



## ETUCE statement on the Commissions proposal for a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)

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In April 2008 the European Commission presented their formal proposal for a “European Credit transfer for Vocational Education and Training”. ETUCE conducted an internal consultation amongst its affiliate member organisations in the relations to the Commissions initial process on ECVET and another following the Commissions presentation of the formal proposal. The present paper builds on the conclusions of both consultations.

The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) represents 110 teachers’ unions in the EU and EFTA countries and more than 5.5 million teachers from all levels of the education sector. As a European Social Partner in education at EU level, the ETUCE is a member of the ETCEG.

ETUCE supports the objective of the Commission’s proposal on ECVET, e.g. the facilitation of mobility between different learning contexts and the promotion of lifelong learning. If ECVET succeeds in bridging different learning contexts and enabling the proper recognition of non-formal and informal learning, it will represent an added value in many countries. However, ETUCE must stress that the added value of ECVET depends on the recognition, by the Commission, of a number of different challenges facing the implementation and use of ECVET.

The main challenges and issues, ETUCE urges the Commission to acknowledge and address, are described in the following:

### **ECVET: an added value**

The added value of ECVET is first and foremost challenged by the risk of it leading to a rise in bureaucracy. ETUCE stresses, that ECVET must be as simple and practical a tool as possible. Keeping ECVET free of unnecessary rules and recommendations serves several purposes, which are all critical for the success of ECVET. First, there is a risk, that a disproportionate increase in administrative and bureaucratic burdens for the education providers and professionals would move resources from teaching to administration. Second, heavy administrative burdens will make it harder for ECVET to gain the necessary support from the education providers. Third, ensuring that ECVET is a simple and transparent tool would also make it easier for the different European vocational education and training frameworks to link-up to it. The large differences in the structure, traditions and methods of the European VET frameworks require a simple and practical structure of ECVET. Furthermore it is important to have precise and concise definitions of terms like *learning outcomes* and *Memoranda of Understanding (MoU)* to ensure that they are not understood to have different meanings in different contexts and frameworks. Guides and/or manuals should be available for the future users and managers of ECVET nationally.

### **ECVET as a tool for assessment and transfer of credit not a means of harmonisation**

ECVET must remain a tool, the Member States can implement and use on their own accord. While it is to be expected that ECVET will bring about changes in the national credit transfer and assessment systems, ECVET must not be a harmonising and/or standard-setting scheme, monitored by the Commission. ECVET should ensure the transparency and compatibility of European training and education systems, but not threaten the positive diversity of these. Especially since vocational education and training entails a combination of theory and practice, and since this combination differs from country to country, it is important that ECVET does not force through changes of the national theory/practice combinations.

### **Clear positioning of ECVET in relations to other European education initiatives**

ETUCE believes it to be very important that ECVET is placed clearly in context with the European Quality Framework, the National Quality Frameworks and Europass. These links between ECVET and the other European initiatives on education must be clearly defined for the national users and managers of ECVET. Clear links between ECVET and the rest of the European educational initiatives can also serve to decrease the lack of trust between the national education and training systems, related to the lack of insight in the systems and frameworks of one another. Building the trust between European VET players is, however, not a challenge, that can be sufficiently handled by a clear definition of ECVET’s links to other European

education initiatives. Further action such as, for example, independent and controlled quality assurance, is needed to promote trust between the different national VET systems. The timetables for the implementation of ECVET should reflect the need for time for the trust-building institutions and mechanisms to function and to promote the trust needed for ECVET to function. It is, however, important to note that the relationship between education partners cannot be based on mutual trust alone.

### **ECVET and its role in lifelong learning**

ETUCE emphasises that ensuring lifelong learning does not solely hinge upon the assessment and transfer of education credits between learning contexts. The most important tools to ensure the quality of, and access to, VET in the Member states are still solid and coherent national strategies for the vocational education and training in each national setting. There is no doubt that ECVET can serve as a contribution but certainly not as an alternative to the national strategies for ensuring and expanding the learning opportunities for the Europeans.

Involvement of the national social partners in the national implementation of ECVET remains an important step to ensure the coherence of ECVET in the Member States.

The ETUCE supports the proposal on ECVET, but urges the Commission to take the above mentioned issues into account and to continue informing and involving the ETUCE, as the social partner for teachers, on this topic.