

Tuning

**Tuning
Educational
Structures
in Europe**

**Tuning
Sectoral
Framework
for Social
Sciences**

**Final Report
2008 - 2010**



Life Long Learning



Education and Culture DG

Tuning Sectoral Framework for Social Sciences

Final Report
2008-2010

Tuning Sectoral Framework for Social Sciences

Final Report
2008-2010

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.

This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

© 2008 Copyright Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency.

The document may be freely copied and distributed provided that no modifications are made, that the source is acknowledged and that this copyright notice is included.

© Publicaciones de la Universidad de Deusto
Apartado 1 - 48080 Bilbao
e-mail: publicaciones@deusto.es

ISBN: 978-84-9830-381-0

Depósito legal: BI - 3.163-2010

Impreso en España/Printed in Spain

Executive Summary

The European Qualification Framework (EQF) is a common European reference framework which links countries' qualifications systems together, acting as a translation device to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems in Europe. In this context, the project examines how the Tuning Project could bridge the European Qualification Framework (EQF) for Life Long Learning (LLL) and the Qualification Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF EHEA) at the subject area level and from there to the sectoral level. The project proposes an approach to integrating, at the sectoral level, the general descriptors used by both qualification frameworks. At this level the first priority is to develop frameworks which offer descriptors and reference points at intermediate level, more general than at subject area level but more specific than at the eight levels of European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for Lifelong Learning (LLL)¹ and the Dublin Descriptors² of the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF EHEA)³.

The project is based on Tuning methodology and the outcomes of the Tuning project⁴ at subject-area level so far. These outcomes are, in particular, the cycle (level) descriptors and key features developed for the first, second and third cycle, that is levels 6 to 8 in the Qualification Framework for LLL. In practice, these are the Tuning templates which have been prepared by the Tuning subject areas and some subject-area-based (thematic) networks. Internationally renowned peers at subject area level validated this material in 2007. The planned objectives and outcomes of the Tuning Sectoral Framework for Social Sciences will be obtained by using the strategy of reflection, debate and consultation in the form of working groups, a method which has proven to be successful in the Tuning I to IV projects (2000 - 2008). Close cooperation with and consultation of experts in the field of non-formal and informal

1 For a description of this approach, see http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44_en.htm

2 See Bologna Framework and National Qualification Frameworks: Appendix 1 at <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/qf/national.asp>

3 For more information, see <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/qf/resources.asp>

4 <http://www.tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/>

learning at both national and international level is also foreseen. This cooperation and consultation is of relevance in particular for mapping secondary formal, informal and non-formal level education. Cooperation with and consultation of secondary education is also essential for achieving the projects' goals.

The working groups consist of representatives of higher education institutions and representatives of associations at subject-area level. In the project, two types of subject areas are distinguished: first, areas which have developed Tuning cycle descriptors and reference points already and which have been validated at different stages, and, secondly, subject areas in the Social Sciences sector for which this had not been done so far. The availability of descriptors and reference points at subject-area level is, in the opinion of Tuning, a precondition for the satisfactory formulation and functioning of sectoral, national and European qualification frameworks. The first type consists of the following subject areas: **Business, European Studies, Education Sciences, Occupational Therapy and Social Work.** The second type of subject areas, for which it is thought absolutely necessary to prepare the required indicators, is represented by the following: **Law, Psychology and International Relations.**

Table of Contents

1. Project Objectives	11
2. Project Approach	13
3. Project Outcomes & Results	15
4. Partnerships	61
5. Plans for the Future	65
6. Contribution to EU policies	69
Annex 1- ECTS and ECVET: Comparisons and contrasts	73

1. Project Objectives

The main aims and objectives for the development of a credit based sectoral qualification framework for the Social Sciences, which will be consistent with frameworks for other Tuning sectors and which will cover levels 3 to 8 of the EQF for LLL, were the following:

- identification of (main) subject areas in the Social Sciences not covered by the Tuning project so far. Establishment of subject-area based working groups for these fields. Initiating preparation of key features and cycle (level) descriptors for these subject areas;
- mapping of secondary general education and vocational education and training level from the perspective of the sector as well as for each subject area involved. Identification of communalities and differences at national level;
- identification of communalities and differences at sectoral as well as at subject area level at European level;
- preparation of cycle descriptors for the levels 6-8 for the new subject area as well at levels 3-8 at sectoral level;
- identification of entrance and exit points as well as entrance levels at levels 3 and 4 and possibly 5 on the basis of different learning routes taken;
- identification of possible (ECTS) credit ranges for the levels 3 to 5 as well as exploration of the link to the ECVET initiative;
- identification of commonalities and differences between the existing cycle (level) descriptors for the first, second, third level, and levels 6 to 8 of the EQF for LLL;
- preparation of sectoral cycle / level descriptors. These descriptors should be written in such a way that both the Dublin descriptors and the descriptors of the EQF for LLL are covered;
- identification of suggestions for fine tuning and bridging of the Bologna (Dublin) descriptors and the descriptors of the EQF for LLL.

For the purposes of constituting clearly defined working groups amongst the participants in the project, these outcomes were grouped into six categories. These categories are set out below in section 4.

The following three main objectives and priorities of the EQF LLL Programme have been identified and have been addressed by this project.

- First, a credit-based European sectoral qualification framework covering the EQF levels 3 to 8 will facilitate the ability of individual learners to develop their competences further in a LLL context.
- Next, it will now be easier to obtain recognition of prior learning outcomes in particular within the same domain or sector and will avoid learners needlessly losing time because of the lack of recognition.
- Finally, descriptors set minimum standards for gaining credit(s) and will, therefore, contribute to the enhancement of the quality of education and training.

The outcomes of this project have been seen in relation to the outcomes of the Tuning Project regarding the enhancement of the EHEA, models for designing, delivering and quality enhancing of degree programmes, the use of credits for the purposes of accumulation as well as transfer, and the best teaching and learning strategies in relation to employability and citizenship.

2. Project Approach

The EQF is a common European reference framework, which links countries' qualifications systems together, acting as a translation device to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems in Europe. In this context, this project has examined how the Tuning Project could bridge the European Qualification Framework (EQF) for Life Long Learning (LLL) and the Qualification Framework (QF) for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) at the subject area level and from there to the sectoral level. It also attempted to see how to integrate, at the level of the sector, the general descriptors of both qualification frameworks. What is really required now are frameworks which offer descriptors and reference points at an intermediate level: more general than at subject area level but more precise than in the eight levels descriptors of the EQF LLL and in the Dublin Descriptors of the QF EHEA.

The Bologna Process has focused on re-structuring the qualifications' framework for higher education in terms of three/four cycles. Discussions about entrance levels and learning routes for admission to higher education institutions and programmes have been not been broached so far. However, in a LLL perspective, it is thought necessary to develop more transparency and clarity about entrance conditions and levels, recognition procedures regarding informal and non-formal learning to gain access to higher education. This requires that level descriptors are developed at sectoral / subject area level for learning between secondary (particularly at post compulsory level) and higher education. It implies the development of sectoral descriptors for the EQF levels 3 and 4. Furthermore, it is thought useful from the perspective of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)⁵ to develop sectoral descriptors for the levels 5 to 8. These descriptors have been based on the comparison of subject

5 The Recognition of (Prior) Learning Outcomes is defined as:

- a) *Formal recognition* – the process of granting official status to knowledge, skills and competencies through either
 - the award of qualifications (certificates, diplomas, degrees or titles: or
 - the grant of equivalence, or credit.
- b) *Social recognition* – the acknowledgement of the value of skills and/or competencies by economic and social stakeholders. See: Konrad J (2009), *Methodology of RPL*, page 10, December available from http://www.rplo.eu/files/methodology_of_RPL1209.pdf

area descriptors and reference points as developed by Tuning. This will surely lead to insightful knowledge into differences and communalities between subject areas within a given sector. This will make it possible to identify more fairly the acquired and non-acquired areas of learning at the level of the individual, when recognition of prior learning outcomes (RPLO) is sought.

The project has been based on Tuning methodology and the outcomes of the Tuning project at subject area level so far. These outcomes are, in particular, the cycle (level) descriptors and key features developed for the first, second and third cycle, which may be taken to equate to levels 6 to 8 in the EQF LLL. In practice, these are the Tuning templates, which have been prepared by the Tuning subject areas and by a number of subject-area-based (thematic) networks. This material was validated, in 2007, by internationally respected peers at subject-area level. The planned objectives and outcomes of the Tuning Sectoral Framework for Social Sciences have been obtained by using the strategy of reflection, debate and consultation in the form of working groups, which has proven to be successful in the Tuning I to IV projects (2000 - 2008). Close cooperation with and consultation of experts in the field of non-formal and informal learning at national and international level has taken place. This cooperation and consultation has been of relevance, in particular, for mapping secondary formal, informal and non-formal level education. Cooperation with and consultation of secondary education has also been essential for achieving the project's goals.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The preliminary to the work on the six identified outcomes has been the drawing up of a short definition of the social sciences sector:

'The social sciences are concerned with the study of and the provision of services to society as articulated in individuals, groups and communities. They examine social structures and organizations (economic, legal, cultural, religious, political, etc.) in both space and time. They explore the dynamic processes and inter-relationships between them and how different meanings and attitudes are created and have to be negotiated. Their scope ranges from the minutiae of human behaviour and development to large-scale social movements. Social Sciences have a strong ethical dimension related to social justice, wellbeing, cohesion and citizenship.'

All the work conducted on the six outcomes below has been related to this definition.

The main outcomes and results of the project are:

1. sectoral learning outcomes framework based on agreed cycle / level descriptors covering levels 3 to 8 of the EQF for LLL;
2. a report containing detailed information about formal, non formal and informal secondary education level identifying the main progression routes from the EQF levels 3 to 6 at national level for seventeen countries as well as a comparison at European level, with an identification of communalities and differences;
3. a survey of the link between ECTS and ECVET as credit accumulation and transfer systems and proposals for the translation of ECVET credits into ECTS credits (and vice versa) for EQF levels 3-8;
4. a report including proposals to bridge the Dublin cycle descriptors and the level descriptors of the EQF for LLL enabling the drawing up of sectoral/subject area descriptors commensurate with both frameworks;
5. the establishment of subject area based working groups for main academic fields within the social sciences not yet covered by the Tuning project;

6. the identification of cross border areas and/or areas overarching different fields of study.

The results for each of these are presented below:

Outcome 1. A sectoral learning outcomes framework based on agreed cycle/level descriptors covering levels 3 to 8 of the EQF for LLL

The production of agreed cycle/level statements of generic learning outcomes for the Social Sciences sector is an absolutely key component of this overall project.

1. The parameters for the drawing-up of the table of sectoral learning outcomes for the social sciences

This Outcome, which, to the best of our knowledge, is a totally pioneering piece of work, was conducted within very carefully defined parameters.

1. Since it would be extremely difficult to produce generic statements of learning outcomes for each and every subject areas taught in HEIs across the entire EHEA (and indeed the division of Social Sciences into specific subject areas can vary from HEI to HEI and from country to country), what has been attempted in this project is the formulation of a set of generic statements for the entire Social Sciences sector.
2. These sectoral descriptors are designed to serve as bridges between the necessarily very generalised statements in the cycle descriptors for the QF EHEA, that is the Dublin Descriptors, and the level descriptors for the EQF, on the one hand, and professional profiles and cycle/level statements of both generic and subject specific learning outcomes for individual subject areas within the Social Sciences, on the other hand. It should be stressed at this point that, whilst sectoral learning frameworks have recently come in for some heavy criticism (see, for example, *Footsteps and Pathways for Lifelong Learning*; Final Report EQF PRO Project, 31 January 2010)⁶, this criticism concerns sectoral

6 See <http://www.eucen.eu/EQFpro/index.html>

providers and not sectors as defined by learning areas. It is, therefore, underlined that the sectoral work here is complementary to, and not in opposition to, previous work.

3. These sectoral generic statements have to accord, at one and the same time, with the Dublin Descriptors and the EQF Level statements. In order to assure themselves that both sets of descriptors were respected, all those members of this project working on this outcome had constantly before them not only the two sets of descriptors themselves but also a number of other documents, drawn up previously which examine the relationship between the two sets of framework descriptors. These documents demonstrate the very clear common and overlapping ground between the two sets of descriptors and this despite the fact that they were drawn up on the basis of somewhat different categorisations of learning outcomes. Both sets of descriptors were, however, constructed in the light of Bloom's taxonomy and their differences are ultimately more apparent than real.
4. The sectoral statements have also to accord with existing statements of generic and subject specific learning outcomes for individual subject areas, as produced in the course of the TUNING project or related projects. TUNING has developed its own categorisation of generic learning outcomes or competences, that is the instrumental, the interpersonal and the systemic. Once again, these categories may be different from those of both the QF EHEA and the EQF but there is no fundamental conflict between them. At the same time, the Social Science sectoral descriptors are intended to act as a guide for drawing up statements of learning outcomes for subject areas which have not yet produced their generic and subject specific statements. A number of these subject areas were included in this project (see Outcome 5 below). The members of the group associated with these new subjects were able to follow the work on the sectoral statements as well as producing those for their own subject areas.
5. It is accepted that these sectoral statements should be drawn up for more than just the three main Bologna cycles as, is the case, in the TUNING subject-area statements. When TUNING invited subject areas to draw up such lists of learning outcomes/competences, the Short Cycle had not yet been added to the other three main cycles of the Bologna process. Clearly, the Short Cycle could not be excluded here, even if not all subject areas in the Social Sciences across HEIs in the EHEA necessarily offer short-cycle programmes. In addition and since a large proportion of candidates for entry to HEI programmes in the

Social Sciences will possess learning outcomes situated at EQF levels 3 and 4, it was seen as most important that descriptors should also be written for these levels as well as for levels 5-8. Again, it is clear that not much consideration in the Bologna Process has hitherto been given to the bridge between pre-HEI and HEI education or between Further/Adult/Continuing education and HEI education.

6. Since the projected table of descriptors was to be drawn up 'vertically' in terms of the EQF levels 3 to 8, it was obvious that 'horizontally' it should also be drawn up according to the EQF's tripartite division of learning outcomes into knowledge, skills and competence. Such a table would, therefore, enable the members of the group, already used to working with the Dublin Descriptors, to familiarise themselves much more thoroughly with the EQF level descriptors in order to accustom themselves to work with them.
7. This decision to adopt this approach was reinforced by the fact that it was also necessary to draw up these sectoral learning outcomes in such a way that they would relate not only to programmes and qualifications taken within HEIs but also those which are taken outside of HEIs in the Adult/Further/Continuing education sector, and, further, to learning which is either informal or non-formal, and which is situated at the equivalent level to one or other of the Bologna cycles. The EQF descriptors are specifically designed to cover all learning of whatever nature at all these levels, in contrast to the Dublin Descriptors.
8. The agreement to proceed in this manner was not, however, reached before considering a number of doubts felt by some members of the group over the precise coincidence between each of the EQF levels 5 to 8 and the four Bologna cycles. These questions of coincidence raised a number of conceptual problems, which were debated at some length, indeed at great length in respect of one of them. Since these conceptual debates touched on very serious questions concerning the precise relationship between the EQF levels and the cycles of the QF EHEA, they are discussed in some detail in the report on Outcome 4 below.
9. In the end, however, it was agreed that the only way to proceed in this project was to accept as unquestioned givens, the more or less strict correlation between the EQF levels 5 to 8 and the four Bologna cycles as suggested in the formal papers proposing the EQF and the ECVET to the European Parliament in 2006 and in the legislation of 2008. Any other conclusion would have made it impossible

to proceed further. This does not mean to say that the conceptual and practical questions raised and discussed under Outcome 4 below may be ignored. They deserve far more debate than could be undertaken within this project. It clearly will not do, however, to suggest, as is the case in *Footsteps and Pathways for Lifelong Learning*, the Final Report of the EQF PRO Project of January 2010⁷, that the very close and over-simplistic coincidence between qualification frameworks and EQF learning levels is an almost perverse result of the work conducted to produce new or revised NQFs. The very way in which the EQF was presented to the European parliament, clearly underlining the coincidence between EQF levels 5-8 and the four Bologna cycles was an incitement to countries to proceed by identifying, first, post secondary but non-HEI programmes and qualifications with one or other of the four Bologna cycles and, then, to work back down their existing qualifications frameworks, whether explicit or tacit, identifying them all with one or other of EQF levels 1, 2, 3 and 4. This way of proceeding emphasises the understandable difficulty and unease, which is experienced by some stakeholders, who are used to qualifications frameworks, when being invited to move in one single step away from qualifications frameworks and towards learning frameworks. Time is needed for people to become comfortable with new conceptual frameworks and to place them at the centre of their thinking. Consequently and whatever the possible flaws in this proposed approach, the members of this project could see no alternative to it.

This, then, was the basic set of parameters on which the table of sectoral learning outcomes for the Social Sciences was constructed.

2. The agreed procedure for the construction of the table

Once these basic questions of approach had been settled, the group decided how the work of constructing the table should proceed in practical terms.

1. Since the EQF divides each level of learning outcomes into three very closely defined categories, knowledge, skills and competence, it was agreed that, first, three groups, each consisting of members drawn both from a wide range of subject areas in the Social Sciences, which

7 See <http://www.eucen.eu/EQFpro/index.html>

have already produced lists of learning outcomes within the TUNING project, and from a broad spread of countries, would draw up lists for all the EQF levels from 3 to 8 for each of these three categories. This would result in the production of three separate sets of 'vertical' lists. In so proceeding initially in this vertical manner, it was certain that each group would pay very careful attention to the central question of the progression of learning achievement from each level/cycle to the next.

2. On completion of this first step, a working group, consisting of selected members of the three original groups, would, then, ensure that each EQF level of the table was as consistent 'horizontally', between knowledge, skills and competence, as it was 'vertically' between the six levels of learning. Again, this group represented a broad spectrum of subject areas within the Social Sciences, already associated with TUNING, and of the countries involved in this project.
3. After this select group, had put the entire table together in a coherent manner, this would be presented for comment and possible amendment to the subject areas in this project which were new to TUNING, that is Law, Psychology and International Relations. This meant that overall eight subject areas in the Social Sciences were involved in the final production of these sectoral tables. After the completion of this project, other subject areas in the Social Sciences will be invited to comment on the table. This will provide the widest possible validation for the sectoral table proposed in this report.
4. The table resulting from this project's work will not, of course, be considered to be set in stone. In the light of comment coming from both those concerned with the Dublin Descriptors and the EQF level descriptors, on the one hand, and from individual subject areas within the Social Sciences, on the other hand, the table will be subject to periodic amendment.

3. Practical problems in constructing the table

The construction of the table presented certain practical difficulties. The major ones, which are likely to be encountered in future by other sectoral groups, are as follows:

1. First, and after the initial attempts to make progress, the three different groups agreed that, for all the close definition of the three cat-

egories of learning outcomes provided by the EQF, they initially felt uncertain that the line of division between 'skills' and 'competence' was as clear as intended. So, a great deal of early discussion took place on what should fall either side of the line of divide between the two. These initial uncertainties were satisfactorily resolved as the work progressed.

2. Secondly, the members of all three groups understood that they would have to be very cautious in drawing up their lists of knowledge, skills and competence for EQF level 3 and 4. They were understandably worried about the degree of coincidence between what they, as members of HEIs or HEI-related institutions, expect of candidates who wish to enter their teaching/learning programmes and that which those who construct and teach programmes in the Social Sciences at levels 3 and 4 expect students to achieve. In this, they were highlighting an age-old problem, namely that of communication between those who prepare students for entry into HEI programmes and those who oversee students' learning once they enter those programmes. This is not the place to rehearse anecdotal evidence about teachers in HEIs complaining of the lack of the requisite 'knowledge and skills' in those they take into their courses or, about teachers in schools constantly complaining of teachers in HEIs, with unrealistic expectations, failing to understand that students are not worse than in the 'good old days' but simply different. Maybe the EQF tables of learning levels will help to diminish these tensions in general and, hopefully, the table drawn up here may aid those specifically involved in the area of the Social Sciences.

Given that those, who participated in the drawing-up of the lists of learning outcomes set out in the table below, were highly conscious of being pioneers in this field, the work on this Outcome, not surprisingly, extended across the greater part of the project time. It is believed, however, that the results will be of very great use not only to those working in the area of the social sciences but to those in the other sectoral areas who will face the task of drawing up a table of learning outcomes for their respective sectors.

It is very much to be emphasised that the lists of generic learning outcomes presented in the table drawn up by and for this sector of the Social Sciences are not intended to cover merely that which is taught in HEIs. As stated above, the table covers EQF levels 3 and 4. It is worth reiterating that for levels 5-8, they cover, formal learning both

inside and outside of HEIs. The table is, also, constructed in order to serve as a reference point for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. In addition and given that many formal qualifications in the Social Sciences are directly related to professional activities, the learning outcomes recorded here are as much work as academic-related. Finally, it was constantly kept in mind that many, who work in the social sector, do so on the basis of non-formal and/or informal learning⁸.

4. The table of the sectoral learning outcomes framework for the social sciences

With all these preliminary and explanatory points in mind, the results of the group's work may be presented in the following table. It is to be hoped that it will serve as a sure guide not only for all those learning and working in the area of the Social Sciences but, also, for those who attempt in the future to draw up similar tables for other learning sectors.

⁸ This is an important area of development in higher education. "The ministers responsible for higher education, for the first time in Bergen in 2005 encouraged the creation of 'opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education, including procedures for the recognition of prior learning'. Recently in April 2009 in Leuven/Louvain la Neuve, they promoted the development by European universities of lifelong learning strategies, stating that "successful policies for lifelong learning will include basic principles and procedures for recognition of prior learning on the basis of learning outcomes regardless of whether the knowledge, skills and competences were acquired through formal, non formal or informal learning paths". http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/documents/Leuven_Louvain-la-Neuve_Communicu%C3%A9_April_2009.pdf

However, for the time being, the development of validation of non-formal and informal learning, except in France and UK where the first arrangement appeared in higher education at the beginning of the eighties, is patchy. Nevertheless, the case studies show that validation is seen as part of the future in universities even if it is not yet widely used or used only in specific courses. The establishment of National Qualifications Frameworks should in the future provide support for building together with formal bridges validation-based bridges between university learning and learning that takes place outside the university in non formal and informal as well as other formal settings. See *Footsteps and Pathways for Lifelong Learning*, the Final Report of the EQF PRO Project, January 2010, <http://www.eucen.eu/EQFpro/index.html>

**Main competences from Level 3 to 8
from the perspective of Social Sciences**

Level	Knowledge	Skills	Competences
LEVEL 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factual knowledge of societal structures and institutions. • Knowledge of processes of social change. • Knowledge of the dynamic inter-relationship between people, structures and the environment. • General knowledge of the professional context. • Knowledge of groups, their development and their interrelationships. • Knowledge of human development particularly in regards to self and area of professional practice. • Knowledge of the principles and values of citizenship. • Knowledge of social identities and differences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates effectively with individuals and groups in a variety of settings. • Recognizes, responds and adapts to new situations. • Follows protocols and rules taking account of cultures and social norms. • Recognises values, ethics, behavioural norms and structures needed to work effectively. • Analyses and solves practical problems by selecting and applying basic tools, methods, and information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assists in shaping the learning or working environment, presents processes and results to the appropriate recipients of such information. • Adapts own behaviour effectively to changing demands of working relationships. • Works within a group and occasionally offers support. • Reflects on own actions and the actions of others and responds appropriately • Learns or works autonomously within contexts which are familiar, taking responsibility for completed tasks • Acts in an ethical way in relation to individuals and groups, and tasks. • Demonstrates appreciation and respect for diversity and multicultural-ity.

Level	Knowledge	Skills	Competences
LEVEL 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factual and practical knowledge relevant to the field of study and practice. • Factual and practical knowledge of the function of institutions, particularly of that related to the field of study or practice. • Knowledge of interpersonal interaction. • Knowledge of the bio, psycho, social, spiritual nature and development of individual. • Basic knowledge of ethical principles, particularly related to practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works within and establishes a range of networks. • Plans, organises, implements and evaluates a specific intervention in the short term. • Takes account of potential consequences of decisions and actions related to specific interventions. • Makes informal decisions based on ethics, values, cultures, behavioural and social norms. • Develops strategies for life long learning • Acts in unfamiliar environments. • Selects and implements a solution from a range of tools to resolve specific problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapts own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems. • Takes responsibility for the completion of tasks. • Acts with civic awareness and with social responsibility on the basis of ethical reasoning • Is responsible for motivating people to achieve common goals using established protocols. • Enables others to make choices and decisions based on information. • Contributes to effective team working
LEVEL 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive, factual, theoretical and practical knowledge within a specific area of the social domain: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — social theories and human development; — historical processes shaping society; — cultural phenomena; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishes and extends networks and partnerships. • Plans, organises, implements, evaluates and intervenes in the medium term. • Anticipates consequences of actions and interventions taking into account ethics, values, cultures, behaviours and social norms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercises management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change. • Reviews and develops performance of self and others. • Takes responsibility in a team.

Level	Knowledge	Skills	Competences
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — the mechanisms of interaction and communication; — social justice, human rights, power, citizenship and ethical practice; — sources that may be used for further development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactively identifies creative and transferable solutions in relation to specific interventions. • Learns or works in changing environments and recognises and utilises available learning opportunities and scopes in action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leads individuals and small groups, facilitating completion of goals with successful contribution of all participants.
LEVEL 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad and integrated knowledge and comprehension of the interdisciplinary background of the field of studies or practice in social sciences. • Advanced theoretical knowledge of the individual and society. • Advanced theoretical and practical knowledge of processes of social changes and especially those relevant to practice. • Advanced knowledge of group dynamics and their internal (power, influence, communication etc.) and external (environment) interrelations. • Advanced knowledge of self as dynamic actor within society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops networks and partnerships across a range of cultures and levels. • Develops creative solutions to abstract problems. • Demonstrates skill in a wide range of interventions in complex, unpredictable and international situations taking account of current evidence. • Contributes to the resolution of interpersonal and intercultural conflicts. • Communicates and debates professional issues and findings in research with experts and non experts of own field, ie. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Formulates, justifies and argues subject specific positions and problem solutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implements appropriate development strategies and creates continuing learning processes autonomously. • Acts and resolves problems with empathy, social responsibility and civic awareness. • Formulates scientifically founded judgements which consider social and ethical findings. • Is responsible for own ethical practice and recognises ethical practice of others

Level	Knowledge	Skills	Competences
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced knowledge and understanding of the processes of the development of power relationships and diversity in society • Advanced knowledge and understanding of ethical principles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Discusses information, ideas, problems and solutions with experts and laymen — Collects, evaluates and interprets relevant information. 	
LEVEL 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly specialised knowledge, basis for original thinking and research in a specific field of study or practice. • Interdisciplinary knowledge relevant to the specialist area of study or practice. • Advanced knowledge and in depth understanding of ethical issues. • Development of critical and autonomous knowledge related to the management of professional practice. • Critical knowledge of a range of appropriate methodologies to the perspective of the discipline. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates and debates professional issues and findings in own and other research with experts and non experts of one's field. • Demonstrates innovation, advanced problem solving and mastery of methods and approaches in complex and specialized fields. • Designs and manages networks, strategies and structures for the long term. • Designs and conducts research to add breadth and depth to knowledge and to inform and innovate practice. • Influences policy in the field. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes responsibility to develop professional knowledge and practice work or study contexts that are complex/unpredictable and require both strategy and process. • Responds and takes responsibility in challenging and unpredictable situations. • Takes responsibility for implementing new strategies and protocols in all situations. • Takes responsibility for good quality and ethical practice at an individual and collective level. • Demonstrates leadership and innovation in management when working in complex and unpredictable situations.

Level	Knowledge	Skills	Competences
LEVEL 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovative, research based, advanced knowledge of the specific field of social study or practice. • Expert knowledge of research methodology relevant to the specific field of study or practice. • Critical awareness of ontological, epistemological and complex ethical issues related to the specific field of study and practice. • Critical awareness of own theoretical development in relation to other fields of knowledge and society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designs, implements and evaluates a range of research strategies in order to develop new knowledge in the field. • Demonstrates independence, originality, creativity and ability in advanced analysis and synthesis of complex ideas with a variety of epistemological approaches. • Effectively communicates new knowledge and innovation in practice using a variety of media to expert and non-expert audiences. • Provides leadership on the development of policy. • Evaluates and resolves ethical dilemmas that have policy implications to practice and research. • Effectively builds contacts and cooperates with beginners and advanced researchers of own and other disciplines, coordinating and guiding complex interdisciplinary research projects. 	

5. Conclusion

It is greatly to be hoped that the construction of this table will act as a potent facilitator of mobility within the Social Sciences, whether this involves movement between different subject areas within the sector or between different categories of educational providers or indeed between the formal, non-formal and informal sectors. It is also hoped that as other sectors produce their own tables, mobility between all sectors will be facilitated by the identification of common learning outcomes. It is clear that, to date, the Bologna Process has so far resulted in only limited mobility of these kinds, as old barriers to effective mobility, even within individual member states, have proved hard to breach. This relative failure has recently been heavily emphasised in *Footsteps and Pathways for the Lifelong Learner*, The Final Report of EQF PRO Project. Even if the explanation proffered by that report for this relative failure is highly contentious, since it is clear that the low level of mobility in Europe as opposed to North America depends on many more factors than the purely intellectual/academic, it does underline the need for more projects of this kind to act as stimuli to the desired outcomes of the whole Bologna and Copenhagen Processes.

Outcome 2. A report containing detailed informaton about the formal, non-formal and informal secondary education level, identifying the main progression routes from EQF levels 3-6 at national level for seventeen countries as well as a comparison at european level, with an identification of communalities and differences

1. Introduction

The production of a table of sectoral learning outcomes for the Social Sciences was an absolutely key feature of this SQF project. This table is laid out above in the report on Outcome 1. Although drawn up with the

previous work of TUNING on subject area competences in mind, it has several novel features. First, it covers not only Bologna cycles 1, 2 and 3 but also the Short Cycle. Next, these descriptors were written using the three categories of learning outcomes identified by the EQF rather than the five categories of the Dublin Descriptors. The adoption of this approach was rendered even more important by the fact that it was decided to introduce a further and most important innovation for the TUNING project, namely the writing of statements of learning outcomes for EQF levels 3 and 4 which concern that learning which, normally, most immediately precedes students' entry into higher and/or further education.

In order to facilitate the task of writing sectoral learning outcomes for EQF levels 3 and 4, it was understood that fifteen countries participating in this project would produce a report on their respective educational systems. At least one person from each participating country was invited to produce the national report.

These reports were designed to summarise the information given in the surveys of national systems published under the auspices of EURYDICE. Hence most of them would give an outline of primary education before moving on, in more detail, to secondary education.

These reports would, however, concentrate on several key features of these national systems. They would:

- look at the way in which reform of the entire educational system is proceeding and, particularly, at the way in which that reform is shaped by the development of the EQF and of its associated credit system, the ECVET. It was understood that this would be closely associated with the new or revised National Qualification Systems (NQFs), which all nations subscribing to the EQF have agreed to produce.
- pay close attention to the teaching/learning of the social sciences in each of the fifteen countries. In practice, more than fifteen educational systems are reported here since Belgium and the UK each have more than one educational system operating within their borders.
- highlight the relationship between formal education, on the one hand and non-formal and informal learning, on the other hand.

The combined effect of these key features would be to make it easier to see how the transition from secondary (or secondary equivalent) education to higher education could be made much more seamless than in the past.

It should be noted that these national reports vary considerably in the degree of detail that their individual authors were able (or felt able) to provide. Some reports give much wider coverage than others. Not surprisingly, those colleagues reporting on countries where work in producing a totally new or revised NQF is more advanced were able to produce much more detailed reports than others were able to do.

Despite the differences between these reports and despite the fact that they do not cover the whole of the European Union, it is more than worthwhile here to underline some general points of close comparison (and some contrasts) which emerge from them. Although these general conclusions are primarily intended to be of help to those in the social sciences sector, it is also hoped that they may help in the work of other sectoral projects as they come on stream.

2. The general structure of primary and secondary education in the European Union

It is most noticeable that, despite the very varied national histories, which have shaped the systems of primary and secondary education across member states of the European Union and the European Economic Area, the educational systems from country to country are, in their basic structures, remarkably similar. Most have a pattern of fundamentally (but not always exclusively) state-controlled education, which is divided into the Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary sectors, with Primary starting at around age 5/6 and Secondary at age 11. General compulsory secondary education ends mainly at age 16, although secondary education may continue until age 18. There are, of course, some exceptions to these age divides. Primary education in UK (Scotland) ends at age 12. In Austria, compulsory secondary education ends at age 15. Some countries, and France is the outstanding example, have a far more developed pre-Primary sector than others.

Great similarities are most notable across the various secondary sectors. Most countries have a formal division between lower secondary and upper secondary sectors. The upper sector, generally commencing around age 16, tends to be divided into two branches, the 'academic' on the one hand, and the vocational/professional/technical, on the other hand. Again there are clear exceptions, as in the Netherlands where the triple divide into VWO, HAVO and VMBO sectors concerns all from age 12 to age 17/18.

The secondary sector, taken together with the further/adult/continuing education sector, is complex enough to have produced what is often viewed by the writers of the national reports as qualifications 'frameworks' which have been and in many cases remain diffuse, difficult to understand and work with for students, education providers and employers alike. These systems are, therefore, understood to be in great need of reorganisation and simplification in order to achieve real transparency. Most of these national reports indicate, as would be expected, that work on a new or seriously revised NQF is in progress. As yet, few countries have completed their (new) NQF. Moreover, there are great differences of degree of advancement among countries which are preparing such a framework for the first time or who are reshaping an already existing one. Those in the latter category often find it difficult to cast off old modes of thinking and to adapt to the new student-centred approach to the learning process. This is vital, however, as an integral part of this work lies, of course, in discovering how each of these national frameworks can be understood in terms of the EQF. As will be seen later in this report, this is not necessarily an easy task and it seems that different countries may be relating the EQF to their own systems in rather different ways, at least for the moment. Much international co-operation will be required in order to ensure that serious anomalies do not appear across national borders⁹.

3. Reform, NQFs and the EQF

Those national reports in which the authors were able to discuss, in some detail, the way in which reform is proceeding and the way in which this is associated with their NQF and with the EQF are as follows: Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic (however briefly in this case), Finland, France, Slovenia, Spain, The Netherlands and the UK. All of these reported on the degree of relative advancement towards producing an NQF or, where one already exists, a seriously revised one. For several, they were only able to make suggestions about how their qualifications structures might equate with EQF levels, either because the NQF is still not completed or, if completed, has not yet been formally set against the EQF. Some tables suggesting equivalence of levels in an NQF with those of the EQF started with equivalence at EQF level 1, whereas others confined themselves to covering only levels 3 and upwards. Some stopped at level 6 since non-HE

⁹ For some of the practical issues involved, see the published Self-Certification Reports at <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/qf/national.asp#B>

education ends at that equivalent level. Most reports identified EQF levels 1 and 2 with learning normally achieved in Primary education. Spain stood out, in this respect as an exception in that EQF levels 1 and 2 were seen in the suggested equivalences as relating, in the first instance, to Diplomas and Certificates of Professional Standard or Workplace training and, in the second instance, to Compulsory Secondary education, whereas level 3 is related to non-compulsory secondary education.

Only serious discussion with and between those making such proposals for the equivalence between national and EQF levels could sort out whether these differences are more apparent than real. The differences, however, do look real and, in themselves, they underline the difficulty which will be felt in most countries between relating the EQF which is defined by levels of learning, with NQFs which are essentially concerned with hierarchies of qualifications which have long been in place and which may be most diffuse. Of course, the two approaches are closely related but the relationship may be often a very subtle one and not that easy to establish with a reasonable degree of certainty. It may be, indeed, that those countries, which confidently relate their hierarchies of qualifications to the EQF, may need to return to the question in greater depth at a later date. It is very noticeable, that only one country to date, the UK, has manifestly tried to tackle at one and the same time both the issue of a hierarchy of learning and a hierarchy of qualifications. This shows in the acceptance of 8 levels of learning and a hierarchy of three categories of qualifications, Awards, Certificates and Diplomas. These different categories of qualifications are differentiated not by level (they may all be achieved at any of the 8 EQF levels of learning) but by the accepted (minimum) number of credits which must be accumulated in order to satisfy the requirements for each of them. This is achieved because the UK is one of the few countries in which a credit system has been set up to accompany the new qualifications framework. Only The Netherlands seems to have proceeded in a similar manner but here, the process has, for the moment, got no further than an attempt to relate qualifications to ECTS credits – curiously ECVET credits have not yet entered the equation. This seems to put the UK ahead of most others, but it will be noticed that it has adopted a credit system which, like the various HE credit systems in operation across the UK, is based on 1 credit being equivalent to 10 hours of student workload. This puts it in conflict (at least in arithmetical terms) with ECTS which works on the basis of 25-30 hours of workload for each credit. Assuming parity between the ECTS and the ECVET (a putative parity discussed below in the section concerning Outcome 3), this means it will also be in discord with ECVET.

The reasons why the UK persists in retaining, both for VET and for HE, a credit arithmetic, which puts it out of step with European developments, remain a mystery to others. Clearly, ECTS has been viewed by UK HEIs with suspicion and it may be that ECVET will be treated with the same disdain. Finland is the only country that indicates in its report that ECVET credits are already being applied to some of its programmes in the upper secondary sector. What is being done in Finland and, for all its idiosyncrasies, the UK raises questions about how and when other countries will turn their NQFs into full National Credit and Qualification Frameworks by using ECVET credits for non-HE education and how they will relate ECVET credits to ECTS credits. This last question is taken up, in considerable detail, in the report on Outcome 3 (and in Annex 1) below.

In terms of relating secondary/further education to the EQF (and presumably its associated credit system), only The Netherlands has reported on the way in which a whole series of problems in using the EQF as the normal and accepted point of reference are being confronted. This openness in laying out the very obvious problems which have to be confronted and overcome in respect of all the stakeholders is extremely refreshing.

4. The place of the social sciences in school learning

The degree of information provided on the place of social science in school learning was very varied across these reports. Some reports offered virtually no information. Some had little to say because they reflected the fact that Social Sciences occupy only a very limited space in the national curriculum, as, for example, in Slovenia where they occupy only 9% of the compulsory curriculum. Some countries (for example the UK and Finland) reported the various subject areas within the social sciences, which are commonly, if not universally, studied in secondary (and maybe also primary) education. Some, for example Spain, underlined that different branches of the baccalaureate had to be followed if students wished to concentrate on this or that particular social science or set of social sciences. Yet others went into considerable detail on the teaching of the social sciences. Bulgaria and the Netherlands were notable in this respect. In the first case, learning outcomes expected of those completing compulsory education were laid out in classic EQF terms of knowledge, skills and competence. Although less directly related to the EQF, impressive lists of what is expected of both primary and secondary students in terms of learning about Man and Society are laid out in the report of The Netherlands.

5. The relationship between formal, non-formal and informal learning

This subject was undoubtedly the most difficult to report on and few contributors did so formally, preferring instead to enter into discussions with the rapporteur to this project who agreed, on this basis, to produce a brief summary of the current state of play. The difficulty experienced by the national representatives is not surprising. A truly clear situation in any nation requires the coming together of a number of features linking formal to non-formal and, above all, informal learning. These are, first, a developed national qualifications framework, legislation concerning the right of citizens to have prior learning recognised and, finally, mechanisms for enabling citizens to exercise their rights. Among the fifteen nations reporting on their educational systems, only France at the moment has all three. In effect, the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is particularly well developed in France. This results in large part from the fact that legislation on the matter defines the whole area very closely. It gives everybody who has a minimum of three years of experience in a field related to the qualification in which they seek to make application, the right to apply.

Under the latest legislation (2004), the following are outstanding characteristics of the system known as the 'Validation des acquis de l'expérience' (VAE):

1. Everybody has an entitlement to initial advice and guidance on how to gain recognition.
2. There is a clear legal right to claim recognition even for a whole Qualification.
3. There is a right to expect the Decision on the claim will not only explain the result but will clearly indicate, in the event of a non-successful application, the work which may be required to achieve a successful outcome in the future.
4. A Qualification gained wholly or partly by VAE has equal status and currency to the Qualification gained by formal learning. This equates closely to the model given in the European guides on the validation of non-formal and informal learning in which Route 1 (formal learning) and Route 2 (non-formal and informal learning) have the same outcomes.

Strong advice is given to would-be candidates on their entitlement and the precise route they should follow. This is easily obtainable via the Internet.

There are different websites since the route to be followed by individual candidates may and often does vary according to the particular qualification which they seek either in part or in toto. This is largely explained by the fact that qualifications/diplomas/certificates, according to particular types, come under the control of a number of different ministries (Work, Agriculture, Culture, Education etc) and candidature for university qualifications comes under the control of the universities themselves. What follows is, therefore, one illustration of a general nature.

The following may be found on the website 'www.vae.gouv.fr' entitled 'Le portail de la Validation des Acquis de l'expérience.' This lays out the steps to follow in making application. These steps are summarised as follows:

Information, advice and guidance

Getting the application form for validating the initial claim

Putting together the correct dossier for validating the claim

Drawing up the dossier for presenting Prior Learning Outcomes (PLO) and the possibility of being mentored in this activity

Decision by the Jury

Following up the candidate subsequent to the decision by the Jury.

The website goes on to give many further details for candidates under each of the above headings. For those without access to the Internet, there is a plethora of printed material available, all of which is extremely easy to follow.

Given that the precise steps to be taken vary when universities are involved, the website directs potential candidates to a heading on the 'specifics of higher education.'

Training courses are available for those who seek to accompany and/or assess candidates for VAE, many of them by the Association nationale pour la formation professionnelle des adultes (AFPA) and, more recently in certain universities¹⁰.

10 There is however a distinct lack of EQF-compatible approaches to the Certification of practitioners' knowledge, skills and competence for RPLO. Currently, a Unit of Learning and Assessment "The Principles and Practice of RPL" has been accepted into the Qualification and Credit Framework [QCF] at Level 5. This is available at http://www.rplo.eu/files/RPL_level_5_proposal_outcomes.pdf Implementations of this approach are under development with an HEI context at Levels 6 and 7 and will be available in September 2010.

It is obvious that the existence of a national qualifications framework in France (the RNCP of which the current version dates basically from 1969) has facilitated much of this construction. It should, however, be noted that the present framework, which is very much defined in terms of teaching input, is due (by 2012) for a very thorough revision in terms of the learner-centred approach of the EQF and the introduction of ECVET. How far this will result in major changes to the present framework is hard to predict. There are clear problems, since the current framework is closely associated with salary levels, a fact which has caused some distortions, as highlighted in the Besson report cited below¹¹. It is certain that this linkage will not cease in the new framework (and it is predicted that the French NQF will not take account of EQF levels 1-3 which bear no direct relation to employment structures) but existing anomalies may be dealt with. On the other hand, it is unclear how far this learner centred approach will affect the way in which VAE candidates are assessed. Some observers, especially of juries operating in higher education, have expressed concerns about the lack of clear statements of learning outcomes to guide jury members in their work. This, no doubt, reflects the slowness with which French universities in general have moved to integrate statements of learning outcomes into their programme/course unit descriptors. Indeed, the common perception is that there is a great deal of indifference, even strong resistance, to the formulation of statements of learning outcomes in the universities. This would tend to explain why, at least on the basis of anecdotal evidence, the VAE system works appears to work more efficiently in the area of VET than in more strictly 'academic' areas. Even so, it remains to be seen in what ways the introduction of ECVET will impact upon the current system. VAE, as currently structured, has been subjected to heavy internal criticism for being cumbersome and overly complex (with so many different ministries being involved all operating variants of the VAE system) and, thus, detrimental to encouraging far more candidates to present themselves for recognition. This criticism is made in the Eric Besson report entitled *Valoriser l'acquis de l'expérience* (September 2008)¹². Amongst other comments, the report emphasises how vital it is to bring the French NQF into line with the EQF in order to render the whole structure of qualifications (of which over 15000 currently exist in France) more legible and comprehensible to candidates.

Whatever qualifying remarks may be made on the French VAE system it is frequently serving as a reference point for other countries.

11 See note 12 below.

12 See <http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/rapports-publics/08000590>

Despite lacking one or more of the above features, other Member States and, where appropriate, regions, are developing a proactive response to the development of RPLO. Being less formal, juridically speaking, they are far less susceptible of brief description than is the case for France. Many naturally see developing RPLO as something to be constructed at the same time as, or, indeed, after, the completion of their NQFs and their referencing to both the EQF and ECVET. Spain, for example, is in the process of overhauling its entire VET system. All countries are, of course, helped in this task of introducing effective RPLO by the existence of the European Guidelines on this question and by various other publications of CEDEFOP. In developing their NQFs in the wider European context, several countries are involved in projects to transfer-in and adapt French technology to local conditions. Two rapid examples of the way in which RPLO has been integrated into systems may be cited for Scotland and for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. For Scotland, see the documents related to RPL¹³. For England, Wales and Northern Ireland, see *Claiming Credit. Guidance on the recognition of prior learning within the Qualifications and Credit Framework*¹⁴. These two cases have been chosen as illustrations because the development of RPLO has been considerably clarified by the completion of the process of relating the respective national frameworks to the EQF (See Report Referencing the Qualifications Frameworks of the United Kingdom to the European Qualifications Framework¹⁵). Developments in RPLO across Europe as a whole may be followed at the European Observatory of Validation of Non Formal and Informal Learning¹⁶.

13 SCQF Handbook (updated December 2009); Social Services Sector RPL Toolkit and evaluation (2008). This report is available at http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Information_Resources/Bookshop/publication_details.asp?pub_id=494

14 The National Report for England and Northern Ireland explains “the qualifications systems in UK are inherently suitable for the validation of achievements in non-formal or informal learning. In addition, each framework has published policies and procedures and support materials for users in relation to the recognition of prior learning.” (Page 14). For version 2, see http://www.qcda.gov.uk/images/tes-assets/Claiming_Credit_QCDA104726.pdf.

15 Criterion 3 in each National Report covers: “The national framework or qualifications system and its qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and linked to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where these exist, to credit systems.” This Report is available at <http://www.scqf.org.uk/News/LatestNews/NewPublicationUKQualificationsFrameworksEQFReferencingReport.aspx>

16 See <http://www.observal.org/observal>

The next few years should see major and rapid developments as the process of elaborating or reworking other nations NQFs is associated both with relating these frameworks to the EQF and doing so in such a way as to be beneficial to making a reality of RPLO. On the simplicity and clarity of the structures and the way in which the systems are operated will depend the growth of numbers of citizens who are truly able to avail themselves of the opportunity to benefit from RPLO. With these provisos, it is obvious that this development will, undoubtedly, have a significant impact on learning and the acquisition of qualifications in the Social Sciences.

6. Conclusion

The information contained in these reports has proved vital in facilitating the work associated with several of the other outcomes of this project. Its usefulness extends, however, beyond the sector of the social sciences and it will no doubt be most helpful to the other sectoral projects as they come on stream.

Above all, these reports raise vital questions about the way in which the EQF and its associated CATS, ECVET will be introduced and will function. It is clear that if all the features associated with the QF EHEA, its preferred CAT system, ECTS, and international agreement on the basic features of quality control have not proved simple to introduce, all the same categories of problems will have to be resolved for the EQF and for its credit system, the ECVET. As stated above, a whole range of these questions/problems is raised in the national report of the Netherlands. Given that these questions and problems concern the whole range of learning, in whatever sector in the EU, it is worthwhile citing the relevant passages here.

In introducing the general question of the relationship of the EQF to the reform process in the Netherlands, it is stated that:

Agreement:

- The importance of EQF is widely shared
- EQF is seen as a solid system
- The way of referencing qualifications is still unclear

Discussion:

- Referencing secondary education, overlapping VET levels

- How to avoid (discussion about) system change
- What about level 1 qualifications
- The position of informal/non-formal education
- National coordination

Remarkable:

- Knowledge gap concerning EQF/NQF
- Initiatives, but not much intersectoral co-operation (Ministry of Education).

A wide range of Dutch stakeholders have been involved in a European-wide consultation process and some of their major recommendations are cited as follows:

The greatest challenge in the short term is recognition or rather understanding, and support of the EQF by business and industry at national and European level. It has been proposed to do this by:

- fine tuning the descriptors for the eight reference levels based on their relevance for the labour market;
- asking countries to integrate professional requirements and the EQF principles into their national qualifications;
- asking the various sectors at European level to apply the EQF principles into their sectoral qualifications.
- To try to avoid bureaucracy upon implementation, keeping the instrument simple by not adding too many supporting tables.
- One condition for effective implementation is to attune related developments at European level to each other and integrate them, for example, grafting with the Europass, the Diploma supplement and the European framework on key competencies.
- Instruments like the Europass/ the Diploma supplement and an integrated system for credit transfer in higher and vocational education, should be linked to the EQF.

It is obvious that the concerns and the proposed solutions expressed above are shared by many other nations and their stakeholders. The concern about the development of an integrated credit system, or at

least of two completely compatible systems, is discussed in the report on Outcome 3 below.

In general, it is expected that these reports will make a further contribution to the ongoing discussions on the way in which the EQF and ECVET will be put in place and the way the two European frameworks and credit systems will function side by side.

Outcome 3. A Survey of the link between ECTS and ECVET as credit accumulation and transfer systems and proposals for the translation of ECVET into ECTS credits (and vice versa) for EQF levels 3-8

The way in which the Social Sciences in HEIs, engage, in the coming years, with one particular aspect of the EQF, namely that of its associated credit accumulation and transfer system (CATS), the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), a system, which is due to become fully operational in 2012, is of very great importance.

Many subject areas in the Social Science sector are vocationally oriented. So, they will shortly be facing a situation in which they will be obliged to deal efficiently and equitably with students, who attempt to move back and forth between the 'further' and higher education sectors, and who will wish to convert ECVET into ECTS credits and vice versa. The need to establish procedures in order to translate credits will be a particularly pressing task in those institutions across Europe which offer both FE and HE qualification programmes and who will be using both credit systems.

In addition, they, like subjects areas in other sectors in HEIs, will have to deal with would-be students who wish to enter HEIs but who have not pursued the more conventional qualification routes towards entry to one or other of the Bologna cycles. Such people will wish to use other qualifications, with their associated ECVET credits as a means to gain entry to HEI programmes. In addition, there will be those who seek recognition for prior learning outcomes acquired through non-formal or informal paths and for which they have gained ECVET credits. Some countries in Europe

already possess very well developed legislation and/or practical mechanisms for dealing with the recognition of such learning, recognition which facilitates credit entry to, or credit exemption within, HEIs. Unfortunately, many others do not yet have clear frameworks and mechanisms and the European-wide development of the Recognition of Prior Learning Outcomes (RPLO) is accepted as a fundamental and pressing need.

Given that HEIs will have to decide soon how they are going to approach this new credit system in such a way as to facilitate the conversion of ECVET into ECTS credits in an equitable manner, it was decided early on in this project to request the project rapporteur to produce a background paper comparing ECTS and ECVET as two distinct credit accumulation and transfer systems (CATS) in both basic conception and in practical day-to-day functioning. Assuming fundamental agreement within this working group on the conclusions of this paper, it would be easier to identify the probable major problems and, consequently, to suggest ways in which ECVET and ECTS credits could be readily compared, understood and translated one into the other. This paper was produced for July 2009 and was, in effect, accepted as the basis of discussions in the third project general meeting in Brussels in December 2009. What follows, therefore, is, first, a résumé of the rapporteur's paper and this is followed by the necessarily tentative conclusions reached at the December meeting.

1. The resume of the paper on ECVET and ECTS

The rapporteur's paper (constantly updated in the light of new publications since July 2009 and until the closing date of this project) which presents, successively, the main characteristics of ECTS and of ECVET, with, in the second case, a list of the problems, both conceptual and practical, which ECVET presents or is likely to present as it comes on stream, is included in Annex 1 to this report. So, no more than a rapid résumé need be presented here of its main conclusions which have a fundamental bearing on the question of how credits may be understood and translated from the one CAT system to the other. These include the following:

1.1. Differences in the conceptual frameworks as between the Dublin Descriptors and the EQF Level Descriptors. The first obvious potential cause of difficulty lies in the fact that the ECVET, as part of the EQF, operates on a different set of categories (three in number) of generic learning outcomes from that of the Dublin Descriptors (five in number), adopted by the QF EHEA, descriptors with which HEIs have

become used to operating during the last decade. HEIs will, therefore, be obliged to undertake a great deal of work to ensure that their professional profiles, their programme, level and course unit descriptors, as drawn up with the Dublin Descriptors as their guide, are also commensurate with the EQF descriptors at the levels appropriate to the various Bologna cycles, that is levels 5 to 8. In some ways, this task should not prove overly difficult: although segmented on the basis of rather different categorisations of learning outcomes, the Dublin Descriptors and the EQF level descriptors are basically in accord one with the other (see Outcome 1 above). Nevertheless, it is clear that there are challenges to be met. The Social Sciences group in this project decided that, for sectoral purposes, it would draw up descriptors for each level of the Bologna cycles in terms of the tripartite division of learning outcomes in the EQF, that is knowledge, skills and competence. They found this task initially very challenging indeed, as has been seen above in the report on Outcome 1.

1.2. Student workload and problems over the definition of the credit year in the ECVET. Apart from defining credit in terms of frameworks of learning outcomes, both ECTS and ECVET try to define credit in terms of relative student workload as a basis for calculating specific numbers of credits. Although both systems operate on the basis of 60 credits per year, there is a real difficulty in establishing whether this apparent arithmetical parity means true parity in all cases between the two systems.

In large part, this difficulty stems from the fact that it is still necessary for those who have designed the ECVET to define carefully, as has been done for the ECTS, the average length of the 'standard' learning year and to indicate, where learning years are not standard (years which are much longer or much shorter than the perceived norm), how many credits should be awarded in total for such 'years'. This is by no means a hypothetical question. ECTS has had to be adapted in order to deal with academic years involving a significant degree of deviation from the agreed 'standard' 38-40 week year and from the associated calculation that this standard year implies an overall student workload of somewhere between 1500 and 1800 hours (i.e. 25-30 hours of work for each ECTS credit). Significant tensions have been experienced between those who feel that the same number of credits can only be awarded when there is very close adherence to these figures (and some would like to see the figures cited above defined more narrowly) and others who have had a somewhat more relaxed attitude to the measurement of student

workload¹⁷. Nevertheless, all agree that deviations from the norms cannot be too great, otherwise the credits concerned, however well defined in terms of learning outcomes, seriously risk losing their credibility.

This need to define the teaching/learning year in relation to ECTS has been most obvious in dealing with second-cycle Masters programmes which have a great variety in length in virtually all countries within the EHEA. As a result of clear proposals put forward in the ECTS Users Guide, programmes consisting of 60 credits (one academic year of two semesters consisting in all of 38-40 weeks), 75 credits (one academic year plus the length of the ensuing summer 'vacation'), 90 credits (three semesters) and 120 credits (two years or four semesters) are now very commonly found, even if these recommendations are not universally accepted. In addition, questions have arisen within ECTS over short course units, especially where these are of a fast-track nature. Without a resolution of the knotty problems which are inevitably going to arise around this question of the standard length of the learning year, in terms of both weeks and of total hours of student work (resolved for ECTS by resorting to the extensive use of student questionnaires), and of the many variants from this standard, it is difficult to see how ECTS and ECVET credits may be translated, with total confidence, from one to the other on a strictly 1 to 1 basis. And where they cannot be so exchanged, on what basis should they be translated according to particular cases? The EQF/ECVET will cover a much wider range of learning situations and environments than does ECTS, so a great deal of work will have to be carried out here in order to clarify the situation not only for users of ECVET but also for those who will be asked to translate ECVET credits into ECTS credits. It is to be hoped that institutions (and indeed sectors and subject areas within HEIs) will compare their approach in such a way as to achieve consistency of practice.

1.3. Questions concerning the closeness of the link between credit and relative student workload in the ECVET. Whilst the ECTS has from the beginning operated on the basis of credit allocation by reference to relative student workload (for which very careful definitions have been given in the ECTS Users Guide), there are some fundamental questions arising out of the documents introducing future users to the EQF and ECVET concerning the firmness of the link in ECVET between credit

17 The measurement of student workload is a far more complex issue than might at first sight appear to be the case. The need for further work on how to establish much clearer guidelines is discussed most usefully in the TUNING report on the *Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degrees in Business*.

and relative student workload. Whilst relative student workload seems to be understood in the explanatory papers for the EQF and ECVET, dating from 2006 to 2008, as the normal method for calculating numbers of ECVET credits, there still remains some suggestion that these credits might, alternatively, be distributed according to the relative importance of the component units of a programme. If those who made this suggestion meant that it may reasonably be assumed that the more important units will always imply greater relative student workload without having to resort to precise calculations of hours of work, then they should have been specific on this point because there is the potential here for serious confusion. The word 'importance' may all too readily be understood in a qualitative rather than in quantitative sense. This is especially true given the fact that, even within HEIs using the ECTS, there have been those, in the past, who would have wished credits to be allocated purely according to the relative importance of individual subject areas within the academic scheme of things, or, indeed, according to the perceived relative importance of individual teachers! Such siren voices have, fortunately, always been firmly rejected by the guardians of the ECTS and the making of subjective judgments on relative academic importance of subjects and/or teachers eschewed. On the other hand, it seems to many, who have long worked with ECTS, that there are those associated with the EQF who would place so much importance on the definition of credit by reference to learning outcomes that this could be to the detriment of relative student workload as a means to making the arithmetical calculations necessary for precise credit allocation. Although it is true that student workload represents the input and not the output of student learning, and although the calculation of student hours of work can legitimately be criticised for being more of an art than a science, it is clear, from the experience of HEIs with ECTS, that a great deal of mutual trust and confidence between institutions and countries does rest on there being, for apparently equivalent learning outcomes, a reasonably close parity of student workload, as measured in terms of hours, weeks, semesters, or 'years' of work and translated into precise numbers of ECTS credits. It is essential, therefore, to keep the input (learning time) and the output (learning outcomes) in close relationship. Of course, there are those who say that learning time is a concept not applicable to the field of informal learning and all that can be 'measured' are the learning outcomes. This is true but it is clearly recognised by experts in this field that the number of credits which are to be awarded as a result of the recognition of informal learning, can only be calculated on the basis of comparisons made with credits awarded for commensurate learning outcomes within formal learning programmes. So, it is clear from every

direction that clarification on learning time is vital within ECVET because, as things stand, there is fertile ground for confusion and even for conflict here.

1.4. Questions concerning the relationship between the relative levels of learning associated with ECVET and ECTS credits. In addition to these very basic matters concerning the calculation of numbers of credits, there are a whole set of other questions which will undoubtedly arise concerning the relative levels of learning between the EQF and the QF EHEA. It will only be possible to compare credit levels with a high degree of confidence once all those nations participating in the EQF have defined their National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs). This is the case because the EQF is, of necessity, no more than a meta-framework. Unlike the Bologna process with its four cycles, the EQF, despite its name, defines only the levels of learning and not the level of qualifications. In this sense, the QF EHEA is more closely a true qualifications framework than the rather inaptly named EQF.

Unfortunately, few countries have, as yet, produced their NQFs. Moreover, some of those which have, must now revise their frameworks because they were produced before the EQF came into existence and they do not necessarily identify only eight levels of learning achievement or define learning outcomes in the same way as the EQF. Whilst the work of formulating or revising the NQFs is being completed, attempts to identify any given set of qualifications with the various levels of the EQF may only be regarded as a highly speculative business. Of course, the fact that levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the EQF have been equated respectively with the Bologna short cycle and cycles 1 to 3 seemingly offers considerable help but, even here, problems arise in transferring in ECVET credits. Many HEIs identify *within* each of the Bologna cycles a number of progressive levels of achievement. They will have to decide, therefore, when transferring in ECVET credits to which level within a given cycle those ECVET credits should be equated. Over and above such questions, what is being discussed here is not just the transfer of ECVET credits between institutions across the various partner countries but also the mutual recognition, across institutional and national frontiers of qualifications which will be defined in terms of the various levels of learning of the EQF. It is expected that the EQF will very much ease the problems, which have long existed over the mutual recognition of qualifications but it remains to be seen whether institutions and countries will accept, as readily as believed, the way in which partner countries have related their qualifications to the EQF. There are more questions involved in such mutual recognition than

relatively simple matters of generic learning levels, particularly where vocational and professional qualifications are involved. Further negotiations between states, along with their associated stakeholders, will undoubtedly be needed on matters of course content and the precise associated programme learning outcomes in order for full mutual trust and confidence to be established. This may be compared, for example, to all the work undertaken within the TUNING Project (and elsewhere), over a large number of subject areas, to establish common criteria for programme design and delivery for first and second cycle qualification programmes within HEIs. The EQF may well help substantially in this task but it can scarcely be expected to act as a magic wand.

1.5. Questions arising from the differences in the respective degree of development of ECTS and ECVET. In terms of understanding both the relative numerical value of ECVET and ECTS credits and the learning outcomes which those credits represent, it must be underlined that ECVET suffers, at the moment, from what appears to be an insufficient provision of those written instruments which are associated with ECTS, written instruments which are rightly seen as being absolutely essential components of that latter system and for its efficient functioning. This difference in degree of development reflects the fact that ECTS has now been in existence for 20 years whilst ECVET is still very new. Even so, ECTS offered HEIs a full package of written instruments from the very beginning of its pilot phase. In contrast, the promised ECVET Users Guide, with, hopefully, a full range of standard formats for its proposed written instruments, has still to appear. The most important of the ECTS written instruments is, without a doubt, the institutional Information Package and Course Catalogue. This means that, beyond attaching mere numbers of credits to their courses and course units, institutions providing learning programmes inform everybody about the content of and the learning outcomes associated with their programme and course units, the level at which they are being taught, and the manner in which they are taught and assessed. Credit transfer, particularly between institutions, which do not know each other well, is absolutely reliant on the quality of this information which goes far beyond anything which can be offered in a Transcript of Record. This is so, even if such transcripts (whether purely internal in format or produced on the ECTS model) are vital as a certified record of what a student has successfully completed and for which s/he has been awarded credits and grades. Even before mobility occurs under ECTS practices, students have a learning agreement, an agreement involving the institutions involved and the student him/herself. This has gone very far to eradicating disastrous mo-

bility, which went disastrously wrong for students, an occurrence which was, unfortunately, too frequent in the early days of the ERASMUS programme. In addition to these instruments of ECTS, all those who now graduate from HEIs in the EHEA must now be given, in addition to a diploma document, a full Diploma Supplement, automatically, free of charge and in a language widely used in Europe. For graduates, this document is crucial in allowing them to enter higher Bologna cycles or in gaining them employment, especially where they are changing countries. In very sharp contrast, the whole body of such written documents has not yet been properly developed for the EQF/ECVET nexus and that will surely make credit transfer between institutions using ECVET and, *a fortiori*, the translation of ECVET into ECTS credits more complicated than it should be, at least until such times as these lacunae are filled.

1.6. Problems of grade transfer in ECVET. Curiously, no reference of any kind has been made in any of the publications concerning ECVET, to the important matter of grade transfer. Yet, this has been perceived, from the earliest days of its pilot scheme, as a serious question in ECTS. Many institutions/countries regard the acquisition by students of superior grades as being as important, if not more so, than simply achieving passing grades in order to be awarded credits. Hence the importance, for all HEIs, of learning about the grading scales of other institutions/countries and how they are used in practice. So, ECTS has constantly tried to find satisfactory mechanisms by which grades awarded in individual HEIs will be comprehensible to other HEIs especially where grade transfer takes place across national boundaries. It is, of course, true that many VET courses may consist of units for which no more than passing grades are awarded to successful students but many others do offer additionally a range of superior grades. In such cases, it is vital that the various grading scales of institutions/countries using the ECVET be understood, especially as these are, undoubtedly, far more numerous, varied and even more incoherent to outsiders than those encountered in HEIs across the EHEA. If satisfactory information is not forthcoming, this will only serve to exacerbate the complications listed above.

1.7. Questions relating to the way in which passing grades are related to the award of credit in both ECTS and ECVET. Of course, where credits are awarded on the achievement of a simple passing grade, it may be argued that the reporting of grades is not particularly important. However, it will be important, as in ECTS, to know whether credits for individual course units are awarded solely on the grade awarded as

a result of the assessment for that particular unit or whether credits may be awarded as a result of the achievement of a grade-point average over a number of associated course units. The practice of what is known in Euro-speak as 'condonement' or 'compensation' is not properly in accord with the theoretical basis on which CAT systems are constructed. The learner demonstrates through the assessment for each and every learning unit that s/he has achieved the learning outcomes of that particular unit, in other words, each unit is discrete. The award of credit demonstrates that the learner can perform a given set of tasks or, alternatively, is apt to proceed to learning at a higher level in the same or in a related subject area. The practice of condonement is, however, so widespread across the EHEA, that it cannot be stopped. In ECTS, HEIs are encouraged to indicate, at the very least, in their Information Packages and Course Catalogues, whether they practice condonement, and to indicate, on their Transcripts of Record, those units for which students have received credits for particular course units in this way. This is an important issue since students may be awarded credits for learning units where they have not satisfactorily demonstrated that they have achieved the learning outcomes. So, HEIs, which do not practice 'condonement' may well refuse, for this very reason, to accept credits awarded in other HEIs in such a manner, since a given student may not in their eyes have demonstrated satisfactorily his/her fitness to pursue studies to a higher level or cycle in the given subject area or another closely related to it. This may prove to be an even more important question in the EQF which is more closely tied to vocational qualifications than has been generally the case in the EHEA.

1.7. ECVET and the basic question of the language(s) of communication. All the various questions and problems outlined above are likely to be further complicated by the fact that, to date, no decision appears to have been made on the basic question of the language(s) in which communication on learning units, programmes and qualifications, and on student requirements and performance will take place between institutions and countries. In the EHEA, English has dominated the practice of mobility with the ECTS, whilst Diploma Supplements must be produced in a widely used language, that is, one of German, French, Spanish or English. This greatly facilitates credit transfer and the mutual recognition of HEI qualifications. As things stand, it is difficult to see what chance of success a candidate will stand with an informal document, produced, say, in Lithuanian, outlining his VET achievements leading to ECVET credits which he wishes to translate into ECTS credits for acceptance in, for example, a Spanish university!

1.8. The piloting of ECVET by comparison with ECTS. Some confusion in the practice of ECVET is all the more likely that its piloting before it is formally launched in 2012 is quite clearly far less lengthy and rigorous than that which was carried out for the ECTS before it was accepted as the predominant CAT system used in HEIs for the whole of the EHEA. The recent survey by the EQF PRO Project, has curiously cast a great deal of doubt on the validity of ECTS by stating that not all countries use it as their primary CAT system and that, in others, credits are simply not allocated in accord with the principles laid down in the ECTS Users Guide. It points to the fact that, in many countries, there is as yet little if any understanding of learning outcomes as the basis of credit. In others, not only learning outcomes but even student workload is ignored in credit allocation. France is quoted as a prime example of credits being allocated purely according to one or other of teacher contact hours or, worse, teacher prestige. Horror stories of this kind are widespread in many countries. But most are of an apocryphal nature and, even where true, have been wildly exaggerated. Where they have occurred, they have done so, not because of flaws in the design of ECTS but despite the lengthy piloting of the system, despite the production of the constantly updated ECTS Users Guide and despite the careful monitoring of the introduction of ECTS through the system of ECTS counsellors. In that case, how much more likely are such cases to occur with ECVET for which no Users Guide exists as yet and no system of counselling has been instituted? The believe that, because the EQF and ECVET are based on a recognition of successive levels of learning defined through statements of learning outcomes, such problems will be avoided is curiously naïve. All credit systems have to face teething problems, which must be resolved in a coherent manner.

2. The conclusions of the social sciences sectoral group on the relationship between ECTS and ECVET

It was with all the problems and questions outlined above in mind that this Social Sciences group approached the overriding matter of how ECVET credits would be accepted in HEIs in the coming years as qualifications to enter schools/departments/faculties of Social Science, and this for all of the three/four Bologna cycles.

First, it has to be accepted that many of the problems outlined above will only be fully resolved as a result of further clarification provided by those who have constructed the EQF/ECVET. In the meantime, great care and sensitivity will have to be displayed by those to whom the task of dealing with EQF/ECVET credits and qualifications is entrusted in HEIs.

Given the fact that ECVET remains, at this moment, an underdeveloped CATS in comparison with ECTS, it is most important to emphasise for all those who have to deal simultaneously with these two learning/qualification frameworks and with these two CATS, that they should understand that they are, for the time being, pioneers in a very new relationship and that they should proceed with the utmost caution. It should, indeed, be reiterated that the ECVET Users Guide, which was promised some considerable time ago, still has not yet made its appearance. Hopefully, when it appears it will address many the questions outlined here.

Whilst waiting for these problems to be resolved and for the production of those formal written instruments which will have to be developed, even if in a more varied way, perhaps, than for ECTS (we are dealing here with a greater number and variety of teaching/training institutions), the members of this group tentatively recommends that credit transfer and translation as between ECVET and ECTS should normally take place on a 1 to 1 basis. There will no doubt be occasions on which this may be clearly seen as inappropriate and institutions will need to proceed with care. When more guidance is available on ECVET, dealing with the less clear situations will, hopefully become much easier.

It is important to underline the necessary conclusion that credit transfer between ECVET and ECTS (and vice versa) will go far beyond questions of credits and grades but will be vitally concerned with establishing equivalence of programme levels and their associated learning outcomes, as is already the case with credit transfer operating purely within HEIs using ECTS. Much goodwill, common sense and sensitive handling, in order to deal equitably with students who are attempting not only to transfer credit but, more specifically, to have ECVET credits translated into ECTS credits (and maybe in the opposite direction), will be required from all those involved in the process. Particular care will, no doubt, be needed in the case of candidates presenting themselves to HEIs with ECVET credits at level 4. In some, probably most, cases, these will be treated as acceptable for credit entry to short or first cycle programmes, but there may well be occasions where the learning outcomes of EQF level 4 ECVET credits may be considered acceptable for some degree of credit exemption. Examples exist already in the EHEA of candidates being granted, for instance, 60 ECTS credits towards a short cycle or first cycle programme. But these cases are not as yet extensive.

Above all, it will be necessary for those responsible in HEIs to eschew notions that vocational courses are somehow innately of lesser value than

those of a more strictly 'academic' nature, They will need to resist any temptation to view this as a reason why ECVET credits may be considered automatically have a lesser value than ECTS credits. It would seem, from anecdotal evidence at least, that the mentality, which insists on the persistence of the old divide between 'intellectual/academic subjects', on the one hand, and the 'mechanical arts', on the other, is not yet on the point of disappearing. Changes in mentality do not, however, occur spontaneously and a great deal of staff development will have to be devoted to effect a shift of attitudes, a shift which, in some academic subject areas, will have to be of near-seismic proportions. Nor are the problems all on the one side. There is already emerging some evidence of a guerrilla conducted by certain proponents of the EQF/ECVET, on the grounds that this is a far superior package than the QF EHEA/ECTS because from the start it has been constructed on the basis of credit defined by learning outcomes. Attempts of this kind to annex border territory, as it were, are distinctly not conducive to constructive co-operation between the two frameworks.

Outcome 4. A report including proposals to bridge the dublin descriptors and the level descriptors for the EQF LLL enabling the drawing up of sectoral/subject area descriptors commensurate with both frameworks

The Dublin Descriptors and the EQF Level Descriptors both offer statements of generic learning outcomes, in the first case, for the four Bologna cycles and, in the second case, for the eight levels of learning of the EQF.

All the partners involved in this sectoral project were concerned with both sets of descriptors since they needed, as stated above, to produce a table of sectoral learning outcomes compatible with them both. There are, however, some differences between these two sets of descriptors which made it necessary to estimate their degree of compatibility. These differences may be set out as follows:

1. The descriptors for these two frameworks are based on different classifications of generic learning outcomes

1.1. The Dublin descriptors are based on an identification of five categories of learning outcomes as follows:

- a) **Knowledge and Skills**
- b) **Applying knowledge and understanding**
- c) **Making judgments**
- d) **Communication skills**
- e) **Learning Skills**

No further definitions are offered for each of these categories.

1.2. The EQF level descriptors, on the other hand, are based on three categories of learning outcomes which are closely defined as follows:

a) 'knowledge' means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of study or work. In the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual

b) 'skills' means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)

c) '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/or personal development. In the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

This leads to the various descriptors being rather different in content presentation and style but the question is whether they are compatible or not.

2. The two frameworks do not cover the same overall range of learning

The QF EHEA deals purely with higher education whereas the EQF was constructed to cover ALL learning. As its full name states it was conceived as a system for Lifelong Learning. Levels 1 to 4 of the EQF were not formulated to have any overlap with the Bologna Cycles, although it will emerge below that there may be one partial exception to this general rule.

3. Overlap between the eight EQF levels and the four Bologna cycles occurs most obviously at EQF levels 5, 6, 7 and 8.

In the materials presented to the European Parliament in 2006, it is clearly stated that, whilst the EQF does not claim to be more than a meta-framework for qualifications (it is more a framework for levels of learning) and whilst it is the task of individual countries to construct or to revise their NQFs in the light of these eight levels of learning, there is, nevertheless, correlation between levels 5-8 and the four Bologna cycles. This results, presumably, from the fact that the Bologna cycles are the result of international agreement for the whole of the EHEA, thus transcending the pre-existing frameworks for higher education of individual member countries. The assertion of this coincidence between levels and cycles is, in many people's eyes, one, which needs to be thoroughly tested to establish whether it is truly valid. Some promoters of the EQF are not happy that learning frameworks and qualification frameworks should be seen as being so closely aligned. This attitude is very clearly reflected in the Final Report of the EQF PRO Project of January 2010. On the other side, there are members of HEIs who find the EQF statements of levels of learning far too imprecise to enable clear identification with the qualifications framework constituted by the Bologna cycles. Some belonging to this second category of doubters were to be found amongst the members of this group.

All three of these differences were confronted during this project.

1. In respect of the differences between the Dublin Descriptors and the EQF level descriptors, it was rapidly discovered that they are, in many ways, more apparent than real. Although it is true that the EQF places somewhat more emphasis on what people are able to do, occupationally, once they have attained a given level of learning, whilst the Dublin Descriptors are more learning programme oriented, it would be a serious error to overemphasise this difference which is more one of degree than of kind. Both sets of categories have been developed with reference to Bloom's taxonomy. In commencing its work, this sectoral group was able to refer to pre-existing attempts to identify the obvious correlations between the learning outcomes of these two frameworks. This greatly facilitated the work of producing a table of sectoral learning outcomes for the Social Sciences which were clearly compatible with both frameworks. In the actual construction of this table (see Outcome 1 above), it was clear that the EQF tripartite framework of learning outcomes was to be preferred as the basic

working tool to that of the Dublin Descriptors. This conclusion was from the outset rendered virtually inevitable by the fact that the table was to be designed to include generic learning outcomes for those who wished to enter upon studies in HEIs or in HEI equivalents. This meant equating these sets of learning outcomes to EQF levels 3 and 4, levels which the QF EHEA does not cover. Consistency of approach demanded that EQF levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 be used for the remainder of the table. Moreover, these tables were being designed to take account not only of learning in HEIs but in institutions which are not HEIs and/or of learning which is either non-formal or informal, learning which, in both cases, is equivalent to that which is achieved in HEIs. Once again, the EQF was the more appropriate framework to use. It is, however, to be reiterated that the differences between the categories of learning outcomes as between the two frameworks caused no serious problems. However, the precise nature of the relationship between the QF EHEA and the EQF did raise some basic questions which could have placed the work of producing the table much more difficult.

2. The first area in which the precise coincidence between the EQF and the QF EHEA was questioned was in relation to EQF level 4. At first sight, it would seem that if EQF level 5, alone, is to be correlated with the Bologna Short cycle. In this interpretation, EQF level 4 has no direct relationship with the Bologna cycles. And yet, the Bologna short cycle is generally deemed to require the accumulation of 120 ECTS credits, normally corresponding to two years or four semesters of formal learning. But there exist, in some parts of the EHEA, qualifications which consist of no more than 60 ECTS credits or their equivalent. Thus, in the UK, there are the Higher National Certificates and Certificates of Higher Education which are quite clearly situated at a level below the complete Short cycle. So, should these, and similar levels of learning be equated with EQF level 4 or should they simply be classified as part of Level 5? The question is of a greater general importance than may at first appear to be the case. The EQF very clearly states that its levels of learning are just that and should not be simplistically equated with a given year of learning. Since the EQF leaves it to individual nations to work out where ALL their qualifications should be situated in the their NQFs, this means that an answer to a general question of this kind may vary from one country to another. In any event, a clear answer will only emerge when the small number of NQFs already completed is substantially augmented. This group did not feel entitled to make any sweeping

suggestions as to how this particular question could or should be resolved. This area of doubt did not, however, substantially affect the approach of those who drew up the sectoral table as they worked on the assumption that Level 4 was normally at a level prior to that of learning in HEIs, one which is concerned, among other things, as a qualifier to enter higher education.

3. The question of the correlation between EQF levels and Bologna cycles became far more contentious when the precise correlation between the EQF levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 and the four Bologna cycles was tested. Doubts started at one particular point. Several members of the group suggested that, since the EQF is a framework for LLL, then its level 8 must relate at one and the same time not only to doctoral but also to post-doctoral learning achievements. But given that post-doctoral attainments are, normally, considerably above those at doctoral level, the EQF is deficient in housing both these categories within level 8. This gave rise to a rather heated discussion. In the end, it was pointed out that EQF level 8 does house both these levels of attainment, regardless of the concerns of certain members of this group. Moreover, this grouping has now passed into European law. It was underlined that the correlation between Bologna Cycle 2 and EQF level 7 could also be questioned on the grounds that second-cycle qualifications in HEIs vary immensely in length, number of credits and, therefore, degree of achievement. Yet, all Masters programmes are covered by one set of the Dublin Descriptors which have been drawn up for the second cycle, and these are also covered in the unitary EQF statement for level 7. That different EQF levels, including level 8, may (potentially) encapsulate a number of 'sub-levels' of achievement does not invalidate them. It is obvious that the same phenomenon occurs within each of the Bologna cycles where institutions often recognise and write descriptors for a number of progressive levels of achievement, with the overall programme descriptor laying out the level of achievement required of students at the end of the given cycle. In any event, the only way in which the drawing up of sectoral learning outcomes for the Social Sciences could proceed was on the basis of accepting the more or less strict and near-universal correlation between EQF levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 and the four Bologna Cycles. The debate is, however, worth reporting because it may well be repeated elsewhere. It certainly underlines the possible tensions which may result from bringing together frameworks of learning

levels and qualifications frameworks, since the former are of necessity of a more fluid nature.

In general, the outcome of this project has been that working simultaneously with the both the Dublin Descriptors and the EQF level descriptors, has proved, despite the general points raised above, far less difficult than many may have feared at the outset. This certainly proved to be the case once the members of the group familiarised themselves more thoroughly with the general framework of the EQF and with its individual level descriptors.

That being the case, this group does not feel that it is necessary to try to produce some 'magic formula' with which to 'reconcile' two systems which vary far less one from the other, in both theoretical and practical terms, than may at first appear to be the case.

Outcome 5. The establishment of subject area based working groups for the main academic fields within the social sciences not yet covered in the Tuning project

The successful production of a sectoral framework for the Social Sciences demanded that a number of subject areas in the Social Sciences be added to those already participating in the TUNING Project. Consequently, to Business Studies, Educational Sciences, European Studies, Occupational Therapy and Social Work, were added Law, Psychology and International Relations, thus giving eight subject areas in total. This overall total constituted a very wide, if by no means exhaustive, spectrum of the Social Sciences. In order to widen the field even further, it was agreed that the results of the sectoral project, especially the table of sectoral learning outcomes for EQF levels 3 to 8, will, after the completion of the project, be submitted to a number of other subject areas in the Social Sciences for comment and validation, with the possibility that they may be somewhat modified.

An important aspect of the work of each of these new subject areas was to produce lists of learning outcomes for each of Bologna cycles 1, 2 and 3. These new subject areas would, of course, benefit from participating in discussions with those who were working on the production of

the table of sectoral learning outcomes. The work of producing subject area and sectoral descriptors proceeded in parallel to the advantage of all involved. A further major task for each of the new subject areas was to produce, if possible, within the timeframe of this project, Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes. They were to do this on the template of such reports already produced by and published for a substantial number of the subject areas already participating in the TUNING Project.

International Relations has only been able to report on the first task. The same is true of Law which has, to date, concentrated on producing an introductory section to a longer report. Given that three very different major legal traditions have developed across Europe, the French, the German and the British Common Law (in this respect Law resembles a number of other subject areas producing Brochures on Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degrees within the TUNING Project) the team has been concerned to identify the chief similarities between the three so that the eventual final report shall not be culture specific. This has necessitated much discussion. Consequently, even the proto list of the competences required by students and future practitioners of law are still at this stage no more than embryonic. By contrast, Psychology which benefits from the substantial previous work accomplished within the Euro-psy thematic network, has produced a full report for Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes. Its only shortfall by comparison with the previous TUNING subject area reports of this kind is that it has not yet been submitted for review by eminent peers on the subject area.

From the perspective of this Social Sciences sectoral project, the most important aspect of these reports is the way in which they relate their lists of learning outcomes/competences to both the Dublin Descriptors and the EQF learning level descriptors, as well as referring to the TUNING categorisation of generic learning outcomes. Obviously, they also had access to the sectoral level descriptors for the Social Sciences as these were developed during this project.

Not surprisingly, the most important of the reports is that from Psychology which includes, *inter alia*, a lengthy and very closely considered general discussion of Learning Outcomes and Competences (section 5). It looks at all the major ways of categorising them and discusses their merits and shortcomings in respect of the needs of studies and professional activity in the field of Psychology.

First, its discussion lacks the distinction made in TUNING methodology between Learning Outcomes, which are that which teachers expect students to know and to be able to demonstrate) and Competences which are that which students actually possess at the end of a period of learning (see pages 19-20). This is discussed without a concluding statement as to the validity/usefulness of this distinction. The distinction does seem to be used later in the report but, in practice, the lists produced seem more to distinguish between 'learning outcomes' as that which students acquire during their period of academic learning/training and 'competences' as that which students are competent to do/perform as professional psychologists. This is a well-known distinction but it does underline the difficulties that arise in the whole field of learning outcomes resulting from the different usages of the common vocabulary of the field.

It is quite clear that the second TUNING distinction between generic and subject specific learning outcomes or competences has had an important impact on the lists drawn up for each of the cycles/learning levels in Psychology.

It goes without saying that the rationale and content of the Dublin Descriptors can clearly be seen behind the three tables laying out the learning outcomes/competences for (post) graduate psychologists. And the same is true for the learning levels (6-8) of the EQF. These descriptors, therefore, perform the essential task of demonstrating the compatibility of these two sets of descriptors.

It should, however, be noted that none of these is considered fully satisfactory for the construction of statements of learning outcomes / competences for Psychology. By contrast with the tripartite division of learning outcomes for the EQF, knowledge, skills and competences, those working on this report for Psychology underline the importance of 'Attitudes' among the fundamental categories of learning outcomes. Without suitable and satisfactory attitudes, it is conclusively argued, no graduate psychologist will ever be a competent professional practitioner. This argument is developed by reference to this quadripartite division of learning outcomes/competence developed for Psychology in the work of R.A. Roe. 'Attitudes', as a category of learning outcomes, are usually seen in the context of a quadripartite division of learning outcomes into knowledge, aptitudes, attitudes and values but it appears that in this EUROPSY report values are subsumed into attitudes.

So, a wide array of different models categorising learning outcomes/competences have had an impact on the tables of learning outcomes/

competence drawn up by this working group but, in the end, a model developed specifically for Psychology (even if on the basis of a well-known and pre-existing quadripartite categorisation of learning outcomes) has proved to be the major one. This would seem to suggest that the tripartite division used in and by the EQF is not considered sufficiently oriented towards the professional profile of psychologists. This is a conclusion which may need serious consideration by those who have constructed the EQF with very particular reference to VET.

This conclusion should in no way be construed as a serious criticism of the EQF but it does indicate that there will need to be a lot of interaction between general QFs and sectoral and subject area QFs. This is a conclusion which echoes others arrived at in the course of this project. The SQF has been built on the basis of using the Dublin Descriptors and, particularly, the EQF level descriptors but the work has proved to be also a test for these general frameworks. It should be noted that a considerable number of project members have expressed concern over the way in which the term 'competence(s)' seems to have so many different meanings according to different theorists and according to the way the term is employed. And that merely concerns the use of the term in the English language. Certain project members have pointed out that the term 'competence(s)' (and its derivatives and other closely associated terms) are even less clear in meaning in certain other European languages. In fact, it is clear that the whole vocabulary of learning outcomes is far from being developed in quite a number of European languages. It is obvious that only the construction of such vocabularies and, further, of a comparative vocabulary across, at least, the most widely used European languages will prevent misunderstandings occurring.

4. Partnerships

The composition of the consortium followed from the Tuning Project and the related Thematic Networks and Associations. It has included subject areas that have completed considerable work regarding the implementation of the Bologna Process at European level: description of subject areas at European level respecting differences and identifying communalities. The selected participants in this sectoral qualification framework have an obvious interest in this project because its outcomes are in line with the work previously done and will answer to an obvious need. The project has been based on the Tuning methodology and the outcomes of the Tuning project at subject area level so far. These outcomes are in particular the cycle (level) descriptors and key features developed for the first, second and third cycle, the levels 6 to 8 in the EQF for LLL. In practice these are the Tuning templates which have been prepared by the nine Tuning subject areas and some eleven subject area based (thematic) networks.

The working groups have consisted of representatives of higher education institutions and of professional associations at subject area level. In the project two types of subject areas have been distinguished. First, there were those which had already developed Tuning cycle descriptors and reference points, results which have been validated at various stages of their development. Secondly, there were a number of subject areas in the Social Sciences sector for which this had not been done so far. The availability of descriptors and reference points at subject area level is - in the opinion of Tuning - a precondition for the sustainable development and functioning of sectoral, national and European qualification frameworks. The first type is represented by the subject areas **Business, European Studies, Education Sciences, Occupational Therapy and Social Work**. The second type of subject areas, for which it is thought absolutely necessary to prepare the required indicators, is represented by: **Law, Psychology and International Relations**.

All persons, institutions and organisations directly involved and responsible for running the project have long standing experience in transnational higher education. Many have well established links with secondary education. All have played leading roles in either the Tuning Projects and/or in European Thematic Networks. These persons belong to the most active and experienced group of European and national experts. Many act as adviser for their sector, higher education institutions

and national and European authorities. Given the fact that the Tuning approach is based on professional and academic profiles and takes into account employability of its graduates, the experts involved have obvious knowledge about the relationship between the labour market and educational and training programmes at higher education level.

List of participants

General Coordinator

Julia Gonzalez
University of Deusto
Spain
jmgonzal@rector.deusto.es

Project Manager

Pablo Beneitone
University of Deusto
Spain
pbeneito@relint.deusto.es

Project Rapporteur

Richard de Lavigne
Consultant for European Higher Education
rdel@orange.fr

Member institutions & their representative

Austria

Elke Kitzelmann
Leopold-Franzens-Universität
Innsbruck
Elke.kitzelmann@uibk.ac.at

Belgium

Guido Cuyvers
Katholieke Hogeschool Kempen
guido.cuyvers@khk.be

Bulgaria

Liliya Todorova
Rusenski universitet "Angel
Kunchev"
Fax: 359 82845708
litod@ru.acad.bg

Bulgaria

Mimi Kornazheva
Rusenski universitet "Angel
Kunchev"
Brie-bg@ru.acad.bg

Czech Republic

Hana Slechtova
Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci
Hana.slechtova@upol.cz

Finland

Tuula Asunta
Jyväskylän yliopisto,
opettajankoulutuslaitos
tasunta@edu.jyu.fi

France

Gerard Schaefer
Institut Regional du Travail Social
de Lorraine
Gerard.Schaefer@irts-lorraine.fr

Germany

Volker Gehmlich
Fachhochschule Osnabrück
gehlich@wi.fh-osnabrueck.de

Germany

Markus Moke
Ruhr-Universität Bochum
Markus.Moke@rub.de

Hungary

Mihaly Nyilas
Eotus Lorand University
nyilasp@ludens.elte.hu

Italy

Annamaria Campanini
Università degli Studi di Parma
annamaria.campanini@libero.it

Italy

Andrea Rossato
Università degli Studi di Trento
andrea.rossato@unitn.it

Denmark

Peder Østergaard
Handelshøjskolen Aarhus
Universitet
ps@asb.dk

France

Marie-Françoise Fave-Bonnet
Université Paris X Nanterre
marie-francoise.fave-bonnet@u-paris10.fr

France

Roger Lécuyer
European Federation of
Psychologists Associations (EFPA)
roger.lecuyer@psycho.univ-paris5.fr

Germany

Margret Schermutzki
FH Aachen
schermutzki@fh-aachen.de

Greece

Sarah Kantartzis
Συλλογος Ελλήνων Εργοθεραπεμπών /
Syllogos Ellinon Ergotherapefton
Fax. +30 / 210 3228979
skanta@ath.forthnet.gr

Ireland

Patrick McCabe
Trinity College Dublin
pmccabe@tcd.ie

Italy

Remo Job
Università degli Studi di Trento
remo.job@unitn.it

Latvia

Tatjana Muravska
Latvijas Universitate
muravska@lanet.lv

Lithuania

Agne Augutaviciute
Vilnius University
agne.augutaviciute@tf.vu.lt

Norway

Lars Skjold Wilhelmsen
Universitetet i Bergen
Lars.Wilhelmsen@jurfa.uib.no

Poland

Patrycja Grzebyk
University of Warsaw
patrycjagrenich@wp.pl

Portugal

Maria Do Ceu Marques
Universidade Aberta
Mariaceu@univ-ab.pt

Spain

María Asunción Martínez Román
Universidad de Alicante
Mason.martinez@ua.es

Spain

Susana Gorbeña Etxebarria
University of Deusto
sgorbena@fice.deusto.es

The Netherlands

Hanneke van Bruggen
Hogeschool van Amsterdam
j.e.van.bruggen@hva.nl

United Kingdom

Sandra Rowan
Skills for Health
Sandra.rowan@skillsforhealth.org.uk

Malta

Isabelle Calleja
L-Università ta' Malta
isabelle.calleja@um.edu.mt

Poland

Jacek Knopek
Centrum Studiów Europejskich
UMK im. Jeana Monneta / Jean
Monnet Centre for European
Studies, Nicolaus Copernicus
University
ncu-ces@econ.uni.torun.pl

Poland

Jakub Urbanik
University of Warsaw
kuba@adm.uw.edu.pl

Slovenia

Pavel Zgaga
Univerza V Ljubljani
pavel.zgaga@guest.arnes.si

Spain

José Maria Peiro
University of Valencia
jose.m.peiro@uv.es

Spain

María Pilar Canedo
University of Deusto
mpcanedo@der.deusto.es

The Netherlands

J.E.Bosch-Boesjes LLm
University of Groningen
j.e.bosch-boesjes@rug.nl

United Kingdom

Robert Mears
Bath Spa University
r.mears@bathspa.ac.uk

5. Plans for the Future

SQF for Social Sciences is seen as a service to all stakeholders, in particular the HEIs in Europe and beyond as well as individual academics and supporting staff and individual learners. It is expected that the SQF will facilitate the work of admission offices and officers as well of bodies working in the field of recognition of prior learning. It is expected that the SQF as a whole and its individual level descriptors will also be used for quality enhancement, assurance and recognition purposes.

In relation to exploitation of results beyond the project period, the project presents very positive perspectives:

The project contribution is expected by a number of groups who will be exploiting the results further:

- People responsible for preparing degrees at university and vocational level. The project provides an initial agreed starting point from where to develop and grow as well as a platform with whom to discuss further developments
- People working in the transition from school to either vocational training or university entrance. This was found as a particularly relevant gap which needs a great deal of attention.
- Professional Bodies in this field. The work has already started by it promises to be of high relevance for the future of the field
- The citizen wanting to improve their professional outlook in relation to the competences that they have acquired and want to adapt it and have them recognised
- Other similar projects, such as Humart (Humanities and Arts) who has already analysed the outcomes and are using them as reference points. Ideally, the different sectors should be integrated and dealt with systematically and the work of Tuning-SQF for Social Sciences will contribute to this task

A number of tools have been already set in place so that the outcomes of the project can be known and used by other groups:

- The web of the project (<http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=202&Itemid=227>) with a ref-

erence to other related webs such as the Tuning webs with close to four million visitors

- Publications which will follow the project will also be included into in a very well known series of publications which have dissemination at world level.
- A third tool for exploitation, improvement and development of results will be the different regional Tuning Projects. A new major project is expected for EU region and several others are at different stages of implementation between EU and other parts of the world:
 - Feasibility Study for Africa
 - Tuning Russia (recently approved)
 - Second Project for Tuning LA (presented and pending the last stage of evaluation)
 - Tuning USA, having gone through the first phase and preparing for the next steps
 - Tuning Australia, Canada and Japan already accepted and in preparation for development
 - Another three regions who have shown a significant interest are China, Neighbouring Regions and India

In all these areas of regional cooperation the SQF for Social Sciences will be a great reference point to start new developments and to exploit what has already been achieved

Thirdly, the work achieved in this project is at the bases and will be developed further in the work of the new development: The Tuning Academy which will be inaugurated on the 27th of September 2010 in Bilbao, Spain. It is not a coincidence that the first sector to be developed will be the sector for Social Sciences. This will consist of four thematic units:

- one related to research on issues such as issues of language identified in this project and others in relation to skills development in specific disciplines (social sciences will be the first to be developed and the experts from the project will be part of the task forces)
- one related to training of trainers with activities in fields related to this project.
- one related to observatories and policies related to employment, counting on the Presence of the DG Employment
- one related to implementation and dissemination

Finally, but of critical importance the members take part in a number of very significant initiatives at European level and they will take the initial outcomes of the project to develop further. Such is the case with the development of NQS and also Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks, the very relevant initiative of New Skills for New jobs or Skills for Jobs (with important connections in the fields of Social Sciences), the work of Thematic Networks and Professional Associations and the continue work at the level of Country Authorities where a significant number of these experts are playing an important role.

6. Contribution to EU policies

In terms of constituting a significant contribution to EU policies, the following were laid down from the outset of the project:-

One of the major aims of the EU policies is the search for adequate reference points. This need was brought about by globalisation, the increase in mobility of the citizen and the desire to gain recognition of learning whatever form that learning may take. In this respect, the outcomes of the project are meant for higher education institutions and their academic and academic-related staff in Europe, as well as organisations which have a role in recognition of prior learning, quality assurance etc. They are expected to be useful, for schools offering secondary education and for organisations / institutions offering vocational education and training in the field of social sciences.

Policies facilitating recognition. The elaboration of sectoral frameworks as it is the case with this proposal is an important tool from the perspective of European wide mobility and employability. Beyond frameworks at subject area level, other reference points can help to locate learning, to identify it at sectoral level as well as at the level of regions and nations. The citizens of Europe are expected to be more and more mobile and are expecting that their competences (knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities) will be recognized in other settings and regions without difficulties and bureaucratic procedures. They will also expect that prior learning outcomes will be recognized in a fair way, to facilitate continuous learning, eventually leading to the awarding of formal qualifications (diploma's and degree certificates).

In particular the outcomes of the project are expected to be useful for **streamlining procedures and criteria in different countries and institutions.** A united EHEA requires common reference points, which are accepted and universally used by the organisations and persons involved. Mapping, identifying and analysing the present situation in Europe regarding entrance conditions, recognition procedures of prior learning outcomes and standardized learning pathways for the EQF levels 3 to 6 will offer greater insight into the existing situation in Europe today. Examples of good and best practice can serve as examples for other countries, institutions and organizations.

One of the prime aims is to see **how the cycle level descriptors of the EQF for LLL and the QF for the EHEA can be bridged at sectoral and subject area level.** This could well lead to suggestions either to combine the two or – if this proves not feasible – to fine tune the two and bring them more into line. In the Higher Education sector an obvious need is felt for doing so, because working with two sets of descriptors, which are based on slightly deviating philosophies of learning outcomes, complicates comparisons and the recognition of (prior) learning outcomes.

Enhancement of learning outcomes approach and search for quality. Furthermore, the achievement of a sectoral qualifications framework, as of national frameworks and the two EQF's will boost the use of the learning outcomes / competences approach. The perceived quality of degree programmes is determined at international level nowadays. This requires the establishment of universally accepted international, or at least European, reference points, i.e. learning outcomes and competences. This pioneer project is, thus, expected to play a pioneering role in this area.

This SQF project has been developed in the expectation of making an important contribution to all the policy areas outlined above. The above report detailing the results in respect of the six Outcomes identified clearly demonstrate that the project has fulfilled its aims.

Outcome 1. When the proposal were made to create the EQF, great concern was expressed that this new framework and the existing QF EHEA should be fully compatible, not only in theoretical but also in practical terms. In producing validated descriptors of learning outcomes for the Social Sciences sector this project has made a major contribution to that end. These descriptors are compatible with both the Dublin Descriptors and the EQF level descriptors, as well as with TUNING methodology on learning outcomes/competences. They provide, therefore, a vital bridge between the two Qualifications frameworks developed for European educational systems. They specifically help in this process by extending the descriptors for the Social Sciences to EQF levels 3 and 4 in order to demonstrate the seamlessness of the progression towards learning in HEIs. This is considerably aided by the adoption for these descriptors of the EQFs tripartite categorisation of learning outcomes into knowledge, skills and competences in preference to the five-part division of learning outcomes adopted by the Dublin Descriptors. In addition, these descriptors in being compatible with both qualification frameworks will surely advance the cause of the attribution of credit entry and exemption through RPLO. These descriptors for the Social Sciences can also form the basis for

parallel descriptors produced by other sectors within HEIs. This conclusion is not invalidated by the very legitimate concern expressed by a number of the members of this project who were uneasy about the lack of what they perceive to be uncertainties in the meaning of some of the terminology of learning outcomes, especially the term 'competence'.

Outcome 2. In producing descriptions, for each of the nations participating in this project, of secondary education, whether compulsory or non-compulsory, and, in some cases, even primary education, the project significantly adds to the first outcome in showing the way to greater seamlessness between these levels of education, including further education, and learning which takes place in HEIs. The projects desire to offer a significant contribution towards the recognition of prior learning outcomes, is somewhat and unavoidably constricted, on the other hand, by the fact that too few nations have, so far, completed their new NQFs and referenced them to the EQF LLL. This is, of course, absolutely central in promoting RPLO.

Outcome 3. Just as the compatibility of the two frameworks for European education, the QF EHEA and the EQF is of great importance, so is the compatibility of their respective credit accumulation and transfer systems, ECTS and ECVET. This project underlines the fact that, although it may be expected that ECTS and ECVET credits may be transferred (on equivalent levels/cycles) on a 1 to 1 basis, there remain many practical questions relating to the detailed organisation and functioning of ECVET which make this far from a certainty. Although others (especially CEDEFOP) have raised, in general terms, the question of the compatibility of the two CATS, this project, to the best of our knowledge, offers the first practical survey of the likely practical problems relating to future compatibility. This being so, the project members make it perfectly clear that a large part of that contribution lies in raising important questions rather than in necessarily furnishing clear answers to those questions.

Outcome 4. This relates specifically to the way in which the project addressed the fundamental theoretical questions relating to the relationship between the Dublin Descriptors and the EQF level descriptors. The resolution of these questions was vital for the successful completion of the sectoral level descriptors for Outcome 1 above. This group does not (cannot) claim to give definitive answers to all the questions but does believe that its discussion of them is a significant practical contribution to the ongoing discussions on such questions.

Outcome 5. This outcome was vital for widening the number of subject areas involved in this SQF project. Moreover, the production by Psychology

of its brochure on *Reference Point for Design and Delivery of Degrees in Psychology* offered the perfect occasion for a fundamental discussion of the way in which different ways of categorising learning outcomes/competences, especially those of the Dublin Descriptors and of the EQF, related to the more specific task of producing statements of cycle/level descriptors for a specific subject area. That which it has been possible to produce within the timeframe of this project by three subject areas may well serve as the basis of future discussions of this question by other sectoral and subject areas.

Outcome 6. The full expectations of this Outcome could not be met since it was believed that this project would proceed in tandem with other sectoral projects who could compare their sectoral descriptors one with another and draw general conclusions from this comparison. Nevertheless, the production of sectoral descriptors for the Social Sciences lays a vital basis for future comparisons with and by other sectors.

Taken overall, this project has not sought merely to demonstrate the compatibility of the two frameworks elaborated for European Education, the QF EHEA and the EQF LLL, but also to raise questions concerning the relationship between the two, questions which need further investigation. Questions have been raised about the degree of compatibility between EQF levels, 5-8 on the one hand, and the short and three cycles of the QF EHEA, on the other hand. How closely do they relate to each other? If the EQF is truly for lifelong learning, then how does one relate it to post-doctoral achievement, since EQF level 8 is normally equated to doctoral studies within HEIs? How does one relate to the EQF levels training which make take place subsequent to completion of HEI qualifications at QF EHEA cycles 1 and 2? Is there any question (some would consider it a danger) of the EQF level descriptors being considered a suitable replacement for the QF EHEA cycles and the Dublin Descriptors? The answers to such questions may appear obvious to those who designed the EQF but various members of this project displayed a sufficient numbers of worries about them to suggest that they need to be further investigated and resolved. Questions have also been raised about the degree to which the tripartite classification of learning outcomes adopted for the EQF is sufficient for practical use in drawing up descriptors of learning outcomes/competences for specific subject areas, especially subject areas which have very direct links to professional activity. The raising of such questions constitutes a vital additional contribution by this project.

In conclusion, this project has been a pioneering one and it has successfully fulfilled its expected outcomes.

Annex 1. ECTS and ECVET: Comparisons and contrasts

Richard de Lavigne
Consultancy for European Higher Education
Independent Expert recognised by the European Commission
for the Bologna and Copenhagen Processes
ECTS and Diploma Supplement Counsellor

Introduction¹⁸

In 2012, ECVET (the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training) a new credit accumulation and transfer system (CATS), will formally come into operation across Europe, in accord with the voluntary recommendation of the European Parliament and the European Council in 2009¹⁹. This new credit system, as its name suggests, principally concerns vocational education and training which takes place after the end of compulsory education in the member states of the European Union and the European Economic Area. It will be implemented alongside another credit system, already in existence for over twenty years, ECTS (the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System), which is applied to the vast majority of qualifications in higher education within the European Higher Education Area. This area is larger than the EU/EEA since many states outside its boundaries have joined the Bologna Process and have adopted the Qualifications Framework for EHEA, so that there are now 46 states involved.

It is legitimate to ask serious questions about the nature of each of these two CATS and about the relationship between them. These questions

18 This paper was first produced as a very brief position paper for the TUNING sectoral project for the Social Sciences much of which is concerned with seeing how the subject areas in this sector in HEIs would be affected by the European Qualification Framework. It has been lengthened, footnoted and constantly updated until the end date of this project in order to take account of the most recent developments with a view to making it available to a wider audience.

19 RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) (2009/C 155/02) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0011:0018:EN:PDF>

are all the more important given that a substantial number of students are expected, in the not distant future, to seek to transfer learning units between institutions operating the two different credit systems. This will necessitate the translation of ECTS credits into ECVET credits and, probably in greater numbers, of ECVET into ECTS credits. Curiously, no one until recently (at least, to the best of our knowledge) had formally posed these questions. Thus, many conferences and workshops on future developments in European education and training have separate sessions on ECTS and ECVET without ever asking the vital questions concerning the degree of compatibility between the two systems and, thus, how they will operate in tandem.

The purpose of this short paper is, therefore, to begin to fill this gap by examining the fundamental similarities and differences between ECTS and ECVET. This will make it possible to identify the points at which difficulties are likely to arise for those who have to operate both systems. Before doing this, it is, first, necessary to explain the context and, therefore, the importance of undertaking this task by looking briefly at both the Bologna and the Copenhagen Processes.

The Bologna process

Across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), institutions of higher education (HEIs) are working hard to apply to their qualifications programmes all the recommendations and requirements of the Bologna Process, more particularly those relating to the Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (QF EHEA). Three principal features may be highlighted.

The first is that the qualifications frameworks of HEIs have to be adapted in line with the structure of three cycles, and, where applicable, the short cycle preceding (or part of) the first cycle. In many countries, this framework necessitates little if any change at all from the existing qualification structures. In others, it is a major change. These three/four cycles are defined by the Dublin Descriptors, statements of generic learning outcomes that students must achieve in order to receive a qualification²⁰. The production of descriptors, commensurate with the Dublin Descrip-

20 For the original Dublin Descriptors (in English) and translations into Dutch, French, German, Irish and Spanish see: <http://www.jointquality.nl/content/descriptors/CompletesetDublinDescriptors.doc>

tors, for each and every teaching programme/qualification is, of course, a major feature of the quality assurance, which must be put in place by all HEIs for compliance with the Bologna Process.

Secondly, each of the Bologna cycles is defined in terms of the minimum and maximum number of credits, which students must normally accumulate in order to gain a given qualification. The only exception concerns third cycle programmes because doubt still persists over the appropriateness of applying credits to what are essentially doctoral studies. The numbers of credits cited as the norm for each cycle are, in fact, ECTS credits. This means that all HEIs must apply ECTS or, at least, a credit system that is compatible with it, to their teaching programmes. Several countries, which have pre-existing credit systems, are now abandoning them in favour of ECTS. As with the implementation of the three/four cycles, the introduction of ECTS represents a greater effort in some countries than in others.

Thirdly, all HEIs are required to provide newly qualified students with a Diploma Supplement, a document for which a standardised eight-part template has been devised²¹. This document, effectively an accompaniment to the actual diploma itself, gives all useful information on the awarding institution and the qualification in question, accompanied by a programme descriptor, the student and the precise programme (including any information on periods of mobility) which s/he took to gain the qualification, the grades awarded for individual units, and, finally, the document is concluded by a brief standardised description of the higher education system in the country where the award was made. This diploma supplement must be issued to all qualifying students, automatically, free of charge and in a language widely spoken in the EHEA.

Although a great effort is being made to harmonise the educational structures, cycle levels and, additionally, the basic learning outcomes/content of teaching programmes, the process is still far from complete in many countries despite the agreed terminal date of 2010, so that partners have been given up to 2012 to conform to some features of the process, so that they may self-certificate that their higher education systems now conform to all the requirements of Bologna. After the formal conclusion of the Bologna Process, all further developments will take place within the framework of the European Higher Education Area.

21 For a summary of the ECTS/Diploma Supplement [DS] see <http://www.jointquality.nl/content/descriptors/CompletesetDublinDescriptors.doc>

The Copenhagen process²²

The adoption in 2008 by the European Union of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF LLL)²³, as a major outcome of the Copenhagen Process, has imposed a further and major task on HEIs, as this framework is much wider than the QF EHEA. The EQF comprises eight levels of learning achievement, as opposed to the four Bologna cycles, levels that are intended to cover all qualifications, in whatever type of educational institution, which are normally attained after the conclusion of compulsory primary and secondary education. The EQF is designed to enhance the transparency of qualifications by providing a meta-framework at European level. The completion of compulsory education, in most member states, occurs for students at around age 16. The EQF is essentially intended to cover all vocational education and training (VET)²⁴. The EQF is also designed to facilitate greatly the recognition of prior learning outcomes (RPLO) through non-formal or informal learning processes. People who have in this way attained various levels of learning as defined by the EQF may, later, attempt to have them recognised as part of, or even as the entirety of, a formal qualification.

There is a considerable overlap between the EQF and the QF EHEA since levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the EQF apparently encapsulate the QF EHEA three/four cycles. It is intended that each country, having developed its own National Qualifications Framework (NQF), should equate all qualifications to the EQF. At levels 5-8, this task will be comparatively simple for

22 The original Copenhagen Declaration (2002) has become integrated into the European Commission's Education and Training 2010 Work Programme. See http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc60_en.htm

23 "The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF for LLL) acts as a translation device to make national qualifications more readable across Europe, promoting workers' and learners' mobility between countries and facilitating their lifelong learning. The EQF will relate different countries' national qualifications systems to a common European reference framework. Individuals and employers will be able to use the EQF to better understand and compare the qualifications levels of different countries and different education and training systems." See the Recommendations of the European Parliament Council in the *Official Journal of the European Union*, (2008/C 111/01=07).

24 This is definitely not to say that Levels 1-3 may not be attained during compulsory education whether primary or secondary. Some countries are taking note of this fact (the UK for example) and others simply find such levels irrelevant and propose to ignore them in drawing up their national qualifications frameworks. This appears, for example, to be the case in France where the current framework with five levels suggests a concordance of French levels 5 to 1 with EQF levels 4 to 8.

programmes taught in HEIs²⁵ but will be more complex for programmes taught at these levels outside of HEIs. In passing, it should be noted that EQF level 4 may sometimes be equated with those preliminary programmes within HEIs which consist of just 60 ECTS credits. For example, in the UK, a student with just one full year (or one full year equivalent) of successful study (60 ECTS credits) may qualify for a Certificate of Higher Education. This is fewer than the 120 ECTS credits required for short cycle qualifications²⁶.

The challenges of integrating the two processes in HEIs

The EQF poses three major challenges for HEIs.

The first is to make sure that their subject cycle descriptors are commensurate not only with the Dublin Descriptors but also with the level descriptors of the EQF. This task is somewhat wider than this statement implies because HEIs will be increasingly interested in the EQF levels preceding higher studies since many qualifications at levels 3 and 4 will serve as entry qualifications to higher education. The difficulty of this task derives in large part from the fact that EQF level statements are of a more general character than the Dublin Descriptors, something which is only to be expected since the EQF level statements cover all non-HEI education and training as well as all that which takes place in HEIs.

The second challenge results from the difference in the nature of the two sets of level/cycle descriptors. The Dublin descriptors are based on an identification of five categories of learning outcomes as follows:

25 I say comparatively simple since recent discussions have revealed that the simple and direct correlation between the ECTS cycles and EQF levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 is not as straightforward as might at first be thought. Thus, for example, it may be observed that if the EQF level 8 equates to the Bologna third cycle, where does post doctoral learning figure in the EQF levels? In fact, it is becoming increasingly clear that equating EQF levels with any qualifications structure will give rise to some difficulties because, and despite its name, the EQF is not in any true sense a qualifications framework but, of deliberate design, is purely a 'learning framework' which may serve to help in the development of national qualifications frameworks.

26 The *Report on referencing the Qualifications and Credit Framework to the Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*, produced by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, notes (especially pp. 22-23 and 35) a certain difficulty in relating QCF level 4 with certainty to one of either EQF levels 4 or 5. See www.qcda.gov.uk

- a) **Knowledge and Skills**
- b) **Applying knowledge and understanding**
- c) **Making judgments**
- d) **Communication skills**
- e) **Learning Skills**

The EQF level descriptors, on the other hand, are based on three categories of learning outcomes which are closely defined as follows:

- a) **'knowledge'** means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of study or work. In the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual
- b) **'skills'** means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)
- c) **'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/or personal development. In the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy²⁷.

This means that HEIs are increasingly finding it necessary to draw up for each of their qualifications an EQF descriptor alongside that constructed on the basis of the Dublin Descriptors. They often find this an awkward task, especially when they attempt to establish a clear line of demarcation between what pertains to 'skills' and what to 'competence'.

Finally, a new credit accumulation and transfer system, the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)²⁸, has been

27 On the origins and development of these three categories, and on their relationship to ECVET, see especially, Jonathon Winterton, 'Competence across Europe: highest common factor or lowest common denominator?', in *Journal of European Industrial Training*, vol. 33, No. 8/9, 2009 pp. 681-700.

28 "ECVET belongs to a series of European initiatives to recognise learning experiences across different countries and different types of institutions. ECVET aims for better comparability and compatibility between different national VET and qualification systems. The system, which should be implemented by Member States by 2012, is a voluntary framework to describe qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes. Each of these

devised to accompany the EQF. This means that HEIs will have to make sure that the numbers of ECTS credits which they have allocated to each of their teaching units/programmes are commensurate with the equivalent numbers of ECVET credits and, to achieve this, they will need to be certain that the rationale behind the credits in these two CATS are fully compatible. Otherwise, the transfer of credits between them would become highly problematical.

Given the above discussion, it is the purpose of this paper to look at the fundamental principles underlying these two systems and whether, and to what degree, they coincide or diverge. It may be said from the outset that it is obvious that there are important divergences between them. If it had been otherwise then all that would have been necessary would have been to adapt ECTS to meet the wider needs of the EQF, as many people associated with the Bologna Process would have greatly preferred. The debate has been resolved, at least for the time being, in favour of having two separate CATS for Europe.

Nevertheless, in making comparisons between ECTS and ECVET, it is necessary to make sure that the divergences are properly identified. It is also necessary to ask whether both the theoretical and practical problems inherent in creating a new credit system, in ECVET, have been properly addressed. ECTS has been in existence now for 20 years. All sorts of problems have arisen, not only during the pilot years from 1989 to 1995 but also subsequently. These have been addressed and dealt with, even if some remain rather intractable. It is pertinent to ask whether those who devised ECVET have drawn profitably on the experience of ECTS.

In the next section of this paper, the essential characteristics of ECTS, as the elder and more developed of the two systems, are laid out briefly. The ensuing and longer section will identify the principal characteristics of ECVET, highlighting the similarities and the differences with ECTS. It is of particular interest to underline those points at which ECVET may well present problems to those who have to put it in place and to use it. It will then be possible to draw some general conclusions from the comparisons.

units will be associated with a certain number of ECVET points developed on the basis of common European standards. 60 points should correspond to the learning outcomes achieved in a year of full time VET." See http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc50_en.htm

A) The essential characteristics of ECTS

These may be laid out briefly in the following numerical order:

1. Credit arithmetic and credit defined in terms of relative student workload

In ECTS, each successful year of study is represented by 60 credits. The figure 60 was chosen because it is both decimal and duodecimal (*i.e.* it is divisible by both 10 and 12) which gives a great deal of flexibility in the arithmetic of credit allocation. Credits are calculated on the basis of relative student workload.

1.1. Student workload is understood to include all learning activities undertaken by students, whether it involves teacher contact or self-directed study, including the preparation for and the sitting of examinations. It covers fieldwork and work placements.

1.2 The precise number of credits for each individual teaching/learning unit is calculated on student workload relative to the workload of other units in the same programme. For example, a unit, which takes up a fifth of a student's annual workload, will carry 12 ECTS credits. The number of credits allocated to each teaching/learning unit constitutes (along with the cycle/level of the unit) that unit's 'credit value'.

2. The definition of the academic year

An academic year, or rather an academic 'session', is equated to approximately 38-40 weeks of teaching/learning, increasingly divided into two equal semesters, each with 30 credits. This equates to a total of somewhere between 1500 and 1800 hours of workload per 'year'. That means that each ECTS credit represents something between 25 and 30 hours of student workload. These figures constitute strong guidelines but are not mandatory.

3. Credit defined in terms of learning outcomes

The number of credits allocated to each learning unit is defined not only by student workload, but also by a given number of learning outcomes which successful students demonstrate they have achieved in the assessment, however that assessment may be devised. Having achieved the outcomes, students receive all the credits for each unit. If not, they receive none.

4. The different categories of learning outcomes and the writing of statements of learning outcomes

The TUNING project²⁹ (amongst others) has increasingly defined the different types of learning outcomes and the various kinds of statements of learning outcomes from the professional profile to the qualification profile and from the cycle/level descriptor to the descriptor of individual teaching units. Many guides to the technique of writing learning outcomes are now available³⁰. It is to be noted that the use of Learning Outcomes necessitates developing the methodology of assessment and grading criteria³¹.

29 "TUNING Educational Structures in Europe started in 2000 as a project to link the political objectives of the *Bologna Process* and at a later stage the *Lisbon Strategy* to the higher educational sector. Over time Tuning has developed into a **Process**, an approach to (re-) designing, develop, implement, evaluate and enhance quality first, second and third cycle degree programmes. The Tuning outcomes as well as its tools are presented in a range of *Tuning publications*, which institutions and their academics are invited to test and use in their own setting. The Tuning approach has been developed by and is meant for higher education institutions" http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1

30 For the theory of learning outcomes and the writing of statements of learning outcomes see:-

ANDERSON, Lorin W. & KRATHWOHL, David R. eds., *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, New York, Longmans, 2001.

BLOOM, B.S. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook 1: The Cognitive Domain*, New York, David McKay Co Inc, 1956

BOWE, Brian et FITZMAURICE, Marian, 'Guide to Writing Learning Outcomes,' publié par le Dublin Institute of Technology, (Learning and Teaching Centre; Lifelong Learning, DIT, 14 Upper Mount Street, Dublin 2).

LAVIGNE, Richard de, ECTS Credits: Relating Learning Outcomes to Calculating Student Workload in the European Higher Education Area. (paper for the III Jornadas Universitarias de Innovacion y Calidad, University of Deusto, Bilbao september 1997

GOSLING, David & MOON, Jenny, *How to Use Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria*, London, Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer, 3rd edition 2002. (see www.seec-office.org.uk)

MAGER, R F, *Preparing Instructional Objectives*, California, Fearon, 1965.

OTTER, Sue, *Learning Outcomes in Higher Education*, Educational Development Unit of the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside for the Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education (UDACE) of the British Government Employment Department, 1993.

UCE Birmingham University: *Guide to Learning Outcomes*. Available at the University of Birmingham Staff & Student Development Unit.

CEDEFOP, *The Shift to Learning Outcomes : Policies and Practices in Europe*, CEDEFOP Reference Series no.72, 2009. (Also available on the CEDEFOP website.)

31 The failure to relate assessment and grading to statements of learning outcomes has recently been underlined in a report on the French universities, see Roger-François

5. The ECTS grading scales and grade transfer

Although comparatively little has been done as yet within the Bologna Process to address properly the methodology of assessment and grading criteria, the concern for grade transfer, between HEIs, an integral part of student mobility, has led to the construction of the ECTS grading scales designed to help institutions to understand and interpret better the local grading scales used in other institutions/countries. Given the continuing problems encountered in grade transfer, there have been recent developments laid out in the latest edition of the ECTS Users Guide (2009)³². More will be said on this subject when the matter of grade transfer is discussed relative to ECVET.

6. The written instruments of ECTS

Credits and grades have been accompanied by the development of a number of written instruments, which were seen, from the very beginning, as being essential to successful mobility and credit transfer. These are:

- a) **the learning agreement** in which the learning programme of a mobile student is agreed in advance by all three parties, that is, the home institution, the host institution and, above all, the student. This constitutes a guarantee that, if the student successfully completes the programme laid down in the learning agreement, all the credits will be given full recognition by the home institution;
- b) **the transcript of record** which records the learning units (and their level) studied by the student and, where the student has been successful in the assessments, the number of credits awarded, along with the local pass grades, grades which will also be shown for units for which the assessment has not been passed and for which, consequently, no credits are awarded;

Gauthier, Martine Caffin-Ravier, Michèle Mosnier, Bibiane Descamps & Henri Peretti, 'L'évaluation des étudiants à l'Université : point aveugle ou point d'appui ?', **Rapport de l'inspection générale de l'administration de l'éducation nationale et de la recherche (Ministère de l'éducation nationale, Ministère de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche)**, Rapport numéro 2007-07, juillet 2007. The problem is far from being confined to France, see, for example, for the UK, Win Hornby, 'Assessing Using Grade-related Criteria: a single currency for universities?', in *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2003, pp. 435-454.

32 See ECTS Users Guide (2009). Annex 3 "The ECTS Grading Tables" pages 41-43 from http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide_en.pdf

- c) **the Information Package and Course Catalogue** of each institution which gives, in advance, all useful information to would-be mobile students and to the teachers who have to decide if they will agree to the period of mobility, on the basis of full information given on teaching programmes and especially on each teaching unit. Properly formulated programme and teaching/learning unit descriptors are vital to this process.

Not surprisingly, these written instruments, initially developed to facilitate credit transfer, are increasingly being adapted by HEIs to the purposes of credit accumulation.

B) The essential characteristics of ECVET and the questions arising from its establishment

ECVET will start to become operative in 2012. As already stated, it has been particularly designed for VET. This immediately raises questions relative to programmes taught in HEIs, which may be considered as VET in character. A number of teachers in HEIs have clearly indicated to ECTS counsellors their uncertainty whether they should use ECTS or ECVET in respect of such programmes. The answer may well be both. The essential characteristics and (potential) problems of ECVET are as follows:

1. Credit arithmetic and student workload

ECVET specifies that a student's annual workload (which includes all learning activities as in ECTS) is represented numerically by 60 credits. This arithmetical parity with ECTS (as against the original suggestion for 120 ECVET credits per year) should help to simplify credit transfer between the two systems. But does simple arithmetical parity mean real parity of numbers and the value of credits?

2. The need to define the learning year in ECVET

It is apparent that the whole notion of the 'year' in ECVET awaits careful definition. This system is to be applied to a multitude of learning programmes, many of which may well consist of a school/academic/training 'year' of ninth months or roughly 38-40 weeks or multiples thereof.

2.1. However, many will have 'years' extending considerably further than this. This is, above all, due to the nature of many training courses,

which include, beyond the normal 'teaching' year in an educational institution, a substantial period of practical training elsewhere, many of them being 'sandwich' courses³³. In such cases, VET programmes cover anything up to 11 months in a given academic year. Given that learners may work for significantly more than the 1500-1800 hours per 'year' which are used as a basis for credit calculation in ECTS, are such units and programmes to carry more than 60 credits for a 'year' or not? The question is by no means a purely theoretical one, since many teachers in the area of VET have already expressed concern about this issue.

2.2. This concern is hardly surprising since the question of the variable length of the academic year has already raised serious questions relative to the three/four Bologna cycles operating with the ECTS. Although there has been considerable debate over the numbers of credits which should be awarded, in first cycle qualifications, for work placements and 'stages' occurring beyond the normal bounds of the academic year, the most obvious manifestation of this concern has been the serious debate over the number of credits to be awarded for second cycle programmes of greatly variable length. Generally, ECTS experts, and especially the members of TUNING, have recommended 60 credits for Masters programmes, which extend over a normal academic session; 75 for those which extend over 11/12 months; 90 for those which extend over three semesters; and 120 for those extending over 4 semesters. Although generally accepted, these recommendations have given rise to some dissent and diversity of national practice. Such questions are likely to cause greater problems with programmes using ECVET, since they undoubtedly cover a far greater variety of teaching 'years'. Close attention will have, therefore, to be devoted to this question.

2.3. The same sorts of problems arising from the length of the 'teaching' year, will no doubt result from learning/training periods, which are much shorter than the more or less standard 'year', without conforming to any set pattern such as the semester in HEIs. Some of these short courses will no doubt be fast track, so much thought will have to be given to the number of credits these short courses should receive, just as with Intensive Programmes in ERASMUS mobility.

33 Some courses are taken part-time in blocks of concentrated study time surrounding a period of practical or work-related experience. This could mean studying for a block of a few days each month, or for a block of a few weeks during a year, or perhaps for a whole term/semester. See http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk/Uni4me/what_can_i_study_/what_are_sandwich_courses_.cfm

3. Translating ECVET credits into ECTS credits and viceversa

The responses to these questions will have to be taken into account when HEIs decide how many ECTS credits they will be prepared to grant in exchange for ECVET credits presented to them by applicants who wish to enter their programmes. This is all the more true because the EQF does not have (and cannot have, in view of the vast range of qualifications awarded across Europe) a set number of cycles for which minimum and maximum number of ECVET credits are recommended.

3.1. So, will HEIs award preset numbers of ECTS credits for a given award at one or other of the EQF levels (always assuming that they are happy about the strict equivalence between EQF levels on the one hand and QF EHEA cycles on the other hand³⁴) or will they exchange ECVET and ECTS credits purely on a 1 for 1 basis? The danger is that individual HEIs will adopt different solutions, creating considerable confusion and inequity.

3.2. Behind all this, there lies a much wider question concerning who will decide in each country's NQF how many ECVET credits will be attached to the component units of each of the multitude of education and training programmes and qualifications. Will it be governmental or quasi-governmental agencies constructing the NQF, especially the national coordination points (NCPs); will it be the institutions which prepare students for the qualifications; or, better still, will it be committees (maybe working in close cooperation with the NCPs) involving as wide a range of stakeholders/social partners as possible, such as was the case when the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) was elaborated? To give just one example of the sorts of problems that will have to be faced in elaborating NQFs a number of member states are currently attempting to address the issue of how to locate the *Meister* (Master of Skilled Crafts) in terms of level and volume of credits³⁵. There is, however, currently no published material dealing with this issue.

34 It may be noted that there is likely to emerge a further complication in equating EQF levels to Bologna cycles in that qualifications awarded within the structure of the Bologna cycles often have internal level progressions. Thus, for example, a three-year/six semester first cycle qualification may well be considered to consist of three (or more) progressive levels. So it will be necessary to decide in case of a transfer/conversion of ECVET to ECTS credits, at what internal level the ECVET credits will be considered to lie.

35 The status of "Master Craftsman" (Meister im Handwerk) is legally regulated in Germany, although there are also "non-regulated" trades. The skilled crafts sector is number 1 in Germany when it comes to providing training. Its dual training system is unique. It combines practical work and learning in the enterprise with theoretical educa-

4. The relationship in ECVET between student workload and learning outcomes

There is a further area for concern about the relationship between ECVET and ECTS credits. As was noted above, ECVET, as presented to the European Parliament in 2008, states that credit, as in ECTS, is constructed on the notion of student workload, as defined by the learning outcomes to be achieved and the notional number of hours it takes the average student to achieve them. However, there still remain in the final proposal papers suggestions that credit allocation may alternatively be based on the idea of the relative 'importance' or 'weight' of the various parts of programmes.

4.1. Now, if 'importance' is understood in a quantitative manner (that is, the number of hours a student has to study to achieve the learning outcomes) than this proposal presents no problem. If, however, 'importance' is understood in a qualitative manner (i.e. the learning outcomes of a given unit are perceived to be of greater value than those of other parts of a given programme and, therefore, should receive more credits than those allocated to other parts of the programme), then credit may be allocated in a way which is increasingly divorced from relative student workload.

4.2. There is a dangerous ambiguity here that needs to be clarified once and for all. The last thing that is required is for self-appointed experts to tell everybody else, on a purely subjective basis (for, there is no other!), which learning areas are of intrinsically greater value than others. Given that such unacceptable suggestions have been advanced in the past for the allocation of ECTS credits, it is by no means a wild surmise that the same phenomenon could occur in ECVET.

4.3. If the above discussion has concentrated on the question of how ECVET credits as the 'new kids on the block' will be translated into ECTS

tion in a vocational school during training. The training concludes with the skilled worker's examination after three to three and a half years. Every skilled worker can take further training and sit the master craftsman's examination. The master craftsman's examination is the top specialist skilled crafts qualification and authorises the person to manage an enterprise and to train apprentices. Skilled workers and master craftsmen can select from a wide variety of options for further training. Examples include further training as a crafts management expert for entrepreneurs and managers or an internationally reputed specialist training as an artisan restorer. In many (Federal German) states the master craftsman's qualification opens the door to studies in a polytechnic or university. See <http://www.zdh.de/en/vocational-education.html>

credits, all the problems listed above will, of course, influence the way in which ECTS credits are translated into ECVET credits. Transfers of credits will not take place in just the one direction.

5. How will student hours of work be calculated in ECVET?

The preceding comments indicate that there are likely to occur serious difficulties in ECVET in determining, with a reasonable degree of precision, the notional number of hours of work that the average student must accomplish in order to achieve the learning outcomes of each unit. If this is so, then there will be a serious divergence from ECTS. Inevitably, hours of study will be more notional in ECVET than they are in ECTS in which, despite debates and hesitations over the 25-30 hour per credit proposal of TUNING (the UK works on 20 hours per credit and Iceland 33 hours, whilst some others have simply ignored the question), has not caused serious difficulties. ECVET is, therefore, likely to be centred more on learning outcomes, with student workload becoming increasingly notional.

5.1. It is clear that there are those who would welcome such a result, especially because, as they correctly, if tangentially, argue, it is impossible to calculate learning hours in non-formal and informal learning. For such a learning-outcomes based approach to credit allocation to be viable, however, it would be necessary for statements of learning outcomes to be far more precise and authoritative than they in fact are. CEDEFOP in one of its reports recognises that there exists much diversity in the theory of learning outcomes and in the manner in which statements of learning outcomes are drawn up³⁶.

5.2. If an over concentration on learning hours in defining credit is to be deplored (and ECTS has wrongly been reproached for this), an over-concentration on learning outcomes is equally to be regretted. It is not difficult to imagine a situation in which statements of learning outcomes are more or less identical for two teaching units at the same EQF level in two different educational establishments/countries and yet for the notional hours needed to achieve the stated learning outcomes to be twice as many, say, in one of the two institutions as stated as in the other. Given reasonable equality between the students undertaking these two units and also between the two learning environments, no one would be deceived into thinking that the true credit value of the learning outcomes of the two units were, as near as makes no difference, identical and that they should carry the same number of credits at the same EQF level.

36 See note 20 below.

5.3 So, a clear double base in which workload and learning outcomes are seen as going together 'like Romeo and Juliet', as a student paper published by TUNING imaginatively put it, is highly desirable, even if one hopes that the outcome of this particular love affair will be less funereal! As for credits awarded for non-formal and informal learning, these will have to be calculated, admittedly with great sensitivity, on the basis of how long it takes students in full time formal learning to achieve the same learning outcomes, just as is done, for example, in Canada. In fact, this point was conceded in the European Commission's paper of September 2006 proposing the establishment of the EQF.

6. The EQF and national credit and qualification frameworks

Additionally, the ECVET displays an essential difference from ECTS which is likely to cause many problems, especially for credit equivalence and, therefore, for the international mobility of credit and of qualifications. As observed above, ECTS is very closely related to clearly defined qualification cycles laid down in the Bologna Process to which all HEIs in the European Higher Education are conforming.

6.1. ECVET, on the other hand, is an instrument of the EQF, which does not (cannot) define clear cycles but simply lays down eight levels of learning achievement. It is left to each country to relate the qualifications laid down in its NQF (once constructed – and only six, which take the EQF into account, have been completed so far, half of them in the UK and Ireland) to each of these eight levels. In this sense, the EQF is very definitely stated not to be a 'true' qualifications framework but rather a meta-framework. The obvious danger here, however, in a situation in which the precise meaning of each of the EQF levels inevitably remains somewhat imprecise, is that individual nations will relate the EQF to the qualifications in their NQFs rather than doing the opposite, that is, working to equate their qualifications to the EQF. It would be encouraging if all countries were to be as rigorous in this work of referencing their NQF to the EQF as is Scotland. In this case, the twelve levels of the SCQF have now been equated to the eight levels of the EQF. But will others be as punctilious in constructing or rethinking their qualification frameworks as part of the process of alignment on the EQF³⁷? Certainly, there is a real potential difficulty here.

37 The other countries in the UK have now completed the process. The referencing for all of them can be found at www.qcda.gov.uk

6.2. The contention of those who constructed the EQF is that statements of learning outcomes for each level will constitute a sure guide to level and equivalence, since such statements provide a much better indicator of the level of achievement than any list of qualification titles. This argument contains a self-evident truth, namely that we all tend to award value to qualifications simply because their names are thoroughly familiar to us and we do so without possessing any serious proof of the true level of learning achievement which they represent. Nevertheless, given the enormous variety of taxonomies of learning outcomes and of methodologies for making statement of learning outcomes³⁸, this degree of confidence in the value of generic statements of level of learning achievement seems rather naïve. Thus, it is more than probable that when two countries relate a given qualification to one and the same EQF level, one country may still believe that its qualification is more 'advanced' than the qualification of the other country and refuse to accord full equivalent recognition to the qualification and its component units and credits granted by that other country. In contrast, by creating a uniform and universally accepted series of cycles, based on the Anglo-American higher education qualifications model, and by simultaneously identifying the generic learning outcomes of each cycle, the Bologna Process has to a large extent avoided this problem.

6.3. A great deal of international co-operation will, therefore, be required in order to iron out such tensions as will be created by the necessarily more diffuse nature of the EQF and the ECVET credits which will be awarded as a consequence. It is to be hoped that, just as there is a Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG), there will be one for this and other aspects of the Copenhagen Process.

7. The written instruments of ECVET

Although ECVET is clearly described as a transfer as well as an accumulation system, the student mobility aspect of the system appears, to date, to be rather underdeveloped in comparison with ECTS.

7.1. In the EQF/ECVET project presented to the European Parliament in 2008, mention is made of the creation of a learning agreement between the two institutions involved in student mobility and the would-be mo-

38 See for example, the CEDEFOP Publication (2009), "The shift to Learning Outcomes: Policies and Practices in Europe" available in English and German from: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Information_Resources/Bookshop/publication_details.asp?pub_id=494

bile student. But when will some standardised form for this learning agreement be produced?

7.2. Further, how are learning contracts to be determined in advance of students' departure by those participating in mobility when nothing is said of the method by which institutions will learn of each other's programmes and their learning outcomes?

7.3. In what manner will the results achieved by students at the end of their period of mobility be communicated between institutions and in a comprehensible manner? In other words, there appears so far to be only a very limited idea of the creation of an internationally standardised and easily readable transcript of record or any notion of the need for information packages and course catalogues. For the moment, it appears that all mobility will proceed on a strictly one-to-one basis between institutions (or within strictly defined networks of partner institutions) and their students and in a manner to be determined by those institutions.

7.4. In this respect, it is particularly to be emphasised that the written instruments of ECTS, along with its credits and grades, were specifically developed in order to supersede the very amateur and inefficient way in which many ERASMUS student mobility programmes had been managed through International Co-operation Programmes (ICPs) in the early days of that programme.

8. Grade transfer in ECVET

In this respect, it is important to note that no mention is made in the ECVET proposals of grade transfer, despite the fact that this has proved to be and remains such a difficult issue in ECTS. The latest edition of the ECTS Users Guide (February 2009), reacting to the difficulties in operating effectively the existing ECTS grading scales, developed to assist in the matter of grade transfer, proposes a new system called 'ECTS Grading Tables'. It is regrettable to say that this is not only poorly thought-out but likely to prove no more successful than the previous system. It seems that the new system simply replaces one set of problems with another. Many have expressed extreme unhappiness with, not to mention real anger at, the proposed changes³⁹.

³⁹ Within the last year or so, I have been contacted by a considerable number international officers in French HEIs asking for help in explaining the workings of the ECTS grading scales to their colleagues. On learning that a new system was proposed in early 2009, the people concerned were mortified to learn that all their efforts in explaining the ECTS grading scales and the importance of using them to their sceptical colleagues had, at a stroke, been rendered null and void.

8.1. Nevertheless, those who monitor and develop ECTS are attempting to deal satisfactorily with what is a serious matter and one which will probably continue to cause important problems until such times as a universally acceptable set of European grading scales for higher education, based on assessment criteria related to learning outcomes, is constructed and then applied sector by sector and subject area by subject area. All this is in sharp contrast to ECVET. True, many VET programmes are of a kind in which the most important thing is for the students simply to pass the assessment whereas grades above basic pass level may be of little or no importance. Nevertheless, this can scarcely be relied on as being a universal feature of VET and other programmes covered by the EQF/ECVET.

8.2. Moreover, grades used in EQF programmes are likely to be even more varied and incoherent than those used in higher education across the EHEA. Concern over this will greatly concern HEIs because grades achieved at EQF levels 3-4 may well be as much a determinant of the acceptance of VET qualifications for credit entry to HEIs as the credits themselves, and so these grades must be made fully readable between institutions and countries. The same will be true for higher levels of the EQF where there will be would-be entrants from non-HEIs who will be seeking credit exemption from parts, or even the entirety, of programmes taught in HEIs.

8.3. In addition, it will increasingly become necessary for sectoral/subject areas in VET to agree what constitutes the threshold level of learning outcomes to define the basic pass level in their teaching units, just as is happening within the Bologna Process, an area to which TUNING, in particular, has made such an enormous contribution through all the work of the subject areas associated with the project and which have delivered their respective reports on the Design and Delivery of Degrees, all of which are to be found on the TUNING website.

8.4. There is also another matter concerning grades which has caused great concern within HEIs using ECTS and which will certainly have to be dealt within ECVET. This concerns the manner in which credits are awarded on the basis of grades received. Strictly speaking, within a fully developed CAT system, credits are awarded as a result of students demonstrating, through the assessment for a given teaching/learning unit, that they have mastered the learning outcomes of that unit. Yet, it rapidly became clear even during the pilot phase of ECTS that many HEIs award credits for certain individual units where a given student has not passed

the assessment on that unit but has achieved a grade-point average over a number of units which means that all the credits for that group of units are awarded to that student. This practice, variously known in Euro-speak as 'condonement' or in 'Franglais' as 'compensation', commonly found not only in individual HEIs but often across whole countries in the EHEA, is, strictly speaking, not compatible with CAT systems since it is fundamental to the proper functioning of both credit accumulation and credit transfer that every unit/module is discrete. This establishes students' competence to practice (some part of) a trade or profession or, at least, to proceed to study the same or an associated subject at a higher level. This much is obvious. However, the practice of condonement is so widespread within the EHEA that it is virtually impossible to stop, especially as students tend to be violently opposed to its abandonment, particularly in France. Those HEIs that do practice condonement are at least encouraged to indicate clearly on their Transcripts of Record those units for which the student has received the credits without having achieved the required minimum pass grade. This enables other institutions, which do not practice condonement, to refuse to transfer in any credits achieved in this manner. This may seem harsh to students but many academics are extremely concerned to protect the quality and reputation of their own qualifications and do not see why that which they perceive to be an unsatisfactory procedure should be forced onto their own institutions. Those who have constructed the ECVET will have to address this important question.

9. The EQF, ECVET and Europass

This lack of sufficient information to aid the smooth functioning of mobility, and indeed, on the workings of ECVET as an instrument of credit accumulation, means that it is difficult at the moment to foresee how and in what form all the information on qualifications covered by the EQF will be represented in qualified people's entries in the EUROPASS. For the moment EUORPASS does no more than recognise the Diploma Supplements issued by HEIs across Europe.

10. The contrast between the piloting of ECTS and of ECVET

Further, mention should be made of the very great difference in the way in which ECTS was launched and in which ECVET is being launched.

10.1. ECTS went through a lengthy pilot phase (1989 - 1995) in which some 145 European HEIs, representing five very different subject areas,

sought to test and to develop the system as a consequence. Once this pilot period was over, the system was extended very gradually into a greater number of subject areas within the pilot HEIs and then to a wider number of HEIs. A group of ECTS counsellors was set up to advise HEIs on any problems which they might encounter in adopting the system. Even then, the European Commission was very careful to consult a large number of ECTS counsellors in order to determine whether ECTS (initially designed purely for credit transfer) could successfully function as a full credit accumulation and transfer system before it was specifically recommended as an integral part of the Bologna Process. Each country subsequently appointed Bologna Promoters, some of whom were designated ECTS experts.

10.2. All this contrasts with what is happening around ECVET. Various test schemes, no doubt reflecting different modes of VET, have been put into place but it appears that several of these will not report back until after ECVET goes 'live' in 2012⁴⁰. And there has been so far little suggestion that continuing and direct help will be offered to institutions in putting the system in place and operating it⁴¹.

10.3. This approach seems ill-advised since it is natural that ECVET, covering a much wider range of modes of learning/apprenticeship than ECTS, will require much more help than that received by HEIs in putting their credit system into place. It is interesting to note the authors of an important recent report entitled *Footsteps and Pathways for the Lifelong Learner* have catalogued some serious failures in the way in which ECTS has been introduced in various member countries of the EHEA. The principal complaint is that, in some places (and France is particularly singled out here), credit allocation is decided less on student workload than on the perceived importance either of the teaching unit concerned or, worse still, of the person teaching that unit⁴². There is a clear element of truth here and most ECTS counsellors have 'dined out' on their (sometimes hilarious) case studies of such misunderstandings and abuses of the system. And these failings and shortfalls have occurred despite all the measures taken to try to ensure that ECTS is applied correctly and

40 See, however, the paper, published by the European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture and by CEDEFOP, entitled *ECVET: From Principles to Practice Synthesis Report* (4-5 December 2008, Paris).

41 For an overview of the ECVET pilot process see <http://www.ecvet-projects.eu/About/brochure.aspx>

42 For this report published in January 2010, see <http://www.eucen.eu/EQFpro/index.html>

uniformly across the EHEA. How much more likely, then, is this to occur with ECVET? The report just cited subscribes to a well-known notion that in ECVET there will be no such serious problems because from the outset credits will be defined in terms of both learning outcomes and relative student workload. Even in the world of VET, teachers brought up in a very different educational environment will need considerable training before they understand and are able to operate effectively this new, student-centred approach to learning. Despite a multitude of conferences and workshops introducing members of HEIs to the theory of learning outcomes and on the writing of statements of learning outcomes and despite the lip-service paid by many HEIs to the use of learning outcomes in defining their programmes, it is quite clear that most institutions are just not prepared to put the required effort into staff development which would allow their staff to use learning outcomes in defining their programmes and units and in relating assessment methods and criteria to declared learning outcomes⁴³. Many teachers in HEIs make no secret of the fact that they think that the whole thing is a nonsense, a new 'fad', which they hope will soon go away and leave them in peace. Curiously, some of those most virulently opposed to the use of learning outcomes are to be found amongst VET teachers operating in HEIs. This being the case, there is no guarantee that such opposition will not be found in amongst non HEI VET teachers.

11. Which language(s) for ECVET?

Finally, attention must be drawn to a simple but vital question concerning the mode of communication.

11.1. When the ECTS pilot scheme was being set up, it was agreed that communication between the HEIs involved would take place in English. English was used as the common language in all meetings. Every institutional and departmental co-ordinator had, therefore, to be able to speak English. All Information Packages had to be produced not only in the home language but also in English. Although this obligation was not extended beyond the HEIs involved in the pilot phase, all HEIs are hotly recommended to have an English version in order to widen their interna-

43 For an interesting case of this phenomenon in a Scottish university, which prides itself on being a pioneer in the defining its programmes and course units in terms of learning outcomes, see HORNBY, Win, 'Assessing Using Grade-related Criteria: a single currency for universities?', in *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2003, pp.435-454. See esp. p. 450.

tional presence. Moreover, no HEI may apply for the ECTS Label unless it has an English version of its Information Package and Course Catalogue. As new countries have joined the EHEA, their national ECTS counsellors have all been English speakers.

11.2. In respect of the Diploma Supplement, the language prescription is somewhat wider. The document must be produced in a widely spoken European language, that is, in one of English, French, German and Spanish. English, as the recognised world language, will no doubt predominate.

11.3. Effectively obliging HEIs to use English is one thing, but what of the multitude of educational institutions and training centres beyond HEIs which will be affected by the EQF/ECVET? In all the papers relating to the EQF and ECVET, no mention is made of the language(s) in which the partners involved in mobility programmes will communicate. Clearly, the question of the means of effective communication is not one which can be ignored if student, credit and qualifications mobility are to become a reality in a multilingual Europe.

Conclusion

As a result of the above surveys, it is apparent that ECVET raises all sorts of problems, problems concerning its theoretical bases, the way it will function in practice and, finally and most important of all, its compatibility with ECTS. Many ECTS counsellors were very hostile to ECVET from the moment it was announced in embryo form, preferring simply that ECTS be developed and adapted to cover a framework much wider, and looser, than that of higher education⁴⁴. However, ECVET is now with us as a reality, or, at least will be from 2012. It is consequently important not to disparage it but to ensure that the two credit systems are made as compatible as possible. Identifying the (potential) problems in ECVET is a positive not a negative approach. Only if the problems are correctly identified and

44 Whether or not such counsellors recognised just how much ECTS would have to evolve in the process, including the likelihood that it would even have to change its name, is another matter. When the future relationship between ECTS and what was then very tentatively known as the 'European Credit System (ECS)' was discussed at a meeting of ECTS counsellors held in Brussels as early as February 2000, a suggestion to merge the two and to change the name of ECTS to the acronym 'EUROCATS' (with a European lynx as a logo, no less) was immediately rejected by those who argued that ECTS must at all costs retain its brand name which was already known worldwide. It is also true that supporters of the ECS present at that meeting were just as unreceptive to any idea of a possible merger between the two systems, arguing that they were too different in conception and functioning to be susceptible of a merger.

analysed may they be confronted and resolved. This is what has happened in ECTS over the years and what must happen with ECVET.

All credit transfer is based on mutual trust and confidence between institutions. ECTS demonstrated that such trust and confidence have to be built on very solid structural and organisational foundations. ECVET has to prove that it is just as solid a foundation for VET as ECTS has been for higher education.

It is hoped that some of the (potential) problems with ECVET and its compatibility with ECTS, will be addressed and resolved by the ECVET Users Guide which was promised more than a year ago but which, at the time of writing, has still not made its much needed appearance. It will be interesting to observe in what way the promised ECVET support groups will be constituted and function⁴⁵.

45 The Recommendations of the European Parliament and Council relative to ECVET published on 18 June 2009 clearly state that these bodies, 'ENDORSE THE COMMISSION'S INTENTION TO:

1. support Member States in carrying out the tasks referred to in points 1 to 6 and in using the principles and technical specifications of ECVET as set out in Annex II, in particular by facilitating testing, cooperation, mutual learning, promotion, and the launching of information and consultation exercises, whilst ensuring access to the guidance material for all interested citizens;
2. develop users' guides and tools, and adapt relevant Europass documents, in collaboration with Member States, national and European experts and users; develop expertise for enhancing the compatibility and 'complementarity' of ECVET and ECTS used in the higher education sector, in collaboration with VET and higher education experts and users at European and national levels; and provide regular information on the developments of ECVET;
3. promote, and participate together with the Member States in, a European ECVET network involving relevant VET stakeholders and national competent institutions for the purpose of disseminating and supporting ECVET within Member States and establishing a sustainable platform for the exchange of information and experience between Member States; establish, from within this network, an ECVET users' group in order to contribute to the updating of the users' guide and to the quality and overall coherence of the cooperation process for the implementation of ECVET;
4. monitor and follow up the action taken, including the results of trials and testing, and, after the assessment and evaluation of this action carried out in cooperation with the Member States, report, by 18 June 2014, to the European Parliament and the Council on the experience gained and implications for the future, including, if necessary, a review and adaptation of this Recommendation, involving the updating of the Annexes and guidance material, in cooperation with the Member States.'

It still seems curious, however, that the ECVET should become operative from 2012 but reporting on the trials and testing of the system will only be completed by 18 June 2014. See http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc50_en.htm

It is vital that all the issues identified in this paper, and others that subsequently arise, be resolved. Above all, building more effective bridges between non-HEI education and training and higher education (which were, from the Middle Ages erroneously perceived as two completely different spheres, resulting in the ‘mechanical arts’ being excluded from the universities for centuries) is surely one of the most vital tasks facing the European Higher Education Area in the coming years. For the moment, the fear, felt by many, is that the existence of two qualifications frameworks, each with its own credit accumulation and transfer system, may serve to drive the two sectors further apart rather than to bring them closer together. For our own part, we are greatly perturbed to have heard, on several occasions, colleagues in HEIs warning others to have nothing to do with ECVET for their vocational programmes lest the use of ECVET credits should serve merely to devalue their qualifications. Equally perturbing is observing, amongst those promoting ECVET, those who are absolutely certain that this CATS is innately a better system than ECTS. Such certitude before the system is operational is truly amazing! As a result, one may observe the beginning of a sort of frontier war between VET and higher education being waged by proponents of ECVET, a war which particularly concerns many VET programmes taught within HEIs or HEI-related at the Bologna Short Cycle level. Such is the case, for example with the BTS programmes in France. Our own observations on this guerrilla are far from unique⁴⁶. In an area where co-operation between promoters of the two frameworks, with their respective CATS, is vital, the damage inflicted by such petty demarcation disputes could, sadly, be incalculable.

Of course, one obvious way in which to avoid such conflicts would be for the two credit systems to be merged into one consolidated system, presumably with ECVET, as the less developed system, being subsumed into a revised and renamed ECTS⁴⁷. This is one of a number of possible scenarios envisaged in the conclusion to the recent CEDEFOP paper on *Linking credit systems and qualifications systems*. It is interesting to note that this paper published in June 2010 discusses, in a more general fashion, many of the concerns about the development of ECVET and its relationship to ECTS which are expressed in this paper⁴⁸.

46 See the EQF PRO report quoted above in note 25.

47 This is one of the scenarios for the next ten years envisaged by the CEDEFOP paper on ‘Linking credit systems and qualifications frameworks’. See note 19 above and note 31 below.

48 See note 22 above and see also http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Information_Resources/Bookshop/publication_details.asp?pub_id=494

Contact us

The Tuning Project is co-ordinated by the University of Deusto, Spain and the University of Groningen, The Netherlands.

General Co-ordinators

Julia González

University of Deusto
Spain
relint@relint.es

Robert Wagenaar

University of Groningen
The Netherlands
r.wagenaar@rug.nl

Project assistants

Ingrid van der Meer

Faculty of Arts, *Tuning* Project
University of Groningen
P.O. Box 716
9700 AS Groningen
The Netherlands
Tel.: + 31 35 542 5038 /
+ 31 50 363 5263
Fax: + 31 50 363 5704
y.van.der.meer@rug.nl

Pablo Beneitone

International Relations Office
University of Deusto
Av. De las Universidades 24
48007 Bilbao
Spain
Tel. :+ 34 944 139 068
Fax: + 34 944 139 069
pbeneito@relint.deusto.es

Visit the Tuning website for more information at

<http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu> and

www.rug.nl/let/tuningeu

