

ECVET consultation in the Flemish Community of Belgium

Summary of the answers to the questions of the European Commission

I. Nature and number of the response

Response. The Flemish Minister of Work, Education and Training, Mr. Frank Vandembroucke, organised a consultation round to which sixteen organisations reacted, thirteen of which provided feedback in terms of content concerning the European ECVET proposal. It concerns:

- ♦ *four advisory and consultative bodies:* VLOR (Flemish Education Council), SERV (Social Economic Council of Flanders), Raad voor Volksontwikkeling en Cultuurspreiding (Council for Popular (non-formal) Adult Education), VVS (Flemish Association of Students);
- ♦ *two training providers:* VDAB (Flemish Public Employment Service) and SoCiuS (Support point for Socio-Cultural Adult Work);
- ♦ *four representatives of profit sectors:* LOGOS (International Transport sector), EDUCAM (Automobile sector), EDUplus (Agriculture and Horticulture sector) and 'Vlaams Centrum voor Vorming en Vervolmaking in de Horecasector' (HORECA sector);
- ♦ *three representatives of the social profit sector:* VOV-Lerend Netwerk and SLN;
- ♦ NVAO (Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Agency).

Limited response from the profit and social profit sectors. In terms of the number of reactions, the response may seem rather limited, but the voices of the four advisory and consultative bodies represent an important part of the organisations involved in the qualification and acknowledgement of competences. It is striking that the profit sector and social profit sector organisations' contribution to the debate remains limited.

Confusion. The reactions show that this ECVET concept is rather confusing. This is concluded from the questions the consulted persons ask with regard to the terminology used in the text, and from the various ways in which they interpret the text.

Various answers to the same question. As a result of the differentiation of interpretations, the respondents sometimes formulated very differing comments to the same question. It is therefore difficult to talk about *trends*, for instance education and training providers having a clearly different opinion than the sectors.

Similar answers to differing questions. Although the answers per question reveal only little harmony among the consulted persons, they tend to sometimes answer similarly to different questions. For instance, the VLOR and the VDAB formulate the same remark about the limited possibility to break down qualifications into units. The various organisations also elaborate on the way in which ECVET should relate to the European/Flemish qualification framework or to ECTS, as an answer to different questions. Can this lack of uniformity in the answers be associated with the character of the ECVET concept which is felt as immature by the respondents?

No thorough analyses. The fact that the European Commission comes up with a vague proposal, seems to prompt the consulted persons to stay superficial and refrain from more thorough analyses in their answers. An example: the answers to the question to what extent and how ECVET will ensure the improvement of the quality of the mobility programmes in the European Union and the participation in them, can be summarized as '*ECVET will stimulate*', supplemented with some preconditions. The response does not deal with the actual *how* and *to what extent*.

The SERV, VLOR, VVS and VDAB provide the most detailed feedback. Through the SERV and the VLOR, the Flemish social partners are involved in the ECVET debate.

II. Summary of the response in terms of content

Potential, but still a great lack of clarity. The consulted persons see the necessary potential in the ECVET principles. The main added value according to the organisations lies in the possibility to establish an (inter)national exchange of information between qualification, training and education institutions and the labour market, providing space for formal learning as well as non-formal and informal learning. They believe that such an integrated, international model may stimulate lifelong learning. However, the concept that is currently on the table raises many questions and objections. The main doubts listed:

- ♦ the technical specifications remain too vague for the consulted persons, notions are defined incoherently and the choices that are made show a lack of motivation;
- ♦ there are many doubts about the extent to which the technical specifications of ECVET take into account the evaluation, validation, acknowledgement, accumulation and transfer of learning results. The formal acknowledgement of informally and non-formally acquired learning results raises the most questions;
- ♦ the consulted persons think that the reference number of 120 points for the allocation of credits, is insufficiently motivated, confusing and/or hard to put into practice. The consultation round results in questions about the mathematical but unmotivated link between 60 credit points from ECTS and 120 points in the ECVET;
- ♦ credit allocation will probably be difficult in practice. The proposal does not opt for one allocation criterion, which may provoke international differences and incompatibility;
- ♦ the consultation round results in various suggestions about making the qualifications transparent. Questions are raised about the relation of ECVET to the European and Flemish (national) qualification frameworks;
- ♦ the organisations' questions concern not only the way in which credits should be allocated, but also the reason why they should be allocated. Among the allocation criteria for credit points proposed by the consultation document, they distinguish criteria relating to the qualification structure on the one hand, and criteria aimed at the training structure on the other hand. However, both cannot be combined just like that;
- ♦ the organisations are concerned about the division of tasks and responsibilities in a European credit transfer system. They wonder who – at the national and the international levels – at the sectors, training providers, government, ... will have which responsibilities;
- ♦ the consulted persons do not entirely or not at all share the same opinion with regard to this division of tasks;
- ♦ a lot of uncertainty remains with regard to the implementation and the facilitation thereof. The consulted persons emphasize the value of practice, with exercises, examples, pilot projects and evaluations;

- ♦ they see potential in the ECVET as a stimulator for the development of (trans)national partnerships, but emphasize that the current proposal is too vague to actually initiate this.

Hardly any inspiring models. For this exercise, the consulted persons can hardly or not at all rely on credit transfer models as they do not exist in Flanders.

Gradual, slow implementation process. Because of the limited familiarity with the concept of the acknowledgement of competence/qualification transfer and the vagueness of the current European Commission proposal, the organisations involved argue in favour of a gradual, slow implementation of the ECVET. This gradual implementation allows the broad field of parties involved – learners, trainers and labour market operators – to grow along with the system.

Additional study and experiments. The consulted bodies think this gradual implementation should be preceded by additional study and an extensive experimenting phase, in order to allow the formulation of concrete answers to the questions that are still open today.

Tuning. The emphasis for the implementation should be on the promotion and tuning of the different European working instruments - ECVET, EQF, Europass and other – that are meant to improve European mobility.

Increased participation in mobility programmes whilst paying attention to the preconditions. The consulted organisations think that a well developed and gradually introduced ECVET will contribute to an increased participation in European mobility programmes. However, they point out that attention should also be paid to other critical success factors, such as linguistic and cultural barriers, financial thresholds, administrative and legal restrictions.

How does the ECVET relate to ECTS and EQF? Throughout the response to the consultation, two uncertainties seem to prevail among the respondents: they wonder how the ECVET relates to the EQF and the ECTS. The consultation document does not clarify this relationship and does not formulate any questions about it either. However, it shows from the reactions of the consulted persons that this topic should be discussed.

Regional and national diversity. It should be noted that the SERV (Social Economic Council of Flanders) doubts whether the ECVET takes sufficient account of the regional and national diversity. Does the ECVET not impose too much one model with which all the member states have to comply? Is such a uniform structure realistic?

A long way to go. The nature of the response to this consultation round, with differing visions and many questions, shows that the ECVET in Flanders – and probably also in other EU member states - still has a long way to go before turning into a system that is fully understood and supported.