



ECVET goes Business

O1 - Research Study

Prepared by Meath Partnership

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Introduction

The ECVET goes Business project aims to develop an approach to make ECVET and other European transparency instruments more relevant to the needs of HR managers and to encourage the integration of these tools in common HR processes and practices in local companies in each partner country. To achieve this aim and to increase the demand for the ECVET and other European transparency instruments on a company level, the ECVET goes Business project team will develop and provide materials and information in a format and language which HR managers, job stewards and business owners can use effectively and with ease. To upskill HR managers to be able to use these tools competently in their HR practices, the project consortium will also develop a concise and comprehensive training programme on how to use ECVET and others in HR management. So as to ensure that the curriculum and materials developed are of relevance to the needs of HR professionals and business owners, it is important that project partners undertake a research process so that all partners can better understand how the EU transparency instruments, such as ECVET, can be mapped onto standard HR process.

There is a need, right across Europe, to broaden and mainstream the use of ECVET by focusing on the business world. While ECVET and other European transparency instruments and tools such as EQF, NQF, EQAVET and Europass, have been widely adopted and integrated into the VET sector across Europe, they still remain largely unknown and unused in the world of work.

Since ECVET was launched in 2009, there have been innumerable pilot projects funded through the Lifelong Learning and Erasmus+ Programmes which have been tasked with developing qualification and learning outcome descriptors for ECVET integration into VET, and tools and instruments to help jobseekers to use EU mobility and transparency instruments to avail of employment and education opportunities across the European Union. The ECVET goes Business consortium will build on the work of these pilot projects to specifically target the needs of the business world and to encourage their use of ECVET and other European tools in their recruitment and selection processes.



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The ECVET goes Business research study is the first core intellectual output of the project. The findings of this report will act as the evidence base for the development of Intellectual Outputs O2 and O3. As such, the research process had at its core the following aims:

- a)** To find out about key Human Resource processes in companies where ECVET and European transparency instruments can be embedded and used;
- b)** To disseminate the project idea directly to the target group members, helping to raise awareness and cultivate interest in the project and its outputs, while at the same time introducing the topic of ECVET and transparency instruments to the target group;
- c)** To build the theoretical background for the two other intellectual outputs of the project, (O2) Handbook – Modern HR Management with ECVET and European transparency instruments; (O3) ECVET goes Business Training Course for HR Staff;
- d)** To foster relationships with the target group so that partners can establish a ‘community of practitioners’ who will test, use and avail of the project outputs as they are developed by the consortium.

At application stage, the project consortium agreed that using a Focus Group was the most suitable research methodology for completing the ECVET goes Business (EGB) research study. The Focus Group was chosen because it is one of the best research methods for yielding qualitative research results. Meeting directly with members of the target group in an informal environment, it is a most effective means of developing a rapport with the target group, of getting them talking to each other and of gathering information on their thoughts, feelings and needs.

All partner organisations undertook to host focus group sessions and to gather data directly from the focus group members. The following report provides a summary of the responses collected and collated by all partner organisations.



Methodology

In order to introduce and discuss the project with local stakeholders, a series of focus groups were held with 76 representatives of businesses, social partners and public bodies across each partner country in January 2016 to address the following themes:

- Recruitment practices
- Skills assessment and training for employees
- Pay policy
- Working in a SMART/Knowledge economy
- Use of EU transparency instruments

To ensure a degree of uniformity and quality across the consortium in terms of organising, recruiting for, hosting and reporting on the various focus groups, Meath Partnership, as the research coordinators, produced a guide to help partners in planning and implementing their focus groups. This guide contained useful tips on how to plan a focus group, invite participants and get the most out of their participation. As a result of this guide, the methodology for completing the research in each partner country was similar. As outlined in the guide, partners invited focus group participants from their existing networks of business professionals, HR managers and business owners. Some partners used the Doodle Poll tool to find a time and date that was appropriate for the majority of participants. Using the guide, partners were better informed in selecting a suitable venue, time and facilitator for the focus group.

Once all the preparation had been completed and the focus group was underway, project partners followed the same format for their focus groups; namely, they began by welcoming and thanking the participants for attending, they gave a brief overview of the topic being discussed, they took time to establish the ground rules and write a 'Group Contract' which would determine how participants behaved in the group setting and then they introduced the questions to be discussed by the group.

When organising and hosting focus group sessions across an international consortium, it is important that there is coherence and consistency in the research



questions asked, so that the findings are comparable across all partner countries. As such, the questions to be put to the focus group participants were agreed at the first partner meeting in Trim, Ireland and it was agreed that all focus group facilitators would pose each of these questions to their HR focus group members. Further down in this report, the answers to these questions and the findings of the focus group interviews will be presented.

Profile of the Focus Group Participants

As part of this project work, partner organisations are working with individuals from across the business community. Specifically, the project team are targeting the following individuals:

- HR managers and staff within companies
- Job/Shop Stewards
- Supervisors
- Line managers
- Social partners
- Other stakeholders

The research findings from these focus groups will inform the development of the curriculum and learning resources for HR specialists and businesses to use ECVET and other EU tools. Therefore, in order to ensure that the research conducted and data collected from the focus group sessions was relevant to the needs of these target groups, it was important for all partner organisations to recruit members of these groups to attend the focus groups. A profile of the participants from these focus groups is included below:

Austria

The ECVET goes Business focus group in Austria was composed of individuals from different fields of the business community. These participants were aged between approximately 30 and 65 years. The group consisted of seven men and four women. These participants have expertise in the areas of industrial representation, employee representation, shop stewardship; as well as individuals who worked with social partners. This table presents a more in-depth overview of the focus group participants.



	Name of Participant and Company	Job Title and brief Job Description
1.	Alfred Berndl, ISOP	Pedagogical project manager
2.	Monika Anclin, Bildungsnetzwerk Steiermark	Education consultant
3.	Stefan Csacsinovits, Bildungsnetzwerk Steiermark	Education consultant
4.	Harald Schweinzer, BM f. V.I.T	Telecommunications technician, shop steward
5.	Walter Blass, TU-Graz	Shop steward general personnel university
6.	Emina Kofrc, Zebra	Migrant adviser
7.	Sabine Sattler, Die Industrie	Secretary of the Industry
8.	Bernhard Pürschl, Industriellenvertretung/Junge Industrie	Secretary of the Young Industry
9.	Christian Wersonik, Sappi Austria	Shop steward, technician
10.	Martina Mersnik, AMS Steiermark	Employment agency consultant
11.	Klaus Breuss, ÖGB	Educational secretary

Germany

As FHM Schwerin works mostly within the tourism sector, the aim was to utilise its' extensive network within this industry. For this reason, there were three participants who worked in the HR departments of local hotel chains (MERCURE Hotels & Intercity Schwerin); three other participants work as business consultants within the tourism industry (RIMC International and Glücksburg Consulting). As well as working in the tourism industry, the majority of participants (six participants = 60%) work directly in the field of HR. The group also comprised four CEOs. Each of the ten participants had several years of experience. Each has also faced the problems associated with not being able to find suitably skilled workers locally for employment in the tourism industry; and as a result of these problems, participants were very interested in learning about the EU transparency tools and how they could help their recruitment practices. In this focus group there were eight women and two men. Half of the participants (50%) are from Hamburg; the other half are from Schwerin. The age range was approximately between 30 and 55 years.



	Name of Participant and Company	Job Title and brief Job Description
1.	Mrs Jana Thielsen	Junior Operations Management, Human Resource Manager; RIMC International Hotels & Resorts
2.	Mrs Helena Rickmers	Trainee in Human Resource Management, RIMC International Hotels & Resorts
3.	Mrs Astrid Ludwig	Director of Intercity Hotel Schwerin
4.	Mrs Victoria Binz	Consultant; Glücksburg Consulting AG
5.	Mrs Stephanie von Schultz	Human Resource Manager; Marketing Manager; MERCURE Hotel Schwerin
6.	Mr Marc Walter	CEO MERCURE Hotel Schwerin
7.	Mr Alexander Richelmann	CEO Richelmann Immobilien
8.	Mrs Ellen Kokaras-Tantzen	CEO ekt
9.	Mrs Kathrin Hoffmann	Civil servant (economic promotion) of capital city Schwerin; town hall
10.	Mrs Maria Liesenberg	Human Resource Manager; CataHRO GmbH

Hungary

The following is a summary of the focus group participants in Hungary.

	Name of Participant and Company	Job Title and brief Job Description
1.	Dorottya Pék Fortuito Ltd	Managing director of a company for National Projects
2.	Gabriella Bódogh Diamond Ltd	Writing her thesis about recruitment and having an insight to the topic both from the side of employers and employees plus the education sector
3.	Marta Kalman TanulasMaskepp	HR and customer relation expert, coach; Having long-lasting experience



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		in HR topics with insight to recruitment and on the job education of many client companies
4.	Klaudia Kis Infomatix Ltd	HR manager of an IT company
5.	Judit Bacsfalvi Manpower Ltd	HR manager of Manpower – one of the biggest recruitment companies in Hungary
6.	Ivan Bardos Hertzog es Bardos Ltd	Head of HR company recruiting employees for the logistic sector
7.	Dorottya Benkő- Csecsei Edes Otthon Kozpont Kft.	Head of a Real Estate Agency
8.	Enikő Frank Municipality of Nagykovácsi	HR manager at the municipality
9.	Adam Wilk Garkith Ltd	Managing director of an accountant company, the company is in contact with an internship recruitment body and employs undergraduates in accountancy and finance
10.	Attila Mátyus Matyus and Matyus Ltd	Co-owner of a trading company with mostly blue collar workers

Ireland

The focus group in Ireland comprised ten individuals; four men and six women. Participants ranged in age from 27 to 54. There was a mixture of HR specialists, career coaches, business owners and entrepreneurs and representatives from the VET sector present for the focus group session.

	Name of Participant and Company	Job Title and brief Job Description
1.	Vivienne Brannigan, Louth & Meath Education and Training Board	VET specialist with extensive experience in designing innovative e-learning solutions for businesses
2.	Peter Egan, Louth & Meath Education and Training Board	VET specialist with extensive experience in using European transparency tools including ECVET, Europass, EQAVET, etc.
3.	Peter Davitt , Fast-track to IT (FIT)	Business owner and entrepreneur who established his own training



		company up-skilling jobseekers to industry standard
4.	Rosita Moyles, J.M. Foods	Business owner and entrepreneur, currently managing a food production and catering company based in Meath
5.	Daire Harlin, Brú Brewery	Business owner and entrepreneur, currently managing a local craft beer brewery based in Meath
6.	Niall Daly, Clonabreany House	Business owner and manager, currently manages a local tourism business based in Meath
7.	Ros Coyle, Tayto Park	HR Manager at Tayto Park, a large theme park and zoo based in Meath
8.	Sinéad Fox, Meath Partnership	Career Coach working with Meath Partnership, providing one-to-one support for businesses and jobseekers
9.	Teresa Hannick, Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union	HR Specialist, working as a sector organiser with one of Ireland's largest trade unions
10.	Mary Baker, Meath Partnership	Career Coach working with Meath Partnership, providing one-to-one support for businesses and jobseekers

Italy

The Italian focus group is composed of ten individuals; four female and six male. These professionals ranged in age from 40 to 50; and they all have many years' experience working in human resource processes and practices.

	Name of Participant and Company	Job Title and brief Job Description
1.	Rossella Giannantonio	HR for Pringraf (Paper Industry)
2.	Fabrizio Giorgilli	Manager for Social Security Service (Public Body)
3.	Margherita De Candia	HR for Job Center Province of Campobasso



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4.	Leonardina Cardellicchio	Counselor Italia Lavoro s.p.a (Job Agency)
5.	Di Bello Gianfranco	Director FENAILP (VET Company)
6.	Antonio Perrino	Officer Molise Region (Public Body)
7.	Lino Iamele	SIRIO Social Service Cooperative
8.	Angelo Fratangelo	HR Director for Province of Campobasso
9.	Gianni Ciao	HR responsible Innovation Factory (Digital work)
10.	Lorella Palladino	General Director Chamber of Commerce

Slovenia

Our focus group is composed of HR managers from different companies. These managers are all female, and ranged in age from 35 to 60 years. These women are all highly educated; each has at least a Bachelor-level degree and has many years of experience in the field of human resource management. The only issue with this sample group was the varying sizes of the companies they represented and the differences between public and private sector companies interviewed.

	Name of Participant and Company	Job Title and brief Job Description
1.	Simona Kuder, CPI (Centre for VET) Public sector / national educational institution	HR manager at public body <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · working practices; · recruitment; · legal compliance; · conditions of employment; · negotiation with external work-related agencies; · equality and diversity
2.	Simona Klukelj, BARTEC VARNOST Manufacture of electric motors, generators and transformers	Managing director <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · implementing company policy · developing strategic plans · maintaining a dialogue between shareholders and the



		<p>board</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Controlling finance · Building and maintaining an effective management team · Assuming full accountability for the board for all company operations
3.	Aleš Dremel, CPU (Institute for business education / private educational institution)	<p>Director</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · implementing company policy · developing strategic plans · maintaining a dialogue between shareholders and the board · Controlling finance · Building and maintaining an effective management team · Assuming full accountability for the board for all company operations
4.	Irena Košnjek, JELOVICA HIŠE d.d. The Wood field; retail trade; Building furniture	<p>HR manager</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · working practices; · recruitment; · legal compliance; · conditions of employment; · negotiation with external work-related agencies;
5.	Sinet podjetje za storitve in proizvodnjo d.o.o. occupational safety and health, fire protection, security, environmental protection, food safety, printing, production of binders and manufacturing of electronic and paraffin candles.	<p>Metka Hribšek, HR manager</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · recruitment; · conditions of employment; · negotiation with external work-related agencies;
6.	TKI Hrastnik, d.d. Chemical industry	<p>Mateja Majdič</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · recruitment; · organizing training for new employees · conditions of employment; · negotiation with external work-related agencies;



7.	CHIPOLO, d.o.o. Research and development activities in other areas of science and technology	Maja Drnovšek <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · developing strategic plans · recruitment; · team building · legal compliance; · Controlling finance
8.	EVJ Elektroprom d.o.o. Heating equipment; Electrical installations; retail trade; Metal products and equipment	Vlasta Uranič <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · implementing company policy · recruitment; · legal compliance; · Controlling finance
9.	YDRIA Motors d.o.o. Manufacture of electric motors, generators and transformers	Tina Menard <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · working practices; · recruitment; · legal compliance; · conditions of employment; · negotiating with workers representatives, trade unions... · negotiation with external work-related agencies; · equality and diversity
10.	RUDIS d.o.o. Trbovlje engineering activities and related technical consultancy	Metka Starc Rak <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · implementing company policy · recruitment; · legal compliance; · Controlling finance

Spain

This is a brief overview of the Focus Group participants:

	Name of Participant and Company	Job Title and brief Job Description
1.	Mrs. Beatriz López Larzep; S.A.	Administrative and Financial Manager
2.	Mrs. Marta Ruiz Capillas Sasyma	H.R. Manager
3.	Mr. Johanka Soto Melchor Gabilondo S.A.	H.R. Manager



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4.	Mrs. Miren Gutierrez Ormazabal	H.R. General Manager
5.	Mrs. Lourdes Forcada Forjas de Berriz S.L.	H.R. Manager
6.	Mr. Alberto Álvarez Inyectametal S.A.	H.R. Manager
7.	Mrs. Inmaculada Hoyos Sunrise Medical S.L.	H.R. Manager
8.	Mrs. Ana Guerrero Furesa S.Coop.	H.R. Manager
9.	Mr. Juan Jesús Blanco FYA 2000 S.L.	Administrative and Financial Manager
10.	Mr. José Maria Leoz Auspola S.Coop.	General Manager
11.	Mr. Guillermo Hormaechea CEMVISA	H.R. Manager
12.	Mrs. Raquel Boyero Tecnichapa- Velatia	H.R. Manager
13.	Mr. Roberto Gonzalez Nueva Herramienta de Corte S.A.	H.R. Manager
14.	Mrs. Pilar Casorran PINE Instalaciones y Montajes S.A.	H.R. Manager

Eight out of fourteen participants were women and mostly of them are between 40-55 years old. Regarding the qualifications all of them attended the University having a degree; apart from that, they completed their careers with any specialized studies (such a master or any other specific study). Twelve out of fourteen have more than 10 years of professional experience.

Focus Group Research Findings

As a core element for all further developments, this comprehensive research study aimed to identify the key processes of HR management in companies (large and SMEs both with a special focus) and to find the process elements where ECVET and



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other transparency instruments can be embedded. This research process aimed to identify key HR processes (e.g. recruiting, wage/salary policy, career planning, leadership development, personal asset planning, motivation, corporate training etc.) and divide these processes into single process steps where ECVET and other instruments could potentially provide support and assistance. The methodological set-up of the research is a qualitative one, and so the focus group format was agreed upon by all partners. To ensure that partners addressed the same issues and collected comparable data from these focus group sessions, five key research themes were set by partners. These five themes were then converted into key research questions which were put to the focus group members in each partner country. The following is a summary of the responses collected by each partner in response to these five research questions.

During focus groups in all partner countries, representatives of the target group will elaborate the processes and define the key points where transparency instruments may come into play. The research study is therefore a core output which is relevant and usable per se but also as a necessary precondition for the other outcomes.

Research Theme: Current Recruitment Practices in your Company

Introduction to the Theme

The aim of this research theme is to gather insight into how companies recruit employees and to unearth some best practice examples in relation to employee recruitment in Europe. By better understanding some of the processes and practices which HR managers use to recruit suitably qualified employees, ECVET goes Business partners will be better placed to advise these managers on ways they could use ECVET and other EU transparency tools in their recruitment practices.

Country Analysis

Research Question 1: How does your company recruit new employees? Describe the procedure for recruiting new employees and any challenges you experience.



This question was put to all participants of the focus group sessions which were hosted by ECVET goes Business project partners. The following is a summary of the responses collected to this research question, per partner country.

Austria

The recruitment practices however differ across the companies represented at this focus group, no matter if organisations or companies are run privately or publicly financed. Unsolicited applications sometimes get collected and can be used in the case of open positions being available; these applications will often only be held on file for a limited time. If a person is hired for an open position, depending on the internal policies, most commonly interviews are held. Additionally aptitude tests or/and psychological sessions are sometimes held before the interview process commences.

Generally, competences which are required for these open positions and abilities in completing tasks required by the position are not tested at recruitment stage. In some organisations and companies, internal head hunting practices are applied; offering employees a bonus where the recruitment of competent and well qualified personnel is concerned. Generally, when an applicant for an open position is already known by an existing employee of the organisation or company, this would have a positive impact on their application. Further to this, with regard to larger companies, they often have their own apprentice academy programmes; this way they are able to offer job-specific, targeted training to the apprentice, and can ensure they are fully trained and competent to meet the requirements of the role once their apprenticeship has been completed. In general, it was emphasised that a successful recruitment process, and the use of suitable practices to achieve this goal, needs sufficient time.

In the ideal scenario, employees would be selected based on the formal qualifications they have and the level of competence they have in the areas related to the position being advertised; and not how well the applicant can write a CV and sell themselves during the job interview. ECVET and other EU transparency instruments could support HR managers in their role as recruiters, by making it easier for applicants to communicate their qualifications and competences in their



CV. These templates, which help applicants to better describe their level of competence, could also be useful to applicants in helping them to describe prior academic achievements and learning completed abroad; making their skills more readable and easily understood in all European countries, especially in sectors and professions where there are legal and academic requirements to apply for certain positions

Germany

Focus group participants in Germany listed the following as the primary tools and practices they use when recruiting employees to their companies and organisations:

- Ø Local advertisements in media (e.g. newspapers or radio adverts; also online – directly on their homepage or in online-newspapers);
- Ø Advertisements in magazines and publications which are specific to the hotel industry (e.g. Hotel Career). This helps HR managers to find suitable candidates from their preferred target group
- Ø Social media posts (e.g. Facebook, Xing, LinkedIn);
- Ø Promotion of positions at trade fairs, both general and specialised;
- Ø Direct approach using national networks and contacts. There was a general consensus amongst the focus group participants that this direct approach has been under-utilised by the hotel industry in the past and should be put to better use in the future;
- Ø Direct recruitment through contact with Higher Education Institutes and schools. These recruitment drives consist of a presentation of the company in lessons or lectures; this depends on the age range and the target group;
- Ø Advertisements through a national employment agency;

In addition to these common practices, there has previously been an EU-funded programme which ran in Schwerin, and nationwide, and was initiated by employment agencies in partnership with the chambers of commerce and industry actors with the aim of increasing the instances of employee mobility across Europe. This project, called, **MobiPro** (<https://www.thejobofmylife.de/de/home.html>), encouraged employees from across Europe to undertake mobilities abroad to find better employment opportunities, and for recruitment agencies to target potential



employees from across the EU. Those who took part in this project from abroad came to Schwerin with the skills required for specific professions (e.g. elder care, nursery or waiter). The companies and HR managers were satisfied with their involvement in this project because very often, these employees came to Schwerin with the skills required for the job role and only required help with their language skills. As a result of this project, participants conveyed that they are open-minded about new projects which aim to increase mobility

Hungary

According to the focus group participants in Hungary, the most common tools to use when advertising jobs are job-search websites and the company's own website. They can also use alternative job advertisement tools and resources such as professional forums, Facebook groups and Linked-In profiles; or they can advertise jobs on posters in local information points when they are recruiting for blue-collar positions.

The basic competencies associated with the role being advertised are usually listed in the minimum requirements section. What participants consider quite important is the personality of the applicants; because, as they have stated, it is always easier to improve a person's technical skills than to change their personality if it does not fit the workplace. In one organisation, HR managers will often hold interviews together where the applicant will meet the other team members and get to know them as part of the interview process. This is a good way of seeing how the applicant will interact and work with the personalities already employed as part of the team and ascertain whether s/he could be a member of the team or not. The most sought after technical skills are language and IT skills and they are always validated in interviews. In terms of CV formats, HR experts like well-structured, short, but uniquely formed résumés.

In terms of the differences between the recruitment practices of small and larger companies, once the short list is created, small businesses prefer to host just one interview which is usually conducted by the owner, with the aim of hiring multi-talented employees who can handle a variety of tasks in different departments. The recruitment process includes practical assessments of tasks and skills such as language and professional skill tests. Larger companies delegate the recruitment



process to HR consulting companies and prefer to hold interviews in a series of rounds or stages so that candidates are well-vetted for the job role. The bigger the company, the more rounds of interviews will be held. As one participant mentioned in the focus group, the worst case this person ever heard of was a company recruiting an engineering post, and holding eleven rounds of interviews to recruit for the position. This interview process lasted for 7 consecutive months.

Ireland

When advertising a new position in the companies who formed part of the Irish focus group, HR specialists employ a variety of tools and resources. These include online job-search websites such as www.jobs.ie, www.simplyhired.ie, www.monster.ie, etc. They also advertise positions online through social media platforms, Facebook and Linked-In primarily; through local media [newspapers – the Meath Chronicle and/or the Anglo Celt, and radio (LMFM and/or Northern-Sound)]; through their own corporate company website; and lastly through their professional networks. When internships or apprenticeships are being recruited for, HR specialists will often target relevant institutes of technology and universities around Ireland, through career days and fairs at these institutes.

Once the applications have been received, HR specialists will usually compose a short-list and call applicants for interviews. Depending on the nature of the position, interviews can also include a short presentation by the candidate, a group interview with all candidates together or they can include a practical demonstration of skills such as a short book-keeping exercise for a position in an accounts department in a company, etc. Depending on the nature of the job and the managerial level of the new appointment, interviews may take place in several rounds. Where a high-level position is being advertised, interviews will usually take place over three rounds, with a group interview, a skills demonstration or an aptitude test for the second round and a final interview round which would be an individual interview between the candidate and the senior management staff of the company.

Italy

The most common recruitment practices used by the participants of the Italian focus group can be divided into two sections: these are the standard recruitment practices for private company compared to those for public bodies. For private companies,



they focus on writing detailed job advertisements and searching their networks and databases for suitable candidates. When applications have been received these companies then undertake an in-depth analysis of candidates' CVs, based on this they create a short-list and host interviews for recruiting new employees. In public bodies, they focus less on searching contacts, networks and databases for suitable candidates and instead they select and recruit employees based on their qualifications and interviews.

Slovenia

The most common practices in recruiting employees from the Slovenian focus group include, advertising new jobs in local media outlets, such as local newspapers and television. If local media is initially unsuccessful, companies will then target national media outlets to recruit candidates with the desired qualifications. Companies also utilise digital media for recruitment purposes, and new positions are advertised through online job-search websites, company websites, social media platforms, etc. They also use more traditional methods of recruitment such as through local employment agencies, at job fairs, through contacts and networks and through presentations to schools and universities.

When seeking to recruit high profile personnel, companies tend to outsource recruitment processes to HR agencies. Here, job roles are described with all the requirements and competencies listed in the advertisement.

Once the CV and/or applications have been received and reviewed, all HR experts agreed that standard practice is to arrange an interview with the most suitable and qualified candidates and to appoint a new employee on the basis of their performance in the interview.

Companies motivate individuals to come and work for them through their promise of the provision of additional training and development, their promotion of a healthy work-life balance, opportunities for progression and promotion in their companies, opportunities for financial and non-financial bonuses and the integration of activities and a social programme for employees, including sports and clubs. Furthermore, some companies can offer additional perks to potential employees such as foreign travel and participation in international projects.



Public companies have to follow prescribed procedures in the recruitment of new employees. They are required to publish tenders online; to appoint a Selection Committee who will review the applications received and then this Committee are required to conduct an informative interview with the candidates who meet the formal requirements. The interview is structured and focuses on specific skills and competencies required by the job role. On the basis of the information gathered the Selection Committee select the most appropriate candidate for the job.

Spain

Most companies prefer to appoint new employees based on personal recommendations and liaising with employment agencies. However, companies also use newspaper advertisements, websites of employment agencies and to a lesser extent:

- Ø CVs which people leave directly in the company;
- Ø Local media publications;
- Ø Public Employment Services;
- Ø Internships and placements through VET centres.

Companies agreed that they advertise the skills, knowledge and experience required for the job in the job description. And this process is usually transparent, as it is shared with the rest of employees. The main difference between companies is the level of detail (transparency) they include in the job advertisement. While some companies include a full job description, others only specify the minimum requirements. These companies only describe the necessary basic skills for the job or some particular skills which they consider to be key or essential for the job.

Companies motivate individuals to join them by developing and promoting the professional development potential of their employees and by promoting the profile of their company and a strong and established company; this is like the branding of the company where they “sell” the company’s reputation and its extensive experience in the field to motivate people. In other companies, sometimes the salary is the main motivation; they try to give an attractive salary to motivate people to come to work for the company. Other times, they use the description of the company



characteristics: the company project, the flexible timetable, calendar, the award of a permanent contract, remuneration policy, etc. to motivate potential employees.

Similarities and Differences

Overall, many of the companies participating in the focus groups were in a position to describe the various recruitment practices with obvious differences emerging across all countries depending on:

- Ø The size of the company: larger companies tended to have greater resources in terms of personnel, financial and time to invest in recruitment practices
- Ø The nature of the company whether private or public: private companies tended to have greater flexibility in terms of chosen recruitment methods once in agreement with national laws. Public companies tended to be highly bureaucratic with little flexibility

Based on an analysis of the answers collected, the following similarities can be highlighted:

- Ø Companies often use local media, online job-search engines, social media and company websites to advertise new positions;
- Ø Where CVs and applications are received, they are usually reviewed and short-listed by a management team or committee, before being invited for interview;
- Ø These interviews are usually hosted by senior management, HR managers or, where recruitment has been outsourced, by external HR specialists.

However, despite these commonalities between recruitment practices, certain issues varied greatly across the countries who took part in this research process, including;

- Ø Incentives and tactics which companies employ to motivate employees to come and work for them – this practice was popular in Slovenia and Spain, but less important in other partner countries;
- Ø Involvement of employment agencies (public and private) in the recruitment process – popular in Germany, Slovenia and Spain but not in other partner countries;



Ø Use of skills demonstrations, aptitude tests and numerous interview rounds as part of the recruitment process – popular in Austria, Hungary and Ireland but less important in other countries where one single interview will suffice.

A summary of all findings to this research question can be viewed in the following table:

AT	DE	HU	IE	IT	SI	ES
Varied depending on regulations and internal policies; size of company and also whether it is public or private	Multiple methods and approaches	Considerable differences depending on the size of the company; larger companies have more complex and elaborate recruitment cycles	Vary depending on the size of the company, where it is private or public and there are also some sectoral considerations that impact on recruitment	Depending on whether the company is public or private, some variation exists	Recruitment practices differ depending on the nature of the company and the complexity of the work position to be filled	There is a mixed approach with all companies advertising skills, knowledge and experience required for the job – however there is varying degrees of transparency provided
Methods used: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsolicited applications • Local ads and tenders (open) • Aptitude tests and Interviews • Internal Headhunting • Apprentice Academies (larger companies only) 	Methods used: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local media ads • Industry-specific publications • Recruitment fairs • Social Media • Direct recruiting through HEI and schools • National Employment Agency • Regional Recruitment Campaigns 	Methods used: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job-search websites • Own corporate websites • Interviews where personality is assessed • Group interviews with existing employees 	Methods used: <p>Small companies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local ads and social media • Referrals and recommendations • Single Interview <p>Larger companies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated HRM • Outsources HRM • National Advertisements • Screening, Skills Demonstrations and Interviews 	Private Companies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job descriptions • Local advertisements • Use of a collective database of candidates • CV Review and Interview <p>Public Companies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public selections based on qualifications and Interviews 	Methods used: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local advertisements with job descriptions • Social media • Job fairs with schools and universities • Contact with ESS • Mix of internal and external avenues pursued • Public Companies must follow prescribed procedures 	Methods used.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal recommendations • Temporary employment agencies • Newspaper advertisements • Employment websites • Recruitment companies

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of focus group responses to this first research theme the following recommendations can be made for the use of ECVET and EU transparency tools in relation to recruitment practices in Europe:

1. ECVET and EU transparency tools can be useful in finding sector-specific employees from abroad, i.e. in the tourism sector for example, where qualifications and language skills may be required;



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2. Transparency instruments are useful in allowing applicants to accurately describing the knowledge, skills and competences they have acquired in their previous work experience. This should be promoted amongst HR specialists;
3. ECVET and EU transparency tools could be suitable for public organisations and companies. Despite the rigidity of their recruitment processes, public companies could use the EU tools to recruit participants from abroad through their public tendering process.

Research Theme: Skills Assessment and Training of Employees

Introduction to the Theme

The aim of this research theme is to gather insight into how companies ensure that their employees' training needs are identified and that suitable training opportunities are provided for their employees. By better understanding how companies provide training and development opportunities for their employees, ECVET goes Business partners will be better placed to advise HR managers on ways they could use ECVET and other EU transparency tools to upskill their employees.

Country Analysis

Research Question 2: Once recruited, do you offer training or up-skilling for employees? If yes, please provide details. What challenges, if any, do you face in finding and retaining employees with suitable skills?

This question was put to all participants of the focus group sessions which were hosted by ECVET goes Business project partners. The following is a summary of the responses collected to this research question, per partner country.

Austria

For certain jobs and positions, especially in the public sector, a point system is established which does not necessarily focus on competences needed. Most issues are also closely linked to recruitment practices in organisations and companies the identification of training needs is undertaken when employees join the company. This is similar for the training of employees which usually takes place when the employee is appointed; most commonly as initial vocational education and training (IVET). Different organisations and companies also follow different philosophies concerning future job perspectives; some openly talk about it from the beginning, and use this as



a motivation for the employee. Training needs assessment also takes place during internships. In some instances, internships are used as a way of finding ‘future employees’ so training here is very relevant and worthwhile for the company in the long-run.

The size of the organisation or company plays a crucial role in determining the frequency and quality of the training for employees, as usually the bigger the company, the more opportunities there are for employees as these schemes and processes are already well-developed.

Germany

Generally, in Germany companies, employees have to identify their training needs on their own and decide if it is worthwhile for them to undertake additional educational programmes. Whether or not they can undertake to complete one of these programmes, is dependent on size of the company; including, human, financial and time resources (they have to be replaced when being off; they lose time to work, etc.). Some focus group participants mentioned a lack of motivation among employees to undertake further training; others expressed that they have eager staff who want to take part in a seminar. Determining and responding to the training needs of an employee is responsibility of the HR Manager and is usually discussed with the employee during performance review interviews. In general, the most popular training programmes which employees request include: the Train-the-trainer qualification or non-accredited, one-off in-house training on a particular topic.

Participants expressed that often companies face a certain “fear” of losing their employees after they have completed this additional training, if they are suddenly ‘over-qualified’ for the job they are currently working in. However, despite this fear, they agree that the loss of an employee is not directly based on the further educational training they have received from the company but rather there are usually other factors and reasons which must lie within the company; adequately it means that they will be replaced adequately. Participants also agreed that often the results of further education training for employees can be hard to quantify.

Hungary

In the Hungarian focus group session, many differences were identified between the employee training practices of smaller and bigger companies’. Smaller firms need



new employees to work on their own as soon as possible, but there are some important positions which require additional competence and confidence – and in this regard, additional training can be required for senior positions in smaller companies. In contrast, medium-sized companies have structured educational programmes. Once new employees are hired, they work as a trainee first, then they work with a mentor; finally, after between 1 and 3 months they can work alone. The personal contact with a mentor is very important during the initial phase of working in the company.

In all companies, training opportunities for employees usually depends on the attitude of the management towards training and education. This can mean a preference for internal or external training providers, or a preference not to provide employee training at all. At HR consulting companies training opportunities are available for everyone; the team leader can make a decision regarding the annual training plan for the company at the beginning of the year and this allows the employees to participate in the newest training programmes on the market.

In the public sector the system is stricter; these companies have pre-determined training programmes which they can run. Employees can choose from the list of training usually provided, however these programmes tend to be inflexible and outdated in content.

Ireland

HR experts stated that skills are typically assessed through on the job performance and ability to complete the work in line with the position. Once hired, most companies have training policies and plans to up-skill their employees. These companies use a variety of training options to satisfy employee requirements, particularly in larger companies, with certain sectors are required to provide minimum training in terms of health and safety.

In smaller companies, lack of funding was highlighted as one of the main barrier to ensuring regular staff training. Annual performance reviews are used as an opportunity for both the employees and the employer to identify future training needs in line with both job-related skills and personal development goals of the employee.



Italy

All HR managers involved in the focus group asserted that companies, both public and private, have policies and plans in place to enhance their employees' skills by delivering a structured programme of training after the recruitment. During probationary periods, employees are asked to report any training needs they have in order to enhance their productivity within the company.

Slovenia

Most companies offer training to employees as part of their training policy. Under these policies, companies generally operate an annual training plan, which focuses initially on job-related skills, particularly in relation to technical skills. Where these training plans are being implemented in companies, future leaders within the company are expressly searched for and supported through training and mentoring services. Training needs are identified by the manager or supervisor and are discussed and agreed upon at the annual performance review interviews. The focus of providing training to employees is to ensure that their professional skills are permanently being upgraded.

In private companies, all types of training is provided including; accredited, non-accredited, formal, Continuous Professional Development (CPD), and these training programmes can be delivered by internal and external training providers. The content of training and education programmes is tailored to the needs of company regarding implementation of tasks and possible future needs of the company. In the public sector however there is a strong perception that HR strategy and training provision is weak – typically training is only provided to comply with legal requirements rather than focusing on employee development.

Spain

The majority of companies who were represented in the focus group had learning and development policies; only 3 companies recognised that they do not currently have a training plan for their employees. Where there is no training plan, training is usually provided for employees immediately when the training need is identified; but there is no policy or procedure to govern how employee requests for training are handled.



Most companies run regular internal training programmes, however if the need arises they will also send their employees out to attend external seminars and workshops which cover specific topics which are relevant to their work.

Training needs are identified by managers through observation, skills assessments, mentoring and by completing competence matrices with employees. Investment in training is linked to the hierarchical position of the worker.

Similarities and Differences

The companies who were represented at the focus group session spoke openly about their training and education plans and programmes for their employees; and from an analysis of the responses collected from focus group participants, the following similarities can be highlighted:

- Ø In general, all companies had some form of training plan for their employees.
- Ø The procedures for providing training differed slightly, but generally the training of employees is comparable across the consortium.
- Ø Employees are free to request training from their supervisors and /or managers. This is either identified as the training need arises, based on employee performance or at the annual employee performance review interview.

Despite the similarities in practices across the consortium, some differences were identified. Mostly these differences pertain to the size of the company and the attitude of the company towards training.

- Ø In smaller companies, HR managers and general managers usually require that new appointees are fully trained to complete all tasks associated with their new role. They often need new employees to be able to undertake a series of activities in a variety of departments, so transferable skills and adaptability are very important attributes for new employees in smaller companies to have.
- Ø Medium-sized and larger companies, tend to have structured training plans in place. They provide on-going training and education programmes to their employees, as well as mentoring for new employees where necessary. These companies usually allocate an annual budget for employee training and up-



skilling, and they tend to offer the majority of training in-house, with external seminars and workshops being offered where a specific training need is identified by the employee.

- Ø In the public sector, there is a general consensus that training is only provided as a legal requirement and not for the betterment of employee knowledge, skills and competences, and as such the provision of training in public organisations is considered to be weak across the consortium.

There is also some scepticism in companies with regard to the provision of training to staff. This includes the fear that once the employee is trained they will seek out alternative employment in other companies, as they are not ‘over-qualified’ for the job they are doing. This fear was expressed in the German focus group.

A summary of all findings to this research question can be viewed in the following table:

AT	DE	HU	IE	IT	SI	ES
Skills Assessment is typical carried out upon commencement of employment (iVET)	The level of skills assessment and training on offer depends on the size and resources of the company	Assessment and training offers depend on the size of the companies. Smaller companies wish for employees to be autonomous in terms of job performance	Skills are typically assessed through on the job performance and ability to complete the work in line with the position	Structured training path are put in place for employees following recruitment	Most companies operate annual training plans focused on job-related skills in the first instance particularly in relation to technical skills	The participating companies had learning and development policies
Different companies have different philosophies concerning future job perspectives	Preferred training is train-the-trainer, in-house or webinar (reducing the time away from the workplace)	Medium sized companies have structured educational programmes and in-company mentors	Most companies have training policies and plans and use a variety of training options to satisfy employee requirements – funding training is the main impediment for smaller companies	On the job performance is monitored and assessed for leadership skills in terms of problem solving and problem setting	Future leaders within the company are expressly searched for and supported	Most companies provide regular training interventions in line with TNAs and strategic plans
Size of the company can dictate the complexity of the assessment and training processes for employees: larger companies tend to focus on “application of competences”	Fear amongst companies’ that they might loose highly trained employees (greater mobility) Measure of abilities is the responsibility of HR and discussed at performance interviews	Most companies operate annual training plans: private companies tend to be more responsive to the market and technology changes in terms of employee training. Public bodies focus on statutory requirements for training	Annual performance reviews are used as an opportunity for both the employee and employer to identify future training needs in line with both job-related skills and personal development aspects Certain sectors are required to provide minimum training in terms of H&S	This function is typically carried out by HRM, where this exists within the companies	In the public sector however there is a strong perception that HR strategy and training provision is weak – typically provided to comply with legal requirements rather than focusing on employee development	Training needs are identified by managers through observation, skills assessments, mentoring and competence matrix. Investment in training is linked to the hierarchical position of the worker



Recommendations

Based on the analysis of focus group responses to this second research theme the following recommendations can be made for the use of ECVET and EU transparency tools in relation to the training of employees in Europe:

- Ø If an ECVET system was integrated into employee training plans, and if it was run in an efficient and transparent manner, this could lead to a shortening of the employee probationary period as the skills of an employee who has trained abroad would be more easily understood.
- Ø If ECVET was implemented and used and understood by companies, employees could attend specialised training overseas for a short period of time and their qualification could be easily readable once they return home to work. Tools such as Euroguidance and Europass can also be utilised to search and to document suitable training for employees abroad.
- Ø If ECVET and other EU Transparency tools are to be most effective in this regard, Europe should work towards creating an international database of employees and potential employees, where individuals and companies could register and advertise positions – this database could facilitate competence-based recruitment across Europe.

Research Theme: Current Pay Policy in your Company

Introduction to the Theme

The aim of this research theme is to gain a better understanding of the current pay policy in private and public, small, medium and large companies across Europe. The purpose of asking HR managers and senior staff this question is to gather insight into the factors which determine when an employee is due a pay rise and whether that is based on the expertise, qualifications and experience of the employee, the length of time the employee has been with the company or the list of responsibilities which are associated with the employee's role.

Country Analysis

Research Question 2: Do you have a pay policy in your company and how do you determine if an employee is due a pay rise? What are the criteria for



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determining pay rises? For example, is it an employee's skill-set, length of service, experience, job responsibility, etc.

This question was put to all participants of the focus group sessions which were hosted by ECVET goes Business project partners. The following is a summary of the responses collected to this research question, per partner country.

Austria

In the public sector in Austria, collective agreements regulate pay policy. Within private companies pay policy is flexible and dependent on the previous pay of the new employees and/or the basic salary which is outlined usually in the job description or at interview stage. In some cases, pay increases are linked to performance appraisals. It is very rare for pay to be linked to training achievements unless it is an academic qualification like a degree.

Germany

In Germany, pay policy is fixed by workers' union collective agreements, which are industry-wide agreements. However, CEOs can decide the final salaries of employees, provided that the basic pay scales are respected. It was widely agreed that a competitive salary is only one part of what motivates an employee to join a company; other motivational factors include a friendly working environment and team atmosphere. In general, education and training is not directly or automatically linked to an increase in salary.

Hungary

In smaller companies in Hungary, pay policy tends to be higher than the minimum requirements. In medium sized companies, salary can be used to motivate employees and ensure job satisfaction. In general, companies determine pay rises based on measurable performance indicators. However, within the public service, the pay policy is very strict.

Ireland

In unionised workplaces in Ireland, pay is determined by collective bargaining; with agreed pay scales in operation in all sectors. In many private companies, pay policy is determined by the CEO or Board of Management, and is based on a combination of industry standards, affordability, cost of living and health of the company finances.



Given the economic recession, pay policy has been stagnant for many years; but there are some signs of positive pay adjustments in public and private sector but not at the same rates. Where cuts have been made to public organisations, there is now a two-tiered pay scale in operation, between employees who were recruited prior to January 2011 and those who were hired after this date. In some instances, such as those employed as primary and post-primary teachers, for example, there can be a variation of 30% in the difference in pay between colleagues, based on when they were appointed. Remuneration is often a combination of salary, health insurance and access to pension schemes.

Italy

In Italy, in general, the pay policy of companies is usually fixed and ruled by collective national agreements. As a general rule, wage increases are determined by contracts of employment, with rises in salary typically linked to qualitative and quantitative objective systems.

Slovenia

In Slovenia, it is standard practice to measure work performance on a monthly basis. This assessment of performance is then used to determine the salary of the employee; meaning that the outcome of the assessment can increase or decrease the employees' rate of pay. More so than in any other country, in Slovenia salary is directly related to job performance, productivity and output. In many private companies, pay policy is decided on by the Director, CEO or Board of Management of a company. Non-monetary rewards are also offered as motivational tools for employees.

Spain

Most companies who were interviewed in Spain agreed that they have a pay policy in place. Their pay policies usually comprise set criteria which are used to set pay levels. These criteria include aspects of the employee's role such as level of responsibility, experience, impact on business, specialisation, etc. Pay rises and pay policies are used as a tool in employee motivation. Depending on the status of unions in the companies, some have collective agreements.



Similarities and Differences

As part of the ECVET goes Business focus group sessions, the issues of pay policy in companies and pay increases for employees were discussed at length. From an assessment of the responses given above, the following similarities can be identified:

- Ø There is some form of pay policy in place in all companies who took part in this research process.
- Ø Where workers' unions are established, pay policy is usually governed by collective agreements.
- Ø In private companies, the pay policy and pay scale for new employees is determined by a range of factors, but is ultimately decided by the Director, CEO and/or Board of Management.

Despite these similarities, the following differences have also been observed across the project consortium:

- Ø Non-monetary rewards are offered to new employees as motivational tools in Slovenia, Germany and Ireland; however this is in contrast to Hungary and Austria where the salary and the opportunity to receive a pay rise are used as the main tools for increasing employee motivation.
- Ø Pay rises are stagnant in Ireland, where a two-tier pay system is in place in the public sector – a similar situation was not expressed in any other partner country.
- Ø Pay can be determined by educational attainment and previous work experience of the employee, as is the case in Ireland and Spain; however this is in contrast to Slovenia, Hungary, Austria and Germany where pay is not determined by training or education of the employee but rather based on the employee's performance.



A summary of all findings to this research question can be viewed in the following table:

AT	DE	HU	IE	IT	SI	ES
In the public sector, collective agreements regulate pay policy	Pay policy is fixed by workers union (industry-wide) collective agreements	In smaller companies, pay policy tends to be higher than the minimum requirements	In unionised workplaces, collective bargaining and pay scales are agreed and in operation	Pay policy is generally fixed and ruled by collective national agreement	Work performance in many cases is measured monthly and directly impacts on salary (plus/minus)	Most companies have a pay policy
Within private companies pay policy is flexible and dependent on previous pay of the new employee and/or a basic salary is set.	However, CFO can decide final salaries once basic are respected	In medium sized companies, salary can be used to motivate employees and ensure job satisfaction	In many private companies, pay policy is determined by the CEO or Board and based on a combination of industry standards, affordability, cost of living, and health of the company finances.	Wage increases defined by contracts of employment	More so than in any other country, in Slovenia salary is directly related to job performance, productivity and output	There is set criteria used to set pay levels such as level of responsibility, experience, impact on business, specialisation, etc.
In some cases, pay increases are linked to performance appraisals	Salary is only part of the motivation to join a company other factors include working climate and team atmosphere	In general, companies determine pay rises based on measurable performance indicators	Given the economic recession, pay policy has been stagnant for many years; but there are some signs of positive pay adjustments in public and private sector but not at the same rates.	Pay increases are typically linked to qualitative and quantitative objective systems	In many private companies, pay policy is decided on by the Director/CEO.	Pay rises and pay policies are used as a motivational tool
It is very rare for pay to be linked to training achievements unless it is an academic qualifications like a degree	Educational training is not directly / automatically linked to increase in salary	Within the public service, the pay policy is very strict	Remuneration is often a combination of salary, health insurance and access to pension scheme.		Non-monetary rewards are offered as motivational tools for employees	Depending on the status of unions in the companies, some have collective agreements

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of focus group responses to this third research theme the following recommendations can be made for the use of ECVET and EU transparency tools in relation to pay policy in Europe:

- Ø Where pay is determined by previous work experience and educational attainment, transparency tools such as the Europass CV, Certificate Supplement and Diploma Supplement would be useful for HR managers to promote during the recruitment process. By encouraging applicants to send their CVs using these templates, this will ensure that all applicant qualifications and work experience are easily readable and understandable.
- Ø The use of tools such as the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO), will help HR managers to set the required skills and



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competences for particular roles within their companies. This will be useful where pay scale in a company is determined by the employees' performance in work tasks.

Research Theme: Working in a Smart/Knowledge Economy

Introduction to the Theme

The aim of this research theme is to better understand any challenges which companies may face in recruiting suitably qualified candidates for modern business, with the required skill sets for employment in the Smart/Knowledge Economy. This research theme aims to find out if companies are struggling to find suitable employees for modern business positions, with the required IT aptitude and soft-skills to work in a modern professional environment.

This research theme also aims to ascertain if HR managers and general managers believe there has been a shift in company culture and recruitment practices as a result of the Smart/Knowledge Economy. By gaining this insight, ECVET goes Business project partners will be better placed to understand the challenges faced by HR experts in recruiting employees with a suitable modern skill set, and partners will also be better informed to advise HR experts how to use EU transparency tools such as EURES, Europass and Euroguidance when attracting the right employees from abroad.

Country Analysis

Research Question 4: With the global business environment becoming more focused on using smart technologies and processes, what challenges does your company face in this regard?

This question was put to all participants of the focus group sessions which were hosted by ECVET goes Business project partners. The following is a summary of the responses collected to this research question, per partner country.

Austria

In Austria, in order to attract suitable employee for the smart technology sector, companies tend to target students from universities through contacts they have in the career offices of universities. Therefore, recruiting employees to this sector is not



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a very difficult task in Austria, because companies have very strong connections with universities. As well as this, companies have access to a community of experts and specialists who connect with other experts in online forums and thematic communities. Companies can also target these specialists through these online communities to recruit suitably qualified personnel.

To retain these highly qualified employees, companies use a variety of incentives from a competitive salary, to other benefits such as working flexible hours, getting a car space, having their own office, etc.

Germany

When participants in the German focus group were asked this question, they did not recognise the terms SMART or Knowledge economy. They also expressed that they have experienced difficulties in finding specialist employees with the required soft skills for modern business practices. Companies who were represented at this focus group also agreed that the type of specialisation required from employees is dependent on the industry sector.

Hungary

At the focus group in Hungary, all company representatives present agreed that basic IT skills are very important in modern business, and new employees need to have these skills or there should be a pathway to them developing skills in this area. Participants also agreed that there is a need to revise the way recruitment is undertaken both as a company but also as an applicant because applicants need to know that they can search for jobs and apply for jobs all online. In terms of company performance in this area, there are some deficiencies as companies need to develop new systems for recruiting employees through some of the new technologies and platforms which are available now.

Ireland

There are skills shortages in these sectors in Ireland at present and companies face a lot of challenges to find employees with language and high-level ICT skills. Small businesses, unless directly working in the ICT sector, are not fully prepared for the SMART economy and the wage incentives are not present to attract the highly skilled workers. This is a big challenge which is faced by small businesses in Ireland as



they cannot compete with the multi-national corporations who offer very generous salaries and benefits packages.

Italy

All companies who were represented at the Italian focus group session expressed that IT forms a central part of the way their companies operate and as such they have updated their systems and practices to be based around the use of IT, and their employees and therefore required to have well-developed IT skills. These companies agreed that IT forms a central part of the way they work and how they interact internally with other departments in their companies and also externally with their clients, stakeholders and contacts. These companies did not state that they faced any challenges in finding employees with the required soft skills for modern business practices, but rather they agreed that there was a need to upgrade their own company practices to keep up with the needs and skills of employees.

Slovenia

Participants in the focus group in Slovenia agreed that the SMART/Knowledge economy represents a change in corporate culture in Slovenia. For some companies, the IT literacy of employees is part of this new company culture and has become a pillar of their employees' development. IT has become so well integrated into this new company culture, that it forms a part of the daily working-life of employees. However, some companies are still only slowly reacting to this change to the SMART/Knowledge Economy and to the practice of integrating IT into their daily work, because of the significant financial resources which are needed to make this change and to invest in the required IT infrastructure.

Similarly, knowledge of foreign languages in some companies was seen as a prerequisite for success in the knowledge economy and one company actually provides English-language courses to their employees for this reason.

Spain

Training employees to work competently in the SMART Economy is seen as a major challenge to companies in Spain. All participants in the focus group, apart from two companies, agreed that there were challenges in the field of HR in relation to recruiting for the SMART Economy. These participants agreed that the biggest



challenges related to findings employees with suitable skills, up-skilling existing employees without these skills so that they can use IT in their daily working-life with ease and ensuring that employees maintain a healthy work-life balance when technology is involved because employees can be contactable 24-hours a day through IT whether it be through email, social media, etc.

Four companies who were interviewed agreed that there is potential for the SMART Economy and the use of IT to impact on their companies' culture. The majority of companies interviewed stated that they specifically recruit for skills linked to the SMART economy and that this has impacted on their recruitment practices.

Similarities and Differences

All countries who were interviewed as part of these focus group sessions are at varying stages of development within their adaptation to the knowledge economy. While the main similarity is the agreement that there is a need for basic IT skills in today's modern business world, there are a greater number of differences in the ways in which the partner countries are responding to the SMART/Knowledge Economy. These can be summarised as follows:

- ∅ In Austria, there is no issue with recruiting highly qualified employees with the required soft skills for the SMART Economy because they have good working connections with universities who will direct graduates to employment opportunities in these companies. Similarly companies in Italy stated that they are advanced in their integration of IT into their daily work, and they similarly have experienced no difficulties in recruiting employees with the skills required for the SMART Economy.
- ∅ In contrast in Germany, the term SMART Economy was unknown among the focus group participants, and they expressed that they experience difficulty in finding suitable employees with these skills.
- ∅ While the integration of IT and technology into business practices is better developed in Hungary and Ireland, and while the companies interviewed are aware of the importance of having employees with these soft skills, HR managers in these countries agreed that they did experience some challenges in recruiting employees with these skills.



Ø In Spain and in Slovenia, challenges have been identified by HR specialists interviewed although they are facing difference challenges in adapting to the SMART Economy. In Slovenia, the challenge lies in how to change company culture to better integrate with the SMART Economy, whereas in Spain the challenge faced by HR specialists is in trying to up-skill existing employees to use IT in their daily work, and trying to find suitably qualified employees with the soft skills needed to work competently through IT.

A summary of all findings to this research question can be viewed in the following table:

AT	DE	HU	IE	IT	SI	ES
Attracting employee for this sector is through contact with Universities	Participants did not recognise the terms SMART or Knowledge economy	Agreement at the focus group that basic IT skills and its development are very important	There are skills shortages in these sectors in Ireland at present and challenges to find employees with language and high-level ICT skills	All companies are characterised by ICT-centric systems	SMART/Knowledge economy represents a change in corporate culture	Training employees to operation in the SMART economy is seen as a major challenge
There are established and strong connections The community of practice and knowledge is strong and specialists meet online and through various fora	Difficulties in finding specialist employees to address this area Specialisation is dependent on the industry sector	In terms of company performance in this area, there are some deficiencies as companies need to develop new systems	Small businesses unless directly working in the ICT sector are not fully prepared for the SMART economy and the wage incentives are not present to attract the highly skilled workers – they cannot compete with the multi-national corporation	ICT plays a key role in terms of operative relationship internally and externally	Knowledge of foreign languages in some companies was seen as a prerequisite for success in the knowledge economy.	There is potential impact on companies' culture Most companies stated that they specifically recruit for skills links the SMART economy

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of focus group responses to this fourth research theme the following recommendations can be made for the use of ECVET and EU transparency tools in relation to working in the SMART/Knowledge Economy in Europe:

Ø Where companies face difficulty in recruiting employees with appropriate soft skills for work in IT, EU instruments such as Europass, Euroguidance and EURES could be very effective in helping managers to find employees with suitable skill sets from abroad – and also in advertising their vacancy across Europe instead of just advertising locally. In this way, where there is an IT



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skill shortage, for example in Spain or in small businesses in Ireland, it would be possible to recruit employees for these positions from abroad.

- Ø Similarly, where language skills are a prerequisite for employment, as is the case in some companies in Slovenia, the Europass Language Passport would be a good template for companies to promote so that they ensure they are employing the best person with the most suitable language skills for the job.
- Ø Where companies are required to upgrade their recruitment practices to be more in-line with the SMART Economy, the EU transparency tools and ECVET in particular provide good templates for these companies to use. Because these templates focus on making qualifications comparable across country borders to encourage mobility, on describing experience and expertise in terms of competences and on emphasising language and IT skills, they are already comparable with the aims of the SMART Economy and so they should be more widely used in HR practices as part of this move to modernise business in Europe.

Research Theme: Use of Transparency Instruments

Introduction to the Theme

The aim of this research theme is to better understand how European transparency tools are currently being used in HR practices across Europe, if they are being used at all; and also ascertain which tools are used most commonly, if any; and how these tools can be better integrated into HR practices in the future.

Country Analysis

Research Question 5: Are European Transparency Instruments used in the recruitment and employee training practices in your company? If yes, please provide details on which Instruments are used and why they were chosen? If no, are you aware of European Transparency Instruments?

This question was put to all participants of the focus group sessions which were hosted by ECVET goes Business project partners. The following is a summary of the responses collected to this research question, per partner country.



Austria

In Austria, participants agreed that ECVET and EU transparency tools are almost completely unknown in HR practices. They are virtually unused by the business community, and HR specialists who attended the focus group were not even aware that these tools had been integrated into VET systems in Europe. While the idea of using these tools was welcomed by the focus group participants, there was a general consensus that a lot of training and support will be needed to fully integrate these tools into common HR practices and policies.

Germany

When asked about their experience in using EU transparency tools, none of the participants were aware of or familiar with ECVET or other transparency instruments. While this was not known, there was a general consensus in the group that the integration of the ECVET model and other EU transparency tools could be possible in HR practices, and could be inevitable within the sphere of professional education.

HR experts who attended the focus group agreed that ECVET and its use is dependent on the industry sector; for example, professions such as waiters, nurses and executive positions could be easily aligned with the ECVET model; whereas, positions which require competence in decision-making ability and which come with greater responsibility cannot be standardized within the ECVET parameters.

HR professionals in the group also expressed that they do not see the value of integrating the ECVET model into their practices, as their employees can train and acquire all necessary skills and competences in colleges and schools at home, and so there is no need for them to go abroad to study and therefore they do not need ECVET to ensure that their training is accredited and recognised at home.

Hungary

HR experts and managers were familiar of the Europass CV. They agreed that they liked this CV template, because it is well-structured and includes all of the important information; but this template does not allow for applicants to personalise their CV and this was seen as a negative thing. They expressed that the Europass CV is usually used by job seekers from abroad. Experts were also aware of the Europass Language Passport which is used to provide additional information on an applicant's



language skills. All other transparency instruments are not well known by these HR experts.

Ireland

In Ireland, transparency instruments are not well known. Due to the fact that some VET professionals attended the focus group, they were aware of the tools associated with Europass, ECVET and EQF; however, these tools had only been implemented in VET provision and validation, and had not yet been adapted to HR practices within these VET institutions. Among the other participants, some were aware of the Europass CV and Language Passport; however they remarked that they only came into contact with these templates when applicants from abroad applied for positions in their companies.

There was a general consensus that some of these tools could be implemented in HR in Ireland, but that considerable training and resources would be required to promote these tools to HR managers and to train them in how to use them effectively. There was also agreement that there would be some opposition to their widespread use in HR in Ireland because people are reluctant to change and to try new formats when they are already fully competent in the use of other tools and resources. This attitude among HJR professionals could pose a real challenge to the implementation of ECVET and other EU transparency tools in Ireland.

Italy

In Italy the transparency tools associated with Europass and the European Qualifications Framework are known; however they are not widely used. The companies who were represented at the focus group agreed that the lack of use of these tools is most likely due to the “bureaucratic path” which most companies are forced to follow when implementing new strategies and resources.

Slovenia

Of the ten companies who were interviewed in Slovenia, five companies were not aware of any EU transparency tools and as a result they do not use them; two companies had heard of the EU transparency instruments but did not use them and three companies had heard of the EU transparency tools but all three had only used the Europass tools in their recruitment practices – with one company using the



Europass Diploma Supplement for recruiting more highly educated individuals and the other two companies using the Europass CV template.

Spain

All participants expressed that they had not heard of, and therefore did not use, the EU transparency tools in their recruitment practices and in employee training. When asked if the use of ECVET would help them to attract employees with specific skills which their company currently needs, four companies stated that they did not know how these tools could impact on their recruitment practices, and the other six companies stated that the tools could possibly impact on how the company recruits employees. Out of all of the focus group participants, only two companies seem to fully understand the topic of transparency tools; with only one company agreeing that the use of ECVET could help in attracting employees with specific skills which their company currently needs.

Similarities and Differences

Across all seven focus groups of 76 participants, almost all companies stated that they either “did not use” or “did not know” about the EU transparency tools and when considered further they were not sure how these tools could be used in HRM processes. While there were some slight differences in the awareness of these tools among the HR professionals in the focus groups, in general the only tools that were used were the Europass CV, Language Passport and Diploma Supplement. It is clear from the findings from this research theme that considerable effort is required in order to promote the EU transparency tools and to ensure that they are fully implemented in HR practices across Europe.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of focus group responses to this fifth research theme the following recommendations can be made for the use of ECVET and EU transparency tools in relation to improving the use of transparency tools in HR practices in Europe:

- Ø A lot of effort is required to promote ECVET and the other EU transparency tools among HR professionals. At present they are known and used somewhat in VET provision and validation; however in order to be better



implemented in HR practices, a lot of effort will be required to promote the tools and to train professionals in how to use the tools.

- Ø HR professionals may be reluctant to implement new tools and resources when they are accustomed to working in a certain way and with certain tools. For this reason, when project partners are promoting these tools with HR professionals, it is important to emphasise the value of using these tools.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Focus group participants from across the consortium were from a variety of economic sectors and the companies who were represented varied greatly in size. From a review of the outcomes of this research process, some observations can be made; namely that smaller companies are more flexible both in their recruitment procedures and in their pay policy. Smaller companies tend to have a pay policy which is less focused on results, production levels and performance of employees; however smaller companies also usually prefer to employ individuals who can undertake several tasks within different departments of the company. In contrast, larger companies prefer individuals with specific and particular skills, and they also tend to follow a stricter structure in assessing employee performance when setting and reviewing pay policies. Furthermore, in terms of training and employee development, larger companies are better placed to offer employees more frequent training and development opportunities; a greater variety of training opportunities and to either bring in external experts to deliver training in-house or to send employees to thematic seminars and workshops outside of the company, depending on the identified training needs. Smaller companies also tended to be more receptive to change and more open to adapting to new methods and the use of new resources in their HR practices. This is something which project partners should bear in mind when they are recruiting participants for the pilot testing phase of the ECVET goes Business project.

In terms of the knowledge and use of the EU transparency tools, following on from this research, it is clear that the tools which are most commonly known and used in Europe are the Europass documents, namely the CV template, the Language Passport and the Diploma Supplement. Of these tools, the CV template is



the most commonly used, but even this was criticised by the HR experts for being too uniform and for not allowing the applicants' personality to come through.

Among the companies who were interviewed, there was some agreement that because the business community is so unaware of ECVET and other European transparency instruments, that these tools must have been developed without first consulting with the business community to see what they might want the instruments to look like, how they could use them and what would have been beneficial to them to be included in the tools in terms of recruitment practices, pay policy and human resource management (HRM). For this reason, the business community in some countries were not supportive of integrating these tools into their HR processes and procedures.

Despite these somewhat negative comments, HR experts who attended the focus group sessions generally agreed that a widespread dissemination campaign which promotes the use and value of the tools to the business community could be effective in securing better buy-in from the business community in using these tools. As well as the promotion of these tools, experts highlighted the need to create and disseminate user-friendly and practical training resources to train business or VET professionals in the use of these tools. Another recommendation for how to ensure the widespread use of ECVET and the EU transparency tools was to campaign for the tools to be introduced through a top-down approach, whereby their use would be compulsory and backed by relevant policy-makers. While this is not within the remit of this project, the development work which this project team will undertake in relation to these tools could act as a best practice example for the future implementation of these tools in Europe.

At the beginning of this research phase, very little was known among project partners with regard to the awareness and use of ECVET and the EU transparency tools by the business community in each partner country; particularly to how or if they are used in HR practices and procedures. Following the conclusion of the research and the review of the research findings, the following recommendations can be made which will inform the future development work of the project team:



- ∅ The first consideration concerns raising the awareness of the EU tools within the business community: what they are and how can they be used?
 - It is clear from the outcomes of the research that the EU transparency tools are not known in the field of HR and they are not used. Where tools were known they tended to be the Europass documents, which is unsurprising seeing as these document templates are directly related to the mobility of workers across Europe and in helping these workers to find work abroad;
- ∅ Information which is provided to HR professionals needs to be practical in nature; free from the jargon and the theoretical language of the EU and needs to clearly explain how these tools can be used in HR and how they can be beneficial to HR practices across Europe;
- ∅ There needs to be a standard, whole-of-Europe approach to the implementation of these tools; some respondents even suggested that making the use of the tools compulsory in HR practices might help;
- ∅ Some companies saw benefit in the EU tools but others failed to be convinced of their relevance – for this reason, partners need to emphasise the value of using the tools in HRM to the companies they are working with;
- ∅ Overall, the majority of participants were interested in the topic and requested additional information and support in this field which is an encouraging sign for the project consortium.

The outcome of this research process is that 76 companies were interviewed and made aware of the EU transparency tools. Of these 76, the majority of participants were open and receptive to learning about the EU transparency tools and wanted to be kept informed of project progress. Based on these results, the project partners will begin to identify how the transparency instruments can be mapped onto the various HR processes. This process will form the basis for the *ECVET goes Business* HR Handbook and Training Programme that will be delivered from autumn 2016.

