

Estonian comments on “European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training”

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As free mobility is one of the fundamental rights of the EU citizens, many people in Europe study and work outside their own country. At the same time, all countries have developed unique education and qualification systems that differ from one another especially so in terms of vocational training and education. **One of the most important pre-conditions of valuating such diversity is transparent qualifications and the opportunity of transferring, recognising and validating one’s learning outcomes abroad.**

During the last years, the aim of better educational cooperation has been fulfilled by the education policy agreements and the recommendation to implement the European Qualifications Framework as well as the developed package of Europass documents and European quality assurance network.

We fully agree with the position of the European Commission which states that in order to ensure mobility of learners and employees only the abovementioned measures shall not be sufficient as the learning and working mobility of citizens is primarily limited by absence of provisions regulating the transfer, validation and recognition of learning outcomes acquired abroad. **Thus, the development of a system by the help of which the learning outcome abroad shall be recognised as acquisition of qualifications shall be necessary and worth supporting.**

ECVET as a system that enables one to describe the qualifications in terms of transferable and accumulative learning units (knowledge, skills and competence) has gained the support of various social partners, education institutions as well as the representatives of education institutions during the consultations. The abovementioned stakeholders have expressed their willingness to participate in the process of development and implementation of the concept in the future as well.

The Estonian positions in response of the questions started in the consultation document are the following:

- **Are the most important objectives and functions of a European system of credits for vocational training and education and the role of proper authorities fully outlined in the consultation document? If not, what is missing?**

In the ECVET consultation document, the objectives and functions of a European system of credits for vocational training and education have been fully outlined, but need further elaboration.

The possible roles of the appropriate bodies have been outlined in the document and in case of sufficient interest and necessity every country shall be able to facilitate recognition of lifelong learning of citizens within one country by implementing ECVET. In case of smaller countries, sectoral cooperation may become the key to overcome administrative burden.

Implementation of ECVET at the European national or sectoral level depends on the willingness and devotion of different countries to implement the concept. Thus, the functioning and efficiency of ECVET system depends on imposition of relevant national regulations and availability of relevant resources.

– **What would be the main added value of the planned ECVET system?**

As the main added value of the planned ECVET system we see the opportunity to value lifelong learning and the knowledge and skills acquired in various learning contexts for individuals as well as to diminish the so called “over learning” due to formal barriers. Thus, implementation of ECVET would be helpful in valuating learning and it would create cooperation possibilities as well as momentum between various training providers.

– **Do some technical specifications need to be set out in greater detail with a view to the practical implementation of ECVET? If so, which ones?**

For practical implementation of ECVET, the definition of a learning unit should be more thoroughly determined. The present approach (unit is the smallest part of knowledge/skills that can be assessed) is not sufficient considering the varying concepts for describing qualifications and creating learning programmes in different countries. We propose complementation of the unit definition with example(s) of unit(s).

– **Do ECVET's technical specifications take sufficient account of the evaluation, validation, recognition, accumulation, transfer of learning outcomes whether formal, non-formal or informal?**

Generally, ECVET's technical specifications take sufficient account of recognition of various learning outcomes. The proposal under discussion gives the implementing institutions broad boundaries for evaluating the learning outcomes. Thus, the clarity and transparency of documents describing the acquired qualifications and learning mobility becomes even more important. According to our position, the Europass learning mobility document (mobility passport) as well as other Europass documents should be further developed but there is no need to create new document forms.

– **Are the allocation of credit points to qualifications and units and using a reference figure of 120 credit points sufficient to ensure the convergence of approaches and the coherence of the system at European level? If not, what would you suggest?**

Estonian biggest reservation on the given consultation document is the recommended potential calculation of credit points – 120 credit points for nominal full-time formal education raises some serious questions.

As the given numerical recommendation has not been sufficiently grounded or explained in greater detail and does not comply with either the ECTS concept of 60 credit points per year or 40 credit points per year in full-time formal education as used in the higher education in Estonia so far, we shall not agree with the numerical value of ECVET suggested in the consultation document.

We believe that the implementation of the suggestion in the consultation document would create unnecessary confusion and it would complicate transition to the common lifelong learning credit point system in the future. We suggest that 60 ECVET points shall be considered as the potential numerical calculation per year in full-time formal education.

- **Under what conditions could describing qualifications in terms of learning outcomes and expressing them in units effectively improve the transparency of qualifications and contribute to the development of mutual trust?**

Description of qualifications in terms of learning outcomes shall be the only way to improve transparency of qualifications, to ensure greater mobility to people as well as to help promote lifelong learning.

- **Which criteria or combinations of criteria for allocating credit points could be selected and used?**

Within the ECVET consultation document, allocation of credit points has been described by various criteria or their combination. The Estonian position is that in the allocation of credit points to qualifications the combination of criteria suggested in the consultation document should be issued from. The common methodological basis for implementing ECVET shall need further description in greater detail. Are there any features in your qualifications system which would favour the introduction of ECVET?

- **What constraints, if any, do you foresee?**

Introduction of ECVET in Estonia is favoured by ongoing education reform – renovation of qualification framework, conceptual renovation of professional standards, implementation of national programmes in vocational education, implementation of RPL principles within the education system as the whole.

With reference to the creation of outcome based vocational programmes the importance of various skills in learning weeks has been evaluated in Estonia and this can be considered a favourable feature in developing ECVET system on the national level.

- **How and within what timeframe (launch, introduction, experimentation, widespread introduction) could ECVET be implemented in your country?**

The best way to implement ECVET in Estonia is implementation on the step by step basis beginning with field or sectoral pilot projects.

The transnational cooperation projects as well as support from the EU would contribute to the implementation process as well.

In order to implement ECVET, the existence of appropriate recommended methodological material is also important.

If the abovementioned pre-conditioned are fulfilled, the concept of ECVET can be implemented within the next years but the wider use shall take significantly more time.

- **What kind of measures should be taken at European national and sectoral levels to facilitate the implementation of ECVET?**

The development and implementation of ECVET could be favoured by the relevant means at the European level – promotion of relevant cooperation projects, development of guidelines, etc.

- **What documents, manuals and guides could be developed to facilitate the implementation of ECVET?**

For implementation of ECVET an appropriate guiding material for introducers would be helpful. The guiding material should include the list of relevant terms, methodologies for

evaluating ECVET, recommended procedures at the national level and descriptions of best experiences.

- **To what extent will ECVET be able to contribute to the development of transnational and even national partnerships and how?**

ECVET shall be able to contribute to the development of transnational and national partnerships by providing a specific instrument and enhancing mutual trust between countries.

It also “constrains” and leads the interested towards recognition.

The opportunity of meeting relevant recognition of one’s skills shall also contribute to international professional mobility.

- **To what extent will ECVET be able to help improve the quality of Community programmes on mobility and participation in these programmes and how?**

ECVET shall be able to help improve the quality of Community programmes on mobility and participation in these programmes by motivating learners/employees to participate as it provides security that the new skills shall be recognised in the country of origin. As the framework of ECVET constrains the interested to draw up agreements, the project contributes to development of professional partnerships between various training providers and employers.

- **To what extent and how do you think that ECVET and Europass could complement each other to enhance mobility?**

ECVET and Europass should complement each other – the learning mobility document of Europass should definitely be complemented with ECVET. ECVET points shall increase the efficacy of Europass and at the same time Europass is the most suitable format for describing ECVET points.