

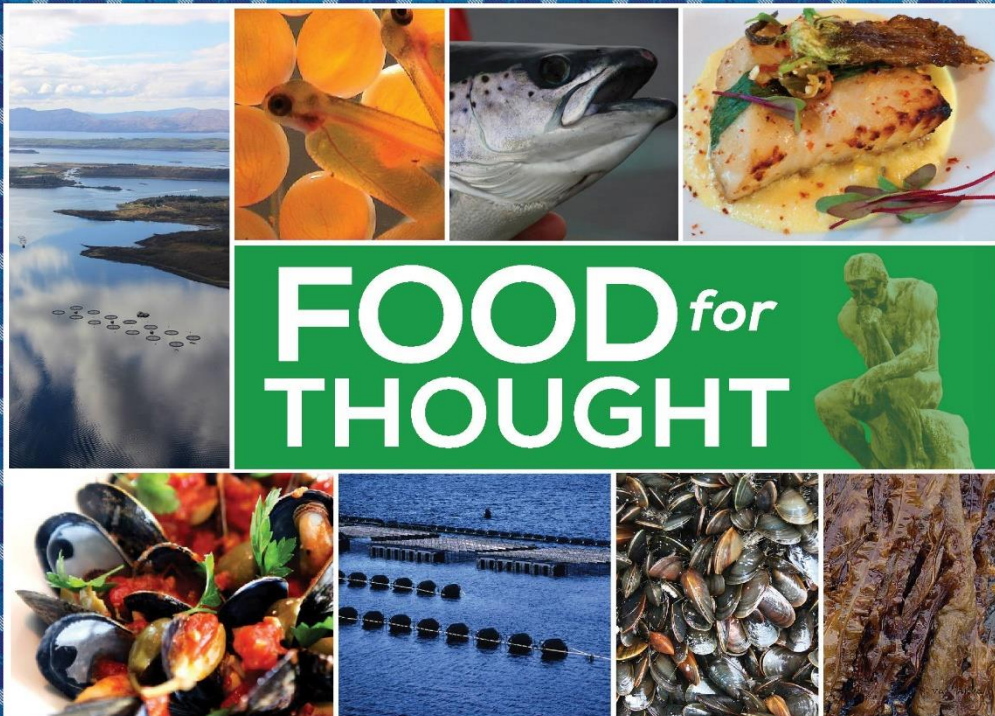
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# Monitoring past, present and future strategies for ECVET implementation in Aquaculture (AQUATNET members)

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## Introduction

The setting up of a European credit transfer system for vocational education and training was first broached in the 2002 Copenhagen Declaration, along with the proposed integration of existing instruments such as the European CV, certificate and diploma supplements, the Common European framework of reference for languages and the EUROPASS into one single framework. Following on from preparatory work carried out by the European Technical Working Group on ECVET (2004), the Commission set out its proposal for ECVET, a system for the transfer, accumulation and recognition of learning outcomes in Europe (SEC (2006) 1461). In anticipation of its acceptance as a VET credit transfer system equivalent to ECTS in Higher Education, the ECVET system was set up by the European Parliament and the European Council on 18 June 2009 with the following timescale: ECVET Implementation procedures to be in place by 2012; report and monitoring of progress in 2013 with final evaluation of progress in 2014. The present study demonstrates how these changes and reforms were presented to institutions in the field of Aquaculture, Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management within the AQUA-TNET network, and their reactions to these events. The sample was composed of the members of the AQUA-TNET Network. The approach successfully incentivised its partners since a higher percentage of partners (54 %) have a life-long Learning (LLL) strategy in place than the HE organisations surveyed by the European Universities Association (average 39 %) (Eleftheriou and Seixas, 2015). The present study is at this time of particular interest to the aquaculture community for several reasons. Aquaculture studies at under-graduate and postgraduate levels are of necessity multi-disciplinary, with a strong component of required practical work. The successful development of ECVET with its use of learning outcomes could have a transformative influence on European aquaculture courses. However, the development of ECVET as equivalent to the highly successful ECTS system has stalled, for reasons given in the Commission's final evaluation report and which are reflected in the present study. In addition, the launch of ESCO (European Skills/Competences Qualifications and Occupations) in 2014 as part of the EU 2020 Initiative in 2014 seems to present a more flexible and accessible alternative than the top-heavy administrative work required to implement ECVET. ESCO (<https://ec.europa.eu/esco/home>), provides occupational profiles for all European industry sectors, linked to skills and competencies which are set out in terms of learning outcomes, thus facilitating cooperation between education/training and labour market stakeholders.

## Methodology

The survey targeted universities, research institutions, industry, associations and others in the project. The survey was designed and pre-tested and then put online with help of LimeSurvey. The email of each partner of AQUA-TNET was inserted in the programme and a specific link was created for each contact. This methodology avoided people answering more than once. The number of institutions represented in responses was 37 from 16 different countries.

## Results and Discussion

Analysis of the responses demonstrated that 89% of responses were from universities and research institutes, which reflects the composition of the AQUA-TNET Network. The institutions concerned carried out courses or training mainly in aquaculture, followed by aquatic resources management and lastly fisheries. Though the course delivery in operation is mostly face-to-face, nevertheless blended-learning and e-learning are well represented with values near 30% (31% and 26% respectively). The total numbers of teachers and students involved in LLL in each institution, was not clear because several respondents did not make a full response. There is evidence that institutions did not provide good information about the ECVET system because 79% of responses said that their information had come from outside their institution. We did not investigate where they had received their information from but during the LLL Workshop it was mentioned that almost all participants had been informed about ECVET by the work carried out by Workpackage 5 (AQUATNET). Less than 50% of the institutions could put the ECVET system of credits into operation in their institutions. More than 60% of institutions stated that they had never used the ECVET system of credits in their LLL courses. Only 53% said that they used the EQF (European Qualifications Framework) as a reference for NQF (National Qualifications Framework) concerning LLL. This demonstrated the low implementation of the ECVET system in these fields and it would appear that a lot of work would have to be done to ensure the implementation of ECVET as a regular practice. 65% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that was a need to establish the ECVET system of credit points in education and training and a majority (58%) agreed that the ECVET system of credits should be put in force as soon as possible. This was in contrast to the findings of the European Commission Report (European Commission, 2014): *"The most valuable elements of ECVET as perceived by stakeholders were the (units of) learning outcomes and the ECVET documents (Memoranda of Understanding and Learning Agreements), but there was no particular relevance or demand for credit points due to their unclear technical specifications. There is considerable potential and support for greater integration of these elements of ECVET with other EU tools in the context of the European Area of Skills and Qualifications."* 71 % of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that ECVET is important for mobility which is in accordance with the above-mentioned report of the European Commission (2014). 61 % of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that should be equivalence between ECVET credit points and ECTS. This is an aspect referred to in the report of European Commission (2014): *"ECTS and ECVET have different purposes and cater for the needs of different stakeholders, therefore the priority would be not to merge those instruments but promote their interrelation with particular reference to learning outcomes rather than credit points"*.

## Conclusions

89% of responses were from universities and research institutes, which reflects the composition of the AQUA-TNET Network. 79% of responses said that their information concerning the ECVET changes and reforms had come from outside their institution, mainly from the work carried out by a coregroup of the AQUATNET network itself. Less than 50% of the respondent institutions were able to put the ECVET system of credits into operation in their respective institutions. Tellingly, and in line with the CEDEFOP Monitoring Report (CEDEFOP, 2013) comment concerning 'lack of readiness of institutions' more than 60% of institutions stated that they had never used the ECVET system of credits in their LLL courses. Only 53% said that they used the EQF as a reference for NQF concerning LLL. This demonstrated the low implementation of the ECVET system in these fields and it would appear that a lot of work would have to be done to allow the implementation of ECVET as a regular practice. Nevertheless, 65% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that was a need to establish the ECVET system of credit points in education and training with a majority (58%) agreeing that the ECVET system of credits should be put in force as soon as possible.

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