



**The European Quality Assurance Reference framework - EQARF
The European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training - ECVET**

**Launching conference
Moving from principles to implementation
ECVET**

17-18 November 2009, Brussels

WORKSHOP H

**DEVELOPING ECVET:
PARTNERSHIPS AND INVOLVEMENT OF COMPETENT INSTITUTIONS¹**

This note has been written to facilitate the discussion in Workshop H "**Developing ECVET: Partnerships and involvement of competent institutions**" of the conference "EQARF and ECVET – Launching conference – Moving from principles to implementation", to be held on 17-18 November 2009 in Brussels. It introduces the main topic of ECVET partnerships and cooperation between competent institutions and stakeholders. It is based on the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of ECVET; it includes material from studies on EQF, ECVET and credits systems as well as from discussions during the European Commission / Cedefop Seminar "ECVET: from principles to practice" (Paris, 4-5 December 2008).

This note introduces issues for further discussion during this workshop. It complements the document of the European Commission "**Get to know ECVET better**", mainly for the sections "Credit transfer and accumulation", "Memorandum of understanding", "Learning agreement" and Part B "Functions of ECVET Competent Institutions".

INTRODUCTION

Partnerships are a key feature of VET in Europe, as decision making, education and training provisions, and the setting of educational, validation or certification standards are processes that involve a wide range of stakeholders, ranging from Ministries in charge of Education, Higher Education or Labour, to social partners, public institutions and agencies from education and labour, or parents' and students' associations (to name but a few).

¹ Written by Michel Aribaud (DG EAC) and Isabelle Le Mouillour (Cedefop)

Comparing the different national or regional qualifications systems², it appears that the dialogue between the various stakeholders in charge of awarding qualifications is organised differently according to how qualifications are designed and perceived (i.e. as integrating occupational and educational standards such as in Spain, on the basis of occupational standards as in the British NVQs, or on the basis of educational standards as in Germany). Also of importance is the functioning of feedback loops between the stakeholders, which could increase the relevance and legitimacy of qualifications in the education and training systems and on the labour market.

Aiming at better responsiveness of VET to economic, social and societal challenges, the responsibilities for VET are increasingly being delegated to regional or local levels, and more autonomy is being devolved to VET providers. Changes in the institutional setting have occurred in the last two years, as reforms brought the involvement of new bodies and a (re)defining of the responsibilities of different VET stakeholders in order to modernise and strengthen the role of VET. The changes involve improving inter-ministerial cooperation in VET, horizontal transferring of decision-making processes to a (non-ministerial) agency, establishing new consultative bodies at national level, strengthening institutional arrangements at regional, sectoral and local levels (regional councils/committees, sectoral councils/ committees, school boards/councils) and broadening participation and strengthening the role of various stakeholders in VET (including social partners, business, non-governmental organisations, teachers and trainers, and learners³).

On the other hand, introducing⁴ national qualifications frameworks based on learning outcomes alters the point of equilibrium of governance in education and training systems: a shift may take place where the position of key stakeholders changes and where users of qualifications, mainly individuals and businesses, are likely to be empowered at the expense of providers.

ECVET AND PARTNERSHIPS

In the context of ECVET, the ECVET partnerships are mainly concerned with mobility, and regarded as partnerships for mobility. Transfer of credits and validation of learning outcomes might also take place outside those mobility partnerships using the ECVET principles, and so the processes are led by the competent institutions of the Education and Training systems concerned.

² Cedefop. The dynamics of qualifications: defining and renewing occupational and educational standards. Cedefop panorama series. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2009. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Upload/Information_resources/Bookshop/556/5195_en.pdf.

³ For more details, Cedefop 2009. Continuity, consolidation and change. Towards a European era of vocational education and training. Cedefop Reference series; 73. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

⁴ Jens Bjornavold and Mike Coles. European Qualifications Framework: Explanatory note 2. January 15, 2009.

The success of ECVET depends on many factors, of which the buy-in and active involvement in the process by stakeholders are crucial. The partnership is an important component of ECVET implementation, as it fundamentally determines the success of the mobility endeavour in terms of achievements of learning outcomes by the mobile learner, as well as the recognition and validation of the acquired learning outcomes. It is at the same time the supporting structure for all practical aspects of VET mobility.

The ECVET Recommendation and the major studies related to ECVET⁵ have highlighted the need for powerful partnerships in terms of the legitimacy of the stakeholders involved and a common understanding of the stakeholders' remit. Opting/Going for ECVET means considering VET provision and qualification awards as a single sequence, in which the steps include assessment, validation and quality assurance, which are addressed by very different stakeholders across the European Education and Training area.

Take, for instance, the definition of a competent institution as set out in the Recommendation: *“an institution which is responsible for designing and awarding qualifications or recognising units or other functions⁶ linked to ECVET, such as allocation of ECVET points to qualifications and units, assessment, validation and recognition of learning outcomes, under the rules and practices of participating countries”* and think for a moment which institution or institutions from your own education and training system might be in charge of/have responsibility for the tasks mentioned in the definition.

The ECVET partnership is formalised in the Memorandum of Understanding. As mentioned in the ECVET FAQ, the Memorandum of Understanding sets out the mutual acceptance of the status and procedures of competent institutions involved. It also establishes procedures for cooperation within the partnership. The partnership has to cope with various tasks which might not correspond exactly with their traditional remit in the national context, such as⁷:

- describing learning outcomes in order to compare qualifications across the different qualifications systems;
- understanding qualifications, and their links to occupations as they exist in a ‘foreign’ qualifications system;

⁵ European ECVET network, ECVET Reflector, ECVET Connexion – reports available in most European languages at http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/moreinformation139_en.htm

⁶ See table attached to the background note.

⁷ For a more elaborated list, please consult the ECVET FAQ document.

- agreeing on the comparability of assessment standards between home and host qualifications systems;
- or fixing the terms of the learning agreement.

ISSUES FOR DEBATE

The following questions should be used as a basis for the discussion in the workshop:

During a recent workshop of the ECVET pilot projects⁸, the delegates categorised the partnerships in terms of – not only – partnerships for mobility at national or international level – but also as partnerships to drive policy change or adaptation of qualifications systems. Hence, the first set of questions:

1. How are ECVET partnerships emerging or how could they emerge? How could they be supported nationally, locally, at European level? How large and wide should partnerships for mobility be?

Partnerships are an element crucial to ECVET implementation as they enable mobility, support transparency on qualifications and training provisions, and inform validation and recognition of learning outcomes. However:

2. What do they need in order to be efficient? Which organisational form should they take: loose linkage, wide network, legal agreement among 'equals', etc.?

Partnerships might pursue a sector approach or might be led by the main characteristics of the qualifications systems in which its members are embedded, hence the question:

3. Does the approach to ECVET involve the danger of developing a closed-shop, and/or are partnerships a sufficient guarantee of quality assurance and trust?

It is planned that ECVET should develop while being tested and experimented on, setting its sights on two major dates in 2012 and 2014:

4. How can the ECVET partnerships be sustainable beyond 2014 and how can they best contribute to the evaluation of the testing phase?

⁸ European Commission/Cedefop. ECVET: From Principles to Practice. Synthesis Report. 4-5 December 2008 – Paris. Brussels/Thessaloniki 2008. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/upload/etvnews/news/4554-att1-1-ecvet-seminar4dec08-synthesis.pdf>.

Table 1: ECVET and the various functions in VET qualifications systems and VET provision

	Conception functions			Realisation functions				Quality assurance
Qualifications system	Design of qualifications	Design of formal or non-formal programmes	Design of assessment/ validation process and procedures	Carrying out the formal or non-formal programme	Assessment of learning outcomes ¹	Validation of learning outcomes ¹	Certification/ recognition ² of learning outcomes	Quality assurance and regulation
ECVET functions	Design of ECVET elements			Use of ECVET for accumulation and Transfer				Quality assurance for all processes
	Description of qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes	Link between units of learning outcomes and the formal or non-formal programme	Link between assessment/ validation processes, the achievement of units of learning outcomes and award of associated ECVET points	Practical use of learning outcomes and credit for mobility	Establishment of Learning agreements Assessment of learning outcomes and award of corresponding credit	Recording of assessed learning outcomes and credit in the personal transcript Validation of learning outcomes and of corresponding credit	Recognition of learning outcomes and process for taking credit into account for the award of qualification (i.e. transfer and accumulation)	
	Drafting of Memoranda of Understanding (all actors may be involved in the drafting of a MoU directly or by delegation)							
	Provision of Information, its Documentation and Communication							
<p>1) formal, non-formal and informal 2) including the award of qualification, certificate, diploma...</p>								