



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 18 May 2004

9599/04

LIMITE

**EDUC 117
SOC 252**

PUBLIC

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

from : the General Secretariat of the Council

to : the Council

No. prev. doc. : 9174/04 EDUC 100 SOC 219

Subject : Draft Council Conclusions on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training

Delegations will find enclosed a text of the above Draft Conclusions as they result from the discussion of the Permanent Representatives Committee on 14 May 2004. At the end of the meeting the President found that, apart from a DK Parliamentary scrutiny reservation, there was a unanimous agreement on the text.

Should this agreement be confirmed, the Council could adopt the enclosed conclusions.

Draft Council Conclusions
on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

AWARE that

- it is the European Union's role to contribute to the development of quality education whilst fully respecting the competencies of the Member States as well as to work together with the Member States with the aim of building a competitive knowledge-based economy.
- Vocational Education and Training (VET) is a vital component of the strategy set at the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, for becoming by 2010 the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth and greater social cohesion.
- the Communication from the Commission on 'Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality' (November 2001), and the Council (Education) resolution on lifelong learning (June 2002) stressed that quality is a principle of lifelong learning.
- the Barcelona European Council in March 2002 agreed that the concrete objectives of education and training systems should be:- quality, access and opening up to the wider world.
Furthermore, Barcelona set the target of making Europe's education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010. The Barcelona conclusions also requested further European cooperation in the area of vocational training.

- the European Employment Strategy calls upon Member States to implement lifelong learning strategies, emphasising the need to improve the quality and efficiency of education and training systems, and to improve public and private investment in human resources. The objectives set in education and training policy should increasingly complement those of economic and labour policy in order to combine social cohesion and competitiveness.
- the Copenhagen Declaration, (November 2002), involving the social partners, the EEA-EFTA countries and the candidate countries, and the Council Resolution, (December 2002), on Enhanced Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training give priority to
 - ‘Promoting cooperation in quality assurance with particular focus on exchange of models and methods, as well as common criteria and principles for quality in vocational education and training.’
- both the Copenhagen Declaration and the Council Resolution on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training identified certain concrete outputs in the fields of quality assurance, transparency and recognition, in order to improve the overall performance and attractiveness of VET and to foster mobility. The Resolution invited the Member States and the Commission to take the appropriate steps necessary to implement these priorities, building on and adapting relevant structures and instruments.
- following the Resolution and as an outcome of subsequent cooperative work between the Commission, the Member States, social partners, the EEA – EFTA and the candidate countries on the Quality Assurance priority, a Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) has been outlined. It was developed through stock taking experiences in and across Member States. Such a Framework should provide a basis and support for Member States in developing and improving their existing national or regional systems and approaches to quality assurance. It should further aim to help Member States to monitor and evaluate their own systems and practices.

- the Joint Interim Report, identifies the definition of a Common Quality Assurance Framework in the context of the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration as a priority.
- such a framework would include the following integrated elements:
 - an appropriate model, to facilitate planning, evaluation and review of systems at the appropriate levels in Member States.
 - an appropriate methodology for review of systems, for example self assessment, to enable Member States at the appropriate level to be self critical and strive for continued improvements.
 - monitoring **as** appropriate at national or regional level, possibly combined with voluntary peer review.
 - measurement tools developed at national or regional level to facilitate Member States to monitor and evaluate their own systems.

STRESSES that

- a CQAF can contribute to increasing transparency and consistency between Member States' policy initiatives, while fully respecting their responsibility for the development of their own systems.
- the objectives set in VET policy should focus on the improvement and evaluation of the results of VET in terms of increasing employability, improving the match between demand and supply, and better access to lifelong training, in particular for vulnerable people.
- there is need for Member States to analyse the effectiveness and attractiveness of their VET systems and for them to strengthen the links between their education and training system and working life.

- a CQAF constitutes an appropriate common European framework and systematic approach to quality assurance in order to meet the above objectives and needs. It can help policy makers and practitioners to get a better insight of how the existing models work, to share best practice and to improve quality systems, on the basis of common understandings.
- the potential of the framework for policy decision-making in the field of quality assurance in VET can be particularly relevant in countries where quality systems are not explicitly developed.

INVITES

The Member States and the Commission, within their respective competencies to :

- promote a CQAF on a voluntary basis while making best use of existing and future national and Community policy instruments.
- develop, together with the relevant stakeholders, practical initiatives in order to assess its added value in improving national or regional systems.
- coordinate activities at national and regional level between the main actors responsible for VET in order to encourage coherence with the Copenhagen Declaration and the Joint Interim Report.
- promote the creation of cooperative and voluntary networks on an experimental basis. This will enable the trans-national exchanges of best practices based on the current and future generations of education and training programmes.
- explore where appropriate the use of common measurement tools, to assist Member States to monitor and evaluate their own systems.