

“Creating the EUCEBS Certificates”

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Introduction

The first phase of the development of the European Certificate of Basic Skills (EUCEBS) took place with co-funding from the European Commission through its Leonardo da Vinci Programme during the period November 2001 to April 2005. The partnership consisted of training centres and universities from seven countries (France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, UK) plus the European Trades Union Institute (ETUI) in Belgium.

This short report describes some of the different elements of the process of developing the EUCEBS Certificates, the Qualified Assessor Award and the online tools developed or used to evidence competences, and in addition describes the changing context within Europe in which the project team worked. It is not a detailed account of the project's work, nor of the products themselves, but an overview of some of the thinking that underpinned our work.

The sections in the report are:

- A: The EUCEBS Certificates
- B: Assessing Competences in EUCEBS
- C: EUCEBS Target Audience
- D: Qualified EUCEBS Assessors
- E: Setting Standards for the EUCEBS Certificates
- F: EUCEBS Certificates & EU Processes

A: The EUCEBS Certificates

The EUCEBS certificates were developed by modification of the basic skills competences produced by an earlier Leonardo da Vinci project, CALABAT (<http://homepages.ed.ac.uk/calarks/calabat/index.html>). The modifications were applied to fit better with the changing view of adult basic skills and a new and wider partner consortium from eight European countries.

Skills were grouped into six broad ‘Domains’: Citizenship; Communication; ICT; Interpersonal Skills; Learning to Learn; Numeracy, and each was structured to provide a coherent certificate. The Domains cover the range of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ skills considered necessary for successful living in modern European society (see for example “Education and Training 2010 - http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/doc/com_2003_685-a1_23013_en.pdf). In the early phase of the project, the intention was to generate only a single EUCEBS Certificate which would be awarded when a candidate had demonstrated all competences in all six domains, but after a short time it became clear that this was unnecessarily restrictive for these reasons:

- It could be de-motivating as learners could be given no award despite passing up to five out of six domains, that is, it was not progressive but all-or-none
- Some learners might be able to pass some domains on the basis of APEL by presenting an portfolio of evidence but would not immediately receive credit for that
- Some learners might only wish to prove competence in some domains (as they do now for ICT with ECDL, English with IELTS, TOEFL) for quite sensible reasons
- Mapping to some national qualifications might be harder if these were modular and EUCEBS were not
- Intermediate level certification (see E) would be less intuitive in a single large certificate than in smaller ones

Each Domain is made up of several ‘Elements’ which contain statements of competences (‘Performance Criteria’) plus statements of the number of independent proofs of competence (‘Range Statements’) that a learner must demonstrate at a sufficiently high level to pass that criterion. These components of the EUCEBS certificates are summarised in Table 1 and are listed in full on the EUCEBS website (www.eucebs.org).

Table 1. The EUCEBS Domains and Elements

Citizenship	<p>Element A - The trainee can explain the meaning of democracy and citizenship in the context of the role of government.</p> <p>Element B - The trainee can name the most basic human rights and can exercise the rights associated with the roles adults have/ play in society.</p> <p>Element C - The trainee can embrace values and attitudes that support social diversity and social cohesion.</p> <p>Element D - The trainee can identify ways to participate in community or neighbourhood activities and can interface with institutions in the public domain.</p>
Communication	Element A - The trainee can describe the various forms of communication and the key elements

	<p>involved in effective communication.</p> <p>Element B - The trainee can communicate effectively and extract information and provide feedback from a variety of spoken contexts.</p> <p>Element C - The trainee can seek information and use reference skills.</p> <p>Element D - The trainee can use a range of reading techniques appropriate for the work, community or leisure situation.</p> <p>Element E - The trainee can use various writing techniques to perform tasks appropriate for home, employment, or leisure.</p> <p>Element F - The trainee can use basic communication technology.</p> <p>Element G - The trainee can use (as a second language to his or her native tongue) one European language at threshold level. (Optional)</p>
ICT	<p>Element A - The trainee can use a personal computer (PC) operating system, e.g. Microsoft "Windows", the PC in which it runs, and the relevant peripheral equipment.</p> <p>Element B - The trainee can use email.</p> <p>Element C - The trainee can use the basic features of a word-processing package, e.g. Microsoft "Word".</p> <p>Element D - The trainee can use the Internet to find information.</p> <p>Element E - The trainee can use a personal computer (PC) operating system, e.g. Microsoft "Windows", for the electronic manipulation of different files.</p>
Interpersonal Skills	<p>Element A - The trainee can work with one other person to complete a Joint task.</p> <p>Element B - The trainee can carry out a defined task in a group.</p> <p>Element C - The trainee can deal with disappointment.</p> <p>Element D - The trainee can deal with opposition.</p> <p>Element E - The trainee can interpret and use common non-verbal messages.</p>
Learning to Learn	<p>Element A - The trainee can describe the characteristics and value of personal informal learning.</p> <p>Element B - The trainee can apply prior learning to new learning.</p> <p>Element C - The trainee can describe the characteristics and value of various learning styles.</p> <p>Element D - The trainee can use study techniques to improve learning.</p> <p>Element E - The trainee can prepare for a learning task.</p> <p>Element F - The trainee can carry out a learning task.</p> <p>Element G - The trainee can report on a learning task.</p>
Numeracy	<p>Element A - The trainee can use concepts and measurements of time, distance and money.</p> <p>Element B - The trainee can calculate the quantity and cost of goods or services.</p> <p>Element C - The trainee can plan and control a budget for a personal, work or leisure project.</p>

	Element D - The trainee can use basic geometric language, rules and formulae to solve problems of shape and volume.
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The level that has been set for the certificates is equivalent to the skills normally achieved by the end of formal schooling (see E for a discussion of the reasons for this decision). Clearly, in some European countries there already exist qualifications in basic skills at this level. These qualifications are national and often embedded within a wider qualifications framework (in the UK the Scottish Credit Qualification Framework – www.scqf.org.uk) and so are not automatically transferable to other countries, even within the EU. They are said to lack “transparency” within the EU context.

The main reason for the development of the EUCEBS certificates was the production of a system for accreditation of adult basic skills that was designed to be applicable across Europe, that is to be transnational.

Three possibilities thus arise as to why someone would wish to acquire one or more EUCEBS certificates:

- s/he individual holds or is taking an adult basic skills qualification in a country which has such qualifications and wishes to have European portability for the award
- s/he wishes to have an adult basic skills qualification in a country that has no such award
- s/he wishes to obtain a specifically European adult basic skills award even though s/he lives in a country with national awards.

To be able to perform this transnational role, the EUCEBS certificates and award system must have certain properties:

- They must be recognised to have validity and utility to learners in each country
- They must be recognised to have validity and utility to employers in each country
- They must be mappable to existing national qualifications (i.e. have transparency)
- They must fit in with the existing activities of the training agencies in each country
- They must be able to be integrated with the developing European Union adult basic skills accreditation processes

The last of these features has been a source of significant contextual change for the EUCEBS project during the past three years and is discussed in more detail in F.

There are two distinct ways in which a learner might gain one or more EUCEBS certificates. They may take tests (ie evidence their competences) at an accredited testing centre, or they may bring pre-existing certificates to the accredited centre for mapping to the competence statements of the relevant EUCEBS domain. The process of testing competences is not defined by the EUCEBS certificates themselves; they are statements of the competences that the successful candidate must have demonstrated, by whatever means are appropriate. However, as part of the EUCEBS project, assessments were devised by partners to demonstrate how each competence might be tested directly and indirectly, and these tests are described in B.

B: Assessing Competences in EUCEBS

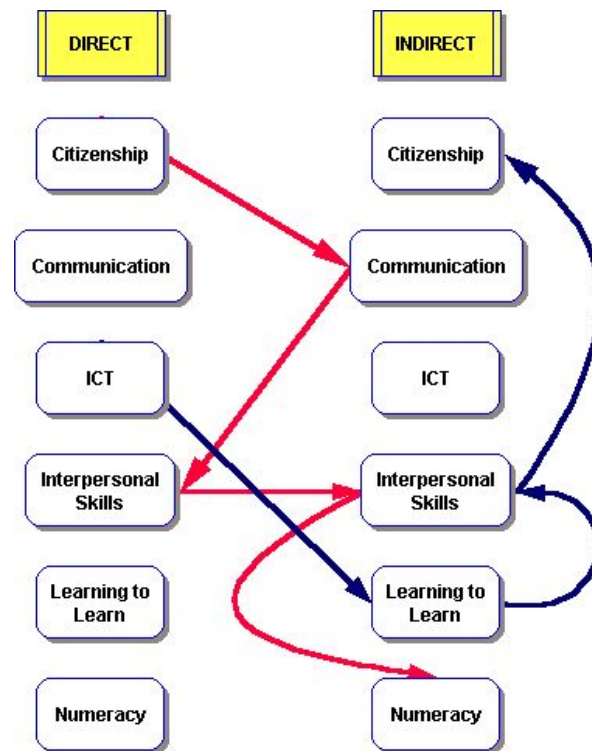
Within the EUCEBS project we have worked with different approaches to the assessment of competences, which can be classified under two broad headings: direct and indirect (Table 1). In **direct testing** the trainee demonstrates competence in any specific task in the presence of an authorised assessor (human or machine), whereas in **indirect testing** the trainee presents evidence of past performances to the assessor (human only) in the form of a portfolio, which the assessor examines for robustness, relevance and rigour.

Testing type	Human assessor	Computer assessor
Direct	Paper test Set & observe task	Computer-aided assessment
Indirect	Portfolio e-portfolio	

Table 1. Types of testing in EUCEBS

In the early stages of the project it was our intention to develop only direct tests, and the use of ICT was to play an important part in assessments by means of tests marked by computer (computer-aided assessment – CAA). It was also expected that for some domains (discussed in A), testing by CAA might prove too difficult to produce or too challenging to take for some learners, especially those with low ICT skills, and so demonstration of competence in the presence of an assessor was anticipated. In this respect EUCEBS was to be similar to the ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence) which can be taken in fully automated format or as a written test. However, during our development of tests and deliberations about the nature of them it became clear that for many adults in our target audience (discussed in C) formal testing might be rather uncomfortable or even unacceptable, and so we began to develop an indirect approach based upon the concept of the portfolio.

The concurrent use of two different approaches (direct and indirect) to assessing the competences of adult basic skills learners presents opportunities and increased flexibility. A given learner may have built a portfolio containing evidence that s/he has competences in some, but not all, elements of the chosen EUCEBS certificate and so can be directly tested in the missing competences. Some domains of competence are easier to test by CAA (e.g. numeracy, ICT), others by portfolio (e.g. learning to learn, communications). Thus a learner wishing to acquire several EUCEBS certificates could take one route to certification and another learner could take a different route (Fig 1)



We shall first describe the way in which the EUCEBS project team developed direct and indirect testing for use in assessing basic skills, and then conclude with consideration of the problems of assessing large numbers of single competences and the need for closer approach to ‘real life’.

Direct testing – CAA & defined tests of competence

Within the EUCEBS project, one use of ICT was directed at establishing computer-aided assessment (CAA) in adult basic skills. There was experience within the team of the use of CAA in formal education for objective testing, and different options were open as to choice of software as well as domains for CAA to be applied. The most straightforward application of CAA comes where unambiguous fixed questions can be applied but where variations on them are easy to construct, conditions that exist in numeracy and ICT. Soft skill competences cannot be directly tested in this way at present, although knowledge of the soft skills and their application can. Textual responses if very short can be marked by computer, but longer textual items are on the limits of software development and beyond the project’s capabilities. As a consequence the first uses of CAA in EUCEBS have been by development and testing of its use in assessing numerical and ICT skills in these two domains.

Two software systems were used originally (Numeracy - WIMS from the University of Nice; ICT – custom system developed within the University of Craiova) and, to demonstrate portability of the tests, the questions and answers were imported into QuestionMark Perception, the commercial system used by the University of Edinburgh. English versions of these tests are available in demonstrator format on the EUCEBS website and define *exemplar tests* for those domains, setting the standard for passing each element in the domains.

In the other four domains (Communication; Learning to Learn; Interpersonal Skills; Citizenship) CAA was not applied, although there are certainly some knowledge aspects of all these domains that could be assessed automatically by computer. Instead paper and performance tests were

developed and tested within the different partner locations. As the tests were of necessity produced in the local language for the adult trainees, each has been translated into English so that a complete record is available in that language. These tests have been agreed by all partners although not all have been tested at several partner locations.

In CAA and other forms of objective testing, the correct answers are clear and so the standard of the test is clear and it could be applied by others without uncertainty. The test may need translation and some local contextualisation to be suitable for other audiences and locations (e.g. young vs. old adults, variations in social and political systems) but in principle they are portable. With assessment of soft skills or where production of complex outputs are involved (e.g. letters, plans), to be sure that the tests are being applied consistently both the tasks to be performed and examples of the outputs (or very detailed descriptions of such) are required. To satisfy this requirement we have presented on the EUCEBS website samples of learners' work that reach pass levels in several domains and in a variety of languages. In direct testing these work samples were produced in the presence of a trainer or assessor.

Indirect testing – e-portfolios to present evidence of competence

The EUCEBS project team's adoption of the use of portfolios, and more specifically, the digital or e-portfolio, was in harmony with a wider movement in north America and Europe towards use of such tools for demonstration of competence in professional groups (teachers, nurses, doctors) as well as for pupils in schools and even populations as a whole. The increase of digital products as outputs of study or work practices (as computer files) began to make physical portfolios less viable as a complete solution to the documentation of past practice, and ability to capture complex ephemeral events on digital images or sound files enabled an entry into documentation of 'soft skills'.

The e-portfolio approach in EUCEBS was also in harmony with a general trend towards accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) as a mechanism to avoid testing in artificial settings with consequent loss of authenticity. This latter is particularly important for adult basic skills, where real-life or real-work settings are preferable to more academic testing and assessment formats. In both France (Bilan de Competence) and Slovenia (sector skills councils) the APEL approach had been recently adopted by the relevant authorities for work-place skills accreditation. However, the term 'e-portfolio' (indeed, 'portfolio' in general) is one with multiple meanings which we must first expand upon to show how it is, and is not, used in EUCEBS.

A portfolio can be used in several ways, not all of which are mutually exclusive, as shown in the table below (Table 2). In the context of the EUCEBS certificates, an e-portfolio system has been developed, which supports 5 of these 9 purposes.

Potential use	EUCEBS	Potential use	EUCEBS
Digital CV		Aid to reflection	✓
Submission of drafts for comment	✓	Submission of evidence for assessment	✓
Group-work sharing tool		Digital repository for learner	✓
Digital repository for management		Record of achievement for all qualifications	
Record of	✓		

achievement in EUCEBS only			
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Table 2 General and EUCEBS uses of e-portfolios

The demonstration e-portfolio on the EUCEBS website which can be accessed by guests shows a partially complete demonstration of competence in several domains and complete competence in some domains. It shows the use of the e-portfolio not only as a *repository* of digital artefacts (files) of various kinds (Word documents, video, scanned images of handwritten documents) demonstrating competences but also as a *reflective tool* in the Learning to Learn domain and as a mechanism for submission of evidence for *feedback* and also for *assessment*. However, as constructed, the e-portfolio is not designed to be used as a tool to *facilitate sharing* of materials other than between trainers, assessors and learners, and hence it does not at present offer the option of being used as a *group-work tool* or a *digital CV*. It is this last use that underlies much of the thinking of governmental agencies about ‘e-portfolios for life’ and as tools to favour greater mobility of workers.

Combining direct and indirect testing

Although we have discussed the value to the learner of being able to offer evidence of competences by direct or indirect assessments, and by use of fully objective questions (as in CAA) as well as more subjective tests (as in Learning to Learn or Interpersonal Skills) this combination of different assessment methods leads to problems for the assessor in setting pass levels for both test types. The objective tests record a pass or fail mark for each question and thus the full range of scores between 100% and 0% can be obtained, whereas in the human-graded tasks the pass-fail decisions are less clear and unless numerical marking schemes are devised the outcomes from the two types of tests do not add directly. The subject of setting standards and pass levels is taken up in E.

‘Real-life’ assessments

There are many individual competence definitions in the EUCEBS certificate (Table 3) and hence assessment of each competence by an individualised test approach results in a long test with many questions or tasks. For example, the Numeracy CAA test can take several hours to complete in total.

DOMAIN	DEFINITIONS
Citizenship	19
Communication	36
ICT	28
Interpersonal Skills	13
Learning to Learn	24
Numeracy	19

Table 3. Individual competences in EUCEBS certificates

In addition, such testing is very similar to those in formal education, something that many of the target audience are uncomfortable with. Adults tend to prefer training and assessment with clear relevance to their lives or work where competences are seen in context(s). Similar caveats apply to many employers who wish to know that potential workers can perform in ‘real-work’ settings and not just in classrooms. It had always been clear to the project team that in reality many simple daily activities involve multiple competences but until the individual competences had been mapped out

and agreed, with tests produced to define the standards for them, trying to work with complex multi-competence assessments was premature.

In the last stages of the project we devised a series of ‘complex scenarios’ to answer this need for ‘real-life’, ‘real-work’ assessments. Some examples are given in the EUCEBS website. The scenarios were created to meet one or more of these criteria:

- They would be recognisable to learners as activities they had done or might do, either completely or partially, or approximately
- They would be recognisable to (potential) employers as activities that show useful competences
- They would include demonstrations of competences from several elements of at least a single domain, preferably two or more domains
- They could describe assessments that might be presented in a direct test
- They could describe the evidences that might be placed in an e-portfolio
- They could be used to train assessors or trainers in EUCEBS competences

The e-portfolio system had been constructed with the option of being able to submit a single item of evidence in more than one element in any domain to take account of this multi-competence approach.

This multi-competence evidencing is exactly the type of activity that would be undertaken by trainers or assessors who were seeking to tease out the skills that learners possessed by analysis of their real-life activities. In the French national ‘bilan de competence’ system such “accompagneurs” are trained in this process, as would be the Qualified EUCEBS Assessors in the EUCEBS system.

C: EUCEBS Target Audience

The target audience for the EUCEBS Certificates is adults of all ages who wish to have some qualification to act as proof of their skills in one or more domains. Typically such adults might include those with no current employment or those aspiring to better employment. The European nature of EUCEBS implies a value beyond national boundaries, and in the context of a widening Europe this has particular resonance at the present time. Some adults might indeed wish a qualification that they could easily take with them and that would be recognised in other European countries without a protracted APL process.

EUCEBS partners were working with a range of adults in their training centres during the piloting of the EUCEBS Competences, and whilst developing tests:

France	Germany	Ireland	Italy	Romania	Slovenia	Spain	UK
Unemployed or poorly employed adults, especially from immigrant communities	Young adults with behavioural problems who have dropped out of the education and training system	Young people at Foundation level	Prisoners	Students at a business college from whom demonstration of soft skills were important	Groups of young people, being groomed for employment, who were not high achievers at school	Unemployed or poorly employed adults, especially from immigrant communities	Young people with physical disabilities

Typically these adults are not comfortable with formal educational settings or assessments and so part of the process of selecting tests and evidencing methods revolved around softening the similarity to formal assessment. We worked particularly towards finding ways in which the learners could demonstrate pre-existing skills (measured against competence statements) that they were already proving in their daily lives.

For some such learners, they may already be quite competent in the domains valued by employers but lack a means of proving this, and would probably not have the time or inclination to attend formal classes in the evenings or weekends.

This audience presents further challenges as seen from the perspective of a funded project. Some may well have quite low literacy skills, and hence materials and testing procedures need to be presented in the local language and in a local context. Thus within the project period it was only possible to develop a subset of all the tests in these variants. In reality it will probably be the case that much of the interactions of training and testing would be oral rather than textual.

D: Qualified EUCEBS Assessors

The assessment of the success or otherwise of a learner in demonstrating competences in the elements of the six domains of the EUCEBS certificates is key to the maintenance of the same standards between all EUCEBS awarding centres. This role falls to the Qualified EUCEBS Assessor, and it is one for which training and regular review are essential features. Independently of country, of language, of training and assessment context, we must be sure that the Qualified Assessors will make the same competence demonstrated or not demonstrated judgement on equivalent items of evidence, be these direct tests or presented through portfolios (see B).

The details of the protocols that were devised for the training and recognition of Qualified EUCEBS Assessors are detailed on the EUCEBS website in the Assessors section, and also the mechanism by which the Assessors would assess the standards of learners' materials.

Training, appointing and reviewing Qualified EUCEBS Assessors

The process of training Assessors is based around a 40 hour course during which trainee Assessors acquire knowledge about the domain of adult basic skills, qualifications and assessment methods, plus an understanding of and ability to judge evidence for the EUCEBS domain in particular. To become an Assessor, an individual must be able to assess evidence in all six domains.

The objectives of the training course are that at the end of the training, the trainees

1. recognize European, national and EUCEBS documents dealing with identification, validation, and certification of non-formal and informal learning (NFL)
2. develop positive attitudes to validation and certification of NFL
3. get acquainted with EUCEBS' 6 domains, their elements, performance criteria and range statements
4. qualify for using the two instruments in the process of validating and accrediting the EUCEBS candidates' certificate in the 6 domains:
 - a) EUCEBS tests, and
 - b) collecting, validating and accrediting NFL and competencies
5. qualify for direct /immediate validation and accreditation of NFL and competencies
6. get to know the characteristics of creating the portfolio, and its components and judge the relevance of evidences in relation the EUCEBS certificate/s and the EUCEBS tests in the 6 domains
7. appreciate the communication competencies of the QEAA, and show adequate responses and respect for the candidates in the process of accrediting the EUCEBS certificate/s
8. know the characteristics of the target groups applying for the EUCEBS certificate.
9. master EUCEBS ICT.

The course consists of 15 hours of face-to-face lessons, 19 hours of active methods of learning (experiential), and 6 hours of self-directed learning. In addition a written and practical test of candidate's knowledge and competencies will be carried out, taking a further 3 – 7 hours.

Potential Qualified EUCEBS Assessors will need to show appropriate educational and experiential qualifications for example higher or upper secondary school educational awards, experience in adult literacy classes, respecting the national regulation (3 years for higher and 5 years for upper secondary school). Experience in teaching trainers/teachers of adults is strongly recommended.

The Qualified EUCEBS Assessor Award will be valid for 5 years. After that period the Assessors are obliged to renew their licence. As a consequence of taking and passing the training, Assessors are also qualified for guidance in the process of collecting and validating non-formal learning for EUCEBS learners, but they cannot play both roles for the same candidate.

Assessing the standard of learners' evidence of competence and awarding certificates

The process of assessing evidence and awarding certificates consists of three stages:

- Preparing the candidates for EUCEBS accreditation,
- Collecting and assessing documentation,
- Assessment and accreditation

In addition for a high quality service there must also be a transparent mechanism for dealing with any complaints.

The assessment process is based around interviews with candidates, although in some settings these may need to be modified to allow an element of interactions at a distance to be included. In the first instance it seemed most likely that EUCEBS candidates would be presenting through local training centres and so would be in a position to take advantage of face-to-face interactions with Assessors. Assessors would generally expect to be assessing the evidence presented in a portfolio (perhaps an e-portfolio) but where gaps existed or where the candidate preferred, direct tests could be used to allow the candidate to demonstrate competencies. (The assessment process through direct and indirect methods is discussed in B).

E: Setting the level for the EUCEBS Certificates

The selection of a level for the EUCEBS certificates was not without problems. In some European countries a well-developed set of academic and vocational certificates exist that cover a range from the most basic to very advanced. An example of such is the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) that has levels from 1 (Access) to 12 (postgraduate, skilled professional), and has academic and vocational components (for more details see www.sqa.org.uk). In other countries such frameworks are less comprehensive (eg the Republic of Ireland, where the lowest level for basic skills is missing). The EUCEBS certificates were to be targeted towards adults with low basic skills who wished to evidence their competences, largely for vocational purposes, and hence they fitted into the lower end of the range of qualifications.

For partners in countries with no low level qualifications there was a value in aiming EUCEBS certificates at the lowest levels as a 'stepping stone', whereas for countries with pre-existing qualifications in this range, the value was to aim for the most useful levels for successful entry to employment. After detailed consideration, it was agreed to aim for certificates at a level that had utility for employment and successful living in modern European society. This would give them a face validity for both learners and for potential employers. The selection of the standards in the competences of the six domains was based upon the experience of all EUCEBS partners who were involved in training adults for employment in their countries. The level was also to be approximately that of the end of compulsory schooling, although in some European countries there was little by way of equivalent certification for soft skills or for transferable skills in general. Given the present lack of transparency in European school leaving certification the selection of the standards could not be matched directly to any European norms.

However, this choice of level for the EUCEBS certificates still left those partners who could offer no certification at a lower level than EUCEBS with a problem. Motivating such learners is much improved if some sense of progress can be achieved in their minds, and the step from their starting points to the successful achievement of a EUCEBS certificate was felt to be too great. The solution that was chosen by the partners towards the end of the project was to agree that the certificates could be awarded at two levels. This modularisation was comparable to that applied at the start of the project when it was agreed that the single EUCEBS certificate should be modified to be a six certificate system, one for each domain. The logic for that change (greater attractiveness, flexibility) could be equally applied to the standards, and so it was decided that at some point in the future the certificate standards would be reviewed to define a partway stage or level where some of the easier competences were demonstrated to achieve a Level 1 certificate and that the full certificate would be defined as at Level 2. (These numbers are not directly related to levels in any national qualification frameworks but are internal terminology only.)

F: EUCEBS Certificates & EU Processes

Throughout the project we have sought to take account of developments at European level as regards both the European Single Framework on Transparency of Qualifications and Competencies, and the Identification and Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning. EUCEBS is a member of the CEDEFOP virtual communities serving both of these European ideals. The two virtual communities have proved invaluable as sources of up-to-date information from Brussels on the contribution of the Copenhagen Process to the implementation of the *Education and Training 2010* work programme, and as platforms from which to disseminate EUCEBS' aims and results.

Our engagement with the Copenhagen Process began initially with the Leonardo da Vinci Thematic Monitoring Projects Study conducted during 2003 on Theme 4, *Transparency, assessment and validation knowledge*. CEDEFOP, progressing this study, asked in a questionnaire that we describe the actual state of our project, including potential differences with the initial planning and objectives and any likely expected future variations. At this stage we were aware of the recommendation, by ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd and the European Commission, that Europass Training be modified to lead the transparency framework-to-be as a record of lifelong learning, and we sought permission, in our EUCEBS Interim Report, to change from the NARICs to the Europass National Contact Points as the place where we would lodge completed trainee records of achievement, including the attainment of EUCEBS certificates.

We obtained this permission, but we do not have, as yet, the synchronicity we are looking for with the Europass in its currently evolving form (please see <http://europass.cedefop.eu.int/europass/preview.action>). In a letter dated 22 July 2004, Mr Philippe Tissot of CEDEFOP wrote to EUCEBS, with a copy to Mr Carlo Scatoli of the European Commission:

Concerning the use of the Europass certificate supplement, this has to be discussed with the Commission and Member States. The Certificate supplement is intended for formal training pathways leading to formal certification; thus the use of the certificate supplement for the Eucebs has to be granted by the Ministries of Education.

While some headway has been made, in some of the EUCEBS partner countries, with the task of obtaining Ministry of Education endorsement, full endorsement by all such ministries is still outstanding. It seems too that competing forces are at work; for instance in Spain, it is the trade unions that have expressed a wish to support EUCEBS certification, rather than the Ministry of Education, and in several countries, umbrella agencies for sector skills councils are clamouring for mould-breaking Sector Skills Agreements between the demand side (employers) and the supply side (providers of education and training). Because EUCEBS certification was developed within its own

European framework in parallel with the Europass certificate supplement, CEDEFOP now pledges to us to explore, with the European Commission, the possibility of setting up a parallel certification area within the Europass, to be used by independent European training concerns that can prove they exercise quality control.

We can take encouragement too from a paper published by the European Commission's Vocational Training Policy division, dated 28 October 2004, entitled *A European Qualification Framework*

Underpinned by a Set of Common Reference Levels. Section 5 of this paper, on common reference levels addressing lifelong learning, states that “a set of common reference levels for qualifications and competences at the heart of the EQF should be conceptualised and implemented according to a lifelong learning perspective and thus cover all levels, phases and stages of education, training and learning. The common reference levels should refer primarily to learning outcomes rather than to specific education and training arrangements or institutions. Unlike other approaches used at sector, national and international...level, a set of mainly outcome-based reference levels would make it possible to compare and link the growing diversity of education, training and learning provisions currently being provided – in formal as well as non-formal and informal settings. Thus the European reference levels would constitute a “reading grid” providing much greater transparency and allowing citizens, enterprises and stakeholders to compare qualifications, competences and education systems throughout Europe and therefore to increase mobility.” In other words, inclusion should now be the name of the game!

We at EUCEBS see our project as directly aligned to the Identification and Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, and have been even more closely involved with the CEDEFOP virtual community addressing this than with the virtual community treating the European Single Framework on Transparency of Qualifications and Competencies. Until the 2004 Leonardo da Vinci Call for Proposals, the concept was rendered simply as "Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning", and was perceived as a sort of glorified APEL. Now however there is a European movement, led by the European Commission, to build on the French *Bilans de Competences* law of 1991 and re-position guidance and counselling at the centre of the process of validating non-formal and informal learning. Instead of guidance being a specialist discipline bolted onto formal education or training provision, it now involves a "dialogue of equals" between counsellor or *accompagnateur* and job or certification seeker. What the job or certification seeker can already do is teased out in such dialogue, and ways are looked for of documenting evidence of this.

To quote Danielle Colardyn and Jens Bjornavold (*Validation of Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Learning: policy and practices in EU Member States*, European Journal of Education, Vol.39, No.1, 2004), "Once evidence is collected, it needs to be documented. Examples have been examined for non-formal and informal learning and have been classified into three categories: the check-up (*Bilan de competences*) of competence; the portfolio and the certification of competences." In the Qualified EUCEBS Assessor Award and accompanying Assessment Procedures that we have developed, all three have approximately equal weight.

However, we would not wish to give the impression that we eschew what one might term the more “old fashioned” functions of guidance. We hope that when we move into a position to supply Qualified EUCEBS Assessor training and EUCEBS certification, we will be able to advertise our European outlets for these on the Ploteus portal at <http://europa.eu.int/ploteus/portal/home.jsp> .

In May 2004, the Council of the European Union published its *Draft Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the Member States meeting within the Council on Strengthening Policies, Systems and Practices in the field of Guidance throughout life in Europe*. This document reaffirms as priorities the commitment to develop high quality guidance provision for all European citizens, the need for further co-operation in the area of guidance in the context of following up the Lisbon Strategy, the re-focusing of guidance provision as an integral part of education and training programmes, better quality assurance mechanisms for guidance services, the need for guidance policy and systems development, and the need to address the guidance policy issues within the Education and Training 2010 work programme.

The whole draft resolution was however a distillation of a far more complex document produced in November 2003 which EUCEBS had adopted as its Bible. This document, entitled *Implementation of “Education & Training 2010” Work Programme: Progress Report, Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning, Contribution of the Commission Expert Group*, concentrated on common European principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning under three categories: formal education and training, the labour market, and voluntary work and leisure time activities. We placed ourselves in the formal education and training category and measured ourselves against the document’s recommendations on individual rights, transparency of procedures, transparency of criteria, training of assessors, inclusion of stakeholders and comparability of validations. Particularly seminal for us was the recommendation that “the requirements met by the individual must be so precisely described that two validation bodies acting independently of each other can be expected to reach the same conclusion.” For us that meant validation bodies in separate European countries. At a time when our thinking in EUCEBS was moving away from the easy option of administering one European-standard set test in all our partner countries, we put a lot of work into agreeing guidelines for the assessors who would be using portfolio approaches with our future EUCEBS candidates.

We now hope to find further inspiration from ECOTEC’s European Inventory on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning at <http://ecotec.com/europeaninventory2004/2004.html> .