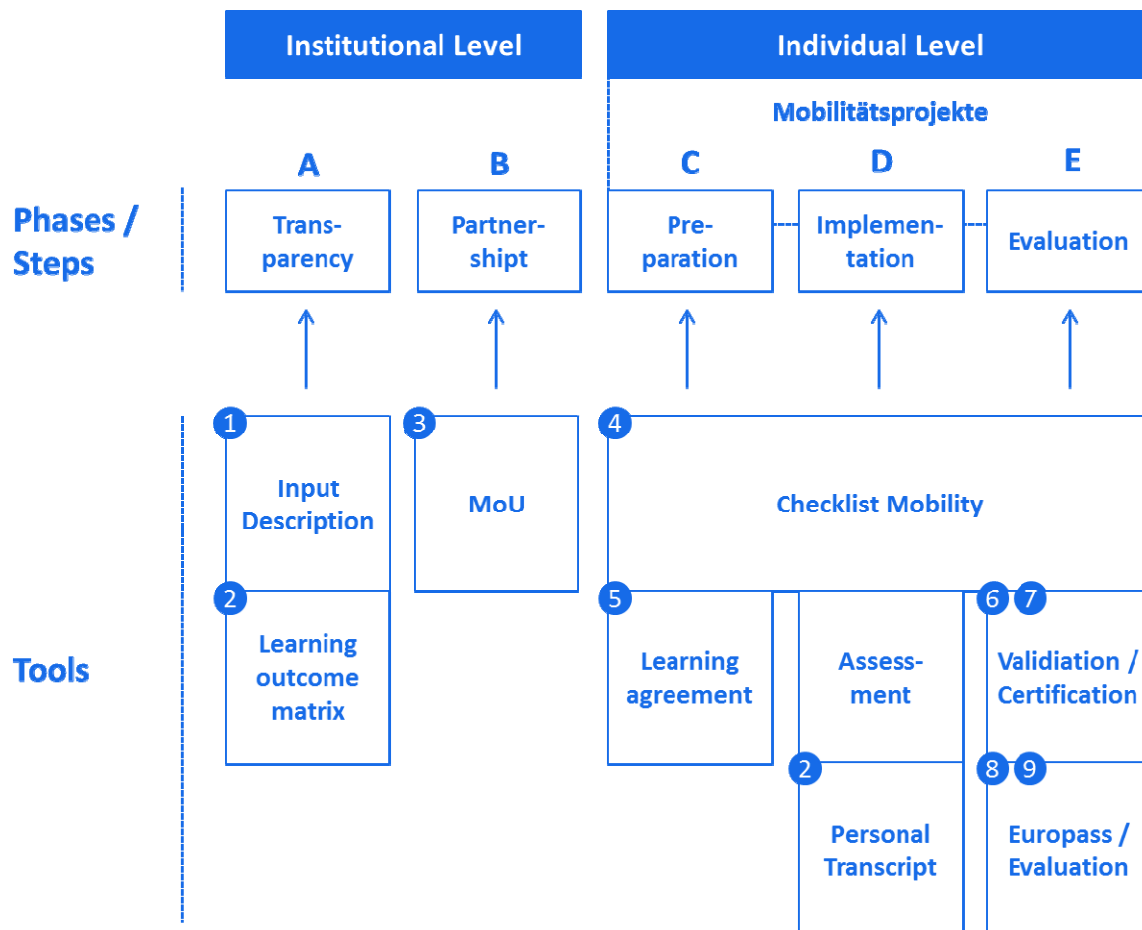
4. SME Master Plus method within transnational mobility

4.1 Introduction

The ECVET principles and instruments can support the organisation and implementation of the mobility process. Thanks to the outcome-oriented description of qualifications – or the parts of a qualification that are of relevance for mobility – in **units of learning outcomes** (☞ Chapter 3.2), a ‘common language’ is created which forms the basis for Europe-wide communication between sending and host institutions. All agreements which have been concluded are laid down in the **documents on the mobility process** (☞ Chapter 3.2) in order to ensure recognition of learning outcomes obtained abroad in the home country. This has the aim to ensure that the mobile learner does not have to retake exams or face prolonged training time in the home country.

As shown in Figure 5, the mobility process comprises a series of phases or steps - both on the institutional and the individual level where the ECVET ‘tools’ can be used. These phases and tools will be outlined on the following pages. Subsequent chapters aim to present and explain those phases in detail based on the experiences made in the SME MASTER Plus project.

Figure 5: ECVET tools as part of the mobility process



Source: SME MASTER Plus

Institutional Level

VET institutions such as companies or VET-schools or training centres which plan to give their apprentices or students the opportunity to take part in mobility stays initially need to search for appropriate partner institutions abroad. For this purpose it is necessary to present the qualification which is provided in the home country in a **transparent [A]** manner (► Chapter 4.2). This can be done, first of all, simply by describing so-called **input factors (1)**. Here aspects such as training times, places of learning, examination elements and entitlements are listed with the objective of comparing them with the foreign qualification. The comparability of such descriptions is limited however: even

where qualifications have the same name and input factors overlap, different contents - that is: knowledge, skills and competence – may be ‘hidden’ behind the qualifications.

Thanks to its structured descriptions, ECVET enables a better comparison of qualification contents. These can, for example, be presented on the basis of learning outcomes in the form of a **learning outcome matrix** (②), which shows units on the vertical axis and learning outcomes (acquired in ascending order) on the horizontal axis. The matrix format makes it considerably easier to visualise common features as well as differences between two qualifications.

Where sufficient transparency concerning the qualification has been established, the **partnership [B]** should be formalised between the institutions by signing a **partnership agreement** (memorandum of understanding, MoU, ③, ➔ Chapter 4.3). This is a framework agreement in which the sending and host institution mutually accept the applicable criteria and procedures for quality assurance, appraisal, validation and recognition of learning outcomes for the purpose of transferring them into the respective other learning context.

Individual Level

The partnership agreement lays the foundation for the organisation of individual mobility stays. Every mobility project consists of three phases: preparation, implementation and follow-up or evaluation of the mobility project. To obtain an overview of all the steps in a mobility process it can be very helpful to use **mobility checklists** (⑤) with precise task descriptions.

In the phase of **preparation [C]** a specific **learning agreement** (LA, ④, ➔ Chapter 4.4) must be concluded between the participants in the mobility stay (the people responsible for the mobility stay in the two training institutions, the learner and his/her parents if appropriate). These agreements include details about the individual mobile learner, the duration of the stays abroad and information about the stakeholders’ spheres of competence. It is also important that the learning agreement specifies the learning outcomes the mobile learner already has or which he/she wants to acquire in the host institution. The learning outcome matrix, which is prepared beforehand, can make communication on this point considerably easier.

In the course of the **implementation [D]** of a mobility stay it is vital that knowledge, skills and competence are imparted which lead to the acquisition of the learning outcomes as stipulated in the learning agreement. These learning outcomes must be **assessed** and documented by the host institution.

In the course of the **evaluation [E]**, the **personal transcript** (PT, ⑥, ➔ Chapter 4.5) is used for documentation purposes; the PT lays down the assessed knowledge, skills and competence the learner can prove to have acquired in the course of his/her stay abroad. With its signature the sending institution **validates** (⑥, ➔ Chapter 4.5) the acquisition of these learning outcomes, which means it recognises them as a part of the qualification in the home country. Optionally it is also possible to issue

a **certificate of attendance** (🕒) to the learner. Moreover, to document the experiences made in the course of mobility stays, the relevant **Europass** documents (📄, in particular the Europass Mobility document and the Europass Language Passport) can be filled in. At the end of every mobility project it should be **evaluated** (📊) to ensure continuous improvement of the quality of work.

4.2 Step 1: Transparency

Introduction

Mutual ignorance of VET programmes and their learning contents represents a major obstacle in the implementation of transnational mobility. It is difficult to identify common denominators for mobility projects only by mutually comparing national curricula, for example. Therefore mobility requires the use of **transparency instruments** because transparency constitutes a key prerequisite for transnational mobility.

With ECVET it is possible to present qualifications in a more transparent - that is: internationally more comprehensible - manner. This in turn creates the operational basis for more cross-border mobility in VET. If therefore two potential partner institutions want to offer mobility stays to their trainees or students, they need to find a **'common language'** first.

At the beginning of the 'search for the common language' in the SME MASTER Plus project there was the description of the master craftsperson qualifications which are offered in the project countries. This description was in the form of so-called **input factors**. In this process, every partner institution characterised its national master craftsperson qualification by using the following key data:

- Name / title of qualification
- Level in the national qualifications framework / ISCED level
- Legal bases
- Access requirements
- Authorities / bodies / institutions responsible for the qualification
- Information about examination modalities
- Duration of VET programmes
- Information about VET programmes

These are suggestions; this list can be expanded if necessary.

Although this description provides a good **overview of the master craftsperson qualifications** available in the individual countries, it does not give any information about the learning outcomes taught as part of a specific master craftsperson programme.

Therefore a **learning outcome matrix** was prepared within the framework of SME MASTER Plus for the master craftsperson qualifications baker, hairdresser, joiner and florist, in this way creating a 'common language' for the organisation, realisation and follow-up of the mobility stay.

Learning outcome matrix

The learning outcome matrix² lists all the learning outcomes - that is: knowledge, skills and competence - in a structured format.


In this context, so-called **units of learning outcomes (units)** were identified in a first step. In line with the ECVET Recommendation, a unit is a component of a qualification which consists of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence. In the SME MASTER Plus project, a unit comprises different competences necessary to carry out core tasks in the master craftsperson's activity field, which covers both the part 'commerce and business' and the trade-specific 'expert or technical part'. This helped identify between 10 and 18 units depending on the qualification. The scope of a unit in turn depends on the activity field's complexity.

For the master baker qualification, for example, 11 units of learning outcomes were defined which could be identified in all project partner countries. Every country was additionally given the possibility to formulate country-specific units, these are units which, as well as building on the common 'European denominator', also form a part of the national qualification. In the case of the 'master baker' learning outcome matrix these are two country-specific units. This made it possible to visualise common features and differences in the composition of the qualifications' units.

The following figure shows the cover page of the 'master baker' learning outcome matrix. By way of an introduction this cover page lists all the units of learning outcomes. This includes both occupation-specific units such as the "production of bread and biscuits" and business/commercial units such as the "foundation, management and organisation of skilled craft enterprises".

²) The learning outcome matrix builds on the principles of the VQTS model (<http://www.vocationalqualification.net/vqts/>). For more detailed information about this model see: Luomi-Messerer, Karin and Markowitsch, Jörg (2006): VQTS model. A proposal for a structured description of work-related competences and their acquisition. Vienna: 3s research laboratory. Download: <http://www.vocationalqualification.net/mmedia/2008.05.07/1210162936.pdf> (18.05.2011).

Figure 6: Overview of the units of the master baker qualification

Title of qualification	Master baker		SME MASTER Plus 
Units of learning outcomes	U1	Accounting and controlling	
	U2	Budgeting, costing and financing	
	U3	Foundation, management and organisation of skilled craft enterprises	
	U4	HR management	
	U5	Vocational education and training	
	U6	Marketing and sales	
	U7	Production of bread and biscuits	
	U8	Production of cakes and pastries	
	U9	Hygiene and food safety	
	U10	Quality management and occupational safety	
	U11	Occupation-specific management	
	U12	Production of small dishes and snacks (country-specific)	
	U13	Communication in the international context (country-specific)	

Source: SME MASTER Plus us

Based on the national curricula but also taking work and business processes into account that are typical for the occupations under study, in a further step the contents were formulated down to the smallest detail and in a holistic manner in the form of **learning outcomes**. This means that in the SME MASTER Plus project a deliberate decision was made against subdividing learning contents into the three EQF descriptors knowledge, skills and competence. This meant it was possible to prevent redundancies as well as allocation problems, particularly between the descriptors 'skills' and 'competence'. In addition, this holistic approach largely meets the principle of professional competence and capacity.

To additionally visualise the learner's competence development, learning outcomes were presented in the form of successive **steps of learning outcome**. This progressive presentation of learning outcomes primarily serves the purpose of promoting learning mobility. In this way it is possible to visualise a learner's performance level also while he/she is still taking part in the VET programme, which in turn makes it easier to outline the contents of individual mobility projects. The number of learning outcome steps is linked with the learning outcome's complexity. As a result it may happen, for ex-

ample, that a (less complex) learning outcome does not need to be subdivided into steps, whereas several steps can be defined for another learning outcome. In addition, two learning outcomes can also be listed ‘in parallel’, which means they are not in a progressive relation to one other but are on the same learning level. Both can, however, be the preliminary phase of another learning outcome/other learning outcomes.

The following figure shows the ‘Vocational education and training’ unit of the ‘master baker’ learning outcome matrix, in which the learning outcomes have been arranged over three steps (from left to right).

Figure 7: Learning outcomes of the ‘Vocational education and training’ unit

Title of Qualification	Master baker				
Title of unit	Vocational education and training				
ECVET credit points	AT	DE	FR	NO	SI
Learning outcomes					
He/she is able <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to name the legal provisions and collective agreement regulations concerning apprentices, to prepare a training contract 	He/she is able to examine the company’s suitability for providing training to apprentices.		He/she is able <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to organise company-based training, to draw up a training plan, to organise training cooperation projects with part-time vocational schools, training centres and other educational institutions 		
	He/she is able <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to assess young people’s readiness for training, to recruit apprentices independently 		He/she is able to prepare apprentices for exams.		
	He/she is able <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to train and instruct apprentices both technically and pedagogically, to respond to the particular needs of young people in a responsible manner. 		He/she is able to resolve conflict with or between apprentices.		

Source: SME MASTER Plus

To ensure that the learning outcome matrix is as easy to read as possible, the units and learning outcomes are largely described without stating any technical details or other specifications. This also means that a learning outcome matrix cannot replace the national curriculum. Therefore it may be necessary to add national specifications to units and also individual learning outcomes in complementary annexes, such as specific working techniques, the use of specific tools, materials, etc.

ECVET credit points

According to the ECVET Recommendation, ECVET credit points or learning credits aim to give additional information in numeric form about a learning unit's relative weight in relation to the entire qualification. SME MASTER Plus could not meet the convention of awarding 60 ECVET credit points for one year in a formal learning context as proposed in the ECVET Recommendation because the master craftsperson qualification is in some countries acquired completely or largely via non-formal pathways. The development of a classification of how these informal and non-formal shares of learning might be put in a relation with formal ones would have gone far beyond the scope of this project.

For this reason, a pragmatic interim solution was chosen at first where credit points were to fulfil the function of a proportional indicator. Based on expert interviews, the project partners spread the total number of ECVET credit points (100 = 100%) separately over the various units of learning outcomes in order to visualise a unit's 'relative weight' in relation to the master craftsperson qualification in the respective partner country. Although this allowed conclusions - even though only to a limited extent - to be drawn on the different weighting of a unit in the various master craftsperson programmes, this did not reveal any actual added value for the promotion of mobility projects. In addition, some doubts were raised about the validity of the results of the subjective approach of expert interviews. Therefore this procedure was also abandoned (at least for the time being) although the 'proportional approach' seems more suited for VET than orientation towards the workload.

Another function of the ECVET credit points - that is their accumulation and transfer to the learning context of the home country - was completely discarded because there exists no credit point system in VET - and therefore also in master craftsperson programmes - in any of the partner countries at present. However, as soon as it is planned to introduce credit points or when countries which already have a credit point system want to use this classification, these can be used. But the assigning of points must be conducted according to the respective country's competent authorities and in their exclusive responsibility.

4.3 Step 2: Partnership

ECVET fosters transnational mobility in the VET, based on **sustainable partnerships or networks**. In order to develop these sustainable partnerships, it is recommended to arrange a partnership agreement (Memorandum of Understanding, MoU).

Who is concerned?

The partnership agreement (Memorandum of Understanding, MoU) could be arranged at institutional level between so-called competent institutions, which “are empowered, in their own setting, to award qualifications or units or to give credit for achieved learning outcomes for transfer and validation” .

If a partnership agreement is concluded between the competent institution in country A and the competent institution in country B, a training providers such as school, training centres or companies in country A should be able to refer back to it when organizing individual mobility projects with its partner organisation in country B. The partnership agreement should then also state clear rules about the recognition of the learning outcomes a learner acquired during mobility when back in the home country.

In practice, the partnership agreement is more often signed at the so called intermediary level by institutions involved in the organisation of mobility. They could be competent institutions for recognition, but not necessarily. In the testing phase of SME MASTER Plus, the partnership agreement was signed between the French Chamber of Skilled Crafts of Ille-et-Vilaine and the Slovenian Chamber of Skilled Crafts.

Steps in the preparation of the partner agreement

The following elements should be reflected upon between the partners before signing a partnership agreement:

What are the objectives of partners (promotion of lifelong learning, transnational mobility, mutual trust, partnership, recognition of learning outcomes...)?
Are there any specific goals of mobility for individuals, professions, sector (acquisition of technical competences, intercultural and key competence) which can be identified and agreed upon?
Should the partnership be based on the principle of reciprocity of hosting and sending or not?
Do the partners have all the information they need about of the competent institutions roles, the

qualification and training system, etc.?
Do the partners foresee the duration of the agreement and a renewal process?
Is the qualification concerned clearly identified? Can the EQF or NQF level be specified?
Is the information about the assessment and validation procedures and quality assurance measures used by the partners complete and clear for all?
Is there an agreement about the use of common methods and tools (common learning outcome matrix, learning agreement and personal transcript)?
Are the contact points for the mobility organisation identified and appointed?
Do the partners need to specify the general / specific duties and responsibilities of the partners for the organisation of the placements?
Is there an agreement about using other tools as EUROPASS mobility?

Content of a partnership agreement

Im nächsten Schritt sollten die folgenden Elemente formalisiert werden:

→ ***Context and objectives of the cooperation***

The partnership agreement provides information about the general context and objectives of the cooperation. Competent institutions could express their support to the partnerships of (potential) sending and host institutions and specify the assessment, validation and recognition of learning outcomes acquired during a mobility period abroad.

→ ***Duration and renewal of the agreement***

Partners agree on the eligibility period and duration and the foreseen procedures for renewal of the agreement.

→ ***Information about the partners***

Partnership agreements provide essential information about all the partners involved (contacts) as well as their functions within the partnership.

→ ***Information about the qualification concerned***

The qualifications(s) concerned are clearly identified and described. Indications about the ISCED or EQF/NQF level could be useful.

→ ***Information about the assessment procedures***

The partnership agreement summarises the manner in which the learning outcomes are assessed by the host institution and could be recognised by the sending organisation. Therefore the partners should make each others assessment and recognition procedures transparent and accept those procedures vice versa. Partners also agree on the use of a learning outcome oriented description of the qualifications concerned (such as the learning outcome matrix), the use of the learning agreement, the personal transcript and Europass mobility.

→ ***Additional agreements about responsibilities for organising mobility***

The partnership agreement could also help to specify the roles and responsibilities of the partners in the practical organisation of transnational mobility, such as logistical organisation of mobility projects, administrative aspects and financial arrangements etc. Furthermore the partnership agreement can specify the cooperation between partners (agreement on common rules of the partnership, evaluation methods for mobility projects, dissemination of project results etc.). In any case, the partnership agreement should refer to the quality standards necessary for the organisation of training pathways as in the Europass mobility and the “*European quality charter*”³.

³ Recommendation (EC) No 2006/961 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on transnational mobility within the Community for education and training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility [Official Journal L 394 of 30.12.2006].

4.4 Step 3: Preparation of mobility

Placements abroad should be used as a didactic tool for developing vocational, intercultural, and linguistic skills as well as broader, personal competences. However new competences do not materialise automatically, just as a consequence of being abroad. In order to exploit the full potential of placements, it is important to take some essential steps to ensure the quality of the learning process.

Usually, transnational placement projects are organised in three phases: before the mobility project starts, during and after the mobility project. Put differently, one can distinguish between the preparation phase, followed by the implementation and the follow-up phase (cf. Fig. 5). The **mobility checklist (4)** provided by SME MASTER Plus is delivering details about each step within these three phases. The learning agreement has a preponderant role stretching from the preparation of the mobility project until the evaluation of the project.

Who is concerned?

The content of the learning agreement reflects the process of negotiation between sending and host institutions. It is negotiated for each learner participating in transnational mobility separately. It is therefore signed by the sending and host institution and the learner.

Steps in the preparation and contents of the learning agreement

The learning agreement is used for providing details about a mobility project at individual level. It should specify the conditions for the training period abroad, clarify the responsibilities of all parties involved and provide information about the learning outcomes which should be achieved by the learner. Synergies should be found with already existing training contracts, especially if they are obligatory to use for administrative reasons. Therefore there is no standardised model of a learning agreement. Nevertheless the following elements should be jointly checked between sending and host institutions before signing the learning agreement:

Are the contact persons in the sending and host institutions appointed?
Does the host institution has all relevant information about the learner? Are the competences that are already achieved by the learner identified?
Are the general and the specific objectives (such as duration and dates of mobility periods) agreed upon?
Are the training places and persons in charge identified?

Are the competences to develop (reference to Unit or learning outcome expected to be achieved) linked to the training program / training activities / tasks?

Are the assessment procedures which will be used identified and clearly explained?

→ **Identification of the contact points (sending / host)**

Contact persons for the learner for all further organisational and pedagogical questions should be appointed by the partners, both in the sending as in the host institutions.

→ **Identification of the learner and his background**

The information and the identification of possible participants for mobility by the sending organisation should be organised. In SME MASTER Plus a portfolio was used to select, but also to present the candidates profile to the host institution which needs sufficient time to identify suitable placement situations. The sending institution should describe the qualification the learner follows (e. g. school based, company based or alternate training). More information is necessary for administrative reasons (age, nationality etc). In SME MASTER Plus, the portfolio allowed to describe also other background information such as:

- Learner's professional aim and her/his motivation concerning participation,
- her/his expectations about the mobility project,
- sending company's background (e. g. number of employees, specialisation etc.).

A Europass CV should be added for further information.

→ **Identification of the time period, duration of mobility and the training places**

Host partners should state clearly when and where the training takes place. Mobility projects can be organised between companies, between companies and training centres, between companies and VET schools etc. It can take place in VET schools or training centres only, at a company only or both in a school / training centre and a company. Therefore the learning agreement should list all places and persons in charge of training and the duration of the time spent there. In addition, a presentation with a plan, photos, introduction of the team, etc. of the host companies or institutions shows the learner what he/she can expect.

→ **Agreement on learning outcomes expected to be achieved**

Sending and host institutions need to agree on the training situation and ensure that the learner will be confronted with situations corresponding to his/her level of competence and the learning objectives agreed upon. There is a need to determine the learning outcomes to acquire (learning expectations / goals) attached to a concrete learning situation / tasks, e.g.

in the form of a work situation in a company. The learning agreement must describe clearly what needs to be achieved. Of course it can be difficult to find a learning place where the learner has the opportunity to be trained in all aspects of a unit or learning outcome, especially if the mobility period lasts only for a (very) short period. The partners should be aware of what can be achieved and must find a way to integrate partial achievements into the learning process. If the learning process starts at home, the process of competence development and the final assessment could be achieved abroad. If the learning period starts abroad, the acquisition of competence and final assessment could be achieved when back in the home country.

→ ***State of the learner's competence development – positioning of the learner***

The host institution generally needs details about the learner's competence level in order to arrange a suitable training situation. The learning outcome matrix helps to identify a learner's state of competence development at the moment of departure (steps of learning outcomes).

→ ***Agreement about assessment procedures used***

Finally, the learner needs to understand how each learning situation and outcome will be assessed. Explanations of the type and methods of assessment used should be added.

4.5 Step 4: Assessment of learning outcomes

The assessment of learning outcomes acquired by a learner during a mobility stay is conducted by the host institution; it constitutes an essential element of ECVET and is an effective **instrument of quality assurance within transnational mobility**. On the one hand, assessment underlines the value of mobility projects in particular within the national learning context. Transnational mobility, which often has the negative image of learners spending some kind of ‘professional holiday’, will be recognised more as a pedagogical tool and a regular part of the national VET system if the competences acquired abroad are assessed, appraised and documented. On the other hand, assessment fosters mutual trust between the different institutions participating in an international mobility partnership.

The project partners of SME MASTER Plus have decided not to implement a standardised procedure for the assessment and appraisal of learning outcomes achieved within transnational mobility. Every partner country has its own principles, methods and instruments, which can also be applied within the framework of ECVET. The **personal transcript** aims to document the learning outcomes.

Before starting the mobility project, the partner institutions should specify the methods and instruments to determine learning outcomes in accordance with the procedure commonly used in the host institution. The same applies to the assessment criteria. In this context the following general principles should be considered:

- The learning outcome assessment methods, instruments and criteria which an institution wants to apply within the framework of a mobility partnership should be made transparent to the partner institution (e.g. in the course of a peer learning visit) and accepted by it.
- The partner institutions’ agreements relating to assessment should be laid down in writing in the partnership agreement / memorandum of understanding (in the learning agreement, for example).
- The principles of proportionality should be observed regarding the complexity. Short-term mobility projects (of up to two weeks) will maybe not need any assessment procedure at all whereas mid- and long-term mobility projects will need a more intensive assessment.
- The assessment procedure should be understandable and clear to all people involved in mobility, especially the learners.
- The assessment should focus exclusively on the learning outcomes specified in the learning agreement.
- The results of the assessment should be documented accordingly (in the personal transcript) to enable the validation of learning outcomes by the sending institution.

For the assessment of learning outcomes a wide range of different instruments can be used, such as:

Written assignments

Candidates work on written tasks that are typical for their occupation. The assessment can cover the subject-related correctness of solutions, the candidates' understanding of subject-specific connections, as well as formal aspects where appropriate.

Practical tests / work samples

Candidates carry out an activity that is typical for their occupation, such as maintenance, production, service, etc. The assessment can cover their working method and the result of their work.

Computer simulation

Candidates carry out an activity that is typical for their occupation by virtual means using a specialist examination program. The assessment can cover their working method and the result of their work.

Interview

Interviews focus on subject-specific issues, situations, problems and their solutions.

Presentation

In a presentation, using technical aids if appropriate, candidates present situations and connections which are typical for their occupation or the solution to a task they were set before. Where necessary, they answer comprehension questions related to their presentation. The assessment can cover subject-related and communicative competences as well as the form and technique of presentation.

Simulated conversation

The simulated conversation is in the form of a role-play. Here candidates act out their future professional position while the examiner takes on the role of a client, business partner, colleague, etc. The assessment can cover the learners' customer orientation, communicative competences and subject-specific competences, for example.

Portfolio method

The portfolio method applies a combination of different methods and instruments, if necessary over several stages.

4.6 Step 5: Validation and documentation of learning outcomes and evaluation of mobility projects

The assessment results, as documented by the host institution in the personal transcript, are validated by the sending institution after completion of the mobility stay. This aims to formally confirm that the learning outcomes which have been acquired by a mobile learner and assessed by the host institution can be recognised as part of the national educational context.

Relevant learning outcomes should then be transferred to the Europass Mobility document (link to the Austrian website). The sending institution can additionally issue a certificate of attendance to the learner.

In the follow-up phase of a mobility project it should also be evaluated. To ensure that the entire process - from preparation to implementation and the follow-up procedure - is continuously optimised it is necessary that all the parties involved - sending institution, learner, host institution, possibly exchange organisation(s) - give each other feedback about what happened during the mobility period. Only in this way can there be a lasting improvement in programme quality. The evaluation can be made either in writing by completing a questionnaire or orally in personal discussions or talks by telephone. There exist a large number of templates for evaluation sheets, such as those of the **Pro Mobility project** (www.pro-mobility.net). To improve the quality of mobility stays it is very decisive that the collected feedback is taken into account in future exchange projects. Only in this way can quality be assured on a lasting basis.

5. Conclusions

The implementation of ECVET in practice within the framework of the SME MASTER Plus project has yielded a range of findings, which lead to the following **conclusions**:

- Mobility projects are a **big asset** for learners in VET: by attending a school abroad or working in a training company, young people learn to adjust to new situations. They are faced with different working methods and techniques, new materials and products, as well as foreign cultures and mentalities. This not only helps them broaden their horizons but also develop more tolerance and open-mindedness to things that are new and not familiar to them. Furthermore mobile learners also improve their command of foreign languages, which can be a great benefit for them in their future professional life.
- Despite the numerous benefits, a fairly modest number of learners are currently taking the opportunity to continue their IVET or CVET programme in another country for a limited time or to complete a period of work placement abroad. One reason can be the frequent **lack of understanding of foreign educational programmes**. This problem can be tackled with ECVET. As experience gathered in SME MASTER Plus has shown, ECVET can contribute to more transparency when it is implemented appropriately and can form the basis for a 'common language'. In addition, ECVET can make the activities related to mobility processes easier. Although it may be true that the implementation of ECVET is connected with certain additional efforts for organisation in the beginning, these efforts will pay off the more often ECVET-based stays are conducted. Moreover ECVET clearly contributes to enhancing quality: with ECVET it is possible to decisively alleviate 'interface problems' - that is the linking of contents learned in the home country with the learning outcomes to be acquired abroad. This provides advantages for all parties involved - both for the sending and for the host institution - and particularly for the learner. The structured description of qualifications creates a 'common language', which forms the basis for any agreement.
- The implementation of ECVET-based mobility projects is, as mentioned above, in the beginning connected with **certain additional efforts** for organisation. An extremely high degree of coordination work between the sending and host institution is required particularly during the preparation phase of the mobility stay. It is therefore recommended to apply ECVET whenever **regular and/or longer-term stays** (qualifying mobility) are conducted which focus on the acquisition of subject-related (expert and technical) learning outcomes. Shorter mobility stays frequently serve to strengthen social and personal competences. Although ECVET can also lead to enhancing quality in these cases, ECVET is not an essential prerequisite for implementation.

- The **formulation of learning outcomes** is of major importance in the implementation of ECVET. They form the basis for the ‘common language’. Although the key characteristics of learning outcomes are known - use of an active verb which should be specified and contextualised, the learner’s perspective, etc. -, their description nevertheless poses some **challenges**: In what ‘width’ and ‘depth’ should learning outcomes be formulated? How should they be presented - broken down into knowledge, skills and competence, or formulated holistically by combining these three elements? SME MASTER Plus does not split learning outcomes into its components, this ensures that readability is enhanced and redundancies are avoided. It is vital that the partners in the mobility process agree on a specific procedure in order to ensure that the descriptions of qualifications can actually be compared. It is also recommended to jointly define elements which occur in both qualifications. The closer the descriptions are, the easier it is to discover common aspects and differences in the contents of qualifications.
- The definition of **units of learning outcomes** is also of major importance. Here an agreement regarding ‘width’ and ‘depth’ should also be reached with the mobility partner. Work in the SME MASTER Plus project has revealed that it is preferable to define the units first and then formulate the relevant learning outcomes. The definitions should not focus exclusively on the curriculum but more on the specific activities associated with the qualification. The curriculum acts rather as a ‘translation’ into teaching contents of the learning outcomes which are connected with the units. The number of units will largely depend on the complexity of the qualification but should range between 10 and 20. Both too many and too few units can be contrary to the intention of transparency, which is pursued by structuring the qualification into these elements.
- The presentation of learning outcomes as well as units of learning outcomes in a **learning outcome matrix** has proven very useful in the course of SME MASTER Plus. The representation of the ‘**learning outcome development**’ in particular has a decisive advantage especially regarding the learners’ mobility: the representation can be used to present learning outcomes which the learner must have achieved when acquiring the overall qualification as well as to demonstrate ‘interim learning outcomes’. This can clarify a mobile learner’s status of knowledge/skills/competence when going abroad at a certain time of his/her VET career. This will facilitate communication between the mobility partners.
- Although the allocation of **credit points** to units of learning outcomes was piloted in SME MASTER Plus, points were not represented in the qualification descriptions because they have no significance in the participating partner countries. According to the ECVET Recommendation, ECVET credit points should serve to reveal the unit’s relative weight in relation to the overall qualification. Consequently they should constitute additional numerical information to the learning outcomes, without which they would be meaningless. Therefore the points alone have no value in ECVET. On the whole the operationalisation of

points has proven problematic: as there are no strict rules for identifying the number of points and for distributing the points to the individual units, every qualification provider can apply its own mode. This leads to difficulties when interpreting the points. Based on experience gathered in SME MASTER Plus it can be said that ECVET points are not absolutely necessary to create transparency.

- The **documents** suggested as part of ECVET - the memorandum of understanding, the learning agreement, and the personal transcript - are well suited to lay down in writing all agreements between the sending and host institution as well as with the learner. They create a safe basis for all involved partners and contribute to the acceptance of mobility projects in the learning context of the home country.
- Regarding **the recognition and transfer of units and learning outcomes**, ECVET clashes with national rules as far as a binding credit transfer to national exams, or parts of exams, is concerned. The recognition of periods of learning and learning contents, by contrast, has proven to be unproblematic. Therefore a flexible approach is recommended here.

On the whole, work with SME MASTER Plus suggests that ECVET can form a **sound basis** for organising and implementing medium- to long-term mobility projects in particular. Thanks to the tools which comprise the ECVET 'toolbox' it is possible to clearly improve the **quality of mobility projects**. Even though not all ECVET principles can be implemented in practice, the key elements - units and learning outcomes - enhance the transparency and comprehensibility of qualifications.

6. Information and support structures for transnational mobility in IVET and CVET

This overview lists, in particular, references to organisations and networks which are committed to promoting transnational learning mobility in the fields of the skilled crafts and SMEs and which can be used by interested actors in VET (such as professional associations, training centres, vocational schools, training companies, etc.). In addition to the Leonardo da Vinci National Agencies a comprehensive overview of different websites of relevance for mobility - including in countries which did not take part in the SME MASTER Plus project - can be found at the Euro-Apprenticeship website (see below).

Europe:

Euro-Apprenticeship – www.euroapprenticeship.eu

Euro-Apprenticeship is a European network to promote transnational mobility in IVET and CVET with special focus on the skilled crafts and SMEs. This internet platform mainly targets bodies responsible for VET and provides the opportunity of creating European networks.

Austria:

IFA (Association to Promote the International Exchange of Apprentices, Young Workers and Trainers of the Economy) – www.ifa.or.at

IFA is the service unit to promote the mobility of apprentices, students of part-time vocational schools, employees and IVET trainers. In its capacity as the central contact point for information and advice for all institutions and people involved in mobility projects, IFA provides support in the organisation of work placements abroad, applies for and awards the funds necessary for this, and ensures recognition of the competences acquired abroad. Members of IFA include all Austrian economic chambers, the Federation of Austrian Industry, Junior Chamber Austria and Junior Industry Austria.

France:

Euroapprentissage – www.euroapprentissage.fr

On this website, the chambers and training centres for skilled crafts in France find materials to organise and implement mobility projects. The website also gives access to the financing of group projects, with funds administered by APCMA as part of LEONARDO DA VINCI.

Germany:

Training without borders – www.mobilitaetscoach.de

‘Training without borders’ is the network of mobility coaches at the German chambers of skilled crafts and the German chambers of industry and commerce. The mobility coaches support businesses, trainers, skilled workers and trainees in the implementation of mobility projects.