



ETUC on ECVET Proposal by the European Commission

European Trade Union Confederation ETUC sees access to training as a major problem when national policies on vocational training and life long learning are discussed. There are 72 million non- or low-qualified workers in EU, which is that is unacceptable number for economy that seeks to be most competitive knowledge based economy in the world. ETUC calls for progressive national goals to diminish the enormous number of employed and unemployed workers without minimum educational qualifications in every member state of the EU.

The Prague conference of ETUC in 2003 set a number of priorities to trade unions work in field of life long learning. ETUC wants to ensure that access to qualified education and training responds to the demands of both young people and adults seeking further training. National actions must promote the inclusion of older workers, low-income earners, early school leavers, those with low levels of qualifications atypical workers and women in lifelong learning measures. To make lifelong learning reality ETUC calls for genuine recognition of prior learning formal qualifications and diplomas and informal competences. In every member state there is a need for better coordination at national level to make lifelong learning reality.

ETUC sees lifelong learning as a mean to employment for individual workers, a mean to competitiveness for a enterprise and a national economy. From trade union point of view key words concerning vocational training are skills development and employability.

ETUC is willing to promote access to training and lifelong learning in any kind of social dialogue, either on European or on national level. The bilateral dialogue on EU level with BusinessEurope in the context of the joint working programme 2006 – 2008 has to be developed.

Results of Copenhagen process

There is no single concept of vocational training in Europe. Besides formal training leading to qualifications learning and training takes place in everyday situations in and outside work. Common European tools should convert learning across boundaries of learning. They should enable transfer of learning outcomes from everyday situations into world of formal qualifications, education and training.

Common European tools must contribute to development of lifelong learning in structured ways. This is way European cooperation within Copenhagen process can help Europe to avoid loss of human resources.

ETUC sees the clear connection between European Qualifications Framework (EQF), National Qualifications Framework ECVET, Common Quality Assurance Framework and recommendations on lifelong guidance and recognition of non formal and informal learning. ETUC stresses that these results from Copenhagen process are meaningful only if they will

create opportunities for European citizens and workers to participate in training according to their needs and wishes.

The heart of these new tools is national qualifications framework, which should accommodate the variety of exams and qualifications in national context. National qualifications frameworks are key elements, in which ECVET can be a tool to help individuals as they pave their personal learning pathways or as they search structured training suitable for them. ECVET can also have an important role in development of curriculum, exams and qualifications to meet the changing demands of labour market and society.

About

ECVET

ETUC working group on lifelong learning has followed the development of ECVET since the project started in 2003. We found that development of mobility inside and within VET-systems is an important goal. For this reason ETUC agrees on goals of ECVET that have been presented in consultation document.

ETUC points out that the consultation document is complex, technical and theoretical. Taking into consideration the variety of systems and actors in vocational training in EU complexity of credit system raises doubts about its practicability. Development of lifelong learning is not a technical but a political question. The key issue is to provide good education and training for those in need so that European citizens and workers will have skills and competences relevant at labour market. Does development and implementation of ECVET support this goal?

In further development it is necessary to develop ways of measuring competencies and skills inside units or credit points. Credit transfer itself is not enough to guarantee that learners have achieved right level of knowledge, skills and competencies.

ETUC is unclear what competent bodies will be. As ECVET will be used in variety of contexts systems and structures need to be as simple as possible. ECVET must not increase bureaucracy in VET.

ETUC identifies a clear distinction between the learning and training needs of youth and adults. Young people need broad education to prepare them for citizenship and work. ECVET needs to support structured initial training not only to allow personal learning pathways which are important for adults.

In some countries with tradition in comprehensive VET (profession principle) the concept of units could lead in the long run, if too many training procedures are split in a lot of units, to tendencies of undermining existing procedures. It would be a matter of national implementation to avoid such a danger. Among trade unions there are also doubts about credit points. ECVET could also be further developed without credit points especially for lifelong learning needs.

If ECVET will be a tool for lifelong learning, it must support bridge building between higher education and vocational training. That must be one of the most important tasks of credit system. From trade union point of view coherent lifelong learning strategy is an entity, which comprises all levels and types of initial and further training or qualifications. From this point it seems obvious that in future there should be only one single credit system for lifelong

learning. As ECTS which exists in higher education does not meet the demands of vocational training it is crucial that principles ECVET will be developed tested and implemented before idea of single credit system will be possible.

Another important task is to build bridges from non formal and informal learning into formal learning and qualifications. ECVET would give opportunities in this field, but it is not clear whether it is possible measure learning in work life in terms of units and credits. There is a danger that accumulation of credits in terms of recognition and validation of learning will undermine non formal and informal learning.

ETUC reminds all stakeholders that ECVET is not new qualification or training system. Instead ECVET will be a tool that can be used within structures of lifelong learning. Development of common European tools does not affect the sovereignty of national authorities in field of education and training. Even if there will be common principles to be adopted, it will be up to national authorities to decide how training and certification will be organised. Insofar as trade unions at national level have to be involved/asked to implement respective measures, will ECVET not be able to change these procedures.

Trade unions are seeking a positive way to promote to development of credit system for vocational training and lifelong learning. Therefore the implementation of ECVET must be accompanied by pilot projects involving social partners at national and European level. As part of testing it is important to identify the desired skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to work in the most widespread European occupations, and then to test an ECVET-pilot at European level in connection with these earlier identified skills, knowledge and attitudes.

ETUC stresses that consultation time was quite short taking into consideration complexity of proposal. ETUC hopes that in future the European Commission gives enough time to member states and stake holders to take position on its proposals. The Commission should also stress that member states should promote participation of social partners and other stake holders into consultation. This has not been the case in several countries.