

# magazine

Keeping you informed about European Credit system for Vocational Education & Training

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## Editorial



**Hélène  
Clark**

European Commission,  
Director - Lifelong  
Learning : policies  
and programme

During the first semester of 2010 we saw several political milestones reached and the road ahead for ECVET has been clarified.

At first, in March 2010, the European Commission presented its communication «Europe 2020: a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth» with two Flagship Initiatives «An Agenda for new skills and jobs» and the recently launched «Youth on the Move» as our contribution to the shaping of the future Europe (see box). Considering VET as a major source of skills and knowledge in Europe, the Commission also published in June the Communication «A new impetus for European cooperation in VET to support the Europe 2020 strategy»,

particularly as an input to the updating of the Copenhagen process (“Bruges Review”) in December 2010.

It was back then in Copenhagen in 2002 when the Member States, the Commission and the social partners explicitly raised the issue of a credit system for the VET sector in order to increase mobility in a lifelong learning perspective and specifically in terms of learning abroad: Qualifications gained somewhere in Europe should no longer be incomprehensible and thus a controversial subject to recognition.

After a number of years and much progress, the ECVET recommendation calls all relevant actors to nationally implement ECVET with a view to make the European area for lifelong learning a reality. As often stated, ECVET is thereby part of a broader European toolkit including the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the referencing of National Qualifications Frameworks in its wake,

## Useful links

[http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/index_en.htm)

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=568&langId=en>

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0296:FIN:EN:PDF>

the Europass the updating of which the ECVET Recommendation asks for and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQAVET) which was also recently established.

Accordingly, one of the central ideas underlying our VET policy is that mobility becomes a regular part of VET training. Learning mobility improves language skills, develops self-confidence as well as a sense of responsibility and employability. Applying the ECVET principles of validation and recognition of learning outcomes will open individual and flexible pathways to all learners concerned.

The actions meant to increase mobility and the attractiveness of VET need an intensified commitment of the European and national authorities. Thus, the upcoming Bruges Communiqué will set respective priorities up to 2020 as

well as propose short term goals.

ECVET has clearly a key role to play in achieving these aims. The various players like the European Commission, the Member States, social partners, training providers, companies and VET professionals must thereby also reach out to the people in the field who need simple to use approaches, practice related guidelines and other supportive tools.

In this context, the newly established ECVET network with its seminars and workshops at national or sectoral level can significantly help facilitate the promotion of ECVET (see [www.ecvet-team.eu/](http://www.ecvet-team.eu/)). Guidance material and an update of the ECVET users' guides will also be provided in the months to come.

Project outcomes prove to be a valuable source of information when it comes to identify challenges, potential solutions and assess impact strategies. The Magazine keeps you informed about projects results and will do so also in due time regarding the projects just selected responding

to the ECVET call for proposals EACEA/08/2010. It is also worth mentioning that the National Agencies managing actions under the Lifelong Learning Programme set up a network to better exploit results of the Leonardo projects with a view to mainstreaming their outcomes and giving a feedback to the ECVET governing bodies.

On top of that you will find in this Magazine two remarkable case studies reflecting the European diversity. The Czech experimentation highlights the important role employers and their association play in the accomplishment of ECVET. This Leonardo project also refers to the set-up process of the National Qualification Framework in the Czech Republic. And on the other hand, the Federal Ministry BMBF in Germany has started the national initiative DECVET to improve the permeability within the sub-system VET, which is broadly supported by the relevant stakeholders including the social partners.

Against the backdrop of the various activities under way, I hope we all can maintain the momentum. ■

**THE NETWORK**

# The European ECVET network

The European ECVET network is a conglomerate of Member States, European social partners and VET providers all working to promote and support ECVET.

**Three objectives are assigned to the European ECVET network :**

- back the initiatives and actions within the Member States,
- communicate the information and experimentations,
- create a long-term platform for information and shared experiences between Member States.

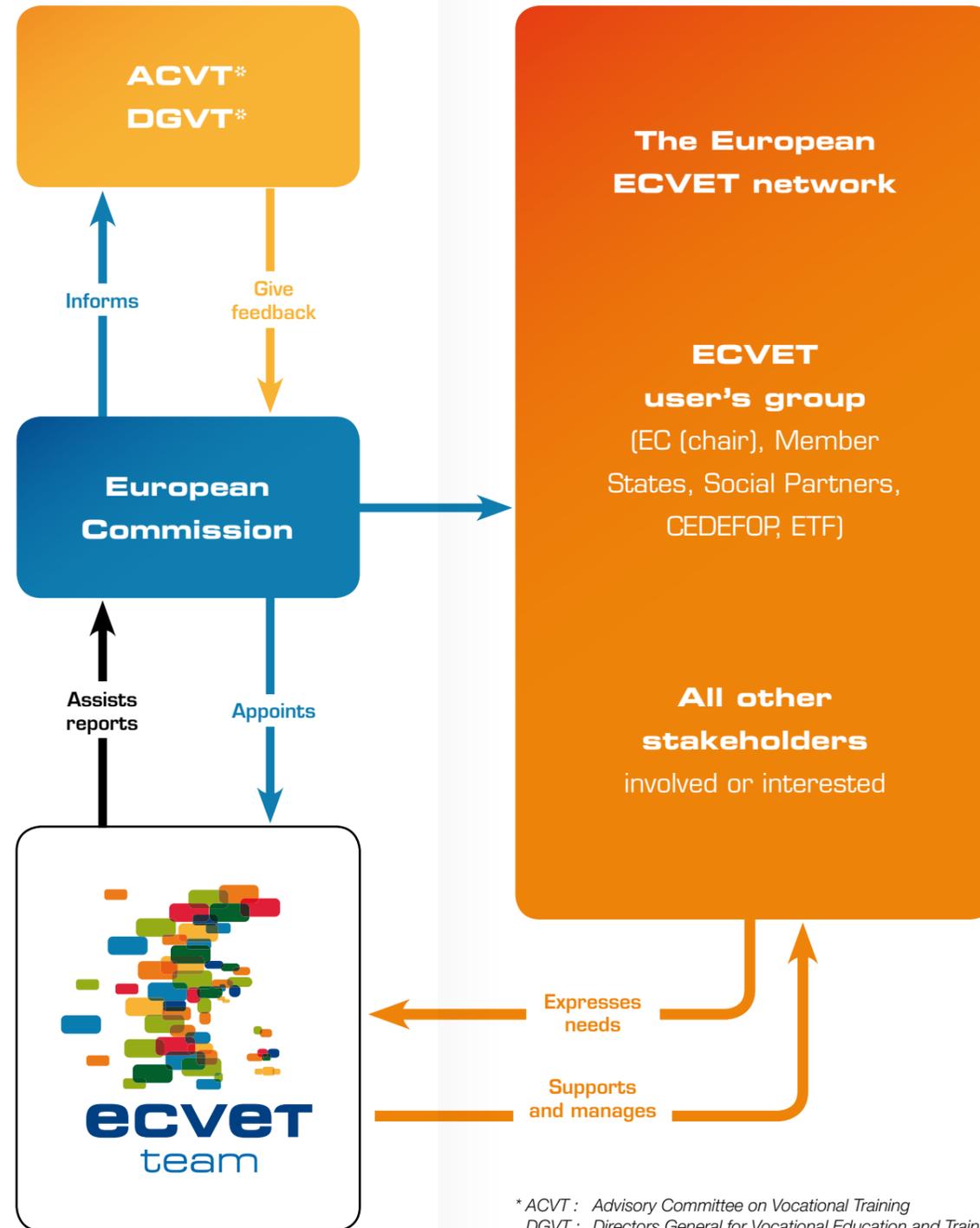
The network is designed to support all stakeholders in vocational education and training for the design, steering as well as the technical, pedagogical and organisational aspects for implementing ECVET.

**Members of the ECVET network :**

All vocational education and training organisations may be network members on the condition they are fully and wholeheartedly committed to the ECVET cause.

**It will comprise :**

- a users group (ex officio member) : three representatives per EU Member State actively involved in the promotion and the implementation of ECVET, the social partners at European level, EEA and candidate countries representatives, Cedefop, ETF, the LLP national agencies, and the European Commission.
- regular members (subscribers becoming members following a process of declaration of interest based on their effective commitment in the development of ECVET at national, regional, local or sectoral level) : representatives of VET providers, competent institutions, sectoral organisations, VET networks, etc, actors involved in the implementation of ECVET. ■



\* ACVT : Advisory Committee on Vocational Training  
DGVT : Directors General for Vocational Education and Training

# ECVET team

The support team of the European ECVET network

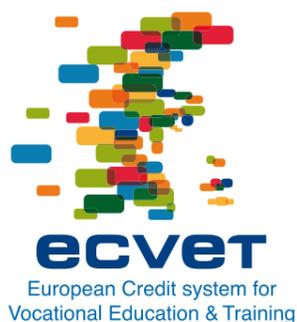
The support team brings together a multiple expertise and a European operational task force. Its main mission is to assist the ECVET European network members from the design of strategies to the operational implementation.

The ecvet team is a consortium formed by the ANFA (automobile services branch in France), the French Ministry of Education and the Chamber of Commerce of Paris. The objective of the ECVET support team towards the European Commission is to assist the ECVET European network allowing the European Commission to fulfil its obligations by supporting and aiding Member States in achieving objectives set by the Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council for implementing the ECVET system.

**The main services implemented by the ECVET team are :**

- Record-keeping of new ECVET network members
- Website set-up and management (www.ecvet-team.eu). This web site will be a crucial tool for communication on ECVET: network agenda, resources, cooperation forum for network member, useful link
- Design and organisation of annual forum of the network, workshops for users' group members), seminars or customized sessions for network members.
- Communication on ECVET: posters, newsletter (ECVET Magazine), creation of a corporate identity, leaflet. ■

# Corporate identity



Within the ECVET European network implementation framework, the communication agency Additiv was mandated to propose a specific visual identity, simultaneously expressive, symbolic, sustainable and coherent. The objective being to unite the relevant project stake holders around a single, recognizable and uniform identity for all communication and information shared within and outside the network.

However logos always originate from an initial idea or principal and in this precise case, using the pre-existing visual identities of the numerous experiments already involved with implementing ECVET throughout Europe as its basis, Additiv decided to work with this "heritage" thus respecting the symbols and codes already being used and recognized by the various players since the "birth" of this system. Therefore, the idea for the graphic design came about after a close examination of existing logos and a dozen or so interviews with European speakers specialised in the ECVET programme and having the necessary experience and know-how. In this way, the semantic fields and values attributed to ECVET became part of the graphic work's rich thought-process. The logo presented here is ECVET's visual identity and is to be used

**" ECVET contributes to building a professional pathway chosen by the individual "**

on all its media and network communication. It is represented through its two eye-catching aspects – on one hand ECVET is represented as a technical system, by reusing the graphic brick code (learning outcomes), and the assorted colours showing their diversity – and on the other hand ECVET is represented as a process, leading towards building a European network, developing homogeneous learning pathways for individuals. The logo's prominent drive is the graphic blocks leaning from the left towards the right, naturally stacking up and ending up "drawing" a face. Faced with the diversity of skills and learning systems, ECVET contributes to transforming this multiplicity into a homogenous group, building a professional pathway chosen by the individual. ■

# Network activities

European ECVET network agenda for 2010 - 2011

2010	<b>October</b>		
	13	ECVET Steering Committee	
	<b>November</b>		
	22-24	ECVET Workshop 2 (Users' Group)	Paris
	30	ECVET Steering Committee	Brussels
	<b>December</b>		
	1	ECVET Users' Group	Brussels
	8-10	ECVET seminar A1.1 (network members)	Paris
2011	<b>January</b>		
	19-21	ECVET Seminar A1.2 (network members)	Munich
	<b>March</b>		
	8	ECVET Steering Committee	Brussels
	14-16	ECVET Workshop 3 (Users' Group)	Prague
	<b>April</b>		
	4-6	ECVET Seminar A2.1 (network members)	London
	<b>May</b>		
	2-4	ECVET Seminar A2.2 (network members)	Rome
	10	ECVET Steering Committee	Brussels
	11-12	ECVET Users' Group	Brussels
	<b>June</b>		
	9-10	ECVET network Forum 2	Madrid
	<b>September</b>		
	12-14	ECVET Seminar B1.1 (network members)	Amsterdam
22	ECVET Steering Committee	Brussels	
<b>October</b>			
5-7	ECVET Workshop 4 (Users' Group)	Berlin	
24-26	ECVET Seminar B1.2 (network members)	Lisbon	
27	ECVET Steering Committee	Brussels	
<b>November</b>			
29	ECVET Steering Committee	Brussels	
30	ECVET Users' Group	Brussels	

Seminars type **A** are for "Designers" (qualifications, assessment, training programme)

Seminars type **B** are for "Users" (training provision, guidance, assessment)

A1 is the 1st seminar for "Designers" // B1 is the 1st seminar for "users"

A1.1 is the 1st seminar part 1 for "designers"

A1.2 is the 1st seminar part 2 for "designers"

A2.1 is the 2nd seminar part 1 for "designers"

A2.2 is the 2nd seminar part 2 for "designers"

## INTERVIEW

Interview done by Didier Gelibert

# Michel Aribaud and Erik Hess

**Michel Aribaud**

 Policy Officer  
DGEAC  
(till 30/10/2010)


**Many of us are still asking ourselves the question "Why ECVET?". In a few words, could you make it clearer for us ?**

The Recommendation from the European Parliament and Council from June, 2009 presents a set of thoughts venturing much further than the description of a credit system in its technical and procedural aspects. The European parliamentarians and Education Ministers have set highly ambitious standards, knowing it is nothing less than presenting European citizens with instruments to facilitate the transfer, recognition and accumulation of learning outcomes with the goal of obtaining a qualification within their own country and within a learning and training area which knows no restrictions or borders. The ECVET<sup>(1)</sup> definition

**" ECVET is for everybody and is wholeheartedly working within a life-long learning perspective "**

which appears in the Recommendation reflects this ambition.

ECVET is aimed at simplifying the pathway to obtaining qualifications, including the recognition of skills acquired in different educational systems or from a totally informal training system. The objective is to allow people wanting to obtain a vocational training certificate to pursue their individual skills recognition and, in the end, to obtain a qualification in the name of their own learning pathway. This pathway could open up new doors for mobility outside their respective country borders.

The principle element of ECVET is the design of qualifications in units of learning outcomes which contain the same principle elements as the diploma or award. I don't think I need to repeat the terms of the Recommendation but I'd like to insist on the two following points. Firstly, I believe it's worth being reminded that in the ECVET spirit, designing qualifications in units does not aim at "breaking down" qualifications and their system. In this sense ECVET is totally

compatible with the so-called holistic approaches of qualifications. It's up to the competent institutions of each country, system or sub-system of qualifications, to draw up the required rules regarding validating and accumulating skills, thus a combination and association of units making the qualifications.

Secondly: ECVET is for everybody, from young people in initial training to adults in continuous vocational training or wanting to have their formal, informal or even non-formal learning outcomes validated and recognized. This means ECVET is wholeheartedly working within a life-long learning perspective. Its implementation and usage should not be limited by geographic mobility of young people during their initial training, unless having misread the Recommendation and misunderstood the determination of the European parliament and States to have ECVET promoted, facilitating transnational mobility and, at the same time, the recognition and accumulation of learning outcomes carried out within very different contexts.

**Since the Strasbourg conference in 2004, M<sup>r</sup>. / M<sup>rs</sup>. X has been criss-crossing the European roads. During his travels, feasibility studies were performed, a recommendation was adopted, experiments were carried out, and a network is being created. To this day, which concrete factors can be discussed ?**

It would be good to make this list longer, adding on an effective European

consultation event, the promotion and steering of several successive waves of pilot projects, whose intermediary or final results were, or will be, used in ECVET testing, as well as concrete actions such as a very successful first guide destined for users in the form of questions and answers. There are also some important events which have marked the road towards the Recommendation: major conferences in Prague and Brussels which have allowed us to do the groundwork for its final adoption.

Other concrete initiatives are being carried out, or are in the process of being worked on, such as the implementation of users' groups and forming teams of national experts whose role is to assist the competent institutions in adopting and implementing ECVET.

In fact, as soon as the Recommendation was adopted, ECVET "overtook" its designers (and there are many of them!). It is now up to the awarding bodies and vocational training systems to determine its management. The results of the last call for centralised propositions regarding ECVET revealed a growing interest for ECVET from countries and competent authorities. So now, other concrete actions must be looked at in countries and within the institutions responsible for implementing ECVET. This magazine issue seems to contain articles showing lots of people all heading in the same direction.

**Regarding your expertise, what sort of advice would you give to a new VET actor (awarding body**

**and/or vocational training centre) wanting to get involved in this adventure ?**

Considering the extreme diversity and immense heterogeneity of VET actors who are likely to become involved in this "adventure", my advice could be misleading or irrelevant. However, I think I can recommend any VET actors interested by ECVET to ensure that all the institutions and players having a key role in the qualification or training system, are totally involved in their respective responsibilities.

When implementing ECVET (not by principle but to benefit people), we must assume that certain players (from vocational training or qualification system) will take the initiatives which I choose to class into three categories according to whether they aim to adopt, apply or use ECVET 1. A reasonable method would consist of discussing the ECVET adventure by organising their questions following this approach.

First and foremost, adopting ECVET means mastering the fundamental principles regarding qualifications, and also the training, such as they are presented in the Recommendation. These principles are described by two words – openness and flexibility. You will see that adopting ECVET implies thinking past the qualifications (and, consequently the training on offer), in terms of meeting individual needs. In a way, ECVET portrays the idea of individualism in "qualification pathways". This means the systems

**" ECVET's fundamental principles : openness and flexibility "**

are open to recognition of individual people's skills, regardless of whether these skills are obtained through geographic mobility, personal or professional ex-

perience, unconventional or formal learning experience, etc ... But the openness of systems to other systems must also be considered: adopting ECVET implies the willingness of key players to consider other systems with mutual trust and not defiance. So for all players involved, enormous efforts must be placed in being open and flexible within their own systems and, based on the analysis they will have made, evaluate the proximity to the ECVET principles. The decision to adopt ECVET must be made following this assessment which results much more from a political sphere than a technical one.

Applying ECVET, or more precisely applying the technical specifications of ECVET (units of learning outcomes, procedures of assessment-validation-recognition-accumulation, ECVET points) requires the development of specific methodologies. Participation with the ECVET European network and the careful analysis of pilot projects, but also the methodologies developed on other various aspects of ECVET (often well before, or during the adoption of the Recommendation) can only be serve as a support to the new initiatives.

Using ECVET, especially within the framework of geographic mobility, implies designing projects, developing partnerships, and establishing mu-

(1) ECVET is a technical framework for the transfer, recognition and, if necessary, the accumulation of individual learning outcomes in order to obtain a qualification" Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council from 18th June, 2009.

tual trust between mobile VET providers. The different implementation sequences must be defined so as to avoid "interrupting" the person's learning pathway. For example, the assessment of skills during the time spent abroad and their validation upon return requires that the validation procedure be operational and that the training offer is personalised enough to prevent the person from having to "redo" the training already successfully accomplished during their mobility.

**For 6 years you have been responsible for the "ECVET" project with the "DG EAC". ECVET is a technical and political adventure but people are at the heart**

### Erik Hess

Policy Officer,  
European  
Commission  
DGEAC B-4



Interview with Erik Hess who joined the European Commission in February 2010 to continue the work Michel Aribaud had been doing since 2004.

### of this system. Could you tell us the most memorable moments for you in this adventure ?

It's more than just moments, it's a movement which has been most memorable for me in the ECVET adventure. Who would have guessed in 2002-2004 what a credit system for vocational training would be? Nobody, and I'm sure of what I'm saying. Of course there was the temptation of copying the former system of ECTS and adapting it (but how?) to the specificities of vocational training. But the objections, reservations and other oppositions were too numerous.

The ECVET project was built from trial and error, hypothetical situations

### ECVET is now : a recommendation to implement, several experimentations, a European Network. What will be your main priorities ?

Actually, there are different activities with different actors to address. Our main concern is certainly how to best support the Member States to implement the ECVET recommendation. So at first we have committed ourselves to governing the whole process in a smooth and efficient way. This means also to put the stakeholders in a position to understand the interplay of the various European tools and initiatives. In this respect, we rely the Member

and controversies. It has introduced experts who are highly-experienced, boasting cultural know-how and having the fear of seeing their own reference system disrupted by this unidentified object.

Slowly, some propositions were adopted, solutions emerged, concepts were put into place and a special vocabulary came into being. But the most memorable aspect remains in a sort of slow and irrepressible acculturation from the ECVET "movement". ECVET has now joined the EQF resulting in an ambitious European cooperation within fields which, on a national level, are just as appreciated as qualification and training. ■

States because this is almost a permanent job to do. We still have too few persons around who are familiar with the impact of the learning outcomes approach or could explain the Quality framework to people on the ground. Above all, we develop several tools to assist the stakeholders in using ECVET. But then, there are of course quite a few other challenges to tackle as well.

### Can you just give us an example ?

Imagine you are a training provider and you want to conduct a ECVET project. You probably struggle with the procedure how to describe qualifications in terms of units of Learning Outcomes.

It very much helps if you can thereby rely on an understandable set of rules, quality indicators, criteria or even maybe standards so that your partner institution can build some trust in you. This is even more important if you consider the assessment, validation and recognition of learning outcomes.

For the time being, we still lack quality driven methodologies and conceptions. On the other hand, there are some pilot projects running and I expect them to come up with promising outcomes. In any case, we will work on this with experts and the EQAVET network. And of course, synergy will develop among the EQF advisory group discussing quality assurance.

### So you don't expect to have settled this tomorrow ?

Actually, we are rather pressed for time. Once National Qualifications Frameworks are established and in full use, the task will be easier. But in the meantime ECVET mobility projects ask for a workable approach and we have to provide them with suitable tools. To create mutual trust, quality really matters.

### You mentioned the lack of knowledge in the field. How can this be better addressed ?

Basically we need both proper tools and many players to promote ECVET at all levels. As regards the tools the ECVET users' group set up a working group to update the ECVET users' guide. This editorial work covers also a guide on ECVET in Mobility and will

address ECVET in a lifelong learning perspective. Then of course, there is your website [www.ecvet-team.eu](http://www.ecvet-team.eu) and besides, the Commission suggests introducing a ECVET Label as a conformity label to better visualize ECVET.

Finally, the Recommendation stresses that as from 2012 the Member States will have implemented necessary conditions and measures so that it is possible for ECVET to be gradually applied.

We are asked to give some support in this regard and currently think to draft a toolkit or sort of compendium to be discussed within the Users' Group. On the other hand, as I already said, we definitely need to reach out beyond the «ECVET community» to put ECVET into practice. The cycle of seminars and workshops you provide will serve our purpose.

### Your communication "A new impetus for European cooperation in VET to support the Europe 2020 strategy" as well as the recently launched initiative "Youth on the Move" highlight the role of the Lifelong Learning programme to achieve the objectives. In what way can the EU programmes contribute to the ECVET implementation ?

Particularly Leonardo projects under the lifelong Learning programme have always been a driver for European cooperation and Leonardo will continue playing a key role to increase learning mobility across borders. In this regard, we count on the network activities of the National Agencies. They monitor both ECVET and quality

related projects with a view to mainstreaming their outcomes. And on top of that, the Agencies are very close to practical needs and challenges that training providers, VET schools and small companies share when it comes to mobility.

So it is foreseen that, as from 2011, the National Agencies can apply for additional funding to set up National teams of ECVET experts to counsel training providers etc. and to prepare information packages and simple to use tools to support ECVET.

### This is quite similar to the ECTS or Bologna promoters in Higher Education ?

Exactly, they have already been working for years under the Erasmus programme and this is a success story. We want this to happen in the VET sector as well. ■

**" ECVET mobility projects ask for a workable approach and we have to provide them with suitable tools. To create mutual trust, quality really matters "**

**FOCUS**

Isabelle Le Mouillour, expert of CEDEFOP Area Enhanced Cooperation in VET and LLL



**CEDEFOP**

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

# Supporting learning pathways

Transparency and portability of qualifications across institutional, sectoral and national boundaries are major triggers to the development of ECVET, ECTS, EQF and EHEA-Framework. At European level, credit systems (CS) and qualifications frameworks (QF) are conceptually linked. At national level, they shape qualifications systems depending on the density of their regulatory role.

Time had come to analyse how far credit systems and qualifications frameworks interact within national qualifications systems and relate to learning pathways. The 2010 Cedefop study on "Linking credit systems and qualifications frameworks"<sup>(1)</sup> brings to the forefront the diversity of implementations and use of those tools, as they reflect the specificities of education and training, differences in schedules and governance patterns. Not all the countries analysed (Australia, Finland, France, Germany, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain and the UK (England, Wales and Northern Ireland (UK-EWNI) and Scotland) have already CS and QF in place, but they have implemented proxies fulfilling the functions of CS and QF (as for instance validation mechanisms or qualifications registers) as presented in the table 1.

**Table 1 : Overview on credit systems and qualifications frameworks**

	Qualifications frameworks	Credit systems
 Australia	Introduced in 1995, review in 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established in some HE institutions</li> <li>Credit points convention</li> <li>Guidelines and principles on credit arrangements within the revised AQF</li> <li>Regional credit system</li> </ul>
 Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of a comprehensive NQF</li> <li>2005 establishment of QF for HE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Since 2005 legislation on ECTS in HE</li> <li>In VET definition of units, credit convention</li> <li>Since 2004 national ECVET initiative</li> </ul>
 France	1969 (revised 2002) setting up of a national classification of qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduction of ECTS in 2002</li> <li>Definition of units in VET, and accumulation</li> </ul>
 Germany	2005 establishment of QF for HE Since 2007 development of comprehensive NQF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2005 structural guidelines for use of ECTS in HE</li> <li>Since 2008 national ECVET initiative</li> </ul>
 Slovenia	Development of a comprehensive NQF 2006 adoption of a classification system of education and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Since 2004 use of ECTS in HE</li> <li>Since 2006 credit point convention for upper secondary VET and NVQ</li> </ul>
 Spain	Development of NQF for lifelong learning Development of QF for HE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ECTS in use since 2003</li> <li>VET qualifications are based on units, accumulation</li> </ul>
 South Africa	First integrated NQF in 1995, revised in 2008	NQF uses common credit points convention, credit arrangements at awarding institutions level
 UK-EWNI	Adoption in 2008 of a jointly regulated credit and qualifications framework	
	Since 2001 framework for HE qualifications	
 UK-Scotland	Since 2001 credit and qualifications framework for all qualifications based on three sub-frameworks and credit systems	

It takes time for QF and CS to deploy. Some of the QF and CS analysed have undergone revision to increase their responsiveness to the expectations of learners, employers and stakeholders in education and training. In most countries studied, QF and CS have been introduced for the very purpose of flexibility, access and equity in education and training. Taking the example of South Africa, not fulfilling to a sufficient level this objective led to the revision of the QF in 2009. Being too complicated to understand and heavy to administrate led to the revision of the UK-EWNI Qualifications and Credit Framework.

How far QF and CS support learning pathways depends partly on their inclusive character towards learning from outside formal/public education and training: Frameworks as the French or Scottish ones include employer-led qualifications, the Australian framework as 2009 did not contain vendor-specific qualifications. It also largely depends upon how qualifications are designed and awarded : the integration of QF and CS in countries can be shaped differently thus having more or less impact on describing, designing and regulating qualifications, the recognition of credits, the quality assurance provisions, etc. As shown in the report, QF and CS might contain requirements on levelling units, a coherent use of learning outcomes approach, defining units and credit points, and developing 'bridging qualifications' or pathways following a unit-based approach.

QF and CS have to bridge the gap from policy to practice, fulfilling their attributed communication role. For that purpose, both have to provide information on access requirements and linkages between qualifications

or study programmes in an understandable manner. They also pertain enabling voluntary on-demand arrangements for permeability or decentralising opening-up access to the provider level. Cedefop report identifies differences between QF and CS when conceived as meta-instruments at European level and developed within national contexts. For instance, within the European context, the most influential lever of QF and CS might be the definition of qualifications levels and learning outcomes as they sustain information and mobility agreements (as in ECVET or ECTS) and enable articulating qualifications across levels. In national contexts further factors such as financing, degree of bureaucracy, motivation of stakeholders to cooperate, the capacity of the competent bodies to enforce the requirements of QF and CS, as well as existence of a learner-driven demand might prevail on their current use for permeability. This last argument is particularly relevant to credits since credit arrangements are mostly local, based on partnerships and operate subject to broad national rules.

Flexible pathways remain the main challenge to qualifications frameworks and credit systems as shown by the experiences gathered in different countries. Combining validation arrangements, credits and qualifications frameworks offer a possibility for further development. The study underlines that changes in governance of national education and training systems towards decentralisation and delegation of decision-making (accompanied by greater responsibility) might bring flexibility if the resources are given – a current wider challenge to education and training policy. ■

## Cedefop and its ECVET activities (Box)

Cedefop, the European Centre to promote the development of vocational education and training (VET) in the European Union, works closely with the European Commission, Member States and social partners. Cedefop supports ECVET implementation and aims to anchor it in the wider context of education and training policy and labour market developments. Cedefop analyses ECVET developments in Europe. As demonstrated by its study on linking credit systems and qualifications framework, Cedefop focuses on monitoring the European tools for education and training (EQF, ECVET, Europass, validation and lifelong guidance), bridging VET and HE, labour market and education.

**Related URL:**

- **Cedefop website :** <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/>
- **Cedefop ECVET homepage :** <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/about-cedefop/projects/european-credit-system-for-vocational-education-and-training/index.aspx>
- **Cedefop Virtual Community on European Qualifications Framework and Credit Transfer in VET :** <http://communities.cedefop.europa.eu/credittransfer-ecq?go=2158996>

(1) The full report of the Cedefop study "Linking credit systems and qualifications framework's is available at : [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5505\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5505_en.pdf)

Stefanie Schiller, Research Assistant of Friedrich Schiller University of Jena (FSU), Department of Economics and Business Administration, Chair of Business and Economics Education.  
 and Anita Milolaza, Research Assistant of Otto-von-Guericke University Magdeburg (OVGU), Department of Vocational Education and Human Resource Development, Chair of Research on Vocational Education and Training.  
 >> Members of scientific support and evaluation team of the BMBF pilot initiative DECVET.

## FOCUS

# The DECVET pilot initiative

DECVET (Development of a credit system for vocational education and training in Germany).  
 Enhancing permeability and transparency in the German vocational education and training system.

Vocational education and training in Germany comprises different tracks. Traditionally learners apply for the dual system and after a few years of professional experience some of them proceed with continuing training. Due to several reasons (e.g. unfavourable economic situations) further sub-systems such as preparatory courses in the “transition system” and school-based VET have expanded in the past few years. So far there are only little interactions and connections between these tracks leading to a lack of crossover mobility and mechanisms for transition. Individuals who try to pass from one system to another hardly receive formal recognition for prior learning achievements.

The DECVET pilot initiative<sup>(1)</sup> aims to explore if a unit-based credit system could increase transparency and encourage vertical and horizontal permeability within and between the different German VET systems. Testing ECVET in the German context the Federal Ministry of Education and Research finances ten national pilot projects<sup>(2)</sup>. From 2008 to 2011 they work on sector-specific transition and credit transfer models for prior learning on one of the following interfaces

of the German VET system :

- passing from vocational preparation into dual-system initial vocational training<sup>(3)</sup>,
- transfer at the interface between joint cross-cutting VET qualifications of a single occupational field within dual-system initial vocational training,
- passing from full-time school-based to dual-system initial vocational education and training,
- legally regulated advanced vocational training with recognition of learning outcomes from the dual-system, additional qualifications and/or professional experience<sup>(4)</sup>.

## DECVET work process

In order to develop and test suitable credit transfer models for Germany all DECVET projects fulfil a standardised work program. While creating the necessary structural conditions and instruments the core elements of the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) have to be put into practice. During the testing phase the projects are given space to allow for experimentation. Hence it is assumed that a variety of solutions will be identified.

## Units of Learning Outcomes

Based on the statutory training regulations and framework curricula the DECVET projects started to identify core activities of the particular qualifications. To facilitate comparison of the qualifications learning outcomes were described focusing on the working process. The projects were free to choose an appropriate matrix or specification: some used the EQF categories knowledge, skills and competence, others decided to apply the grid of the German Qualifications Framework draft<sup>(5)</sup> with the categories professional competence (knowledge, skills) and personal competence (social competence, self-competence). They allocated single learning outcomes into 6 to 13 units on average representing a full qualification. In spring 2010 the projects completed the translation of inputs into learning outcomes – a step which goes along with the broader German reform agenda.

## Assessment and validation of learning outcomes

Having descriptions of learning outcomes the project teams were to

develop and test suitable assessment standards and instruments that allow verification and evaluation of competencies. The testing procedures had to meet certain requirements such as quality criteria, performance-orientation, procedural economy and examiner competence. The work has shown that the transparency, comprehensibility and validity of the new assessment approaches are essential to ensure that recognition procedures will gain acceptance among the stakeholders.

**“ The transparency, comprehensibility and validity of the new assessment approaches are essential to ensure that recognition procedures will gain acceptance among the stakeholders ”**

## Analysis of equivalencies

As part of the validation process the DECVET projects investigate overlaps (equivalencies) in learning outcomes of the respective qualifications and units at the interfaces mentioned above. They finally document the minimum and/or maximum potential for credit transfer/crediting for the learner when passing between or within VET tracks.

## ECVET points

One intention of DECVET is to find reasonable criteria for the allocation of credit points to learning outcomes. These criteria need to be applied to the units representing their relative weight in relation to the qualifications.

## Models for crediting (recognition of prior learning)

Based on the above-mentioned work

steps the DECVET projects are currently concerned with the detailed design and piloting of credit transfer procedures which are capable of gaining acceptance. On the one hand the methods and models are tested with pilot groups of trainees in different training institutions, schools and companies. On the other hand several open issues have to be discussed and resolved with all relevant actors from VET practice, e.g. the question of initiation of recognition processes or competent institutions for each step.

## Challenges and perspectives

Future work in 2010-2011 will focus on the challenges :

- So far the certification process in Germany is based on final examinations and not on accumulation of a set of assessments. It has to be discussed if a unit-based system can increase the desirable vertical and horizontal permeability at the interfaces and which agreements can be reached.
- Assessment of competences sets new demands on examination staff. Thus training concepts have to be developed and accomplished.
- The projects and stakeholders discuss if and to what extent a quantitative credit system could yield added value for the VET system in Germany. Certainly this is a very

complex question because so far credit points are not an element of vocational education and training in Germany.

- Concerning the models for crediting/recognition the active involvement of VET actors in the steering groups of the initiative and its individual projects is essential.

Pilot results on the feasibility, efficiency and functionality of the developed credit transfer models will be available in 2011. Thereafter it will be necessary to review whether and to what extent the different credit transfer models tailored to particular interfaces and sectors can be generalised and standardised for the VET system as a whole. ■

(1) <http://www.decvet.net/en>

(2) The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) supports and coordinates the initiative.

(3) Many young people gain competences during training programs of the vocational transition system but struggle for transfer into an appropriate apprenticeship and recognition of prior learning outcomes.

(4) Also considering competencies acquired through non-formal/informal learning.

(5) <http://www.deutscherqualifikationsrahmen.de>

**FOCUS**

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# ECVET in the Czech Republic

## Employers' participation in preparing conditions for implementation

The Czech Republic is among those European states whose process of developing conditions for ECVET implementation starts from a very low basis. Fulfilling tasks resulting from the approved Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council is within the purview of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports that charged the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education with accomplishing it.

The Partnership and Quality system project of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports under way in 2008 accelerated significantly preparation for entering of the credit system into vocational education and training in the Czech Republic. Wide-ranging discussions on the new European instrument captured in paper called "ECVET Study" continued within the project. From the beginning, the Study had been conceived as

a whole structured in such a way which enabled to work relatively independently with every of its seven parts. While possibilities to implement ECVET were considering the analysis of necessity of ECVET and preparedness of vocational educational and training in the Czech Republic was of great importance. SWOT analysis formed one part of the analysis. Under "Strengths" is stated :

**There are three milestones in nationwide activities so far:**

- The ECVET consultation process resulted in a national report in 2007. The Report particularly stressed that implementation of the system should have been carried out gradually and in combination with extensive international verification. The Report also pointed out that conditions for ECVET implementation seem to be relatively good because development of the National Qualifications Framework has been under way in our country and simultaneously the reform of secondary school curricula has been in progress. The both processes have one common denominator: great emphasis is put on learning outcomes.

- Good social status of initial vocational education and training
- Initial education based on comprehensive and holistic educational programmes comprising general education, development of key competences, and vocational education
- Emphasis put on educational/learning outcomes in vocational education and training
- Majority of citizens achieve at least upper secondary education
- Schools successfully take part in (international) mobility projects
- Development of the National Qualifications Framework and generally positive attitude of relevant actors to the European Qualifications Framework
- Social partners take part in formulating requirements that are subsequently reflected in educational programmes

- Pilot projects focused on ECVET testing were launched with support of the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) at the beginning of 2009. Among them, there are also projects with Czech participation that is ensured and coordinated by the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education.

The CREDCHEM project the aim of which is to develop and test a credit transfer system in chemical industry is one of them. The project seeks to match employers' interests with those of their potential employees who are trained for jobs in related fields of study.

Another project called RECOMFOR is focused on international trade. It is based on results of the previous COMINTER project aimed at formulating the job profile of employees in export-import (trader, sales assistant) suitable for ECVET, based on units of learning outcomes and with rules flexible enough to allow for its adaptation for a given country. The RECOMFOR project is intended to contribute towards developing basis for mobility network.

**The CETRAEL Project**

It is gratifying to know that systematic information support of specialized circles both at schools and world of work brings first fruits. This demonstrates conception of the CETRAEL (The Certification transfer of vocational training – branch electrician into credit system) project. The project is executed by the Czech Association of Energy Sector Employers (SZE). This nationwide Association is a member of the Confederation

of Industry of the Czech Republic. Since its establishing, the Association has participated not only in employers' activities, e.g. development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework in the Czech Republic, but it is interested as well in education at secondary technical or vocational schools focused on energy. This "bilateralism" creates exceptionally good conditions for joining the project which is connected with credits and possibilities for their transfer.

The CETRAEL project forms an independent continuation of the previous Leonardo da Vinci EURCERT pilot project (CZ / PP – 1340005, "Transnational certification of completing the standardised training programme in electrical engineering focusing on electricity generation and distribution").

Educational programme in the CETRAEL project is focused on modern technologies in electrical engineering education: renewable energy sources, and modern cable and programmable technologies. The educational programme has a modular form and enables to deepen and upgrade qualifications in a partially way. Moreover, it makes possible to determine basis of credit system for its effective implementation within EU countries. The project is connected with implementation of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) as well as with development of the National Qualifications Framework in the Czech Republic.

The management committee of the project approved the following four

educational modules at the meeting in Prague, in October 2008 :

- **Module 1** : Renewable energy sources,
- **Module 2** : Cable technologies and insulated aerial line,
- **Module 3** : Programmable technologies in housing (residential buildings),
- **Module 4** : Programmable technologies in industrial construction (industrial objects).

**Basic characteristics of the project**

**Project executor:**  
Czech Association of Energy Sector Employers, Prague (CZ)

**Project coordinator and partner:**  
Secondary school for energy and construction, Chomutov, subsidised organisation (CZ)

**Partners of the project – schools:**  
Integrated secondary school for energy and construction, Sokolnice (CZ)  
Secondary electro-technical school, Trnava (SK)  
F+U Thüringen, Erfurt (DE)  
Kainuu Vocational College, Kajaani (FI)

**Partners of the project – industry and expert associations:**  
VMET Thüringen, Erfurt (DE)  
Handwekshammer Trier (DE)

While drafting the project, partners respected fully the EU principle stipulating that project executors should be provided for instruments which facilitate them recognition and certification of learning outcomes. This principle is fulfilled entirely by the following outputs of the project:

Educational programmes in modular arrangement respond to requirements stipulated in qualification and assessment standards; range of educational programmes is adequate to the delimited principle, i.e. 30 hours = 1 credit.

Textbooks comprising basic competences on 60 to 80 pages.

Validation of meeting educational standards by “educational passport” and certificate.

Charging educational institutions with verifying assessment standards of educational programmes (industry associations give authorization to verify).

All documents mentioned above are available both in Czech and English versions.

The project partnership also built on the Recommendation for ECVET. It incorporated both institutions of vocational education and training and industry and employers’ associations. It means that accessibility of information and guidance has been ensured during the project (and hereafter) and principles of quality for assessment and validation of learning outcomes have been kept.

Educational programmes in the project were developed by educational institutions. Social partners (representatives of industry associations in the project) made an audit of proposed educational programmes as for their usefulness and relevance in practice. Manageability and difficulty of set parameters of assessment standards from which the educational programmes are derived were verified by sixty participants of courses and other educational events. ■



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