



# Using ECVET to Support Lifelong Learning

ANNOTATED EXAMPLES OF HOW ECVET CAN  
BE USED TO SUPPORT LIFELONG LEARNING

Note prepared by the ECVET Users' Group



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The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training

ECVET

## Using ECVET to Support Lifelong Learning

ANNOTATED EXAMPLES OF HOW ECVET CAN  
BE USED TO SUPPORT LIFELONG LEARNING



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Education and Culture

Lifelong learning: Policies and Programme

Professional training; Leonardo da Vinci

**This document was prepared by the ECVET Users' Group and it was approved during the ECVET Users' Group meeting on 30 November 2011.**

It complements the series of guidance documents and explanatory notes which constitute the ECVET Users' Guide.

If you would like a more detailed explanation of ECVET concepts, principles and processes, please refer to another element of the ECVET Users' Guide entitled: *Get to know ECVET Better – Questions and Answers*<sup>1</sup>.

If you would like better insights into how ECVET can be used to support transnational mobility, in particular in initial VET, please refer to the document entitled: *Using ECVET for Geographical Mobility*.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/ecvet\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/ecvet_en.htm)

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## 1 This note

This note complements the ECVET Users' Guide. As of January 2012, the Users' Guide includes the following documents:

- *ECVET Questions and Answers*<sup>2</sup> which explains the technical specifications of ECVET and supports them with examples; and
- *Using ECVET for geographical mobility*<sup>3</sup> which discusses good practice in using ECVET for organised mobility of learners.

This note is intended to inspire further experimentation of ECVET for lifelong learning and to support the application of ECVET in the recognition of learning outcomes in different situations. It was written to illustrate the added value of ECVET technical specifications in creating flexible learning pathways in a lifelong learning perspective. The note contains no specific recommendations or guidelines. It is for the Member States and stakeholders to decide whether, in which situations and how they wish to use ECVET for lifelong learning.

The note contains several possible situations and examples of learners' paths in which ECVET technical specifications could be used to enable recognition of learning outcomes. These examples are inspired by mechanisms and provisions for accumulating and recognising learning outcomes that currently exist in some EU Member States, but the examples as such, are hypothetical. The range of situations described in this note in which ECVET could be used is not meant to be exhaustive.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ecvet/faq\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ecvet/faq_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The document will be published on this website: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/ecvet\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/ecvet_en.htm)

## 2 Context

*The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (‘ECVET’) is intended to facilitate the transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes of individuals who are aiming to achieve a qualification. This will improve the general understanding of citizens’ learning outcomes and their transparency, transnational mobility and portability across and, where appropriate, within Member States in a borderless lifelong learning area, and will also improve the mobility and portability of qualifications at the national level between various sectors of the economy and within the labour market.*

Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council (ECVET Recommendation)<sup>4</sup>

The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) was developed to enable people to build on what they have learnt in the past when wishing to achieve a qualification. Competent authorities may decide to use ECVET to give people the opportunities to get recognition for learning outcomes they achieved abroad, but also for learning outcomes achieved through learning in another institution or system within the same country or those acquired by experience. Such situations are discussed in this note. The technical specifications that are core to ECVET enable transfer of credit (meaning positively assessed learning outcomes) across countries, but also across institutions within a country or across qualifications systems. The ECVET technical specifications are schematically summarised in Figure 1 and are described in greater detail in the ECVET guide: *Get to know ECVET better: Questions and Answers*<sup>5</sup>.

Credit transfer and accumulation for transnational mobility of learners in initial VET is one possible way of using ECVET. Competent authorities governing qualifications systems may also wish to use the ECVET technical specifications to enable people to gain recognition for learning accumulated in a lifelong learning perspective. The use of ECVET for lifelong learning always depends on the rules and practices in the qualifications system concerned.

This note presents the possibilities of how ECVET could be used to support the recognition of learning outcomes in a lifelong learning perspective.

**The fact that ECVET can be used for several purposes, as shown in this note, does not mean that to implement ECVET competent authorities need to enable its use for all the different situations discussed.**

Depending on the national/system-level priorities, competent authorities may wish to implement ECVET for transnational mobility only or to focus on one or several ways of using ECVET in the perspective of lifelong learning.

ECVET is one of several instruments and mechanisms that can support recognition of learning outcomes and thus support lifelong learning. To enable recognition of learning outcomes, ECVET can complement and be complemented by:

- The development of qualifications frameworks;
- The use of approaches for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning;
- The use of a credit system (ECTS) in higher education;
- The Europass documents that record an individual’s qualifications, credit and learning outcomes.

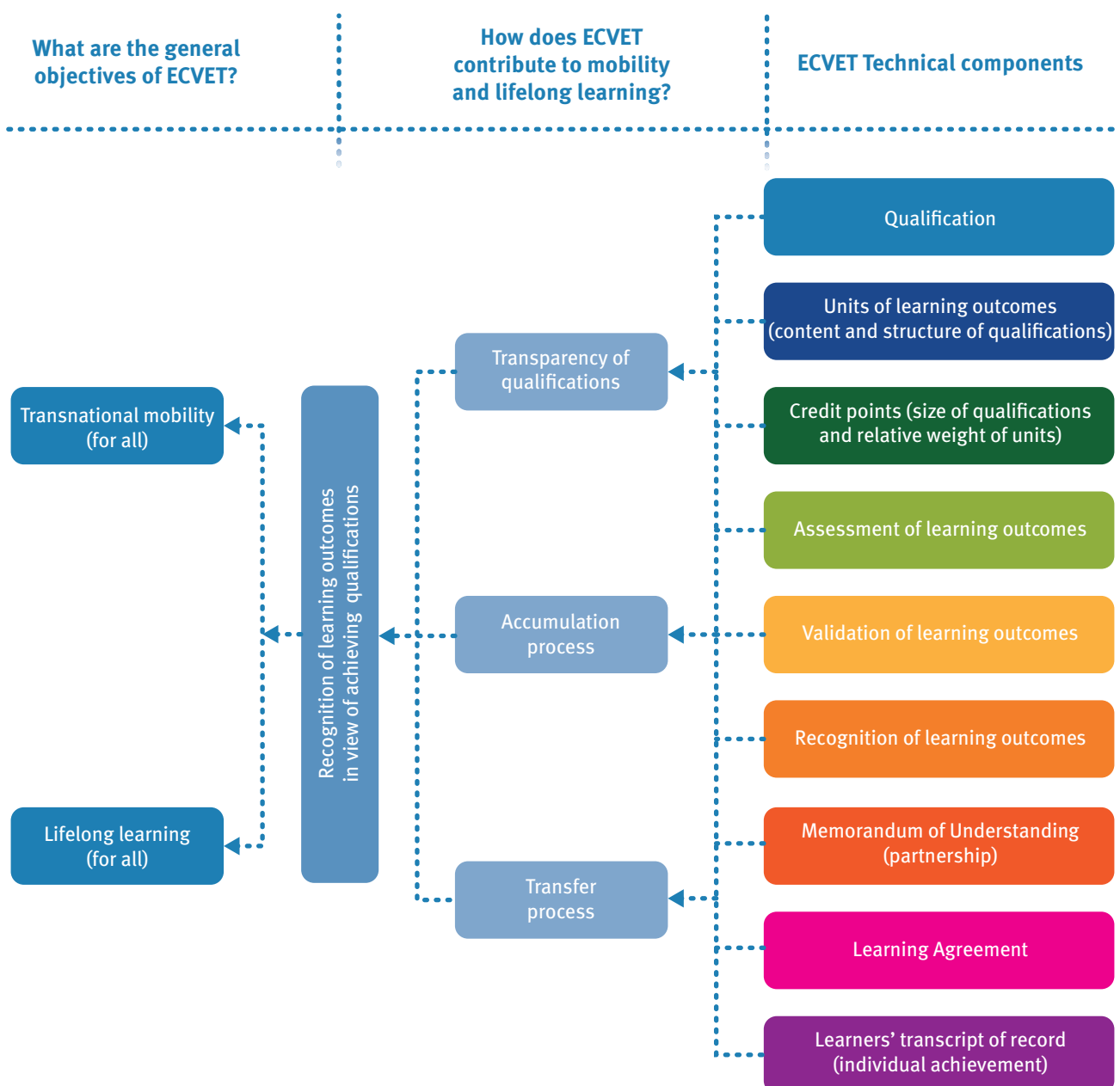
<sup>4</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0011:0018:EN:PDF>

<sup>5</sup> This document endorsed by the ECVET Users Group can be downloaded here: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ecvet/faq\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ecvet/faq_en.pdf)

The strengthening of quality assurance in education and training can also contribute to the improvement of individualised learning paths. Quality assurance is a transversal element that concerns all the above mentioned instruments as well as ECVET. To use ECVET to support the opportunities for learners to accumulate learning outcomes in a lifelong learning perspective, quality assurance measures should underpin all the components and processes related to ECVET: from the identification of units of learning outcomes and their description, through the learning process until assessment, validation and recognition.

The ECVET technical specifications facilitate communication between stakeholders concerned and the exchange of information about what learners have achieved in view of validation and recognition of their learning outcomes. The technical specifications contribute to the development of a common language shared by these VET stakeholders. However, ECVET also requires the existence of trust between competent institutions at national as well as European level. Therefore, the use of ECVET needs to be underpinned by partnerships and communities of practice. These can be national if the objective is to support lifelong learning within a country or transnational if the aim is to support mobility and lifelong learning across countries.

**Figure 1 | ECVET objectives and its technical specifications (components)**





## 3 Why is ECVET relevant for lifelong learning policies

*This Recommendation therefore contributes to the wider objectives of promoting lifelong learning and increasing the employability, openness to mobility and social inclusion of workers and learners. It particularly facilitates the development of flexible and individualised pathways and also the recognition of those learning outcomes which are acquired through non-formal and informal learning.*

### 3.1 Why use ECVET to support lifelong learning?

In the context of economic restructuring, where certain sectors are declining and laying off staff while others have difficulties in recruiting adequately qualified staff, there is a need for a flexible workforce. People are expected to have the aptitude but also the opportunities to continue learning and develop new knowledge, skills and competence. Given the demographic pressure in Europe, there is a strong need for improving employment rates and ensuring that the human and social capital of people in Europe is used to its best.

Lifelong learning is expected to facilitate individuals' transition between different employment positions, companies or sectors, but also the transition from unemployment or inactivity into employment. It is also seen as a means to improve the matching between labour market demand and supply. Finally, it is an instrument to support social inclusion in a context where achievement of a certain qualification level has become the minimum requirement for the majority of stable and 'decent' jobs.

ECVET is a tool that can assist lifelong learning by improving transfer, recognition and accumulation of what has been learnt in the past. It can ease the development of individualised lifelong learning paths which enable people to gain knowledge, skills and competence and ultimately also a qualification progressively and building on what they learnt previously.

This note presents some hypothetical examples of how ECVET can contribute to these broader goals.

### 3.2 What ECVET characteristics facilitate lifelong learning?

As presented in the *ECVET Recommendation*, ECVET combines several technical components and processes into a methodological framework that forms the ECVET technical specifications.

The core element of ECVET technical specifications is the use of **learning outcomes**. Learning outcomes describe what a person knows and is able to do and therefore they are neutral to how, in which context and over what duration individuals' have developed their knowledge, skills and competence. They make it possible to recognise learning in view of achieving a qualification independent of where the learning took place and over what duration.

Another core aspect of ECVET technical specifications is the use of **units of learning outcomes (units)**. The use of units creates the possibility to recognise learning outcomes that correspond to a part of a qualification and to achieve the remaining learning outcomes through further learning.

The assessment, validation and recognition of units enable **credit transfer and accumulation**. This may help competent institutions to develop approaches whereby learners can build on the knowledge, skills and competence they have achieved in the past, be it in formal education and training, non-formal learning, through working, leisure activities or any other learning, in order to gain a qualification. The *ECVET Questions and Answers* document, defines credit transfer and accumulation as follows:

- **Credit transfer** is a process through which learning outcomes achieved in one context can be taken into account in another context. Credit transfer is based on the processes of assessment, validation and recognition.
- **Credit accumulation** is a process through which learners can acquire qualifications progressively by successive assessments of learning outcomes.

The processes of credit transfer and accumulation can be used within a predefined education and training pathway, but they can also be used to facilitate transitions as part of individuals' learning paths. The Cedefop glossary<sup>6</sup> makes the following distinction between education and training path and pathway:

- The education and training path is the sum of learning sequences followed by an individual to acquire knowledge, skills and competence;
- The pathway is a set of related education and training programmes provided by schools, training centres, higher education institutions or VET providers that facilitate individuals' progression within or between sectors.

Paths and pathways are different concepts: the former is the result of an individual's choice and the latter concerns the institutional set up and predefined linkages. This note concerns more specifically the use of ECVET for individuals' paths, even though some examples also refer to predefined pathways.

The use of ECVET is expected to be facilitated by the development of **partnerships**. Partnerships can have different objectives. Some may aim at improving geographical mobility of learners (for example partnerships among training centres in different countries), others at strengthening the possibilities for lifelong learning (for example, partnerships between providers of VET and providers of adult learning, or partnerships between VET providers and higher education institutions). Partnerships may be formalised through a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)**, though in situations where other forms of agreements (explicit or implicit) exist, such formalisation may not be necessary. Setting up MoUs for lifelong learning may be particularly useful for situations where it is expected/ desired that the pathway created by credit transfer and accumulation will be used by a larger number of learners so as to avoid each case needing to be examined on an individual basis.

The documentation of what qualifications and credit (positively assessed learning outcomes) a person has achieved over the lifetime, in form of a **learner's transcript**, serves as evidence to enable validation and recognition in another education institution, sub-system or sector.

All these characteristics make it easier for a person to gain recognition for their learning progressively and independent of where they have acquired their knowledge, skills and competence.

### 3.3 In what manner can ECVET be used for lifelong learning?

The life trajectories of individuals are varied and people have different needs in terms of learning, recognition of learning outcomes and qualifications, depending on their situations and paths. The idea behind credit systems is that once people have achieved specified learning outcomes, these remain an *acquis* over a certain period of time. Asking people to undertake learning leading to the same outcomes would be a waste of their time and resources with possible negative impacts on their motivation. This is why credit can be transferred and accumulated to achieve a qualification. The situations where credit transfer and accumulation can be useful are varied, for example:

- Adults may want to upgrade their qualifications or achieve an additional qualification without having the possibility to attend a full-time training programme because of their work or other commitments. They may wish to achieve the qualification by obtaining one unit after another and accumulating the units using ECVET in view of gaining the full qualification;

<sup>6</sup> (Cedefop 2008. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/13125.aspx>)

- People who are already qualified may wish to or need to achieve another qualification which shares some learning outcomes with the qualification that they already hold. The credit from the qualification that they already hold could be transferred using ECVET and the education and training programme that they need to undergo could be shortened;
- Young people who have dropped out of education and training and who wish to return after one or two years could use ECVET to be able to build on the units of learning outcomes they have achieved in the past without having to go through the whole programme from the beginning;
- People who have been exercising a profession without having the related qualification may want to achieve such a qualification to progress in their career or for other reasons. They may have achieved a number of relevant learning outcomes through informal learning which could be validated and recognised and the person would achieve some of the units of the qualification. The person could achieve the remaining units of the qualification through formal learning and accumulate credit, using ECVET, to get the full qualification.

Overall, five situations can be distinguished in how ECVET can be used in a lifelong learning perspective:

1. **Progressively accumulating learning:** Accumulating credit progressively over time with possible disruptions in the learning path, but preparing for a single qualification (no change of pathway);
2. **Changing the pathway and qualification within the same qualification system:** Transferring and accumulating credit within the same qualification system and at the same level, from one qualification and pathway to another (for example, from a qualification in one economic sector to a qualification in a related economic sector);
3. **Changing the pathway and qualification from one system to another:** Transferring and accumulating credit at the same level from one education or qualification sector to another (for example, from a more narrow continuing VET qualification achieved through a public employment training programme towards a broader initial VET qualification that gives the person more opportunities);
4. **Formalising achieved learning outcomes:** Validating and recognising learning outcomes achieved in non-formal or informal learning towards a qualification in a formal qualifications system;
5. **Progressing or upgrading a qualification:** Transferring and accumulating credit from a qualification at one level towards a qualification at another level (for example, from a post-secondary VET qualification towards a qualification in the same field in higher education).

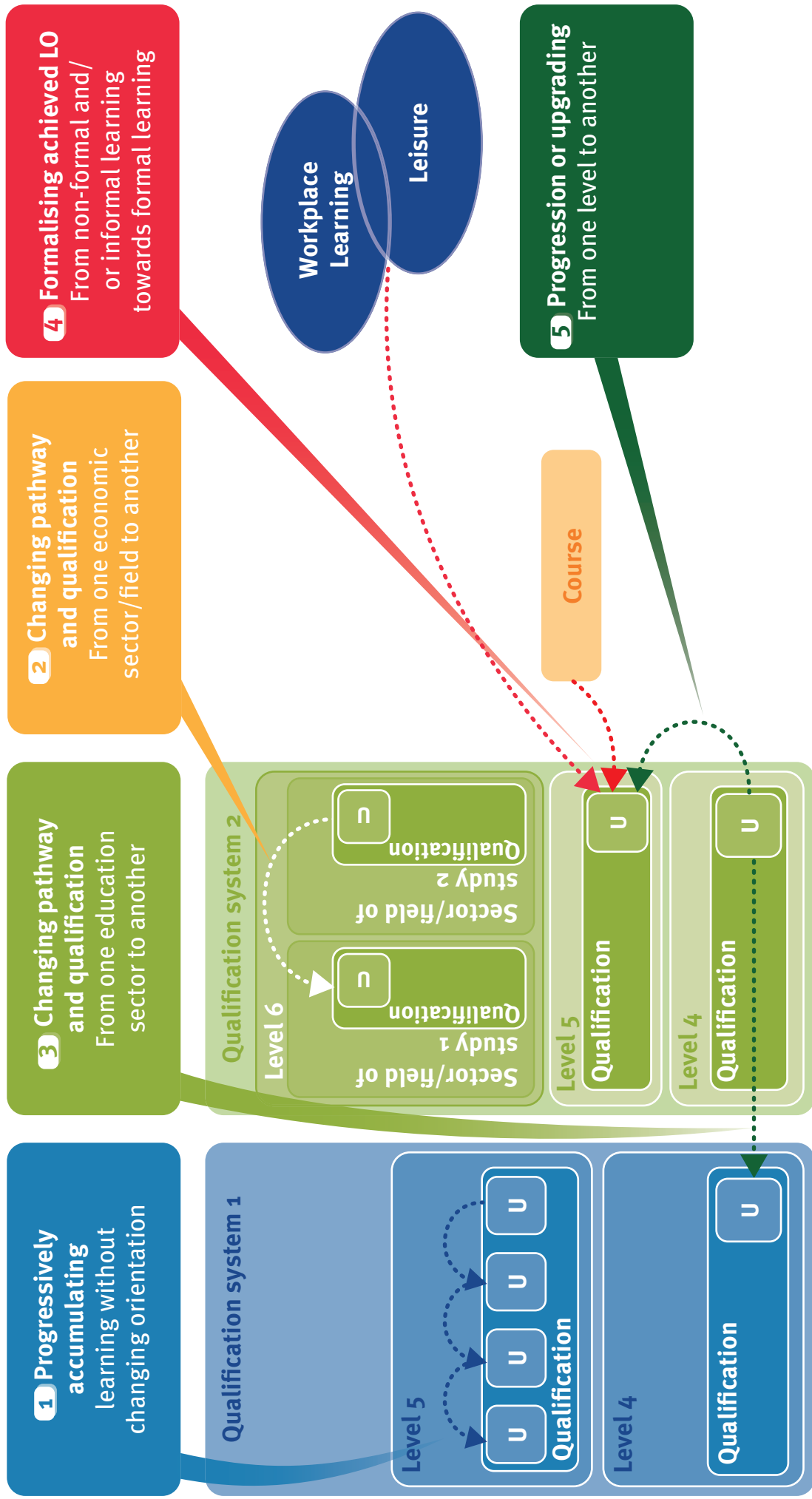
These five situations are illustrated in Figure 2.

The rest of this note presents these five situations through hypothetical examples of possible learning paths. Each hypothetical example illustrates the way ECVET could be used in situations where better recognition of learning outcomes could support lifelong learning and facilitate the learning path of individuals.

As already said, competent authorities may decide to use ECVET for some forms of transitions only. This will depend on the main issues faced by their education and training systems and also on what other instruments they already have in place to support lifelong learning.

Figure 2 – Using ECVET to achieve a qualification in a lifelong learning perspective: five situations summarised

Legend: LO - Learning Outcomes; Q - Qualification; U - Unit Of Learning Outcomes



Formal Learning

Non-formal and/or Informal Learning

Note: All examples in the upcoming sections of this note are hypothetical. The main features of these examples are inspired by what is already possible in some EU countries. However, the detailed descriptions in the examples are not based on real-life cases.

## 4 (Non-)Formal learning while working using ECVET

*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 Recommendation

Given the pace of the evolution of requirements for many professions, there is an increasing need for professionals to update and upgrade their knowledge, skills and competence over their lifetime<sup>7</sup>. This may lead to the achievement of a new or additional qualification. However, many adult learners face very practical barriers when it comes to taking part in formal education and training. Those who have for instance, employment or family commitments, may find it difficult to take part in a full-time training programme. It is therefore necessary to put in place education and training provision that gives the opportunity to achieve qualifications progressively.

### 4.1 How could ECVET support participation in (non-)formal training while working?

**Progressively accumulating learning without changing orientation**

**Qualification System (e.g. CVET)**

**Level 4**

**Unit 7**

**Unit 2**

**Unit 1**

**Level 3**

**F o r m a l L e a r n i n g**

ECVET uses the concept of units, which group learning outcomes into sets that are smaller than the full qualification. Competent authorities may decide to structure their qualifications in units and give learners the possibility to achieve units one by one and to achieve the full qualification following the accumulation of units. In some cases, the award of the qualification may follow automatically once all units have been achieved. In others, the competent authorities may wish to condition the award of the qualification with a requirement that students must successfully pass a final assessment that would indicate that they are capable of combining the knowledge, skills and competence from all units in view of a more complex product or project.

The training providers preparing adult learners may use the different units as a basis for structuring their education and training provision. Each unit would be assessed and recorded in a learner's transcript which documents what the person has achieved.

This organisation can lead to the development of less constraining education and training pathways. Adults who are at the same time working and/or caring for their family could spread the normal duration of the training programme over a longer period by first attending the learning activities leading to one unit, achieving the unit and then moving towards those learning activities for another unit. This way, they could combine education and training with working life while at the same time being able to receive a formal recognition in the form of a qualification for the learning outcomes achieved.

<sup>7</sup> See the results of Cedefop skills supply and demand in Europe up to 2020, [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3052\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3052_en.pdf)

## 4.2 Hypothetical example of a learning pathway where an adult would combine learning and working

<b>Context</b>	<p>Peter has been working in the construction sector for several years and he is qualified for the profession of a construction worker. He has been working as a bricklayer.</p> <p>He now wishes to change his career and become self-employed, which is difficult in his current profession. Though he wishes to remain working in the construction sector, he would like to change orientation and to be working with wood.</p> <p>Therefore, he desires to attain the knowledge, skills and competence needed for the profession of woodworker, but also obtain the qualification linked to this profession.</p> <p>With the help of the public employment service, Peter has identified a training provider in his town that provides flexible programmes leading to this qualification.</p>
<b>The qualification and the learning path</b>	<p>This qualification is at a higher level than the one he currently holds. Peter discusses his future learning plans with a guidance counsellor. The counsellor identifies that the vast majority of learning outcomes that are required for the qualification that Peter wishes to achieve, are new for him. Therefore, he needs to take part in the full education and training programme to achieve all the learning outcomes required. It is not possible to recognise credit from his previous qualification.</p> <p>The full-time programme for adult learners that prepares individuals for the given qualification takes one and a half years. Peter cannot afford to stop working as he needs the revenue from his employment. However, it is possible in his country for him to take paid training leave for one day a week over the duration of two years. Peter can then spend one full day taking part in a formal education and training programme and he can also dedicate some time to learning in the evenings and weekends.</p>
<b>ECVET in this context</b>	<p>The qualification that Peter wants to achieve is based on the ECVET technical specifications. This means that it is divided into units and these units can be achieved progressively. Each unit is assessed separately and when the person achieves all the units, they need to design and execute a project in woodwork which serves as a final examination.</p> <p>Because of this unit-based structure, it is possible to organise the pathway in a way that enables learners like Peter, to progressively accumulate learning outcomes.</p> <p>Peter starts by taking part in learning activities that lead to one of the units of the qualification. These activities can be concentrated in one day of training, provided that Peter has the time to do some additional theoretical learning in the evening.</p> <p>Once achieved, every unit is recorded in his transcript which documents his progression. Peter as well as the VET provider know exactly what Peter has already achieved and what remains to be achieved. Peter could use this transcript in case he needs to change the education and training provider (for example, because of moving to another town).</p> <p>Over the period of two years, Peter takes part in the necessary learning activities and the required assessment and he progressively achieves all the required units of learning outcomes. When Peter has achieved all the units he still needs to do a final assessment that consists of designing and executing a product in woodwork. He completes this final part of his learning path at weekends. The final product as well as the record about the achievement of units of learning outcomes is evaluated by an examination jury that deliberates on the award of the qualification.</p> <p>At the end of this process, Peter has learnt all he needs to carry out the profession of woodworker and he also holds the qualification related to this profession. He can now set himself up as an entrepreneur in this area.</p>

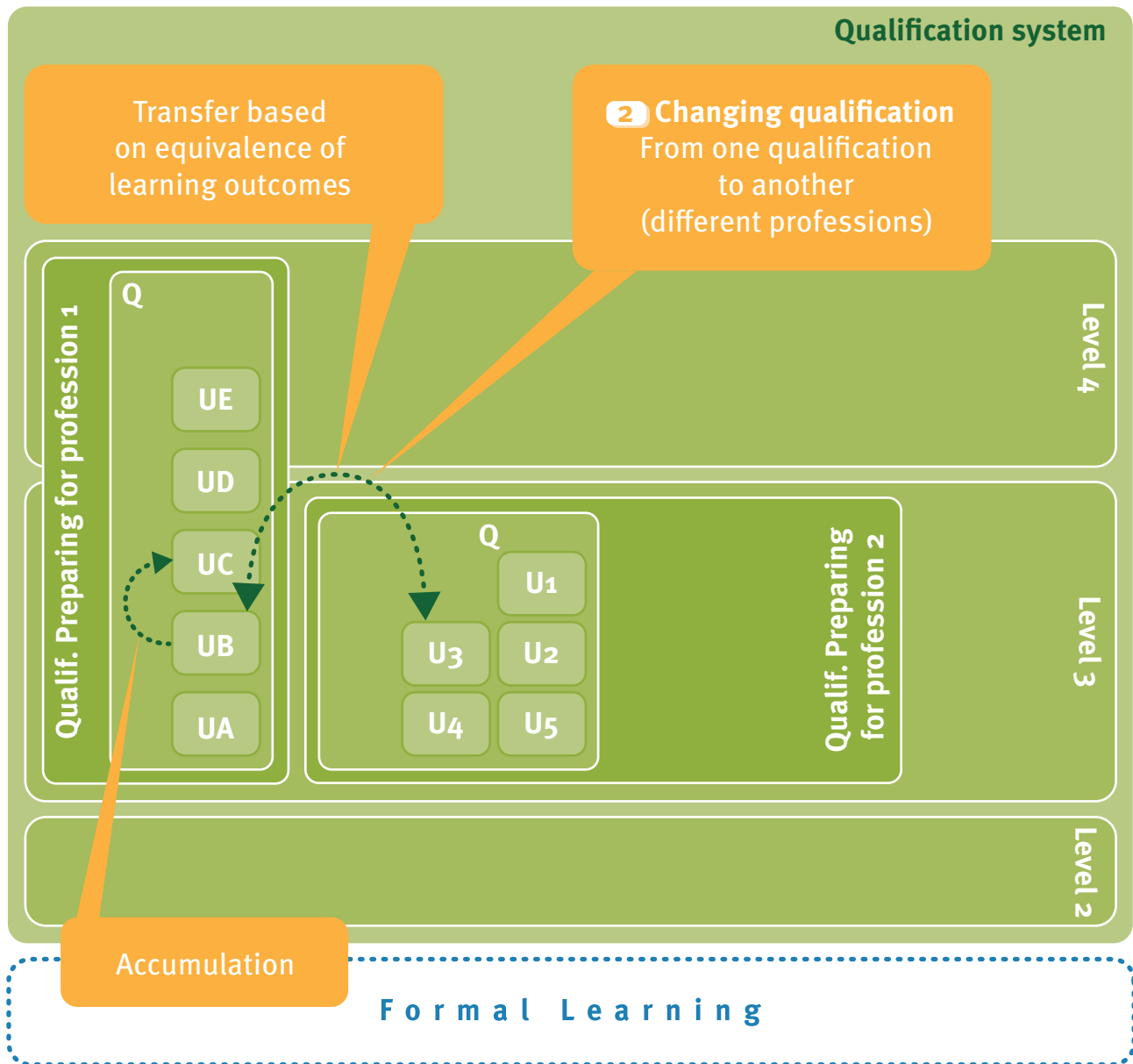
# 5 ECVET and learners' change of pathways

*The Recommendation therefore contributes to the wider objectives of promoting lifelong learning and increasing the employability, openness to mobility and social inclusion of workers and learners.*

ECVET Recommendation

There is still a large number of young people in Europe who leave education and training without holding any labour market related qualifications. It is currently estimated that more than one third of young people aged 15 to 24 are not in education, employment or training<sup>8</sup>. If they find employment, often they will only be able to take up unqualified jobs which correlate with a greater risk of unemployment. Providing these young people with suitable learning opportunities which will prepare them for a qualification and a profession and hence give them a chance for successful labour market integration, is high on the political agendas of many European countries. After leaving compulsory education, many of these young people have already undertaken some vocational education and training, but they have dropped out at a certain point in time.

## 5.1 How can ECVET support the transition from one education and training pathway to another



8 EU Youth Report 2009 [http://ec.europa.eu/youth/pub/pdf/eu-youth-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/youth/pub/pdf/eu-youth-report_en.pdf)

The use of ECVET can have a role to play in preventing young people from dropping out of education and training as well as bringing young people back into education and training:

- Use of ECVET in preventive measures: sometimes young people are at risk of dropping out, among other things, because the pathway that they follow is not adapted to their learning styles or aspirations. Reorientation towards a more adapted education and training programme can be part of the solution to prevent dropping out. However, if the person is already advanced in his/her pathway, having to start from the beginning might have a contrary effect and lead to further de-motivation. ECVET could be used to enable recognition of at least part of the credit (assessed learning outcomes) achieved in the past so that the learner does not have to start everything from zero again.
- Use of ECVET in curative measures: when young people who have dropped out for some time from education and training return, they could also gain credit recognition for what they have learnt while in formal education and training; this could be combined with recognition for what they have learnt while working, if that was the case. Like above, the idea is to avoid the possibly de-motivating effect of having to start everything from the beginning while the person already has the relevant knowledge, skills and competence.

The competent authorities in charge of the qualifications system can decide to use ECVET to develop links and equivalences between units of different qualifications. Different qualifications can also contain common units (the same unit can be found in different qualifications<sup>9</sup>). It is possible that the relative weight of these units, as expressed in terms of ECVET points, is the same when the unit is common to several qualifications. However, depending on the system rules on the allocation of credit points, it is also possible that the relative weight would differ from one qualification to another even if the unit is the same<sup>10</sup>.

## 5.2 Hypothetical example of how ECVET could be used to support transitions across pathways

<b>Context</b>	<p>Jose has started an education and training programme to become a chef. This is a programme that normally takes three years to complete. However, while he is in the second year of training, he wants to start working. Due to changes in his family life, he needs to become financially autonomous and to work full time. He has an opportunity to take on a job in a restaurant in his town and to work as a handyman. He wishes to quit his training centre without completing the qualification he initially wanted to achieve.</p> <p>Jose is at risk of dropping out.</p>
<b>The solution</b>	<p>The training centre where Jose is learning also prepares young people for another qualification in the catering industry. This is a qualification at a lower level than that of a chef and it prepares mainly for the profession of commis-chef.</p> <p>The trainer advises Jose to change his training pathway. Jose could gain credit recognition for the units of learning outcomes he has already achieved during his nearly two years of education and training.</p>

<sup>9</sup> For more information please refer to the explanation and the examples on the use of common units in the document: *Get to Know ECVET Better: Questions and Answers*.

<sup>10</sup> See the document: *Get to Know ECVET Better: Questions and Answers*, on different modes of allocation of ECVET points.



## ECVET and transition of education and training pathway

The competent authority which governs both qualifications concerned uses ECVET to define qualifications. The qualification preparing for a chef and the qualification preparing for a commis-chef are not at the same level, but they have the same entry conditions (in other words, regardless of which qualification they are preparing for, students enter one or the other pathway at the same level of learning – after the completion of compulsory general education). The typical duration of programmes differs: the programme preparing chefs typically lasts three years (180 ECVET points) and the programme preparing commis-chefs typically lasts two years (120 ECVET points). The two qualifications have a number of common units and each also has units specific to the given profession.

Based on a review of Jose's transcript, Jose is able to receive recognition for 7 units (these are described using 100 ECVET points) in view of the qualification of commis-chef. He needs to achieve 2 more units (which correspond to 10 ECVET points). This can be completed over several months while he is working. He also needs to pass a final assessment for the qualification of commis-chef (this also corresponds to 10 ECVET points), in which he succeeds.

As a result, Jose leaves the education and training system as a qualified commis-chef. If he wishes and has the possibility to upgrade his qualification in the future, he can do so and part of the credit for the qualification of commis-chef will be recognised. He will only need to achieve those units that are not part of the qualification that he already holds.

## 6 ECVET to facilitate updating workers' qualifications

*This Recommendation therefore contributes to the wider objectives of promoting lifelong learning and increasing the employability, openness to mobility and social inclusion of workers and learners.*

ECVET Recommendation

Qualifications in vocational education and training are related to one or a set of professions. Though those designing qualifications can try to predict what given profession(s) will entail in the near future, it is impossible to plan into the extended future. Some professions evolve radically over a period of ten years for example, while others may be disappearing. There is therefore a constant need to update the qualifications of employees and in some cases, when a sector goes through a decline, there may be a need to fully change the qualifications of groups of individuals in order for them to be able to reintegrate into new professions. ECVET can support such changes by making it easier to recognise the parts of qualifications (units of learning outcomes) that the individual(s) hold(s) towards the qualification to be acquired.

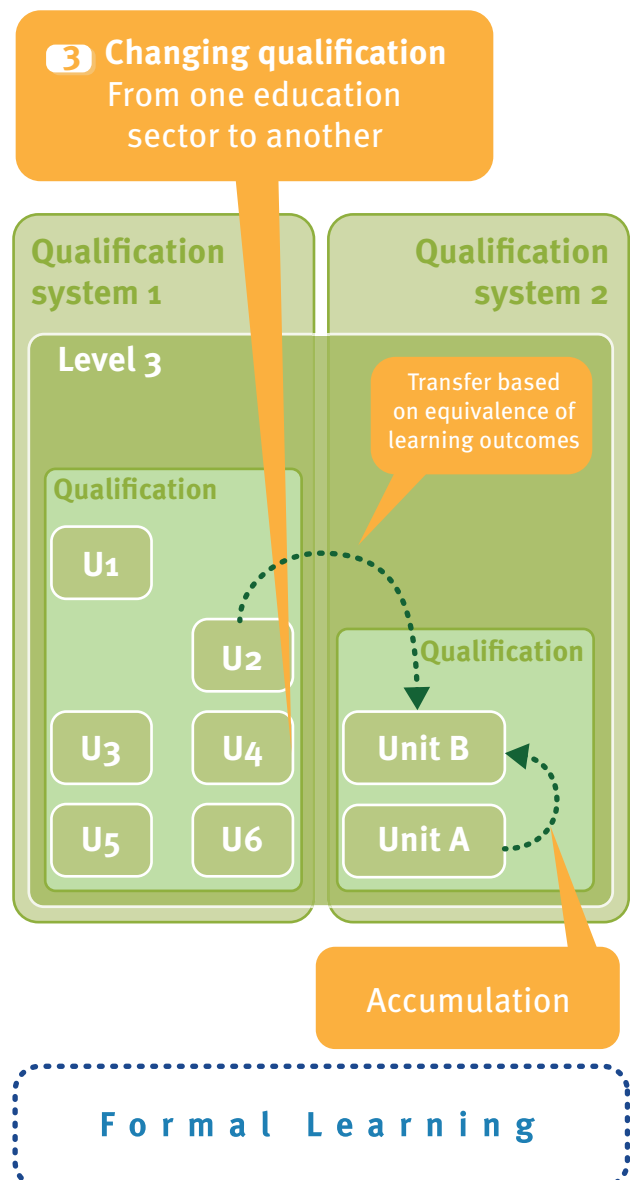
### 6.1 How could ECVET assist with requalification?

The units of learning outcomes could be used by competent institutions to develop links between qualifications. While each profession or group of professions requires knowledge, skills and competence that are specific to the tasks of professionals in the given field, there are also often learning outcomes which are shared with other professions (for example, with other professions in the same sector or even beyond).

It is therefore possible for competent institutions to identify overlap or equivalence between units of learning outcomes of different qualifications. Competent institutions may<sup>11</sup>:

- Use the concept of common units, whereby one unit can be found in several qualifications;
- Establish equivalence between units whereby the learning outcomes of the two units may not be exactly the same, but are considered to be equivalent and the competent institution will recognise them as such (without additional learning or evidence of achievement).

By using ECVET, it can therefore be possible to shorten the process of achieving a new qualification for people who already hold relevant qualifications by asking them to only undergo learning for units that concern learning outcomes they have not yet achieved.



<sup>11</sup> See the explanation on the type of units in: *Get to Know ECVET Better: Questions and Answers*.

## 6.2 Hypothetical example of a learning pathway where ECVET could facilitate gaining a new qualification

<b>Context</b>	<p>The paper production industry in a given region is declining and one of the paper production plants is closing down leaving qualified and skilled workers without employment.</p> <p>In the same region a paper recycling plant is being set up and looking to employ qualified workers. In order to maintain its ecological quality label this recycling company has a policy of employing staff with a qualification of the recycling industry branch.</p> <p>However, the workers who have been working in paper production and have qualifications related to the paper production sector have a large part of the required knowledge, skills and competences and the company is very interested in hiring some of these workers.</p>
<b>The solution</b>	<p>The qualification required by the recycling company is awarded by a sectoral organisation which is in charge of the training as well as the certification.</p> <p>The recycling company in question approaches the sectoral organisation and asks it to examine whether the workers who have qualifications in paper production could receive equivalence for some of the units of the qualification in the recycling sector.</p>
<b>Requalification and ECVET</b>	<p>The qualification of the recycling industry is designed using the ECVET technical specifications. It is based on units of learning outcomes and the units can be accumulated. The training centres provide the required training and carry out learners' assessment in the framework of rules defined by the sectoral body. The sectoral organisation conducts the validation and recognition procedure for the assessed units of learning outcomes.</p> <p>Using the learning outcomes description of all units of both qualifications (the one in the recycling sector and the one held by the workers from paper production), the sectoral organisation analyses both qualification standards. They identify commonalities in learning outcomes and significant overlap for part of the units of learning outcomes. The recycling sector organisation also trusts the quality of the assessment and validation process used for the award of the qualification in the paper industry.</p> <p>The sectoral organisation therefore establishes equivalence between some units of the qualification the workers already hold and several units required for the qualification in the recycling sector.</p> <p>The workers' credit for the learning outcomes they have already achieved is transferred towards the requirements of the new qualification.</p> <p>As a result, the workers have to undergo the training for a smaller number of units which are very specific to the recycling industry. They accumulate the credit for the transferred units of learning outcomes and credit for newly achieved units of learning outcomes.</p> <p>The sectoral organisation establishes a possible pathway between a qualification it awards and a qualification awarded by another competent authority. The sectoral organisation wishes to formalise this pathway and therefore develops a partnership with the other competent authority. The rules of the partnership, including the conditions under which credit can be transferred from one qualification to another, are explicitly formulated in a MoU. The pathway between qualifications that is developed in this manner remains valid and could be used by other persons in the future.</p>

## 7 ECVET and validation of non-formal and informal learning

*A learner can achieve a qualification by accumulating the required units, achieved in different countries and different contexts (formal and, where appropriate, non-formal and informal).*

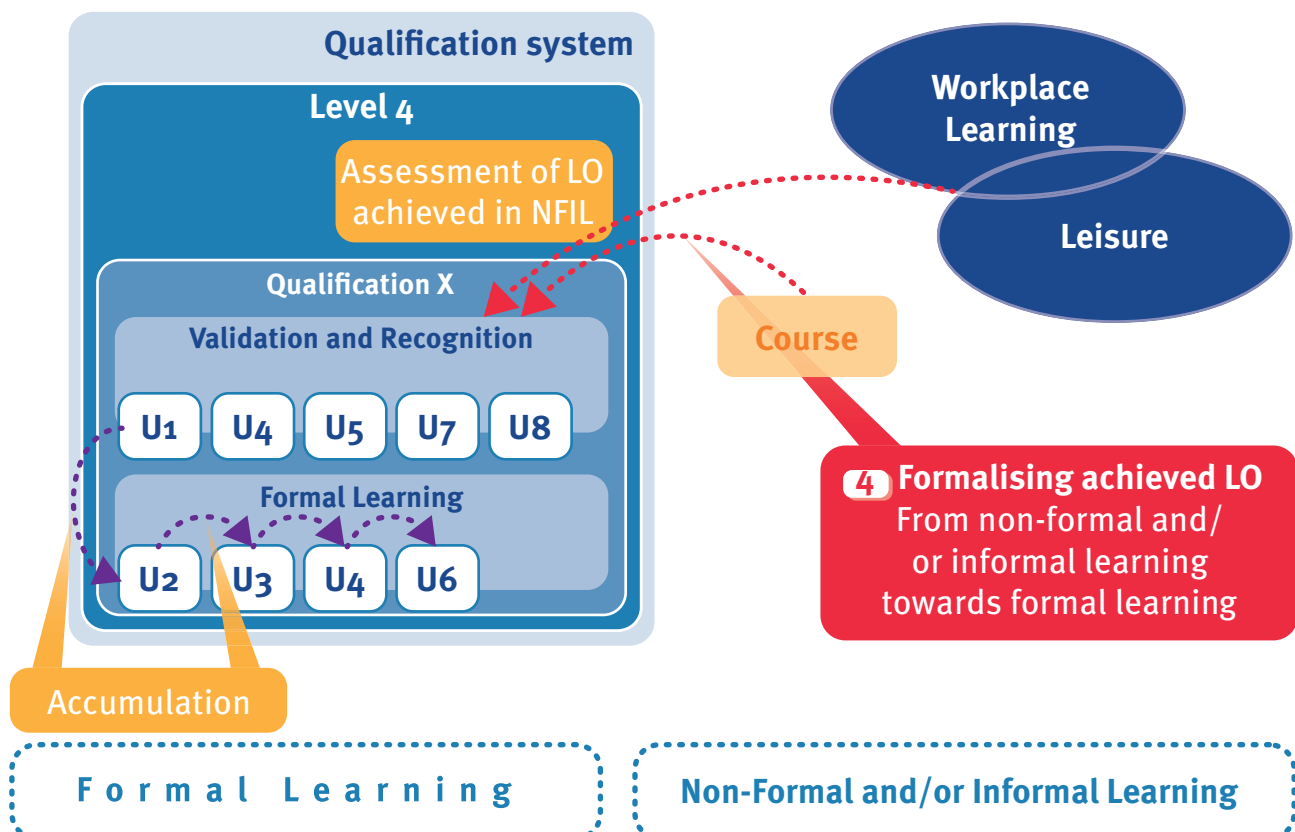
ECVET Recommendation

The validation of non-formal and informal learning enables individuals to receive recognition for what they have learnt through professional activities, volunteering or leisure activities or any other learning. Validation is developing in European countries and it is used in many different contexts as demonstrated in the 2010 update of the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning<sup>12</sup>.

Validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning can take many forms, from acknowledgement of one's competences by an employer (appraisal or job offer), through guaranteeing access to a training programme or an exemption from part of the programme to the award of a (full or partial) qualification<sup>13</sup>. The process of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning is typically based on<sup>14</sup>:

- The existence of a standard that describes the expected knowledge, skills and competence of a person (this can be a job description, the qualifications standard, or the learning outcomes description of a unit);
- A process by which the individuals' learning outcomes are identified and compared to the standard: i.e. assessment and validation.

### 7.1 How can ECVET technical specifications support the validation of non-formal and informal learning?



<sup>12</sup> <http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2011/77643.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> See Cedefop (2009): *European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning*.

<sup>14</sup> Idem

Competent institutions may decide to use ECVET to support the validation of non-formal and informal learning. If this is the case, the following aspects of ECVET can facilitate the process:

- ECVET is based on the use of units of learning outcomes. The learning outcomes of a unit represent a ‘standard’ against which a person’s knowledge, skills and competence is assessed (see above). The use of units creates the possibility to recognise learning outcomes for parts of qualifications and to give people the possibility to achieve the remaining units of learning outcomes through formal learning;
- ECVET uses the distinction between the processes of assessment, validation and recognition. The assessment process identifies the learning outcomes achieved independent of the process through which they have been acquired. These learning outcomes are then validated based on the unit learning outcomes descriptions and then recognised;
- ECVET documents the learning outcomes a person has acquired;
- When using ECVET, VET providers and competent institutions are expected to develop quality assured approaches to assessment, validation and recognition.

ECVET could therefore support partial or full validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in view of achieving qualifications (i.e. through the award or units). It can also help the mainstreaming of the use of a quality assured processes of assessment, validation and recognition.

## 7.2 Hypothetical example of a learning path that would combine ECVET and validation of non-formal and informal learning

<b>The context</b>	<p>Susanne has an upper-secondary leaving qualification in general education. She left her post-secondary studies only after a few months because she was pregnant. When she was taking care of her son she was not able to pursue her studies and needed to find employment.</p> <p>After her maternity leave she started to work as an assistant in a small company.</p>
<b>Informal learning</b>	<p>She was first in charge of simple administrative tasks such as filing, archiving, recording information in appropriate sheets, booking travel for the company staff, etc. Later, she worked alongside the office coordinator whom she was supporting. The office coordinator progressively involved Suzanne in more complex tasks.</p>
<b>Non-formal learning</b>	<p>After three years of work in this company, the main office coordinator decided to leave and the company was keen on promoting Suzanne to this position. However, to perform this job, she needed to upgrade some of her knowledge and skills about aspects of human resources tasks (such as payroll) which the office coordinator was also in charge of.</p> <p>The company therefore paid for a short two month (part-time) course for Suzanne in the area of human resources. This involved developing her knowledge about the legal context of enterprises in her country as well as the understanding of different tasks that she was to take on in the very near future. This course was provided by a recognised provider of non-formal learning and she received a transcript for having achieved the required learning outcomes.</p> <p>She was promoted and started to work as the office coordinator. After some time she decided to gain a vocational qualification in business administration, but she was not ready to attend the programme for two years of full time study, which is the normal duration.</p>

<b>The solution</b>	<p>She talked to a guidance counsellor, who helped her to identify the qualification and the programme she was interested in. The counsellor also told her that given her path, she would certainly be able to receive recognition for at least part of the qualification.</p> <p>She sought advice with a VET provider who indeed confirmed that she would certainly be able to receive recognition for some of the qualification units. To do that, she had to complete a dossier, including evidence about her past employment, the tasks she performed and the non-formal learning she undertook.</p> <p>Based on the evidence provided and following an in-depth discussion with Suzanne about the work she used to perform, the counsellor in the VET provider institution identified the parts of the qualification that she should be able to receive recognition for.</p>
<b>ECVET and validation of NFIL</b>	<p>The qualification Suzanne wanted to achieve was designed based on ECVET, using units of learning outcomes and achievable through the accumulation of credit.</p> <p>The qualification was composed of seven main units. One of the units concerns learning outcomes achieved during practical experience. Suzanne had evidence that she has worked in the field relevant for the qualification for several years and she received recognition for this unit based on this evidence.</p> <p>Of the seven units, one was about the administrative management of human resources. The course that Suzanne has passed several years ago was preparing for the required knowledge, skills and competence of this unit. The course was accredited and recognised at the national level. She also had evidence of additional short courses through which she updated her knowledge of new legal developments in this area every year. Therefore, Suzanne has achieved this unit based on the recognition of her previous non-formal learning.</p> <p>Another unit of the qualification was about using standard ICT applications. Suzanne had no evidence of non-formal learning in this area, but she has been working with a variety of applications while working. She was therefore advised to pass the assessment for that unit directly, without additional studies. She successfully did this and achieved the unit.</p> <p>Suzanne's husband is from another country and while living together, visiting his family and listening to his conversations with their son, Suzanne has achieved good basis in this language: she can read well, have a conversation and write letters. One unit of the qualification she wanted to attain concerns the mastering of a foreign language. She was also advised to pass the assessment for this unit without additional training.</p>
<b>Accumulation</b>	<p>As a result, Suzanne received recognition for three out of seven units as well as for the required practical experience based on her previous learning and work.</p> <p>To achieve the qualification she however still needed four more units. For these, she would prepare through formal learning. With help from the counsellor in the VET institution they developed a personalised education and training plan. Over the course of a year, she would attend courses on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons and work part time.</p> <p>At the end of the year she successfully passed the assessment for the remaining units. She has therefore accumulated all the units necessary as well as the working experience. She was awarded the qualification she desired and needed and was able to move forward in her career.</p>

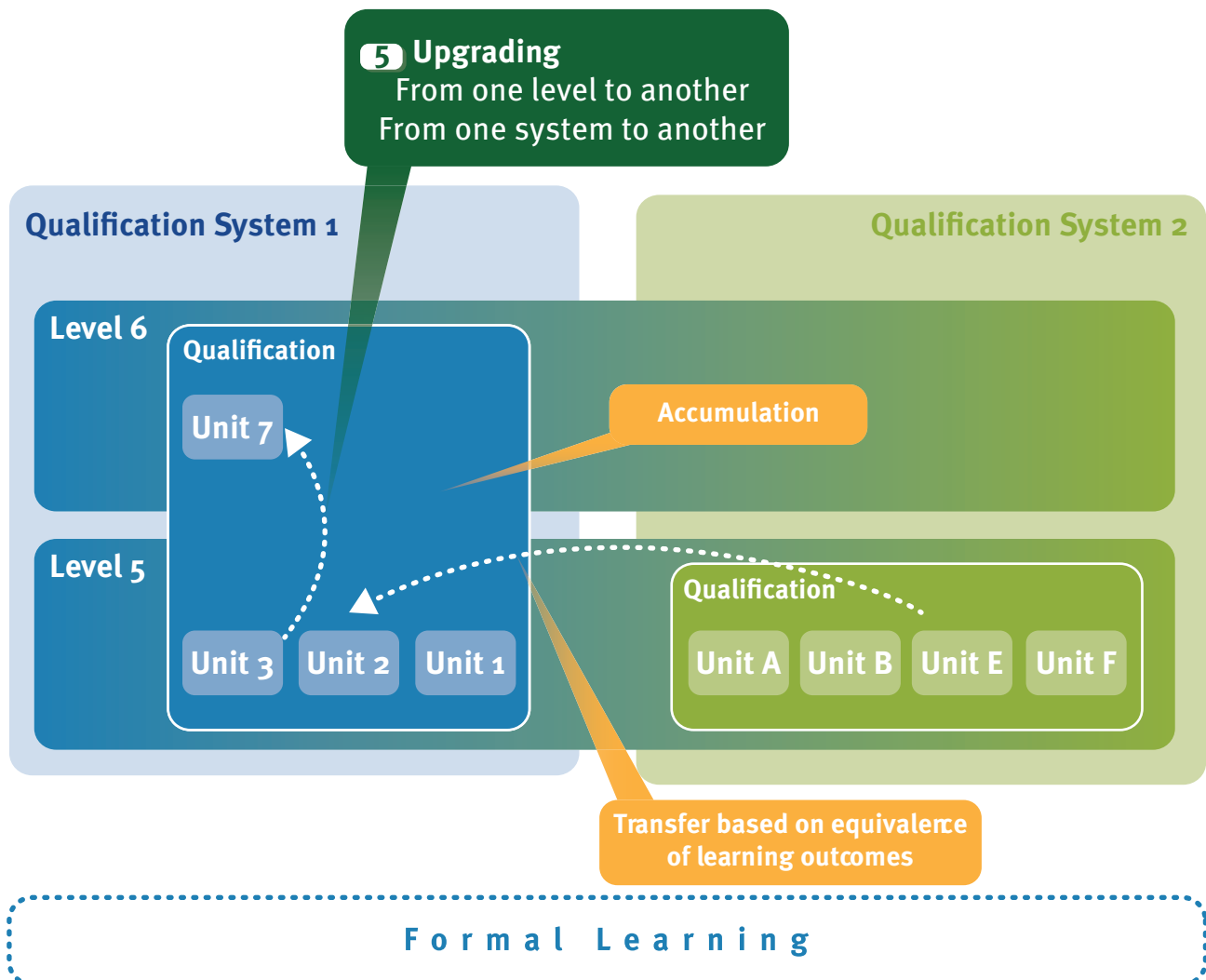
## 8 ECVET and recognition between different qualification systems and levels

*This Recommendation should facilitate the compatibility, comparability and complementarity of credit systems used in VET and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System ('ECTS'), which is used in the higher education sector, and thus should contribute to greater permeability between levels of education and training, in accordance with national legislation and practice.*

ECVET Recommendation

When an individual wants to update and upgrade their qualification, it is sometimes necessary to progress from one education and training system to another. Individuals with vocational qualifications may want to progress towards higher education and people with more academic higher education qualifications may want to achieve a vocationally oriented qualification. The qualifications that these individuals already hold may contain learning outcomes that are also required for the qualification they want to pursue. Rather than undergoing learning related to the knowledge, skills and competence that they already possess, they could have part or all of the credit they have achieved in the past recognised in view of the other qualification. This would give them access to a programme or shorten their education and training path and enable them to spend their time learning only things that are new to them.

### 8.1 How can ECVET support permeability?



The use of ECVET in vocational education and training can support recognition of credit from another education sector towards VET, but it can also improve the recognition of credit from VET to another qualification system:

- When learning outcomes are used to define qualifications in both qualifications systems, it becomes easier to identify to what extent the requirements of one qualification overlap with the requirements of another qualification;
- Thanks to the use of units (or programme components in higher education), it is possible to map the learning outcomes achieved in view of the qualification that the person already holds against the learning outcomes of the qualification that the person wishes to achieve. If there is a relationship between the units of the qualification and the structure of the learning activities (for example, use of programme components), it becomes easier to exempt the person from part of the qualification.

The development of partnerships between VET competent authorities (including providers) and competent authorities from other systems facilitates the development of enhanced access routes and progression pathways using credit transfer and accumulation.

## 8.2 Hypothetical example of the use of ECVET for permeability between VET and Higher education

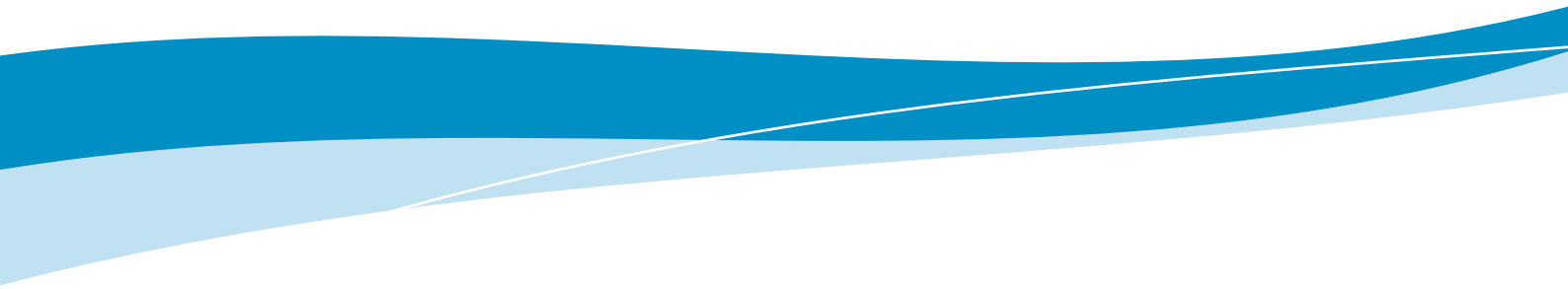
<b>Context</b>	Lucie studies chemistry in a University. She has completed two years of an academic pathway in chemistry but realises that she would prefer a more practical and professional pathway. She is not sure whether she wants to continue her studies until she receives an academic bachelor's degree in chemistry; however, she believes that this would not be sufficient for her to find employment and she would certainly need to pursue a master's degree. She does not want to complete a further three years of studies and would prefer to switch to a pathway that would enable her to find employment more quickly.
<b>The solution</b>	<p>She goes to see a counsellor in her university who advises her to orientate herself towards a VET qualification in chemical analysis. This qualification leads to diverse professions that require chemical analysis in a number of different industries: such as waste or water treatment, food production, production of construction materials, etc.</p> <p>She is advised that she will be able to transfer part of the credit she achieved in higher education towards the vocational qualification. This is possible because both qualifications use learning outcomes and both qualifications are based on the principle of progressive accumulation.</p>
<b>The qualifications in the two education sectors</b>	<p>The bachelor programme that she is enrolled in and the programme linked to the VET qualification she wishes to achieve, have very similar entry conditions (these are at the same level).</p> <p>During the two years of her studies, Lucie has completed programme components in different areas of chemistry. Though she did not complete the full bachelor degree, she holds modules that have been positively assessed certifying that she has achieved the required knowledge, skills and competence. The achieved components are documented in her transcript of record and correspond to 120 ECTS points.</p> <p>The qualification that she wishes to achieve is designed using ECVET: it is based on units of learning outcomes and uses ECVET points. Units are based on sets of learning outcomes that correspond to areas of knowledge, skills and competence in relation to the working process in a laboratory. This qualification is normally prepared in two years of studying and is described with 120 ECVET points. The academic qualification she was studying for was based on programme components whereby each component corresponds to an area of the given discipline (for example, organic chemistry, inorganic chemistry, mathematics for chemistry, etc.) and each component is described in ECTS points. The VET competent authority identifies that these components overlap partly with the units of the VET qualification.</p>



<p><b>Using ECVET for credit transfer and accumulation from HE to VET</b></p>	<p>The VET provider that prepares the qualification in chemical analysis analyses Lucie's transcript of record to identify overlap between what she has already achieved and what is required for the VET qualification. The provider analyses the learning outcomes of the programme components that she has already achieved. Part of these programme components corresponds to units of the VET qualification that she wishes to achieve (for example, organic and inorganic chemistry). She therefore validates the credit for these units and does not need to undergo additional learning or assessment regarding these learning outcomes. Some of the learning outcomes that Lucie has achieved are not part of the VET qualification and cannot be validated and recognised.</p> <p>As a result, the VET provider validates and recognises a large part of the credit that Lucie has already achieved. The credit transferred is described with 80 ECVET points.</p> <p>However, the VET qualification contains some units of learning outcomes that are not part of the more academic qualification, such as learning outcomes related to the industrial legislation in relation to chemistry or industrial processes. Lucie therefore needs to achieve these units of learning outcomes (corresponding to the remaining 40 ECVET points) through formal learning in the VET provider.</p>
<p><b>Using ECVET for credit transfer and accumulation from VET to HE</b></p>	<p>Unlike Lucie, Joe wishes to transfer from the VET pathway towards higher education. Joe has successfully achieved the VET qualification in chemical analysis (120 ECVET points), but wishes to further pursue his studies to attain a bachelor's degree (180 ECTS) and later a master's degree in chemistry.</p> <p>The university where Joe seeks recognition compares the learning outcomes of the full VET qualification that Joe has achieved with the learning outcomes requirements for the bachelor degree. The university concludes that there is partial overlap in learning outcomes of the two qualifications and recognises several programme components which are equivalent to 90 ECTS points.</p>
<p><b>Partnership</b></p>	<p>Very similar paths to those of Lucie and Joe are followed by other students. To avoid having to evaluate the transcript of each individual learner, the VET competent authority and the higher education institution (which is competent for design and award of the academic qualification) decide to set up a more formal partnership that will facilitate transition from one context to another. Among other things, the two institutions develop and sign a MoU which sets the conditions under which credit can be transferred between the two qualifications concerned and how. This includes identification of equivalence between units of the VET qualification and courses/modules of the higher education programme.</p>



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