



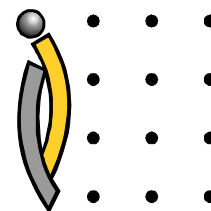
REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA
MINISTRSTVO ZA ŠOLSTVO IN ŠPORT

Directorate for Secondary and
Higher Education and Adult
Education



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Center RS
za poklicno
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Ljubljana



A public debate on the credit system in vocational education and training (ECVET) was organised by the Ministry of Education and Sport in conjunction with the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training. All main actors involved in vocational education were invited to the debate: as well as representatives of the Ministry of Education and Sport, these included the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, professional chambers, representatives of the expert councils, representatives of the institutions involved in the process of defining qualifications, and representatives of schools and faculties.

The debate included a presentation of European Commission Staff working document and key questions relating to the credit system in vocational education and training (ECVET). Discussion also covered activities for the implementation of the credit system that are already taking place in Slovenia (legislative framework, credit evaluation of programmes) and the new challenges brought by ECVET.

Key points from the debate:

1. The purpose and reasons for the European credit system are well defined. One of the key objectives of ECVET is to strengthen international mobility in vocational education and training, and it was stressed that ECVET can make an important contribution to this objective. It was also highlighted that emphasis should also be placed on vertical and horizontal mobility in the formal education system and the positive influence that ECVET could have on the transferability of knowledge in the national context. The question was also raised as to whether it would not also make sense to incorporate the credit system into general education, above all from the point of view of horizontal mobility and the strengthening of parity of

esteem. The significant added value is above all from the point of view of the individual, in the taking into account of various aspects of learning and training, the possibility of transferring learning outcomes from one context to another, and strengthening access to education, evaluation and recognition of learning outcomes. At the systemic level, the objective is to open up the system of education and training and the interconnection of subsystems, and therefore the participants emphasised the importance of connecting the credit system and the qualifications framework at both the national and European levels.

2. It was pointed out that the various aspects of ECVET are well defined for formal education but that many questions have remained open with regard to the identification, assessment, transfer and recognition of informally acquired knowledge. Likewise, there is too little emphasis in the Commission Staff working document on the accumulation and capitalisation effect of the credit system, which would highlight, more than the transfer itself, the joint work and cooperation of various levels of actors in defining, identifying, assessing and recognising learning outcomes.
3. Additional work (including research) will also need to be invested in the definition of credit points so as to capture through this tool the development potential of the credit point, i.e. the definition of competence (in all dimensions: vocational, personality and citizenship) and use the experience gained from the introduction of this system in tertiary education. The definition of the credit point primarily in terms of workload again places the attention on input rather than on output and thus represents an obstacle above all to the evaluation and recognition of informal and non-formal learning, and consequently an obstacle or a reduced effect for the individual. As many learning outcomes as possible should probably be set in the form of tasks or projects or by taking into account all the additional activities of the individual (e.g. community work, running the school newspaper, summer work, helping the elderly etc.). Until new criteria are developed, we would propose 60 credit points for learning outcomes in the formal education system in one year, not least for the sake of compatibility with the credit system in tertiary education. Similarly, it is not always clear what the smallest number of units that make up a qualification should be. The only criterion for connecting units to partial

qualifications is relevance in the labour market. The development of the system will require good experimental work and the development of suitable knowledge and expertise, and therefore a pilot introduction at the transnational, national, regional and sectoral levels is of key importance.

4. In order to achieve greater transparency of qualifications and the building of mutual trust, the adoption of a uniform methodology for the description of qualifications would be a welcome and necessary aid. In the design of qualifications in the form of units, however, there is a danger of fragmentation of learning and learning pathways. The sum of the units is still not necessarily a qualification, and it is very important that the individual is capable of connecting knowledge, skills and competences for effective and innovative activity in context.
5. Common principles for ensuring quality are of key importance in building mutual trust. It will also be necessary to connect the other instruments that have been developed at the European level into a more coherent whole. These instruments include: the European Qualifications Framework, Common Quality Assurance Framework, Common Principles on validation of non-formal knowledge, Europass, key competences, principles for counselling and guidance. The building of a national framework (in connection with the payment system) will also contribute to the greater transparency and added value of the credit system. Slovenia has already commenced activities in this direction.
6. The legal basis is already in place in Slovenia for the credit-based evaluation of learning achievements in secondary vocational and technical education and post-secondary education programmes (the new Vocational and Technical Education Act, OJ RS No 79/2006, the new Post-Secondary Technical Education Act, OJ RS No 86/2004, in the Act amending the National Vocational Qualifications Act, OJ RS No 118/2006). In accordance with these acts, new vocational and technical education programmes have a modular structure. A module or subject is the smallest unit of an education programme/qualification, to which credit points are allocated with regard to the following: the value of the volume of learning outcomes, work invested, and learning activities (including various forms of

instruction, exercises, and practical education in school or in a company, ongoing work, project work, preparation for exams). A unit has a relative value in terms of the value of the overall qualification. Vocational and technical education programmes are evaluated in terms of credit points by the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational and Technical Education at the proposal of the drafters of the programmes.

In accordance with the Vocational and Technical Education Act (OJ RS No 79/2006, Article 14), education programmes are allocated a number of credit points corresponding to the type of qualification they lead to:

- lower vocational qualification: 120 credit points,
- secondary vocational qualification: 180 to 240 credit points,
- secondary technical qualification: 240 to 300 credit points,
- vocational/technical qualification: 120 credit points,
- vocational course: 60 to 90 credit points.

Master craftsman, foreman and manager examinations are worth 60 credit points.

In accordance with the Act amending the National Vocational Qualifications Act, OJ RS No 118/2006) a similar system will also apply to the evaluation and recognition of informally acquired knowledge, where greater emphasis will be placed on the actual or estimated effort invested in the achievement of learning outcomes.

By the end of 2007 all programmes of secondary vocational education and secondary and post-secondary education will have been structured into modules, rated in terms of credits and defined in the form of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences). We do not see any difficulties in the implementation of ECVET within the framework of the national formal education system, but many more challenges remain for identifying, assessing and recognising learning outcomes in the transnational context, and for informally acquired knowledge, for which a longer period will be necessary.

6. For successful implementation at the European and national levels, considerable efforts will need to be invested above all in the basic education and in-service training of teachers, in accordance with the philosophy of the concept of learning outcomes and student-centred learning, the evaluation of knowledge and competences acquired outside the formal system, and the tendency to link theory and practice. At the systemic level, too, connections with the business sector need to be strengthened and infrastructure created for the regular updating of competence profiles. ECVET would need to be supported by a wide-ranging and effective promotional campaign for various target groups (individuals, employers, schools). Above all it needs to be highlighted that it is learners who will gain most benefit from ECVET, and therefore their right to the evaluation of learning outcomes needs to be strengthened. A great deal of effort will still be required in order for providers and employers to recognise the added value of ECVET.

It also became apparent during the debate that common language needs to be formulated of all the fundamental concepts and expressions that define ECVET at the European level, while at the national level more detailed explanations tied to national conditions could be added. Similarly, uniform principles and sufficiently operational guidelines should be formulated for the evaluation and recognition of credit points and their incorporation into the various national systems, which as far as possible should derive from the required outputs. The use of quality assurance systems and mutual cooperation and connection is of key importance for the formation of mutual trust. So too is a simple infrastructure that is built on existing bodies and does not establish new ones.

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