

Quality principles

and European tools in Erasmus+

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THE RESULTS OF A SURVEY AMONG THE IMPLEMENTERS OF ERASMUS+ MOBILITY PROJECTS AND COOPERATION PROJECTS, WITH A FOCUS ON THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF EUROPEAN TOOLS AND OTHER PRINCIPLES RELATING TO QUALITY ASSURANCE	6
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INTRODUCTION

Traineeships abroad are made possible by funds from the European Erasmus+ programme, which are provided by the European Commission to Member States to support the priorities of the common education policy, including the intention for young people to complete part of their education abroad. In previous years, the number of Czech pupils and students participating in traineeships abroad through this programme was about 4 000 per year and is expected to increase further looking forward. The Czech National Agency for International Education and Research (DZS) has also been working in the long term to improve their quality so that they best reflect the visions of European education policy.

A new programming period for EU education policy was launched in 2021, aiming among other things to increase the share of young people participating in traineeships abroad to 8% by 2025. In addition, the former National Teams of ECVET Experts have been transformed into **National VET Teams**. The activities of the Czech team are coordinated by DZS, and its main tasks include support for using European tools and improving the quality of vocational education.

This brochure is one of the results of the cooperation between the VET Team and DZS. **Its main objective is to contribute to improving the quality of Erasmus+ projects and to present both the selected European tools and the quality principles that are recommended for the planning and implementation of these projects.**

The brochure presents the results of a survey among implementers of mobility projects (KA1) and cooperation projects (KA2) under 2018–2020 Erasmus+ calls. The survey focused on their knowledge and use of European tools and other principles relating to quality assurance. It took place in June 2021. 104 respondents returned the questionnaire; the return rate was 52%.

The questionnaire investigated whether the implementers used some of the following principles to support project quality, in addition to the main European tools such as Europass, EQF and EQAVET:

- tracking graduates,
- creating student portfolios,
- determining the content of mobilities through learning outcomes,
- participant assessment by a mentor,
- transparent recognition of acquired competencies.



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1. European tools and their implementation in Erasmus+

1.1 Europass

Europass facilitates communication between employers and job seekers, students and educational institutions across the European Union, improves the transparency of skills and qualifications in the EU and promotes student and staff mobility in the European labour market.

One of the most important documents for Erasmus+ mobility projects is the Europass Mobility, which is often used to certify the learning outcomes acquired and their subsequent recognition upon return.

In the initial part, general knowledge of Europass and its usefulness were assessed. This is then followed by a more detailed exploration of the knowledge of its various components, namely: Curriculum Vitae, Cover Letter, Certificate Supplement, Diploma Supplement, Europass Mobility for Volunteers, Europass Mobility and Certificate Supplement – Certificate of vocational qualification.

The evaluation of the answers concerning general knowledge of Europass was very positive, as 92% of respondents know and use this tool and another 7% are planning to use it. At the same time, 93% of respondents who actually use Europass found it very useful or rather useful. 39% of them use it for other purposes, 47% do not, 14% of respondents are not aware of other possible uses of Europass.

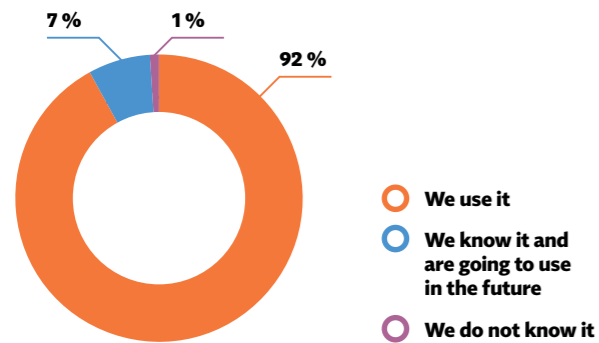
For the question on the specific use of the different Europass documents, respondents could select multiple answers. For mobility purposes, Europass is most commonly used as Europass Mobility (85% of respondents), followed by Curriculum Vitae (55%) and Certificate Supplement (37%). The following forms are used less commonly: Cover Letter (20%), Certificate Supplement – Certificate of vocational qualification (17%) and Diploma Supplement is only used by 10% of respondents (this corresponds to the lower proportion of respondents from tertiary technical schools). Europass Mobility for Volunteers was mentioned only once. However, its relevance to respondents implementing Erasmus+ projects is low because it is a different project area.

The questionnaire survey confirmed the hypothesis that Europass as a European tool is relatively well known among respondents. Respondents consider it important and appreciate its usefulness. However, there is still room for improvement in the use of the specific components of Europass, especially the Curriculum Vitae and the Cover Letter. Its use for the organisation's other activities is average (only 47% of respondents use it that way).

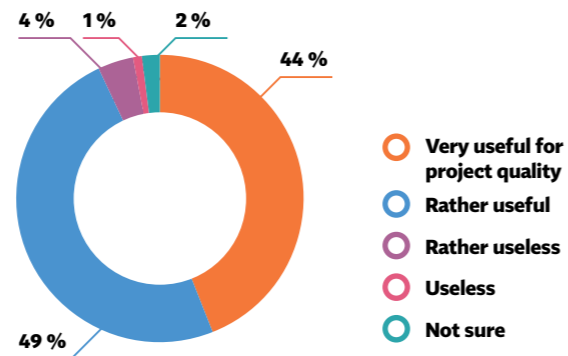
Knowledge and use of Europass by Erasmus+ KA1 and KA2 grant beneficiaries under the 2018–2020 calls



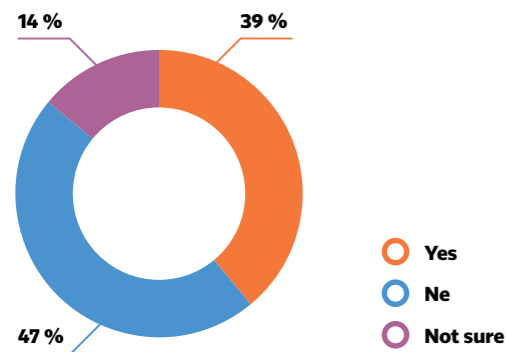
General assessment of Europass



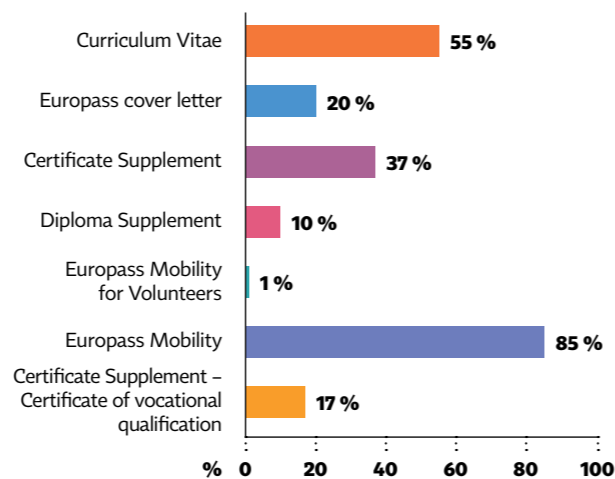
General usefulness of Europass



Other uses of Europass



Specific use of the different Europass documents



1.2 European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

The EQF¹ is one of the European tools to promote the clarity and transparency of education systems. It is a common European reference framework that helps understand, compare and recognise qualifications acquired in the European Union.

According to the survey results, a significant proportion of respondents (37%) do not know this tool. It is surprising that such a high proportion of respondents report that they do not know the EQF and are even not planning on using it because the vast majority of mobility project implementers include the EQF level in the learning outcome units they use and in all documents they issue.

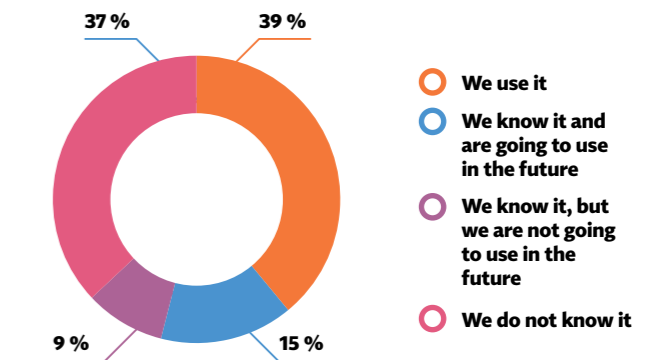
Of the respondents who said they knew the EQF, 21% found it very useful, 55% found it rather useful, 11% found it rather useless, 5% found it useless, and 8% were not sure. However, other uses of the EQF are perceived by these respondents as very limited: only 16% of those who know the EQF say they use it for other purposes. 66% do not use this European tool for other purposes, and 18% are not aware of other possible uses of the EQF.

The hypothesis that the implementers of mobility projects have a deeper knowledge of the EQF than the implementers of cooperation projects was not confirmed. We believe that the issue of the knowledge and use of this tool is specific in that work with this instrument is rather “passive”. Many project coordinators do not work with the certificate and diploma forms on which the EQF level is indicated. For the processing of the units of learning outcomes, it is sufficient to only indicate the EQF level. No deeper knowledge is required in this case.

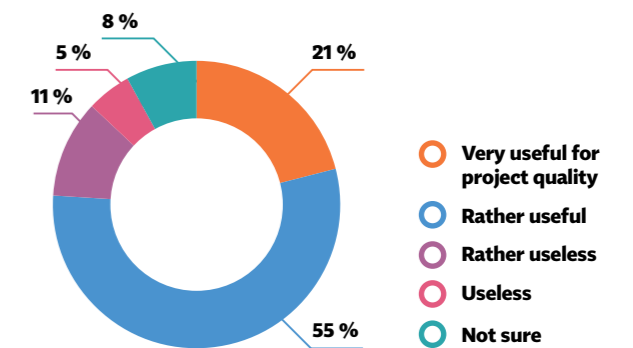
Knowledge and use of the EQF by Erasmus+ KA1 and KA2 grant beneficiaries under the 2018–2020 calls



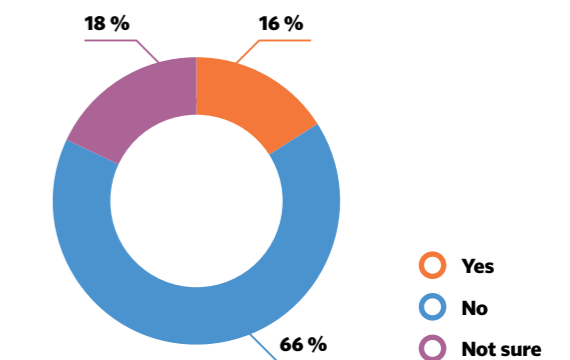
Use of the EQF



Usefulness of the EQF for project quality



Other uses of the EQF



¹ <http://www.nuv.cz/eqf/webova-infografika>

1.3 European Quality Assurance Reference Framework – EQAVET

The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQAVET) was developed by the Member States in cooperation with the European Commission. It was adopted as a Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of the EU in 2009. It provides policy makers, national institutions and VET providers with common tools for quality management and assurance in vocational education and training.

In addition to respecting the Erasmus+ Quality Standards, the implementers of traineeships abroad may also draw inspiration from the quality assurance principles in line with the EQAVET tool².

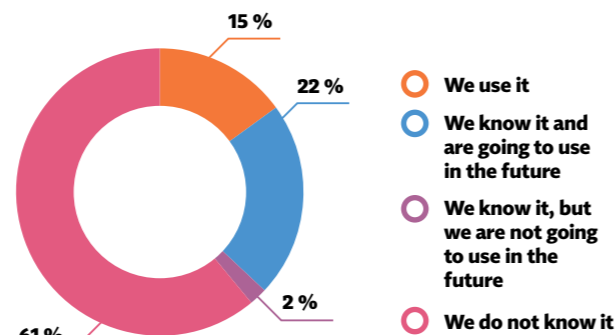
Only 15% of respondents use the EQAVET, 22% are going to use it, 2% know it but are not going to use it. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (61%) thus report that they do not know the EQAVET. However, despite the generally low usage, the EQAVET is assessed positively by the respondents who know it. 27% of them consider it very useful and 67% of the respondents consider it rather useful.

According to the survey results, knowledge of the European EQAVET tool is below average. The result is probably attributable to the fact that this tool is new to the respondents and it has only been among the priorities for Erasmus+ projects since 2021.

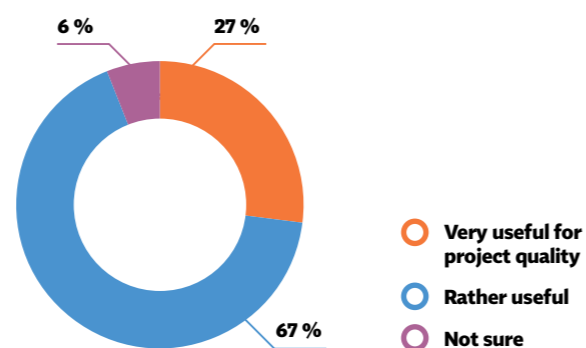
Knowledge and use of the EQAVET by Erasmus+ KA1 and KA2 grant beneficiaries under the 2018–2020 calls



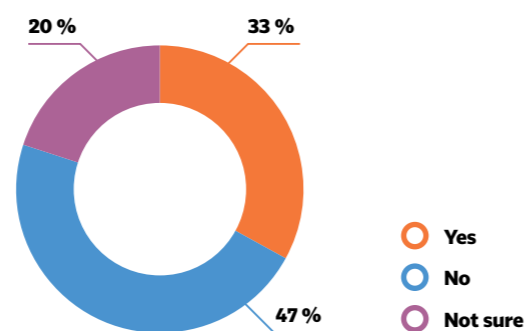
Use of the EQAVET



Usefulness of the EQAVET



Other uses of the EQAVET



² <http://www.nuv.cz/eqavet/jak-prakticky-postupovat>

2. Other principles related to quality assurance

2.1 Tracking graduates

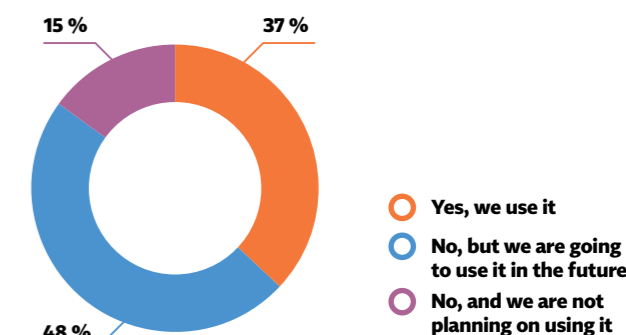
One of the useful tools in quality management in education is the regular monitoring of the career paths of school graduates in terms of their labour market employability (as per the EU Council Recommendation of 20 November 2017 on tracking graduates³). In particular, they are monitored in terms of their employability in the field they studied in order to obtain feedback on the content of vocational education and graduates' readiness for the labour market. The feedback can serve as a basis for revisions and adjustments to the framework and school education programmes.

The career paths of graduates are mainly tracked through surveys, research and studies concerning the tracking school graduates' career paths after their transition from education to practice. These surveys provide empirical evidence on the alignment of education and vocational training with labour market requirements and, in turn, can help improve both initial and further vocational education. Most graduate surveys are conducted at the national level, and in some cases, at the level of self-governing regions. At the same time, some schools track their graduates on their own.

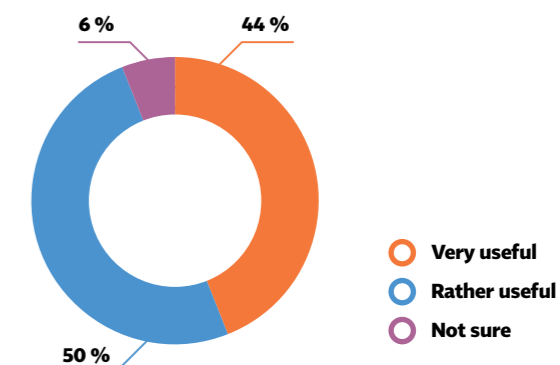
Other important sources of information on graduates' employability in the labour market include analyses of unemployment of graduates of secondary schools and tertiary professional schools or the match between education and employment for workers with secondary vocational education or the transition of graduates to the labour market, carried out by the NPI CR.⁴

Respondents show great interest in tracking graduates, which is one of the ten indicators of the European EQAVET tool and a priority of the EU, although only 37% of them are currently engaged in it. Another 48% intend to track graduates in the future. Almost all the respondents who use graduate tracking (94%) find it useful, and nearly half of them even find it very useful. The main reason for this positive result usually lies in the usefulness of tracking graduates for the school. Despite the fact that the responses reflect neither the quality of the way tracking is implemented at the different schools nor the subsequent use of tracking, this is a positive result.

Tracking graduates



Usefulness of tracking graduates



³ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/CS/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H1209\(01\)&from=es](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/CS/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H1209(01)&from=es)

⁴ www.infoabsolvent.cz

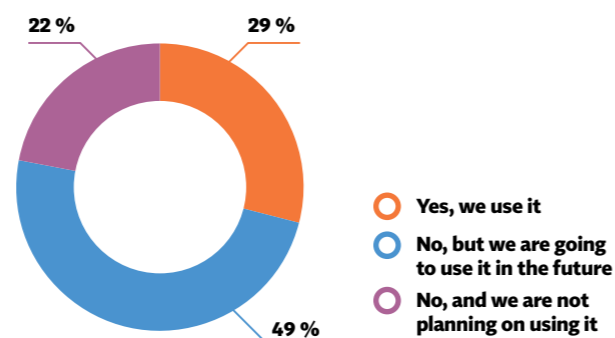
2.2 Creating student portfolios

The student portfolio is one of the ways to guide and encourage students to prepare for entering the labour market, whether it is a printed (“paper”) portfolio or an e-portfolio, which also naturally develops the digital competencies of pupils and students. It started to be used in school education in the 1990s, but it is not yet widespread in the Czech Republic. However, there are examples of inspiring practice from different school levels. Depending on their purpose and use, portfolios can be classified as working (documentary) portfolios, demonstration (representation) portfolios and assessment (diagnostic) portfolios. The portfolio encourages students to actively engage in their own learning and to take responsibility for their results and, in turn, it develops their ability to evaluate the knowledge and skills acquired.

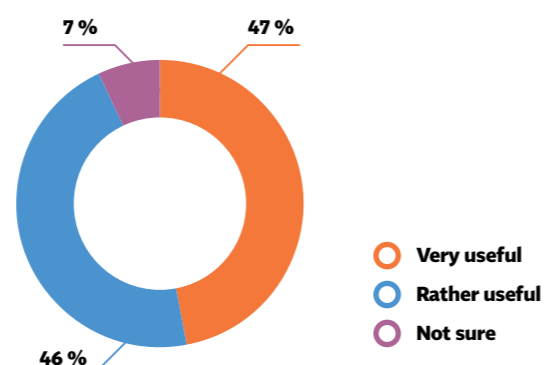
Where schools use student portfolios, one important part of such portfolios are the skills acquired during traineeships abroad as documented by certificates, as well as the related photographic documentation of the products.

It can be concluded that the use of portfolios among the survey respondents is still below average (only 29% of respondents use them). A positive finding is that 93% of those respondents who use student portfolios find them useful (47% very useful and 46% rather useful).

Creating student portfolios



Usefulness of creating student portfolios



2.3 Quality principles that are based on ECVET principles

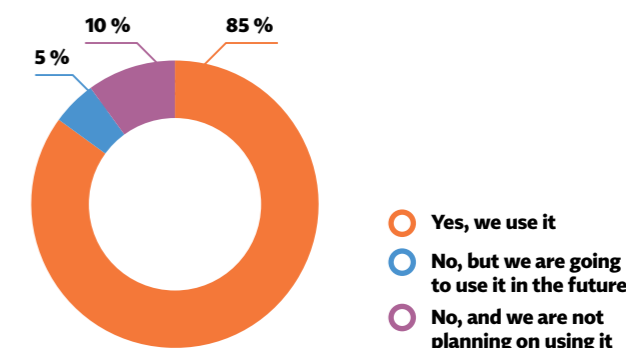
The results of the questionnaire survey show that the professional work done by the ECVET Team had a significant impact in the past period. Even though sub-surveys in the past period showed that the quality of the formulation of learning outcomes is not always as good as it could be, knowledge of these principles and work with the learning outcomes tends to be at a high level and is used and appreciated as important by most respondents.

In addition to formulating the learning outcomes, it is now also common among respondents that these outcomes are assessed by a mentor in the workplace – and the principle of the recognition of learning outcomes by the sending organisation is increasingly used.

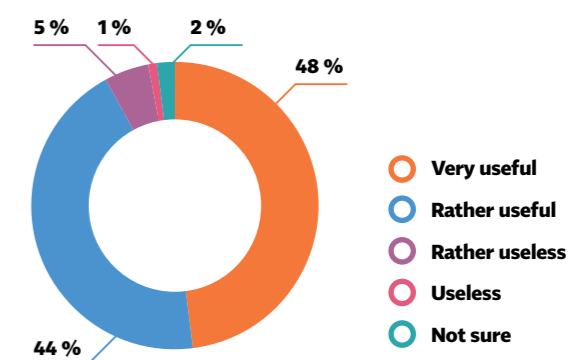
Defining the learning outcomes

Developing the content of traineeships through formulating the learning outcomes is very well known to respondents, both those implementing mobility projects (KA1) and co-operation projects (KA2). The respondents tend to assess this principle as positive. 90% of respondents use it or are going to use it. Of those who use the principle, 92% find it very or rather useful. The area of further use of learning outcomes in the organisation is weaker. In fact, the use of the principle of formulating learning outcomes for the organisation’s other activities is relatively low – only 36% of the respondents who have experience with this principle use it for their other activities.

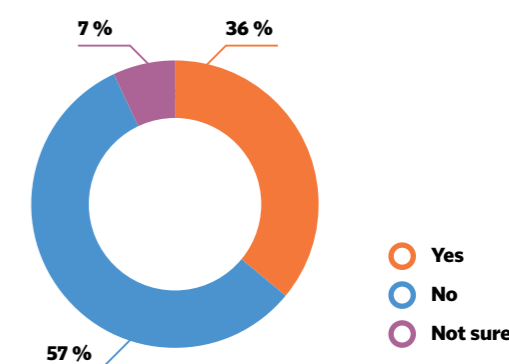
Use of defining the learning outcomes



Usefulness of defining the learning outcomes



Other uses of formulating the learning outcomes

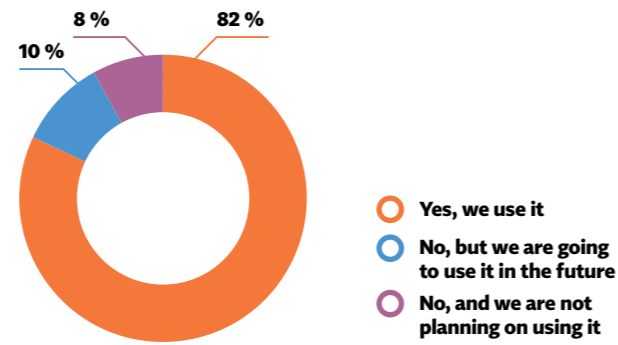


Trainee assessment by a mentor

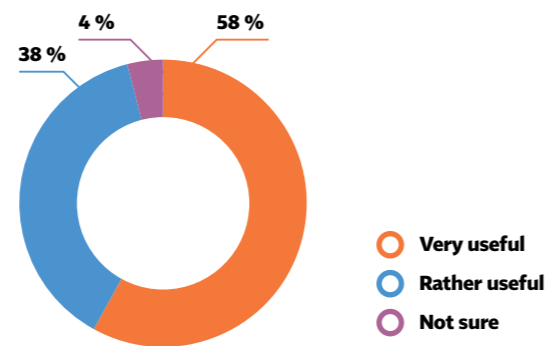
As is evident from the results of the questionnaire survey, trainee assessment by a mentor from the receiving organisation is one of the principles that has become very widespread and successful, especially for assessing trainees. This is also evident when comparing the survey results with previous similar surveys. Sending organisations' interventions in the assessment (e.g. sending accompanying persons or reassessing the student after returning from their traineeship) have decreased significantly.

This element is used by the vast majority of respondents: 82% use it and 10% are going to use it. Only 8% have no intention of using this tool. Of the respondents who use it, 58% consider it as very useful. 38% view it as rather useful. Overall, 97% of the respondents who have some experience with the principle find it useful. However, other uses of the principle of trainee assessment by a mentor in the receiving organisation are at an average level: of the respondents who use it for Erasmus+ projects, only 59% also use it for other purposes, and 31% do not.

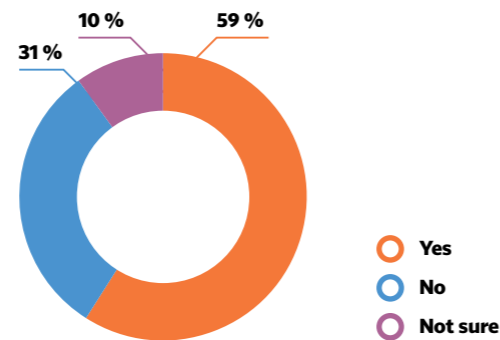
Use of trainee assessment by a mentor



Usefulness of trainee assessment by a mentor



Use of trainee assessment by a mentor for other purposes



Ensuring transparent recognition of acquired competencies

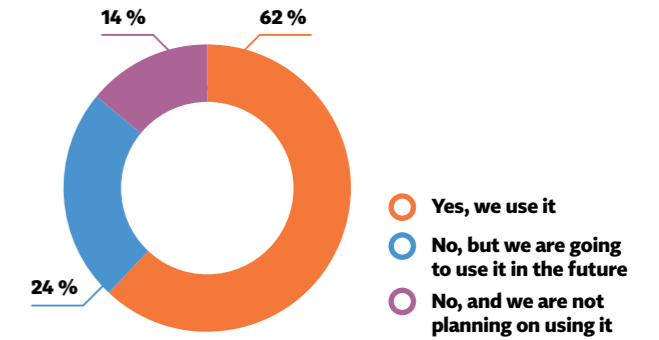
The issue of recognition of competencies in any educational context (formal, non-formal and informal), including education abroad, has been a priority of EU education policy for several years and is being discussed at the national level. However, according to the results of the questionnaire survey, the issue is somewhat unclear at the level of individual schools. The survey shows that schools tend to make relatively little use of this principle for their other activities. This result is largely attributable to the fact that the concept of "recognition" is not understood consistently, despite the efforts of experts from the DZS, who in all their outreach and information activities have been emphasising the distinction between the validation of certificates and the recognition of learning outcomes.

62% of the respondents recognise the competencies acquired by participants, 24% are going to and 14% are not considering it. Of the respondents who already recognise competencies, 97% said they found transparent recognition of learning outcomes very or rather useful (62% very useful and 35% rather useful).

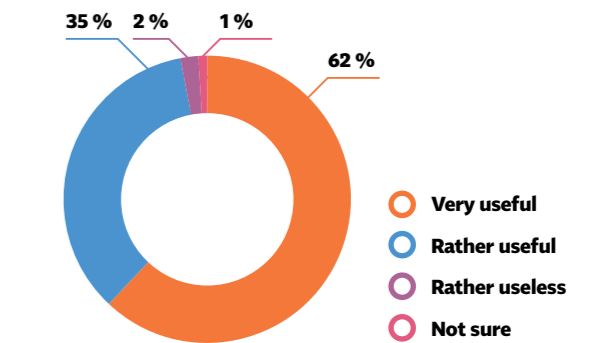
There is room for improvement in the use of recognition for schools' other activities. Of the respondents who recognise competencies in Erasmus+ mobility projects, 51% also use this principle for other purposes, 37% do not and 12% are not sure.

While the results in the area of recognising mobility outcomes are generally good (over 60% of respondents use them and find them very useful), they can certainly be further improved.

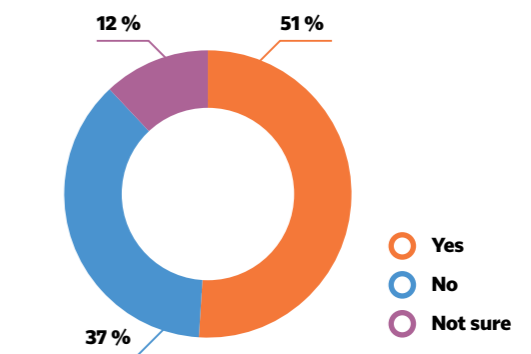
Ensuring the use of transparent recognition of acquired competencies



Usefulness of transparent recognition of acquired competencies



Use of the principle of recognition for schools' other activities



Conclusions from the questionnaire survey

Obviously, it is not possible to determine the actual use of the European tools and quality elements for all Erasmus+ grant applicants and project implementers solely based on the results of the survey carried out. Its results are limited by the sample examined and the definition. Even so, they show certain trends in this area that indicate the strengths and weaknesses of working with these tools and elements and point to the respondents' main problems.

Main findings:

Knowledge and use of European instruments are good among Erasmus+ project implementers in the Czech Republic. In general, the results found for specific quality elements were better than those for the use of European instruments. Most of those who use them consider them important. There is still room for improvement in terms of their implementation in the sending organisations' other activities.

The most commonly used European tool is Europass. Among mobility project implementers, Europass is also the most commonly used certificate of mobility completion that describes the knowledge, skills and competences acquired by its holder. Above all, respondents appreciate its transparency both in the Czech Republic and abroad and consider it a relevant part of the student portfolio and a tool to improve employability.

The EQF is much less known – despite the fact that its different levels are indicated both on school certificates and on the recommended templates for Learning Outcomes Units within Erasmus+ projects.

Knowledge and use of the EQAVET tool is then under 20%. This is thus a quality pillar that is yet to become widespread in future projects. It will therefore become a focus of interest for the DZS and the VET Team in the Czech Republic.

The most commonly used quality elements include formulating the learning outcomes and trainee assessment by a mentor (both are used by more than 80% of respondents) as well as the transparent recognition of learning outcomes (more than 60%). The good results are strongly linked to the work of ECVET experts in previous years, while other tools and quality elements are less well known and used. It is clear

that this initiative has been effective and has contributed significantly to the quality of the projects.

As expected, the principles of developing student portfolios and graduate tracking are less used in the field of mobility.

It is encouraging that many respondents plan to use quality elements in the future. This is evidence that respondents consider them to be important and useful and view their benefits as positive. Almost half of the respondents intend to use them in the future. Only fewer than 20% of respondents are not planning on using any of these principles.

However, the questionnaire survey also revealed problems related both to the implementation of the European tools and to quality elements. These include e. g. unclear terminology or inaccurate understanding of the content of the European tools or their merely formal use.

In order to improve the quality of projects, it seems necessary to familiarise those submitting Erasmus+ projects with current EU strategies and preferences related to their content. In line with the survey respondents' preferences, it is also necessary to maintain a focus on creating practical examples and providing information interactively through workshops and exchange of experience.

In conclusion, the current standard of respondents' work with the European tools and quality principles is a good starting point for its future improvements.

Respondents expressed satisfaction with the DZS's work and support, as well as a willingness to learn new things and implement them in their organisation's practice. Their interest in the DZS's outreach and information activities in the next period is a testimony to this.

Quality principles and European tools in Erasmus+

Authors: Jaromír Coufalík, Martina Kaňáková, Hana Slámová, Helena Slivková

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**Czech National Agency for International
Education and Research (DZS)**

Na Poříčí 1035/4, 110 00 Prague 1

☎ +420 221 850 100

@ info@dzs.cz

www.dzs.cz



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