
Study on the feasibility of an ECVET system for apprentices (test phase)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
1. Objectives of the study.....	4
2. Methodological approach	4
3. Organisation of partnership.....	6
4. Analysis of sub-systems	8
5. Diagnosis and proposals.....	11
6. The key stakeholders (players) implementing training.....	13
7. Implementation of actions	14
8. Conclusion.....	15

List of abbreviation

ANFA	Association Nationale pour la Formation Automobile French Training Organization for Motor Trade and Repair
CEDEFOP	Centre Européen pour le Développement de la Formation Professionnelle
DGEAC	Directorate-General for Education and Culture
EEE / EEA	Espace Economique Européen / European Economic Area
ECVET	European Credit Transfer in Vocational Education and Training
EQF	European Qualification Framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
IVET	Initial Vocational Education and Training
MENESR	Ministère de l'Education Nationale, de l'Enseignement Supérieur de la Recherche - French Ministry of Education
SWOT	Strength Weakness Opportunities Threats

INTRODUCTION

In the frame of the feasibility studies related to ECVET device ordered by the DGEAC of the European Commission, the study ECVET Connexion focuses specifically on the perspectives of implementation in initial vocational education and training provision. A parallel study, ECVET REFLECTOR¹, focuses specifically on the certification components. The results of both studies were presented together at a European seminar held in Berlin on 30 November 2006.

The study should contribute to finalize the Recommendations of the European Commission to the Members States on the implementation of a European credit system in VET. Moreover, the analysis and the tools developed could help the different national stakeholders in determining their position according to the other systems and to identify the opportunities to adapt their own system. Finally, the concrete proposals for action and the priorities underlined can be applied both by the European Commission and the national stakeholders.

This study has been lead by the Association Nationale pour la Formation Automobile (ANFA) [French Training Organisation of the Automobile Services sector] and the French Ministry of national Education, higher Education and research (MENESR). The ANFA is a joint body and the Training Insurance Funds for the Motor Trade and Repair sector in France. The MENESR is the main awarding body and training provider in Initial vocational education and training in France. Moreover, these two institutional stakeholders brought together several country experts and a steering committee whose composition was diversified in order to ensure the objectivity of the conclusions.

The analysis of the text produced by the technical working group on the ECVET mechanism, then the analysis of the draft text submitted for consultation, showed that the projected recommendation focuses first on the certification system, and the impact on the training offer is implicit and never clearly formulated. So, the explication of this impact is the preliminary subject of the study.

After defining the integration condition of ECVET within the training organization, the objective of the study is to assess its acceptability by the systems and the distance needing to be covered to implement it, to determine the priority actions to be lead and to identify the main actors who can be vectors for these actions. If the ECVET mechanism is often presented as a modern expression of vocational education and training, the study is neither a comparison of the systems in term of performance, nor an attempt to find the best system. It looks deep into the systems, which leads to subtle conclusions, to a grading system based on several dimensions corresponding to the ability to integrate the ECVET mechanism, one of the main objectives², being to serve the young in IVET.

¹ Conducted by a research institute for vocational training and Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (Germany)

² Considering the scope of the study, it is to serve an individual in its integral acceptance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Objectives of the study

The “ECVET CONNEXION” study, on the one hand, aims at analysing the IVET system in Europe from the angle of the training offer (nature, organisation, programs, offer delivering,...); on the other hand, at identifying the obstacles to the implementation of the proposed ECVET mechanism; and to formulate recommendations favouring its development.

2. Methodological approach

The study covers IVET and apprenticeship in Europe³ – member states, EEE countries, candidate countries and pending membership countries – from the angle of the nature, the organisation and the delivery of the vocational training offer and the mutual recognition process based on an ECVET type system.

ECVET covers the whole of VET in the perspective of long life learning⁴. Nevertheless, the study is limited to the scope of IVET. This essential information is detailed in the Terms of references of the study from the contracting Authority. This means that continuous vocational training has not been included in the results and in the recommendations, even though the issue was raised by the interviewees in the course of investigations. For the same reasons, non formal and informal learning have not been included.

The notion of the training offer covers “*the whole of training actions proposed by the training providers⁵ (private, public, or associations). Those training actions whose objective is obtaining a certificate and/or qualifications are elaborated on the request of the public or private financing institution*”.

In the training process (identification, conception, delivery, evaluation, certification), the training offer comes after the conception of training pathways and precedes training delivering. The training offer specifies notably: title, domains, speciality areas, grading, pathway (and sequentiality), objectives, modes, target public, means of access, the targeted qualification/certificate. So, it is a catalogue describing the training courses provided in order to obtain a specific qualification.



In the ECVET CONNEXION study, the definition has been enlarged in order to present the training offer in a dynamic perspective aligned to the whole process. Consequently, the training offer becomes all stages going from the offer conception to the evaluation of learning outcomes through the training delivery.

³ In accordance with the terms of reference (EAC 64)

⁴ Seen from this perspective, ECVET is concerned with formal learning, informal, non-formal and the study is limited to formal learning.

⁵ Training provider: any organisation or individual providing training services. *Comment:* training providers may be organisations specifically set up for this purpose, or they may be others, such as employers, who provide training as part of their business activities. Training providers also include independent individuals who offer training services. Source: Cedefop, 2003.

The ECVET mechanism, which was submitted for consultation, is based on political intentions such as improving the general quality of vocational education and training in Europe, disseminating the European systems of vocational education and training, both within our territory and outside, as well as developing long life learning, which should prevent social exclusions. One of the strategic axes of action for achieving the objectives is the mobility of learners between different systems. Mobility favours the dissemination of innovations and good practice, but it also imposes the implementation of devices favouring cooperation between the systems and the development of mutual trust. The ECVET CONNEXION study fits into three problem-related areas:

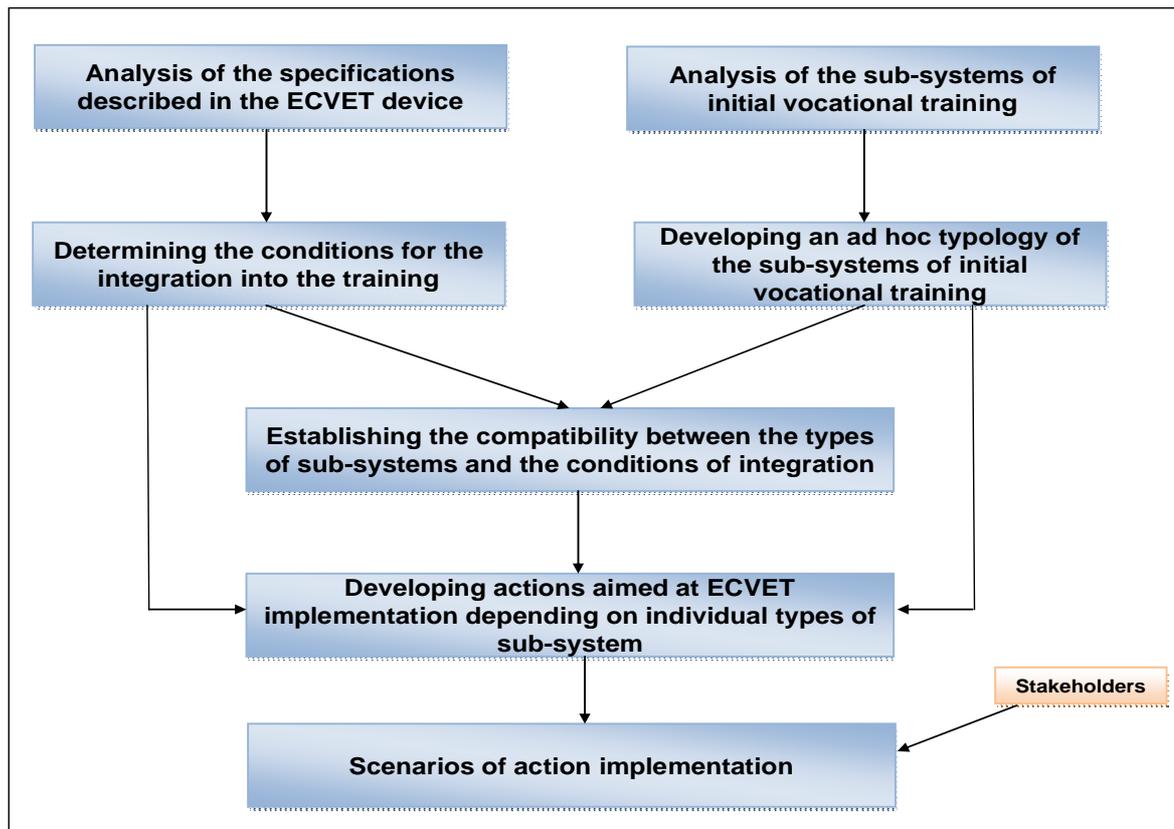


1. Does the concept of the ECVET mechanism question the fundamental principles of specific VET systems in Europe and thus changes their social function and organisation?
2. If the ECVET mechanism does not question the fundamental principles, will the implementation of the system create substantial changes in the relations between the stakeholders and the functioning of actual mechanisms? What conditions do those systems have to meet? What is the distance between the actual systems and the ECVET mechanism?
3. Finally, what are the main actions that should be undertaken on the national and European level so as to facilitate the implementation of the ECVET system (so that citizens and learners can effectively benefit from it) and how to make those actions most effective?

Answering underlines 2 difficulties:

- ▶ The first difficulty is to obtain a global though incomplete picture of the VET systems in Europe which reflects their diversity,. Since the objective is not to make a diagnosis of each system, but rather to assess the feasibility of implementing the ECVET mechanism at the European level, it is necessary to refer to an ad hoc typology to enable every stakeholder to position their own system.
- ▶ The second difficulty is to present the ECVET mechanism in terms of its impact on the training offer. The mechanism, as it is presented, concerns the description of certification in terms of units, expressed in learning outcomes, accumulated and with credit points allocation. So, there are recommendations to competent bodies, responsible for certification, whereas the impact on the other stakeholders of the system has not been covered in the technical specifications or in the consultation document. The study was concerned with presenting the ECVET system in relation to all aspects, in particular, those linked to its implementation, bearing in mind that the definition of some points has not yet been finalized.

The ECVET Connexion study is structured according to the following methodology:



3. Organisation of partnership

The “Association Nationale pour la Formation Automobile” and the French Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Research have decided to cooperate on the study. The cooperation between a Ministry – the main provider of vocational education and training in France – and a branch – also significantly involved in this field– illustrates symbolically the necessity to approach the ECVET device taking into consideration the diversity of approaches. This appears in the variety of experts networks (total of 38) who were invited to contribute to this study (central administration 13, regional administration 3, sectoral organisations 8, training providers 8, organisations specialized in the training analysis 5).

The ECVET CONNEXION study was conducted from January 2006 to December 2006. The first phase “dynamic study of the systems of IVET” was held between January and June 2006, the second phase “research action” finished in December 2006.

The approach includes the action research principle consisting in establishing a permanent dialogue - with the Steering Committee, the country experts, the field stakeholders - in order to verify the information and hypotheses, and to approve the initial research and the obtained results.

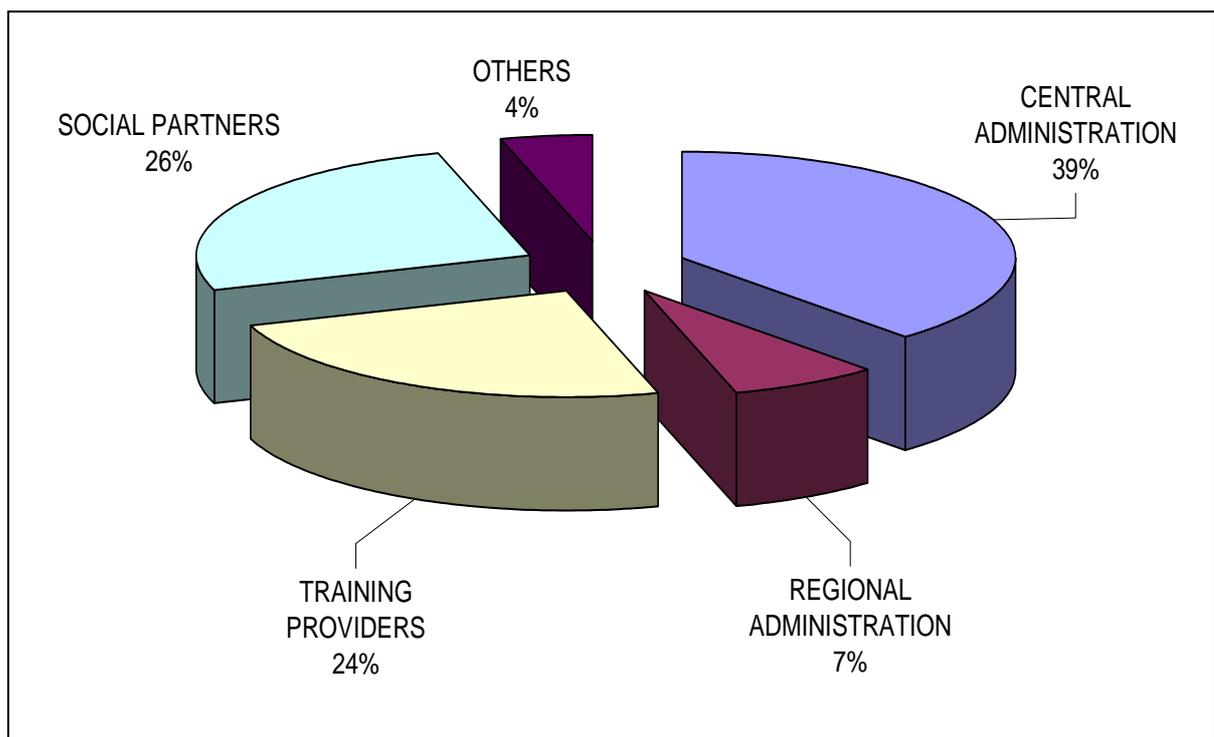
The typical stages for this kind of study have been respected: collection of information, analysis of the systems with respect to the implementation of the ECVET mechanism, diagnosis and action plan.

The information was collected in two ways: a first phase with individual⁶ interviews with the country experts based on the questionnaire, a second phase based on group meetings (platforms) with concrete case studies currently being tested. For each of these phases area leaders were appointed among the members of the Steering Committee.

After achieving the first stage, country-studies have been produced. A first analysis was carried out and the first trends were identified. These tendencies were confirmed and adjusted through platforms established in 19 countries. The country-experts held a debate on the feasible implementation of the ECVET mechanism in the national systems of vocational training, illustrated with sectoral case studies based on concrete projects.

The questionnaire was administered to 170 representative stakeholders involved in the training process (minimum 7 stakeholders per country covered by in-depth study). The platforms gathered more than 190 people.

Distribution of interviewees with respect to structure (grouping)



⁶ 21 countries covered by in-depth study (research based on documentation and meetings), 9 countries covered by documentary research with national studies produced by the local experts, 2 countries (Malta and Iceland) covered by documentary research, but the collected information cannot be included in the study.

4. Analysis of sub-systems

ECVET is a project designed to facilitate the transfer and the accumulation of learning outcomes, according to an approach enabling the description of certification in terms of units of learning outcomes that can be transferred and accumulated (knowledge, skills, and competence) and with which credit points are allocated.

The ECVET technical specifications are concerned with the scope of certification. They constitute the first “condition”. However, this single condition is insufficient; others conditions have also been identified.



The ECVET mechanism cannot be narrowed down only to the technical specifications to be applied to systems of IVET, but the ECVET mechanism should be integrated into a wider project, to give it its full meaning.

The term **CONDITION** refers to the steps and measures taken, to enable the training provider to integrate the ECVET device.

The objective is to assess the characteristics of the sub-systems of IVET with regard to the implementation conditions and the use of the ECVET device, from the perspective of the training offer.

Consequently, adopting the ECVET mechanism, with technicality as a preliminary condition, implies taking into account the three others conditions (flexibility, autonomy, permeability) in order to apply this method in the national sub systems of IVET.

The 4 conditions identified are the following:

- ▶ Technicality: integration of ECVET technical specifications
- ▶ Flexibility of training pathways
- ▶ Autonomy of training centres
- ▶ Permeability: openness to mobility, trust between partners.

Each of the 4 conditions is a response to specific and imperative needs for the implementation of the ECVET mechanism. It underlines that the formal adoption of the ECVET mechanism by the competent bodies is insufficient to make the training providers able and/or willing to implement the system.

The first level of analysis provides us with an overall picture of the sub-systems of initial vocational education and training in Europe with respect to the conditions of the ECVET mechanism implementation.

Generally, approximately 50% of the sub-systems reach or exceed the minimum threshold (for the implementation of the ECVET device) established for 3 conditions. In case of “autonomy”, only one third of the sub-systems reach this minimum level.

Nevertheless, a given system may be favourable to one condition; it may not be favourable for another one.

The table below presents the situation in 30 analysed sub-systems.

Distribution of sub-systems with respect to the number of conditions with the evaluation above 4

Number of sub-systems which reached level 4 for 4 conditions	8
Number of sub-systems which reached level 4 for 3 conditions	5
Number of sub-systems which reached level 4 for 2 conditions	2
Number of sub-systems which reached level 4 for 1 condition	10 (*)
Number of sub-systems which did not reach level 4 for any condition	5 (**)

(*) including 8 systems under reform (**) including 4 systems under reform.

Source: ECVET Connexion study, County Studies

Several observed elements show recurrences in functioning, organisation and processes between different sub-systems of IVET. Moreover, many of those sub-systems could be grouped together, as long as the sub-systems apply similar solutions and attitudes to the whole of the observed points. The general logic of their organisation suggests we can define their underlining purpose and to name it: the group then becomes a sub-system type.

The typology is fundamental for the study: if there is a conflict between the principles of the ECVET mechanism and the sub-system foundations, such a sub-system cannot adopt the ECVET mechanism without questioning its own nature. The “foundations” of a given sub-system of vocational education and training are determined by the mission which stakeholders (or even an entire society) attribute to vocational education and training. They are significant carriers of social values, including perception of the notion of profession, confidence in the training system to ensure the competitiveness of enterprises and the economy. Consequently, the fundamentals should be distinguished from the functioning modes which are considered to be more flexible over time.

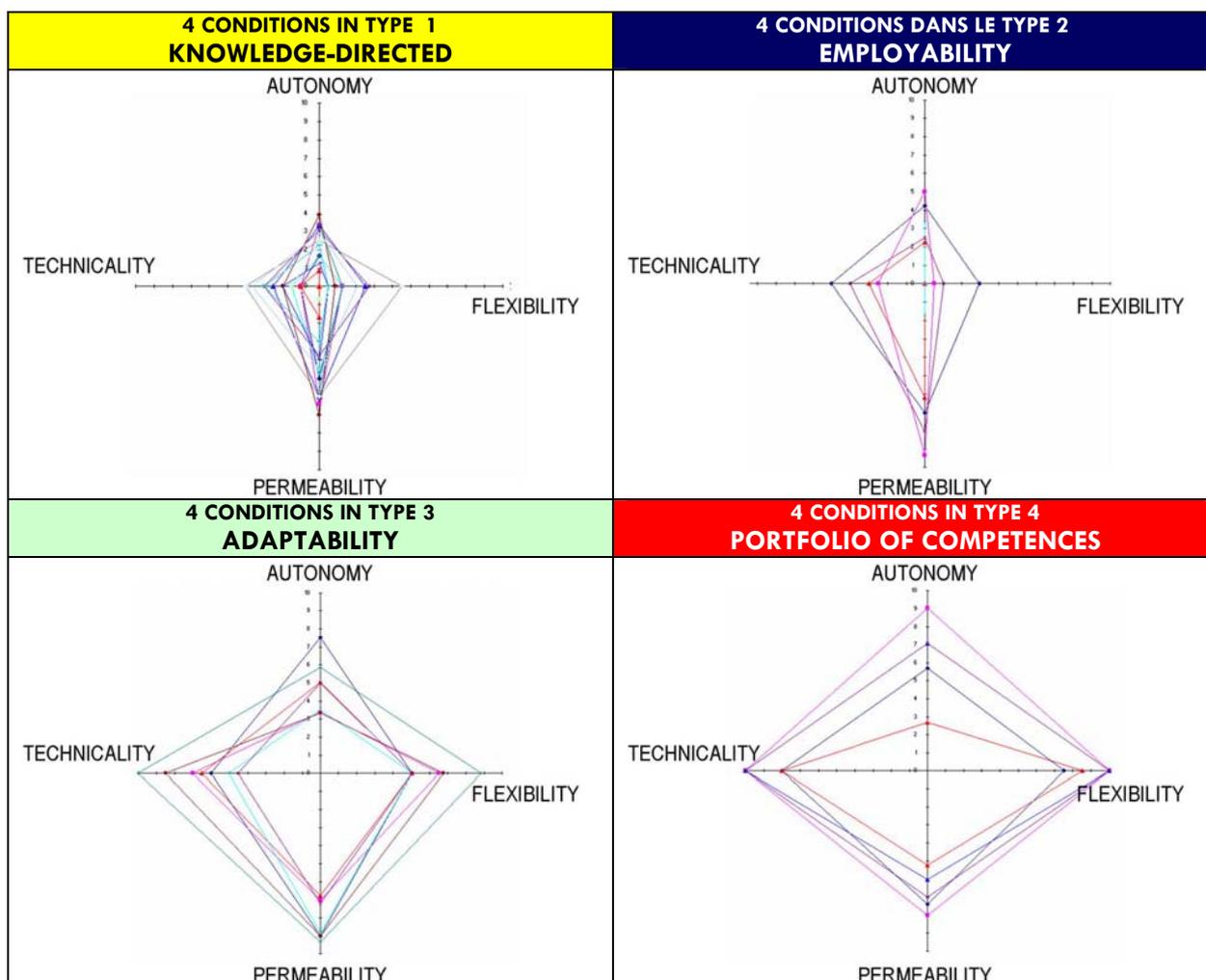
In order to set up the typology, the observations were summarised and grouped into determining characteristics. A given sub-system was classified into the type it was the nearest to. All the training sub-systems aim at introducing young people into the labour market, developing their knowledge, favouring employability, transmitting competences facilitating adaptation to changes. However, each of the types stresses different specific aspects. The typology is established on the intentions (the values carried by the sub-systems) and not on the performance of the systems.

Typology of 4 sub-systems of vocational education and training

<p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">KNOWLEDGE-DIRECTED</p>	<p>Training is perceived as a preliminary period before active professional life, a time during which the basics are acquired, they will be used after, then employability will be built on this base. At the end of this period, the learner will face the complexity of real professional situation: the learner acquires skills and competences in the training centre / in laboratory, and the employer will adapt him to real-life situations.</p> <p>Employability of the learner is deferred</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">EMPLOYABILITY</p>	<p>Training is based on occupation. Close association of professional groups across all stages of the process constitutes an essential element of the system. Companies are a key stakeholder of the process. Learners should be operational (capable of undertaking work) at the end of the training.</p> <p>Immediate employability of the learner is expected</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ADAPTABILITY</p>	<p>Training is focused on professional adaptability: the notion of occupation is wide. The occupation is considered as accessible after an adaptation period during which the acquired competences are verified. This contextualization takes place during the first employment.</p> <p>Employability of the learner is potential</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PORTFOLIO OF COMPETENCES</p>	<p>Training is focused on progressive and individual acquisition of qualification. It is composed of autonomous modules which can be combined/ gathered depending on the circumstances, in order to fit to the requirements of employment/position held. The training pathway is composed of successive validation of the learning outcomes enriching progressively the competences portfolio of a learner. The employability of the learner allows him a “flexible” constitution of a competences portfolio.</p> <p>Employability is constructed by assembling by the learner</p>

5. Diagnosis and proposals

The graphs below show the functioning of the sub-systems of IVET. The graphs represent the combination of the 4 conditions established for the implementation of the ECVET device. Consequently, the closer the system is to 0 points, the lower is the correspondence to the 4 conditions. On the other hand, the further the system is from 0 point (it is open), the more the system favours the 4 conditions and appears as potentially ready for the implementation of the ECVET device.



Source: ECVET Connexion study, County Studies

The comparison between the 4 graphs gives a global vision of the European sub-systems according to the implementation of the ECVET mechanism. It shows also the possible cooperation between the sub system from the same type or from another type.

The cooperation within the same type facilitates the identification and the implementation of actions favouring a stronger adequacy to the necessary conditions for implementing the ECVET device. For all types (except type 1), there are always sub systems which have a better performance in one particular condition and which are already compatible to the mechanism.

The cooperation between systems from different types is possible to optimize the compatibility level, based on the existing practices.

The propositions and actions are aimed at overcoming the obstacles for the implementation of the ECVET mechanism in IVET. They are based on the results of the analysis, the interviews held with more than 180 people as well as the conclusions of the platforms, which were implemented in nearly 20 countries and which gathered more than 190 people. A difference was made between the propositions which concern the technical specifications of the ECVET device and the conditions existing in the system of initial vocational education and training for implementation.

Propositions
WORK ON THE COMBINATION OF THE TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS OF THE ECVET DEVICE (TECHNICALITY)
1. Sharing of good practices
2. Identification of the elements of the most receptive systems to the implementation of the technical specifications
3. Works on the crucial importance of the units organization
Actions
FAVOURING “RECOGNISED MOBILITY” AND FACILITATING INDIVIDUALISATION OF THE PATHWAY (FLEXIBILITY)
1. Favouring the implementation of modularized training adapted to recognised mobility
2. Increasing the average period of geographic mobility
3. Facilitating the recognition of learning outcomes through mutual trust in evaluation
4. Making compatible the trainings organisation for a managed mobility
DEVELOPING THE EXPERTISE OF THE FIELD STAKEHOLDERS (AUTONOMY)
1. Developing the expertise in the production of qualifications
2. Developing the expertise in the area of evaluation
3. Developing the expertise in the implementation of mobility projects
4. Training the training centres to the modular approach and to the management of individualised training pathways
BUILDING BRIDGES ACROSS THE SYSTEMS (PERMEABILITY)
1. Making the training offer compatible <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Promotion of accessible writing methodologies ▶ Construction of common curricula (top-down approach) ▶ Use of current experiments (bottom-up approach)
2. Developing networks
3. Appreciation and using the relations between the ECVET mechanism and the existing European tools (EUROPASS, EQF, etc.)
4. Developing specific units (dedicated to mobility)

6. The key stakeholders (players) implementing training offer

There is a whole range of stakeholders in IVET such as: central administration bodies, editors of the training support and teaching materials, research institutions in the area of teaching, training centres, professional branches, consular chambers, enterprises, labour unions, trainees' parents, and trainees themselves. It is difficult to come up with an exhaustive list and to carry out a detailed analysis of the role and influence of all stakeholders in the process of training. Consequently, the decision was made to limit the study to the "key stakeholders" who were determined in other studies and surveys related to the area and who can have a significant influence on the achievement of the ECVET mechanism implementation.. The stakeholders included in the study have been divided into categories⁷:

- ▶ **Institutions of "administrative" type**
- ▶ **Institutions representing the "world of economy"**
- ▶ **Training Centres**
- ▶ **Enterprises/companies**

The analysis of the training process showed a whole range of functions for stakeholders of VET. Consequently, all of these stakeholders, depending on the sub-system and the stage of the process, may have one of the following functions: pilot, supervisor, facilitator or counsellor. Those 4 roles⁸ are presented below:

- ▶ **Pilot**
- ▶ **Supervisor**
- ▶ **Facilitator or provider of services**
- ▶ **Counsellor**

These functions (roles) exist in all sub-systems of IVET In the case of centralised systems, when the management is conducted by a dominant stakeholder, often the Ministry, the pilot and supervisor functions (sometimes conception's functions) can be brought together in a single stakeholder. Diversity is nevertheless the main rule, which means that the role of a given stakeholder and not its nature is the key point for any action.

⁷ The typology of the stakeholders used in the ECVET Reflector study differs to a certain extent with respect to the objectives. It appeared that it was important to distinguish the representatives of enterprises and the enterprises *sensu stricto* due to the specific role every type of "structure" can play in the training offer.

⁸ The term role should be understood as "action in the process"

7. Implementation of actions

PROPOSITIONS & ACTIONS	INVOLVED STAKEHOLDERS (PLAYERS)				COMMISSION*
	PILOT	SUPERVISOR	FACILITATOR ⁹	COUNSELLOR	
WORK ON THE COMBINATION OF THE TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS OF THE ECVET DEVICE (TECHNICALITY)					
1. Sharing of good practices	X			X	X
2. Identification of the elements of the most receptive systems to the implementation of the technical specifications	X			X	
3. Works on the crucial importance of the units organization	X	X			X
FAVOURING "RECOGNISED MOBILITY" AND FACILITATING INDIVIDUALISATION OF THE PATHWAY (FLEXIBILITY)					
1. Favouring the implementation of modularized training adapted to recognised mobility	X	X	X	X	X
2. Increasing the average period of geographic mobility			X		X
3. Facilitating the recognition of learning outcomes through mutual trust in evaluation	X	X	X		X
4. Making compatible the trainings organisation for a managed mobility	X		X		
DEVELOPING THE EXPERTISE OF THE FIELD STAKEHOLDERS (AUTONOMY)					
1. Developing the expertise in the production of qualifications	X		X	X	
2. Developing the expertise in the area of evaluation		X	X		
3. Developing the expertise in the implementation of mobility projects			X	X	X
4. Training the training centres to the modular approach and to the management of individualised training pathways			X		X
BUILDING BRIDGES ACROSS THE SYSTEMS (PERMEABILITY)					
1. Making the training offer compatible					
▶ Promotion of accessible writing methodologies	X				X
▶ Construction of common curricula (top-down approach)	X				X
▶ Use of current experiments (bottom-up approach)	X		X		
2. Developing networks			X		X
3. Appreciation and using the relations between the ECVET mechanism and the existing European tools (EUROPASS, EQF, etc.)	X	X			X
4. Developing specific units (dedicated to mobility)	X		X	X	X

* European Commission was added to the concerned stakeholders as initiator, expertise provider, and counsellor.

⁹ Facilitator and provider of services

8. Conclusion

Generally speaking, the stakeholders of vocational education and training in Europe are favourable to the implementation of the ECVET device.

The ECVET Connexion study reveals the following leading ideas:

1- The ECVET mechanism cannot be reduced to the adoption of the technical specifications, other conditions should also be taken into account, such as the flexibility of the training offer, the autonomy granted to the training providers, the permeability (openness to mobility and European stakeholders) of the stakeholders of vocational education and training. In the case of some sub-systems, work should be done to bring them closer to the technical specifications. In case of all the sub-systems, and the majority of types, the condition of “Autonomy” is the one where the most work needs to be done.

2- Potentially, ECVET can be implemented in the different sub-systems. The technical specifications exist in a more or less marked way in all the types of systems. Consequently, the implementation of the ECVET mechanism could be more or less long according to the different types of systems.

3- Apart from the strictly technical principles, mutual trust constitutes the most important element of the whole device. It is an aspect going across all the elements of the ECVET device and the implementation conditions.

4- The actions which need to be undertaken to match the sub-systems to the identified conditions, are aimed mainly at acculturation of stakeholders, development of expertise (in terms of individualisation of the training pathways, evaluation, etc.), development of projects on common construction of curricula, expansion of the potential of the current projects and information to the young (final beneficiaries).

ECVET can not be reduced to the study, which is limited to IVET, but it also falls within the framework of long life learning. Its analysis and its implementation should take into account continuous training, informal and non formal learning outcomes, validation of hand on learning experience, etc.

Finally, it should be stressed that the individual is at the centre of the ECVET mechanism. Within the scope of the ECVET Connexion study, the final beneficiary is a young person in initial vocational education and training (particularly apprentices).