Removing Barriers to Mobility of Seafarers

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Abstract

Every seafarer would like to have the freedom to work on board as many foreign flag vessels as possible using her/his qualifications acquired in her/his own country. The certificates issued by a national administration are expected to satisfy the minimum requirements set by International Maritime Organisation (IMO), which should ideally satisfy the national requirements of member states of IMO and hence acceptable to all IMO member states. However, in reality this is not a case and the certificates issued by one country are not universally accepted or transferable to other flags. This situation restricts the mobility of seafarers; thus causing nationally qualified professionals often to be excluded from working on/commanding identical vessels other than those registered by the seafarer's own national flag. Considering that there are imbalances of surpluses and shortages of officers and ratings in most countries, current situation does not help to address the shortages by taking advantage of the surpluses elsewhere.

This paper reports on an experiment, an EU funded project known as TRECVET, introducing a means of transferring and recognising prior learning and achievement through the European Credit system in Vocational Education and Training (ECVET); a system which aims to remedy the non-recognition of similar qualifications/certificates gained in one country by other countries.

The TRECVET project is developing software methods to make syllabi comparisons more transparent. The approach relies on breaking down any course syllabi, in any given country, into its most fundamental elements such that meaningful information on commonalities, differences and country specific requirements that can be identified. By this technique, the qualifications and learning outcomes are expected to become more transparent and comparable. This approach is expected to lead to the transferability, recognition and mobility of seafarers in the project partner countries and later throughout Europe and worldwide. The tool is being designed to be scalable and able to accept syllabi from any Vocational Education and Training (VET) programme.

Keywords: TRECVET, Small Commercial Vessels, Qualifications

1. Introduction

What is the problem? The certificates issued by a national administration are expected to satisfy the minimum requirements set by International Maritime Organisation (IMO), which should ideally satisfy the national requirements of member states of IMO and hence acceptable to all IMO member states. However, in reality this is not a case and the certificates issued by one country are not universally accepted or transferable to other flags. Even the EU member states do not recognise each other's certifications. This because within the EU there are numerous industries, organisations and professional bodies whose interpretations, regulations, training methods, examination requirements and levels of competence do not match where they are solely dependent on the specific requirements

and circumstances of each Member States. This causes those qualifications neither universally accepted nor transferable amongst Member States hence mobility restrictions on suitably qualified personnel, professionals, trainers and learners, within the EU [1].

The problem of non-recognition of certificates, qualifications gained in one country by other country across Europe in Small Commercial Vessel (SMV) sector is a well-known problem. The current situation restricts the free movement of labour, as it also prevents suitably qualified skippers choosing their work according to where it is needed and on a vessel matched to their level rather than origin of qualification. This problem exists across most EU Member States

The following is quoting the current situation with UK personal that may wish to work in other flags:

"If you are working on board a non-British boat, your RYA certificates are likely to be acceptable but you will need to comply with the rules of the flag state. Please contact the relevant maritime authority for full details of their requirements [2]*".*

A specific example to this, UK qualified skippers resident in Spain can only work commercially on UK registered (flagged) vessels; they are not allowed to work on Spanish or any other EU registered vessels. Additionally, Spanish nationals residing and working in Spain with similar Spanish qualifications can only work on Spanish registered vessels; they cannot take command of a foreign flagged vessel. It is therefore possible, in fact common, that a suitably qualified skipper is excluded from commanding one or more identical vessels, operating out of the same port, based solely on the national flag that the particular vessel is operating under. While there is an issue of shortages and surpluses of sea personal across Europe and Worldwide, it is very obvious that the existing problem need a solution [3].

2. Survey Results

A recent survey was conducted with sea schools, boating associations, charter companies, skippers and other interested parties all over Europe to find out their view of the lack of recognition of qualifications in Skippers Qualification [4]. The results received validate the existing problem. The followings are short summary of the survey outputs:

"I have UK licences but the boat I was destined to sail got registered under the French flag. For French skippers with MCA/RYA accreditation it is possible to just request regularisation with the French system. But for foreign skippers with the same MCA/RYA licences this is not possible. They need to take a test about French maritime law and the French language. The only problem is that these tests are rarely organised. So it becomes impossible to sail as a skipper on French vessels for foreigners. The easiest way to achieve the French certificates is to take a full Captain 200 course."

"UK does not accept my Belgian Officer 500gt qualification (nor master 500 gt)"

"I have the German SportHochSeeschifferSchein, but in Italy where I live and work it is not recognized as professional qualification. So I can't work officially as skipper of commercial yachts with Italian flag."

"To work in Portugal you are required to carry Portuguese license (Patroa da Costa). The burocratic procedure to obtain this license is such that as a foreigner you won't get it on the basis of your RYA or Dutch licenses."

The survey participants also believe the cause of the lack of recognition to be:
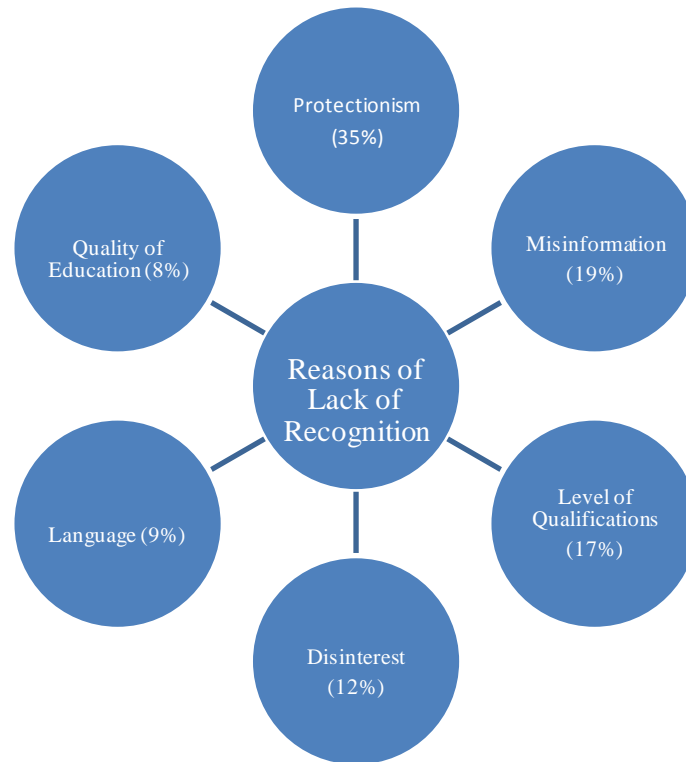
Figure 1 – Resons of Lack of recognition [4]

Overall, the survey results indicate that the majority of the participants consider that the lack of recognition is NOT due to the standard of qualifications but mainly due to National Authorities protecting their own interests and being misinformed about foreign qualification standards.

3. Methodology

As a start point, a methodology was developed to develop TRECVET tool systematically. The experts responsible for the UK syllabi broke that syllabus down into its smallest parts, called Fundamental Elements (FEs). An FE is defined as the smallest component of a unit of learning outcome that can still be considered to be a complete logical learning entity.

Each FE of the UK syllabus is valued at zero and allocated with key words. This means that the UK syllabus is used as the reference level to compare and judge differences in a numerical way when assessing other countries syllabi.

At later stage, The German and Spanish experts broke down their own syllabi and extract the FEs using the same methodology as the UK/reference syllabus. This resulted in three sets of common FEs from the three national syllabi. The remaining FEs are the differences between the three syllabi.

Each FE of the German and Spanish syllabi is given a positive or negative numerical value (weighting) depending on how it compares to the corresponding FE from the reference syllabus based on depth of learning, content, time of study and the level of assessment.

This then led to developing the software tool in close cooperation with the other partners and the above findings and full functioning TRECVET tool which is tested and available to its target group.

In this project the tool is developed in one language only, because the main focus of the project is to develop the innovative methodologies and to demonstrate the principles involved. The scalability of the tool is ensured a multi-lingual capability for the future

4. TRECVET Software

The software is an innovative software tool, available online, which uses the method of breaking syllabi down into their smallest parts and making them comparable in an objective way. The tool enables authorities, training institutions and learners to easily find differences (pluses and minuses) commonalities and differences between the syllabi in each country and thereby creating the necessary transparency and trust for the implementation taking into account of the ECVET (European Credit System in Vocational Education and Training) principles [5].

The tool provides a solution to the specific problem in the SCV sector and gives acceptance and mutual recognition of comparable qualifications from different EU Member States within the SCV sector providing transparency and simplicity when assessing the equivalence of different training syllabi [6].

The training syllabuses, from 3 countries Germany (SportSeeSchiffersschein-SSS), Spain (Patrón Profesional de Embarcación de Recreo – PPER) and the U.K. (Yachtmaster Offshore Commercial) were broken down into their Fundamental Elements (FEs) using official syllabi or exam papers, depending on availability.

The outcome of analysing the syllabi identified and classified of a set of fundamental teaching elements, which are called "Fundamental Elements "(FE's). When identified, these FE's are stored with additional information (key words and weightings to indicate depth of learning) under individual country headings on a suitably designed database. Once The fundamental FE's of each country's syllabus are stored on the database to develop a methodology, algorithms and other software that are as a tool for and a "easy to use" General User Interface (GUI) enables learners, trainers and decision makers to make queries that simply and transparently:

- compare the syllabi of pairs of countries;
- identify common fundamental elements in the syllabi of pairs of countries;
- identify country specific differences between the syllabi of pairs of countries;
- extract and construct a list that identifies the elements required by a worker to qualify within another country's system; and
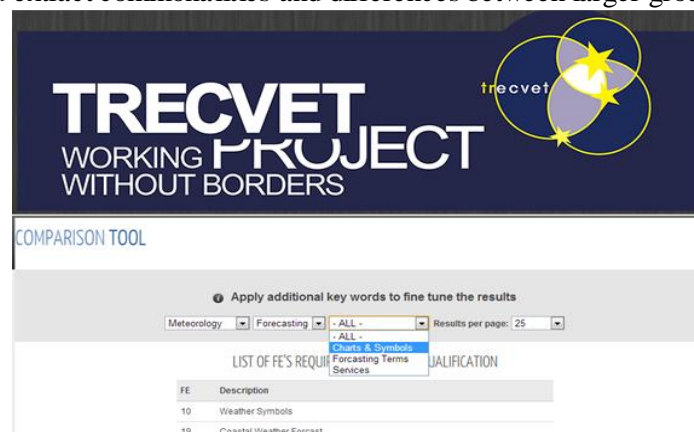- compare and extract commonalities and differences between larger groups of syllabi.

Figure 2 – TRECVET Comparison Tool [1]

It is worth to note that the tool explicitly does not aim for harmonisation between Member States and specifically recognises various national approaches and cultural differences with regard to

qualifications in VET. But, with growing trans-national mobility of the European citizens, the project also sees the need for more and easier European cooperation. By highlighting commonalities, it is hoped to demonstrate to decision makers that differences are smaller than anticipated and therefore mutual recognitions of qualifications are easier to grant.

Furthermore, the tool is designed to be scalable and flexible to accommodate any VET syllabus. Decision makers from all Member States and from all VET industries will benefit from the opportunity of having a tool for objective analysis of their own and other countries curricula. It is hoped that this will encourage a more positive approach towards implementation of the ECVET principles.

5. Future Plans

Once these 3 initial selected countries are finalised, the intention is to develop the system further in such a way that it is scalable and can, in the future, be used to store and manipulate learning elements from not only syllabi associated with the marine sector, but also training and education syllabi from other sectors. In this way the tool will be used to identify learning elements that have relevance in what might initially appear to be unrelated sectors. For example basic fundamental teaching elements such as, Fire Prevention, Fire Fighting Methods and Equipment, First Aid, and Hazards from Electrical Equipment are as equally relevant in hospital, hotel, catering, factory and commercial premises settings as they are in a marine environment. On a more academic level marine sector fundamental skills involving trigonometry and navigation may also be transferable into Civil Engineering, Surveying, Geodetics, Seismology and Oceanography.

The consortium will use the "Small Commercial Vessel" (SCV) sector to demonstrate the possibilities of implementing the projects innovative TRECVET software tool and its principle of fundamental elements.

This project has focused its resources to analyse the data of three Member States (UK, Spain and Germany) and therefore sees this as a first step towards incorporating all Members States SCV syllabi.

For learners, trainees and workers, the tool brings all required information making it easier to decide on career paths which offer European mobility and thereby creating greater chances of employment and more flexibility.

6. IMPACT

The project idea and its product TRECVET is aimed to be used and implemented by the Target Groups

Target Group A: Authorities, Competent Bodies and Decision makers for the SCV marine sector)
This Target Group is invited by the partnership consortium to attend projects meetings, and a final dissemination meeting. During these meetings they are invited to add input to the projects philosophy and also test the projects software tool and FE system to see first-hand how it will create a base for these competent bodies (this Target Group) to apply ECVET policy to their industries syllabi.

These competent bodies are:
- Germany: Deutscher Motor Yacht Verband (DMYV);
- Spain: Dirección General de la Marina Mercante;
- The UK: Royal Yachting Association (RYA);

The consortium partners run this project with ground level experts but in close co-ordination and cooperation with these three authorities. It is envisaged that involvement in the project by this Target Group, lead to facilitate the step towards ECVET implementation for their own countries syllabi.

Target Group B) (students, learners, professionals), and

Target Group C) (trainers, institutions, SMEs and VET organisations).

These Target Groups are introduced to the ECVET principals and informed how these principals will impact their future opportunities and mobility in general.

This project will specifically demonstrate relevance of ECVET within their own industry with regard to future choices and decisions for career strategies.

Target Group a) is directly involved in the projects meetings and dissemination strategy and is made fully aware of the projects objectives and plans.

Target Groups b) and c) and the wider VET industries is advised through the dissemination strategy of the project and included in the projects activity and progress. This is achieved by inviting these Target Groups to take part in the projects web site communication facilities and options; for example, the websites online management system for private discussion or the websites email facility or the web sites open forum platform.

The Target Groups a, b and c. is advised and invited to test the effectiveness of the TRECVET system and to be able to compare the three syllabi from Germany, Spain and the UK.

The major impact from the results of this project is that the three competent bodies involved, is provided with a tool that makes their syllabi objectively comparable. Therefore it gives them the opportunity to convene and agree recognition principles of each others qualifications aligned to the ECVET strategy.

It is considered that the results of this project will demonstrate to other authorities who fall within **Target Group A)** but are outside the three bodies involved, the means to join up to the ECVET strategy, thereby spreading this strategy further across Europe.

Impact for Target Group B) (students, learners, professionals)
By using the TRECVET tool and comparing qualifications from different EU countries, this Target Group will be able to make informed career choices and will be afforded greater flexibility and more improved mobility opportunities. Students will also benefit from cost and time savings when making these decisions.

Impact for Target Group C) (Trainers, institutions, SMEs and VET organisations).
This Target Group will benefit from the TRECVET software tool as it will provide a link to and display the necessary detailed information between the current situations of parallel curricula of different Member States. Furthermore this Target Group can use the information displayed by the tool to advise students from within their own schools and institutions on matters of career choices and certification required for that choices.

The project consortium is committed to life of the project long after the term of the project has ended. The consortium will keep maintaining the TRECVET tool, the website and its forums and provide information through newsletters to all interested parties.

6. Conclusion

Qualifications are not universally accepted across Europe. In the Small Commercial Vessel maritime sector qualifications are not recognised between Member States and workers cannot command identical vessels under different national flags.

The promotion of mutual recognition of qualifications between EU Member States and the implementation of the ECVET framework on a European scale is high on the list of priorities in Europe as laid down in the Copenhagen Process, Lisbon Treaty and most recently, the Bruges Communiqué.

One of the main objectives of the project is to strengthen European cooperation, support European policy decisions like ECVET and promote workers mobility across Europe. Such activity would not be possible at the national level and needs the cooperation of experts from different EU countries to bring together different approaches, knowledge and experience.

TRECVET Project consortium believe that all member states within the SCV sector must find a way to recognise each other's qualifications in order to create work mobility for professional personnel within the sector.

TRECVET project is developing software to reduce syllabi to their most fundamental elements and present meaningful information on commonalities, differences and country specific requirements. In this way qualifications and learning outcomes become transparent and comparable, leading to transferability, recognition and mobility across Europe. The tool is scalable and able to accept syllabi from any VET industry enabling decision makers to comply with their commitments to implement ECVET principles. The online tool will empower learners and trainers to make decisions about study, career paths, job placement and mobility.

7. Acknowledgment

8. References

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