

DISCUSSION PAPERS

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Gabriele Fietz, Thomas Reglin,
Isabelle Le Mouillour

**Implementing and developing
a Credit System
for Vocational Education and Training**

Final Report



Documentation of the study carried out by f-bb/BIBB on behalf of the European Commission



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Table of Contents

Tables	7
1. Executive summary	9
1.1. Scope of the study	9
1.2. Characteristics of the typology.....	10
1.3. Two approaches to ECVET.....	12
1.4. Implementing ECVET.....	13
1.5. Reader's guideline.....	15
2. Introduction: targets and context of ECVET development.....	19
2.1. The European Union and vocational education and training	20
2.2. Europass	21
2.3. European Qualification Framework (EQF).....	22
2.4. ECVET	25
2.5. Accompanying research	28
3. Methodological and theoretical fundamentals	31
3.1. Research hypotheses	32
3.2. Scope of the study and data collection	35
3.3. Course of actions	40
3.4. Working definitions.....	42
3.5. Typology building	44
3.6. Legal aspects on implementation and use of ECVET (by Andreas Hänlein).....	52
3.6.1. ECVET and subsidiarity – on an EU legislative framework for a European vocational training policy	52
3.6.1.1. The relevance of an EU legislative framework.....	52
3.6.1.2. Subsidiarity and the basic principles of the EU Treaty	52
3.6.1.3. The EU legislative basis of vocational education and training	53
3.6.2. Conclusions regarding ECVET	59
3.6.3. Concluding remarks	64
3.7. Trust-building instruments in ECVET (by Andreas Hänlein)	64

3.7.1. Introduction	64
3.7.2. The models of the SOCRATES/ERASMUS programme and ECTS.....	65
3.7.3. Forms of possible agreements in transnational VET	66
3.7.4. On the legal admissibility of transnational agreements in VET.....	70
3.7.5. Recommendations on the practical implementation to be derived from the proposed considerations.....	72
4. General results.....	75
4.1. Learning outcomes	75
4.2. Attitudes towards ECVET and lifelong learning	79
4.3. Ambiguities and misunderstandings	79
4.4. Restrictions, obstacles, potential synergies	82
5. Typology	95
5.1. Differential analysis of valuation systems	95
5.2. Transfer within various VET/qualification systems.....	98
5.3. Creating a typology	103
5.3.1. “Holistic loners”	107
5.3.2. “Unit-aware internationalists”	112
5.3.3. “Holistic internationalists”	118
5.4. Relationship between ECVET readiness and credits	124
6. Stakeholder analysis.....	127
6.1. Attitude towards ECVET	127
6.2. Differentiation of the groups of stakeholders.....	132
7. Recommendations	139
7.1. ECVET and VET policies: Two viewpoints	139
7.2. Typology and practical recommendations	143
7.2.1. Example I: a “holistic loner”	143
7.2.2. Example II: a “unit-aware internationalist”	146
7.2.3. Example III: a “holistic internationalist”	147
7.3. Recommendations regarding the four areas of requirements of ECVET.....	150
7.3.4.2. Recommendations on European mobility projects design	162

8.	Bibliography.....	171
9.	Annexes.....	173
9.1.	Template for National Experts	175
9.2.	Interview Guideline.....	189
9.3.	Information for national experts: Interview phase	198
9.4.	The “ECVET reflector” Study. Institutions and Experts	201

Figures

<i>Fig. 1: Main parts of the study</i>	16
<i>Fig. 2: The EQF as a transnational reference system</i>	24
<i>Fig. 3: Learning units in ECVET</i>	26
<i>Fig. 4: Cooperation of competent bodies</i>	28
<i>Fig. 5: Steps and methods</i>	32
<i>Fig. 6: Research hypotheses</i>	34
<i>Fig. 7: scope of study and core team of research network</i>	36
<i>Fig. 8: Steps in typology building</i>	46
<i>Fig. 9: Levels addressed and stakeholders</i>	48
<i>Fig. 10: Research hypotheses and instruments</i>	51
<i>Fig. 11: “In your view, how outcome-oriented is your IVET?” Country spanning analysis</i>	77
<i>Fig. 12: What do the certificates document? Viewpoints of individual countries</i>	78
<i>Fig. 13: Identification of “units” in different qualification systems</i>	81
<i>Fig. 14: Identification of units in context of cross border transfer</i>	82
<i>Fig. 15: Potential obstacles to the introduction / application of ECVET I</i>	83
<i>Fig. 16: Potential obstacles for the introduction / application of ECVET II</i>	89
<i>Fig. 17: Valuation practices for vocational training</i>	97
<i>Fig. 18: Transfer: country-related analysis</i>	99
<i>Fig. 19: Comparison of results with respect to internal and cross-border transfer</i>	99
<i>Fig. 20: Potential areas of transfer (Source: Templates for national experts)</i>	100
<i>Fig. 21: Categories on which typology building is based</i>	103
<i>Fig. 22: Analysis of National Templates according to types</i>	106
<i>Fig. 23: Sub-categorisation of types</i>	107
<i>Fig. 24: Sub-categorisation: Holistic Loner</i>	108
<i>Fig. 25: Sub-categorisation: Unit-aware internationalist</i>	113
<i>Fig. 26: Sub-categorisation: Holistic internationalist</i>	119
<i>Fig. 27: What is your attitude towards ECVET? Country spanning overview</i>	128
<i>Fig. 28: Position of stakeholders towards ECVET</i>	129
<i>Fig. 29: Attitude of stakeholders towards ECVET</i>	131
<i>Fig. 30: Stakeholders differentiation: five spheres and attitude towards ECVET I</i>	133
<i>Fig. 31: Stakeholders differentiation: five spheres and attitude towards ECVET II</i>	134
<i>Fig. 32: Neutrality of the instrument, ECVET and subsidiarity</i>	155
<i>Fig. 33: ECVET and development at country level</i>	157
<i>Fig. 34: Design of the credit system</i>	160
<i>Fig. 35: Institutional framework at national level</i>	161

Tables

<i>Table 1: ECVET reflector guide</i>	18
<i>Table 2: Example of an EQF level</i>	23
<i>Table 3: Realms of the analysis</i>	38
<i>Table 4: Battery of questions of the survey instruments</i>	39
<i>Table 5: Valuation, Validation and Certification in mobility context</i>	43
<i>Table 6: Essential elements of ECVET</i>	50
<i>Table 7: ECVET and lifelong learning from the viewpoint of the interview partners (n = 114)</i>	79
<i>Table 8: Contradictory answers of the national experts</i>	80
<i>Table 9: Potential obstacles to the introduction / application of ECVET I</i>	84
<i>Table 10: Potential obstacles for the introduction / application of ECVET II</i>	90
<i>Table 11: Indications on reasons of reservations – examples</i>	129
<i>Table 12: Differentiations among attitudes and possible reasons</i>	136
<i>Table 13: Dual systems and ECVET</i>	138
<i>Table 14.1: Factors for innovation diffusion as for ECVET, according to Rogers (2003)</i>	142
<i>Table 14.2: Admissions to ECVET und factors of the innovation process, according to Rogers (2003)</i>	143
<i>Table 15: Proposals for actions to be taken (in relation to the reflector typology)</i>	151
<i>Table 16: Recommendations along the levels of “ECVET readiness”</i>	152
<i>Table 17: Distribution of responsibilities of schools and companies in three IVET system groups</i>	163
<i>Table 18: Scenario 1 – apprentice from group I in company from group II</i>	166
<i>Table 19: Scenario 2 – apprentice from group II in company of group I</i>	167
<i>Table 20: Scenario 3 – schools from group III send students to companies in group I</i>	168
<i>Table 21: Scenario 4 – schools from system I send young learners to schools in system III</i>	169

1. Executive summary

1.1. Scope of the study

The ECVET reflector study was carried on behalf of the European Commission between December 2005 and February 2007, shortly before the ECVET consultation phase. It is embedded in the general objectives of the European Commission and Parliament on enhancing mobility of apprentices (both young people and adults) within VET.

The study mandate was to analyse the relationships between the features of the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET), as proposed by the European Commission in its consultation document¹, and the existing regulations and practices of assessment, validation and certification as well as accumulation and transfer of learning outcomes in the national and/or qualifications and VET systems in Europe. The terminology used is the one suggested in the ECVET consultation document, the EQF proposal² and the Tissot terminology³ (2004).

The results presented in this report rely on the analysis of documents selected by national experts and compiled in a database containing 417 documents. The scope of the study and its focus on actual development required a regional survey design and the active participation of 55 regional experts who carried out a total of 186 standardised interviews in 32 countries. It evaluates both the status quo and the dynamics revealed by VET systems (which in many countries are indeed considerable) to identify both synergy effects and obstacles which may occur while introducing ECVET. The aims of the study include:

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/ecvt/index_en.html (read October 2007)

² Commission of the European Communities, Implementing the Community Lisbon Programme. Proposal for a RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (presented by the Commission) {SEC(2006) 1093} {SEC(2006) 1094} Brussels, 5.9.2006.

³ Tissot, Philippe, Terminology of vocational training policy: a multilingual glossary for an enlarged Europe. Ed. Cedefop. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2004, http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Information_resources/Bookshop/publication_details.asp?pub_id=369 (read October 2007).

- Formulating qualified proposals as to how to design ECVET for possible subsequent implementation throughout Europe in accordance with national and regional rules and regulations;
- Identifying possible needs for support during ECVET implementation and application;
- Formulating recommendations for further actions at VET stakeholder levels in national and regional contexts.

The study requirements stipulate further that the results should be transmitted anonymously.

ECVET reflector focuses on initial vocational education and training (IVET), acknowledging that this represents a limitation of the implementation ECVET field as mentioned in the consultation paper. ECVET reflector focuses on the mobility of young learners. On the basis of data proceedings and analyses, a typology of qualifications/ VET systems was established. This typology provides the basis for recommendations on national ECVET implementation and for identifying general tendencies in the relationship between national practices and ECVET.

1.2. Characteristics of the typology

ECVET central objective is to promote mobility in vocational education and training in Europe. From the perspective of ECVET reflector, the core process is the *transfer* of *units* as parts of qualifications. The units are assessed and credited in a host country before being transferred, validated and eventually certified in a home country.

No VET or qualifications system is in a position to immediately implement ECVET fully. In course of the study we worked with the concept of *ECVET analogies*. Examples are assessment/certification of units (as parts of qualifications) or methods for transferring learning outcomes at a national level (between training providers) in countries where systematic measures for transferring units acquired abroad have not yet been implemented.

If a country features ECVET analogies in terms of unitisation (and/or modularisation) and transfer we attribute to this country a high degree of *ECVET readiness*.

Consequently the typology focuses on two dimensions:

1. The *examination and assessment* of units (parts of qualifications), defined by learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competence – KSC). ECVET is based on identifying units below the level of full qualifications. Respective practices already existing in a country can be regarded as helpful analogies in the process of ECVET implementation.
2. The *transfer* of credited units into the home qualifications system in terms of evaluation, recognition and awarding of qualifications. If respective practices in a country already exist, the degree of ECVET readiness is high. This topic is closely related to the possibility of achieving partial assessments and certificates, as transfer means that parts of qualifications gain formal status in a new context (= are validated).

Based on these dimensions, the following three types of qualifications systems can be identified:

Type A: The “holistic loner”: This type focuses on full qualifications. VET programmes are geared towards final examinations and certificates. There is neither a legal nor an institutional framework allowing the transfer of partial qualifications. The emphasis of examination and certification practices is not on learning outcomes. The VET system focuses on the completion of a training programme of specified duration, i.e. the certification system does not provide for continuous documentation of the knowledge, skills and competence acquired step by step.

Type B: The “unit-aware internationalist”: Single units are subject to examination and assessment, and cross-border transfer of partial qualifications takes place both *internationally* and *nationally*.

Type C: The “holistic internationalist”: This type occupies an intermediate position in the typology. As a rule, qualifications are awarded on the basis of final examination. Partial qualifications are awarded for the sake of internationalising the qualification / VET system in the context of cross-border transfer.

The holistic loner and the unit-aware internationalist are extreme types, whose boundaries are much more blurred in actual qualifications and VET systems. The following trend is noteworthy: Many countries – e.g. 50% of the “holistic loners” – are preparing or already implementing VET system reforms aimed at enhancing both the flexibility and openness of these systems. Accordingly, there is a high acceptance of the ECVET project throughout Europe.

1.3. Two approaches to ECVET

National implementation strategies for ECVET depend greatly on the type of qualifications and VET systems encountered and their development stage. One might consider that the type B displays most of the prerequisites for implementing ECVET. Thus, recommendations concerning the implementation process have to take into account the different levels of ECVET readiness.

A further important point is that in a type A system, ECVET analogies may only be found on a small scale, but at the same time, the relevant stakeholders consider ECVET a helpful device for ongoing reforms aimed at more flexibility in the VET system. Other countries may primarily (or exclusively) aim at more cross-border mobility. This aspect of *different policy objectives in ECVET implementation must* also be considered in the recommendations. It proved to be an independent variable in our country studies. Indeed, we found that in 15 countries synergies with VET reforms (ongoing or in the planning stage) are to be expected. This group includes countries of all levels of ECVET readiness. Expert statements in our interviews document a widespread awareness of the potential of ECVET to support national reform efforts.

The two approaches towards ECVET can be described as follows:

Approach 1: Cross-border transfer

ECVET is implemented to enhance mobility during IVET. The implementation aims at easing equivalence testing and validation of learning outcomes acquired at home and abroad, turning it into normality. In this respect, the focus is rather on technical recommendations aimed at conceiving appropriate ways of regulating jurisdictions, the provision of supportive and informative materials, etc.

Statement: ECVET is a mobility instrument aimed at ensuring transferability of learning outcomes across different VET systems.

Approach 2: The reform context

ECVET implementation may promote due changes at a national level to increase transitions and flexibility of VET systems within a country.

Statement: Many European VET and qualification systems are moving towards greater flexibility and permeability. ECVET may support ongoing national reforms.

1.4. Implementing ECVET

The following recommendations are related to the typology, as well as to the two approaches described above (contextual recommendations). The second category of recommendations deals with the requirements for a practicable implementation of ECVET (operational recommendations).

Contextual recommendations regarding “cross-border-approach” are:

1. to include recognition of mobility periods as a possibility in the national VET programme design (legal regulations);
2. to highlight analogies to “units” and “credit transfer” at the national level (formative evaluation, accumulation systems, etc.);
3. to emphasise the cross-border function inherent to ECVET, i. e. highlight that identification of ECVET “units” does not require a reshaping of VET programmes in terms of modularisation (units are parts of qualifications, described by learning outcomes, not parts of VET programmes);
4. to include all relevant stakeholders at country level, e. g. within the structures of tripartite “ECVET implementation committees”;
5. to promote trust by introducing accompanying quality assurance measures..

Contextual recommendations regarding the “reform approach”:

This group of recommendations depends on the respective objectives of the actors at national level. Possible recommendations could include:

1. Relating credits to qualifications;
2. Awarding credits for partial qualifications;
3. Decentralising VET systems by increasing the role of VET providers in awarding qualifications;
4. Supporting the learning outcome orientation in qualification/VET systems;
5. Creating *outcome*-oriented methods of examination and qualification awarding;
6. Providing a basis for accumulation/transfer of learning outcomes as units;
7. Using the potential of ECVET to enhance permeability;
8. Individualising learning pathways;
9. Implementing ECVET as a means of facilitating validation and recognition of prior learning.

Operational recommendations:

The success of ECVET depends on its practicability to a high degree. The main message of the study is to keep ECVET as simple as possible in terms of administrative burden and user-friendliness and to confer it the status of an evolving instrument through experimentation. Accordingly the main operational recommendations are:

1. to facilitate ECVET implementation by conducting tests at sector level and to redesign, if necessary, the instrument according to the obtained results;
2. to support cross-system mobility projects connecting countries with school-based, work-based and dual VET systems (e.g. checklists, specimen forms);

3. to initiate model mobility projects aimed at bringing together such heterogeneous systems;
4. to identify national examples of an “ECVET-analogue” practice (e.g. existing practices of assessment of learning outcomes);
5. to link ECVET with European transparency instruments which have already been introduced;
6. to avoid new bureaucracy in defining competent bodies (“no parallel structures”) and to enlarge the pool of competent bodies regarding ECVET (decentralised solutions);
7. to develop concepts for ECVET implementation at the competent-body level (provision of required resources);
8. to set up transnational consultation boards at the sectoral level (starting, e.g., from sectors where mobility is high);
9. to offer train-the-trainer-programmes designed to facilitate the use of ECVET instruments;
10. to provide support in the form of:
 - an ECVET information system on competent bodies,
 - assistance in acquiring partners,
 - provision of information regarding examination and assessment practices.

1.5. Reader’s guideline

This report contains three main parts: 1) theoretical fundamentals, 2) general results and typology, 3) recommendations. Fig. 1 gives details about each part.

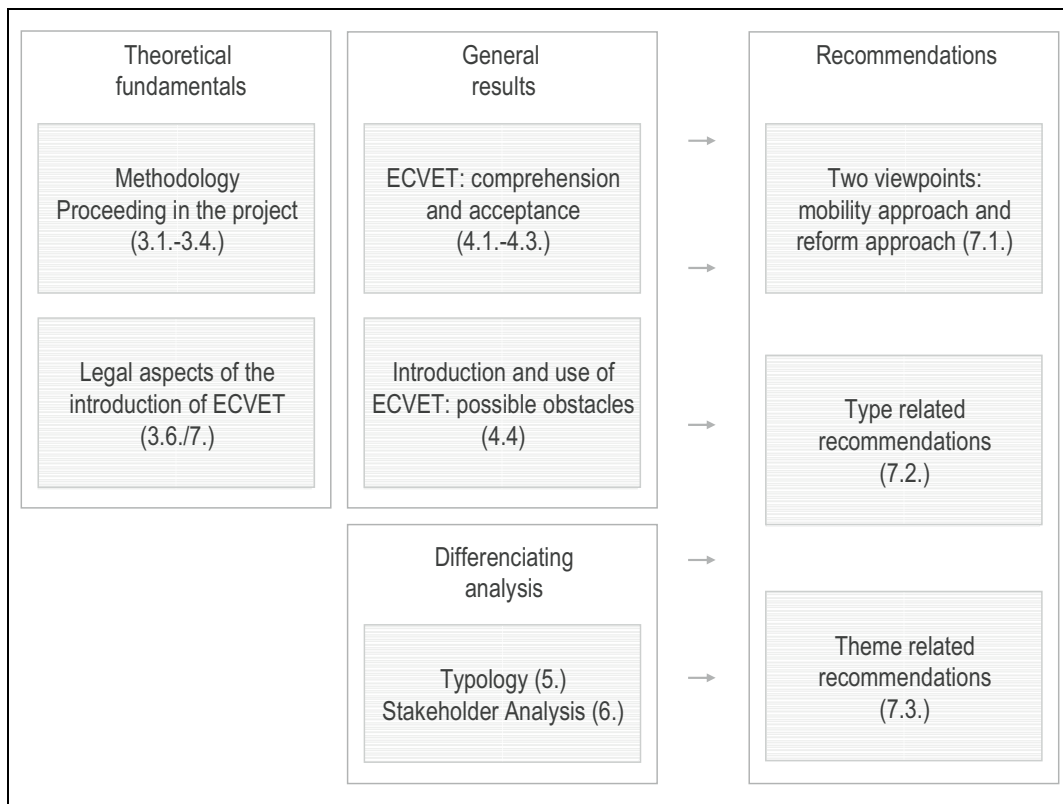


Fig. 1: Main parts of the study

The first part (chapter 3) outlines the theoretical fundamentals. Details on research hypotheses and the methodological approach adopted by the study, as well as on the research strategy, data collection and quality assurance are set out in sections 3.1 to 3.5. The central considerations regarding legal aspects and the national ECVET implementation are set forth in sections 3.6 and 3.7.

The second part of the report is dedicated to the analysis and general results. It is divided into three chapters:

- Chapter 4 takes a transnational perspective and deals with general issues concerning the acceptance of the ECVET on the part of European VET experts, as well as any (theoretical and practical) questions that may require clarification in advance. Section 4.4 gives details of the study results on potential obstacles to the introduction and use of ECVET in various European countries.

- Chapter 5 presents a step-by-step elaboration of the “ECVET-readiness” typology (illustrated by the respective situation of some of the countries). It aims to identify the general features inherent to the relationship between ECVET and the various national qualification systems. It is followed by a presentation and discussion of the three main types identified.
- Chapter 6 draws conclusions by analysing the attitudes of relevant stakeholders towards ECVET.

The recommendations on ECVET design and implementation given in the third part are based on three points of reference:

- The main incentives underpinning the introduction of ECVET (focus on mobility aspects vs. ECVET as an instrument to be used within the context of national reform endeavours) – Section 7.1
- The typology as elaborated in Chapter 5 – Section 7.2;
- The principal requirements to be met by a transparency instrument for the promotion of transnational mobility of learners in VET – Section 7.3.⁴

Table 1 provides an overview of central issues dealt with by the study, and indicates which sections provide further details.

⁴ Hypotheses concerning the nature of these requirements will be developed in Section 3.1 which deals with the fundamentals of the study.

Table 1: ECVET reflector guide

Common language in VET	
Have those involved already created, a common language in European VET, or is this a task still to be worked out?	Section 4.3
Credit points	
Does a high degree of ECVET readiness mean that there is a credit system in use within a country?	Sections 5.1 – 5.4
Diversity of VET systems	
Which accompanying measures could facilitate the communication between different qualifications systems?	Section 7.3.4
ECVET affinities	
How can ECVET affinities be identified in national qualifications systems?	Sections 5.1 – 5.3
ECVET readiness	
Which degrees of ECVET readiness can be identified?	Sections 5.3.1 – 5.3.3
Modularisation	
What is the difference between identifying units in the transfer of learning outcomes and modularisation?	Section 4.3
Mutual trust	
What are potential trust-building instruments for VET mobility projects?	Section 3.7
Outcome orientation in VET	
What is the current state of outcome-orientation of VET systems in the various European countries?	Section 4.1
Subsidiarity	
How can ECVET compliance with the principle of subsidiarity – to which European measures in VET must adhere – be ensured?	Section 3.6
VET Reform	
Can ECVET implementation support national VET reforms?	Sections 7.1 – 7.3

2. Introduction: targets and context of ECVET development

Mobility of labour is not only essential to promote European economic integration and integration of other measures to create a single internal market for goods and services, but also to enhance the transnational exchange of experience and to move closer to a European identity. Economic realities, however, are far from meeting requirements necessary to achieve these aims. While for European workers, initial vocational training might be the period of life in which they are offered the possibility to acquire mobility experience at an early stage, the mobility of apprentices across inner-European borders is still quantitatively insignificant. Episodic periods of training spent in another European country are associated more with a kind of “tourist” endeavour. Periods of training are spent in another European country sporadically, if at all.

Of the numerous reasons for this pronounced lack of propensity for mobility among apprentices one of the most serious is certainly the great diversity of nationally organised VET systems, which vary according to regulations, degrees of formalisation, institutional providers of education and training, and allocation of responsibilities. This in turn accounts for a lack of transparency of skills gained in the course of mobility periods spent abroad. The disparity of certification and validation procedures is too great. In particular, systems where there is a high degree of formalisation of education and training pose almost insurmountable obstacles for the knowledge, skills and non-specific competence acquired abroad to be aligned with national norms and made visible in documentation. As a consequence, participation in exchange programmes tends to remain a luxury, since periods of vocational education and training spent abroad would not be recognised as an integral part of education.

In higher education this problem was solved by the adoption of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), developed under the ERASMUS programme. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity by which European educational policies are regulated, the ECTS did not aim to harmonise systems of higher education but rather to create a clearing system to ensure that learning outcomes achieved abroad and relevant for certification could be transferred to the home country. This has made studying in foreign European country normality with a solid

institutional basis. This has given a fresh impetus to university reforms currently being pursued by a number of EU member states.

In view of the success of the ECTS it seems advisable to establish a corresponding transfer system – the ECVET system – in vocational education and training too. However, this field is characterised by a number of particularities which exclude 1:1 implementation. To begin with, the responsible institutions – schools, universities, businesses, bodies responsible for certification, chambers of commerce, etc. – differ between and within countries. As a rule there is a network of players and stakeholders involved in this matter. Therefore the ECVET system, which is being developed at present, will have to satisfy different demands and prove adaptable in a different, more complex environment.

2.1. The European Union and vocational education and training

In March 2000 EU heads of state and government agreed on their goal to make Europe “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world” by the year 2010, as is the frequently quoted formulation in the *Lisbon Declaration*. Within the framework of developing a strategy for tackling this ambitious goal, policies were also defined regarding both general and vocational education and training. Thus, at the spring European Council in Stockholm on 23/24 March 2001 devoted to discussing economic and social issues, the “Report on the Concrete Future Objectives of Education and Training Systems” was endorsed. The Report’s core issues address improving the quality of general and vocational education and training in the EU, providing access to life-long learning for all citizens, as well as opening up European education and training systems to the world. With a view to safeguarding the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, the open method of coordination has been deemed to be appropriate to guarantee improvements to be achieved in due time and in an effective manner in general and vocational education and training. Furthermore, the Council stressed the urgency of taking appropriate measures to promote mobility, and called for the development of an action plan to meet this requirement.

At their meeting at Bruges in October 2001, the Directors General for vocational education and training proposed a cooperation process to be launched in both initial and continuing vocational

education and training. This initiative was concretised in the Copenhagen Declaration endorsed by the Ministers of Education and the European Commission in June 2002. The Declaration places high emphasis on measures aiming at increasing transparency and recognition, and promoting mobility. It was agreed:

- to tackle the issue of establishing a European Qualifications Framework (EQF),
- to integrate the existing Europass and the European Curriculum Vitae into a single document to increase the transparency of qualifications and knowledge,
- to establish common criteria for quality assurance in VET,
- to facilitate the transfer of learning outcomes and promote mobility during initial vocational education and training through the establishment of a credit system in vocational education and training (ECVET).

Subsequently, activities were initiated aimed at incorporating several existing transparency tools into Europass. Technical Work Groups were commissioned to draw up the EQF and ECVET. The following provides a short description of these tools to highlight differences and common features, as well as the functions ECVET might be able to fulfil as a self-contained system.

2.2. Europass

Since 1 January 2005, Europass was made available to European citizens to enable them to document acquired qualifications and competence. Europass is a document portfolio designed to contribute “as a single framework to the promotion of transparency of qualifications and competencies” (cf. EU Bulletin of 31 December, 2004). This standardised format, in addition to listing periods of initial and continuing education spent at school, in the workplace and in higher education indicates all periods of employment, as well as knowledge and skills acquired in both informal and non-formal settings. Europass contributes to the promotion of mobility, in that it is designed to assist citizens in presenting their qualifications and competence, as well as to facilitate

drawing up of applications for employment or programmes of continuing training both at home and abroad.

With its five elements – *Europass Curriculum Vitae*, *Europass Mobility*, *Europass Diploma Supplement*, *Europass Certificate Supplement* and *Europass Language Portfolio* – Europass provides a standard format catering for the documentation of individual education and working careers in a way which is understandable across Europe. Including additional European aspects (such as learning periods spent abroad and language skills) to standard job applications and providing an explanation of certificates with a view to foreign readers Europass may contribute to enhanced mobility in Europe. Citizens may use the Europass document portfolio (or parts of it) on a voluntary basis. The respective explanations/supplements, however, exclusively aim to make the documents *understandable* in a transnational context, and in no way affect recognition issues and transfer possibilities.

2.3. European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

The *European qualifications framework (EQF)* facilitates comparison of qualifications across different vocational education and training systems by specifying reference levels describing learning outcomes from different education and training courses. These are defined via descriptors, such as knowledge, skills and competence. Knowledge comprises theoretical and/or factual knowledge; skills may refer to cognitive skills (problem-solving, creative thinking etc.), or to practical skills (e.g. the use of tools and materials); competence, within the context of the EQF, are described in terms of “responsibility” and “autonomy”.

The description of learning outcomes constituting a given qualification as distinct from others is done in accordance with various “levels”. It is based upon criteria, such as the range of knowledge and skills, levels of specialisation, as well as the ability to cope with open, non-standardised situations calling for action. Table 2 renders the definition of Level 4 as an example:

Table 2: Example of an EQF level (Commission of the European Communities, 5.9.2006)

	Knowledge	Skills	Competence
<i>Level 4</i> The learning outcomes relevant to Level 4 are	factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems within a field of work or study	Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities

The EQF is designed to be a methodical tool enabling cross-country comparison of learning outcomes. Hence, parallel to the development of the EQF, national qualifications frameworks needed to be created to cater for the systematic description of learning outcomes achieved in the various countries. On that basis, the function of the EQF consists in making universally transparent the relationships between learning outcomes achieved in various countries. Categorisation of NQF levels on the basis of EQF will be sufficient for a country to establish a relationship to *all* countries participating in the system.

The introduction of the EQF also serves to make qualifications/competence transparent throughout Europe with the focus placed on whole systems, rather than individual learning outcomes. A description of those systems from an *outcome* perspective contributes to increased permeability between general, vocational and higher education. Competence acquired through informal learning will also be considered.

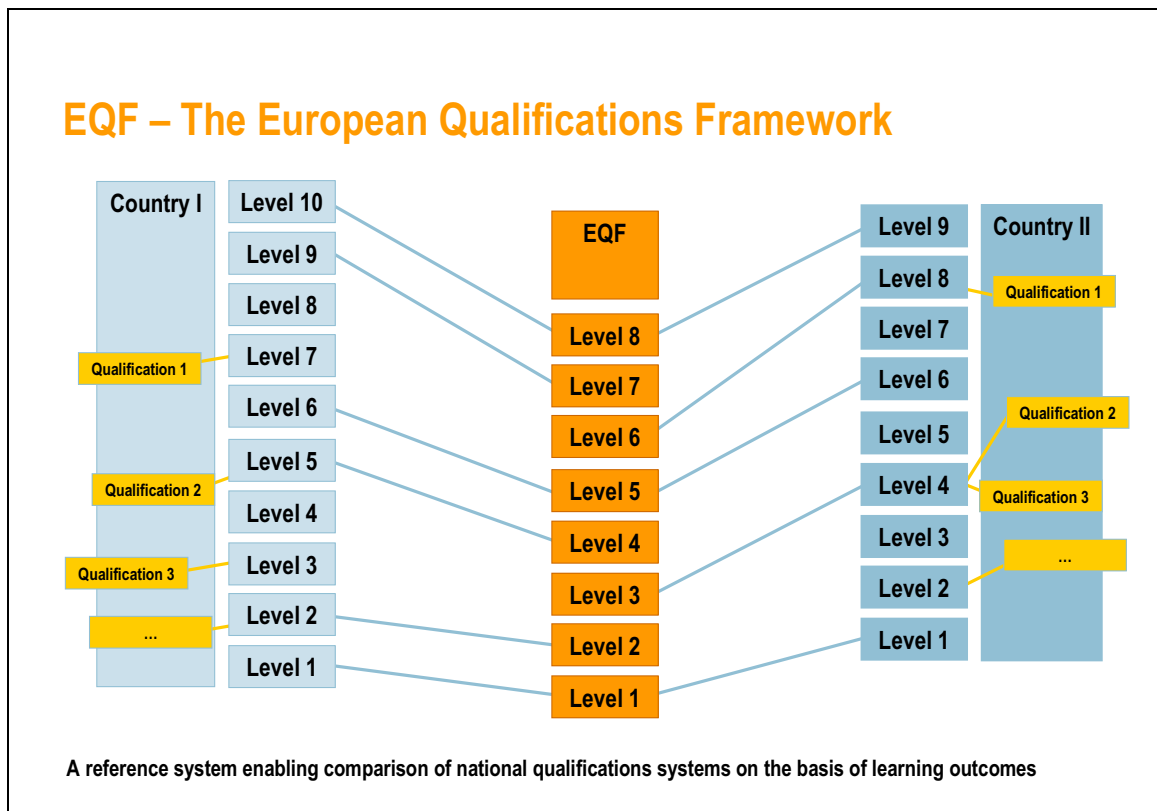


Fig. 2: The EQF as a transnational reference system

Inasmuch as qualifications frameworks create transparency primarily in terms of the “relative value of qualifications”⁵, EQF will facilitate procedures of recognition, crediting and establishing equivalence of qualifications/competence gained in the countries. It does not replace them, however. *Classification* of national qualifications in accordance with the levels defined by the NQF and EQF is done by the individual countries and their sustainability will still have to stand the test at the European level.

⁵ Commission of the European Communities, Proposal for a RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, Brussels 2006, p. 3.

2.4. ECVET

EQF and ECVET are both based on learning outcomes. However, unlike the two tools described above the ECVET not only aims at increasing transparency (whether of individual learning outcomes or national qualifications systems) and thus at an elementary *prerequisite* for the transferability of learning outcomes achieved abroad, but also at their recognition and transfer. ECVET promotes (enhanced) mobility during initial vocational education and training. The description of periods of learning spent abroad using the set of tools provided by ECVET – i.e. through learning outcomes and, as the case may be, the awarding of credit points representing learning outcomes in relation to a full qualification – helps to make learning in another European country an integral part of a given vocational qualification pursued at home. The development of a *European Credit (Transfer) System for Vocational Education and Training* (ECVET), while drawing upon the approach adopted by the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) for the promotion of the mobility of students in the EU that has been underway since 1989, also takes into account the *specifics of vocational education and training*.

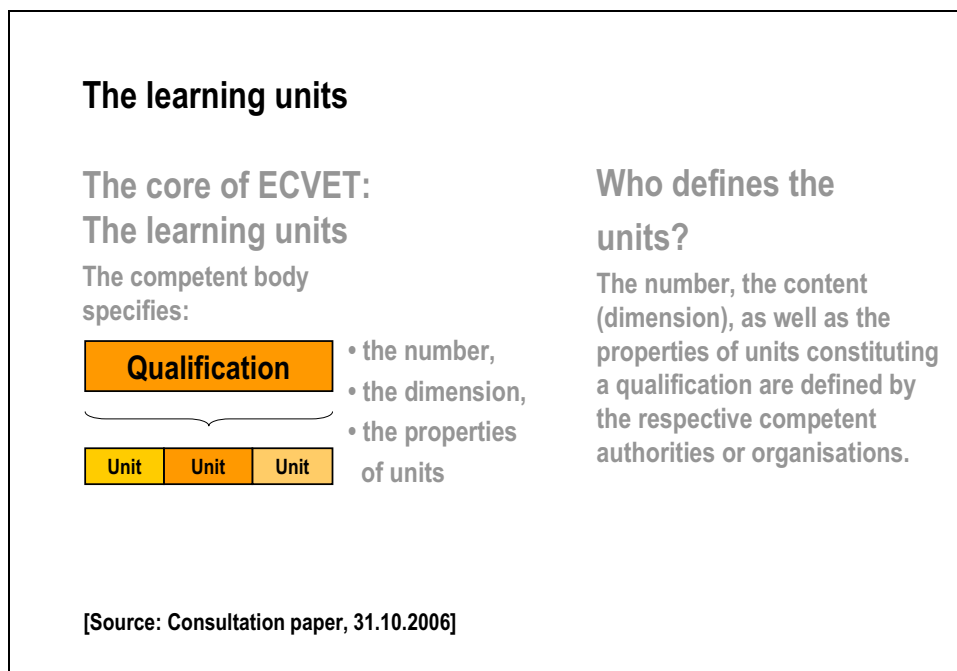
ECVET is a *system catering for the accumulation and transfer of credits in initial and continuing vocational education and training*. It provides the means necessary to document and validate across ‘system borders’ learning outcomes achieved by an individual in the course of VET. “System borders” does not only refer to borders of national VET systems. Beyond that, ECVET supports countries that want to make progress in enhancing *learners’ mobility in the national VET-system* in terms of increasing both *vertical and horizontal permeability* between parts of the system and, in particular, between vocational and higher education and training. Furthermore, since the system also accounts for learning outcomes obtained in informal settings (including learning on-the-job) their recognition – if envisaged by the national legislation – will be simplified. Thus, learners *outside the education system* will also benefit from the introduction of ECVET.

ECVET facilitates the documentation, validation and recognition of learning outcomes achieved abroad – be it within formal VET settings or non-formal contexts. The system is individual-centred, i.e. based on the validation of KSC achieved by an individual which, in turn, provides a basis for accumulating and transferring these outcomes.

The learning outcomes concept was chosen because VET systems and individual programmes vary considerably compared to higher education. The description of learning outcomes is based upon so-called “units” which, by consolidating various kinds of knowledge, skills and competence, yield a double result:

- The definition of “units” indicates the nature of knowledge, skills and competence to be acquired within various learning contexts (qualitative dimension).
- At the same time, it may be linked with the definition of a number of credit points weighting the unit in relation to a “full qualification” – irrespective of how it may be defined in the various national contexts (quantitative dimension).

The units are the elements to be transferred and/or accumulated, thus facilitating mobility. The way they are *combined* is a matter of regulation at national level, e.g. corresponding to established practice for defining professional profiles or curricula for vocational schools.



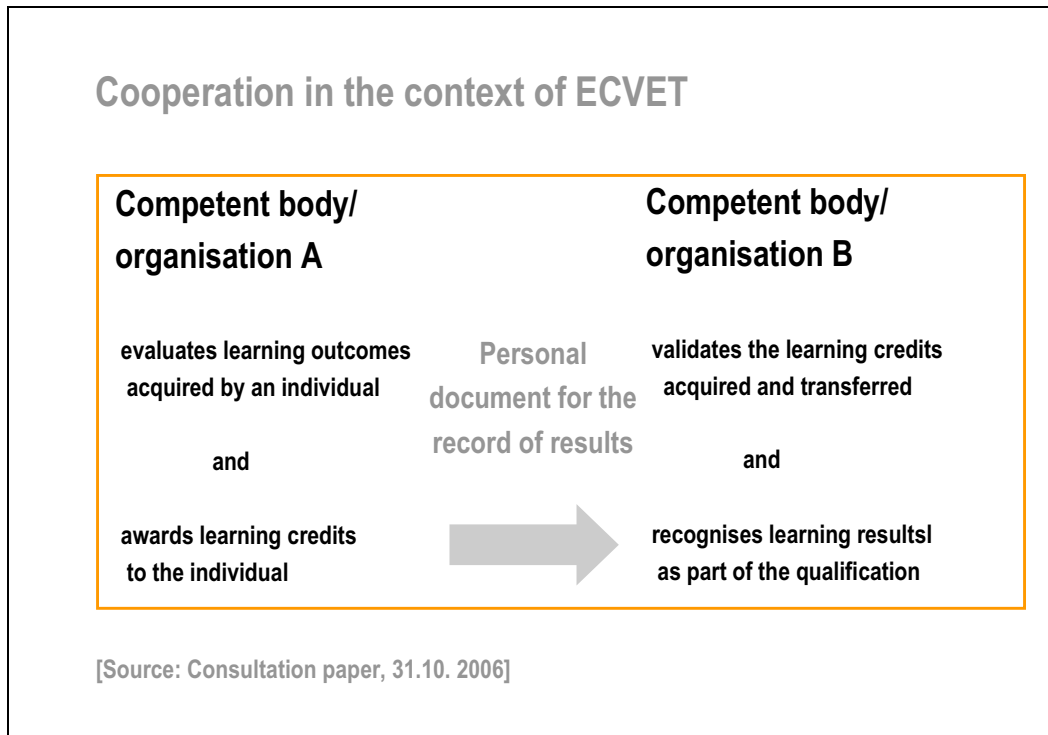
*Fig. 3: Learning units in ECVET
(according to: Commission of the European Communities, 31 October 2006)*

From the learners' point of view, accumulation and transfer may be described as follows:

- Knowledge, skills and competence are acquired during a stay abroad in the form of one or several units. Learning outcomes will be documented, and upon returning home they will be transferred and credited towards the training course attended at home. The newly acquired units will be added to units acquired previously.
- Units may be acquired in all EU member states that have adopted the respective validation procedures. Subsequently, the units may be credited towards a full qualification as defined within the national context. Countries participating in the system will designate competent bodies, i.e. institutions in the member states awarding accredited qualifications.

Inevitably, the process involves many national actors, meaning conventions and agreements must be concluded between education and training providers, enterprises and national authorities. New aids will be required in addition to the transparency tools already available.

- As the main instrument, the *memorandum of understanding* is a voluntary agreement concluded between VET providers, national authorities and other competent bodies in each of the participating countries. This tool creates mutual trust by regulating the cooperation in the areas of validation and recognition of qualifications acquired by a learner within a mobility context.
- The *learning agreement* is signed by the VET providers in both countries – the sending and the hosting party - and the learner. It describes learning outcomes to be achieved during the mobility period in both qualitative and quantitative terms.



*Fig. 4: Cooperation of competent bodies
(according to: Commission of the European Communities, 31 October 2006)*

2.5. Accompanying research

Parallel to the finalisation of the ECVET consultation paper that was presented on 31 October 2006, the European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture commissioned two studies at the end of 2005 whose task was to examine the countries' levels of preparedness regarding implementation of the nascent system.

The ECVET reflector study, which is supervised by the Forschungsinstitut Betriebliche Bildung and the Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung in Germany, examined the features of national VET systems regarding validation, recognition, accumulation and transfer of learning in initial vocational education and training. This report presents the results of the research project.

The ECVET connexion project that was conducted simultaneously targets issues relating to the conception and implementation of ECVET from another vantage point – that of providers of VET programmes. The feasibility study compiled in the course of the project analyses ECVET's openness to adaptation, given the institutional structure of the organisations concerned with its implementation. ECVET connexion was supervised by the Association Nationale pour la Formation Automobile and the Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche, both in France.

Both studies were conducted in close cooperation with the members of the project teams and were presented to the public for the first time at an expert symposium in Berlin on 30 November 2006.

3. Methodological and theoretical fundamentals

This study aims to analyse the relationship between ECVET and the national systems of assessment and certification of learning outcomes on the one hand and existing procedures of recognition, transfer and accumulation on the other. In doing so the study pursues practical aims in terms of identifying both the obstacles and favourable conditions ECVET may face in the various European countries, proposing qualified suggestions as to how to design ECVET such that it may be built upon, and advising actors in vocational education and training in the various countries as to the measures and instruments to be applied in order to make ECVET application a success. Hence, the final report comprises (1) a descriptive part, (2) an analytical part and (3) a practical part which, in turn contains (a) recommendations regarding action to be taken at both the European and the national/regional levels and (b) proposals concerning technical solutions and instruments.

An analysis of the relationships between a European credit transfer system and national VET and qualification systems is not to be understood as the application of a standard beyond discussion. The research team's tasks also include the elaboration of proposals concerning further development of both the ECVET and accompanying instruments.

The methodology used combines different research methods: desk research, in-depth interviews, stakeholder analysis and typology building. These methods will be presented below in more detail. Fig. 5 illustrates the links between the project steps and the selected methods.

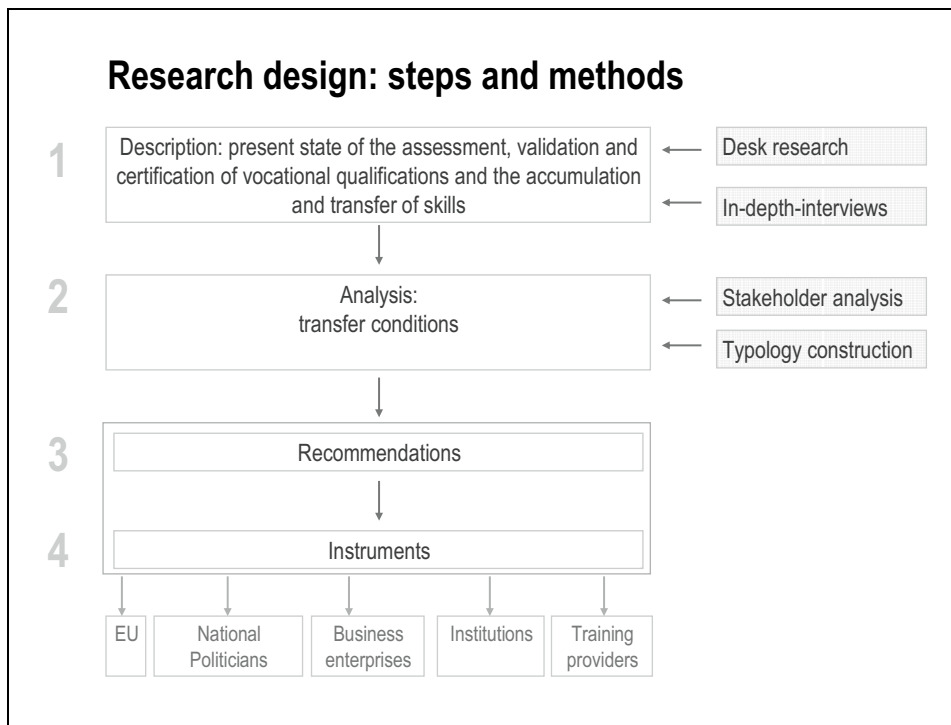


Fig. 5: Steps and methods

3.1. Research hypotheses

In terms of ECVET design and implementation, what requirements must be met in order to optimize their part in fostering young European’s mobility? Above all – thus the first, still highly abstract hypothesis – it will have to prove its worth as an *instrument catering for transparency*.

Highlighting the necessity to promote “transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of skills and/or qualifications between different countries and levels” (p.4), the Council’s resolution adopted on 19 December 2002 on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training (Bulletin C 13 of Jan. 18th, 2003, p. 2-4) does not make the aim to create transparency – according to the formulation of the Copenhagen Declaration – the first priority without reason. Serving to make learning outcomes visible, examination and certification procedures are, by their very nature, instruments ensuring transparency. Accordingly, trans-national transparency of such procedures is the first and elementary requirement for cross-

border mobility in IVET, if learning outcomes gained during this period are to be relevant to certification.

At the present state of research four main concrete requirements might emerge from the objective of accomplishing transparency between different systems of examination and certification. They can be characterised as follows:

1. *Neutrality of the instrument*: Making learning outcomes “legible” across country borders requires a neutral language independent from individual national systems. It is ensured that ECVET does not enforce any change of the systems. Provided this is the case, the task is particularly predestined to be tackled at the European level corresponding with the principle of subsidiarity of European VET activities.

The *learning outcomes* approach aims at the smallest common denominator of the various VET and qualification systems insofar as these – irrespective of any jurisdictions, organisational forms and methods – are primarily oriented towards learning outcomes.

2. *Support of reforms in VET*: At the same time, a number of European countries have launched reform projects and discussions which may give fresh impetus to the introduction of ECVET at the European level. Countries which have been trying (a) to enhance permeability between sub-systems of the educational system in terms of enabling certification of partial results or (b) to develop their rather monolithic VET-programmes towards certification of partial qualifications might thus gain profit from the tools provided by ECVET. Its potential usefulness in the context of actions to be taken at the national and regional levels would therefore have to be kept in mind when designing the ECVET and drawing up the communication concept.

Two further requirements may be subsumed under the heading *manageability of the credit system*. A transparency instrument can function as such only if designed with a view to the potential user’s attitudes, viewpoints and actions. If it is to cover the required range of applications it must be integrated into the practice context in which those concerned with examination, certification and crediting are acting, enabling them to become acquainted with it within reasonable time. In systems which as yet do not – or only to a small extent – provide for, e.g. certification of parts of

qualifications, it will be helpful to reveal hidden analogies or to provide accompanying instruments which must also be easy to handle.

3. *Design of the credit system:* “Keep it simple!” The ECVET’s success depends upon the degree of acceptance it will find on part of the actors of VET, i.e. enterprises, associations, competent bodies, educational providers, vocational and technical schools, and – last but not least – the learners themselves. However, universal acceptance of the instrument can be achieved only if it proves to be sufficiently significant and understandable for users and manageable for the issuers of the certificates.

While manageability of the ECVET must be ensured by its very design it may be further enhanced by the provision of accompanying instruments and aids.

4. *Institutional framework at national and regional levels:* In addition, the ECVET needs institutional embedment in the national application contexts ensuring its use without frictional losses and guaranteeing acceptance on the stakeholders’ part. Moreover, neither the competent bodies nor other actors must be overstretched. Possible recommendations formulated with respect to this sphere will primarily address VET-policies in countries intending to make use of ECVET.

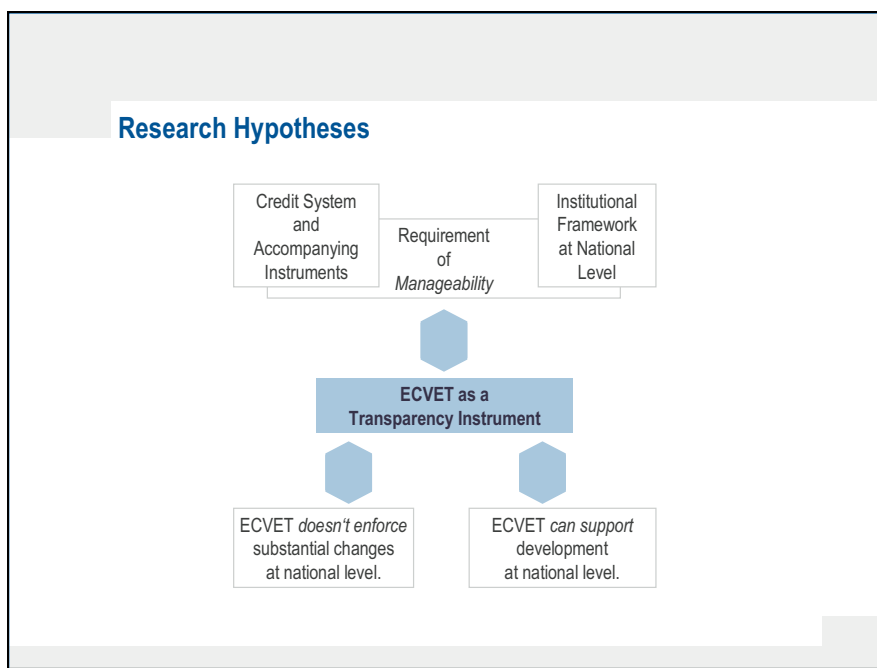


Fig. 6: Research hypotheses

3.2. Scope of the study and data collection

In addition to the EU 25, the study covers the new Member States of Bulgaria and Romania, the EFTA-countries and the candidate countries Croatia and Turkey. This required a complex project management. The quality and representativeness of the proposed study was ensured by means of a cascading system: the study was carried out with close cooperation between (1) project leaders, (2) core team (team leaders from seven countries, organizing the research in about five countries each) and (3) about 25 further national VET experts responsible for research in their own country of origin. In addition, a legal opinion was commissioned.

In the core team, f-bb (Research institute in VET - DE) was leading the project, BIBB (Federal Institute of Vocational Training - DE) was co-leader; OEEC (Organisation for Vocational Education and Training in the Ministry of National Education - EL), National Board of Education - FI), MENESR (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche - FR), CINOP (Centre for Innovation of Education and Training - NL) and QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum authority - UK) were team leaders. All actors were involved in the quality assurance of the study following a cascading system.

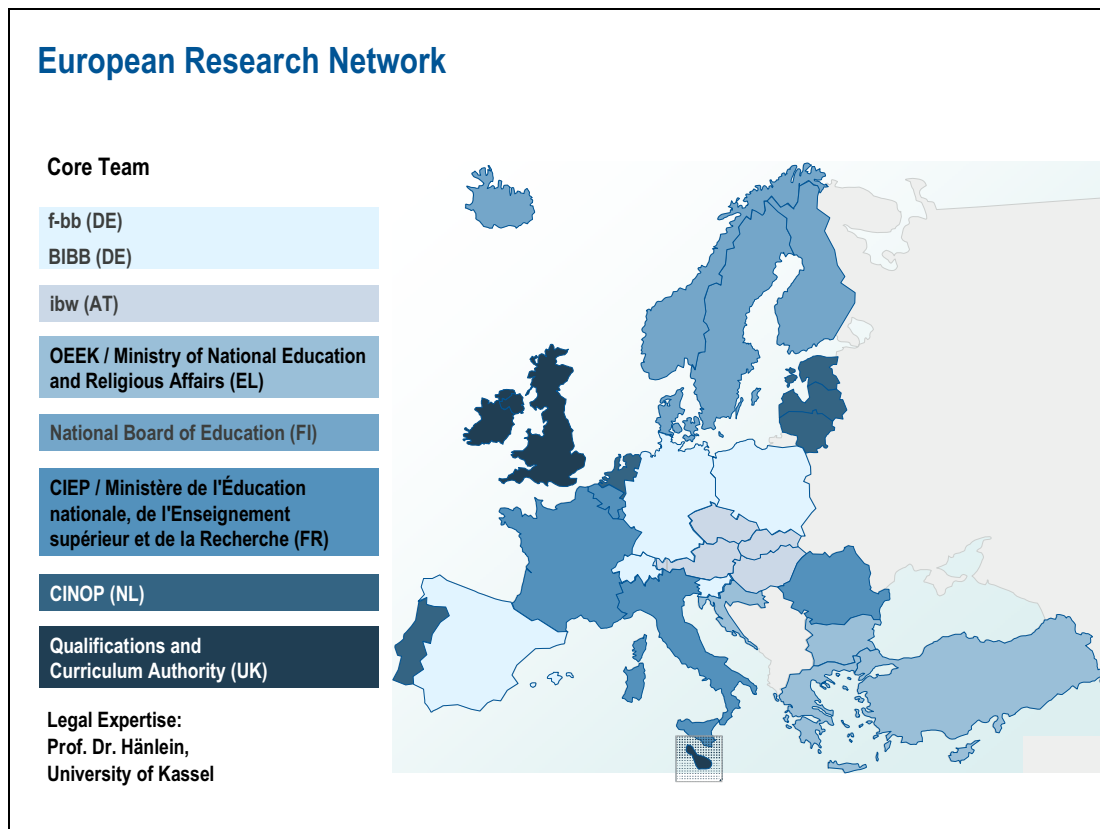


Fig. 7: scope of study and core team of research network

During the analytical part of the study the team could partially refer to studies conducted on the topic within the framework of CEDEFOP. However, a vast amount of separate data had to be collected by the research team, since descriptive works addressing individual systems of vocational education and training were not able to reflect the dynamic constellation within which a research project aiming at the practical development and successful implementation of ECVET is localised:

- The existing country surveys do not all reflect the most up-to-date level. They neither can, nor should, focus on aspects of development and dynamics of changes that have not yet reached the institutional and legal levels.
- The focus of research is mainly on the “fit” between the nascent ECVET and the existing regulations and practices at both the national and the regional levels. Going beyond sys-

tem description, such *relational analysis* must also include the perception of ECVET on part of the various stakeholders at the national level, which, to that end, must be systematically examined.

The analytical part of the study draws upon the following data material collected during the project:

- a collection of legal sources and other documents on the practises of examination and certification adopted in the various countries, including, *inter alia*, acts on VET, bills on educational reform projects, contributions to national reform debates and examination regulations and procedures;
- a country report drafted by the national expert responsible for the country (survey instrument: *Template for National Experts*);
- interviews conducted with at least five relevant stakeholders in each country (survey instrument: *Interview Guideline*).

A step-by-step procedure in accordance with a decentralised procedure was adopted to recruit interview partners. The experts responsible for a certain country had to acquire at least five interview partners in accordance with a specified template containing the thematic fields to be covered (cf. Table 1). The selected individuals' contact addresses were made available at:

www.ecvet.net. The project managers subjected the selected interview partners to a review, formulating additional proposals if required. The national researcher then conducted the interviews and, after adding comments, submitted them to the heads of the area teams.

From Table 1 it follows that there is quite a wide circumference surrounding the actors grouped together in a certain area. This accounts for a certain restriction which was, however, inevitable not least for reasons of (time) economy. Nevertheless in countries where the structure of VET-systems is particularly complex, interviews were conducted with more than five partners if that possible (country 7 and country 10: nine; country 33: seven).

Table 3: Realms of the analysis

Sphere		Stakeholder
No.	General Description	
I	state bodies	ministries / national
		authorities / national
		ministries / regional
		authorities / regional
		accreditation bodies
V	... with transnational mission	bodies in charge of recognition of certificates acquired abroad, national Europass agencies
II	vocational education and training (VET) providers	public VET providers
		independent VET providers
III	business representatives	companies
		chambers
		employers associations
IV	workers/employees representatives	trade unions / representatives of learners in VET

The questions contained in the Template for National Experts focus, above all, on the description of partial aspects of systems of examination and certification which are of special interest in terms of the “fit” between national systems and ECVET. In addition to an abridged descriptive part, the interviews address in particular questions on the interviewees’ practical relationship to ECVET, as well as their acceptance and assessment of potential impacts. This allowed dynamic aspects to be investigated.

Table 4: Battery of questions of the survey instruments

Realm	Template for National Experts	Interview Guideline
Valuation of learning by appraisal and examination	X	X
Processes of certification of competence acquired in initial vocational training and in apprenticeship	X	X
Equivalence and comparability	X	X
Trends, challenges and outlook in ECVET-context I: appraisal, certification and validation processes	X	X
Transfer	X	X
Accumulation / capitalisation	X	X
Trends, challenges and outlook in ECVET-context II: accumulation, capitalisation and transfer processes	X	X
Lifelong learning and European perspective		X
Attitude towards VET		X
Allocation of key documents of legal sources to the subject fields	X	

The interviews lasted up to two hours (the majority lasted one and a half hours) and were summarised up by the interviewer in writing and reviewed in order to eliminate any unclearness in the interview partners' replies. As far as possible, the interviews were conducted in English, French or German. If that was not possible an abstract of the interview was provided in the expert's mother tongue. Where the interviewee's approval was required, the interview was only translated into English after this had been granted. Almost none of the experts made use of the option to answer part of the questions contained in the guideline – submitted in advance – prior to the conduct of the interview.

Since the project's research work was conducted parallel to the development of ECVET – prior to the consultation process – it could not be assumed that all interview partners were sufficiently familiar with the current state of the Technical Specifications and discussions going on in the

context of the preparatory phase of both ECVET and EQF. Hence, in preparation for the interview they received an information package together with the guideline which contained the following parts:

- *Illustrative example:* A short PowerPoint presentation on the functioning of ECVET.
- *Questions and answers concerning ECVET:* A detailed explanation of the system with reference to the Technical Specifications submitted by the 2005 Technical Work Group. (The questions and answers contained in this document were supplemented by further items and the answers were entirely based on the formulations used in the Specifications.)
- *Description of ECVET:* A three-page article containing information on the general background, the characters and the potentials of ECVET (available in 25 European languages at: www.ecvet.net).
- *Project description:* A brief outline of the aims of the ECVET reflector project.

The need to ensure sufficient exactness, given the dynamic nature of an ongoing development process had to be taken into account when compiling the information materials.

3.3. Course of actions

Meetings of the project core team were held on 16 and 17 January (Nuremberg), 17 and 18 May (Nuremberg), 18 July (Nuremberg), and 17 and 18 October (Bonn) 2006. In addition to the core team special experts, national and VET experts were involved in some of the meetings.

There were three working sessions with the legal expert, Professor Hänlein. Professor Hänlein also attended the last core team meeting. He provided an expertise on aspects of the implementation and use of ECVET from a legal perspective (see sections 3.6 and 3.7). In addition he provided advice regarding the identification of legal sources and was involved in the typology building process.

The information material, as well as the survey and analysis instruments conceived by the project management were discussed during the workshops and made available in an electronic form to be commented on by the project partners during the entire project life-cycle. The website www.ecvet.net was launched at the beginning of the study and has a public and an internal section.

Dissemination activities took place in the second phase of the projects:

18 September 2006, Prague: Presentation of interim results during the conference “Towards an ECVET model: New approaches to transparency, mobility and international recognition of competences”

2 October 2006, Helsinki: Presentations during the “Workshop on ECVET: The launch of the Consultation”. Four thematic sessions: ECVET and transparency, ECVET and lifelong learning, ECVET and mobility, ECVET and mutual trust.

30 October 2006, Bonn: Presentation of parts of the study during the conference “European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training”, organised by the German Ministry for Education and Research and the National Agency Education for Europe at the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training, Bonn.

30 November 2006: The “Final Seminar on the outcomes of ECVET reflector and ECVET connection” took place in Berlin in the “Haus der Deutschen Wirtschaft” (House of German Business). Participants – among them the general directors of VET, representatives of social partners, VET experts, representatives of the training sector, representatives of the EC – were from 29 countries.

4 December 2006, Helsinki: Presentation of preliminary results during the conference “From Copenhagen to Helsinki”, organised under the Finnish Council Presidency.

3.4. Working definitions

Considering ECVET from a legal and regulative perspective implies identifying the procedural steps up to the awarding of a vocational qualification on a transnational basis. Within the Reflector project we use the following scheme:

- Step 1: assessment of learning outcomes in the respective host country;
- Step 2: awarding of credits;
- Step 3: evaluation of learning outcomes acquired abroad (including allocation of credits, documentation and awarding of certificates);
- Step 4: recognition of the credits acquired abroad as parts of the qualification to be obtained;
- Step 5: awarding of a qualification in accordance with the rules and regulations applied in the learner's home country.

Steps 1 to 2 fall under *valuation* of the learning outcomes achieved abroad. During his/her stay abroad the learner will pass exams according to the rules of the host country and be awarded credits. The valuation process will be completed by the award of credits. This might include the issuance of certificates for the acquired learning outcomes and of documents related to the learning activities. This prepares the ground for Step 3. *Credits* are formalised bundles of learning outcomes that are subjected to transfer; they are awarded after an assessment procedure. Credits might correspond to parts of formal qualifications in either the host or the home country.

The *validation* part of the ECVET procedure encompasses an evaluation of the learning outcomes (Step 3), i.e. the verification of the compliance of learning outcomes acquired abroad to the qualification standards at home. This evaluation is based on the documentation transmitted by the host country and on the awarded credits. This leads to the recognition of the credits acquired abroad.

The outcomes of this step will fall within either the procedure of “recognition” or “awarding of a qualification”. This depends on the national and regional legal and regulatory context as Steps 4 and 5 will be carried out in the learner's home country. With respect to Step 5 in particular, aspects regarding formal law connected with the awarding of a qualification must be considered.

The awarding of a qualification is concretised by a *certificate* in the following meaning: an “official document by an issuing body or authority documenting, as the outcome of a standardised evaluation procedure, an individual’s learning achievements” (Tissot 2004, p. 39).

One of the difficulties we encountered when carrying out the study was drawing a distinction between the processes of valuation on the one hand and validation processes on the other. Hence, we shall refer to evaluation as a part of the valuation process, with “valuation” being included as an intermediary stage with respect to validation. Referring to Tissot (2004, p. 157), we shall understand validation as the “process of assessing and recognising a wide range of knowledge, know-how, skills and competences, which people develop throughout their lives within different environments, for example through education, work and leisure activities”. We replace the process of assessment with an evaluation process in the ECVET context. As a result, the arrangement of the various procedural steps would look as follows:

Table 5: Valuation, Validation and Certification in mobility context

Host country	Process	Home country
Valuation	Assessment of learning outcomes acquired by the learner	
Valuation	Awarding of credits	
Valuation	Evaluation of learning outcomes acquired abroad (including their allocation to credits, documentation and awarding of certificates)	Validation
	Recognition of credits acquired abroad as parts of the qualification to be obtained	Validation
	Awarding of a qualification in accordance with the regulations applied in the learner’s home country	Certification

The three main elements of valuation, validation and certification are essential to secure the transfer of parts of qualifications.

One further important definition element concerns the differences between “VET systems” and “qualifications systems”. The term VET system is used, in our study, to stress VET provisions and VET programmes. “Qualifications systems” and “competent bodies” are used as defined by the European Commission. Consequently a qualification is defined as “formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards (Commission of the European Communities 2006⁶). In the ECVET context, responsibility for the assessment and validation processes might be dissociated and taken on by two different VET partners.

3.5. Typology building

The design and development of recommendations was not done on the level of detailed description of single VET-systems. Rather, the basis is in fact a typology that highlights general tendencies in the relation between national practices and ECVET. The aim was to generate generalising information on fields of action that have to be respected, possible problem areas and synergies that are to be expected in countries which want to use the new device.

The typology construction will be based upon methods used in qualitative social research. (Kluge 2000⁷).

1. Property space definition: i.e. collection of attributes in terms of properties and/or dimensions. Typology construction begins by identifying those properties which bear relevance to the typology construction according to the study’s scientific objectives.

⁶ Commission of the European Communities (2006). Implementing the Community Lisbon Programme. Proposal for a RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL on the establishment of a European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (presented by the Commission) {SEC(2006) 1093} {SEC(2006) 1094} Brussels, September 5, 2006. COM(2006) 479 final version 2006/0163 (COD)

⁷ Kluge, Susann (2000, January). Empirically grounded construction of types and typologies in qualitative social research, p. 4. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research [On-line Journal]*, 1(1). www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/1-00/1-00kluge-e.pdf (read October 2007).

2. Analysis of empirical regularities: In a further step, the outcomes of the investigation will be analysed with respect to potential empirical regularities. The subsequent grouping aims to create groups with an internal homogeneity.
3. Type construction: The phase of type construction is dedicated to the analysis of the internal relations within the groups, characterised by regularities. This may result in a condensation of the material or in a reduction of the groups. The subsequent interpretation of the regularities identified marks the step towards the construction of a type. If, however, a satisfactory interpretation is not possible on this basis, the definition of a property space will be revised.
4. Characterisation and specification of types: For instance, prototypes, ideal types, extreme types.
5. Formulation of practical recommendations. If the methodology were being used primarily for analysis, step 4 would be the final one. However, since the outlined research project pursues a primarily practical aim, the final step would have to consist more in the formulation of practical recommendations concerning the implementation of an ECVET system in the various types: To which stakeholders must special attention be paid and in which contexts? Where is it possible to gain synergy effects with the national dynamics of development? What kind of assistance, information, consultation and support might be rendered with respect to the various constellations of actors? Etc.

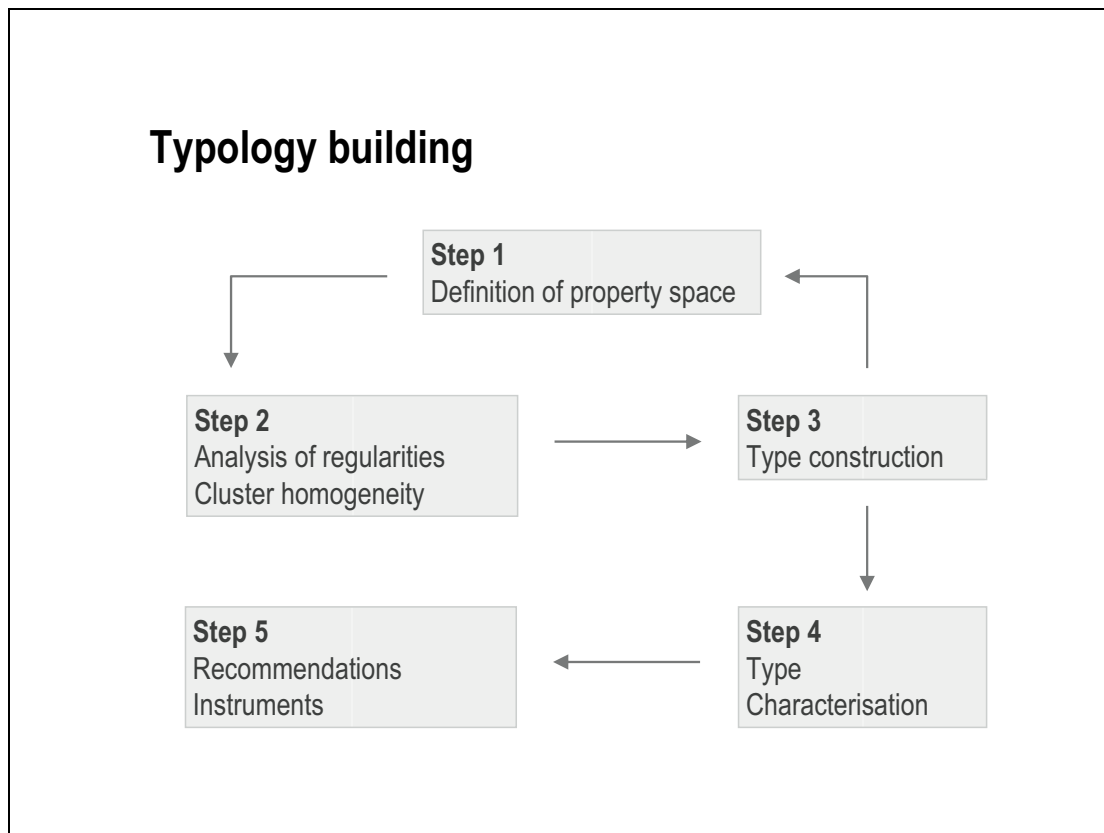


Fig. 8: Steps in typology building

There are a number of features which must, *prima facie*, be taken into consideration when creating a basis for establishing a typology of qualifications systems in terms of their ECVET-readiness.

These include:

- degree of outcomes orientation of examinations and certificates,
- focusing on the outcomes of formal learning versus the possibility of validation of informal learning; (non)existence of a culture of competence-oriented valuation (also relating to continuing education and training), as well as of respective institutions,
- provision of education and training in state institutions versus private businesses; (non)existence of combined forms (duality, alternance),

-
- co-existence of different systems of initial vocational education and training within one country,
 - constellation of actors in the sphere of certification (schools, businesses, state certifying bodies, chambers, etc.),
 - distribution of remits among actors (at the national, regional, sectoral etc. level),
 - degree of (vertical and horizontal) permeability; (non-)existence of forms of transfer of learning outcomes across the boundaries of sub-systems of the national system of vocational education and training,
 - existence of a national qualification framework, etc.

However, the primary objective of the study is not to identify a wide range of potentially favourable or unfavourable conditions for implementation. Instead it aims to compare the central elements of ECVET as a system which facilitates processes for the validation, transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes with corresponding practices in the various European countries, and thus to allow conclusions to be made on how “fit” the respective countries are for ECVET. The study thus has many similarities to a SWOT analysis. There are, however, two major differences:

- *Firstly*, SWOT analyses investigate internal strengths and weaknesses and the external conditions on which social systems – often companies – must base their strategic planning *in view of a set of objective standards*. In the current case, conclusions that the “fit” is unsatisfactory could either lead to recommendations for changing the design of ECVET or for devising supporting measures. *Both* aspects are variable – within certain limitations. Indeed, the practical part of the study does make recommendations regarding the design of processes and tools at EU level.
- *Secondly*, SWOT analyses usually consider contexts where many factors interact with one another and where there is a wide variety of “opportunities” and “threats” to the specific system under consideration. In contrast, vocational education systems of different countries are to be related to *one* clearly organised tool with a clear set of properties.

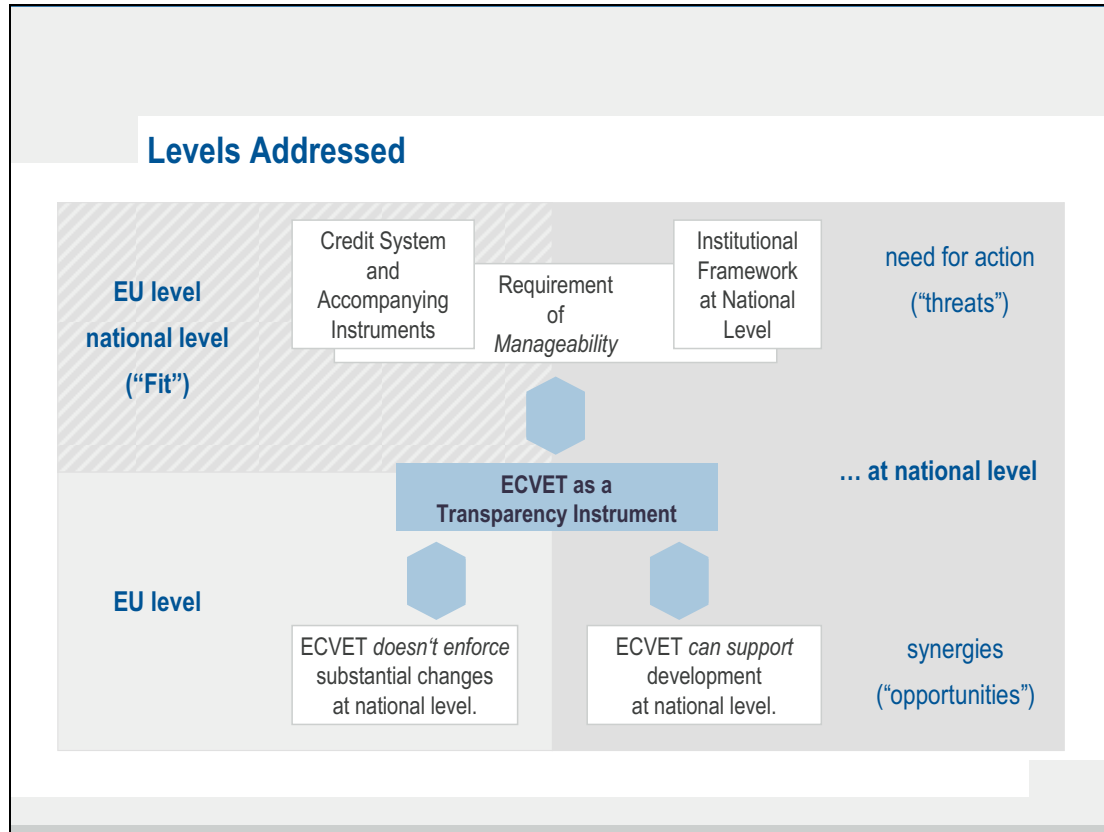


Fig. 9: Levels addressed and stakeholders

The aim was to identify these ECVET properties on the one hand and favourable conditions for ECVET implementation at national level on the other, to develop a problem-oriented typology, as demanded by the research goal.

The first step in creating the typology was developing a characterisation of ECVET which:

1. identified the essential elements of ECVET and
2. considered them in light of favourable conditions at the level of a qualification system.

If ECVET is to function properly in cross-border mobility projects, it is essential that:

- units of qualifications can be obtained: descriptions of training completed must be programme-independent, i.e. based purely on the intended learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competence);
- recognition of the equivalence of learning content acquired abroad with that of the qualifications in the country of origin;
- transfer of learning outcomes to the qualification and identification of corresponding parts within the training course which was the starting point of the mobility project;
- cross-border and non-programme-specific accumulation of the learning outcomes of the various learning contexts.

Only an *aggregate* of these elements can guarantee that learning experiences gathered abroad become an integrated part of the respective qualifications in the country of origin.

Table 6 relates ECVET elements to useful conditions of national implementation.

Table 6: Essential elements of ECVET

	Useful Conditions at National Level
Validation of Learning Outcomes	Assessment of parts of qualifications possible
	(Qualification) standards in use for the assessment procedures
	Accumulation towards qualification
Validation	Existence of different forms of validation (of prior learning experiences, school-based learning, etc.)
	Value of interim examinations, end of module tests, etc.
	Existence of different forms of certification (regarding their legal meaning)
	Existence of partial certificates / certificates for single units
Recognition and Equivalence	Methods for recognising KSC acquired abroad or in another part of the VET system when granting access to a VET programme / granting a full or partial certificate
	Definition of cross-border equivalences and their application
Transfer	Existence of transfer in the context of international mobility / between different parts of the IVET – e. g. in a regional or sector perspective Transfer procedures
	Existence of common units in different programmes / qualifications facilitating transfer
	Transfer of full or partial qualifications
Accumulation / capitalisation	Existence of accumulation in the national IVET/qualification system / in specific parts of the IVET/qualification system
	High efficiency and level of use of the accumulation processes

Fig. 10 illustrates which research and data collection methods were used to gather information on the four levels identified earlier (see 3.1).

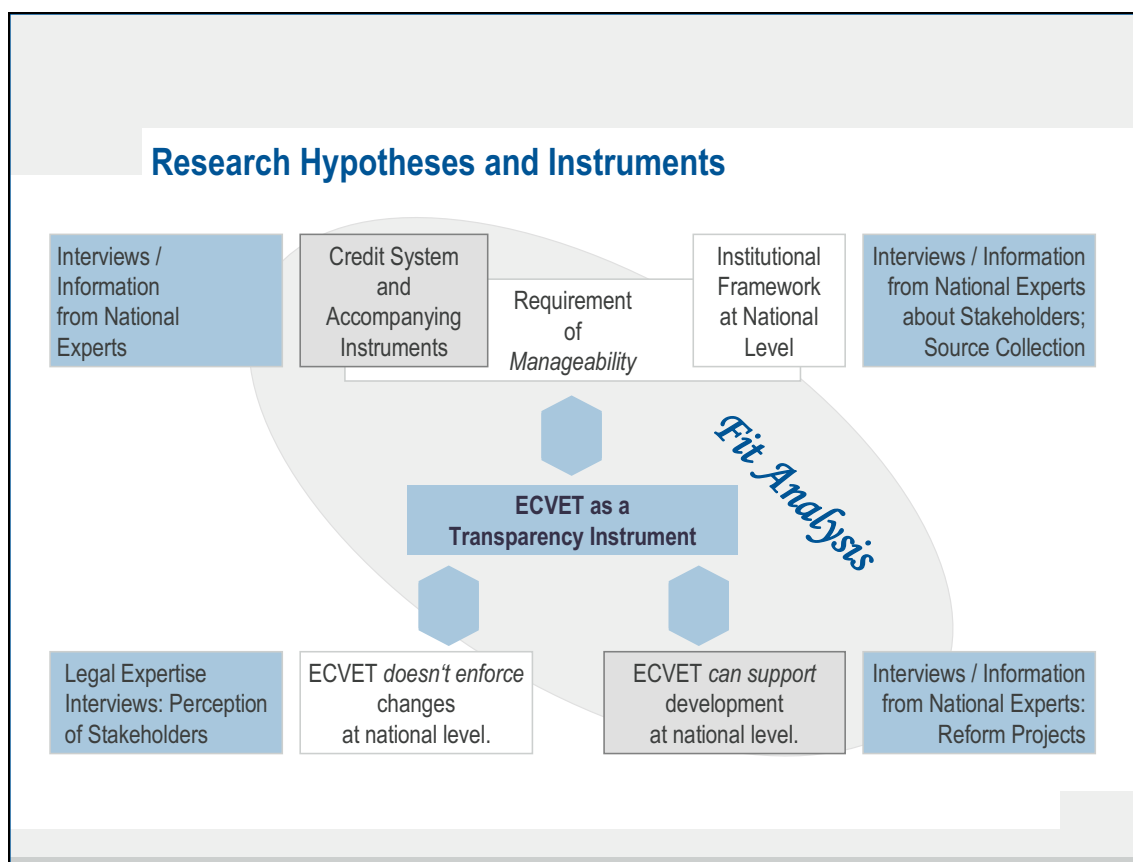


Fig. 10: Research hypotheses and instruments

3.6. Legal aspects on implementation and use of ECVET (by Andreas Hänlein)

3.6.1. ECVET and subsidiarity – on an EU legislative framework for a European vocational training policy

3.6.1.1. The relevance of an EU legislative framework

The ECVET reflector research project aimed at examining whether and under what conditions the implementation of the “ECVET prototype” elaborated at the European level may be expected to run smoothly, and at establishing which potential obstacles to implementation in any of the Member States ought to be taken into consideration when developing ECVET.

Naturally, the core issue of such analysis is the question of whether and to what extent national systems of vocational education and training are compatible with the European concept and which modifications might be required at the national level. It must also be taken into account that the commitment to reforms will depend on whether such directives are regarded to be legitimate. In this sense, compatibility with EU legislation is of crucial importance. This section therefore examines the compatibility of ECVET with EU legislation, in particular with Primary Law. At the same time, EU legislation will be analysed with a view to finding therein any suggestions to be drawn upon when developing the new system.

3.6.1.2. Subsidiarity and the basic principles of the EU Treaty

The division of political responsibility between the national and the European level is often characterised by the concept of subsidiarity. While this holds particularly true for educational policy in this context, the concept of subsidiarity is used in a rather broad and unspecific sense in terms of basically assigning the prerogative for action to the Member States, i.e. to the lower level, envisaging action to be taken at a higher (the European) level only on special grounds. In contrast, the EC Treaty presents a more juridical precise formulation of the division of responsibility as a triad

of principles one of which is also called the principle of subsidiarity, but in a specific sense (Art. 5 II EC)⁸.

The first principle is the Principle of Limited and Specific Power Transfers to the EU (*Prinzip der begrenzten Einzelermächtigung*). It refers to the delineation of responsibilities⁹, stating that the Community shall act within the limits of the powers conferred upon it by the Treaty and of the objectives assigned to it therein (Art. 5 I EC). The other principles – the Principle of Subsidiarity (Art. 5 II EC) and the Principle of Proportionality (Art. 5 III EC) – refer to the *exercise* of jurisdiction by the Community. When examining the possibilities of action the European Union has in the field of vocational training policy, it shall first be established on which authorisation jurisdiction by the Community in this section might be based.

3.6.1.3. The EU legislative basis of vocational education and training

Community jurisdiction in the field of vocational training policy

Art. 150 EC¹⁰ lays down the central provision authorising the implementation of measures in vocational education and training in the sense of the principle of limited and specific power transfers to the EU. In accordance with paragraph 1 of the Article, the Community shall implement a vocational training policy¹¹ which aims to support and complement the measures taken by the Member States while strictly respecting the Member States' responsibility for the content and organisation of vocational training. This provision establishes, on the one hand, the jurisdiction of the Community in this policy section and on the other, from this it follows that the jurisdiction

⁸ These two distinct ways of using the concept of subsidiarity clearly come to the fore in the German version of the EU Treaty: On the one hand, Article 5 EC is headed "Subsidiaritätsprinzip" and, on the other hand, this principle features as one among a number of partial principles in paragraph 2 of the same Article. As opposed to this, a more precise formulation is to be found in Article I-11 of the Treaty of Constitution which bears the heading "Grundprinzipien".

⁹ This basic dogmatic distinction is also to be found in Article I-11 of the Constitution Treaty.

¹⁰ As opposed to this, the Commission's proposal on a "Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on the establishment of a European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning" dated September 5, 2006 – KOM (2006) 479 final version, is not only based upon Art. 150 EC (referring to vocational education and training) but also upon Art. 149 EC (referring to general education). The reason for mentioning both articles as a legal basis lies in the fact that while the EQF is meant to be an instrument for the facilitation of mobility between general and vocational education within educational system the ECVET is related only to the field of vocational education and training (V=vocational).

¹¹ For details on the concept of vocational education and training (which, in the context of ECVET is, however, not unproblematic), see Classen, in: von der Groeben/Schwarze, Art. 150 EC Rz 2 f.

held by the Community, rather than being exclusive, is a supporting and complementing one. It is important to state this since the aforementioned principle of subsidiarity can be applied in a juridical sense only in case of non-exclusive jurisdiction (Art. 5 II EC).

It is only recently that this provision assigning jurisdiction in vocational training policy in such clear form became enshrined in the EC Treaty. Originally, it was laid down in the Treaty of Maastricht, by which the former, considerably more concise Article 128 EC Treaty¹² was replaced by Article 127 EC Treaty¹³, which was then renamed Article 150¹⁴ by the Treaty of Amsterdam. There were, however, provisions prior to this (which are still in force) authorising the Community to take action in this field to promote the free movement of people. In this context particular mention must be of Article 47 EC, on the basis of which the so-called directives for recognition were issued.

Forms of action under Community law

Article 150 EC also contains a provision on forms of action to be used by the Community in exercising its jurisdiction. Paragraph 4 states that the Council may adopt measures contributing to the achievement of the objectives referred to in the Article. The measures referred to are, in particular, those mentioned in Article 249 which says that the Commission shall make regulations, issue directives, take decisions, make recommendations¹⁵ or deliver opinions. The concept of

¹² Article 128 of the EEC ran as follows: “The Council shall, acting on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee, lay down general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy capable of contributing to the harmonious development both of the national economies and of the common market”.

¹³ On this, see Shaw, *From the Margins to the Centre: Education and Training Law and Policy*, p.556 (572 ff.)

¹⁴ The only substantial amendment brought about by this was that for an act to be adopted, the Committee of the Regions must also be consulted (Art. 150 paragraph 4 and Art. 263 ff EC).

¹⁵ Such instrument has now been proposed by the Commission to regulate the EQF; cf. the Commission’s proposal on a “Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on the establishment of a European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning”, dated September 5, 2006 – KOM (2006) 479 final version.

measures also covers further acts, in particular the great number of resolutions¹⁶ issued by the Council in the field of education¹⁷.

Last but not least, the so-called “method of open coordination” has become widely used over the past years, in particular as an instrument of European educational policy. According to this method which is of significance especially in those policy sections where the scope of action for European organs is rather limited, the Council shall issue guidelines and time schedules as may be proposed by the Commission and the Council, or the Commission shall specify quality indicators in cooperation with the member States. After a certain period the Member States shall submit reports on the progress of the implementation of these directives which will form the basis of an evaluation to be carried out by both the Council and the Commission to formulate recommendations¹⁸. However, this method of “benchmarking” adopted by European policies is not undisputed¹⁹. As opposed to other policy sections, Art. 150 EC does not explicitly refer to it. Thus, it is unclear how the procedure is to be developed further under Primary Law²⁰.

Insofar as the scope of actors participating in the “method of open coordination” also involves governments, this method overlaps with that of concerted action occasionally taken by the governments at Council meetings when making decisions which are not to be regarded as Council decisions²¹. Intergovernmental cooperation of this kind also takes place when the decision-making process involves governmental representatives of states which are not members of the

¹⁶ See Classen, in: von der Groeben/Schwarze, Art. 150 EC Rz 12 and Art. 149 Rz 27; also cf. Oppermann, *Europarecht*, p. 581 (Rz 12)

¹⁷ E.g., the ERASMUS programme (on this, ECJ May 30, 1989 – Rs. 242/87 – Slg. 1989, 1425, 1449) or the Leonardo-da-Vinci programme, OJ 1999, L 146/33.

¹⁸ Cf. the arguments put forward in Ennuschat, p. 198 ff.; also cf. Oppermann, *Europarecht*, p. 176 (Rz 114) and Göbel, *Von der Konvergenzstrategie zur offenen Methode der Koordinierung*, 2002, p. 145 ff.; Karl, *SDSRV* 53, p. 7 ff.

¹⁹ Criticism has been launched in particular by the German *Länder*; e.g. Hablitzel, *DÖV* 2002, 407 ff.; also, cf. Ennuschat, p. 201 f.

²⁰ In contrast, see: on the coordination of economic policies by “broad guidelines of economic policies”: Art. 99 II EC; on the coordination of employment policies by “guidelines”: Art. 128 II EC; on the coordination of social policy: Art. 137 II EC. Also cf. the procedural recommendation contained in the White Paper of European Governance KOM(2001) 428, S. 28.

²¹ See Oppermann, *Europarecht*, p. 174 (Rz 109).

European Union. Examples of intergovernmental decisions in this sense are the Bologna and the Copenhagen Declarations²².

Objectives of a European vocational training policy

In addition, Article 150 EC defines the objectives to be attained by Community action in vocational education and training, listing six objectives which can be divided into two groups.

The first group of objectives refers to the promotion of mobility, in particular of mobility within Community territory. These objectives aim to:

- encourage mobility of instructors and trainees and particularly young people (item 3 Var. 2);
- stimulate cooperation on training between educational or training establishments and firms (item 4);
- develop exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the training systems of the Member States (item 5).

Thus, these three objectives fall within the concept of the internal market (Art. 14 EC) and the basic liberties.

The second group of objectives reflects a genuinely European concern in terms of the design of a vocational training policy, aiming at proactively influencing European educational systems. These objectives include:

- facilitation of adaptation to industrial changes, in particular through vocational training and retraining (item 1);

²² On the Bologna Declaration, see Wex, Bachelor und Master, p. 90; Wex, *ibid.*, p. 393 ff. also renders the text of the Bologna Declaration; Source of the Copenhagen Declaration: “Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, and the European Commission, convened in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002, on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training” (http://ec.europa.eu/education/copenhagen/copenhagen_declaration_en.pdf).

- improvement of initial and continuing vocational training in order to facilitate vocational integration and reintegration into the labour market (item 2);
- facilitation of access to vocational training (item 3 Var. 1).

Provisions for the protection of the Member States' competencies in educational policy

Finally, it must be noted that both Article 150 and Article 5 imply a number of restrictions narrowing the scope of action of European actors. These legal restrictions do not only apply to “classical” actions taken by the Community explicitly referred to in Article 249. It must also be ensured in general that Community law is neither infringed upon nor impeded by any measure that might be taken, including measures of intergovernmental cooperation²³.

Two of these restrictions follow from Article 150 EC. The first is the requirement to fully respect the Member States' responsibility for the content and organisation of vocational training²⁴ (paragraph 1; “requirement of respect”), and the second – paragraph 4 – to exclude any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States (“harmonisation ban”). This ban which is also referred to in other provisions of Primary Law that empower the Community to take action has gained considerable weight by case law judgements of the European Court of Justice²⁵.

Another two restrictions ensue from Article 5 EC. The first, as already mentioned, is the (specific) principle of subsidiarity laid down in Article 5 II EC and according to which, in areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, as is the case in the field of vocational training policy, the Community shall take action only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved by the Community. Certainly, the significance of this principle will be greater in areas in which the Community has the autonomy of defining

²³ European Court of Justice 1986, 29, 81 Rz 39 – Rs 44/84 – (“Hurd”); reference is made hereto in Oppermann, *Europarecht*, p. 174 (Rz. 109).

²⁴ German version: “unter strikter Beachtung”; the English version is more significant: “... full respect of the responsibility of the Member States ...”,

²⁵ Cf. European Court of Justice 5.10.2000 – C – 376/98 – Slg. I-8419 ff. (ban on tobacco advertisement). Compare in addition EuGH 12.12.2006 – Rs.G-380/03 – (FRG/European Parliament and Council of the EU).

the objectives to be pursued by educational policy. Conversely, the principle is less likely to be deemed infringed upon when the Community's primary concern is facilitation of mobility between the Member States' education systems²⁶. After all, according to the second restriction, "principle of proportionality", any action taken by the Community must not go beyond what is necessary to achieve the objectives of the Treaty (Art. 5 paragraph 3 EC). Following case law judgements delivered by the European Court of Justice it must be considered whether or not the chosen means are obviously inappropriate for achieving a certain goal and whether or not they obviously exceed the extent of what is necessary to achieve this goal²⁷.

Thus, there are a number of restrictions to be adhered to. It must also be considered that Article 150 EC authorising European educational policy notably deviates from Article 149 EC that addresses the systems of general education. Stating that supporting and complementing measures shall be taken by the Community only "if necessary" (Article 149 paragraph 1 EC), this Article introduces an additional reservation which is interpreted such that the Commission shall be free to decide if it is going to take action at all²⁸. In comparison, Article 150 paragraph 1 EC, apart from being formulated more stringently, lacks any such additional prerequisite of necessity. While according to this Article the Community shall "implement a vocational training policy", pursuant to Article 149 paragraph 1 EC it shall merely "contribute" to vocational training policy. We can therefore conclude that in the field of vocational training policy the Community may adopt measures it would not be authorised to take on the basis of Article 149 EC²⁹.

Finally, when handling the various restrictions called upon to protect the Member States' competencies in VET policy, it must be kept in mind that strict application of these restrictions will be less likely if the Community, in pursuit of its policy, draws upon or develops further concepts already being practiced in the Member States. In such cases the Community's activities may indeed be characterised as having a "supporting" role in the sense of both Article 149 and Article

²⁶ As has been convincingly set forth by Classen in: von der Groeben/Schwarze, Art. 150 EC Rz 13.

²⁷ Cf., e.g., EJC 12.11.1996 – Rs. 84/95 - (United Kingdom/Council [ref. working hours directive]); recently also EuGH 12.12.2006 – Rs.G-380/03 – FRG/European Parliament and Council of the EU [concerning ban of tobacco advertisement].

²⁸ Classen in: von der Groeben/Schwarze, Art. 149 EC Rz 10.

²⁹ Classen in: von der Groeben/Schwarze, Art. 150 EC Rz 14.

150 EC³⁰. What relevant here is whether or not and to what extent the individual national educational policies are already informed by concepts similar to those now emerging at the European level³¹.

3.6.2. Conclusions regarding ECVET

Having set out the framework established by Primary Law we will now consider some of the consequences this may have for the ECVET project.

Forms of action and procedures

The first question concerns the legal form in which the European credit transfer system for vocational education and training should be set up. Without carrying out an in-depth analysis it can be maintained that the European Community's jurisdiction for such a concept results from its competence "to implement a vocational training policy" (Article 150 I EC).

Certainly, such policy cannot be developed on the basis of a Council regulation which would have a direct effect in the Member States. Not leaving any scope for national legislation, such mode of regulation would neither comply with the provision to fully respect the responsibility of the Member States (Article 150 I EC), nor with the harmonisation ban (Article 150 IV EC). A directive does not seem appropriate either, as it would define legally binding objectives to be implemented by the Member States on the basis of legal acts and thus contradict the principle of subsidiarity. Legally binding provisions might be an option to be considered if the envisaged credit point system was to apply exclusively to transnational contexts. However, the aims pursued by the Lisbon Strategy from which the ECVET project has evolved go beyond such setting, addressing educational policy itself. With a view to this, but even without having in mind such remote scenarios, it may be argued that a non-legally binding instrument seems to better serve the

³⁰ Similar arguments in the context of Art. 149 put forward by Classen in: von der Groeben/Schwarze, Art. 149 EC Rz 10.

³¹ Hence, from a legal analysis certain requirements may be derived concerning the conduct of comparative studies to be carried out within the framework of ECVET reflector: Carrying out these studies special attention has to be paid to any relationships between the individual national legal orders and the concept of the ECVET project.

restrictive principles laid down in Primary Law. Accordingly, a form of action both admissible and advisable would be a non-binding Council recommendation in the sense of Articles 150 IV, 249 V EC, following the model of the Commission's recommendation regarding the EQF³². Moreover, such a recommendation would both enable and require participation in the procedure by the European Parliament pursuant to Article 251 EC, as well consultation of the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (cf. Article 150 IV EC).

All this – and thus a high level of legitimation – would not be assured if ECVET became the subject of an act implemented within the framework of the *method of open coordination* (e.g. “vocational training policy guidelines”)³³ unless in this case the procedure were also governed by Article 150 IV EC. However, such procedure is not to be recommended since, as has been set out, in the field of educational policy Primary Law does not provide an explicit basis for “open coordination”.

Finally, an intergovernmental declaration following the model of the Bologna and Copenhagen Declarations could be considered. This would require all governments involved to adopt a unanimous resolution³⁴ which as such, however, would not be legally binding. Neither could the institutionalised “soft” pressure exerted by the coordination method be justified on the basis of such a declaration as it is unlikely to have a sufficiently legitimate basis. On the other hand, it might be by its very weakness that the instrument could prove more appropriate than any other “sharper” instrument for the formulation of further political goals.

“Unitisation”

The introduction of a credit (transfer) system for vocational training implies that qualifications are conceived of and described as a whole composed of smaller units. There are indeed indications that the Member States will be encouraged to opt for designating the single elements that constitute a qualification as “units” in the sense of partial qualifications or partial results of train-

³² Cf. fn. 3.

³³ For general criticism of the “open coordination” under this aspect, see Karl, SDSRV 53, p. 7 (23)

³⁴ Cf. Oppermann, *Europarecht*, p. 174 (Rz. 109).

ing processes³⁵. Hence, the question is how to assess a European act requiring or encouraging the Member States to ensure “unitisation” of qualifications within their systems of vocational education and training.

There would not be any objections in terms of primary law, providing such requirement were directed towards a mere re-description or re-representation of existing qualifications – i.e. as the total of a number of “units”. In particular this would neither affect the Member States’ responsibility for the “content and organisation of vocational training” (Article 150 I EC) nor contradict the harmonisation ban (Article 150 IV EC). It would, however, have to be examined separately if such assessment were appropriate, should the partial units within the educational system be organised as self-contained “units” in the sense of a “modularisation”³⁶. An examination does not have to be carried out at this point, though, as modularisation in that sense is not intended.

Introduction of credit transfer

On the basis of a credit transfer system both single units and qualifications – as a bundle of units – are assigned credit points so as to enable transparent accumulation and crediting of learning outcomes³⁷. If units are assigned credit points in the sense explained above these will express the relative weight a partial qualification has in relation to the respective overall qualification³⁸.

If the Community required Member States were to envisage and implement the awarding of credit points in vocational training, this would go beyond a re-description of existing processes, as it would call for the introduction of procedures for a differentiated awarding of credit points.

³⁵ On the concept of “unity”: Report submitted on June 28, 2005 by the Technical Work Group Crediting of Credit points, p. 7: “A credit point system would allow qualifications to be sub-divided into units or the objectives of a educational or vocational education programme sub-divided into partial objectives a unit forms part of a qualification”; also cf. Le Mouillour, *European approaches to credit (transfer) systems in VET*, p. 77: “unit means the elementary (or smallest) part of a qualification or of a curriculum, and is outcome oriented”.

³⁶ On the concept of a module as referred to here, see, Le Mouillour, *ibid*: “Module means the elementary (or smallest) part of a learning pathway, and is process-oriented. It corresponds to a specific way of organising resources, workload and learning time to reach certain objectives”.

³⁷ Cf. Report of the Technical Working Group Crediting of credit points, submitted on June 28, 2005, p. 7.

³⁸ Cf. Report of the Technical Working Group Crediting of credit points, submitted on June 28, 2005, p. 7 and p. 15 f.

Yet such requirement would not disregard the provision to respect the Member States' responsibility (Article 150 I EC) as the awarding of credit points as such³⁹, while leaving the content of vocational training processes untouched, would only marginally affect its organisation in terms of content. Again, this would not infringe on the harmonisation ban (Article 150 IV). Regarding the principle of subsidiarity (Art. 5 II EC) it must be underlined that a credit transfer system, if it were also to ensure cross-border mobility, would have to be given a consistent form throughout Europe, meaning the Community would be called upon to take joint action. Concerning the principle of proportionality (Art. 5 III EC) – and also taking into account the principle of subsidiarity – it has to be pointed out that the countries are not expected to award credit points immediately and in all of their territory. Rather, the idea is to proceed step-by-step, concentrating initially on those curricula and industries in which (cross-border) mobility of learners is most likely, or in which experimentation with such mobility projects is already taking place. Such resource-saving procedures do take into account the principle of proportionality.

Appraisal and valuation of learning outcomes

Crediting of learning outcomes will depend on the learner's performance and the progress he/she makes in achieving a certain unit. This means that learning outcomes achieved relating to single units must be appraised, valued and, eventually, recognised⁴⁰. The requirement that partial qualifications subsequently be subjected to examination procedures, although noticeably interfering with national sovereignty over the organisation of curricula may nevertheless be considered to be justified. For it can be argued that transnational mobility during vocational training requires the recognition of learning outcomes achieved abroad and this would be impossible without furnishing any evidence of successful completion of the respective learning elements. Since in accordance with the provisions of Primary Law, European vocational education and training policy is explicitly called upon to encourage mobility (as laid down in Article 150 paragraph 2 No 3b), the requirement of verification and evaluation procedures carried out by European bodies is likewise acceptable. At least this applies if and to what extent such requirements relate to transnational training measures as intended within the framework of ECVET.

³⁹ So, here it has not yet been taken into account that credit points can only be awarded after an evaluation of the learning achievement has been carried out upon completion of each module.

⁴⁰ Cf. Report of the Technical Working Group Crediting of credit points, submitted on June 28, 2005, p. 8; on the requirement to pass examinations during the period of studies, see Wex, Bachelor und Master, p. 142 ff.

Recognition and transfer of learning outcomes

Something similar holds true for the last step necessary in the implementation of a credit transfer system in vocational education and training – the recognition and transfer of externally achieved learning outcomes. Provisions made at the European level encouraging Member States to recognise learning outcomes gained abroad do not seem incompatible with the restrictions of Primary Law. This seems to apply unrestrictedly to the crediting of units acquired abroad towards the duration of training prescribed at home. It seems more problematic from a European perspective, though, to encourage Member States to credit a partial qualification acquired abroad towards a final examination to be taken at home. It is likely that this may be required by the Community only if the respective national laws do contain provisions envisaging the crediting of learning outcomes achieved during training towards the results of any final examination. However, if a training system is organised in such way, it would be an act of undue discrimination not to equally recognise learning outcomes, which are in principle considered to be creditable, simply because they were achieved abroad.

“Memorandum of understanding”

For learning outcomes achieved “externally” to be recognised, it is necessary that all participants can be confident that completion, evaluation and assessment of the learning process are reliable. It is therefore foreseen within the framework of ECVET that the transfer of credits from one country to another will be based upon an agreement in the form of a “memorandum of understanding”⁴¹ to be signed by the competent bodies and/or the training providers. Obviously a kind of skeleton agreement, this document will provide the basis on which individual learning processes taking place at various training establishments in different countries will be organised⁴².

The conclusion of such skeleton agreements would presuppose a European instrument to define a legal structure for the actors involved to refer to as a guideline. The “common platforms” con-

⁴¹ Report of the Technical Working Group Crediting of credit points, submitted on June 28, 2005, p. 8 and 20 f.

⁴² As concerns concrete individual cases presumably a number of detailed individual agreements consisting of several pages will have to be concluded between the receiving and the sending institution as well as the learner – as is usual in respect of projects sponsored under the LEONARDO programme; on the “learning agreements” concluded under the ERASMUS programme, also cf. Wex, Bachelor und Master, p. 150.

stitute an instrument fulfilling a similar function in the sense of Articles 15 and 58 of the new directive on the recognition of occupational qualifications (Directive 2005/36/EC). However, this is a somewhat unwieldy instrument, as it ultimately aims at regulation by the Commission. Instead, it might be suggested to follow the model of agreements concluded under the ERASMUS or the LEONARDO programme.

Regulations issued at the European level providing such an instrument will not infringe upon the restrictions laid down in Primary Law as long as implementation is optional the Member States.

3.6.3. Concluding remarks

In conclusion, it can be stated that at the European level requirements relating to vocational education policy must be formulated more cautiously, the higher their implications in terms of being legally binding. However, the scope of action might broaden if and insofar as European regulations drew upon developments having already taken place in the Member States and which are also reflected in their legal orders. Taking into account such developments might indeed be regarded as an expression of the respect the Community is obliged to pay to the Member States' competencies in accordance with Article 150 I EC. Here, it is also of interest with a view to Primary Law to establish whether and what number of elements the various systems of vocational education contain for a European regulation to draw upon. Once such "points of contact" have been identified at the national level they might be referred to in both the process of development and the justification of a future European instrument, so as to respect to national sovereignty over vocational training policy.

3.7. Trust-building instruments in ECVET (by Andreas Hänlein)

3.7.1. Introduction

If learning outcomes achieved in an external training course are to be transferred to an internal programme, all actors involved must trust each other. This requirement is emphasised at several

points of the Technical Specifications of the ECVET⁴³ – and rightfully so. Proposing an instrument to cater for this need in terms of establishing mutual trust between the participating institutions, the paper mentions the “Memorandum of Understanding”. Although it does not follow from the paper exactly how this is to be understood, it is quite obvious that the instrument refers to agreements to be reached by the partners, and its conception seems to be motivated by the understanding that such an instrument is of central importance when it comes to establishing and maintaining mutual trust. The conclusion of a contract – be it on an informal basis, in writing, or in any other form – reflects the concurrence of the parties’ wills in terms of expressing their common interest to realise an intention to which the agreement refers. Concurrence of wills is the result of contract negotiations taking place between parties who have identified each other as potential partners in advance. As a rule, trust is building up gradually in the course of “getting closer to each other” and it may solidify as the agreement remains in place (or, at worst, evaporate). Naturally, the building of trust required for joint projects to be realised will be easier, the better the partners know each other, especially if they are maintaining business relationships. This would, for instance, be the case if subsidiaries of a business group decided to establish a joint training partnership. On the other hand, there is the more strenuous option for a single enterprise to search for a foreign partner in order to carry out joint training programmes.

This paper shall consider which type of agreements might be appropriate for implementation in ECVET. In doing so, it will refer to agreements developed in the course of carrying out the SOCRATES-/ERASMUS-sponsored student exchange programmes in order to identify structures which may additionally be required in the field of vocational education and training.

3.7.2. The models of the SOCRATES/ERASMUS programme and ECTS

A student’s eligibility for promotion under the ERASMUS programme depends on whether the learning outcomes he/she has achieved at a foreign university can be credited towards the study

⁴³ European Credit Point System for Vocational Education and Training. Technical Specifications, Report of the working group dated June, 28, 2005, pp. 1.4. and 2.3.

programme of his/her home university⁴⁴. This requirement has been accounted for in practice by the introduction of a kind of trilateral contract, a so-called learning agreement⁴⁵. These agreements which must be concluded prior to commencing the study course abroad involve both, the sending and the receiving university, as well as the student. They contain the learning units (courses) to be completed at the receiving university and express the sending university's commitment to acknowledge these units, provided they were completed successfully, as a regularly completed part of the study course.

Besides, it is essential that these individual learning agreements be embedded in the context of contractual framework relationships at regular terms in the form of cooperation relationships between universities⁴⁶. These form the basis for the participating universities to become acquainted with each other so that there is no need to verify the partner institution's reliability each time an individual learning agreement is concluded.

In order to participate in the SOCRATES/ERASMUS programme universities must have qualified as universities in the sense of the programme by their respective countries⁴⁷.

3.7.3. Forms of possible agreements in transnational VET

In the following, the mechanisms implemented in the university sector will be theoretically transferred to the sphere of vocational education and training one-to-one, so as to examine which modifications might be necessary with respect to the special features of the sphere of vocational education and training

⁴⁴ Cf., e.g., the first version of the Socrates programme: Resolution No. 819/95/EG of the European Parliament and the Council dated March 14, 1995 on the joint action programme SOCRATES, OJ EC No. L/ 87/10.

⁴⁵ For this, refer to Commission of the European Communities, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, ECTS Users' Guide. European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System and the Diploma Supplement", Brussels 14 February 2005, Sections "Application form for students" and "Learning Agreement" (ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/ects/doc/guide_en.pdf, read: October 2007).

⁴⁶ For this, refer to Resolution No. 819/95/EC, Appendix, chapter 1, action 1, A.

⁴⁷ Article 2 paragraph 2 of Resolution No. 819/95/EC.

Application of the ERASMUS model to VET

A mere transference of the described model would imply that both the sending and the receiving university's places would be taken by a sending and a receiving VET-provider, respectively. In this case, on the one hand, trilateral agreements would have to be concluded relating to each learner's individual learning pathway and stipulating which qualification elements shall be of relevance with respect to the envisaged training course to be completed abroad, to ensure that these will be accepted as a part of the training course attended at home. The framework for such an individual learning agreement would be constituted by a skeleton agreement concluded by the participating training establishments. Thus, cooperation between universities would be replaced by cooperation between VET providers.

At this point, a distinctive difference can be seen already. In higher education, the negotiating parties are the universities, i.e. bodies responsible for higher education that are, as a matter of principle, *similar to each other* as regards their respective responsibilities in both the sending and the receiving country. These include the provision of educational programmes, elaboration of study courses and examination regulations, regulation of the admission to examinations, administration of examinations, and the awarding of certificates. The relative weights to be attributed to periods of study completed within the framework of exchange programmes are a matter of negotiation between these actors who also regulate the allocation of ECTS credit points.

In contrast to this, in the sphere of vocational education and training throughout Europe there is a great *diversity of actors*, such as state-governed schools, business enterprises, private VET providers, chambers, associations, etc. The various countries show considerable differences concerning the distribution of responsibilities for sovereign acts – the valuation of learning outcomes or the awarding of certificates on the one hand and the organisation of programmes of study on the other among these institutions. With respect to IVET exchange programmes it is therefore important to specify which functions are carried out by the respective institutions acting as negotiating parties.

Against the background of these considerations, the following examines some possible variants involving various actors as well as legal implications.

Variant 1: Private businesses acting as VET providers

What is characteristic of the VET sector is that in some countries vocational education and training is conducted by private enterprises.

If the sending and the receiving institution are both private enterprises the legal relationships between the trainee and the sending enterprise are governed by a private-law contract – the VET-contract which, alongside aspects of education and training, also regulates issues relating to labour legislation, in particular to the extent of the reimbursement of training costs. Thus, the dispatch of a trainee abroad for training purposes must be covered by respective labour legislation provisions⁴⁸. In particular, arrangements will have to be made concerning the possible continuation of payment of the compensation, as well as the coverage of extra costs. In addition to such agreements there is a need for agreements to be concluded between the enterprises which provide the training, and the trainee concerning the what parts of training must be completed abroad, as well as the conditions of importing them into the training course at home. The framework of this arrangement could be provided by private-law cooperation agreements between the participating enterprises.

Of course, training does not necessarily have to be conducted by private enterprises. This function could also be assumed by a state or other public educational provider. However, such constellation might also be based upon an arrangement, such as a learning agreement or a skeleton agreement. The question to be resolved would be that of their classification within the legal system in terms of qualifying them as relating to public, or rather to private law, although this point does not seem to be of particular importance.

Variant 2: The role of public organs

It has to be expected that individual national legislations require the involvement of a public organ other than the training establishment, especially in cases when training is provided by private

⁴⁸ Cf. Stück, Aktuelle Rechtsfragen der Auslandsausbildung, NZA 2005, p. 1393 ff.

enterprises. It must therefore be clarified which role the responsible public organs are going to play in respect of the agreements described above. One possibility is that the public organs' consent will be required (only) for individual learning agreements. Further, it is conceivable that such consent will be necessary for a cooperation agreement to come into effect. As a final option, the public actor might have the right to a say at both levels.

As a result of the recent reform of VET legislation, in Germany, the first variant was put in place. Thus, if initial training undergone abroad extends over a longer period (up to nine months), a plan agreed with the public organ will be required (cf. Section 76 III 2 Vocational Training Act). The amendment to the German Vocational Training Act also contains general provisions on cross-border collaborative training (Section 2 III Vocational Training Act). Moreover, having explicitly acknowledged collaborative training (Section 10 V Vocational Training Act), the legislator has provided for a legal institute which can also be applied within a transnational context⁴⁹.

Variant 3: Dual systems

What have finally to be taken into consideration are dual systems, within which two different bodies are in charge of vocational education and training – vocational schools and enterprises. Involving two educational establishments within one country, such setting requires agreements to be made between various actors, and this also holds true for transnational mobility programmes. With a view to the partners involved in the dual system, the arrangements to be made have to cater for the most diverse needs, e.g. when it comes to granting a leave of absence for an apprentice to take part in a mobility programme: For the company, the relevant question is that of continuation of payment of training compensation during the apprentice's absence from work, but for the school, it may be off-holiday stays abroad come into conflict with compulsory attendance of vocational school⁵⁰. It is conceivable, though, to meet such arrangement requirements by con-

⁴⁹ See Hänlein, Die Verbundausbildung im neuen Berufsbildungsgesetz, NZA 2006, 348, 351; see also Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände, Internationale Kompetenzen stärken – Auslandsaufenthalte für Auszubildende! Handreichung zur Durchführung von Auslandsaufenthalten, 1st edition, August 2005.

⁵⁰ In many countries which have the dual system the attendance of vocational school is compulsory for as long as is required to obtain a professional qualification. For regulations concerning compulsory attendance of vocational schools, see School Act Schleswig-Holstein, Section 23 "Beginning and end of compulsory attendance of vocational school" (cf. www.schooloffice-sh.de, read October 2007).

cluding separate agreements, or to include the school or the competent body for the purview of the school as another party to the agreements.

Whereas schools and companies in some of the dual systems share responsibilities, schools play a rather minor role in others as can be seen in, e.g., the German dual system of vocational education and training. What is decisive for obtaining a certified professional qualification is the workplace-based part of learning and that is why this part of learning is valued above all. Learning outcomes obtained in *vocational schools* are of less significance; these are evidenced by a separate certificate and not reflected in the final certificate.

As a rule, sovereign acts – recognition of learning outcomes as a prerequisite for admission to examination, as well as the certification of examination results – are taken upon by third parties. In countries where the dual system has been established, these functions are primarily carried out by the chambers. In addition there are public bodies, such as ministries or regional authorities acting as competent bodies. According to the German Vocational Training Act which, which, as mentioned above, in principle provides for the possibility to spend parts of the training period abroad, responsibility for monitoring and promotion of stays abroad lies with the competent bodies. Stays abroad exceeding a period of four weeks require the accordance of a scheme with the competent body as mentioned above (§ 76 III, Vocational Training Act). Accordingly, the competent body is in charge of valuating the learning outcomes achieved abroad and relating it to the qualification to be acquired at home.

3.7.4. On the legal admissibility of transnational agreements in VET

There are various replies to the argument that legal construction of agreements like the ones described is not possible:

Article 150 paragraph 2 (4) of the EC Treaty

As one of the aims to be pursued by European VET policies, the EC Treaty explicitly mentions the promotion of transnational cooperation between educational institutions⁵¹. However, such cooperation is not conceivable without any agreements having been concluded in advance. It can therefore be assumed that on the basis of Article 150 EC the Member States may be recommended to facilitate such agreements, i.e. to provide for a legal instrument should the present legal system exclude such agreements⁵².

Precedents in the field of educational policies

Secondly, it has to be noted that in the sphere of educational policies, experience has already been gained with the implementation of similar agreements (as pointed out in this article) with regard to the SOCRATES/ERASMUS programmes. Another example is the LEONARDO programme⁵³ which, among other purposes, serves to facilitate the dispatch of young persons abroad for educational purposes. According to this programme student exchange shall take place within the framework of “transnational partnerships”⁵⁴ – which, in German terminology, would denote a kind of agreed educational association. Thus, there is no reason to hold that such practice could not be pursued within the framework of a future ECVET programme.

⁵¹ German version: “Förderung der Zusammenarbeit in Fragen der beruflichen Bildung zwischen Unterrichtsanstalten und Unternehmen”; English version: “to stimulate cooperation on training between educational or training establishments and firms.”

⁵² Arguments relating to the ERASMUS programme in Hailbronner/Weber, *WissR* 30 (1997), p. 298 ff. (320 f.: “This is to legitimise not only certain EU-actions but also autonomous agreements, especially those concluded between universities of different countries.”); also cf. Art. 5 para. 3 of the Decision No. 819/95/EC: “The Member States shall take the necessary steps to coordinate and organize the implementation of this programme at national level, in particular, by providing for the appropriate structures and mechanisms at national level”.

⁵³ Decision of the Council of Dec. 6, 1994 No. 94/819/EC on an action programme for the implementation of VET policies throughout the European Community, and the Decision of the Council of April 26, 1999 No. 1999/382/EC on the implementation of the second phase of the Union’s action programme in vocational education and training “Leonardo da Vinci”, OJ EC No. L 146/33.

⁵⁴ Decision of the Council No. 94/819/EC, Annex, Section A IV 1: “..... transnational partnerships in VET...”.

Precedents from other contexts

Finally, mention has to be made of transnational agreements concluded in other contexts, such as, for example, Regulation (EEC) 1408/71 on the coordination of social security schemes. Among other things, this regulation stipulates which legislation is applicable to cases involving more than one country with Article 17 providing for exceptions from the respective regulations (Article 13 ff.) on the basis of transnational agreements⁵⁵. On the one hand, it should be noted which organs are being considered to act as possible parties to such agreements. Apart from the Member States themselves, these include the competent bodies⁵⁶, or organs designated by these bodies. Thus, it is left up to the respective country to determine the body which will be authorised to conclude transnational regulations. It is also taken into account that such competence may be assigned at quite different levels. On the other hand, it is interesting that the provision covers agreements of different characters. These may either be general regulations relating to certain groups of persons, or agreements might be concluded on concrete individual cases. Given such background, the structure described above – i.e. the sphere of transnational VET characterised by individual agreements on the one hand and skeleton agreements on the other – loses the air of being something extraordinary.

3.7.5. Recommendations on the practical implementation to be derived from the proposed considerations

With regard to the requirement of building trust, any recommendation ought to emphasise that this might be facilitated by cooperation agreements concluded between educational establishments. Moreover, these might also provide the framework for individual training agreements.

It should also be recommended that model agreements or forms designed to facilitate the conclusion of concrete agreements be elaborated at the EC-level – in a modified form, if required.

⁵⁵ “Exceptions to Articles 13 to 16: Two or more Member States, the competent authorities of these States or the bodies designated by these authorities may by common agreement provide for exceptions to the provisions of Articles 13 to 16 in the interest of certain categories of persons or of certain persons.”

⁵⁶ In Article 1 lit. 1 of the Regulation 1408/71 a “competent authority” is defined as follows: “in respect of each Member State, the Minister, Ministers or other equivalent authority responsible for social security schemes throughout or in any part of the territory of the State in question”.

Finally, what might be considered is the establishment of a kind of multilateral administrative commission to be entrusted with drawing up such forms at the European level – quite in analogy with Regulation (EEC) 1408/71. The “Administrative Commission” mentioned therein (Art. 80 Regulation (EEC) 1408/71⁵⁷) is, among other things concerned with the development of sickness insurance forms to be used abroad⁵⁸.

⁵⁷ Article 80 paragraph 1: “There shall be attached to the Commission an Administrative Commission on Social Security for Migrant Workers (hereinafter called ‘the Administrative Commission’) made up of a government representative of each of the Member States, assisted, where necessary, by expert advisers. A representative of the Commission shall attend the meetings of the Administrative Commission in an advisory capacity.”

⁵⁸ Art. 81 lit f Regulation (EEC) 1408/71 and Art. 2 paragraph 1 Regulation (EEC) 574/72; for a detailed explanation, see Cornelissen, in Fuchs (ed.), *Europäisches Sozialrecht*, 4th edition, 2005, Art. 81 Rz 35 ff.

4. General results

4.1. Learning outcomes

The development of a transfer tool which can be used in different learning contexts demands a common means of expression for the description of learning outcomes independent of programmes and other contexts of origin. ECVET therefore focuses on “learning outcomes formulated as knowledge, skills and competences” (Commission of the European Communities, Consultation Paper, p. 5). Learning outcomes as the focus of assessment, validation, recognition, transfer and accumulation is a central feature of the system.

“One of the key virtues of focusing on knowledge, skills and competences is that these relate to learning outcomes or outputs, irrespective of the routes of acquisition involved, rather than on learning inputs.” (Winterton/Delamare - Le Deist/ Stringfellow 2006, p. 21)

Analyses looking at possible hindrances and synergy effects in the implementation of ECVET should therefore pay special attention to this particular point. The first question which arises is how the *outcome* philosophy is received and accepted by experts interviewed. All vocational educational systems may in some way claim to be directed towards *output*, as required in the practical context of an occupation, but that does not mean that the necessity for a “second glance” at national vocational training structures from the perspective of the *outcomes* is always appreciated.

However, a qualitative analysis of interview answers showed that this is very often the case. Interviewees were asked “What do the certificates document (knowledge, skills and competence etc.)? In which proportion?” The vast majority of them were very familiar with the outcome approach and said it was used as a measure for judging examination procedures and certificates in their countries.

“In the main, certification refers to how something was completed (grade) and individual test modules. [...] I would say that certification of knowledge, skills and competences [...] are very rare at the moment.” (Interview No. 2005)

“The content and the components included in each qualification are a proportion of theoretical, practical or combined subjects.” (Interview No. 2103)

“[...] only the success.” (Interview No. 2902)

The study carefully analyses national deviations from and similarities to the outcome approach of ECVET.

“Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes / motivations are ‘globally’ considered; the ‘proportion’ between them is established case by case by the ‘competency’ required by any single activity. Certificates also document the achievement of general education goals, and in this case Knowledge is the only aspect to be evaluated and considered.” (Interview No. 4004)

Very few answers lacked any explicit mention of KSC.

“The certificate documents the final marks of the different subjects as well as the final mark of the practical exam and an overall final mark. The final exam work and the mark of the subject General Education are double counted.” (Interview No. 2702)

Sometimes interviewees referred to lists of learning goals or to KSC included as part of a qualification on which certification is based, without explicitly describing them. Other reference material was identified:

“There is an indirect mention and description of the activities and tasks within the certification guides that the trainees get before the final certification exams.” (Template no. 2100)

Attempts at a quantitative evaluation are rare:

“The certificates basically document knowledge and skills acquired. The proportions in VET: 30% knowledge, 70 % skills; the proportions in IVET: 50% knowledge, 50% skills” (Template no. 2600)

“Certificates mostly document the acquisition of knowledge and skills and – very seldom – also of competences. Competences are only documented when 'Projektarbeit' [project work] is included in the final exam.” (Template no. 1000)

Some experts combine their observation that there is little or no documentation (in some cases: equivalent documentation) of KSC with a general criticism of national practices.

“Formally, knowledge as well as skills and key competences should be documented. In reality, however, documentation of knowledge prevails.” (Template no. 1500)

“Description of *learning outcomes* is not taking place to the degree that it should be.” (Interview no. 2002)

Figure 11 is a quantitative portrayal of the experts' viewpoints. About 6 % of the experts stressed that current vocational training reforms at national level were highly *outcome-oriented*.

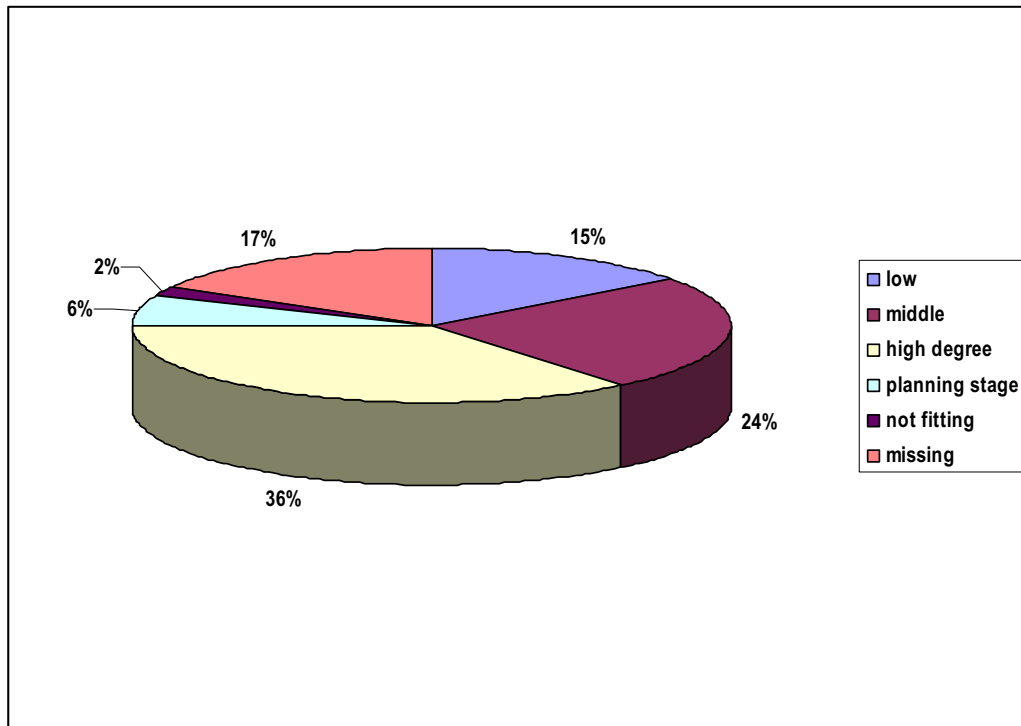
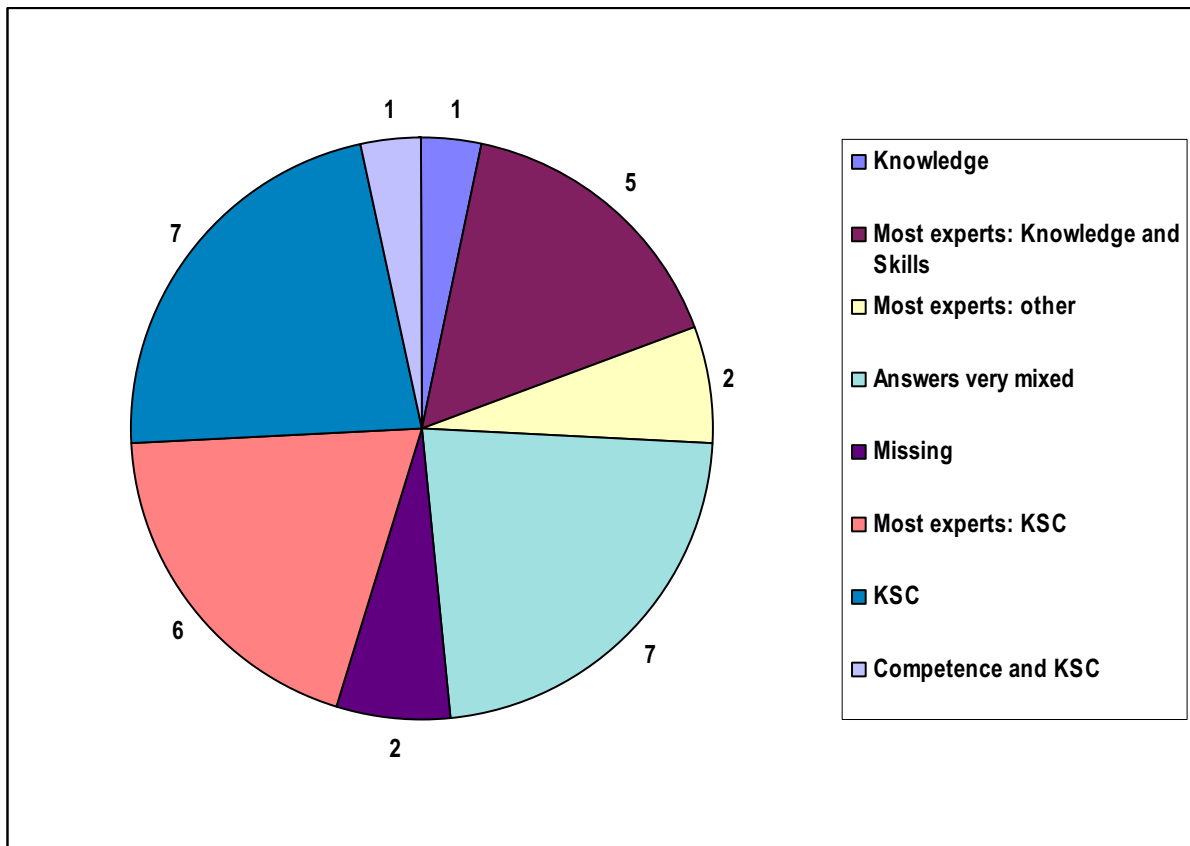


Fig. 11: "In your view, how outcome-oriented is your IVET?" Country spanning analysis (n = 156; experts from 31 countries)

Answers to the question as to what the national certificates document revealed the following distribution:



*Fig. 12: What do the certificates document? Viewpoints of individual countries
 (n = 186; experts from 31 countries)*

KSC is one of the areas where the experts were not always in agreement (cf. 4.3.). Fig. 12 summarises the prevailing opinions in the various countries. The survey found that in just *one* country all the experts agreed that the national certificates document only the acquisition of knowledge. In five countries the majority of experts felt that emphasis was placed on both knowledge and skills. The answers from seven of the countries gave an absolutely unclear picture. In 14 of the 31 countries, all or almost all of the experts believed that knowledge, skills and competence were documented.

4.2 Attitudes towards ECVET and lifelong learning

Among the experts there was a high level of acceptance of theses according to which the ECVET might contribute to the promotion of lifelong learning and, in particular, the integration of various phases of an individual learning pathway. This fact indicates that the ECVET, in addition to its primary goal of promoting cross-border mobility, is regarded to bear the potential for facilitating national endeavours to modernise VET-systems.

Table 7: ECVET and lifelong learning from the viewpoint of the interview partners (n = 114)

According to you, is the use / implementation of the European credit system for VET in your national IVET a way...			
	...to put into practice the concept of life-long learning	...to link the different phases of one's learning pathway	...to increase participation to IVET
Yes	98	105	80
No	9	2	25
No answer	7	7	9

4.3. Ambiguities and misunderstandings

A significant insight has been the remarkable disagreement among our interview partners – all of whom are recognised VET-experts – regarding questions (seemingly) relating to the objective character of their national VET systems. Evaluation of the agreement of interview (among experts of *one* country in each case) gave the following result:

Table 8: Contradictory answers of the national experts

Country	Credit System	International Transfer	Transfer between Parts	Accumulation	Accumulation in Parts of the System
1	?	yes	yes	yes	yes
4	?	?	yes	?	?
6	?	?	yes	?	?
7	No	-	-	-	-
8	?	?	yes	-	-
10	?	?	yes	?	yes
11	Yes	?	yes	?	?
21	No	no	no	no	?
25	No	?	yes	?	?
28	?	no	?	yes	?
29	-	yes	yes	yes	yes
31	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
32	no	no	?	?	yes
33	?	?	?	Yes	?

yes / no Concordance of national experts
 ? Discrepancies in the answers obtained
 - no answer

In view of this result it may be expected that efforts to create a common language in VET – a task CEDEFOP has been pursuing at the European level for many years – will continue to be high on the medium-term agenda. In this sense ECVET could gain the function of contributing to a common base of understanding, above all related to the question of accumulating learning outcomes and thus bring fresh impetus to the debate on the promotion of lifelong learning.

In particular, there seems to be terminological confusion over the distinction between “modules” and “units”. One of the questions posed in the interview (Question 1.2 of the Guideline) was, “Do you have something like units (parts of qualifications) or modules (parts of VET programmes)?” Many responses did not differentiate between the *process* level (modules as parts of programmes) and the level of *learning outcomes* (“units” as parts of qualifications defined on the basis of KSC) suggested in the question.

“The vocational upper secondary qualifications consist of modules and units.” (Interview 1804)

“We have such parts like units – meaning 1 school semester (sometimes 2 semesters – depending of the branch of vocational school). It is difficult to precise the difference between unit and module.” (Interview 3305)

In some cases, an identification of units is associated with the modularisation of VET-programmes.

Under what conditions would you change your attitude towards ECVET?

“[Somewhat positive:] If it means compulsory modularisation.” (Interview 1604, response to question 9.5)

Such association is understandable as VET-systems based upon a holistic structure also have a tendency to holistically describe the results of education and training processes.

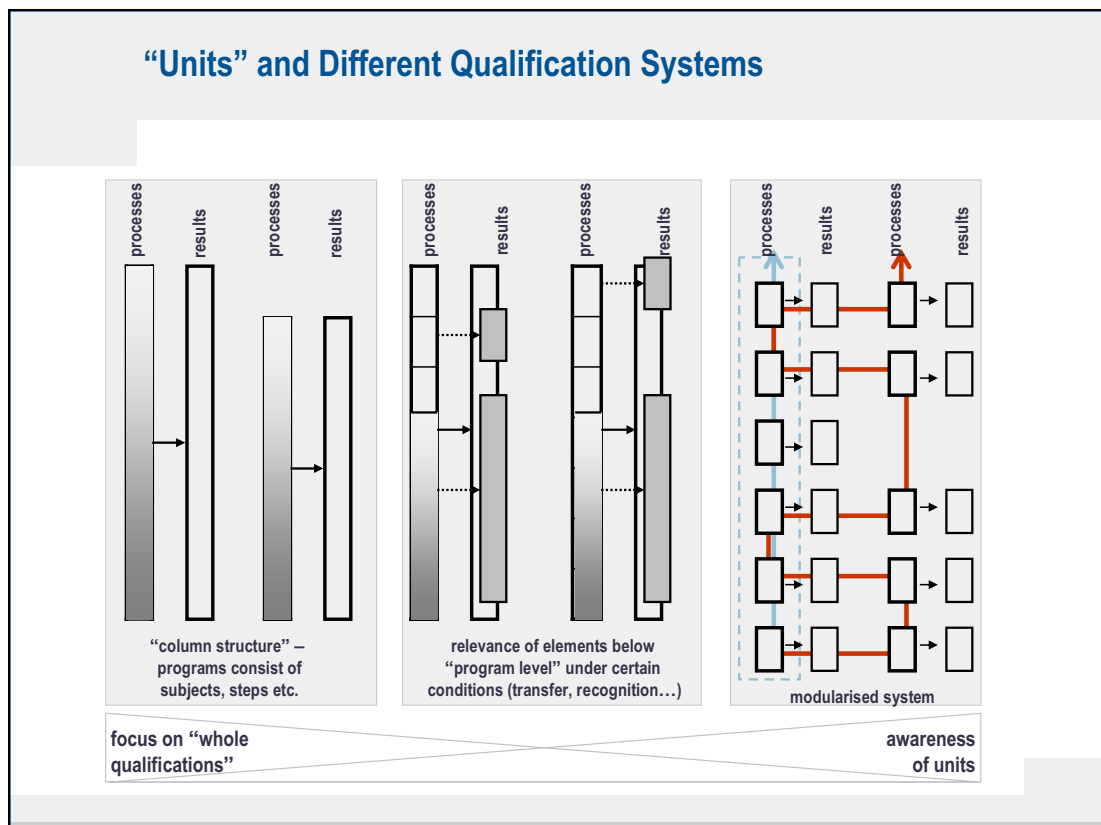


Fig. 13: Identification of “units” in different qualification systems

To promote the acceptability of ECVET it could be helpful to create awareness of the differentiation of the levels and to make it clear that identification of units for the purpose of mobility of learners is not necessarily linked to modularisation of programmes.

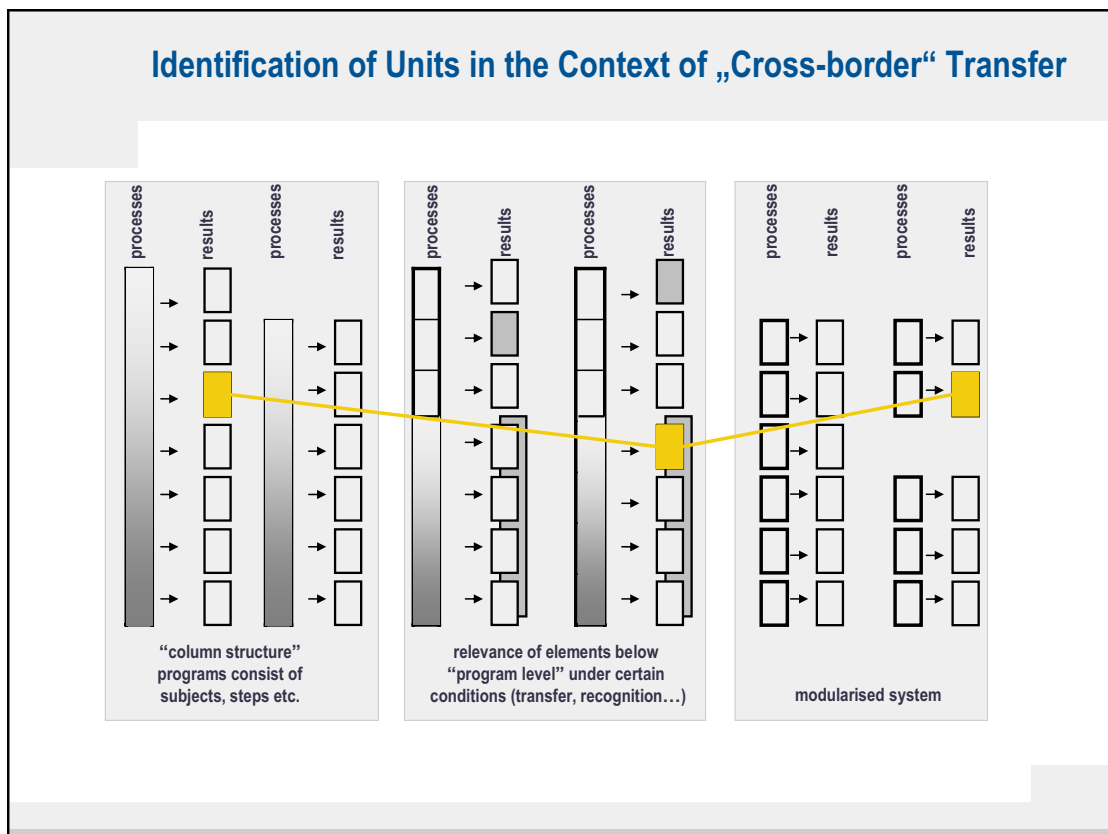


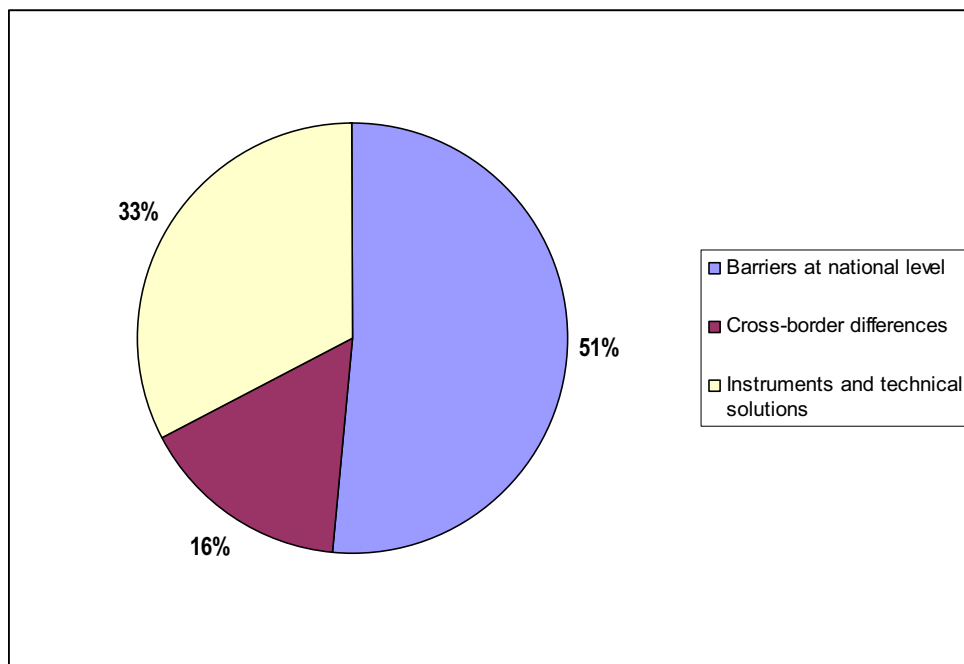
Fig. 14: Identification of units in context of cross border transfer

4.4. Restrictions, obstacles, potential synergies

When it comes to formulating recommendations regarding the conception and implementation of ECVET, it is particularly interesting to note the potential obstacles the experts expect to encounter upon implementation. In this context, the interview guideline drew a distinction between the aspects examination/validation/certification on the one hand and transfer on the other.

The following presents a cross-country overview of problems expected to arise in connection with the introduction of ECVET: Which aspects would our interview partners regard the most critical? Are concerns linked to ECVET design, or rather to potential problems arising from national implementation? A description of specific preliminary conditions in the sense of a country typology will follow only in the next chapter.

First, it should be pointed out that only slightly more than 50% of the experts surveyed actually addressed obstacles of this kind (concerning examination/validation/certification: approx. 58%; concerning transfer: approx. 54%).



*Fig. 15: Potential obstacles to the introduction / application of ECVET I
(in terms of methods of examination / validation / certification; Statements of 146 experts from 29 countries: 85
mentions of one or more obstacles; n = 107)*

Fig. 15 gives an overview of the topical areas addressed. A differentiated listing of the problems mentioned is shown in Table 9.

*Table 9: Potential obstacles to the introduction / application of ECVET I
(in terms of methods of examination / validation / certification (Statements of 146 experts from 29 countries: 85
mentions of one or more obstacles; n = 107)*

Category	Subcategory	n = 107
Area: Barriers at national level		
Deficits of the VET system at national level	Lack of training culture	5
	Lack of transparency at national level	
	National system too complicated and rigid	
	Split of the national system	
	VET system not seen as on a par with school education	
Frictions within the institutional framework at national level		2
Holistic approach		8
Lack of centralisation		3
Lack of knowledge and experience		6
No fit ECVET / national system	Feasible only in parts of the VET (vocational component)	9
	Grading code	
	Handling of credits not useful in the system	
	No fit with ongoing reform	
	No outcome orientation	
	No units/modules	
The dual system and a credit system do not fit well together		
NQF needed		2
Requires reform	Basic cultural change	6
	Other means of assessments have to be developed	
	Requires modularisation	
	Requires national reform	
	System change	
	Would need sector organisations to play a bigger role	
Buy in of stakeholders	Buy in of stakeholders	4
	Lack of involvement of social partners	
Political obstacles	Lack of political will	3
	Traditional VET policy	

Problems of attitude	No acceptance of social partners Nobody deems it necessary Public opinion	3
Defence of social standards		2
Tradition		2
Area: Cross-border differences		
Differences of VET approaches	Cultural differences Difference of VET systems (dual / school based) Differences of national systems Different approaches to assessment Difficult to agree on standards / criteria Lack of comparability	6
If general European acceptance cannot be reached		1
If no transparency is accomplished		1
Lack of trust	Lack of trust No general acceptance without involvement of the state No trust in certificates from the private sector Difficult to reach organisation spanning recognition	5
Quality	Quality Recognition depends on quality Reliability	4
Area: Instruments and technical solutions		
Activities at European level required	European reference frame required European standards required Unified EU school law is needed Voluntariness	5
Bureaucracy		3
Competent bodies	Lack of a national authority Reliability of competent body	2
Cost and resources	Cost and resources Shortage of examiners Training of trainers required	16
Problem with progression		1

Technical issues	<p>Connection between a credit system and full recognitions of a qualification in other countries has to be clarified</p> <p>Difficult to visualize what the credit, as a numerical value of learning outcomes, actually represents</p> <p>Implementation process</p> <p>Possible obstacles in connecting ECTS and ECVET</p> <p>Technical issues</p> <p>Short time-span</p>	6
Usability		2

A quantitative evaluation and subsequent pooling of results according to the contents referred to by them will yield 26 groups of obstacles (the categories listed in the table). If similar mentions are accounted for separately (omitting double mentions) the number of obstacles mentioned will total 65 (sub-categories).

Rather than focussing on the problem areas, if the differentiation is effected in accordance with the respective weights attributed to the obstacles, as well as the expected difficulty degree as regards the implementation of ECVET, as expressed by the mentions, a rough distinction can be drawn between four groups:

1. Responses citing the necessity to take action as regards measures accompanying the introduction of ECVET (“buy-in of stakeholders”) – approx. one third of responses
2. Responses citing obstacles that might be tackled using the set of tools provided by ECVET (“difficult to achieve inter-organisational recognition”) – approx. one sixth of responses
3. Responses citing a lack of prerequisites for the ECVET to be used which the interview partner would regard essential but the provision of which will not be possible in the short-term, such as “a lack of a training culture” – approx. one third of responses
4. Responses citing a more fundamental incompatibility between ECVET and national systems of vocational education and training (“would require national reforms”) – again approx. one sixth of mentions.

An unambiguous allocation of replies to one of the four groups is possible only to a certain extent. Certainly, responses citing technical problems connected with the introduction, the required usability of the system etc. may be clearly allocated to the first group (“need for action”). But what weight should be attributed to, e.g., a problem the interviewee would refer to as “resulting from the differences between national systems”? As with regard to other responses in this case, it can also be noted that to a certain extent the *starting point* of development appears to be an *obstacle to the introduction* of the ECVET (“lack of confidence”). This might be construed both as expression of principal accordance with the aims and scepticism as regards their feasibility. Yet considering the high degree of acceptance the ECVET project enjoys among experts, it may be assumed that the latter assumption is definitely the more improbable alternative.

The second group (obstacles the use of ECVET might minimise) also covers mentions referring to the *internal structure* of national systems of vocational education and training. Even though there may be other reasons, one, issue frequently addressed is that of interface problems between sub-systems. In Table 9, these are:

- Lack of transparency at national level
- National system too complicated and rigid
- Split of the national system
- Frictions within the institutional framework at national level
- No outcome orientation
- Other means of assessments have to be developed
- No trust in certificates from the private sector
- Difficult to reach organisation spanning recognition

The question here is whether countries which see a need for reforms in these spheres may also use ECVET for further development of the national system of vocational education and training. Indeed, a considerable number of interviewees indicated that this would be the case (cf. section 7.1. below).

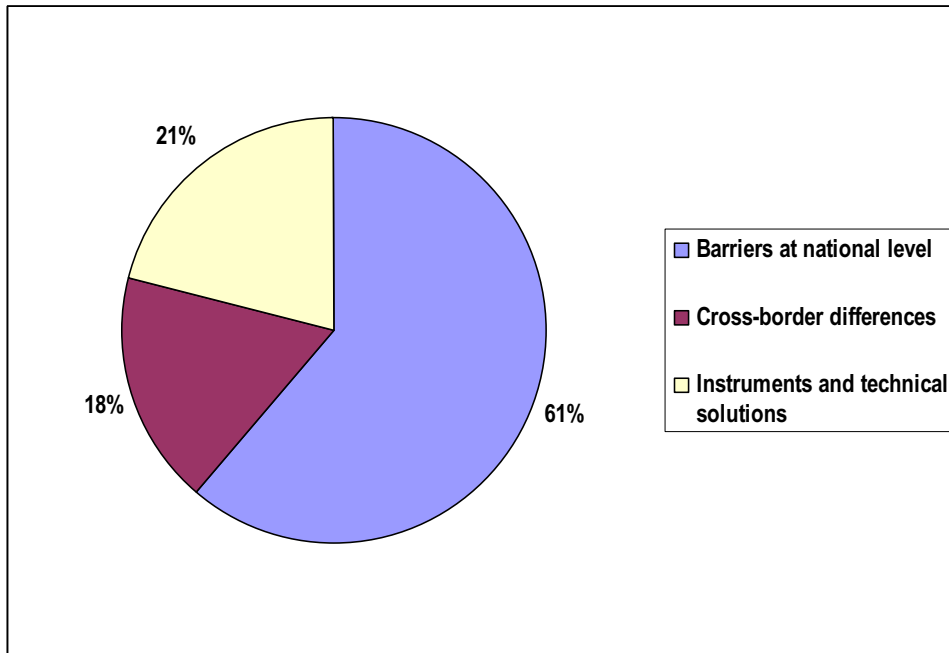
A small number of responses listed in the fourth group (more fundamental problems arising from incompatibility) might imply that ECVET contradicts the principle of subsidiarity (“system

change”) and would therefore not be in accordance with the legal opinion drawn up within the framework of this study (cf. sections 3.6.1 and 4.3). Rather than a need for action, there would be a need for further explanation (cf. section 7.3.1 of the chapter of recommendations).

In general, however, legal obstacles (“requires national reform”) are regarded as being of less importance, than obstacles posed by cultural backgrounds (“basic cultural change”, “tradition”). Admittedly, it is not always possible to draw a clear distinction between these two aspects (“no fit with ongoing reform”).

What is also notable is that many of the obstacles identified at the national level (more than a quarter of all items mentioned) are seen in connection with a need for *internal* reforms (lack of transparency, flexibility, etc.), which might be an indicator of potential synergetic effects between the European and the national levels.

However, indications for a need for action at the European level are stronger when it comes to the issue of transfer (5% / 20%).



*Fig. 16: Potential obstacles for the introduction / application of ECVET II
(with a view to transfer: Statements of 146 experts from 29 countries: 79 responses citing one or more obstacles;
n = 114)*

“Transfer is never easy!” as one expert commented. Still, none of the experts interviewed see any fundamental systemic obstacles to the introduction of a transfer system at the European level. According to the experts the transfer of learning outcomes acquired abroad is linked to solving the following potential obstacles (see Table 10).

*Table 10: Potential obstacles for the introduction / application of ECVET II
(with a view to transfer; statements of 146 experts from 29 countries: 79 mentions of one or more obstacles;
n = 114)*

Category	Subcategory	n =113
<i>Area: Barriers at national level</i>		
Subdivisions within the national systems	Barriers between parts of the education and training systems Division into subsystems No integration of subsystems at national level Obstacles concerning transfer across the different strands Lack of open systems Cultural differences between regions Tradition and culture	7
Lack of co-ordination and co-operation within the national systems	Lack of co-ordination between institutions Difficulties of understanding/agreement between public administrations	2
Trust and parity of esteem within the national systems	Lack of trust between subsystems Lack of understanding between different types of qualifications at national level Mistrust of the Federal Authorities Parity of esteem – vocational and academic Awarding bodies are reluctant to accept other's accreditations Lack of trust	10
Financial barriers	Economic interest of enterprises Economic interest of VET providers ("cash-per-student") Financial issues Financing system does not support EPL Costs and resources	5
Entry requirements	Rigidity of the school administration Request of identifying of the respective curriculum required	9
Meaning of (final) examination for qualifications award	Final summative examination Holistic approach Only full qualifications valued Process orientation Transition without examination only at the beginning at national level	6

Category	Subcategory	n =113
Legislative barriers and state-of-the-art	Barriers of legislative nature Lack of a credit system and of a Vocational Qualifications Authority to accredit VET institutions at national level Progress in the ongoing VET reform required	3
Vocational profiles and standards	Descriptions of professional profiles in many regulations too rigid Specificity of professional regulations Formalisation Absence of standardised units in the educational process at national level	4
Lack of flexibility	Lack of flexibility Lack of flexibility in training itineraries Transfer system could reduce the flexibility in the organisation of learning pathways	3
Lack of outcome orientation	Diploma orientation of the system More outcome orientation required Not competence-oriented VET programmes Provider focussed systems	4
No methods for description of learning outcomes	Difficult to create usable system to describe the goals Non-transparent descriptions (too programme related) Contact hours	3
Validation of prior and experiential learning	APL difficult Lack of system for validation of KSC acquired in non-formal education Not yet clearly defined system of non-formal assessment Lack of a system for recognition	4
Recognition procedures	Advance in the equivalence-correspondence issue required Recognition procedures too input oriented Lack of liability in allowance	4
Lack of political support	Lack of political interest No awareness of the relevance Will to use it No need for new kind of competences seen	5

Area: Cross-border differences		
Rationales of different qualifications and VET systems	<p>Construction of the programmes</p> <p>Difference in extent and content of education</p> <p>Difference of systems (curriculum based systems and competence based systems)</p> <p>Differences between training content of programmes</p> <p>Differences in the levels of foreign national qualifications framework and the emerging national one</p> <p>Different systems of valuation in the VET systems</p> <p>Diversity of systems</p> <p>Substantial differences among educational systems</p> <p>Differences regarding normative aspects of work performance</p> <p>Different quality of technological equipment in schools</p>	13
Lack of comparability	<p>Lack of comparability in curricula construction (no units)</p> <p>Lack of comparability of study programmes</p> <p>Lack of comparability/information about other systems</p>	3
Need for contractual basis	<p>Communication problems (memorandum of understanding would help)</p>	1
Language problems	<p>Language barriers, multilingualism</p>	3
Area: Instruments and technical solutions		
Training packages	<p>Absence of standardised units in the educational process</p> <p>Design of transferable training packages</p>	2
Standards	<p>Lack of common standards/training criteria</p> <p>Lack of common and known training standards and criteria</p> <p>Lack of agreed procedures at international level</p> <p>Lack of a common minimum catalogue of qualifications</p>	4
Assessment of learning outcomes	<p>Absence of the independent assessment of competences</p> <p>Lack of evaluation methods</p> <p>Lack of an independent assessment of competences</p>	3
Identification of learning outcomes	<p>Lack of a system for designing learning outcomes in relation to competences</p> <p>Lack of a unified system of KSC</p> <p>Quality of KSC and the practical dimension of learning skills and competences</p>	3

Equivalence of learning outcomes	Identification of the basic cross curricular skills of the learning outcomes Comparability of competences	2
Permeability map	Complexity in the passages and transferral processes (“map” at general and specific levels required)	1
Credit system	Lack of transparency and thus comparability of qualifications defined in terms of reference levels and organized into modular training programmes	4
Information and documentation	Lack of information and documentation	4
Others	Further general obstacles to mobility	1

These statements allow for formulating possible development paths of national/regional qualifications systems. The statements can be divided into contextual and procedural factors.

The contextual factors

The national/regional qualifications systems are *not monolithic* but divided into subsystems, following diverse institutional remits. They are more or less characterised through lack of trust, understanding and coordinating between the subsystems and between the stakeholders of the qualifications and VET systems. To a certain extent ECVET is considered as an external element which either might foster dissidences among the qualifications/VET systems or support on-going respectively outstanding reforms of the qualifications/VET systems.

In any case this calls for the development of *transparency* and *parity of esteem* between the stakeholders and the competent bodies, especially across vocational and academic qualifications.

The introduction and/or implementation of ECVET will have to be accompanied by *financial measures* encouraging VET providers to host foreign learners or to send the learners abroad. The financial support should also be awarded for the development of APL methods.

While mobility relies on the motivation of the learner, allowing for transfer and implementing a credit system call for a political will to do so. Many experts mention the *cultural aspects* of such an innovation.

The procedural factors

Transfer implies that permeability is anchored in the qualifications/VET systems. This calls for an adaptation of entry requirements to VET programmes to ensure greater openness. Related to this, the experts highlight the need to establish methods for assessment of prior learning and non-formal learning, which could be used Europe wide. One major aspect is that this assessment should be done in view of validating the *acquired learning outcomes*. The main reference for qualifications within VET being the *vocational profiles and standards*, it seems that, according to the experts, their description should be adapted to allow for transfer. This accounts for less rigidity, less programme/curriculum oriented description of the qualifications, and more orientation towards learning outcomes. For European purposes an international system for establishing comparability in VET should be developed.

A Quality assurance system could include the accreditation of VET providers and the development of information on methods in use in different countries for the description and assessment of learning outcomes. Procedures must be developed to assess parts of qualifications, i.e. units for incoming learners and to award them credit.

5. Typology

The various ECVET elements delineated in points 3.4 (working definitions) and 3.5 (typology building) and the ECVET readiness of vocational education and training systems can be summarised in two principal aspects which correspond to the instrument's chief objective of facilitating mobility in the context of initial vocational training by transferring units:

1. Examination and assessment of learning outcomes achieved in a mobility period by the country delivering credits (working definition, Steps 1 to 3)
2. Transfer to the country of origin's VET and qualifications system which (also) permits these learning outcomes to be used as the basis for granting a diploma in compliance with effective regulations in the home country (working definition, Steps 3 to 5) .

Typology building is focused on these aspects.

5.1. Differential analysis of valuation systems

Reference framework

Study of national valuation practices must first account for the general environment which provides the basis for formulating, ascertaining and assessing learning outcomes. Are organisation and implementation of vocational training defined through

- norms stipulating instruction content (curricula, vocational education and training programmes with defined elements) or
- qualifications as “a formal expression of knowledge, skills and wider competences of the individuals” which “confers official recognition of value in the labour market and in fur-

ther education and training” and which “can be a legal entitlement to practice a trade” (TWG ECVET 2005, Annexes, 1, p. 3)?

Elements

In the first instance this question pertains to the role of qualifications standards and how they are defined.

- Are they divided into “subjects” or topical areas, conforming to traditional scholastic didactic logic? (“The curriculum is divided into subjects and the content is often a list of topics to be taught,” Template no. 4100, Question 1.4.) Programmes with a defined curriculum feature this element type.
- Do knowledge, skill and competence constitute the programme elements? (“The qualifications based on the national core curricula are divided into study modules and competence-based qualifications are divided into modules,” Template no. 1800, Question 1.4.) This alternative exists in both curricular and qualification-based programmes.
- Does the approach aim towards “comprehensive qualifications”, i.e. individual qualification facets, learning steps and contents are present in the practice of teaching and learning, yet play a subordinate or no role at all in assessment practices? (“The [...] VET programmes are defined by years of learning and final exams. The final exam awards the whole qualification. The basic understanding of all programmes can be called holistic,” Template no. 1000, Question 1.4.)

Assessment

In all the above cases forms of constant assessment may be practised as for instance: “formative and summative assessment alongside the learning process” (Template no. 1700), “The students’ knowledge and skills and their progress are assessed at sufficiently regular intervals both during and after the studies” (Template no. 1800.). This is a supplementary examination of the success of learning processes with a low degree of formality.

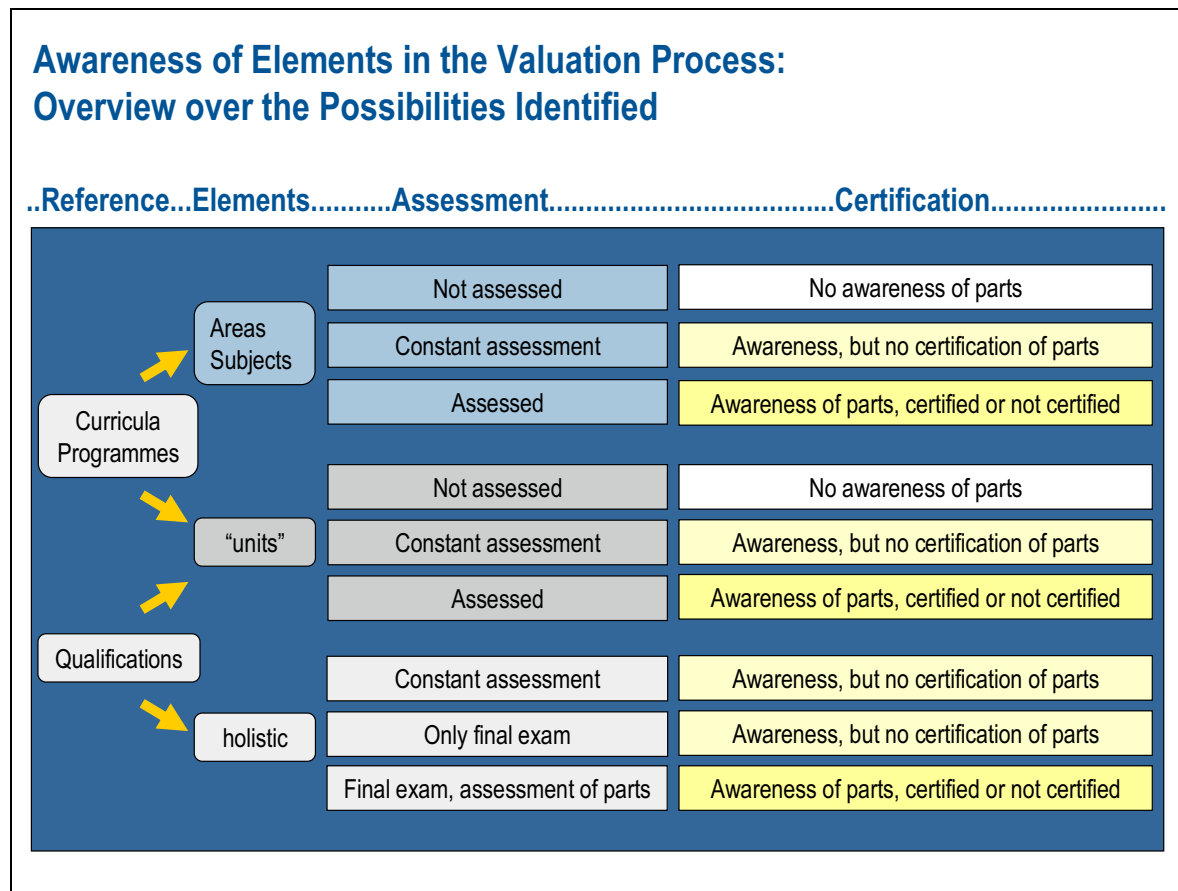


Fig. 17: Valuation practices for vocational training⁵⁹

Programme module assessment does not necessarily take place or, in contrast, may gain increased independent status. Noteworthy examples of the latter are major/minor award systems. (cf. Template no. 1300: “Currently, it is not possible [...] to have assessed parts of the VET programme. After production and implementation of new programmes with modules in future years, it will be possible to assess single parts [modules].”)

⁵⁹ The term units is in quotation marks in the figure because it represents subdivisions of teaching programmes at the element level, not parts of qualification as is normally the case when units are mentioned in the context of ECVET.

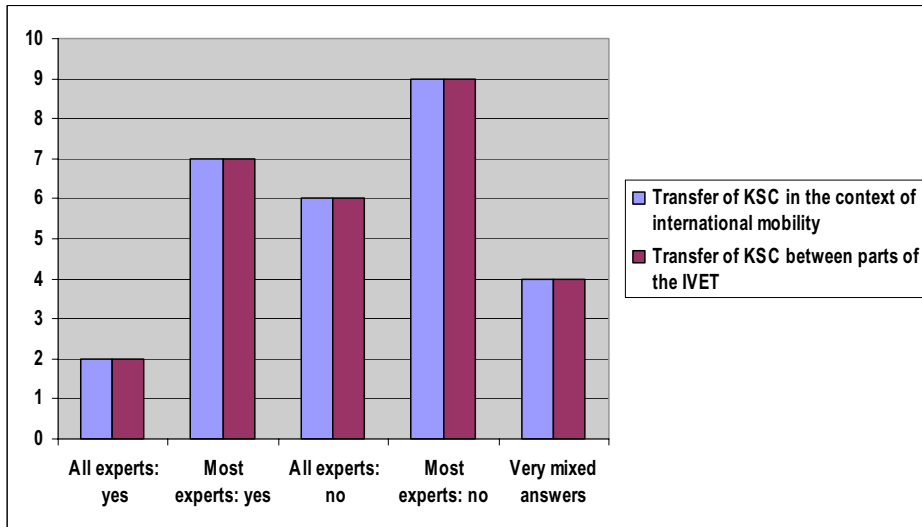
Validation/Certification

The fourth aspect addressed is the validation/certification of assessment findings. Figure 13 summarises how units are valued in applying various methods of scholastic outcome appraisal. Systems vary from an outright focus on final examination and certification to single assessments without partial certification, partial certification awards and a mix of certified and uncertified units. It is striking that differentiations made in programmes are absent at the certification stage. Even fundamentally “holistic” systems may allow for partial certification. (This is sometimes in response to special situations, such as increasing drop-out rates – cf. Template no. 2000 and 3700).

5.2. Transfer within various VET/qualifications systems

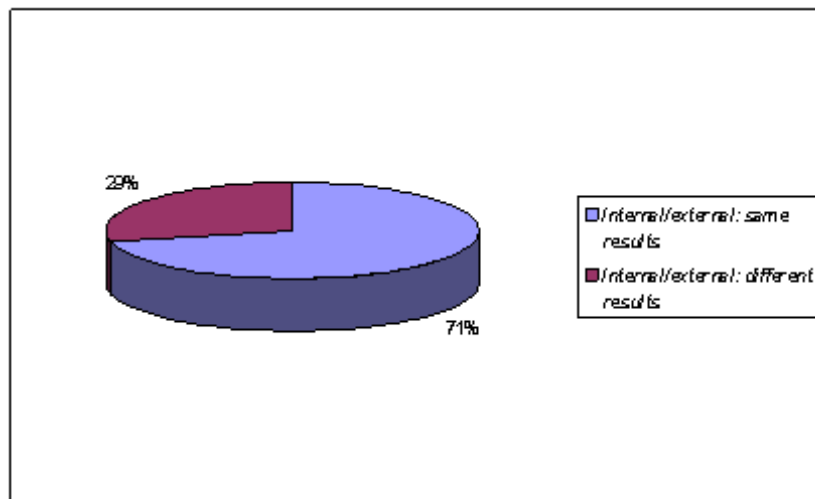
If it comes to the transfer of learning outcomes it is, first and foremost, cross-border transfer that is of interest in ECVET. However, transfer procedures with respect to learning outcomes from one context into another as practised within a country, too, will have to be taken into consideration. For these may be instances of practical application to be followed enabling the respective actors to gain experience concerning the appraisal of outcomes of training periods completed in other vocational education and training programmes.

The views held by the responding experts with respect to the assessment of transfer possibilities in their respective countries occasionally turned out to be rather heterogeneous. In some countries, there are considerable differences concerning the assessments.



*Fig. 18: Transfer: country-related analysis
(Responses to question 5.1 of the Template for national experts and the interview guideline 28 countries, 190 experts)*

As concerns the quantitative aspect, results were the same with respect to both internal and cross-border transfer. This is, however, not true for the country level.



*Fig. 19: Comparison of results with respect to internal and cross-border transfer
(Responses to question 5.1 of the Template for national experts and the interview guideline: 28 countries, 190 experts)*

Within the context of this survey, “transfer” is understood as the transfer of parts of qualifications within IVET. Issues relating to the transfer of full qualifications are of relevance here inso-

far as transferability of a qualification may be a requirement for admission to other programmes of vocational education and training. In general, however, they are more closely connected with issues concerning the access to the labour market.

Fig. 20 presents an overview of the results relating to both cross-border and internal transfer.

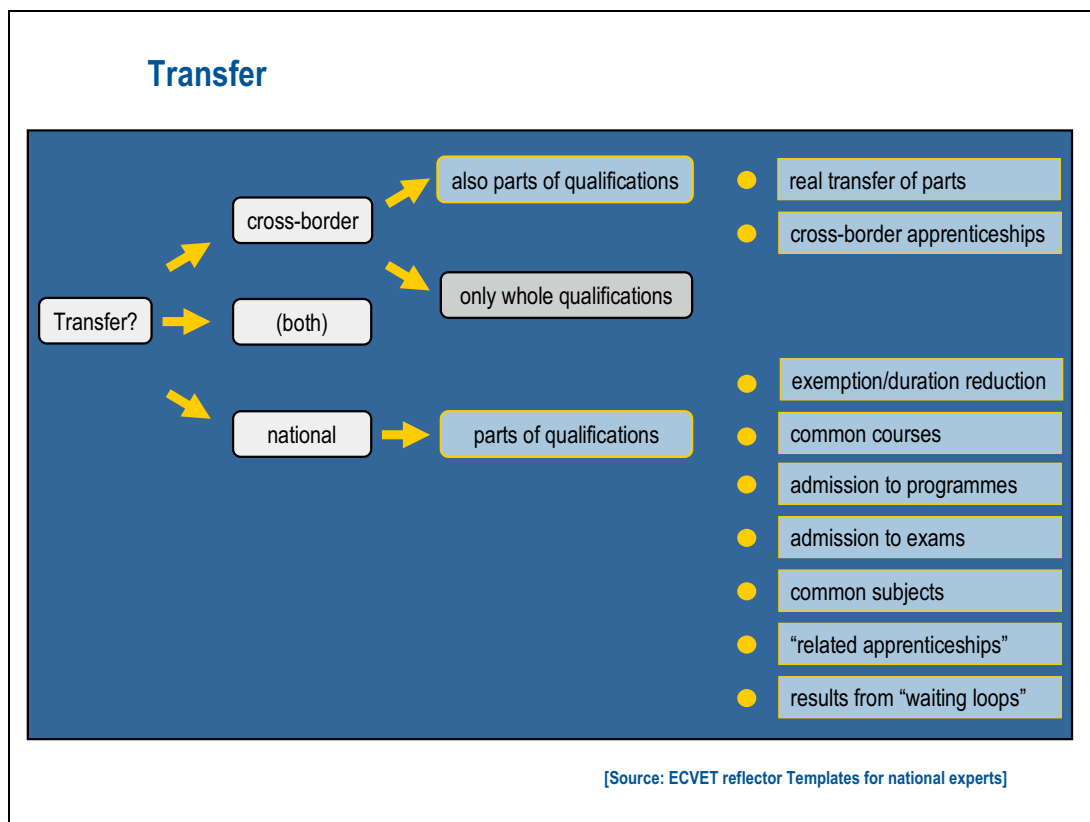


Fig. 20: Potential areas of transfer (Source: Templates for national experts)

In the following the categories identified will be explained on the basis of quotations.

Cross-border transfer

Real transfer of parts:

“Students [...] have the right to be accredited for their previous studies at other institutions when the objectives and key contents of the studies are in line with the curriculum [...]. In practice, this means that studies taken abroad can be included into person’s studies.” (Template no. 1800) – “It is stated in the core curriculum that the student can complete part of his or her on-the-job-learning abroad.” (Ibid.)

Cross-border apprenticeships:

“The formal strand (school education, apprenticeship contract, social security, final examination, etc.) of this apprenticeship takes place [...] [at home], while the enterprise-based training takes place in a neighbouring country.” (Template no. 2900)

Transfer between programmes at home

Exemption / time reduction:

“[...] persons leaving VET-schools and college before the end of the programmes can get reductions of the training period in apprenticeship training.” (Template no. 1000) – “Reduced duration of apprenticeship training due to completion of upper secondary education [...]: Everyone who has successfully completed a secondary school, a VET college, a VET school or another apprenticeship training programme with final exam may undergo, in a condensed form, an apprenticeship [...]” (Template no. 1000) – “Transfer is translated into exemption for the programme for a qualification, thus shortening the learning pathway.” (Template no. 3100)

Common courses:

“Common units are defined in IVET.” (Template no. 3800) – “The ECDL is part of different qualifications and is recognised. The same is true for the implementation of the common European framework for modern languages.” (Template no. 3100)

Admission to programmes:

“[Transfer] exists in both instances [in matters of rights to enter a programme and real transfer] but there is no transparent system. It depends upon the decisions taken by the registry office.” (Template no. 3000)

Admission to exams:

“Transfer of knowledge, skills and competence acquired in other occupations requiring formal training [...] [subsequent to the] admission to the final examination [in related training courses].” (Template no. 2000)

Common subjects:

“Where students transfer from one qualification to another or from general to vocational upper secondary education and training, they can be accredited for at least the completed core subjects and free-choice studies. The provider should compare conformance of studies with the curriculum in terms of objectives and core contents.” (Template no. 1800)

“Related apprenticeships”:

“Most apprenticeships (job profiles) are related with other apprenticeships (job profiles). Therefore mutual recognition of learning times and learning outcomes have been established by the responsible bodies.” (Template no. 1000)

Results from “waiting loops”:

“Transfer of qualification contents of preparatory programmes offered within recognised VET [into the regular training course].” (Template no. 2000)⁶⁰

⁶⁰ The concept of “waiting loops” needs some explanation because it is tied up to specific national contexts. This is given here very shortly: In some countries with dual VET systems, labour market shortages have triggered efforts to implement at the national level measures that include aspects of learning outcomes transfer from one learning context to another: The functioning of dual systems – under which vocational training takes place at both part-time vocational and technical schools and companies – requires companies to provide for training places. There are a number of different labour market policies designed to afford relief to young people waiting to be allocated a training place by either bridging the waiting period, or by preparing them for a future initial training relationship in such way that they would be fit to find an apprenticeship position.

In Germany, there have always been a great number of vocational training preparation programmes (often referred to as “waiting loops” in a critical way) organised by various training providers which, with regard to their contents, draw upon regular training programmes. As a result of statutory amendments adopted in 2003 (Ordinance on the certification of vocational competence acquired in the course of vocational training preparation [Berufsausbildungsvorbereitungs-Bescheinigungsverordnung – BAVBVO] adopted 16 July 2003, as well as Vocational Training Act, 2005, sections 68 – 70) these qualification measures were adapted so as to be closer related to regular vocational education and training. With the relationships between preparation programmes and regular training in terms of contents having become even stronger learners are awarded a certificate of vocational competence issued either at the end of the preparation programme or after completion of a certain qualification module. This raises the question of valuation of partial qualifications acquired in the course of vocational preparation. Under certain circumstances, as well as in individual cases, qualifications obtained in the course of vocational training preparation might be credited towards initial training, which would lead to a reduction of the duration of training.

5.3. Creating a typology

If one creates a typology of the qualifications systems according to the two central criteria for ECVET (i.e. valuation and transfer), four logically possible alternatives result.

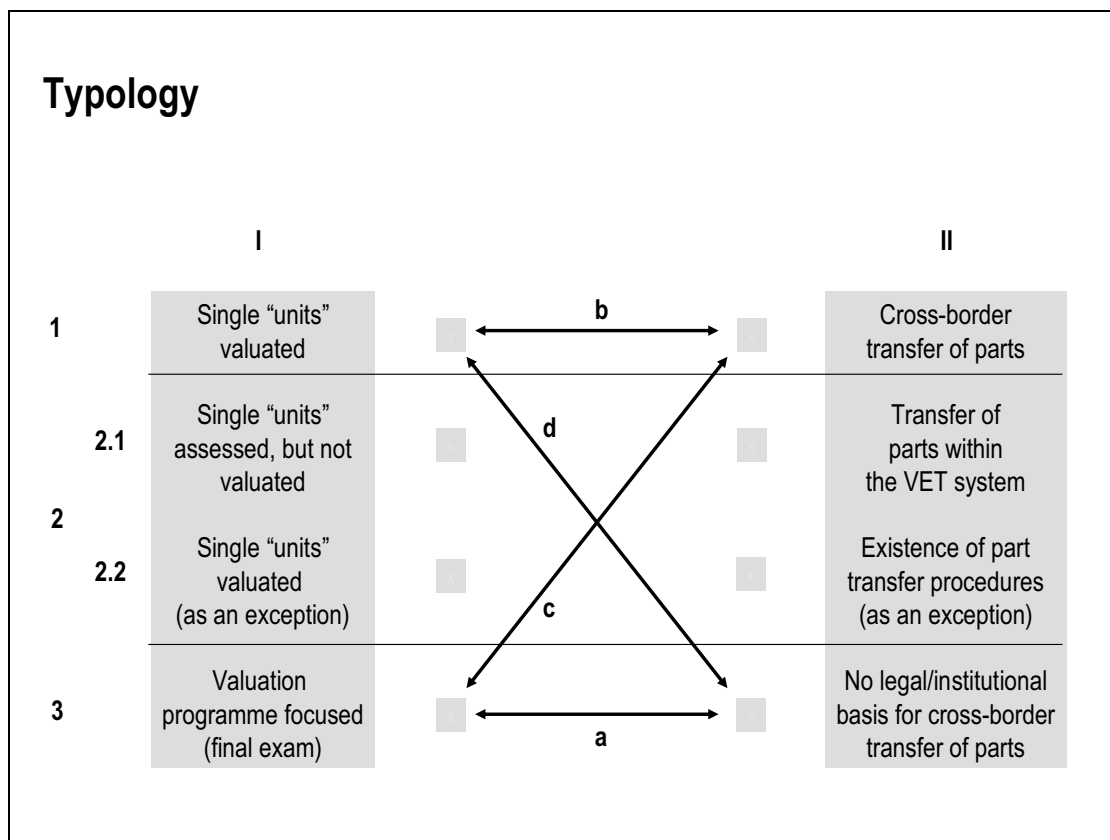


Fig. 21: Categories on which typology building is based

Levels 1 and 3 of the above diagram present either/or possibilities in columns I and II: A system is *either* focused on a final exam, *or* it (also) provides for testing and assessment methods that award an independent value to the individual units below the level of a full qualification. Methods of international transfer below the level of the recognition of certificates are *either* available *or* they are missing. This yields the following combination possibilities:

- a. The training programmes are oriented to a final exam. The legal and institutional requirements for a transfer of partial qualifications are lacking: “holistic loner” type.
- b. Individual units are assessed and the cross-border transfer of partial qualifications is possible: “unit-aware internationalist” type.
- c. The training programmes are oriented to a final exam; however, partial qualifications are considered in the context of cross-border transfer: “holistic internationalist”.
- d. Individual units are assessed, but the legal and institutional requirements for a transfer of partial qualifications are lacking: “unit-aware loner” type.

The situation appears somewhat more complicated when one takes into consideration (2.1) what a national expert calls “implicit analogies” to ECVET. These are procedures in which a certain independent importance is attached to partial qualifications (without the systematic orientation of vocational education and training to the final examination being called into question as a result). Countries which have not yet put in place systematic measures for transferring partial qualifications attained abroad to the training system can, however, have methods for transferring learning outcomes between training providers *domestically*.

Furthermore, measures (2.2) that are not actually systematically intended in the VET / qualifications system can find their way into the spectrum of national regulations due to special situations. They tend to be regarded as exceptions but can gradually become the norm if the reasons for their introduction continue to exist. This is the case in several countries and concerns both criteria. Examples of this are:

- *Partial qualifications*: Young people who are not up to the requirements of a full training programme or drop out for other reasons receive certificates that document what they have learned before dropping out.
- *Transfer*: Learning outcomes from preparatory courses can be included in the training programme that is desired or finally selected by the learner if limited possibilities for admission to training have led to the creation of interim measures and offers of basic vocational education and training (so called “waiting loops”, see explanation in footnote 57).

Exposing the hidden layer of implicit analogies is interesting above all for systems and in the respects in which level 1 ECVET readiness does not exist. It will be important to analyse existing subdivisions of VET programmes and measures of formative assessment regarding their possible relevance in the context of ECVET for those countries which want to use ECVET, but do not have practice of valuation of learning outcomes below the level of full qualifications. Therefore the result of the typology building is illustrated in figure 22 in a way in which ECVET-related practices below the “ideal condition” of a valuation at unit-level (Further ECVET-related Practice: Valuation) and the possibility of cross-border-transfer (Further ECVET-near Practice: Transfer) are respected in the context of the national qualifications system. Furthermore, it will be noted whether reform projects aiming for enhanced possibilities of valuation of partial qualifications at national level – independently from the coherence of their origin– are in the phase of implementation or in preparation, or if there are opposing tendencies.

The statements show that the typology must map the extremes of emphasising and neglecting regard for partial qualifications in the validation/certification system as well as the “intermediate area” of unit-conscious assessment practice and situational system modifications which put increased emphasis on partial qualifications. In order to gain an understanding of the typology it is essential to conceive of both the “holistic loner” and the „unit-aware internationalist” as *extreme types* with a wide range of possibilities existing between them. Proposed concept formation aims to bring order into this range of possibilities rather than to suggest that these extremes could actually be encountered in a pure form in reality. For there exists neither the “holistic loner” who would not permit any communication going beyond the boundaries of entirely monolithic programmes, nor the “unit-aware internationalist” whose entirely open system would admit free unrestricted accumulation of learning outcomes regardless of the programmes in which these were achieved.

Results

<input type="checkbox"/> Relevant "implicit analogies" to ECVET in countries with a lower level of ECVET readiness	(Further) ECVET-near practice				Total
	No	Certification	Transfer	Both	
"Holistic loner"	0	4 + 1 + 1	1	4 + 3 + 1	15
"Unit-aware internationalist"	0	1	1	2 + 2 + 1 + 1	8
"Holistic internationalist"	0	1	0	2 + 3 + 1	7
"Unit-aware loner"	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	8	2	20	30

- Reforms towards more awareness of "units" and/or more transfer in the planning or implementation phase
- Reforms towards more awareness of "units" and/or more transfer are discussed at political level
- Reform towards less importance of "units"

Fig. 22: Analysis of the Templates for national experts according to types (two Templates not attributable)

The types found by analysing the empirical material (the "holistic loner", the "unit-aware internationalist" and the "holistic internationalist") are described in more detail in the following. A "unit-aware loner" has not been identified. It will also be shown that the vocational education and training systems belonging to a particular type can differ in many respects (which is not surprising given the variety of VET/qualifications systems in Europe). Fig. 22 shows that this already holds true for characteristics related to the narrower thematic context of this study. The countries are therefore each classified in the following scheme:

		(Further) ECVET affinities				
Implicit analogies	both					
	transfer					
	valuation					
		reform towards less ECVET affinity	no reform	minor reforms / discussion	reform towards more ECVET affinity	System dynamic

Fig. 23: Sub-categorisation of types

After a general characterisation, several of the classified systems will then be described as examples according to the characteristic areas identified above (under 3.3), in order to reveal their shared traits as well as to clarify the possible range within a type.

5.3.1. “Holistic loners”

In many, but by far not all countries that belong to this type, the vocational education and training system is strongly centralised and organised like a school. School-based training exists alongside various forms of linking school-oriented and work-based learning. The range is therefore wide:

- The initial vocational education and training takes place after the completion of mandatory schooling, either at institutes for vocational education and training or at vocational education and training facilities for upper secondary education.
- Purely school-oriented and an alternating training programmes can be identified.

- This group comprises countries with dual training programmes of several years' duration.
- In two countries of this group regions have high importance in vocational education and training.

About half of the countries have reform plans at the national level which aim at greater outcome orientation and/or improved transfer possibilities in vocational education and training that are either already in the implementation phase – in one case, the old system and the reformed system currently exist side by side – or are being discussed on the political level and tested in model projects. Here, the ECVET is often regarded as a support for current vocational education and training reforms and an impetus for further innovation.

		ECVET affinities				
Implicit analogies	both		19		2, 3 6, 9 25, 28	
	transfer				32	
	valuation		20	4, 5 13, 18 22	15	
		reform towards less ECVET affinity	no reform	minor reforms / discussion	reform towards more ECVET affinity	System dynamic

Fig. 24: Sub-categorisation: Holistic Loner

In what follows, we will look two exemplary systems with state-run, school-based initial education and training, one of them rather static (country A) and the other has high dynamic towards reforms (country B).

Assessment and validation of learning outcomes

The systems of this type are not primarily oriented to learning outcomes for the most part. The certification system is based on examinations after a defined training period and is not oriented to documenting knowledge and competence. Below comprehensive vocational education and training reform, however, there can also be tendencies that point to a stronger orientation towards learning outcomes.

In *case A*, for example, a law has been passed but not yet implemented that aims to create a national system for linking vocational education and training to employment and validate vocational qualifications irrespective of how they were acquired. Here, achievement is assessed in school-based training during the school year through oral and written intermediate exams and individual or group assignments with a final report. Each school year ends with a written final exam. Various certificates exist. In alternating vocational education and training, the same certificates are issued despite the longer duration and the additional practical experience. An innovation in the past years is a certificate that documents skills that have been acquired during practical training at the workplace.

The vocational education and training system in *case B* is currently undergoing an extensive restructuring process that is heading towards increased flexibility. The implemented parts of the reform pay considerably more attention to the sub-units of full qualifications. At programme level, this corresponds to a division into modules, which are defined by sets of competences to which credits are allocated according to the training standards and the framework plan. However, the sub-units are not independent of the general programme, which is implied by the term “module” and would be expected especially in certification practice.

The examination methods focus on learning outcomes in the sense of skills and competence. However, this is not sufficiently expressed in the (grade-based) assessment method. A separate certification does not take place for each module. The certification system provides for a final certificate for each qualification that lists the learning outcomes related to the qualification. The continuous documentation of learning outcomes at the end of the modules remains within the school and serves formative purposes. Any certificates of attendance issued after the successful completion of a module do *not* document acquired competence. A national expert would expect a

positive, stimulating effect on vocational education and training if the final module exams were to be further developed with this aim.

Partial certifications for modularised work-based programmes are systematically provided for. Here, the acquired competence are to be documented separately and transferably (on a credit basis) after a module is successfully completed.

The appraisal of learning outcomes only receives an official status if they correspond to a full qualification. Units are identified in the reformed vocational education and training system, but they are not subject to separate certification or recognition methods. Nevertheless, the prerequisites for this exist, since the adopted standards already define the respective assessment methods to be taken into account. Learning outcomes are thus determined in a standardised way. All exams before the final exam have a formative character. They ascertain whether the skills and competence allocated to a module have actually been acquired and thus establish the formal condition for admission to the final exam.

In addition to the certificates of school-based training programmes, there is a certificate for graduates of company training programmes.

Recognition and equivalence

A uniform method for recognition and equalisation of learning outcomes from different programmes does not exist in *case A*. The exception is the recognition of one to two semesters when the initial training has been followed by post-secondary training in the same field. There is also no institutionalised method for recognising learning units or qualifications acquired abroad. The recognition of equal learning units has become established within limited areas, however – e.g. in the framework of the LEONARDO programme.

In *case B*, it is possible to determine the equivalence of parts of qualifications on the basis of the defined general key competences after a suitable individual case analysis. The recognition of KSC acquired abroad is the subject of bilateral agreements. Formalised methods are not available. Selective experiences of establishing equivalence in the context of mobility could be gained in the LEONARDO programme. There is no recognition of competences acquired outside of the voca-

tional education and training system. Its introduction would require the definition of corresponding authorities and methods.

Transfer and accumulation

In *case A*, there is no official framework for transferring learning outcomes acquired abroad or for transferring within the national initial training system. However, there has been recurrent involvement in European projects that promote the mobility of trainees among European countries on the basis of shared learning units. Generally, the permeability of the system is limited above all due to the pronounced centralisation, which allows little flexibility on the lower levels of the educational system. Learning units or modules that could be easily transferred between programmes do not exist.

Nevertheless, learning outcomes can sometimes be transferred from one institution to another within the national vocational education and training system. Theoretically, transitions between the school-based vocational education and training and the programmes of upper secondary education, which lead to the general qualification for university entrance, are also possible. In practice, however, the two branches of upper secondary education are relatively impermeable.

Methods for accumulating learning outcomes are not provided for in the system. The assessment of learning outcomes is only slightly oriented to learning outcomes and is not structured according to independent units. The one-year vocational education and training leads to a leaving certificate that is only relevant to the labour market and is not related to any admission rights within the educational system. Something like “accumulation” is possible, at most through involvement in supplementary further training measures.

Within the school-based system, there are certain possibilities to build upon partial qualifications or initial training at other institutions. However, there is no accumulation across different training programmes: The option of collecting individual training units with defined learning outcomes in the framework of an individualized training pathway, thereby switching between different sectors and programmes does not exist. In the interest of promoting lifelong learning, corresponding reforms are being discussed but have not yet been implemented.

Methods for transferring learning outcomes across national borders do not exist in *case B*. To the extent that the consulted experts see accumulation implemented in the national system, they think of the accumulation of modules or units within a programme allowing learners to rise up through three qualifications levels. An accumulation across programmes in the area of school-based training is still only in its infancy.

Accumulation of KSC could be achieved if the valuation was no longer exclusively focused on the programme level but instead applied an independent assessment of learning outcomes as early as the module level. The accumulation of learning outcomes is also hindered by the lack of permeability between the parts of the system – especially between secondary and tertiary training.

5.3.2. “Unit-aware internationalists”

Vocational education and training systems of the second type can be highly school-oriented. However, they are not continuously so. Much attention is given to units. Transfer takes place domestically as well as across borders in almost all cases.

The group of “unit-aware internationalists” includes countries where the qualifications system has such a credit system in use or in preparation, as well as countries where neither is the case. A high degree of “ECVET readiness” does not mean that a credit system is already in use in a country.

		Further ECVET affinities				
Implicit analogies	both	24	12, 16		10, 23, 33	
	transfer			8, 11		
	valuation					
		reform towards less ECVET affinity	no reform	minor reforms / discussion	reform towards more ECVET affinity	System dynamic

Fig. 25: Sub-categorisation: Unit-aware internationalist

In what follows, we look at three countries: in one of them (*case C*) ECVET favourable elements are already anchored to a high degree in a systemic way; in the second (*case D*) some ECVET – relevant aspects exist only in a very rudimentary way, but an emerging dynamic development seems to promise a fast alignment. *Case E* is of special interest: there are credits, but in the school based system of this country those credits are related to subjects and are measuring learning times. Current innovations aim at producing outcome orientation by other means than awarding credits.

Assessment and validation of learning outcomes

In *case C*, initial vocational education and training is largely structured on a modular basis. A national body was set up to cater for the sphere of vocational education and training whose responsibilities also include the regulation of issues relating to certification. Within the framework of an award system, certificates document the modules associated with the respective awards each of which is assigned specific standards of examination and assessment.

In addition to taking place within the modularised school-based system, initial vocational education and training has a form of apprenticeship training which was essentially defined by the duration. However, following reforms directed at strengthening the outcome-oriented approach, now standards are in place specifying the KSC that must be evidenced.

The certificates awarded within the system of IVET in *case C* give proof of legally acknowledged qualifications which are embedded in a National Qualifications Framework. Attainment of a full qualification comprising several parts and requires the successful completion of the entirety of modules by which it is constituted. The certification system which is applied to the majority of training courses enables the learner to acquire partial certifications which also evidence qualifications acquired at a lower level than the full qualification. Examination and assessment procedures are organised such so as to be in line with both the respective learning requirements and the place of instruction (company or school). There are both formative and summative modes of examinations.

A further requirement – apart from validation of learning outcomes – for the attainment of a qualification in IVET is a specified duration of education and training which, however, cannot be split up into individual modules that would build on each other. Learning outcomes are documented by final certificates. Besides, at present there are a number of other training programmes which, although not having a modular structure, will be subjected to re-organisation to be integrated into the award system. Currently a system for validation of learning experience gained within non-formal and informal settings is being developed.

The system of IVET / qualification in *case D* is modularly structured and competence-based. Occupations and occupational groups are summarised in a uniform national catalogue which is related to the catalogue of vocational education and training modules. The description of the modules defines the knowledge, skills and competence to be acquired. These are the subject of testing and assessment at the end of each unit in the form of defined learning outcomes. The validated units here comprise personal and social competences (transversal modules) in addition to vocational skills in the more narrow sense.

The final qualifications acquired after passing all the competence units of a training cycle in *case D* are official, recognised certificates with general validity that confer the right to work in particular

occupations and are listed in the catalogue of vocational education and training certificates. If the *entire* training cycle has not been passed, a certificate will identify the completed competence units according to “passed – failed” and possibly with the corresponding grades. The partial certificates not only confirm participation in the programme but also the acquisition of the specified competence.

In *case E*, the training programmes of initial vocational education and training, which can be allocated to upper secondary education and always last three years, allow a defined number of credits to be acquired each year. These credits, in turn, represent a number of learning hours. The qualifications, which are defined in nationwide, uniform framework syllabi, are divided into study modules. In addition to the nationally standardised programmes, educational providers can develop their own study modules that have the status of elective modules for learners, according to the regional demand. An upper credit limit is defined for the overall scope of the elective modules.

Partial qualifications exist that are weighted within the full qualification through the assignment of credit points, whereby a “school-oriented logic” is followed by assigning points to subjects and by awarding a particular number of points to practical training at work, as with a “subject”. It is therefore understandable that when national experts are asked about aspects of an outcome orientation, they emphasize above all any other form of documentation of skills, which take place with the social partners, and not so much the characteristics of the credit system.

The aim of a recently introduced innovation is to check the attainment of learning objectives with special consideration of aspects of labour market suitability. They are to accompany the entire training programme and be carried out close to the workplace in cooperation with businesses.

In *case E*, it is possible to successfully complete a vocational education and training programme as part of an apprenticeship at a company; however, this option does not play a significant role in terms of quantity. In an apprenticeship at a company, the certification of a qualification is linked to an assessment by the employer and by the provider of the theoretical education.

Recognition and equivalence

In *case C*, matters relating to the recognition of occupational qualifications and the validation of learning outcomes achieved abroad are dealt with by a competent body. Similar bodies have also been set up with respect to other organisations operating, e.g. at the sector level. As practised at present, the procedure requires a learner to file an individual application by which he/she has to furnish evidence of qualifications and learning outcomes acquired previously. If they are ascertained to be equivalent, the respective awards will be granted.

At present, a number of methods are being developed to ensure the operability within the framework of the national award system of equivalence of (partial) certificates and learning outcomes achieved abroad. In order to maintain quality the focus is placed on the implementation of comparative standards. With regard to the national VET system, within the framework of the NQF, a clear reference system catering for the comparability of qualifications will be established through the assessment of learning outcomes achieved abroad.

According to the standards of the national catalogue in *case D*, the validation of informal learning and the recognition of competences acquired through practical work experience can lead to admission to a training programme with a recognised certificate. However, the elaboration of standards to ensure the checkability, creditability and transparency of the assessment and validation of KSC is not complete and the methods developed so far are still considered insufficient.

In contrast to the college system, the national initial training system does not have general standards according to which certificates from foreign apprenticeships are recognised and equated to domestic certificates. The responsibility for recognising foreign certificates lies with the Ministry of Education, which decides on a case-by-case basis when no bilateral agreements exist.

Case E has recognition methods. When learners switch (a) between vocational education and training programmes or (b) from general education to programmes of upper secondary education, they receive recognition at least for successfully completed core and elective subjects. It is the task of the educational provider to compare what has been learned with the objectives and contents of the target programme, using skill demonstrations if necessary. Various recognition procedures exist.

The core curriculum allows learners to complete part of the company training phase abroad. The VET providers are obligated to cooperate with each other on a regional basis, so that learners have different options and can also take advantage of offers from other places. Furthermore, they have the right to have studies at other institutions recognised. This includes the possibility of having learning outcomes achieved abroad recognised.

Transfer and accumulation

By largely basing the VET system on a modular structure and providing for the possibility for a learner to acquire partial certificates for single modules at a lower level than the full qualification *case C* aims to cater for a maximum of both horizontal and vertical mobility in accordance with the programme as laid down by the NQF.

What might prove to be an obstacle are the admission requirements applying to certain training courses, as well as regional characteristics and the split-up of responsibilities within certain areas. However, it is the declared, statutorily expressed objective of national policies to provide for the possibility of transfer and aggregation of competence.

Since the reforms beginning in the 1990's, the modularisation of the training programmes within the vocational education and training system of *case D* have been of central importance. Nevertheless, the transfer of qualifications and modularly acquired KSC is still considerably restricted. No coherent system exists for transferring acquired qualifications. In particular, there is no direct access from secondary to advanced initial VET. Despite their division into competence units, both are self-contained areas, so that successful completion of secondary training is not directly linked with entrance rights to higher training. (This is linked instead to the acquisition of the entrance requirement for higher education.)

In addition, the individual components of the training programmes (the units to be valued) and the full qualifications lack comparability within the initial training in their two sub-systems as well as in relation to the other training areas of the national VET system. The creation of a general reference framework for the comparability and recognition of acquired KSC is thus one of the main tasks of the national catalogue. This process is not yet complete. It has been possible to create a certain basis, e.g. by providing transversal learning units that extend across the individual

training programmes and training cycles and can be transferred within the initial vocational education and training.

In view of the fact that the creation of transfer possibilities for learners in vocational education and training is still in the initial stages in *case D*, it is very important to pick up the thread from existing experience with mobility programmes for trainees and from the participation in European programmes.

Various elements support the accumulation of validated KSC for acquiring a certificate. At the top of the list the certification of individual competence units in the framework of training programmes should be mentioned here in case the final certificate has not (yet) been attained. The accumulation of learning outcomes during training is documented. In addition, the certification creates the prerequisite for recognising attained learning outcomes and can function as an admission requirement.

In *case E*, the recognition of learning outcomes has a basic relevance for the design of the learning pathway in the target programme. Nevertheless, this does not lead to a shortened duration of study in every case. In order to make progress in this area, improvements are necessary in the curriculum design and in the electronic documentation of the course of training. The lack of mutual trust among players is also sometimes a problem. The existence of identical units in different programmes as described above makes transfer easier. All units that exist in different programmes can be transferred. However, transfer is not limited to the level of admission requirements. This is a real transfer of full or partial qualifications.

5.3.3. “Holistic internationalists”

“Holistic internationalists” organise their initial vocational education and training and qualification system towards a final exam, but always also have moments of ECVET-oriented valuation practice. They have in common the fact that despite their orientation to full qualifications and a rather low significance of their parts – they allow a transfer of partial qualifications in an international context, at least to some extent.

The group of “holistic internationalists” includes most vocational education and training systems that (entirely or partially) have a dual structure as well as school-based systems that have taken steps towards strengthening alternation elements in recent times. In some of the countries represented here, the goal of comprehensive practical business ability (throughout or in parts of the initial vocational education and training) is being implemented through a strong quantitative emphasis on training components close to work.

In the following we focus on two examples: *case F* represents a monolithic dual system. Currently reforms are being discussed that might be suitable for mixing up the high importance of leaving certificates; practices of transfer and accumulation are arising due to exceptions. *Case G* is in a phase of transition from a state-run, strongly school based system towards a more flexible system (with dual elements). Ongoing reforms are generating elements that might allow synergies when using ECVET.

		(Further) ECVET affinities				
Implicit analogies	both		29, 31	7	1, 14 30	
	transfer					
	valuation				21	
		reform towards less ECVET affinity	no reform	minor reforms / discussion	reform towards more ECVET affinity	System dynamic

Fig. 26: Sub-categorisation: Holistic internationalist

Assessment and validation of learning outcomes

In *case F* aspects of an outcome orientation can be seen in the concept of comprehensive practical business ability, to which dual systems are committed, inasmuch as it emphasises a result of vocational education and training work. When asked about the outcome orientation of their vocational education and training system, national experts of this country often answered that this exists to a great degree. They especially emphasise the importance of the universal employability of people who have gone through a vocational education and training programme.

According to the logic of this “holistic system”, practical ability is differentiated according to knowledge, skills and competence that are described in detail in state guidelines for providers (companies and vocational schools). The focus of the training organisation and testing system, however, is on the collection of these elements. The determination of training success, as well as certification practice, is oriented towards full qualifications which are acquired in training programmes of several years’ duration.

As much as this system approach gives priority to learning outcomes with its criterion of proving oneself in practical business situations, it little reflects the micro level of knowledge, skills and competence in testing and certification practice. This micro level is only present in the practical teaching of the instructors and in the learning processes themselves as learning steps, subject areas, tasks and areas of responsibility. This ends in an accumulation of learning outcomes according to the following pattern: learners can only proceed to step two after they have successfully mastered the first step. It is quite possible that forms of assessment and documentation for such partial successes exist within organisations that are involved in training. However, they do not have any official status.

The certificates are final certificates that relate to the practical business part of the training. The testing and awarding of certificates are part of the area of responsibility of the authorities in charge of supporting and checking vocational education and training. The results attained in the school-oriented part can be mentioned in the final certificate. As far as the labour market is concerned, though, they are of relatively minor importance.

Intermediate exams play either a subordinate role or no role on the path to acquiring a certificate. They have a formative character and serve to check the teaching practice on the one hand and the individual ability of learners to meet the requirements of a training programme on the other. They have recently gained more importance and now influence the final grade within certain boundaries. Yet they have no relevance independently of the training programme.

According to the opinions held by national experts, the current situation is characterised by a combination of input and output-oriented factors. Learning outcomes are defined by occupational standards and examination provisions having the form of compulsory catalogues of knowledge, skills and competence to be acquired. Learning outcomes have to be evidenced during final examinations – both written and oral – as well as by practical project work. The results achieved at those examinations are subjected to central monitoring.

In *case G*, the new NVQ-system – besides the procedures for the assessment of learning outcomes achieved in formal settings – provides for the validation of KSC acquired through non-formal or informal training programmes. In general, however, the national VET system still follows a concept largely informed by features of school-based training (instruction organised as a sequence of school years) that leaves little room for individual measures. The main goal is to convey a wide array of vocational skills and competence. One expert has pointed out that the relationship between formal training programmes and the NVQ has not yet been fully clarified.

All VET-programmes recently introduced are based upon occupational standards defined through modules which, apart from the name and a level definition, contain the nomenclature of the related competence, other requirements for pursuing the respective occupation, as well as typical workplace requirements. Comprising several occupational standards the VET-programmes may thus be regarded as “units” which, in case a learner quits the programme prior to completing it, will be certified separately. Documentation of learning outcomes is based upon a portfolio approach.

Assessment of learning outcomes takes place on a continuous basis in the course of formative assessment accompanying the programmes. Full implementation of the reform of the VET-system is to bring about the possibility of separate assessment of individual modules. As a matter of principle, examinations taken prior to the final examination currently *do not have* a value of their

own, independently to the VET programme. The aim is imparting the full qualification, the acquisition of which will entitle a learner to access other programmes offered within the formalised VET-system (vocational matura). Partial qualifications are an exception to the rule.

Recognition and equivalence

In *case F*, time that has been spent in an apprenticeship in a related occupation can also be credited for admission to final examinations. This benefits above all graduates from occupations with a short training period who aspire to a final examination in a related occupation with a wider range. After passing the final exam and being correspondingly employed for a defined length of time, they can demand admission to the final exam in the wider-target occupation.

The possibilities for recognising knowledge from vocational experience are limited over the period the vocational activity. A vocational education and training reform has recently relaxed the situation somewhat in this respect. In any case, the recognition of learning outcomes attained outside of the target context concerns the admission to exams, not the recognition of partial qualifications.

As of today, in *case G* there is no formalised methods to establish the equivalence of (completed or partial) qualifications, and this applies to both the national and the international contexts. Equivalence is established on the basis of single-case examinations leading to the exemption from having to attend certain parts of a training programme. If a VET-programme is to be attended by an adult person the school will have to consider any previous validation of learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal settings.

Transfer and accumulation

In *case F*, parts of the vocational education and training monitored by the responsible authorities can be carried out abroad. The duration of the mobility phase is not supposed to exceed a defined upper limit, however. In the case of a shorter foreign phase, transfer is automatically possible. For longer stays abroad, a plan must be coordinated with the responsible authority. The system provides for foreign exams for foreign learners as well. When the requirements for admitting

foreigners are checked, formal educational certificates from abroad as well as periods of employment abroad are considered.

Company training periods can be shortened by crediting vocational pre-education periods outside the company. Educational programmes of vocational schools and vocational education and training at other vocational education and training institutions can be included in the company training in this sense. Recently, graduates of a purely school-oriented vocational education and training can also be admitted for examination by the responsible authorities in the system of vocational education and training.

Expanded possibilities for transfer have also been introduced in recent years with a view to special target groups, “on the margins” of the system, so to speak. Thus, special arrangements have been made for participants in vocational preparation measures (young people who do not yet seem to be fully capable of training). Here, there are possibilities for transferring learning outcomes to subsequent regular training programmes. The same is true of other state-supported measures before training.

In order to ensure an appropriate range of company training places, legislators have created the possibility for different companies and education providers to cooperate on training. In the framework of an individual training programme, each involved party (only) contributes to the learning and work areas that they can cover due their business processes or service offer. The learning experience acquired at different locations adds up to a full training programme.

Beginnings of an accumulation of learning outcomes are only found in the system in very large units (expressed in years, e.g. when supplementing an initial vocational training programme by a one-year specialization).

In *case G*, transfer of learning outcomes is possible in the context of international mobility. On domestic level, the learning outcomes achieved with respect to certain subjects may be transferred in the case a learner changes programme. After completion of the reform of the VET-system it will be possible to transfer modules (each of which will be subject to separate assessment). Any extension of transfer possibilities would presuppose an amendment of access requirements, as well as enhanced cooperation between schools. Presently, however, possibilities of

transfer depend on the fulfilment of *workload*-, rather than of *outcome*-criteria. Transfer concerns aspects of the formal VET-system (access requirements, participation in parts of programmes, subjects), rather than KSC *independently* of the context in which they were acquired.

As it is only in the initial stages, the development of procedures for the accumulation of learning outcomes is closely linked to the implementation of a modularised system.

5.4. Relationship between ECVET readiness and credits

A high degree of ECVET readiness does not mean that a credit system is already being used within a country. The group of “unit-aware internationalists” includes countries where the vocational education and training system has such a credit system in use or in preparation as well as countries where neither of these is the case. Although efforts of a “holistic loner” towards more flexibility can reciprocally be connected with the introduction of a credit system, this has to go along with further legal and organisational measures in order to reach the desired target.

Examples from the group of the “unit aware internationalists”:

- In *country 11*, the training programmes of initial vocational education and training allow a defined number of credits to be acquired each year. These credits, in turn, represent a number of *learning hours*.
- In *country 23*, there is no national credit system that facilitates the transfer between training programmes. The most important educational provider does use credits within its training programmes, though. Most of these training programmes are divided into units (which could also be used as a basis in the context of ECVET).
- In *country 10* and *country 16*, the VET system is modularized, without credit points being used (*country 16*: credits in preparation).
- For *country 8*, the national expert states – interestingly – that a credit transfer exists *without* a credit point system and thereby points out that a credit *point* system is only one possible transfer instrument (end/means relation). The transfer between qualifications and pro-

grammes takes place in a horizontal as well as in a vertical direction in country 8 and also includes the recognition of prior learning.

Examples from the “holistic loner group”:

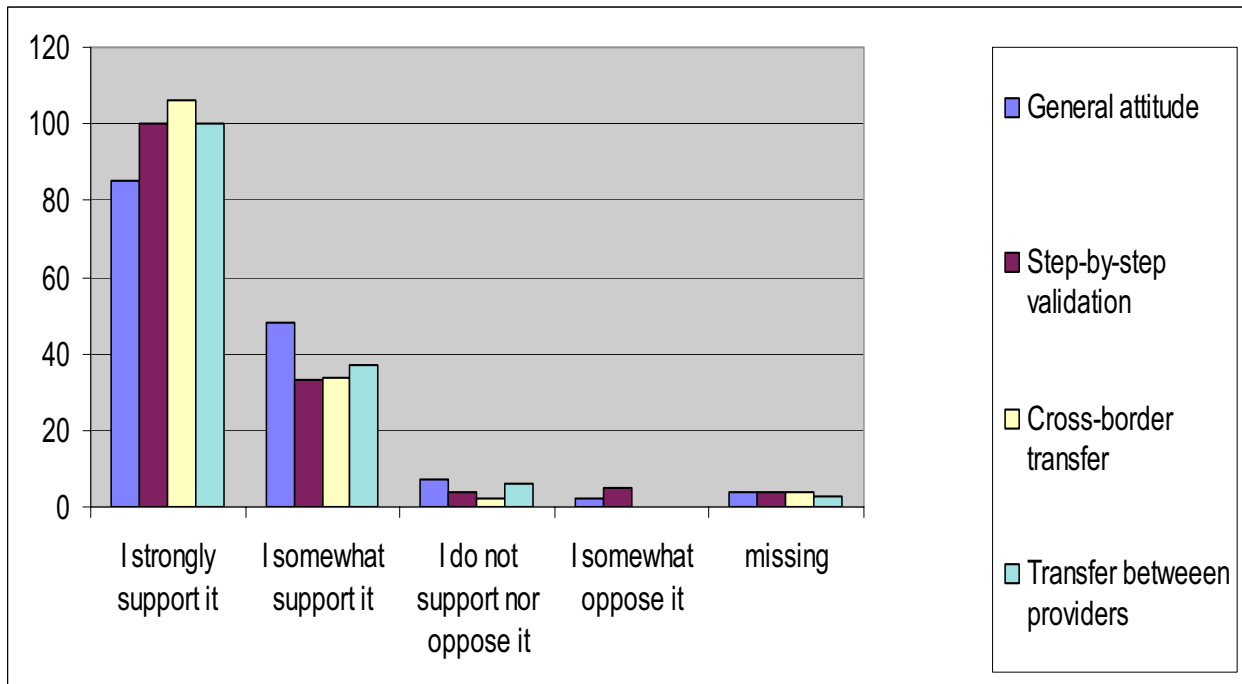
- In *country 28*, which – at the time being – can be allocated to the group of the “holistic loners”, a credit system has been introduced in this connection, i.e. the training standards that form the basis of every qualification always include credits. Experts expect the complete implementation of the new system to increase the flexibility of the learning paths in the national vocational education and training system and to systematically take into account the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning.
- In *country 15*, in which high priority is currently being given to making the vocational education and training system more flexible, a credit system is in preparation. The current reform has led to the coexistence of two systems. It aims for a modular system that promises a considerably greater consideration of market requirements in vocational education and training. The allocation of credits is planned for this system.
- In *country 32*, initial steps have been taken in the direction of a credit system in conjunction with the preparation of a national qualification system.
- The situation in *country 25* appears very different. Here there is no credit system, and none is planned either. The vocational education and training system, which is based on a strong involvement of the social partners and is greatly accepted by all sides, is divided into modules to which learning outcomes are allocated in a differentiated way. Vocational education and training is the responsibility of the provincial authorities; school-based vocational education and training is accompanied by an equally important practical component. The system is currently being reformed to give greater consideration to general competences and a greater international opening.

6. Stakeholder analysis

6.1. Attitude towards ECVET

Several questions in the interview guideline relate to experts' attitudes towards ECVET. The answers revealed a great deal of support for the creation of a credit system for VET (61% said "I strongly support it", 33% said "I somewhat support it", 1% said "I do not support nor oppose it", 2% said "I somewhat oppose it", and none said that they strongly opposed it. 3% gave no answer. n = 107).

This is all the more remarkable as many interview partners readily expressed any reservations and points of criticism regarding certain sub areas (e. g. the transfer function or the step-by-step evaluation of learning outcomes). It can therefore be excluded that the stakeholder analysis might lack a sound basis for making a positive selection by including only promoters of ECVET in the survey.



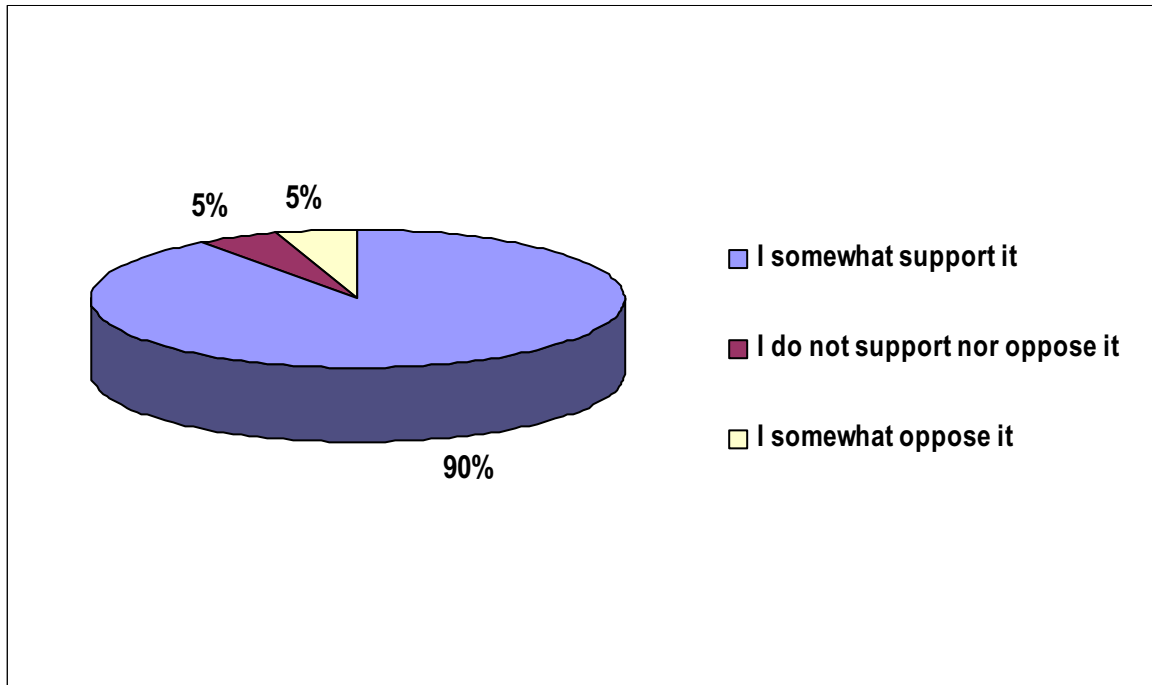
*Fig. 27: What is your attitude towards ECVET? Country spanning overview
(Statements of 107 experts from 19 countries, interview guideline 9.2)*

In order to rationalise the various views we extended the question concerning the principal attitude towards ECVET by adding a differentiating question to single out some of the instrument’s partial aspects which are of significance: the step-by-step validation of learning outcomes, transfer between countries and transfer between training providers or training programmes within the country.

Quite interesting are answer constellations of the following kind:

- ECVET: I somewhat support it
- step-by-step validation: I somewhat support it
- transfer between countries: I strongly support it
- transfer between providers: I strongly support it

The analysis relates to the almost 33 % of responses that did not express a strong supporting attitude towards ECVET.



*Fig. 28: Position of stakeholders towards ECVET
(n = 139)*

Conclusions can be drawn from these constellations regarding the reason for only limited acceptance of ECVET. This pattern reflecting a certain preference for “holistic” approaches in VET against accumulation of partial qualifications prevails in some of the interviews.

Table 11 is a compilation of all those cases in which the differentiating questions have suggested certain conclusions regarding the genesis of a respondent’s general attitude.

Table 11: Indications on reasons of reservations – examples

Country	General attitude	Step-by-step validation of learning outcomes	Transfer from one country to another	Transfer from one education/training provider to another
1	I somewhat support it	I somewhat oppose it	I strongly support it	I strongly support it
6	I somewhat support it	I somewhat support it	I somewhat support it	I strongly support it
8	I somewhat support it	I do not support nor oppose it	I do not support nor oppose it	I strongly support it
11	I somewhat support it	I somewhat support it	I strongly support it	I strongly support it
21	I somewhat support it	I strongly support it	I somewhat support it	I strongly support it
31	I somewhat oppose it	I somewhat oppose it	I somewhat support it	I do not support nor oppose it
33	I do not support nor oppose it	I strongly support it	I somewhat support it	I strongly support it

A general evaluation reveals that national transfer – in contrast to a step-by-step validation – is only very seldom decisive for objections against ECVET in total; therefore strongly supported in almost all responses. Step by step validation is in about 50% of cases in play where answers on the three aspects lead to a differentiation, and is in almost a third of the cases exclusively.

Regarding the ECVET specifications it could be reasonable to attach special value on the difference between:

- an assessment of learning outcomes in parts of IVET, without which, a ECVET could hardly function on the one hand and
- the systemic significance of such a statement against the background of a given national context on the other.

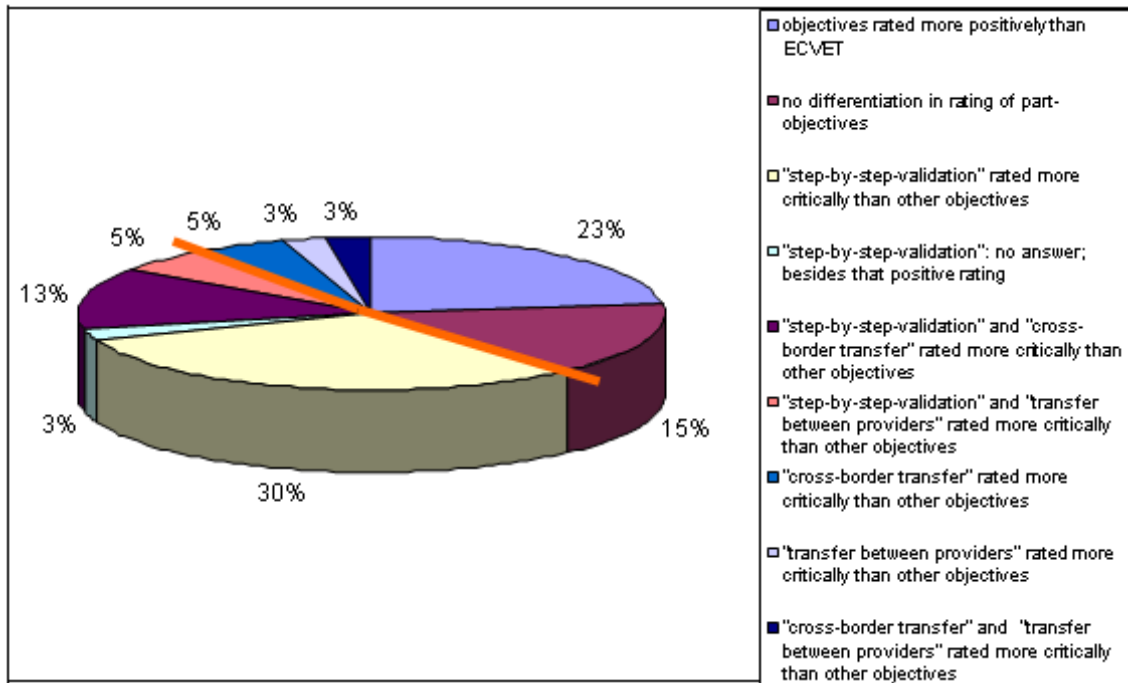


Fig. 29: Attitude of stakeholders towards ECVET
Mentions regarding general attitude: no strong support of ECVET (n = 39)

In less than a quarter of the cases investigated here, the ECVET instrument is rated less positively than the objectives ECVET serves for.

Arguments reflecting certain reservations about ECVET are often based upon the following considerations:

1. Their confidence in the national system of vocational education and training being rather high, stakeholders seem to worry that opening it up might impair the quality of education:

“a poorly prepared ECVET or a system that would reduce the influence of the industry and social partner, or reduce the quality of and confidence in VET, would face serious opposition.” (Interview no. 3202)

“Would change [the positive] attitude if the system is being introduced without clear criteria and quality guarantees.” (Interview no. 3203)

2. When the national system of vocational education and training pursues a “holistic” concept there are fears that both standards established in respect of vocational pedagogies and social standards would be undermined (cf. the end of the following section).

3. Another concern has been the impact ECVET might have on the labour market in case it will have to be opened up, which in many opinions is deemed problematical:

- ECVET: I somewhat support it
- step-by-step validation: I strongly support it
- transfer between countries: I somewhat support it
- transfer between providers: I strongly support it

“How would you demonstrate your attitude towards ECVET? Which actions would/could you take? – To make known the impact on VET and the consequences for the labour market and the right of establishment. [...] Depending on the impact on labour market I would look at it differently” (Interview no. 2903)

Comments of this kind fuel the suspicion that the introduction of credits in IVET is being mixed up with issues relating to the recognition of qualifications.

However, the labour market issue may as well be put forward – with a higher degree of plausibility – by supporters of ECVET:

“What impact could the use of ECVET have on your national IVET [...]? [...] achieving wide spectrum of modern learning methods [...] job oriented education for European and world labour market” (Interview no. 3305)

6.2. Differentiation of the groups of stakeholders

The differentiation of the groups of stakeholders provides the following picture:

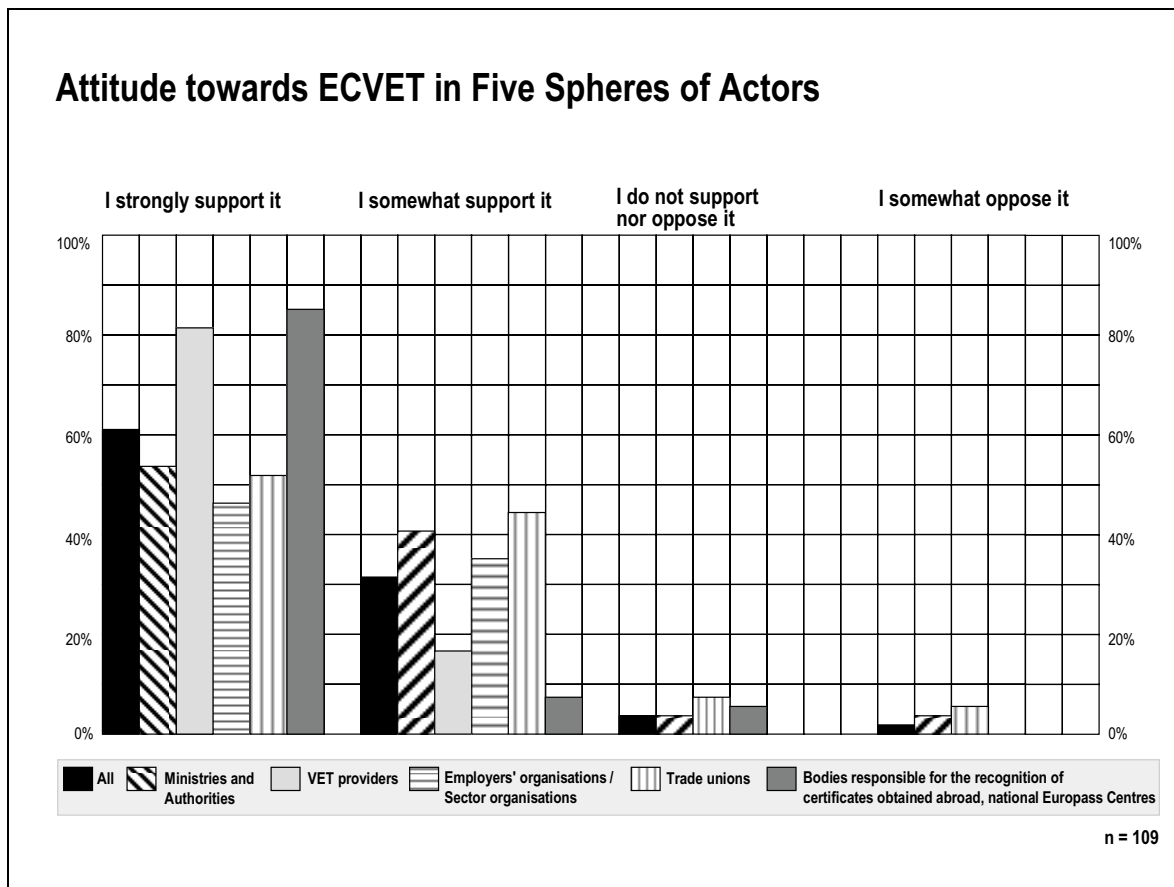


Fig. 30: Stakeholders differentiation: five spheres and attitude towards ECVET I

Here, it becomes evident that within both the group of VET providers and that of authorities responsible for issues of mobility and recognition, the number of “strong supporters” is considerably higher than among the other respondents (more than 80% in each case with their share in the whole group of respondents, as stated above, being 61%). Putting together, on the one hand, the positive statements (“I strongly / somewhat support it”) and the more critical comments (“I do not support nor oppose it” / “I somewhat oppose it”) on the other, will, however, make the differentiation between the groups smaller. It becomes obvious that employers’ representatives take a more reserved stance than do other respondents (“supporters”: 92% of the total number of respondents, and 82% of the total number of respondents from the group of employers’ representatives).

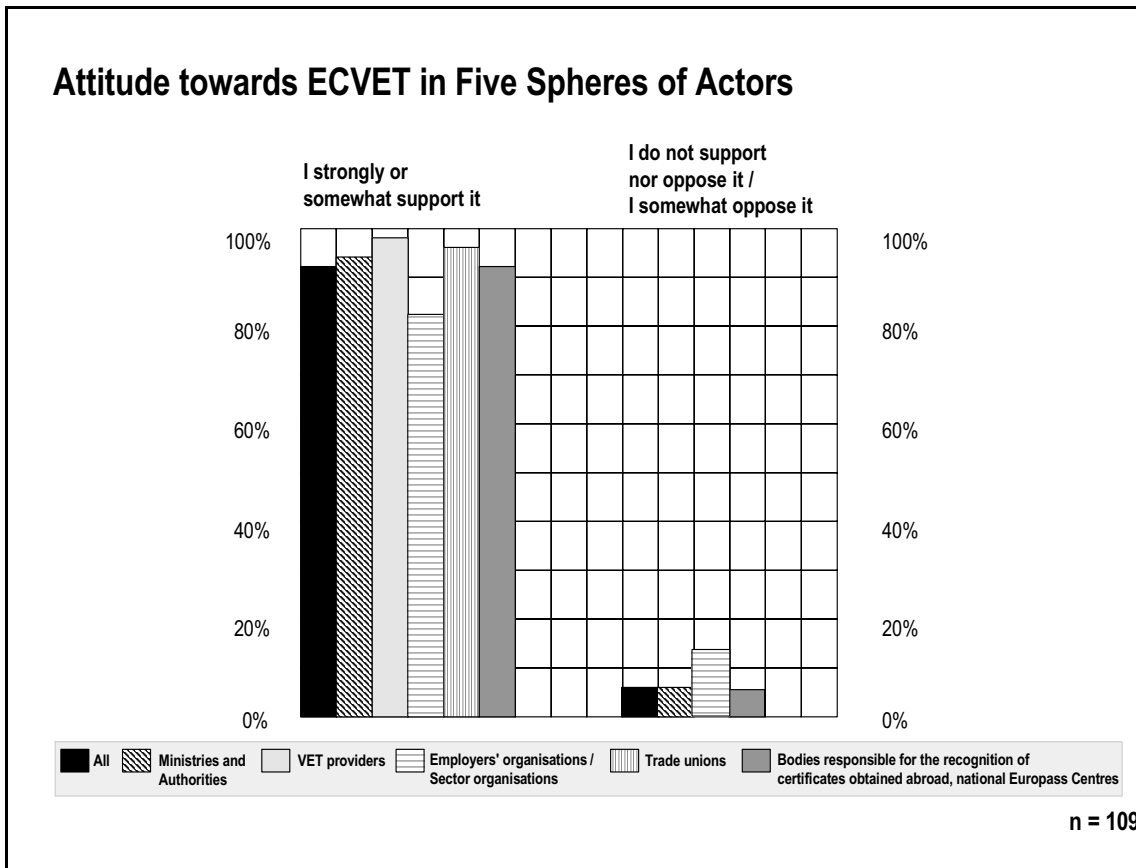


Fig. 31: Stakeholders differentiation: five spheres and attitude towards ECVET II (compiled in accordance with the categories “supporters” and those showing certain reservations)

Other critical factors occasionally mentioned in this context are cost issues and the danger of extra bureaucracy:

“A lot of effort has been wasted to implement transparency projects, and the ECVET process, is also cost-intensive. Still, increasing permeability is a goal worth working for!” (Interview No. 2011)

“Talking of a recognition *procedure*, however, is somewhat disquieting. When it comes down to recognition bureaucracy ought to be kept at a minimum level. Of great significance are both the “*zones of mutual trust*” and *transparency*. Apart from this, market forces have to be brought to bear on this process to the greatest possible extent. Business enterprises would primarily be interested in *where* credit points have been acquired. It might be helpful to base the process on a kind of “*eBay principle*” in the sense of providing ratings of educational providers’ offers on the internet. There is a demand for access that would be short, fast and simple – such is the perspective of

the industry and the enterprises which, however, would also affect the individual.”
(Interview No. 2011)

However, concerns about an increase in costs and bureaucratic load also appear among representatives of other spheres.

“Obstacles will be: costs of this type of assessment.” (Interview no. 2904)

“Bureaucratic approach, (“transfer” to credits). Formalism.” (Interview no. 3601)

Still, as regards the general assessment of ECVET concerns of this kind are of less importance.

The table shown below includes responses from 24 countries and represents another attempt to trace possible reasons for the differentiations among experts’ attitudes. The first column states the most negative response given in a country to one of the four questions concerning attitude. The second column renders the most negative response given in the country as concerns the general attitude towards ECVET. The third column indicates the sphere of responsibility of those experts whose attitudes in regard of at least one of the four questions were more critical than those expressed by the majority of interviewees in the respective country. The fourth column indicates the country type according to the typology elaborated in the previous chapter.

Table 12: Differentiations among attitudes and possible reasons

Most negative response to one of the four questions regarding the attitude towards ECVET	Most negative response to the question regarding the <i>general</i> attitude towards ECVET	Provenance of the experts more critical towards ECVET than the majority	Type
I somewhat oppose it	I somewhat support it	1, 4	HI
I somewhat oppose it	I somewhat oppose it	3, 4	HI
I do not support nor oppose it	I do not support nor oppose it	3	HI
I strongly support it	I strongly support it	-	HI
I somewhat support it	I somewhat support it	3	HI
I somewhat support it	I somewhat support it	1	HI
I do not support nor oppose it	I do not support nor oppose it	4, 5	HI
I somewhat oppose it	I somewhat oppose it	1, 4	HI
I somewhat oppose it	I somewhat support it	-	HL
I somewhat support it	I somewhat support it	1 & 2	HL
I somewhat support it	I somewhat support it	1	HL
I strongly support it	I strongly support it	-	HL
I somewhat support it	I strongly support it	5	HL
I do not support nor oppose it	I do not support nor oppose it	-	HL
I somewhat support it	I somewhat support it	-	HL
I somewhat support it	I somewhat support it	1, 2, 3, 4	HL
I somewhat support it	I strongly support it	-	HL
I somewhat support it	I somewhat support it	1	HL
I strongly support it	I strongly support it	-	HL
I do not support nor oppose it	I do not support nor oppose it	4	UI
I somewhat support it	I somewhat support it	1, 3, 4	UI
I somewhat support it	I somewhat support it	3, 4	UI
I somewhat support it	I strongly support it	1, 2, 3	UI
I do not support nor oppose it	I do not support nor oppose it	1	UI

Spheres: 1 = Ministries and authorities; 2 = VET providers; 3 = Employers' organisations / Sector organisations; 4 = Trade unions; 5 = Bodies responsible for the recognition of certificates obtained abroad, national Europass Centres

-: no clear majority among attitudes (identity > 50 %)

Countries: 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33

On the basis of this evaluation, a distinction can also be drawn between representatives of ministries and authorities, as well as of employers and employees (attitudes ten, seven and eight times more critical than the attitude expressed by the majority of national experts) on the one hand, and VET providers and representatives of institutions concerned with issues of recognition and mobility, on the other (attitudes three and two times as high, respectively, as the majority attitude). In four cases the least positive stance in regard of the general attitude towards ECVET is more positive than the least positive position in regard of one of the differentiating questions. However, there is no indication that less positive positions depended on the respective country type. This may be explained by the fact (as shown in the previous chapter) that in countries in which ECVET readiness is rather low, as a rule, reforms of the system of vocational education and training are being discussed on a broad basis, or have even entered the phase of implementation.

It is, however noticeable that the group of countries in which reservations about ECVET prevail (highlighted in red) includes *almost all* European countries with a dual system (highlighted in red in the right-hand column). Obviously, the reason for this is that the holistic approach is firmly fixed in the actors' minds:

“[Please specify the most important obstacles concerning transfer] Mainly the presence of the final summative examination and the cultural convictions of professional associations concerning the holistic approach to learning.” (Interview no. 4002)

“The programmes are still based on a holistic way of thinking.” (Interview no. 1605)

“Although there is certain fracturing the system we have places the emphasis on *occupational ability* in a holistic sense.” (Interview no. 2011)

It is noticeable, though, that existing reservations, rather than being brought forth by a particular incompatibility of ECVET and dual systems, seem to reflect a certain “theoretical super-structure” according to which special importance needs to be given to aspects of the holistic concept (cf. the phrase “cultural convictions of professional associations” cited in the first quotation above). Thus, a separate examination of dual system shows that this group not only includes all types identified in this study (“unit-conscious internationalist”: one; “holistic internationalist”: three; “holistic loner”: two) but, in addition, features a wide variety of “implicit analogies” to the

approach adopted by ECVET, as well as reform endeavours that would rather suggest the existence of a synergetic relationship.

Table 13: Dual systems and ECVET

Type	Analogies/Val.	...Transfer	both	Reform
UI			X	Minor/discussion
HI			X	yes
HI		X		Minor/discussion
HI	X			yes
HL	X			Minor/discussion
HL			X	-

Placing the emphasis on the implementation of a comprehensive conception of vocational education and training certainly implies that practices of examination and certification focus on a full qualification, rather than making visible partial qualifications. But the same applies to many other programmes that are predominantly school-based. In any case, a remarkable tendency towards a critical – in view of the extraordinarily positive general result we should rather say: less positive – attitude prevails in countries in which VET is organised on a dual basis, although there is no clear differentiation with a view to certain groups of stakeholders.

7. Recommendations

This depiction of affinities and incompatibilities between qualification systems and ECVET in this study is not an end in itself. It is a necessary step to elaborate policy recommendations for European and national policy makers and stakeholders. It therefore highlights both the *aims* stakeholders associate with the introduction of ECVET and their different *viewpoints* regarding these aims.

7.1. ECVET and VET policies: Two viewpoints

The empirical data provides some evidence that within the European VET systems analysed ECVET is viewed from two varying standpoints which are linked to differing practical approaches:

- *Approach I* – Implementing ECVET (solely) for cross-border transfer. It aims to increase mobility in the IVET phase. ECVET is considered a system neutral instrument which can significantly ease the assessment of equivalences of learning outcomes acquired at home and in other countries and thus allow them to become a normal part of training (cf. 3.1, Hypothesis 1).
- *Approach II* – Implementing ECVET to promote, *inter alia*, domestic reforms which boost the accessibility and flexibility of *national* qualifications systems (cf. 3.2, Hypothesis 2).

This aspect of *different policy objectives linked to the implementation of ECVET* proved to be an independent variable in the country studies, supplementing the typology by an important additional aspect.

Approach I appears to be most prevalent in countries which share the aim of enhancing mobility and which also express a vested interest in *preserving the national status quo*. This is addressed in question 9.5:

“Under what conditions would you change your attitude towards ECVET?”

“[Generally negative attitude:] Sceptical, as far as fragmentation and accumulation are concerned. If fragmentation at the national level could be stemmed the matter could be approached more optimistically.” (Interview no. 2013)

“[Generally positive attitude:] If the current quality level of VET is not to be negatively influenced.” (Interview no. 2703)

“[Positive attitude:] My attitude would change if the system leads to a reduction in quality.” (Interview no. 3002)

“[Positive attitude:] Cannot imagine a situation where I would not support the ECVET principles. However, a poorly prepared ECVET or a system that would reduce the influence of the industry and social partner, or reduce the quality of and confidence in VET, would face serious opposition.” (Interview no. 3202)

“[Generally positive attitude:] Would change attitude if ECVET is developed in a way to weaken national VET, and if the social partners are not actively involved in preparations and implementation.” (Interview no. 3205)

Interviewees who dismissed or ignored the question about a shift in attitude often appear to favour *Approach II*.

“[Question 9.1] What are the potential impacts to you and your organisation of the implementation of a European Credit transfer system for VET like ECVET?”

“We have the expectation that the [...] problems of interfaces [in Country 1] might be better regulated.” (Interview no. 1005)

“The implementation of ECVET will enhance our scope of activities and will involve more young people in flexible learning pathways. Our institute will also be available for the gradual validation of experience and informal and non formal learning. The units will make more attractive vocational education and training.” (Interview no. 2102)

“Increased education quality, correct procedures (transparent and objective).” (Interview no. 1302)

“We would like to prove it in our reform project.” (Interview no. 2205)

“European Credit transfer system should make the national VET system more transparent, attractive for trainees. It would be easier to compare and recognize the KSC of employees and efficiently plan the further training for them.” (Template no. 2600)

Both viewpoints may be expressed simultaneously:

“Under what conditions would you change your attitude towards ECVET?”

“[Generally positive attitude:] If it means compulsory modularisation.”

“[Question 9.1] What are the potential impacts to you and your organisation of the implementation of a European Credit transfer system for VET like ECVET?”

“It can increase the mobility both national and between countries.” (Interview no. 1603)

Finally, it may occur that *different stakeholders* in a particular country tend towards one standpoint or the other.

Both approaches allow the possible implementation of ECVET at European and/or national levels to be qualified as an incremental innovation. It is consequently possible to apply the five factors for adoption and diffusion of innovation identified by Rogers (2003) to ECVET:

1. Relative advantage: The degree to which an innovation is perceived as better than the idea it supersedes. [...] The greater the perceived relative advantage of an innovation, the more rapid its rate of adoption will be.
2. Compatibility: Indicates the degree to which an innovation is perceived as consistent with the existing values, past experiences and needs of potential adopters.
3. Complexity: The willingness to adopt an innovation depends on the degree to which it is perceived as difficult to understand and gives the impression it would be difficult to implement and require the user to acquire new skills and knowledge.
4. Trialability:⁶¹ The easier it is to experiment with an innovation on a limited basis, i.e. using a justifiable amount of resources and without excessive consequences, the fewer barriers there are to implementation.
5. Observability: This is the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others. Adoption willingness is positively correlated with observability (cf. Rogers, 2003, pp. 15).

⁶¹ For the fourth feature Rogers coins a term derived from “to try”.

Implementation of ECVET as an innovation process at the national level varies according to the approach (I or II) taken:

Table 14.1: Factors for innovation diffusion as for ECVET, according to Rogers (2003)

Approach Characteristic	I Focus on Cross-border Transfer	II Cross-border Transfer + VET Reform
1. Relative advantage	Mobility periods can be integrated into VET programmes with little investment.	ECVET augments vertical and horizontal mobility; broadens transfer and accumulation opportunities. VET as an aspect of lifelong learning.
2. Compatibility	Describing learning outcomes independently of programmes determines their systematic accessibility: ECVET as a tool which facilitates transparency without affecting the substance of vocational training system.	The focus on learning outcomes is the <i>leitmotiv</i> for innovation <i>within</i> the system: compatibility through synergies between ECVET and national developments.
3. Complexity	Because it is to a certain degree an instrument “external” to the national VET system, ECVET is invariably and painstakingly evaluated on the basis of how complicated and costly its implementation would be.	The availability of an instrument which can be implemented nationally <i>and</i> throughout Europe reduces complexity: synergies between ECVET and national developments.

Both approaches – *Approach I* focussing on cross-border transfer and *Approach II* focussing on cross-border transfer as well as on VET reform – were found in the stakeholder interviews. However, *Approach II* appeared more common. A multitude of current and future reforms aiming at greater flexibility in vocational training and additional horizontal and vertical mobility in national VET systems could indeed make use of the instruments provided by a European credit system.

Factors four and five of Rogers’s diffusion theory exceed the bounds of the empirical research carried out in the context of the reflector study. However, based on plausibility considerations the table could be completed as follows:

Table 14.2: Admissions to ECVET und factors of the innovation process, according to Rogers (2003)

Approach	I	II
Characteristic	Focus on Cross-border Transfer	Cross-border Transfer + VET Reform
4. Trialability	ECVET trials can be run for specific sectors as part of mobility projects such as the LEONARDO Programme.	Trials are not disconnected from the national vocational education and training system and there is no political interest in such a separation. (Identifying suitable sectors for model projects might be necessary)
5. Observability	Indicators could be: the implementation of mobility projects during training, changing the status of mobility periods in the context of vocational training and increasing the mobility rate.	Results are readily observable (e.g. establishing mobility between vocational training and higher education). Clear communication of national goals, well-defined criteria for success and establishing a systematic monitoring system can significantly enhance observability.

7.2. Typology and practical recommendations

Against this backdrop, the typology described in chapter 5 allows recommendations and proposals to develop technical instruments to be formulated.

7.2.1. Example I: a “holistic loner”

Portrait: Extremely centralised vocational education and training system (initial vocational training at state vocational education institutions). Certification system is not primarily based on learning outcomes. Oral and written interim exams take place during the school year; written final exam at the end of the school year. Validation of

occupational learning experiences in development but not yet implemented. No uniform recognition procedures or means of establishing equivalence for learning outcomes in different programmes. No institutionalised method of recognising learning units or qualifications obtained outside of the country. Experiences gathered in specific areas (LEONARDO Programme). No official framework for learning outcome transfer. Mobility within the system is restricted mainly by a strong centralisation. Units are not transferable between programmes. Accumulation of learning outcomes is almost irrelevant.

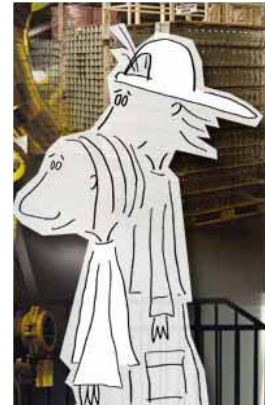
Cross-border Perspective

State schools could assume the task of seeking foreign partners for mobility projects, identifying appropriate “units”, negotiating the framework conditions of exchange and concluding “learning agreements”. A certain amount of legal independence is a basic requirement for this. Implementing ECVET would involve examining the scope of schools’ responsibilities for ECVET and to reach binding agreements, and the willingness to do so. Incidentally, this is a question of resources.

As a general rule partial qualification has no stand-alone value in the VET systems of “holistic loners”. Furthering the identification of possible ECVET “units” is therefore of particular importance. This requires procedures which allow identification of analogies within the traditional forms of formative assessment (which have always been bound to “units”), identification of commonalities with systems in possible partner countries and realistic estimation of the equivalence of learning experiences. Because experience is lacking in this area, it will be helpful to document good practices and to make them available to all. Currently they can only be found in the context of LEONARDO mobility projects.

Advantages for the learner:

Mobility projects can be designed very closely to the training needs of the learner involved. For the learners the preparation of mobility projects is a non-bureaucratic act; they are not sent on a long “institutional way”. Strengthening the role of schools may put them in a position where they could respond to arising needs in a more flexible way, thus providing a contribution to elevating the quality of the entire VET system. Here, the cross-border- and the system-development-perspective are closely linked.



Learning experiences in other European countries are becoming possible to a wider extent, not only in exemptions. Transparency of mobility projects is created in a way that they can take place in an atmosphere of mutual trust. According to the degree in which the knowledge of comparability and difference of learning experiences is increasing, learning periods abroad can be integrated more systematically in a training pathway and be planned as part of the individual learner development.

System development perspective

Despite the rigidity of the system in example country I, some innovations are being implemented while others are planned. One of these innovations consists in broadening the variety of examination types. ECVET could assist in:

1. providing a system of work-based assessments such as “skills demonstrations” (currently in development with common standards) and
2. making foreign expertise accessible through increased international exchange and thus establishing a “culture of validation”.

ECVET use could considerably broaden the currently rather limited possibilities for transfer within the VET system and give them a more valid and reliable foundation. This would avoid redundant training. Finally, ECVET could be exploited to make it possible to accumulate learning outcomes independently of a programme.



Advantages for the learner:

Recognition of learning outcomes acquired outside the formal VET-system might be facilitated. New methods of assessment of learning outcomes could be used for making knowledge, skills and competences visible, even in the case where the complete programme has not been passed. In particular the transition from vocational education and training to educational tracks which allow access to higher education would be significantly facilitated.

7.2.2. Example II: a “unit-aware internationalist”

Portrait: Predominantly school-oriented vocational education and training system. Very unit aware. Transfer within the system and cross-border. Credit system in place. However, implementation does not follow an output oriented approach: credits represent hours of instruction. VET programmes are subdivided into modules, the allocation of credits follows a “scholastic logic”: credit points are attributed to subjects. Recent innovation: skill demonstrations. When learners transfer from one vocational training programme to another or from general VET to upper secondary school programmes, at the least completed core and specialised courses are recognised. Units with general validity can be transferred. Varying recognition procedures. A portion of in-company training may be done in a foreign country. However, recognition of learning outcomes does not automatically shorten the duration of training phases. Some VET providers lack trust in one another.

Cross-border perspective

The system already provides for integrating learning phases in other countries into training pathways. Schools are able to organise exchange processes. The use of skill demonstration procedures and corresponding procedures for assessing learning outcomes is still in the initial phase. Describing learning experiences on an outcome-oriented basis can significantly facilitate transfer, regardless of the system.

Advantages for the learner:

Mobility projects are significantly facilitated. They are increasingly (not only occasionally) used, because the character of the acquired learning outcomes is more clearly defined and documented than in the past. Thus, we can talk of a change from an “interesting supplement” to the standard initial vocational education and training to a piece of normality in IVET.



System development perspective

Despite obvious existing affinities, ECVET use in example II can also lead to synergy effects when observed from the system-development perspective. Defining learning outcomes for training modules can greatly enhance the worth of the current credit system. This can assist in bolstering mutual trust among VET providers. The shortening of training times through transfer is facilitated. Lastly, applying ECVET tools can ease the process of implementing skill demonstrations which is currently in progress.



Advantages for the learner:

The existing scope of flexibility of the system can fully develop their advantages for the learner. Time consuming “doubling of learning phases” are omitted. Switching between training providers is significantly facilitated. A higher degree of outcome orientation increases the benefit of training programmes a learner has passed and of the certificates he/she is provided with. Demonstration of what a learner knows and is able to do towards the labour market becomes easier.

7.2.3. Example III: a “holistic internationalist”

Portrait: Comprehensive occupational competence is the express objective of training. Significant quantitative weighting of in-company training. The knowledge, skills and competence which must be acquired are clearly defined

in the respective regulations. Certification practices are, however, geared towards overall qualifications. Forms of assessment do exist at the micro level of VET, the results of these assessments, however, bear no official status. Focus on leaving certificate. Recognition processes lead to admittance to exams. A portion of VET can be completed in a foreign country (monitored by competent bodies). In-company training periods can be shortened through accreditation of previous, non-work-experience vocational training periods. First signs of learning outcome-accumulation only exist in large units (specialisation after basic training). Improving transfer possibilities is under intensive debate.

Cross-border perspective

Legislation promotes cross-border transfer of learning outcomes. As a legal regulation already exists, it would be reasonable to examine whether the relevant article must be adapted before ECVET implementation. In order to avoid encumbering mobility projects by fragmenting responsibilities, care should be taken to ensure foreign partners have *a single* contact person. This first of all requires clearly-defined relationships between schools, businesses and competent bodies with regard to ECVET.

To expand cross-border transfer, “units” in the context of in-company training must be identified and defined. As VET is primarily based on complex, activity-based forms of training and the degree of “unit awareness” is low, communications with foreign partners within mobility projects have to be carefully prepared. It will be necessary to clearly define:

- What knowledge and skills and competences must a learner already possess?
- What is to be learnt?
- What criteria will be used to determine learning outcomes?

Advantages for the learner:

Preparation of phases of learning abroad is facilitated and becoming less bureaucratic. A consistent procedure as it has been defined when introducing ECVET supplements the individual examinations and regulations. The benefits of a stay abroad is becoming more transparent for the learner and can therefore be more easily taken into account.



System development perspective

The identification of “units” with a view to cross-border transfer, as described above, would also establish the pre-conditions for extending internal transfer options. Transfer could take place at the level of learning outcomes and would far exceed the current possibilities. This corresponds to the current development needs of the system inasmuch as well-functioning communications between different organisations (full-time in-school vocational training institutions, enterprises, training cooperation partners) continues to grow in importance. ECVET could be applied to improve communication between these stakeholders to establish more flexible routes to achieving the aim of “complete qualification”. ECVET could also be used to document the learning outcomes of those who drop out of vocational training.



Advantages for the learner:

In this case, too, doubling of learning times could be significantly minimised. The facilitated co-ordination between the different providers within a system unburdens the learner. The documentation of partial qualifications on a learning outcomes basis would also significantly benefit those who drop out of training programme. It would no longer be a case of simple “all or nothing” and the problematic situation arising due to early abandoning holistic training programmes would be eased.

7.3. Recommendations regarding the four areas of requirements of ECVET

Beyond reflecting the differences in qualifications systems, stating recommendations for the introduction of ECVET has to take into account the four requirements identified (neutrality and compatibility with reforms for the management of ECVET, design and institutional framework for the introduction of ECVET, see 3.1) from the perspective of the four types of the reflector typology: Table 15 shows that it is not a matter of a 1:1 correlation. Only one aspect (neutrality) is relevant to all types; the others refer to specific types.

As we have seen in chapter 5, there are manifold crossovers between these types. Furthermore existing differences between “holistic loner”, “holistic internationalist” and “unit-aware internationalist” are relativised due to numerous reform projects towards more flexibility, permeability and outcome-orientation currently being pursued in the qualifications systems analysed.

Table 15. *Proposals for actions to be taken (in relation to the reflector typology)*

	Holistic Loner	Holistic Internationalist	Unit-aware Internationalist
Neutrality of the instrument	Clarification of the Cross-border-function of ECVET Involvement of those stakeholders, who worry about an erosion of national (e.g. quality-) standards caused by increasing mobility in IVET.		
Support of reform in VET	Using ECVET for the creation of more flexibility and permeability on national level Using ECVET for a competence-based description of learning outcomes	Using ECVET for a competence-based description of learning outcomes	
Design of the credit system	Identification of implicit analogies of ECVET in national VET/qualification practices		
		Clarification of the relation between ECVET and existing instruments and methods	
Institutional framework	Legal regulation of equivalence of learning outcomes acquired abroad	If necessary adaptation of existing legal provisions of regulating equivalence of learning outcomes acquired abroad	
	Establishing prerequisites for the accomplishment of mobility schemes and the assessment and valuation of learning outcomes in the context of ECVET (e.g. via more flexible regulation of responsibilities or decentralised solutions); securing the resources required	Responsibility for tasks in connexion with ECVET fulfilled by those institutions currently in charge of analogue tasks; securing the resources required	

Additionally to the actions to be taken for implementing ECVET (Table 15) we have identified the ECVET readiness of qualifications systems on a “low-medium-high” scale, from simple cross-border use of ECVET to the use of ECVET within the qualifications systems. Some recommendations are general and apply regardless of the ECVET readiness of the systems, others depend on it. We present an overview of these recommendations in Table 16.

Table 16: Recommendations along the levels of “ECVET readiness”

ECVET readiness	Recommendations	Transversal recommendations	
High	Use ECVET as a means for facilitating APL	Linking ECVET with national reform projects	Using ECVET for the development of a common language in national VET (precondition for LLL!)
Medium	Use ECVET as a means for achieving more outcome orientation		
	Link ECVET to “exceptions” regarding partial qualifications within the VET system		
	Adapt existing legal regulations promoting mobility		
	Identify ECVET analogue practices at national level (e. g. within procedures of formative assessment)		
Low	Defin the role of VET providers as competent bodies in the state-run sector		
	Make legal statements on the equivalence of mobility periods in VET with participation in national programmes		
	Give examples of outcome-oriented descriptions of national programmes (“unitisation prototypes”)		

The recommendations along the four requirements for ECVET are presented in the following part in detail.

7.3.1. Neutrality of the instrument. Subsidiarity

From a legal viewpoint, *subsidiarity* means:

"In areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Community shall take action, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, only if and insofar as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved by the Community." (Art. 5 par. 2 EC-Treaty; s. above 3.6.1.3.)

The crucial point is in how far particular goals can be better achieved by common action than by measures taken by a single state. In this spirit the EC-Treaty establishes a harmonisation ban for

VET (Art. 150 par. 4) and proclaims a “vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States” (Art. 150 par. 1).

Cross-border projects (e.g. information exchange or apprentices mobility) certainly fall in the field of common actions. A European credit system for VET corresponds to the principle of subsidiarity insofar as it would limit itself to a “cross-border function”, requiring description of educational programmes only with respect to this very function. Understood this way ECVET is a transparency instrument for countries wishing to take part in mobility programmes. This interpretation is also supported by the paper drafted by the Technical Working Group.

However, it can be stated that some stakeholders in Europe preferring approach I (focus on cross-border transfer; see 7.1) are concerned that the impact of a *voluntary* ECVET implementation could exceed the cross-border context and lead to unintentional consequences.

Following the prerequisites for actions in line with the principle of subsidiarity, we recommend to make explicit at an early stage of the implementation at European level “what ECVET effectuates and what not”. The emphasis must be placed on the cross-border function, delineating it from any interferences in the national and regional actors’ sovereignty over formulating VET policies.

In particular, a distinction must be made between the three aspects:

Firstly countries willing to implement ECVET must envisage a “system change” in the sense clearly defined by the mobility goal. They will have to set up competent bodies or to vest existing VET establishments with new competencies in order to fulfil the requirements of the cross-border transfer of units in VET. After all, learning outcomes obtained *abroad* will be attributed a binding status within the context of the respective *target programmes*. These reform steps – which are *directly* linked to the introduction of ECVET – relate to a credit system’s integral elements.

Secondly in countries using ECVET, further legal and institutional regulations may be affected by the implementation. Here, adaptations may be required – for example, if national legislation already contains provisions concerning the recognition of learning periods spent abroad and the respective regulations differ from ECVET. In case that mobility projects connect various legal contexts (e.g., training provided on the basis of a labour contract under private law – school-

based education within the framework of compulsory education or combinations of both), legal regulations may, in addition, be required to make mobility projects possible (e.g. limited exemption from compulsory education, regulation and provision of substitutive forms).

Thirdly introducing ECVET might presuppose a more fundamental change in terms of lending flexibility to practices of examination, validation and recognition of learning outcomes within a certain VET system. If so, a number of countries would not be able to use ECVET unless their VET systems were subjected comprehensive reforms. This consideration, though, seems to lead to a circular conclusion claiming that introduction of ECVET is possible only where an analogous practice has already been established. The outcomes of the study (cf 4.4) actually suggest a more cautious formulation according to which analogies identified at the national level will *facilitate the use of ECVET*. On the other hand, countries already using ECVET and seeking to make forms of certification more flexible also at home may benefit from synergy effects (Recommendations on this aspect will be put forward in section 7.3.2). Thus, in the sense of general promotion of lifelong learning ECVET might assume a flagship function.

Descriptions of ECVET must, in particular, highlight the distinction between “units” primarily fulfilling a descriptive function, and “modules” which are relevant to the conception of VET programmes including any consequences of both a vocational-pedagogical and statutory nature (delineation and imparting of partial skills; possibility of separate certification etc.) it may entail. It might be helpful to point out that “units” in this sense may in principle be encountered in any VET-system (see 5.3, the concepts of implicit analogies and further ECVET-related practice). Moreover, implementation may be considerably facilitated by the identification of ECVET-analogies in VET systems intending to implement ECVET.

There have been concerns that the introduction of an ECVET – even if it did not formally infringe the principle of subsidiarity – might bring about “stealthy” deterioration of national quality standards in VET.

For countries in which there is a high degree of trust in both the actors and adopted practices of examination and certification in VET consequent adherence to the *bottom-up approach* will be an essential provision for ECVET to find acceptance. In concrete terms this could mean that these

countries are encouraged to have the ECVET piloting phase accompanied by national “implementation committees” with a tripartite representation.

As trust in established procedures accompanies the apprehension that national quality standards might be undermined by ECVET, it might be helpful to propose accompanying instruments for quality assurance and to link in particular the introduction of an ECVET with current VET quality assurance activities at European level.

Transparency of quality in VET might in particular be enhanced by building up a common “best-practice database” documenting in detail successfully implemented projects of apprentices exchange, explaining the vocational-pedagogical procedures adopted therein and making available courseware, visual documents, field reports etc.

Fig. 32 synthesises the recommendations for implementing ECVET from the perspective of the first requirement on subsidiarity.

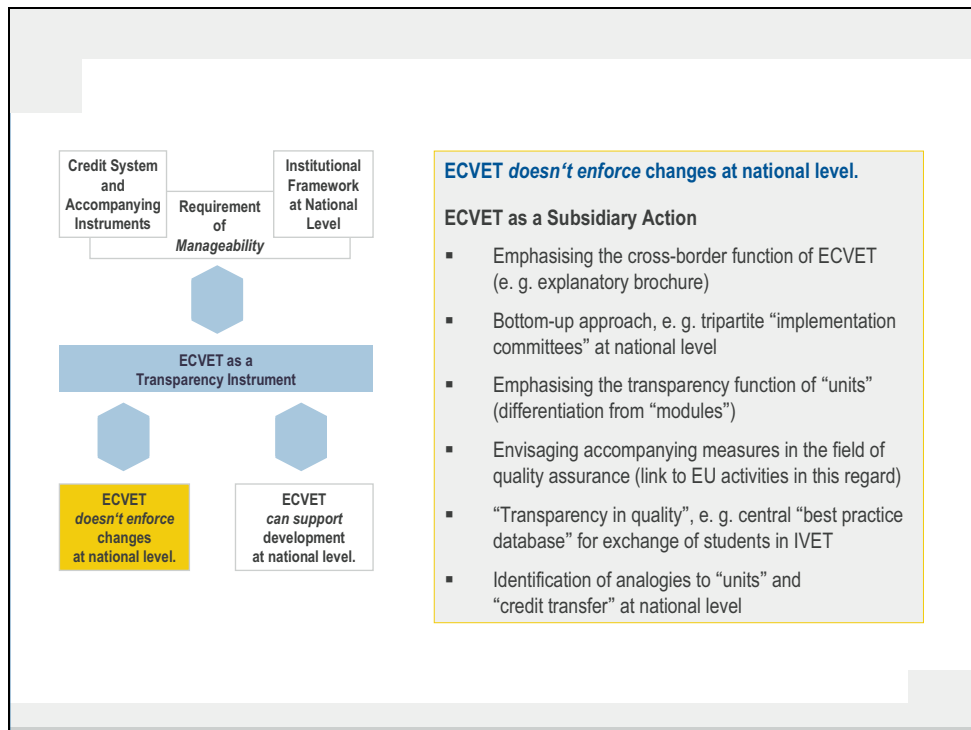


Fig. 32: Neutrality of the instrument. ECVET and subsidiarity

7.3.2. ECVET and ongoing reform efforts at country level

As stated in the typology and in terms of requirements and conditions for ECVET, ECVET can be considered as an opportunity to support on-going reform efforts within national qualification systems, e.g. towards enhanced transition, widening the range of partial qualifications and introduction of a certification practice strengthening the aspect of lifelong learning. Some interview partners, as shown above, specifically emphasise this aspect of an ECVET implementation.

1. In some countries for different stakeholders, combining approaches towards ECVET, are in the foreground (cross-border transfer vs. cross-border transfer + VET reform; see 7.1). In these countries it could be useful to clarify the objectives of ECVET implementation in the context of an open discussion process.

2. Recommendations on ECVET implementation include setting ECVET in systems undergoing reforms or reform initiatives in the context of:

- *Mutual understanding and cooperation:* ECVET might be used both as a means to reach mutual understanding and to establish cooperation between various institutions or VET providers at national level. The set of tools suggested by ECVET might also be used by countries that are just about to strengthen the aspect of work-based learning and examination, implementing new procedures of assessment of learning outcomes (such as the demonstration of skills). This might also facilitate the exchange of experience between VET systems with similar reform endeavours in VET.
- *Flexible validation and certification processes:* While flexible forms of validation and certification of learning outcomes facilitate the use of ECVET, ECVET may also contribute to making qualification awarding systems more flexible. VET systems trying to enhance their flexibility may consider using ECVET as a tool for the *certification of learning outcomes independently of both the way and the context in which they have been achieved*. In such cases, ECVET not only would be the means for making certificates legible across the borders of the national qualifications system, it might also promote decentralisation of the certification practices. Certification might thus be established as a new business area.
- *Common basis for documentation:* ECVET might contribute to creating a uniform and objective basis for the documentation of individual learning pathways in lifelong learning.

3. Countries striving to improve possibilities of transfer within their VET systems might consider integrating ECVET into the national regulations. This implies:

- *Crediting KSC*: VET programmes would be assigned credits in accordance with the KSC to be achieved.
- *Partial qualifications*: An individual might be legally entitled to have parts of acquired qualifications evaluated.
- *Recognition process*: Educational providers could be obliged to examine to what extent credits previously acquired by an applicant to a VET programme are relevant to the award of a specific qualification, and which provisions have to be made as regards transfer and crediting.

Fig. 33 summarises the recommendations:

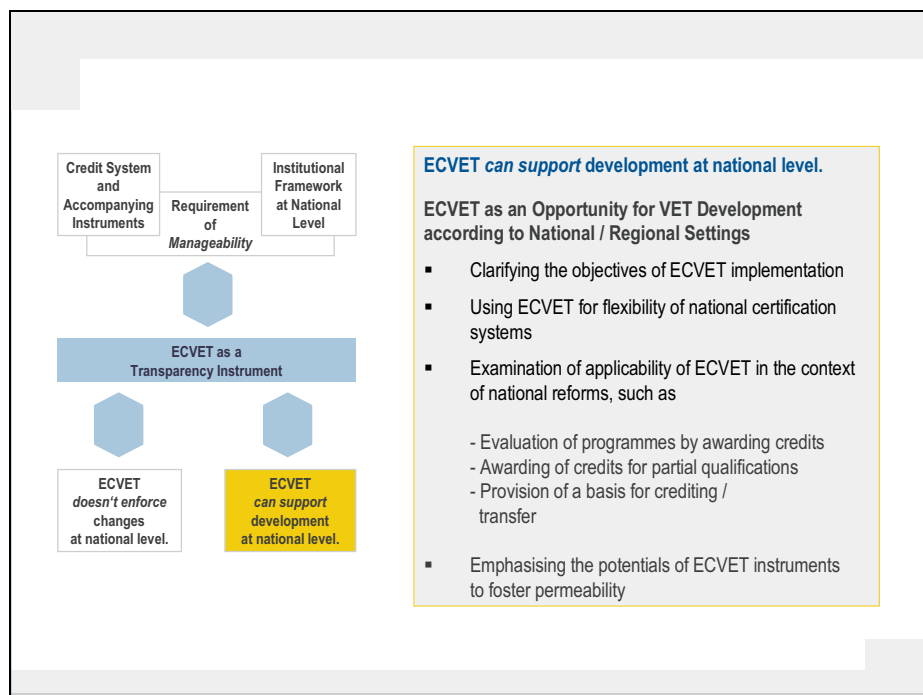


Fig. 33: ECVET and development at country level

7.3.3. Design of the credit system and accompanying instruments

The recommendations concerning the design of the credit system that may be inferred from the survey results. They can be expressed in a concise maxim: “Keep it simple!” Making ECVET a user-friendly and user-oriented instrument implies the following recommendations:

1. *Develop pilot project:* In order to make sure that ECVET is both understandable and applicable for practitioners, it should be tested within VET pilot projects at an early stage. From such pilot projects which should be organised at branch/sector level multiple benefits may be expected:

- They will guarantee the necessary domain-specific concretisation. Many interview partners have pointed out that setting up a formal framework for negotiations and the documentation of mobility projects cannot replace expert discussions at the operational level about the contents of such projects: It is here where decisions on the contents to be imparted at a certain stage of the educational pathway have to be made and their relative share within a particular domain has to be determined.
- Once there are concrete examples available on how ECVET works, its use will increasingly become easier gradually foregrounding its instrument character. Practitioners will be able to realise that it is in particular the generic character of the ECVET description that makes it an appropriate support in concrete bargaining processes.
- Experiences gained from the pilot projects may be submitted to the political level and serve for system adaptations.

2. *Identify analogies:* Analogies to the basic elements of the ECVET (cf. 5.3 and 7.2.1) may prove useful when it comes to making the system understandable. If, e.g., one starts from the assumption that any VET system includes units – even if of a considerably different methodical-didactic and legal status – the provision of catalogues of potential “unit-candidates” (thematic fields in the curriculum, learning project, complex job task...) may simplify the work with ECVET. The respective catalogues may be provided for various types of VET-systems and commented on the basis of practical experience.

3. *Use EQF:* Another way to facilitate the use of ECVET is to link it with EQF and to point out how EQF levels could be used for a description of ECVET units (e.g. by handbooks and compilation of examples).

4. *Support cooperation:* Model agreements or forms should be developed at European level in order to unburden VET actors. If appropriate, these documents could be modified and thus they could support the process of drafting concrete agreements. The establishment of a kind of multilateral administrative agency on a European level for providing such formalities could be taken under consideration (see 3.7.5).

5. *Provide information:* In view of the vast diversity of actors involved in VET systems in Europe, it is essential not only to create the basis for mutual trust, but also to establish cooperation in mobility promotion so as to provide sufficiently clear, easy-to-access and purpose-related information.

5.1. In order to support cooperation in the field of mobility promotion and to facilitate the preparation of negotiation processes involving all actors, a common ECVET information system should be created that would give insight into the responsibilities and functions carried out by the various bodies involved in mobility projects in the respective European countries.

5.2. A “European ECVET Guide” might support educational providers in finding partners in other European countries (competent bodies – comparison of various systems at the European level that would facilitate mobility projects by pointing out similarities and indicating complementary relationships, etc.).

5.3. Another accompanying measure to promote mutual trust might be the provision of concrete, illustrative information materials on vocational education and training in Europe, in particular on the procedures adopted with respect to examinations and the assessment of learning outcomes. These might include films and multimedia-based information systems, as well as organisation of visiting programmes for educational staff.

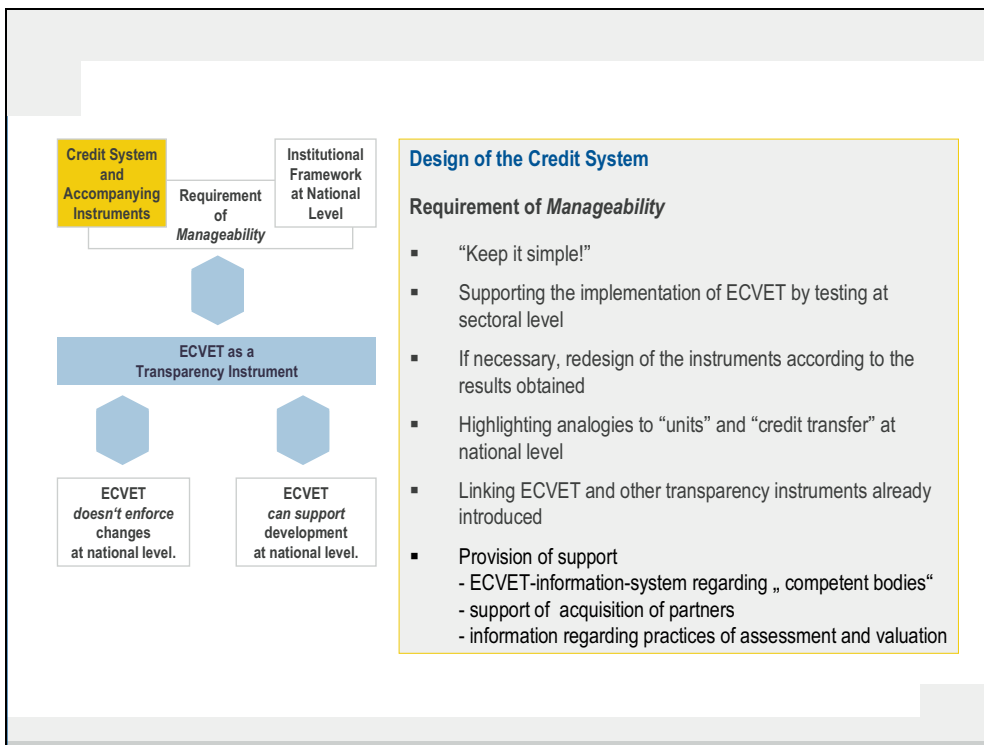


Fig. 34: Design of the credit system

7.3.4. Institutional framework

Recommendations on the design of the institutional framework for the implementation of ECVET primarily address political actors at both the national and regional level. Fig. 35 provides an initial overview.

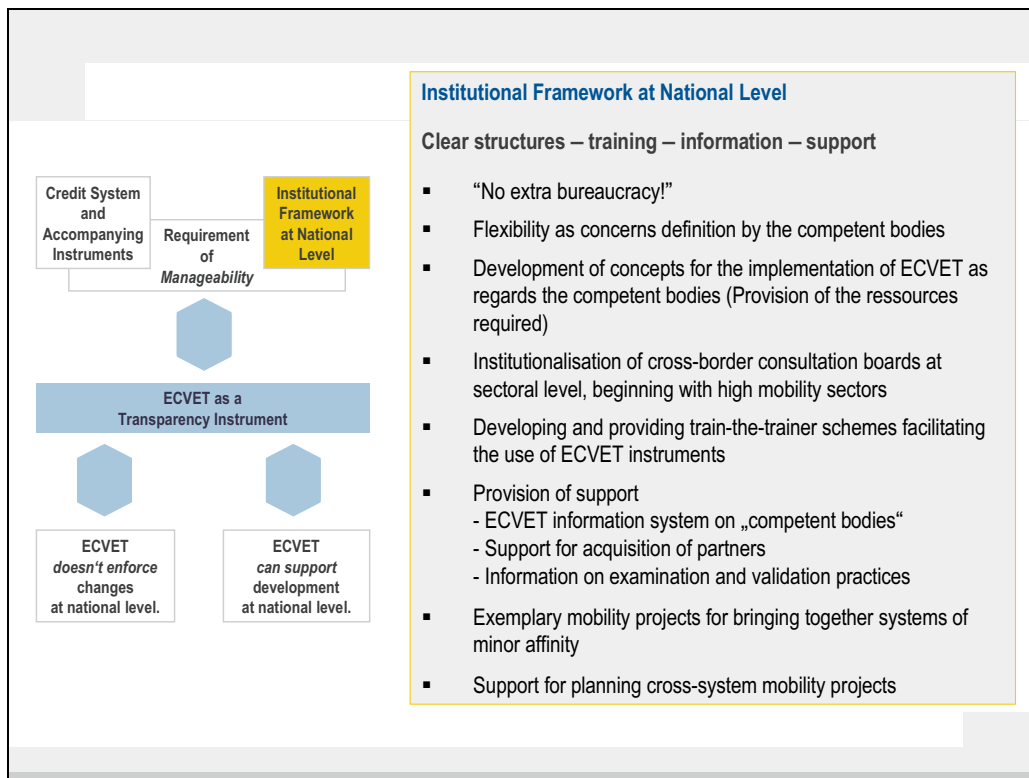


Fig. 35: Institutional framework at national level

1. Some interview partners pointed out that it would be counter-productive “to establish parallel structures” at national and regional levels. Identifying competent bodies for ECVET must not bring about new institutions and thus an extra load of red tape. It is likely that in many countries this aspect has to be considered in order to reach a broad acceptance of ECVET. As a matter of fact, in some VET-systems, several candidates are eligible to perform this function among the existing institutions. This consideration leads to recommendation 2.

2. In the interests of creating flexible structures to ensure unbureaucratic assessment and documentation of learning outcomes beneath the level of full qualifications, it may be useful to enlarge the pool of competent bodies regarding the ECVET context (e.g. entitling VET providers to hold examinations in systems in which at present they are allowed to provide training only; decentralising examinations in state run VET systems with a highly centralised assessment procedures). Steps in this direction might be accompanied by quality assurance measures.

3. It may be of use if, in VET systems implementing ECVET, “implementation bodies” were established, bringing together various educational providers (schools and enterprises). They could accompany and support the build-up of know-how and communication structures. In concrete terms, these might in the first instance be industries in which there is an above-average mobility of employees and capital.

4. In order to make educational staff fit for using the new instruments it is advisable to provide for train-the trainer programmes.

7.3.4.2. Recommendations on European mobility projects design

Mobility projects based upon a “cross-system approach” might e.g. merge both school-based and workplace-based VET-systems. According to the ECVET approach it can be expected that it will be possible to agree about learning outcomes wherever they have been achieved. Nonetheless mobility projects will link systems with different regulations and remits for VET provision, assessment and qualifications awarding. This should be linked to the documentation of problems and examples of good practice, as well as the compilation of guidelines.

Some scenarios may illustrate the major constellations that have to be considered in this regard.

The importance of both schools and companies as regards the provision of initial vocational education and training, as well as their mutual relationship, differs considerably across the systems under investigation. Whereas in some systems companies share the responsibility for providing education and training with schools, occasionally assuming a dominant role within this relationship, in other systems they are not at all involved in IVET or have a limited role in affording internships and training opportunities on a non-binding basis. Depending on this distribution, existing IVET systems may be classified into three groups.

Group I: Dual: Companies have major roles as VET providers

Group II: Alternating: Balanced distribution of responsibilities for IVET between companies and schools

Group III: School-based: Prevalence of school-based VET providers

The distinction between the *dual system* and *alternating system* seems to be neglected sometimes; it could be characterised by the degree of adjustment of the two providers of IVET (the schools and the companies): while the alternating system foresees a systematic connection and a balance between both providers, this is not necessarily the case in dual systems. Each group is characterised by specific legal provisions in terms of labour contract obligations, compulsory schooling, involvement of VET providers, their respective remits in terms of assessment. The fact that many countries have several systems with different constellations (dual – school-based, school-based – alternating) existing in parallel has been disregarded.

*Table 17: Distribution of responsibilities of schools and companies
(Differentiated by three IVET system groups)*

	Responsibility for providing IVET leading to vocational qualification		Learning/learning outcomes assessed	
	company	school	company	school
Dual/Alternating system	x	x	x	x
School-based system		x		x

Remits within dual systems

Dual systems assign a strong role to company-based training. Here school and company assume shared responsibility for initial training. In one country (dual system with a predominant role being assumed by the company) we found the following provisions: the company-based part is called outcome-oriented, as it is oriented towards the principle of the *ability to act*.

Organisation of the training process: Alongside the company-based part, the vocational schools are convey learning contents of both a general and a work-related nature.

Assessment: Companies play an important role in the assessment and examination procedure: they are represented in the board of examiners and are also involved in designing and to conducting the examinations. In terms of content, examinations place high emphasis on creating authentic workplace situations: the examinee will simulate characteristic job-tasks and proceed in the form of projects. Continuing assessment also takes place in the second learning place, vocational schools. Here teachers have the responsibility.

A vocational qualification is obtained after passing the final examination on the vocational part – the learning outcomes acquired in the companies. The certificates awarded by vocational schools are irrelevant to the attainment of a vocational qualification. The learning outcomes achieved at vocational school are not included in the final certificate. They may, however, be mentioned therein upon the learner's request.

Remits within alternating systems

In *alternating systems*, IVET is based upon a well-balanced cooperation between schools and companies. This can be ideally shown by another country.

Organisation of the learning process: The vast majority of IVET programmes consist of two parts of the same duration: a school part and an apprenticeship part in an enterprise or in a public institution. Only a few weeks of workplace-based learning take place during the school-based part. In this period practical training is mainly provided in the school workshops, which are well equipped.

Assessment: Assessment methods are adapted to the teaching/training methods and the nature of what is being taught. Written and oral examination dominates the more general theoretical subjects at school, whereas practical-theoretical tests dominate in the trade-specific parts of the IVET programmes and during the apprenticeship period.

During apprenticeship, tutors in the training enterprises perform continuous assessment of practical performance. Students receive a “Proof of Competence” after each completed year of the school-based part of IVET. A final practical-theoretical “trade examination” after completing the apprenticeship period is organised over one day to one week, where the student has to demonstrate KSC by both planning a given job, estimating requirements/materials and time, and to produce what is requested. Although the certificates awarded by schools have full legal status, a national expert from a country of this group states:

“In practice, in the view of the labour market actors, the [...] [school related certificate] is rarely fully recognised the same way as the [...] [company based certificate].”
(Template no. 2500, question 2.6)

Remits within school-based systems

In *school-based systems*, IVET (both general and vocational education and vocational training) is entirely provided by schools many of which have their own vocational training shops in which work-related parts of IVET are carried out.

Organisation of training process: Internal learning in schools may be supplemented by short periods of external experience in enterprises. The full responsibility for both the organisation of training and the examination lies with the schools.

Assessment: Consequently, learning and learning outcomes in both educational and training parts of the programmes are assessed by pedagogical staff (teachers/trainers) of the schools according to common assessment criteria and by means of similar assessment methods and tools.

In view of the national expert of this school based system there might be a need for documenting labour market relevant qualification more than this is done at the time being:

“According to the type of final examination, knowledge as well as skills and key competences should be documented. In reality, however, documentation of knowledge prevails.” (Template no. 1500, question 2.7)

“For the time being, only validation of learning within the formal education and the so-called normative education leads to formally recognised certification.” (Template no. 1500, question 2.3)

7.4.4. Four scenarios

If mobility measures alternate between these different systems various constellations may be worth considering. In the following, three possible scenarios and recommendations derived from each one will be presented.

Scenario 1: Mobility project from dual to alternating system

In countries belonging to group I, companies as well as schools are responsible for initial training. Successful completion of the school-based part is the prerequisite for the learner to be admitted to the final examination.

Table 18: Scenario 1 – apprentice from group I in company from group II

<p>Host country: “Alternating system”</p>	<p>Scenario 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A company in the home country concludes a learning agreement with a company in the host country. ▪ The credits acquired will be accounted only in regard of the company-based part of training. ▪ During the mobility phase, the learner misses classes. 	<p>Home country: “Dual system”</p>
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Recommendations:

1.1. The vocational school in the learner’s home country is involved in the negotiation of the learning agreement.

1.2. The vocational school in the learner’s home country can provide learning material, e. g. online distance learning programmes agreed between both companies that will be processed by the learner in parallel with the company-based training period. Those training offers are related to the training content agreed in the learning agreement. Thus the missing (due to absence of the learner) learning content of the vocational school in the home country could be acquired. At the same time the practical training in the company in the hosting country could be improved.

In addition increasing the efficiency of the mobility measure, this might also facilitate coordination between both IVET-providers in the dual system of the learner’s home country and thus contribute to ongoing reform processes.

Scenario 2: Mobility project from alternating to dual system

Since the alternating system is based upon an agreed, well balanced relationship between the two IVET-providers – the school and the company – careful planning of the mobility phase by *both* partners in the home country is important.

Table 19: Scenario 2 – apprentice from group II in company of group I

Host country: “Dual system”	<p>Scenario 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Company A in the home country (alternating) also sets out the “learning agreement“ with company B in the hosting country (dual system). ▪ The awarded credits are transferred only to the company based part of the alternating IVET. 	Home country: “Alternating system”
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Recommendation:

2. The training period spent abroad should be planned in the home country in the long term by *both* actors to be integrated in both IVET providers’ overall concept. The learning agreement should respect the requirements of both of the alternating learning places in the home country. Consequently both IVET-providers in the home country should be involved in the negotiation-process.

Scenario 3: Mobility project from school-based system to dual system

Since in group III, companies are not at all responsible for IVET, they have neither the staff, nor the material resources required to carry out occupation-related parts of education and training. It can therefore be useful that IVET-centres providing school-based training have the company-based parts of IVET carried out in groups I and II.

Table 20: Scenario 3 – schools from group III send students to companies in group I

<p>Host country: “Dual system”</p>	<p>Scenario 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School in the home country stipulates the “learning agreement” with company in the host country. ▪ Valuation of practical training is not known in the home country. It has no relevance for the final certificate. ▪ Awarded credits during practical training in the host country can not easily be integrated in the qualification at home. ▪ In addition: learning content in the school of the home country is missing! 	<p>Home country: “School-based system”</p>
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Recommendations:

3.1. Schools in the home country are encouraged to consider how they could integrate the parts of qualifications the learner has acquired during the training in the company in the host country

in a broader qualification within their school-system. If appropriate they should involve other competent bodies in these considerations.

3.2. Selecting appropriate companies, actors in the sphere of school-based education and training should ensure coverage of sectors poorly attended by both school-based IVET and companies affording work placements at home.

3.3. The schools are encouraged to establish sustainable partnerships in various countries that would exceed the duration of a single mobility measure.

Scenario 4: Mobility project from dual system to school-based system

As a rule, in VET establishments of systems that are predominantly school-based, theory and practice are more closely linked than in locally separated VET-institutions of dual and alternate systems. This might be taken into account in the context of mobility measures as it might be of benefit in particular for young learners with learning difficulties.

Table 21: Scenario 4 – schools from group I send young learners to schools in group III

<p>Host country: “School-based system”</p>	<p>Scenario 4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The school of the home country negotiates a learning agreement with the school/VET-centre in the host country. ▪ Learning outcomes obtained in school-based systems of another country are relevant only to the school-based part in the home country. ▪ With regard to a full qualification to be acquired in the home country, the school-based part plays a minor role. 	<p>Home country: “Dual system”</p>
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Recommendations:

4.1. Prior to the beginning of the mobility phase, the learning contents imparted at home which are based upon a close link between theory and practice should be singled out to be adopted by the partner in the host country.

4.2. Since the credits acquired during the mobility phase relate to both parts of VET in the dual/alternate system of the home country, they should accordingly be counted in both parts. This requires that both the school and the company reach an agreement prior to the beginning of the mobility period concerning the weighting of the learning outcomes to be acquired and also, that the dual partners take part in the negotiations over the learning agreement to be concluded with the school in the host country.

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9. Annexes

Annex 1: Template for National Experts

Annex 2: Interview Guideline

Annex 3: Information for national experts: Interview phase

Annex 4: “ECVET reflector” Study. Institutions and Experts

9.1. Template for National Experts

INTRODUCTION:

The template for national experts and further empirical steps

The REFLECTOR project aims at analysing the relationship between the nascent ECVET and the national VET systems with respect to the appraisal, validation and certification processes for skills gained through apprenticeship, and the accumulation, capitalisation and transfer processes for skills gained through apprenticeship in order to identify both the obstacles as well as favourable conditions encountered by the ECVET in the various European countries.

The project focuses on IVET and apprenticeship (EQF levels 3 and 4).

The empirical part of this project contains three major elements:

- *A questions list for national expert (section 1 of this template).* The national experts are invited to answer the questions presented hereafter in this template. This list supports the descriptive part of the project. You might refer while answering those questions to the official documents selected for the source collection.
- *A source collection (section 2 of this template).* A description of the national state of the art on the basis of official documents (extracts of acts, regulations etc) along the list which is provided in the second section of this document. The relevant contents from those documents will be identified and summarised by the national experts. The source collection should be filled online via the project platform.
- *An interview guideline.* The interview by the national expert of national stakeholders on the basis of the interview guideline. The guideline is a separate document.

The reason for having some questions addressed to the national experts in this template and a questionnaire for the national stakeholders is to spare time during the interview (interview duration) and to be able to adopt in the interview a dynamic and forward-looking approach on our core issues (“what could or should be ... if ... credit transfer ...”).

The filled template for national experts will be transmitted to the regional team leaders. It should be filled out in English (if possible). You will find at the end of this guideline the definition of the main terms used.

It can not be avoided that some questions are repeated in both questionnaires. Since we need to understand exactly the point of view of our interviewees in the second project phase there will be some overlaps between this questionnaire and the interview guideline.

Please state your country:

... and some contact and information details:

Name:

Organisation:

Function:

Date:

SECTION 1: THE QUESTIONS LIST ADDRESSED TO THE NATIONAL EXPERTS

Part 0. Preliminary

- 0.1 Does the IVET of your country/the country analysed include a credit system? A credit system might have been introduced in parts of IVET or for specific purposes. Is a credit system at the planning stage?

Part 1. Appraisal of learning outcomes (via examination and/or assessment)

This part aims at identifying the potentials for changes in appraisal of learning outcomes. We understand by learning outcomes:

- *Statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do, or is able to demonstrate, after completion of any learning process or at the end of a period of learning.*
- *Learning outcomes include knowledge, skills and competences.*

The intervening stakeholders

- 1.1 Which organisations / stakeholders are in charge of designing the assessment procedures in IVET?
- 1.2 Which organisations / stakeholders are responsible for implementing the assessment procedures?
- 1.3 Following the Europeanisation / Copenhagen process, have any changes in terms of distribution of work, responsibilities and coordination occurred, in IVET, between organisations involved in the design of appraisal processes?

Assessment procedures

- 1.4 How are the different parts of VET programmes or qualification defined? Is there something like units (parts of qualification) or modules (parts of VET programmes)?
- 1.5 How is assessment organised alongside the learning process (i.e. summative or formative assessment process)? Is it possible to have parts of VET programmes assessed? Under which circumstances could this be possible?
- 1.6 How are the assessment procedures constituted as concerns the examination methods (written exam, oral exam, practical demonstration, etc) or according to the simulation of work processes and the required KSC for mastering tasks?
- 1.7 Which are the (qualification) standards in use for the assessment procedures?

Examination

- 1.8 What is the value of interim examinations, end of module tests, etc (if they exist):
 - for any future VET pathway?
 - for an eventual start in the professional career?

If not existing, are interim examinations, end of module tests etc gaining ground? For which reasons?

- 1.10 How is the balance organised between workplace-based and school-based learning activities? What are the main differences in relation to assessment between both kinds of learning activities?
- 1.11 How are the marks or grades awarded (completion, pass or fail – scale of marks/grades)? Is it possible to balance the results of different exams to obtain the certificate?

Sources (Link to Source Collection)

- 1.12 Please specify the most important legal regulations and official documents regarding appraisal and examination.

Part 2. Certification processes for skills gained through apprenticeships

This part aims at identifying the potentials for changes in certification processes.

We understand by certification:

- *All processes of formally validating knowledge, know-how and/or skills and competences acquired by an individual, following a standard assessment procedure. Certificates or diplomas are issued by accredited awarding bodies.*
- *A certificate being an official document, issued by an awarding body, which records the achievements of an individual following a standard assessment procedure.*

The intervening stakeholders

- 2.1 Which organisations are in charge of designing the certification procedures? Which changes occurred during the last five years (e. g. new organisations designing IVET certificates/degrees, foreign certification agencies being active in the national IVET)?
- 2.2 Which organisations are entitled to grant / deliver certificates / degrees? Which organisations cooperate for granting certificates?

Processes

- 2.3 Among the following which processes lead to certification:
- validation of prior learning experiences,
 - validation of school-based learning,
 - validation of workplace-based learning or
 - a mix of them?
- 2.4 Has it always been the case?
- 2.5 If you apply different processes how are they coordinated? Please describe.

Certification forms

- 2.6 Do different forms of certification (regarding their legal meaning) exist in the VET system (for instance: attestation of participation to a course, documentation of acquired KSC)?
- 2.7 What do the certificates document? (Knowledge, skill, competences etc.). In which proportion?
- 2.8 Do you grant full and/or partial certificates? How do you make the difference between both kinds of certificates? For instance do you grant certificates for single units? or document medium sized VET units?

Sources (Link to Source Collection)

- 2.9 Please specify the most important legal regulations and official documents regarding certification.

Part 3. Equivalence and comparability for validation

In the context of mobility, learning outcomes acquired abroad might gain official status either through the award of certificate or through the grant of equivalence. Recognition is linked to the definition of equivalence between KSC acquired abroad and KSC foreseen in the national VET system. We have dealt with the issue of certification in part 2 of this questionnaire; we now concentrate on equivalence and comparability of the learning outcomes out of IVET.

The intervening stakeholders

- 3.1 Which organisation / stakeholder is in charge of establishing equivalence between learning outcomes acquired in different learning contexts
 - (a) abroad or
 - (b) at home?
- 3.2 Which would be the main tasks of such an organisation to establish equivalence? Which steps would/could be taken? Which cooperation forms between different IVET organisations would/should be installed?

Recognition procedures

- 3.3 Are there any methods of establishing equivalence

- between learning outcomes or units as parts of qualifications?
 - between VET programmes?
 - between VET profiles?
- 3.4 Which methods do you use for recognising KSC acquired abroad or in another part of your VET system when it comes:
- to granting access to a VET programme?
 - to granting a full or partial certificate?
- 3.5 Could you quote some examples of geographical / horizontal mobility including the process of defining equivalences?
- 3.6 If it is possible to define “equivalence” between learning outcomes acquired in a foreign VET system for entering / rejoining your national VET system:
- Does it mean that the individual learner does not have to take exam for the corresponding unit / KSC?
 - Does it mean that the individual learner get a full or partial exemption for parts of the VET programme?
 - Does it mean that the individual learner receives a partial certificate?

Sources (Link to Source Collection)

- 3.7 Please specify the most important legal regulations and official documents regarding equivalence and comparability of learning outcomes in VET.

Part 4. Trends, challenges and outlook in ECVET context I: Appraisal, certification and validation processes

- 4.1 Are the methods of appraisal, certification and validation in IVET currently being discussed in your country? Is there any criticism concerning the methods of recognition used at the present time?
- 4.2 Are there any reform projects? Who are the campaigners of reform?
- 4.3 Please describe the conditions of a possible introduction of credit point systems as far as appraisal, certification and validation are concerned. Which obstacles might it encounter? Are there synergies to be expected?

- 4.4 Please specify the relevant stakeholders in the system of appraisal, certification and validation in IVET. What could be their role in the implementation of an ECVET?

Part 5. Transfer

Credit systems in education are devices allowing for transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes, aggregated in units, and expressed in credits. Once learning outcomes are achieved by the learner, he might be able to transfer them in another education context and have them added up to the ones he had before or will acquire. In this part of the questionnaire, we would like you to elaborate on the transfer function of credit systems.

- 5.1 Does “transfer” of knowledge, skills and competences exist in the national IVET?
- in the context of international mobility Yes No
 - between different parts of the IVET Yes No
e. g. in a regional or sectoral perspective
[“between different parts”: if no → questions 6.1]
- 5.2 Please describe the procedures.
- 5.3 Please specify the most important obstacles concerning transfer (for instance entry requirements of training programmes).
- 5.4 Do common units in different programs/qualifications entail easier transfer? Please give examples.
- 5.5 Does transfer only exist in matters of rights to enter a programme or is it a real transfer of full or partial qualifications?

Sources (Link to Source Collection)

- 5.6 Please specify the most important legal regulations regarding transfer.

Part 6. Accumulation / capitalisation

The ECVET model fulfils the major function of accumulation of KSC in terms of units toward qualification. This part of the questionnaire aims at identifying whether accumulation processes already take place that might be supported by the use of ECVET and which conditions have to be fulfilled to do so.

6.1 According to you, does “accumulation” towards qualification exist ...

- in the national IVET system? Yes No
- in specific parts of the IVET system? Yes No

E.g.: only in the school-based part,
only in the apprenticeship part or
in the context of international mobility

[If there aren't any accumulation processes → 7.1]

6.2 According to you, what is accumulated?

- units⁶² Yes No
- modules Yes No
- single knowledge, skills and competences Yes No
- your proposal: ...

Accumulation procedures

6.3 What are the objectives of accumulation? For individuals to obtain a certificate, a partial or a full qualification, to reach the “next level” in the training system? What is your reference system while envisaging accumulation?

6.4 Are there any forms of accumulation spanning various training programmes in terms of lifelong learning?

Sources (Link to Source Collection)

6.5 Please specify the most important legal regulations regarding accumulation and capitalisation.

Part 7. Trends, challenges and outlook in ECVET context II: accumulation, capitalisation and transfer processes

⁶² See ECVET glossary of terms

- 7.1 Are aspects of accumulation, capitalisation and transfer processes currently being discussed in your country? Is there any criticism concerning the actual status of accumulation/capitalisation and transfer?
- 7.2 Are there any reform projects? Who are the campaigners of reform?
- 7.3 Please specify the relevant stakeholders (organisations, departments within an organisation, or persons).
- 7.4 What could be their role in the implementation of an ECVET?

SECTION 2: SOURCE COLLECTION

No.	Type of document	Full coverage of all of the participating countries	Selected examples from all of the participating countries
1	Acts on vocational education and training: the entirety of paragraphs relating to appraisal, validation and certification of learning outcomes in VET and to accumulation and transfer processes for skills	X	
2	Legislative provisions relating to awarding of credits in VET, definition of units/modules in VET qualifications or programmes	X	
3	Key documents providing statistical data on vocational training and the labour market Completion rates in apprenticeship Demand for the different diploma holders on the labour market Significance of certificates issued by other than state authorities (e.g. of producer's certificates) Implementation of the ECTS at a national level in the target countries	X	
4	Examination regulations, examination procedures (main focus on automotive service and commerce)		X
5	Leaving certificates issued by the key certification bodies of the VET systems: vocational schools, trade and technical schools, chambers, national certification authorities, etc.		X
6	Existing procedures for validation and recognition of prior learning and experiential learning in IVET	X	
7	Documentation related to qualification standards and certification repertories or registers	X	
8	Relevant passages of official documents regarding educational reform projects		X
9	Contributions to national reform debates (documents of outstanding importance only)		X
10	Documents on the implementation and acceptance of theme-related innovation projects: national and European programmes		X
11	NQF and related documents		X

SECTION 3: GLOSSARY

Accreditation (of programmes, institutions)

Process of accrediting an institution of education or training, a programme of study, or a service, showing it has been approved by the relevant legislative and professional authorities by having met predetermined standards. [EQF]

Assessment

The sum of methods and processes used to evaluate the attainments (knowledge, know-how, skills and competences) of an individual, and typically leading to certification. [EQF]

Certificate/diploma

An official document, issued by an awarding body, which records the outcomes of an individual following a standard assessment procedure. [EQF]

Certification (of knowledge, skills and competences)

The process of formally validating knowledge, know-how and/or skills and competences acquired by an individual, following a standard assessment procedure. Certificates or diplomas are issued by accredited awarding bodies. [EQF]

Comparability of qualifications

The extent to which it is possible to establish equivalence between the level and content of formal qualifications (certificates or diplomas) at sectoral, regional, national or international levels. [EQF]

Competence

Competence includes: i) cognitive competence involving the use of theory and concepts, as well as informal tacit knowledge gained experientially; ii) functional competence (skills or know-how), those things that a person should be able to do when they are functioning in a given area of work, learning or social activity; iii) personal competence involving knowing how to conduct oneself in a specific situation; and iv) ethical competence involving the possession of certain personal and professional values. [TWG ECVET]

Credit points (or credits)

Credit points are allocated to qualifications and to the units that constitute them. By agreement, they represent, in numerical form the volume of learning outcomes, the relative importance of each of the units that make up a qualification, in relation to the expected, outcomes i.e. the knowledge, skills and competences that must be acquired and assessed, regardless of the learning pathway. [TWG ECVET]

Credit system

A system of credits makes it possible to break down a qualification or the objectives of a programme of vocational education and training into units. Each unit is defined in terms of knowledge, competences and skills. It may be characterised by its size and relative importance, expressed in general by credit points (or credits) or other factors. Each unit can be validated and awarded separately. [TWG ECVET]

Formal learning

Learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment (in a school/training centre or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to certification. [EQF]

Formative evaluation

Formative evaluation is a method of judging the worth of a program while the program activities are forming or happening. Formative evaluation focuses on the *process*.

Informal learning

Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. It typically does not lead to certification. [EQF]

Knowledge

The facts, feelings or experiences known by a person or a group of people [EQF]

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do, or is able to demonstrate, after completion of any learning process or at the end of a period of learning. [TWG ECVET]

Mobility

The ability of an individual to move and adapt to a new occupational environment. [CEDEFOP]

Module

A self-contained, formally structured learning experience. It should have a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes, expressed in terms of competences to be obtained, and appropriate assessment criteria. [ECTS]

Non formal learning

Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It normally does not lead to certification. [EQF]

Qualifications

Qualifications are a formal expression of knowledge, skills and wider competences of the individuals. They are recognised at local, national or sectoral level and, in certain cases, at international level.

A qualification is achieved when a competent body determines that an individual's learning has reached a specified standard of knowledge, skills and wider competences. The standard of learning outcomes is confirmed by means of an assessment process or the successful completion of a course of study. Learning and assessment for a qualification can take place through a programme of study and/or work place experience and/or any type of formal, non formal or informal learning pathway. A qualification confers official recognition of value in the labour market and in further education and training. A qualification can be a legal entitlement to practice a trade. [TWG ECVET]

Recognition

a) *Formal recognition*: the process of granting official status to skills and competences either

- through the award of certificates or
- through the grant of equivalence, credit units, validation of gained skills and/or competences and/or

(b) *social recognition*: the acknowledgement of the value of skills and/or competences by economic and social stakeholders. [EQF]

Skill

The knowledge and experience needed to perform a specific task or job. [EQF]

Summative evaluation

Summative evaluation is a method of judging the worth of a program at the end of the program activities.

Transparency of qualification

The degree to which the value of qualifications can be identified and compared on the (sectoral, regional, national or international) labour and training markets. [EQF]

Unit

A unit is part of a qualification. It can be the smallest part of the qualification that can be evaluated, validated or certified. A unit can be specific to one particular qualification or common to several qualifications. The knowledge, skills and competences that make up the credit form the basis for the assessment and validation of people's outcomes. Units are validated at the end of the assessment of outcomes, the results of which must comply with the requirements of the qualification. [TWG ECVET]

Validation (of non formal and informal learning)

The process of assessing and recognising a wide range of knowledge, know-how, skills and competences, which people develop throughout their lives within different environments, for example through education, work and leisure activities. [EQF]

Valuing learning

The process of recognising participation in and outcomes of (formal or non-formal) learning, in order to raise awareness of its intrinsic worth and to reward learning. [EQF]

Vocational education and training

Education and training which aims to equip people with skills and competences that can be used on the labour market. [CEDEFOP]

Workload

The workload includes all learning activities required for the achievement of the learning outcomes (i.e., lectures, practical work, information retrieval, private study, etc.). [ECTS]

Sources

[CEDEFOP] CEDEFOP (Philippe Tissot), Terminology of vocational training policy. A multilingual glossary for an enlarged Europe, Luxembourg 2004

[ECTS] Directorate-General for Education and Culture, ECTS users' guide. European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System and the Diploma Supplement, Brussels 2005

[EQF] Commission of the European Communities, Commission Staff Working Document. Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, 2005

[TWG ECVET] European Credit System for VET (ECVET). Technical Specifications (Report 2005 of the Credit Transfer Technical Working Group)

9.2. Interview Guideline

INTRODUCTION

Aims of the interviews

The REFLECTOR project aims at analysing the relationship between the nascent ECVET – European Credit (Transfer) System for Vocational Education and Training – and the national VET systems with respect to the appraisal, validation and certification processes for skills gained through apprenticeship, and the accumulation, capitalisation and transfer processes for skills gained through apprenticeship in order to identify both the obstacles as well as favourable conditions encountered by the ECVET in the various European countries. This project is supported by the European Commission (General Direction for Education and Culture).

The project focuses on IVET incl. apprenticeship (EQF levels 3 and 4).

The interview is a major analytic part of the ECVET reflector project, it brings insight in the actual situation and the changes emerging in or at the borderline of IVET. A general description on the appraisal, validation and certification process in the respective countries is carried out by desk research.

Structure of the interview guideline

1. Appraisal of skills via examination and assessment
2. Certification processes for skills gained through VET and apprenticeship
3. Equivalence and comparability for validation
4. Trends, challenges and outlook in ECVET context I:
Appraisal, certification and validation processes
5. Transfer
6. Accumulation/capitalisation
7. Trends, challenges and outlook in ECVET context II:
accumulation, capitalisation and transfer processes
8. Lifelong learning and European perspective
9. Your attitude towards ECVET

The questions with a “p” can be answered prior to the interview by the interviewees in agreement with the interviewers.

Confidentiality and language policy

The interviews will be carried in English (see explanation in the supporting information for national experts). The results will be transmitted to the project leaders by the area team leaders.

The results of the questionnaire will be made anonymous and will be integrated in the stakeholders analysis and report of the project to the European Commission and European Parliament. The names of the interviewees will be listed in the report (upon agreement).

You will find at the end of this guideline the definition of the main terms used.

The interviewee

Name:

Organisation:

Function:

Language of interview:

Duration of the interview:

“P”-Questions have been answered in advance? Yes No

Do you agree the listing of your name in the final report? Yes No

Do you wish to receive a project report? Yes No

Address for contact:

Date of interview:

Place of the interview:

Part 0. Preliminary

Does the IVET of your country/the country analysed include a credit system? A credit system might have been introduced in parts of IVET or for specific purposes. Is a credit system envisaged to be introduced shortly?

Part 1. Appraisal of learning outcomes (via examination and/or assessment)

We understand by learning outcomes:

- *Statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/ or be able to do, or is able to demonstrate, after completion of any learning process or at the end of a period of learning.*
- *Learning outcomes include knowledge, skills and competences (KSC).*

1.1 In your view, how outcome-oriented is your IVET? Which evidence can you bring of the outcome-orientation of your system?

1.2 How are the different parts of VET programmes or qualification defined? Do you have something like units (parts of qualification) or modules (parts of VET programmes)?

[p]

1.3 What is the meaning of the examination results? Which value do they have? Can they be considered independently from the rest of the VET programme as a token (or voucher), as something as good as an award for instance?

[p]

Part 2. Certification processes for skills gained through apprenticeships

We understand by certification:

- *All processes of formally validating knowledge, know-how and/ or skills and competences acquired by an individual, following a standard assessment procedure. Certificates or diplomas are issued by accredited awarding bodies.*
- *A certificate being an official document, issued by an awarding body, which records the achievements of an individual following a standard assessment procedure.*

- 2.1 Do different forms of certification (regarding their legal meaning) exist in your VET system (for instance: attestation of participation to a course, documentation of acquired KSC)?
- [p]
- 2.2 What do the certificates document (knowledge, skill, competences etc.)? In which proportion?
- [p]
- 2.3 To what extent does/would the certification system favour or restrict the development of training in modules defined in terms of learning outcomes?

Part 3. Equivalence and comparability for validation

In the context of mobility, learning outcomes acquired abroad might gain official status in your national IVET system either through the award of certificate or through the grant of equivalence. Recognition is linked to the definition of equivalence between KSC acquired abroad and KSC foreseen in the national VET system. We therefore now concentrate on equivalence and comparability of the learning outcomes out of IVET.

- 3.1 Which organisation / stakeholder is in charge of establishing equivalence between learning outcomes acquired in different learning contexts
- (a) abroad or
(b) at home?
- [p]
- 3.2 Which organisation / stakeholder could be in charge of establishing equivalence between learning outcomes acquired in different learning contexts
- (a) abroad or
(b) at home?
- 3.3 Which would be the main tasks of such an organisation to establish equivalence? Are some aspects of such a system already in place? Which steps would/could be taken? Which cooperation forms between different IVET organisations would/should be established?

Part 4. Trends, challenges and outlook in ECVET context I: Appraisal, certification and validation processes

- 4.1 According to you, could the awarding of credits for acquired learning outcomes be treated as a form of certification? Under which conditions?
- 4.2 Would you consider that awarding credits according to your national rules for learning outcomes achieved abroad is a recognition procedure (even if for the time being your IVET might not include a credit system)?
- 4.3 What is your viewpoint concerning the actual practice of appraisal, certification and validation in your country? Are you aware of reform projects concerning appraisal, certification and validation you consider promising? Please describe. (This question refers to all learning no matter if formal, non-formal or informal.)
- 4.4 According to you, how would the introduction / use of a credit system in VET impact on the methods of assessment, certification and validation? Which obstacles might it encounter? Are there synergies to be expected?
- 4.5 Following the Europeanisation / Copenhagen process, have any changes in terms of distribution of work, responsibilities and coordination occurred, in IVET, between organisations involved in the design of appraisal and certification processes?
- 4.6 Which are the relevant stakeholders in the process of appraisal, certification and validation in IVET? Please consider the role they have in facilitating and regulating assessment, certification and validation now and the role they might have in the context of an ECVET.
- 4.7 Which organisation / stakeholder could be in charge in your national VET of establishing regulations and rules? What could be their role in the implementation of an ECVET?

Part 5. Transfer

Credit systems in education are devices allowing for transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes, aggregated in units, and expressed in credits. Once learning outcomes are achieved by the learner, he might be able to transfer them in another education context and have them added up to the ones he had before or will acquire. The next questions regard the transfer function of credit systems.

5.1 According to you, does “transfer” of knowledge, skills and competences exist in your national IVET?

- in the context of international mobility Yes No
- between different parts of your IVET Yes No

e. g. in a regional or sectoral perspective
[“between different parts”: if no → questions 6.1]

[p]

If in your opinion transfer of knowledge, skills and competences exists between different parts of the IVET:

5.2 What is being transferred (for instance proofs of competence, parts of entry requirements)? Would you say that transfer of KSC between different settings and qualifications is easy? Is there any need for action in order to make the transfer easier?

5.3 Please specify the most important obstacles concerning transfer (for instance entry requirements of training programmes).

Part 6. Accumulation / capitalisation

The ECVET model fulfils the major function of accumulation of KSC in terms of units toward qualification. This part of the questionnaire aims at identifying whether accumulation processes already take place that might be supported by the use of ECVET and which conditions have to be fulfilled to do so.

6.1 According to you, does “accumulation” towards qualification exist ...

- in your national IVET system? Yes No
- in specific parts of your IVET system? Yes No

E. g.:

- only in the school-based part,
- only in the apprenticeship part or
- in the context of international mobility

[If there aren't any accumulation processes → 6.4]

[p]

6.2 According to you, what is accumulated?

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • units ⁶³ | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| • modules | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| • single knowledge, skills and competences | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| • your proposal: | ... | |

[p]

6.3 How would you describe the degree of efficiency and the level of use of the accumulation processes?

6.4 Are there some aspects of your VET system that hamper the accumulation of KSC / units towards certification and qualification as foreseen in ECVET? How could these barriers be removed?

Part 7. Trends, challenges and outlook in ECVET context II: accumulation, capitalisation and transfer processes

7.1 What is your viewpoint concerning the actual practice of accumulation, capitalisation and transfer? Are you aware of any reform projects in your country you consider promising in this respect? Please describe.

7.2 According to you, how would the introduction / use of a credit system in VET impact on the accumulation, capitalisation and transfer procedures in your IVET?

7.3 Which are the relevant stakeholders in the process of transfer and accumulation in IVET? Please consider the role they are playing now in facilitating and regulating the transfer and accumulation procedures and the role they might have in the context of an ECVET.

7.4 Which organisation / stakeholder could be in charge in your national VET of establishing regulations and rules concerning transfer and accumulation in the context of the implementation of ECVET? What could be their role in the implementation of an ECVET?

7.5 Which are or would be the main tasks of such an organisation to establish transfer and accumulation procedures according to ECVET? Which steps would/could be taken?

7.6 Which cooperations between different IVET organisations would/should be established?

⁶³ See ECVET glossary of terms

Part 8: Lifelong learning and European perspective

8.1 According to you, is the use / implementation of the European credit system for VET in your national IVET...

- a way to put into practice the concept of lifelong learning Yes No
- a way to link the different phases of one's learning pathway Yes No
- a way to increase participation to IVET Yes No
- Other: please specify:

[p]

8.2 What impact could the use of ECVET have on your national IVET (e.g. Europeanisation of qualification standards, development of alternatives to national certification procedures)?

8.3 Which existing European instruments facilitating transparency between VET systems are you aware of? How would you appraise their current and future importance?

Part 9. Your attitude towards ECVET

9.1 What are the potential impacts to you and your organisation of the implementation of a European Credit transfer system for VET like ECVET?

[p]

9.2 What is your general attitude towards ECVET?

- I strongly support it
- I somewhat support it
- I do not support nor oppose it
- I somewhat oppose it
- I strongly oppose it

9.3 Let us differentiate three important aspects of ECVET. What is your attitude regarding

	I strongly support it	I somewhat support it	I do not support nor oppose it	I somewhat oppose it	I strongly oppose it
1. the step-by-step validation of learning outcomes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. the transfer of learning outcomes from one country to another	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. the transfer of learning outcomes from one education/training provider to another	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

[p]

9.4 How would you demonstrate your attitude towards ECVET? Which actions would / could you take?

9.5 Under what conditions would you change your attitude towards ECVET?

Part 10. Last questions

10.1 “ECVET connexion”, another European project concerning the possible implementation of an ECVET, is currently preparing a test phase.

Are you willing to participate in this test, or would you help to find partners in the sectors of automobile and trade?

[p]

10.2 In preparation of the interview we provided you some information about ECVET. Was this information useful for the interview? Was there any information you hadn't got before? Was there anything in it you found surprising?

10.3 Which aspects of the ECVET are of special interest to you, on which you would like more information?

[p]

[Annex: Glossary, s. SECTION 3 of the Template for National Experts]

9.3. Information for national experts: Interview phase

1. What documents are handed over to national expert?

ECVET reflector “Interview Guideline”: this is the instrument for the national expert for carrying out the interviews with stakeholders. This document contains questions marked with “P” that could be answered in written form by the interviewee in advance.

“ECVET information package” for providing information on ECVET to the interviewees.

Form “Comments on the interview”: One page form for documenting observations the national experts (persons in charge of conducting the interview) gained during the interview.

ECVET reflector “Template for National Experts”: This document has to be filled in by the national expert himself/herself: The list of questions supports the descriptive part of the study.

2. How to identify interviewees from five spheres?

In the identification process of the interviewees five spheres should be covered:

- *Sphere I*: Educational policies, authorities, bodies responsible for certification, etc.
- *Sphere II*: Educational providers, vocational schools, trade and technical schools
- *Sphere III*: Chambers of commerce, professional associations, business enterprises, SMEs
- *Sphere IV*: Trade unions, apprentices’ representatives
- *Sphere V*: Bodies responsible for the recognition of certificates obtained abroad, national Europass Centres

That means, five interviews will be the minimum to be carried out from each national expert for each country. At least one interview for each sphere has to be carried out, but it could often be useful to have more stakeholders interviewed.

3. How should the interview process be carried out?

First step: Identification of the interviewees. agreement on interview, upload in the website information about interviewee, sphere, contact details and interview date:

www.ecvet.net > DocumentLibrary > Expert Interviews

Second step: Handing out of “interview guideline” and “information package” to the interviewee.
- We recommend approx. one week before the interview will take place. Informing the interviewee about confidentiality and the procedure as indicated in the first pages of the interview guideline. Adjusting if the interviewee prefers to fill in the questions marked with “P” in advance. If yes, this should be done in written form and provided to the national expert before the oral interview.

Third step: The interview should be done on site, if possible. The national expert (interviewer) asks the questions following the interview guideline and takes the minutes of the answers. It is up to the national expert if he/she prefers – in agreement with the interviewee – to have the interview recorded. If “p”-questions have been answered in advance the interviewer should check if it is necessary to ask for supplementing information or clarify misleading answers. The national expert will also register any peculiarity of the interview situation and any demand of the interviewee for additional information. These observations are to be fixed in the form “Comments on the Interview”.

Fourth step: The national expert compiles the documentation of the interview (a comprehensive summary per question). He/she provides this report to the interviewee who has the opportunity to comment for finalisation.

Fifth step: The national expert collects and archives the filled interview guidelines.

4. What should the National Experts deliver to their Area Team Leaders (via the protected area of www.ecvet.net)?

The filled “Template for national experts”.

“Documented interviews”: A comprehensive report of the answers filled in the “interview guideline”. This documented interview has been checked by the interviewed expert, who has confirmed that he/she agrees with the report.

The filled form “Comments on the interview” with relevant observations gained during the interview.

<i>We ask to provide all these documents in English. See explanation in 6. (What about Translation?).</i>

Even if this process is not in the focus of the interview phase: Please remind national experts that they should continuously upload relevant documents for the source collection in the space in the protected area of the website (s. Template for National Experts, p. 11). .

5. When are the Deadlines?

The phase for carrying out the interviews is from now to 14th of June. As agreed during the first core team-meeting, we do need results and interim results before this date. National experts are asked to provide documented interviews to the website immediately after receiving final comments by the interviewee.

We ask the national experts to deliver the answers in the “Template for National Experts” and the most relevant documents of the “Source Collection” for the country of his/her responsibility by 5th of May.

6. What about Translation?

We recommend to deliver the documentation of the interview in English. If appropriate the interviews could be carried out in the national language. National experts will then have to provide the documentation of the answers in English.

First exception: If the national expert agrees with his/her area team leader, who perhaps speaks French or German, the documentation could also be provided in one of these languages.

Second exception: In the case of jeopardising the whole interview process by the language problem, we would look for a possibility to translate some interviews. If national experts notice the need for translation, it is absolutely necessary to contact f-bb well in advance, before starting the interview. We need to coordinate and look for solutions!

- We have to cope with limited budget for translation also when establishing the source collection: We agreed during the first core team meeting, to look carefully, if any of the relevant documents could exist in English. Of course, most documents will only exist in the language of the respective country: For that case, the national expert should carefully identify and indicate the relevant pages and paragraphs that should be translated.

Thank you for your understanding and support; the project will really face a problem if the need of translating the interviews would exceed certain limits.

We wish you all the best for this elementary phase of survey and are looking forward to the results of the interviews. The area team leaders and also the project leaders will be at your disposal for any additional question that might arise!

9.4. The “ECVET reflector” Study. Institutions and Experts

Country	Institute	Contact Person
Project Leaders		
DE	Forschungsinstitut Betriebliche Bildung (f-bb) gGmbH Obere Turnstraße 8 D-90429 Nürnberg www.f-bb.de	Thomas Reglin reglin.thomas@f-bb.de
DE	BIBB - Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung Robert-Schuman-Platz 3 D-53142 Bonn www.bibb.de	Isabelle Le Mouillour Lemouillour@bibb.de
Area Team Leaders		
AT	ibw – Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft / Institute for Research on Qualifica- tions and Trainings of the Austrian Economy Rainergasse 38 A-1050 Wien www.ibw.at	Dr. Arthur Schneeberger schneeberger@ibw.at
DE	Forschungsinstitut Betriebliche Bildung (f-bb) gGmbH Obere Turnstraße 8 D-90429 Nürnberg www.f-bb.de	Gabriele Fietz fietz.gabriele@f-bb.de
DE	BIBB - Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung Robert-Schuman-Platz 3 D-53142 Bonn www.bibb.de	Isabelle Le Mouillour Lemouillour@bibb.de
GR	O.E.E.K. – Organisation for Vocational Educa- tion & Training / Ministry of National Educa- tion and Religious Affairs 94 Iros Konstantopoulou Ave 16346 Ilioupolis, Athens www.oEEK.gr	Loukas Zahilas loukaszahilas@yahoo.com
FI	National Board of Education Centre of International Mobility P.O. Box 380 (Hakaniemenkatu 2) FIN-00531 Helsinki www.oph.fi	Kari Nyysölä Kari.nyysola@oph.fi

FR	Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche / Centre internationale d'études pédagogiques 1 avenue Léon Journault 92318 Sevres Cedex www.education.gouv.fr	Richard Maniak richard.maniak@education.gouv.fr
NL	CINOP centre for innovation of education and training P.O. Box 1585 5200 BP 's-Hertogenbosch www.cinop.nl	Jan Tonneman jtonneman@cinop.nl
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Abstract

Developing an EU system of credit transfer for VET (ECVET) started with the 2002 European Council Resolution on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in VET (the "Copenhagen Process"). The European Commission adopted a strategy of evidence-based policy for ECVET. In 2005, it gave a mandate to the BIBB and f-bb/Nuremberg to analyse the relationships between the features of ECVET and the existing regulations and practices of assessment, validation and certification as well as accumulation and transfer of learning outcomes in qualifications and VET systems in Europe. This project is one of three major comparative studies carried out in Europe: 'ECVET reflector', 'ECVET connexion' and 'ECVET mobility'. The results of the studies were fed into the Commission's proposal for a recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on the establishment of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (April 2008).

This 'ECVET reflector' study focuses on the readiness of qualifications systems in Europe to facilitate ECVET, to enhance cross-border mobility, and support reforms at national, regional or sector levels of VET systems. Based on its typology of qualifications systems, the 'reflector' study formulates recommendations for implementing ECVET which are addressed to all VET actors in Europe. VET stakeholders and researchers are invited to consider these results as a source of information, of innovation and of reflection on the development of the European VET area.