

# Extract from the exploratory study for development of communication media on ECVET for the business world



**ecvet**  
Belgian team  
(BE-Fr)

**EAC**  
**EA**  
Education, Audiovisual & Culture  
Executive Agency

 Education and Culture DG  
Lifelong Learning Programme

March 2014

## Foreword

*End of 2011, the "Agence francophone pour l'éducation et la formation tout au long de la vie" has responded positively to a call for proposals from the European Commission for the creation of a team of experts to support the implementation of ECVET in French speaking Belgium.*

*The team should consist of experts who all had to have a solid knowledge of ECVET and have had the opportunity to test the implementation of some of these principles or tools.*

*In addition to the objectives set in the tender, the ECVET Team of Experts is responsible for the following challenges:*

- *Build a common language,*
- *develop tools to support implementation,*
- *develop a common reflection on ways to promote learning throughout life,*
- *work on developing transnational networks ECVET.*

*Extract from the report by Thomas LEMAIGRE (journalist) and the Virginia RENAUDIE (consultant) at the request of the team of experts ECVET.*

*This memo lists the basic points of a study carried out from November 2013 to January 2014 at the request of the French-speaking Belgian ECVET national contact point.*

*The aim of this study was to determine the optimal conditions for conducting an ECVET awareness-raising campaign targeting the social partners, in particular employers. Two freelance consultants were commissioned to conduct the study, Thomas Lemaigre and Virginie de la Renaudie.*

*This memo lists their main findings and recommendations.*

### **Summary of the findings**

- > These findings are made on the basis of a study of recent national literature and a sounding out of HR professionals and employer representatives at sectoral level. They result from questionnaires used to establish their relationship to certifications, skills and VET in company practices in the field.
- > From hiring to outplacement, at different stages in an individual's career, a certification or diploma is not taken into account in HRM for job profiles requiring more than an upper secondary diploma.
- > To a much greater extent, the reputation of certain schools or good experiences (effect of education markets) are taken into account, as well as, in all probability, sectoral certifications, attestations issued at the end of examinations held by the social partners. In this context, work placements and sandwich courses are to be seen as local arrangements which, under certain conditions worthwhile looking at in greater depth, impact everyday company life and development to the extent that they limit uncertainty when recruiting new employees.
- > The reported short supply of employees in certain occupations is pushing a number of employers to diversify their recruitment channels, and thus to collaborate with the VET system. This said, the analysis reveals that certain recruitment difficulties are related as much to weaknesses in the qualifications produced by the VET system (problems linked to the technical facilities available in the VET colleges were for example referred to) as to HRM quality problems.
- > The relationship of companies to VET varies greatly. It is better developed in certain sectors (*inter alia* sectors having to cope with fast-moving technological innovation cycles), in certain large-sized companies, and in Flanders. This points to a form of cultural "dualisation" in the business world, characterised by different forms of management, in particular in terms of professionalised HRM.
- > Nevertheless, even when HRM thinks in terms of skills, talents, training objectives, etc., little account is taken of diplomas and certifications, with the focus much more on *soft skills*, behaviour, past careers and experience, motivation, etc.

- > A slightly different interpretation is to be attached to these findings in sectors and companies where diplomas and certificates serve as entitlements to gaining access to employment, for calculating wages or for opening up possibilities for internal mobility.
- > Employers invest in some cases considerable effort in training people when they first take up a position (IVET). Such training periods can be formal or informal. In the majority of situations, the choice is made by the company in a voluntary manner. This reality partially relativizes the strictly tailored-to-the-job approaches often guiding VET practices.
- > By contrast, no priority is attached to CVET, and, in those cases where it is in common use, its use is strictly reactive, mainly to keep abreast of technological developments.
- > These findings are surprising to the extent that they point to a gap between practices in the field and the discussions in the media on the divorced relationship between school and VET, on life-long learning, on talent-scouting, etc.
- > For these qualification levels, there is no intra-EU employee mobility within the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. *Cross-border* recruitment is costly and difficult to manage, and for those practicing it, it would seem to be more a default solution.
- > Here as well, our observations point to a situation out of tune with the European discussions on mobility, and especially with the primary objective announced for ECVET. The regulatory model promoted for executives is not transferable.
- > Implementation and promotion of ECVET do however have great economic relevance in the particular context of French-speaking Belgium as a meta-instrument for coordinating VET certifications. This approach is helpful to the extent that it drives the modernisation, coordination and integration of VET policies and programmes. Though a certain amount of progress has been made, more progress is possible and a lot more could be done in coordinating approaches and avoiding competition, leading to greater and more visible added value attractive for HR professionals on the ground.

### ***Summary of the recommendations***

- > It is too early to conduct any campaign raising awareness for the benefits of ECVETs and targeting the business world.
- > Before doing this, we need to wait until ECVETs have been translated into various certifications and diplomas actually used in the labour market, and if possible where such certifications and diplomas act as entitlements.
- > Such an awareness-raising campaign would have to be in tune with sectoral circumstances (planning, messages to be put across, channels, etc.).
- > Independent of whether such a sectoral option is taken up, an awareness-raising campaign on the benefits of ECVETs will only reach a certain section of the business

world, i.e. that which we have attempted to describe as already aware of the skills dimension of HRM.

> We recommend a campaign not specifically targeting ECVETs as such, but instead concrete subjects such as work placements or certifications and diplomas. Using such an approach would provide an opportunity to “brand” ECVET. Although there are regular campaigns for private certifications, it seems more than opportune to put a focus on public certifications.

> We recommend not using a traditional dissemination strategy, as this would be doomed to failure, or even counter-productive. An ECVET campaign alone cannot convince companies to become interested in VET and ECVET. A strategy both more wide-ranging and more detailed is more appropriate in our opinion, informing those who need information, when they need it.

> The awareness-raising campaign must coincide with the actual availability of several ECVET certifications and diplomas on the labour market.

> In support of this both wide-ranging and detailed campaign, a website informing people of the benefits of ECVET in French-speaking Belgium is considered the most appropriate vehicle. Such a website would have to have different entry points, reflecting such aspects as different sectors, company size, etc. It would be complemented by a small printed information sheet, complementary to the “ECVET diploma” and handed over to the employer by a job applicant holding such a diploma, showing him where he can find more information online.

> Last but not least, the campaign must be based on the needs, expectations and concerns of companies, taking account of their use of language, and conducted in a simple, efficient and pragmatic manner. The design of the awareness-raising tools must be entrusted to B2B PR professionals.

> Taking all this into account, we see it as opportune that such wide-scoped VET awareness-raising measures not be borne solely by the AEF, but by a consortium of stakeholders involved in modernising VET systems - in the context of a strategy bringing the whole concept of VET to the attention of the business world.

> Such a strategy needs to involve the social partners both upstream and downstream. We even suggest looking into the possibility of developing something similar with the delegates appointed by the Flemish Region in the sectoral centres.

> Finally, there is a dangerous lack of scientific knowledge on certain key aspects of the subjects dealt with in this paper, although there is a wealth of knowledge on the dynamics of employment and the careers of higher education graduates. With a view to improving the management of VET policies, systems and organisations, it is considered urgent to conduct detailed studies on VET practices (whether IVET or CVET), on the use of private actors in the labour market, on sectoral certifications,

and above all on work placements and on-the-ground collaboration between the VET system and companies.