

Consultation on the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training

(ECVET)

SEC(2006) 1431

31/10/2006

Finland's Response

27/04/2007

Description of the Consultation Process

The Finnish Ministry of Education has provided information on the consultation regarding the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) at various events and on the ministry's website. The Ministry of Education organised a consultation and discussion event on the Commission's ECVET proposal (SEC(2006) 1431) on 7 March 2007 in Helsinki. An invitation to the event was sent out to major stakeholders and was also displayed on the ministry's website. There was a link to the consultation documents on the ministry's website.

The discussion began with introductory presentations on ECVET and on the results of ECVET trials (FINECVET pilots and Leonardo projects), and comments from the representatives of major stakeholders (employer and employee organisations, education and training providers, students). After the presentations there was a discussion on the Commission's proposal regarding ECVET. The discussion had 40 participants representing employer and employee organisations, education and training providers, student associations, state authorities and FINECVET projects.

On the basis of the discussion event and responses to the Commission's proposal received by the ministry, the Ministry of Education drafted a response to the Commission Staff Working Document. The draft of the response was visible and open to comments on the ministry's website. The final response to the Working Document took into account the comments and improvement suggestions received on the draft. The Finnish response describes the debate held on ECVET in Finland, as well as different stakeholders' reactions to the Commission's proposal.

Purpose of and Reasons for ECVET

The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) is considered to be necessary, and its development and adoption are seen as beneficial. The aims of ECVET – increased mobility, validation of competence acquired abroad or outside the formal system of education and training, and increased transparency of qualifications – are seen as desirable.

The greatest value added by ECVET lies in the fact that the system can facilitate the transfer, accumulation and validation between different countries of training modules and learning outcomes. Education and training providers from different countries have already agreed on some credit transfer systems, for the purposes for instance of student exchange. Even after the implementation of ECVET, credit transfer would require a bilateral agreement, knowledge of the other country's education and training system and mutual trust. Mutually agreed procedures and tools facilitate cooperation, save time and effort and thus promote mobility. It is important that ECVET increase mobility not only during studies, but also more widely, e.g. when searching for jobs in a foreign country. In order for ECVET to be implemented, it must be interesting, easy to understand and sufficiently simple, and it must offer clear benefits from the point of view of employers and the individual alike.

The aims and functions of ECVET are described clearly in the consultation document. The methods/tools used for achieving the aims in the diverse systems of vocational education and training are, however, still unclear or generalised, and require elaboration and specification. It is particularly important to link ECVET and its tools to other tools shared in Euro-

pean vocational education (EQF, EUROPASS, CQAF) and the parallel system for higher education (ECTS).

Technical Basis for ECVET

It is considered beneficial that ECVET is based on learning outcomes, i.e. descriptions and comparisons of the competence produced by a qualification. A system based on learning outcomes makes it possible to recognise and validate competence acquired outside the formal system of education and training. Further development of the system is still needed in this respect, however. The consultation document does not pay enough attention to non-formal and informal learning and the evaluation of related competence as part of ECVET. The system should be developed so that it clearly defines the principles of recognising non-formal and informal competence. In this way it would provide better support for lifelong learning.

One problem identified with ECVET lay in credit points and how to define them. Credit points are a tool that provides guidance and further information in describing and comparing competence produced by education and training in numeral form. Comparisons should always be primarily based on qualitative rather than quantitative descriptions of the competence and learning outcomes produced. Some believe that credit points may actually be unnecessary, and that descriptions and comparisons should focus solely on learning outcomes. However, credit points would be necessary as additional data to facilitate the transferability and validation of studies and competence. Comparability would be increased if a shared vision regarding how credit points should be allocated and related to other EQF levels were defined at pan-European level. It would be necessary to trial and test different allocation systems to find the most suitable model. Experiences gained from the higher education ECT System should be taken into account when allocating credit points. The use of the same evaluation system in vocational and higher education, with clearly defined interrelationships between the two systems, would facilitate cooperation and mobility and build bridges between education levels. The use of a shared evaluation system would require an adjustment of ECTS to focus more clearly on learning outcomes.

Implementing ECVET

The success of ECVET relies on mutual trust. Mutual trust can be increased by describing learning outcomes in uniform and transparent ways. This would give representatives of different countries a shared understanding of competence and learning outcomes acquired abroad. It is good that ECVET intends to use the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in describing the competence produced by a qualification as a whole, as well as the competence produced by a unit of a qualification. The use of a common framework will increase transparency and shared understanding, which in turn increases mutual trust.

It would be worth making use of the experiences gained from the higher education ECT System. The use of the same evaluation system in vocational and higher education would facilitate cooperation and mobility and build bridges between education levels. Evaluations should place an emphasis on learning outcomes. Although comparative time calculations may be difficult due to the diverse ways in which competence can be acquired, the notional or real length of the education and training should be mentioned as additional information, among other things in order to facilitate validation. Qualifications leading to professional certifications or other qualifications must also be defined in terms of their length due to the requirements of directives governing eligibility for certification.

The implementation of ECVET in Finland would be facilitated by the fact that the Finnish qualification system is very clearly organised. The competence produced by qualifications is described in terms of learning outcomes and competences in National Core Curricula and requirements for demonstrations-based qualifications, which are used by education providers when drawing up their own curricula. All qualifications consist of units, and a study dimensioning system similar to the credit point system is already in use to describe students' workloads. ECVET could be linked to the Finnish qualification system fairly easily. The implementation of ECVET would be facilitated by the system being refined according to the suggested improvements mentioned in this response.

The implementation of ECVET in Finland could be linked to the existing decision-making and management system. It would require a national resolution on the implementation of the system, a description of the qualification system, agreement on the principles for allocating credit points, and the classification of existing qualifications according to EQF levels in a Government Decree. In the National Core Curricula and requirements for demonstrations-based qualifications, the Finnish National Board of Education would have to provide descriptions of qualifications, units and the competence produced in them in terms of knowledge, skills and competence, as well as a definition of evaluation criteria. Furthermore, procedural instructions would also be needed for education and training providers and other stakeholders.

Measures for Supporting the Implementation and Development of ECVET

The aims and functions of ECVET are clear, but the methods for achieving the aims still require elaboration and specification. There is also room for improvement in the definitions of the roles of social partners and in the coordination and delegation of tasks between various operators. Thus it is important to trial ECVET first at European level in order to draw conclusions, on the basis of which the system can be adjusted and complemented before its final adoption. Trials conducted at a European level could be supported by national, sector-specific trials.

From the point of view of educational operators, a major benefit of ECVET would be the use of shared procedures and tools throughout Europe. Therefore, for the sake of the functionality of the system, models should quickly be created for ECVET's tools (e.g. the Memorandum of Understanding and Learning Agreement), with instructions for different operators. The functionality of shared tools should be tested before the final ECVET tools are produced. Shared and easily accessible descriptions of the competence produced by qualifications, as well as models for contracts and documents would facilitate national and international networking. Particular attention should be paid to making all documents and tools available electronically.

The implementation of ECVET should progress stagewise, in a similar fashion to the implementation of EUROPASS. At the first stage, prototypes of the central elements of ECVET could be adopted and tested, and then improved and complemented on the basis of experience. The implementation of the system must be supported by an extensive communication campaign which will impart the importance of the measures to individuals, employers and education and training providers. The importance of mutual trust and quality assurance must be emphasised specifically.

The links between ECVET, other pan-European vocational education and training tools and the higher education ECT System should be emphasised and developed further. In addition,

care should be taken not to increase bureaucracy but instead to offer sufficiently simple practical tools and methods for promoting mobility from the point of view of education and training providers.

ECVET's Potential for Enhancing Mobility

In ECVET, the competence and learning outcomes produced by qualifications are described in terms of knowledge, skills and competence, and these descriptions are linked to the EQF. A uniform description method will improve the transparency of competence acquired through qualifications, and increase trust in learning outcomes or competence acquired elsewhere (nationally and internationally). Mutual trust and jointly agreed principles would facilitate cooperation and promote the creation of partnerships.

At best, ECVET can also be used as a quality assurance system for training modules and competence transfer. It would make different education and training providers' curricula easier to understand and compare, which in turn would facilitate the validation of studies and competence nationally and internationally. International student exchanges would be more attractive if there is certainty as to how studies completed during the exchange can be used as part of a qualification. ECVET would allow the added value brought by internationalisation and international exchanges to be evaluated, and individual learning paths to be created.

Finnish FINECVET projects have shown that EUROPASS is a good way of documenting studies. EUROPASS is currently being made more user-friendly by further exploiting IT systems and electronic data transfer. The development of ECVET should take EUROPASS documents into account; it would be particularly beneficial if qualification-specific evaluation results and credit points could be appended to the Mobility record and the Certificate Supplement.

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