



FETAC

*Further Education and
Training Awards Council
Comhairle na nDámhachtainí
Breisoideachais agus Oiliúna*

Towards a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training

Irish Response

2007

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1 Introduction

In November 2006 the European Commission formally launched a consultation on a proposed outline for a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). Notification was forwarded from the Commission to the relevant Ministries in the 32 countries participating in the Copenhagen process and in the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme.

The Commission prepared a consultation document. This document is available on the website of the DG EAC: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/consult/index_en.html

In Ireland, the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment requested the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), as the single national awarding body for further education and training in Ireland, to carry out the consultation on their behalf.

FETAC prepared a background paper¹ to set the scene for the Irish consultation on ECVET. The paper was circulated to relevant stakeholders in Ireland and significant feedback was received.

This paper is the Irish response prepared by FETAC on behalf of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, following the consultation process.

2 Irish Context

National Framework of Qualifications

Ireland has in place since 2003 a national framework of qualifications. The national framework is designed to facilitate the development of a credit accumulation and transfer system based on learning units. The broad approach of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and its partners including FETAC is to work towards a national approach to credit that will facilitate a seamless transfer between further education and training and higher education and training.

▪ FETAC as the Competent body

FETAC was established in 2001 with responsibility for making awards in further education and training Ireland and quality assuring providers and their programmes.

As the single national awarding body for further education and training FETAC would be the appropriate competent body in Ireland for the purposes of overseeing the implementation of ECVET.

FETAC is the competent body with responsibility for the development and making of awards in the further education sector including the assigning of credit.

¹ Towards a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training, FETAC, January 2007

- Quality Assurance of Irish FET providers

Quality assurance is a key driver to improving the status and image of VET in Ireland and across Europe. Quality assurance of providers will be a key mechanism towards the establishment of mutual trust and agreements between providers.

FETAC is the Irish body responsible for quality assuring further education and training providers and their programmes.

It is FETAC policy, as outlined in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, that all providers offering programmes leading to FETAC awards have established procedures for quality assurance which will maintain and improve the quality of their programmes.

The provider's role is to deliver quality assured programmes in order to facilitate learners to achieve FETAC awards. As and from 2007 all providers offering programmes leading to national vocational awards must have their quality assurance agreed with FETAC. FETAC will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of provider's quality assurance procedures and will review the agreement within a maximum period of five years from the date of initial agreement.

- FETAC awards

FETAC as the competent body will through the implementation of its Common Awards System play a key role in the facilitation of ECVET in Ireland. The credit system being introduced in the context of the Common Awards System has the capacity to be fully integrated with ECVET as proposed. Therefore it is anticipated that Ireland should be in a position to commence introducing ECVET from 2008, in parallel with national developments.

The new Common Awards System to be introduced in Ireland from 2008 will enable FETAC and providers to enter into arrangements and agreements for credit transfer based on their respective competences i.e. on a national basis (FETAC) or localised/institutional basis (providers).

- Recognition of other awards

FETAC's role as an awarding body is to recognise learner achievement for the purpose of making awards. In the interest of learners, FETAC also recognises "other awards" and will give learners credit for unitised parts of "other quality assured awards" they have successfully achieved.

FETAC does and will continue to establish comparability between its minor awards and units or parts of their qualifications in other countries. Comparability decisions are currently based on existing national alignment agreements (e.g. between Ireland, Scotland, England/Wales/Northern Ireland) and/or direct comparisons between the two systems. Decisions are conditional on the existence of appropriate quality assurance arrangements within the "other" countries system. In the future the EQF will play a significant role in this activity.

FETAC will also continue to establish comparability arrangements between its awards and the units or parts of professional, global and sectoral awards e.g. ECDL.

3 **Consultation process in Ireland**

As noted above, the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment requested FETAC, as the competent body, in further education and training to carry out the consultation in Ireland on their behalf.

To meet the Commission's March deadline a timetable for national consultation was prepared and agreed with the relevant Departments.

In order to assist the consultation process, FETAC prepared a background paper setting ECVET and the consultation in a national and European context.

FETAC's plan was to: (a) circulate this background paper and the Commissions consultation document to an extensive number of stakeholders for comment (b) host a consultation seminar in February 2007; and (c) prepare a draft a national response for consideration by both departments.

FETAC circulated the background paper to all its stakeholders in January 2007 and published it on the FETAC website.

In February all stakeholders were invited to a Consultation Seminar in Dublin. The purpose of the consultation seminar was to present the ECVET proposals to stakeholders for consideration. Some 40 stakeholders (see Appendix 1) attended the seminar. Presentations on ECVET were made by the European Commission and FETAC. This was followed by a discussion forum.

Submissions were formally requested up until the end of February 2007.

In March FETAC collated the data in the submissions and compiled this response. FETAC would like to express thanks and acknowledges the support and contributions of all stakeholders who participated in the consultation process.

4 **Overview of ECVET**

The main purpose of ECVET is to enhance mobility and facilitate individuals who undertake learning activities outside their own country to gain validation and recognition of the learning outcomes acquired abroad, whether the learning outcomes are achieved in a formal, informal or non formal context.

ECVET proposes an approach whereby learning outcomes acquired abroad can be taken into consideration for the purposes of issuing a qualification in a learner's country of origin. ECVET proposes a common approach to describing qualifications in terms of learning outcomes, thereby making it easier to understand the range of different national systems.

The approach is based on sets of learning outcomes presented in unit form with appropriate credit ratings. A proposed structure to support implementation is the 'competent body' which will have associated responsibilities for assigning of credit at a national level. The proposed ECVET approach is also entirely voluntary for both learners who participate and the respective providers who facilitate and recognise the credit transfer arrangements.

This approach is in line with other initiatives taken at European level, in particular the proposed European Qualifications Framework (EQF), designed to improve the

transparency of qualifications across Europe. As ECVET is based on learning outcomes irrespective of the learning context, it facilitates the transfer and validation of formal, non formal and informal learning outcomes, thereby improving access to qualifications.

5 Response to Consultation Process

During the consultation process many views and comments were expressed by a wide range of stakeholders. Following the circulation of the background paper a number of meetings were held with a range of stakeholders.

The Consultation seminar was well attended by stakeholders and again generated interesting points.

Fourteen stakeholders made formal submissions to FETAC as a result of the consultation process (see Appendix 2). These stakeholders represented a broad range of national organisations and included the Department of Education and Science, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, the Dublin Institute of Technology, HETAC, Aontas, IBEC, Leargas, and a variety of providers from the both the higher and further education and training sectors.

Many significant comments and issues were raised in the submissions of a) national relevance and b) for consideration at a European level in the context of ECVET. The type of submissions varied with some stakeholders responding to the questions set out in the consultation paper and others who prepared general feedback statements.

The response prepared by FETAC has aimed to incorporate, in as much as possible, all relevant comments and views. The response has been prepared in answer format for each of the pre-prepared questions with an issues section at the end of the paper summarising the issues arising throughout the consultation process. A number of recommendations are provided in Section 8 based on the findings of the consultation process.

It is important to note that some of points made by the contributors related very specifically to the Irish context and others made comments relating to the wider European context such as the proposed European Qualifications Framework.

6 Responses to Consultation Questions

The questions were taken directly from the Commissions consultation document. They were presented in four subsections of issues: the purpose of and reason for an ECVET system, the technical basis for ECVET, implementing ECVET, measures for supporting the implementation and development of ECVET, and ECVET's potential for enhancing mobility.

Purpose of and reasons for an ECVET system

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

In broad terms the objectives and functions of ECVET as outlined in the consultation document have been clearly articulated in the paper and are understood by stakeholders within the Irish context. Irish stakeholders welcome the proposal and clearly support its objectives.

The lack of transparency and non recognition of qualifications in VET is identified as a real barrier to mobility of people and ECVET is recognised by stakeholders as a step towards addressing this problem. However the introduction of the National Qualifications Framework in 2003 and the pending and eagerly awaited introduction of the EQF are seen by Irish stakeholders as more significant attempts to increase transparency.

However it is recognised that there are many details to be worked out yet and greater clarity will be needed on many aspects of the ECVET proposal. The proposal was stated to be 'revolutionary' for some countries and there is concern that it may never be integrated into national systems.

The concept of voluntary participation of the member states and of the stakeholders in their respective qualifications systems was welcomed by Irish stakeholders.

- (ii) What would be the main added value of the planned ECVET system?**

The main added value of ECVET will be the enhanced mobility of learners within the further education and training sector of Europe. Another point of added value will be the increased opportunities for recognition of Irish awards abroad and recognition of other awards here in Ireland. It will also increase the mutual knowledge and understanding of different systems of education and training amongst European states. It will complement existing tools such as the NQF and the proposed EQF.

Technical basis for ECVET

- (iii) 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?**

It is suggested that technical specifications need to be set out in more detail and tested for ECVET. Stakeholders have expressed some concerns that the proposed system is complex and bureaucratic. This is particularly to be noted in relation to employers who at this point in Ireland are becoming familiar with the National Framework of Qualifications (NQF) and now will in the short term be faced with the EQF.

It is also noted that employers involved in VET in Europe will have a greater responsibility for ECVET facilitation because of their direct role with apprenticeship training in many states. If and when implemented ECVET will need to be flexible to allow for the diversity of provider in this context.

The recognition of and measurement of informal learning was stated as unclear and was considered to need much more work to be managed in an international ECVET 'recognition' context. It was suggested that the existing formal contexts be considered first and that it would be over ambitious to attempt to include all learning contexts at this point. The inclusion of non formal learning at a later stage may be a sensible approach.

(iv) Do ECVET's technical specifications take sufficient account of the:

- evaluation
- validation
- recognition
- accumulation
- transfer

of learning outcomes whether formal, non-formal? If not, please give details.

Testing and evaluation of the proposed ECVET system is a critical element to ascertain the requirements around the above elements for ECVET. One suggestion was that the test phase be confined to those with a credit system only which would assist the system to be implemented in the first instance.

In principle Ireland is ready to participate in ECVET. However in practice there will be lessons to be learned by all involved.

An interesting point from one stakeholder was a call for monitoring by an independent body to ensure parity of esteem within the credit system.

See also above response to Question 3 regarding informal learning.

(v) 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?

During the consultation there was considerable debate around the ECTS concept. There was a strong articulation of views from the higher education and university sectors in support of the extension of the ECTS system. It was suggested that confusion would arise if a new credit system (ECVET) was to be introduced and that coherence between further and higher education at both national and European levels would be undermined if the ECVET system as proposed is to proceed. Recommendations were made for the existing ECTS to be used as a common credit system and for a credit system for all education and training to be built on the same (rather than different) principles.

There were also issues relating to the Irish National Framework of Qualifications where the level 6 of the framework is shared by further and higher education. It was a concern that the higher and further sectors should have a compatibility and coherence between them in an Irish context and at European level.

Ireland is currently developing a national approach to credit and welcomes the development of joint working arrangements between higher education and vocational education and training.

Implementing ECVET

- (vi) 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?**

There was a consensus amongst contributors that Ireland is in a good position to facilitate learners for ECVET given the existence of the national framework of qualifications, and HETAC and FETAC awards. These conditions strongly support recognition and transfer within Ireland and these conditions will enable Irish learners to be recognised abroad.

The establishment of a shared framework (EQF) was described as a key support mechanism to facilitate transfer of units and awards. This was proposed as critical prior to the establishment of any ECVET activities.

There were other points for consideration:

- *VET systems in many European countries relates to apprenticeships only – this is not the case in Ireland. It was suggested that the transfer of credits will not be possible unless a ‘transparent and shared understanding of VET is agreed upon’.*
- *A suggestion for the devising of a set of shared principles for a common understanding of VET was made. This is an important point for consideration especially when only 4 European states have national frameworks to manage qualifications and credit systems.*
- *A practical point made was that the remit of the awarding body FETAC does not include the supporting of ECVET activity on the ground in terms of organising exchanges etc and that an organisation (existing or new) would be needed to support the organisation of ECVET arrangements amongst providers nationally and in Europe to make it happen.*

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

The consultation in Ireland raised a lot of discussion on credit points. Linking ECTS and ECVET was a significant and recurring issue.

In the immediate Irish context 120 credits is linked to a major award in VET.

The ECVET metric will need to be compatible with ECTS systems so that there is a seamless progression and that the barriers that exist or are perceived to exist between further and higher education are diminished or preferably eliminated completely.

(viii) Are there any features in your qualifications system which would favour the introduction of ECVET? What constraints, if any, do you foresee?

The Irish framework of qualifications is a competency based system built on learning outcomes which have to be assessed. This is a critical feature for the introduction of ECVET. As these structures are already in place Ireland is in a strong position to implement. See Question (vi) also.

The features of award types as defined by the National Qualifications Authority give a structure for the recognition of awards in Ireland. The 'component' certificate or minor awards made by FETAC is the smallest unit of currency for transfer purposes and could accommodate learning transfer as appropriate.

(ix) How and within what time frame (launch, introduction, experimentation, widespread introduction) could ECVET be implemented in your country?

Ireland has the awards and credit infrastructure. Further infrastructure and funding will be required to enable providers to source and identify partners etc. and be enabled to implement and at a later stage review and evaluate the system.

Considerable time will be required to introduce and implement ECVET in Ireland and testing of ECVET processes is also strongly supported. A pilot study should be undertaken at European level with a limited number of participants in order to ascertain the impacts on systems, providers and learners and to identify the level and types of supports required.

The national resource implications of this initiative should not be underestimated. Providers may be interested to participate but given other national priorities resources have to be distributed appropriately. The issue of financing for ECVET will need to be addressed in Ireland as elsewhere.

It is anticipated that the attraction of Ireland as a destination may be high due to the high demand for English as a language of study. Meanwhile the language issue is an important one for Irish citizens going outwards as in general competency in a second language is lower than their European counterparts. Thus the providers note that the flow of students may be more inward in direction than outward and this perceived imbalance in flow would need to be managed.

Measures for supporting the implementation and development of ECVET

(x) What kind of measures should be taken at European national and sectoral levels to facilitate the implementation of ECVET?

- *European Qualifications Framework*

There was strong support and awareness of European developments amongst Irish stakeholders. The EQF proposal was clearly identified as a critical mechanism to enable the establishment of agreements for credit recognition and transfer in a European context.

- *CQAF and the European Network on QA in VET*

The Common Quality Assurance Framework should play a key role in the facilitation of ECVET. Building sustainable quality assurance within and across countries in the area of VET is a central driver to improving the mobility of learners and workers.

The aim of the European Network on QA in VET i.e. ENQA-VET is to promote structured cooperation in quality assurance among member countries, to exchange information and experience, debate, mutual learning, consensus building and to provide a forum to develop common criteria and principles for quality within VET.

Currently, ENQA-VET has 23 member countries and the European social partners (employers and employees) are significantly involved. The Network may be in a position to support the implementation of ECVET by facilitating the development of partnerships and building mutual trust.

- *Lifelong learning programme*

The Lifelong learning programme and Youth in Action programmes are suggested as very suitable and timely mechanisms for testing and implementation in relation to ECVET.

- *Training of trainers*

Supports for training of VET personnel for the facilitation of ECVET is also an important consideration. This may include training and staff development but also visits to partner countries to research and establish relationships and develop exchange mechanisms. This will be particularly important for those working in non formal contexts and the workplace.

- *Documentation development*

Web based documents and templates, manuals and guides are also needed for individual learners and providers to establish transnational arrangements and to facilitate ECVET implementation.

- *Monitoring*

There will be a need to monitor implementation across the European community to ensure fairness and consistency for learners participating in ECVET. An independent European based monitoring service may be required with a strong reference to the EQF and national systems.

(xi) What documents, manuals and guides could be developed to facilitate the implementation of ECVET?

Sample MOU's, learning agreements, Manuals and guidelines on ECVET implementation, Guidelines on RPL, and more information of the VET and qualification systems of other countries will be needed to facilitate ECVET.

ECVET's potential for enhancing mobility

(xii) To what extent and how will ECVET be able to contribute to the development of transnational and even national partnerships?

When implemented ECVET will lead to development of new partnerships within the further education and training sector. The demand from learners and their facilitators for mobility and eventual recognition will determine the amount and extent of partnerships.

An amount of intra European exchange activity already exists in Ireland and operates relatively effectively within existing partnerships. There may be scope to build on this activity which will require marketing to the respective client groups.

A point of interest raised was the implications for credit transfer by learners between and across national providers including public and private. This is a major possibility in the Irish context given the range of public and private provider types and the award system which enables learners to accumulate minor awards over time, irrespective of provider type.

(xiii) To what extent and how will ECVET be able to help improve the quality of community programmes on mobility and participation in these programmes?

It is suggested that ECVET could become an aspect of the new European Community programmes for testing purposes and wider implementation in the future.

(xiv) To what extent and how do you think that ECVET and Europass could complement each other to enhance mobility?

The relationship between the Europass portfolio and ECVET needs to be carefully worked out. As Europass Mobility is not validated, ECVET may become a more useful tool within the Europass Portfolio and lead to a merging of these tools.

General comments by stakeholders referred to ECVET as 'another tool' to support learners engaging in mobility activities. It will be there to assist learners who volunteer to travel and will be part of a package of materials there to assist in the transfer of learners and recognition of their learning both already acquired and to be acquired as part of the exchange.

7 Issues

In general the proposed ECVET concept and approach is broadly welcomed in Ireland subject to the development of appropriate tools and procedures, the undertaking of a pilot phase to introduce the system and resolve highlighted issues, and the introduction of funding streams to support implementation.

However, some significant concerns were expressed nationally regarding the resource implications for providers, given the volume of change currently taking place in Ireland in further education and training with regard to the introduction of a) new quality assurance arrangements, b) a new Common Awards System and (c) the Recognition of Prior Learning.

There were also some concerns raised regarding the timing of the ECVET initiative as it may be overtaken by developments with EQF. Some stakeholders expressed concerns regarding the added value of ECVET in the context of the EQF and the development of NQFs. The majority of stakeholders believe that the development of the EQF and NQFs should be the priority for Europe for 2007-2010. They also strongly suggest that given the introduction of EQF, a new approach to credit should be considered across VET and HE.

The following specific issues were identified:

- ECTS and ECVET

The consultation process has confirmed the need for alignment of ECVET and ECTS in order for a seamless transfer of learners between further and higher education as well as transnationally. This is a critical issue and strongly articulated by Irish stakeholders. They suggested that consideration should be given to building a unified credit system across VET and HE in the context of the EQF.

- Scale and take up of ECVET

Debate during the consultation suggested that the take up of mobility opportunities in Ireland presently is quite small and providers note that the movement will be mainly inwards with less outward movement. There are existing arrangements for transnational mobility between providers in Ireland and other European countries. Many of these are facilitated under Socrates and other funding arrangements. ECVET will offer recognition to these learners. However the debate did not suggest that there would be a significant increase in mobility as a result of ECVET but that the support structure would be there for those who need and do wish to travel. This debate reflects the current Irish position of full employment and immigration by other European citizens to Ireland for the purposes of employment. Recognition of qualifications from other countries and access to education and training in Ireland are viewed as more important national issues.

- Defining VET in Europe

VET as it is referred to in the Commission consultation paper incorporates many types of adult learning processes. This has been identified as an issue to be addressed. In Ireland the further education and training sector includes adult learning, training for employment, apprenticeships, community education, enterprise training to mention but a few. In many other European countries it focuses on apprenticeship and there is a significant involvement of employers. A suggestion is to determine 'common principles' on the nature of VET in Europe and to support potential providers with information of the respective VET systems in EU states prior to any engagement.

- Simplicity and clarity

A number of Irish stakeholders mentioned the importance of having 'simple and clear' processes and procedures for ECVET implementation. Already there are many new terms such as MOU's, learning agreements etc. Clear simple paperwork with web support is proposed in order to facilitate ease of implementation for providers and learners.

- Non formal and informal learning

The inclusion of 'non formal and informal learning' is a concern due to the lack of systems to evaluate and measure this learning in many countries. Further consideration needs to be given to how this is to be included and what guidelines need to be developed.

- Implication for links between further and higher education

The national agenda to increase access from further education to higher education was discussed as part of this consultation process. Will ECVET as it is proposed assist access or could it inhibit it? The integration with ECTS is one issue. The recognition of ECVET credit for access to higher education is another issue that needs to be considered at national level.

8 Recommendations

Based on the national consultation process undertaken the following key recommendations are proposed:

1. Prior to the introduction of ECVET supports and funding arrangements need to be considered at national and European level. Given the nature of the initiative it is likely to be resource intensive on providers in terms of sourcing and resourcing the learning exchanges.
2. The introduction of ECVET should commence with a pilot project/study e.g. with a limited number of countries to ascertain a) the demand for such a mobility instrument, b) the level of funding required, c) the impact on providers, d) and the type of supports required. The pilot should be evaluated before large scale implementation of ECVET.
3. ECVET should be developed in conjunction with the EQF. The implementation of EQF is central to the successful implementation of ECVET.
4. In line with above recommendation, the development of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) and the future alignment of national frameworks to the EQF is central to the facilitation of mobility of learners in Europe and should be given priority at national and European level.
5. The Irish framework of qualifications published in 2003 adopted the concepts of learning outcomes and award types including major and minor awards. This facilitates credit accumulation for learners in a national context. Ireland believes that the adoption of national frameworks of qualifications and award types recognising large and small volumes of learning will also facilitate recognition across European borders as it will assist in the context of the EQF, the comparison and alignment of learning attained in other jurisdictions.
6. The focus on learning outcomes is welcomed. Outcome based qualifications systems will enable easier comparisons to be made across borders and contribute to the development of national qualifications frameworks.
7. The integration of ECTS and ECVET mechanisms has been clearly identified as an issue of concern by Irish stakeholders. Two parallel systems operating on different principles will complicate the implementation of ECVET. Coherence and mutual understanding need to be achieved between VET and higher education in order to facilitate learners moving across borders and across systems.

Therefore, given the pending agreement on and introduction of the EQF, it may be opportune to commence discussions and development at a European level of a unified credit system/model (across VET and HE) to sit/link/accompany the EQF. Ireland recommends that the Commission establish a working group to look into this option.

8. A standardised metric for the size of units as proposed needs to be determined before further progress is made on ECVET. The metric of 120 credits needs to be considered. In the Irish context 120 credits apply to a full major award. ECVET should have the facility to

allow recognition of smaller credits e.g. 30-40 to be achieved while abroad to facilitate their accumulation towards the attainment of a full award in their home country which could amount to 120 credits.

A standard size of 1 credit to 10 hours notional effort should be considered for VET. This metric can easily translate to the HE metric set for ECTS.

9. Quality assurance is a fundamental basis of all certification and exchange systems, at systems and provider levels. The CQAF should underpin all ECVET development. The quality assurance of providers will assist the development of mutual trust between countries regardless of their varied systems.
10. The development of tools and procedures at European level for the facilitation of ECVET should be undertaken prior to implementing any activity and examined as part of the proposed pilot phase. These should include a manual or guidelines with 'templates' for Memorandum of Understanding, Learning Agreements, and general information tools for interested providers and learners. These tools and procedures should build on the tools already in use for ECTS and other European exchange mechanisms.
11. In the Irish context, language capacity has been identified as an important factor for consideration within an ECVET context. Language training will be an important aspect to facilitate successful implementation of ECVET. Appropriate resources and funding will be required to enable the building of language capacity of learners and providers.
12. Consideration should also be given to the need for the establishment of an organisation (existing or new) in each participating country to coordinate and standardise arrangements for ECVET and to assist providers. That is, participating countries would need national coordination points to support and operationalise this initiative.

Appendix 1

List of organisations who attended the consultation seminar

Aontas - National Association for Adult Education
Central Remedial Clinic
City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee
Chambers Ireland
Construction Industry Federation
County Dublin Vocational Education Committee
Department of Education and Science FE section
Department of Health and Children
Dublin Institute of Technology
Dunlaoire Vocational Education Committee
Failte Ireland – National Tourism Development Authority
FAS National Training and Employment Authority
HETAC Higher Education and Training Awards Council
ICS Irish Computer Society
Institute of Directors of Institutes of Technology
Institute of Technology Sligo
Irish Business and Employers Confederation
Mayo Vocational Education Committee
National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI)
NCVA Support Services
P.J. Carrolls Ltd.
Waterford institute of Technology
Mayo Vocational Education Committee
Teagasc – Irish Agricultural and Horticultural Development Authority

Appendix 2

List of organisations who made formal submissions

Aontas National Association for Adult Education

Chambers Ireland

Dublin Institute of Technology

European Universities Association

Failte Ireland – National Tourism Development Authority

Further Education Section, Department of Education and Science

Higher Education and Training Awards Council

Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC)

Institute of Technology Tralee

Irish Universities Association (IUA)

Leargas

National Council Vocational Awards Support Service

National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

Teagasc Irish Agricultural and Food Development Authority

**Towards a European Credit System for
Vocational Education and Training**

Background Paper

January 2007

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1 Introduction

In November 2006 the European Commission formally launched a consultation on a proposed outline for a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). Notification was forwarded from the Commission to the relevant Ministries in the 32 countries participating in the Copenhagen process and in the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme.

The Commission prepared a consultation document. This document is available on the website of the DG EAC: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/consult/index_en.html

In Ireland, the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment requested FETAC, as the single national awarding body for further education and training in Ireland, to carry out the consultation on their behalf.

In order to assist the consultation process, FETAC has prepared this background paper that sets ECVET and the associated consultation process in both a national and European context.

FETAC's plan is to: a) circulate this background paper and the Commissions consultation document to an extensive number of stakeholders for comment b) host a consultation seminar in February 2007; and c) prepare a draft a national response for consideration by both departments.

This background paper should be read in conjunction with the Commissions consultative document.

2 Background

As part of the Copenhagen Declaration the Commission established a Technical Working Group on Credit Transfer in November 2002. This Technical Working Group (TWG) is one of a number of groups established for the implementation of aspects of the Copenhagen Declaration. Edwin Mernagh of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland represented Ireland on this group up until September 2006. More recently Angela Lambkin of FETAC is Ireland's representative.

The ECVET Technical Working Group assisted the Commission in developing the consultation document referenced above. The Mandate of the Technical Working Group on Credit Transfer in VET can be found in Appendix 1 of this paper.

The Council of EU Ministers and the European Commission agreed a Joint Interim Report in 2004; 'Education and Training 2010'. The report called for the establishment of a European framework to stand as a common reference for the recognition of qualifications. The development of ECVET is closely associated with the development of a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning. See Appendix 2.

The Commission commenced a development process for a European Qualifications Framework in July 2005. This process is now near complete and in September 2006 the Commission presented to the Council a proposal for a Recommendation to the European Parliament and the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. The introduction of the proposed EQF will strongly support the operation of a European Credit system for VET, as it will bring greater clarity and transparency to the complex and diverse range of national qualification systems across Europe.

The EQF will provide a common reference basis (based on learning outcomes) for the future comparability's of qualifications that will greatly enhance European learner and worker mobility. The proposed EQF comprises eight levels. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) devised a tentative referencing of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) to the Irish Framework of Qualifications. See Appendix 3.

3 **Consultation**

The 32 countries, including Ireland, participating in the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme were requested by the Commission to undertake their own national consultations.

As noted above, the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment requested FETAC, as the competent body, in further education and training to carry out the consultation in Ireland on their behalf.

The Commissions consultation document presents arguments for the design and adoption of an ECVET system at European level. It is acknowledged that the success of an ECVET system will depend on a) its relevance to learners, b) its credibility and reliability to the national authorities responsible for qualifications and c) its ability to support and contribute to the promotion and development of lifelong learning.

In addition to member countries the European social partners (employers associations and trade unions), sectoral groups and industry associations, European networks for research on education and training for young people and business networks, and other interested parties are invited by the Commission to comment.

The European consultation process will continue until the end of March 2007 with the aim of inviting all the players and experts to give their opinion on the objectives, principles and technical characteristics of the proposed ECVET.

The European Commission will analyse and summarise the responses to the consultation. In addition it will be discussed at a major European conference to be held in June 2007 under the German Presidency. This conference will close the consultation process.

The results of the consultation process will be used by the Commission to prepare a formal proposal on an ECVET system which the Commission will put forward for decision at European level in 2007.

In order to focus the debate and discussion the Commission prepared a number of questions for the consultation process. These are available in section 6 of this paper.

4 **Timetable**

To meet the Commission's March deadline a timetable for national consultation was prepared and agreed with the relevant Departments. See below.

What	When
Background paper circulated to stakeholders for comment	19 January 2007
Consultation seminar	15 February 2007
Closing date for receipt of comments	28 February 2007
FETAC to draft national response and forward to DES and ETE	Mid March 2007
DES and ETE to agree national response	End of March 2007
European Commission deadline	End of March 2007

5 **Summary of ECVET proposals**

Purpose

The main purpose of ECVET is to enhance mobility and facilitate individuals who undertake learning activities outside their own country to gain validation and recognition of the learning outcomes acquired abroad, whether the learning outcomes are achieved in a formal, informal or non formal context.

Approach

ECVET proposes an approach whereby learning outcomes acquired abroad can be taken into consideration for the purposes of issuing a qualification in a learner's country of origin.

In order to do so, it proposes a common approach to describing qualifications in terms of learning outcomes, thereby making it easier to understand the range of different national systems.

This approach is in line with other initiatives taken at European level, in particular the proposed European Qualifications Framework (EQF), designed to improve the transparency of qualifications across Europe.

As ECVET is based on learning outcomes irrespective of the learning context, it facilitates the transfer and validation of formal, non formal and informal learning outcomes, thereby improving access to qualifications.

Methodology

ECVET proposes:

- 1) A methodological framework, agreements and common principles to foster dialogue and cooperation between the diverse range of providers operating within vocational education and training across Europe.

Several EU initiatives have recently made progress in developing common principles towards greater transnational cooperation. These include:

- the adoption of common European principles in the field of quality assurance ²
 - the adoption of common European principles on the identification and validation of non formal and informal learning outcomes ³
- 2) Instruments/tools for providers, practitioners and competent bodies, enabling them to:
 - describe a qualification in terms of units of learning outcomes which are transferable and can be accumulated (knowledge, skill and competence) with associated credit points
 - compare more easily the learning outcomes acquired in different countries and to validate and recognise them.

Transfer process

The ECVET learning outcomes transfer process is like a transaction between two competent bodies or institutions which are empowered to award qualifications and/or credits for learning outcomes:

- one body or institution assesses certain learning outcomes achieved and awards credits to the learner, the learners credit is registered in a personal transcript of record
- the second awarding body validates (accepts) the credits as a valid record of the learners achievement and recognises them for the award of the qualification.

² Council Conclusions on quality assurance in vocational education and training, 9599/04 EDUC 117 SOC 252, 18 May 2004 (http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/30c/vetquality_en.pdf)

³ Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, within the Council, on common European principles for identification and Validation of non-formal and informal learning, 9600/04 EDUC 118 SOC 253, 18 May 2004.

Example

The individual can transfer and accumulate learning outcomes in order to obtain a qualification.

To facilitate the transfer process of learning outcomes, ECVET is based on:

- the description of qualifications in terms of learning outcomes (knowledge, skill and competence)
- the expression of qualifications in units of learning outcomes which can be transferred and accumulated.

To facilitate the understanding of qualifications and units, ECVET credit points are used as a numerical representation of each unit and to define its weight and its relative value compared to the whole qualification.

Competent body/institution A in Country X	Individuals transcript of record travels from A to B	Competent body/institution B in Country Y
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- assesses certain individuals learning outcomes and- awards credit to the individual	=>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- validates credits obtained and transferred by the individual and- recognises learning outcomes as part of the qualification to be obtained

Key definitions

Competent body

A competent body is an authority, institution or organisation at national, regional, local or sectoral level that, according to national rules and practices, is responsible for and/or involved in one or more of the functions related to the implementation of ECVET.

Unit

A unit is a set of knowledge, skill and competence which constitute a part of a qualification. A unit can be the smallest part of a qualification that can be assessed, validated and possibly certified. A unit can be specific to a single qualification or common to several qualifications. The characteristics of units composing a qualification (content, size, total number of units etc) are defined by the competent body responsible for the qualification at the appropriate level.

Credit points

Credit points are an additional source of information in numerical form. They have two functions:

- to give a simple representation of the relative value of a unit of learning outcomes in relation to the whole qualification.
- to facilitate the transfer of learning outcomes in a concrete way by providing a common reference at European level between qualification systems

ECVET will enable the allocation of credit points through different approaches and instruments. ECVET credit points should be allocated on the basis of criteria such as:

- an estimate of the importance of the content of each unit defined in terms of knowledge, skill and competence
- reference to a real or notional average length of a programme
- real or notional learner workload in a formal learning context
- real or notional learner effort in an informal learning context

Implementation

As implementation refers to how ECVET may work in practice, the text below is taken directly from the Commission's consultation document.

Stage 1: the establishment of partnerships

In order to facilitate the implementation of ECVET, VET providers and/or competent bodies at the relevant level could establish **partnership agreements or memoranda of understanding (MoU)**. During this phase of initialisation, the memoranda of understanding could contribute to creating the climate of trust which is necessary for insuring the durability of the system, its operational characteristic and the effective credit transfer.

In the MoU, partners could specify:

- Correspondence between qualifications (units and credit points) and/or learning outcomes concerned by transfer. The EQF levels could contribute to the establishment of the correspondence.
- The assessment, transfer and validation processes (units or parts of units)
- The specifications for quality assurance.

The key point of the MoU is the learning outcomes for which credits are awarded by one or the other of the partners can be recognised irrefutably.

Partnership agreements could be established between different authorities or organisations according to the type and desired degree of co-operation. Thus, MoU could be established between bodies responsible for qualifications (ministries, branches) and/or networks of VET providers (Chambers of Commerce...) and/or VET providers or other stakeholders in VET (training centres, schools, firms...).

A model memorandum of understanding could be developed at European level.

Stage 2: the learning agreement

It could be necessary to draw up an individual learning agreement for each person, notably in the formal learning context. This document would specify the learning outcomes expected at the end of a period of mobility (units or parts of units) and the associated points of credit. This individual learning agreement should be drawn up between the person and the two partners.

A model learning agreement could be developed at European level.

Stage 3: award ECVET credits

ECVET credits are awarded (units and associated ECVET credit points) after the assessment of the learning outcomes. Credits are recorded in a transcript of record which gives details on;

- knowledge, skills and competence which are acquired
- the credit points which are associated with the achieved learning outcomes

A template of the transcript of record could be designed at European level.

Stage 4: transfer, validation and accumulation of credits

In accordance with the MoU and the learning agreement, credits should be transferred, then validated by the sending organisation and recognised for obtaining the qualification concerned, by accumulation according to the rules.

6 Questions for the consultation process

The questions below are taken directly from the Commissions consultation document. They are organised into four groups of issues: the purpose of and reason for ECVET system, the technical basis for ECVET, implementing ECVET, measures for supporting the implementation and development of ECVET, and ECVET's potential for enhancing mobility.

When preparing to submit comments to FETAC on ECVET it would be appreciated if the specific questions and/or issues identified below were addressed.

Questions

Purpose of and reasons for an ECVET system

1. Are the most important objectives and functions of a European system of credits for vocational training and education and the role of competent authorities fully outlined in the Commissions consultation document? If not, what is missing?
2. What would be the main added value of the planned ECVET system?

Technical basis for ECVET

3. 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?
4. Do ECVET's technical specifications take sufficient account of the:
 - evaluation
 - validation
 - recognition
 - accumulation
 - transferof learning outcomes whether formal, non-formal? If not, please give details.
5. 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?

Implementing ECVET

6. 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?
7. Which criteria or combinations of criteria for allocating credit points could be selected and used?
8. Are there any features in your qualifications system which would favour the introduction of ECVET? What constraints, if any, do you foresee?
9. How and within what time frame (launch, introduction, experimentation, widespread introduction) could ECVET be implemented in your country?

Measures for supporting the implementation and development of ECVET

10. What kind of measures should be taken at European national and sectoral levels to facilitate the implementation of ECVET?
11. What documents, manuals and guides could be developed to facilitate the implementation of ECVET?

ECVET's potential for enhancing mobility

12. To what extent and how will ECVET be able to contribute to the development of transnational and even national partnerships?
13. To what extent and how will ECVET be able to help improve the quality of community programmes on mobility and participation in these programmes?
14. To what extent and how do you think that ECVET and Europass could complement each other to enhance mobility?

7 **ECVET and developments in Ireland**

The proposed approach to ECVET has many parallels with the Irish national approach to frameworks, qualifications, credit and vocational education and training.

Ireland is one of a few countries that have a single framework of qualifications, the National Framework of Qualifications, introduced in October 2003.

The Irish National Framework of Qualifications comprises 10 levels, award types, level indicators (expressed as learning outcomes) and related policies on access, transfer and progression, including the Recognition of Prior Learning and Credit.

The national framework is designed to facilitate the development of a credit accumulation and transfer system based on learning units.

In 2001 two awards councils were established (FETAC and HETAC) with responsibility respectively for further education and training and higher education and training. Their responsibilities include quality assurance of providers and programmes and making awards. Both Councils have similar functions with regard to their respective sectors.

Higher education in Ireland fully supports the Bologna process and higher education credit operates in accordance with the European Transfer and Credit System (ECTS).

The broad approach of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland is to work towards a national approach to credit that will facilitate a seamless transfer between further education and training and higher education and training.

Competent body

As the single national awarding body for further education and training FETAC is the appropriate competent body in Ireland for the purposes of implementing ECVET.

The responsibilities of the competent body as specified in the consultation document of the Commission include:

- design arrangements linked to the assessment, transfer, validation and recognition processes
- description of qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes
- allocation of ECVET credit points to qualification and units and
- the decision of the adoption of ECVET.

These responsibilities have a close and direct link to the statutory responsibilities of FETAC as set out in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999.

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is a key driver to improving the status and image of VET in Ireland and across Europe.

It is FETAC policy, as outlined in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, that all providers offering programmes leading to FETAC awards have established procedures for quality assurance which will maintain and improve the quality of their programmes.

As and from 2007 all providers offering programmes leading to national vocational awards must have their quality assurance agreed with FETAC. For new providers this requirement has been in operation since January 2005.

FETAC will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of provider's quality assurance procedures and will review the agreement within a maximum period of five years from the date of initial agreement.

FETAC awards

Following an extensive placement and classification process in 2005, all FETAC awards are now included on the National Framework of Qualifications.

All new FETAC awards will be developed in the context of the framework. That is, all awards are developed in the context of level, and award type (major, minor, special purpose, supplemental). All award standards are stated in terms of learning outcomes.

FETAC has established a minimum size (volume) for each award type. The size is measured in numeric terms, where each 10 hours notional effort equals 1 credit value. Notional effort is defined as a NOTIONAL concept of time, i.e. an estimation of the time, on average; it takes a typical learner to achieve the designated outcomes.

Currently (2007) most but not all FETAC major awards are divisible into minor awards. See Appendix 5 for details. A minor award is the smallest award made by FETAC. This minor award equates to the 'unit' as defined in the Commission Consultation Document as 'a set of knowledge skills and competence which constitute a part of a qualification.'

From 2008 all new FETAC awards will have enhanced features which will include definitive and defined characteristics which will directly facilitate and support credit, accumulation and transfer. This will be as a result of the introduction of the new Common Awards System (CAS), agreed by the Council in autumn 2005. See Appendix 4.

Common Awards System (CAS)

The purpose of the Common Awards System is to provide coherent, flexible, unitised and fit for purpose awards at levels 1-6 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Major awards are the principle class of awards that FETAC makes.

All major awards will be divisible into minor awards. Minor awards can be accumulated over time towards one or more named major awards.

All minor awards will identify the appropriate standards of knowledge, skills and competence required to achieve the award.

The standards will be expressed as learning outcomes.

The Common Awards System has the following characteristics:

- unitisation (i.e. major awards are divisible into minor awards)
- part of a qualifications framework
- outcomes based
- built on quality assurance

A credit system is underpinned by the above characteristics.

The Common Awards System (CAS) incorporates a Credit, Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) for further education and training in Ireland.

The new CAS will be introduced from 2008 for new awards. Over time all existing awards will be harmonised (reviewed) into the Common Awards System. This will take some time (approx. 5 years) and will be completed in a planned and systematic manner.

Each named major award will be assigned a total credit value. Each minor will be assigned a relative credit value within the total credit value.

The credit values are calculated on the basis of “notional time”. Notional time is based on the amount of time it takes the typical learner to achieve the learning outcomes identified in a minor award and at a particular level. The notional time metric to be used in the CAS is:

Ten notional hours = 1 credit value

FETAC has established the minimum size for a minor award at 5 credits.

FETAC makes awards on the basis of successful completion of minor awards. Each minor award has a specified credit value. See Appendix 4.

Minor awards will be of the following types: those **generally transferable** (i.e. generic and usable across a range of major awards), **vocationally transferable** (occasionally usable over a number of major awards) or **not transferable** (unique to a particular field of learning).

Learners may transfer to programmes leading to other major awards and carry with them (subject to the named award requirements) minor awards (i.e. credits) already accumulated.

As FETAC makes the minor award, the credit is nationally recognised (within further education and training) and centrally deposited.

This facilitates an effective and efficient credit accumulation and transfer system that is **framework based rather than provider or provision dependent**.

Roles and responsibilities

FETAC

FETAC's role as an awarding body is to recognise learner achievement for the purpose of making awards. In the interest of learners, FETAC also recognises “other awards” and will give learners credit for unissued parts of “other quality assured awards” they have successfully achieved.

FETAC does and will continue to establish comparability between its minor awards and units or parts of their qualifications in other countries. Comparability decisions are currently based on existing national alignment agreements (e.g. between Ireland, Scotland, England/Wales/Northern Ireland) and/or direct comparisons between the two systems. Decisions are conditional on the existence of appropriate quality assurance arrangements within the “other” countries system. In the future the EQF will play a significant role in this activity.

FETAC will also continue to establish comparability arrangements between its awards and the units or parts of professional, global and sectoral awards e.g. ECDL.

Providers

The providers role is to deliver quality assured programmes in order to facilitate learners achieve FETAC awards.

Based on the architecture of the new Common Awards Systems and the comparability arrangements identified by FETAC at a national level, providers will be in a position to enter into partnership agreement and learning agreements with institutions in other member countries in order to facilitate learners achieve awards based on the accumulation of learning outcomes assessed while abroad. ECVET will support this activity.

8. ECVET and other European developments

Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF)

Building sustainable quality assurance within and across countries in the area of VET is a central driver to improving the mobility of learners and workers.

Ireland is a founding member of the European Network on Quality Assurance in VET (ENQA-VET).

ENQA-VET was launched in October 2005 in Dublin, at a Conference hosted by FETAC with the support of the Department of Education and Science, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the European Commission. Currently, ENQA-VET has 23 member countries. The European social partners (employers and employees) are also significantly involved.

The aim of ENQA-VET is to promote structured cooperation in quality assurance among member countries, to exchange information and experience, debate, mutual learning, consensus building and to provide a forum to develop common criteria and principles for quality within VET.

The main tool of ENQA-VET is the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF). This tool was developed by the European Commissions Technical Working Group on Quality Assurance in VET in 2004 and was agreed by member states in the Council Conclusions in May 2004 for implementation on a voluntary basis.

The CQAF constitutes a European reference framework to support member states improve, reform and develop their national VET systems.

European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

ECVET is one of a suite of initiatives being undertaken at European level to improve the transparency of qualifications and the extent to which qualifications provide appropriate recognition for learning achievements in a lifelong learning context.

A key element in this development is the planned introduction of a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF). The 8 EQF levels are defined by learning outcomes that relate to qualifications and qualification frameworks in use across

Europe. These levels provide the common reference that is needed to underpin a credit system.

The EQF will greatly support and facilitate the implementation of ECVET.

European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)

The adoption of a system of credit is also a key component of the Bologna process within the European Higher Education Area.

Introduced originally to support international student mobility, ECTS is becoming a generalised/common basis for credit systems in higher education in many European countries.

9 Conclusions

ECVET is intended to facilitate the transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes acquired by individuals moving from one learning context to another and from one national system to another.

It will be based on the voluntary participation of the member states and of the stakeholders in their respective qualifications systems.

It is a methodology enabling qualifications to be described in terms of transferable learning outcomes or units to which credit points can be attached.

Its success is linked to other key European initiatives, in particular the EQF. The EQF is a reference tool which will facilitate the comparability and recognition of qualifications in member states on a quality assured basis.

Ireland fully supports the introduction of an EQF and the current Bologna process for Higher Education.

In addition Ireland is very conscious of the need to ensure a seamless connection/integration between VET and Higher Education at both a national and European level.

FETAC as the competent body will through the implementation of its Common Awards System play a key role in the facilitation of ECVET in Ireland. The credit system being introduced in the context of the Common Awards System has the capacity to be fully integrated with ECVET as proposed. Therefore it is anticipated that Ireland will be in a position to commence introducing ECVET from 2008, in parallel with national developments.

The new Common Awards System will enable FETAC and providers to enter into arrangements and agreements for credit transfer based on their respective competences i.e. on a national basis (FETAC) or localised/institutional basis (providers).

10 **Next steps**

This background paper and the Commissions consultation document will be circulated to a range of relevant stakeholders for comment.

FETAC welcomes all comments and will publish all responses on its website.

FETAC will analyze the responses and will host a national consultation seminar in February. All relevant stakeholders will be invited.

Based on the results of the national consultation process, FETAC will draft a national response for recommendation to Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment.

FETAC welcomes the Commissions consultative process and looks forward to implementing the final recommendations when agreed at European level.

Appendix 1

Mandate of the Technical Working Group on Credit Transfer in VET.

Increased cooperation in vocational education and training

The objective of the draft Council resolution on enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training is to:

“investigate how transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of competences and/or qualifications, between different countries and at different levels, could be promoted by developing reference levels, common principles for certification, and common measures, including a credit transfer system for vocational education and training.”

On this basis, taking into account experiences in higher education, and the Socrates-Leonardo-Youth joint action projects on ‘construction of bridges between qualifications: a system of transfer and accumulation of training credits for lifelong learning’, as well as other relevant projects and experience in the fields of transparency, non-formal learning and quality, the mandate of the technical working group on credit transfer should be:

1. To investigate, taking into account the European Credit Transfer System, options for the development of a system of credit transfer for vocational education and training at European level.
2. In parallel to this work, to investigate the role and character of
 - common reference levels for competences and qualifications, taking into account experience and ongoing work for example in CEDEFOP, in higher education and in the regulated professions,
 - and common principles for certification.
3. To report systematically to the coordination group and the ACVT and to make a progress report by end of October 2003.
4. To present a report to the Commission outlining a basis for a concrete action in this field. Proposals from the Commission will be submitted to the ACVT for opinion.
5. The working group should be composed of representatives of the Member States, Candidate and EEA countries and Social Partners. The group should be supported by CEDEFOP and ETF and, if needed, strengthened by other sources of expertise, for example independent experts, networks etc.

Appendix 2

European Qualifications Framework

Descriptors defining levels in the European Qualifications Framework

Each of the 8 levels is defined by a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any system of qualifications.			
	Knowledge	Skills	Competence
	In the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.	In the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).	In the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.
Level 1 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 1 are	basic general knowledge	basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	work or study under direct supervision in a structured context
Level 2 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 2 are	basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study	basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	work or study under supervision with some autonomy
Level 3 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 3 are	knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study.	a range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems
Level 4 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 4 are	factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	a range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities

Level 5 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 5 are	comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change review and develop performance of self and others
Level 6 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 6 are	advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups
Level 7 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 7 are	highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields	specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams
Level 8 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 8 are	knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields	the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research.

Compatibility with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area

The Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area provides descriptors for cycles. Each cycle descriptor offers a generic statement of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with qualifications that represent the end of that cycle.

- * The descriptor for the higher education short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle), developed by the Joint Quality Initiative as part of the Bologna process, corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 5.
- ** The descriptor for the first cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 6.
- *** The descriptor for the second cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 7.
- **** The descriptor for the third cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 8.

Appendix 3

Tentative referencing of the National Framework of Qualifications to the European Qualifications Framework

NFQ (Irl)	EQF
1 & 2	1
3	2
4	3
5	4
6	5
7 & 8	6
9	7
10	8

Appendix 4

Common Awards System: Award types and credit values

Award Types	Levels					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>small</i>	<i>medium</i>	<i>large</i>	<i>large</i>	<i>large</i>	<i>large</i>
Major	15 - 20	20 - 30	40 - 60	60 - 90	90 - 120	90 - 240
	<i>Smaller than the major of which it is part</i>					
Minor	5 or 10	5 or 10	5, 10 and 15	5, 10 and 15	5, 10, 20 and 30	10, 20, 30 and 40
	<i>Small to medium</i>					
Special	5min 10max	5min 20max	5min 40max	5min 40max	5min 60max	5min 60max
	<i>Small to medium</i>					
Supplemental	-	-	-	5min 50max	5min 60max	5min 60max

Note: Credit Value of 1 = 10 hours notional learning time (see further details of notional learning time below)

Appendix 5

Divisibility of existing FETAC major awards

Currently, all FETAC awards are developed based on the processes and procedures of the former awarding bodies: NCVA, FÁS, Fáilte Ireland, Teagasc.

Over time, these processes and procedures will be replaced by the new Common Awards Systems.

The Common Awards System will require all major awards to be divisible into minor awards.

Former Awarding Body	Existing position regarding minor awards
NCVA	All major awards are divisible into minor awards
FÁS	Approximately 70% of major awards are divisible into minor awards. The main exceptions include the apprenticeships.
Fáilte Ireland	Approximately 40% of Fáilte Ireland major awards are divisible into minor awards
Teagasc	100% of Teagasc major awards are divisible into minor awards

