

## Application of ECVET and ECTS to New Qualifications

Main Authors: Prof. Anna Szumilewicz and Julian Berriman

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## 1. Introduction

To achieve one of the main goals of the Blueprint project, which is the assignment of ECVET and ECTS to new qualification in the active leisure sector, it is necessary to understand what these systems are.

**ECVET, the European credit system for vocational education and training** promotes wide mobility and lifelong learning. It enables to recognise, accumulate and transfer skills and knowledge acquired during a stay in another country or using different Vocational Education and Training (VET) provider. Due to ECVET these experiences contribute to building up vocational qualifications, recognised both in the labour market and by educational institutions (CEDEFOP, 2013).

References to a credit transfer system for VET can be traced back to the Copenhagen Declaration, of 2002, where the recognition of competences and qualifications was confirmed, by the Directors General for Vocational Training (DGVET) and the European Commission, as a priority for VET (ECVET-toolkit.eu). Since then, many international projects have been implemented to set and test the principles for using ECVET in various sectors. One of the most important document, promoting the implementation of ECVET by all Member States was published in 2009 (2009/C 155/02). The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a European Credit Systems for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) confirmed common ECVET principles and provided detailed technical specifications how to use it. According to above recommendation, “ECVET is a technical framework for the transfer, recognition and, where appropriate, accumulation of individuals’ learning outcomes with a view to achieving a qualification. ECVET tools and methodology comprise the description of qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes with associated points, a transfer and accumulation process and complementary documents such as learning agreements, transcripts of records and ECVET users’ guides” (p. 15). “ECVET points provide complementary information about qualifications and units in numerical form. They have no value independent of the acquired learning outcomes for the particular qualification to which they refer, and they reflect the achievement and accumulation of units. To enable a common approach for the use of ECVET points, a convention is used according to which 60 points are allocated to the learning outcomes expected to be achieved in a year of formal full time VET” (p. 16).

ECVET was confirmed as a priority within the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013) and, more recently, within the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020) (ECVET-toolkit.eu). As part of its direct support to the EU political and institutional process underpinning ECVET, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) monitors and analyses progress made in establishing ECVET at national, regional and project levels and points to the key challenges countries are facing (CEDEFOP, 2013, CEDEFOP, 2016).

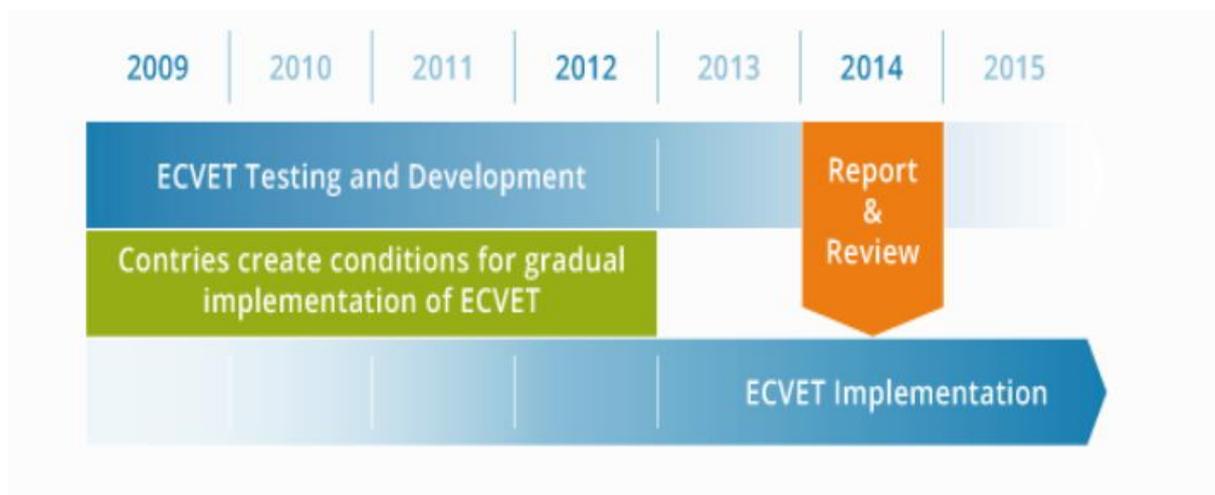


Figure 1 - The timeline of ECVET development and implementation (ECVET-toolkit.eu)

**ECTS, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)** is a tool of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) for making studies and courses more transparent and thus helping to enhance the quality of higher education (EC, 2015). ECTS was instituted in 1989 to enable the learning outcomes mobility in Higher Education. The implementation of ECTS was a response to the need to recognize the achievements of students who travelled within the Erasmus programme and benefited from education in different countries and universities.

Nowadays, ECTS credits are broadly used. ECTS can be applied to all programmes, whatever the mode of delivery (classroom-based, work-based, distance learning) or the status of students (full-time, part-time), and to all kinds of learning contexts (formal, non-formal and informal). Points are also awarded for apprenticeships and optional subjects that make up the integral part of the study programme. Thanks to this, the student has the opportunity to quantifiably present his/hers individual learning path and confirm his or her achievements from outside the given study programme. It can be beneficial both on the labour market and in undertaking further education in another field of study.

ECTS points are expressed as average workload of a learner, necessary to achieve the intended learning outcomes. 60 ECTS credits are allocated to the learning outcomes and associated workload of a full-time academic year or its equivalent; there are usually 30 credits per semester. Workload is an estimation of the time the individual typically needs to complete all learning activities such as lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, work placements and individual study required to achieve the defined learning outcomes in formal learning environments. In most Member States, the official documents have been published by national legal bodies to formalise the use of ECTS. In most countries, workload ranges from 1,500 to 1,800 hours for an academic year, which means that one credit corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of work. It should be recognised that this represents the typical workload and that for individual students the actual time to achieve the learning outcomes will vary (EC, 2015).

## 2. How the active leisure sector use ECVET and ECTS? – survey outcomes

Analytical work from recent years shows a large diversity of particular EU Member States in the implementation of ECVET and ECTS. It can be assumed that the differences in this area will be visible between sectors, both in the national and international dimension. In the available sources, we have not found studies on to what extent ECVET and ECTS systems are used in the active leisure sector. Therefore, we decided to conduct a survey on this topic among stakeholders of active leisure sector, before the application of ECVET and ECTS to new qualifications.

### 2.1. Survey methodology and participants

We conducted the survey during the 9<sup>th</sup> International Standards Meeting in Warsaw, on the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> November, 2018. ISM is one of the most notable, annual events for the fitness sector, organised and hosted by EuropeActive. One of the main goals of ISMs is to improve the quality of education for exercise professionals. This event brings together key stakeholders from the fitness industry including employers, training providers, national associations and the representatives of national registers of exercise professionals from across Europe and around the globe. 104 delegates participated in the ISM in 2018.

| No. | Position in the fitness sector           | n <sup>1</sup> | % <sup>2</sup> |
|-----|--|----------------|----------------|
| 1.  | <b>Training provider</b>                 | 16             | 44             |
| 2.  | <b>Certification/accreditation body</b>  | 6              | 17             |
| 3.  | <b>Employer/operator</b>                 | 2              | 6              |
| 4.  | <b>Supplier</b>                          | 1              | 3              |
| 5.  | <b>Government official</b>               | 1              | 3              |
| 6.  | <b>Association/federation/NGO worker</b> | 6              | 17             |
| 7.  | <b>Other <sup>3</sup></b>                | 4              | 10             |

<sup>1</sup> n - respondents were allowed to provide more than one position; <sup>2</sup> % of all responses; <sup>3</sup> answers given: university worker (2), publisher (1), consultant (1)

*Table 1 - The responders' position in the fitness sector (N=30)*

To assess the fitness stakeholders’ knowledge on the use of the ECVET system in their sector we used a one-page questionnaire (Appendix 1). During a break between ISM sessions, the delegates received a questionnaire and were asked to complete and return it immediately. This methodology was intended to limit the possibility of communication between respondents or the use of any information sources. We collected 30 completed questionnaires from respondents representing 19 countries, also from outside the EU (Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Lebanon, Malta, Netherlands, Hungary, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, USA). In the

Table 1 we presented the responders’ position in the fitness sector.

## 2.2. Survey outcomes

Over half of the respondents did not know what the ECVET system is (Figure 2). This is a particularly worrying result, because over 60% of respondents were people directly related to the educational processes of exercise professionals (44% training providers and 17% representatives of certification/accreditation body).

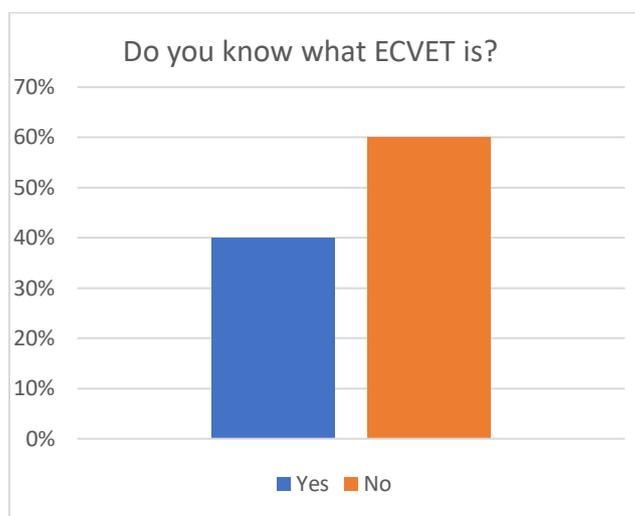


Figure 2 - Answers of respondents (N=30) to the question: "Do you know what ECVET is?"

Only 20% of respondents said that ECVET is used in their country. Others replied that they did not know or that ECVET was not used by their country (Figure 3). It should be emphasized that this response was given by eight respondents from EU member states (Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherland, Poland), in which ECVET should have been implemented (CEDEFOP, 2016, 2009/C 155/02).

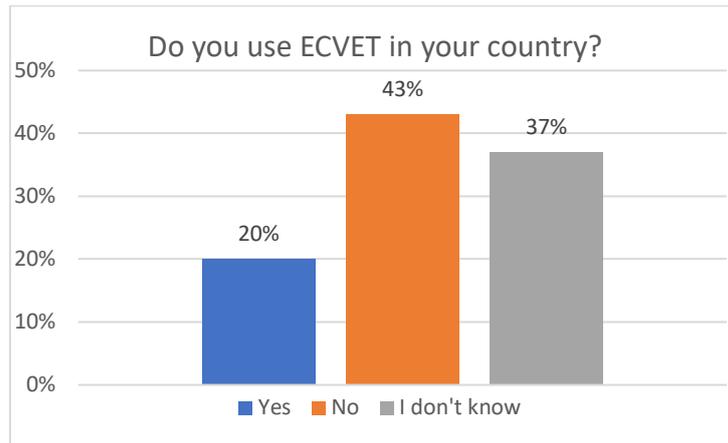


Figure 3 - Answers of respondents (N=30) to the question: "Do you use ECVET in your country?"

The respondents showed similarly low level of knowledge in answering the questions whether there were any legal regulations to use ECVET (**Error! Reference source not found.**) and whether any other credit system for learning outcomes accumulation and transfer was used in their countries (Figure 5). As alternative education credit system the respondents indicated: ECTS (one respondent from Ireland and one respondent from Belgium), the credits of Icelandic Ministry of Education (one respondent from Iceland) and the Continuing Education Credits of US – CECUS (two respondents from USA).

The research results obtained are surprising because according to the CEDEFOP report published already in 2013, "the Member States were progressing and were increasingly committed to ECVET implementation" (CEDEFOP, 2013, p. 1). Despite the fact that a large diversity was noticed at the time both in the concept of using educational points in VET and in the progress of implementation work, the use of ECVET had good prognosis.

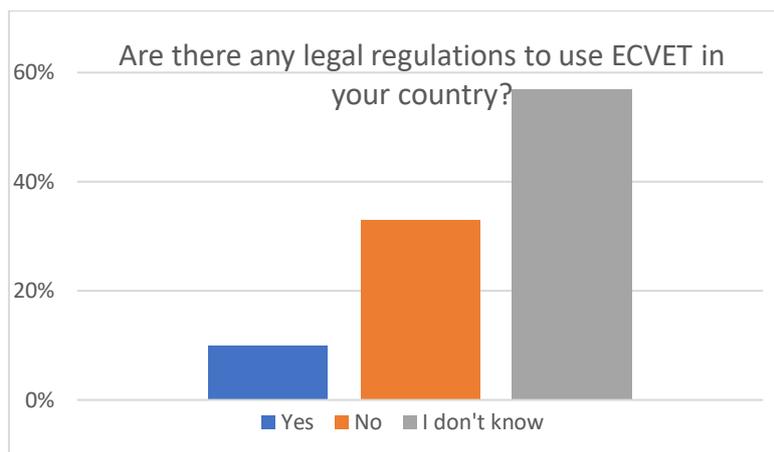


Figure 4 - Answers of respondents (N=30) to the question: "Are there any legal regulations to use ECVET in your country?"

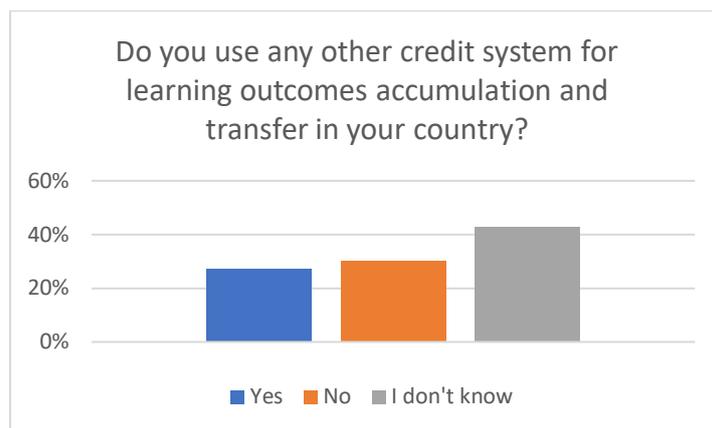


Figure 5 - Answers of respondents (N=30) to the question: "Do you use any other credit system for learning outcomes accumulation and transfer in your country?"

A positive result is that as many as 70% of survey participants said that the use of the educational credit system was a useful tool. Such answers encouraged us to continue working in this area. As regards recommendations for the development and implementation of this system, respondents indicated that the system: should "be transparent", "have clear quality standards which are measurable", "have one general way of handling", "be controlled by someone", "can be used in different sectors", "is needed to keep track of units collected", and that it should be implemented in the European Register of Exercise Professionals (EREPS).

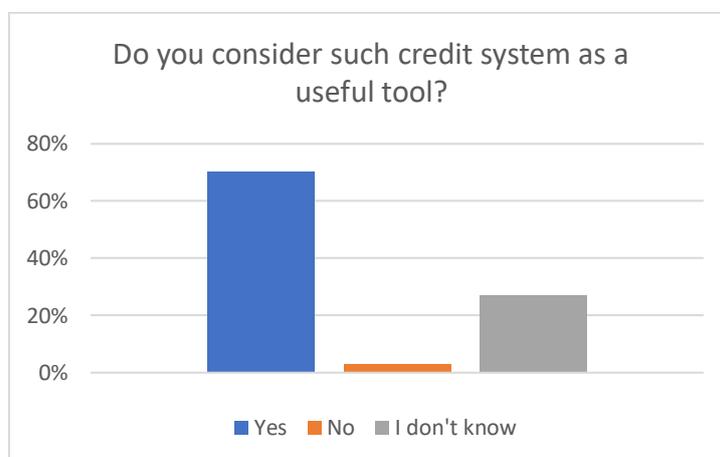


Figure 6 - Answers of respondents (N=30) to the question: "Do you consider such credit system as a useful tool?"

### 2.3. Conclusions from the survey

Despite the fact that the study group was not large, it was composed of respondents from different countries and performing different roles in the fitness sector, interested in the quality of education of exercise professionals. Based on this study, we found that:

- 1) The ECVET system has been implemented in EU member states since 2002, therefore its use should be widely known. This is especially true for people involved in the educational process, and validation and certification of qualifications, regardless of the sector. However, our research showed that the majority of the fitness stakeholders didn't know what the ECVET is, how it can be used and whether there were any regulations to use it in their countries. There is a need for extensive international activities promoting the ECVET system.
- 2) The vast majority of the fitness stakeholders considered a credit system to accumulate and transfer learning outcomes as a useful tool. Therefore, it's justified to develop recommendations how to use such a tool in this sector. Based on these outcomes we were encouraged to assign ECVET and ECTS points to exemplary qualifications from active leisure sector.

| No. | Basic Terms                         | Definition <sup>1</sup>  |
|-----|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1.  | <b>Qualification</b>                | A formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent institution determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards. |
| 2.  | <b>Learning outcomes</b>            | Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process and which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.                |
| 3.  | <b>Unit of learning outcomes</b>    | Component of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence, that can be assessed and validated.  |
| 4.  | <b>Credit for learning outcomes</b> | A set of learning outcomes of an individual which have been assessed and which can be accumulated towards a qualification or transferred to other learning programmes or qualifications. |
| 5.  | <b>ECVET points</b>                 | A numerical representation of the overall weight of learning outcomes in a qualification and of the relative weight of units in relation to the qualification.                           |

<sup>1</sup> According to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of the 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). Official Journal of the European Union. 2009/C 155/02.

*Table 2 - Basic terms used in the process of ECVET allocation*

### 3. The methodology to assign ECVET and ECTS to active leisure qualifications

#### 3.1. Basic definitions

To assign ECVET points to qualifications, the definitions of ‘qualification’, ‘learning outcomes’, ‘unit of learning outcomes’, ‘credit for learning outcomes’, ‘ECVET points’ should be well understood (2009/C 155/02). They are presented above, in the **Error! Reference source not found.**

#### 3.2. The difference between ECVET points and credits

The terms of ECVET point and ECVET credit, although in practice often used interchangeably, according to above definitions don’t mean the same. The ECVET points provide information about the qualification and the units, while the credit designates the learning outcomes the learner has achieved. In other words, ECVET points are linked to the qualification structure and description (independent of whether someone has achieved the qualification or not). Whereas credit is related to a person and his/her personal achievement (credit does not exist on its own without someone having achieved it). What’s more, credit can be transferred and accumulated if the competent institution recognizes it as a relevant part of the qualification for which the learner is preparing or seeks recognition.

ECVET points can support the understanding of a qualification - together with units, descriptions of learning outcomes and information about the level of qualifications. The number of ECVET points allocated to a qualification, can indicate for example, that the scope of the qualification is narrow or broad. The number of ECVET points allocated to a unit provides the learner with information concerning the relative weight of what s/he has accumulated already (ecvet-secretariat.eu, 2020).

#### 3.3. The weight of a unit of learning outcomes

In ECVET, the allocation of points usually has two phases: ECVET points are allocated first to a qualification as a whole and then to its units. For a given qualification, one formal learning context is taken as a reference and, on the basis of the convention, the total number of points is assigned for that qualification. From this total, ECVET points are then allocated to each unit according to their relative weight within the qualification. For qualifications which do not have a formal learning pathway reference, ECVET credit points can be allocated through estimation by comparison with another qualification which has a formal reference context (2009/C 155/02).

According to the above EU recommendation, the relative weight of a unit of learning outcomes, with regard to the qualification and then the allocation of ECVET points, should be performed using the following approaches or a combination of them:

- Different stakeholders “value” the different units which are part of the qualification according to the relative importance of the unit’s learning outcomes for the labour market, for progression to other qualification levels or for social integration;
- Different stakeholders “value” the complexity, scope and volume of learning outcomes in the unit, in relation to the learning outcomes of the overall qualification. Skills and competences in the unit are evaluated with regard to their share in the overall skills and competences of the entire qualification;
- Different stakeholders “assess” the effort necessary for a learner (estimation of the learners’ effort, workload or learning time needed) to achieve the unit’s required learning outcomes.

Whichever method or combination of methods is chosen, the size of the unit should be reasonable – too small units could lead to fragmentation without proper understanding, and too large ones could impair mobility (BE-TWIN, 2010).

According to the ECVET Secretary, it’s important to allocate ECVET points to qualifications and not to education and training programmes. It is also possible that the same qualification can be prepared through various educational programmes (ecvet-secretariat.eu, 2020). It is a common situation in the international fitness sector, where numerous educational entities implement their own vocational education and training based on the EuropeActive educational standards.

Various methodologies of assigning ECVET have been presented in former projects (BE-TWIN, 2010, EC, 2011, ICARE, 2013, Synthesis, 2012). However, so far none of the applied methodologies has been treated as the gold standard.

### 3.4. The numeric expression of ECVET and ECTS points

| The features of educational credit <sup>1</sup> :  | The stakeholders of an educational process:                                  |   |                                       |
|--|--|---|---------------------------------------|
|  | Employers  | Learners  | Educational institutions (HE and VET) |
|  | need the credits for:  |   |                                       |
| Set of learning outcomes has been assessed and validated according to an agreed standard | Confirmation of good preparation for professional roles in the labour market |   |                                       |
| is awarded when the individual has achieved the defined learning outcomes                |  | Mobility of education and planning of an individual learning path |                                       |

|   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>expressed in a quantitative value (e.g. credits or credit points) demonstrating the estimated workload an individual typically needs for achieving related learning outcomes</p>   |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• planning time for learning</li> <li>• comparing educational offers of various institutions</li> <li>• choosing the preferred way of learning (based on guided-learning or self-learning)</li> </ul> | <p>planning the educational process (including scheduling classes, booking classrooms and educational equipment, planning working time and teachers' salaries, setting prices and promoting the educational offer)</p> |
| <p><sup>1</sup> Council Recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. Official Journal of the European Union (2017/C 189/03).</p> |  |  |  |

*Table 3 - The importance of the educational credit features for stakeholders of educational process*

We fully agree with the changes in the educational concept in recent decades, focusing primarily on the final effect of the learning process in the form of acquired knowledge, skills and competences. However, in this project, assigning ECVET and ECTS points to the active leisure qualifications, we decided to combine two approaches to education: modern - focused mainly on learning outcomes, and more historical - directed to the educational process itself.

Although informal learning has gained in importance in recent years and Member States are encouraged to recognize and validate achievements from this learning path (2012/C 398/01), formal and non-formal learning are still important ways of gaining education and professional development. This is reflected, inter alia, in the EU recommendation on ECVET. To allocate ECVET points “for a given qualification, one formal learning context is taken as a reference” (2009/C 155/02, p. 17). Despite the fact that educational entities, especially in the field of non-formal education should still have a lot of autonomy in organizing the educational process, it is necessary to develop measurable guidelines in this regard. This will enable transparency and comparability of their educational offer and, for the learner, will facilitate mobility of education.

According to the EU recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, ‘credit’ means confirmation that a part of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of learning outcomes has been assessed and validated by a competent authority, according to an agreed standard; credit is awarded by competent authorities when the individual has achieved the defined learning outcomes, evidenced by appropriate assessments and can be expressed in a quantitative value (e.g. credits or credit points) demonstrating the estimated workload an individual typically needs for achieving related learning outcomes (2017/C 189/03). Based on this definition we analysed the features of educational credits in the context of needs of various stakeholders participating in

educational process: learners, employers and educational institutions (**Error! Reference source not found.**).



*Figure 7 - The transmission of the weight of learning outcomes into learning hours*

According to the EU recommendation: ‘ECVET point means a numerical representation of the **overall weight of learning outcomes** in a qualification and of the relative weight of units in relation to the qualification’ (2009/C 155/02, p. 14). To express the weight of a particular learning outcome we can say how important or complex it is in relation to the whole qualification. However, this is only a qualitative information. To express the weight of learning outcomes (LO) numerically, we need to go to learning hours, as presented in Figure 7:

According to the EU recommendation: ‘To enable a common approach for the use of ECVET points, a convention is used according to which 60 points are allocated to the learning outcomes expected to be achieved in a year of formal full time VET’. Therefore, we can assume that 1 ECVET is 25-30 learning hours (Figure 8), similarly to ECTS (EC, 2015).



*Figure 8 - The expression of one year of formal learning as ECVET points in relation to learning hours*

The methods of ECTS assignment, transfer and accumulation differ from country to country (BE-TWIN, 2010). In some EU countries, ECTS credits are still allocated on the basis of contact hours to particular courses/modules or a combination of this approach with student workload. There is an approach that for full-time students at least a half of learning hours should be implemented through contact hours.

To date, there are no universal guidelines on how to assign ECVET points to qualifications. When preparing our recommendations in this area, we took into account both the practices used in relation to ECTS and the specificity of vocational educational and training. Since many learning outcomes are practical skills in training for exercise professionals, we've found that each hour of learning with a tutor requires at least about two hours of self-work, preferably in workplace. The ratio of 1:2, for the contact hours in relation to self-learning, has resulted in (

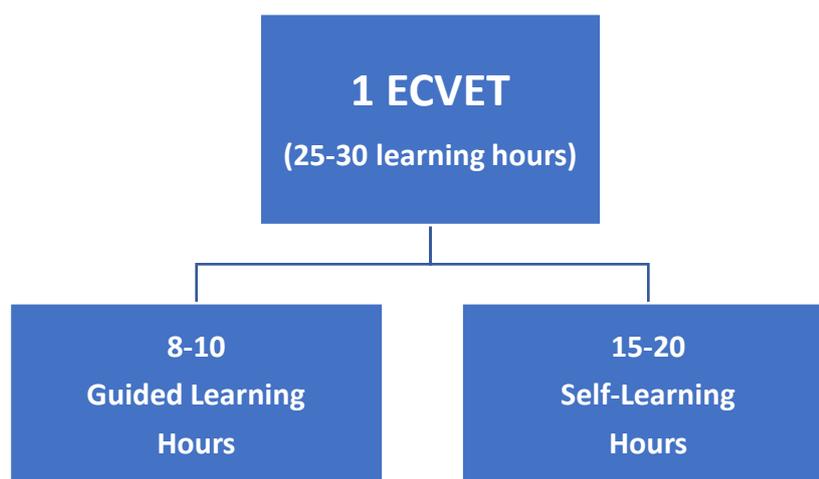


Figure 9):

*Figure 9 - Proposed structure for 1 ECVET point expressed as learning hours*

There are different ranges of learning hours in educational programmes that lead to the same/similar qualifications in the fitness market. In the Blueprint project we have initiated a process to set minimum requirements for learning hours for its accredited training providers. We strongly emphasise that we do not depart from the modern learning concept, where the most important consideration is the learning output (learning outcomes), not the education process itself. Our aim is to make the accreditation process for training providers more transparent and the educational and vocational programmes more comparable. Using ECVET and ECTS in active leisure qualifications, we also want to facilitate the transferability of qualifications or individual learning units between vocational education and training (VET) and higher education (HE) systems. What's more, our approach (based on both credits and learning hours) enables educational institutions to plan the educational process (including scheduling classes, booking classrooms and educational equipment, planning working time and teachers' salaries, setting prices and promoting the educational offer). The benefits for the learners are inter alia: the possibility to plan time for learning, comparing educational offers of various institutions and choosing the preferred way of learning (based on guided-learning or self-learning) **(Error! Reference source not found.)**.

To the above ends, we have applied the concepts of allocating both ECVET and ECTS points and also Guided Learning Hours (GLH), Self-Learning Hours (SLH) and Total Qualification Time (TQT). The

numerical representation of ECVET points through contact hours and self-learning is an important element for planning, controlling and evaluating the learning process carried out by different educational entities. Values for GLH, SLH and TQT are calculated by considering the different activities that learners would typically complete to achieve all learning outcomes defined for a particular standard/qualification. We are aware that individual people need different time to learn. Therefore, in our assumption, to validate a qualification the learner does not have to prove the particular number of learning hours spent, only the achievement of required learning outcomes.

### 3.5. Guided Learning Hours (GLH), Self-Learning Hours (SLH), Total Qualification Time (TQT)

We define **Guided Learning Hours** as a measure of the time spent being taught or instructed live by a course supervisor, tutor or other appropriate provider of training.

Examples of activities which can contribute to Guided Learning Hours include:

- Classroom-based learning supervised by a tutor
- Work-based learning supervised by a tutor
- Live webinar or telephone tutorial with a tutor in real time
- E-learning supervised by a tutor in real time
- All forms of assessment which take place under the supervision of a supervisor (excluding final verification of qualifications by a person not included in the training process).

As **Self-Learning Hours** we consider the estimated number of hours a learner will reasonably be likely to spend in self-preparation/study or self-assessment, as directed by (but not supervised by) a course tutor or other course representative.

Examples of activities which can contribute to Self-Learning Hours include:

- Independent and unsupervised research/learning
- Unsupervised compilation of a portfolio of work experience
- Unsupervised e-learning
- Unsupervised e-assessment
- Unsupervised coursework
- Watching a pre-recorded podcast or webinar
- Unsupervised work-based learning

**Total Qualification Time (TQT)** is a measure of a qualification size and made up of the number of Guided Learning Hours and estimated Self-Learning Hours. It should be noted that to confirm a qualification, the learner does not have to prove the particular number of learning hours spent, only the achievement of learning outcomes.

### 3.6. Transferring ECVET and ECTS

Because in our approach both ECVET and ECTS systems are based on a similar assumption that 1 point is 25-30 hours of learner's workload, points assigned in one system can be transferred to the other system in a 1: 1 ratio. This solution is also justified by the fact that regardless of the educational system, the learner's goal is to obtain exactly the same professional competencies. For example, in the case of qualifications as a personal trainer (4 EQF), it does not matter whether the person is learning in a VET institution or gaining an additional professional qualification in the course of higher education. In each system, the learner should acquire knowledge, skills and competences to design implement and evaluate exercise program for low-risk clients (EuropeActive, 2018). The same number of points (ECVET or ECTS) should be assigned to the same learning outcomes.

A few years ago, new methods of arithmetic conversion of ECVET and ECTS points in the Banking Insurance Finance (B.I.F) Project were presented (de Lavigne, 2011). The project authors proposed point transfer between both systems, using two types of coefficient. The first of these was the EQF coefficient (related to EQF levels of learning outcomes units) and the second was the complexity of unit coefficient. The coefficients were applied to the baseline credit points which were estimated on the notional learner workload of each unit. This approach was criticized by Richard de Lavigne (2011) as too complicated, impractical and causing a lot of bias. According to de Lavigne, ECTS and ECVET may be exchanged on 1 to 1 basis under the condition that "the EQF coefficient and the complexity of unit coefficient for the course units both stand at 1". This situation obviously occurs in the case of learning units consisting of identical learning outcomes, as described above.

For applying ECVET credit transfer, already in 2009, the European Commission recommended using the learning agreement and personal transcript (2009/C 155/02). These tools have evolved a lot since then. Every year, the use of ECVET tools (the templates for Memorandum of Understanding and the Learning Agreement) and procedures (assessment, validation and recognition) have been discussed in detail in an international group of experts (Kristensen, 2019). The ECVET documentation, has proven to be a useful tool to make the learning outcomes visible, transferable and recognized, also in mobility outside the EU. The ECVET principles and particularly using the common language of learning outcomes have proven to work globally. After 10 years of implementation, the European Commission conducted broad research to explore how ECVET has developed in European countries. One of the most positive outcome was that ECVET has integrated the ECVET Memorandum of Understanding and Learning Agreement into Europass while making their use mandatory for Erasmus+ beneficiaries of VET mobility actions (EC, 2019).

In 2018 the Council Recommendation (2018/C 444/01), confirmed the importance of learning recognition across borders and specifically referenced the value and importance of transparency tools such as those developed and used within ECVET (Memorandum of Understanding, Learning Agreement). According to this document, EU Member States should make a political commitment to take steps to introduce automatic recognition between various educational system (including VET and HE) by 2025. Intensive actions should be taken in this respect in the active leisure sector, too.

## 4. Application of ECVET and ECTS to the Personal Trainer qualification

In the Blueprint project, we assigned ECVET and ECTS points to the qualifications of a personal trainer, based on the educational standard for this profession and developed by a group of experts cooperating with EuropeActive a few years ago.

The first step was to verify the qualification structure. Experts have defined professional roles (learning outcomes units), named in this document as "core knowledge and skills areas". Due to this structure, it was possible to assign ECVET points to individual units - separate 'components of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence that can be assessed and validated' (2009/C 155/02, p. 15).

The next stage was determining the weight of individual units and related professional competences by experts from the Sector Skills Alliance for the European Fitness sector. The first meeting took place in Warsaw on November 14, 2018, the second in Copenhagen, November 20, 2019. At both meetings, experts emphasized the importance of communication and soft skills in the work of a personal trainer. They recognized psychosocial competences as important as the skills to assess the client's state of health and to plan and implement a training program. Therefore, for the following units: 'Psychosocial aspects of health & fitness', 'Health & fitness assessment: collecting and analysing information' and 'Training adaptation & exercise planning & programming' a double weight was determined compared to the other units, and consequently a double number of ECVET points was allocated. In this way we obtained 11 ECVET points for eight units (**Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.**).

An important step was to find a reference point for the estimated learning hours needed to obtain all learning outcomes. On the European market, many professional courses are conducted in the VET area leading to the qualification of a personal trainer. Experts representing training providers most often considered about 300 learning hours as sufficient for this qualification. One example of formal acceptance of such a number of learning hours is the qualification of a personal trainer, included in the Polish Integrated Qualification System, approved by the Polish Sport Ministry (ZRK, 2020). This volume of qualifications, after division into 11 ECVET points, allowed to justify the assumption that 1 ECVET is about 25-30 learning hours (

Figure 9). Because in this project we adopted the principle of converting ECVET points into ECTS in a 1 to 1 ratio, we also assigned 11 ECTS points to the qualifications of the personal trainer.

We presented the above methodology to international experts at the International Standards Meeting, November 21-22, 2019 in Copenhagen. They confirmed the validity of both the number of ECVET and ECTS points assigned to the personal trainer qualification and the assumption that 1 ECVET point is 8-10 guided learning hours and 15-20 self-learning hours. It should be emphasized that these are only estimates that are to organize the educational processes proposed by various institutions. Under no circumstances a specified number of learning hours may be a required proof for the confirmation of a given qualification. The actual number of hours spent learning will vary between

learners, depending on their capabilities, previous experience, available educational resources, motivation, etc.

| Personal Trainer qualification (4 EQF)  |   |                                       |   |  |                    |                   |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|---|--|--------------------|-------------------|
| No.   | Core learning areas (learning units)                              | Assessment methods                    | Guided Learning hours <sup>1</sup>                              | Estimated Total Time (per unit) <sup>2</sup> | ECVET <sup>3</sup> | ECTS <sup>4</sup> |
| 1.  | Role of the PT  | Theoretical and practical evaluations | 8-10  | 25-30  | 1                  | 1                 |
| 2.  | Functional anatomy  | Theoretical and practical evaluations | 8-10  | 25-30  | 1                  | 1                 |
| 3.  | Physiology  | Theoretical and practical evaluations | 8-10  | 25-30  | 1                  | 1                 |
| 4.  | Nutrition   | Theoretical and practical evaluations | 8-10  | 25-30  | 1                  | 1                 |
| 5.  | Psychosocial aspects of health & fitness                          | Theoretical and practical evaluations | 16-20   | 50-60  | 2                  | 2                 |
| 6.  | Health & fitness assessment: collecting and analysing information | Theoretical and practical evaluations | 16-20   | 50-60  | 2                  | 2                 |
| 7.  | Training adaptation & exercise planning & programming             | Theoretical and practical evaluations | 16-20   | 50-60  | 2                  | 2                 |
| 8.  | Business and marketing skills for personal trainers               | Theoretical evaluation                | 8-10  | 25-30  | 1                  | 1                 |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  |   |                                       | <b>88-110</b>   | <b>275-330</b>                               | <b>11</b>          | <b>11</b>         |
| <b>Estimated Total Qualification Time</b>   |   |                                       | <b>275-330 spread over a minimum of 4-6 months <sup>5</sup></b> |  |                    |                   |
| <sup>1</sup> Time of 45-60 min;<br><sup>2</sup> Expressed in learning hours (guided and self-learning combined)<br><sup>3</sup> 1 ECVET is approx. 8-10 Guided Learning Hours + 15-20 Self Learning Hours (25-30 learning hours in total).<br><sup>4</sup> 1 ECTS = 25-30 learning hours;<br><sup>5</sup> To ensure the effectiveness of the education process, we recommend minimum 4-6 months of learning to obtain the PT qualification. This period also seems rational due to the time needed to accumulate knowledge and, practical and motor skills. |   |                                       |   |  |                    |                   |

*Table 4 - Number of ECVET and ECTS, Minimum Guided Learning Hours, Total Time assign to the Personal Trainer qualification*

The opinions of participants of ISM in Copenhagen were promising for the development of ECVET and ECTS systems in active leisure sector. Most of them were positive about the use of these tools (Figure 10).

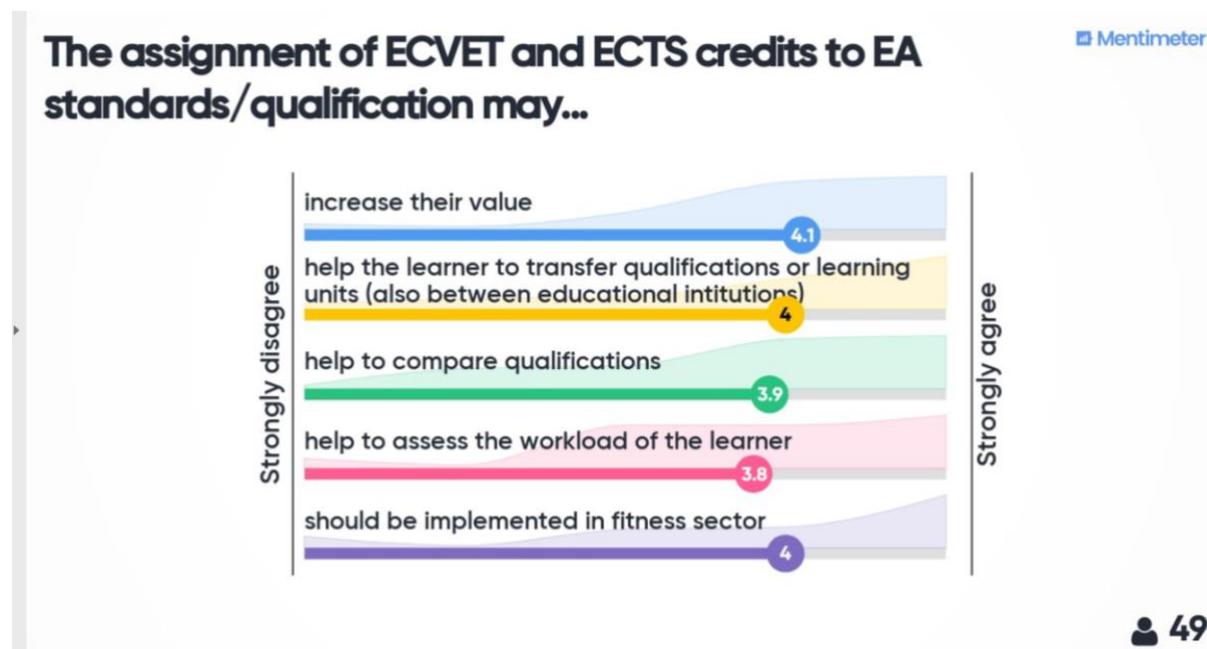


Figure 10 - Opinions of ISM participants in 2019 on assigning ECVET and ECTS points to qualifications in the fitness sector

Based on the allocation of educational points and learning hours we could develop recommendations for training providers on minimum required Guided Learning Hours, which can be used in the accreditation process. However, apart from the learning hours, we are going to carefully analyse the strategy for assessing the achievement of individual learning outcomes. We recommend exceeding these minimums if training providers recognise that more hours are needed for learners to achieve all learning outcomes indicated for a given qualification.

We assume that the EQF Level 4 Personal Trainer will have acquired all knowledge and skills required to work as Fitness Instructor. Therefore, when summarising the educational points and the time and effort devoted to the education of a personal trainer, one should consider his or her achievements from the previous level of education (Table 5).

## 5. Application of ECVET and ECTS to the other active leisure sector qualifications

Based on above methodology we assigned ECVET and ECTS also to other active leisure qualifications: Fitness Instructor and Group Fitness Instructor (Table 5) and Exercise for Health Specialist qualification (Table 6). Successively, we will allocate these educational credits and learning hours also to other active leisure qualifications.

| Fitness Instructor and Group Fitness Instructor qualifications (3 EQF)   |  |                                       |   |  |                    |                   |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|--------------------|-------------------|
| No.  | Core learning outcomes areas (learning units)        | Assessment methods                    | Guided Learning hours <sup>1</sup>                            | Estimated Total Time (per unit) <sup>2</sup> | ECVET <sup>3</sup> | ECTS <sup>4</sup> |
| 1.   | Human Movement                                       | Theoretical and practical evaluations | 8-10  | 25-30  | 1                  | 1                 |
| 2.   | Exercise Physiology                                  | Theoretical and practical evaluations | 8-10  | 25-30  | 1                  | 1                 |
| 3.   | Health and Safety                                    | Theoretical and practical evaluations | 8-10  | 25-30  | 1                  | 1                 |
| 4.   | Lifestyle Management & Communication                 | Theoretical and practical evaluations | 8-10  | 25-30  | 1                  | 1                 |
| 5.   | Fitness Instructor or Group Fitness Practical Skills | Theoretical and practical evaluations | 16-20   | 50-60  | 2                  | 2                 |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   |  |                                       | <b>48-60</b>  | <b>150-180</b>                               | <b>6</b>           | <b>6</b>          |
| <b>Minimum Total Qualification Time</b>  |  |                                       | <b>150-180 spread over a minimum of 3 months <sup>5</sup></b> |  |                    |                   |
| <sup>1</sup> Time of 45-60 min;<br><sup>2</sup> Expressed in learning hours (guided and self-learning combined)<br><sup>3</sup> 1 ECVET is approx. 8-10 Guided Learning Hours + 15-20 Self Learning Hours (25-30 learning hours in total);<br><sup>4</sup> 1 ECTS = 25-30 learning hours;<br><sup>5</sup> To ensure the effectiveness of the education process, we recommend minimum 3 months of learning to obtain the Fitness Instructor or Group Fitness Instructor qualifications. This period also seems rational due to the time needed to accumulate knowledge and, practical and motor skills. |  |                                       |   |  |                    |                   |

*Table 5 - Number of ECVET and ECTS, Minimum Guided Learning Hours, Total Time assign to the Fitness Instructor and Group Fitness Instructor qualifications*

| Exercise for Health Specialist qualification (5 EQF)  |  |                                       |   |  |                    |                   |
|---|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|--------------------|-------------------|
| No.   | Core learning outcomes areas (learning units)  | Assessment methods                    | Guided Learning hours <sup>1</sup>                              | Estimated Total Time (per unit) <sup>2</sup> | ECVET <sup>3</sup> | ECTS <sup>4</sup> |
| 1.  | Role of the Exercise for Health Specialist   | Theoretical evaluations               | 2-3   | 7-8  | 0.25               | 0.25              |
| 2.  | Advanced Functional Anatomy and Biomechanics   | Theoretical and practical evaluations | 8-10  | 25-30  | 1                  | 1                 |
| 3.  | Physiology & Pathophysiology   | Theoretical and practical evaluations | 16-20   | 50-60  | 2                  | 2                 |
| 4.  | Nutrition for Health   | Theoretical evaluations               | 8-10  | 25-30  | 1                  | 1                 |
| 5.  | Psychosocial aspects of Health & Fitness: Changing Health Behaviours                                     | Theoretical and practical evaluations | 16-20   | 50-60  | 2                  | 2                 |
| 6.  | Health & Fitness Assessment: Collecting and analysing information  | Theoretical and practical evaluations | 8-10  | 25-30  | 1                  | 1                 |
| 7.  | Training Adaptations, Exercise Planning & Programming for Individuals with Controlled Medical Conditions | Theoretical and practical evaluations | 16-20   | 50-60  | 2                  | 2                 |
| 8.  | Participant Management and Programme Administration  | Theoretical evaluation                | 6-7   | 18-22  | 0.75               | 0.75              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  |  |                                       | <b>80-100</b>   | <b>250-300</b>                               | <b>10</b>          | <b>10</b>         |
| <b>Minimum Total Qualification Time</b>   |  |                                       | <b>250-300 spread over a minimum of 4-6 months <sup>5</sup></b> |  |                    |                   |
| <sup>1</sup> Time of 45-60 min;<br><sup>2</sup> Expressed in learning hours (guided and self-learning combined)<br><sup>3</sup> 1 ECVET is approx. 8-10 Guided Learning Hours + 15-20 Self Learning Hours (25-30 learning hours in total).<br><sup>4</sup> 1 ECTS = 25-30 learning hours;<br><sup>5</sup> To ensure the effectiveness of the education process, we recommend minimum 4-6 months of learning to obtain this PT qualification. This period also seems rational due to the time needed to accumulate knowledge and practical skills. |  |                                       |   |  |                    |                   |

*Table 6 - Number of ECVET and ECTS, Minimum Guided Learning Hours, Total Time assign to the Exercise for Health Specialist qualification*

## 6. Conclusions

Both systems of accumulation and transfer of educational achievements: ECVET and ECTS have evolved strongly in the last two decades. These tools increasingly support the concept of education mobility, recognition of achievements from different learning paths and the certification system, both in the area of vocational education and training and higher education. Many international projects have demonstrated the benefits of using ECVET and ECTS points, as well as instruments supporting these systems, such as the Memorandum of Understanding or Learning Agreement. However, their weaknesses are also noticeable. First of all, it is their limited scope (not all sectors use it) and the lack of understanding of their principles by average citizens of the Member States.

Our survey conducted in November 2018 showed that in the fitness sector the use of ECVET and ECTS was negligible. Fitness stakeholders, interested in the educational process for exercise professionals, mostly did not know what the ECVET system was, whether it was used in their country and whether there were any legal regulations in this respect. The positive result was that both before and after assigning ECVET points to fitness qualifications respondents positively assessed this tool. This encourages to continue the development of education accumulation and transfer systems in this industry and their promotion among various stakeholders, including educational entities from both VET and HE. It is certainly worth using good practices in these activities from other sectors.

Based on a detailed analysis of the ECVET and ECTS assumptions, we came to the conclusion that their use should combine two approaches to education: a modern concept that focuses on learning effects achieved by the learner and a traditional approach, also taking into account the educational process itself. In this work, we proposed, in addition to assigning ECVET points to qualifications, also their numerical value through learning hours (guided and self-learning hours), similarly to the assumptions of ECTS. Of course, we agree that the most important is the final effect of the education process in the form of acquired knowledge, skills and competences, regardless of whether the education took place in a formal, non-formal or informal manner. Nevertheless, an attempt to describe learning outcomes in a total detachment from the formal side of the learning process and its quantitative parameters seems to be utopian. In addition, it would not be in line with the European commission recommendation on ECVET. Experts have suggested there that as a reference for assigning points one should be using solutions from the formal education system. Lack of quantitative information about qualifications may make it difficult for the learner to plan his / her career path. That is because, it will not contain sufficient information, including about the estimated time spent on learning and about the costs, if any. In turn, educational entities will have difficulties with the educational process planning (including class planning, booking classrooms and educational equipment, planning working time and teachers' salaries, setting prices and promoting the educational offer). Therefore, unjustified avoidance of information about estimated learning hours may negatively affect the development of the education market.

Our proposal to assign both points and learning hours to qualifications has been positively evaluated by an international group of experts from our sector. In the near future, we plan to assign points and hours to other qualifications. We are convinced that this will increase both the quality and also the comparability and mobility of education in our industry.



## Appendix 1

## Questionnaire on the use of the ECVET system in the fitness sector

**Application of ECVET and ECTS to new qualifications – BLUEPRINT PROJECT; IO6**

1. Your country:.....
2. Your position in the fitness sector:
  - Training provider
  - Certification/accreditation body
  - Employer/operator
  - Supplier
  - Government official
  - Association/federation/NGO
  - Other.....
3. Do you know what ECVET is?
  - Yes
  - No
4. Do you use ECVET in your country?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I don't know
5. Are there any legal regulations to use ECVET in your country?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I don't know
6. Do you use any other credit system for learning outcomes accumulation and transfer?
  - Yes (If yes, please describe shortly) .....
  - .....
  - No
  - I don't know
7. Do you consider credit system as a useful tool?
  - Yes
  - No
  - I don't know
8. If yes, what would you recommend to develop and implement this system?
  - .....
  - .....
  - .....

Thank you very much for your input!

For further questions please contact me: [anna.szumilewicz@awfis.gda.pl](mailto:anna.szumilewicz@awfis.gda.pl)



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