



Benefits and Objectives of ECVET Implementation in Bulgaria: an Empirical Study

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ABSTRACT: The comprehensive analysis presented in this article examines the potential positive effects of complete ECVET implementation in Bulgaria, aligning with the European guidelines established by CEDEFOP. By focusing on a diverse range of topics, the report offers valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to enhance the quality and relevance of VET in Bulgaria. Despite the potential benefits of ECVET, its implementation in Bulgarian vocational education has not yet been realized and lacks a comprehensive credit system for credit exchange within both secondary and higher vocational education. Consequently, the development of an effective ECVET implementation system, including a robust assessment framework, remains an ongoing challenge. ECVET is poised to support learners in Bulgaria across several key dimensions. Its ability to foster adaptability, practical skill acquisition, and alternative learning strategies equip learners with the competencies necessary to thrive in today's dynamic job market. Moreover, ECVET promotes the development of organizational skills, facilitates informed career choices, and accelerates professional implementation. The successful implementation of ECVET necessitates a concerted effort from various stakeholders, including VET institutions, employers, and learners. By embracing ECVET, Bulgaria can significantly improve the quality and relevance of its VET systems, better prepare learners for the workforce, and stimulate economic growth. Ultimately, ECVET contributes to learners' personal satisfaction, self-esteem, and shorter paths to the labor market. These benefits underscore the transformative potential of ECVET in enhancing the educational experience and career prospects of learners in Bulgaria.

KEYWORDS: ECVET implementation, Bulgarian VET, VET quality.

INTRODUCTION

ECVET has become an integral component of vocational education and training (VET) systems across all European Union member states. Designed to support vocational schools, training centers, employers, and learners, ECVET has emerged as an effective tool for enhancing the quality of VET. A fundamental distinction between traditional training systems and ECVET lies in their underlying principles. Traditional systems often rely on a fixed number of instructional hours determined by trainers, while ECVET prioritizes learning outcomes that trainees achieve based on established educational standards. This focus on practical results ensures that learners acquire and apply relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies. ECVET offers several advantages, including shorter conversion times between educational levels and improved alignment of acquired qualifications with economic needs. Moreover, ECVET is closely linked to the validation of informal and non-formal learning, facilitating the recognition of skills and competencies acquired outside of formal education. Back in 2009, the European Commission's recommendation on ECVET marked a significant milestone in the development of a standardized framework for vocational education and training (VET) across Europe. The subsequent establishment of the ECVET Governance in 2010 provided a platform for supporting national initiatives, fostering cooperation, and promoting peer learning. Since then, ECVET has been actively developed and implemented in numerous European countries. Preparatory efforts have encompassed a wide range of activities, including legal and regulatory updates, as well as pilot projects and testing initiatives. It is important to note that the implementation of ECVET is not isolated but is closely linked to broader policy objectives, such as improving international learning mobility, reforming VET systems, and developing robust qualification frameworks.

In Bulgaria, the introduction of ECVET is particularly relevant given the country's membership in the European Union and the growing opportunities for international mobility and remote work enabled by technological advancements, but still not implemented as EU practices with integrated credit system. By adopting ECVET, Bulgaria can enhance the quality and relevance of its VET



programs, better prepare professionals for the global job market, and support teachers, educators, and employers through improved funding and collaboration opportunities.

A European recommendation on the *European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training* (ECVET) in June 2009 is a strong signal to start testing and experimenting with ECVET. At the beginning of 2010, the ECVET Governance was created to support national initiatives, cooperation, peer learning and ownership, and to make ECVET developments visible and integrated. Meanwhile, in most countries ECVET is developing. Preparation for the implementation of ECVET includes activities ranging from legal and regulatory updates to wide-ranging testing initiatives. The implementation of ECVET does not stand alone but is clearly linked to policies to improve international learning mobility, to PEO reforms at national, regional or local level towards greater permeability within and between systems and to the development of qualification frameworks.

All 30 countries included in the 2010 CEDEFOP report (*CEDEFOP, 2010*) demonstrated a commitment to implementing ECVET. While some countries adopted a more cautious approach, the overall trend was one of positive progress. The primary strategies for advancing ECVET implementation were largely informed by the analytical recommendations outlined in the CEDEFOP guidelines:

- ✓ of wide-ranging creation of testing initiatives.
- ✓ measurement of results (theoretical and methodological approaches).
- ✓ updating VET legislation and legislation.
- ✓ adaptation of qualification system.
- ✓ adopting a "wait and see" strategy.
- ✓ combining ECVET with NQF development.
- ✓ learning through work in European ECVET projects.
- ✓ marketing ECVET to stakeholders.

The most recent CEDEFOP report is the Annual Report for 2023 (*CEDEFOP, 2023*). It was published in September 2024. The report comprehensively examines a diverse range of topics pertaining to VET, including:

- ✓ *Skills shortages and mismatches*: The report analyzes the prevailing skills gaps in the European labor market and proposes strategies to address these challenges.
- ✓ *VET participation rates*: The report investigates trends in VET participation across European countries and identifies key factors influencing these rates.
- ✓ *VET quality*: The report assesses the quality of VET programs and pinpoints areas requiring improvement.
- ✓ *VET funding*: The report explores the challenges associated with funding VET programs and proposes potential solutions.
- ✓ *The Internationalization of VET*: The report examines the growing trend of internationalization in VET and discusses the opportunities and challenges it presents.
- ✓ *Digitalization of VET*: The report analyzes the impact of digitalization on VET and emphasizes the need for VET institutions to adapt to technological advancements.
- ✓ *Inclusion and diversity in VET*: The report investigates issues of inclusion and diversity within VET and outlines strategies for promoting equity and access."

Back in time where all is initially decided, in 2010 CEDEFOP report documented widespread commitment to ECVET implementation across all 30 member states. While the pace of adoption varied, most countries actively pursued ECVET initiatives. The strategic approaches to ECVET implementation were largely informed by the analytical recommendations outlined in the CEDEFOP guidelines. Twelve countries embarked on comprehensive testing initiatives, including Germany, Finland, Austria, and Belgium (Wallonia). These initiatives aimed to assess the feasibility and potential benefits of ECVET, with a focus on enhancing learning and qualification mobility or improving the permeability of VET systems. In the initial phase, these initiatives typically involved feasibility or action studies to inform policy decision-making. The case of Belgium exemplifies the interconnectedness of ECVET initiatives and European projects. The ECVET initiative in Wallonia was supported by the development and outcomes of European ECVET projects, demonstrating the synergy between national and European efforts.

Key strategic elements for successful ECVET implementation include:

1. Wide stakeholder involvement: Engaging a diverse range of stakeholders, including students, teachers, employers, and policymakers, is crucial for the success of ECVET initiatives.



2. Regional measurement: Supporting mobility through regional measurement and recognition frameworks.
3. Project-based learning: Adopting project-based learning approaches to enhance practical skills and real-world application.
4. Legislative and regulatory updates: Aligning national legislation and regulations with ECVET principles.

Beyond the 12 pilot projects, over 110 ECVET-related projects have been registered in the European ADAM database. These projects have focused on analyzing the features of ECVET, developing solutions, and sharing experiences and best practices. A common challenge has been the establishment of standardized references and qualifications for mobility and transparency, aligning with European frameworks like EQF [European Qualification Framework] and ECVET.

The integration of ECVET into national education and training systems has been a significant focus for many countries. ECVET applies to qualifications at levels 3 to 6 of the EQF across various fields, including building and construction, health, and transport and logistics. This integration is not limited to the national level but extends to regional and local contexts, addressing the broader need for geographical, educational, and professional mobility in PEOs. The development of ECVET in a national context is often not an isolated initiative but is closely linked to other reforms, such as validation of non-formal and informal learning and cross-border mobility. For example, in countries like the Czech Republic and Germany, ECVET implementation has been integrated into broader reforms of the VET system and national qualification frameworks.

The introduction of ECVET in Bulgaria, following the examples of other countries, particularly those in the former Soviet bloc, aligns with the growing recognition of the need for new professionals to possess a range of skills to meet the demands of the modern labor market. Both secondary and higher education institutions are increasingly adopting leading European practices to prepare students for the future. ECVET, with its emphasis on lifelong learning and project-based approaches, aligns well with the expectations of the so-called “Gen Z” generation, which will soon form a significant portion of the economically active population in Bulgaria.

To gain a deeper understanding of the attitudes and benefits of ECVET implementation in Bulgaria, empirical studies are necessary. A site survey conducted among 200 secondary and higher education students in the country can provide valuable insights into how students perceive the impact of ECVET on their education and career prospects.

Relationship between VET and the labor market in Bulgaria

Despite the potential benefits of ECVET, its implementation in Bulgarian vocational education *has not yet been fully realized*. At present, Bulgaria *lacks a comprehensive credit system for credit exchange within both secondary and higher vocational education*. Consequently, the development of an effective ECVET implementation system, including a robust assessment framework, remains an ongoing challenge.

The absence of a credit system in Bulgarian vocational education hinders the alignment of the domestic system with European standards. This lack of alignment can limit opportunities for student mobility, recognition of qualifications, and participation in international collaborations.

The forecast demand for qualifications is based on a macroeconomic model (for medium and long-term forecasts) and annual demand for employer skills needs (for short-term forecasts) (*ECVET, 2018*). Medium- and long-term forecasts take into account demographic trends and changes in the educational status of the workforce and in the structure of the economy. You provide information on labor supply and demand for:

- level of education (primary, junior high, secondary or higher).
- economic activity (*NSI, 2015*) [last open publicly available].
- profession (*CFET, 2024*).
- structural labor shortage/surplus by level of education.

According to the model, in 2030 the labor market requires qualifications at the following levels:

- primary education or lower – 1.1%.
- lower secondary education – 6.2%.
- secondary education (both stages) – 67.1%.
- higher education – 25.6%.



In the long term (2030), labor demand will increase for higher education (still reaching 28.8%) and decrease for secondary (still reaching 64.1%).

According to the 2023 Employer Skills Needs Survey (*Employment Agency, 2023*) The professionals most in demand by employers are predicted to be:

- for those with higher education: information and communication technologies (ICT), business and administrative (financial and sales) professionals, teachers, mathematicians.
- for those with secondary education: workers in the field of service and sales (cooks, waiters, bartenders, hairdressers and beauticians), workers in the food industry and woodworking, operators of stationary machines and equipment, drivers of motor vehicles.
- for those with primary or lower secondary education: workers in agriculture, forestry and fisheries; workers in mining and manufacturing, construction, in the food industry, manufacturing of clothing and wood products.

The survey shows that 10.3% of employers plan to provide training to their employees, managers with the highest professional qualifications such as accountants, bodyguards, teaching assistants, waiters, bartenders and restaurant and entertainment workers. There is also the acquisition of key competences (social, civic, digital, initiative and entrepreneurship) and training for new technologies, equipment and product innovations, customer work and business activities.

Since 2018, the employment commissions of the regional development councils have been collecting, processing and transmitting every two years to the Employment Agency information on the demand for labor by employers. This will ensure adequate planning of VET supply to reduce skills imbalances in the labor market.

ECVET is expected to support learners in Bulgaria in these aspects (*ECVET 2017*):

1. *Enhanced adaptability*: ECVET empowers learners to effectively apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts.
2. *Practical skill acquisition*: ECVET facilitates the acquisition of practical knowledge and skills that are highly valued by employers.
3. *Alternative learning strategies*: ECVET promotes the adoption of diverse learning approaches, including distance learning and lifelong learning.
4. *Organizational ability development*: ECVET fosters the development of essential organizational skills, such as time management and project planning.
5. *Improved career orientation*: ECVET assists learners in making informed career choices and navigating the job market.
6. *Accelerated professional implementation*: ECVET can provide learners with a faster pathway to professional implementation.
7. *Personal satisfaction and self-esteem*: ECVET contributes to learners' personal satisfaction and self-esteem through the achievement of educational goals.
8. *Shorter paths to the labor market*: ECVET can help learners enter the workforce more quickly and efficiently.

VET qualifications are included in the list of VET occupations approved by the Minister for Education (VET, 2014). It was developed by the *National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET)* in social partnership with industry chambers, the ministry and representatives of employers - the latter always initiates changes to the list. In practice, this happens once a year. The list is structured by educational field, professional field, profession and specialist. The list includes about 500 qualifications (specialties); two to three new ones are added each year depending on the needs of the labor market.

According to the *Preschool and School Education Law* and the *VET Act*, the acquisition of professional qualifications is regulated by the *State Educational Standards*. The *National Agency for Vocational Education and Development of Standards*, coordinated with the salaries of the ministries and departments, and the *Minister of Education* approves them. The standards are structured by profession (often across multiple specialties) and include:

- requirements for applicants.
- job description.
- units of learning outcomes.
- training facility requirements.



- requirements for trainers.

This approach uses the principles of the 2015 ECVET recommendation. It aims to link units of learning outcomes to credits in VET. The standards are mandatory for VET programs leading to nationally recognized qualifications, including for adults.

The curricula are based on the framework programs and the State educational standards for VET. The Ministry of Education implements the mandatory part of VET curricula for new professions or forms of education in VET schools. Curriculum development is supported by VET teachers and employers. The school-specific part of the curriculum is designed by VET providers for each program to reflect the specifics of the local labor market. Vocational school curricula include a study schedule, the distribution of subjects between the general and vocational parts, graduation requirements and reporting notes to ensure that learning outcomes are achieved. Vocational training centers develop their own training programs that also take into account previous training. These programs are evaluated (licensed) by NAPOO.

The National Qualifications Framework (NAPOE, 2012, 2016, 2022) covers the entire education system and all qualifications. It defines the level, including level 0 (preparatory). Secondary and post-secondary VET qualifications refer to levels 2 to 5 of the NQF. Levels 6 to 8 refer to bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees in higher education linked to the European Higher Education Area qualifications framework. The national qualification framework is to be updated in accordance with the structure of upper secondary education (stage 1 and stage 2).

The introduction of new qualifications involves consultation between VET providers and business representatives. For example, in 2016, a new EQF level 4 applied programmer qualification was added to the list of VET occupations. The proposal to develop this new qualification is in the Bulgarian Association of Software Companies to overcome the shortage of personnel in the software industry. Together with NAPOE prepares a State Educational Standard describing the professional knowledge, skills and competences required. The following proposal for the introduction of the new qualification together with the standard was approved by the expert committee on information and communication technologies, electronics and automation, represented by social partners (employers, unions) and NAPOO. The approval of the new qualification enables the introduction of new training for the Vocational Education and Training in Information Technology (IT) program in 2017/18. The flexibility of the curriculum allows students from both VET and general education to join the program, which covers 900 hours of training over three years (MES, 2016).

Validation is an alternative way of gaining a professional qualification for those who have not completed a formal VET program. The validation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning is an integral part of lifelong learning policy. The National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014-20 foresees the introduction of validation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal education and self-study by 2018; the VET development strategy 2015-20 prioritization as valid in the context of lifelong learning. These policy documents are identified as an effective tool to support the employability of the group with traditionally low participation in lifelong learning, such as those without education and qualifications, the over 50s or the long-term unemployed. Although validation is included in the Vocational Education and Training Act (Article No. 40) of 1999, the regulation does not provide guidance on how the procedure should be organized. It was only available to employees with at least six months of employment status in the occupation. In 2014, with the amendments to the Law on Vocational Education and Training, validation of the results of self-directed and non-formal learning was introduced. After the changes in the law, a validation procedure was approved and has been in force since 2015 (regulated by Ordinance No. 2). VET providers organize valid occupations and specialties, inclusion in the VET occupation list.

The introduction in 2014 of a new approach to developing state education standards, based on units of learning outcomes, makes the validation process more transparent. Applicants provide evidence of the learning outcomes they possess for the acquisition of a qualification or part of it, leading to vocational training and the labor market. Methods for assessing learning outcomes are essentially identical to those for assessing knowledge, skills and competences applied in formal education and training. Two types of certificates can be issued after they are valid:

- certificate validating full qualification. Through an exam, it certifies that all units of learning outcomes, defined in the State Education Standard, have been achieved.
- a certificate validating part of a professional qualification (partial qualification). Through an exam, it is certified that one or several units of learning results have been achieved, inclusion in the State Educational Standard.

Holders of these certificates have the same rights as those who obtain documents through the formal education system. The validation procedures are monitored by the regional educational authorities and NAPOE. They also include direct approaches to



suppliers. Validation procedures to be funded by beneficiaries (natural persons), companies and projects; the validation fee for individuals may not exceed the actual costs incurred by the Provider.

The Pre-school and School Education Act (2015) still in effect, establishes quality management processes, including for VET. Performance management is a free process of organizational development based on its analysis, planning, implementation and evaluation. This takes into account:

- whether VET providers achieve the added objectives, for example transition of graduates to the labor market, matching supply with demand in the regional labor market.
- analysis of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and risks for development.
- presentation of training.
- school environment, including the need for evaluated services. The assessment is carried out through a biannual self-assessment and inspection.

Self-evaluation is part of the internal evaluation of the quality of education. Vocational schools determine their own procedures and criteria for self-evaluation based on the guidelines of the State Educational Standard for Managing Performance in the Force. The process follows the following steps:

- creation of a working group.
- definition of activities, procedures, criteria, indicators and tools.
- contact with teachers, teachers and parents.
- performing self-assessment and analyzing results that may lead to choices.
- preparation and validation of the report.

Inspection is the process of producing a comprehensive independent expert assessment of the school's education assessment at a given point in time with guidelines for improvement. Every school must be inspected at least once every five years. VET providers must establish an internal system effectively to meet the requirements of the standard. This system includes:

- quality assurance policy and objectives.
- performance management responsibilities.
- system implementation rules.
- annual self-assessment schedule.
- rules and procedures for measuring quality achieved through self-assessment.

Decisive activities to improve efficiency with the working environment, learning outcomes, interaction with local community stakeholders, social partners, employer organizations and universities; and staff training. The Ministry of Education supports and monitors quality assurance in vocational schools, the National Education Agency does this in vocational training centers.

STUDY DESIGN

A quantitative research method was used - an anonymous survey with a combination of open and closed questions (Appendix 1). The method is well known to the respondents, as it is the most frequently used method statistically in Bulgaria.

The sample consists of 200 students:

- 100 students from UTP [University of Telecommunications and Post – Sofia];
- 50 students from Vocational School on Telecommunications- Sofia.
- 50 employers.

All high school students are over 16 years old, and students are between 18 and 23 years old.

The survey is distributed with the help of the school pedagogical advisers in the vocational high school and with the help of the administration of the Students Department at VUTP. The employers are those who work directly with the two educational institutions on a project basis and the connection with them again happens through the pedagogical advisers and the administration.

Respondents participate voluntarily and anonymously, both for ethical reasons and to facilitate them to answer the research questions honestly. The survey is short, contains 10 questions, of which only the last one is open-ended, and the others imply an answer on a five-point scale with either "yes" or "no" - so it takes no more than 10 minutes to complete.

The set of the research is to assess the perception of students and employers about the benefits of introducing ECVET in Bulgaria.



The following hypotheses will be proven or disproved:

1. The implementation of ECVET will lead to an increase in the quality of vocational education and training in Bulgaria.
2. Students who graduate from ECVET-based programs will have better job prospects in a global context.
3. Employers will value qualifications gained within ECVET more highly.
4. ECVET will make the Bulgarian education system more competitive at the European level.

RESULTS AND COMMENTARY

The sample consists of a total of 200 people – the size is for convenience, so the research does not claim to be representative. However, its design is consistent with the need for credibility.

The first question explores while respondents are familiar with ECVET. A five-point Likert scale was used, on which the answers were distributed as follows among all 200 respondents:

How familiar are you with the European Qualifications Framework for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)?

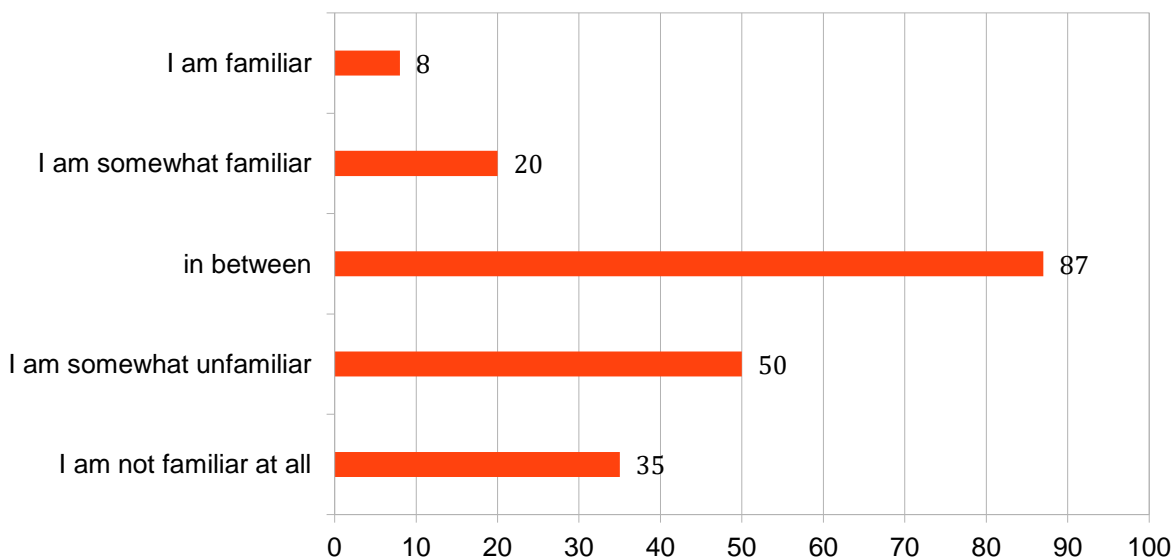


Figure 1 - How familiar are you with the European Qualifications Framework for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)?

It is obvious that in Bulgaria you get to know the framework with little - at least among students and employers. To enable a more precise interpretation of the following results, the table below will show how the responses are distributed among your group of respondents:

Table 1 - Distribution of responses by respondent groups

Response option A group of respondents	I am not familiar at all	I am somewhat unfamiliar	In between	I am somewhat familiar	I am very well acquainted
students	9	31	48	10	2
High school students	18	10	19	3	-
Employers	8	9	20	7	6



Students and employers are more aware of ECVET than students. To a large extent, this is due to the fact that in high school in Bulgaria, very few people are really interested in their future professional development, due to two very widespread notions - firstly, that they must then graduate from university, and secondly, that, regardless of what they have completed in these two degrees, something radically different may be at work. To a large extent, in addition to parents and adults, this perception is also supported by employers, who rarely require certain qualifications for the more desirable and higher-paying professions, but instead offer company training and internship programs without this being directly related to high school or higher education in the district.

The next question explores whether the respondents think that the implementation of ECVET in Bulgaria will support the recognition of their qualification:

Do you think that ECVET will facilitate the recognition of your qualifications abroad?

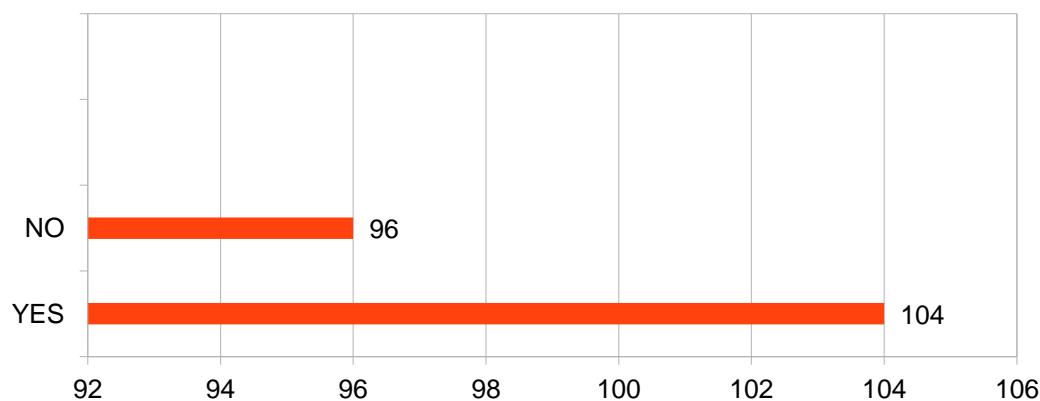


Figure 2 – Do you think that ECVET will facilitate the recognition of your qualifications abroad?

Table 2 - Distribution of responses by respondent groups

Response option A group of respondents	Yes	No
students	43	57
Students	35	15
Employers	26	24

Here, the number of positive answers is only 8 more than the number of negative ones - i.e. there is no noticeable tendency to clearly account for the benefits of applying ECVET in our country. Moreover, students indicate the negative option more often, and the number of employers indicating the positive and negative option is almost the same. The students are the ones where the positive answers have the upper hand. However, this, combined with the fact that they are also the least informed group about the nature of ECVET according to their self-assessment in the first question, raises the question of how far the answer "yes" is based on specific knowledge of the subject or is more likely to be the result of the influence of parents and teachers and their pro-European sentiments in general. What is the reason why students believe more than the other two groups of respondents that ECVET will support the recognition of their qualifications in the country can become clear from the analysis of the following answers?



A third question examines whether respondents think that ECVET will improve the quality of education in Bulgaria:

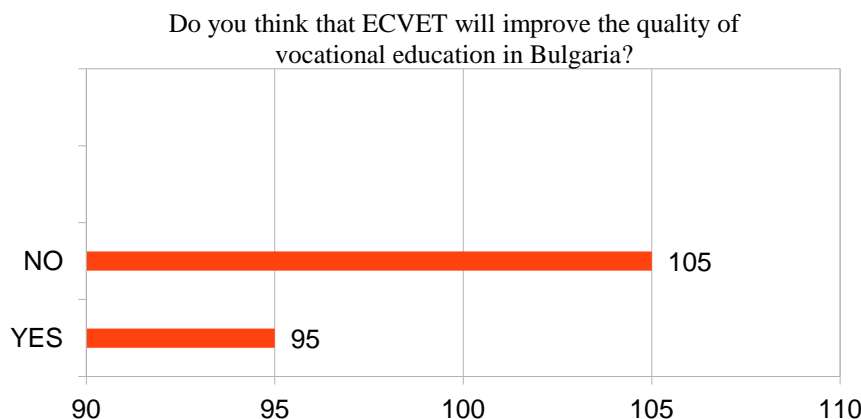


Figure 3. – Do you think that ECVET will improve the quality of vocational education in Bulgaria?

Table 3 – Distribution of responses by respondent groups

Response option	Yes	No
A group of respondents		
students	35	65
Students	27	23
Employers	33	17

Here, as can be seen from the graph above, negative responses predominate. This time it is the students who tip the scales towards the negative – they are the group more than 50% of whom strongly do not believe that the implementation of ECVET alone can improve education. To a large extent, this is because most students are already working, and in the field in which they would like to continue their future career development and, entering the labor market, they begin to be more clearly aware of the problems of the education system and the gap between her and business. So, it is natural for them to understand that the solutions are complex just like the problems and implementing one of them is not enough.

Employers are rather positive, as they hope that this framework will allow them to be more actively involved during the training of their future staff. For students, the difference between the positive and negative answers given is very small - this does not provide enough information about the reasons for the distribution.

The fourth question is interested in whether, according to the respondents, what has been introduced in ECVET in Bulgaria will facilitate the transition between educational levels:

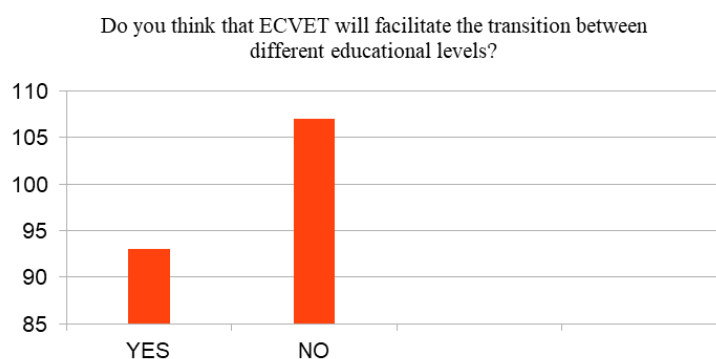


Figure 4 – Do you think that ECVET will facilitate the transition between different educational levels?



Table 4 - Distribution of answers by groups of respondents

Response option	Yes	No
A group of respondents		
students	40	60
Students	41	9
Employers	12	38

Here, too, negative responses prevail among students and employers. Only students overwhelmingly believe that the introduction of the European credit system for qualifications can ease them from one level of study to another, there can be hope that the framework will help them avoid sitting some exams. It is a fact, however, that the Bulgarian education system is constructed so that each of its levels is relatively autonomous from the previous one, which is especially true for secondary and higher education. I.e. there is no mechanism to help students who have chosen the same vocational field for their secondary and higher education to benefit from preferences at university entrance.

The fifth question asks whether respondents believe that ECVET will make it easier for them to find a job after completing their education:

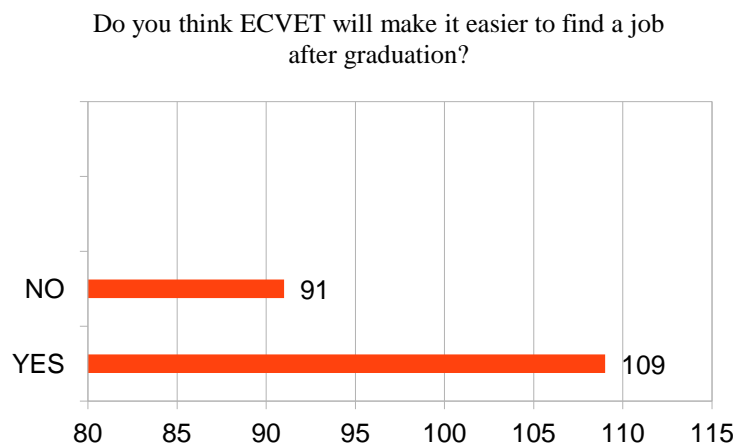


Figure 5 - Do you think that ECVET will make it easier to find a job after completing your education?

Table 5 - Distribution of answers by groups of respondents

Response option	Yes	No
A group of respondents		
students	56	44
Students	42	8
Employers	11	39

Here the positive answers reach - both students and pupils believe that it will be easier to find a job after completing education if ECVET is implemented in Bulgaria. To a large extent, this will probably be your long hope to reduce the distance between the labor market and education, which will lead to an easier realization. However, employers are skeptical - this is so, as a number of companies prefer not to rely on qualifications in secondary and higher education, but to model personnel to their liking during the



company's successful training. Therefore, for these enterprises, the stronger connection between systems and stakeholders can be said to become a negative phenomenon.

A sixth question seeks respondents' opinion on whether ECVET will facilitate the implementation of new curricula:

Do you think ECVET will facilitate curriculum development?

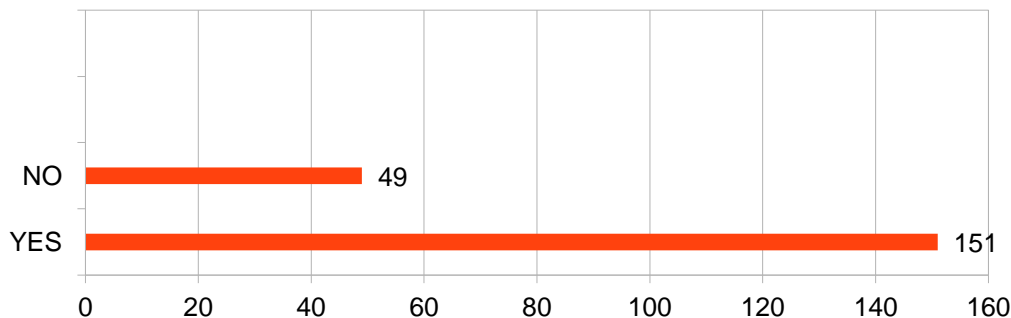


Figure 6 - Do you think ECVET will facilitate curriculum development?

Table 6 - Distribution of answers by groups of respondents

Response option	Yes	No
A group of respondents		
students	70	30
Students	38	12
Employers	43	7

Here, positive answers perceptibly predominate among all three groups of respondents. The new curricula to take into account the needs of both the labor market and current degree learners and the easier, smoother and more targeted transition between your educational levels and employment. As this lies at the very foundation of ECVET, it is not surprising that all three main stakeholder groups – pupils, students and employers – believe that the implementation of the framework in Bulgaria will help to update curricula.

Question 7 addresses if, according to respondents, ECVET will increase innovation in education:

Do you think ECVET will increase learning innovation?

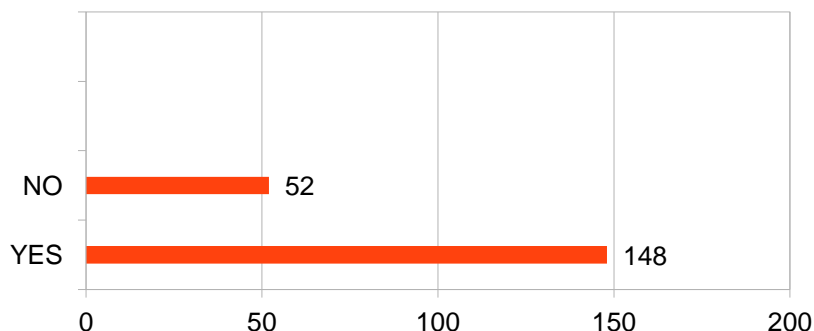


Figure 7 – Do you think ECVET will increase innovation in education?



Table 7 - Distribution of answers by groups of respondents

Response option	Yes	No
A group of respondents		
students	71	29
Students	45	5
Employers	32	18

Similar to the previous question, here too, the predominant answers for all three groups of respondents are positive. The ECVET framework itself has at its core innovation as the foundation for linking education and the labor market in the context of lifelong learning. The teachers and the employers themselves are clear that a large part of the European frameworks and programs are related precisely to innovations and the need to introduce them in the disorganized sphere, among which education, especially in countries like Bulgaria, are more backward economically than others in the EU and this is their chance for advancement.

The next two questions – 8 and 9 – are addressed only to employers. The eighth question checked whether, according to them, the introduction of ECVET in Bulgaria will help them find better qualified personnel more easily:

Do you think ECVET will help you find better qualified staff?

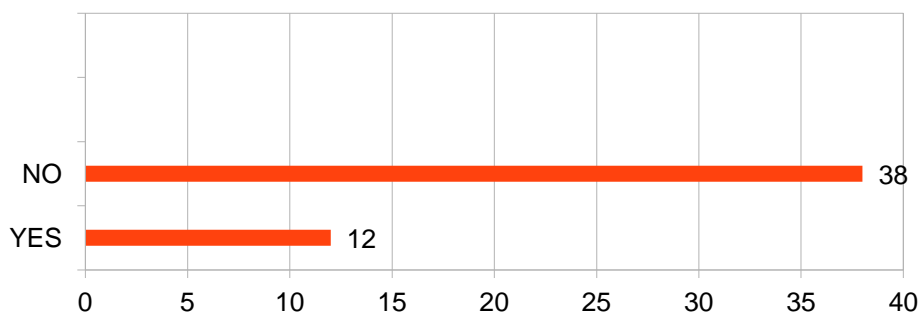


Figure 8 – Do you think ECVET will help you find better qualified staff?

It has already been emphasized several times that a number of companies prefer to model their personnel themselves through in-house training. Moreover, it is a standard practice to hire people with a qualification different from the subject of the company's activity or with only a secondary education, so that the training is more successful and works only for the purposes of the specific employer. Therefore, despite the complaint about the lack of qualified personnel, it can actually be said that employers do not want one.

On the other hand, they are looking for more and more personal characteristics and "soft" skills, which the education system does not test at any level in our country. That is why and according to them ECVET was introduced to be successful, it will not help companies in their search for suitable employees. However, it is also possible that there is opposition from the side of business, since the improved links between it and education will allow you to model personnel according to the taste of a given company, and it is this resistance that is reflected in this distribution of answers.

The ninth question concerns whether the implementation of ECVET in Bulgaria will facilitate cooperation with educational institutions:

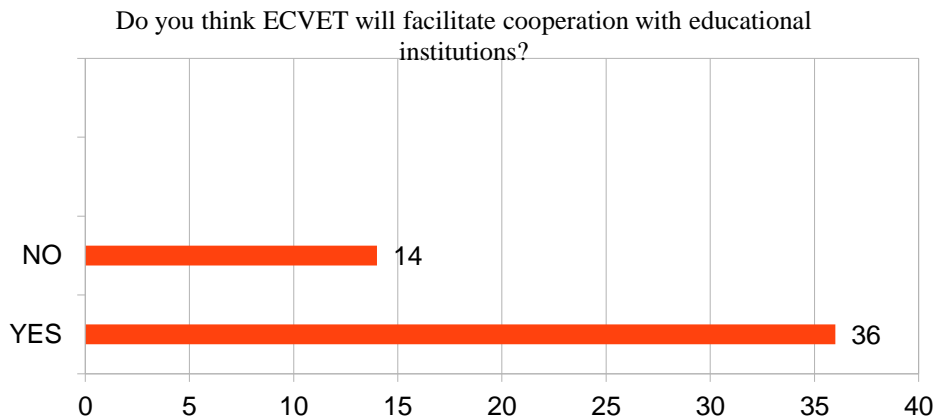


Figure 9 - Do you think ECVET will facilitate cooperation with educational institutions?

The analysis of stakeholder responses reveals a prevailing positive sentiment towards ECVET implementation in Bulgaria. The ECVET framework, designed to enhance communication and collaboration among stakeholders, aligns with the expectations of employers and other key actors.

The open-ended question regarding potential benefits of ECVET implementation elicited a range of responses from respondents. Common themes included:

- Increased opportunities for remote work with international companies
- Enhanced project-based learning experiences
- Improved prospects for obtaining higher salaries
- Accelerated career growth
- Broader professional development opportunities

These responses generally reflect the evolving demands of the 21st-century labor market. However, it is evident that VET in Bulgaria, both at the secondary and higher education levels, still requires greater understanding and appreciation.

While there is no overarching, centralized effort to advance ECVET in Bulgaria, a set of coordinated strategies and objectives have emerged. These initiatives focus on aligning VET systems with ECVET principles, improving permeability, recognizing prior learning, and adopting European learning pathways.

CONCLUSION

At this stage in Bulgaria, there does not seem to be an overall focused effort to advance ECVET, rather a set of more or less clearly coordinated strategies and objectives is observed. They pay close attention to the characteristics and traditions of VET systems, but also identify areas for change - the implementation of ECVET is understood by the need for increased permeability in education and training, for more recognition of prior learning and for "European" learning paths. Some aspects of ECVET implementation can be included in the discussion and activities of the stakeholder groups. Key areas for consideration in ECVET implementation include:

1. **Categorical implementation:** ensuring consistent application of ECVET principles across different VET programs and institutions for its application to ECVET, other mechanisms such as validation, learning outcomes, level indicators should be put in place, which would help to credit and evaluate learning across system and institutional boundaries – not all of which currently operate in the field of VET. In addition, it is necessary to build common quality criteria for describing learning outcomes, determining units, etc.
2. **Supporting mechanisms:** Establishing necessary mechanisms such as validation procedures, learning outcomes, and level indicators to facilitate mobility and recognition.
3. **Shared vocabulary:** Qualification frameworks and the adoption of a learning outcomes approach led to a set of definitions that enable communication qualifications, professions, training programs and more. However, the difficulties



encountered within the European projects, as well as the technical aspects, are necessary to bridge the divide between formulation for a regulatory or truthful document and formulation to enable mobility or assessment and show validation that the issue of terminology is of essential importance. Language and terminology are defined as part of the ECVET learning culture and should not be reduced to terminology development 'restricted' to a group of administrators in a limited community - the scope of ECVET is broad and includes all stakeholders involved in mobility and learning paths, at the level of Bulgaria, but also at the supranational level;

4. **Balancing flexibility and standardization:** Striking a balance between providing a standardized framework and allowing for flexibility and adaptation to local contexts.
5. **Level of formalization:** ECVET envisages a common convention and different levels of agreement between stakeholders (Memorandum of Understanding, training agreement, etc.). European, national, regional, local and sectoral stakeholders, including learners, are part of ECVET partnerships. Following the European consultation on aspects of ECVET, these pose dangers of personal regulation and administrative burden for stakeholders and especially for mobility specialists in Bulgaria. Nowadays in our country this is still a major problem and a balancing act between providing quality and allowing flexibility in ECVET.
6. **Characteristics of ECVET:** European and Bulgarian ECVET governance mechanisms should take an active role without overdoing or introducing new administrative levels, a common warning in the ECVET field. The variety of implementation strategies in each country, as well as in the experience in Bulgaria, is due to the fact that ECVET affects many aspects of vocational education and training systems and poses a sharp question about the "identity of ECVET" (what is ECVET? what is not is ECVET?).
7. **Stakeholder engagement:** Fostering active participation and involvement from a wide range of stakeholders, including VET providers, learners, employers, and the general public.

More than ever, ECVET requires communication with VET providers and participants, as well as with employers and the general public, to support stakeholder participation and proactivity. By addressing these areas, Bulgaria can effectively implement ECVET and reap the benefits of a more flexible, adaptable, and internationally recognized VET system.

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