

E-learning Course in Organic Food Retailing in Bulgaria

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Abstract. The current paper presents results from the Transfer of Innovation Project titled: “ECVET-based training of trainers in organic food retailing to „EcoQualify“ Quality Assurance System” (ECVET-EcoQualify, № 2013-1-BG1-LEO05-08698). The main project aim is to create an e-learning training course for teachers/trainers and tutors/instructors oriented to offer them the abilities needed to design, plan and distribute training courses based on the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the European Qualification Framework (EQF) in a very specific subject field - organic food retailing. The paper presents the structure of the e-learning course, the main topics in the training contents, etc. based on the “EcoQualify” Quality Assurance System and following the EQF and ECVET-learning outcomes approach. The e-learning course is available in the following languages: English, Czech, German, Bulgarian, Italian and Turkish. The e-learning platform has been created and administered by Forum Berufsbildung – Germany.

Keywords: organic food retailing, e-learning, ECVET, EQF.

1 Introduction

Organic food retailing is one of the fast growing sectors of the European economy. Moreover, consumers' interest in organic products has risen in the last years (Ivanova, 2012). Therefore, the issue of educating managers and shop assistants is gaining more and more importance. However, this sector is suffering from a severe lack not only of qualified personnel, staff and managers, but also of well qualified teachers and trainers who provide training in that field (Ivanova, 2013). The main objective of the ECVET-EcoQualify project is to create a training course for teachers/trainers and tutors/instructors oriented to offer them the abilities needed to design, plan and distribute ECVET and EQF-based training courses in the field of organic food retailing. The e-learning course demonstrates how to apply the Methodology for EQF and ECVET-based training course for organic food retailing paying attention to the development in NQF in each of partner countries. The e-learning course is available in the following languages: English, Czech, German, Bulgarian, Italian and Turkish. The e-learning platform has been created and administered by FORUM Berufsbildung – Germany. For Bulgaria, this is the first e-learning course in the field of organic food retailing.

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2 Methodology

The e-learning course demonstrates how to apply the Methodology for EQF and ECVET-based training course for organic food retailing paying attention to the development in NQF in each of the partner countries.

The methodology applied is based on an integrated approach taking into consideration the following main aspects:

a) Learning outcomes definition criteria coming from EQF / ECVET regulations and methods, as it was analyzed and applied in previous Leonardo da Vinci Partnership Project;

c) ECVET criteria to evaluate and assign credit points, taking into account the complexity, scope and volume of learning outcomes in the unit, effort necessary for a learner to acquire the knowledge, skills and competence required for the unit, as clearly stated in the official study of EU Commission “The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training” (ECVET). (“Get to know ECVET better Questions and Answers” (February, 2011).

The following communication tools are used:

- Working meetings of the project management team, including consultants;
- Consultation via e-meetings;
- Information and advisory inputs by e-learning and e-training experts.

3 Project Partners, Target Groups and Sectors

3.1 Project partners

- University of Agribusiness and Rural Development (UARD), Bulgaria – Contractor and Coordinator
- Organic Retailers Association (ORA) – Austria
- Zivy Venkov – Czech Republic
- FORUM Berufsbildung. e .V. – Germany
- Ökomarkt e.V. Hamburg – Germany
- Institut Equalita – Germany
- Associazione Terre dell’ Adriatico (ADRIALAND) – Italy
- Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University – Turkey
- Education Research Association (ERA) – Turkey

3.2 Target groups and sectors

ECVET-EcoQualify project addresses the Priority titled: Support to initial and continuous training of VET teachers, trainers, tutors and VET institution managers (LEO-TraInno-8). The target group includes teachers and trainers, VET providers of

services and trainers in the field of lifelong learning. The target sectors are education, agriculture, organic trade and retailing, ecological field and food safety. In fact, we refer in particular to a very specific sector – organic food retailing which is characterized with a gap of well qualified teachers/trainers and tutors.

4 E-learning contents – description of the main e-learning course documents

4.1 E(co)-Qualify Quality Assurance System

E(co)-Qualify is a comprehensive European Quality Assurance System for further education in the area of organic food retail. It offers a basis for meaningful assessment and certification systems and contributes to the alignment of different training and evaluation systems. (Ivanova M., D. Dimitrov, et al., 2013).

4.2 Methodology for EQF and ECVET-based training course for organic food retailing

The document outlines the methodology on EQVET units and credits attribution, leading to the integration of E(co)-Qualify qualifications into ECVET. The strategy is a bottom-up approach (from the work and market sector to educational and training activities) assuring the transferability of the project results to other sectors where informal and non-formal knowledge is concerned. It identifies basic units and points able to establish a shared credits system for transferring recognized qualifications in different European countries vocational and educational contexts. The E(co)-Qualify qualifications credit system identifies corresponding learning units and credit points for each qualification level, with the goal to make the E(co)-Qualify qualifications identifiable for implementation across Europe.

4.3 Learning Outcomes

The document contains detailed description of Key Units and Learning Outcomes by Professional Profiles, following the EQF/ECVET methodology.

Learning outcomes are defined as statements of what a learner "knows, understands and is able to do" after a learning process. The categories are: 1/ Knowledge; 2/ Skills; 3/ Competence. They can be used for different purposes. For example as descriptive units for the qualification frameworks, in order to define qualifications, design curricula and make assessments. They exist on different levels and in different quality according to their precision.

4.4 Guidelines for VET Institutions in organic sector

The Guidelines define the didactics and practical instructions for training of teachers in organic sector following the EQF and ECVET learning outcomes approach.

5 Training course components

5.1 Component 1 – Learning outcomes

Learning Outcomes are grouped in "Units". A unit of learning outcomes (also called "unit" or "module") is a component of a professional profile consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence that can be assessed and validated. This presupposes that the units of learning outcomes are structured comprehensively and logically and that they can be examined. Units of learning outcomes can be specific to a single professional profile or common to several.

The description of qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes is one of the main elements of ECVET.

The **units of learning outcomes** are used to describe the qualification and it is important that the units of learning outcomes are designed so that they can be:

- **Clearly understood** by involved actors - such as learners, teachers and trainers in home and host institutions, and competent institutions with responsibility for validating and recognising learning outcomes achieved during geographical mobility.
- **Achieved during mobility** - for example, taking into account learners' existing knowledge, skills and competence, the duration of the planned mobility and the learning opportunities able to be accessed in the host institution and country.
- **Assessed abroad** - for example, taking into account learners' foreign language skills - some learning outcomes may be easier to assess abroad than others.
- **Recognised** when the learner returns to the home institution.

5.2 Component 2 – Organic Agriculture

This Component provides knowledge on the basic principles of organic production system, the difference between organic and conventional products, technologies in organic production, breeding technology of organic livestock production, disease control, pests and weeds in organic farming, etc. (Angelova, Popov, Ivanova, 2008). The course of study includes the following topics:

- History of Organic Farming
- Principles of Organic Farming
- Basics about Soil and Agriculture

- Soil and Agriculture II
- Soil and Humus Management
- Humus Management
- Basics of Organic Crop Farming
- Crop Rotation
- Plant Protection and Weed Regulation
- Plant Protection
- Animal Welfare

5.3 Component 3 - The Retailer of Organic Products and its 5 Professional Profiles

The first point the partners agreed on is the overall Professional Qualification which is the ultimate goal of the learning paths we have been working around. On the basis of previous projects' results and surveys, we believe that today in Europe a new Professional Qualification is stemming from the onward and upward growth of organic products market, the RETAILER OF ORGANIC PRODUCTS. It was precisely this Professional Qualification the aim of Eco-Qualify previous Leonardo da Vinci project, we capitalized inside the current project. A long and deepened discussion lets partners to In the field of Organic Food Retailing the partners of ECVET-EcoQualify project have been determined 5 Professional Profiles which represent the progressive professional development of initially non-skilled people should follow to attain the higher level of Knowledge, Skills and Competences that could make them as a professional Organic Shop Manager. This point is a very meaningful one, as it clearly shows that Organic Retail Sector is a new employment area where it is possible to build up a satisfactory, dynamic and motivating career, not yet taken into consideration by traditional education institutions like high school and universities. In the following Table 1, we present the general description, based on EQF criteria, of the five Professional Profiles building up the Professional Qualification of RETAILER OF ORGANIC PRODUCTS, namely:

1. General Agro-food Shop Beginner;
2. Organic Products Shop Junior Sales Assistant;
3. Organic Products Shop Sales Assistant;
4. Organic Products Shop Area Manager;
5. Organic Products Shop General Manager.

5 Conclusion

The e-learning course designed on the project ECVET-EcoQualify provides the opportunity to implement for the first time in Bulgaria the e-learning approach in the field of organic food retailing. The target group of teachers and trainers will gain sufficient knowledge, skills and competence in the field of organic agriculture, organic food marketing, etc.

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