



## **Policy recommendation**

# **Transnational Harmonisation of ECVET for Project Management Education**

## **A Framework for Consistency, Mobility, and Modern Competence Development Across Europe**

### **1. Introduction**

In an increasingly interconnected Europe, project management (PM) has become a vital skill across industries. However, variations in national qualifications and training frameworks pose challenges to mobility and mutual recognition. This paper explores the potential of the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) as a tool to harmonise PM education transnationally, facilitating the transfer, accumulation, and recognition of learning outcomes.

### **2. Background on ECVET**

ECVET was designed to improve the transparency and transferability of vocational qualifications across the EU. It allows learners to accumulate credits for assessed learning outcomes, supporting lifelong learning and mobility. Key elements of ECVET include:

- Learning outcomes
- Units of learning outcomes
- Credit points
- Memoranda of Understanding between institutions
- Personal Transcripts



### **3. Relevance of ECVET in Project Management Education**

Project management, with its structured, competency-based nature, aligns well with ECVET principles. Core PM skills—such as planning, budgeting, risk management, and team coordination—can be broken into assessable learning outcomes and units. However, implementation remains inconsistent across countries.

The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) is highly relevant in the context of Project Management (PM) education, as it provides a flexible and structured framework to design, deliver, and recognize learning outcomes across countries and institutions. Project Management is inherently a competency-based discipline, requiring both theoretical knowledge and practical skills—making it well-suited for modular and outcomes-based training supported by ECVET.

By applying ECVET principles, PM training programs can:

- Standardize learning outcomes across countries, enhancing comparability of qualifications.
- Support mobility, allowing learners to gain and transfer credits for PM modules completed abroad.
- Promote lifelong learning, enabling individuals to gradually build their PM competencies over time.
- Facilitate recognition of informal and non-formal learning (e.g. workplace experience or online courses).
- Encourage collaboration between vocational institutions and employers to co-develop practical units.

Furthermore, as the demand for skilled project managers increases across sectors (construction, IT, manufacturing, etc.), aligning PM education with ECVET ensures that learners acquire industry-relevant, transferable skills that are recognized across the European labour market.



#### **4. Challenges in Harmonising PM Education Across Borders**

Harmonising Project Management (PM) education across countries, especially within the European context, brings significant benefits but also presents several complex challenges. These arise from differences in educational systems, cultural approaches to management, and institutional priorities. Below are key challenges:

##### **1. Curricular Differences**

PM education varies widely in scope, depth, and structure across countries. Some systems focus heavily on theoretical frameworks (e.g., PRINCE2, PMI), while others emphasize practical, case-based learning. Aligning learning outcomes without losing national specificity can be difficult.

##### **2. Lack of Common Terminology and Standards**

PM terminology, methodologies, and certification standards are not always aligned. Terms like "risk management" or "stakeholder analysis" may be taught or interpreted differently, making mutual recognition of competencies inconsistent.

##### **3. Diverse Qualification Frameworks**

National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) often differ in how credits are assigned, making cross-border mapping of PM competencies complex—even with a tool like ECVET or EQF.

##### **4. Language and Cultural Barriers**

Communication styles, team dynamics, and leadership approaches in project environments are influenced by local culture. Teaching PM in a cross-border context requires sensitivity to these differences, particularly in soft skills training.

##### **5. Uneven Adoption of ECVET**

Not all countries or institutions have fully implemented ECVET, which slows down efforts to harmonise VET-based PM education. Some providers lack awareness or capacity to modularise learning outcomes as required.



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## 6. Variability in Industry Engagement

Employer involvement in PM education varies across regions. Where industry links are weak, educational programs may lack relevance or practical alignment, making harmonisation efforts less effective.

## 7. Digital Readiness and Resource Gaps

Access to digital tools, virtual collaboration platforms, and simulation-based PM training varies, particularly between urban and rural institutions. This creates inequity in implementing modern, harmonised teaching approaches.

## 8. Recognition of Informal/Non-formal Learning

Project management skills are often acquired through work experience, volunteering, or informal training. Ensuring that these experiences are validated and credited consistently across countries remains a challenge.

## 5. Benefits of ECVET Harmonisation

The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) provides a structured framework that facilitates the transfer, recognition, and accumulation of learning outcomes across institutions and borders. When applied to Project Management (PM) education, ECVET harmonisation offers several strategic advantages:

### 1. Facilitates Cross-Border Mobility

Harmonising PM qualifications through ECVET allows learners to complete parts of their training in different countries, with full recognition of credits earned abroad. This increases international exposure, promotes cultural adaptability, and prepares learners for global project environments.

### 2. Improves Transparency and Comparability

ECVET provides a common language for describing learning outcomes, credit points, and competence levels. This enhances transparency, enabling learners, educators, and employers to better understand and compare qualifications across Europe.



### 3. Supports Modular and Flexible Learning

ECVET encourages modularisation of PM training programs. This makes learning more flexible, allowing learners to acquire specific units of competence based on their career needs, and to build qualifications progressively over time.

### 4. Strengthens Quality Assurance

With defined learning outcomes and assessment criteria, ECVET contributes to more consistent quality standards in PM education. It promotes mutual trust between institutions and ensures a higher level of reliability in skill recognition.

### 5. Enhances Employability and Career Progression

Recognised, portable qualifications based on ECVET principles make it easier for project management professionals to seek employment across borders, support career mobility, and pursue lifelong learning pathways.

### 6. Encourages Industry-Education Alignment

ECVET fosters dialogue between vocational training providers and industry. Harmonised learning outcomes in PM ensure that training programs respond to actual labour market needs, including soft skills, leadership, risk management, and digital PM tools.

### 7. Promotes Lifelong Learning

By enabling accumulation and transfer of credits, ECVET helps adult learners and professionals return to education without restarting from scratch. It supports continuous professional development (CPD) in fast-evolving project management environments.

### 8. Fosters European Cooperation in VET

The harmonisation process facilitates stronger cooperation between institutions across the EU, creating joint programs, shared standards, and collaborative innovation in vocational PM education.



## **6. Methodological Approach for Harmonisation**

Achieving transnational harmonisation of Project Management (PM) education through the ECVET system requires a structured, collaborative, and iterative methodology. The approach ensures that qualifications are aligned, learning outcomes are compatible, and mobility is facilitated across borders. The following methodological steps are essential:

### **1. Stakeholder Engagement and Needs Analysis**

Harmonisation begins with identifying and involving key stakeholders: VET providers, PM professionals, employers, accreditation bodies, and learners. A thorough needs analysis helps to define common objectives, gaps in training provision, and industry demands at national and European levels.

### **2. Mapping of National Qualifications and Competences**

A comparison of existing PM qualifications, training modules, and occupational standards across countries is conducted. This includes identifying overlaps, divergences, and potential equivalencies in content, duration, and skill levels.

### **3. Definition of Units of Learning Outcomes (ULOs)**

Based on the mapping exercise, shared Units of Learning Outcomes are defined. These describe what a learner is expected to know, understand, and be able to do after completing a learning unit. Each unit includes:

- Knowledge
- Skills
- Responsibility and autonomy
- Suggested ECVET credit points

### **4. Reference to EQF and NQF Levels**

The defined units are aligned with both the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and relevant National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) to ensure transparency and coherence across education systems.



## 5. Design of Assessment and Validation Methods

Harmonised assessment criteria and validation procedures are developed to support mutual recognition of learning outcomes. This ensures learners are evaluated fairly, regardless of where the learning took place.

## 6. Development of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)

Formal agreements are created between institutions and organisations involved in learner mobility. These MoUs outline roles, responsibilities, and conditions for credit transfer and recognition of learning outcomes.

## 7. Piloting and Feedback Loops

Pilot programs are run to test the harmonised learning units, credit allocation, and mobility mechanisms. Feedback from learners and educators helps refine the content and methodology before broader implementation.

## 8. Training of Trainers and Capacity Building

Educators and trainers receive support to adapt to the harmonised curriculum, methodologies, and tools. This includes workshops on ECVET principles, learning outcomes-based teaching, and cross-border cooperation.

## 9. Digital Tools and Documentation

Implementation is supported by digital platforms that track learners' progress, document achieved credits, and facilitate secure data exchange between institutions (e.g., Europass, Learning Agreement templates).

## 10. Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement

Harmonisation efforts are embedded in a quality assurance framework that monitors outcomes, ensures consistency, and allows for periodic review. Indicators include learner satisfaction, credit recognition rates, and mobility uptake.

### **7. Case Study Examples / Best Practices**

Examples from Erasmus+ funded projects and transnational partnerships demonstrate successful models:

- PM VET-EU Project: Developed a shared curriculum for junior project managers with ECVET-aligned modules.



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- Dual-VET in Germany and Austria: Applied unit-based learning outcomes in real workplace contexts.
- Italian-Spanish PM mobility programme: Used Memoranda of Understanding to validate training periods abroad.

## **8. Proposed Common Learning Outcomes for PM**

To ensure consistency and transferability of knowledge, skills, and competences in PM education across countries, the following common learning outcomes are proposed. These are structured in accordance with ECVET principles and aligned with EQF levels 4–6, depending on the depth and complexity of the program.

Each learning outcome includes Knowledge, Skills, and Competence (Autonomy and Responsibility) components.

### **1. Project Planning and Organisation**

#### **- Knowledge:**

Understand the principles of project life cycle, project charter, and planning methodologies (e.g., Gantt charts, WBS, scheduling).

#### **- Skills:**

Develop project plans including scope, resources, deliverables, timelines, and risk analysis.

#### **- Competence:**

Apply planning tools independently, adjust plans based on evolving needs, and take responsibility for coordinating resources.

### **2. Risk and Quality Management**

#### **- Knowledge:**

Understand risk identification, analysis, mitigation, and quality assurance/control principles in projects.

#### **- Skills:**

Apply tools like risk matrices, SWOT, and quality checklists to monitor and control project risks and outputs.



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## - Competence:

Identify risks autonomously, propose mitigation actions, and integrate quality requirements into project planning.

## 3. Project Budgeting and Financial Control

### - Knowledge:

Understand basic budgeting principles, cost estimation methods, and financial reporting.

### - Skills:

Prepare budgets, monitor expenditures, and use project financial tools (e.g., cost variance analysis).

### - Competence:

Manage project budgets within defined limits, report on variances, and propose adjustments with minimal supervision.

## 4. Team and Stakeholder Management

### - Knowledge:

Understand team dynamics, stakeholder engagement strategies, and communication plans.

### - Skills:

Facilitate teamwork, resolve conflicts, and communicate project updates to diverse audiences.

### - Competence:

Lead small teams, coordinate stakeholder meetings, and maintain collaboration across functions.

## 5. Use of Digital Tools in Project Management

### - Knowledge:

Familiarity with digital PM tools (e.g., MS Project, Trello, Asana) and collaborative platforms.



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## - Skills:

Set up project dashboards, assign tasks, and track progress using digital platforms.

## - Competence:

Select and use appropriate PM tools to support digital collaboration and project tracking.

## 6. Sustainability and Ethics in PM

### - Knowledge:

Understand ethical standards, legal compliance, and sustainability principles in project work.

### - Skills:

Integrate ethical decision-making and sustainability assessments into project proposals.

### - Competence:

Apply ethical judgment, ensure social responsibility, and adapt project approaches to minimize negative impacts.

## **9. Tools and Instruments Supporting Harmonisation**

Effective harmonisation of PM education across borders requires the adoption of standardized tools and instruments that facilitate transparency, comparability, and mutual recognition of learning outcomes. The following tools are central to the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and support transnational cooperation and mobility:

### 1. Learning Outcomes Approach

- Focuses on what learners are expected to know, understand, and be able to do at the end of a learning process.

- Promotes a competency-based curriculum structure aligned with labour market needs and project management standards.



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- Enables mapping PM qualifications to EQF (European Qualifications Framework) levels for consistency across countries.

## 2. ECVET Points

- ECVET points quantify the volume of learning based on the workload, duration, and complexity of the program.

- In PM education, assigning ECVET points to specific learning units (e.g., risk management, budgeting, stakeholder communication) helps establish transferable credit systems across institutions and countries.

## 3. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

- A formal agreement between partner institutions defining the framework of cooperation and mutual trust.

- Outlines procedures for credit transfer, validation, and recognition between countries and ensures shared understanding of learning outcomes in PM education.

## 4. Learning Agreement

- Individualised agreement between the sending and receiving institution, the learner, and possibly the employer.

- Specifies the competences to be acquired, the learning context, and assessment methods, ensuring alignment with the home qualification system.

## 5. Europass Documents

- Tools such as the Europass CV, Mobility Document, and Certificate Supplement support documentation of PM skills and experiences across borders.

- Facilitate employability and educational progression by presenting qualifications in a transparent and comparable format.

## 6. EQAVET Framework

- The European Quality Assurance in VET framework ensures continuous quality improvement.

- Encourages institutions delivering PM education to monitor and evaluate learning outcomes, stakeholder feedback, and curriculum alignment with ECVET standards.



## 7. Digital Platforms and E-Learning Tools

- Integration of platforms like Moodle, Open edX, or PM simulation software allows flexible delivery of harmonised content.
- Supports remote learning, assessment tracking, and digital credentialing, enhancing cross-border accessibility and consistency.

These tools collectively ensure that project management education becomes more coherent, mobile, and adaptable to a pan-European context. They provide a foundation for sustainable partnerships between education providers, companies, and learners involved in PM training and qualification.

## **10. Recommendations and Policy Implications**

To support effective transnational harmonisation of Project Management (PM) education, several strategic recommendations and policy actions are needed at institutional, national, and European levels. These recommendations aim to strengthen the implementation of the ECVET framework, improve the quality of PM training, and ensure alignment with labour market needs.

### 1. Develop a Standardised PM Competency Framework

Recommendation:

Adopt a common European competency framework for PM based on recognised standards (e.g., IPMA, PMI), aligned with ECVET principles.

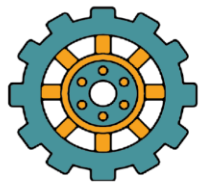
Policy Implication:

Facilitates the mapping of learning outcomes to the EQF, supports mutual recognition, and ensures consistency in PM skills training across countries.

### 2. Promote Cross-Border Institutional Partnerships

Recommendation:

Encourage VET providers, universities, and companies to form consortia for developing and piloting joint PM curricula with shared learning outcomes and assessment criteria.



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## Policy Implication:

Strengthens mobility and cooperation, enhances curriculum relevance, and supports innovation in PM education delivery.

### 3. Integrate ECVET into National Qualification Systems

#### Recommendation:

Ensure national education policies formally incorporate ECVET tools (learning outcomes, credit points, learning agreements) into VET and lifelong learning systems.

#### Policy Implication:

Creates legal and operational structures for credit transfer, validation, and recognition of PM qualifications within and across countries.

### 4. Invest in Educator Training and Capacity Building

#### Recommendation:

Support training programs for PM educators, trainers, and assessors on outcome-based education, ECVET methodology, and digital tools.

#### Policy Implication:

Improves teaching quality and assessment reliability, increasing the effectiveness of harmonised PM training programs.

### 5. Ensure Quality Assurance and Monitoring

#### Recommendation:

Apply the EQAVET framework to all PM VET programs to monitor learning outcomes, stakeholder satisfaction, and employability.

#### Policy Implication:

Promotes transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement of PM education aligned with European standards.



## 6. Support the Use of Digital Tools and Microcredentials

### Recommendation:

Leverage digital platforms for learning, assessment, and credentialing, including the use of Europass and digital badges for PM competencies.

### Policy Implication:

Enhances access to PM education, especially for adult learners, and supports modular, flexible training pathways in line with ECVET principles.

## 7. Align PM Education with Labour Market Needs

### Recommendation:

Establish advisory boards with industry representatives to ensure PM learning outcomes reflect evolving market demands and project-based work trends.

### Policy Implication:

Boosts employability and productivity by aligning skills with real-world PM roles, especially in digital and innovation-driven sectors.

These recommendations highlight the need for coordinated policy action and sustained collaboration across borders. They aim to create an integrated, flexible, and learner-centred PM education ecosystem that supports professional mobility and competence development throughout Europe.

## **11. Conclusion**

ECVET offers a strategic opportunity to harmonise project management education across Europe, fostering a more integrated labour market and supporting the development of modern, transferable competencies. With coordinated action among educational providers, industry, and policymakers, transnational mobility and recognition in PM training can become a practical reality.