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The EQF and ECVET support portal

# EU VET SUPPORT

Guidelines for ECVET and Prior Learning  
Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)  
application in VET praxis



## INDEX



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Introduction	4
Purpose and benefits of ECVET and PLAR	5
Basic principles	6
Proposal on a PLAR procedure	7
Linking PLAR to existing European transparency tools	10
Practical recommendations on applying ECVET and realising the learning outcomes orientation	11
Practical recommendations on applying ECVET and developing assessment methods for PLAR	15
The euVETsupport portal	17
EQF and ECVET in transport and logistics	18

## Summary

The overall aim of these guidelines is to propose principles and mechanisms that support education and training providers and enterprises in the logistics sector in developing or improving structures and procedures to recognise the outcomes of all forms of learning, particularly those of non-formal and informal learning. They are based on European principles, recommendations and terminology as well as on practical experience gained in many countries inside and outside of Europe.

The guidelines

- provide an initial overview of the topic;
- help stakeholders to become familiar with the core ideas of ECVET, learning outcomes and validation;
- support stakeholders' initiatives to apply ECVET principles as well as to develop and implement any process that is linked with recognition and validation of learning outcomes.



Working and learning across borders in a branch beyond borders:  
vocational education and training within transport and logistics

## Introduction

**L**earning outcomes are the results of any kind of learning process in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences acquired through prior learning, i.e. formal, non-formal and informal learning within or outside of formal learning settings.

**Validation** is a process that makes visible individual learning outcomes, assesses them, recognises them and usually results in a formal qualification like a certificate or diploma. The term 'validation' refers to the confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes acquired by an individual in any kind of learning setting have been assessed against predefined criteria and are compliant with the requirements of a validation standard (Cedefop 2009<sup>1</sup>). In these guidelines, we equally apply the terms validation and PLAR (Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition) for this process.

The shift to learning outcomes and its validation emphasises the integration of learning, working and living throughout an individual's life and across family-related, work-related, leisure-related and study-related settings. It is central to enhancing employability and mobility, and increasing motivation for lifelong learning.

The overall aim of validation of learning outcomes is to reveal, recognise, assess and accredit those parts of an individual's learning that traditionally remain unrecognised, unseen and not well promoted.

The demand for the recognition and validation of learning outcomes was expressed through the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning in 2012<sup>2</sup> which include that the European Member States

- have in place, no later than 2018, arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning which enable individuals to have their prior learning validated and to obtain a full or a part qualification;
- include at least four elements (identification, documentation, assessment, certification) in arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, whilst allowing each individual to take advantage of any of these, either separately or in combination, in accordance with his/her needs;
- apply existing principles and instruments in arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (ECVET, EQF, guidance and counselling, transparent quality assurance measures), whilst taking into consideration national, regional, local and/or sectoral needs and characteristics;
- promote the involvement in the development and implementation of the elements and principles referred to of all stakeholders, such as employers, trade unions, chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts, national entities involved in the process of recognition of professional qualifications, employment services, youth organisations, youth workers, education and training providers, and civil society organisations.
- promote coordination on validation arrangements between stakeholders in the education, training, employment and youth sectors, as well as between those in other relevant policy areas.

<sup>1</sup> Cedefop (2009): Terminology of education and training policy: a multilingual glossary. Luxembourg.

<sup>2</sup> Council Recommendation 2012/C 398/01

## Purpose and benefits of ECVET and PLAR

**C**redit systems in general and ECVET in particular as well as PLAR both have several ECVET breaks down qualifications into smaller components such as units or modules which can be documented and assessed and which are described in terms of learning

Applying learning units allows for identifying which components of a qualification have been achieved already and which components have not yet been achieved. Moreover, identifying common components of formal qualifications and applying a learning outcomes orientation opens up for establishing connections between different types of qualification. This may lead to improved transfer between formal qualifications on the one hand and non-formal/informal learning on the other.

In sum, linking the overall ideas of credit systems with PLAR and qualifications frameworks covers four elements which have been described by Cedefop (2010: 58) as four dimensions:

- the coherence of the description of qualifications (passive role) which promotes a common language across the qualifications subsystems and education and training institutions;
- the coherence of qualifications design (active role) that aids recognition of qualifications or parts of qualifications in other subsystems or institutions;
- the governance necessary to put in place qualifications frameworks and credit systems, meaning to implement the framework and credit requirements;
- the openness of qualifications systems resulting from processes underpinning the use of framework and credit mechanisms.

Benefits that arise from applying ECVET and link it with PLAR can be:

- to better address the needs of mature learners and part-time students by providing alternative forms of entry requirements and shorten the period of study through earning exemptions, i.e. a reduction of time needed to complete a qualification and thus a reduced time away from the workplace;
- to better contribute to the match of work supply and demand by addressing what a learner is actually able to do after completion of a qualification;
- ECVET and PLAR can increase motivation and interest in workplace practice from the learner's/employee's perspectives;
- ECVET and PLAR help improving employee retention, reduction of recruitment and training costs.

These guidelines are in line with the Council Recommendation (see above), the 2012 'Unesco Guidelines for the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning', with previous Council Recommendations on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and with the Guidelines for EQF adaptation as proposed by the EQFpredict project.



Learning on the workplace happens every day

## Basic principles

In line with the 2012 Unesco Guidelines, any validation and recognition procedure should be based on principles

- ensuring equity in access to learning opportunities and in equal treatment for all. Every individual should have both the right to access and engage in any form of learning suited to her/his needs, and to have her/his learning outcomes assessed and validated;
- fostering the equal value of learning outcomes independently of how, where and in which settings they were acquired. Thus, prior learning outcomes should be treated on a par with those obtained in formal learning settings;
- ensuring the central role of individuals within the PLAR process that is, participation in PLAR should be on a voluntary basis emphasising the needs of the individual learner;
- opening up formal education and training, providing more flexible pathways to qualifications and thus, taking into account learners' experience and needs;
- promoting quality assurance in the entire PLAR process. Any PLAR process should be based on basic quality assurance criteria, i.e. objectivity, reliability, validity, fairness and transparency;
- enhancing trust in the value of prior learning and its validation by documenting each PLAR procedure, providing transparency of each step of the PLAR procedure and evaluating PLAR processes regularly;
- strengthening partnerships and enhancing trust in PLAR among all stakeholders to develop shared responsibilities in the overall PLAR procedure and actually allocate responsibilities among

stakeholders: Stakeholders should establish competences, rights, and responsibilities as well as credibility and legitimacy of those who carry out the assessment. This also includes to respect legitimate interests of relevant stakeholders and to avoid conflicts of interests.

Before developing and implementing validation procedures, education and training providers as well as enterprises and all other relevant stakeholders should be aware of the challenges that derive from linking existing assessments for formal education with validation. According to Cedefop (2009: 38)<sup>3</sup> this includes several questions such as:

- how to avoid validation of prior learning being perceived as undermining existing formal qualifications and assessments;
- how to create (monetary and non-monetary) incentives that foster the acceptance of validation by both education providers, enterprises and individual learner/employees;
- what does it mean to describe a particular qualification in terms of learning outcomes (instead of describing it in terms of learning objectives) and what consequences does this have for assessment;
- how can coherent practices be ensured and based on consistent national/sectoral standards?
- what are the administrative requirements for guidance, counselling, documentation, assessment, validation, and evaluation?

<sup>3</sup>Cedefop (2009): European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning. Luxembourg.

## Proposal on a PLAR procedure

PLAR can be designed as either an integral part of existing formal education and training pathways or in parallel with the formal education and training system. In the first case, it is regarded as one of several regular national/sectoral routes to recognition of learning outcomes that leads to certification. In the second case, it is provided and managed differently but linked with the formal education and training system in a way that it refers to e.g. national/ sectoral standards or benchmarks. Also, PLAR can refer to either an exemption from an assessment in the national education and training system or an exemption from a *part* of the education and training programme. Against this background, **we propose to set validation of non-formal and informal learning against the validation processes for formal learning in the 'regular' education and training system.**

Also, we propose that stakeholders develop and implement PLAR procedures that include **at least the following elements and stages:**

- Information and guidance
- Identification and documentation of learning outcomes
- Assessment of individual learning outcomes
- Credit transfer or award
- Certification of assessment results
- Evaluation

We also recommend including an element of monitoring and evaluating all PLAR procedures to ensure its quality and provide a feedback instrument for providers, assessors and learners. This element should be part of stage 5 as presented in the schematic depiction of a validation process (Figure 1: Schematic depiction of a validation process).

A validation process basically includes five

stages that are elaborated in the following sections.



Guidance, counseling and the provision of information are fundamental elements of PLAR

### Stage 1: Information and guidance

Before an individual takes the decision to seek validation, he/she needs to know what the added value (benefits) will be, at is to be expected, what preconditions and standards have to be met, and what types of documents have to be provided and developed by himself/herself.

During the first stage, individuals receive written or oral information on the overall PLAR procedure. For this purpose, we propose to prepare and provide information on timelines for validation, costs, procedure, forms of evidence of learning outcomes, quality and standards, presentation of evidence, assessment and assessment preparation, and support available. The first step may be provided online, face-to-face, by phone etc. It should be free of charge and provided either before the overall process, during a single stage (mostly the first stage) or during the overall process. It can be provided by either the competent bodies that run the assessment procedure or by independent institutions and information providers. We propose to have this step separated from the other stages as well as we propose to have the first stage run by independent guidance and counselling agencies to avoid a mix-up of

the various stages of the overall PLAR process and conflicts of interest.

**Stage 2: Identification and documentation of learning outcomes**

Within this stage, the individual has to become aware of his/her learning outcomes that are relevant for the PLAR process. To become aware of his/her learning outcomes

means to identify them by e.g. dialogue and/or written portfolios based on a questionnaire and thus, to make the learning outcomes visible and understandable. From a content point of view, this step is mostly linked with the formal qualification the procedure is aiming at, i.e. the dialogue and the portfolio are linked with particular knowledge, skills, and competences that are part of the envisaged qualification.

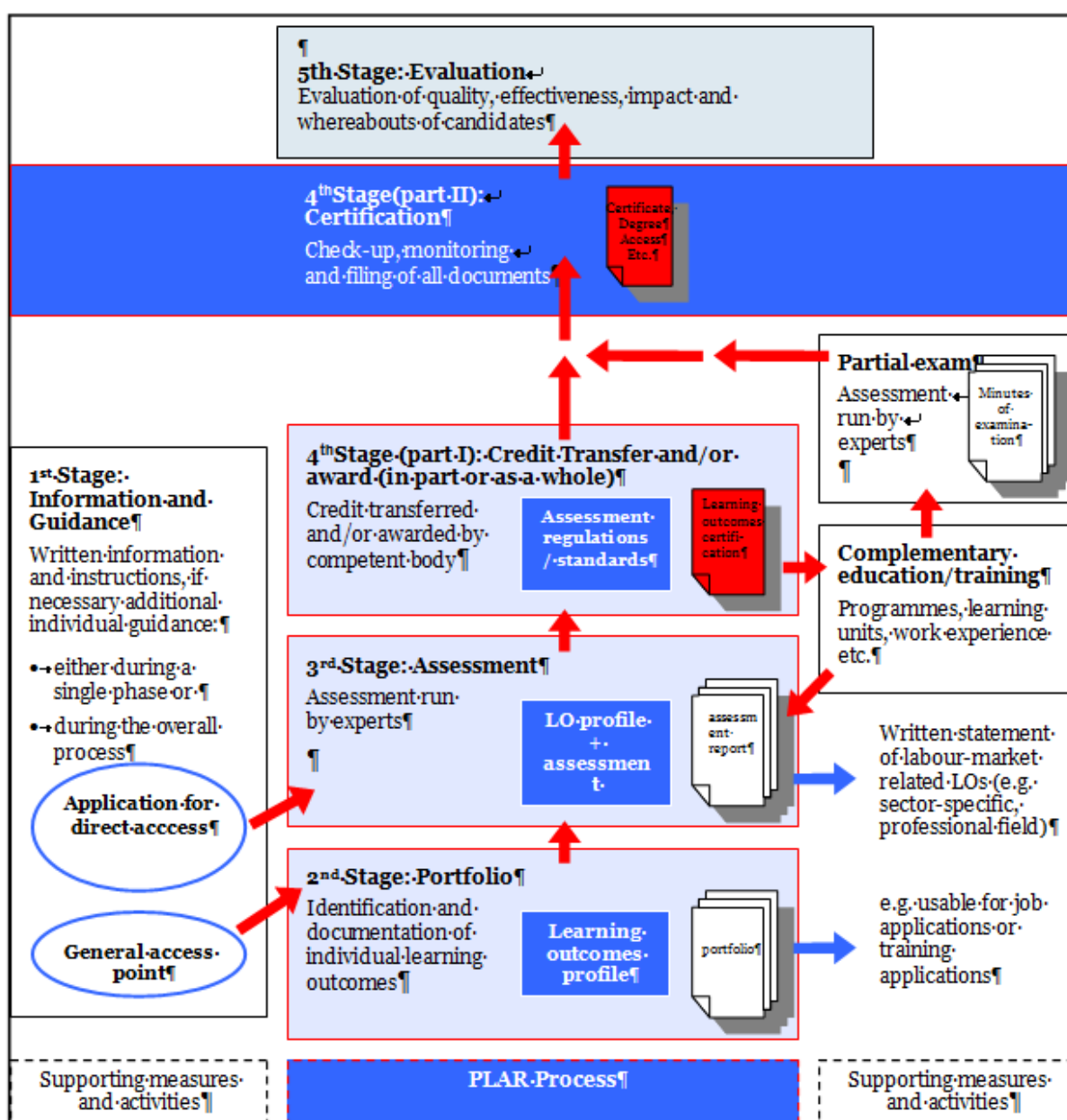


Figure 1: Schematic depiction of a validation process



### Stage 3: Assessment of individual learning outcomes

Assessment is a general term that refers to all methods used to judge performance of an individual. It may either concern the student or the trainer (teacher, instructor), but also the training methods (evaluation). The related terms 'test' and 'exam' are mostly used to describe an assessment conducted in a formal learning setting and designed to ensure

- high objectivity (would the outcomes of the process be the same if it were conducted by another assessor?)
- reliability (would the outcomes of the process be the same if it were repeated under the same conditions?)
- validity (are the particular learning outcomes that are being validated by the overall PLAR process and the specific PLAR methods precisely the ones that are intended to be validated?)
- fairness, transparency and a clear reference to pre-defined assessment criteria and standards that have to be met?

All assessment is done against predefined criteria. Such criteria include national/sectoral standards (that are either the same as or equivalent to the standards for qualifications obtained through formal learning processes, expectations, measurement of learning outcomes, and the scope of assessment criteria. In general, assessment can focus on individual learners, groups of learners (class, workshop, training programme etc.), an institution, or an education and training system as a whole. In PLAR context, assessment focuses on an individual and his/her learning outcomes.

Assessment is done by competent bodies or national/regional authorities who have the legal right, the expertise and the experts assess the learning, to award credit and qualifications.



Recognition of prior learning can result into parts of a qualification to be complemented with additional learning

### Stage 4: Credit transfer or award and Certification of assessment results

Stage 4 consists of two parts since certification of assessment results (part II) may be provided by experts different from the ones involved in the assessment itself (part I). Also, when credit is granted for prior formal learning as part of a validation process this has not necessarily to be done by the same experts. Particularly in terms of granting time credit proved by formal work contracts, letters of recommendation etc., involvement of assessors is not necessarily necessary.

Certification can be obtained either in terms of a full qualification or in terms of a part qualification. If a full qualification is not awarded due to a lack of e.g. work experience a candidate may be awarded a part qualification and receive complementary education and training (in the form of e.g. programmes, further experience or additional learning units to receive the specific full qualification).

### Stage 5: Evaluation

All documents related to the PLAR process should be filed and (regular) evaluation of the whereabouts of the applicants and the PLAR procedure itself should be carried out. Both can ensure quality and monitoring of all PLAR activities.

## Linking PLAR to existing European transparency tools

PLAR instruments should be linked to existing European transparency tools (EQF, ECVET, Europass) to promote transparency of and permeability between qualifications pathways and education systems. In terms of linking learning outcomes and PLAR with existing European transparency tools means

- to describe all qualifications that can be obtained and all forms of learning suited for accreditation in terms of learning outcomes that is, to describe the specific intentions and aims of a qualification, programme or module. Learning outcomes describe what a learner should know, understand and be able to do at the end of an education or training programme or module;
- to depict all qualifications in a hierarchy or continuum to identify learning levels. Such levels should match those of the specific national qualifications frameworks and the European Qualifications Framework;
- to depict all qualifications in terms of learning units (modules) and allocate credits to each learning unit which describe the “size” of a qualification and the relative weight of the learning unit in comparison to other learning units and the overall qualification;
- to assess all qualifications independently of the form or provision, curriculum, and teaching methods via which they were acquired;
- to modularise all qualifications, assign them to different levels with the same descriptors and describe them in terms of learning hours;
- to employ benchmarks to accredit and assess all types of learning;
- and – if necessary – to apply PLAR to

Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications.

- In terms of realising the learning outcomes orientation and linking it to PLAR mechanisms the task is
- to develop a common set of methods and instruments such as workplace observation, oral and written tests, dialogue, simulation etc. that may be applied within all PLAR processes. However, it should be up to assessors to decide when to apply which instruments and methods;
- to provide information and guidance on the opportunities for and on the benefits of validation before individuals start with a PLAR procedure;
- to provide guidance and counselling while an individual is undergoing a PLAR procedure;
- to apply existing instruments such as the Youthpass or the Europass documents by applying them as integral part of PLAR procedures;
- to carry out assessments against regional, national, sectoral or professional standards that should be accessible and understandable to individuals.



Paving ways and promoting transparency between different European transparency tools

## Practical recommendations on applying ECVET and realising the learning outcomes orientation

The practical guidelines are intended to support stakeholders (training providers, employers, etc.) in applying basic principles of ECVET. They were developed to help realising the learning outcomes orientation and can be used in terms of supporting PLAR, providing mobility schemes (or individual mobility plans) as well as applying national qualifications frameworks. They are based on political recommendations (see above) as well as on practical experience gained in prior projects and approaches aiming at realising the learning outcomes orientation.<sup>4</sup>

### Developing a learning outcomes language

Before developing a PLAR procedure, stakeholders should develop a common terminology with respect to the contents and objectives of the qualifications and competences that can be awarded. The basis for this common language is the EQF and the ECVET, i.e. the idea of describing qualifications and all forms of learning that can be assessed in terms of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes include various types of knowledge, skills competences, attitudes, as well as (work) experience and a description of qualifications in terms of learning outcomes ensures that all persons involved in a PLAR process develop a common understanding of the intended results of the PLAR process.

According to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union on the Establishment of a European Qualifications Framework for

Lifelong Learning (2008: 11f.)<sup>5</sup> learning outcomes are statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process. Learning outcomes are – in general – defined in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences:

- **knowledge** refers to facts, principles, theories, and practices that are related to a field of work or study. Knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual knowledge;
- **skills** mean the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. They are described as cognitive (logical, intuitive, and creative thinking) or practical (use of methods, materials, tools and instruments);
- **competence** means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills, personal, social and methodological abilities in work or study situations as well as in professional and personal development. It is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy (European Parliament and the Council of the European Union on the Establishment of a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning 2008: 11f.).

### Developing units of learning outcomes ('modules')

A learning outcomes unit (also called 'learning unit' or 'module') is a component of a (formal) qualification consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills, and competences that can

<sup>4</sup> We mainly refer to: Nationale Koordinierungsstelle ECVET (NKS-ECVET) (2010): Geographical Mobility in Vocational Education and Training: Guidelines for describing units of learning outcomes. Bonn; Using ECVET for Geographical Mobility.

Part II of the ECVET User's Guide: [http://www.ecvet-projects.eu/Documents/ECVET\\_Mobility\\_Web.pdf](http://www.ecvet-projects.eu/Documents/ECVET_Mobility_Web.pdf); DAAD (2008): Lernergebnisse in der Praxis. Bonn.

<sup>5</sup> European Parliament and the Council of the European Union (2008): Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, PE-CONS (2008)3662/07, Brussels.

be assessed, validated, and – whenever necessary and appropriate – certified. Thus, units of learning outcomes have to be structured comprehensively and logically; they can be either specific to a particular qualification or common to several qualifications.

A unit of learning outcomes should describe the intended results of a learning process in a consistent and structured way, the work load (i.e. the general time required to complete the learning unit) and clear criteria for assessment. Units of learning outcomes can be determined on the basis of complete work assignments, working processes, areas of work, fields of action or fields of competence which are typical of the particular profession. At best, learning units describe the whole range of a vocational profile and ideally can be derived from an existing curriculum or syllabus. However, in case of vocational profiles or qualifications that have not yet been linked to formal training, units of learning will have to be developed from the scratch.

There are several criteria that should be considered for developing learning units:

- Units of learning outcomes should be designed in a way that they can be completed as independently as possible of each other. When developing individual portfolios for PLAR (usually done in stage 2 of a validation process), this can lead to redundancies when preparing several units, i.e. competences may be listed in several similar units. We recommend accepting this phenomenon as it indicates the diversity and complexity of knowledge, skills, and competences.
- Units of learning outcomes should include all necessary learning outcomes, i.e. they should describe all intended shades of knowledge, skills, and competences.
- The scope, volume, complexity and level of difficulty of units of learning outcomes should be described realistically.
- Units of learning outcomes should be assessable. Thus, linking units of learning

outcomes with occupational activities and tasks supports a realistic basis for providing PLAR.

- If the overall qualification is not (yet) linked with a particular EQF/NQF level, then the units of learning outcomes should be linked with the appropriate level(s) in the EQF/NQF.

### Describing learning outcomes: Taking the first steps

Learning outcomes should be described in a way that is understandable and thus 'manageable' for all stakeholders involved in a PLAR process. We recommend considering that:

Learning outcomes refer to vocational qualifications and assessable vocational knowledge, skills and competences rather than they refer to an individual's specific development or competence profile. Learning outcomes and units of learning outcomes refer to the envisaged achievements of an *average learner* and thus are described from the learner's perspective rather than from the trainer's, teacher's or instructor's perspective. Also, learning outcomes do not describe the learning pathway or the learning target. Instead, they describe the result following the completion of the learning process.

If existent, training plans, curricula, syllabi, professional standards, or examination regulations are the starting point for describing learning outcomes. If not existent, they can be generated from work processes.

In terms of PLAR, learning outcomes have to be describable, presentable, and assessable. Thus, learning outcomes should be described as realistic, precise and concrete as possible which allows the assessor to evaluate the level of learning outcomes achievement during a PLAR process.

The setting of the learning process itself, its endurance and its circumstances including e.g. methods of instruction or linkages with a formal training or learning process are neither relevant for the description of the learning

Table 1: Describing learning outcomes (examples)

Examples	
<b>Knowledge</b> (field: Logistics Management <sup>7</sup> )	
He/she is in the position to...	...identify how logistics and supply chain strategy can contribute to the competitiveness of an organisation ...critically evaluate the issues associated with the development of supply chain strategy ...evaluate the notion of flexibility within supply chain strategy development ...analyse organisational problems using supply chain related methodological tools and approaches ...identify and reflect on the underlying values and beliefs of current supply chain practitioners ...critically reflect on his/her thinking and understanding of the supply chain strategy implementation
<b>Skills</b> (field: Warehouse Logistics Management <sup>8</sup> )	
He/she...	...manages timesheets ...processes orders ...organises the dispatch and delivery of goods ...ensures goods are stored safely ...maintains health and safety standards ...keeps accurate records
<b>Competences</b> (field: Basic Certificate in Transport and Logistics, competence area: dispatching stocks <sup>9</sup> )	
He/she...	...identifies required schedules for dispatch ...uses workplace and product knowledge to plan sequence of work ...selects appropriate materials handling equipment within required regulations and timeframe for the despatch ...selects goods for dispatch, checks it against product knowledge, labels and other identification systems ...sorts, assembles and consolidates products ...secures orders, places it in storage/dispatch zones in accordance with schedule ...completes workplace records, labels and attaches appropriate documentation

outcomes nor for the description of the assessment methods. However, there might be exceptions e.g. when a particular volume of workplace experience is a precondition to be met within the PLAR process.

A basic principle to be considered when describing qualifications in terms of learning outcomes is the proper use of clear statements and appropriate articulation as displayed in table 1.

Using verbs (instead of listing content-related nouns) allows for describing activities rather than describing lists of content-related items that have to be learnt. Also, the description of activities (verbs) should be linked with a reference point i.e., with the type of activity that is involved and/or what the knowledge, skills and competences aim at.

A detailed description is provided table 2. It is based on Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning

(1972)<sup>6</sup>. The numbers indicate the levels of complexity (1 = lowest, 6 = highest); however, they do not refer to any qualifications frameworks levels.

All descriptions of learning outcomes should reflect their learning and qualification level and depict whether the vocational competences can be applied under supervision, autonomously or responsibly and competently. Table 2 shows examples how this can be done.

In this context, we also propose to describe learning outcomes as a matrix, subdivided into elements of knowledge, skills, and competences. Such a matrix ensures a better

<sup>6</sup> Bloom, B. S.; Engelhart, M. D.; Furst, E. J.; Hill, W. H., Krathwohl, D. R. (1956): Taxonomy of educational objectives: the classification of educational goals; Handbook I: Cognitive Domain New York, Longmans, Green. This taxonomy distinguishes between six cognitive levels with increasing complexity. It has been used for learning outcomes and learning objective descriptions all over the world for decades

comparison with respective existing curricula, professional standards etc. and can easily be linked with assessments within a particular learning unit.

**The relevance of credit points (ECVET) and qualifications frameworks**

ECVET is based on the idea to value learning outcomes that were acquired in institutions outside the formal education and training system and/or outside the home country. Since these learning outcomes are often considered ‘non-formal’ or ‘informal’, ECVET (as well as qualifications frameworks) can

be regarded as a step in developing trust in PLAR.

ECVET credits can be determined for a unit of learning outcomes in accordance with the overall number of units of learning outcomes and/or the overall qualification.

However, the credit award and allocation is not a precondition to apply ECVET in terms of learning outcomes orientation, application of PLAR and/or qualifications frameworks. Validation should be seen as an integral part of a national qualifications system. Developing and linking national qualifications frameworks with validation procedures is a

Table 2: List of verbs to describe cognitive knowledge; based on Bloom's Learning Taxonomy (Bloom et al. 1956) and (amended and redefined) by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001)

Level of complexity	Verb	Explanation	Examples of verbs to indicate/describe learning outcomes at this level
1	knowing and remembering	remembering, recalling and passing information as precisely as possible	define, describe; enumerate, identify, list, match, name, reproduce, state
2	comprehending and understanding	grasping, understanding and restating in own words the meaning of information	classify, cite, discuss, give examples, illustrate, make sense out of, paraphrase, summarize
3	applying	using previously learned information and transferring it to and using it in new and concrete situations to solve problems	act, administer, assess, collect, construct, contribute, demonstrate, inform, participate, prepare, produce, provide, report, utilize
4	analysing	breaking down informational materials into their components, examining and understanding the structure of information to develop conclusions by identifying motives or causes, making inferences, and/or finding evidence to support generalizations	analyse, break down, categorize, compare, conclude, contrast, correlate, differentiate, distinguish, illustrate, outline, prioritise, recognise, subdivide
5	synthesising and evaluating	combining, reproducing and setting the value of information or prior knowledge and skills to compile a new or original whole	adapt, anticipate, collaborate, compile, compose, facilitate, formulate, integrate, intervene, model, modify, plan, reorganize, revise, structure, validate
6	creating	judging the value of information based on personal, social or scientific values and opinions, resulting in a new ‘product’, with a given purpose but without real right or wrong answers	conclude, criticize, critiques, decide, defend, develop, judge, justify, reframe

help transfer non-formal/informal learning and its outcomes into formal ones and thus can be

used as a way to improve access to and provision within and transfer of qualifications.

## Practical recommendations on applying ECVET and developing assessment methods for PLAR

Basically, methods used for the identification, assessment and validation of non-formal and informal learning are the same ones used for assessing formal learning. However, some methods have to be amended to the specific needs for PLAR and the particular character of learning outcomes that were acquired outside the formal education and training system. An overview of basic assessment methods is provided in the following sections.



Tools to assess prior learning need to be adjusted to the particular character of learning outcomes acquired outside formal learning

### Interviews

Interviews may be particularly useful in areas where judgement and reduction of complexity is necessary and/or when candidates have to proof strong oral communication skills. In an interview, candidates confirm their ability to demonstrate their knowledge of a subject and – in case of group interviews or debates with peer candidates – their capacity to sustain a considered argument and to demonstrate communication and social skills. Also, precise wording can be tailored to respondents and precise meaning of questions and answers can be clarified (e.g. for candidates who are second language learners).

When developing interviews, each question within the interview schedule should be mapped to a particular learning outcomes unit. This will help determine the sufficiency of the evidence to be collected and determine whether any other aspects of the learning outcomes unit need to be collected elsewhere.

### Workplace observation and simulation of working tasks

Workplace observations may be either conducted in a way that

- the candidate demonstrates his/her knowledge, skills, and competences by executing a given task that is observed and assessed by assessors or that
- the candidate observes another person executing a given task and afterwards will be asked by the assessors to explain, characterise etc. what he/she has observed.

Whereas a) is more convenient and less costly, b) may be particularly helpful for candidates aiming at qualifications in very complex situations where judgement and observations skills are needed. Also, b) provides a method to measure a candidate's ability to focus, notice and remember as well as it places emphasis on problem solving and critical thinking.

In general, a task has to be provided to the candidate that will provide the opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate a specific skill or competence. The task may be part of a real or simulated workplace activity. Details about the conditions of the workplace should be communicated to the candidate as well as he/she should be provided a copy of the task.

### Oral/written tests

Due to low costs, high levels of objectivity, validity, reliability and fairness, oral and written tests are widely accepted and applicable. Oral and written tests should provide clear assessment of specific knowledge, skills and competences. Whereas written tests require a minimum of writing skills but allow for reflecting on an answer before giving (writing) it, oral tests are used to demonstrate in-depth understanding of complex issues and the ability to explain them in simple terms. However, they usually cause more candidate anxiety than written tests.

Written tests may be based on a multiple choice and true or false format and thus should be pretested to ensure norm referencing of responses. They are considered more objective than many other methods. This type of test is well suited to being completed, marked and graded by computer but often criticised as too narrow to represent the complexity of skills and competences.

Essays can be used as test method to check the quality and standard of a required writing skill level, the ability to develop a coherent argument, and to confirm extent, understanding and transferability of knowledge and critical evaluation of ideas. Generally, essay tests are easier to prepare but more difficult to assess in terms of objectivity, validity and reliability.

### Product based methods

Products can be e.g. portfolios (for a detailed description see next paragraph), written reports, videos, photos, work samples or exhibitions of work.

Product based methods can be used to have the candidate demonstrate his/her knowledge, skills and competences in a complex way that is closely linked with real workplace situations. Thus, the method needs to specify whether the product only will be assessed, or whether it will also include the production process. If it is product based assessment only, then the candidate needs to be instructed

on what to include in the product. The conditions for producing the product should be clearly specified in the beforehand and provided to the candidate since it will directly influence the type of response to be produced by the candidate. If the method also incorporates assessing the process of building the product, then the observations of the process would need to be also judged and recorded and thus needs a clear instruction how this judgement and recording should be provided by the candidate.

### Portfolios

A portfolio is an organised collection of (written) materials (either on paper and/or digital) that presents and verifies learning outcomes acquired through experience. In many countries and sectors it is used either

- as an integral part of the overall validation process and thus as part of the assessment or
- as an integral part of the overall validation process that has to be compiled by the candidate but is not part of the assessment itself.

Portfolios provide the opportunity to actively involve the candidate in the PLAR process and usually offer a mix of approaches strengthening the overall validity and reliability of the method. An individual portfolio might include letters of reference, testimonials, résumés, photographs of work samples, presentations, etc.

Whereas portfolios are less common in formal education and training they are a highly recommended method in PLAR since they can promote learners' awareness of the PLAR process, focus learners' attention on quality assurance and increase candidates' self-responsible integration in the PLAR process. However, to guarantee that quality standards in developing portfolios are met and consistency is provided, we recommend that candidates receive support and feedback when preparing their portfolio.



## The euVETsupport portal

**euVETsupport: the portal for VET practitioners on EQF and ECVET application in praxis**

European cooperation becomes more and more important in order to answer skill shortages and mismatches that challenge our economy already today. European instruments such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the European Credit System for Vocational Education (ECVET) and training have been put in place by the European Union in order to address this challenge by

- supporting the mobility and recruitment of workers across borders,
- fostering the mobility of learners in order to prepare them for the European labour market,
- making vocational education and training more corresponsive to the needs of the European labour market,
- ensuring that workers abilities gained in any learning context receive recognition on the labour market and
- facilitating lifelong learning of Europeans in order to meet the qualification needs of employers and workers in Europe today and in future.

**But European instruments need to be implemented in the daily VET praxis**

The implementation of these European instruments and, therefore, the realisation of these aims is not just a question of policy making and discussion among policy makers. In order to bring these tools to life they need to be implemented at the grass-root level of vocational education and training ... by the trainers, teachers, tutors, educators, recruiters and managers out there who are engaged into VET and work everyday with the beneficiaries of these European tools: learners, workers, job-seekers, career changers, companies, etc..

**EU VET SUPPORT**

- Interactive learning and sharing area (registered users only)
- Consultation forum
- Library / Resources
- Pool of experts

Lifelong Learning Programme

Transparency and comparability of qualifications, the recognition of non- and informal learning, flexibility and mobility within vocational education and training (VET) as well as a European approach within VET are more important than ever in times of skill shortages, economical challenges and high youth unemployment rates in Europe.

Europe facilitates this process with European VET instruments such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the European Credit System for VET (ECVET). The proper application and implementation of EQF and ECVET offer many advantages and help both HR departments and VET providers to successfully master the challenges faced by industry today.

The euVETsupport portal guides and advises VET providers and HR departments in

applying and implementing the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the European Credit System for VET (ECVET) in their daily praxis. The portal serves as the virtual environment of the euVETsupport users and network. Aligned to the individual needs and particular requirements of the VET practitioners concerned, the portal provides its end-users with specific information, support tools and assistance for making best use of the European instruments in their daily practice.

The portal will be open to the public after a testing and adjustment phase as of April 2014 and after the project's end. Please get in touch with the project coordinator in order to participate in the testing.

[www.euVETsupport.eu](http://www.euVETsupport.eu)

## EQF and ECVET in transport and logistics

### EURO TRANS LOG

This project aimed to consider the companies' needs to define standard definitions within transport and logistics in order to create transparency between countries based on EQF and ECVET. [www.eurotranslog.eu/](http://www.eurotranslog.eu/)



### CENTRAL

The changes occurring in the logistics sector give rise to increased demand for new skills. But existing certificates and training do not always provide a satisfactory response to the needs of employers and training bodies. This project was launched in order to improve existing systems and develop new approaches to i.e. support learner mobility in this sector with ECVET. [www.logisticsqualifications.eu](http://www.logisticsqualifications.eu)



### PROLOG/ EUCOLOG

The core of these two projects is the SOLOS model (an organisational development model that aims to support workers to improve their skills through learning on the job). Three learning outcomes based profiles based on the EQF were exemplary defined for the learning model SOLOS. [www.solos-model.eu](http://www.solos-model.eu)



### MetaLOG

The MetaLOG project intends to setup a sectoral qualifications framework for the transport and logistics sector aims to support the long-term establishment of a "European Logistics Skills Network". [www.project-metalog.eu](http://www.project-metalog.eu)

### ProfDRV

This project explored the occupation professional driver and aimed to develop a learning outcomes based profile as well as related EQF-compatible quality standards for a comparable implementation of professional driver qualification in Europe based on directive 2003/59/EC and further vocational programmes for this occupation. [www.project-profdrv.eu](http://www.project-profdrv.eu)



### ICT-DRV

The major aim of this project is the exploration of multimedia based learning with CBT and simulators within professional driver qualification. The learning outcomes approach is used based on the ProfDRV quality standards and in order to increase quality of technology-based learning in this occupational field. [www.project-ictdrv.eu](http://www.project-ictdrv.eu)



### KNOW-IN

The KNOW-IN project created a new professional



figure for the Road Freight Transport Sector: the European Road Transport Manager (EU-RTM) who has the management skills, tools and interventions needed to address the challenges the sector faces. The profile is based on EQF learning outcomes and incorporates ECVET as a tool to enable the recognition of prior learning.

[www.know-in.eu](http://www.know-in.eu)



Transport and logistics: a sector in need of qualified workers

## Notes

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# EU VET SUPPORT

Further information about euVETsupport:

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Email: [eu-project.akademie@dekra.com](mailto:eu-project.akademie@dekra.com)



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Lifelong  
Learning  
Programme