
By André Huigens for ECVET.NL

The purpose of this conference was to get insight in the state of the art concerning the implementation of ECVET in the Agricultural education in Europe. Presentations were showed by representatives from Austria, France, Poland, Spain, the Netherlands and Slovenia. All partners in this conference were supposed to know the background of the EQF. My conclusion was that the participants hardly knew anything about it. Most of the representatives were not so much involved in the backgrounds of the EQF and its instruments ECVET, EQUAVET and the Europass. All partners were asked to present the national effort on the paragraph of the ECVET implementation and in particular in the agricultural sector.

For the expert group: the level of knowledge and understanding concerning this subject was again very low. The representatives in this conference were supposed to be informed concerning the implementation process. The mental model of ECVET is mainly that it is an instrument to validate the study trip of students to another country. There is hardly any awareness of the connection between a study trip, a study program, a supposed to reach learning outcomes and the recognition and validation process of this all. In my observation the gap here can be seen as ‘dramatic’. When asking questions concerning the quality assurance most people have no idea of the relation between assessment, validation and recognition. That is not to be solved with credit points like ECTS system.

On the second day I did a presentation based on the same methodology I used with the group in Portugal. (see my report concerning this meeting, Portugal, March 2013).
An overview of the situation in the countries attending the conference:

Spain:
In Spain ECVET is concentrating on the process of integrating formal- and non-formal-learning. This process is more less related to the recognition of non-formal learning to the formal learning pathway. Spain is using ECVET for EVC trajectories and schools are hardly aware of the added value in mobility on national- and international level. Spain does not have vocational education for the lower levels (1-2-3) of the EQF which might cause a problem for their labour market. Students who went three or four years to school for a graduation on level 4 are not willing to do the work on the lower levels, which leads to a significant high number of higher educated people in the branch. For instance: In the Murcia region the Agricultural industry is one of the most important economical pillars of their BNP. Most of the work here is in the EQF levels 1, 2-and 3. The Murcia region is very much relying on workers from abroad as the Spanish Vet educational entrance level is level 4.
France:
France does not have vocational education for the EQF levels 1 and 2 and they are reconsidering to develop vocational education for level 2. France was always one of the first countries to implement the European tools. The representative for France in this meeting was coming from a private school and was hardly informed about the French situation. She could not tell that much about the French situation. The mainly use ECVET for mobility abroad. France has a national qualification structure and the representative did not know if this is outcome based.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels correspondences established between the French qualifications framework and the EQF</th>
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<tr>
<td>French 5-levels structure</td>
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<tr>
<td>I – Doctorate grade</td>
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<tr>
<td>I – Master grade</td>
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<tr>
<td>II – Bachelor grade</td>
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<tr>
<td>III</td>
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<tr>
<td>IV</td>
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<tr>
<td>V</td>
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<td>Not applicable</td>
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Levels and descriptors

The original five-level structure introduced in 1969 was used as basis for referencing the French framework to the EQF in 2010.

The French qualification system has developed considerably since these levels were agreed in 1969 and the development and introduction of a more detailed structure is seen as critical. These descriptors will furthermore have to be consistently based on the learning outcomes approach; differentiated through the concepts of skills, knowledge and competence.

The national council on statistics (CNIS) commented on the debate on a new level structure (CNCP, The French national Committee for vocational certification, 2011) (104) by stressing that it "... would like to see these reflections lead to a new classification of certifications that takes into account changes in the structure of qualifications and the links set up within European higher education.' A draft 8-level structure will probably be ready in December 2011. This draft will take into account the input given by the national council on statistics. A particular issue in the French case is how the new structure will link to the standard classification for occupations (ISCO). Also, the current level 5 (the lowest) is correlated to minimum wages, which complicates any change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Level definition</th>
<th>Learning outcomes</th>
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<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Personnel holding jobs normally requiring a level of training equivalent to that of the vocational studies certificate (BEP) or the certificate of vocational ability (CAP), and by assimilation, the level one certificate of vocational training for adults (CFPA).</td>
<td>This level corresponds to full qualification for carrying out a specific activity with the ability to use the corresponding instruments and techniques. This activity mainly concerns execution work, which can be autonomous within the limits of the techniques involved.</td>
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<td>IV</td>
<td>Personnel holding jobs at a supervisory highly skilled worker level and able to provide proof of a level of training equivalent to that of the vocational certificate (BEP), technical certificate (BT), vocational baccalaureate or technological baccalaureate.</td>
<td>A level IV qualification involves a higher level of theoretical knowledge than the previous level. This activity concerns mainly technical work that can be executed autonomously and/or involve supervisory and coordination responsibilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Personnel holding jobs normally requiring a level of training equivalent to that of a diploma from a University, Institute of Technology (DUT) or a technology certificate (STB) or a certificate corresponding to the end of the first higher education cycle.</td>
<td>A level III qualification corresponds to higher levels of knowledge and abilities, but without involving mastery of the fundamental scientific principles for the fields concerned. The knowledge and abilities required enable the person concerned to assume, autonomously or independently, responsibilities in design and/or supervision and/or management.</td>
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<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Personnel holding jobs normally requiring a level of training comparable to that of a bachelor or master's degree.</td>
<td>At this level, exercise of a salaried or independent vocational activity involves mastery of the fundamental scientific principles for the profession, generally leading to autonomy in exercising that activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Personnel holding jobs normally requiring a level of training above that of a master degree.</td>
<td>As well as confirmed knowledge of the fundamental scientific principles for a vocational activity, a level I qualification requires mastery of design or research processes.</td>
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Austria.

Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) is formulated by the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture, Department International and multilateral affairs. "... as an instrument to increase transparency and improve the planning of mobility periods. Actually the number of 'mobile' learners at vocational education and training (VET) establishments is rather low. In Austria mobility periods of apprentices and schoolchildren at VET schools and colleges are also the exception rather than the rule. Longer-term stays abroad - those exceeding two or three weeks' duration - in particular are comparatively rare. This may be due to many reasons: The age of learners may play a role here as well as lacking structures (a central mobility coordination office, for example) or linguistic and financial barriers. Furthermore, one important impediment is insufficient understanding of foreign education systems, programmes and content. The diversity of VET in Europe, which is an expression of the individual countries' different cultures and traditions, makes the comparability of education offers difficult and has the result that young people hardly seize the opportunity of spending a short-term period of learning abroad. Such a stay would be highly valuable for young people, however, because it would possibly contribute to their personal development and also enhance their opportunities on the labour market". (Guidelines for the application of ECVET, Federal Ministry Austria is basically one the countries who is involved in the development process of the EQF and ECVET process. This because the 3 S laboratory is an Austrian research centre and well known in Europe for educational renewing. Austria was also partner in EQUFAS, a leading EQF project for the Agricultural sector.
The basic principle of ECVET, the Austrian explanation:

1 Austrian students or apprentices like to spend a few weeks abroad during their training, to continue their professional education, but also to develop their knowledge of foreign languages.

2 Based on a structured description of qualifications (for important parts for the mobility) defined as credits or units of learning outcomes (including numerical Additional information in the form of EVCET points), it is possible to establish the knowledge, skills and competencies to be acquired abroad, so the results of learning process abroad are compatible with the Austrian qualification.

3 The documents in the transfer process (partnership agreement or memorandum of understanding, learning agreement, Personal Performance) and agreements, such as for test mode, quality assurance, credit transfer, etc., between the home and host institution, guaranteeing the learners that what they have learned in the host country, is recognized in Austria and can be counted. So the trainees can continue their education at home freely - without leading to an extension of the training or to catch-up examinations.

4. The foreign learning outcome thus fits “seamlessly” in to their education – as part of the Austrian qualification.

Poland
The Polish representative was not so much involved in the ECVET processes but he was well informed concerning the technical process around their national qualification framework and ECVET bodies.
Figure 1. Three sets of level descriptors in Polish qualifications framework

EQF
Generic descriptors (meta degree)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Universal PQF
Generic descriptors (1 degree of genericness)

PQF
Generic descriptors (2 degree of genericness)

Appropriate for general education

Appropriate for vocational education

Appropriate for higher education

The education system in Poland, including the examination schedule

LABOUR MARKET  HIGHER EDUCATION  POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

MATURA EXAMINATION

POST-SECONDARY SCHOOLS

VOCATIONAL EXAMINATION

VOCATIONAL EXAMINATION

SPECIAL EDUCATION POST LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOLS  BASIC VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOLS

VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL EXAMINATION

SPECIAL EDUCATION LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOLS

LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOLS

PRIMARY SCHOOL FINAL TEST

SPECIAL EDUCATION PRIMARY SCHOOLS

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

SPECIAL EDUCATION PRE-SCHOOLS

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION
The following public authorities are involved in the implementation process:

- Ministry of National Education
- Ministry of Science and Higher Education
- Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
- Inter-ministerial Taskforce for Lifelong Learning
- National Team of Bologna Experts
- Bureau for Academic Recognition and International Exchange
- National Centre for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education
- Lifelong Learning Programme

Poland is receiving coaching from ECVET-team Europe in the implementation process of ECVET. The Polish representative was not informed concerning the progress of this process.

**Slovenia:**
Slovenia was able to present their National Qualification Framework by their National coordinator:

Methodology for Development VET Programmes:
- based on the starting points for development of vocational educational programmes (2001);
- programmes are prepared on the basis of occupational standards (employers role);
- programmes are modular structured and based on learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, competence), valorised with credit points

Types of Qualifications in Slovenia
- **FORMAL EDUCATION**
  - based on standards designed by employers
- obtained after successfully completing formally approved educational programmes
  - NATIONAL VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATION (NVQ)
- based on standard designed by employers
- obtained after validation of non-formal or informal learning

VET programmes and NVQ:

- OCCUPATIONAL STANDARD
  - VET programme
  - educational institution
    - youth/adults
  - national vocational qualification
    - VET diploma

- OCCUPATIONAL STANDARD
  - NVQ catalogue
  - accredited assessing agencies
    - adults
  - NVQ certificate
An example of how they work with credit points in Slovenia:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>3-years vocational education</th>
<th>2-years voc.-technical education</th>
<th>4-years technical education</th>
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<td>180 credits</td>
<td>120 credits</td>
<td>240 credits</td>
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**General core units (common to all fields)**

- **51 credits**

**Vocational modules (including practical training)**

- **85 credits**
  - Obligator modules: 40 c.
  - Vocation specific: 26 c.
  - Optional modules: 19 c.
  - Other optional modules (decided by school): 20 c.

- **49 credits**
  - Obligator modules: 26 c.
  - Vocation specific: 13 c.
  - Optional modules: 10 c.
  - Other optional modules (decided by school): 11 c.

**Practical training (in enterprises)**

- **36 credits**
  - 24 weeks

**Free-choice units and final examination**

- **8 credits**
Credit points are allocated to entire educational programmes as well as their components (modules, final work, work placements…)

Credit point allocation to the programme components is based on their weight in terms of workload needed for student to achieve the expected learning outcomes.

1 credit point corresponds to 25 hours of learning activities.

60 credit points per one year of formal education.

NVQ with equivalent modules in curricula have the same number of credit points as corresponding (group of) modules in formal education.

Number of credit points of NVQ modules with no corresponding (group of) modules in formal education, is based on comparison with similar modules.

The Agricultural occupational standards:

There is no VET education in Slovenia under level 3!
Conclusion:
The skills and knowledge concerning EQF and ECVET and its background in this group of participants was not so high.

In my observation of the situation in VET institutions, most policy makers and boards of directors of these organisations are hardly aware of the consequences of the implementation of the outcome based approach of EQF in their educational system. In a way most educational institutions on VET level assume that the National Coordination Points will tell them what EQF level they ought to print on their present certificates, and what they are supposed to change in their learning style and learning way.

Focussing on ECVET.
ECVET units are supposed to be outcome based developed and that is a different approach. Working with ECVET units based on the learning outcomes approach includes a change in our educational dimension. It is a paradigm shift and it asks for more than investigating present qualification systems creating units of the present systems and sticking EQF levels on them. Most educational institutions are not aware of this paradigm shift and what is needed to become a modern educational organization which is aware of the needs of the present European economy. The real connection to lifelong learning is “learner-centered” thinking based on the process of learning and in case of a study abroad related with the added value of this mobility. The consequences of this paradigm shift in education asks for changes in organizations and that is under provision of policymakers and boards of directors. The implementation strategy needs to pay attention to these aspects as it is crucial for building the bridge between VET education and the needs of the labor market.

Most of the units (very view real examples) which are developed are based on the so called ‘dual learning system’ which requires the participation of companies of the labour market. In that case it makes sense that we ask ourselves the question “What is the added value for the companies to host students from other countries?”

I talked to school leaders in many European countries and the situation is the same everywhere, even in Finland, which is considered the top in European education. There are NCP’s in all countries and they are doing their work, but most of them get limited or no feedback and relevant questions concerning these issues from the work floor. It’s much more complicated than we assume. Most educational institutions are not aware of this paradigm shift and what is needed to become a modern educational organization which is aware of the needs of the present European economy. The real connection to lifelong learning is “learner-centered” thinking. The consequences of this paradigm shift in education asks for changes in organizations and that is under provision of policymakers and boards of directors.

The implementation strategy needs to pay attention to these aspects as it is crucial for building the bridge between VET education and the needs of the labor market.

It takes more than changing a methodology to a more learning focus. Our students no longer enter the classroom with the idea that all knowledge will come from the teacher with his books and methods. Students work on the computer and the amount
of data from the internet they are able to use is enormous. Many teachers still have an entirely different mental model of the use of data.

There is a big difference to what can be seen as data, information, knowledge, understanding and wisdom. This is the pathway teachers, mentors or counsellors have to follow with their students to reach outcome based competencies by context related experiences. Being competent is related to knowing what you know and what you do not know, on each level. The present school systems end up at the level of 'Understanding', which is the use of knowledge in different fields.

But there is more to make education outcome based…..

- In my opinion the most important issue to work on, is the permeability of the educational system. ImpAQ project (D.O.I. project ended in 2012) and this conference showed as an outcome that in many countries level 1 and 2 of the EQF in diverse VET sectors in education does not exist. That means that for most of the workforce in Europe there is no education. They cannot step into the EQF system if the entry level is 3 or 4. Do not make the mistake that the Vet levels start on level 3 or higher as the labour market is focussing on permeable development of the individuals within their teams!

- Another outcome in the conclusions of this conference: The so called competence profiles contain team competences and (according to the level requirements) a holistic view of the market.

Those two things are often missing in educational programs. Teachers are focused on groups of individuals in a classroom and students work for themselves and not for others in the group. When students are asked to work on a group assignment which will also give them individual credits for their examinations they will probably make objections. They will not want responsibility for others in the group, especially not for weaker students.

When working as a team in a company they are responsible for the team results and many companies train their employees in team development skills and processes and a more holistic view of their customers. That is the missing link in education but it has been the paradox of educational institutions for the last three decennia. Education of students is basically focused on individual results and companies need more than that.

For the experts:

Het is voor een ieder interessant om de leertheorien van L.Dee Fink te bestuderen, die komen wel heel erg tegemoet aan datgene wat Anne Potters en ik, Rob van Wezel’s semi-retorische vraag noemen. Daarbij gaat het steeds om het leerrendement op verschillende niveaus, de stellende, vergrotende en overtreffende trap. Hoe kun je het rendement verbeteren?

Voorbeelden van wat ik bedoel:
Met een toets krijg je een behoorlijk objectief en betrouwbaar beeld van de prestaties van de student. En daar kun je eigenlijk vrij eenvoudig op ingrijpen om het rendement te verbeteren.

Een trpje lastiger om te verbeteren is het onderwijs gericht op beroepshandelingen en beroepsprodukten. Hier komen een aantal zaken bij elkaar:kennis, vaardigheden, overzicht en inzicht. Hier gebruiken we assessments voor. Maar competenties zijn moeilijk te operationaliseren, het oordeel is vaak holistisch en hoe moet je dat dan goed verantwoorden?
De overtreffende trap is hoe beoordeel je of een student een onderzoekende en kritische houding heeft. Als je weet hoe je dat beoordeelt weet je hoe je het onderwijs moet verzorgen en verbeteren. De lastigheid is dat die houding eigenlijk overal terugkomt, maar nergens tot een concreet, tastbaar en dus beoordeelbaar resultaat leidt.

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