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**Executive Summary**

This E-note urges UK stakeholders to respond to a European Commission consultation on a 'European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training'.

**Attachment**

Summary of consultation document

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**Keywords**

Credit, Europe,  
Bologna Process

30 January 2007

## European Commission Consultation, 'European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training'

1. The European Commission has launched a consultation on its proposals for a 'European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training' (ECVET)<sup>1</sup>. The UK HE Europe Unit urges UK higher education institutions (HEIs) and organisations to respond to the consultation to ensure the UK HE sector's views are fully expressed. The deadline for responses is the end of March 2007. The Europe Unit will also seek to coordinate a UK HE sector response. For more details, including the consultation document, visit: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/ecvt/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/ecvt/index_en.html). A summary of the consultation document is attached as an annex.

**Background information**

2. The so-called 'Copenhagen Process' supports cooperation in vocational education and training (VET) in Europe. In 2004, Ministers responsible for VET in 32 European countries signed a Communiqué in Maastricht giving priority to the development of a European credit transfer system for VET. The main aims of the proposal listed in the consultation document on the system are as follows:
  - Enhancing mobility
  - Validating the outcomes of lifelong learning
  - Facilitating transparency of qualifications
  - Supporting mutual trust and cooperation
3. The Commission's consultation document describes ECVET as:
  - A useful and concrete device intended to facilitate transfer and accumulation (capitalisation) of learning outcomes of individuals who pass from a context of learning to another and/or from a qualifications system to another.

<sup>1</sup> The Commission is consulting all the countries participating in the Education and Training 2010 work programme, the European Social Partners, the relevant European associations, NGOs and networks, European sectoral bodies etc

- A methodical way for describing a qualification in terms of units of learning outcomes which are transferable and which can be accumulated (knowledge, skills and competence), with associated credit points
- 4. The implementation of ECVET would involve four stages:
  1. establishment of partnerships
  2. the learning agreement
  3. award of ECVET credits
  4. transfer, validation and accumulation of credits
- 5. The consultation on ECVET should be seen in the context of the European Commission's proposal for a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) published in 2005 and currently passing through the EU institutions<sup>2</sup>. The Commission's consultation document proposes that the implementation of ECVET will be based on the reference levels proposed within the EQF.

#### **The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the Bologna Process**

6. In parallel to the above developments, the Bologna Process<sup>3</sup> to create the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) adopted a Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA in 2005. The Framework is generic and overarching in nature and is based on learning outcomes. It includes three cycles with descriptors and typical credit ranges for each cycle<sup>4</sup>. Greater use of credit and the development of ECTS into an accumulation system for the EHEA is one of the action lines of the Bologna Process. ECTS originates from the European Union's (EU) mobility programmes and the European Commission has indicated to stakeholders that it will review ECTS in 2007. The UK HE sector has argued for a learning outcomes approach to the use of ECTS.

#### **Department for Education and Skills (DfES) consultation**

7. The DfES is also holding a public consultation on the ECVET proposals with a deadline for responses of 15 March. For more information, see:  
[www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/conDetails.cfm?consultationId=1430](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/conDetails.cfm?consultationId=1430).

#### **Timescale**

8. The deadline for responses to the European Commission's consultation is end of March 2007. Responses should be sent to the following email address: [EAC-A3-ECVET@ec.europa.eu](mailto:EAC-A3-ECVET@ec.europa.eu). Institutions/stakeholders are asked to copy any responses to the UK HE Europe Unit or to inform the Unit of any comments for incorporation into the UK HE sector response no later than 10 March 2007 (email: [info@europeunit.ac.uk](mailto:info@europeunit.ac.uk)). The Commission will organise a conference in June under

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<sup>2</sup> For more information, see: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/index_en.html). The UK HE sector position paper on the EQF can be downloaded at: [www.europeunit.ac.uk/resources/EQF%20Position%20paper%20on%20website1.pdf](http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/resources/EQF%20Position%20paper%20on%20website1.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the Bologna Process, visit: [www.europeunit.ac.uk/bologna\\_process/index.cfm](http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/bologna_process/index.cfm).

<sup>4</sup> For more information on the Framework, see: [www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main\\_doc/050218\\_QF\\_EHEA.pdf](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf).



the German Presidency of the EU on the outcomes of the consultation exercise. The Europe Unit will inform the sector of the dates and venue of this event when they are available.

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## **Annex – Summary of European Commission consultation document**

### **Summary and purpose of the consultation**

The project entitled "European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training" (ECVET) is designed to facilitate the transfer, accumulation and recognition of people's learning outcomes. It has been developed under the aegis of the European Commission pursuant to the Education Council Resolution of 12 November 2002 and the Copenhagen Declaration of 30 November 2002. The mandate given in 2002 has been renewed and strengthened by the Maastricht Communiqué of 14 December 2004, which was agreed by the Ministers responsible for vocational education and training from 32 European countries and also by the European social partners and the Commission.

### **Main issues and challenges for ECVET**

In Europe, many people undertake learning activities outside their own country. The appeal of this kind of mobility is nonetheless limited by various factors, in particular the absence of provisions for the transfer, validation and recognition of learning outcomes acquired abroad. The same applies to the transition from one system of vocational education and training to another, or from an informal learning situation to a formal training context. What is therefore needed is a system whereby people can follow through the process of qualification while moving from one learning context to another. ECVET thus aspires to be an information exchange tool to help individuals take full advantage of learning acquired, in particular as a result of transnational mobility, whether the context was formal, non-formal or informal.

Within the European area, the disparate nature of vocational education and training, the large number and diversity of those involved and the differences in the national or sectoral systems of qualification, constitute one of the major challenges facing ECVET.

### **Principles of ECVET**

ECVET is a method enabling qualifications to be described in terms of transferable and accumulable learning units (knowledge, skills and competence) to which credit points are attached.

ECVET is intended to facilitate the transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes acquired by people moving from one learning context to another, from one system of qualification to another;

ECVET will be based on the voluntary participation of the Member States and of the stakeholders in their respective qualifications systems and vocational education and training. ECVET will be a mechanism to foster a synergy between the training providers through the support it will provide for cooperation between partner organisations, with a view to the transfer and accumulation of individual learning credits.

### **The consultation document**

The consultation document outlines the main characteristics of ECVET. It consists of thematic headings (supplemented for public consultation with annexes and a slide show accessible on the European Commission's website) forming a coherent whole.

These documents serve as the basis for the consultation, which involves, in particular, the policy-makers, the social partners, the stakeholders and experts in qualifications systems and vocational education and training in Europe.

The results of the consultation will be analysed with a view to creating a Community instrument. They are scheduled to be discussed at a major European conference to be held in June 2007 under the German Presidency. This conference will close the consultation process and open the approval process.

Following the consultation, the Commission will decide on how best to take the project forward.

In addition, experiments, studies, further tests and pilot projects under the Leonardo da Vinci programme, whether ongoing or planned, can supplement the solutions arising from the consultation. At the end of the consultation process and during the subsequent phase, the European Commission, supported by Cedefop, will ensure that the work carried out on ECVET will be enhanced and expanded through the development of, for example, a "tool box" or a system user guide.

**The parties consulted are invited to respond to the following questions which are considered particularly important for the development of ECVET:**

*4.2.1. The purpose of and reasons for an ECVET system*

- Are the most important objectives and functions of a European system of credits for vocational training and education and the role of competent authorities fully outlined in the consultation document? If not, what is missing?
- What would be the main added value of the planned ECVET system?

*4.2.2. The technical basis for ECVET*

- Do some technical specifications need to be set out in greater detail with a view to the practical implementation of ECVET? If so, which ones?
- Do ECVET's technical specifications take sufficient account of the: evaluation, validation, recognition, accumulation, transfer of learning outcomes whether formal, non-formal or informal? If not, please give details.
- Are the allocation of credit points to qualifications and units and using a reference figure of 120 credit points sufficient to ensure the convergence of approaches and the coherence of the system at European level? If not, what would you suggest?

*4.2.3. Implementing ECVET*

- Under what conditions could describing qualifications in terms of learning outcomes and expressing them in units effectively improve the transparency of qualifications and contribute to the development of mutual trust?
- Which criteria or combinations of criteria for allocating credit points could be selected and used?
- Are there any features in your qualifications system which would favour the introduction of ECVET? What constraints, if any, do you foresee?
- How and within what timeframe (launch, introduction, experimentation, widespread introduction) could ECVET be implemented in your country?

*4.2.4. Measures for supporting the implementation and development of ECVET*

- What kind of measures should be taken at European national and sectoral levels to facilitate the implementation of ECVET?
- What documents, manuals and guides could be developed to facilitate the implementation of ECVET?

*4.2.5. ECVET's potential for enhancing mobility*

- To what extent and how will ECVET be able to contribute to the development of transnational and even national partnerships?
- To what extent and how will ECVET be able to help improve the quality of Community programmes on mobility and participation in these programmes?
- To what extent and how do you think that ECVET and Europass could complement each other to enhance mobility?