

034670/EU XXIII.GP
Eingelangt am 09/04/08

EN

EN

EN



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 9.4.2008
SEC(2008) 440

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Accompanying document to the

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**

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

**[SEC(2008) 441
COM(2008) 179 final]**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY	4
1. PROCEDURAL ISSUES AND CONSULTATION OF INTERESTED PARTIES... 9	
1.1. Expert Group.....	9
1.2. Consultation process	9
1.3. Follow-up to the consultation.....	11
1.4. External expertise.....	11
2. PROBLEM DEFINITION – WHAT ISSUE/PROBLEM IS THE PROPOSAL EXPECTED TO TACKLE?	13
2.1. Promote and develop quality assurance management in VET.....	15
2.2. Promote quality in VET to support mobility and lifelong learning	16
2.2.1. Improve effectiveness of VET	16
2.2.2. Increase the consistency of quality developments between countries and the transparency of VET systems.....	16
2.3. Political mandate.....	16
2.4. Legal basis.....	17
2.5. Subsidiarity and proportionality.....	17
3. OBJECTIVES	18
3.1. Consistency with other policies and objectives of the Union	18
3.2. Policy objectives	19
3.3. Specific objectives	19
4. WHAT ARE THE MAIN OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO REACH THE OBJECTIVES?	20
4.1. Option 1: no instrument	20
4.2. Option 2: A Communication from the Commission	20
4.3. Option 3: A Commission Recommendation	21
4.4. Option 4: A Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council.....	21
4.5. Option 5: A Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council.....	22
5. ANALYSIS OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF THE FIVE OPTIONS	22
5.1. Advantages and disadvantages of Option 1: no action	23

5.2.	Advantages and disadvantages of Option 2: Commission Communication	24
5.3.	Advantages and disadvantages of Option 3: Commission Recommendation under Article 150.....	24
5.4.	Advantages and disadvantages of Option 4: European Parliament and Council Recommendation under Articles 149 and 150	25
5.4.1.	Impact on VET systems:	25
5.4.2.	Impact on stakeholders.....	26
5.4.3.	Impacts outside the EU	27
5.4.4.	Impact on the administrative burden and costs for competent bodies and institutions	27
5.4.5.	Impact on the EU budget.....	28
5.5.	Advantages and disadvantages of Option 5: European Parliament and Council Decision under Articles 149 and 150.....	28
6.	COMPARING THE OPTIONS	29
7.	MONITORING AND EVALUATION	30
	Annexes 1 and 2	31

This Impact Assessment Report commits only the Commission's services involved in its preparation.

This text is prepared as a basis for comment and does not prejudge the final form of any decision to be taken by the Commission.

SUMMARY

The objective of the Impact assessment is to analyse the various ways of ensuring take up of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF) and the most suitable option in terms of a choice of an appropriate legal instrument.

The Framework results from work carried out in cooperation with a wide range of bodies with specific competencies in quality development in VET. This co-operation started with the European Forum on Quality in VET (2001-2002), followed by Technical Working Group on VET (2003-2004) and, since 2005, with the European Network on Quality Assurance in VET (hereafter referred to as "ENQAVET").

The Commission consulted the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training (ACVT) including the representatives of Member States Governments and Social partners that gave a strong support to the EQARF. Furthermore the Directors General for Vocational Training of Member States (DGVT) and the former Copenhagen Coordination Group (CCG) were also strongly involved in the preparation of this initiative.

In addition the proposal results from work carried out in close cooperation with the European Forum on Quality in VET (2001-2002), then by the Technical Working Group on VET (2003-2004) and, since 2005, with the European Network on Quality Assurance in VET ("ENQAVET"), that includes the main stakeholders on quality assurance in VET issues.

In general these consultations confirmed broad support for the Framework as a relevant reference instrument to help Member States to promote and monitor continuous improvement of their Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems¹ and thereby increase mutual trust across countries.

The Framework comprises:

- a quality assurance and improvement cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment and review of VET, supported by common quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators;
- monitoring processes, including a combination of internal and external evaluation mechanisms, to be defined by Member States as appropriate in order to identify:
 - (a) the strength of systems, processes and procedures; and
 - (b) areas for improvement;

¹ 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>

- the use of measuring tools to provide evidence of effectiveness.

Quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators have been set out through consensus-building and a bottom-up approach to support the implementation of the Framework.

The impact assessment examines five possible options.

- (1) *No instrument at European level.* This would mean continuing on the basis of CQAF principles as currently exist. However, the experience so far suggests that the present framework had limited impact in terms of stimulating Member State to promote its use.
- (2) *A Communication from the Commission.* Despite its stronger weight as a Recommendation, like option 3, this would not involve the Member States or the European Parliament in its adoption and 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.* Like option 2, this would not involve the Member States or the European Parliament in its adoption and would not generate the political commitment needed to ensure implementation at the national level.
- (4) *A Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, under Article 149 and Article 150 of the Treaty.* The freedom of action of the Member States would be maintained. However, a strong political signal would be provided of the intention of the institutions to build upon the Council Conclusions of 2004² to develop VET systems and provision and thereby, facilitate mobility throughout Europe. A recommendation 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 the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council 2006/143/EC of 15 February 2006 on further European Cooperation in quality assurance in higher education and the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council 2006/961/EC of 18 December 2006 on trans-national mobility within the Community for education and training purposes; European Quality Charter for Mobility.
- (5) *A Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council, under Article 150 of the Treaty.* This would require adopting principles and obligations for Member States to relate their quality systems to the Framework. This would also require adopting harmonised quality benchmarks and standards at European level and de facto obligations for Member States to apply the standards. It would be highly unlikely to achieve support. There is an overwhelming consensus among the stakeholders that the use of the Framework should be entirely voluntary.

DG Education and Culture, in comparing the strengths and weaknesses of the above options, has elected to propose option 4, which would enable the Commission – with the co-operation

2

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

of the Member States and the social partners – to address the challenges identified and find appropriate solutions. This option, which also corresponds most closely to Member States' and stakeholders' expectations, would provide the best basis for the successful implementation of the Framework and for achieving its real added value in terms of increased effectiveness, better consistency of quality developments between countries and enhanced transparency of VET systems, thereby supporting mobility and lifelong learning. It would also be consistent with the approach taken under the EQF and ECVET initiatives.

Another question for impact assessment is the expected impact on the administrative burden and costs. While difficult to appraise in absolute terms given the diversity of situations between Member States, the impact seems to be limited and primarily linked to organizational arrangements between existing bodies. At EU level, only monitoring costs should accrue.

Finally, monitoring and evaluation of the Framework success in meeting its objectives will be continuous. If adopted by the Parliament and Council, the Framework would be kept under review and form the basis for further development. The Commission would monitor the implementation of the Framework and report three years after its adoption, to the European Parliament and the Council, on the experience gained and consider the implications for the future, including if necessary a review of the legal instrument. This report will be based, *inter alia*, on the results of an external evaluation.

Quality Assurance: What is involved?

The effectiveness and efficiency of training provision in meeting the evolving needs of society, the economy and individuals has to be regularly evaluated, monitored and improved, on the basis of evidence.

Quality assurance 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 should therefore imply a systematic approach, which should include ways to monitor the performance of VET and use of 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 European Qualifications Framework (EQF). It also underpins the establishment of the Framework.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is an important driver in the creation of a knowledge-based society underpinning the Lisbon strategy. This needs to be based on investment in, and improvement of, the quality of human resources. The mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy in 2005 concluded that these challenges are currently not being met.

There is wide diversity of VET systems and programmes across the EU, responding to different aims. Europe requires common points of reference to ensure transparency, consistency and portability of qualifications between the many streams of development across Europe, thereby facilitating mutual trust and mobility in a borderless lifelong learning perspective. All of this should happen without infringing the Member States' autonomy in the governance of VET systems.

The Framework's main aims and added value are intended to contribute to:

- increasing the effectiveness of VET in response to a wide range of needs, while maintaining overall coherence across different levels of implementation;
- improving the transparency and consistency of developments between countries, thus fostering mutual trust and mobility of learners and workers in a lifelong learning perspective.

Further, it will strengthen inclusive and sustainable cooperation between the relevant stakeholders in promoting quality improvement at all levels.

The development of the Framework is an integral element of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme and of the 'Copenhagen Process'. It builds on achievements resulting from European cooperation in this area since 2002 ('Copenhagen Process'), and in particular on the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF)³ that was established on the basis of existing experience in Member States and other participating countries.

The Framework forms part of a series of measures designed to support continuous improvement of the quality and governance of VET systems. These include the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)⁴, the European Credit System for VET (ECVET)⁵, and the common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning⁶.

The Framework fully respects the competence of the Member States. At the same time it seeks to stimulate:

- the creation of more developed and consistent quality assurance and improvement systems across countries, to contribute to increased effectiveness of training and thereby to enhance the status of VET in the European Union;
- 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 should be a flexible instrument capable of developing further as a result of practical experience, at both European and national levels. The CQAF approach was endorsed by the Council.

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

3 The CQAF approach was endorsed by the Council Conclusions on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training, 18 May 2004

4 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning', to be published

5 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

6 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

The Framework is proposed on the basis of Article 149 and Article 150 of the EC Treaty. These provisions provide that the Community supports the action of the Member States in the field of education and culture and explicitly refer that "the Community shall contribute to the development of quality education" and that "Community action shall aim to (...) improve initial and continuing vocational training (...)". Furthermore, the Treaty refers that the activities of the Community shall include a contribution to education and training of quality⁷.

⁷ Article 3, paragraph 1, (q).

1. PROCEDURAL ISSUES AND CONSULTATION OF INTERESTED PARTIES

Lead Directorate-General: DG Education and Culture

Other Services involved: The European Centre for the development of vocational training (CEDEFOP) and the European Training Foundation (ETF)

Agenda Planning/Work Programme reference: 2007/EAC/028

The proposed Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (the Framework) is part of the Commission's Legislative and Work Programme for 2007.

Consultation and application of expertise

1.1. Expert Group

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 started with the European Forum on Quality in VET (2001-2002), followed by the Technical Working Group on VET (2003-2004) and, since 2005, with the European Network on Quality Assurance in VET (hereinafter referred to as "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 biannual Work Programme and the Quality Assurance National Reference Points (QANRPs). These bring together a wide range of stakeholders at national level. ENQAVET assisted fully at all stages of the development of the Commission's proposal.

1.2. Consultation process

As mentioned above, the proposal results from work carried out in cooperation with a wide range of bodies associated with VET and quality assurance.

The Commission consulted the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training (ACVT), a tripartite body established by Council Decision⁸. It 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.

It consulted the Directors General for Vocational Training (DGVN), an informal group closely associated with the Copenhagen process, which comprises high-level officials from the Member States, EEA and candidate countries, and the European social partners. The DGVN was invited to comment on the proposal by written procedure on 13 June 2007.

8

Decision of the Council of 2 April 1963, OJ n° 63 of 20 April 1963, p. 1338

Prior to this, the CQAF outline, principles and criteria as well as subsequent developments were regularly presented to/discussed by the ACVT, DGVT and the former Copenhagen Coordination Group (CCG), as part of the reporting process on progress and achievements made within the 'Copenhagen process', and in the specific area of quality assurance in VET.

As a consequence, extensive feedback was provided from a wide range of stakeholders in 31 European countries, including the candidate countries.

The consultation confirmed broad support for the Framework, which was needed to support robust national quality assurance systems, to increase mutual trust and to support the EQF implementation. The consultation demonstrated that the Framework is seen as a constructive initiative which should contribute significantly to the improvement and transparency of the quality of VET systems across countries and thereby enhance the status of VET and stimulate reforms in support of lifelong learning. The replies showed broad agreement on the following issues:

- the Framework is necessary and broadly relevant;
- its implementation and use should be voluntary;
- it should remain a common reference, acting to promote a continuous evaluation and quality improvement culture;
- it should pave the way for further developments on common principles, quality criteria, indicative descriptors and reference indicators to be produced through European cooperation, on a bilateral or multilateral basis;
- the proposed quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators are broadly accepted, and are to be used as appropriate;
- the Framework should support the implementation of the EQF.

Stakeholders nevertheless called for clarification of the Framework's role in supporting the EQF and ECVET implementation and stressed the need to keep the reference criteria and descriptors as simple as possible.

Main comments from the ACVT were:

The Government Group welcomed the proposal for a reference framework on quality assurance in VET and underlined the role it could play as a “support tool” for the EQF. It considers the descriptors too detailed if these are to be the basis for future reporting. The implementation target for 2009 may raise difficulties in several Member States. It welcomed the quality indicators but advocated further work on the part of the European Network on Quality Assurance in VET in this field. It underlined the need to move from indicators agreed by participating countries to European indicators. It sought clarification on the Quality Assurance National Reference Points.

The Employers Group also welcomed the proposal while aligning itself with the Government Group's view that the descriptors are too detailed. It asked how the Quality Assurance Framework would be used to support the EQF. The Group considered that some specific indicative descriptors at provider level seem to be relevant for school-based VET providers

but do not fully apply to training in firms. It invited the Commission to be more specific about implementation and in particular on the role of the European Network on Quality Assurance in VET in this regard.

The Workers Group congratulated the Commission on the content and timeliness of this proposal, quality assurance being a cross-cutting theme to be considered in future political decisions, in particular in the EQF. The group suggested that the Recommendation be more specific on the use of indicators according to the different levels. Furthermore, it wanted the social partners to be explicitly mentioned in points 1 and 4 of the recommendations to Member States.

DGVT main comments:

The consultation of the DGVT provided a few additional comments. The Commission's proposal was welcomed as a means of supporting the development of robust quality assurance systems in all Member States, which it believes is crucial in order to increase mutual trust across countries. The potential European framework could be used in pre-accession and partner countries.

The need for simplification and better balance between the Recommendation and the annexes was stressed. The deadline of 2009 as starting date for implementation raised some questions. The need to strengthen links with the Standing Group of Indicators was referred to.

Additional comments have been made by ENQAVET, following the verification launched at the same time as the ACVT. The comments focused mainly on the need to include training of teachers and trainers in the descriptors and underlined the need for continuous work on indicators on a bilateral and/or multilateral basis and building on national sources, when European sources were not appropriate.

1.3. Follow-up to the consultation

In response to the request for simplification of the quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators, ENQAVET's board, which is the Network's executive, was consulted and intensive exchanges with the Commission provided for concentration and clarification, thereby making them more operational. The quality criteria, indicative descriptors and set of indicators form part of the formal proposal and are agreed as a result of this process.

The implementation target was changed to 2010. The links with the Standing Group of Indicators have been strengthened.

1.4. External expertise

The establishment of the Framework has involved a wide range of bodies with specific competences in quality development in VET. In addition, Cedefop has provided strong technical and scientific support to this work, mainly by launching specific studies and organising peer learning visits. The ETF has liaised particularly with candidate countries. In addition, external experts have lent technical and scientific support to the overall process of European cooperation leading to the establishment of the Framework, bringing a transversal dimension to national data collection.

External expertise proved useful for data collection and analysis of different approaches to improving quality across countries, and in the identification of cases of good practice. This

made it possible to identify common issues underpinning quality assurance in most countries, and to define the common principles, quality criteria, indicative descriptors and the reference set of quality indicators forming part of the Framework.

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. The set of indicators finally chosen remains open to adaptation in the light of experience and further developments in data availability.

Further to this, other tools have been developed to support implementation. A European Guide to self-assessment⁹ was developed, to help VET providers improve the quality of training provision. It provides an overview of existing frameworks for self-assessment which are used in different settings and gives practical examples. The guide has already stimulated developments in a number of countries. A European Peer Review Manual for initial VET was developed through a project under the Leonardo da Vinci Programme¹⁰. Use of peer review in VET is still rather limited and should be extended. The manual provides guidelines for using peer review in initial training in support of external evaluation and to help providers to improve quality. Bodies responsible for quality assurance at national level from 12 countries participated. The manual is being further tested in a new Leonardo project¹¹.

In addition, studies and cross-analysis carried out by Cedefop have helped to further develop the CQAF and guidance tools for its implementation. These are available in Cedefop's Virtual Community (<http://communities.trainingvillage.gr>).

It is this experience and input that has made it possible to build the Framework on the foundations of the CQAF. Its use will help implement other initiatives such as the EQF. This can best be achieved if Member States commit themselves to a strategy for using the Framework not later than 2010.

1.5. Opinion of the IA Board

The impact assessment report has been submitted to the Impact Assessment Board (IAB). In line with the recommendations of the Board, the problem definition of the report makes clear that the focus of the impact assessment is on how to ensure the proper implementation of ENQAVET. The content of ENQAVET has been elaborated and endorsed by the Member States and the stakeholders, and is not assessed here.

The revised IA report also takes account of the recommendations of the IAB on the different legal options. It provides more precise and complete analysis of these options and notably of option n°4 "Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council" which is considered to be the most appropriate to ensure take-up of the Framework. The comparison of

9 'An European Guide on Self-assessment for VET providers', Cedefop, September 2003

10 '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)

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

options was reviewed to clarify the advantages of this EU approach as well as the existing limits. The revised report also clarifies the feasibility of adopting Recommendations of the European Parliament and the Council in this field. Information on the approval of four earlier Recommendations has been updated to support this analysis.

The IA Board also recommended clarification on the choice of the indicators and descriptors which were selected for monitoring. The choice of indicators and descriptors was part of the consensus reached with Member States and stakeholders on the introduction of ENQAVET. They have been annexed to this impact assessment report.

Table 6 was modified in order to clarify that the adoption of a binding legal instrument such as a decision of the European Parliament and the Council under option 5 is not appropriate for the setting up of a voluntary system.

2. PROBLEM DEFINITION – WHAT ISSUE/PROBLEM IS THE PROPOSAL EXPECTED TO TACKLE?

Recent years have seen a degree of attention being given, both at the EU and national levels, to the promotion of quality in VET and there is a broad consensus on the importance of Vocational Education and Training (VET) as important drivers of the EU's strategy to become more competitive and socially cohesive and in the creation of a knowledge based society as outlined in the Lisbon strategy. As mentioned before, there is a clear demand from Member States for promoting quality improvement in education and training through cooperation at European level, as explicitly stated in the Helsinki Communiqué.

The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework reflects this consensus and was drawn up on the basis of widespread consultation of the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training (ACVT), the Directors General for Vocational Training (DGVT), the Copenhagen Coordination Group (CCG) and the European Network on Quality Assurance in VET (ENQAVET).

If we are to make effective progress towards achieving the Lisbon and Barcelona goals, sustainable cooperation at European level needs to continue and be supported by effective commitment of Member States and participating countries. Member States must take ownership of the process, the relevant stakeholders at all levels need to be motivated and involved in the process of continuous quality improvement and accountability of VET systems, concrete actions need to be implemented, coordinated, monitored and followed up.

The development of the proposed EQARF builds in particular on the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF), that was established on the basis of existing experience in Member States and other participating countries. The challenge now is to find the most appropriate instrument to ensure that the Framework is applied consistently across the Union.

At European level, initiatives can be categorised as follows:

- Peer learning visits, as a means to foster exchange of good practice and mutual learning. Since 2004, over 200 experts have participated in eleven visits, organised by different host countries with the technical and financial support of

Cedefop¹². Each one of these visits provided for a cross-country analysis¹³ on the specific topic of the visit.

- Studies, to improve existing knowledge of quality systems, and in particular, sectoral approaches;
- Information/Awareness-raising activities, to involve a wide range of stakeholders in quality activities;
- Increasing the synergy with the LdV Programme, as a means to bring together and increase coherency between policy development at European level and transnational project development.

However, further action is needed if VET is to contribute as fully as possible to the creation of a skilled and knowledge-rich EU workforce. For example, the most recent draft Joint Council/Commission Report on Education and Training points to continued slow progress in relation to participation in adult learning and to the persistence of low skills in a significant share of the population. The proposed Recommendation is a means to give new impetus to the continuous improvement of **quality management practices** and, ultimately, of VET systems.

There are many strands to VET. It forms an important part of young people's early learning where, in addition to providing specialised qualifications, it must also offer broad development of learning capacity, fostering willingness and ability to access lifelong learning and promote active citizenship, often for young people at risk of exclusion. It plays a key role in active labour market measures, providing training and qualifications in skills required by the labour market. And it provides education in advanced technical skills vital to Europe's knowledge-based future.

This breadth of purpose and range of missions are reflected in the way VET is organised across the EU – national and regional programmes respond to different standards and lead to many different qualifications. 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.

In the field of quality assurance management, European cooperation has proved to be a lever for promoting quality improvement in VET. It has facilitated the exchange of experience, mutual learning and consensus-building on common principles, guidelines and tools for quality development. The sustainability of this process and increasing the stakeholders' involvement in it nevertheless remains a major issue.

12 Since mid-2004 the following visits have taken place: "Quality assurance and responsiveness in the Dutch VET system" (Den Hague); "Teachers involvement in quality assurance and development" (Bucharest/Tergoviste); "Matching supply and demand" (Paris); "Quality assurance in VET through cooperation between learning sites and quality management in companies" (Bonn); "The use of indicators at VET provider level" (Helsinki); "Accreditation of VET-providers" (Rome); "Quality indicators" (Helsinki); "Quality of Training in Enterprises" (Lillehammer); "Self-assessment of VET-providers" (Coventry); "Involvement of the social partners in QA in VET" (Stockholm); "Relevance of the CQAF" (Copenhagen)

13 See <http://communities.trainingvillage.gr/quality>

2.1. Promote and develop quality assurance management in VET

The European framework (CQAF) provides a common device to facilitate cooperation across countries and allows for strengthening of 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.

Compatible with most existing systems, the CQAF provided for common principles and a reference point to support consistent assessment and improvement of existing systems and provision across countries. Common issues underpinning quality assurance in most countries were identified, and reference points developed, despite the variety of approaches, making it easier to give support to a wide range of initiatives at European and national levels¹⁴.

The CQAF and the associated European cooperation process placed Quality Assurance in VET higher on the policy agenda at European level: the Council Conclusions of May 2004 endorsed the CQAF approach. The Austrian Presidency organised a conference in Graz (May 2006), bringing together over 300 experts and stakeholders from VET and Higher Education sectors from all the Member States and candidate countries, and the social partners. This initiative allowed for wide exchange of experiences and the identification of common issues for cooperation between the two sectors. Finally, the Finnish Presidency underlined in the Helsinki Communiqué the need to progress from CQAF towards a culture of quality improvement.

At national level, several initiatives were taken in Member States and candidate countries on quality assurance in VET, based on the CQAF. Those initiatives vary from country to country in terms of objectives, nature, content and stakeholders' involvement (see annex).

The CQAF therefore paved the way for concrete initiatives, mutual learning and better understanding between countries. It is this experience and input that has made it possible to build the Framework on the foundations of the CQAF.

However, the absence of quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators supporting its implementation as well as its uncertain status make it difficult to apply generally. Several countries have pointed to the need to strengthen the CQAF status if it is to be widely accepted and applied by stakeholders, and for this to support the EQF implementation. The joint report of 2004¹⁵ identified development of CQAF as a priority. The Helsinki Communiqué of 2006 underlined the need to progress from the CQAF towards a culture of quality improvement.

While acknowledging the initiatives of a number of countries to promote the use of the CQAF, the quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators which support the CQAF implementation have to be made explicit and the status of this instrument needs to be strengthened if it is to be widely accepted and applied by the relevant stakeholders at all levels. This is crucial in terms of ensuring that the Framework addresses the key issues underpinning quality improvement of VET.

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

15 '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

2.2. Promote quality in VET to support mobility and lifelong learning

2.2.1. Improve effectiveness of VET

Education and training systems must be flexible enough to respond to the evolving needs of society, the economy and individuals, while maintaining overall coherence across different levels. Quality assurance and continuous improvement of VET systems play a crucial part in supporting the reform processes which are required in order to achieve the Lisbon goals.

Focusing on the outcomes of learning and evidence-based quality improvement is a valid way of steering the reform and modernisation of VET systems. It also makes for greater effectiveness of VET in improving employability, the matching between training supply and users' needs at local, regional and national levels, and promoting better access to lifelong learning, especially for vulnerable groups in the labour market.

The Framework gives particular emphasis to the 'outcomes' of VET and learning and to the relationship between the VET systems, lifelong learning, the labour market, employment and the economy. Further, it provides a measurement tool to facilitate review of VET based on evidence. This is crucial to increase the effectiveness of VET, thereby enhancing the status of VET and its attractiveness.

Through quality improvement of VET systems, the Framework strengthens the foundations underpinning EQF and ECVET implementation, namely by placing emphasis on the assessment of learning outcomes. It can still further develop through European cooperation, as practical experience is gained.

2.2.2. Increase the consistency of quality developments between countries and the transparency of VET systems

VET programmes fulfil different purposes and lead to many different qualifications. This diversity creates scope for mutual learning. Yet it requires common points of reference to ensure consistent and transparent development of the many streams across Europe, while not infringing the Member States' autonomy in the governance of VET systems.

The Framework provides for common references, which are quite compatible with Member States' responsibility for the governance of their systems, in order to make it possible to maintain consistency and transparency between the different policy initiatives of the Member States, thereby improving mutual trust and facilitating mobility of learners and workers, in a lifelong learning perspective.

2.3. Political mandate

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 Resolution¹⁶ and the Declaration¹⁷ 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.

16 19 December 2002 (OJ 2003/C 13/02)

17 Adopted in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002

The joint interim report of the Council and the Commission to the European Council, on the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme (2004)¹⁸, considers that ‘the common quality assurance framework for vocational education and training (as part of the follow-up to the Copenhagen Declaration) and the "development of an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines for quality assurance"¹⁹ (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’.

The Council conclusions of May 2004 invited Member States and the Commission to promote the CQAF, on a voluntary basis, with relevant stakeholders. At the national level, they called for priority to be given to using common instruments, references and principles, and to the systematic involvement of relevant partners. They called for work at the European level to focus on the priorities of the Copenhagen process and on implementation.

The Helsinki Communiqué of 2006, reviewing the priorities of the Copenhagen Process, underlined the need to move from CQAF towards a culture of quality improvement. It also called for wider participation in the ENQAVET.

Finally, the Commission's proposal for a Recommendation on the establishment of a European Qualifications Framework includes general principles for quality assurance in education and training. During consultation, it became clear that there was a strong demand for quality assurance in helping relate the national qualifications systems to the EQF. The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework provides a basis for further specific development linked to the implementation of the EQF.

2.4. Legal basis

The Framework addresses a VET-related policy issue. It encourages cooperation between Member States and supports and supplements their efforts to promote the quality of education and VET systems. It is therefore proposed under Article 149 of the EC Treaty, 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 (...)".

Furthermore, the Treaty states that the activities of the Community shall include a contribution to education and training of quality²⁰.

2.5. Subsidiarity and proportionality

According to the EC Treaty the competence of the Community in the field of vocational training is limited to a supportive action complementing the action of the Member States. The proposal does not replace or define national quality assurance and/or approaches and leaves the implementation of the Recommendation to the Member States. 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

18 '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

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

20 Article 3, paragraph 1, (q).

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. As such it brings an added value to the efforts of the Member States to improve the quality of VET. 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 subject 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.

3. THE PROPOSAL THEREFORE COMPLIES WITH THE SUBSIDIARITY PRINCIPLE. IT COMPLIES WITH THE PRINCIPLE OF PROPORTIONALITY BECAUSE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INITIATIVE BEING VOLUNTARY AND SUPPLEMENTARY TO THE ACTION OF THE MEMBER STATES CORRESPONDS TO THE AIMS PURSUED. OBJECTIVES

3.1. 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)²¹ and in particular Guideline No 24. The Guidelines stress that lifelong learning systems should be accessible to, and responsive to, changing needs and that adaptation and capacity-building is required if they are to respond successfully to developments in the knowledge-based economy.

In a similar way, the Communication on Cohesion Policy²² draws attention to the importance of reinforcing investment in human capital through better education and skills, and of 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.

Clearly, the Framework will help achieve these objectives of employment policy and cohesion policy.

21 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

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

3.2. Policy objectives

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.

The main policy objective of the proposal is to provide an instrument to promote continuous improvement and accountability of VET systems, thereby:

- increasing the mobility of learners and workers;
- improving access to lifelong learning;
- enhancing the status and attractiveness of VET;
- improving employability and social inclusion;
- providing more timely and appropriate responsiveness to rapid economic and social changes.

The Framework will support quality development of VET systems required by the Lisbon strategy. It also aims to contribute to the target set by the Barcelona European Council in 2002 of making Europe's education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010.

Through its contribution to the improvement of VET systems and its emphasis on learning outcomes, the Framework will strengthen the foundations underpinning the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, the European Credit System for VET and the common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning. It can develop still further through European cooperation, as practical experience is gained.

Along with these objectives, the Framework builds on the Council Resolution and the Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training on the Promotion of Enhanced European Cooperation in VET, giving priority to *cooperation in quality assurance with particular focus on exchange of models and methods, as well as common criteria and principles for quality in vocational education and training*. It also mirrors the 'Helsinki Communiqué' insofar as it entails progressing from CQAF towards a culture of quality improvement and wider participation in the European cooperation process, through ENQAVET.

3.3. Specific objectives

The specific objectives of the Framework are:

- Improve the effectiveness of VET;
- Increase the consistency of quality developments between countries and the transparency of VET systems;
- Facilitate cooperation, mutual learning and stakeholders' involvement.

The Framework allows for the development of further common European tools specifically aimed at VET and will promote European cooperation, as requested in the Helsinki Communiqué.

4. WHAT ARE THE MAIN OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO REACH THE OBJECTIVES?

Given that there have been repeated requests to facilitate the development of quality assurance for VET across the EU, the question is how to achieve this. Five options have been taken into consideration. Options 2 to 5 set out below all envisage the establishment of the Framework. In each case, the Framework's content, structure and aims would be the same – but would be proposed or introduced via different instruments. The options are set out by ascending degree of prescription or obligation on Member States, as determined by the respective legal instrument in each case.

4.1. Option 1: no instrument

This would mean continuing on the basis of CQAF principles. However, the quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators supporting the CQAF implementation were not explicit in the Council Conclusions of 2004 and its uncertain status makes it difficult to generalise. There would be no reference point from which to obtain endorsement of further developments of CQAF. This would make it difficult for participating countries to make consistent use of the system and to reap the benefits of peer review and mutual learning. A number of countries have pointed to the need for strengthening the status of the CQAF if it is to be widely accepted and applied by stakeholders. Country developments are very diverse. This is in accordance with Member States' responsibility for the governance of their systems. Common European references, which are quite compatible with this responsibility, will make it possible to maintain transparency and consistency between the different policy initiatives of the Member States. The absence of any reference instrument at European level would lead to increasing inconsistency, low transparency and lack of trust in VET provision between the Member States, thus making it difficult to enhance the status of VET. It would inhibit follow-up to the enhanced cooperation launched by the Council Decision and Declaration of 2002, which envisaged a culture of quality improvement. It would mean that the Commission had not responded to the Member States' request to promote quality in education and training, and thereby to support the implementation of EQF and ECVET. Cooperation between Member States on the basis of bilateral agreements would be complex and uncoordinated. Stakeholders would not have an overall framework for cooperation on quality assurance. This option would not meet the demands of Member States to foster European cooperation to develop common principles and criteria on quality assurance in VET.

4.2. Option 2: A Communication from the Commission

This would be a statement of Commission policy. 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. It seems unlikely that the wide group of stakeholders involved would apply the principles so as to have real impact and added value at the national level.

4.3. Option 3: A Commission Recommendation

Like option 2, this would be a statement of Commission views, but neither the Member States nor the European Parliament would be involved in its adoption 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. There is also the fact that earlier, related policy issues such as the EQF and the ECVET proposal have been advanced via the mechanism of a Council/EP Recommendation.

4.4. Option 4: A Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council

This option entails establishing the Framework by a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, under Article 149 and Article 150 of the Treaty. By recommending that the Framework be used by Member States on a voluntary basis, the freedom of action of the Member States would be maintained. However, adoption of the Framework by co-decision would be a strong signal of the intention to build upon the Council Conclusions of 2004 to develop the transparency of VET systems and provision and thereby to facilitate mobility throughout Europe on the basis of explicit quality criteria and indicators. It would also provide a reference framework that would facilitate the implementation of EQF and ECVET. The expected impact on the administrative burden and costs, while difficult to appraise in absolute terms given the diversity of situations between Member States, seems to be limited and primarily linked to organisational arrangements between existing bodies. At EU level, only monitoring costs are to be considered.

Taking into consideration the process for establishing the Framework – cooperation between the Commission, Member States, EEA and candidate countries and the European social partners – and the process of consulting the appropriate bodies at European level in the field of VET, the Commission has devised a blueprint for the Framework.

The use of the Framework is voluntary. It does not take over any of the established roles of existing quality systems or frameworks. The Framework is designed to support Member States in promoting and monitoring quality improvement in VET at different levels, providing a common basis for further development of quality principles, reference criteria and indicators, as appropriate.

The main features and components of the Framework are set out in more detail below.

The Framework is an instrument for promoting continuous improvement of quality in VET. It comprises:

- a quality assurance and improvement cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment and review of VET, supported by common quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators;
- monitoring processes including internal and external evaluation mechanisms, to be defined within countries as appropriate, in order to identify
 - (a) the strength of systems, processes and procedures; and
 - (b) areas for improvement;
- the use of measuring tools to provide evidence of effectiveness.

The Framework would be supported by common quality criteria, indicative descriptors and reference indicators agreed at European level.

Indicators are key instruments for guiding and improving quality management. They provide objective criteria to measure the results and outputs of training systems and structures. As previously mentioned, the set of indicators identified for the proposal was selected from among 200 indicators by translating the three political priorities (employability, matching and access) into agreed objectives (e.g. increase investment in training of teachers and trainers, increase in completion rate) and then relating them to measurable indicators. The 10 selected indicators each have a stated policy rationale. They are easy to understand, and are built on empirical evidence, stocktaking across Member States and national best practices. Application of the indicators by Member States will provide reliable data on the extent to which the objectives have been reached, enabling evidence-based policy making and cross-country benchmarking.

The Framework sets out a systematic approach to quality, including the roles of actors at different levels and the way they relate to each other. It points to 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.

The Framework gives particular emphasis to the ‘outcomes’ of learning, in terms of increasing employability, improving the matching between training supply and users' needs at local, regional and national levels, and promoting better access to lifelong learning, especially for vulnerable groups in the labour market.

4.5. Option 5: A Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council

This 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 a de facto obligation for Member States to apply the standards. It would be highly unlikely to achieve support. There is an overwhelming consensus among the stakeholders that use of the Framework should be entirely voluntary.

5. ANALYSIS OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF THE FIVE OPTIONS

An analysis of the impacts, positive and negative, of the five options considered is set out below; it identifies the problems, describes the objectives the Commission is seeking to achieve, and defines a set of criteria against which the impacts can be assessed.

Problems identified	Objectives	Indicators
Effectiveness of VET systems has to be increased in response to evolving needs	Give support for capacity building in providing timely and appropriate responses to specific needs Foster an assessment and accountability culture in	Use of the Framework at system and provider levels Use of indicators and data on user satisfaction to review VET at system and provider

	VET, based on the outcomes of learning Enhance status and attractiveness of VET	levels Greater take-up of VET among citizens
Lack of transparency and consistency of developments between countries, thus hindering mutual trust and mobility of learners and workers in a lifelong learning perspective	Further develop and implement common European tools specifically aimed at VET	Common tools specifically developed to improve VET Greater mobility of learners and workers.
Need to strengthen inclusive and sustainable cooperation between the relevant stakeholders in promoting quality improvement at all levels	Foster the development of sustainable and inclusive networks at different levels to improve quality in VET	Practical initiatives to develop cooperation at European and national levels, using the Framework as a tool for quality improvement QA systems in place in majority of MSs, relating to the Framework

5.1. Advantages and disadvantages of Option 1: no action

This option suggests addressing the problems identified by accepting a system of bilateral and multilateral arrangements between Member States and sectors without EU involvement. Potential positive impacts could include immediate, practical solutions for some Member States, for instance in continuing the use of existing quality systems or developing new quality assurance approaches to VET without a European reference point and therefore reviewing VET systems without relating them to common quality criteria and indicators. Additionally, such an approach would entail little or no cost to the Commission and would not require coordination or supervision in the field of quality assurance.

There is a variety of quality assurance instruments at national, regional, local and international levels, such as labels, ISO standards, EFQM, TQM and others. However, these instruments do not build on quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators agreed through a bottom-up approach and consensus-building in the context of a cooperation process between European countries. They do not aim at supporting cooperation across countries. Furthermore, they do not put a major focus on learning outcomes, which is a key feature of the Framework.

Multilateral or bilateral arrangements would not be underpinned by a Europe-wide set of criteria necessary to achieve the consistency required to promote mutual trust across the EU. In a European Union of 27 (and growing) Member States a system of bilateral agreements would result in a complex and opaque set of arrangements. While in some cases such an approach might offer solutions, the replication of such arrangements across the EU would be

more problematic. Bilateral/multilateral arrangements could therefore support and supplement but not replace a Europe-wide solution.

Additionally the no-action option would not foster either a culture of continuous quality improvement at all levels or increased transparency of VET developments across countries.

Further, the no-action option would be unacceptable to many stakeholders that call for the promotion of quality assurance and improvement through enhanced European cooperation, and would hinder the development of VET systems.

5.2. Advantages and disadvantages of Option 2: Commission Communication

A Communication from the Commission would not meet the criteria. As a non-legal instrument, it would simply be too weak to foster the implementation of the Framework. In effect, it would take the Framework little further forward than the Council Conclusions of 2004 and the subsequent working document that was achieved through joint work carried out between the Commission and Member States, EEA and candidate countries and the European social partners, represented in ENQA-VET.

A Communication would preclude any role for the Member States and the European Parliament in its adoption and thus reduce the standing and credibility of the eventual Framework.

It would not require commitments from Member States and so neither they nor the Commission would be motivated to take concrete implementing measures. A Communication would therefore not create the structures and systems of cooperation necessary for the establishment of the Framework.

Further, Member States would not be encouraged or given incentives to reform aspects of their educational systems, in particular the development of quality assurance and improvement systems and approaches, established on a learning outcomes basis.

Its additional positive impacts would therefore be limited. However, its negative impacts would be considerable. Member States, social partners and other stakeholders would be disappointed with the limited influence of a Communication, after investing considerable time and effort in helping to devise the Framework and responding to the Commission's consultation.

5.3. Advantages and disadvantages of Option 3: Commission Recommendation under Article 150

A Commission Recommendation, under Article 150, would not meet the criteria. Although a legal instrument, it is unclear whether it would have a stronger impact than Option 2. Similarly, it would not require Member State or European Parliament involvement in the formal adoption of the instrument. The initiative would therefore not generate the political commitment to implementation at the national level which is crucial to the success and continued momentum of the Framework, as stressed in the proposal on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong learning (Annex III). It would lack the necessary political standing and effectiveness within the Member States, which have worked closely with the Commission in developing the Framework.

It is therefore unlikely that, at a practical level, a Commission Recommendation would result in Member States taking the measures necessary to establish the National Quality Assurance Reference Points that are crucial in relaying European cooperation and the operational implementation of the Framework.

5.4. Advantages and disadvantages of Option 4: European Parliament and Council Recommendation under Article 149 and Article 150

It is expected that this option should be able to address all the issues and problems identified and achieve the set objectives.

Positive impacts would be achieved at the European and national levels, for the citizen and the EU. Stakeholder feedback - at the national, European and sectoral levels - has overwhelmingly called for common European tools specifically aimed at VET to be implemented on a *voluntary* basis. It would be the solution most acceptable to the Member States and would be in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity under the Treaty and proportional in its requirements and impact.

Crucially, Member States would maintain the political investment they have held in the development of the Framework from the earliest stages rather than being excluded from the legislative process as they would be under Option 3. A European Parliament and Council Recommendation under Articles 149 and 150 would therefore be the most appropriate legislative instrument.

Moreover, there is a history of using such Recommendations to achieve objectives in fields related to the Framework, for example:

- the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning, (2008);
- the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on Key competences for lifelong learning 2006/962/EC of 18.12.2006;
- the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on trans-national mobility within the Community for education and training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility 2006/961/EC of 18.12.2006;
- the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council 2006/143/EC of 15 February 2006 on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education (OJ L 64 of 4.3.2006, p. 60), based on Commission proposal COM(2004) 642 of 12.10.2004.

In addition, there are several older examples in the field of education and training, including the 2001 Recommendation on European cooperation in quality evaluation in school education and the 2001 Recommendation on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, volunteers, teachers and trainers.

5.4.1. Impact on VET Systems:

(a) Promoting continuous improvement and accountability of VET systems

The Framework is an instrument for promoting continuous improvement of quality in VET, with a view to enhancing its effectiveness. It was designed to support Member States in promoting and monitoring quality improvement in VET at different levels, providing a common basis for further development of quality principles, reference criteria and indicators, as appropriate.

It is not intended to take over any of the established roles of existing quality systems or frameworks. It makes it possible to identify the strength of systems and areas for improvement, and points to ways in which the performance of VET can be monitored.

The Framework gives particular emphasis to the ‘outcomes’ of learning and evidence-based quality improvement as a means to steer the reform and modernisation of VET. It will thus allow for better effectiveness of VET in improving employability and the responsiveness of training supply to users' needs at local, regional and national levels, and in promoting better access to lifelong learning, especially for vulnerable groups in the labour market.

By enhancing its effectiveness, the Framework will contribute to enhancing the status and attractiveness of VET.

Through quality improvement of VET systems, the Framework will also strengthen the foundations underpinning EQF and ECVET implementation. It can develop still further through European cooperation, as practical experience is gained.

(b) Increasing the consistency of quality developments between countries and the transparency of VET systems

There are many strands to VET, its programmes respond to different standards and it leads to many different qualifications. This diversity creates scope for mutual learning. Yet it also requires common points of reference to ensure consistency and transparency between the many streams of development across Europe. This is a crucial issue in promoting mutual trust, and thereby supporting mobility and lifelong learning.

The Framework provides for such common points of reference, while not infringing the Member States' autonomy in the governance of VET systems, thereby creating appropriate conditions for implementation. This is a significant improvement over the CQAF, which allowed for a number of relevant developments to improve the quality of VET but with limited scope. Besides, this option would strengthen the status of a European instrument for quality improvement and provide appropriate legislative support to facilitate widespread use by the relevant stakeholders at all levels.

Furthermore it would allow follow-up to be given to the request of a number of countries in the Education Committee in 2006 when discussing the EQF reference to the CQA.

5.4.2. Impact on Stakeholders

The Framework is a common device that facilitates the exchange of experiences and mutual learning across countries. European cooperation helping to promote quality improvement in VET, by facilitating the exchange of experience, mutual learning and consensus-building on common principles, guidelines and tools for quality development, has led to the establishment of the Framework. This is fully in line with the principles underpinning the implementation of the ‘Copenhagen Declaration’ and the ‘Helsinki Communiqué’. The sustainability of this process and increasing the stakeholders' involvement in cooperation at all levels remains a

challenge, if we are to make effective progress towards a quality improvement culture across countries.

A Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council inviting Member States to use the Framework, and inviting them to strengthen cooperation and stakeholder involvement in quality improvement in VET, seems to be the most appropriate instrument for guaranteeing sustainable and inclusive cooperation at all levels.

There is a clear demand from Member States for promoting quality improvement in education and training through cooperation at European level, as explicitly stated in the Helsinki Communiqué (2006), reviewing the priorities of the Copenhagen Process.

5.4.3. Impact outside the EU

Although the proposed legislative instrument would be a Recommendation of the Parliament and Council, and therefore applicable to the 27 Member States, it should be emphasised that 32 countries participate in the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme and the 'Copenhagen Process', within which the Framework has been developed. Additional countries - Norway and Iceland - have been active in the development of the Framework, participating in the Technical Working Group on quality in VET and in ENQAVET. Some of these countries have already begun to use the Framework to develop national initiatives and/or national frameworks for quality development, partly in response to the potential implementation of the European Framework. Countries seeking accession to the EU would undoubtedly benefit from such early preparatory work in using the Framework.

Potential negative impacts include the possibility that, because of its voluntary nature, Member States might choose not to relate their quality systems to the Framework or that, in introducing the Framework, they would not abide by the established criteria and procedures and that this might in turn hinder transparency and undermine mutual trust. It may be that some countries choose to implement a quality system that could be difficult to relate to the Framework. Additional uncertainties would be created by the potential slow pace of implementation and development of quality systems, which might hinder a truly Europe-wide meta-framework.

5.4.4. Impact on the administrative burden and costs for competent bodies and institutions

The Framework is an instrument designed to support Member States in promoting and monitoring quality improvement in VET. It provides a common reference to help policymakers and practitioners to get a better insight into how the existing quality models work, to identify areas of provision that need improvement, and to take decisions on how to improve them based on common quantitative and qualitative references. It 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.

Cross-country analysis carried out by Cedefop on quality management approaches in Member States²³ revealed a wide variety of situations between countries. Cost impact and administrative burden will therefore depend on elements such as:

- the existence of quality systems and their relevance within countries;

²³ Please see Cedefop's Virtual Community (<http://communities.trainingvillage.gr>)

- the extent to which the existing quality systems and approaches at different levels include the principles, quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators underlying the Framework's implementation: in some cases the implementation of the Framework will be a light process, at a very low cost; in other cases, it may require more substantial work and a correspondingly higher investment;
- the priority given by countries to the implementation of the Framework and, therefore, the scope and number of the initiatives that will be taken;
- the choices made in terms of process implementation: coordination and monitoring mechanisms (e.g. centralised/decentralised);
- the nature and extent of tasks that Member States decide to assign to the Quality Assurance National Reference Points (platforms bringing together existing bodies and stakeholders from different levels).

However, the relatively general level of detail of the quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators supporting the Framework's implementation makes it possible to develop and refine them for a specific context. Further, the fact that they are derived from existing experience makes it fairly simple to use them with existing quality assurance instruments. The different activities developed since 2004 to test and further develop the CQAF have provided evidence on the consistency of the fundamentals of the Framework, with most of the systems in place. Also, the National Quality Assurance Reference Points bring together/network existing bodies and actors: they do not require the creation of new bodies or structures. The expected impact on costs, while difficult to specify, is to be linked to organisational arrangements building on existing bodies, structures and systems, and will therefore remain quite limited.

5.4.5. Impact on the EU budget

Very limited 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 follow-up costs are to be considered.

5.5. Advantages and disadvantages of Option 5: European Parliament and Council Decision under Article 149 and Article 150

The Decision option would offer solutions to some of the problems identified. It would facilitate the implementation of the Framework and cooperation between Member States, improve quality of VET systems and increase mobility.

However, there are a number of problems with using a Decision under Articles 149 and 150 to introduce the Framework. In general, a Decision is more prescriptive than a Recommendation. A Decision would impose on Member States principles and obligations related to their national VET and quality systems. The overwhelming consensus among stakeholders, by contrast, is that the implementation of the Framework should be entirely voluntary and that it should entail no legal obligations. Member States and other stakeholders might object to the increased burden of obligations arising from a Decision. Additionally, to a great extent, the Framework's impact on assisting the reform of national systems and in influencing developments outside the EU is likely to depend on its status as an entirely voluntary framework.

Decisions in the area of education and training policy are rare, and have mainly been used to authorise financing of programmes.

For all these reasons, a Decision would be difficult politically.

6. COMPARING THE OPTIONS

	Option 1: No action	Option 2: Communication	Option 3: Commission Recommendation (Article 150)	Option 4: EP and Council Recommendation (Articles 149 and 150)	Option 5: EP and Council Decision (Articles 149 and 150)
Quality of VET would be improved based on common references	No	To a limited extent only - political commitment would not be sufficient	No, because of limited influence of Member States, which would not be involved in the adoption process	Yes	Decision is a binding instrument which is not appropriate for a voluntary system .
A culture of quality improvement, assessment and accountability in VET would be widespread	Unlikely on a significant scale	To a limited extent only - political commitment would not be sufficient.	No, because of limited influence of Member States, which would not be involved in the adoption process	High potential	Unclear at this stage
Consistency and transparency of VET developments between countries would be achieved	No	Limited	Limited	Yes	Yes
Cooperation would be enhanced and further European VET-specific tools would develop based on common references	Not systematically, only as a by-product of bilateral arrangements	To a limited extent only - political commitment would not be sufficient.	No, because of limited influence of Member States, which would not be involved in the adoption process	Yes	Yes
Sustainability of cooperation and stakeholders' involvement in quality improvement in VET would increase	No	Limited	Unlikely on a significant scale	Yes	Yes
Attractiveness and status of VET would be enhanced	No	Limited	Limited	Yes	Yes

Learner and worker mobility would increase	Depends on commitment of Member States	Depends on commitment of Member States	No because of limited influence of Member States, which would not be involved in the adoption process	Yes	Yes
Employability would improve	No	Depends on commitment of Member States	No, because of limited influence of Member States, which would not be involved in the adoption process	Yes	Yes

7. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring and evaluation of the Framework's success in meeting its objectives would be continuous. The Framework, if adopted by the European Parliament and the Council, would not be a static reference, but would instead be kept under review and form the basis for further development.

The Commission would monitor the implementation of the Framework and report, three years after its adoption, to the European Parliament and the Council, on the experience gained and the implications for the future, including if necessary a review of the legal instrument.

The following indicators will enable the Council, Parliament and Commission to determine if the Framework's objectives have been reached:

- all Member States use the Framework as a common reference to develop their Quality systems for VET in particular by using the reference set of quality indicators presented in an annex;
- the adoption by Member States of national Quality systems related to the Framework;
- increased participation in ENQAVET;
- designation by all Member States of National Quality Assurance Reference Points to ensure the follow-up of initiatives and efficient dissemination of information.

Annex 1

EXAMPLES OF INITIATIVES TAKEN BY PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES, BASED ON THE USE OF THE CQAF²⁴

AUSTRIA

- The CQAF has been chosen as a reference point for the development and implementation of a huge quality assurance process for the VET-school system (Q.I.S.: 'Quality in Schools'), involving the relevant departments in the ministry, the regional school authorities as well as several school managers. This is a bottom-up initiative which tries to encourage schools to take over quality assurance and quality improvement in an autonomous way, by establishing a top quality assurance system for school administration at all levels: national, regional, institutional.

IRELAND

- The CQAF's principal features correspond to the national model of quality development and to a certain extent it has influenced the FETAC²⁵ policy on quality assurance at provider level. Chief among these is the methodology for the self-assessment of training providers. The indicators proposed by the CQAF have also influenced FETAC policy development.
- The CQAF was one of the instruments used to carry out FETAC's review in 2007.

ROMANIA

- The CQAF has strongly influenced shaping the national quality assurance framework for initial VET and the adoption of a law in this area.
- The CQAF principles and instruments developed to facilitate its implementation (a European guide for self-assessment of VET providers) led to setting out two manuals: one on self-assessment of VET providers and the other on the inspection manual, both of which were implemented in 122 VET schools before being used at national level.

HUNGARY

- A quality improvement programme based on the CQAF and covering the VET system as a whole is currently being implemented, with the necessary context-specific adaptation.
- Creation of the legislative background promoting implementation of the VET Development Strategy for the period 2005–2013. It is stated that *by the end of 2008 all institutions/VET providers could implement a quality assurance system designed and developed by considering the European Common Quality Assurance Framework.*
- Adaptation of CQAF to the Hungarian school-based vocational education and training sector: pilot project involving the participation of 160 schools.
- The preparatory work for CQAF implementation was launched in January 2007 for the adaptation and implementation of CQAF in the adult VET sector.

24 The examples illustrate the types of initiatives taken by national/regional/local authorities dealing specifically with the use of the CQAF. By no means do they reflect the Member States' policies and instruments for approaching quality in VET

25 FETAC, the Further Education and Training Awards Council, was established on 11 June 2001 under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999. It is the single national awarding body for the further education and training sector in Ireland

NORWAY

- The CQAF is an element of the national strategy of the Cooperation Body for Vocational Education and Training, which is in charge of the National Action Plan for Quality in Vocational Education and Training.
- The CQAF references were used to check whether education and training are planned, implemented and assessed according to the objectives designed in the pilot project “The apprentice inspectors” (electronic questionnaire where apprentices and students can report their own opinion on learning conditions, equipment, learning environment according to educational objectives).

ITALY

- ***Quality Chart***

The Quality Chart is a voluntary agreement between VET providers who commit themselves to respecting some quality criteria (regarding organisation, teaching, processes, and outputs). The major providers' organisations signed it in November 2003 under the coordination of ISFOL (Institute for the Development of Vocational Training, Ministry of Labour). The Quality Chart takes into consideration the CQAF principles.

- ***Guide on Self-assessment***

The guide on self-assessment which forms part of the CQAF has been translated and adapted to the specific context, in order to support the development of a pilot project launched in a limited number of schools.

DENMARK

- Seminars have been organised for the VET colleges and social partners to present and discuss the CQAF. Colleges were represented and gave their suggestions on the framework.
- The CQAF was used as a reference system supporting presentations and debates. The Danish authorities are also looking at whether the CQAF can be used to provide a better overview and documentation of quality assurance at provider level in VET.

FINLAND

- A project has been launched by the Ministry of Education to update and develop the quality recommendations for providers of educational services, for educational institutions and apprenticeship training. The recommendations were updated taking into account the CQAF principles.
- Quality management Recommendations for Vocational Education and Training, based on the CQAF principles, were developed and adopted in 2006 by the Finnish Ministry of Education. The Recommendations form an important part of Finland's implementation of the Copenhagen process.

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>	<p><i>Context / Input indicator</i></p>	<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>	<p>IVT²⁶</p> <p>CVT²⁷</p>
<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>	<p><i>Input/Process indicator</i></p>	<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>	<p>IVT</p> <p>CVT</p>

²⁶ Initial Vocational Training

²⁷ Continuing Vocational Training

Indicator

*Type of
Indicator*

Policy Rationale

Applicable to

Indicators supporting quality objectives for VET policies			
<p>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 criteria²⁸</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>IVT²⁹</p> <p>CVT</p> <p>LLL (Lifelong learning): percentage of population admitted to formal VET programmes</p>
<p>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>

28 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.

29 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			
No 7 Unemployment rate ³⁰ according to individual criteria	<i>Context indicator</i>	Background information for policy decision-making at VET-system level	IVT CVT
No 8 Prevalence of vulnerable groups: a) percentage of participants in VET classified as disadvantaged groups (in a defined region or catchment area) according to age and gender; b) success rate of disadvantaged groups according to age and gender	<i>Context indicator</i>	Background information for policy decision-making at VET-system level Support access to VET for socially disadvantaged groups Support adapted training provision for socially disadvantaged groups	IVT CVT

30

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>