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ECVET in Polish VET



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Using ECVET within a national qualifications system can be analysed from two perspectives. Firstly, by looking at how ECVET principles apply to VET systemic solutions in a given country - these usually include the “architecture” of vocational qualifications

(e.g the formulation of learning outcomes and units based on learning outcomes), procedures for credit accumulation and transfer and for validation. Secondly, by looking at how ECVET is used to support international educational mobility. This text aims at showing how these two interconnected aspects of ECVET come together in Poland.

Until recently, credit accumulation and transfer was not widely used in the Polish VET system. However, the last two years brought significant changes in the law regulating the formal initial VET and continuing VET systems. The changes are primarily aimed at improving the link between vocational education and labour market needs, popularising vocational education for adults and creating more flexible learning pathways. In many ways, they are in line with the ECVET technical specifications.

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The core curriculum for vocational education is described by using learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, personal and social competences) and units of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes in the core curriculum define the examination requirements. Procedures for credit accumulation and transfer have been implemented - this makes it possible to attain vocational diplomas without having to start the vocational education process “from the beginning”; successive, appropriately chosen qua-



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lifications can be added to those that have already been attained. Individuals are able to attain vocational qualifications through non-formal paths and in the course of work. Adult learners may apply to take extramural exams conducted by the Regional Examination Boards (OKE) and after passing such exams, can achieve national vocational qualifications (the same qualifications which are awarded to VET school students). Therefore, it can be said that from the VET system perspective, ECVET principles have already been introduced in Poland.

In this context, it is also worth mentioning that solutions for credit accumulation and transfer (compatible with ECVET) are seen as an important component of the integrated qualifications system in Poland. Pilot projects have been conducted to verify the initial proposals. (see: the Polish Referencing Report at http://www.kwalifikacje.edu.pl/images/wersjaENG/Raport_Ref_GB.pdf). However, the final political decisions have not been made yet. The coming years will show to what extent it will be possible to implement the common principles of credit accumulation and transfer for the entire qualifications system in Poland.

There is also growing interest in using ECVET as a tool to support international mobility. Additionally, increasing numbers of Polish VET stakeholders are becoming aware of ECVET's added

value. Every year growing numbers of VET providers, with the financial support of the National Agency for the Lifelong Learning Programme, organise international mobility projects with ECVET. Because of the rising interest, the Agency has organised a substantial number of events (seminars, workshops) and produced informational materials aimed at promoting ECVET usage.

Using ECVET in mobility projects is also supported by the recent national VET reform. By introducing learning outcomes as the primary point of reference in developing VET qualifications and learning programmes, it is now easier for Polish VET providers to discuss and compare learning outcomes with their foreign partners. It is also easier to exempt learners from part of the training and indicate the additional credits achieved by learners in the Europass-mobility document.

However, there are some organisational arrangements in Polish VET which might pose difficulties in using ECVET for mobility projects (language and financial barriers will not be discussed). The size (volume) of units of learning outcomes defined in the core curriculum is rather "large" (requiring several months of study), whereas most of the mobility periods are short (several weeks). National VET certificates and diplomas are not awarded by VET providers but by Regional Examination

Boards (OKE). Examination boards conduct centrally governed assessment and certification. Therefore, learners cannot be exempted from the final assessment or any part of it. The exam conducted by OKE will always cover each learning outcome defined in the VET core curriculum.

One of the features of Polish school-based VET is the presence of a general education component. This means that after the mobility period, students have to catch up with the "general" part of the learning programme. Thus, international mobility cannot lead to shortening the time of learning by the host school. On the other hand, this allows pupils from VET schools to shape their educational career in a more flexible way - graduates of technical schools who have also passed the Matura exam are eligible to apply to higher education institutions.

More possibilities have developed for the recognition of non-school-based qualifications courses. These courses are dedicated to adults and lead to the same national vocational certificates awarded to VET school students. However their learning programmes do not lead to a certificate of completion at a VET school and, therefore do not require learners to take the extensive general education component at the same time. ■