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## **The European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training**

This note provides information for the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT) on the development of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) within the framework of the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme.

The success of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training very much depends on its relevance and credibility to those involved in education, training and learning. The ACVT – representing social partners and national authorities responsible for vocational education and training – was invited in June 2006 to give its view on the ECVET proposal consultation paper in the perspective of the consultation which took place from November 2006 to March 2007. Moreover, the ACVT members were invited to give their opinion on the ECVET proposal, through the consultation process. The ACVT was informed of the results of the consultation and of the follow up during the ACVT meeting of June 2007.

The ACVT is now invited to give its view on the proposed principal elements of the ECVET legal text. It should therefore play a key role in the development and implementation of ECVET.

## **PROPOSED PRINCIPAL ELEMENTS OF THE ECVET LEGAL TEXT**

**The background (preamble) will refer in particular to:**

### ***The political mandate***

- the March 2002 European Council in Barcelona, which called for European education and training to be a world quality reference by 2010, specifically the request for instruments to promote transparency of qualifications and recognition methods in the area of vocational education and training;
- the November 2002 Education Council Resolution and the Copenhagen Declaration of 30 November 2002 on the future priorities for enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training, emphasising that priority must be given to the design of a credit system for vocational education and training;
- the Joint Interim report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme, which stressed the need to develop a European credit system for VET;
- the Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council of 15 November 2004 on the Future priorities of enhanced European Cooperation in vocational education and training that gave priority to the development and implementation of a European credit transfer system for vocational education and training (ECVET) in order to allow learners to build upon the achievements resulting from their learning pathways when moving between vocational training systems;

### ***The policy context***

- the key role of vocational education and training in achieving the Lisbon goals;
- the key role of lifelong learning in achieving employability, mobility and social inclusion of workers and learners;
- the relevance of ECVET to the needs of both learners, workers, VET systems and labour market;
- the ECVET's relationship to existing instruments such as ECTS, Europass, the European Quality Charter for mobility and EQF, , ;
- the 2004 European principles on the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- the 2004 Council conclusions on Quality assurance in VET

### ***The subject, scope and functions of ECVET***

The legal text will establish ECVET as an operational system intended to facilitate the transfer, recognition and accumulation of learning outcomes of individuals. For this purpose, it will improve the transparency and portability of citizens' learning outcomes across different Member States. These learning outcomes may be achieved in formal,

non-formal and informal learning contexts. The implementation of ECVET by the Member States will be voluntary.

### ***Member States' tasks***

We propose that it be recommended that Member States:

- promote ECVET to facilitate mobility in vocational education and training and for lifelong learning and adopt measures by 2011 for progressively applying ECVET to vocational education and training qualifications on the basis of the technical specifications enclosed in the annex;
- Implement ECVET from 2011 for the transfer, recognition and accumulation of individuals' learning outcomes achieved in formal, non-formal and informal contexts;
- support the development of partnerships and networks involving social partners and professional sectors, dedicated to the experimentation implementation and promotion of ECVET;
- Ensure that vocational education and training stakeholders and individuals have access to information and guidance for using ECVET and ensure that the qualifications to which ECVET is applied and the related "Europass" documents issued by the competent authorities contain explicit information related to the use of ECVET;
- Promote and apply the principles for quality assurance in education and training set out in annex III of the recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework when using the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training.
- Insure that mechanisms of coordination and monitoring are operational at the different appropriate levels , in order to guarantee the transparency and consistency of initiatives taken for the implementation of ECVET.

### ***Commission's tasks***

We propose that it be recommended that the Commission:

- Support Member States in carrying out the above tasks in using the principles and technical specifications of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training as set out in the legal text, in particular by facilitating testing, cooperation, mutual learning and promotion;
- Develop an ECVET users' guides, guidance material and guidelines in collaboration with European experts, develop expertise for reinforcing the compatibility between ECVET and ECTS used in Higher Education, provide regular information on the developments of ECVET;

- Establish an ECVET users' group, involving relevant vocational education and training stakeholders in order to ensure the quality and overall coherence of the cooperation process for the implementation of ECVET;
- Monitor the action taken in response to the legal text, and after the assessment and evaluation of this action fulfilled in cooperation with the Member States, report, five years after the adoption of the Recommendation, to the European Parliament and the Council on the experience gained and implications for the future, including, if necessary, a possible review and revision of the legal text.

**The annexes will include:**

- A set of definitions which apply for the purposes of the legal text
- ECVET main technical specifications

## ANNEX 1

For the purposes of the legal text, the definitions which apply are the following:

- “Qualification: a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards;
- “Learning outcomes”: statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process and are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence;
- "Unit of learning outcomes" (unit): a part of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence, that can be assessed and validated;
- "Credit for learning outcomes" (Credit): individuals' learning outcomes which, being assessed, can be transferred, validated and accumulated;
- "Competent institution": institution which is responsible for design and recognition of qualification or units or other functions linked to ECVET such as allocation of ECVET points to qualifications and units, assessment and validation of learning outcomes, under the rules and practices of participating countries;
- "Assessment of learning outcomes": methods and processes used to establish how far a learner has in fact attained particular knowledge, skills and competence;
- "Validation of learning outcomes": the process of confirming that certain assessed learning outcomes achieved by a learner correspond to specific outcomes which may be required for a unit or a qualification;
- "Recognition of learning outcomes": the process of granting official status to validated learning outcomes for the purpose of awarding a unit or a qualification;
- "ECVET points": a numerical representation of the overall weight of learning outcomes in a qualification or of the relative weight of units in relation to the qualification;

## **ANNEX 2**

### **ECVET main technical specifications**

ECVET is intended to facilitate the recognition of learning outcomes, in the framework of mobility, for the purpose of achieving a qualification. The application of ECVET for a given qualification is based on the following elements:

- Description of the qualification in Units of learning outcomes (units);
- Design of a learning outcomes transfer and accumulation process;
- Establishment of partnerships of competent institutions;
- Allocation of ECVET credit points to the qualification and to the units.

#### **1. UNITS OF LEARNING OUTCOMES**

A unit is an element of a qualification, consisting of a part of the knowledge, skills and competence required by a given qualification. A qualification is made of the whole set of units. Thus, by accumulating the required units, a learner can achieve a qualification.

The units composing a qualification should be:

- Described in legible and understandable terms by mentioning the contained knowledge, skills and competences;
- Constructed and organised in a coherent way with regard to the overall qualification;
- Constructed in a way that enables discrete assessment and validation of learning outcomes contained in the unit.

A unit may be specific to a single qualification or common to several qualifications. The learning outcomes contained in a unit may be achieved through formal, non-formal or informal learning. A unit may have a limited validity in time.

A unit of learning outcomes in itself does not usually constitute a qualification. A unit is not to be confused with a component of a learning or training programme or with a curriculum

The rules and procedures for defining characteristics of units of learning outcomes are defined by competent institutions according to the national, regional or sectoral rules.

The specifications for a unit should include at least:

- The generic title of the unit;
- The generic title of the qualification to which the unit relates;

- The reference of the qualification according to the EQF level and, if appropriate, the NQF level, with the ECVET credit points associated with the qualification;
- The learning outcomes contained in the unit;
- The procedures and criteria for assessment of these learning outcomes;
- The ECVET credit points associated with the unit

## **2. TRANSFER AND ACCUMULATION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES, ECVET PARTNERSHIPS**

For using ECVET, units, or parts of units of learning outcomes achieved and assessed in one setting are transferred to another setting. In this second context, they are validated and recognised by the competent institution as part of the requirements for the qualification aimed by the person. Units of learning outcomes can then be accumulated towards this qualification, according to national, sectoral or regional rules.

Credit transfer is facilitated by establishing a partnership between competent institutions each of which is empowered, in their own setting, to award qualifications or units or to give credit for achieved learning outcomes for transfer and validation, and by using a learning agreement.

The establishment of a partnership aims to:

- Provide a framework of cooperation between the partners, set out in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) through which a climate of mutual trust is established;
- Enable the partners to design, specific arrangements for credit transfer for learners.

The MoU should confirm that the partners:

- Accept each other's status as competent institutions;
- Accept each others' quality assurance, assessment, validation and recognition criteria and procedures as satisfactory for the purposes of credit transfer;
- Agree the conditions for the operation of the partnership, such as objectives, duration and arrangements for review of the MoU;
- Agree on the comparability of qualifications concerned for the purposes of credit transfer using EQF to establish the reference levels.
- Identify other actors and competent institutions that may be involved in the process concerned and their functions

The Learning Agreement is concluded by two competent institutions, in the framework of a MoU, and a specific learner. It should:

- Distinguish between “home” and “hosting” competent institutions<sup>1</sup>;
- Specify the particular conditions for a period of mobility such as the identity of the learner, the duration of the mobility period, learning outcomes expected to be achieved and the associated credit points.

The Learning Agreement should establish that, if the learner has achieved the expected learning outcomes and these have been positively assessed by the ‘hosting’ institution, the ‘home’ institution can validate and recognise them as part of the requirements for a qualification, according to the rules and procedures established by the competent institution.

Transfer between partners can apply to learning outcomes achieved in formal or non-formal contexts. Thus, the transfer of credit for achieved learning outcomes has three stages:

- The “hosting” institution assesses the learning outcomes achieved and awards credit to the learner. The learning outcomes achieved and the corresponding credit points are recorded in a learner’s personal transcript<sup>2</sup>;
- The “home” institution validates the credit as a suitable record of the learner’s achievement.
- The “home” institution then recognises the learning outcomes that have been acquired. This recognition gives rise to the award of the units and their corresponding credit points, according to the rules of the “home” system.

Validation and recognition by the competent “home” institution depend on the successful assessment of learning outcomes by the competent “hosting” institution, according to the agreed procedures and quality assurance criteria.

Transfer of learning outcomes in the framework of ECVET can also take place outside partnerships using assessment, validation and recognition procedures according to the rules of the competent institution that awards a qualification.

### **3. ECVET POINTS**

ECVET points provide complementary information about qualifications and units in a numerical form. They have no value independent of the acquired learning outcomes to which they refer.

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<sup>1</sup> The “home” institution is the institution which will validate and recognize learning outcomes achieved by the learner.

The “hosting” institution is the one that delivers training for the learning outcomes concerned and assesses the achieved learning outcomes.

<sup>2</sup> A personal transcript is a document which details learners’ assessed learning outcomes.

In ECVET the allocation of points has two phases: first ECVET points are allocated to a qualification as a whole and then to its units.

To enable the allocation of credit points to a qualification as a whole a convention is used, according to which, 60 credit points are allocated to the learning outcomes expected to be achieved in a year of formal full time VET. For a given qualification, one formal learning context is taken as a reference and, on the basis of the convention, the total number of points is allocated for that qualification. From this total, ECVET points are then allocated to each unit according to their relative weight within the qualification.

The relative weight of a unit of learning outcomes, with regard to the qualification, should be established according to the following criteria or a combination of these criteria:

- The relative importance of the learning outcomes which constitute the unit for labour market participation, for progression to other qualification levels and for the needs of society;
- The complexity, the scope and the volume of learning outcomes in the unit;
- The effort necessary for a learner to acquire the knowledge, skills and competence required for the unit.

These allocations are made by the competent institution responsible for the design and maintenance of the qualification or specifically empowered for this task. The allocation of ECVET points is part of the design process of a qualification. In countries which have a previous national system of points, the relevant competent institutions establish arrangements for the conversion of national credit points to ECVET points.

The relative weight of any given unit, as expressed in ECVET points, may vary from one qualification to another.

The successful achievement of a qualification or of a unit triggers the award of ECVET points to a learner, independent of the actual time required to achieve them.

Any qualification acquired through non-formal or informal learning for which a formal learning pathway reference can be identified, carries the same ECVET points as the reference.

For qualifications which do not have a formal learning pathway reference, ECVET credit points can be allocated through estimation by comparison with another qualification which has a formal reference context. To establish the comparability of the qualifications, the competent institution should refer to the equivalent EQF level or, possibly, NQF level, or to the similarity of the professional fields or the learning outcomes.

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