

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)
 (Text with EEA relevance)
 (2009/C 155/02)

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 149(4) and Article 150(4) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee ⁽¹⁾,

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions ⁽²⁾,

Acting in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 251 of the Treaty ⁽³⁾,

Whereas:

- (1) The development and recognition of citizens' knowledge, skills and competence are crucial for their personal and professional development and for competitiveness, employment and social cohesion in the Community. In this respect, they should facilitate transnational mobility for workers and learners and contribute towards meeting the requirements of supply and demand in the European labour market. Participation in borderless lifelong learning for all, and transfer, recognition and accumulation of individuals' learning outcomes achieved in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, should therefore be promoted and improved at the Community level.
- (2) The Lisbon European Council in 2000 concluded that increased transparency of qualifications should be one of the main components necessary to adapt education and training systems in the Community to the demands of the knowledge society. Furthermore, the Barcelona European Council in 2002 emphasised the importance of improving transparency and recognition methods in the area of vocational education and training ('VET').

- (3) VET schemes, one of the main areas of lifelong learning, are directly linked to general and higher education, and to the employment and social policies of each Member State. Through their cross-sectoral impact, they promote not only the competitiveness of the European economy and fulfilment of the needs of the labour market but also social cohesion, equality and the participation and involvement of citizens.

- (4) Council Resolution of 19 December 2002 on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training ⁽⁴⁾ (the Copenhagen process), and the 2004 joint interim report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme ⁽⁵⁾, stress the importance of a credit transfer system for vocational education and training, while the 2008 joint progress report of the Council and the Commission ⁽⁶⁾ stresses the need to step up efforts to improve the quality and attractiveness of VET.

- (5) The Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council of 15 November 2004 on the Future priorities of enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training gave priority to the development and implementation of a European credit transfer system for VET in order to allow learners to build upon the achievements resulting from their learning pathways when moving between vocational training systems.

- (6) The purpose of this Recommendation is to create a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training ('ECVET') intended to facilitate the transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes of individuals who are aiming to achieve a qualification. This will improve the general understanding of citizens' learning outcomes and their transparency, transnational mobility and portability across and, where appropriate, within Member States in a borderless lifelong learning area, and will also improve the mobility and portability of qualifications at national level between various sectors of the economy and within the labour market; furthermore, it will contribute to the development and expansion of European cooperation in education and training.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 100, 30.4.2009, p. 140.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 325, 19.12.2008, p. 48.

⁽³⁾ Position of the European Parliament of 18 December 2008 (not yet published in the Official Journal) and Council Decision of 11 May 2009.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 13, 18.1.2003, p. 2.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ C 104, 30.4.2004, p. 1.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ C 86, 5.4.2008, p. 1.

- (7) ECVET should be based on the principles and technical specifications set out in Annex II. Furthermore, it should be underpinned by the common principles for quality assurance set out in the Council conclusions of 28 May 2004 on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training and the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training ⁽¹⁾.
- (8) ECVET is applicable for all learning outcomes which should in principle be achievable through a variety of education and learning paths at all levels of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF), and then be transferred and recognised. This Recommendation therefore contributes to the wider objectives of promoting lifelong learning and increasing the employability, openness to mobility and social inclusion of workers and learners. It particularly facilitates the development of flexible and individualised pathways and also the recognition of those learning outcomes which are acquired through non-formal and informal learning.
- (9) Transparent quality assurance principles, exchange of information and development of partnerships between institutions competent for qualifications, VET providers and other relevant stakeholders should help to build mutual trust and should facilitate the implementation of this Recommendation.
- (10) This Recommendation should facilitate the compatibility, comparability and complementarity of credit systems used in VET and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS²), which is used in the higher education sector, and thus should contribute to greater permeability between levels of education and training, in accordance with national legislation and practice.
- (11) The validation of assessed non-formal and informal learning outcomes should be promoted in accordance with the Council conclusions of 28 May 2004 on common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- (12) This Recommendation complements the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning ⁽²⁾ which recommends that Member States promote close links between the EQF and existing or future European systems for credit transfer and accumulation in higher education and VET. While the main objective of the EQF is to increase the transparency, comparability and portability of acquired qualifications, ECVET is aimed at facilitating the transfer, recognition and accumulation of learning outcomes of individuals on their way to achieving a qualification.
- (13) This Recommendation takes into account Decision No 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass) ⁽³⁾ and Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on trans-national mobility within the Community for education and training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility ⁽⁴⁾.
- (14) This Recommendation should facilitate the involvement of competent local and regional authorities in the exercise of linking national or other qualifications frameworks and systems to ECVET, where appropriate.
- (15) This Recommendation should be without prejudice to Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications ⁽⁵⁾ which confers rights and obligations on both the relevant national authority and the migrant. Using ECVET should not affect access to the labour market, where professional qualifications have been recognised in accordance with Directive 2005/36/EC. Moreover, ECVET does not imply any new entitlement for citizens to obtain the automatic recognition of either learning outcomes or points.
- (16) The introduction and implementation of ECVET is voluntary, pursuant to Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty, and can therefore be undertaken only in accordance with existing national laws and regulations.
- (17) Since the objectives of this Recommendation, namely to support and complement the activities of Member States, to facilitate cooperation between them, to increase transparency and promote mobility and lifelong learning, cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale or effects, be better achieved at Community level, the Community may adopt measures, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity as set out in Article 5 of the Treaty. In accordance with the principle of proportionality, as set out in that Article, this Recommendation does not go beyond what is necessary in order to achieve those objectives, insofar as it does not replace or define national qualifications systems, qualifications or national credit systems, does not prescribe specific learning outcomes or an individual's competences, and does not aim at or require either the fragmentation or the harmonisation of qualifications systems,

⁽¹⁾ See page 1 of this Official Journal.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 111, 6.5.2008, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 390, 31.12.2004, p. 6.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 5.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ L 255, 30.9.2005, p. 22.

HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT MEMBER STATES:

1. promote the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) as set out in Annexes I and II at all levels of the EQF with reference to VET qualifications, in order to facilitate trans-national mobility and the recognition of learning outcomes in VET and borderless lifelong learning;
2. create the necessary conditions and adopt measures, as appropriate, so that as from 2012 – in accordance with national legislation and practice, and on the basis of trials and testing – it is possible for ECVET to be gradually applied to VET qualifications at all levels of the EQF, and used for the purpose of the transfer, recognition and accumulation of individuals' learning outcomes achieved in formal and, where appropriate, non-formal and informal contexts;
3. support the development of national and European partnerships and networks involving institutions and authorities responsible for qualifications and diplomas, VET providers, social partners and other relevant stakeholders dedicated to trialling, implementing and promoting ECVET;
4. ensure that stakeholders and individuals in the area of VET have access to information and guidance for using ECVET, whilst facilitating the exchange of information between the Member States. Furthermore, ensure that the application of ECVET to qualifications is properly publicised by the competent authorities and that associated 'Europass' documents issued by the competent authorities contain explicit relevant information;
5. apply, in accordance with national legislation and practice, the common principles for quality assurance in VET set out in the Council conclusions of 28 May 2004 on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training when using ECVET, particularly in relation to the assessment, validation and recognition of learning outcomes;
6. ensure that there are functioning coordination and monitoring mechanisms at the appropriate levels, in accordance with the legislation, structures and requirements of each Member State, in order to guarantee the quality, transparency and consistency of the initiatives taken to implement ECVET.

ENDORSE THE COMMISSION'S INTENTION TO:

1. support Member States in carrying out the tasks referred to in points 1 to 6 and in using the principles and technical specifications of ECVET as set out in Annex II, in particular by facilitating testing, cooperation, mutual learning, promotion, and the launching of information and consultation exercises, whilst ensuring access to the guidance material for all interested citizens;
2. develop users' guides and tools, and adapt relevant Europass documents, in collaboration with Member States, national and European experts and users; develop expertise for enhancing the compatibility and complementarity of ECVET and ECTS used in the higher education sector, in collaboration with VET and higher education experts and users at European and national levels; and provide regular information on the developments of ECVET;
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;
4. monitor and follow up the action taken, including the results of trials and testing, and, after the assessment and evaluation of this action carried out in cooperation with the Member States, report, by 18 June 2014, to the European Parliament and the Council on the experience gained and implications for the future, including, if necessary, a review and adaptation of this Recommendation, involving the updating of the Annexes and guidance material, in cooperation with the Member States.

Done at Brussels, 18 June 2009.

For the European Parliament
The President
H.-G. PÖTTERING

For the Council
The President
Štefan FÜLE

ANNEX I

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this recommendation, the following definitions shall apply:

- (a) 'Qualification' means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent institution determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards;
 - (b) 'Learning outcomes' means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process and which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence;
 - (c) 'Unit of learning outcomes' (unit) means a component of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence, that can be assessed and validated;
 - (d) 'Credit for learning outcomes' (credit) means a set of learning outcomes of an individual which have been assessed and which can be accumulated towards a qualification or transferred to other learning programmes or qualifications;
 - (e) 'Competent institution' means an institution which is responsible for designing and awarding qualifications or recognising units or other functions linked to ECVET, such as allocation of ECVET points to qualifications and units, assessment, validation and recognition of learning outcomes, under the rules and practices of participating countries;
 - (f) 'Assessment of learning outcomes' means methods and processes used to establish the extent to which a learner has in fact attained particular knowledge, skills and competence;
 - (g) 'Validation of learning outcomes' means the process of confirming that certain assessed learning outcomes achieved by a learner correspond to specific outcomes which may be required for a unit or a qualification;
 - (h) 'Recognition of learning outcomes' means the process of attesting officially achieved learning outcomes through the awarding of units or qualifications;
 - (i) 'ECVET points' means a numerical representation of the overall weight of learning outcomes in a qualification and of the relative weight of units in relation to the qualification.
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ANNEX II

ECVET — PRINCIPLES AND TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

ECVET is a technical framework for the transfer, recognition and, where appropriate, accumulation of individuals' learning outcomes with a view to achieving a qualification. ECVET tools and methodology comprise the description of qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes with associated points, a transfer and accumulation process and complementary documents such as learning agreements, transcripts of records and ECVET users' guides.

ECVET is intended to facilitate the recognition of learning outcomes in accordance with national legislation, in the framework of mobility, for the purpose of achieving a qualification. It should be noted that ECVET does not imply any new entitlement for citizens to obtain the automatic recognition of either learning outcomes or points. Its application for a given qualification is in accordance with the legislation, rules and regulations applicable in the Member States and is based on the following principles and technical specifications:

1. Units of learning outcomes

A unit is a component of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence that can be assessed and validated with a number of associated ECVET points. A qualification comprises in principle several units and is made up of the whole set of units. Thus, a learner can achieve a qualification by accumulating the required units, achieved in different countries and different contexts (formal and, where appropriate, non-formal and informal), while respecting national legislation relating to the accumulation of units and the recognition of learning outcomes.

The units that make up a qualification should be:

- described in legible and understandable terms by referring to the knowledge, skills and competences contained in them,
- constructed and organised in a coherent way with regard to the overall qualification,
- constructed in a way that enables discrete assessment and validation of learning outcomes contained in the unit.

A unit may be specific to a single qualification or common to several qualifications. The expected learning outcomes defining a unit may be achieved irrespective of where or how these have been achieved. Thus, a unit is not to be confused with a component of a formal learning programme or training provision.

The rules and procedures for defining characteristics of units of learning outcomes and for combining and accumulating units for a given qualification are defined by competent institutions and partners involved in the training process according to the national or regional rules.

The specifications for a unit should include:

- the generic title of the unit,
- the generic title of the qualification (or qualifications) to which the unit relates, where applicable,
- the reference of the qualification according to the EQF level and, where appropriate, the national qualifications framework (NQF) level, with the ECVET credit points associated with the qualification,
- the learning outcomes contained in the unit,
- the procedures and criteria for assessment of these learning outcomes,

- the ECVET points associated with the unit,
- the validity in time of the unit, where relevant.

2. Transfer and Accumulation of learning outcomes, ECVET partnerships

In ECVET, units of learning outcomes achieved in one setting are assessed and then, after successful assessment, transferred to another setting. In this second context, they are validated and recognised by the competent institution as part of the requirements for the qualification that the person is aiming to achieve. Units of learning outcomes can then be accumulated towards this qualification, in accordance with national or regional rules. Procedures and guidelines for the assessment, validation, accumulation and recognition of units of learning outcomes are designed by the relevant competent institutions and partners involved in the training process.

Credit transfer based on ECVET and applied to learning outcomes achieved in formal learning contexts should be facilitated by establishing partnerships and networks involving competent institutions, each of which is empowered, in their own setting, to award qualifications or units or to give credit for achieved learning outcomes for transfer and validation.

The establishment of partnerships aims to:

- provide a general framework of cooperation and networking between the partners, set out in Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) through which a climate of mutual trust is established,
- assist the partners in the design of specific arrangements for credit transfer for learners.

The MoU should confirm that the partners:

- accept each other's status as competent institutions,
- accept each other's quality assurance, assessment, validation and recognition criteria and procedures as satisfactory for the purposes of credit transfer,
- agree the conditions for the operation of the partnership, such as objectives, duration and arrangements for review of the MoU,
- agree on the comparability of qualifications concerned for the purposes of credit transfer, using the reference levels established by EQF,
- identify other actors and competent institutions that may be involved in the process concerned and their functions.

For applying ECVET to learning outcomes achieved in a non-formal and informal learning context or outside the framework of an MoU, the competent institution which is empowered to award qualifications or units or to give credit should establish procedures and mechanisms for the identification, validation and recognition of these learning outcomes through the award of the corresponding units and the associated ECVET points.

3. Learning agreement and personal transcript

For applying credit transfer involving two partners and a specific mobile learner, a learning agreement is concluded by the two competent institutions involved in the training and validation process and the learner, in the framework of an MoU. It should:

- distinguish between competent 'home' and 'hosting' institutions⁽¹⁾,
- specify the particular conditions for a period of mobility, such as the identity of the learner, the duration of the mobility period, learning outcomes expected to be achieved and the associated ECVET points.

⁽¹⁾ The 'home' institution is the institution which will validate and recognise learning outcomes achieved by the learner. The 'hosting' institution is the one that delivers training for the learning outcomes concerned and assesses the achieved learning outcomes.

The learning agreement should lay down that, if the learner has achieved the expected learning outcomes and these have been positively assessed by the 'hosting' institution, the 'home' institution should validate and recognise them as part of the requirements for a qualification, according to the rules and procedures established by the competent institution.

Transfer between partners can apply to learning outcomes achieved in formal and, where appropriate, non-formal and informal contexts. Thus, the transfer of credit for achieved learning outcomes has three stages:

- the 'hosting' institution assesses the learning outcomes achieved and awards credit to the learner; the learning outcomes achieved and the corresponding ECVET points are recorded in a learner's 'personal transcript' ⁽¹⁾,
- the 'home' institution validates the credit as a suitable record of the learner's achievement,
- the 'home' institution then recognises the learning outcomes that have been acquired; this recognition gives rise to the award of the units and their corresponding ECVET points, according to the rules of the 'home' system.

Validation and recognition by the competent 'home' institution depend on the successful assessment of learning outcomes by the competent 'hosting' institution, in accordance with the agreed procedures and quality assurance criteria.

4. ECVET points

ECVET points provide complementary information about qualifications and units in numerical form. They have no value independent of the acquired learning outcomes for the particular qualification to which they refer and they reflect the achievement and accumulation of units. To enable a common approach for the use of ECVET points, a convention is used according to which 60 points are allocated to the learning outcomes expected to be achieved in a year of formal full time VET.

In ECVET the allocation of points usually has two phases: ECVET points are allocated first to a qualification as a whole and then to its units. For a given qualification, one formal learning context is taken as a reference and, on the basis of the convention the total number of points is assigned for that qualification. From this total, ECVET points are then allocated to each unit according to their relative weight within the qualification.

For qualifications which do not have a formal learning pathway reference, ECVET credit points can be allocated through estimation by comparison with another qualification which has a formal reference context. To establish the comparability of the qualifications, the competent institution should refer to the equivalent EQF level or, possibly, NQF level, or to the similarity of the learning outcomes in a closely related professional field.

The relative weight of a unit of learning outcomes, with regard to the qualification, should be established according to the following criteria or to a combination thereof:

- the relative importance of the learning outcomes which constitute the unit for labour market participation, for progression to other qualification levels or for social integration,
- the complexity, scope and volume of learning outcomes in the unit,
- the effort necessary for a learner to acquire the knowledge, skills and competence required for the unit.

The relative weight of any given unit common to several qualifications, as expressed in ECVET points, may vary from one of these qualifications to another.

Allocations of ECVET points are normally part of the design of qualifications and units. They are produced by the competent institution responsible for the design and maintenance of the qualification or specifically empowered for this task. In countries where there is already a national system of points, the relevant competent institutions establish arrangements for the conversion of national credit points to ECVET points.

⁽¹⁾ A personal transcript is a document which details the learners' assessed learning outcomes, units and ECVET points awarded.

The successful achievement of a qualification or of a unit triggers the award of the associated ECVET points, independently of the actual time required to achieve them.

Usually the transfer of a unit entails the transfer of the corresponding ECVET points so that they are included when the transferred learning outcomes are recognised, in accordance with national or regional rules. It is up to the competent institution to reconsider, where necessary, the ECVET points to be taken into account, as long as the rules and methodologies which are laid down for this purpose are transparent and underpinned by quality assurance principles.

Any qualification acquired through non-formal or informal learning for which a formal learning pathway reference can be identified, and the corresponding units, carry the same ECVET points as the reference, since the same learning outcomes are being achieved.
