

# Quality in International Long-duration Mobility: Lessons from the Erasmus+ Programme

UK ECVET Expert Team, December 2020

## 1.0 Introduction

It is increasingly common for young people to spend time abroad either as part of an apprenticeship or vocational training programme or if they have recently graduated from one. Thus far, most of these periods have consisted of several days or at most 2–3 weeks or so<sup>1</sup>. However, longer duration mobility (LDM) lasting several months is fast developing, spurred by its introduction into EU programmes and, more broadly, by its being seen as a way of improving the quality of international mobility.

But in many important ways, LDM is different to short duration mobility (SDM): it is not simply a question of doing the same for longer. SDM and LDM are complementary, and in the future both will exist side-by-side, but embracing LDM has its own challenges as well as opportunities and has repercussions for how to ensure a high-quality experience.

The aim of this document is to offer guidance to policy-makers and practitioners on how to address these issues. In particular, the overarching question addressed is:

- ***How can we ensure the value of long-duration mobility is maximised through learners gaining recognition for knowledge, skills and competences acquired abroad?***

Drawing on the principles of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), which will continue to be part of European VET policy and practice<sup>2</sup>, the document explores the added value and challenges of LDM of 3-6 months and how policies and practices can be adapted and developed to ensure LDM provides a high quality experience for all stakeholders that maximises the benefits for learners and employers. It draws on evidence from a wide range of sources<sup>3</sup> and consultations with a wide-range of informed actors with experience in the mobility field, including VET providers, employers and awarding organisations (see Annex).

<sup>1</sup> Though in some countries average length is greater, e.g. 7 weeks in Finland.

<sup>2</sup> As the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET states, ECVET principles and tools will continue to be used and developed in the framework of other EU instruments after 2020, including those supported under Erasmus+ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1507&langId=en>

<sup>3</sup> Including outcomes of the UK Erasmus+ National Agency 2018 SEED Peer Learning Event; the Erasmus+ projects SEPLO (<http://www.seploecvet.eu>), VARE (<http://www.vareproject.eu>) and European Pathway, a Gateway to Work (<https://www.eurooppalainenopintopolku.fi/guidance-book/>); the ESF-funded Learning Network on Transnational Mobility Measures for Disadvantaged Youth and Young Adults (TLN Mobility - <https://www.esf.de/portal/EN/Funding-period-2014-2020/TLN-Mobility/content.html>); the outcomes of the 2018 ECVET Forum on 'Using ECVET for long-duration mobility' reported in ECVET Magazine No.32: [https://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/system/files/magazines/en/ecvet\\_mag\\_32.pdf](https://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/system/files/magazines/en/ecvet_mag_32.pdf); and the insights from four online Round Tables held by the UK ECVET Team in November 2020.

## 2.0 Added value and challenges of LDM

Compared to SDM, LDM brings added value to mobility in a number of ways for learners and employers (both as organisations sending learners abroad and receiving them), as shown in Table 2.1<sup>4</sup>.

**Table 2.1 Added value of LDM compared to SDM**

Learners	Employers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Improved learning experience through having more time to acclimatise to cultural and industry differences</li> <li>➤ Greater opportunity to acquire technical skills</li> <li>➤ Better transversal/soft skills especially personal development and intercultural skills</li> <li>➤ Better language skills</li> <li>➤ Improved employability</li> <li>➤ Access to new networks and employment opportunities</li> <li>➤ Ability to better understand the needs of industry through spending additional time in the workplace</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sending employers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Greater return on investment through having learners gain a much broader understanding of the industry.</li> <li>➤ Returning learners bring new ideas, improvements and innovations to workplace practices and possibly also new networks and business/collaboration opportunities</li> </ul> <p><b>Receiving employers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Visiting learners bring new ideas, and improvements to workplace practices</li> <li>➤ Enhanced intercultural understanding among existing employees</li> <li>➤ Potential to identify possible future employees, especially among recent VET graduates<sup>5</sup></li> </ul>

*Source: Based on UK Erasmus+ National Agency (2018) Sharing Experiences of work with Employers in Delivering international work placements (SEED): Report and Recommendations*

At the same time, LDM can accentuate the challenges that are experienced as part of SDM or raise new ones (Table 2.2). Indeed, LDM may formally not be possible for all learners. In the UK learners on a two-year vocational course would not be able to take part unless a mobility unit is built in to a programme of learning for the qualification they are studying. Employers – especially smaller ones – may struggle to engage with LDM given the greater costs and commitment involved: large multi-national companies would be more able to support LDM within their individual groups since they typically share the same or similar technical production systems (and many have internal ‘mobility programmes’ anyway).

The challenges are likely to be especially problematic where apprentices are concerned, since they are employees and employers are understandably reluctant to release staff since they will be paying wages for an absent member of staff<sup>6</sup>. This issue is likely more acute in years two or three of an apprentice’s training, which is also when mobility is most likely. It has been reported that apprentices have sometimes been required to use their holiday in order to take part even in short-duration mobility<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> This is not to assume that everyone participating in LDM will be in employment since learners may be taking school-based VET programmes as well as apprenticeships.

<sup>5</sup> Graduates throughout the paper means people who have completed (or graduated from) any VET programme

<sup>6</sup> These financial problems are reported to be major obstacles to longer-duration mobility for sending employers in countries with strong apprenticeship systems – EU consultee.

<sup>7</sup> UK consultee

**Table 2.2 Challenges of LDM**

Learners	Employers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Fear of losing touch with the training programme at home and of being unable to catch up before final exams</li> <li>➤ Greater demands in terms of evidencing skills acquisition</li> <li>➤ Financial concerns, e.g. learners may need to give up employment, general money management issues (for some learners this may be their first time away from home), how to deal with expenses abroad. Insurance can become expensive for long stays abroad.<sup>8</sup></li> <li>➤ Personal issues, from e.g. domestic caring responsibilities to low self-confidence. Long-duration mobility is likely to push people beyond their comfort zones much more than short-duration ability or be more difficult to take on in the case of caring responsibilities</li> <li>➤ Language fears, culture shock and missing the small things of home. From a young person's perspective, several months may feel like a very long time indeed. Loneliness may be a problem.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sending organisations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Employers may question the value of paying for an employee who is away for so long and of finding cover for them whilst they are away.</li> <li>➤ Mobility may interrupt company-specific training</li> <li>➤ Employers may retain legal responsibilities for apprentices even when abroad which represents extra risks and potential costs (e.g. monitoring/communication for duty of care purposes)</li> <li>➤ Concerns regarding the quality of the work-based experience that the learner will receive when abroad.</li> <li>➤ Sequencing the mobility period so learning meshes with what they will learn at home, and when they will learn it.</li> <li>➤ Trust in assessment processes used abroad (if host/receiving organisation assessment is used)</li> <li>➤ Fear of losing an apprentice</li> </ul> <p><b>Receiving organisations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Concerns over the quality of the learners they receive - they will need reassurance that strong selection procedures are in place.</li> <li>➤ Concerns over the level of pastoral care that they might be expected to provide, especially when this is 'out of hours'.</li> <li>➤ Issue of health and safety, insurance and safeguarding.</li> <li>➤ Where work changes, due to unforeseen circumstances, it may no longer be possible to deliver the LOs agreed during the mobility placement</li> </ul>

Source: UK Erasmus+ National Agency (2018) *Sharing Experiences of work with Employers in Delivering international work placements (SEED): Report and Recommendations*

Dealing with these challenges requires greater planning and more comprehensive supports for all involved – learners, employers and VET providers. Indeed, the challenges fall on VET

<sup>8</sup> With the UK's departure from the EU, travellers from the UK may also have the expense of applying for a visa if they are to spend more than 90 days in any 180-day period in the Schengen area (the 90/180 rule).

providers as much as – if not more than - learners and employers, e.g. simply completing application forms for LDM is likely to require more advanced planning than for SDM.

In short, LDM has the potential to improve the learning experience for participants by giving more time to acclimatise to cultural differences and overcome any communication challenges (e.g. general linguistic issues or related to industry-specific terms) and by providing learners with the opportunity to acquire a wider range of skills in greater depth and to enhance employability – as well as - but there are more and greater challenges standing in the way of realising those opportunities.

### 3.0 How to respond to the challenges: 10 key measures for success

To ensure successful outcomes from LDM periods, it is necessary to go beyond the components envisaged in the ECVET principles: this can involve packages of wider support services/activities or delivering similar components to SDM but to a more intense extent<sup>9</sup>. The following range of measures is beneficial:

- ✓ Stronger partnerships
- ✓ Promotion
- ✓ Preparation of learners and between sending and receiving organisations
- ✓ Pastoral support and social and cultural activities
- ✓ Extra financial support
- ✓ Recognition of competences acquired
- ✓ Follow-up activities
- ✓ Equipping mobility staff with appropriate skills
- ✓ Making more use of digital tools
- ✓ Underpinning quality procedures

The following sections unpack these additional supports, which involve action on the part of both sending and receiving organisations.

#### 3.1 Stronger partnerships

LDM is likely to require stronger partnerships, especially with employers, given the greater commitment required, not just in terms of time but also resources: as one consultee put it, employers are more like partners in LDM than SDM. LDM places considerable requirements on receiving organisations to the point where it is important that there are mutual benefits for partnerships to work. Where it is anticipated that receiving organisations will play a greater role in assessing learners from abroad (see sections 4 and 5), strong partnerships with high levels of trust appear to be a *sine qua non*.

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<sup>9</sup> This section draws in particular on: the outputs from the UK Erasmus+ National Agency 2018 SEED Peer Learning Event; and TLN-Mobility (2014) Coordinated Call on ESF Transnational Mobility Measures for Disadvantaged Youth and Young Adults: Manual of Guidance, which describes minimum quality standards for mobility periods of at least two months for disadvantaged youth and young adults, adapting the standards for more general purposes here; and also outcomes of the 2018 ECVET Forum on 'Using ECVET for long-duration mobility' reported in ECVET Magazine No.32:  
[https://www.ecvetsecretariat.eu/en/system/files/magazines/en/ecvet\\_mag\\_32.pdf](https://www.ecvetsecretariat.eu/en/system/files/magazines/en/ecvet_mag_32.pdf)

### 3.2 Promotion

LDM is likely to be harder to sell to both learners and employers than SDM. For learners, several months from home is a more daunting prospect. For employers, both sending and receiving staff raises the challenge noted in Table 2.2, and is especially challenging in respect of apprenticeships. In certain countries and certain sectors, where the ‘mobility culture’ is not well developed, LDM is likely to be a particularly difficult idea to promote<sup>10</sup>. Conversely, there are companies, especially multinationals currently embarking on ambitious exchange programmes, that would be very receptive to LDM once made aware of it. Promoting the added value of long-duration compared to short-duration mobility to both learners and employers is therefore important.

### 3.3 Preparation of learners and between sending and receiving organisations

There are two main elements to preparation:

(i) **Preparation of individual learners.** Whereas two or three weeks abroad is like work experience, LDM is much more like a job, and learners need to be prepared to treat it as such and to behave like employees (e.g. in areas like taking days of work for illness, which is an unlikely occurrence with SDM). For obvious reasons, this is more of an issue for people on VET programmes than apprenticeships. Mechanisms also need to be put in place to identify the specific needs of participants and ensure pastoral support is in place to meet them. This includes equipping them with a basic understanding of the cultural life of the host country and with necessary language skills, preparing them to cope with uncertainties and in helping them with practical issues like travel arrangements, insurance, residence and work permits, Social Security, accommodation and health and safety. Learners should have the chance to meet their host organisation, e.g. through a video call or interview. Managing learners’ expectations is also important and this is aided through interactions with hosts before they leave.

(ii) **Advance planning visits of staff from sending to hosting/receiving organisations** (VET providers and/or companies) are crucial to facilitate inter-institutional cooperation, better prepare the mobility period and ensure their high quality. Employer participation in advance planning visits to the hosting country would be beneficial.

Ensuring a learner is correctly and adequately prepared helps to maximize their achievement of learning outcomes (LOs) during a mobility period<sup>11</sup>. ECVET tools are ideal for the purpose, especially the Learning Agreement, for making sure that learners, and indeed all parties concerned, are fully aware of their learning programme, the LOs that they have already obtained and will acquire during the mobility period, and the assessment and certification procedures agreed. In a similar way, the Europass CV can be used, particularly with younger learners who may not have prepared a CV before, to get learners to think about the competences they already have and might acquire during the mobility period and also how to express those competences to a potential employer. Other tools can be used too, e.g. creation of a profile on LinkedIn.

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<sup>10</sup> Feedback from consultees

<sup>11</sup> SEPLO (2017) Guidance to recognition and validation of learning outcomes, p.6  
<http://www.seploecvet.eu/guidance-on-the-assessment-of-los/>

### 3.4 Pastoral support and social and cultural activities

The likelihood of personal and practical issues becoming a hindrance to learners' effective participation increases with LDM, although they are likely to be more significant to young people than adults owing to their comparative lack of life, and possibly inter-cultural, experience. Accompanying persons or mentors thus assume a new importance. Ideally they should be actively involved with participants at all stages – preparation, mobility period, follow-up activities (see below). This is in order to provide continuity of support and build on-going relationships. More than just answering occasional questions or providing ad hoc help, their role is to offer guidance and counselling to participants and deal with their welfare, practical issues and personal development. It is important that participants have mentors in host/receiving countries as well as mentors whilst at home. Digital tools have the potential to be an additional element in the toolbox for providing pastoral support, helping to keep in touch with learners and ensuring they do not get 'lost' in the process during LDM.

As part of pastoral support, the provision of social and activities is particularly important in LDM as they provide opportunities for participants to socialize with local people – and of the same age in the case of youngsters.

### 3.5 Extra financial support

Extra financial support may be necessary for sending and receiving partners to provide tailor-made support and courses, provide online support, access to training material etc. In order for learners to acquire an entire group of competences abroad in a foreign language some adaptations to pedagogy may be required. And accompanying persons may need to spend longer with learners abroad than with short-duration mobility.

As noted, releasing apprentices for LDM represents a key challenge for employers since they are productive employees (unless employers have internal programmes which enable employees to spend time abroad within the same company or with a partner company, e.g. in a supply chain)<sup>12</sup>. Whilst the Erasmus+ programme provide grants to support learners' travel and subsistence costs, employers receive no support, unless from national funds, as in Austria where some national funding as a kind of compensation is available for learners during apprenticeship training (though not for skilled workers after completion of the training). More widespread availability of financial support to employers might partly help to encourage employer participation in LDM, but it would not cover all the difficulties related to releasing a member of staff for several months or the problem of interrupting the acquisition of company-specific skills. There are also other issues to tackle such as differences in wage levels between countries, which becomes a significant issue with LDM. For some mobility practitioners dealing with apprenticeships, the financial challenges of LDM are the most difficult part to resolve.

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<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that in some countries, e.g. Scotland, some VET providers have developed apprenticeships which enable apprentices to spend all their time in the workplace to accommodate employers' reluctance to release staff for any length of time.

Learners may require additional financial support under LDM or guidance on how to manage money. It may be necessary to fund return trips home during the mobility period, which would not be necessary under SDM, or emergency travel.

### 3.6 Recognition of competences acquired

LDM provides scope to increase the range and depth of skill acquisition, which makes it all the more important that recognition occurs in order to maximise the value of the time spent. However, whereas many of the other measures described in this section can be relatively easily resolved through additional resources and more extensive preparation, support and follow-up activities, recognition issues can involve a range of issues that warrant more detailed exploration. They are discussed further below in sections 4-6.

### 3.7 Follow-up activities

Well-structured and organized follow-up activities are important in ensuring that learners make the most of the competences and attitudes they have developed. Participants in mobility may need help to reflect on their experiences and identify their next steps whether into employment or further learning. The information generated can, in turn, be used for promotion activities for subsequent groups of mobile learners, as well as helping sending employers to make use of the potential new ideas brought back.

### 3.8 Equipping mobility staff with appropriate skills

In order to ensure all the diverse activities described above can be effectively carried out, the team of staff involved in mobility need the right skills. In addition to skills in project coordination and management, other skills needed include social and psycho-pedagogical skills, mentoring, and inter-cultural and linguistic competences. Staff may need training in such areas, for example, in how to deal with mental health issues.

### 3.9 Making more use of digital tools

Digital tools have great potential to improve the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of mobility periods and especially LDM. Indeed, they could open the way to more and better LDM by, for example, not only making it possible for learners to stay in touch with their sending organisation more regularly, but also to access some learning and learning material/exercises delivered at home, and facilitating assessment without home assessors having to make constant visits to receiving organisations abroad (see section 5.2 below). In light of experiences with the coronavirus pandemic, digital tools should be integrated into plans/strategies for mobility as a matter of course as a tool to improve quality, not seen as an add on. (See also section 5.2)

### 3.10 Underpinning quality procedures

A vital underpinning support to ensuring quality in mobility is in the development of quality procedures<sup>13</sup>, which should be integrated into the whole process and not just an ‘add on’. Quality documentation held by participating organisations should take into account the specific needs of LDM, as outlined above. One approach is for LDM partners to develop shared quality procedures, which could be based on standard agreed forms and evidence requirements for those measuring achievements and to facilitate recognition. For example, the European NETINVET project, though not explicitly focused on LDM, supports a network of volunteer training centres which implement quality charters that have been jointly developed (for use in the international trade and transport and logistics sector)<sup>14</sup>. Quality charters exist for both the training centres (‘extending from mobility offerings to follow-up and assessment’ and going ‘beyond course content to include the daily life of learners in mobility in an intercultural context’) and hosting/receiving companies (which ‘addresses the academic, social and intercultural aspects of work placements’ and ‘does not replace learning agreements and contracts developed to cover each specific mobility operation’).

Quality documentation also needs to be backed up with other measures taken to ensure the quality of placements, such as accreditation and registration of companies, pre-mobility site visits to companies and company assessment by VET schools and company visits during the mobility period<sup>15</sup>.

## 4.0 Recognition of competences acquired during LDM

With learners spending several months abroad during a LDM period, it becomes all the more important that the competences they acquire are recognised and validated as part of their overall qualification. Indeed, skills recognition is arguably the most important aspect of LDM but the challenges surrounding it have also been amongst the hardest to solve.

The ‘gold standard’ of recognition would be to be able to identify learning outcomes from within a learner’s programme/qualification that they could work towards abroad; and then for the relevant knowledge, skills and competences acquired to be assessed during the mobility period so that they count towards the achievement of the qualification. Ideally, the assessment would also be conducted by assessors in the receiving organisation, thus helping to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of assessment processes, and building another dimension of added value into mobility exchanges. At the same time, the ‘what’s in it for me’ question may pose a barrier, pointing to the need for close reciprocal arrangements if host/receiving organisation assessment is to be developed.

Unfortunately, key inhibitors often arise in this process stemming from the structure of qualifications and the nature of assessment requirements. These issues are explored in the following sections.

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, the EQAMOB partnership: <http://www.euroapprenticeship.eu/en/about-eqamo-co.html>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.netinvet.eu/en/about/quality>

<sup>15</sup> ECVET Magazine No.32 ‘The Annual ECVET Forum 2018: 14-15 June 2018, Sofia, Bulgaria’, p.12: [https://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/system/files/magazines/en/ecvet\\_mag\\_32.pdf](https://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/system/files/magazines/en/ecvet_mag_32.pdf)

#### 4.1 Structure of qualifications and LOs

The way qualifications are structured in terms of LOs affects the potential for identifying LOs that could be the focus of a transnational mobility period. Generally speaking, the more detailed the LOs (i.e. the more fine grained the LO structure) the easier it is to identify LOs that could be selected for participants to work towards during a mobility placement, all else being equal<sup>16</sup>. Where there is no modular structure to qualifications, it may be more difficult to isolate some LOs that could be the focus of mobility and, in any case, these would be unlikely to have assessment criteria as modular qualifications would. Alternatively, qualifications may contain an optional element where VET providers can operate discretion in designing learning and this may be advantageous for mobility. As one EU project notes:

*'Vocational colleges have varying degrees of autonomy within which they are able to integrate work based learning (and specifically transnational mobility) as an accredited component of an initial vocational training course. Some VET providers can decide whether or not to recognise credit achieved abroad. Within other qualification systems, permission has to be sought at national/regional level, which can be more complicated'.<sup>17</sup>*

LDM has the potential for a single mobility period to be more substantive in terms of the breadth/number of LOs covered which might be easier to accommodate within a qualification – e.g. reducing the need to isolate one or two LOs within a group. At the same time, this would increase the commitment required of the sending and receiving organisations involved to design a mobility period where a block of LOs might be achieved and would also increase the needs in terms of evidence gathering and assessment.

Whatever the structure of qualifications and LOs, this factor cannot be seen in isolation from the issue of assessment, discussed in the next section.

#### 4.2 Use of continuous assessment in the qualification system in general<sup>18</sup>

**Terminal or end-point assessment** (through a final examination, panel or committee) is prevalent in initial VET<sup>19</sup> in Europe, and in some countries it is only the annual or endpoint exams that count towards the final qualification (the VARE report in 2017 found this in the following countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Romania, Slovenia)<sup>20</sup>. In these latter circumstances, it is unlikely that the achievement of learners sent

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<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that, depending on the size of the LO and the duration of the mobility period (amongst other things), learners may not be able to achieve a whole LO during a mobility period. Hence the phrase 'work towards' is used here.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.seploecvet.eu/the-application-of-learning-outcomes-within-a-transnational-work-placement/> – accessed 5.5.20

<sup>18</sup> Information in this section comes from VARE (2017) Country Comparison Report

<sup>19</sup> Initial VET is taken as part of the initial, compulsory phase of education.

<sup>20</sup> In England, apprenticeships based on standards (which includes all new apprenticeships from 2020), assess skills, knowledge and behaviours by an end-point assessment, or EPA. Some apprenticeships also include mandatory qualifications that must be achieved before the apprentice meets the 'gateway' requirements that confirm readiness for the EPA.

from such countries on transnational placements could count towards their formal qualifications.

In contrast, where there is **continuous assessment** of a learner's progress against learning outcomes during a programme there is more scope for the recognition/validation of learning outcomes acquired during a mobility period. Fortunately, most countries apply a combination of both continuous and end-point assessment. In a few countries qualifications are based on the accumulation of units or modules that are assessed separately, without final assessment at the end of a learning programme (examples are to be found in the IVET systems of Finland, Ireland, Malta, Spain and the UK).

### 4.3 Types of assessment processes used

A wide range of assessment methods is used in Europe and here the focus is on those used in continuous assessment since it is in this area that there is potential for assessment of transnational mobility. Evidently, the nature of assessment affects the scope for gaining recognition during mobility. For example:

*'In countries where assessment is limited to exam or practical exercises within a controlled setting, there is **limited or no option** for a transnational mobility to be credit bearing.'*<sup>21</sup>

The table below shows the **types of assessment methods found in general use** across Europe in the two different settings in VET, roughly in descending order of prevalence according to the number of countries where they exist.

**Table 4.1 Methods of continuous assessment in general use in Europe**

In school- or classroom-based settings	In work-based settings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Written tests or assignments, oral tests or presentations (e.g. AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FR, EL, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, MT, PL, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK)</li> <li>➤ Assessing practical tasks / practical skills demonstration (e.g. BG, CZ, IE, IT, FR, EL – in the final year, HU, LU, MT, NO, RO, SI, UK)</li> <li>➤ Continuously evaluating skills and competences (e.g. AT, BG, DE, FI, FR, LU), e.g. by observation through the teacher.</li> <li>➤ Assembling portfolios (e.g. DK, IE, LU, NO)</li> <li>➤ Vocational interviews (e.g. IE, IT, LU),</li> <li>➤ Project work (e.g. EE),</li> <li>➤ Orders (e.g. LU),</li> <li>➤ Team-work (e.g. EE)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Practical tests and assignments / practical demonstration in artificial or 'real' work setting (e.g. BE, CZ, EE, EL, FI, HR, HU, IT, LU, LV, NO, SK)</li> <li>➤ Continuous observation / evaluation of competences (e.g. AT, DE, DK, EL, IE, FR, LU, NL, NO, UK)</li> <li>➤ Portfolios / 'Diaries of practical training' (e.g. BG, IE, LU, PT, RO)</li> <li>➤ Written exams (e.g. AT, DE, DK, EE, LV)</li> <li>➤ Vocational interviews (e.g. LU, IT)</li> <li>➤ Competence tests in real working life (e.g. FI)</li> <li>➤ General knowledge assessment (e.g. SE)</li> </ul>

Source: Derived from the VARE project

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.seploecvet.eu/the-application-of-learning-outcomes-within-a-transnational-work-placement/> – accessed 5.5.20

In terms of the **types of assessment used in mobility**, procedures for evidencing learning outcomes tend to be aligned with those used in work-based learning at local/national level, e.g. most commonly<sup>22</sup>:

- assessment grids/observation records often called witness statements;
- reports including personal transcripts/logbooks, reports from tutors, etc.

Other methods include: video recordings; oral presentations; Europass documents; and the use of a digital assessment system (the latter in the Netherlands).

The **main actors involved in the evidencing of LOs** appear to be:

- the learner
- the accompanying person (college tutor/teacher)
- the work placement tutor or supervisor<sup>23</sup>.

Depending on the country, additional external assessors might also be involved (e.g. public officers in France, job-related experts in the Netherlands and the international mobility coordinator in Denmark). The involvement of intermediary organisations is also a possibility in Italy and Denmark.

The **role of learners** is particularly important in settings where they are not always under the supervision of their usual tutor/teacher. In this context, self-evaluation activities have a key role to play and learners will therefore need support in this area, especially in light of the increasing use of digital tools and gathering assessment evidence in e-portfolios.

#### 4.4 Requirements for assessors

It appears that in-company trainers are rarely required to be trained as assessors, and most assessment is done in schools by qualified teachers, which also means that it is assessors from schools who are most likely to be involved in assessment as part of transnational placements<sup>24</sup>. Exceptions to this are found in Austria, Croatia, Germany and the UK. Requirements for assessors typically specify the skills and knowledge required along with qualifications, industry experience or Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Assessors will also need language skills.

#### 4.5 Other factors affecting assessment in transnational mobility

There are a number of other factors to take into account. Translation constitutes a major practical obstacle. Even if it is possible to conduct assessment using host assessment, the need to translate documentation, including evidence of competences acquired, represents a large potential cost. Other factors include the language skills of learners and assessors.

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.seploecvet.eu/the-application-of-learning-outcomes-within-a-transnational-work-placement/> – accessed 5.5.20. These were methods used in the five SEPLO project countries, i.e. a small sample.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.seploecvet.eu/the-application-of-learning-outcomes-within-a-transnational-work-placement/> – accessed 5.5.20

<sup>24</sup> VARE (2017) Country Comparison Report

Timing or sequencing is also a key issue, i.e. when LOs should be taken and how they fit with programme timetables in different countries involved.

## 5.0 Solutions to the challenges of recognition

In light of the issues described above, what solutions are available?

### 5.1 Dealing with qualifications/learning outcomes issues

One approach is to **make space within the formal qualification structure** for mobility. In France, 2014 saw the creation of an optional mobility unit for all vocational baccalaureates. It covers transversal and language skills and requires the application of French continuous assessment methods. It has since been extended to other certifications and levels including the *certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* (CAP). In Denmark, the “Praktik i udlandet” (work placement abroad) scheme enables learners to take part of their work placement abroad as a part of their Danish education.

Sometimes, qualifications structures have **optional modules** that are designed to provide local flexibility in programme content, and these can be used for the purpose of international mobility. For instance, in Ireland it is possible to take a work experience module that can be used for international work placements<sup>25</sup>. In Scotland, colleges and other Credit Rating Bodies (CRBs) are able to create their own programmes, and could create single unit programmes specifically for LDM. Although these would sit outside the formal qualification, they would be levelled against the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (and hence the EQF) and would be included on the SCQF and would have a specific credit value. The CRBs concerned would also develop quality assurance processes as required for the approval of programmes on the SCQF and some of the issues regarding assessment etc. could be addressed through this process.

Another approach is to **develop common competence frameworks between countries**. This approach is probably most appropriate to particular sectors and/or occupations owing to the detailed level of work involved and the challenges of reaching a shared agreement at the level of knowledge and skills. Companies with common interests operating in different countries have sometimes sought to develop such frameworks, e.g. in the Scottish and Norwegian salmon fishing industry<sup>26</sup>, and of course they exist within large multi-nationals which operate their own training schemes. The European Qualifications Framework provides a common referencing tool that can assist in work of this type at a broad level. At a more detailed level, a number of EU-funded projects have tried to identify shared competence frameworks in particular sectors or occupations, usually spanning a small number of countries<sup>27</sup>. The EC has committed to exploring European Vocational Core Profiles in order

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<sup>25</sup> An example can be viewed here:

[https://www.qqi.ie/sites/docs/awardslibrarypdf/5n1356\\_awardspecifications\\_english.pdf](https://www.qqi.ie/sites/docs/awardslibrarypdf/5n1356_awardspecifications_english.pdf) (accessed 27.05.20)

<sup>26</sup> Feedback from consultees

<sup>27</sup> E.g. TRECNET, which sought solutions for the lack of cross-border mutual recognition of qualifications for commanders of small commercial marine vessels: <http://www.trecvet.eu>

to facilitate the transparency and recognition of qualifications as part of the Europass platform<sup>28</sup>.

In the UK, Awarding Organisations that offer qualifications internationally may be able to assist their centres with mapping UK qualifications to qualifications in receiving countries, thus identifying common elements that can form the basis of learning outcomes that can be assessed during mobility.

Another approach is to **step outside the formal (regulated) qualification framework** and to focus on providing learners with opportunities to gain credit for skills that are additional to those covered by the qualification. Where VET providers have sufficient autonomy over programme/qualification content to do this, placement-specific learning outcomes can be developed in order to provide structure to the work placement. Such learning outcomes could be said to be semi-formal in the sense of not being linked to a formal qualification, although evidently they would have greater labour market value if they could be so linked.

At the same time, a word of warning is needed here regarding the equal treatment of learners. Not all learners have the chance to go abroad, and this should be taken into account when giving those that do participate in trans-national mobility the opportunity to acquire an extra ‘credential’ (or extra “points” that contribute towards a final examination).

There is an obvious opportunity afforded by the need to step outside the formal curriculum to focus on **transversal/soft skills**. Transnational mobility is, of course, particularly (if not uniquely) well placed to support the development of personal competences (including self-confidence, self-esteem, problem-solving, taking responsibility, organizational abilities, reliability, staying power, team working, entrepreneurialism), as well as intercultural skills, the ability to socialise with people from different backgrounds, and linguistic skills. Such skills are not always dealt with in a comprehensive or systematic way within qualifications, though there are notable exceptions as in the qualification system in Finland. Indeed, sometimes transversal/soft skills are almost completely absent and within a single country they may be treated in highly variable ways between qualifications, in the absence of national guidance<sup>29</sup>.

Hence there is likely to be scope to fill such gaps and to highlight the benefits of mobility in terms of transversal/soft skills<sup>30</sup>. This approach may be attractive to employers who often express their need for such skills alongside technical skills. In Germany, the “Europa Assistant” training initiative is run by a number of professional schools and chambers parallel to regular professional training and provides an opportunity to acquire knowledge in areas such as European law, export, and behaviour in an intercultural context. It is quite demanding of learners, being intensive and taking only three weeks but it is popular with

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<sup>28</sup> Council of the European Union (2020) COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience

<sup>29</sup> Cedefop (2020). *European qualifications framework. Initial vocational education and training: focus on qualifications at levels 3 and 4*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Cedefop research paper; No 77. <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/114528>

<sup>30</sup> In this regard, it is noteworthy that the Osnabrück Declaration of November 2020 suggests that Member States should promote intercultural knowledge, skills and competences as part of VET curricula and qualifications - one of a number of measures related to boosting trans-national mobility.  
<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1507&langId=en>

learners and employers alike as it shows that those who participate are highly motivated and is used by employers to attract highly motivated apprentices<sup>31</sup>.

In addition, this approach may offer the opportunity to use different assessment methods to those used within the main qualification being pursued by the learner which may be more suited to mobility, e.g. remote/digital assessment methods (as noted above, it has been found that in general evidencing methods in mobility are aligned with those used in work-based learning at local/national level).

Stepping outside the formal curriculum raises issues of how the skills acquired are to be recognised and validated<sup>32</sup>. It may be possible to gain credit towards other qualifications (formal recognition) or the Europass Mobility document can be used to record achieved (non-formal recognition in the sense of being outside formal qualification arrangements).

Another important question is whether such an approach – which avoids technical skills central to the qualification and target occupation – would provide LDM, with its greater cost and commitment requirements, with sufficient added value. Certainly, in higher education the benefits of periods abroad are often couched in terms of transversal skills, but the expectations and culture of VET are different as are the learners who may need greater support to realize these transversal benefits, as noted above. Employers may need further convincing of the benefits of LDM if it is focused solely on transversal skills outside the formal curriculum, notwithstanding that they value such skills highly. For VET providers, add-on international modules or units could be a unique selling point in attracting learners.

Another way of offering LDM would be to provide it **after a programme has been completed**. Offering a mobility period abroad after programme completion, say within 12 months of graduation, may be attractive to graduates from school-based VET programmes who are not going straight into employment and who, once the LDM is completed, could benefit in the competition for employment from the additional skills acquired. Erasmus+ funding to cover travel and subsistence is available for up to a year after completing a programme. However, for apprenticeships, this option is likely to be difficult as qualified apprentices are skilled workers and, without financial compensation, employers have little incentive to release their employees.

Taking a mobility period after graduation raises other challenges too. For instance, recent VET graduates from school-based programmes would, in effect, be unemployed people unless VET providers were to maintain responsibility for the ‘learner’ once they had formally left a programme. Unemployment benefits are unlikely to allow people to travel abroad, except perhaps for a short holiday, so remaining as a ‘learner’ would probably be essential in order to take part in mobility. If providers were to somehow extend their responsibilities, it would require a new approach/culture to be put in place. In Finland VET providers are able to take a student back to their institution to complete an extra module, e.g. a specific module for internationalisation; the student is insured through the institution, and funded by the government. Where apprenticeships are concerned, it is debateable if taking part in mobility after graduation is a realistic option at all: the apprentice would need to give up their employment for the LDM and face the unemployment benefit issues already noted.

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<sup>31</sup> Evidence from consultee. For initiative see: <https://www.hwk-muenster.de/de/ausbildung/auszubildende/zusatzqualifikationen#section-277>

<sup>32</sup> As noted above in section 2.0, UK learners may not be able to participate if LDM is outside the formal curriculum.

LDM might be offered **between VET programmes**, e.g. after an initial VET programme has been completed and as a way of attracting learners into the next level of training or higher VET courses by recognising the skills and competences acquired abroad and thus providing exemption from the need to complete certain learning outcomes. This approach could make use of existing methods for recognising prior learning (validating previously acquired competences).

## 5.2 Dealing with assessment/assessor issues

Given the many obstacles to assessment in mobility, it seems likely that most often it is the **sending organization** that handles assessment, although there appears to be a lack of systematic evidence to show this currently. In the UK, the predominant assessment model appears to be that of a visiting staff member from the sending organisation undertaking assessment, mirroring what happens during domestic work experience placements, whilst consulting or collaborating with the workplace host/mentor, for example through the provision of progress reports and adjusting learning targets<sup>33</sup>.

In some countries, the legal framework facilitates this model of assessment being undertaken by the sending organisation. In Bulgaria, it was reported in 2015 that work placements in a VET school abroad can be recognised as a mandatory placement within a training programme. In Austria, the final apprenticeship examination has to be taken in order to obtain the qualification which means that whilst there is no automatic validation and recognition of learning outcomes obtained abroad, end-point reassessment takes place at national level (double assessment) and legislation allows learning/work placement periods abroad to be included. Interestingly, the time apprentices can spend abroad was also increased in 2010<sup>34</sup> and apprentices can now spend up to six months per year in another country for their apprenticeship training.

It has been found that transnational placements may **circumvent the issue of “host country assessment”** by using one of three methods<sup>35</sup>: assessing the learning outcomes achieved by the learner during mobility back at the home institution; by applying ‘shared assessment’ approaches between the host/company and the sending institution; or by the accompanying person from the sending organisation undertaking the assessment<sup>36</sup>. At the same time, this is not a static situation and some providers are very committed to the development of host assessor capacity, e.g. by developing employers as receiving organizations so they can provide reliable witness testimony<sup>37</sup>.

Interestingly, the possibility for using **digital tools** to resolve assessment issues at a distance (remotely) seems to have been underexploited so far. The possibility of making greater use of such tools has been drawn into the spotlight by COVID-19 and warrants further consideration. For example, e-portfolios provide vehicles for holding and quality-assuring evidence that may be useful in the context of LDM: evidence can be accessed by actors

<sup>33</sup> Evidence gathered during UK ECVET Online Round Tables, November 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Cedefop (2015). Ensuring the quality of certification in vocational education and training. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 51. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/25991>

<sup>35</sup> VARE (2017) Country Comparison Report, p. 6

<sup>36</sup> SEPLO (2017) Guidance to recognition and validation of learning outcomes  
<http://www.seploecvet.eu/guidance-on-the-assessment-of-los/> p.11

<sup>37</sup> UK consultee

from both sending and host/receiving organisations, to reflect their respective roles (assessor, internal verifier, programme leader etc.). Digital tools arguably have potential to ‘dramatically simplify and accelerate the collection of evidence’ by e.g. enabling the design of evaluation forms and the representation and analysis of collected information, as well as the use of smart devices to gather video and photographic evidence that can be stored and subsequently attached to the personal transcript of the students. But challenges such as how to use digital signatures to ensure reliability<sup>38</sup> and validity also exist

Regarding the **requirements set for assessors**, projects can share the competence requirements in the Learning Agreement, and validation activities can themselves be a constructive transnational activity<sup>39</sup>.

## 6.0 Conclusions regarding assessment during LDM

The preceding sections have shown that the issue of how to recognise and give credit to skills acquired during a mobility period revolves around two main issues: the nature of qualifications/LOs; and the nature of assessment methods and associated processes/controls. Figure 6.1 seeks to capture the main dimensions of these interlocking issues in terms of their effect on recognition (although this diagram is an aid to understanding and does not purport to capture all the complexities involved).

**Figure 6.1 How assessment and qualifications content shape approaches under mobility<sup>40</sup>**

	<b>Non-modular qualifications and/or end-point assessment</b>	<b>Modular qualifications with units separately and continuously assessed</b>
<b>Flexible assessment/assessor requirements</b>	Alternative (non-formal) LOs and recognition methods likely to be needed, e.g. use of Europass Mobility	Potential to use LOs from within the qualification and develop host/receiving organisation assessment
<b>Strict assessment/assessor requirements</b>	Alternative (non-formal) LOs and recognition methods likely to be needed, e.g. use of Europass Mobility	Assessment requirements may make it impossible to use LOs from within the qualification, although this depends on how the LOs are drafted – some allow scope for variation (e.g. those referring to the Standard Operating Procedures of the organisation). Using LOs in other qualifications may be another solution.

*Source: authors*

Regarding qualifications, it has been shown that their structure may make it difficult to use their LOs during mobility entirely or that the space for optional modules (if available) might

<sup>38</sup> SEPLO (2017) Guidance to recognition and validation of learning outcomes, p.6  
<http://www.seploecvet.eu/guidance-on-the-assessment-of-los/> p.11

<sup>39</sup> VARE (2017) Country Comparison Report

<sup>40</sup> It should be noted that it is also possible to have modular units combined with end-point assessment that provides an opportunity to look at the competences acquired holistically by contextualising them in a final examination.

be used (e.g. some UK qualifications have been designed to include a work placement module within the optional section of the award, and clearly where this is the case, it is an easy fit, and such modules are usually flexible in terms of the competences gained). Where LOs in the qualification being pursued cannot be used, an alternative is to develop placement-specific LOs or to make use of existing – or design new - micro-credentials. These might cover technical skills but transversal/soft skills might provide the most scope to add value.

Inflexible assessment requirements can make it difficult for assessment to take place abroad. If host/receiving organisation assessment is not feasible, alternatives are:

- ✓ carry out assessment back home (perhaps again, i.e. twice)
- ✓ send an assessor
- ✓ train the accompanying person to be an assessor
- ✓ assess remotely using digital technologies, e.g. to observe someone carrying out a process or to conduct an interview with the learner.

These are not either/or alternatives: combinations might be used. Moreover, it may still be possible to develop the capability for host assessment and to seek changes to national assessment requirements.

## ANNEX

### Method and Acknowledgements

This guidance document was prepared during 2020. The process began with a review and synthesis of relevant materials – currently orientated towards short-duration mobility – to see whether and how they might be logically extended and made relevant to LDM. These materials provided the basis for an initial synthesis report, which was subsequently developed into a first draft of this guidance document for consultation with a range of stakeholders.

A survey of Erasmus+ KA1 projects in the UK was used to identify organisations for consultation, along with relevant previous contacts of the UK ECVET Team, including the ECVET Community of Practice. Consultations were then carried out with a selection of VET providers, employers and awarding bodies, both in the UK and more widely in Europe. Comments on the topics contained in the document were used to make revisions, as were the outcomes from other ECVET Expert Group activities, not least from four online Round Tables held with Erasmus+ beneficiaries during November 2020.

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Any mistakes and omissions remain the responsibility of the authors.