

GA

RE: Reactie NVAO met betrekking tot het ECVET-consultatiedocument

Date
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Subject
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1. Introduction

Higher education has almost two decades of experience with a European credit system (ECTS). The further development of ECTS is one of the objectives of the Bologna Process. Although this objective hasn't gotten much priority by the ministers the further development of ECTS has not come to a stand still. ECTS as a system has been deepened and strengthened. From a workload based system ECTS has evolved into a system based on both workload and learning outcomes. This reaction therefore needs to be read in this perspective.

2. Objectives

In order to *facilitate lifelong learning* and to *ensure access to higher education* it is very importance that specific attention is paid to the correspondence and compatibility between ECVET and ECTS. From reading the consultation document, we foresee a possibility to move towards *one, unified European credit system* in the future.

NVAO therefore considers it of the utmost importance that a credit system aims to realise the following objectives.

(1) Facilitate Lifelong learning

The consultation documents states that ECVET complements the European Qualifications Framework because both are based on common principles and concepts. A new credit system should therefore completely fit the European Qualifications Framework. It would therefore be useful to *develop ECVET from the point of view of lifelong learning* and not only from the perspective of vocational education and training. A credit system for the European Qualifications Framework will facilitate lifelong learning.

(2) Ensure access to higher education

ECTS has already been implemented and is actively being used by European higher education. Other parts of the world have even copied basic ECTS concepts. The way in which ECVET would be implemented should therefore take into account the fact that another credit system is already in place in Europe. ECVET as a credit system should

page 2 van 3 therefore *ensure full and complete compatibility with ECTS*. This will facilitate and ensure access to higher education.

(3) One unified European credit system

In the consultation document, the fundamental principles of ECTS are expressed as follows:

- focused on learning outcomes expressed in terms of knowledge, skills and competence;
- based on a process of qualification;
- adapted to the demands of lifelong learning and all learning contexts, on an equal footing;
- geared towards the mobility of people.

These principles are in line with the developments in higher education. European higher education is actively and fully implementing a learning outcomes approach based on the overarching qualifications framework of the European Higher Education Area. This provides the European Commission with the opportunity to develop one unified European credit system.

3. To remove or to throw up barriers

To achieve these three objectives it will be very important that any implementation of a new credit system doesn't bring about misunderstanding or even throw up barriers between the different levels of education. From the consultation document it is however clear that there is one major discrepancy between ECTS and ECVET. ECVET associates 120 ECVET credit points on average to the learning outcomes achieved by an individual in a year in a formal full time VET context. ECTS on the other hand only associates 60 ECTS credit points to a one year (formal) workload.

ECVET is claimed to be different than ECTS because ECVET is fully focused on learning outcomes. This is a so-called output orientation, an orientation towards the results of learning. It is however important that ECTS has developed into a system based on both workload (input) and learning outcomes (output). An input orientation points towards workload, length of studies and the learning effort.

It is however clear from the consultation document that workload also plays an important role in the ECVET system. First, 120 ECVET credit points are associated to the achievements in a year in a formal full time VET context (input). Second, the proposed criteria for the allocation of ECVET credit points point to units do not point towards learning outcomes but rather towards input elements:

- an estimation of the importance of the contents of each unit defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence (input and output);
- reference to a real or notional average length of programme (input);
- real or notional learner workload in a formal learning context (input);
- real or notional learner effort in an informal learning context (input).

ECVET is not fully and exclusively output oriented and has more in common with ECTS than is at first sight apparent from the consultation document. It would therefore be hard to understand if a new credit system doesn't align its association of credits with an already existing credit system.

4. Conclusion

The proposed ECVET system is an excellent basis for further work on a unified European credit system. NVAO fears however that the independent realisation of ECVET could lead to

page 3 van 3 an inflation of different and indeed not necessarily compatible European credit systems. This in turn could carve up European education or throw up new barriers. From the consultation document we have learned that the basic principles behind the ECTS and ECVET systems are similar and compatible. It would therefore be useful to broaden the concept and make these principles the basis of *one unified European credit system* in line with the principles behind the European Qualifications Framework. Every other European level or type of education should then build on this European credit system to build up their own credit system (ECTS, ECVET, ...) in which validation and recognition can be handled differently. By doing this we would be able to *facilitate lifelong learning* and *ensure access to further education* in a clear and exemplary way.