



**The Scottish Credit and
Qualifications Framework**

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership

Response to the Consultation on a European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training

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INTRODUCTION

From its launch in 2001, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) has become a vital tool to support lifelong learning in Scotland and for widening participation in education. The SCQF provides a national vocabulary for describing learning opportunities and makes the relationships between qualifications clearer.

The SCQF is central to the strategy for lifelong learning in Scotland as it aims to:

- Help people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfil their personal, social and economic potential;
- Enable employers, learners and the public in general to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how the qualifications relate to each other, and how different types of qualifications can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce.

The SCQF also helps to describe the programmes of learning that lead to qualifications; supports the development of routes to progress from qualification to qualification; and maximises the opportunities to transfer credit points between qualifications.

In November 2006, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership, a company limited by guarantee, was established to take forward the aims of the SCQF. Its members are: the Association of Scotland's Colleges (ASC); the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA); Scottish Ministers; Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA); and Universities Scotland.

The Board of Directors comprises: Ray Harris (ASC); Norman Sharp (QAA); Stephen Kerr (Scottish Executive, representing Scottish Ministers); John Young (SQA); and David Caldwell (Universities Scotland). At its first Board Meeting on 15 November 2006, I was appointed as Chair of the Board.

The objects of the Company are:

- To maintain the quality and integrity of the SCQF;
- To promote and develop the SCQF;
- To maintain and develop relationships with other frameworks in the UK, Europe and internationally.

To assist in meeting these aims, the Board has established the SCQF Quality Committee to advise it on all matters pertaining to the quality assurance of the Framework. It has also established the SCQF Forum to provide an important locus for key stakeholders to identify ways in which the SCQF can be used to assist in widening access, encouraging participation and ensuring the development of people's skills and knowledge to their full potential.

In responding to the ECVET Consultation, the SCQF Partnership has consulted with representatives within the member organisations, Postholders in the Social Services and HEI Sectors, and representatives from the Vocational Education and Training Sectors, and I herewith provide the response on behalf of the SCQF Partnership.

Andrew Cubie CBE,
Chair of the SCQF Partnership Board

1. THE PURPOSE OF AND REASONS FOR AN ECVET SYSTEM

- 1.1 *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 consultation document? If not, what is missing?*

The consultation document should provide clearer definition on what is meant by 'competent body'. For the SCQF, 'competent bodies' are defined as SCQF Credit Rating Bodies, who have the authority by the SCQF Partnership to allocate a credit value and level to a programme of study. The SCQF Credit Rating Bodies at present are Scottish HEIs, Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Scotland's Colleges.

For ECVET, the consultation document highlights that the allocation of credit will be made through a process of *qualification to unit*. The process adopted by the SCQF for allocating credit to a programme of learning is *unit to qualification*, and it is therefore recommended that this process of *unit to qualification* be considered for the proposed ECVET system.

- 1.2 *What would be the main added value of the planned ECVET system?*

The ECVET system will add value by:

- Supporting two way mobility for learners through the recognition of different member states' qualifications;
- Supporting joint development work in qualifications and sector frameworks;
- Helping to build on trans-national and national partnerships;
- Providing a unified but flexible 'recognition' system.

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) should become the overarching reference point for ECVET however, it is important that it does not override existing national framework structures. The SCQF would be the first point of reference for Scottish qualifications.

2. THE TECHNICAL BASIS FOR ECVET

- 2.1 *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?*

The SCQF has a quality assured and robust system for recognising qualifications. This is addressed through the SCQF Credit Rating Guidelines, and is overseen by the SCQF Quality Committee that is tasked with advising the SCQF Partnership on maintaining the integrity and quality assurance of the Framework.

The SCQF Partnership recommend that, for the purposes of ECVET, it is necessary to expand on the issue of quality assurance and the specifications for this from a European perspective, to ensure that all national partners' systems adhere to a consistent, but flexible, quality assured arrangement. There also needs to be a clearer methodology for allocating credit which is consistent and can be flexible enough to be adopted by all national partners.

2.2 Do ECVET's technical specifications take sufficient account of the:

- Evaluation;
- Validation;
- Recognition;
- Accumulation;
- Transfer

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

It would be too early to provide comment until the ECVET system commences. If these specifications were at institutional level, there is a danger that they may not be considered credible, for example, a “*what’s in it for me*” attitude may prevail. As the proposed ECVET system is based on a voluntary agreement, it would depend very much on what happens in practice and custom.

The SCQF is an all encompassing Framework that allows for wider recognition of learning that has been achieved in a non-formal or informal context, although in some cases, it is not always possible to identify the learning outcomes due to lack of assessment. Through the SCQF, Scotland has developed a robust and credible system for allocating and transferring credit for the learning outcomes achieved, whether formal, non-formal or informal.

A recent credit-rating project in Scottish colleges highlighted some common findings to support credit rating: mentoring support, a system of peer sharing and the need for adequate time to be allocated. There is little mention of resources likely to be needed by competent authorities who will undertake the process of credit-rating and some guidance will be required.

2.3 *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?*

Having no formal methodology for ECVET could invalidate the system and discourage a voluntary uptake from national partners “European” system. It could be suggested that if a bi-lateral agreement was reached with a major member nation, it could form the basis which others may follow, thus setting a European standard that could be adopted across all participating nations.

Within the SCQF, the allocation of credit points is achieved through the reference figure of 1 credit point equalling a notional 10 learning hours and 120 credit points for 1 full-time year of study within higher education.

This methodology has been adopted by the rest of the UK as a means of applying credit to learning outcomes for both higher and vocational education and training. Work is currently underway to test some models of allocating credit and the current principles adopted within the UK, which is based on the model used in Scotland. It would be recommended that ECVET does not contradict, but complements existing systems.

3. IMPLEMENTING ECVET

- 3.1 *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?*

In Scotland, the aim of the SCQF is to provide a national vocabulary to describe learning in terms of learning outcomes and thus improve the transparency of qualifications for learners. Learning described in terms of learning outcomes can help to make programmes of learning more transparent and help to aid credit transfer between qualifications. This system has been successful in Scotland and a mutual trust has been built through the formalisation of a partnership for those responsible for maintaining the integrity and quality assurance of the Framework.

For the purposes of an ECVET system, it is important that there is credibility in the system or a common understanding of its aim to help encourage the voluntary uptake across member states.

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

Within the SCQF, the allocation of credit is based on 1 credit point representing the outcomes of learning achieved through a notional 10 hours of learning time. This methodology has been adopted by other developing frameworks in the UK and Ireland as a means of applying credit. Scottish higher education recognises 120 SCQF credits for 1 full time year of study and this compares with 60 ETCS credits for 1 full time year of study, hence the ratio of credits adopted is 2:1. It would be recommended that ECVET does not contradict, but complements these existing systems.

- 3.3 *Are there any features in your qualifications systems which would favour the introduction of ECVET? What constraints, if any, do you foresee?*

The SCQF is a voluntary Framework which is based on a partnership agreement between those responsible for its development. It has been well received by various sectors and organisations in Scotland which offer both higher and vocational education and training, and is recognised for having a robust system which allows for benchmarking qualifications and allocation or transfer of credit. The principles behind ECVET being a voluntary system, based on partnerships, would be welcomed by the SCQF Partnership.

- 3.4 *How and within what timeframe (launch, introduction, experimentation, widespread introduction) could ECVET be implemented in your country?*

Scotland already has a robust and quality assured system for allocating credit and benchmarking qualifications. The SCQF contains most mainstream qualifications in Scotland and work is on-going to populate the Framework with professional, non-formal and informal qualifications. The SCQF Partnership was established to maintain the integrity of the Framework as well as taking forward its further promotion across various sectors of education and training. Strong partnerships have been built with other emerging frameworks within the UK and Ireland and the SCQF Partnership welcomes opportunity to work closely with emerging frameworks in Europe and internationally.

If ECVET is to be based on voluntary agreements, it could be introduced to Scotland at any time.

4. MEASURES FOR SUPPORTING THE IMPLEMENTATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ECVET

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

It is important that, through national frameworks, the overarching European Qualifications Framework is the main reference point for ECVET. The SCQF is the main Framework for Scotland, and in higher education the EHEA is the main reference point for the ECTS. Both these systems have been successful, so the recommendation would be to build on what has already been achieved.

Within Scotland, many institutions already have established good working relationships through project work that may contribute to ECVET development. It may therefore be worth considering how this could be captured and built upon for the purposes of introducing and implementing ECVET.

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

The Development Partners for the SCQF were responsible for the development of Guidelines for Credit Rating; Credit Transfer and the Recognition of Prior Learning, which have been widely accepted by those in the HE and vocational training and education sectors that use the Framework as a tool for learners. These Guidelines were developed in consultation with those responsible for the development of the Framework as well as a range of stakeholders who would benefit from its use.

It would be useful to develop case studies on what ECVET intends to achieve could be presented on the European Commission's website as well as guidance, which would help to ensure consistency in its use across national partners.

5. ECVET'S POTENTIAL FOR ENHANCING MOBILITY

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

ECVET should help to do this by enhancing partnerships and providing a platform for mobility to occur, as proposed in the consultation document;

“ECVET should be developed and implemented gradually on a voluntary basis without any legal obligation, since it does not have a regulatory mission. When ECVET is applied in the countries which decide to implement it, national or regional legislation and/or current sectoral rules on qualifications should be taken into account”. (p16)

5.2 To what extent and how will ECVET be able to help improve the quality Community programmes on mobility and participation in these programmes?

If ECVET can be implemented irrespective of the learning context, it would enable the facilitation of transfer and validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. However, other factors create barriers to mobility such as: language;

college time; motivation of learners etc. ECVET may not capture the 'enhanced added value learning' of exchange programmes.

In Scotland, the SCQF allows for recognition of learning outwith a formal context which has helped to make community programmes more transparent and applicable within a wider formal / non-formal setting. However, socio and economic barriers can still exist; preventing programme participation and this is not something that a Framework can solely help to eradicate.

5.3 *To what extent and how do you think ECVET and Europass could complement each other to enhance mobility?*

It may be possible that ECVET and Europass could give recognition to one another however, issues with enhancing mobility will depend on European States and the national barriers that exist. ECVET will be just one tool and it is in the implementation and promotion of ECVET, EQF and Europass consistently to individual end users which will make the real difference.