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EUROPEAN CREDITS TRANSFERT SYSTEM FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (ECVET)

Principles and reference framework for implementation

1. CONTEXT

The Copenhagen declaration of 30 November 2002 set the priority of developing a credit transfer systems for VET.

A mandate was therefore given to a working group to explore possible options for the design and development of a credit transfer system, compatible with specificities of vocational education and training. This working group, composed of experts nominated by participating countries and social partners has faced the challenge of laying the foundations of an ECVET system which allows dialogue and exchange between VET systems, which are very different from one another both in terms of perceptions and pedagogical organisation.

The implementation of ECVET requires first an agreement at European level on the objectives, principles, scope and field of application of the system, as well as on the reference framework for its implementation. These elements are set out in this note, which aims provide a basis for the document to be presented to the ministerial meeting at Maastricht.

As a result of its investigations, the technical working group (TWG) on credit transfer in vocational education and training has, accordingly, developed proposals the principles and rules of a European credit (transfer) system for VET (ECVET), which should ensure its effective implementation within a variety of mobility exchange initiatives, individual or institutional, and involving national authorities and VET providers. This basic approach has been tested in case studies (see Annex) and will be further tested through pilot projects in the context of the Leonardo da Vinci programme.

2. A EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER SYSTEM FOR VET

2.1. Aims and objectives of ECVET

The overall aim of ECVET is to contribute concretely to lifelong learning. ECVET should facilitate, on the one hand, mobility of trainees within their individual VET pathway within and between different national systems, and encourage and promote, on the other hand, individual geographic and professional mobility. ECVET should also include in its principles and organisation all formal, non-formal and informal

training/education/learning processes. It should therefore support individual development and employability.

This aim can be broken down into two objectives:

- In the perspective of allowing everyone to create and follow individual learning pathways, ECVET improves transparency and recognition of learning outcomes (be they acquired through formal, non-formal or informal learning activities), in view of their accumulation and transfer within and between various VET systems.
- In the perspective of management of VET systems, ECVET should, through the development of mutual trust between the stakeholders of national VET systems, encourage cooperation between respective authorities, education and training providers, teachers, trainers and learners, within and beyond national frontiers. ECVET should thus contribute to the quality and attractiveness of VET systems.

ECVET at once requires and promotes transparency of qualifications (defined the objectives of a VET programme, in turn expressed in terms of knowledge, skills and competences), of procedures (i.e. assessment or recognition procedures), of learning processes (i.e. formal, non-formal and informal learning processes and pathways) and structures (i.e. organisation of the VET systems, institutional responsibility of the stakeholders/practitioners). ECVET is based on the establishment of mutual trust between VET authorities, providers in terms of the assessment of the knowledge, skills and competences acquired, and the level of achievements of mobile VET learners or trainees.

2.2. Principles of ECVET: Functions and scope

ECVET comprises a mechanism, the two operational functions of which are to allow individuals:

- to move from one national, formal VET system to another; to access the formal VET system from a non-formal learning context; to transfer learning outcomes between such systems and learning contexts
- and to accumulate and have valued learning outcomes along their individual VET learning pathway.

ECVET as such allows individuals to convert their learning outcomes from one system to another.

- ECVET is centred on the learner (trainee, pupil or student) in the European context where mobility and free circulation of persons are individual rights.
- ECVET is a European decentralised system based on voluntary participation of member states and of the respective VET stakeholders according to the national legislation and regulations on assessment, recognition, certification and quality assurance.
- ECVET must be linked to the new Europass, the development and implementation of which should support the diffusion of ECVET among stakeholders

- The implementation of ECVET will be supported by the common reference levels framework
- ECVET should be supported by the Common Quality Assurance Framework and the common European principles for identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- ECVET will in the medium term be integrated with the European Credit Transfer System for higher education (ECTS).

The scope and field of application of ECVET at national and European levels are defined as follows:

- ECVET is designed for VET systems as a whole (formal and non-formal VET, initial and continuing VET).
- ECVET is aimed at learners at any level of the formal VET systems, whether their learning pathways include workplace or school-based learning experiences.
- ECVET makes it possible to link and to combine formal and non-formal learning experiences, and promotes access to formal VET systems on the basis of non-formal and informal learning.
- ECVET can be used in case of bi- or multilateral mobility.
- ECVET is designed to be used by any accredited VET provider irrespective of its size, status, degree of autonomy, or the legislative and regulatory framework of the respective VET system in respect of the quality standards in use.
- ECVET can be applied in a regional, national, European or even international context.

2.3. Reference framework for ECVET

ECVET rests on three essential rules, which are the pillars of its effective implementation:

The objectives of a learning pathway, a training programme or elements of a qualification are expressed in terms of knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired and mastered at a given reference level. They are agreed formally, assembled and organised in units.

It is based on the convention defined at European level that a maximal number of credits is allocated to a set of units, corresponding to a complete learning pathway, VET programme or qualification. This convention makes it possible to allocate to each unit (or set of units) a number of credit points according to the relative weight of each unit. The transfer/exchange value of each unit may thus be defined in terms of credit points.

An agreement, documented in a ‘memorandum of understanding’, links the institutions which implement a learner mobility experience based on the ECVET mechanism. This MoU formalises the zone of mutual trust between the institutions, i.e. the MoU comprises, on the one hand, the set of units which are the subject of learning in one VET system or the other, and on the other hand the characteristics of the training modules, the programme or traineeship...in which the learners will take part during the mobility experience. This MoU, along with other documents (Europass, certificate or diploma

supplement...) secures the transparency of the individual mobility process, the learning outcomes, and the acquisition of the corresponding knowledge, skills and competences.

2.4. Provisional calendar of the next steps in the ECVET project

- 5 October 2004: presentation of the project to the Directors General for vocational training
- 12-13 October: European seminar on ECVET in Bonn, Germany
- 25 November: presentation to the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training
- 14 December: Explicit reference of the proposed ECVET approach in the Maastricht Communiqué, which will be adopted by the Ministers of vocational training
- Final trimester of 2004 and first semester of 2005: continue the work of the TWG
 - Definition of the credit points scale
 - Design of a general framework for the Memoranda of Understanding between VET providers
 - Design of a manual for VET providers and learners
 - Design of an experimental framework for ECVET
- End of first semester 2005: formal proposal from the Commission on the ECVET system (i.e. the principles, reference framework and the conditions for implementation of ECVET)
- Second semester 2005 and first semester 2006: experimental implementation of ECVET
- Second semester 2006: extended implementation of ECVET