

EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER SYSTEM FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

NATIONAL CONSULTATION CONFERENCE

DOLMEN RESORT HOTEL - 16TH MARCH 2007

General Report

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**THE NATIONAL CONSULTATION ON A
EUROPEAN CREDIT SYSTEM FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (ECVET)**

In a letter to the Hon. Minister of Education, Youth and Employment, Commissioner Jan Figel requested his support and invited him to organize a national consultation on the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET).

The objective of the planned ECVET is to create a European device which can be used on a voluntary basis and which will facilitate the transfer, validation and recognition of learning outcomes achieved by individuals, notably those who are mobile across borders, irrespective of whether their learning was obtained in a formal, non formal or informal.

The Minister of Education Youth and Employment invited those experts and stakeholders most directly concerned by the development and implementation of the ECVET at the European, national and sectoral levels to give their views on what the aims and technical specifications should be. It is important that all relevant bodies and institutions with a direct interest in lifelong learning – education, employment, youth, economic - participate actively and that they in turn consult all relevant sectors of employment and education.

A national Consultation Conference was organised on the 16 March, 2007 bringing together the major stakeholders and interested parties.

Anthony DeGiovanni

Director Further Studies and Adult Education

Conference Convener

PROGRAMME

- 8.30 Registration
- 9.00 Welcome
Dr. Cecilia Borg
Director General Education
- 9.10 Opening of the Conference
Hon. Dr Louis Galea
Minister of Education, Youth and Employment
- 9.30 European Credit for Vocational Education and Training –
Towards Mobility and Flexibility
Mr. Karsten Krüger
CEDEFOP European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
- 10.00 The National Consultation
Mr. Anthony DeGiovanni
Director, Further Studies and Adult Education
- 10.15 The Employer and Vocational Credit Transfer
Mr. Joseph Farrugia
Director General, Malta Employers Association
- 10.30 *Coffee Break*
- 11.00 ECVET and the National Qualifications Framework
Dr James Calleja
CEO Malta Qualifications Council
- 11.15 An Investigation on the Implementation of ECVET in Malta using
European Commission Parameters
Ms Katya DeGiovanni
- 11.30 Credit Transfer and Tourism Studies
Mr. Teddy Camilleri
Deputy Director, Institute of Tourism Studies
- 11.45 ECVET and the Vocational Learning Institution in Malta
Mr. Ray Farrugia
Registrar, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
- 12.00 Closure
Mr. Francis Borg
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education Youth and Employment

Introduction

Mr Anthony DEGIOVANNI - Convener and Chairperson of the Conference

Mr. DeGiovanni welcomed the participants and thanked them for accepting his invitation to participate in this consultation exercise. He specially thanked Dr Karsten Kruger who kindly accepted to come all over from Thessaloniki to address the conference and the Hon. Minister of Education Youth and Employment for his support to this event and for accepting to officially open the conference. Mr. DeGiovanni introduced Dr. Cecilia Borg Director General of Education.

Welcome speech

Dr. Cecilia BORG - Director General of Education

Dr. Borg said that in Malta education has always been given top priority. Special attention was always given to human resources and to the quality of training provision so that the Maltese students could be able to compete locally and abroad. The Maltese education system always stressed the importance of certification and skills required.

Dr. Borg spoke of the evaluation process and said that evaluation criteria in EU countries may vary. Europass provided a solution as regards academic certification, and likewise ECVET would be tackling vocational education.

Dr. Borg spoke about the mechanism required for the recognition of skills and competences from abroad. She also emphasised the awareness needed to value work experience. ECVET would ensure certification and mobility.

Opening Address

Dr. Louis GALEA - The Hon. Minister of Education Youth and Employment

Minister Louis Galea said that Malta is responding to the European Commission's call to consult on ECVET at national level. He said that the fact we are discussing the possibility of a credit system for VET in a European market speaks volumes in the ways that the world, the labour market and the economy are changing. He added that, in Malta, we are able to grasp the opportunity and reflect on the European Commission's proposals, do our best to understand and not to adopt wholesale, to try to influence and to implement – in Malta – making use of our small economy of scale.

Minister Galea said that this is what is happening in the National Qualifications Framework and therefore is able to give a valid contribution in this area, as the University did in 1997 with the European Credit Transfer system. The Minister added that Malta is to present its position on ECVET by the end of March. He emphasised the linkage between education and employment, learning and outcomes, and between teaching and assessment. Minister Galea said it is no longer

possible not to put in place measures, systems or modes that enable everyone to accumulate a certificate of credit for learning, for what he/she is able to do.

The Minister spoke about the Malta Qualifications Council and said that it is intensely moving to shape a National framework of qualification built on eight levels. Very soon we will be discussing the basic descriptors of the first three levels. He said it is important to have a fair system enabling everyone to be assessed and to be given credit for learning and development. Every qualification is to have a number of credits assigned to it. This system of credits has to take account of the process of prior learning, which in Malta is still in its infancy.

Minister Galea said that ECVET is necessary to be able to promote mobility in the European labour market, to be able to ensure a transparent system of qualifications and to build trust between higher and vocational education. The final objective is for employers to have a very clear picture of employees and prospective employees. He said that it is important to work for parity of esteem between academic and vocational education, to have better and more exchanges, to have better mobility of workers, and greater synergies between institutions. We need programmes that can be developed between institutions and between countries.

Minister Galea concluded that by the end of the year Malta would have a national qualifications framework which puts a solid foundation for the future.

ECVET- Towards Mobility and Flexibility

Dr. Karsten Kruger - CEDEFOP

Dr. Kruger said that ECVET is a tool to open learning pathways between institutions and between countries. He referred to the Lisbon and Copenhagen declarations adding that ECVET addresses such issues as priorities within lifelong learning, mobility and flexibility. He said that the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) couldn't be fully developed without ECVET. Both are centred on certification and are transparency oriented. This is important in order to establish a European dimension of learning based on learning outcomes. He spoke on learning outcomes and said that the input based approach was now left behind as it is too complicated while the learning outcomes approach is easier. What's important is what we can assess. Learning outcomes address transparency, comparability, promote accountability and validation and therefore improve quality.

Dr. Kruger said that EQF and ECVET go together. EQF is a reference point of ECVET. We want them to be used and accepted by all the social actors. In this regard it is important to establish a high quality certification process. He added that ECVET provides the social actors with a framework that establishes dialogue between providers and between partnerships beyond borders.

For enterprises ECVET provides higher transparency of vocational training. ECVET provides higher mobility for individuals because it makes it possible to transfer learning outcomes to other countries.

Dr. Kruger then spoke of barriers of transfer. These include lack of transparency, lack of mutual trust, there is no validation, and hence no accumulation of learning outcomes and no recognition. In this regard ECVET can act as a barrier breaker because it establishes partnerships between countries.

ECVET is based on the units of learning outcomes which consist of knowledge, skills and competencies as agreed with other competent bodies and able to be applied in different countries.

Dr. Kruger then dealt with the transfer process claiming that assessment of learning outcomes leads to award of credits which are validated and hence recognised. He said that ECVET creates mutual trust between the social actors and trust in the credit system which in turn establishes the quality of learning, the quality of the learning outcome assessment, of the validation process and of the quality of certification.

Dr. Kruger ended his speech by stating that ECVET is a means of communication, a translation device between different VET systems. ECVET constructs pathways between one area of vocational training and another.

The National Consultation Process

Mr. Anthony DeGiovanni - Director of Further Studies and Adult Education

Mr. DeGiovanni spoke about the national consultation process which consists of a working document and questionnaire e-mailed to around 200 different stakeholders, the holding of a national conference and the formulation of a national report on ECVET. He said that the document and questionnaire were sent to learning institutions, employers association, human resource managers, unions, national agencies, student and youth organisations, public services, and academics.

Mr. DeGiovanni said that he was basing his presentation on the first ten random responses, these being three each from trade unions, learning institutions, government ministries and one from a public corporation.

Eight respondents were satisfied with the remit, while two others said that a better remit is needed, defining the role of the competent authorities in a better way.

With reference the main added value of ECVET, respondents mentioned comparability for mobility, help to employers in recruitment processes, transparency, help to learning institutions to structure their programmes and help in the setting of vocational standards and schemes of assessment.

As regards technical specifications, seven respondents said that these should be in greater detail and should recognise non formal and informal learning. The trade unions favour harmonisation while educators are more for a diversity of approaches. A 'one fit for all' approach is not desirable. There were mixed responses as regards sufficient account of evaluation and validation.

On the allocation of credit points (120), two respondents were in general agreement but argued that credit points should vary with the level. Implementation of ECVET is possible under certain conditions. Respondents said that these conditions include participation of all stakeholders in setting up national frameworks. The qualifications are to be expressed in learning outcomes and units, which can be understood by employers and employees. Transparency instruments need to be developed. Quality assurance and development of recognition of non formal and informal learning are also needed.

When commenting on the criteria for implementing ECVET, respondents mentioned the notional learning time for each unit, the established vocational standards and the determined learning outcomes, among other things.

As regards the features favouring the introduction of ECVET in Malta, Mr. DeGiovanni said that the Minister has already answered the question in his speech. He added that many vocational programmes that lead to UK qualifications are already outcome based. He also referred to constraints. These include the challenge of developing a coherent national vocational qualifications framework and the uncertainty caused by the transition. The timeframe for implementing ECVET should include an experimentation phase, a transition period, and an intensive awareness campaign. Another suggestion was that it should follow the finalized EU proposal. Some respondents said that two years would be enough. Others mentioned 2010 as the year of implementation, while other respondents left the decision in the hands of the education ministry, or that it should be at the same pace as other Member States.

Measures for implementation include expert support, funding, sharing of expertise, conferences at regional and national level, dissemination of information and establishment of national sectoral boards.

Documents and manuals are to include guidelines on initial vocational education and training. ECVET enhances mobility as an instrument of information, a means to identify personal training needs, a help in assessing the nature and level of provision of receiving institutions. It also increases trust, facilitates mutual recognition processes, selection for employment and further studies.

ECVET helps to improve the quality of Community programmes through transparency in quality provision, participation of students and workers, higher added value in study placements and elimination of difficulties on recognition and accreditation.

Mr. DeGiovanni concluded that respondents feel that Europass mobility and certificate supplements are necessary compliments to ECVET and that the holistic approach for Europass should be emulated in ECVET.

The Employer and Vocational Credit Transfer

Mr. Joe FARRUGIA - Director General, Malta Employers Association

Mr. Farrugia spoke of the Lisbon targets on developing a knowledge-based economy and on removing barriers to labour mobility. He said that a major barrier is the transportation and recognition of qualifications. Mr. Farrugia said that ECVET targets at enhancing mobility, facilitates validation, recognises learning outcomes and improves access of qualifications as applied to formal, non formal and informal learning. He said that we need to change the culture to allow for better recognition of informal learning and qualifications as based on vocational initiatives. He added that employers need to develop this key issue in implementing ECVET. Mr. Farrugia said that workers may be asking for accreditation for their work experience. He said that establishing a credible system of accreditation would require recourse at enterprise and MEYE levels to see that the system is working. He said that ECVET contributes to Lifelong learning and promotes a culture in the employer-employee relationship which leads to more in-house training.

On the issues affecting employers, Mr. Farrugia said that these include harmonisation between participating countries for transnational recognition and comparison. He added that there is the need to establish a mechanism, which translates units into, credits, so that a notional effort is needed. There has to be an interface between credit points and translation of learning outcomes. Mr. Farrugia said that the participation of constituted bodies in implementing ECVET is essential adding that many employers are not fully aware of ECVET.

Mr. Farrugia said that labour mobility in Malta stands at 1.5 % of the workforce. However this is large when one considers that 7500 foreign workers have a permit to work in Malta. He also claimed that there is an escalation in the increase of foreigners working in Malta. Mr. Farrugia stressed the need to prioritise as there are still issues – among educational institutions on recognition of each other's qualifications. ECVET can help quantify value of students leaving school without formal qualifications. They could gain skills and competences informally. ECVET is a tool, which gives them recognition for what they are doing, and encourages them to rejoin the education sector.

Mr. Farrugia said that ECVET also encourages a higher participation of females in the labour market. He concluded that employers need to play a more active role and to work towards active participation.

Interventions from the floor

Mr. Vincent Farrugia - Director General , GRTU, said that his sector faces the same problems as the employers, mainly due to shortage of skills in various sectors. He said that the training facilities that exist are not coping with the vacancies. Local small enterprise owners are also facing problems of assessment. He said it is good for the GRTU to be active at European level. He emphasized the local situation especially as regards certification.

Mr. Paul Attard - Policy Advisor, Education Ministry said that qualifications awarded by the Malta College of Art Science and Technology (MCAST) are not dependent on recognition by University. He said that MCAST is currently holding discussions with the University of Malta in order to increase collaboration between them and to facilitate the mobility of students between the institutions. MCAST, as an institution, is complementary to the University at the tertiary education level.

Mr. Charles Mizzi - Chairman, Malta Qualifications Council referred to Question 2b of the questionnaire and said that in a Helsinki conference last November, a number of countries opposed the award of credit points.

Dr. Karsten Kruger answered that there are problems on how to assign points to units of learning outcomes, hence the importance of defining the units well. He said that it is up to the social actors to define ways on how to assign credit points. He added that one has to assign units of learning outcomes first and then to define. Then one has to address credit points if needed. This item is still an open discussion.

Mr. Ruben Buttigieg - Malta Institute of Management said that one has to be careful on ECVET and see that it is not counterproductive in the longer term. One has to distinguish clearly between

ECVET and educational merits based on normal education programmes. He added that over-emphasis on voluntary participation reduces credibility. In implementing ECVET one should see that employers do not have an extra burden to carry. Mr. Buttigieg claimed that in Malta, recognition of qualifications is still a problem especially with respect to foreign bodies in Malta.

Ms. Sandra Agius, Assistant Head of a Secondary School said that more information and awareness on ECVET is needed.

ECVET and the National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning

Dr James Calleja - Chief Executive Malta Qualifications Council

Dr. Calleja indulged on the importance of parity of esteem and the fact that he strongly believes that ECVET is a system that helps “learners transform qualifications into employment”

His presentation included a summary of the Malta Qualifications Council (MQC) remit, an overview of the revised National Qualification Framework (NQF) showing the intimate relationship between NQF and the credit system. Dr Calleja referred to the importance of common currency and common language with reference to the proposed system and indulged upon the relationship between an NQF and a Credit Transfer System. He also listed the advantages to learners referring to it as a translation device, the fact that students know a-priori what that credit involves, and that it is understood within the labour market. He continued to say that the system would make VET more visible. Dr Calleja referred to the benefits to employers and the country as a whole.

An investigation on the implementation of ECVET in Malta using European Commission Parameters

Ms Katya DeGiovanni - Researcher

Ms DeGiovanni gave an overview on the origins of this research on ECVET initiated by Prof. R Sultana from the University of Malta. She gave a summary of the participating countries in the REFLECTOR project underlining the fact that Malta was monitored by the QCA in the UK. REFLECTOR, targets specific areas; namely Assessment, Transfer, Validation and Accumulation of Learning Outcomes as separate processes in the whole system; Recognition/Certification of Learning Outcomes, the (different) Roles of Component Bodies in the ECVET process. Ms DeGiovanni further elaborated on how the data was achieved and the main findings for Malta. She elaborated further on the latter saying that there is need of clarity in jargon and procedures and a need for coordination between stakeholders. She ended her interesting presentation by outlining on the limitations of the Project and gave a summary of the main results to be achieved on a European level. She supplied the audience with the project website (www.ecvet.net)

Credit Transfer and Tourism Studies

Mr. Teddy Camilleri - Deputy Director, Institute of Tourism Studies

After giving a brief overview of the Programmes of Study at the Institute of Tourism Studies, Mr. Teddy Camilleri focused on the Modular System in use at ITS. Mr. Camilleri dwelt on the benefits of the modular system mentioning entry points for various skills. He focused on entry level studies and relative credits and, very importantly, assessment of APL (both as regards academic certification as well as work experience). Mr. Camilleri proceeded with a slide showing the credit planner for Hotel Operations Certificate. He went on to speak about local industrial Trade Practice which exposes students to the real world of work and helps them put into practice knowledge and skills learned at ITS as well as reflect on work experiences and identify learning outcomes which these experiences have provided. Mr. Camilleri also explained details of the Learning Agreement and Assessment. He continued to say that the International Internship is complemented by Europass Mobility and finished by underlining the quality of the Educational Programmes of ITS due to its continuous Review of Programmes and Quality Assurance.

ECVET and the Vocational Learning Institution in Malta

Mr. Ray Farrugia - Registrar, Malta College of Arts Science and Technology

Mr. Farrugia began by delineating the main reasons behind ECVET and the various initiatives undertaken by his institution in the field of Lifelong Learning. The emphasis is to achieve parity of esteem of vocational qualifications. Mr. Farrugia dwelt on the practical aspects of ECVET and also referred to problems involved. He continued by giving a definition of Formal, Non formal and informal learning and pointed out problems which assessment in this area involves. He further added that the Malta Qualifications Council is best placed to regulate this area. Mr. Farrugia proceeded to delineate certain difficulties which MCAST encounters in this regard especially when it comes to understand the long term interests of industry and the fact that students are not assessed on the factory floor. He went on to focus on MCAST provision and partnerships with other awarding bodies. Mr. Farrugia emphasised that when qualifications are competence based there are little problems while others which are not unit based are more difficult. Syllabi have to be re-drafted into competence based documents. Mr. Farrugia further delineated the main problems as lack of finances, manpower, resources, expertise in writing syllabi and training in Curriculum Development in VET. Induction in the field must be provided by experts so that the stigma of VET is reduced. ECVET is seen as a solution to the problem when ECTS and ECVET converge. Mr. Farrugia referred to fatigue in apprenticeship programmes. Mr. Farrugia ended his presentation by underlining the fact that vast cooperation is needed to provide quality education.

Interventions from the floor

1. Mr. John SALAMONE REYNAUD - Malta Dental Technologists Association

Mr. Salamone Reynaud referred to Dr James Calleja's presentation. He said that there is no regulation of their profession. According to NQF they would be in Level 5. Other diplomas would have less credits and still fall in the same level.

Dr J Calleja referred the query to Mr. DeGiovanni who made reference to the EU General Systems Directive and said that in cases of substantial difference these are treated on a Case by Case basis.

2. Mr. Lawrence MIZZI – Malta Institute of Management

Mr. Mizzi emphasized the fact that the ECVET system should be on a voluntary basis as it could result cumbersome on an administrative level to employers. He continued by adding that the proposed E(M)CVET would be most welcome and should be taken on board.

Closure of the Conference

Dr Karsten Kruger

Dr K Krüger, in his concluding comments, remarked on the very practical points made during the conference and that the Malta Report will be most welcome. He went on to say that he was impressed by the support given to the conference and that he was optimistic to confront the new stage of the refinement of the relevant tools. The next step on a European level will be the testing phase and there are great expectations for ECVET.

Mr Francis Borg – Permanent Secretary Ministry of Education Youth and Employment

Mr Francis Borg concluded by thanking everyone and referred to Mr Ray Farrugia's presentation saying that we share the responsibility to make things happen in complete commitment to quality in Education. He referred to the on-going reorganization in the Education System, the Malta Qualifications Council and the National Commission for Higher Education as recent landmarks in the evolution of Education in Malta. Mr Borg augured energy and synergy and, denouncing finger pointing, emphasised the importance of schools and the world of work working together to "make things happen – together".