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**COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT**

*Accompanying document to the*

**Proposal for a**

**RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT  
AND OF THE COUNCIL**

**on the establishment of a European Credit system for Vocational Education and  
Training (ECVET)**

**IMPACT ASSESSMENT SUMMARY**

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## COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

### SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A EUROPEAN CREDIT SYSTEM FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (ECVET)

One of the main obstacles to attracting more interest in mobility within the framework of initial and continuing training is the difficulty in identifying and validation learning outcomes acquired during a learning period abroad. Moreover, the lack of arrangements allowing citizens to transfer and have their learning outcomes recognised from one learning context to another can also create barriers to learner mobility and access to lifelong learning.

This impact assessment sets out the various options Commission has considered in seeking to find solutions to these issues and for ensuring take up of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)<sup>1</sup>. It underlines the added value a European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training would bring in facilitating lifelong learning and reducing barriers to mobility across Europe.

Education and training are an integral part of the Lisbon Strategy - the EU's programme of reforms which seeks to meet the challenges of the knowledge society and economy. More specifically, the development of citizens' knowledge, skills and competences, through education and training, is critical to achieving the Lisbon goals of competitiveness, growth, employment and social cohesion.

The mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy in 2005 concluded that these challenges are currently not being met. In particular, in the context of this paper, there remain important barriers to the achievement of lifelong learning and to learner and worker mobility. There is therefore a need to develop tools and cooperation mechanisms which can increase participation in lifelong learning and facilitate the transfer of qualifications – between institutions, systems and countries. Increased transparency of qualifications is a prerequisite for this strategy and is necessary to the development of the knowledge, skills and competences required by Europe's citizens.

The European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training is directed at citizens, and is intended to facilitate the recognition of their learning outcomes, in a borderless lifelong learning process. The technical specifications of ECVET are based on practices already existing in some Member States. They comprise the following elements:

- Description of the qualification in Units of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competence), which can be transferred and accumulated.
- Design and ensure transparency of a learning outcomes transfer and accumulation process, which enables units of learning outcomes achieved and assessed in one setting to be transferred to another setting and accumulated;

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<sup>1</sup> An indicative table on specific terminology related to ECVET is included at the end of the IA

- Establishment of partnerships of competent institutions to create an environment in which mutual trust can be developed and provision of a framework for ECVET credit transfer as part of a future borderless learning and training area;
- Allocation of ECVET points to the qualification and to the units as a necessary and complementary source of information. This allocation is based on a common European convention.

In order to use ECVET, units - or parts of units - of learning outcomes achieved and assessed in one setting are transferred to another setting. In this second context, they are validated and recognised by the competent institution as part of the requirements for the qualification that the person wishes to obtain. Units of learning outcomes can then be accumulated towards this qualification, according to national, sectoral or regional rules.

As set out in the impact assessment and in the draft Recommendation, ECVET is a device to facilitate the transparency, comparability, transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes between different learning contexts. It does not aim at or require atomisation of qualifications nor does it aim at harmonisation of qualifications and VET (Vocational Education and Training) systems. It is thus intended to complement and reinforce existing mobility instruments such as the European Credit and Transfer System for Higher Education (ECTS), Europass and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). At a secondary level, ECVET is expected to be able to contribute to the reform of national vocational education and training systems and the achievement of genuine lifelong learning.

Thus, the aim of ECVET is to provide added value in the area of mobility and lifelong learning.

The proposed ECVET is an integral part of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, which seeks to achieve the education and training aspects of the Lisbon goals. The Commission prepared its blueprint for ECVET following repeated requests from the Member States, the social partners and other stakeholders.

The first option considered involves not using any legal instrument, i.e. no action by the European Union. This would mean continuing on the basis of the diverse European situation where national credit and transfer systems exist in some countries and not in others. There would be no reference point from which to obtain information about further developments in the transfer and recognition of mobile learners' learning outcomes. It would inhibit follow-up to the enhanced cooperation launched by the Council Decision and Declaration of 2002, which envisaged the development of a credit system at European level. It would mean that the Commission had not responded to the request of the Member States to develop a credit system that can be used in vocational education and training. However, this option would be unacceptable to many stakeholders and would not fulfil the clear mandate given to the Commission by the Member States.

A second option is a communication from the Commission. However, a Commission communication is not an instrument which would involve the Member States or the European Parliament in its adoption. This option would therefore not generate the necessary political commitment for the creation and the effective implementation of an operational ECVET.

A third option is a Commission recommendation under Article 150 of the Treaty, which relates to vocational training. Although it is a legal instrument, a Commission

recommendation would still not have a stronger impact than the previous option, as it would not involve Member States or the European Parliament in the formal adoption and so would not generate the degree of political commitment required to effectively implement ECVET.

A fourth option under consideration is to establish ECVET via the legislative instrument of a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, under Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty. This instrument would recommend that ECVET be used by Member States on a voluntary basis as a device facilitating transparency, comparability, transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes between different learning contexts throughout Europe. Taking into consideration the process for designing ECVET – co-operation between the Commission, Member States, EEA and candidate countries and the European social partners – and the extensive process of consulting the appropriate bodies and stakeholders at European level in the field of VET, the Commission has devised a blueprint for ECVET.

A fifth option is to establish ECVET via the legislative instrument of a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council, under Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty. However, this alternative would be a Decision adopting principles and obligations for those Member States which relate their national systems to ECVET, whereas the overwhelming consensus among stakeholders (Member States, social partners, sectors and others) is that ECVET should be entirely voluntary.

The Commission, in comparing the strengths and weaknesses of the above options, has elected to propose option 4, which would enable – with the co-operation of the Member States and the social partners – to address the challenges identified and find appropriate solutions. This option also corresponds most closely to the expectations of the Member States and stakeholders. It would provide the best basis for the successful implementation of an operational ECVET and for achieving the real added value the European dimension can bring for citizens in the field of lifelong learning and mobility through accumulation and transfer of learning outcomes between different learning contexts.

ECVET's success in meeting its objectives will be continuously monitored and evaluated. If adopted by the Parliament and Council, ECVET would not be set in stone, but would instead be kept under review and form the basis for further development. The Commission would monitor the implementation of ECVET and report four years after its adoption, to the European Parliament and the Council, on the experience gained and consider the implications for the future, including, if necessary, a review of the legal instrument. This report will be based, *inter alia*, on the results of an external evaluation.