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# The development of ECVET in Europe

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# The development of ECVET in Europe

(2011)

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## Foreword

This paper focuses on strategies for implementing the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) in Member States of the European Union, two countries of the European Economic Area (Liechtenstein and Norway) and two candidate countries (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey).

Developing these strategies brings greater clarity to objectives and assets. European learning mobility remains an important driver for ECVET implementation, although no longer the only one. In national and regional contexts, further drivers for ECVET development are improving recognition, validation and permeability within education and training. Monitoring shows that ECVET is building on existing assets: favourable national institutional contexts, continuing VET reform, existing credit systems and arrangements, and legal provision.

Fifteen countries have set up ECVET coordination points, the level of activities has increased across all countries and detailed roadmaps for ECVET implementation are emerging: in short, there is visible progress. The momentum should be maintained.

The 2009 European Recommendation invites Member States to take measures for ECVET implementation until 2012. This paper shows that preparations for ECVET had started as early as 2004. National projects and initiatives considered ECVET related issues even though they focused mainly on developing qualifications systems and lifelong learning. Cedefop monitoring of ECVET developments clearly shows the links between those initiatives and ECVET.

The increasing commitment since then is essential: ECVET is an important and implicit aspect of many changes in education and training. Continued effort is necessary, with adaptation of its rationales to national contexts. ECVET must be embedded in existing arrangements and should not be interpreted as a stand-alone, new tool. Member States have allocated resources for this aim and begun to communicate it to the wider public, reflected by an increasing presence of ECVET in the media.

The conclusions drawn from this report are based on our research, analysis and interpretation. Cedefop, in cooperation with the European Commission, will continue to publish regular monitoring reports to reflect ECVET developments.

With this working paper, Cedefop is also creating a forum for exchange of experience and opinion and peer learning which may contribute to the implementation of ECVET. The monitoring is part of the evaluation of ECVET: the recommendation foresees that by 2014, the ECVET implementation shall be analysed for possible revision of the European Recommendation.

The results of this working paper also contribute directly to the short term deliverables and strategic objectives set out in the Bruges Communiqué.

Christian F. Lettmayr  
*Acting Director of Cedefop*



## Acknowledgements

This working paper is based on analysis of policy and research documents and on the results of 45 interviews carried out between May and September 2011, gathering the views of more than 65 experts and members of the European ECVET Users Group. Cedefop is indebted to them for their availability, input and support and for their comments in reviewing the draft document. Equally we are grateful for the support of the European Commission and the European Training Foundation.

Ms Isabelle Le Mouillour, senior expert at Cedefop, wrote the report and undertook the analysis on which it is based. Mr Loukas Zahilas (senior expert at Cedefop) provided the internal review to the working paper. Ms Yvonne Noutsia (Cedefop) provided technical support in preparing this publication and Ms Vicky Oraiopoulou (Cedefop) coordinated the interviews.

This report is part of Cedefop's monitoring of ECVET developments. It provides the basis for future peer learning and networking activities. It will be regularly updated to include different initiatives and to meet the European deadlines for evaluating the implementation of ECVET in Europe. The work is undertaken in cooperation with the European Commission.

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## Executive summary

The preparatory phase of ECVET implementation has started in all European countries. Although not always accompanied by an official formal decision, all countries have dedicated working groups, are undergoing feasibility analysis, or have projects to test ECVET. The intensity of activities has gained pace and there is much information and communication on the subject with a large range of stakeholders to establish commitment. Peer review and learning are taking place at European, national and regional levels as well as within sectoral organisations.

Countries are reflecting on the usefulness and feasibility of ECVET and developing narratives supporting its implementation: this is an essential step since it is still difficult to establish the cost/benefit relationship of implementation. A clear policy level commitment is much needed and can only be reached by linking ECVET to the needs of education and training. This partly explains the opening-up of ECVET not only to European learning mobility but also to permeability and improved education and training quality. This shift links ECVET to core issues such as the efficiency of education and training systems, the revision of qualifications and educational standards, and to better targeting VET to the requirements of learning and working careers.

To grasp the development of ECVET in Europe it is necessary to consider its context. Most countries are modernising their (vocational) education and training systems, tackling issues such as learning outcomes approaches at the level of occupational standards, training regulations, qualifications, curricula and assessment methods. Also included is development of a unit-based approach to education and training standards. There needs to be an infrastructure for dialogue and negotiations and reflecting upon changes to learning and teaching. These are long-term changes: countries might engage in progressive updates of their qualifications, starting by piloting some newly introduced, or those for which stakeholders voice a need. Monitoring indicates that, in most European countries, the existing legislation accommodates fairly well with ECVET. The legislation has mostly been updated in recent years but time is needed for these regulatory changes to shape into the reality.

Further contextual aspects are the development of national qualifications frameworks and the existence of credit systems or credit arrangements. Many European countries have chosen to deal with credit systems (and ECVET) as part of their activities related to national qualifications frameworks. Fifteen ECVET national coordination points have been set up and mostly coincide with the EQF coordination points and EQAVET national reference points. This shows

that countries are attempting to establish the synergy between the tools, at least at institutional level. The decision on ECVET also relates to issues of compatibility, coherence of existing provisions for transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes and, if relevant, setting up conversion of existing credit arrangements into ECVET. Education and training systems should undergo as little change as possible; they should run their existing credit arrangements or systems (being compatible with ECVET) and allow European mobility in VET by operating with ECVET. This brings into consideration new questions of conversion between existing credit systems and ECVET to develop learning mobility, as well as whether ECVET could be an opportunity to revise existing credit systems.

ECVET benefits from past reform and the predominance of the learning outcomes approach in education and training. The interviews indicated that time has come to develop a specific ECVET agenda for learning outcomes, mobility and permeability. This would concern, for instance, units of learning outcomes, credit award and conversion mechanisms. Benefiting at national or regional levels from the experiences gathered in European ECVET projects is proving difficult, with some exceptions. Projects mainly support raising awareness on possible approaches and choices as well as on understanding ECVET in a comparative perspective.

Newly established national or regional ECVET organisations committed themselves to improving the transfer of proposals from projects to wider contexts. The European governance structure has long been criticised for being too complicated; however, it fulfils its role in supporting European countries in decision-making, delivering information materials and organising peer learning. Monitoring shows that ECVET is dealt with at the level of competent bodies and is on the agenda of working or coordinating groups dedicated to European education and training policy. Capacity building certainly takes time and the current economic context is more aligned to cost-efficiency. In 2010, and more strongly in 2011, brokerage agencies or organisations are appearing within the ECVET institutional setting at national and regional levels. They include ECVET national coordination points, the agencies in charge of the European lifelong learning programme and sectoral organisations and associations of providers aiming at bridging the divide between policy-makers and practitioners across the different levels (European, national, regional, local). ECVET will also benefit from the current European support to set up national ECVET experts and the proposal by the European Commission for a programme 'ERASMUS for all' put forward on 23 November 2011.

## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

The European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) entered its second year of development in 2011. This paper on monitoring developments appears in an important period for ECVET since countries are invited by the European Recommendation to develop until 2012 the conditions and measures for gradual ECVET implementation. Further the intermediary review of progress achieved by countries in implementing the 22 national level short-term deliverables defined in the 2010 Bruges Communiqué – that also includes ECVET implementation – will be carried out in 2012.

Member States are preparing for ECVET implementation. An institutional infrastructure has emerged, tests and experimentation remain significant but, more important, ECVET has moved to national and regional levels. ECVET is an incremental innovation in education and training systems in Europe that runs the risk of losing visibility as part of the ambitious reform agendas established for the period 2004-15. Its challenge is being undertaken by relevant working groups and there are different information activities on ECVET.

This paper reviews the ECVET decision-making process in different education and training systems, focusing on objective-setting and governance development. It shows how ECVET is sustained and might also compete with VET reforms and existing credit systems and arrangements. 'Preparing for ECVET' means building on qualifications systems to allow for the introduction of credits. It includes mapping existing support elements such as legal regulations or credit systems/arrangements in place. The last section of this paper addresses major challenges in establishing by 2012 the necessary conditions for gradual ECVET implementation in Europe.

This working paper features 45 interviews carried out between May and September 2011 (see Annex) gathering the views of more than 65 experts and members of the European ECVET Users Group (representatives of ministries, qualifications authorities, social partners, chambers of commerce, craft and industries, and research institutes). The interviews lasted between one and two hours. Further input comes from research and policy documents available until September 2011. The monitoring covering 36 education and training systems, considering the devolved administrations as existing in Belgium or the UK. Altogether 32 countries are reviewed.

## CHAPTER 2

# The decision on ECVET

### 2.1. Initiating the process

The ECVET process has started in all European countries, demonstrating positive take-up of the concept. It has different connotations and takes different forms; interviewees from nine education and training systems indicated that no formal decision has been taken on ECVET. In most cases the decision to implement ECVET is implicit and not formalised, i.e. there is no official declaration on implementation but a general commitment to the 2009 European Recommendation with several ECVET-related activities in process. In Luxembourg, for instance, ECVET is embedded in the VET reform currently in its implementation phase. In Scotland the decision includes following-up on ECVET development and developing guidance on how to use it. This approach is shared with Northern Ireland and England; the UK national coordination points work closely together on all activities.

Some of the activities are centrally coordinated: strategy papers have been presented to ministries by relevant VET authorities (as in the Czech Republic, Sweden); recent laws or current law proposals contain preparatory elements for ECVET implementation in countries such as Estonia, Greece, Latvia and Romania. In Denmark a model for implementation of ECVET in VET is expected to be formally decided by the end of 2011 (Danish Evaluation Institute, EVA, 2011). The development of a credit system in VET might be included in government education strategy or a policy programme such as in Belgium (Wallonia), Bulgaria, and Lithuania. Other activities are promoted by single organisations (as can be seen in the list of European projects). In Italy, the interest of competent bodies for ECVET is demonstrated by their engagement in European projects.

Many VET systems present a high level of ECVET readiness. Few interviewees believe that their education and training systems will soon be ready to start ECVET implementation. The Bulgarian programme for developing education and training policy foresees the gradual introduction of credit transfer in VET from 2012 to 2013. In Latvia, the new VET law – which includes ECVET – could be finalised in 2013. Finland has committed itself to full implementation of ECVET by autumn 2013 with legislative and systemic preparations starting 2012.



In Poland, VET has been undergoing reform since 2008 and ECVET implementation is due to start at the beginning of 2012. The focus of this initiative lies in developing core curricula which should link related qualifications; each qualification would include units following the ECVET proposal. In Estonia, the national development plan for education and training includes, by 2013, the introduction of a credit point system for VET (Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, 2009).

**Table 1. Basis for decision to implement ECVET (multiple replies, N=40)**

<b>Basis for decision</b>	<b>Number of quotes</b>
Continuing VET reform	10
European Recommendation	12
European and national priorities	6
National position paper during European consultation	6
Feasibility study, impact analysis	4
European projects	2

*Source:* Interviews with ECVET Users Group (May-September 2011)

In many countries, the decision to implement ECVET means for the time being following on the answers formulated during the 2006-07 European consultation or the text of the European Recommendation to shape activities and measures. Belgium/Flanders, for instance, follows European development closely, but has not undertaken formal initiatives to implement ECVET. The 2006-07 ECVET consultation with Flemish stakeholders (advisory and consultative bodies such as Flemish Education Council and Flemish Socio-Economic Council, training providers, representatives of the profit sector, representatives of the social profit sector and accreditation organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders) showed that 'most of the consulted organisations found that the ECVET system had potential, but remained much too vague and unclear and needed further elaboration' (Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training, 2011, p. 69). The current approach to ECVET is in line with this result; peer learning activities are organised to clarify how ECVET is to be understood in the Flemish and European contexts. As early as 2007, Turkey committed to ECVET in an official internal meeting followed by a national consultation collecting more than 250 responses (Altin and Yalcin, 2011).

Some interviewees mentioned that, since the European Recommendation foresees a trial period until 2012, the current period can be used to develop peer learning and testing before ECVET implementation; the current decision is to design and carry out preparatory and accompanying measures, including cost-

benefit assessment or developing the argumentation in favour of ECVET. This is the case in France with a reflection on the conditions and impacts of ECVET implementation. The Maltese ECVET initiative aims at testing from 2011 to 2013 before possible implementation. The testing approach is backed in some countries by the choice of the agencies for the Lifelong learning programme to set ECVET as a national priority within the lifelong learning funding scheme (Germany, Estonia, Italy, Austria, UK, etc.).

In some cases, ECVET is considered as a logical and coherent further step within VET reform since 2007 (and before): this might imply that the visibility of any ECVET decision is low or that there is no need for major marketing. Within many systems, the response to ECVET is positive, though priority is given to NQF or developing a national qualifications framework includes elaborating provisions for ECVET. Giving priority to NQF implies that the implementation of ECVET might be delayed (for instance Belgium/Flanders, Spain, Cyprus, the Netherlands, and Poland). By contributing to establishing full learning outcomes-based descriptions of qualifications, the national qualifications frameworks should subsequently support ECVET implementation. In few countries (Greece, Cyprus) it is expected that the national qualifications framework will have a structuring effect on the qualifications. The Dutch national qualifications framework is not a credit-based qualifications framework; higher education institutions are working with European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS) according to European agreements. ECVET is starting to be developed in VET based on different projects. The further implementation of ECVET for the Netherlands will be examined in autumn 2011 (Van der Sanden et al., 2011).

#### Box 1. **Czech Republic: ECVET in the development of NQF**

In the Czech Republic, the operational programme Education for competitiveness (2009-15) includes the development of the national vocational qualifications framework, which is a part of the National register of vocational qualifications (*Národní soustava kvalifikací* – NSK). The register creates conditions for recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning. At the same time it addresses the mismatch between supply and demand of skills in the labour market and relatively low participation of adults in continuing education. It is foreseen to assign credit points to, or develop learning units for, partial qualifications in the register. The register already contains approximately 300 partial qualifications; the final goal is about 1000 qualifications.

*Source:* Interview with ECVET Users Group (May-September 2011), NRP/CZ (2011).

It is also worth looking at the reasons for hesitations, reservations and delays in decision-making (that also partly explain the low profile of ECVET implementation). The interviewees (as in Denmark, Ireland, Spain or the UK) mention the lack of clarity on the objectives and purposes of ECVET, the need for

assessing its impacts on VET, the difficulty in identifying its real added value, and the frequency and thoroughness of VET reform in recent years. In some countries, the delay in a formal decision is linked to general difficulties in consolidating VET reforms and in developing the necessary procedures (Italy) and also to a lack of human and financial resources (Portugal).

All in all this leads to an array of ECVET related activities: Table 2 shows the intensity and range such activities across Europe. In comparison with the 2010 edition (Cedefop, 2010a) this table indicates the starting years of activity (as far as available). It also shows that learning by working in projects, combining ECVET with NQF developments and carrying out information and marketing, are favourite approaches. The 'wait and see strategy' turned into an active strategy since it is mixed with the activities at different levels of the VET systems (see for instance the activities of different competent bodies, the multiplicity of peer learning activities and European ECVET projects). Adapting the qualifications systems might imply, as in Lithuania, developing modularisation (Box 8) or reforming curricula, as in Slovenia.

Table 2. **ECVET related activities: mix (multiple replies)**

	Broad range initiative	Impact analysis	Updating regulations	Adapting qualifications system	Wait and see	Combine with NOF	ECVET European projects	Informing stakeholders
Austria (2011)		X 2008		X		X	X	X 2011
Belgium / Flanders (2011)					X			
Belgium/Wallonia (2011)	X	X	X	X			X	X
Bulgaria (2011)			X	X 2012			X	X 2010
Cyprus (2011)	planned		under discussion			X		X
Czech Republic (2011)	X 2009	X 2008		planned		X	X 2009	X 2008
Denmark (2011)		under discussion						X

	Broad range initiative	Impact analysis	Updating regulations	Adapting qualifications system	Wait and see	Combine with NOF	ECVET European projects	Informing stakeholders
Estonia (2011)			X				X	X
Finland (2011)	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
France (2011)		X	under discussion				X	X
Germany (2011)	X 2007						X	X
Greece (2011)			X 2010	X 2011		X 2010	X	
Hungary (2011)				X 2006, 2011		X 2008	X 2008	X
Iceland (2010)			X				X	
Ireland (2011)	planned	X	X	X		X	X	
Italy (2011)			X 2005	X 2008			X	
Latvia (2011)				X 2013		X	X	
Liechtenstein (2011)					X			
Lithuania (2011)			X 2007	X 2010		X 2010		
Luxembourg (2011) *				X				
Malta (2011)	X 2011	X 2011-13	X 2005	X			X 2011	X 2011
Netherlands (2011)							X	
Norway					X		X	
Poland (2011)					X	X		
Portugal (2011)								X
Rumania (2011)			X 2011	X		X	X	
Slovak Republic (2011)	X 2011	X 2013	X	under discussion		X 2011	X	
Slovenia (2011)	X 2011		X 2006	X			X	

	Broad range initiative	Impact analysis	Updating regulations	Adapting qualifications system	Wait and see	Combine with NOF	ECVET European projects	Informing stakeholders
Spain (2011)	X				X		X	
Sweden (2011)						under discussion	X	X
UK-England		X 2010				X	X	X
UK-Wales (2011)					X		X	
UK-Northern Ireland						X	X	X
UK-Scotland (2011)			given			X	X	X
Turkey (2011)			X2010-12	X 2007-13		X2008-13	X2008-13	X2011-13

*Source:* Based on ReferNet reports, interviews with ECVET Users Group (May-September 2011), categories of activities listed in the interview guideline

In 2009, the devolved administrations in the UK the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework partnership (SCQF partnership), the Welsh Assembly Government, Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) commissioned a scoping study to support the development of an implementation plan for ECVET in the UK. This shows that many features of the UK qualifications system are consistent with the concepts and principles of ECVET, which can build on the existing qualifications frameworks. However, it indicates the need to develop ‘the motivation and culture of mobility in VET’ (McNeill and Faurshou, 2010). Consequently, the study recommends a focus on analysing demands and patterns of mobility in VET towards the use (and usefulness) of crediting learning periods abroad. It highlights, as a second issue, the relationship between ECVET and existing credit arrangements. Potential comparative benefits of ECVET are its capacity to capture learning outcomes in informal and non-formal learning, to ease and open up credit transfer, and to improve quality assurance mechanisms for VET provision. The study confirms that Scotland, Northern Ireland and England had the necessary preconditions to implement ECVET. It recommends setting up strong leadership to prepare for ECVET implementation: ‘It would need to become a strategic priority, driven and supported by Government agencies

and key partners in the vocational education and training systems, both formal and non-formal' (McNeill and Faurischou, 2010, p.22). This priority will need to be consolidated by greater dialogue around the implications, relative benefits and the longer term strategies and policies which might impact on providers, awarding bodies and institutions. The scoping study suggests three options for ECVET implementation: a forum to discuss and monitor ECVET development in Europe led by a central agency (starting reflection on internal UK-mobility to then expand to mobility across other Member States); a project based approach (by joining existing networks); and commitment to the European timescale. The 2011 interviews revealed that the UK has already organised a common ECVET working group and that projects are being developed.

## 2.2. The objectives of ECVET implementation

The interviewees indicated that they intend to implement ECVET to develop European learning mobility. At the same time, they confirmed that, in many VET systems, the level of learning mobility is currently low and it is difficult to increase European mobility in (initial) VET. Learning mobility is understood as a contribution to the personal and professional development of young people. According to the European benchmark, it shall be raised by 2020 to a European average of at least 6% of 18-34 year olds with an initial VET qualification having had a VET-related study or training period abroad of minimum two weeks, or less if documented by Europass (Council of the European Union, 2011). It might be the case that the anticipated difficulties with ECVET are not so much linked to its features but more directly with the promotion and organisation of learning mobility in VET.

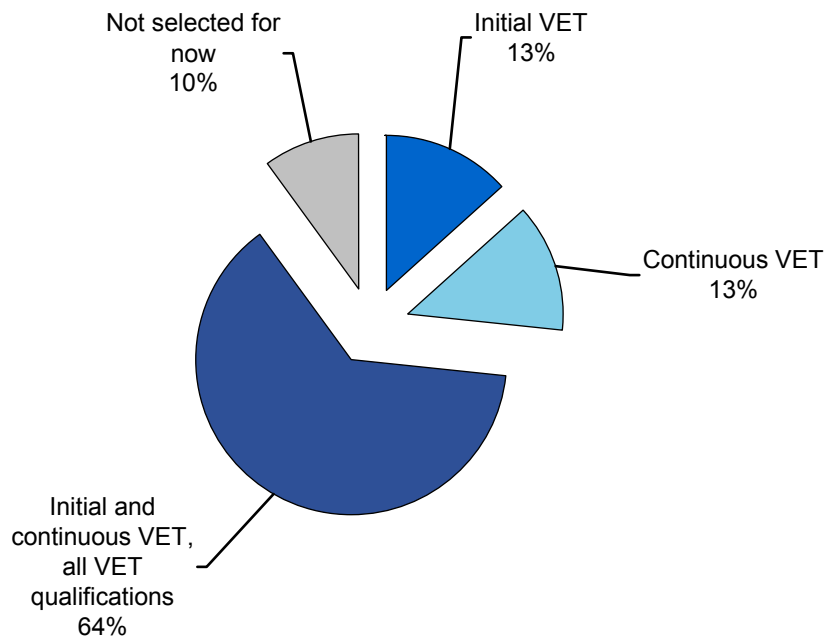
To gain support for ECVET implementation, the interviewees also mentioned, alongside mobility, further objectives such as permeability, recognition, validation, quality improvement or lifelong learning. In many VET systems, such objectives are embedded in VET reforms aiming at increased flexibility, transparency, efficiency and accountability. As mentioned in the European higher education review of the Bologna Process, 'mobility, particularly as a period of study abroad during the Bachelor, will remain a challenge unless it is central to the institutional internationalisation strategy' (Surssock and Smidt, 2010, p. 8).

Table 3. **Objectives associated with ECVET (multiple replies, all respondents, N=65)**

Objectives	Frequency of quotations
European mobility	32%
Permeability	18%
Recognition, validation	18%
Quality and standards	14%
Lifelong learning	5%
Integration in working and social life	3%
European identity	3%
Transparency of qualifications	3%
Improve European VET cooperation	2%
Flexibility	2%

Source: Interviews with ECVET Users Group (May-September 2011)

Developing 'European mobility' (the most quoted objective following Table 3), including mobility between neighbouring countries, is the main objective for implementing ECVET. In the context of increased regionalisation of education and training and decentralised VET administration, mobility also means mobility between regions. The interviews show that ECVET is strongly associated with improving recognition, validation and permeability within education and training systems. The item 'recognition and validation' covers seeking ways for drop-outs to return to education and training (Belgium/Wallonia, Estonia) or integration of migrants and disadvantaged groups into education and training (Italy). It also means improving the quality of access to education and training on the basis of formal and informal learning (Cyprus) and to qualifications for adults (Estonia), and establishing equivalences between qualifications by different awarding bodies. Permeability relates to improving the efficiency of education and training systems and establishing links between existing qualifications through using learning outcomes and between the offers by providers operating within the national system (Czech Republic, Lithuania), thus making possible for learners to navigate and change between providers and qualifications. The item 'quality and standards' covers revision of VET standards (Slovakia), development of the learning outcomes approach (Slovenia), quality improvement in learning processes (Sweden), transparency and trust in standards in use (Austria) and the coherence of standards used across different sectors (IVET/CVET).

Figure 1. **Fields of implementation of ECVET (N=30)**

Source: Interviews with ECVET Users Group (May-September 2011)

Member States largely foresee implementing ECVET in all initial and continuous VET qualifications in a lifelong learning perspective. Continuous VET might include adult learning or further education, depending on national education and training structures. Covering IVET and CVET implies establishing cooperation between a wide range of stakeholders, as presented in the next section.

### 2.3. Institutional context

In most cases, the ministry in charge of VET qualifications at EQF levels 3 to 5 is responsible for ECVET. The leading organisations are represented in the European ECVET Users Group and Table 4 shows that in most cases the ministry in charge of education would have the lead and work in cooperation with other awarding ministries or qualifications authorities. The ministry in charge might also mandate the corresponding national VET institute or authority for VET. In most countries, working/coordination/steering groups are set up to deal with European education and training in general or with ECVET in particular (Table 4). Those groups have decision-making and implementation powers; they rely in their composition on the multiplicity of VET stakeholders.



Table 4. ECVET management structure by country

	Leading organisations	The ECVET management structure
Austria	Federal Ministry for Education, Culture and Arts	Working group with Federal Ministry of education, social partners, <i>Länderschulratvertreter</i> , VET schools and regional delegates. It meets four times a year.
Belgium/ Flanders	Ministry of Education and Training, Ministry of Employment	Common management committee following-up on the Bruges Communiqué
Belgium/ Wallonia	Ministry of Education and Training	Dedicated groups on regulations and legislative revision, pedagogical issues, for the disciplines concerned (French, science, maths, etc.), for occupations concerned and a working group dedicated to apprenticeship
Bulgaria	National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET) as specialised body to the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria	NAVET has led an inter-institutional working group since 2010; it comprises the Ministry of Education, NAVET (also members of ECVET working group), higher education institutions, national employer and employee representatives. It meets once every three months.
Cyprus	Ministry of Education and Culture	The national ECVET working group representing the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Human Resource Development Authority and the Ministry of Labour and Work meets once a month.
Czech Republic	The Ministry of Education, is officially in charge. It mandated the National Institute for Education (Národní ústav pro vzdělávání, NÚV)	NÚV has led the Czech ECVET Expert Group since the beginning of 2011. It gathers representatives of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the social partners, the Association of Institutions for Adult Education, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the National Agency for European Educational Programmes, regional authorities, vocational schools, the Association of Vocational Schools, the Chamber of Commerce and the Agrarian Chamber. It meets twice a year but works continuously via e-mail. In July 2011 the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NÚOV) merged with two other agencies into NÚV.
Germany	The Federal Ministry for Education and Research	The Federal Ministry for Education and Research leads the ECVET German steering group with participation of the social partners, Länder education ministries and the National Agency. Further awarding bodies and relevant stakeholders have their specific steering group following European VET policy, as for instance the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts or DIHK.
Denmark	Ministry of Education	(no decision yet)

Leading organisations		The ECVET management structure
Estonia	Ministry of Education and Research	Since 2010, the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre (NEQC) leads a working group gathering the Leonardo da Vinci Agency, the Qualifications Authority and the Ministry of Education and Research.
Spain	Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Immigration; to be further decided	(no decision yet)
Finland	Ministry of Education and Culture has mandated the FNBE with the coordination of FINECVET.	The FINECVET steering committee gathers major stakeholders. It is foreseen in early autumn to set up a national ECVET working/advisory group.
France	The Ministry of Education (leader of the MENECEVET project and member of the ECVET Users Group). Each awarding body, as far as its qualifications are concerned by the MENECEVET project.	Many stakeholders are engaged in ECVET at their respective levels of responsibility and legal remits. Information is circulating via the members of the ECVET Users Group, including the Ministry of Education which is also a member of the CNCEP. Regular organisation of information and follow-up sessions (for instance for ministries creating qualifications).
Greece	Ministry of Education mandated the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications (EOPP)	Representatives to the European Users Group
Hungary	Ministry of National Economy. It cooperates with other relevant ministries (National Ministry of Resources, responsible for general education, Ministry of Agriculture, etc.)	In Autumn 2011, the National Institute for Vocational and Adult Training (NIVE) planned to set up an expert team from NIVE (researchers, experts), teachers, trainers of VET schools, social partners and Tempus Public Foundation.
Ireland	The Ministry of Education delegated the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC)	The Copenhagen steering group gathers VET providers, the National Training and Employment Authority, tourism training agency, VET school, FETAC. It has representatives in the ECVET working group.
Italy	Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education and University and regional authorities	The activities are not yet structured as work. The Institute for the Development of Vocational Training for Workers (Isfol) is substantially involved in ECVET processes. Social partners and sector representatives are usually involved following their remits.
Liechtenstein	The Ministry of Education, the Office for Vocational Training and Career Counselling and the Agency for International Educational Affairs.	
Lithuania	The Ministry of Education and Science and the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre (QVETDC)	The QVETDC runs central professional committees (Ministry, employers, employees, VET and HE providers), and is going to establish sectoral professional committees (social partners). The central committees are strategic decision-maker for qualifications and credit systems at all E&T levels, including economic stakeholders, social partners, main ministries, and training providers.

	Leading organisations	The ECVET management structure
Luxembourg	Ministry of Education and Partners	Curriculum teams are working per occupations and are joint bodies of nominated professionals.
Latvia	Ministry for Education and Science	National working group in consultation with different ministries, social partners representing 12 branches preparing i.a. the new law (2013).
Malta	Ministry of Education, Employment and Family	A Copenhagen coordination group is following all European and national initiatives on the tools. Role of Malta Qualifications Council, meetings with major stakeholders and training providers all along the national project
The Netherlands	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, and Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality	(no decision yet)
Poland	Department for vocational and continuing education of the Ministry of Education	Cooperation between stakeholders takes place within the 2010-13 project.
Portugal	(no decision yet)	Representatives to the European Users Group (Ministry of Labour)
Romania	Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports, Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, Ministry of Culture and National Authority for Qualifications (Law on Education).	The National Authority for Qualifications leads a national working group. It gathers training providers, teachers, sectoral committees, group of stakeholders per domain (map of qualifications and occupational standards). The agency is positioned in-between Ministry of education and ministry of labour.
Sweden	The Ministry for Education has mandated the Swedish national agency for education.	An ECVET working group was set up in 2011 to develop a proposal on ECVET implementation in Sweden.
Slovenia	The Institute for Vocational Education and Training (CPI)	Work on ECVET is organised in projects. Depending on their scope, they might include the ministry of education and the schools or CPI and schools.
Slovakia	Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic	The state Institute for Vocational Education is in charge of formal education. The adult education and youth division of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic is responsible for non-formal/adult education. They cooperate with the National Institute for Lifelong Learning.

	Leading organisations	The ECVET management structure
United Kingdom	Scotland: role of SCQF partnership until Dec 2011 Wales: Welsh Government England: ECCTIS Ltd on behalf of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Northern Ireland: Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)	UK-Europe coordination group has the remit to coordinate all EU-related education activities. In addition, ECORYS (the Leonardo Agency for the UK) has submitted a proposal for ECVET experts. All national contact points will work closely with these experts and ECORYS.
Turkey	The Ministry of National Education (MoNE)	The MoNE works together with the Vocational Qualification Authority (set up in 2006), Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Council of Higher Education and universities.
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	(no decision yet) The Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, VET Centre, the Centre for Adult Education and VET providers should be in charge.	

Source: Interviews with ECVET Users Group (May-September 2011)

The working groups dedicated to ECVET, many of which have been recently set up, cooperate with groups working on competences-based teaching methods, validation or assessment mechanisms. ECVET activities are mostly co-financed by the national budget for education and European funding (European Social Fund, Human Resource Development programme or Lifelong learning programme). National funding covers personal and operational costs. Four interviewees indicated that ECVET activities are currently funded exclusively from national resources.

Capacity building and setting up organisational and technical support to ECVET takes time. In this context, it is relevant to review different examples from emerging ECVET roadmaps.

## Box 2. The German roadmap to ECVET

In 2007 the Federal Ministry for Education and Research set up the Innovation Circle on Vocational Education to identify the central challenges for innovation in German VET, and to work out concrete options for improving VET structures. The innovation circle gathered representatives from the Federal Ministry for Education and Research, the Federal Ministry for Economy, the Conference of Länder Ministers of Education, Conference of Länder Ministers of Economic Affairs, Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology, representatives of industrial associations, of trade unions, of the Federal Employment Agency and of Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training as well as companies and part-time vocational schools and researchers. The resulting ten guidelines for modernisation of VET included the development of transfer opportunities in the education system and more specifically the development and piloting of a credit transfer system for VET.

This led in November 2007 to the start of the DECVET initiative: 'DECVET is not the direct implementation of ECVET in the form of a national credit transfer system. The initiative is currently piloting models for crediting competences at the interfaces of the German vocational education and training system. Core elements of ECVET such as outcome oriented learning units or credit points are being addressed within this process and consideration is also being accorded to the particular characteristics of the national VET system' (Bergzog et al., 2010, p. 4). DECVET is further linked to initiatives such as ANKOM (Credit transfer of occupational competences to higher education courses of study), 'job starter connect', 'optimisation of training provision for the semi-skilled unemployed or the route into vocational education and training in North Rhine-Westphalia'.

The Federal Ministry for Education and Research, supported by the national ECVET working group, defines the frame for ECVET development in its March 2011 'concept paper on testing ECVET in the context of transnational mobility in Germany' (2011-13) (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, BMBF, 2011). ECVET testing has for objectives the development of transparency and permeability on the basis of the learning outcomes approach, the qualitative improvement of competence development during mobility, and efficient management of learning times. The testing of ECVET rests on transnational mobility, formal qualifications, competence orientation in learning outcomes, definition of units of learning outcomes, competent bodies, evaluation/validation/documentation of learning outcomes.

In November 2010 the Federal Ministry for Education mandated the National Agency for VET at the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) as national coordination point for ECVET. In parallel the ECVET national working group was set up.

*Source:* Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung – BMBF (2011); Cedefop ReferNet Germany, Hippach-Schneider et al. (2010); interview, Bergzog et al. (2010).

### Box 3. The Dutch roadmap to ECVET

The Dutch roadmap to ECVET follows a bottom up approach of experimenting with it in mobility projects. An ECVET national coordination point was recently established in the NA LLP Leonardo da Vinci. This will provide a basic infrastructure for building a community of practice: website, overview of initiatives in the Netherlands, network meeting for ECVET projects. A National Team of ECVET experts will develop suitable information materials and events for VET providers and stakeholders starting in 2012. They will provide recommendations on the use and implementation of ECVET and also consider the small-scale pilot project in the health care sector (Box 6).

*Source:* Interviews with ECVET Users Group (May-September 2011)

In 2010, and more so in 2011, brokerage agencies or organisations are appearing within the ECVET institutional setting at national and regional levels. These organisations, such as the ECVET national coordination points, the agencies in charge of the European lifelong learning programme, and sectoral organisations and associations of providers aim at bridging the divide between policy-makers and practitioners across the different levels (European, national, regional, local).

### Box 4. Overview of activities by the ECVET national contact point for England

The English ECVET contact point is housed by ECCTIS Ltd and functions on behalf of the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). In 2011, BIS commissioned the English NCP with a needs analysis on ECVET. Since then the NCP has been working with an English awarding body on a pilot project on a draft converter to map ECVET points to QCF credits and vice versa. The NCP activities include:

- 1) Developing expertise on ECVET in England. Assisting awarding bodies in understanding how ECVET can work with existing vocational qualifications or how the ECVET process can be considered in the design of new awards, responding to enquiries from training institutions, awarding bodies, organisations and members of the public.
- 2) Liaison with relevant bodies. ECVET NCPs in the UK and other relevant bodies.
- 3) Dissemination of information. Attending events to support the development of ECVET in England; providing information to VET students on how ECVET can help to validate learning and aid mobility; attending ECVET events in Europe and in the UK; conducting study visits to gather information from EU partners.
- 4) Research activities. Involvement in projects to help align ECVET to English qualifications; conducting a pilot project to determine possible methods for allocating ECVET points to English qualifications; conducting a needs analysis for ECVET development in England; conducting a learner survey to determine awareness and support of ECVET and mobility principles; exploring links between ECVET and other instruments (e.g. Europass), exploring the possibility of introducing an 'ECVET in England' label for qualifications that have had ECVET points allocated, for quality assurance purposes.

*Source:* <http://www.ecvet.org.uk/AboutUs.aspx>

Fifteen education and training systems in Europe have already set up an ECVET coordination point (NCP) and officially appointed an institution. An ECVET coordination point is also nominated in Switzerland and Turkey (Table 5). In ten additional systems, the mandate is still pending, although an organisation has already been selected and in some cases proposed to relevant ministries for official mandating (Belgium/Wallonia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Spain, Italy, Latvia, Austria, Poland, Portugal and Sweden). Eight systems have so far not taken any official or informal decision (Belgium/Flanders, Denmark, France, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Rumania, and Slovakia) but seven are developing ECVET activities. Most coordination points are located within qualifications authorities or national VET institutes (even those not officially mandated yet) and some at national agencies for Leonardo/LLP. They are tightly linked to the leading organisations in the ECVET national processes (Table 4). In France, the NCP has not yet been nominated but the Ministry of National Education has decided to become institutionally involved and lead the ECVET centralised project MENECEVET. In Spain, Poland and Portugal the interviewees mentioned that the representatives in the ECVET Users Group will most probably be the contact persons for ECVET. The European ECVET Recommendation does not foresee the establishment of ECVET national coordination or contact points, contrary to the European Recommendations on EQF and EQAVET. The setting up of such coordination/contact points is a strong signal and element of ECVET development in European countries.

The tasks of the ECVET contact or coordination points include coordinating progress and activities on different issues linked to its introduction/development (qualifications standards, learning outcomes approach, assessment). They are also engaged in information dissemination to the wider public on European and national ECVET development. The NCP will rely for daily work on cooperation with colleagues working at education ministries and qualifications authorities; their proximity to those organisations is presented in Table 4 and Table 5. The interviewees stressed that the ECVET coordination points have limited personal capacity with, in many cases, only one or two persons allocated. The interviews also revealed that many NCP intend to use the European call for proposals to set up national teams of ECVET experts to increase their personal capacities. (In 2011, the European Commission addressed the national agencies for the lifelong learning programme with a call for proposals; the submission procedure was taking place at the time of the interviews). Table 5 lists the ECVET coordination points as at the end of September 2011. It also shows that countries are attempting to establish the synergy between the tools, at least at institutional level, by delegating ECVET, EQF and EQAVET to the same organisation.

Table 5. **National ECVET coordination points**

Country	ECVET coordination points	EQF coordination points	EQAVET national reference points
Cyprus	Ministry of Education	Department of Technical and Vocational Education, Ministry of Education and Culture	To be appointed
Germany	National agency 'Bildung für Europa' at the Federal Institute for vocational education and training	BBJ Consult AG	German National Reference Point for Quality Assurance in VET
Estonia	Estonian National Examinations and Qualification centre	Estonian Qualifications Authority	Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency
Finland	Finnish National Board of Education		
Greece	National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications (EOPP)		
Hungary	National Institute of Vocational and Adult Education	Ministry of National Resources	National Institute of Vocational and Adult Education
Lithuania	Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training development Centre		
Luxembourg	Ministry for National Education and Vocational Training, Department for vocational training		
Malta	Malta Qualifications Authority	To be appointed	
The Netherlands	National Leonardo agency	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science	CINOP International Agency
Slovenia	National Institute for Vocational Education and Training of Slovenia		
Switzerland	The Foundation for Confederal Collaboration and Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology are following ECVET developments		
Turkey	Education Research and Development Unit/Vocational and Technical Education Research and Development Centre	Vocational Qualifications Authority	To be appointed
UK / England	Ecctis Limited (since 2010)	Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)/Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA)	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)
UK / Northern Ireland	Council for the Curriculum Examinations & Assessment (since July 2011)	Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA)	Department for Employment and Learning
UK / Scotland	SCQF Partnership		Scottish VQ Board
UK / Wales	Credit & Qualifications Framework for Wales	Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru (Welsh Assembly Government)	

Source: Interviews with ECVET Users Group (May-September 2011), Cedefop virtual community; EQAVET (2011).



## 2.4. Information on ECVET

There are already many activities to inform Member State stakeholders about ECVET. In nine countries, in line with the state of play on ECVET preparation, many activities are already defined but will take place in 2012. Currently, information is directed to Ministries and VET main stakeholders in the context of the Copenhagen working groups or inter-institutional groups working on education and training (see Table 4). The most active marketers of ECVET are found in Belgium/Wallonia, Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Austria, Slovenia and Finland. In Germany, seminars and workshops are organised by the BIBB, the national agency and the ECVET national coordination point addressing (VET) professional organisations, VET providers and ministries. ECVET specific events (national conferences, peer-learning seminars, and information sessions) are being held in 13 different countries.

Information is complemented by training sessions in Belgium/Wallonia, Luxembourg, Romania and Finland. For instance in Belgium/Wallonia, starting in 2011, information on the national ECVET initiative (CPU) will be part of regular training for teaching staff at schools: trainers have already received their training to be operational for the school year starting 2011. In Romania the training sessions are also part of the ECVET national project. The need for training might also explain the increasing demand to the European ECVET team (part of European ECVET governance) for customised seminars addressing specific target groups (wider public, education and training, qualification designers, ECVET promoters) in national or European contexts. Increasingly, information on ECVET will become part of the tasks of the national coordination points, as in Greece and Sweden.

ECVET information uses standard communications such as printed and electronic media. Publications already existing or foreseen include short leaflets in several languages, websites, articles in professional journals and reviews. Many countries envisage producing handbooks and guides for VET providers and stakeholders in European mobility projects. A selection of items from the European ECVET questions and answers <sup>(1)</sup> will be published in national languages depending on the resources for translation; this is an activity undertaken at national level.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Available from Internet:  
[http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/files/ECVET\\_QUESTION\\_ANSWERS\\_Feb\\_2011\\_en\(download\\_ID\\_17648\).pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/files/ECVET_QUESTION_ANSWERS_Feb_2011_en(download_ID_17648).pdf) [ cited 15.12.2011].

The developments or adaptations of templates (for instance, memorandum of understanding, learning agreements, transcripts) are of less interest but some activities are planned or in place in 15 countries. The most often quoted template is the memorandum of understanding, followed by the individual transcript of records. The interviewees expected proposals from ECVET projects and envisaged extension of proposals by the first generation of ECVET centralised projects such as FINECVET, Recomfor, or Valogreg. Two interviewees expected the national agencies' thematic networks to elaborate such templates.

## CHAPTER 3

# ECVET as part of VET modernisation

### 3.1. Continuing VET reform

In most systems, ECVET is integrated in reforms which started in parallel with, or even before, the ECVET European Recommendation. This renders it difficult, in some cases, to identify progress made, although respondents see the work done on renewal of occupational and educational standards or qualifications as very positive and supportive. There follows a brief presentation of the reforms under way, based on interviews and complementary sources.

Table 6. **Overview of major initiatives and projects**

Countries	Initiatives/projects working title	Status	Details
Austria	Implementation of ECVET for mobility (2009-..)	Current	Studies include development of ECVET guide, flyer, internet documentation, guideline for memorandum of understanding
	Learning outcomes based educational standards ( <i>Lernergebnisorientierte Lehrpläne</i> )	Current	Revision of 800 vocational standards ( <i>Berufsbilder</i> )
Belgium / Flanders	No title available 2011	Preparatory phase	Analysis of ECVET European projects, reading European documentation, organisation of peer learning activity focused on existing credit systems to see how they work and to evaluate their compatibility with ECVET
Belgium / Wallonia	Project Practical inter-regional tools for ECVET (OPIR) 2009-11  Project Unit-based qualifications (CPU) 2011-14	Current	European ECVET centralised projects conceived as part of the reform. Concrete deliverables: review of five qualifications by June 2011; five qualifications by December 2011; new decree on training by September 2011, second new decree by February 2012
Bulgaria	National programme for an integrated system for credit transfer in HE and VET part of national lifelong learning strategy 2008-13	Current	Part of new government programme since 2009

Countries	Initiatives/projects working title	Status	Details
Cyprus	Development of competence-based vocational qualifications system (2006-13; ESF project) Project focusing on ECVET is planned (including peer learning activity)	Pending decision	Project foreseen under the Human Resource Development Authority
Czech Republic	A proposal for ECVET implementation has been put to the Ministry	Pending decision	The proposal is based on analysis and consultations, existing proposals for units and modules in VET qualifications elaborated by field expert groups
Germany	DECVET 2007-12	Current	Pilot projects for systematic testing of a credit point system aimed at measurement, transfer and recognition of learning outcomes/competences between single fields of VET. It aims to identify potential for recognition and increase permeability within VET and to VET
Denmark	A proposal for ECVET implementation has been put to the Ministry of Education	Pending decision	A plan for action has been set up and is awaiting decision by the Ministry of Education. The plan for action includes writing guidelines on credits, credit points, and the most important qualifications in learning outcomes. It also includes testing and consulting with trade committees
Estonia	Project VET curricula development 2005-08  Project Modernising the content of VET 2007-13  National programme Developing of VET	Current	Curriculum reform and VET modernisation progressed along two major ESF projects since 2005. The ESF programme Modernising the content of VET (2007-13). The revision of curricula following a modularised approach is under way, unit-based qualifications are already in place
Finland	FINECVET 2004-11  Finnish Government's Plan for Education and Research 2007-12	Current	FINECVET includes testing ECVET and piloting mobility to identify how ECVET fits with the Finnish VET system. In its last phase FINECVET focuses on transnational mobility, the ECVET process and documentation of learning outcomes. There is a problem with recognition and difficulty in finding a way of avoiding double assessment
France	MENECVET 2011-13	Current	Analysis of conditions for ECVET implementation at EQF level 4, expected impacts in writing learning outcomes for vocational qualifications, and orientations for mobility using ECVET, opportunity for quality improvement in standards writing and assessment

Countries	Initiatives/projects working title	Status	Details
Greece	No title available	Pending decision	As part of the national project of reform of initial VET curricula
Hungary	Concepts for general education act	Current	Developing the existing modularised, learning outcomes-based NQF
Ireland	No title available	Preparatory phase	Possibility to set up a project with Northern Ireland on existing programmes which could be completed by recognition (ex. Agriculture)
Italy	Project Model of Transferability of Learning Outcome units among different ECVET systems (MOTO) (2009-11) Project COmpetency and Learning Outcomes Recognition for migrants (COLOR) (2011-14)	Current	No national initiative but several relevant Leonardo funded projects
Lithuania	National project Formation of qualification and development of modular VET system 2009-13	Current	ECVET embedded in that project. Learning outcomes approach already developed; focus on units, need for partial qualifications and how to introduce credit system. Conceptual work and practical testing
Luxembourg	Modernisation of IVET and CVET until 2013  European centralised project VaLOGReg 2008-11	Current	Modernisation of IVET and CVET towards a modular and competence-based structure. This contains 119 IVET programmes
Latvia	European project with 12 expert committees 2010-13	Current	Analysis over 12 branches of basic qualifications and related occupational standards in knowledge and competences, and of possibilities to allocate credit points, analysis of equivalences between qualifications
Malta	European project: VET credit conversion system 2011-14	Current	Develop and test a conversion system on basis of 30 qualifications at different EQF levels
The Netherlands	Small-scale ECVET pilot project in the healthcare sector.	Preparatory phase	The healthcare sector will face labour market shortages in the near future. Units of learning outcomes, ECVET credit points and more flexible learning pathways could help alleviate this problem. The method will be analysed for transfer to other sectors
Poland	Elaboration of terms of reference for the implementation of the National Qualification Framework and the National Qualification	Current	Follows on a ESF project for the development of qualifications inventory (2008-10)

Countries	Initiatives/projects working title	Status	Details
	Register for lifelong learning 2010-13		
Romania	Project on curriculum for IVET 2010-13	Current	ECVET is embedded in project for review and revision of qualifications standards and curricula in VET at EQF level 3 and 4
Slovenia	Slovenian development strategy started in 2005  Reform of curricula 2006-10	Current	The reform of curricula and introduction of a credit point system ended in 2010. Now two projects are running: one to evaluate the role of credit points, the second one focuses on mobility in the automobile sector
Slovakia	No title available 2012-14	Planned	For the time being, pilot project on description of qualification and assessment standards in small entrepreneurship. This includes 57 qualifications which will be described following ECVET criteria
Turkey	2005: development of modular curricula  Lifelong learning strategy paper (2009-13)  Project Railway Operation in ECVET – RAILVET 2010-12	Current (2005-13)	Since 2005 the MoNE has undertaken modular curricula and decided to pilot crediting in line with ECVET. In 2006 the Vocational Qualifications Authority was established. The lifelong learning strategy paper (2009-13) lists under priority 15 (Improving international Cooperation and Mobility) the development of crediting of formal, non-formal and informal learning using international credit transfer systems.
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	National Programme for development of education 2005-15	Current	

Source: Interviews with ECVET Users Group (May-September 2011); 2010, ReferNet reports.

It is not possible to establish direct relationships between setting up government priorities, major initiatives and projects and the level of progress towards ECVET implementation. Developing the learning outcomes approach, setting up modules/units of learning outcomes, validation procedures and – most important, according to the Estonia report (Cedefop ReferNet Estonia, 2010) – developing a new education and learning culture should have a leverage effect on ECVET implementation. This is why the initiatives and projects listed in Table 6 are to be considered with the preparatory activities for ECVET implementation. In Italy, for instance, most of the recent reforms in higher education and VET include curricula design in learning outcomes and units of

learning outcomes. In countries such as Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Germany and Turkey, governments have included in their lifelong learning strategies the issue of transfer, recognition, and learning outcomes. These issues are also in the newest national reform programmes of most European countries (see [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm)).

ECVET initiatives in Belgium/Wallonia, Germany and Finland have been presented in detail in the Cedefop 2010 monitoring (Cedefop, 2010a). As in many systems, Belgium/Wallonia decided to seize the opportunity of ECVET implementation to address the needs of practitioners, the labour market, the providers and further stakeholders to improve its VET system. The initiative includes the revision of 256 existing standards (NRP/BE, 2011; interview). In Finland, FINECVET is entering its third phase; this will end in December 2011. The final phase focuses on the ECVET process, documentation and quality assurance and aims to make it understandable, in particular for teachers (Finecvet, 2011). In Germany, the DECVET initiative will end in March 2012 and its evaluation results will be available after June 2012 (Bergzog et al., 2010).

#### **Box 5. Modernising VET and preparing for ECVET in Bulgaria**

Bulgarian VET reform started with improvement of VET standards, considered pivotal for national ECVET implementation. VET standards for the acquisition of vocational qualifications have been outcome oriented since 2007. In 2011 a new revised model of a VET-standard based on ECVET principles was set out through revision of existing VET-standards from different vocational areas. The model was created using project results and discussed with social partners. It contains a set of units, each including learning outcomes described in knowledge, skills and competence, appointed NQF/EQF level and quality assurance assessment criteria. The new model will be applied for 20 pilot professions and will be the basis for new modular framework training curricula and modular training programmes for all qualifications in the IVET and CVET systems. It will widen validation of prior learning. ECVET is implemented within the national lifelong learning strategy 2008-13 which will lead to an integrated system for credit transfer in higher education and VET by 2013.

In 2010 an inter-institutional working group was set up in the National Agency for VET (NAVET) for upgrading the framework for elaboration of the VET standards according to ECVET. Afterwards the group started on further activities such as analysing different projects on ECVET implementation, discussing legislative amendments in the VET Act (with respect to ECVET), guidelines and handbooks for VET standards developers (using the units of learning outcomes approach), discussion of ECVET implementation in Bulgaria, proposals and statements to be discussed by the NAVET management board.

*Source* Interview with ECVET Users Group (May-September 2011); Nikolova (2010).

### Box 6. **Modernising VET and preparing for ECVET in Estonia**

In 2007, the Ministry of Education and Research set on its agenda the development of a holistic, flexible and sustainable competence-based qualifications system, which supports lifelong learning and mobility and enhances the competitiveness of society. The decision was backed by a master plan and legislation: the revised Professions Act (PA) was adopted in May 2008.

The following major conceptual and cultural changes are under way:

- Systematic shift towards learning outcomes based curriculum development in all sectors of formal education (general, vocational, higher and adult education);
- Development of competence (learning outcomes) based professional standards, which can serve as an input for curriculum development, and as standard for assessment, valuation and certification of personal competences;
- Modularised approach to professional standards and curriculum development, complemented by rules and procedures for modularised assessment, valuation and certification of qualifications and partial qualifications;
- Unit based credit system will be implemented and ECVET will be incorporated into the modules, in parallel with renewing qualification standards, where different skills and competences will be expressed through ECVET;
- Gradually widening valuation of prior learning.

Curriculum reform and innovative approaches to teaching and assessment have been organised along projects such as the VET curricula development ESF project (2005-8) and the Modernising the content of VET ESF-project (2007-13). The national development plan for education and training (2009-13) inscribes ECVET under the activity 'updating national curricula corresponding to professional standards'. By 2013, under the lead of the Ministry of Education and Research, National Examinations and Qualifications Centre (NEQC), Qualification Authority, legislation should provide for implementing ECVET and learning outcomes (acquired skills and competence) should be comparable at the international level. This goes along with preparing guidance materials (including on validation and ECVET) by the NEQC.

*Source:* Interview with ECVET Users Group (May-September 2011); Cedefop ReferNet Estonia (2010), Rekkor (2011); Estonian Ministry of Education and Research (2009)

### 3.2. **European projects**

By 2010 some countries were already benefiting from ECVET European projects while developing a national approach. This was the case in Belgium/Wallonia which was carrying out the testing of its pilot scheme for unit-based qualifications at regional and European levels. Two actions are meanwhile being undertaken in parallel: from the academic year 2010/11, the regional Minister for Compulsory Education and Social Mobility started a regional pilot scheme in secondary education; and the CPU-Europe project supports the experimental implementation of ECVET.



In 2011 eight European centralised projects (Table 7) were selected following a call for grants to support national projects to test and develop ECVET (European Commission, 2010). For some countries, such as France and Malta, these projects are the first step of a national strategy for ECVET. In the case of Italy or Germany, they complete the efforts of many different projects and initiatives opening up to sectoral perspectives (metals technology and health care for the projects led by German organisations) or to specific target groups reflecting national priorities for VET policy, as in the case of Italy.

Table 7. **European centralised projects for developing ECVET in national contexts**

Project	Description	
C.O.L.O.R. Competency and Learning Outcomes Recognition for migrants	Objectives: validation and recognition of learning outcomes for access of migrants to labour market	Two sectors: healthcare and construction 11 qualifications (based on both national and regional standards) at EQF level 3
	Italy (Leader)	Partner countries: Malta, Romania, UK-Scotland
C.P.U. certification per Units	Objectives: find a solution to drop-outs and failures; develop a culture of 'recognition of learning'; attract young people to VET by developing and individualising training pathways; propose a qualification structure compatible with education objectives and lifelong learning	Three sectors: motor vehicles, hospitality/catering, and beauty therapy Five qualifications
	Belgium Francophone (Leader)	Partner countries: Spain, France, Romania
EASYMetal European Credit System for Basic Vocational Qualifications in the Metal Industry	Objectives: mobility between training schemes and sub-schemes at the interface between preparation for vocational training and dual vocational training in the German vocational training system by creating transparency and recognition of partial qualifications	Sector: metals technology (e.g. plant mechanic, industrial mechanic, tools mechanic, metal worker).
	Germany (leader)	Partner countries: Denmark, Austria Turkey
ESyCQ European Credit System for Commercial Qualifications	Objectives: ECVET for a selected area of vocational training and all forms of learning (formal, non-formal, informal)	Six certified qualifications/professions from commerce and IT training.
	Germany (leader)	Partner countries: France, Austria
I CARE Improving Mobility and Career Paths for Personal Care and Social Workers	Objectives: develop a proposal for ECVET as tool for recognition of learning outcomes, competences and qualifications of mobile personal care and social workers in Europe.	Personal care and social work
	Italy (leader)	Partner countries: Germany, Poland, Romania

Project	Description	
2get1care Lifelong Learning and Interprofessionality in Health Care Professions	Objectives: test ECVET in health care professions in the German Region of North-Rhine Westphalia (Germany); develop the transferability of units of learning outcomes across professions and countries	Sector: healthcare Professions: speech therapy; occupational therapy; physiotherapy; geriatric care; further education of trainers.
	Germany (leader)	Partner countries: Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria
MENEVET Testing and developing ECVET in national education	Objectives: testing and developing ECVET for mobility within a qualification-type under the remit of the French Ministry of National Education (MNE)	Type of qualification: Vocational Baccalaureate Professions: reception service; secretarial; accounting; health and social work; electrical engineering; building technician Level NQF IV, EQF 4
	France (leader)	Partner countries: Belgium, Germany, Spain
VET-CCS VET Credit Conversion System	Objectives: convert all national VET qualifications into ECVET as part of the Malta Qualifications Framework	A mix of qualifications (engineering, art and design, agribusiness, tourism, basic skills and trade training, ICT) MQF level 1-5
	Malta (leader)	Partner countries: Italy, Romania, Slovenia

Source: EACEA (2010).

The 2010 monitoring report (Cedefop, 2010a) gave insight into the methodologies of some projects but also raised questions on the transfer of results from projects to national policy. The European ADAM database <sup>(2)</sup> registers 135 ECVET-related projects, including the European centralised projects. During the 2011 interviews it became obvious that the members of the ECVET Users Group are aware of only some of the projects in which their country is participating; information is rarely addressed to them directly. Representatives of 22 VET systems commented on the transfer of results from projects to national decision-makers. They underlined the need to improve dissemination but also expressed some hesitations on the relevance of project results to national contexts. Projects are considered mostly relevant as a contribution to setting up strategies for ECVET implementation, a process-orientation, rather than technical solutions. Interviewees expressed interest in issues such as involvement of stakeholders, setting up agreements (memorandum of understanding, learning agreement), and developing networks for mobility. Some used projects results and proposals when formulating their proposals for national ECVET strategies (in the Czech Republic for instance),

<sup>(2)</sup> <http://www.adam-europe.eu/adam/thematicgroup/ECVET> [cited 15.12.2011].

preparing for implementation at national level (in Luxembourg and Romania), or intend to use them to organise peer learning activities (in Belgium/Flanders, Cyprus and Sweden).

According to the interviewees, the project proposals on how to write learning outcomes or to build units are in need of further elaboration and analysis before entering national education and training systems. Some interviewees underlined that projects have very diverse proposals which are not evaluated coherently for transfer and so are difficult to use. Even if dissemination of project results is established, transparency neither guarantees clarity nor the usefulness of these results.

Projects raise awareness of potential ECVET implementation pathways and of how to develop methodologies and tools addressing specific aspects of it. They also support comparative understanding, that is to say the need to understand and trust foreign VET systems. Here are the first two most quoted benefits. Proceeding with ECVET implies involving all stakeholders, especially VET providers (Austria), policy-makers (Italy, Finland, Sweden), or enterprises (Romania); it also requires information activities at local, regional and national level (Bulgaria) and the need to proceed in a reflected and evidence-based manner (Bulgaria, Estonia) including considering the cost/benefit balance (Germany). A strong general message is that real understanding of ECVET comes from piloting it in real mobility context (Italy, Hungary and Finland). While projects allow understanding that the comparative approach to VET systems is part of ECVET implementation, further efforts are needed to grasp differences between these systems (for instance on the issues of assessment, unit-building, VET provisions, curricula, qualifications). This understanding is required to develop a quality assured approach to differences in VET and is part of the alignment of qualifications and units in developing mobility.

Results from projects will be discussed in national or regional ECVET events. The interviews illustrate the following ways of transferring results and proposals from the projects to national or regional decision-makers:

- monitoring of project development. This can take place by contracting experts (external to projects) to carry out evaluation of projects and progress made at European level, and feed into peer learning activities. Alternatively, in some countries, the competent bodies directly monitor the progress of projects and also participate in European ECVET events;
- involvement of decision-makers and competent bodies in projects, for instance at of steering committee level. In a few cases, the competent bodies are coordinating the ECVET or ECVET-related initiatives;

- discussion of project progress and results within the different Copenhagen process or lifelong learning working groups; invitations to project leaders to meetings with competent bodies and ministries;
  - dissemination activities by national agencies in charge of lifelong learning programmes.
- In Italy, these activities are led by a single organisation (Box 7).

**Box 7. Informing stakeholders on ECVET in Italy**

Projects are evaluated within the standard and common procedures of the lifelong learning programmes.

The Italian National Agency carries out various activities to disseminate projects to project participants, the wider public and decision-makers such as

- organisation of events involving national authorities, stakeholders, and practitioners;
- show-case of good practices on the National Agency's website;
- thematic analyses and publications;
- thematic networking with other NAs (NetECVET).

*Source:* Interview with ECVET Users Group

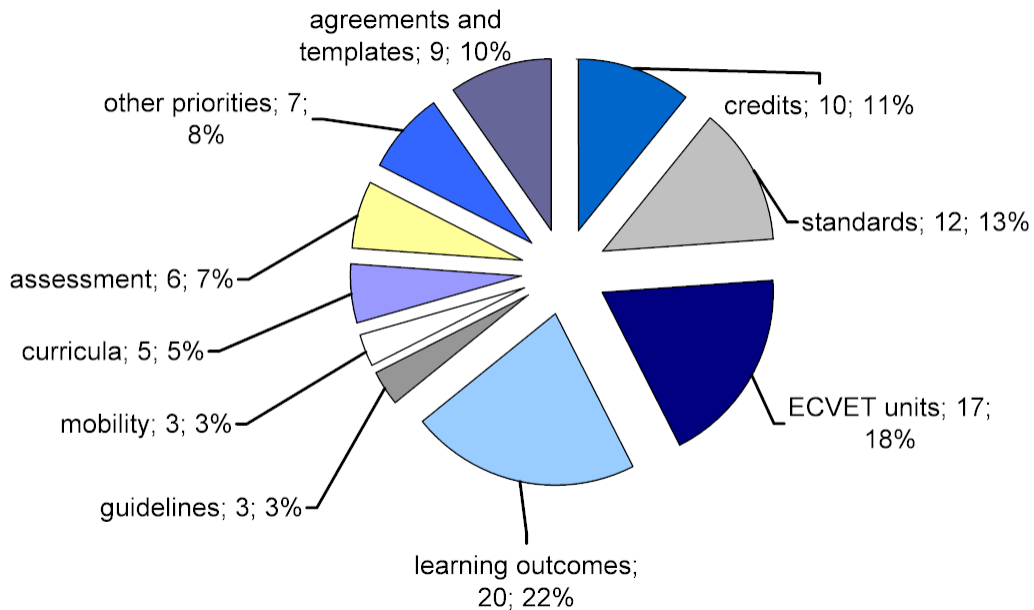
## CHAPTER 4

# Preparing for ECVET

### 4.1. The conceptual roadmap: from qualifications to credits

In recent years the learning outcomes approach has spread as an underlying concept to education and training. Numerous initiatives and projects across Europe show the predominance of learning outcomes in the agendas of education and training modernisation. Interviews with stakeholders in Europe indicate that the time has come to develop an ECVET specific agenda to learning outcomes and mobility. Progress with the learning outcomes approach, as demonstrated by the agreements on the level descriptors of the national qualifications frameworks (Cedefop, 2011), builds a sound basis for ECVET. However to progress, the learning outcomes approach has to move into qualifications standards, education standards, assessment and recognition/validation. The questionnaire used for this monitoring set the following question: Which are the priority elements of the ECVET implementation in your country? Interviews suggested different elements for starting ECVET implementation (Figure 2): in decreasing order, these are learning outcomes (20 responses), ECVET units (17 responses), standards (12 responses), credits (10 responses) followed by elements linked to mobility management (agreements and templates), assessment and evaluation, and curricula and teaching environment.

The first ECVET component to be tackled is learning outcomes and standards. This implies developing a shared understanding of what 'learning outcomes' means, how the approach impacts on education and training systems, and how learning outcomes are developed and written. Such questions are of great concern to the interviewees as well as the ECVET projects. Impacts range from a change in 'mentality' or 'mindset' to very concrete changes to school and workplace-based learning arrangements, teaching provisions and the process from evaluation/assessment to recognition/validation. While it seems to be agreed that learning outcomes reflect professional standards, concerns were voiced on creating and updating such standards, including professional, occupational and educational standards. This explains why both the learning outcomes and standards are such a prominent task within education and training modernisation projects and initiatives (Table 6).

Figure 2. **Priorities for ECVET implementation (multiple replies, N=92)**

Source: Interviews with ECVET Users Group (May-September 2011)

When these issues are settled, the interviewees look to the second component, i.e. the ECVET units. One of the difficulties in understanding unitisation and modularisation is terminology. Both terms might be used as synonymous and, in many cases, translation brings additional confusion. The unitisation of qualifications has gained momentum with the development of credit arrangements based on learning outcomes and with the progress made in recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, illustrated in Boxes 8 and 9. Within ECVET a unit is a component of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence that can be assessed and validated. The respondents identified as tasks link to units: defining and building of units, reflecting on the links between modules and units, and creating guidelines and framework conditions for developing ECVET units. The interviews revealed that the issue of ECVET units has to be considered from the 'insider' viewpoint. This could lead, for instance, to developing guidelines for ECVET unit design. It is also an issue to be explained to the wider public with customised guidelines and guidance to users, including templates. The interviewees indicated that in general, developing templates is not considered as high priority: much is expected on that issue from the European projects and their coordinated supervision. Further technical aspects of the ECVET process, such as the award of credits and allocation of credit points, are on the 'to do' list of many ECVET

national initiatives and working groups, but are considered as not such a priority at this stage of ECVET development.

#### Box 8. **Modularisation in Lithuania**

In Lithuania, ECVET is linked to the VET reform towards modularisation of curriculum and embedded in the 'practical VET resources development programme' (2007-13). The 2007 revision of the 1997 Law on vocational education introduced a modularised structure of qualifications whereby content is regulated by individual guidelines for higher education study fields and professional standards. According to the Law, a module in vocational training is a self-contained teaching and learning unit, leading from a defined input level of the learner to a competence increase planned in advance. Modularisation has been taken forward to introduce more flexibility and greater opportunities for lifelong learning; it also links to the expected development of validation of non-formal and informal learning in VET. Modularisation is also conceived as part of creating better conditions for learning mobility and an overall internationalisation of studies.

The modularised approach has been tested in a European project for the trade of decorator/builder (funded by Leonardo da Vinci lifelong learning programme). For Lithuania the testing of modularisation concerns more than 50% of the VET providers: this trade is offered by 40 of the 70 VET institutions. This project took as a starting point the Scottish modular VET to develop a European modular training programme for decorator/builder with the associated credit system.

*Source:* Vilnius Builder Training Centre et al. (2010); Cedefop ReferNET Lithuania (2011).

#### Box 9. **Units and modules in Luxembourg**

The 2008 Law for reforming VET focuses on reorienting IVET towards a modular and competence-oriented structure. The changes setting up requirements for ECVET and EQF/NQF implementation will run in the period 2009-13. The reform concerns 119 initial VET programmes over three qualification levels. All vocational training is structured into learning units which can be accumulated.

The reform includes dividing IVET programmes into components (units and modules). It is new to the Luxembourg VET system that units correspond to assessable partial qualifications and are further structured into modules. Units run from six to maximum twelve months; the model foresees six units corresponding to a full qualification.

The development from qualification to curricula is based on a four step approach: the definition of professional profile (*Berufsprofil*) includes working areas/domains, assignments and tasks; the development of training profiles (*Ausbildungsprofil*) to which competences are associated (competences are defined following a 2008 law as encompassing knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to master one profession or trade; they are also broken down into cognitive competence, social competence, self competence); the training profiles are structured into framework curricula (*Rahmenlehrpläne*) which includes units or modules; the framework curricula build the basis for developing assessment and curricula.

*Source:* Euler and Frank (2011); Ministère de l'Education nationale et de la formation professionnelle (2011).

The roadmap for ECVET implementation includes different elements. Respondents indicated that it includes conceptual work (on learning outcomes, units of learning outcomes, qualifications, transfer, accumulation, and assessment) and political and explanatory work. As exemplified in the UK (Table 8), defining ECVET implementation strategy includes the need to reflect on which stakeholders are engaged on which tasks. This mapping exercise has been realised in the context of a preparatory analysis to defining the UK approach to ECVET.

**Table 8. Activities currently undertaken by stakeholders in the UK qualifications systems**

Activities	Responsible stakeholder
Define the qualifications and develop qualification structure	Regulator, colleges, sector skills councils, awarding bodies
Define each unit	Awarding bodies, colleges, approved VET providers
Define the credit points	Awarding bodies, colleges, approved VET providers
Progressive validation of the learning outcomes	Awarding bodies, sector skills councils, approved VET providers
Accumulation and transfer of credit for the units achieved	Awarding bodies, colleges, approved VET providers
Transfer of the learning outcomes	Quality assurance systems, transparency between awarding body and approved providers
Transparency and mutual trust between the partners	Regulators, awarding bodies, VET providers
The individual ECVET learning agreement	Host and receiving institutions and the learner
The memorandum of understanding	At project, regional or national level depending on the nature of the mobility.

*Source:* Adapted from McNeill and Faurshou (2010).

The table above illustrates the activities undertaken in the UK VET qualifications systems. ECVET mirrors what is already in place for the UK, with the exception of the last two activities, which are ECVET-specific.

## 4.2. The legal aspects

Some 20 of the 45 interviewees considered that existing legislation accommodates fairly well with ECVET. The legislation has mostly been updated in recent years; it includes elements which would support ECVET



implementation, such as the learning outcomes approach, possibilities for transfer and recognition of learning outcomes achieved abroad, and modularisation or unitisation of qualifications or programmes (see Table 9). There is broad argument on allowing time for those regulatory changes to shape the reality. In Romania, for instance, the new law on education, in place since January 2011, mentions the implementation of a credit system comparable to ECVET: now work is under way on elaborating methodologies for ECVET implementation. For countries having recently reviewed their education and training legislation, changes implied by ECVET are an issue of methodology rather than regulation, as in France.

Five interviewees reported that ECVET working groups and initiatives are setting out proposals for amending existing legislation or for new regulations; these aim to introduce elements supportive of ECVET (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Malta and Finland). The acts or regulatory pieces linked to ECVET would come into force in 2012 or 2013. In Estonia, the new VET law went to the Estonian Parliament in September 2011, incorporating an Estonian credit point system following ECVET principles. In some cases ECVET is not the trigger for changing the legislation, or even included in the changes, but the working groups are ensuring that negotiations between stakeholders on the legislation open opportunities for ECVET implementation. Legislative changes might concern a wide range of issues, illustrated by Finland. Although well advanced in preparing for ECVET implementation, introducing ECVET implies modifying the VET Act, the Act on financial aid for students, the vocational adult education Act and the Decree on recognition of prior learning. Modifying the legislative context might be an opportunity for linking ECVET with other European tools such as validation or national qualifications frameworks. Following the current piloting by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education, Youth and Science of the new system for validation, the amendments to the VET Act envisage that validation will be tightly linked to both the NQF and the credit system. The system is scheduled to be put in practice by 2013 (Nikolova, 2010).

Six interviewees did not consider changes in legislation as relevant at the moment; this can be linked to decisions on ECVET being pending.

Table 9. Relating legislation to ECVET

System	Details
Austria	ECVET links well with existing legislation
Belgium/Wallonia	Legislation has been updated on 14 June 2011 to accommodate VET reform (learning outcomes, unitisation)
Czech Republic	Implementation of ECVET will not require changes in existing legislation
Germany	VET law (2005) foresees international learning mobility and could accommodate ECVET
Denmark	VET Act already includes learning outcomes and modules
France	Existing legislation could support ECVET
Greece	The Law 3879/21-09-2010 on lifelong learning refers (article 11) to the development of transfer credit system for VET and to establishing the national organisation for the certification of qualifications controlling it; it also includes NQF
Hungary	ECVET is expected to be part of the legislation on NQF
Italy	Most recent reforms in VET introduced the learning outcomes and unit-based approach to curricula. International learning mobility is already foreseen by law for all students of professional and technical schools
Liechtenstein	The VET law and regulations on international mobility are sufficient
Lithuania	The 2007 VET law offers possibilities for modules and credits, for competence-based units. An act set up the structure of professional standards at the end of 2009. It might be necessary to prepare legislation which might follow on the concept of modular VET system
Luxembourg	The new law passed in 2008 comes into implementation with the school year 2010
Poland	The new school law of 19 August 2011 (passed on 7 September 2011, to enter into force in September 2012), is thematically related to ECVET (qualifications with units of learning outcomes)
Romania	New Law on national education entered into force in February 2011. It mentions the implementation of transferable credit system, comparable to ECVET. Following this legislation, work is under way on methodologies for ECVET implementation (qualifications, allocation of points, etc.).
Slovenia	The Vocational Education Act (2006) sets out the credit-based assessment of various forms of education. It also links to ECVET, EQF, Europass and EQAVET. The 2007 National Vocational Qualifications Act envisages modular credit-based assessment and a methodology for recognising non-formal and informal learning according to ECVET
Slovak Republic	The lifelong learning act was passed in 2008 and could accommodate ECVET
Turkey	Lifelong learning strategy document, regulations of the vocational qualification authority and vocational and technical education regulations are providing a suitable basis for ECVET implementation
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	The Law on VET and the concept for postsecondary education are the base for policy decision for ECVET development in postsecondary education

### 4.3. Credit systems and credit arrangements

The VET systems reviewed can be split into three groups: those with credit systems or credit arrangements; those with no credit systems or credit arrangements but proximity to ECVET (learning outcomes approach to education and training, units or modules, etc.); and systems without such mechanisms. The Cedefop 2010 ECVET monitoring (Cedefop, 2010a) identified a high level of ECVET readiness for most VET systems. The 2011 review of initiatives and projects under way in VET systems for the last decade confirm this result.

This section includes validation based on the updated European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning in Table 10. Current evidence of the effect of credit arrangements on validation procedures is generally weak (Hawley et al., 2010). Validation is contextual to ECVET since learning experiences are validated as part of credits. Credit systems and validation reinforce each other in education and training systems. Introduction of units and unit-based assessments, as in credit arrangements, supports the award of partial qualifications through the validation of non-formal and informal learning; credits, modules or units enable the development of validation mechanisms.

The interviews revealed a new issue of major concern: the question of compatibility, of choice between existing credit systems/arrangements and ECVET, is a growing preoccupation. The term 'credit arrangements' is used to indicate solutions to support accumulation, transfer, validation, and recognition of credits in general; the term 'credit systems' has a more 'systemic' dimension, with rules to accumulate, validate and recognise credit. These rules are embedded (a priori) in qualification design; they state, for instance, that qualifications are to be unit-based. The distinction between credit system and credit arrangement is slightly adapted from Cedefop (2010b). Past and recently reviewed legal arrangements contain provisions for transfer, validating and crediting learning outcomes. Some education and training systems have credit arrangements and credit systems for qualifications in IVET, CVET and HE. This influences how implementation of ECVET is envisaged. Countries already operating credit systems or credit arrangements are listed in Table 10; the reflection on ECVET varies. These countries are viewing ECVET in comparison to what they have already in place and their perception and assessment of its comparative advantage will be a determinant of ECVET implementation. Their questioning on ECVET is set in terms of compatibility, conversion or even metrics (value in points, use of the workload or notional time concepts). It might also lead to operating two credit systems in parallel, as already exists in some national

contexts: ECVET for mobility and an ECVET-compatible credit system for progression and permeability.

These considerations offer a parallel to the relationship between ECVET and ECTS. 'Although ECTS has been part of the Bologna Process since 1999, it is still not fully implemented across all the countries. ECTS credits are widely used for both credit accumulation and transfer, but there are two main challenges in fully implementing ECTS: measuring credits in terms of student workload and linking them with learning outcomes' (Rauhvargers et al., 2009, p. 14). The level of use of ECTS differs, whether for transfer, accumulation or recognition of prior learning. Considering the development of ECTS over time could help in reflecting on ECVET and confirm some of the results of the 2011 ECVET monitoring. Nowadays ECTS is used as part of curricular design but it was developed to aid recognition of study periods abroad: countries using credits before Bologna have reviewed or adapted their national credit systems to be compatible with ECTS. According to Sursock and Smidt (2010), 10% of the surveyed higher education institutions still use a credit transfer system which is not ECTS for Bachelor and Master programmes. England, Wales and Northern Ireland run a national credit system compatible with ECTS for accumulation and transfer at national level, and ECTS is only used for international student exchange. Compatibility is also given between the Irish credit system for higher education and ECTS. Except for those countries, all European Member States have introduced ECTS in their higher education systems.

Table 10. **Overview of existing credit systems by country**

Country	Education and training sector (besides ECTS)	ECVET-readiness in terms of learning outcomes approach in VET, unitisation/modularisation	Level of development of validation
Belgium/Wallonia	Credit system in adult education for social advancement	All those issues are tackled in the CPU project	Medium-low
Germany	No credit system	In development: competence-based qualifications	Medium-high
Denmark	Credit system in general upper secondary since reform from 2005	Yes	Medium-high
Estonia	Legislative proposal for Estonian credit system (tbc)	Yes, unit-based qualifications and competence-based occupational standards	Medium-low
Spain	No credit system	Accumulable and accreditable learning expressed in learning outcomes; modularised system	Medium-high

Country	Education and training sector (besides ECTS)	ECVET-readiness in terms of learning outcomes approach in VET, unitisation/modularisation	Level of development of validation
Finland	Credit system in upper secondary VET	In Finland ECVET has been part of the revision of upper secondary VET and national qualifications requirements towards developing individual learning pathways (both national and international). ECVET is bound to be part of the review of competence-based examination, a sector in which there is no credit system yet	High
France	No credit system	Qualifications are unit-based, units consisting of learning outcomes (skills, competences and knowledge), compulsory and assessed training periods in the workplace	High
Hungary	No credit system	Since 2006 development of modularised VET. Mobility within the Hungarian VET system is operating with a modularised learning outcomes-based system	Low
Ireland	The credit for further education and training (Common Awards System 2005) turned into a credit framework in 2008. The national approach to credit (access, transfer, and progression) is part of the Irish qualifications framework.		Medium-low
Italy	No credit system	ECVET has a good compliance with present Italian VET and HE structure	Medium-low
Luxembourg	No credit system	Since 2000 VET reform; meanwhile, implicit credit system which is compatible with ECVET	/
Romania	The January 2011 law foresees a credit system based on ECVET	Methodology for allocation of points still to be elaborated	Medium-high
Sweden	Three credit systems run in parallel: a unit-based credit system for formal education based on learning outcomes, one for upper secondary education and one for post secondary VET		/

Country	Education and training sector (besides ECTS)	ECVET-readiness in terms of learning outcomes approach in VET, unitisation/modularisation	Level of development of validation
Slovenia	Credit system is operating since 2006 (points, transfer). Credit points are allocated to all education programmes, implementation in 90 schools is taking place		Medium-low
Slovak Republic	Accumulation system		Medium-low
UK-England	The qualifications and credit framework (QCF)	see below	Medium-high
UK-Northern Ireland			Medium-high
UK-Wales			Medium-high
UK-Scotland	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, SCQF (1)	The SCQF makes full use of learning outcomes, units and credits across all types of qualifications and learning programmes (1).	Medium-high

‘All of the UK frameworks included in this referencing exercise (of national qualifications frameworks to the EQF) are explicitly based on learning outcomes and credits. In many cases these are assembled through rules of combination to fulfil the outcome for a qualification. Achievement of units and qualifications is recognised by the award of credit with the transfer of that credit being dependent on the rules governing each of the frameworks’ (Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency – QCDA et al., 2010, p. 14). The English VET system is highly compatible with the ECVET principles as outlined in the European Recommendation; as per the regulations for the Qualifications and Credit Framework, English VET qualifications are structured into units with specific learning outcomes (NARIC UK, 2011). The QCF includes all regulated VET qualifications for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNI). All these qualifications are built up from smaller units of learning. Units and qualifications have a credit value and a level.

The needs analysis by ECCTIS Ltd on ECVET in the English VET environment concludes that the English VET structure set-up, which includes modularisation and qualifications broken into units and learning outcomes, is highly favourable to ECVET. In practice, institutions will need solid partnerships with other providers to support overseas placements and successful implementation of ECVET; students will need to engage in placements. Information to students and all stakeholders is needed, as is coordination (NARIC UK, 2011). Since the 2005 reform in Denmark, students in general upper

secondary education can obtain credits for previously completed studies, periods of stay abroad, etc., and be granted admission to subjects at a higher level or exemption from courses when the credit transfer is particularly substantial (Aagaard, 2010).

#### Box 10. **Credit arrangements: the Spanish approach to ECVET**

In Spain, VET is coherent with the ECVET philosophy. The VET system is based on modular learning programmes. All the diplomas from initial VET within the education system are 2 000 hours in duration, both intermediate diplomas (3B ISCED level) and higher level diplomas (5B ISCED and higher) are expressed in learning outcomes and permit acquiring professional competences following established standards in response to production sector needs. All the diplomas support acquiring and improving personal and social competences and exercising active citizenship. The new system for validation of professional competences acquired through professional experience establishes the assessment and partial accreditation of units of competence of professional qualifications (established standards) included in VET diplomas or on certificates of professionalism. The competence units thus accredited can result in the validation or exemption of the corresponding modules included in either the VET diplomas or in the certificates of professionalism. At the moment, the validation procedure is only used for vocational education and training at both levels, intermediate and higher. However, the Ministry of Education is working on the legal framework on validation for university level. The first draft of the royal decree recognises universities' autonomy and states that each university will decide on modules or units to validate, to a maximum of 15%, as well as on the method to be used. Once an official decision on ECVET is reached across government, working groups, including all relevant stakeholders and linking to different advisory bodies, could be set up.

*Source:* Interview with ECVET Users Group (May-September 2011); Alonso (2010).

The Spanish situation is similar to the one in France. The French system (at least as far as the qualifications awarded by the Ministry of Education, are concerned) is consistent with most ECVET principles: qualifications are organised in units, the units consist of learning outcomes (skills, competences and knowledge), and there are compulsory and assessed training periods in the workplace (Trocmé, 2010).

In Slovenia, the credit system for VET aims at ensuring the quality of education and training and providing a systematic description of education programmes and their units. Consequently, it is strongly linked to the establishment of a national qualifications framework which represents further development of the Klasius, a classification of qualifications set up in 2006. Different sources (see Box 11) underline the difficulty of linking credit systems with validation of non-formal and informal learning (and assessment processes) and the fact that no single agreed credit transfer system is in place (Cedefop ReferNet Slovenia, 2010).

**Box 11. Credit systems in Slovenian education and training**

Slovenian education and training operates two credit systems: ECTS in the field of higher education and a credit system for vocational education and training. Established in 2006 by the Vocational Education Act, the credit transfer and accumulation system concerns VET, technical education and post-secondary vocational levels.

The VET credit system is based on learning outcomes (expressed as knowledge, skills and competences in the Klasius. This was introduced in 2006, includes all national programmes and qualifications from primary school to doctorates, and those obtained within formal educational and national vocational qualifications. The credit system is envisaged as modularly structured programmes with credit points based on the introduction of NVQ. VET programmes are modular: each module has relative value compared to the value of the overall qualification. Each unit has a relative value against the whole educational programme, expressed in terms of credit points. The National Council of Experts for Vocational and Technical Education allocates credit points based on a proposal by educational programmes designers. According to the Vocational Education Act, which regulates upper secondary vocational and technical education, 60 credit points are allocated for one year of formal education. Consequently, short-term vocational education (two and a half years) would be allocated 120 credit points, vocational secondary education (three years) 180 to 240 credit points, technical secondary education (four years) 240 to 300 credit points) and vocational-technical secondary education 120 credit points for two years after vocational secondary education. The allocation is based on student workload including learning in school, practical training at work, individual learning work (regular work, literature studies, seminars, project work, and research work), and preparation for exams and other forms of assessment. Students gain credit points by meeting learning requirements set in the educational programme or in units of the programme.

In the period 2008-11, education and training policy in Slovenia had been focusing on creating a more open and flexible system with no 'dead ends' and the recognition of non-formal learning. The reform further pursues the improvement of portability of qualifications and the implementation of the European tools

*Source:* Tašner (2010), Cedefop ReferNet Slovenia (2010).

The implementation of ECVET faces dilemmas linked to its possible deployment fields and objectives. The interviews uncovered a dual view on ECVET: on the one hand, a proposal for a credit system to enable European learning mobility and support validation; on the other hand, a model for a national credit system supporting progression within and to education and training offers, embedded in specific VET contexts. This leads to the following questions as reported by the interviewees. Are both objectives to be reached with the proposal being made in the Recommendation? Are the conclusions drawn by the centralised projects and many Leonardo da Vinci projects for mobility really transferable to permeability cases? The projects deal on a limited scale with the learning outcomes and qualifications design; they already mention that the work invested is huge: how will this be when applied to the whole VET system?



**Box 12. The Irish credit system and ECVET**

The principles of ECVET are adhered to in the national framework of qualifications which is referenced to the EQF. The principles are also adhered to in the design of the new qualifications system for further education and training. A national awards/qualifications system, known as the Common Awards System (CAS) has been introduced for all further education and training awards at national framework of qualifications at Levels 1-6. The CAS is replacing all existing FETAC awards over time: it is a national outcomes-based awards system which provides a coherent architecture for all awards/qualifications in further education and training. The CAS includes the implementation of a Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS), reflecting the typical amount of learner effort and enabling the accumulation of credit over time. Qualifications within CAS are based on learning outcomes, units, accumulation, credit, transparency, clear rules, and quality assurance of providers, programmes and services, and assessment processes; this provides very favourable conditions for the implementation of ECVET.

**Draft comparability between credits within the CAS and ECVET Points**

NFQ Level	CAS Major Award Credit Value*	ECVET Credit**	CAS/ECVET Comparability/Relationship
1	20	60	0.3/1
2	30	60	0.5/1
3	60	60	1/1
4	90	60	1.5/1
5	120	60	2/1
6	120	60	2/1

(\*) One credit from the common awards System is worth ten hours of notional learning time

(\*\*) A one year full time programme of VET learning equates to 60 credits. One ECVET credit equates to 20 hours of notional learner effort.

*Source:* Interview with ECVET Users Group (May-September 2011)

In VET systems with existing credit systems or credit arrangements, the main reflections focus both on conversion towards ECVET for European mobility and a parallel credit system compatible with ECVET principles. This appeals to many interviewees. These reflections might also indicate that preparation for implementing ECVET has reached a new stage: the understanding of ECVET (within the community of persons in charge) is set, the next step is about determining the scope of ECVET implementation, establishing the means in terms of cost/benefit, and developing convincing arguments for the wider range of stakeholders. Using ECVET for European mobility might require some marginal changes on provisions for learning mobility. Developing a genuine credit system might require the revision of educational standards. This also explains why many peer learning activities within projects or emerging national initiatives are discussing existing credit systems within non-higher education and higher education sectors.

## CHAPTER 5

# Challenges ahead

The 2010 ECVET monitoring identified four factors supportive of ECVET implementation: policy decision; legal basis; technical and practical features; evaluation and feed-back loop. Ranking the factors according to the 2011 interviews and document analysis, the essential one is not only the policy decision by itself but its dissemination across education and training. Member States are investing much in this aspect and are organising events, setting up websites, and institutionalising ECVET by creating ECVET national coordination points.

It is important to remember that the European ECVET initiative is in its preparatory phase: Member States are preparing for ECVET implementation to start in 2012 and many are putting forward proposals to their competent bodies for decision. They elaborate their proposals on the basis of existing legal arrangements and lessons gathered during peer-learning activities or by analysing ECVET national and/or European projects and documents. The legal basis and the technical features for ECVET are, in their current shape, highly compatible and supportive in many countries.

This report expands the list of supportive factors needed for cultural change towards the learning outcomes approach. More specific is the concept of valuing learning experiences from abroad and from non-formal and informal contexts for entry to education and training. Valuing learning outcomes implies trust and confidence in processes which are not anchored in one's own qualifications systems.

Interviewees from all countries emphasised that stakeholders need clarity on ECVET related matters and to be able to identify its added value in relation to their concerns. For them, this aspect of ECVET implementation is as important as the work on learning outcomes or unit-based qualifications. Identifying the added value implies different aspects such as finding convincing arguments when addressing different categories of stakeholders or linking the ECVET approach to the needs of VET systems. To get ECVET started, respondents stressed the need for clear statements at ministerial levels and from major stakeholder organisations on its potential and added value.

Preparing for ECVET implementation takes place in the foreground of existing or developing arrangements for validation and, in some cases, for crediting learning experiences. Both elements are gaining importance and

indicate that ECVET is not starting from scratch but is an element embedded into modernising VET. However, it brings new questions on how to articulate existing credit systems and arrangements with ECVET and how to develop the convincing arguments to position it in education and training systems; it stresses the debate on ECVET added value and the necessity to develop visibility in education and training systems. Those elements are potentially reorienting the approach. At national or regional level, the preparatory work focuses on feasibility and impact analysis (on the basis of pilot testing, reflection groups) in the context of continuing change and implementation of reforms started even before the European ECVET Recommendation.

The opportunities for peer learning have multiplied in 2011 as part of European ECVET governance. Altogether 11 European workshops and the European ECVET annual forum took place in 2011, coordinated by the European ECVET Team. Those workshops targeted the members of the ECVET Users Group but also the persons in charge of ECVET within national education and training. Peer learning is also progressing at national levels as indicated in the report. Those activities, and the governance set up in Member States, lead to better understanding of ECVET and improved identification of the relevant issues for the forthcoming implementation.

This monitoring shows that ECVET is multi-purposed, since it addresses European learning mobility, permeability within education and training systems, and portability of qualifications and learning outcomes for entry to education and training. Some of the difficulties encountered by ECVET in its role of fostering European learning mobility are those traditionally quoted as obstacles to mobility: under-aged learners, language proficiency, social and psychological aptitudes and readiness for mobility among others. Developing mobility appears such a huge task that it might question the worthiness of implementing ECVET for European mobility; an argument questioned by many successful mobility experiences discussed, for instance, during the ECVET annual forum. This prompts stakeholders to develop appropriate narratives and reflect on setting up strategies for mobility in VET. This aspect is especially taken on board by the ECVET national coordination points. It is anticipated that the Erasmus for all programme will offer substantial support for national ECVET implementation.

## List of abbreviations

2get1care	Project title – Lifelong learning and interprofessionality in health care professions
ANKOM	Project title – Credit transfer of occupational competences to higher education courses of study <i>Anrechnung beruflicher Kompetenzen auf Hochschulstudiengänge</i>
BE	Belgium
BIBB	Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (Germany) <i>Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung</i>
BMBF	Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Germany) <i>Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung</i>
C.P.U.	Project title – Certification per units
CNCP	National Professional Certification Committee <i>Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle</i>
CO.L.O.R.	Project title – Competency and learning outcomes recognition for migrants
CPI	Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (Slovenia)
CPU-Europe	Project title – Unit-based qualifications
CSQF	Credit systems & qualifications frameworks
CVET	Continuing vocational education and training
CZ	The Czech Republic
DECVET	German pilot initiative: Development of a credit system for vocational education and training in Germany = <i>Leistungspunktesystem für die berufliche Bildung</i>
DEMOP	Project title – Development of European modular training programs for decorator/builder and their adjustment in Lithuanian and European VET institutions
DIHK	Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce
E&T	Education and training
EASYMetal	Project title – European credit system for basic vocational qualifications in the metal industry

ECCTIS	Education Counselling and Credit Transfer Information Service (United Kingdom)
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
EOPP	National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications <i>Εθνικός Οργανισμός Πιστοποίησης Προϊόντων (Ε.Ο.Π.Π.)</i>
EQAVET	European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework
ESF	European Social Fund
ESyCQ	Project title – European credit system for commercial qualifications
ETF	European Training Foundation
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council (Ireland)
FINECVET	Finnish national initiative: development of a credit system for vocational education and training in Finland
FNBE	Finnish National Board of Education
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
HE	Higher education
I CARE	Project title – Improving mobility and career paths for personal care and social workers
ICT	Information and communication technologies
ISCED	International standard classification of education
ISFOL	Institute for the Development of Vocational Training for Workers (Italy) <i>Istituto per lo Sviluppo della Formazione Professionale dei Lavoratori</i>
IVET	Initial vocational education and training
KOPLAT	Project title – National Slovakian ECVET project conceived as a communication platform for employers, schools and young people
LLP	Lifelong learning programme

M.O.T.O	Project title – Model of transferability of learning outcome units among different ECVET systems
MENECVET	ECVET project for French diplomas (EQF 4)
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
MNE	Project title – Testing and developing ECVET in national education
MoNE	Ministry of National Education (Turkey)
MQF	Malta qualifications framework
NA	National Agency
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centre
NAVET	National Agency for Vocational Education and Training
NCP	National coordination point
NetECVET	Thematic network consisting of 14 national agencies of the lifelong learning programme
NEQC	National Examinations and Qualifications Centre (Estonia) <i>Riiklik Eksami- ja Kvalifikatsioonikeskus (REKK)</i>
NIVE	National Institute for Vocational and Adult Education (Hungary)
NQF	National qualifications framework
NRP	National reform programme
NSK	Národnísoustavakvalifikací – National register of vocational qualifications (Czech Republic)
NUV	Národní ústav pro vzdělávání – National Institute for Education (Czech Republic)
NUOV	National Institution of Technical and Vocational Education
NVQ	National vocational qualifications
OPIR	Project title – Project practical inter-regional tools for ECVET <i>Outils Pratiques Inter-Régionaux</i>
PA	Professions Act
QCF	Qualifications and credit framework
QVETDC	Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre (Lithuania)

Recomfor	Project title – A European mobility network for learners in the field of trade
ReferNet	Cedefop's network for VET in Europe
RAILVET	Project title – Railway operation in ECVET
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
SCQF	Scottish credit and qualifications framework
Tbc	To be confirmed
UK	United Kingdom
UK NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centre (United Kingdom)
VaLOGReg	Project title – Value learning outcomes in the Grande Région
VET	Vocational education and training
VET-CCS	Project title – VET credit conversion system
VQA	Vocational Qualification Authority (Turkey)
ZDH	German Confederation of Skilled Crafts

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## ANNEX

# Interview Guideline (2011) Strategies for ECVET implementation

### Decision-making

1. Has a decision been taken to implement ECVET in your VET system?
2. Which has been the basis for policy decision-making?
3. Why is ECVET taken forward in your country? or why not ?
4. Which is the name of your initiative or project for ECVET implementation (if any)?

### Governance

5. How is the work on ECVET development organised?
6. Which ministries, organisations and institutions are officially in charge of ECVET?
7. Has a decision been taken for a national ECVET coordination point? \*
8. How are the developments of ECVET in your country financed? \*
9. In your opinion, are several ECVET testing projects and/or initiatives running in your country? Are some planned?
10. How is the assessment or evaluation of the initiatives (and different testing projects) foreseen? How is the feedback to policy decision-making foreseen? How are the different initiatives, programmes, projects which might exist at national, regional or local levels coordinated?

### Strategy

11. Which is/are your target groups for ECVET implementation?
12. The Cedefop 2010 monitoring <sup>(3)</sup> identified 8 strategic lines of actions for ECVET implementation. Which are the lines of actions undertaken in your country? please indicate their starting date \*

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<sup>(3)</sup> [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/6110\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/6110_en.pdf), p.23

(multiple reply possible)	Yes/No	Date
1. Setting up broad range testing initiatives		
2. Measuring impact (theoretical and methodological approaches)		
3. Updating VET legislation and regulations		
4. Adapting qualifications systems		
5. 'Wait and see' strategy		
6. Combining ECVET with NQF development		
7. Learning by working in ECVET European projects		
8. Marketing ECVET to stakeholders		
...		
13. Which are the priority elements of the ECVET implementation in your country? With which elements would you start?		
14. How does ECVET implementation link to existing legislation or legislation in development?		
15. How do you envisage linking ECVET to existing credit systems (ECTS, own national credit systems, etc.)? to your qualifications framework? to Europass documents?		
16. In the case that ECVET testing and initiatives date back, what did you learn or have you observed from past ECVET projects for the development of ECVET in your VET system?		

### Interacting with education and training stakeholders

17. How have you planned to inform or are you informing your national stakeholders on ECVET?
18. Have you planned or already developed templates to support ECVET implementation at national, regional or local level? \*

### Your views on specific aspects

19. What do you consider as necessary conditions for ECVET implementation in your system?
20. Which are the obstacles to ECVET implementation? And possible solutions to overcome them?



**CEDEFOP**

European Centre for the Development  
of Vocational Training

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## The development of ECVET in Europe (2011)

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The European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) can be seen as an incremental innovation to education and training systems in Europe; it may also lose visibility among the ambitious modernisation agendas and the multiplication of European education and training tools. ECVET processes have been started at national and regional levels: dedicated institutions have been set up; convincing narratives are being elaborated in dialogue; and ECVET positions and decisions are being prepared. To succeed, ECVET has to emerge as a strategic priority, addressing concrete challenges in education and training. This is the main challenge for education and training institutions and their partners.

This Cedefop monitoring report concentrates on the development of conditions and strategies for ECVET implementation, analysing current education and training systems in respect of their potential to support such implementation.



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