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COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 9.4.2008
COM(2008) 179 final

2008/0069 (COD)

Proposal for a

**RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE
COUNCIL**

**on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for
Vocational Education and Training**

[SEC(2008) 440]

[SEC(2008) 441]

(presented by the Commission)

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

1) CONTEXT OF THE PROPOSAL

Grounds for and objectives of the proposal

The objective of the proposed Recommendation is to establish a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (hereinafter referred to as "the Framework") as a reference instrument to help Member States to promote and monitor continuous improvement of their Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems, based on common European references. The Framework should contribute to quality improvement in VET and to building mutual trust in national VET systems within a genuine borderless lifelong learning area.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is an important element of the EU's drive to become more competitive and socially cohesive, as outlined in the Lisbon strategy. The creation of a knowledge-based society underpinning that strategy needs to be based on investment in, and improvement of, the quality of human resources. More effective use of resources and a future-oriented design of VET involving new approaches to learning, both in schools and at work, are essential ingredients.

This breadth of purpose is reflected in the way VET is organised across the EU – national and regional programmes respond to different standards and lead to many different qualifications. This diversity means that there is huge scope for mutual learning and for an EU-wide reflection about future organisation. And it also means that Europe requires common points of reference to ensure transparency, consistency and portability between the many streams of development across Europe. All of this should happen without infringing the Member States' autonomy in the governance of VET systems.

The target set by the Barcelona European Council in 2002 of making Europe's education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010 put the issue of how to build and ensure quality of VET systems at the centre of the Education and Training policy agenda. The Council Resolution¹ and the Declaration² of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training on the Promotion of Enhanced European Cooperation in VET, which launched the Copenhagen process, provided important pointers towards the Barcelona target.

Subsequent European cooperation has enabled the exchange of experience, mutual learning and consensus-building. This paved the way for common principles, guidelines and tools for quality development which led to the establishment of a Common Quality Assurance Framework for VET (CQAF) in 2003. The CQAF approach was endorsed by the Council³, which invited both Member States and the Commission to promote it through practical initiatives involving the relevant stakeholders, on a voluntary basis.

Compatible with most existing systems, the CQAF provided for common principles and a reference point that made it possible to promote a number of initiatives at European and national levels⁴. However, the quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators supporting

1 19 December 2002 (OJ 2003/C 13/02)

2 Adopted in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002

3 Council Conclusions on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training, 18 May 2004

4 For further details, please see <http://communities.trainingvillage.gr/quality>

implementation of the CQAF are insufficiently explicit and make the instrument difficult to generalise.

A number of countries have underlined the need to strengthen the status of the CQAF. In any event, the need for further development of the CQAF was recognised at the time of its endorsement by the Council in 2004. Finally, the Helsinki Communiqué of 2006, reviewing the priorities of the Copenhagen Process, underlined the need to progress from the CQAF towards a culture of quality improvement.

The proposed Recommendation builds on experience gained through the use of CQAF and responds to requests made by Member States.

Education and training systems must be flexible enough to respond to a wide range of needs, while maintaining overall coherence across different levels of implementation. The effectiveness and efficiency of training provision in meeting such needs must be regularly evaluated, monitored and improved, on the basis of evidence.

Quality assurance⁵ is a means to achieve this. It should be seen as an instrument for continuous improvement of VET, based on a quality cycle establishing the appropriate interrelation between planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment and review of VET. Quality assurance implies a systematic approach to quality, with an explicit focus on the roles of actors at different levels and the way they relate to each other. It should also include ways in which the performance of VET can be monitored, and use measurement to support review and improvement of VET at system and provider levels.

This approach to quality assurance is reflected in the general principles for quality assurance in education and training contained in Annex 3 to the Recommendation on the establishment of the EQF.

Existing provisions in the area of the proposal

Momentum has been created as a result of the Council Resolution and Declaration of 2002 (the "Copenhagen process"), followed by the Council conclusions of May 2004, and the Helsinki Communiqué in 2006. In addition to underlining the need to build upon the CQAF, the Communiqué called for wider participation in ENQAVET (European Network on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training)⁶. The ENQAVET was established to facilitate exchange of experience, mutual learning and consensus-building, and support, test and further develop the CQAF. In a number of countries, the ENQAVET is supported by Quality Assurance National Reference Points (QANRPs)⁷.

Quality assurance has been developed in other related fields which have an impact on VET. In higher education, the Bergen ministerial meeting of 2005 and the Recommendation on further

5 For the purposes of the Recommendation, definitions which apply are based on Cedefop's Glossary on Quality in Training (working paper, November 2003) <http://communities.trainingvillage.gr/quality>

6 ENQAVET was established in October 2005 by the European Commission following the favourable opinion of the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training. Its members have been designated by Member States, candidate countries, EFTA-EEA countries and the European Social Partners' organisations, according to an explicit procedure

7 In most participating countries, ENQAVET relies on national quality assurance reference points that were established to provide active support to the implementation of the Network's work programme and raise awareness/keep relevant stakeholders informed of the Network's activities. Such reference points are based on/bring together existing relevant bodies at the national level and liaise with and involve a wide range of relevant stakeholders

European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education⁸ provided standards and guidelines for quality assurance. The Recommendation on the European Quality Charter for Mobility⁹ introduced quality assurance concepts in developing and implementing actions in support of mobility.

Thus, recent years have seen a degree of attention being given, at both EU and national levels, to the promotion of quality in VET. The Framework should be a means of giving new impetus to the continuous improvement of quality management practices and, ultimately, of VET systems.

The Framework fully respects the competence of the Member States. It seeks to stimulate:

- the creation of more developed and consistent quality assurance and improvement systems across countries;
- increased transparency of quality assurance and improvement systems and approaches in VET, to improve mutual trust and facilitate mobility;
- co-operation and mutual learning, to foster stakeholder involvement in a culture of quality improvement and accountability at all levels.

The Framework forms part of a series of measures designed to support continuous improvement in the quality and governance of VET systems. These include the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)¹⁰, the European Credit System for VET (ECVET)¹¹, and the common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning¹².

Use of the Framework will be voluntary. Its main users will be public authorities and the bodies charged with quality assurance and improvement.

Consistency with other policies and objectives of the Union

The Framework will contribute to achieving the European Employment Strategy's goal of more effective investment in human capital. In particular, it will contribute to improving the quality and efficiency of investment in human capital through better education and skills, in line with the Employment Policy Guidelines (2005-2008)¹³ and in particular Guideline No 24.

In a similar way, the Communication on Cohesion Policy¹⁴ draws attention to the importance of reinforcing investment in human capital through better education and skills, and of

8 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 February 2006 on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education, 2006/143/EC, OJ L 64/60 of 4.3.2006.

9 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on transnational mobility within the Community for education and training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility, OJ L 394/5, 30.12.2006, (2006/961/EC)

10 Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, COM(2006) 479 final, Brussels, 5.9.2006

11 Commission staff working document. 'European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training; a system for the transfer, accumulation and recognition of learning outcomes in Europe'; SEC (2006) 1431 - 31 October 2006

12 Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning, 9175/04 EDUC 101 SOC 220 18 May 2004

13 Council Decision of 12 July 2005 on Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States (2005/600/EC), OJ L 205/21, 6.8.2005

14 Communication from the Commission, Cohesion Policy in Support of Growth and Jobs: Community Strategic Guidelines 2007-2013, COM (2005) 0299, 5.7.2005

reforming education and training systems using common European references and principles. It invites Member States to use the resources under the Convergence objective to improve, among other things, the quality and effectiveness of education and training provision.

2) CONSULTATION OF INTERESTED PARTIES AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Consultation of interested parties

Consultation methods, main sectors targeted and general profile of respondents

The proposal results from work carried out in cooperation with a wide range of bodies with specific competencies in quality development in VET. This cooperation took place in the European Forum on Quality in VET (2001-2002), the Technical Working Group on VET (2003-2004) and, since 2005, through ENQAVET.

ENQAVET brings together a variety of institutions from 25 of the countries participating in the Education & Training 2010 Work Programme, and the European social partners. Further, it draws in the views of a still wider group of interested bodies which participate in specific activities of ENQAVET's work programme, and of the QANRPs, which bring together a wide range of stakeholders at national level. The Commission also consulted the Director General for VET (DGVT) and the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training (ACVT), which includes representatives of governments, trade unions and employers' organisations from each Member State. The ACVT gave a favourable opinion on the Commission's draft proposal at its meeting of 14-15 June 2007.

Summary of responses and how they have been taken into account

This consultation confirmed broad support for the Framework.

Particular emphasis was laid on arrangements for implementation and the need to keep the reference criteria and descriptors as simple as possible. There was also support for quality indicators and for inviting ENQAVET to carry out further work, in cooperation with the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks.

Collection and use of expertise

Scientific/expertise domains concerned

Cedefop¹⁵ has provided strong technical and scientific support while the ETF¹⁶ liaised particularly with candidate countries.

Methodology used

The Framework builds on the CQAF, which was developed through consensus, taking into consideration the different national approaches to improving quality, and in particular through identified cases of good practice. In particular, it proved possible to identify common issues underpinning quality assurance in most countries, and to develop a reference set of quality indicators.

15 European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

16 European Training Foundation

Over 200 indicators were identified and analysed. The list was narrowed down by prioritising those that could support quality assurance at both system and provider levels and that had potential for use in cross-country comparison and mutual learning. Account was also taken of the need to link quality improvement in VET to broader European objectives such as increasing employability, improving the matching between training supply and users' needs and promoting better access to lifelong learning. Practical experience from European and national projects, particularly peer-learning, allowed better definition of the indicators at provider and systems level. Further tools that have been developed can facilitate the Framework's implementation. The European Guide to self-assessment¹⁷ is intended to help VET providers improve the quality of training provision. A European Peer Review Manual for initial VET was also developed, through a project under the Leonardo da Vinci Programme¹⁸. The manual is being further tested in a new Leonardo project¹⁹.

The CQAF principles and criteria were kept at a relatively general level, in order to make it possible to develop and refine them for a specific context. A number of European countries have already developed a national framework for quality assurance on the basis of the CQAF. A few studies and practical projects have helped to further develop the CQAF. These are referred to in Cedefop's Virtual Community (<http://communities.trainingvillage.gr>).

Main organisations/experts consulted; Summary of advice received and used; Means used to make the expert advice publicly available

See above (*consultation methods ...*)

Impact assessment

The objective of the Impact assessment is to analyse the various ways of ensuring take up of the Framework and the most suitable option in terms of a choice of an appropriate legal instrument. The IA report has been submitted to the Impact Assessment Board (IAB) and takes account of the recommendations of the IAB on the different legal options.

There is a consensus, shown in repeated Council conclusions and in the Copenhagen process, in favour of modernisation and improvement of VET. Continued exchanges since 2003 have underlined the value of developing quality assurance for VET across the EU. The role of any EU instrument should, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, be to promote, facilitate and support action at the level of the Member States. The first question for impact assessment relates to the choice of instrument for doing this. Five options have been taken into consideration.

1. *No instrument at European level* would mean continuing on the basis of such CQAF principles as currently exist. However, the experience so far suggests that the present framework has had limited impact in terms of stimulating Member States to promote its use. The current status of the framework makes it difficult for participating countries to make consistent use of the system and to reap the benefits of peer review

17 "An European Guide on Self-assessment for VET providers", Cedefop, September 2003

18 "European Peer Review Manual for initial VET", Gutknecht-Gmeiner, Maria; Lassnigg, Lorenz; Stöger, Eduard; de Ridder, Willem; Strahm, Peter; Strahm, Elisabeth; Koski, Leena; Stalker, Bill; Hollstein, Rick; Alluli, Giorgio; Kristensen, Ole Bech (Vienna, June 2007)

19 "Peer Review Extended" (EAC/32/06/13m LE-78CQAF), www.peer-review-education.net ; "Peer Review Extended" (EAC/32/06/13m LE-78CQAF), www.peer-review-education.net

and mutual learning. A number of countries have already pointed to the need for a stronger instrument in support of applying the EQF reference to the CQAF.

2. *A Communication from the Commission* setting out its ideas on QA. However, neither the Member States nor the European Parliament would be involved in its adoption and it would not generate the political commitment needed to give credibility to the Framework and to ensure implementation at the national level.
3. *A Commission Recommendation* would be a statement of Commission views, but neither the Member States nor the European Parliament would be involved in its formulation and it would not generate the political commitment needed to ensure implementation at the national level, which is crucial to successful European cooperation in this area. Use of a Commission Recommendation would carry the risk of being seen as a development which runs counter to subsidiarity.
4. *A Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, under Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty* would be a strong political signal of the intention of the institutions to build upon the Council Conclusions of 2004 to develop VET systems and provision and thereby to facilitate mobility throughout Europe. This option appears to correspond to the expectations from the Member States, the social partners and other stakeholders, to foster quality improvement of VET systems, through European co-operation and will keep the voluntary character of the instrument. Moreover, using a Recommendation in this field would be consistent with other similar initiatives such as EQF.
5. *A Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council, under Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty* would require adoption of principles and obligations whereby Member States relate their quality systems to the Framework. This would also require adoption of harmonised quality benchmarks and standards at European level and de facto obligations for Member States to apply the standards. There is an overwhelming consensus among the stakeholders that use of the Framework should be entirely voluntary.

3) LEGAL ELEMENTS OF THE PROPOSAL

Summary of the proposed action

The proposed Recommendation establishes the Framework to help Member States promote and monitor quality improvement of VET systems. Its application is voluntary.

It is recommended that Member States promote the use of the Framework to foster continuous improvement of the quality of VET, and that they further develop it. It is also recommended to use the Framework to promote inclusive cooperation and mutual learning through ENQAVET, to strengthen and further develop Quality Assurance National Reference Points, and monitor the implementation of the Framework with a view to conducting a review of the Recommendation, if appropriate, five years after its adoption.

It is the Commission's intention to support Member States in carrying out the above tasks, namely through the Lifelong Learning Programme and by monitoring progress in implementing the Framework, in the context of the Education & Training 2010 Work Programme.

Legal basis

Article 149 which states that "the Community shall contribute to the development of quality education" and Article 150 which explicitly states that the "Community action shall aim to (...) improve initial and continuing vocational training (...)".

Subsidiarity principle

The proposal complies with the subsidiarity principle as the proposal does not fall under the exclusive competence of the Community.

The main function of the Framework is to provide agreed cross-country references that can help Member States and stakeholders to document, develop, monitor, evaluate and improve the effectiveness of their VET provision and quality management practices. It also provides a basis and common language for reporting at national and European levels. This in turn will increase transparency and consistency of policy and practical developments between and across countries, thereby improving VET in the European Union. It cannot be achieved by the Member States individually.

Community action will better achieve the objectives of the proposal for the following reasons:

- The challenges related to transparency and consistency of policy and practical developments as regards quality assurance in VET across countries are shared by all Member States; they cannot be solved at national or sectoral level alone;
- If all 27 Member States were to negotiate bilateral agreements on the matter covered by this Recommendation with all other Member States separately and in an uncoordinated way, this would result in an extremely complex and non-transparent overall structure at the European level;
- The proposal provides a shared framework with common quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators to support consistent development of quality in VET between countries and facilitate cross-country cooperation. These functions cannot be provided by action at the national level.

Proportionality principle

The proposal complies with the proportionality principle because it does not replace or define national quality assurance systems and/or approaches, and leaves the implementation of the Recommendation to the Member States.

Choice of instrument

Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council.

4) BUDGETARY IMPLICATION

Member States:

The Framework is not intended to replace existing systems, nor does it require the creation of new structures, and existing reporting systems will be used, minimising the administrative

burden. It builds on existing experience and cases of best practice in Member States and other participating countries.

EU budget:

There will be no cost impact on the EU budget as the Lifelong Learning Programme – Leonardo da Vinci – includes specific provision to support focused initiatives in this area. Only monitoring costs are to be considered.

5) ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Review/revision/sunset clause

The proposal includes a review clause.

European Economic Area

European Economic Area countries have participated voluntarily in the European cooperation process launched at Copenhagen in 2002, and have been fully associated with the development of the Framework. The proposed Recommendation is therefore likely to be relevant to them.

Detailed explanation of the proposal

The primary users of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework will be national/regional authorities and public and private bodies in charge of quality assurance and improvement, including at provider level. Nevertheless, quality improvement of VET provision is crucial for meeting customers' needs: the Framework is therefore of particular relevance to the final users of the system.

The Framework provides also for enhanced cooperation and greater mutual trust between national stakeholders and international sectoral organisations involved in education and training. Its successful implementation requires, however, that national education and training authorities and other public and private stakeholders commit to it on a voluntary basis. Particular attention must be paid to the development - through testing, experimentation and direct cooperation - of support and guidance material.

The European Network on Quality Assurance in VET has a key role to play in this process, as its members are formally designated by Member States, candidate countries, EFTA-EEA countries and the European Social Partners' organisations. Furthermore, the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework should be facilitated at European level by the Commission and by agencies like Cedefop and the European Training Foundation.

The Framework comprises:

- a quality assurance and improvement cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment and review of VET, supported by common quality criteria (annex 1 to the proposal), indicative descriptors and indicators (annex 2 to the proposal);

- monitoring processes, including a combination of internal and external evaluation mechanisms, to be defined by Member States as appropriate in order to identify: (i) the strength of systems, processes and procedures; (ii) areas for improvement.
- the use of measuring tools to provide evidence of effectiveness.

The Framework sets out a systematic approach to quality, including outlining the roles of actors at different levels and ways in which the performance of VET can be monitored. It provides a measurement tool to support review and improvement of VET at system and provider levels. It is based on the quality continuous process that links : (i) setting of policy goals/objectives and planning; (ii) definition of the principles underpinning the implementation of means and actions planned to achieve the goals and objectives; (iii) design of the mechanisms for evaluation of programme provision against goals and objectives, and the assessment of achievements/outcomes at individual, provider and system levels; (iv) review, based on a combination of internal and external evaluation results, processing of feedback and organisation of procedures for change.

Monitoring involves a combination of internal and external evaluation mechanisms, to be identified by Member States as appropriate. The combination of these two strands will provide ongoing verifiable and authenticated feedback on progress towards reaching the policy goals, as a result of activities and actions introduced or planned. The Framework gives particular consideration to systematic self-assessment, as a bottom-up process to improve the quality of training provision.

Measurement should provide evidence on whether policies/activities/actions have been achieved or need further improvement. It thereby contributes to improving the governance of systems.

While focusing attention on the outcomes of VET and learning and the relationship between the VET systems, lifelong learning, the labour market, employment and the economy, the set of indicators is organised as a coherent chain which reflects the objectives, inputs, processes, and the results of training. It consists of two general indicators, four mutually reinforcing indicators which deliver information on outputs and outcomes of training against policy priorities. This is complemented by two context indicators providing for relevant context information to enable the assessment of achievements, and two descriptors providing additional qualitative information on factors determining the quality of VET. Apart from the descriptors, all the indicators are based on quantified data and consequently they can support the evaluation of achievements against the defined objectives.

Proposal for a

**RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE
COUNCIL**

**on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for
Vocational Education and Training**

(Text with EEA relevance)

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 149(4) and Article 150(4) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission²⁰,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee²¹,

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions²²,

Acting in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 251 of the Treaty²³,

Whereas:

- (1) The transition to a knowledge-based economy (Lisbon European Council 2000) requires modernisation and continuous improvement of vocational education and training (VET) systems in response to rapid change in the economy and society, so that they can help increase employability and social inclusion and improve access to lifelong learning for all.
- (2) The Barcelona European Council in 2002 set the target of making Europe's education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010.
- (3) The Lisbon Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs 2005-08 call upon Member States to develop affordable, accessible lifelong learning systems responsive to the changing needs of the knowledge-based economy and society. Adaptation and capacity-building of education and training systems is necessary to improve their labour market relevance. The objectives set in education and training policy should therefore increasingly complement those of economic and labour market policy in order to combine social cohesion and competitiveness.

²⁰ OJ C , , p. .

²¹ OJ C , , p. .

²² OJ C , , p. .

²³ OJ C , , p. .

- (4) Following the Council Resolution²⁴ on the Promotion of Enhanced European Cooperation in VET ('The Copenhagen process'), 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 (hereinafter "CQAF") has been developed, taking account of existing experience and 'good practice' in the different participating countries.
- (5) According to the joint interim report of the Council and the Commission to the European Council, on the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme (2004)²⁵, "the CQAF for VET" (as part of the follow-up to the Copenhagen process) and the "development of an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines for quality assurance"²⁶ (in conjunction with the Bologna process and as part of the work programme on the objectives of education and training systems) should be top priorities for Europe".
- (6) The Education Council in May 2004²⁷ endorsed the CQAF approach and invited Member States and the Commission, within their respective competencies, to promote it on a voluntary basis, together with relevant stakeholders.
- (7) The establishment of the European Network on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (hereinafter "ENQA-VET")²⁸ provides a European platform that allows for appropriate follow-up to the Council Conclusions of 2004 and the Helsinki Communiqué, and facilitates sustainable cooperation across countries.
- (8) In 2006, the Helsinki Communiqué underlined the need to further develop and implement common European tools specifically aimed at VET, by (...) drawing on the principles underlying a CQAF, as referred to in the May 2004 Council Conclusions on quality assurance in VET, in order to promote a culture of quality improvement and wider participation in the ENQA-VET network.
- (9) This Recommendation establishes a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (hereinafter "the Framework") as a reference instrument to help Member States to promote and monitor continuous improvement of their VET systems based on common European references, which builds on and further develops the CQAF. The Framework should contribute to quality improvement in VET and to increased transparency and consistency of VET policy developments between Member States, thereby promoting mutual trust, mobility of workers and learners, and lifelong learning.

²⁴ 19 December 2002 (OJ 2003/C 13/02).

²⁵ "Education & Training 2010": the success of the Lisbon strategy hinges on urgent reforms - Joint Interim Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe, 26 February 2004.

²⁶ "Realising the European Higher Education Area". Communiqué from the Conference of Ministers responsible for higher education, Berlin, 19 September 2003.

²⁷ Council Conclusions on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training, 28 May 2004.

²⁸ The European Network on Quality Assurance in VET was established in October 2005 by the European Commission following the favourable opinion of the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training. Its members have been designated by Member States, candidate countries, EFTA-EEA countries and the European Social Partners' organisations, according to an explicit procedure.

- (10) The Framework should comprise a quality assurance and improvement cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment and review of VET, supported by common quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators. The monitoring processes, including a combination of internal and external evaluation mechanisms, have to be defined by Member States as appropriate in order to identify the strength of systems, processes and procedures and areas for improvement. The Framework should include the use of measuring tools to provide evidence of effectiveness.
- (11) The Framework should be applied at both VET system and provider levels. It provides a systemic approach to quality, covering and inter-relating the relevant levels and actors and it should give strong emphasis to monitoring and improving quality, combining internal and external evaluation, review and processes for improvement, supported by measurement. The Framework should be a basis for further development through cooperation at European, national, regional and local levels.
- (12) In providing for concrete means to support an evaluation and quality-improvement culture at all levels, this Recommendation contributes to the use of evidence-based policy and practice, as a basis for more efficient and equitable policies, in accordance with the 2006 Council Conclusions on efficiency and equity in European education and training systems²⁹.
- (13) This Recommendation should take into account the common "Principles for Quality Assurance in Education and Training" that are included in Annex 3 to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (hereinafter EQF)³⁰. The Framework should therefore support the implementation of the EQF. It should also support the implementation of other European instruments, such as the European Credit System for VET (hereinafter ECVET)³¹, and the Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning³².
- (14) This Recommendation conforms to the principle of subsidiarity referred to in Article 5 of the Treaty insofar as its objective is to support and supplement Member States' action by facilitating further cooperation between them to increase transparency of VET and to promote mobility and lifelong learning.
- (15) This Recommendation conforms to the principle of proportionality referred to in that Article because it does not replace or define national quality assurance systems. The Framework does not prescribe a particular quality system or approach, but provides common principles, quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators that may help to assess and improve existing systems and provision.

²⁹ European Council 23-24 March 2006, Presidency Conclusions; Communication and Council Conclusions on 'Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems' COM (2006) 481 and OJ 2006/C 298/03.

³⁰ OJ C , , p.

³¹ Commission staff working document. 'European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training; a system for the transfer, accumulation and recognition of learning outcomes in Europe'; SEC (2006) 1431 - 31 October 2006.

³² Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning, 9175/04 EDUC 101 SOC 220 18 May 2004.

HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT MEMBER STATES:

1. use and further develop the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework, quality criteria, indicative descriptors and reference indicators as set out in Annexes 1 and 2, to further improve, reform and develop their VET systems, support lifelong learning strategies and the implementation of the EQF and promote a culture of quality improvement at all levels;
2. devise a national approach for implementing the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework not later than 2010, involving the social partners and all other relevant stakeholders in accordance with national legislation and practice. This should include the identification of a number of common indicators to assess and monitor progress and to support review;
3. participate actively in the ENQA-VET as a basis for further development of common principles, reference criteria and indicators, guidelines and tools for quality improvement in VET at national, regional and local levels, as appropriate;
4. designate a Quality Assurance National Reference Point (hereinafter QANRP) for VET that brings together existing relevant bodies and involves the social partners and all stakeholders concerned at national and regional levels, in order to ensure the follow-up of initiatives and efficient dissemination of information. The reference points should:
 - keep a wide range of stakeholders informed about the European Network's activities;
 - provide active support to the implementation of the European Network's Work Programme;
 - take concrete initiatives to promote further development of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework in the national context.
5. undertake a review of the implementation process every three years. The national reviews will contribute to a European review to be organised by the Commission.

ENDORSE THE COMMISSION'S INTENTION TO:

1. support Member States in carrying out the above tasks, in particular by facilitating cooperation and mutual learning, testing and developing guidance material, and providing information on quality developments in VET across EU countries;
2. develop the role of ENQAVET in contributing to policy development in this area through concrete proposals and initiatives;
3. monitor the action taken by the Member States in response to this Recommendation and report, three years after its adoption, to the European Parliament and the Council on the experience gained and implications for the future, including, if necessary, a review of this Recommendation.

Done at Brussels,

For the European Parliament
The President

For the Council
The President

ANNEX 1

THE EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE REFERENCE FRAMEWORK: QUALITY CRITERIA AND INDICATIVE DESCRIPTORS³³

This annex provides common quality criteria and indicative descriptors to support Member States, as appropriate, when implementing the Framework³⁴.

Quality Criteria	Indicative descriptors at system level	Indicative descriptors at VET provider level
<p><i>Planning reflects a strategic vision shared by the relevant stakeholders and includes explicit goals/objectives, actions and indicators.</i></p>	<p>Goals/objectives of VET are described for the medium and long terms, and linked to European goals</p> <p>The relevant stakeholders participate in setting VET goals and objectives at the different levels</p> <p>Targets are established and monitored through specific indicators (success criteria)</p> <p>Mechanisms and procedures have been established to identify training needs</p> <p>An information policy is devised to ensure optimum disclosure of quality results/outcomes subject to national/regional data protection requirements</p> <p>Standards and guidelines for recognition, validation and certification of competences of individuals have been defined</p>	<p>European, national and regional VET policy goals/objectives are reflected in the local targets set by the VET providers</p> <p>Explicit goals/objectives and targets are set and monitored</p> <p>Ongoing consultation with relevant stakeholders takes place to identify specific local/individual needs</p> <p>Responsibilities in quality management and development have been explicitly allocated</p> <p>There is an early involvement of staff in planning, including with regard to quality development</p> <p>Providers plan cooperative initiatives with other VET providers</p> <p>The relevant stakeholders participate in the process of analysing local needs</p> <p>Providers have an explicit and transparent learner charter in place and a quality system is put in place</p>

³³ For the purposes of the Recommendation, definitions which apply are based on Cedefop's Glossary on Quality in Training (working paper, November 2003) <http://communities.trainingvillage.gr/quality>.

³⁴ A further specific set of quality indicators is detailed in Annex 2.

<p><i>Implementation plans are devised in consultation with stakeholders and include explicit principles</i></p>	<p>Implementation plans are established in cooperation with social partners, VET providers and other relevant stakeholders at the different levels</p> <p>Implementation plans include consideration of the resources required, the capacity of the users and the tools and guidelines needed for support</p> <p>Guidelines and standards have been devised for implementation at different levels</p> <p>Implementation plans include specific support towards the training of teachers and trainers</p> <p>VET providers' responsibilities in the implementation process are explicitly described and made transparent</p> <p>A national and/or regional quality assurance framework is devised and includes guidelines and quality standards at provider level to promote continuous improvement and self-regulation</p>	<p>Resources are appropriately internally aligned/assigned with a view to achieving the targets set in the implementation plans</p> <p>Relevant and inclusive partnerships are explicitly supported to implement the actions planned</p> <p>The strategic plan for staff competence development specifies the need for training for teachers and trainers</p> <p>Staff undertake regular training and develop cooperation with relevant external stakeholders to support capacity building and quality improvement, and to enhance performance</p>
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<p><i>Evaluation of outcomes and processes is regularly carried out and supported by measurement</i></p>	<p>A methodology for evaluation is devised, covering internal and external evaluation</p> <p>Stakeholder involvement in the monitoring and evaluation process is agreed and clearly described</p> <p>The national/regional standards and processes for improving and assuring quality are relevant and proportionate to the needs of the sector</p> <p>Systems are subject to self-evaluation and external review</p> <p>Early warning systems are implemented</p> <p>Performance indicators are applied</p> <p>Relevant, regular and coherent data collection takes place, in order to measure success and identify areas for improvement. Appropriate data collection methodologies are devised, e.g. questionnaires and indicators/metrics</p>	<p>Self-assessment/self-evaluation is periodically carried out under national and regional regulations/frameworks or at the initiative of VET providers</p> <p>Evaluation and review covers processes and results/outcomes of education including the assessment of client satisfaction as well as staff performance</p> <p>Evaluation and review includes adequate and effective mechanisms to involve internal and external stakeholders, such as managers, teachers, students, parents, employers, social partners and local authorities</p> <p>Benchmarking and comparative indicators are used for mutual learning and performance improvement</p>
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<p>Review</p>	<p>Procedures, mechanisms and instruments for undertaking reviews are defined at all levels</p> <p>Processes are continuously reviewed and action plans for change devised. Systems are constantly being developed</p> <p>Benchmarking to support mutual learning between VET providers is encouraged and supported</p> <p>Information on the outcomes of evaluation is made publicly available</p>	<p>Learners' feedback on their learning environment and experience is gathered and used to inform further actions</p> <p>Information on the outcomes of the review is widely and publicly available</p> <p>Procedures on feedback and review are part of a strategic learning process in the organisation</p> <p>Results/outcomes of the evaluation process are discussed with relevant stakeholders and appropriate action plans are put in place</p>
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ANNEX 2

A REFERENCE SET OF QUALITY INDICATORS FOR VET

This annex provides a comprehensive set of indicators to support the evaluation, monitoring and quality improvement of VET systems and/or providers. The set of indicators will be further developed through European cooperation on a bilateral and/or multilateral basis, building on European data and national registers.

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Type of Indicator</i>	<i>Policy Rationale</i>	<i>Applicable to</i>
Overarching Indicators for Quality Assurance			
<p style="text-align: center;">No 1</p> <p>Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers:</p> <p>a) share of providers applying internal quality assurance systems defined by law/at own initiative</p> <p>b) share of accredited VET providers</p>	<i>Context/Input indicator</i>	<p>Promote a quality improvement culture at VET-provider level</p> <p>Increase the transparency of quality of training</p> <p>Improve mutual trust on training provision</p>	IVT ³⁵ CVT ³⁶
<p style="text-align: center;">No 2</p> <p>Investment in training of teachers and trainers:</p> <p>a) share of teachers and trainers participating in further training</p> <p>b) amount of funds invested</p>	<i>Input/Process indicator</i>	<p>Promote ownership of teachers and trainers in the process of quality development in VET</p> <p>Improve the responsiveness of VET to evolving demand of labour market</p> <p>Increase individual learning capacity building</p> <p>Improve learner's achievement</p>	IVT CVT

³⁵ Initial Vocational Training.

³⁶ Continuing Vocational Training.

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Type of Indicator</i>	<i>Policy Rationale</i>	<i>Applicable to</i>
Indicators supporting quality objectives for VET policies			
<p style="text-align: center;">No 3</p> <p>Participation rate in VET programmes:</p> <p>Number of participants in VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria³⁷</p>	<p><i>Input/Process /Output indicator</i></p>	<p>Obtain basic information at system and provider levels on the attractiveness of VET</p> <p>Target support to increase access to VET, including socially disadvantaged groups</p>	<p>IVT³⁸</p> <p>CVT</p> <p>LLL (Lifelong learning): percentage of population admitted to formal VET programmes</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">No 4</p> <p>Completion rate in VET programmes:</p> <p>Number of successfully completed/abandoned VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria.</p>	<p><i>Process/ Output/ Outcome Indicator</i></p>	<p>Obtain basic information on educational achievements and the quality of training processes</p> <p>Calculate drop-out rates compared to participation rate</p> <p>Support successful completion as one of the main objectives for quality in VET</p> <p>Support adapted training provision, including for socially disadvantaged groups</p>	<p>IVT</p> <p>CVT (when relevant)</p>

³⁷ Besides basic information on gender and age, other social criteria might be applied, e.g. early school leavers, highest educational achievement, migrant, ethnic minority, handicapped persons, length of unemployment, etc.

³⁸ A period of 6 weeks of training is needed before a student is counted as a participant.

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Type of Indicator</i>	<i>Policy Rationale</i>	<i>Applicable to</i>
<p>No 5</p> <p>Placement rate in VET programmes:</p> <p>a) destination of VET learners in 6-12-36 months after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria;</p> <p>b) share of employed learners in 6-12-36 months after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria.</p>	<p><i>Outcome indicator</i></p>	<p>Support employability</p> <p>Improve responsiveness of VET to the changing demands in the labour market</p> <p>Support adapted training provision, including socially disadvantaged groups</p>	<p>IVT (including information on destination of dropouts)</p> <p>CVT</p>
<p>No 6</p> <p>Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace:</p> <p>a) information on occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training, according to type of training and individual criteria</p> <p>b) satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences</p>	<p><i>Outcome Indicator</i></p> <p>(mix of qualitative and quantitative data)</p>	<p>Increase employability</p> <p>Improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market</p> <p>Support adapted training provision, including socially disadvantaged groups</p>	<p>IVT</p> <p>CVT</p>

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Type of Indicator</i>	<i>Policy Rationale</i>	<i>Applicable to</i>
Context information			
<p>No 7</p> <p>Unemployment rate³⁹ according to individual criteria</p>	<i>Context indicator</i>	Background information for policy decision-making at VET-system level	IVT CVT
<p>No 8</p> <p>Prevalence of vulnerable groups:</p> <p>a) percentage of participants in VET classified as disadvantaged groups (in a defined region or catchment area) according to age and gender;</p> <p>b) success rate of disadvantaged groups according to age and gender</p>	<i>Context indicator</i>	<p>Background information for policy decision-making at VET-system level</p> <p>Support access to VET for socially disadvantaged groups</p> <p>Support adapted training provision for socially disadvantaged groups</p>	IVT CVT

³⁹ Definition according to ILO and OECD: individuals 15-74 without work, actively seeking employment and ready to start work.

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Type of Indicator</i>	<i>Policy Rationale</i>	<i>Applicable to</i>
<p>No 9</p> <p>Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market:</p> <p>a) Information on mechanisms set up to identify changing demands at different levels;</p> <p>b) evidence of their usefulness.</p>	<p><i>Context/Input indicator</i></p> <p>(qualitative information)</p>	<p>Improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market</p> <p>Support employability</p>	<p>IVT</p> <p>CVT</p>
<p>No 10</p> <p>Schemes used to promote better access to VET:</p> <p>a) Information on existing schemes at different levels;</p> <p>b) evidence of their usefulness.</p>	<p><i>Process indicator</i></p> <p>(qualitative information)</p>	<p>Promote access to VET, including socially disadvantaged groups</p> <p>Support adapted training provision</p>	<p>IVT</p> <p>CVT</p>