

Background paper

Policy conference June 10th and 11th 2002:

Increased co-operation in European vocational education and training

The purpose of this paper is to provide background for and input to the conference on ‘Increased co-operation in European vocational education and training’, taking place in Brussels June 10th and 11th 2002. The paper is divided into three main parts:

- The first part frames a vision for increased co-operation in European vocational education and training (VET). Reflecting numerous policy initiatives during recent years, the purpose is to clarify why increased co-operation can add something to the rich diversity of European vocational education and training.
- The second part addresses four specific areas where closer co-operation is urgently needed. Concentrating on how to increase *transparency*, improve *recognition* and strengthen *quality* of vocational qualifications and competences, the rapidly changing relationship between *sectoral, national and international (European) qualifications* will be used to illustrate the current situation and remaining challenges.
- The third part addresses the question of how to realise closer co-operation through new and/or improved working methods as well as through specific projects.

No complete or finalised solutions are presented in this paper. The aim is to make an interpretation of the current state of affairs in the areas referred to above, and on this basis indicate possible strategies. It is up to the conference to react to this interpretation and give advice on how to proceed

1. WHY INCREASED CO-OPERATION IN EUROPEAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

The Lisbon European Council in March 2000 set the European Union the strategic goal of becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world. The development of vocational education and training is a crucial and integral part of this strategy. The Barcelona European Council in March 2002 reaffirmed this important role. The conclusions give a mandate to introduce instruments to ensure the transparency of qualifications, and, in parallel to the Bologna process in higher education, to develop closer cooperation in the field of VET. Barcelona also set the objective of making European education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010¹.

Following the Communication on lifelong learning published by the Commission in November 2001 and welcomed by the Barcelona Council², a strategy for the development of vocational education and training must target all age groups and all learning forms (formal, non-formal and informal). It was also stressed in the Communication that there is a substantial role to be played

¹ Points 44 and 43 in ‘Presidency conclusions’, Barcelona 15 and 16 March 2002

² Presidency conclusion 45: ‘The European Council welcomes the Commission Communication on ‘Making a European Area for lifelong learning a reality’ and invites the Council to adopt a resolution on lifelong learning before the European Council in Seville (30.5.2002), taking into account the European Employment Strategy.’

by co-operation at European level in stimulating and supporting the implementation of lifelong learning across the Community. Member States must remain responsible for the design and management of their own systems, while moving broadly in the same direction. Turning European vocational education and training into a world leader, in line with these conclusions, therefore requires a willingness to reconsider the challenges ahead and a willingness to increase co-operation at all levels.

In order to increase opportunities for citizens for trans-national mobility, allowing them to use their qualifications and competences as a common currency throughout Europe, it will be necessary to go beyond what it is possible to achieve at one particular level, in one system or even in a single country. The following three challenges indicate where the main focus of a voluntary, close and committed co-operation effort can be directed:

- Existing vocational education and training provisions in Europe are highly fragmented and difficult to overview both at national and at European level. A main challenge is to move towards a situation of positive diversity where it is possible, for individuals as well as societies at large, to see how the huge variety of learning opportunities and learning outcomes can be combined in the best possible way. .
- Transfer of qualifications and competences from one context/setting to another is becoming increasingly necessary, not only between countries but perhaps even more between different parts of the national labour markets. So far, solutions have only to a limited degree covered the needs of vocational education and training. Applying a lifelong and lifewide perspective to vocational learning requires a proper system for validation, transfer and accumulation of qualifications and competences.
- The quality of vocational education and training varies considerably within Europe. This is to a certain extent due to differences between national qualification systems, traditions and approaches, but increasingly due to the proliferation of (in particular continuous) education and training offers outside the national, public systems. This proliferation of specialised, frequently private, provisions makes it extremely difficult to ensure that an appropriate level of quality is sustained. . Development of transparent and commonly accepted quality standards to be applied on a broad basis can thus be looked upon as key feature in a strategy to improve the overall performance of European vocational education and training.

These challenges suggest that in the coming decade, European vocational education and training will have to be able to make full use of the diversity and richness of existing institutions and systems, building on longstanding traditions for quality and professional pride. A balance must be struck between the stability and long-term perspectives provided by strong public education and training systems, and the more specialised and flexible kind of learning characteristic of working life. As such, full use will have to be made of learning in formal, non-formal and informal settings. Such a balanced mix of approaches, linking public and private provision, at national, regional and local (including enterprise) level, will provide a strong basis for lifelong learning. In addition, the development of European and international qualifications will have to be supported in view of the globalisation of markets and technologies.

Solutions to these challenges must therefore be sought in the interrelation between institutions, levels, systems and nations. There are obvious and even logical limits to what can be achieved in a single institution and even a national system in terms of reducing fragmentation, supporting transferability and strengthening the overall quality of vocational education and training offers. Recent studies by the OECD (2001) illustrate how high fences between education and training institutions and systems make it difficult to optimise the use of available resources.

The co-operation effort needs to include all major actors, irrespective of the level or the institutional context they are operating in. Legal and administrative mechanisms for co-ordination and control, as typified by national qualifications systems, need to be supplemented by other instruments and approaches such as the exchange of good practice, dialogue and peer review. In their discussion of the principles for increased co-operation, the Directors General for vocational training (DGVT) underlined that work must be based on the principles of transparency and mutual trust. Furthermore, at their meeting of the DGVT in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 23-24 April 2002, there was general agreement on the following points:

- There is a need for increased cooperation in the field of VET, on a voluntary and ‘bottom-up’ basis, and according to Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty, in order to fulfil the mandate of the Barcelona European Council.
- The active involvement of the social partners, as well as the EEA countries and the candidate countries is essential to the success of this initiative.
- A long-term perspective should be applied.
- The aim of increased cooperation should be to promote mutual trust, transparency, and increased recognition of qualifications on the one hand, and to raise the status (in terms of quality) of VET on the other.

These are the principles on which to base a voluntary cooperation process, seeking to identify simple means for co-operation, according to agreed criteria.

2. PRIORITY AREAS FOR INCREASED CO-OPERATION IN EUROPEAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The purpose of this second part is to address four specific areas where increased European co-operation is needed and possible. The three first sub-chapters deal with the questions of transparency, recognition and quality of vocational qualifications and competences. The aim is to summarise the ‘state of affairs’ in each separate area and use this as a basis for reflection on short- and long- term priorities. The fourth sub-chapter, dealing with qualifications developed at sector and branch level, is transversal in the sense that policies on transparency, recognition and quality will influence developments in this field.

2.1 Transparency of vocational qualifications and competences

Transparency of qualifications has been defined by CEDEFOP (2001) as ‘the degree of visibility necessary to identify and compare the value of qualifications at sectoral as well as regional, national and international level’. In the comments to this definition, CEDEFOP lists a number of reasons for working towards increased transparency, for example:

- To help job seekers explain their qualifications and competences to potential employers, at national and international level,
- To help individual learners to access formal education and training,
- To support employers and learning institutions in making qualified judgements on ‘foreign’ or ‘external’ qualifications,
- To improve the co-operation and mutual learning between national qualifications authorities and institutions on qualification issues,
- To support transfer of qualifications and competences between countries, sectors and enterprises, thus promoting labour market mobility.

During the 1990s, several EU initiatives underlined the need for increased transparency of vocational qualifications. The Resolution of the European Council of 3 December 1992 emphasised the need for Member States to provide reciprocal information on qualifications and qualification systems, thus making it easier for individuals and enterprises to make judgements on foreign qualifications. The Council Resolution of 15 July 1996 called on Member States to promote increased transparency by introducing a common format for certificate supplements providing a description of the qualifications obtained. The decision of the European Council of 21 December 1998³ to set up a 'EUROPASS' can also be looked upon as an initiative supporting transparency of vocational qualifications. The aim of the EUROPASS is to assist and promote mobility in work-linked training by providing a voluntary Europe-wide means of recording (but not automatically recognising) periods of training outside the 'home' Member State.

With the exception of EUROPASS, which was made available to trainees from 2000, and the efforts in a few Member States to develop and introduce certificate supplements, little practical follow up of these initiatives took place. So far, the Leonardo da Vinci programme supported, however, development and testing of various approaches to increased transparency. Working on a wide range of transparency tools and instruments, these projects gave important feed-back on how to solve technical and organisational problems related to transparency of vocational qualifications.

The first phase of the Leonardo da Vinci programme (1995-99) illustrated that transparency of vocational qualifications is not so much a technical problem. A wide range of promising instruments and approaches were actually developed and made available. The impact of these initiatives was limited, however, as little effort was made to ensure implementation of project results into regular and permanent institutions and systems.

This lack of institutional and political follow-up led, in 1999, to the establishment of the 'European Forum on transparency of vocational qualifications'. Initiated by the European Commission and CEDEFOP, the main task of the Forum was to support development and implementation of solutions to transparency of vocational qualifications. Consisting of representatives from all the Member States and the social partners, the Forum has been able to attract more political and institutional attention (formally enhanced through the Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council of 10th of July 2001 on Mobility within the Community⁴) to the issue. The result of this work has been the introduction of a set of new European transparency tools focusing specifically on vocational qualifications.

- The new European certificate supplement is based on the idea set forward by the Council Resolution of 1996. The supplement provides information on the skills and competences acquired by the holder of the certificate, the range of occupations accessible by the holder, the awarding bodies, the level of the certificate, different ways of achieving the certificate

3

⁴ OJ L215 9.8.2001; Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council of 10th of July 2001 on Mobility within the Community (for students, persons undergoing training, young volunteers, teachers and trainers)

(combinations of school and work) as well as the entry requirements to next level of education. The supplement is not a substitute for the original certificate, neither does it give any guarantee that the skills and competences in question are recognised. The strength of the supplement is that it is simple (two pages), that a common format has been adopted at European level and that all Member States and EEA countries have accepted to introduce it.

- The new European network of ‘National Reference Points’ for vocational qualifications builds on experiences from the Leonardo da Vinci programme. The reference point will be the first point of contact when questions relating to national qualifications and certificates arise. The reference point will also be able to give guidance on where to find information, both at home and abroad through the link to other reference points. So far (May 2002) 18 countries (Member states, EEA countries and candidate countries) have established or are in the process of establishing National reference points.
- The aim of the new European Curriculum Vitae, presented through a Commission Recommendation March 2002, is to provide individuals with a simple, standardised but voluntary format for presentation of formal qualifications attained in education and training as well as competences acquired through work, leisure time and family activities.

These positive developments should not conceal, however, that important challenges remain. The following points indicate where future initiatives and actions are needed:

- Existing instruments and services supporting transparency of vocational qualifications are not sufficiently visible and accessible to ordinary citizens.
- Instruments and services have to a large extent been developed and presented in isolation from each other, not as elements in an strategy. Is it, for example, possible to envisage, as is done in the Communication on Lifelong learning, a European ‘portfolio model’ bringing together different approaches in a more coherent way?
- The instruments and services for vocational education and training should be co-ordinated with parallel instruments and services developed for higher education. The fact that a certificate supplement for vocational education and training now operates in parallel to a diploma supplement for higher education may cause confusion. There is a need to clarify the relationship between the new reference points for vocational qualifications and the NARIC and ENIC centres in higher education.
- The role of guidance and counselling services in supporting transparency of vocational qualifications must be addressed. Particular attention must be given to the role of the European network of national resources centres for vocational guidance (NRCVG). There is a need to clarify the relationship between the NRCVGs and the new reference points for vocational qualifications.
- Existing initiatives focus to a large extent on transparency of vocational qualifications acquired through formal, initial training (exemplified through the certificate supplement). While this is an important and logical starting point, transparency of qualifications and competences acquired through continuous training and through non-formal learning has not been addressed in a systematic way so far (see also section 2.2.2).

2.2 Recognition of vocational qualifications and competences

Recognition implies an acknowledgement that a set of qualifications and competences has a value which is (at least) equivalent (but not necessarily equal) to the requirements set by the

recognising body. The term recognition needs to be put into a specific context to be properly understood:

- an enterprise may recognise competences acquired through work experience if these meet the requirements for content and quality set by the work organisation;
- an education and training institution will recognise (certify or accredit) a learning outcome if this is found to meet the requirements set in the curricula or some other standard;
- a national qualification authority may recognise foreign qualifications if it finds that these are equivalent to their own qualifications

Irrespective of the degree of formalisation, recognition will inevitably require transparency and mutual trust. Transparency is necessary in order to be able to judge profile and content, trust is necessary in order to reduce the uneasiness and suspicion towards qualifications and competences acquired ‘on the outside’ (be this in another branch, another part of the education and training system or in another country).

Traditionally, European debates on recognition have focused exclusively on the recognition of foreign qualifications. Free movement of labour within the EU requires that individual citizens are allowed to transfer and make use of their national qualifications in another Member State. The emergence of a European strategy on lifelong learning, emphasising the need to make better use of competences acquired in non-formal and informal settings, requires a broader approach to the question of recognition.

These general remarks will be illustrated through a presentation and discussion of the existing legal approach to recognition linked to the internal market, as well as the new forms of recognition appearing in relation to the non-regulated professions, as well as non-formal and informal learning.

2.2 Recognition of vocational qualifications (regulated and non-regulated professions) and competences

Recognition implies an acknowledgement that a set of qualifications and competences has a value which is (at least) equivalent (but not necessarily equal) to the requirements set by the recognising body. The meaning of the term differs considerably, ranging from recognition according to standards set by a work organisation, recognition according to the standards set by an education or training institution or recognition of foreign qualifications according to national, European or international terms of reference.

Co-operation in this field is necessary to reduce barriers to trans-national mobility, and to enable citizens to use their qualifications and competences as a common currency throughout Europe. While the European debate on recognition has concentrated on the aspect of ‘foreign qualifications’, the introduction of a lifelong and lifewide perspective to education and training policies requires that a broader approach is developed, including the challenge of recognising non-formal and informal learning.

2.2.1 Recognition of professional qualifications in the regulated professions

The specific characteristic of the regulated professions is that a legal provision limits access to those professions, as an independent professional practitioner or as an employee, to the holders of specific qualifications. National regimes are based on local qualifications leading to access to

the profession in their territory. This can constitute a legal obstacle to free movement as professionals from other Member States have different qualifications obtained in another jurisdiction. This is why a series of directives has been adopted under Article 47.2 of the EC Treaty generally either to apply minimum co-ordination of education and training in all Member States leading to the automatic recognition of certain titles throughout the European Union, or to ensure that, even without minimum co-ordination of training, professionals can move on the basis of the professional qualifications and experience obtained in one Member State, subject sometimes to compensation measures. Compensation measures can take the form of an aptitude test or period of supervised practice, at the choice of the migrant. They are designed to make up for substantial differences which are evident between the competences of the migrant and those required in the Member State in which recognition is sought. Lawyers are subject to two specific directives creating a liberal regime for provision of services and establishment based on authorisation to practise under title of the Member State of qualification.

While the operation of the directives applying minimum co-ordination and training (doctors, general care nurses, dental practitioners, veterinary surgeons, midwives, pharmacists and architects) requires no more than verification of the necessary documentation, recognition processes under the General System require examination and evaluation of the education, training and professional experience of each migrant. The granting of recognition to individual professionals under the General System can therefore be more administratively burdensome for competent authorities. Additional comparability and compatibility within co-ordinated education and training can also further strengthen the basis for free movement. All means by which conditions of professional recognition could be simplified and improved can therefore make a contribution to the effective functioning of the system. Increased co-operation in European vocational education and training can therefore make an important contribution to facilitating the operation of recognition processes for the regulated professions.

At the same time, the Commission has recently presented a new proposal for a directive on recognition of professional qualifications (document COM(2002)119, adopted on 7 March 2002). This proposal continues a long process of consolidation and simplification started under the SLIM initiative (for Simpler Legislation in the Internal Market) and replaces some fifteen directives with around 300 articles by a single text with around 60 articles. The proposal also provides for simpler and clearer conditions for the cross-frontier provision of services in accordance with the mandates given by the Lisbon and Stockholm European Councils for a more dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy and to implement the Commission's Internal Market Services Strategy. Concerning the General System, and following the results of the open consultation held last year with interested parties, the proposal suggests the adoption of professional platforms as a means for the development of easier conditions of free movement, adapted to the characteristics of each profession. The proposal also seeks to reinforce the support provided by national authorities to their migrating professionals. The legislative process on the proposal starts in Parliament and Council in June. In its Action Plan on Skills and Mobility, the Commission called for the early adoption of the proposal in 2003 with a view to its implementation in 2005.

2.2.2 Recognition in the non-regulated professions, and of non-formal and informal learning

While the existing rules on professional recognition for the regulated professions are highly relevant for vocational qualifications and competences, an increasing proportion of the labour market operates outside regulated areas. There is therefore a need to consider, in a systematic

manner, how to support recognition in the non-regulated area. The challenge is to go beyond minimum requirements so that diversity is accepted as a positive asset, as something bringing an added value to national qualifications. The development and establishment of a new credit transfer system, covering initial and continuous VET and operating at European level, may be one way to go beyond these minimum rights and obligations. Such a system must be based on as simple a set of criteria as possible.

Increased mutual trust is the key to recognition of vocational qualifications in Europe. A new, pro-active approach to recognition must go beyond the minimum requirements set for the regulated professions and confront the lack of trust towards 'external' and 'foreign' qualifications. A first step in this direction could be to agree on a set of voluntary standards, which could be used by certifying bodies and applied to certificates. As illustrated by existing norms (see for example European Norm 45013), the reliability and credibility of a certificate may be strengthened through the introduction of a set of common and transparent principles. Certificates building on these principles would have to be appropriately labelled, thus signalling the added value provided by applying common standards.

The increased attention towards learning taking place outside formal education and training institutions, at the work place, in voluntary activities, in leisure time activities and at home, requires an even broader approach to recognition than what has been outlined above. Most Member States are currently trying to set up national systems for the identification, assessment and recognition of non- and informally acquired competences. Parallel initiatives are being taken by enterprises, sectors and branches and by voluntary organisations and associations (3rd sector organisations). These approaches face a number of common challenges;

- A challenge related to methodologies. It is not always obvious how to 'measure' learning outcomes which have been acquired in a non-standardised and highly contextual form. The need for mutual learning and exchange of experiences is very much emphasised at European level, possibly pointing towards the development of common methodological guidelines and requirements⁵. As long as reliability and validity can be questioned, the credibility of new approaches will be endangered.
- A challenge related to reference points and standards for recognition. It is not obvious who should be given the task of setting the standard and/or reference point for recognition. While solutions have to reflect the specific context and need addressed, there is a need to define and develop common principles supporting the credibility (and overall value for the user) of the various approaches. Such procedures could clarify how standards have been developed and set up, how they are being renewed and how they are linked to the validation process.
- A challenge related to overall coherence at sectoral, national and European level. As the number of initiatives towards recognition of non-formal and informal learning increases, so does also the danger of fragmentation. Efforts to recognise non-formal learning are motivated by a wish to make better use of all forms of learning and to enable citizens to combine knowledge and competences from different settings, formal as well as non-formal. If new approaches are constructed as isolated sub-systems addressing only a limited field of activity, transfer and accumulation may actually be hindered. A major concern at European level is whether and how it is possible to link together different initiatives within a single framework. A diversity of approaches is obviously needed but a main challenge is to assure

⁵ This was the conclusion of the conference on 'Validation of non-formal and informal learning: European experiences and solutions', organised by the European Commission and the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research in Oslo 6th and 7th of May 2002.

that these initiatives are able to link together and communicate with each other. Without such an interlinkage, the objective of the Communication on lifelong learning to bridge together formal, non-formal and informal learning will be lost.

2.3 Quality of vocational qualifications and competences

The improvement of the quality of vocational training is at issue both in national and Community level policies. There are many reasons for this. Awareness, on the one hand, of the role of a qualified workforce in raising the competitiveness of the economy, and on the other hand, in the fight against unemployment, has led to significant developments in vocational education and training at national and at Community level.

As investments in training increase, the need to ensure their effectiveness and to measure returns on them is felt both by companies and by the public authorities. The development of quality management approaches in initial and continuing training has therefore made some progress, the extent of which varies from country to country. These approaches are designed mainly to improve : the governance of VET systems by public or private authorities; learning outcomes regarding economic and social needs; the flexibility of training provision mainly in sectors undergoing rapid high-tech change; mobility in training and labour markets.

Furthermore, European integration raises the question of quality in the perspective of supporting mobility in the EU. Mobility policy, which has a central place in education and training policies at Community level, is accompanied by a considerable effort to improve the transparency of qualifications. But transparency on its own is not enough to guarantee a high degree of (mutual) trust and accountability in existing VET provision. Developing a policy on quality in vocational training is therefore an important challenge at Community level, but a consensus must be built on how to achieve this, particularly in relation to the scope of guidelines and decisions to be taken at various levels.

2.3.1. The quality of vocational education and training in the Community political agenda

The Community began to address the question of the quality of vocational training notably during the 1990s. In its Resolutions of 1994 (94/C 374/01) and of 1995 (95/C/207/03) the Council invited the Member States to increase their efforts with a view to improving the quality and appeal of vocational training, and to develop, with the social partners and relevant bodies, exchanges of information and experiences, in accordance with national practices, aiming inter alia to encourage vocational training providers to improve the quality of their services, and to promote methods and tools for the evaluation of the quality of vocational training.

It also asks the Commission to support Member States' and social partners' efforts to achieve these goals, to promote dialogue and to encourage experimentation, in particular by means of the various existing programmes and Community initiatives. The Leonardo da Vinci programme has thus, since its launch in 1994, been an important instrument for innovation and transfer of experience. The programme has supported more than sixty specific projects on design, instruments and management of quality in vocational training.

Finally, in its Resolution of 1999 (2000/C 8/04) on the development of new working methods for European co-operation in vocational education and training, the Council considered that co-operation could be strengthened by the creation of a structured platform for discussion and

implementation of agreed actions, according to a rolling agenda. Quality of vocational education and training was a main priority in this agenda.

The creation of the European Forum on the quality of vocational training, as a co-operation and exchange platform between the Commission, the social partners and the Member States, responds to the main elements of the Council Resolutions. The work programme of the Forum (2001-2002), based on a consensus between the Member States and the social partners, is guided by three political objectives: to contribute to the improvement of employability, access to training, and consistency between supply and demand of training. The work programme nevertheless has a certain flexibility, enabling it to support developments in Community policy. As such, increased co-operation in VET could contribute to:

- confirming the principles directing the work undertaken at Community level, largely inspired by the Council Resolutions, and which stress the exchange of information and experience, the collection and dissemination of innovations and "good practice";
- bringing new prospects to the mandate of the Forum (if necessary);
- defining the development of the work programme;
- consolidating the results of the work undertaken at Community level, by promoting broader debates at the relevant levels;
- communicating proposals for concrete actions towards the various segments of the decision-making processes.

2.3.2. Some key issues on quality of vocational education and training

The co-operation established within the framework of the Forum between Member States, Social Partners, the Commission, Cedefop and a number of experts, has been supported by exchanges of information, experiences and "good practice" between countries. These were focused on four areas which are crucial in quality development: quality management approaches; self evaluation; examination and certification arrangements; indicators for a quality strategy in VET.

The work carried out led to the identification of a number of common problems encountered in various contexts, as well as of different choices of Member States in seeking for solutions to ensure and enhance the quality of training. As a result, a certain number of proposals were drawn up intending to support the debate and decision-making at different levels on the design and management of quality in vocational training.

The criteria for designing and implementing consistent Quality Management Approaches (QMA) in initial and continuing training has been a major issue at stake in the Forum's work. The cases collected are evidence of the need to take into account three levels in the design of QMAs : a meta level (the vision) ; a content level (operational factors like setting goals, standards, assessment and evaluation systems, involvement of actors ...) and a context level (key conditions to support quality management approaches). The cases also revealed the existence of two main types of approaches : those focused on measuring mismatches between goals and outcomes, leading to the improvement of the training provision and the development of quality standards; and the approaches that go beyond and may lead to the revision of goals and of the process of setting them. In a more general way, the analysis of the rationale laying behind the

strategic decisions of Member States on QMA's (international instruments like ISO or EFQM ; national/local initiatives like quality labels, quality awards, accreditation of training bodies, self evaluation, formal external control...), provides for the identification of the main core elements to be considered by the MS in setting up a QMA or in taking decisions to foster the existing one.

In the same perspective, the Forum also devoted considerable work to the identification of the conditions in which the use of self evaluation (SE) may become a main instrument in the quality cycle, as well as of the risk factors in its implementation. The 140 cases collected from Member States showed that self-evaluation was regularly used as a method of managing VET provision. It may be used by national or/and public authorities to pilot/manage the quality of VET providers (mainly in initial training). Several countries (UK, NL, A, DA, IR, Iceland) have legal instruments that provide for the framework of piloting initial training systems in this way. On the other hand, self evaluation may also be used by private providers, top managers, employers' networks and social partners to raise the quality of VET provision. Used in most cases in the perspective of organisational development, it may become in some cases mainly an instrument of control of VET providers to which penalties may be associated, such as the suppression of a label or of the right to practice. A main issue raised by the cases collected is the use of self-evaluation for benchmarking between VET providers and its direct effects on the improvement of the overall performance and quality of VET provision.

The quality criteria for examination and certification arrangements is also a central issue in the Forum's work, which is close to that of the Transparency Forum on non-formal and informal learning. In this regard, emphasis has been placed on providing an overview of the quality factors of certification and examination arrangements associated with the different systems. A certain number of conditions to develop and sustain quality in this field have been identified providing for support to Member States in decision-making on specific arrangements at national, regional and sector levels (initial and continuing training). The organisation of the quality process of certification and examination implies for example the systematic revision of diplomas, continuous analysis at different levels to identify new needs, flexibility of the examination methods, on-the-job assessment ...

The last issue that has been dealt with by the Forum concerns the identification of Indicators for a quality strategy in VET. The work developed so far provides for a conceptual framework identifying context, input, output and outcome indicators for measuring the quality of training provision, in order namely to support an exchange of experiences between Member States. In this perspective, the mapping and analysis of available indicators in Member States, Eurostat and OECD, led to a first proposal on a set of hard and soft indicators that could be used to identify the quality of VET provision according to the policy priorities of improving employability, matching between supply and demand, and access to training. A main issue raised in this context is the strategy laying behind the use of indicators in terms of the development of a quality policy: to ensure that standards are met (quality assurance) or/and to raise the standards on a continuous basis. The question on the needs to improve the existing data, namely on quality strategies in VET, was addressed.

The result of the overall work carried out so far can be considered as a first step seeking to achieve a shared understanding of quality development. The reports that have been drawn up and the information provided by the cases collected are intended to support the debate in various bodies at national and Community level, in order to progress in building a broad consensus on the guidelines to follow and the actions to implement. These debates should make it possible to go into greater detail on the essential questions dealt with by the Forum and on the main results

achieved. These "transversal" questions concern key elements necessary to support the definition of policies on the development of quality in initial and/or continuing training:

- Which principles may guide the development of quality in vocational training?
- What are the criteria for the definition of the quality of vocational training?
- How can a system aiming to ensure the quality of training be designed: what are the principal elements, how may the relationship between cost and benefit be accounted for?
- What may be the role of the State, the social partners and the training bodies in the design and management of a system of quality?
- How can such a system be managed and articulated at various levels; which mechanisms, tools, indicators, procedures are appropriate?
- What are the principles underpinning the various possible choices?
- In what perspective, at which levels, and with whom could objectives and standards be set? Who authorises them, who verifies if standards have been achieved, what initiatives are taken when standards are not achieved, who modifies them?
- How could a system of quality be evaluated and corrective measures developed?
- Which are the best initiatives at national and Community level to support the development of a policy on quality of vocational education and training?

A number of concrete initiatives can be envisaged on a short and medium term basis. The following ideas could be considered in relation to the ongoing work of the Forum on Quality where a number of proposals regarding Quality Management Approaches, Self evaluation, examination and certification arrangements and indicators for a quality strategy, are being prepared:

- The means could be developed for institutional co-operation between bodies dealing with quality assurance.
- Bilateral or multilateral projects could be established, and reference or contact points set up, with a view to developing commonly agreed work programmes.
- Ways and means for independent and voluntary testing/accreditation of education and training offers should be considered.
- Agreement on a set of principles for certification and validation procedures (including validation of non-formal and informal learning).
- A more systematic strategy for the active exchange of good practice, monitoring and peer review to clarify strengths and weaknesses at sectoral, national and European level.

2.4 Development of European/international qualifications at sector/branch level

In recent years, an increasing number of initiatives have been taken towards European and/or international qualification arrangements and standards, promoted by governments or the private sector itself. International frameworks, exemplified by the European social dialogue, have also

been used for this purpose. Given the tendency towards internationalisation of trade and labour markets this is not surprising. A growing number of enterprises emphasise the need for some kind of common currency in the field of qualifications and competences. The overall impact of these initiatives has so far been limited as in most cases they have been developed in isolation from each other and frequently have failed to develop beyond an experimental level. A number of successful initiatives indicates, however, that this picture is changing. There is therefore a need to discuss how to support and make best use of these initiatives, including how to avoid the hazards involved.

Cedefop has, in co-operation with the Commission and the social partners, initiated a process to facilitate a more concerted approach in this field. At a meeting in Brussels on 22 January 2002, representatives of more than 20 different sectors (in agriculture, industry and services) as well as the interprofessional social partners presented a highly interesting overview of current activities. Participants also expressed readiness to pursue the matter further. The meeting also gave valuable insights into the various factors that motivate actions at sector level, such as tight labour markets, the necessity to improve the image or status of a branch, the needs to reduce barriers to mobility, demands for more transparent qualifications, as well as a common understanding of the challenges resulting from the new knowledge environment⁶.

The following prominent examples illustrate how various initiatives have been pursued at sector/branch level.

- The project 'Professionnalisation Durable' initiated by the French Ministry for Education and supported by the Commission: the aim of the project (in which eight countries are taking part) is to establish a common methodology for the setting up and renewal of European qualification standards. These standards are being developed through a 'bottom up' approach (in the hotel and automobile industries), building on active contributions from the industry sectors themselves. The aim is to establish a 'European Diploma' to be offered on a voluntary basis by the Member States, in addition to existing national certificates.
- The ICT sector has been active in various initiatives with the overall aim of addressing problems of quantitative and qualitative skills shortages. With the support of the European Commission, a consortium, Career Space, has been set up consisting of eleven major ICT companies as well as professional associations. The first step in this work was to develop generic skills profiles relevant to key jobs in ICT, and the second was to develop new ICT curriculum guidelines⁷. These profiles and guidelines will assist the design of courses to match the profiles and needs of Europe's ICT industry and 'eEurope'.

Other examples can be found within metalworking, electro, fisheries, geology and transport. In order to guide and support the development of qualifications at sector and branch level, several options must be considered.

⁶ A conference to be organised in Denmark 23-24 September 2002 will provide a more complete overview of initiatives and expectations at sector level, and secondly, indicate possible ways for the social partners as well as European, national and regional institutions to influence this process. The conference, supported by the Commission, the European Monitoring Centre on Change (Dublin Foundation) and Cedefop, will offer an opportunity to discuss how overall support can be offered at European level, supporting the rich diversity of approaches but avoiding fragmentation.

⁷ See <http://www.career-space.com/>

- The ‘professional platforms’ introduced through the general system on recognition of qualifications (see 2.2.1) offers professional associations the possibility to define and agree on (quality) criteria for the pursuit of the profession in question.
- The sector committees established through the European social dialogue may be used to pursue work on sectoral qualifications. Certain sectors have already used this opportunity. The social dialogue may also be used to define requirements and recommendations for setting standards and developing training offers.
- The systems and tools developed by the European Committee for Standardisation (CEN) may be of relevance to the development of sectoral qualifications. CEN is an association of 20 members (Member States of EU as well as of EFTA). CEN co-operates closely with the International Standards Organisation (ISO) and other bodies responsible for the setting of standards. CEN currently covers more than 300 trade and professional bodies in liaison with technical committees. These organisations provide drafts for standardisation. The aim of CEN is to implement voluntary standardisation throughout Europe to meet market needs, to remove trade barriers and to provide support for European legislation, in conjunction with ISO or private organisations representing European and world-wide interests.
- In view of Cedefop’s mission to support the social partners, the Centre could provide valuable support to the ongoing efforts to develop qualifications at sectoral level. This could consist of providing an overview of initiatives and produce case studies, both valuable in supporting exchange of experiences and mutual learning. Cedefop could also play an instrumental role in supporting ongoing work within the framework of the general system for recognition (professional platforms) and the European social dialogue. The role of the European Training Foundation relative to the candidate countries should also be considered in this context.

The present interest in matters relating to sector qualifications and standards reflects a growing awareness of the possible benefits as well as the hazards of the issue. The benefits derive from the possibility that a sector approach, through support of transparency and mutual trust, could provide a common, basis for ‘automatic’ recognition of learning outcomes. Equally important is the fact that industry sectors and branches are the first to confront changes in technology and markets and consequently the first to identify needs for competence development. The hazards include the risk that standards might contribute to sector protection, thereby making the link (including mobility) between qualifications acquired at different levels more difficult.

The following concrete steps could be considered:

- Ensure that the numerous initiatives result in a concerted approach. Cedefop could, in co-operation with the relevant part of the commission (DG Education and Culture, DG Employment and DG Internal Market) bring together relevant stakeholders and interest groups. A start could be made at the conference to be organised in Denmark in September. An important outcome of such a concerted approach would be increased transparency and comparability.
- Consider an interprofessional framework for sector approaches, including common principles, procedures to validate sector job-profiles, qualification standards, curriculum guidelines as well as procedures supporting the overall quality of sectoral qualification approaches. Such a framework should not be developed in isolation, but should be linked to a more general system for credit transfer (as discussed in 2.2).

Neither individual citizens nor enterprises need ‘encapsulated’ or isolated qualifications restricted to one single context or sphere. The challenge is to support a development where

qualifications developed in different sectors can be combined, where sectoral and national qualifications can strengthen each other mutually and where sectoral initiatives address the need for European and international skills.

3. DEVELOPING A 'TOOL-BOX' FOR INCREASED CO-OPERATION ON EUROPEAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING; HOW TO IMPROVE AND RENEW WORKING METHODS?

Increased co-operation must be developed within a policy framework defining basic visions, specific objectives, a time-table for realising these visions and objectives and an indication of main roles and responsibilities. Given such a framework, success in terms of practical co-operation depends on the ability to develop creative and efficient working methods. The purpose of this chapter is to list as wide a range of approaches as possible, thereby providing a basis for the discussion on how to take forward work in the four different areas presented above.

- Closer institutional links could be established between European qualification authorities. Although some countries already co-operate on an ad hoc basis, there is a need to develop co-operation arrangements that are more permanent and committing. These links must reflect the wide differences in institutional structures existing in Europe today. Setting up a European standing conference of qualification authorities could be an important step in this direction and could lead to more systematic work on common co-operation principles and projects. A standing conference would offer a way of addressing and clarifying existing differences and similarities in a constructive way. Closer institutional co-operation must be organised in such a way that social partners, sectoral representatives and professional associations are included in a systematic and appropriate way. A standing conference of qualification authorities must therefore be open to and include these.
- Co-operation initiatives are being pursued equally through bi-lateral and multilateral co-operation. Such initiatives may be particularly solve problems which are specific to certain regions. Bi- or multilateral co-operation will also be useful for testing of solutions which eventually may implemented at European level. This model is illustrated by the project 'Professionnalisation Durable' initiated by the French Ministry of Education.
- The increased tendency towards development of qualifications at sector and branch level requires platforms for co-operation where issues related to transparency, transferability and quality can be addressed. A starting point would be to consider how the 'professional platforms' set up in relation to the general system on recognition can best be utilised. There is also a need to examine whether this approach can be better co-ordinated with the social dialogue processes at European level. Such a framework, possibly supported by Cedefop (and ETF) must address a double purpose; on the one hand supporting sectors and branches in developing high quality education and training solutions; on the other hand addressing the needs of individual citizens for credible and transparent qualifications.
- There is a need to develop a more systematic strategy for active exchange of good practise, monitoring and peer review to clarify strengths and weaknesses at sectoral, national and European level. Cedefop and ETF need to further develop methods and strategies in this field and co-operation with other international bodies (notably OECD) should be supported and developed when this is possible. Efforts should be made to integrate monitoring and peer review more closely into policy processes, assuring that there is a continuous feed-back between policy making and monitoring.
- Ways and means for independent testing and accreditation of education and training offers should be considered, such as, for example 'Stiftung Bildungstest' in Germany. A European network could develop common guidelines and requirements (to be applied on a voluntary

basis). This kind of independent testing and accreditation would be of particular importance in relation to education and training offered outside the national qualifications systems, for example continuous training. A related approach, but emphasising non-formal and work-based training, would be to use elements of, for example, the UK 'Investors in people' in a Europe wide strategy. Valuable experience can also be found within specific professional sectors where international accreditation of training programs and offers has been developed over a long period. This is exemplified by the French 'Ecole Nationale de la Sante Publique' through its development of a methodology and frame of reference for accreditation of training programs. All these approaches may require the introduction of a European 'quality label' indicating that the institution or training in question complies to a set of pre-defined and agreed principles and criteria.

- Agreement on a set of principles for certification and validation procedures (including validation of non-formal and informal learning). One alternative is to use existing international standards (developed by CEN, ISO) as a point of departure, responding to the needs of individual citizens for credible certificates which can be earned in any country/context as well as spend in any country/ context.
- The development, through research and institutional co-operation, of a framework for credit transfer at European level. One option is to pursue this as an extension of the European Credit Transfer System developed for Universities (making full use of the input from the relevant projects within the Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Youth 'Joint Action'). Another option is to radically extend the role and scope of the existing EUROPASS by transferring it into a system allowing all forms of education, training and learning to be registered.
- Introducing a Europe wide credit transfer requires the development and implementation of a common set of qualification levels. There is a need to carefully consider previous experiences in this field.
- The role of the existing European Fora (Transparency and Quality) needs to be carefully considered over the next year. The aim must be to make full use of their potential (providing platforms for technical support and deliberation) and at the same time avoiding unnecessary overlap. It may be possible to envisage a rationalisation of these structures into a single European vocational training Forum, with associated thematic working groups, such as on transparency, quality, guidance, or non-formal learning.
- The role of the Leonardo da Vinci programme (and other EU programmes) needs to be carefully considered. A consistent approach to 'valorisation', requested by the international conference on this topic in Madrid April 2002, must be pursued. This requires a 'feed back loop' where policies on vocational education and training are clearly reflected in the programme and where results of the programme are fed back into the policy making processes.

European Commission, 30/05/02

Glossary of lifelong learning terminology

active citizenship

The cultural, economic, political/democratic and/or social participation of citizens in society as a whole and in their community.

adaptability

The capacity to adapt to new technologies, new market conditions and new work patterns of both enterprises and of those employed in enterprises.

assessment

A general term embracing all methods used to appraise/judge the performance of an individual or a group.

certificate/diploma

An official document, which formally records the achievements of an individual.

certification

The process of issuing certificates or diplomas, which formally recognise the achievements of an individual, following an assessment procedure.

civil society

A 'third sector' of society alongside the state and the market, which embraces institutions, groups, and associations (either structured or informal), and which may act as mediator between the public authorities and citizens.

compensatory learning

The provision of learning which should have been acquired during compulsory schooling.

competence

The capacity to use effectively experience, knowledge and qualifications.

corporate social responsibility

The commitment of a corporate organisation to operate in a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable manner, while acknowledging the interests of internal and external stakeholders.

digital divide

The gap between those who can access and use information and communication technologies (ICT) effectively, and those who cannot.

digital literacy

The ability to use ICT proficiently.

eLearning

Learning that is aided by ICT.

employability

The degree of capacity an individual demonstrates to find a job, keep it and update occupational competences.

empowerment

The process of granting people the power to take responsible initiatives to shape their own life and that of their community or society in economic, social and political terms.

European governance

The administration of European affairs through the interaction of the traditional political authorities and ‘civil society’, private stakeholders, public organisations, citizens.

formal learning

Learning typically provided by an education or training institution, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and leading to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner’s perspective.

guidance

A range of activities designed to assist people to make decisions about their lives (educational, vocational, personal) and to implement those decisions.

identification (of competences)

The process of specifying and defining the boundaries and nature of competences.

informal learning

Learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases it is non-intentional (or “incidental”/random).

intergenerational learning

Learning that occurs through the transfer of experience, knowledge or competences from one generation to another.

knowledge-based society (or knowledge society)

A society whose processes and practices are based on the production, distribution, and use of knowledge.

learning community

A community that widely promotes a culture of learning by developing effective local partnerships between all sectors of the community and supports and motivates individuals and organisations to participate in learning.

learning facilitator

Anyone who facilitates the acquisition of knowledge and competences by establishing a favourable learning environment, including those exercising a teaching, training or guidance function. The facilitator orientates the learner by giving guidelines, feedback and advice throughout the learning process, in addition to assisting the development of knowledge and competences.

learning organisation

An organisation that encourages learning at all levels (individually and collectively) and continually transforms itself as a result.

learning region

A region in which all stakeholders collaborate to meet specific local learning needs and implement joint solutions to common problems.

lifelong learning

All learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective.

lifewide learning

All learning activity whether formal, non-formal or informal. Lifewide learning is one dimension of lifelong learning.

non-formal learning

Learning that is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.

recognition of competences

1) *Formal recognition*: the process of granting official status to competences, either

- by awarding certificates or

- by granting equivalence, credit units, validation of gained competences;

and/or

2) *Social recognition*: the acknowledgement of the value of competences by economic and social stakeholders.

social inclusion

The integration into society of individuals, or groups of individuals, as citizens or as members of different “public” social networks. Social inclusion is fundamentally rooted in labour market or economic inclusion.

valuing learning

The process of recognising participation in and outcomes of (formal, non-formal or informal) learning, so as to raise awareness of its intrinsic worth and to reward learning.
