

Using the principles of ECVET and EQF for the labour market: the success story of the YEBISU e.e. partnership

‘Face to face’ with André Huigens (Wellant College, the Netherlands, and partnership leader of YEBISU e.e.) and André Hertog (managing director of Irado, the Netherlands), by Pauline van den Bosch (ECVET Secretariat)

Can you explain why YEBISU e.e. is a good example of ECVET for the labour market?

Mr. André Huigens: “The project is a partnership that can be seen as a community of practitioners. Twelve companies from eight countries and four educational institutes as well as a branch organization and researching institutes are members of this group.

“e.e.” stands for Empowers Employees. YEBISU is the story of a company working on their employees’ skills development. We strongly believe that this is essential for the future of companies. We can call it an ECVET experience but in reality it is all covered under the umbrella of the EQF. Actually we are convinced that you cannot implement ECVET, without the EQF”.

The demand for this initiative came from companies. They see ECVET/ EQF as a solution for their human resource and labour market challenges. Can you explain this?

Mr André Huigens: “We started some years ago with the first YEBISU project.

It was on the initiative of Van der Spek group, a Dutch gardening company. Van der Spek group is still the leading company in the YEBISU history, but now we are exploiting and using the YEBISU principles and tools in other contexts, other companies and other levels as well. The most important result of the first YEBISU project was a common understanding concerning the EQF among the partners, which can serve as a basis for the development of units of learning outcomes. The reason that we look to Irado as an example for this interview is Irado’s focus on their lower level employees.

In our previous YEBISU project we developed a framework where we described the EQF descriptors for each level more in detail. So, not only in terms of knowledge, skills and competences; we went far beyond this. We also described the change, adaptability, range of work, flexibility etc. for each EQF level. The reason is that companies are convinced that these elements are often more important than just the skills and knowledge. We made this framework for entrepreneurial competences. We are now using both this framework and the ECVET principles (mainly the



empowersemployees

units of learning outcomes) in a very efficient way, which makes employees more competitive in the market”.

Mr. André Hertog: “I will explain it from our company’s point of view. Irado is a Dutch company; we collect garbage, maintain the public greens, and do street cleaning of the public space in parts of the Netherlands. We are relatively small and therefore vulnerable in an internationally operating market. Irado is a service provider for the cities, so it is in the interest of these cities to get our services for the lowest price. We continuously want to improve, develop and distinguish ourselves. For this reason, we started to develop all employees of Irado from service provider for the cities to partners in business. The biggest challenge is the experience

of learning in different contextual situations and handling the limitations of mental models.

To give some examples of what we do in terms of empowerment of employees: Irado trains unemployed people to adjust their work discipline in a way they can easier find a job. We provide training for those who are looking for a job. We also provide work for people with a barrier to the labour market because of a disability. This branch is changing fast. We require that our employees continuously adapt their working attitude and that they are aware of the core values of our company. Employees are working in a constantly changing context, which requires different type of skills and competences”.

How does it work in practice? Do you use the concept of the Learning outcomes?

Mr. André Huigens: “In the project, one of the steps was to do research concerning companies’ expectations

with regard to their employees’ behaviour. We came to the conclusion that it is all about intrapreneurial behavior. In Finland they were called the ‘hidden competences’. We worked this out in a profile and the companies translated our profile in a practical way in concrete units of learning outcomes. People are trained according to these units.”

Mr. André Hertog: “About 60% of the employees are handling their work on EQF level 1 and 2. Irado is working on Intrapreneurial skills, which can be seen as generic skills, professional skills and socio- emotional skills. Those can easily divided in ECVET units. For example: the employees of level 1 and 2 are trained in units with Dutch language skills to make sure they can read the safety and handling instructions of new machinery. They also train them in units with professional skills. All the employees at Irado follow a unit on social and emotional skills and competences. All these development/training sessions (divided in units) take place during working hours and we lead this process.

The result is not only that people gain professional skills; we see that people are now more conscious about themselves, about what they can learn and what they want to learn. It changes the way that people think and act. We notice that it contributes to better values within our organization. Employees are more responsible and feel ownership for what they do.”

Do you feel this concept of units of learning outcomes is sufficient to understand each other, both between countries and as within one country between the labour market and educational institutes?

Mr. André Hertog: “The language of the learning outcomes is the language of the companies. This might be the big difference between the labour market and educational institutes. The concept of units makes it easy to develop small learning units with outcomes based descriptors for training of the lower level workers. In this way we can see what

The activities of the YEBISU e.e. partnership and its effect on the employers and employees

- A framework for entrepreneurial behavior
- Profiles with learning outcomes for the competences
- 8 best practice cases



- Changing the way people think about themselves
- Changing the way people act
- Changing the way people lead, educate and learn

Source: PowerPoint presentation of YEBISU e.e. “What’s your story?”

our workers know, understand and are able to do, and it helps us with our recruitment practice. It also helps us identify what training is needed.

EQF is a common language for the YEBISU partners and it makes sure that we understand each other. For example, the partners fully understand each other when we speak about the level of certain professional profile, in a certain context. The ECVET concepts, like the units, are used for the individual development plans of the employees. We are expecting the VET institutes in our regions to carry out the validation and recognition of these individual learning units. We, as a company, have to take care of the accumulation in our job profiles. We are convinced that learning horizontally is as important or maybe even more important than vertical learning. This means development within the levels and not focusing from one level to a higher level as the VET institutions are accustomed to doing.”

“The secret of its success is the intrinsic motivation, the involvement of the management and the theory of the learning organization together with the open dialogue between the YEBISU partners.”

Learning from your experiences, what is needed to make ECVET workable for the labour market and companies. What are the success factors?

Mr. André Hertog: “The VET institutions should understand that learning in a training centre is not the only way to achieve knowledge, skills and competences. Learning can take place in all kinds of circumstances and contexts.

That makes employees more motivated for lifelong learning. I think that this is also one of the biggest challenges: to make employees more aware of their own role in the company. When employees are aware of their own involvement, they can connect themselves to team thinking, team learning and the overall mission of the company. This is what makes the companies in YEBISU more competitive compared to other companies. However, I have to admit that this is a slow process. It takes time. We started with this process in 2002.”

Mr. André Huigens: “The secret of its success is the intrinsic motivation, the involvement of the management and the theory of the learning organization together with the open dialogue between the YEBISU partners. For this the European instruments are a big help. Borderless learning is what the EQF, ECVET and its instruments are working for.” ■

Read more on the project's [website](#).