

FINECVET 2 PROJECT

APPLICATION OF THE EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER SYSTEM FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (ECVET) IN FINLAND

FINAL REPORT SUMMARY 2008

European countries are in the process of creating a *European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training* (ECVET), which can be used to support recognition of learning outcomes achieved or competences acquired in another country. The Finnish National Board of Education has been meeting the challenge by piloting the ECVET system since 2004 in the national FINECVET project, which aimed to prepare implementation of the ECVET system in Finland. The two-stage project developed and tested the ECVET system within a total of nine different upper secondary level vocational qualifications.

1. PROJECT SCHEDULE

In December 2004, the Finnish National Board of Education set up a national project aiming to apply the ECVET system to Finnish upper secondary vocational education and training and to test the effectiveness of the system. The project was one of the first national ECVET projects in Europe. Since the ECVET system was only just being developed and since no decisions had as yet been taken, the national project had the opportunity to influence development of the system at a European level through the ECVET Technical Working Group. The project was named FINECVET 1 and it lasted one year (from December 2004 to December 2005).

At the end of the FINECVET 1 project, development of the ECVET system was still ongoing. This was why there were calls for the project to continue. A new project, named FINECVET 2, was subsequently launched in August 2006 and ended in December 2007.

2. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The objectives of both the FINECVET 1 and FINECVET 2 projects were to:

1. define the concepts of the ECVET system and how they apply to the Finnish education system;
2. test the effectiveness of the European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) in different upper secondary vocational qualifications;

3. prepare a national information and guidance plan for education providers and representatives of the working life for the purpose of implementing the ECVET model.

Since the ECVET system was still being developed and was fairly incomplete during the first stage of the project, the FINECVET 1 project mainly focused on the first objective, i.e. defining the concepts and applying them to the Finnish education system. In addition, the project carried out preliminary tests of the applicability of the credit transfer system in five upper secondary vocational qualifications. The FINECVET 2 project was able to make use of these outputs and develop them further.

The FINECVET 2 project mainly concentrated on the second objective. In order to achieve the objective, the project agreed to produce concrete tools and models for the ECVET system.

Work on objective 3, preparing a national information and guidance plan for education providers and representatives of the world of work, is still to be tackled after this project. This work will make use of the results of the FINECVET projects.

3. FINECVET 2 PROJECT PARTICIPANTS AND ORGANISATION

The FINECVET 2 project included seven education providers and a total of nine different upper secondary vocational qualifications; four providers and five qualifications were also involved in the first project stage. The education providers each included 1 to 3 qualifications in the project. Each provider had educational institutions and/or enterprises as international partners, representing Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Turkey. The foreign partners were generally organisations already working with the education providers in terms of student exchanges. In addition, the education providers also co-operated with some Finnish educational institutions and trade unions in their own field.

The project involved the following education providers, educational institutions, vocational qualifications and partner countries:

Joint Authority of Education in the Espoo Region (OMNIA)

- Vocational Qualification in Vehicle Technology: France
- Vocational Qualification in Hotel and Restaurant Services: Spain
- Vocational Qualification in Social and Health Care: Germany

Helsinki Business College

- Vocational Qualification in Business and Administration: Austria, Italy, Lithuania and Turkey
- Vocational Qualification in Business Information Technology: Hungary and Italy

Joint Authority of Kainuu Region, Kainuu Vocational College

- Vocational Qualification in Agriculture: Germany

Keuda – Training Consortium of Central Uusimaa, Apprenticeship Training Centre

- Vocational Qualification in Vehicle Technology: France
- Vocational Qualification in Construction: France

Finnish Business College Foundation, Finnish Business College

- Vocational Qualification in Business and Administration: Germany and the Netherlands

City of Tampere, Tampere College

- Vocational Qualification in Forestry: France, Germany, Spain and Sweden

City of Vantaa, Vantaa Vocational College Varia

- Vocational Qualification in Building Maintenance Technology: Germany and the Netherlands

4. PROJECT RESULTS

The project produced concrete models and tools for implementation of the ECVET system. The most important results are as follows:

1. The project developed **models to describe entire qualifications or their studies of different scopes in terms of knowledge, skills and competence**. Descriptions of entire qualifications were used to compare equivalent qualifications in three countries, whereas other descriptions were used to outline studies to be completed in another country.
2. The project put forward **a proposal to determine credit points and the level of studies within the EQF**. The proposal suggests that one year of study and a three-year qualification would equate to 60 and 180 credit points respectively. This is also the solution which the European level is favouring. The project suggested that credit points for specific studies would be determined according to the relative proportion of the three years of study that their completion requires. At EU level, it is likely to be decided that credit points would be determined according to the relative weight of the learning outcomes concerned within an entire qualification and in terms of the vocational competence that it provides. In order to determine the EQF level of studies, the project suggested that the EQF level of qualifications and their compulsory modules would be decided nationally, whereas the level of optional qualification modules would be determined by education providers.
3. In terms of assessment of learning outcomes, the project tested the assessment criteria and documentation forms developed for Finnish vocational skills demonstrations. These work when a Finnish teacher is involved in assessment of skills demonstrations and where the receiving country has an assessment procedure in place equivalent to vocational skills demonstrations. In addition, the project co-operated with an international partner to produce a documentation form for assessment of a skills demonstration/practical test, which differed from the Finnish assessment procedure and was also used. The project developed a template for an **assessment documentation form applied to the ECVET system**, where learning outcomes are assessed in terms of knowledge, skills and competences. This form was not tested in practice during the project. One of the education providers held a final

test at the end of an on-the-job training period that conformed to the host country's practices.

4. The project prepared a **Learning Agreement document template**, which is student-specific and filled in before the start of a student exchange. The effectiveness of the document template was tested in a real-life situation. The template is suitable for use as an agreement concluded both with other educational institutions and with enterprises, for purposes such as on-the-job learning periods.
5. The project prepared a **Memorandum of Understanding document template**, which is a mutual general agreement between an education provider and its international partner. The appendix section of the document template was completed by three education providers using their own details. The template was tested with international partners and it turned out to be useful and to increase mutual trust. The template should be supplemented with a possible field-specific appendix.
6. The Europass Mobility document was used for student exchanges. **Europass Mobility** is very suitable for use within the ECVET system. Participants would like to see some additions to the document, specifically that it should be completely electronic and that it should always be in English.
7. **A credit transfer process model** was produced for one qualification. The tool applied in the model is a description of learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and competences and comparison of these between three countries. In addition, it highlights an education provider's decision-making process: as part of their curricula, education providers should decide on the procedure of validating and recognising studies completed in another country as credits for students.
8. **Other results** included proposals for EQF levels of qualifications and their units, comparisons between countries in implementation of the ECVET system, added value to competence brought about by studies completed in another country and partial harmonisation of the learning outcomes of qualifications completed in different countries.

The project produced concrete tools for implementation of the ECVET system. All outputs will be reviewed and approved prior to their publication on the project website.

More information about the project is available at www.oph.fi → Kehittämishankkeet → FINECVET

5. CONCLUSIONS

Representatives of education providers who participated in the FINECVET 2 project were very positive and enthusiastic about the opportunities introduced by the ECVET system and they are ready to implement the system as soon as decisions have been made.

The following list is a compilation of the FINECVET 2 project's conclusions and proposals for action:

1. In Finland, it is easy to describe learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and competences on the basis of curricula and national guidelines for vocational studies. At a national level, it is necessary to agree how to define knowledge, skills and competences in relation to the Finnish division by assessment target, because the Finnish method of describing learning outcomes is much more comprehensive and diverse compared with the requirements of the definition set out in the EQF Recommendation. The descriptions of learning outcomes produced within the project can be used as models once they have been reviewed and approved.
2. The total credit points awarded for Finnish three-year upper secondary vocational qualifications should be the same in all qualifications. The credit points for individual units of qualifications should be determined nationally according to the relative weight of their respective learning outcomes within the entire qualification. The amounts of credit points given for sub-units smaller than units would be decided by individual education providers in accordance with national guidelines.
3. The EQF level of three-year upper secondary vocational qualifications may vary between individual qualifications; the project suggests reference level 3 or 4. The European debate appears to be settling on the *average, best fit* assessment level as the point of reference. This being the case, the EQF level would be determined according to the Finnish assessment level for a good grade. The EQF levels of qualification modules should also be determined nationally. The EQF levels and credit points of entire qualifications and their units should be determined within the National Core Curricula and Requirements of Competence-based Qualifications. These should be indicated on the qualification certificate in order to facilitate employment.
4. Assessment of learning outcomes should be based on descriptions of learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. If assessment is carried out according to another country's practices, it is necessary to establish the criteria on which the grades are based and how assessment is to be documented. For this purpose, it would be advisable to create nationally uniform guidelines, such as a form used to collect assessment information. The assessors should be individuals/bodies competent under the statutes of the sending or receiving country. The project produced various assessment forms, which need to be reviewed and approved by the Finnish National Board of Education prior to implementation.
5. The Learning Agreement document template produced within the project can be put to use once it has been reviewed, supplemented with instructions for completion and approved.
6. The Memorandum of Understanding document template produced within the project can be introduced once it has been reviewed and approved.
7. The Europass Mobility document is very suitable for use within the ECVET system. The document should be further developed such that it would be completely electronic and that it would always be in English. The content of the Europass Mobility document should be revised such that it would be possible to indicate the EQF level of the qualification or its units and to attach any appendices that the ECVET system may require.

8. The pilot showed that the method of describing learning outcomes within the ECVET system can be used in support of comparing competences provided by different qualifications. Decisions on validation and recognition of studies completed abroad will be taken by individual education providers. In order for a decision-making process to be systematic, official and conforming to the requirement of students' legal protection, the process should be outlined in the provider's curriculum.
9. It would be advisable to draw up national guidelines for the different stages and measures involved in implementing the ECVET system, complete with a process flowchart indicating responsibilities and functions at both national and regional levels.