

About ECVET

General background

Employee mobility is an essential factor not only in promoting the economic integration of Europe apart from other measures to be taken in order to create a single internal market for goods and services, but also in intensifying transnational exchange of experiences as well as in moving further towards the formation of a European identity. Economic realities, however, can hardly be said to meet the requirements necessary for achieving these aims. While with respect to European employees *initial vocational training* might be the period of life in which they are being offered the possibility to acquire mobility experience at an early stage, apprentices exchange across inner European borders is still a minor factor in terms of quantitative flows. In its work programme drafted in Lisbon in February 2002, the European Council of Ministers of Education agreed on systematic and structured cooperation in education throughout the European Union, and the Copenhagen Declaration (2002) defines as a joint task in particular the development of a credit point system for vocational education and training: Drawing upon the approach adopted by the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) for the inner European mobility of students that has been in progress since 1989, The *European Credit (Transfer) System for Vocational Education and Training* (ECVET), will, in addition, have to consider the *specifics of vocational education and training*. Hence the Commission set up a Technical Working Group (TWG) that took up work in December 2002. The preparatory work carried out by the TWG served as the basis for the proposal of an ECVET model that was presented to the General Directors for General and Vocational Education in Brussels in July 2005. At present, this proposal is being elaborated in greater detail – not least with reference to the research projects *ECVET reflector* (www.ecvet.net) and *ECVET connexion* (www.ecvetconnexion.com).

The nature and capabilities of the ECVET

In the field of vocational education and training, the function the European Commission has vis-à-vis the member states is a supporting and supplementing one, bearing in mind that Article 149 of the EC Treaty formulates a harmonisation ban, and Article 150 prohibits central interference in national systems of vocational education and training. In accordance with the Principle of Subsidiarity, the ECVET has been conceived as a system that, based upon the voluntary participation of the EU-members and taking into account national legislation on vocational education and training, aims at creating transparency between the systems.

The ECVET is a *system for the accumulation and transfer of credit points in vocational education and training*, enabling the documentation and certification of learning success gained in the course of vocational education and training across “system borders”.

- In particular, it is targeting the *borders of national systems of vocational education and training*: Learners having spent certain training periods in another European country will thus be given the opportunity to have them recognised as part of their training in their home country.
- Another feature is the promotion of *mobility of learners within a particular education system*, i.e. to ensure *both vertical and horizontal permeability* between sub-systems and in particular between vocational and higher education in Europe.
- Finally, it will be of benefit to learners *outside the education system*: Since the ECVET also considers the results of informal learning (including on-the-job learning) it will ensure their recognition as far as provided by national legislation.

Person-centred, i.e. founded on the validation of the individual's knowledge, skills and competences¹ that form the basis for their accumulation and transfer, the ECVET will ensure documentation, validation and recognition of learning results achieved abroad taking into account both formal vocational education and non-formal contexts.

Using the learning results as a benchmark seems appropriate since, unlike the situation in the university sector, both vocational training systems and individual training courses vary widely from each other. The description of learning results will be effected through so-called *units* which, incorporating various elements of knowledge, skills and competences, fulfil a dual purpose:

- The definition of *units* contains the specification of the knowledge, skills and competences to be obtained (qualitative dimension).
- At the same time, each unit will be assigned a certain number of credit points so as to weight it in relation to "full qualifications" regardless of the latter's definition within the respective national context (quantitative dimension).

Being elements subject to transfer and accumulation, respectively, the *units* will thus promote mobility. Ways of *combining* them will be a matter of national regulation in the same manner as are job descriptions or vocational curricula.

From the learners' viewpoint, accumulation and transfer may be described as follows:

- During his/her stay abroad, a learner will gain certain knowledge, skills and competences in the form of one or more units. The learning results will be *documented* and after termination of the stay abroad *transferred* and *credited* to the study course completed at home. The new units will be *cumulated* with those completed prior to that period.
- Units may be built up through validation of the results of vocational experience gained in any EU-member state in which the respective procedures exist and will be credited to the overall qualification pathway as defined in the national context. States participating in the system will define "competent bodies", i.e. institutions in the member states issuing recognised qualification certificates (in Germany: *Länder* authorities, chambers, universities etc.).

¹ Knowledge, skills and competences are being used with reference to the EQF Consultation Paper.

From a proposal to a system

From the description of the basic elements and functioning of the ECVET it becomes evident that the overall process involves a wide range of national actors and therefore calls for the conclusion of conventions and agreements.

Hence the ECVET system will have to provide for a number of tools and information carriers.

While some have already been designed in a European context and introduced on a national level, e.g. the EUROPASS, some other, ECVET-specific, tools necessary for its implementation are still under development.

- The *Memorandum of Understanding* – as the main instrument – has the character of a voluntary agreement concluded between providers of vocational education, national authorities and other competent bodies in the participating countries. It aims at creating mutual trust by regulating the mode of cooperation in the fields of validation and recognition of qualification in connection with mobility in general.
- The *learning agreement* will be signed by the representatives of educational institutions from the two countries involved and the learner. It contains a description of learning results acquired during the mobility period both in qualitative and quantitative terms and will be signed by the despatching and the host organisations, as well as by the learner.

It is planned to make available a complete manual on the ECVET-system before the end of 2006.

[Summary based upon Isabelle Le Mouillour, Das Europäische Leistungspunktesystem für die Berufsbildung: Stand und Perspektiven (The European credit point system for vocational education and training: current state and perspectives). In: Berufsbildung in Wissenschaft und Praxis (BWP) 35 (2006) / 2, p. 24 – 28]