



UNION EUROPEENNE DE L'ARTISANAT ET DES PETITES ET MOYENNES ENTREPRISES
EUROPÄISCHE UNION DES HANDWERKS UND DER KLEIN- UND MITTELBETRIEBE
EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF CRAFT, SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES
UNIONE EUROPEA DELL' ARTIGIANATO E DELLE PICCOLE E MEDIE IMPRESE

UEAPME position on the proposal for a Recommendation on the establishment of the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training" ECVET

Introduction

The ECVET Recommendation proposal is a fundamental instrument for ensuring more transparent qualifications and enhanced mobility regarding the education and training systems and labour markets in Europe.

UEAPME strongly welcomes the new proposal of the European Commission on the establishment of the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET).

UEAPME has been actively involved from the start in the various discussions at European level on the development of ECVET. Together with the other European Social Partners, as well as the Member states, UEAPME supported “*the development and implementation of the European credit transfer system for VET (ECVET) in order to allow learners to build upon the achievements resulting from their learning pathways when moving between learning systems*” in the Maastricht communiqué¹ and continued this backing when asking for “*developing and testing a European Credit System for VET*” in the Helsinki communiqué.¹

I - General remarks

UEAPME fully supports the process of creating a European credit transfer system in VET, in particular because the ECVET proposal adopts the learning outcome approach which better reflects the labour market requirements. Moreover the learning outcome approach is key to overcome the difficulties of taking into account the various forms of learning, be it formal, informal or non formal, and in particular on the job learning.

UEAPME welcomes and insists on the voluntary nature of the use of ECVET, which does not impose any legal obligations nor an harmonisation of VET and qualifications systems.

UEAPME underlines that ECVET is a long-term project and that it will only gain in strength as a real concept over time. It requires further development in an ongoing and deepening process. Only in the long run and on the basis of several national and sectoral cross-boarder experiences, will it contribute to the establishment of a true credit transfer system.

¹ Helsinki Communiqué on Enhanced European Cooperation in VET
http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/helsinkicom_en.pdf

Concerning the relationship between ECVET and ECTS, UEAPME fully agrees that in the long term these should be made compatible in order to facilitate the transition from one learning system to the other. The more the two systems converge in mutual recognition, the more this will help to create a parity of esteem between general (and higher education) and VET. Nevertheless, this cannot be done in the short term, as ECVET first has to develop and work as an own entity. In addition, the two instruments are currently based on different logics, one on learning input and the other on learning outcomes, which need to be reconciled.

Complementarity also needs to be ensured with other European instruments, in particular EUROPASS. ECVET builds on the experiences of the mobility pass within EUROPASS. Both of them are complementary to each other. Therefore a closer cooperation between those two instruments needs to be secured in order to ensure consistency.

Furthermore, the implementation of ECVET should avoid additional costs and new bureaucracy in defining competent institutions. The creation of so-called parallel structures must be avoided.²

Benefits for Crafts and SMEs

UEAPME identifies clear benefits which the ECVET proposal should bring in the long term for Craft and SMEs in Europe:

- To attract more people to the learning context and motivate them to participate in continuous training
- To create a real lifelong learning culture
- To enhance the mobility of apprentices and young people in initial VET
- The shift to a learning outcome approach can contribute to providing skills better adapted to the needs of the labour market and add to the creation of a European labour market
- To facilitate the modernisation and sometimes reshaping of the education and training systems by the various actors.

At the same time it creates new challenges for companies:

In order to have a successful implementation and full use of ECVET, companies might be involved in the process of evaluation, recognition and validation of acquired competences. This necessitates good guidance and strong support from intermediary bodies such as professional organisations or chambers in particular for small businesses ready to assume this new responsibility.

The introduction of ECVET and of the concept of units of learning outcomes should ultimately contribute to a better management of competences within the company. However ECVET use will only reach that objective if the shift towards the concept of learning outcomes is done in a transparent, coherent and coordinated manner: firstly at EU level but also at national, sectoral, regional and local level.

The quick development of practical common user guides is highly necessary.

²Reflector study on ECVET http://ec.europa.eu/education/doc/reports/doc/ecvetref_en.pdf

II More specific UEAPME recommendations for the ECVET development

The focus must now lie on the two main core elements of ECVET, namely the creation of “unit of learning outcomes” to which case credit points are attached, as well as the “partnership” concept.

The credit points should not have an absolute value. They should only be an additional source of information.

More work will need to be undertaken on Common European terms of references for units³ and on the credit points. Units are the core of the system. One of the main challenges will be to decide on workable and transferable units at national and sectoral or even European level. The overall work on the common terms of reference should be beneficial in facilitating the development of mutual trust between the partners and improve transparency of qualifications. The ECVET users’ guide needs to be carefully designed and will be an important tool for ensuring correct and consistent application.

Implementation of ECVET should be a continuous process. The pilot projects and test phase are essential to continue working on the practicalities of units and at the same time to develop new partnerships and networks for the purpose of establishing mutual trust.

In addition, the creation of qualitative and sustainable partnerships need to be strongly encouraged notably through the various EU existing programmes such Erasmus and Leonardo da Vinci. This will be a decisive prerequisite for the development of reliable memoranda of understanding (MoU).

Finally the ECVET methodology should contribute to improving the quality of the European Community mobility programmes, in particular through facilitating the full recognition of learning outcomes gained during the quality mobility period.

It will also encourage mobility actors⁴ to put more emphasis on the quality aspects of tutoring, learning processes and the evaluation of learning outcomes. The recent proposal for a Recommendation on the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQARF) will also feed in to this as a reference tool.

Conclusion

- o European craft, small and medium sized enterprises fully support the aims and objectives of ECVET
- o A functioning ECVET should have the following benefits for companies:
 - To attract more people to the learning context
 - To enhance the mobility of apprentices and young people in initial VET
 - The shift to learning outcome approach should contribute to providing skills, adapted to the needs of the labour market
- o UEAPME strongly agrees with the voluntary participation in this initiative for the Member States

³ 60 points now form one unit.

⁴ Such as VET institutions, business organisations, chambers, enterprises and schools.

- o However, ECVET is a long term project, therefore further ongoing work on consolidating and deepening this instrument will be indispensable
 - o The ongoing lessons learnt from the practical experimentations need to be regularly incorporated into the further development to ensure fine-tuning of the system
 - o To ensure a full operational transfer system more work will need to be undertaken on Common European terms of references for units and on the credit points
 - o The implementation of ECVET should avoid additional costs and new bureaucracy in defining competent institutions
 - o European existing programmes should further contribute to reinforce the creation of sustainable partnerships and networks in view of development of memoranda of understanding
- Against this background, the ECVET users' guide will be an important instrument for encouraging a correct and consistent application of this new tool.

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