

# ECVET BULLETIN

November 2009



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# Editorial

## ECVET, from principles to implementation

Michel Aribaud, European Commission, Directorate General Education and Culture

The Recommendation on the establishment of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training formally entered into force in June 2009. The European Parliament and the Council recommend that Member States create the necessary conditions and adopt measures, as appropriate, so that as from 2012 ECVET can be gradually applied to Vocational Education and Training qualifications at all levels of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), and used for the transfer, recognition and accumulation of individuals' learning outcomes achieved in formal and, where appropriate, non-formal and informal contexts.

In doing so, the co-legislators have given a strong signal to all actors in qualifications systems across Europe. On one hand, with the ECVET Recommendation, the European vocational education and training stakeholders now have a legislative basis for the process of cooperation regarding all aspects of ECVET. This cooperation will soon become much more concrete with the development of the European ECVET network and the reinforcement of the pilot projects' cooperation process. The Recommendation calls on Member States to enter the process of experimentation and gradual implementation of ECVET, of course in line with the principle of voluntary application of the Recommendation.

On the other hand, the Recommendation provides these same actors a set of principles and technical specifications which are now agreed and set. The "ECVET triangle" (Units-Points-Validation of learning) is now described with precision, although discretion is left to the actors for its implementation. Now it is time to go further and move from principles to implementation. The launching conference, organised in Brussels on 17 and 18 November, is an important event in this process of transforming concepts and principles into practical methods, usable tools and operational devices.

The four workshops which are proposed to the 200 conference participants focus on the practical arrangements which are inherent to the application of ECVET:

- Implementing ECVET: units of learning outcomes and ECVET points. Learning outcomes and units play a crucial role in ECVET. Moreover, implementing ECVET will entail the adoption of both a learning outcomes approach and the unit structure approach. ECVET points have also an important function in ECVET: points complete units of learning outcomes in the description of the content of the qualification and provide the learner complementary and useful information. The task of the workshop is to explore how ECVET units and points could be concretely implemented.
- Using ECVET: accumulation and assessment of learning outcomes (formal, non-formal and informal contexts). Once ECVET is implemented (units defined and points allocated), it is necessary to make it functional from the point of view of the learners. In other words, it means that the assessment, validation and accumulation processes must be designed and organised.
- Applying ECVET: mobility and transfer of learning outcomes, permeability. The core questions for this workshop are: how do you deal with ECVET for mobility purposes? How could a degree of flexibility be introduced in the VET and qualifications systems so that they enable "recognised mobility"?
- Developing ECVET: partnerships and involvement of competent institutions. Networking, bi-lateral or multilateral arrangements are of crucial importance for the development of operational partnerships enabling mutual trust between providers and competent institutions, and so doing, to facilitate mobility of learners and recognition of learning outcomes achieved abroad. The workshop is focused on the question of quality, sustainability and efficiency of such partnerships.

The current projects are embedded in the design of concrete responses to the questions which will be on the table during the conference, and they generously lend their support to the work in the workshops. They should be thanked and their experience is a source of inspiration for all event participants.



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

# The European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)

## European governance and cooperation

**This text presents the broad lines of the European cooperation and governance process for the implementation and the development of ECVET following the official adoption of the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of ECVET on 18 June 2009.**

### European governance for ECVET: challenge and necessity

By adopting the ECVET recommendation, the co-legislators, the European Parliament and the Member States showed their will to make a European credit system for VET a reality for European citizens. This new deal implies a reinforced cooperation in the fields of mobility and qualifications, particularly in the domain of transfer and recognition of learning outcomes achieved abroad by individuals. This cooperation not only consists of exchange of good practices, but also of developing a shared approach to what are the required conditions for the effective implementation of ECVET.

The ECVET Recommendation gives the Member States the responsibility for creating the necessary conditions and adopting measures in view of the application of ECVET<sup>1</sup>. It also gives them a crucial responsibility for ensuring that there are functioning coordination and monitoring mechanisms in each country, in order to guarantee the quality, transparency and consistency of the initiatives taken to implement ECVET<sup>2</sup>.

The recommendation gives the Commission a substantial role for putting in place structures and means as well as monitoring and follow-up processes. The recommendation officially foresees a European ECVET network<sup>3</sup>. This network will have a strong role. The text also foresees a European users' group. The Recommendation gives these structures a legal basis for their existence.

The implementation of ECVET involves a large range of stakeholders operating in training and qualifications systems<sup>4</sup> such as competent authorities, awarding bodies, assessment boards, training providers etc. These stakeholders fulfil different roles and assume different functions in the ECVET process (designing the qualifications in units of learning outcomes, allocating ECVET points, carrying out assessment of learning outcomes, awarding credit, organising mobility and transfer of credit, etc). There is a wide diversity of players responsible for these functions: ministries (for example minis-

tries of Education, Labour, etc), chambers (chamber of commerce, craft), sectors and branches, education and training centres and institutions, qualifications authorities or agencies, etc. The successful implementation of ECVET implies that in each country all stakeholders concerned can be involved at the right level in the different processes linked to the adoption and the use of ECVET.

The ECVET projects which are currently developed in the framework of the Lifelong learning programme, demonstrate that it is highly desirable to propose to stakeholders a collaborative platform in view of exchanging opinions and experience and of designing solutions. This will be the main task of the European ECVET network.

The development of ECVET implies also a European governance. Its challenge is to enable a dynamic monitoring process of the implementation and the development of ECVET, in view of keeping the overall coherence of these developments. This will be the main task of the ECVET users' group.

### The European ECVET Network

The Recommendation foresees the creation of a European ECVET network, "involving relevant VET stakeholders and national competent institutions", in which the Commission and the Member States will participate actively. Chaired by the Commission, the network will contribute to the dissemination and support of ECVET across Member States and it will "establish a sustainable platform for the exchange of information and experience between Member States".

The network will be open to the European VET community and will comprise as members Member States representatives, social partners at European level and representatives of interested stakeholders such as VET providers, competent institutions, VET networks, VET pilot projects etc. The national Lifelong Learning Programme agencies, Cedefop and ETF will be closely associated to the network.

The European ECVET network will meet at least once a year in a forum. The main task of the

1 See Recommendation 2 to MS of the ECVET Recommendation

2 See Recommendation 6 to MS of the ECVET Recommendation

3 See Commission's intention 3 of the ECVET Recommendation

4 See section B of the Questions and answers memento "Get to know ECVET better".

network will be to provide a collaborative platform for implementing the ECVET Recommendation using a dedicated website and other relevant instruments for communication, dissemination and collaboration in view of exchanging opinions and experience for designing solutions.

Appropriate means will be given to facilitate the cooperation between Member States, within the ECVET network. In this respect, the Commission launched a call for tender to have a secretariat supporting the network and organising activities for its members, such as research, advice, information, promotion etc.

The role of the secretariat will be to provide services to the members of the European ECVET network in order to ensure that the network functions dynamically and efficiently, so that it can perform the tasks and achieve the objectives set out in the Recommendation. The secretariat will also establish resources and expertise centre capable of promoting ECVET and of advising and supporting those who operate and promote ECVET in the countries. Last, but not least, the secretariat will develop the network as a permanent forum for the exchange and pooling of information and experience and will organise an annual forum as mentioned above.

The offer of service proposed by the secretariat to the network should also comprise:

- a specific offer proposing information, training and support modules and cycles for the network members who will become the ECVET promoters;
- a 'standard' offer, made of information, training and support modules and cycles for VET staff involved in the introduction of ECVET;
- a 'customised' (or tailor-made) offer: demand-responsive and involving *inter* or *intra* modules and cycles (training, advice on designing ECVET projects and networks, etc.).

## The ECVET users' group

The recommendation foresees the creation of an ECVET users' group, established from within 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"<sup>5</sup>.

The ECVET users' group will meet twice a year. It will comprise Member States' representatives appointed officially and who should have been given a clear mandate as a member of the ECVET users' group, the social partners at European level and the European Commission. Interested parties such as representatives of national Lifelong Learning Programme agencies or representatives of the Higher education sector could participate as observers or invited experts. Cedefop and ETF will be associated to its work.

The activities of the ECVET users' group could include various tasks such as working groups and studies.

The European ECVET network and the ECVET users' group will begin their activities during the first semester of 2010. The European governance is intended to support and guide the Member States in their efforts to achieve the objectives laid down in the Recommendation on the establishment of ECVET. For Member States, the aim is to create the conditions and adopt the measures required for ECVET to be gradually introduced with effect from 2012, to promote ECVET, to support the development of partnerships and networks at national and European level and to make the necessary arrangements as regards quality assurance, information provision, coordination and guidance in the introduction of ECVET.

**Michel Aribaud,**  
European Commission, DG EAC

5 See Commission's intention 3 of the ECVET Recommendation.

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, ENDORSE THE COMMISSION'S INTENTION TO:

3. promote, and participate together with the Member States in, a European ECVET network involving relevant VET stakeholders and national competent institutions for the purpose of disseminating and supporting ECVET within Member States and establishing a sustainable platform for the exchange of information and experience between Member States; establish, from within this network, an ECVET users' group 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;

**Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) (2009/C 155/02) – extract.**

<b>The European ECVET network</b>	Is an open and sustainable platform for cooperation. It supports ECVET within Member States, enables exchange of information and practice, develops networking, promotion and dissemination, gives advices to the Commission on the activities to be launched and driven.
<b>The ECVET users' group</b>	Contributes to the updating of the users' guide and to the quality and overall coherence of the cooperation process for ECVET implementation. Prepares, together with the Commission, the joint work programme of the group. The activities of the ECVET users' group will take various forms such as working groups and studies. Proposes and decides to create other groups, so called implementation groups, to work on specific issues, in accordance with the needs expressed by the European ECVET network. Reports to the ACVT and DGVT.
	Restricted meetings of the Commission and members of the ECVET users' group ensures continuity and linkage between the ECVET Network and the Users' group and the secretariat and to contribute to the validation of the work programme of the Users' group and of the secretariat
<b>The Commission</b>	Impulses and takes initiatives and follows the implementation of ECVET in Member States. Develops and pilots the complementary measures. Chairs the ECVET network and the ECVET users' group. Reports to the European Parliament and to the Council. Informs DGVT and ACVT. Appoints the contractor for the Secretariat and follow up the
<b>The Secretariat</b>	On behalf of the Commission supports and organizes activities of the network, contributes to the activities of the ECVET users' group, develops service offerings in the direction of the network (training, information etc.); assists the Commission in the process of technical and administrative management of the network, reports to the Commission..

# Understanding the relationships between sectors and the European Qualifications Framework<sup>1</sup>

Authors: Tormod Skjerve, Loukas Zahilas, Isabelle Le Mouillour, Cedefop

## Introduction

In VET governance structures are changing: A range of new bodies have been set up and responsibilities of different VET actors (re)defined. Changes aim particularly at improving inter-ministerial cooperation, strengthening institutional arrangements at regional, sectoral and local levels as well as broadening participation and increasing the role of various stakeholders in VET – social partners, business, non-governmental organisations, teachers and trainers, learners<sup>2</sup>. The involvement of social partners and sectoral organisations in the EQF consultation back in 2005<sup>3</sup> and their follow-up of EQF developments shows their high interest and commitment to the issue of qualifications frameworks.

The term “sector” can be understood differently. It is used along economic or professional categories; this renders the work on the EQF transversal to the existing classifications and taxonomies of economic activities, economic sectors, or occupations. “Sectoral approaches” are related to different elements such as the initiators and partners involved in projects, the nature of the sectors, the need to build emerging qualifications or upgrade existing ones or the mechanisms used by stakeholders to refer to the EQF sectoral qualifications existing outside national systems and frameworks in a credible and trusted way.

Since end 2008, the European Commission has set up a sub-group within the EQF Advisory Group to identify sectoral issues of specific relevance for the implementation and functioning of the EQF as a framework covering all qualifications. Our contribution discusses the main issues arising while considering qualifications and qualifications frameworks from a sectoral perspective: stakeholders’ roles and governance patterns, quality and trust, sectoral qualifications frameworks and referencing processes to EQF. It concludes by drawing lines for further work and cooperation.

## The European Qualifications Framework and sectoral qualifications

The objective of the Recommendation on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) of the European Parliament and the Council on 23 April 2008<sup>4</sup> is “to create a common reference framework which should serve as a translation device between different qualifications systems and their levels, whether for general and higher education or for vocational education and training.” While the main emphasis of the EQF is on the comparison and linking of national qualifications and qualifications levels, the framework could **potentially** operate as a common reference for **all** qualifications – including those awarded by sectors and multinational companies. In the EQF Recommendation it is stated that the European Commission has a particular responsibility in enabling “international sectoral organisations to relate their qualifications systems to a common European reference point and thus show the relationship between international sectoral qualifications and national qualifications systems.” This focus on international sectoral organisations can be seen as an acknowledgement of an increasing diversification and internationalisation of qualifications. While it is difficult to provide an overview of these developments, agreements on common European or international standards for qualifications, the emergence of European or international sectoral qualifications frameworks as well as the growing importance of qualifications issued by multi-national companies, indicate that the basis for and role of qualifications is changing<sup>5</sup>.

The emergence of sector or company based solutions may reflect a need for:

- increasing the labour market relevance of qualifications;

1 This contribution is based on Cedefop activities in the field of sectoral developments linked to EQF (support to the EQF advisory subgroup on sectors, workshops gathering projects representatives, analysis and studies). Further information on Cedefop activities in that field are available at: [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/themes/theme\\_b/default.asp](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/themes/theme_b/default.asp)

2 Cedefop 2009. Continuity, consolidation and change. Towards a European era of vocational education and training. Cedefop Reference series; 73. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities

3 [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/back\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/back_en.html)

4 Com [2006] 479 / PE-CONS 3662/07

5 Leonardo da Vinci projects: Testing the European Qualifications Framework (EQF); Relating international, national and sectoral qualifications to the EQF.



- providing training and qualifications tailored to the specific needs of sectors or companies;
- increasing transparency of qualifications and mutual recognition of certificates;
- facilitating mobility for workers and improving possibilities for lifelong learning;
- facilitating transfer of qualifications and competences acquired in different areas (countries, enterprises, occupations, tasks, levels);
- developing systems of assessing and validating learning outcomes, including non-formal learning; and for
- making visible transversal knowledge, skills and competence elements.

## Quality and trust

Stakeholders have reacted differently to these tendencies. Many national education and training authorities are concerned that the development and promotion of qualifications at sector/company and (in particular) international level will reduce transparency, threaten quality and in general undermine mutual trust towards qualifications. Some stakeholders fear that linking these qualifications to the EQF will create a false image of reliability and trust, and thus increase the problems listed before. Sectoral organisations and associations argue, on their side, that the rapid changes in markets and technology require more flexible and tailored solutions serving the needs of individuals and enterprises better. These stakeholders agree that lack of transparency and trust is a problem today, and acknowledge EQF as an important part of a future solution. The diverse and decentralised character of sector and company based qualifications thus raises a number of difficult questions – of a principal and general as well as a practical character.

For the EQF to be used efficiently by sectors and companies it will be important to identify mechanisms which ensure the necessary mutual trust and credibility. The main principle must be that any qualification must be referred to the EQF in a way which is transparent and credible to all countries and stakeholders involved. The qualification development experiences in many sectors have proved that multi-stakeholder partnerships including enterprises and social partners are the key to address rapidly changing individual and labour market needs in an effective and flexible manner. Thus, while quality assurance remains – at the present time – a mostly

unaddressed issue to be solved by aligning sectoral strategies to national and international directions, two possible ways<sup>6</sup> for dealing with mutual trust and credibility exist:

### 1. The NQF mediated approach

This so-called NQS/NQF<sup>7</sup>-mediated approach implies that qualifications are referred to the EQF through national systems and frameworks. According to this strategy, cooperation between sectors, stakeholders, and public bodies should result in a transitive extension of mutual trust and stakeholders' credibility of qualifications. In this case, the issue would be of the creation of a shared understanding of the domains to be matched, thus ensuring the transparency and sustainability of the mediated referencing procedure, and the same quality criteria would apply to all qualifications.

### 2. The direct mapping approach

This second strategy relies on a direct mapping against the EQF. In this case, the buffer ensured by national systems and frameworks would be lacking. Suitable strategies for guaranteeing the adequacy and reliability of the referencing rules used, as well as the credibility and legitimacy of the referencing actors, would be required. This alternative may be seen as presenting a challenge to the traditional way qualifications are awarded, questioning established roles, interests and rights.

Finally, in both cases referencing could pass through an additional step carried out at the sectoral level. This would consist of the definition of sectoral frameworks contributing to further structure the domain in a national and/or trans-national perspective.

## Qualifications frameworks from a sectoral perspective

There is an obvious need for sectoral frameworks dealing with qualifications developed outside traditional formal education channels managed by public authorities. This is one of the key messages of the ongoing Cedefop study on sectoral qualifications and the EQF. This study also draws the attention to the central element of the referencing process as presented above; and brings insights into how qualifications and qualifications frameworks are considered in the sectors. Some of these are elaborated hereafter.

Sectoral qualifications frameworks are basically following two patterns:

1. Some are mainly aimed at “cataloguing” qualifications; although their goal is to deal with various conditions of working and learning and they definitely make the link with job profiles and occupations explicit, they refer to

6 The Cedefop study “The relation between sectoral qualifications and the EQF” is considering nine broad sectors (automotive, construction, financial services, ICT, logistics, personal services, retail trade, tourism and transport). The publication is forthcoming.

7 NQS stands for National Qualifications System and NQF for National Qualifications Framework

concrete qualifications defined in the sector (e.g. the hairdressing industry, where European certificates are linked to occupational profiles, as well as to a levelling structure referenced to the EQF);

2. Other approaches (e. g. the automotive, the ICT and the financial sectors) can be regarded as oriented towards competence frameworks. Those frameworks allow for describing learning outcomes in terms of performance expectations by employers of the employee's contextualized abilities to act. This approach contrasts with the understanding of qualifications frameworks as describing the learning outcomes and thus providing evidence of the applicant's capacity to meet these expectations.

By the way the diversity of approaches to qualifications frameworks also concerns the number of qualifications levels used. While some sectors tend to use the same concept of level as the EQF (e.g. the automotive and construction sector), in other sectors levels are used with a different meaning (e.g. in terms of proficiency, as in the ICT sector). Furthermore, even when they are used with the same meaning, the number of levels could differ from that of the EQF (e.g. the ICT sector exploits a structure based on five proficiency levels; for the framework designed by the construction sector, six levels are envisaged, five matching with those of the EQF and one positioned in an intermediate position between two adjacent EQF levels). In the hairdressing domain, as the concept of level is strongly related to three certification routes, the framework is based on three levels that nonetheless match the corresponding EQF ones.

Although the analysed sectors confirm the need for the ongoing shift towards learning outcomes for referencing purposes, referencing is often implemented by referring to broad descriptors derived from professional tasks, duties and expectations (and not necessarily encompassing all the EQF categories). In the construction and in the financial services domain, levelling is based on the EQF categories, whereas in the ICT sector a level is described in terms of complexity, autonomy and behaviour.

The analysis also shows that, once aligned to the EQF, levels of the sectoral frameworks need to be described with a greater detail: they need to be contextualised at the sectoral level. For instance, in the construction sector, the qualifications framework includes all the items which are obligatory

and necessary in the sectoral processes (that cannot be taken into account using the general EQF wording). Therefore, each of the EQF categories is further subdivided into sector specific items.

## Concluding words

Cedefop is supporting the implementation of the EQF at European, national and sectoral levels and providing insights into sectoral dynamics and cross-sectoral developments at national and international level. Sectoral developments in the field of EQF are multi-faceted; acknowledging and reflecting upon sector involvements in that field helps understand the dynamics of education and training in Europe. Concrete tasks are on the agenda – confirmed during the November 2009 Cedefop workshop on sectoral developments linked to EQF<sup>8</sup> – such as:

1. elaborating common ways to define, design and categorise qualifications in order to increase transparency and secure the use of the EQF descriptors as common basis for cooperation and comparison. For the time being the EQF descriptors can be (and have been) read in different ways. Sometimes they have been contextualised in sectoral terms (e.g. in financial services); some have separated the knowledge, skills and competence elements from each other; while others read them as related elements in one complete level statement;
2. developing common approaches / prototypes for identification and definition of learning outcomes. Existing interpretations of learning outcomes differ often not only between sectors but even within the same educational levels and sectors. There are cases for instance where competences as expressed through learning outcomes are not of the same nature as competences defined by human resources specialists. There are also cases where the analysis of professions on required competences is not transparent and appropriate.

There is a strong commitment from the sectors and their representatives in the Leonardo da Vinci projects to the need to increase mobility (within a specific sector and/or between sectors), to improve permeability (between educational sub-systems) and make qualifications more transparent. The development activities in the field of EQF require considering further the European tools and priorities (e.g. ECVET and Europass).

8 A documentation will be made available on Cedefop Internet shortly.



# Designing and describing units of learning outcomes for purposes of credit transfer and accumulation

## Overview of the third seminar of ECVET pilot projects (Berlin 19-20 October 2009)

Daniela Ulicna, GHK Consulting

Units are a core element of ECVET. They enable progressive assessment, validation and consequently accumulation of learning outcomes. They are instrumental in relating qualifications from different systems to each other in order to identify learning outcomes that can be transferrable. The ongoing ECVET pilot projects are all, in one way or another, concerned with issues of:

- Design of units;
- Description of units;
- Use of units to enable progressive accumulation of learning outcomes and credit transfer.

These three functions of units are closely inter-related but each of them has specific influence on how a unit relates to the full qualification and how it is presented.

### Use of units to structure the content of qualifications

First of all, units are designed as components of qualifications. As such they **structure the qualification** and its content. Decisions on what constitutes a unit impact on what learners can accumulate. Obviously the principle in ECVET is that learners accumulate assessed learning outcomes that are grouped into units. However, there are different criteria according to which units can be constituted, such as<sup>2</sup> based on typical occupational activities (e.g. identifying potential suppliers and sourcing<sup>3</sup>), competence areas (e.g. maintaining and assuring the reliability of mechatronic systems<sup>4</sup>), according to the products/services delivered (e.g. floor covering work<sup>5</sup>) or according to the main functions of the professional on the workplace<sup>6</sup> (e.g. communication function (with clients, colleagues), technical

A unit is a component of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence that can be assessed and validated.

ECVET Recommendation<sup>1</sup>

function (realising a shampoo, realising a scalp and hair treatment, etc.)). In addition to these ways of conceiving units, that are all related to the occupation the qualification prepares for, additional units may exist which are related to the education and training systems and the progression towards higher levels of qualifications (such as those concerning learning outcomes from general education). The criteria selected for grouping learning outcomes into units will have impact on issues such as the size of units or the way they combine generic learning outcomes with the technical ones.

As already pointed out in the 2<sup>nd</sup> issue of the ECVET bulletin, most ongoing ECVET pilot projects<sup>7</sup> are working in the perspective of developing certain forms of common units or common reference units. Once these common references are developed, they are related to the existing qualifications in the systems concerned. This approach is taken partly because not all the systems involved in the project partnerships use units for constructing their qualifications or because the way units are constructed in the different systems is not comparable in terms of, for example, the size of units or the underpinning criteria based on which learning outcomes are grouped. For example, regarding the qualification of Import and Export Sales Assistant that the Recomfor project is working on, several reference units designed in the project, may be equivalent to one unit in some countries (e.g. France where units tend to be rather large) while one unit may be broken down into two units in other systems<sup>8</sup>. The use of common references ena-

1 See: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc50\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc50_en.htm)

2 For more information see the ECVET Questions and Answers

3 Title of a unit from the Recomfor/Cominter project

4 Title of a unit from the VQTS project

5 Title of a unit from the Baltic education project

6 This was for example the case of VET qualifications in the French Speaking Community of Belgium which were one of the examples discussed during the seminar

7 For information on the pilot projects mentioned in this article see the project web-site: [www.ecvet-projects.eu](http://www.ecvet-projects.eu)

8 For more information see the handbook of the Comiter project (which preceded the Recomfor project) here: <http://www.ecvet-projects.eu/Toolbox/ToolboxList.aspx?id=12>

bles to overcome such system specificities through the design of a 'grid' which represents the common minimum denominator (see for example the work of the SME Master project) and which is compatible with the diversity at national/system level. While this is an approach taken by several ongoing pilot projects, alternatives, not described here are also being explored (e.g. by the VaLOGreg project).

The ECVET pilot projects engaged in designing common references have chosen an approach whereby units are identified on basis of occupational activities (e.g. OPIR, Recomfor, SME

Master plus) or tasks observed on the workplace (e.g. Credchem, Aerovet). For example, the table 1 below, presents the approach used by the project Credchem. The ECVET pilot projects using this approach first analyse the occupation in the partner countries in terms of tasks/activities and then identify commonalities and differences across the countries. The learning outcomes that enable learners to execute these tasks are then described. Afterwards, the link between the occupational tasks/activities and the existing qualification in each partner system is made by institutions/experts from that country.

**Table 1: Steps in defining units of learning outcomes based on professional tasks (Credchem)**

1	Analyse, generalise and classify the typical vocational/professional tasks within the vocational domain (= the chemistry sector in production and laboratory)
2	Select concrete, representative tasks which enable describing knowledge, skills and competences
3	Within each task define the necessary work-steps (steps of thinking and action)
4	For each work-step define the necessary fact-knowledge (expertise) (= knowledge that is fundamental in order to decide on and to justify an action)
5	Based on work-steps and the necessary fact knowledge identify the basic skills
6	Differentiate competence-steps/levels of autonomy necessary for completing the tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The completion / carrying out of an action according to work instruction</li> <li>• Problem-oriented task solving</li> <li>• Optimising methods / procedures</li> </ul>

During the Berlin seminar the following main advantages of an approach to structure qualifications in units based on key activities or tasks were underlined:

- Focusing on the occupational activities/ tasks enables to overcome differences in national traditions in describing qualifications since for most occupations the activities and tasks on the workplace are highly comparable. The partners in the project can discuss the qualification without necessarily having to understand all the details of how qualifications in the partner countries are constructed. Once they have identified the common activities, it is the role of those who know the national system to make the link between the existing qualification standard and the learning outcomes necessary for the activities/tasks identified.
- The language used to describe tasks and activities avoids the 'qualification specialist jargon' and is hence understandable to all: foreign partners but also employers and learners;
- The focus on activities and tasks is particularly favourable for units which will be assessed on the workplace.

While the focus on occupational activities/tasks is the basis for several ECVET projects, it is only the

beginning of their work on units. The description of a key activity/ task does not yet constitute a unit of learning outcomes. Once the activities/tasks that are common to the project partners are identified, the knowledge, skills, competence that learners need to master in order to execute them are then described<sup>9</sup> (see also below).

### Use of units to describe the content of qualifications

The second function of units is to **provide information** about the content of qualifications. As set in the ECVET recommendation:

**Units should be described in legible and understandable terms by referring to the knowledge, skills and competences contained within them.**

ECVET is an instrument that will facilitate credit transfer across different qualifications systems. To enable recognition of credit that learners have achieved in another country or institution, ECVET requires transparency regarding the content of qualifications. Only if the information about learning outcomes contained in a unit, and their assessment

<sup>9</sup> See for example the description of a unit 'Making Temporary Hair Styles' in the example 2 of the ECVET Questions and Answers document.

criteria, is clearly presented will institutions be able to make judgements on recognition of learners' credit.

But the description of units is not only aimed at providing information to the competent institutions in charge of recognising credit. It also informs employers about the content of the qualification as well as learners about what they are expected to learn through their education and training programme.

During the discussions in the Berlin seminar, the ECVET pilot projects identified the following guidelines to make sure that the description of units is understandable to persons from other qualifications systems:

1. The title of a unit is crucial. By looking at the titles of units in the qualification one should be able to get an understanding of its content. The title should therefore be meaningful in its own right.

2. It is important that the description of units' content enables the reader to identify all these aspects: knowledge, skills and competence. This does not mean that the unit description needs to be structured according to these three concepts. Some ECVET pilot projects choose to present their units in three columns representing knowledge, skills and competence (e.g. OPIR or Recomfor<sup>10</sup>). It means that each description of competence is accompanied by a description of related skills and knowledge (see the example in Table 2). Other projects (e.g. SME Master) have decided to describe learning outcomes without breaking them down into these three categories (see the Table 3) arguing that in carrying out activities and tasks learners need to combine all three elements to achieve the expected results. In the assessment process these are also combined and not evaluated separately.

**Table 2: Extract from a unit description of the OPIR project**

<b>Qualification:</b> Hairdresser		<b>Unit:</b> Making temporary hairstyles
Note: This extract only presents some learning outcomes of the unit concerned		
Knowledge	Skills	Competence
Hair properties (tensile strength, elasticity, porosity, reaction to water, electrical properties,...). Types of hair cuts in relation to the morphology and hair types Techniques of hair styles: straighten, curl, brushing, etc.	Identify hair properties. Suggest an adapted hair style to the client. Choose the hair style technique in line with the chosen hair cut.	In an autonomous and responsible manner, advice the client in order to agree an adapted hair cut. Advice a new or established client, in a responsible and autonomous manner, in order to agree an adapted hairstyle, taking into account her wishes or characteristics.

**Table 3: Unit description from the SME Master plus project**

<b>Qualification:</b> Master Baker Crafts-person		<b>Unit:</b> Production of bread, small breads and rolls
<b>Learning Outcomes:</b>		
S/he is able to choose ingredients production methods and techniques for various types of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• white, brown and mixed bread,</li> <li>• traditional, specific and organic bread,</li> <li>• small breads and rolls.</li> </ul> S/he is able to apply the recipes.	S/he is able to demonstrate mastery in the production of these various types of bread, small breads and rolls.	S/he is able to design, decorate and present these various types of bread, small breads and rolls according to customers' orders.
		S/he is able to modify existing recipes and production methods of bread, small breads and rolls.
		S/he is able to develop innovative recipes and production methods of bread, small breads and rolls.

3. In order to make sure that units' titles and units' descriptions are clear and understandable to those stakeholders who have not directly participated in their design and writing as well as to people from other systems, a 'review' or 'validation' process can be envisaged. In such proc-

ess the description is submitted to a sample of different stakeholders such as employers concerned by the occupation, assessors or teachers. The goal of the process is to find out whether the information provided is clear and sufficient for the needs of these parties.

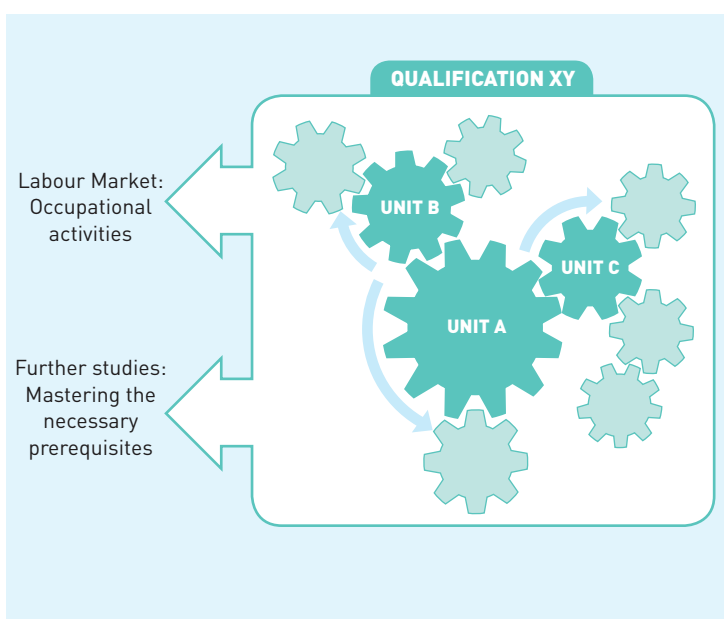
<sup>10</sup> See examples of unit descriptions in the ECVET Questions and Answers

## Use of units to enable progressive accumulation of learning outcomes and credit transfer

Finally, units are **a means for learners to achieve a qualification**. By enabling progressive accumulation of units, ECVET gives them the possibility to build on what they have achieved in the past in order to acquire a qualification. For these purposes, as defined in the Recommendation, units should be:

**Constructed in a way that enables discrete assessment and validation of learning outcomes contained in the unit.**

For learners, units can be compared to *gears*, each of which exists on its own and addresses a specific need, but which combined will enable him/her to respond to and act in complex situations on the workplace. To continue in this metaphor, the qualifications standard defines the *gears* needed. Depending on the qualification standards, it is possible that some of the units contain learning outcomes that can be found also in other qualifications. These could be compared to *spare parts*. Obviously this metaphor oversimplifies the ideas of credit accumulation and transfer but it enables to illustrate the relationship between individual units and a qualification.



Regarding the aspects of credit transfer and accumulation, the discussions among pilot projects during the Berlin seminar showed that:

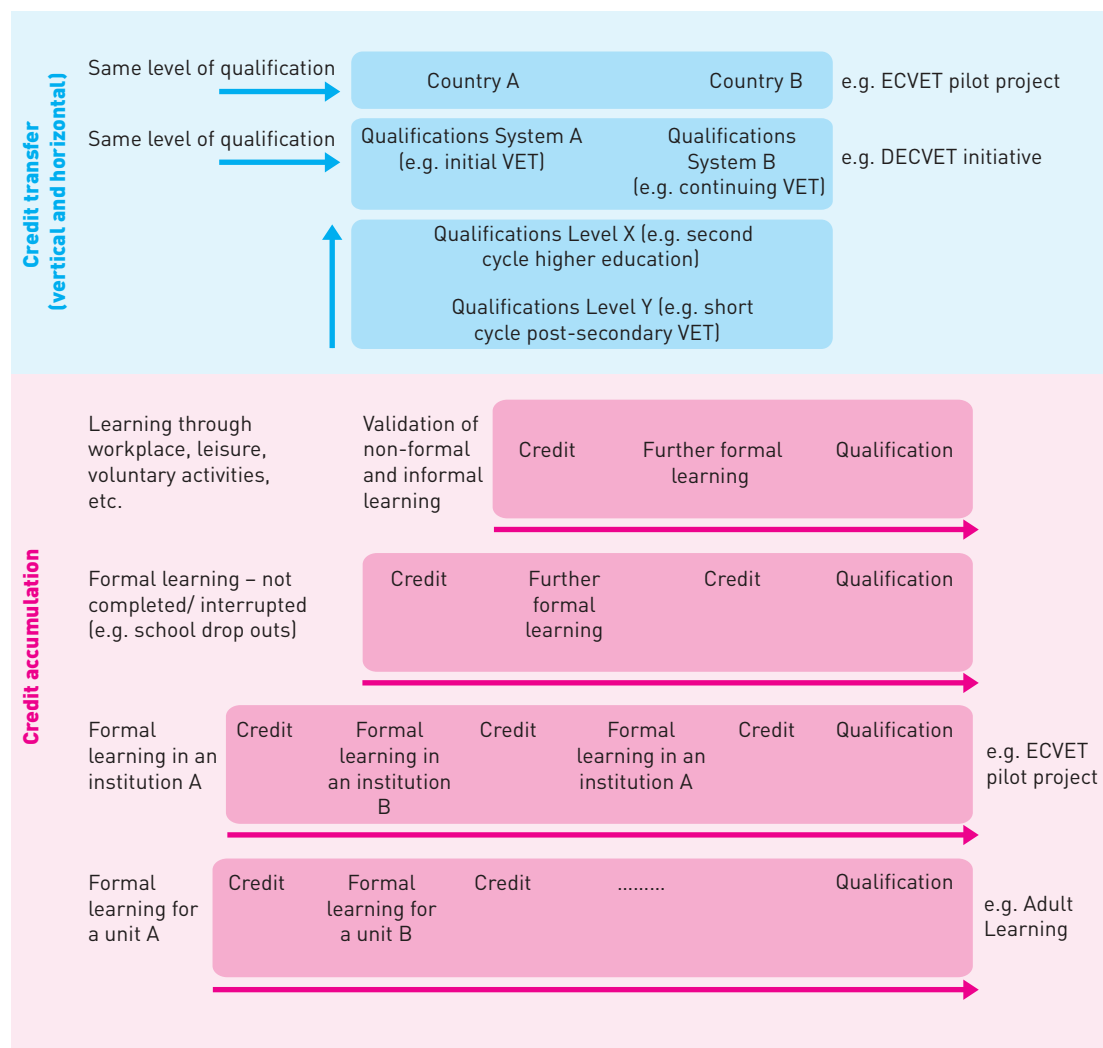
- There are different contexts in which credit transfer can take place such as: geographical mobility or mobility from one system to another (at the same level); recognition of learning outcomes achieved outside formal learning (e.g. on the workplace by doing the job without necessarily having the qualification); progression from one qualification level to another (see figure 1 on the following page for illustration).

- Depending on the context, the use of units may vary. When units are designed specifically for one of the above purposes they will not necessarily meet the expectations of other credit transfer contexts. This is mainly related to aspects such as the size of units and possibly the criteria on basis of which they combine/group learning outcomes (e.g. how more generic learning outcomes are combined with the technical ones). For example, the units that the ECVET pilot projects are designing specifically for purposes of geographical mobility, within a limited timeframe, are particularly suitable for this context. On the other hand where units are designed for the purpose of validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning they may be difficult to use for such short duration of geographical mobility.

Bearing in mind that the eleven ECVET pilot projects are mainly concerned with using units in the context of geographical mobility, the following were identified as key issues for units' assessment and validation:

- The size of a unit (in terms of combination of learning outcomes) has impact on the complexity of the assessment. While large units enable learners to demonstrate that they master and are able to combine their learning outcomes in a complex manner they also require setting up more comprehensive assessment processes.

Figure 1 – Illustration of different contexts for credit transfer and accumulation



- When learners are expected to achieve given learning outcomes in a limited period of time, it is necessary that they have the expected prerequisites. Therefore if a unit designed for mobility purposes requires learners to have already achieved some specific learning outcomes (other than those generally expected to access the education and training programme), these should be specified.
- When units are closely related to occupational activities and tasks it facilitates the description of their assessment criteria as well as assessment on the workplace.

### Conclusions

Most of the ECVET pilot projects have only started to work on aspects such as assessment and therefore further work and exchange on this topic will be

required later on in 2010. In the next year, several projects have also scheduled periods of learners' mobility during which the units (are the learning outcomes appropriate? are the descriptions clear to teachers/assessors/ employers in case of on-the-job training? etc.) and their assessment and validation will be tested. As a result of these mobility periods further messages and clarifications can be formulated and new issues may be identified. Finally, the ongoing pilot projects' focus on geographical mobility does not enable formulation of messages with regard to the use of units in other contexts of credit transfer. Lessons from other experimentations in areas such as use of credit for progression or validation of non-formal and informal learning may be desirable.



# What's New

## ECVET Questions & Answers

For the ECVET launching conference, held in Brussels on 17-18 November 2009, the European Commission has prepared a document providing further explanations on and some examples of ECVET concepts and principles. The ECVET Questions and Answers document distributed at the conference can be downloaded from the toolbox available on the ECVET pilot projects' web-site: <http://www.ecvet-projects.eu/Toolbox/Default.aspx>.

## Relationship between credit systems and qualifications frameworks

Cedefop is organising an expert workshop on 21 and 22 January 2010 on the relationship between credit systems and qualifications frameworks. It will be an opportunity to present and discuss the results of a one year comparative study analysing the developments of both tools (credit systems and qualifications frameworks) in VET and HE, across 8 countries (Australia, Finland, France, Germany, Slovenia, Spain, South Africa, UK-EWNI and UK-Scotland). The workshop will take further the discussions started in May 2009 during a first Cedefop/DG EAC seminar on transition and permeability in education and training. Promoters of ongoing ECVET and EQF projects dealing with these issues will be participating alongside representatives of DG EAC, experts in Education and Training, policy-makers and sectors representatives. Specific focus will be given to debates on:

- how both tools relate to each other;
- how they (separately or when articulated jointly) impact on qualifications; and
- how do they influence progression, permeability and opportunities for learners to construct individualised learning pathways.

Contact person for this seminar:

Isabelle Le Mouillour, Cedefop  
([Isabelle.Le-Mouillour@cedefop.europa.eu](mailto:Isabelle.Le-Mouillour@cedefop.europa.eu))

## Joint seminar between German DECVET projects and the European ECVET pilot projects

The October (19-20) ECVET pilot project seminar held in Berlin was an opportunity for the European projects to learn more about and exchange with representatives from the German DECVET initiative. The two groups have organised their regular seminars in parallel with joint introductory and closing sessions leaving space for exchange. As presented in the second issue of the ECVET Bulletin, the DECVET initiative is addressing aspects of credit transfer in the context of permeability across different VET systems in Germany. The English version of the DECVET initiative web-site is now available and can be accessed here:

<http://www.decvet.net/en>.

## Vocationally oriented education and training at higher levels of the EQF

Cedefop is carrying out a study that will provide an overview of the provision and characteristics of vocationally oriented education and training in Europe at the levels equivalent to 6, 7 and 8 of the EQF. The study will in particular research whether and how the shift to learning outcomes influences the parity of esteem between VET and academic/higher education. Besides desk research and interviews with experts, the study will deliver 6 explanatory case studies on permeability arrangements between different qualifications systems. It will cover 13 countries (Norway, Ireland, UK, Netherlands, Finland, Germany, Portugal, Poland, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Romania, Denmark) and different sectors among which ICT, Health care (nursing), Agriculture, and Teacher training.

The ECVET Bulletin presents news and articles on ECVET developments. It is published quarterly, by GHK Consulting, as part of the contract to support testing and development of ECVET, commissioned by the European Education Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency.

The next issue of the ECVET Bulletin will be published at the end of February 2010. If you want to subscribe to the electronic version of the Bulletin, you can register following the instructions here:

<http://www.ecvet-projects.eu/Bulletins/registration.aspx>

Any comments or suggestions regarding the ECVET Bulletin should be submitted to the following address: [contact@ecvet-projects.eu](mailto:contact@ecvet-projects.eu).

If you are involved in an ECVET pilot project or a related initiative and interested in sharing your experience and achievements, we would be very pleased to publish an article about your work.

