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COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 9.4.2008
COM(2008) 180 final

2008/0070 (COD)

Proposal for a

**RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE
COUNCIL**

**on the establishment of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and
Training (ECVET)**

**[SEC(2008) 442
SEC(2008) 443]**

(presented by the Commission)

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

1. Context of the proposal

Grounds for and objectives of the proposal

The need for a continuous renewal of citizens' knowledge, skills and competence is crucial for the EU's competitiveness and social cohesion, and in this respect vocational education and vocational training have a key contribution to make. However, complexity and a lack of co-operation between different providers/authorities and between different national systems weaken its impact. Barriers hinder individual citizens from accessing education and training and from combining and accumulating learning outcomes achieved in different learning contexts. They make it difficult for citizens to move within the European Vocational Education and Training (VET) area and the European labour market and to pursue genuine lifelong learning without borders.

The Lisbon European Council in 2000 concluded that increased transparency of qualifications and lifelong learning should be two of the main components in the efforts to adapt Europe's education and training systems both to the demands of the knowledge society and to the need for an improved level and quality of employment.

The 2002 Council Resolution on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in VET (the "Copenhagen Process") emphasised that giving priority to a system of credit transfer for VET was one of the common measures needed in order to promote the transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of competence and/or qualifications, between different countries and at different levels.

In the 2004 Maastricht Communiqué, the Ministers responsible for VET, the Commission and the European social partners agreed to give priority to the development and implementation of ECVET. This was confirmed by the same group in the 2006 Helsinki Communiqué which calls further development of common European tools namely ECVET¹.

This ECVET proposal responds to the political mandate described above.

General context

One of the main obstacles to attracting more interest in transnational mobility as part of initial and continuing vocational training and education is the difficulty in identifying, validating and recognising learning outcomes acquired during a stay in another country. Furthermore lifelong learning is taking place increasingly in different countries and in a wide variety of contexts, formal, non-formal and informal.

What is needed, therefore, is a way of enabling people to pursue their learning pathway by building on their learning outcomes when moving from one learning context to another, and from one country to the other.

¹ Maastricht Communiqué on the future priorities of enhanced European cooperation in vocational training and education, 14 December 2004 (http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/ip/docs/maastricht_com_en.pdf); Helsinki Communiqué of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training, 5 December 2006 (http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/helsinkicom_en.pdf)

One of the most important challenges to be faced is the diversity, even fragmentation of education, VET and qualifications systems in Europe. A large number of qualifications and of different competent institutions and actors may be involved. Their activities may include the definition of qualifications, methods for assessing and validating learning, setting training objectives, determining the content of learning outcomes, implementing training programmes. A wide range of providers may be involved: ministries, agencies, occupational sectors, companies, social partners, chambers, non-governmental organisations, and so forth. In some cases, a national authority may accredit or empower training providers or other actors to prepare and issue qualifications, points, etc. In other cases, these functions can be devolved to the regional level, or to the providers.

Countries have a national framework defining levels of qualifications or a classification for these levels. These frameworks may or may not be geared towards the organisation of education or training cycles. Moreover, depending on the systems, qualifications may be obtained either after only one type of formal training programme or following several kinds of learning processes.

The award of qualifications is based, in some systems, on the accumulation of units of learning outcomes either associated with credit points (United Kingdom, Finland, Sweden...) or without credit points (France, Spain...). Credit systems are sometimes developed within a broader qualifications framework (Scottish and Welsh credit and qualifications framework) or designed for specific qualifications (IFTS system in Italy). Furthermore, depending on the country, there are many ways of using units and points for learning outcomes and, in certain countries different practices for the allocation of points for learning outcomes may coexist.

Considering the diversity described above, common conventions and technical principles are required in order to ensure mutual trust and to enable the transfer and recognition of learning outcomes in the context of trans-national mobility.

Existing provisions in this area at European level

This ECVET proposal belongs to a series of European initiatives, including the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), Europass², the European Quality Charter for Mobility (EQCM), the European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning and the European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)³:

- ECTS was promoted by the Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council of 10 July 2001 on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, volunteers, teachers and trainers⁴, used in higher education. ECVET should be compatible with ECTS so as to enable bridging vocational education and training and higher education.
- Europass was created by Decision No 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences.

² Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass)

³ Proposal for a recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning, COM(2006) 479 final, Brussels, 5.9.2006

⁴ OJ L 215, 09.08.2001

- The European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning were agreed in the form of Council Conclusions in 2004⁵. The implementation of ECVET will take these principles into account.
- EQCM was adopted through the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on trans-national mobility within the Community for education and training purposes (European Quality Charter for mobility⁶). It states in point 8 of its Annex that, when mobility is undertaken by individuals, "*participants should be provided with assistance to facilitate recognition and certification*" of learning outcomes. ECVET is intended to support the quality of individuals' mobility as required by the abovementioned Recommendation.
- EQF was launched by the 2008 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European qualification framework (EQF)⁷ as a reference tool for the comparison of qualification levels in national qualifications systems and also in qualifications systems developed by international sectoral organisations. ECVET will complement and build on common concepts and principles with the EQF. Indeed, ECVET uses EQF as the reference level for qualifications.

Consistency with other policies and objectives of the Union

ECVET does not apply to the mutual recognition of qualifications in the area of regulated professions, as that is ensured by Directive 2005/36/EC⁸ of 7 September 2005, because ECVET is not a tool for granting rights to migrants in recognition of their qualifications acquired in one Member State with a view to exercising a regulated profession in another Member State. In such a case, only the Directive imposes legally binding obligations on Member States' authorities.

2. Consultation of interested parties and impact assessment

Consultation of experts

The Cedefop (2005) report on "*European approaches to credit (transfer) systems in VET – An assessment of the applicability of existing credit systems to a European credit transfer system for vocational education and training (ECVET)*" builds extensively on relevant international cases and practices in the field of credit systems. In 2005 the Commission financed two studies to look into ECVET in the context of European mobility in the area of initial vocational training⁹. These two studies conclude that the ECVET principles are viewed in a positive light by the stakeholders who were met and interviewed. ECVET is also seen as a being key device for the improvement of the VET systems with the prospect of a better matching with the individuals' needs and the requirements of the labour market. However, the studies underline that ECVET cannot be introduced and used unless it is culturally and technically adapted to the national, regional or sectoral contexts. They confirm that ECVET

⁵ 9600/04 EDUC 118 SOC 253, 28 May 2004

⁶ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p.5

⁷ OJ [...]

⁸ OJ L 255/22, 30.09.2005, p.1

⁹ ECVET Reflector (<http://www.ecvet.net/c.php/ecvet/index.rsys>); ECVET Connexion (<http://www.ecvetconnexion.com/>)

can be applied without calling into question the existing initial education and vocational training system and the fundamental principles of certification and qualifications.

Lastly, the Commission has drawn useful conclusions from the results of projects previously funded under the Leonardo da Vinci programme that demonstrated that an approach based on units of learning outcomes is the appropriate answer to the issue of transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes of individuals who move from one learning context to another.

Consultation of interested parties (2006-2007)

From November 2006 to March 2007, the European Commission launched a Europe-wide consultation process on an ECVET blueprint based on the Commission Staff Working Document "European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) – A system for the transfer, accumulation and recognition of learning outcomes in Europe" - SEC(2006) 1431. That document was based on the work of an expert group launched in 2003 and made up of representatives of all the main areas of education and training (general, adult, vocational, higher education and training) as well as representatives of public authorities, sectors, social partners and Cedefop.

As part of this consultation process, the ECVET blueprint was presented to and debated in a range of meetings organised by national authorities, social partners, sectoral bodies and others during the consultation period. An open consultation was conducted over the internet during the same period. The results¹⁰ of the consultation process were discussed at a conference held in Munich in June 2007.

The consultation process confirmed the broad support for ECVET. The majority of respondents agreed that there is a need for a common European Credit system for VET. However, support was made conditional on a series of requirements and recommendations, which have been taken into account by this proposal.

Collection and use of expertise

Scientific/expertise domains concerned

Following the consultation process, an expert group was set up in 2007 to agree a new set of technical specifications as well as a set of key definitions underpinning this Recommendation. Cedefop and the European Training Foundation also contributed actively to the work, collaborating closely with the Commission, the external experts and the expert groups.

Summary of advice received and used

See above

Means used to make the expert advice publicly available

Lastly, the technical specifications agreed by the expert group were part of a document submitted to the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training, which delivered a positive opinion on the main elements of the proposal at its meeting of 13 December 2007.

Impact assessment

¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/education/ecvt/results_en.html

The impact assessment underlines the added value ECVET would bring in facilitating lifelong learning and reducing barriers to mobility across Europe. It sets out the various options Commission has considered in seeking to find solutions to these issues and for ensuring take up of ECVET.

Failure by the European Union to take any action would allow the current unsatisfactory situation to continue, which would be unacceptable to many stakeholders, given the abovementioned obstacles to the transfer and recognition of learning outcomes; moreover, it would not fulfil the clear mandate given to the Commission.

A Communication from the Commission would not involve the Member States or the European Parliament in its adoption and therefore would not generate the necessary political commitment for the creation and the effective implementation of an operational ECVET.

Nor would a Commission Recommendation under Article 150 of the Treaty have a stronger impact than the previous option, as it would not involve Member States or the European Parliament in the formal adoption, and so would still not generate the degree of political commitment required to implement ECVET effectively.

A Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council under Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty would adopt principles and obligations for those Member States which relate their national systems to ECVET. However, the overwhelming consensus of stakeholders (Member States, social partners, sectors and others) is that ECVET should be voluntary.

A Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council, under Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty would commit the Member States on a voluntary basis to using ECVET as a device to facilitate transparency, comparability, transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes between different learning contexts and different countries, with a view to setting up a lifelong learning area without borders. The Commission identifies this option as the most appropriate. It corresponds most closely to the expectations of both Member States and stakeholders, and it would provide the best basis for the successful implementation of an operational ECVET and for achieving the real added value that the European dimension can bring.

The Commission impact assessment report is accessible on the Commission's website.

3. Legal elements of the proposal

Summary of the proposed action

The proposed Recommendation would commit the Member States to using ECVET on a voluntary basis. It establishes ECVET as a methodological framework that can be used to describe qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes with associated points, with a view to transferring and accumulating learning outcomes. ECVET is based on the designing of coherent and meaningful units of learning outcomes and not on fragmentation of qualifications. ECVET does not aim for or require harmonisation of qualifications and VET systems; it aims instead for better comparability and compatibility. The proposed Recommendation includes two annexes presenting a glossary and the key features of ECVET.

It is recommended that Member States should implement ECVET by 2012. Member States are also recommended to develop partnerships and networks at European, national, regional, local and sectoral level, as appropriate, and to promote and apply the principles for quality

assurance in VET when implementing ECVET. Member States should provide access to information on ECVET and guidance to stakeholders and individuals, and ensure that all relevant qualifications and related "Europass" documents issued by the competent authorities contain clear information related to the use of ECVET. Lastly, Member States are recommended to ensure that functioning coordination, monitoring and review mechanisms are in place, which take existing instruments into account in order to guarantee the consistency of initiatives within and across countries. The national reviews will contribute to a European review to be organised by the Commission.

The proposal invites the Commission to support Member States in carrying out the above tasks, to develop an ECVET users' guide and tools, to establish a pilot ECVET users' group and to developing a European ECVET network in order to ensure the quality and overall coherence of the cooperation process for the implementation of ECVET. Moreover, the Commission will monitor the action in response to the Recommendation with a view to a possible review four years after its adoption.

Legal basis

Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty

Subsidiarity principle

Community action better achieves the objectives of the proposal for the following reasons:

- The proposal provides a common device, a common terminology, common references and shared approaches and conventions for cooperation between involved stakeholders. These functions cannot be provided by action at the national level.
- The challenges related to mutual trust, transparency, validation and transfer of learning outcomes in VET on the European scale are shared by all Member States and cannot be solved exclusively at national or sectoral levels.
- If stakeholders involved in VET from all 27 Member States were to negotiate bilateral agreements on the subject covered by the proposed Recommendation with all other stakeholders individually and in an uncoordinated way, using specific and particular concepts, principles and rules, this would result in an extremely complex and non-transparent overall structure at the European level.

Proportionality principle

This Recommendation conforms to the principle of proportionality because it does not replace or define national qualifications systems and/or qualifications, it does not harmonise VET and qualifications systems and it leaves the implementation of the recommendation to the Member States. Existing reporting systems will be used, thereby minimising the administrative burden.

Choice of instruments

Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council

4. Budgetary implication

No implications for the Community budget.

5. Additional information

Review/revision/sunset clause

The proposal includes a review clause.

European Economic Area

The proposed act concerns an EEA matter and should therefore extend to the European Economic Area.

Detailed explanation of the proposal

The *objective of ECVET* is to support and promote transnational mobility and access to lifelong learning in VET. While EQF provides a common reference framework which is meant to serve as a translation device between different qualifications systems and their levels, ECVET provides a common methodological framework which is meant to facilitate transfer of credit for learning outcomes from one qualifications system to another, or from one learning pathway to another (see examples in the annex to the explanatory memorandum, chart 1). It contributes to the permeability of learning systems, compatibility between autonomous education and VET systems and, in so doing, supports the possibility for learners to build individual learning pathways leading to qualifications. Its implementation is based on the principle of voluntary participation by the Member States and stakeholders.

The ECVET methodological framework includes principles and key technical specifications to enable qualifications to be described in terms of units of learning outcomes and associated ECVET points (see chart 2 in annex), for the purpose of credit transfer and accumulation and to support partnerships. The ECVET principles and technical specifications are designed for use in a flexible but structured way. They will be further detailed in the ECVET users' guide.

As a *unit-based credit system*, ECVET will contribute to developing and extending European cooperation in education and training. Based as it is on learning outcomes, the proposed unit-based credit system is compatible with all qualifications systems, learning contexts and learning approaches. A unit-based approach supports flexible individual learning pathways, where learners can accumulate the required units of learning outcomes over time, in different countries, and in different learning modes to achieve a qualification. Its flexibility facilitates the process of organizing mobility experiences for VET learners, while its principles preserve the overall coherence and integrity of each qualification and avoid the excessive fragmentation of learning outcomes that have to be validated and recognised. Finally, a unit-based credit system creates the possibility of developing common references for VET qualifications by providing a common structure and conventions.

ECVET partnerships and networks involving competent institutions, authorities, social partners, sectors and providers are essential for the testing, development and broad implementation of ECVET. They provide a way for the wide variety of VET institutions to work together. They create an environment in which mutual trust can be developed and provide a framework for ECVET credit transfer. These partnerships should be formalised through *ECVET Memoranda of Understanding*. *Learning Agreements* offer simple, convenient and systematic guidelines for practical implementation of credit transfer arrangements and procedures for an individual learner.

ECVET points are attached to qualifications and units of learning outcomes as a necessary and complementary source of information. These are developed on the basis of common European conventions and, by enhancing the legibility of achieved learning outcomes they facilitate transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes achieved by a learner.

Furthermore, by assigning ECVET points to both a qualification and its component units, learning outcomes become more "tangible". In this way, ECVET points provide information in terms of the overall weight of the learning outcomes required to achieve a qualification and allow the relative weight of each of its component units to be identified. They reflect the achievement of units of learning outcomes and the accumulation of units. It is to be noted that ECVET points have a meaning only in relation to learning outcomes within the particular qualification, unless the national, regional or sectoral rules allow for ECVET points to be used in another way. As a convention, 60 points will be assigned to the learning outcomes expected to be achieved in a year of formal, full-time VET.

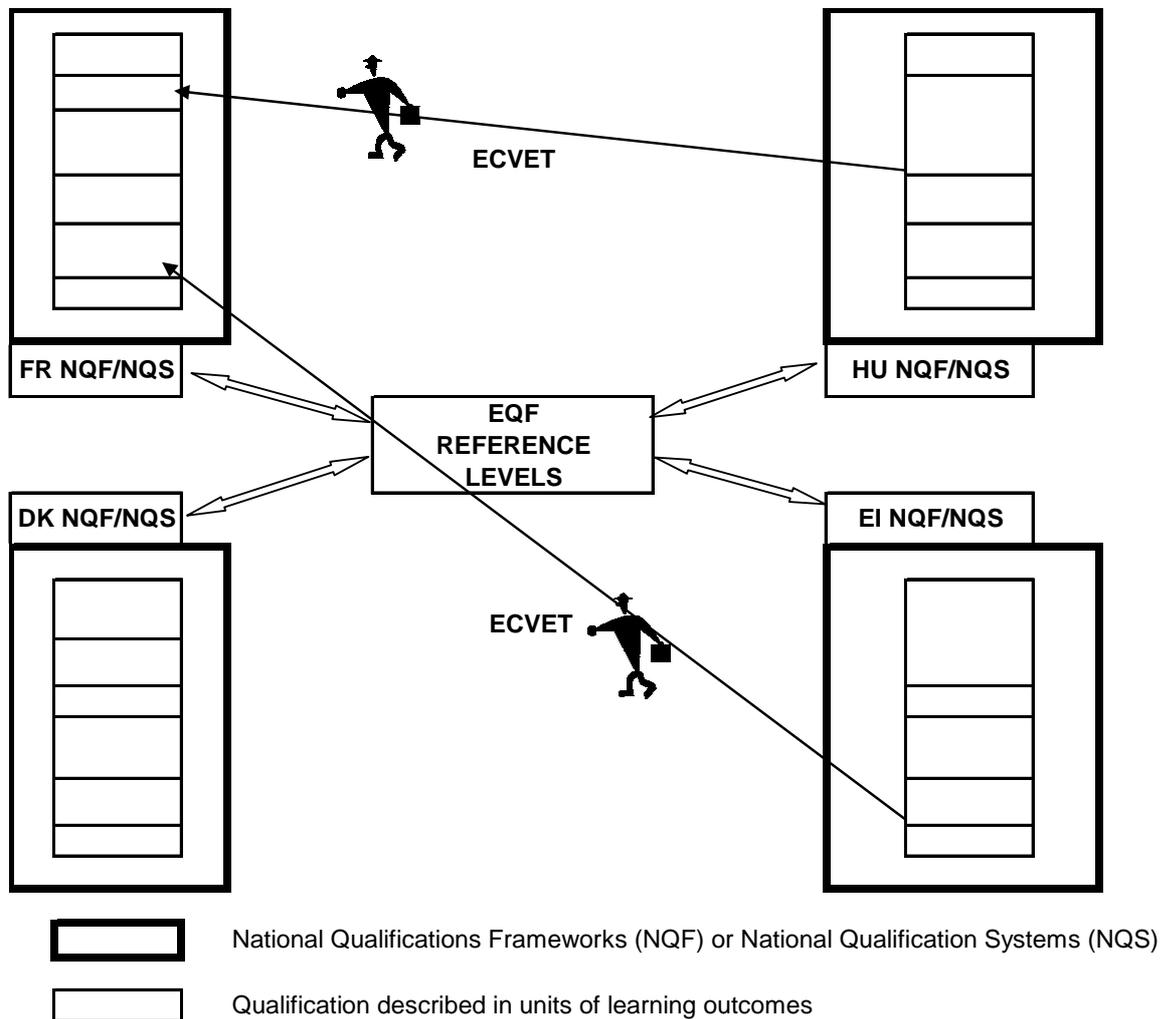
In ECVET, any *credit obtained by a learner* is an expression of the validity of his/her achieved learning outcomes for the purpose of transfer and accumulation towards a qualification. These learning outcomes are assessed and validated so that credit (units of learning outcomes) can be transferred from one VET qualifications system to another or from one learning context to another. *ECVET* can be used regardless of whether these qualifications systems have their own credit system(s). ECVET can be implemented within any VET qualification at any EQF reference level. It is applicable to learning outcomes achieved in any context (examples in annex, chart 3). The *end users of ECVET* are learners. ECVET will be effective only after it has been made operational by the relevant competent institutions at national, regional, local or sectoral level. These institutions should define and decide the scope of implementation and formalise decisions at the appropriate level. They also have a role in ensuring that the implementation and use of ECVET follow quality assurance criteria.

In order to create conditions for effective recognition and credit transfer processes, and thus promote mutual trust among the different actors, ECVET requires commitment to quality assurance criteria and procedures by all actors involved and at all the levels of the system.

Implementation of ECVET should be a continuous process which requires the effective and sustainable commitment of competent institutions, authorities, social partners, sectors and providers, and will require a high degree of synergy between initiatives at the European, national and sectoral levels.

Annex to the explanatory memorandum

Chart 1: EQF and ECVET for transparency and portability of learning outcomes (example).



In the above example, the individual obtained his/her qualification in FR by accumulating learning outcomes transferred from HU, EI.

Chart 2: units of learning outcomes and ECVET points (example)

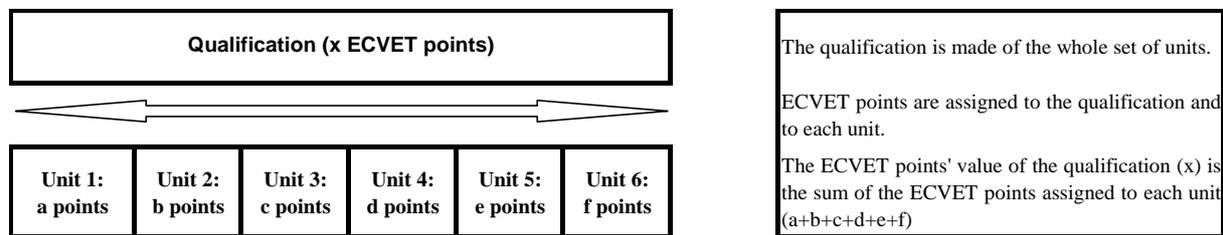
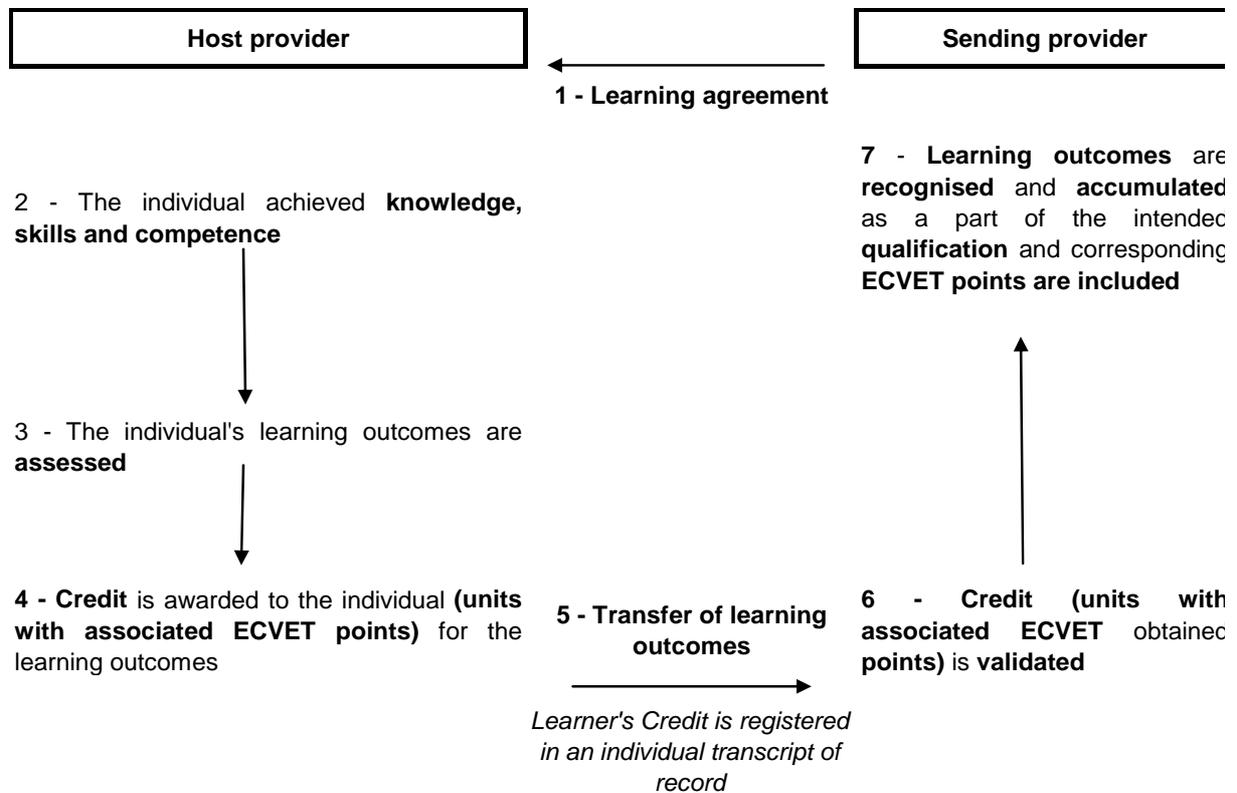


Chart 3: Application of ECVET for transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes

Example n°1: transfer organised by two partners (VET providers) in a formal learning context for individuals who are involved in a mobility programme, such as Leonardo da Vinci.



Example n°2: transferring and valuing learning outcomes achieved in a professional and life experience (non-formal and informal learning context), by an individual who has professional experience and wishes to attain a qualification.

**Context A: professional and life experience
(non-formal and informal learning context)**



1 - The individual achieves **knowledge, skills and competence.**

Context B: towards the qualification

5 - **Learning outcomes** are **recognised** and **accumulated** as a part of the intended **qualification** and corresponding **ECVET points** are included.

4 - **Credit** obtained (**units with associated ECVET points**) is **validated** by the competent institution empowered for this task.

3 - **Credit** is awarded to the individual (**units with associated ECVET points**) for the achieved and successfully assessed learning outcomes.

2 - The individual's learning outcomes are **assessed.**



Proposal for a

**RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE
COUNCIL**

**on the establishment of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and
Training (ECVET)**

(Text with EEA relevance)

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Articles 149(4) and 150(4) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission¹¹,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee¹²,

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions¹³,

Acting in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 251 of the Treaty¹⁴,

Whereas:

- (1) The development and recognition of citizens' knowledge, skills and competence are crucial for individual development, competitiveness, employment and social cohesion in the Community. In this respect, they should facilitate trans-national mobility for workers and learners and contribute towards meeting the requirements of supply and demand in the European labour market. Participation in borderless lifelong learning for all, transfer, recognition and accumulation of individuals' learning outcomes achieved in formal, non-formal and informal contexts should therefore be promoted and improved at the national and Community levels.
- (2) The Lisbon European Council in 2000 concluded that increased transparency of qualifications should be one of the main components that are necessary to adapt education and training systems in the Community to the demands of the knowledge society. Furthermore, the Barcelona European Council in 2002 emphasized the importance of improving transparency and recognition methods in the area of vocational education and training.

¹¹ OJ C , , p. .

¹² OJ C , , p. .

¹³ OJ C , , p. .

¹⁴ OJ C 145, 30.06.2007, p. 5-9

- (3) Council Resolution of 19 December 2002 on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training¹⁵ ("the Copenhagen process"), and the Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme adopted in 2004¹⁶, stress the importance of a credit transfer system for vocational education and training.
- (4) The Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council of 15 November 2004¹⁷ on the future priorities of enhanced European Cooperation in vocational education and training 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.
- (5) The purpose of this Recommendation is to create the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (hereinafter "ECVET") intended to facilitate transfer, recognition and accumulation of learning outcomes of individuals who are aiming to achieve a qualification. This will improve the transparency and portability of citizens' learning outcomes across and within Member States in a borderless lifelong learning area.
- (6) ECVET should be based on the principles and technical specifications set out in Annex 2 to this Recommendation. Furthermore, it should be underpinned by the common principles for quality assurance provided for in the Council conclusions on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training of May 2004¹⁸ and the Recommendation on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training¹⁹.
- (7) ECVET is applicable for all learning outcomes which should in principle be achievable through a variety of education and learning paths, and then be transferred and recognised. This Recommendation therefore contributes to the wider objectives of promoting lifelong learning and increasing the employability, mobility and social inclusion of workers and learners, to the modernisation of the education and training systems, to the development of flexible and individualised VET pathways, to the linkage between education, training, employment and individuals' needs, to the building of bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning, and to the recognition of learning outcomes acquired through life and occupational experience.
- (8) Transparent quality assurance principles, exchange of information and development of partnerships between institutions competent for qualifications, VET providers and other relevant stakeholders should help to build mutual trust and should support the implementation of this Recommendation.
- (9) This Recommendation should facilitate the compatibility and comparability between credit systems used in VET and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation

¹⁵ OJ C 13, 18.1.2003, p. 2.

¹⁶ Doc. 6905/04 EDUC 43 of March 2004

¹⁷ Doc. 13832/04 EDUC 204 SOC 499 of November 2004

¹⁸ Doc. 9599/04 EDUC 117 SOC 252 of May 2004

¹⁹ OJ ... , p. .

System (ECTS), which is used in the higher education sector, and thus should contribute to greater permeability between levels of education and training, in accordance with national legislation and practice.

- (10) The validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes should be promoted in accordance with the Council conclusions on common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning of 28 May 2004²⁰.
- (11) This Recommendation complements the Recommendation [...] of the European Parliament and of the Council of [...] on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (hereinafter "EQF")²¹ which recommends to the Member States to promote close links between the EQF and existing or future European systems for credit transfer and accumulation in higher education and vocational education and training. While the main objective of the EQF is to increase the transparency, comparability and portability of acquired qualifications, ECVET will facilitate the transfer, recognition and accumulation of learning outcomes of individuals on their way to achieving a qualification.
- (12) This Recommendation takes into account Decision No 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass)²² and Recommendation 2006/961/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on trans-national mobility within the Community for education and training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility²³.
- (13) This Recommendation should be without prejudice to Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications²⁴, which confers rights and obligations on both the relevant national authority and the migrant. Using ECVET should not affect access to the labour market, where professional qualifications have been recognised in accordance with Directive 2005/36/EC.
- (14) Since the objective of this Recommendation, namely to facilitate cooperation and increase communication and transparency in order to promote mobility and lifelong learning, cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of its scale, be better at Community level, this Recommendation, is in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity referred to in Article 5 of the Treaty. In accordance with the principle of proportionality referred to in that Article, the present Recommendation does not go beyond what is necessary in order to achieve those objectives, since it does not replace or define national qualifications systems and/or qualifications and/or national credit systems, it does not describe specific learning outcomes or an individual's competences and it does not aim for or require atomisation or harmonisation of qualifications systems

²⁰ Doc. 9600/04 EDUC 118 SOC 253

²¹ OJ ... , p. .

²² OJ L 390, 31.12.2004, p. 6

²³ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 5.

²⁴ OJ L 255, 30.9.2005, p. 22. Directive as amended by Council Directive 2006/100/EC (OJ L363, 20.12.2006, p.141).

HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT MEMBER STATES:

1. promote the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (hereinafter "ECVET") as set out in Annex 1 and 2 in order to facilitate trans-national mobility in vocational education and training and borderless lifelong learning;
2. use ECVET from 2012, in particular by adopting measures for its gradual application to vocational education and training qualifications, in accordance with national legislation and practice, for the purpose of transfer, recognition and accumulation of individuals' learning outcomes achieved in formal, non-formal and informal contexts;
3. support the development of national and European partnerships and networks involving competent institutions and authorities, social partners, sectors and VET providers, dedicated to the experimentation, implementation and promotion of ECVET;
4. ensure that stakeholders and individuals in the area of vocational education and training have access to information and guidance for using ECVET. Furthermore, ensure that the application of ECVET to qualifications is properly publicised by the competent authorities and that associated "Europass" documents issued by the competent authorities contain explicit relevant information;
5. apply the principles for quality assurance when using ECVET, particularly in relation to the assessment, validation and recognition of learning outcomes;
6. ensure that there are functioning coordination and monitoring mechanisms at the appropriate levels, in accordance with legislation, structures and requirements of each Member State, in order to guarantee quality, transparency and consistency of the initiatives taken to implement ECVET.

ENDORSE THE COMMISSION'S INTENTION TO:

1. support Member States in carrying out the tasks referred to in point 1 to 6 and in using the principles and technical specifications of ECVET as set out in the Annex 2, in particular by facilitating testing, cooperation, mutual learning, promotion, and the launching of information and consultation exercises, through a European ECVET network;
2. develop a users' guide and tools in collaboration with national and European experts and users, develop expertise for reinforcing the compatibility between ECVET and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System used in the Higher Education sector, and provide regular information on the developments of ECVET;
3. establish, within one year of the date on which this recommendation is adopted, an ECVET users' group involving relevant vocational education and training stakeholders and national competent institutions and participating in the European ECVET network, in order to contribute to the updating of the users' guide and to the quality and overall coherence of the cooperation process for the implementation of ECVET;

4. monitor and follow up the action taken, in particular by updating the guidance material and, after the assessment and evaluation of this action carried out in cooperation with the Member States, report, four years after the adoption of this Recommendation, to the European Parliament and the Council on the experience gained and implications for the future, including, if necessary, a possible review and adaptation of this Recommendation.

Done at Brussels,

*For the European Parliament
The President*

*For the Council
The President*

ANNEX 1

For the purposes of the Recommendation, the definitions which apply are the following:

- a) "Qualification": a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent institution determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards;
- b) "Learning outcomes": statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process and which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence;
- c) "Unit of learning outcomes" (unit): a component of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence, that can be assessed and validated;
- d) "Credit for learning outcomes" (Credit): individuals' learning outcomes which have been assessed and which can be accumulated towards a qualification or transferred to other learning programmes or qualifications;
- e) "Competent institution": institution which is responsible for designing and awarding qualification or recognising units or other functions linked to ECVET, such as allocation of ECVET points to qualifications and units, assessment, validation and recognition of learning outcomes, under the rules and practices of participating countries;
- f) "Assessment of learning outcomes": methods and processes used to establish the extent to which a learner has in fact attained particular knowledge, skills and competence;
- g) "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;
- h) "Recognition of learning outcomes": the process of attesting officially achieved learning outcomes through the awarding of units or qualifications;
- i) "ECVET points": a numerical representation of the overall weight of learning outcomes in a qualification and of the relative weight of units in relation to the qualification.

ANNEX 2

ECVET –Principles and Technical Specifications

The European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training is intended to facilitate the recognition of learning outcomes, in the framework of mobility, for the purpose of achieving a qualification. Its application for a given qualification is based on the following principles and technical specifications.

1. Units of learning outcomes

A unit is a component of a qualification, consisting of a part of the knowledge, skills and competence required for a given qualification. A qualification comprises in principle several units and is made up of the whole set of units. Thus, a learner can achieve a qualification by accumulating the required units, achieved in different countries and different contexts (formal, non-formal and informal).

The units that make up a qualification should be:

- described in legible and understandable terms by referring to the knowledge, skills and competences contained in them;
- 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 expected learning outcomes defining a unit may be achieved irrespective of where or how these have been achieved. Thus, in principle a unit is not to be confused with a component of a formal learning programme or training provision.

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

The specifications for a unit should include:

- 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 points associated with the unit;

- the validity in time of the unit, if relevant.

2. Transfer and Accumulation of learning outcomes, ECVET partnerships

In ECVET, units of learning outcomes achieved in one setting are assessed and then, after successful assessment, 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 that the person is aiming to achieve. Units of learning outcomes can then be accumulated towards this qualification, in accordance with national, sectoral or regional rules. Procedures and guidelines for the assessment, validation, accumulation and recognition of units of learning outcomes are designed by the relevant competent institutions.

Credit transfer based on ECVET and applied to learning outcomes achieved in formal learning contexts should be facilitated by establishing partnerships and networks involving 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.

The establishment of partnerships aims to:

- provide a general framework of cooperation and networking between the partners, set out in Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) through which a climate of mutual trust is established;
- facilitate 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 other's 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.

For applying ECVET to learning outcomes achieved in non-formal and informal learning context or outside the framework of a MoU, the competent institution which is empowered to award qualifications or units or to give credit should establish procedures and mechanisms for the identification, validation and recognition of these learning outcomes through the award of the corresponding units and the associated ECVET points.

3. Learning agreement and personal transcript

For applying credit transfer involving two partners and a specific mobile learner, a Learning Agreement is concluded by the two competent institutions, in the framework of a MoU, and the learner. It should:

- distinguish between competent "home" and "hosting" institutions²⁵;
- 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 ECVET 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 ECVET points are recorded in a learner's "personal transcript"²⁶;
- 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 ECVET 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, in accordance with the agreed procedures and quality assurance criteria.

4. ECVET Points

ECVET points provide complementary information about qualifications and units in numerical form. They have no value independent of the acquired learning outcomes to which they refer and they reflect the achievement and accumulation of units. To enable a common approach for the use of ECVET points, a convention is used according to which 60 points are allocated to the learning outcomes expected to be achieved in a year of formal full time VET.

In ECVET the allocation of points usually has two phases: ECVET points are allocated first to a qualification as a whole and then to its units. 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 assigned for that qualification. From this total, ECVET points are then allocated to each unit according to their relative weight within the qualification.

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ A personal transcript is a document which details learners' assessed learning outcomes, units and ECVET points awarded.

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 competences or of the professional fields or the learning outcomes.

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

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

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

Allocations of ECVET points are normally part of the design of qualifications and units. They are produced by the competent institution responsible for the design and maintenance of the qualification or specifically empowered for this task. In countries where there is already a national system of points, the relevant competent institutions establish arrangements for the conversion of national credit points to ECVET points.

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

Usually the transfer of a unit entails the transfer of the corresponding ECVET points so that they are included when the transferred learning outcomes are recognised. It is up to the competent institution to reconsider, if necessary, the ECVET points to be taken into account, as long as the rules and methodologies which are laid down for this purpose are transparent and underpinned by quality assurance principles.

Any qualification acquired through non-formal or informal learning for which a formal learning pathway reference can be identified, and the corresponding units, carry the same ECVET points as the reference, since the same learning outcomes are being achieved.