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'COPENHAGEN PROCESS'
First report of the Technical Working Group
'QUALITY IN VET'

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Contact: F. Oliveira Reis, Telephone +32 2 299 1237, Fax: +32-2-295.78.30
e-mail: fernanda.oliveira-reis@cec.eu.int

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1 INTRODUCTION

Interest in quality development of VET systems has increased progressively over recent years, in line with a growing awareness of the role of VET in economic competitiveness and social inclusion. This reflects a concern for efficiency and effectiveness in VET in view of the challenges of rapidly changing socio-economic contexts. Such interest also recognises the need to ensure returns on investment of scarce resources by both public and private sector actors.

Quality development in VET systems is also a key instrument in supporting the transition to a knowledge-based society and economy. The role of quality in VET in increasing transparency and mutual trust within and between VET systems is of the utmost importance, in terms of supporting mobility and lifelong learning in the European Union.

These are the main reasons that have led to numerous policy initiatives in quality development in VET. The frequency and type of initiatives at national level varies from country to country. In order to increase transparency and mutual trust in European VET systems, there is need for a better understanding of the different choices made by/in Member States in this field, and for better consistency between developments across Europe. These are the basic principles underpinning European action in this field.

2 THE EUROPEAN POLICY AGENDA ON QUALITY

Since the early Council Resolutions and Conclusions aiming at improving the quality of VET (1994¹, 1995², 1999³), the issue has been addressed mainly through the exchange of information and experience, and by promoting dialogue and experimentation, in particular by means of the European education and training programmes.

Since 1995, the Leonardo da Vinci programme (LdV) has supported a large number of transnational projects and co-operation initiatives, which we must continue to take stock of and on which we must continue to build.

In December 2000, the European Forum on Quality in VET was created by the European Commission, in line with the relevant Council Decisions and Resolutions, as well as with the interest of the Directors General for Vocational Training (DGVT) and of the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training (ACVT). Guided by the same principles of exchange of information and experience, and of stimulating the debate, the Forum was the first structured technical co-operation platform between the Commission, the Member States and the Social Partners, dealing with the issue of quality in VET at European level.

The Council Resolution⁴ and the Declaration⁵ of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training on the Promotion of Enhanced European Co-operation in VET ('The Copenhagen process'), is a fundamental step forward compared to the first Council Resolutions and Conclusions of the 90s and the European Forum itself.

¹ 94/C 374/01

² 95/C/207/03/1995

³ Council Resolution 'Into the new millennium: developing new working procedures for European cooperation in the field of education and training'(2000/C 8/04)

⁴ 19 December 2002 (JO 2003/C 13/02)

⁵ Adopted in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002

The ‘Copenhagen process’, together with the report on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe⁶ and the detailed work programme⁷ to implement these objectives through the Open Method of Co-ordination (‘Objectives process’), provide the political framework for co-operation at European level in the field of quality assurance and enhancement in VET.

Allowing for mutual learning between Member States, as well as EEA-EFTA countries, candidate countries and the Social Partners, these instruments are aimed at allowing for efficient and effective progress towards the target set by the Barcelona European Council in March 2002 of making Europe’s education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010.

This first report of the Technical Working Group (TWG) on quality in VET, is to be presented to the Commission by the end of October 2003. Any Commission proposals will be submitted to the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training for opinion.

2.1 The ‘Copenhagen process’

The Council Resolution and Declaration, respond to the request from the Barcelona European Council in March 2002 to introduce instruments to ensure the transparency of diplomas and qualifications, including by promoting action similar to the Bologna-process, but adapted to the field of VET.

The Resolution invites the Member States and the Commission, within the framework of their responsibilities, to involve the candidate countries and the EFTA-EEA countries, as well as the Social Partners, in implementing the agreed priorities. The Declaration, which followed, was agreed by the ministers responsible for VET from the European Union and candidate countries, and endorsed by the Social Partners at European level.

The initial focus of the Copenhagen process until 2004 is on the development of a single framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences; credit transfer in VET; and quality assurance. These priorities aim at promoting mutual trust, transparency and recognition of competences and qualifications, and thereby at establishing a basis for increasing mobility and facilitating access to lifelong learning.

A meeting will be held in late 2004, with the participation of the ministers responsible for VET, the European Commission and the Social Partners, ‘to review progress and give advice on future priorities and strategies’.

Both the Resolution and the Declaration define the principles underpinning enhanced co-operation in VET: (i) ‘co-operation should be based on the target of 2010, set by the European Council in accordance with the detailed work programme and the follow-up of the Objectives report’; (ii) measures should be voluntary and principally developed through bottom-up co-operation; (iii) initiatives must be focused on the needs of citizens and user organisations’; (iv) co-operation should be inclusive and involve Member States, the Commission, candidate countries, EFTA-EEA countries and the Social Partners’.

A gradual integration of the Copenhagen process with the follow-up of the objectives report will be carried out in the future. The joint interim report to the Spring European Council in 2004 on

⁶ Council Document 5680/01 of 14/02/2001, see <http://register.consilium.eu.int/pdf/fr/01/st05/05980f1.pdf>

⁷ Council Document 5828/02 of 4/02/2002, see <http://register.consilium.eu.int/pdf/en/02/st05/05828en2.pdf>

the Objectives process will include a progress report on the implementation of the Copenhagen declaration.

The mandate given by the ministers at Copenhagen is being implemented through technical working groups (TWGs) where Member States, the Commission, candidate countries, EFTA-EEA countries and the European Social Partners are represented. Cedefop and the ETF are also represented in the groups.

The implementation of the priorities of the declaration through the TWGs is being co-ordinated by the 'Copenhagen Co-ordination Group' (CCG), which has also given attention to the need to develop effective co-ordination arrangements at national level. The CCG is composed of representatives of all Member States, candidate and EFTA-EEA countries and European Social Partners.

The ACVT, which is the formal tripartite body on which Member States' Social Partners are represented, along with Government representatives, is asked for its formal opinion and kept fully informed of, and invited to discuss, policy developments. The DGVT gives informal advice on forthcoming initiatives as well as strategic matters.

The Copenhagen Declaration sets out the policy agenda in the field quality assurance in VET:

'Promoting co-operation 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'

This agenda is being implemented through the TWG on quality in VET (see membership, annex 1), according to a detailed work program for 2003 (annex 2). Cedefop and the European Training Foundation provide relevant support to the TWG's work.

The work of the TWG builds on the results of the former Quality Forum (May 2001-September 2002), which had reached a first consensus on some proposals targeted at European, national and provider levels in such areas as 'quality management systems', 'self-assessment of training providers', and 'quality indicators'.

2.2 Mandate and work programme of the TWG

The mandate of the TWG, drawn up by the Commission and endorsed by the ACVT, translates the content of the policy agenda in terms of operational objectives and sets a timetable for implementation. This mandate provides the basis for the Group's work programme for 2003 and 2004.

The work programme for 2003 was primarily focused on points 1-3 and 6 of the mandate (see below), for which concrete results were expected. A new work programme must be drawn up for 2004, in order to consolidate the outline proposals for the operational approach and co-operative framework (see below).

As regards point 1: 'examine existing national and international standards and norms, their application, strengths and weaknesses', a background paper has been finalised⁸. For points 2: 'identify a common core of criteria for quality development at European level'⁹ and 3: 'develop

⁸ see 'Quality standards and norms in European VET', Working paper, September 2003, by Kim Faurschou,

⁹ see 'The Common Reference Framework on Quality in VET', Working paper, September 2003, by Kim Faurschou

a limited set of coherent quality indicators for VET at systems level, on the basis of good practice'¹⁰, concrete proposals have been made by the TWG.

The development of an 'operational approach' (point 4) progressed well and is already the subject of a wide consensus in the group. It led to the setting up of a Common Quality Assurance Framework for VET, which includes the 'common core of criteria' and the 'set of indicators' as well as a practical tool: an European guide to self-assessment¹¹. The 'outline proposal for a co-operation framework' (point 6) is presented in this report and gives possible directions for future work.

Mandate of the TWG on quality in VET

- 1) to examine existing national and international standards and norms, their application, strengths and weaknesses;
- 2) to identify a common core of criteria for quality development at European level;
- 3) to develop a limited set of coherent quality indicators for VET at systems level, on the basis of good practice;
- 4) to develop an operational approach based on the common core of criteria and the set of indicators. Such an approach should include concrete methods and practical tools to support self-assessment, as well as guidelines and checklists for quality assurance;
- 5) to outline a proposal for a co-operation framework in order to develop common activities between countries on specific issues, to promote the exchange of good practice and the use of voluntary peer review at different levels. This should include monitoring the follow-up of the operational approach (see 4. above) by the Member States;
- 6) to ensure that Member States and relevant stakeholders will be regularly informed on developments and outcomes from the work of this group and the follow-up to the Quality Forum, in particular via the electronic platform set up by Cedefop;
- 7) to report systematically to the co-ordination group and the ACVT;
- 8) to present a report by October 2003 to the Commission setting out the results of points 1, 2 and 3 and outlining a basis for points 4 and 5. Commission proposals will be submitted to the ACVT for opinion.

2.3 Working methods

In order to make best use of existing initiatives, the members of the TWG have provided, as far as possible, the necessary information to take forward this work, in particular by identifying 'cases of good practice' at national level.

¹⁰ see 'A limited set of coherent quality indicators', September 2003, by Erwin Seyfried

¹¹ see 'An European Guide on Self-assessment for VET providers', September 2003, by Lise-Lotte Ravnmark,

The 'mapping' of initiatives started by the European Forum on Quality was further developed and consolidated by the group: for some issues, the information provided previously was considered sufficient; in other cases, extensive fine-tuning or additional data collection was needed. The members of the TWG also carried out an initial verification in their own countries of the results of the work done at European level. Their active contribution to the implementation of a co-operative framework and to the forthcoming experimental phase of applying the results achieved, is crucial.

The TWG acts as a first-level platform of co-operation engaging, in several countries, inclusive national 'networks' and 'fora'. It thereby promotes debate, exchange of experience and dissemination of information between relevant stakeholders at different levels.

Cedefop provides strong technical and scientific support for all the work, addressing the horizontal aspects of data collection, and the analysis and synthesis of all the relevant materials. External experts assist the Centre in these activities. The ETF liaises with candidate countries, namely by facilitating the collection of information on specific points of the mandate and by contributing to the dissemination activities on the TWG's results towards these countries.

A Virtual Community (VC), created and managed by Cedefop, in co-operation with the TWG and the Commission, provides access to information and exchanges between the members of the TWG as well as external stakeholders.

The Commission (DG EAC, Unit B1) provides overall co-ordination of activities. It is also responsible for the organisation of the TWG's meetings and for reporting to the ACVT, the DGVTV and the CCG.

To date, the TWG has met four times (one-day meetings for the first three of them). It will meet in December 2003, in order to consider the outcomes of the meetings of the DGVTV (20-21 October) and the ACVT (27-28 November), particularly in relation to the TWG's report. The December meeting will also allow the TWG to react to the interim report on the objectives process, a first draft of which will be adopted by the Commission in November. This meeting will take place by the 1st of December in order to allow time for the TWG to prepare a proposal for the CCG's meeting of December 2003, on possible further developments of the TWG's mandate and the work programme for 2004.

3 PROPOSAL FOR A OPERATIONAL APPROACH TO QUALITY MANAGEMENT (QM): TOWARDS A EUROPEAN COMMON QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

The work of the TWG on Quality Assurance aims at:

- maintaining and improving the quality of programmes across the European Community
- enabling mutual trust in other Member States' systems to be developed/enhanced in order to fully implement the Copenhagen process, including the introduction of a Credit Transfer System.

At this stage, the essence of the work of the TWG is the establishment and eventual operation of a Common Quality Assurance Framework, which will enable Member States and providers, to establish good practice which will further promote mobility.

A Quality Assurance system requires and reinforces transparency not only within and between providers but also between Member States' systems. Providers across Europe offer a vast range of programmes catering for the needs of learners with varied needs and expectations. Therefore it is important that common references give direction as to what is expected of systems and

providers by way of policies and procedures while acknowledging that the implementation may vary.

Such common references should promote quality assurance systems, which include:

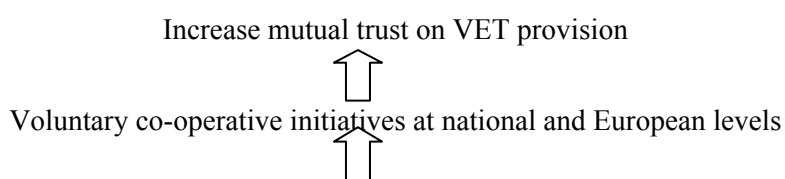
- a process of goal setting for education and training activities and related services
- policies and procedures designed to implement the goals
- a monitoring system to measure ongoing attainment of the goals and a formal evaluation system which will examine and report on the achievement of the goals. This evaluation will include the views of learners and of (an) objective person(s) competent to make comparison with other similar provision
- a system of responding to the findings of the monitoring and evaluation which will address areas for improvement and build on areas of strength.

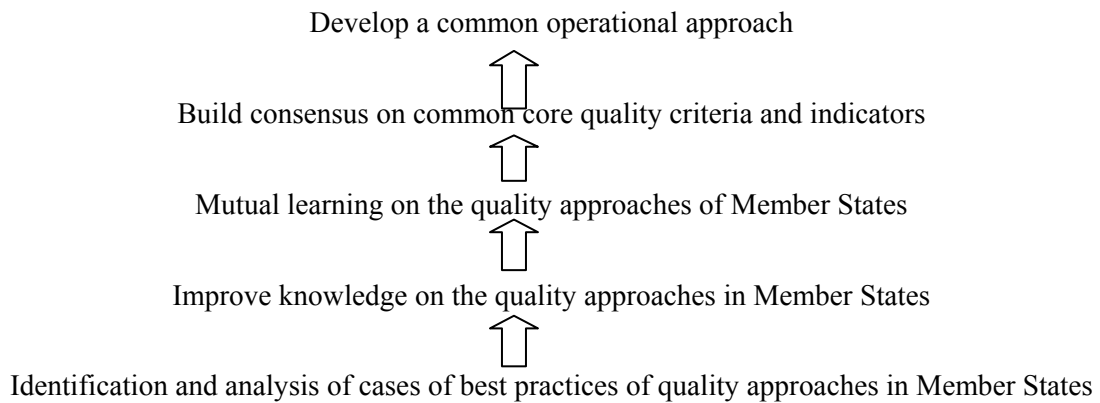
In striving to implement effective Quality Assurance Systems, providers must review existing policies and procedures or develop new ones. The management and staff at systems and provider levels need to examine the essence of what they do, and how they do it. This will enable them to capture and codify existing good practice as well as to identify areas of provision that need improvement. The Common Quality Assurance Framework provides for clear references to support these processes.

3.1 Rationale of the Common Quality Assurance Framework

In accordance with its mandate the TWG work identified a common core of criteria and a set of indicators for quality development at European level, which are set out in detail in annexes 3 and 4. Considering that a systematic approach is necessary to guarantee effective QM, the core criteria were identified in relation to a structured framework. As mentioned before, this led to the drawing up of a proposal on a Common Quality Assurance Framework, which can be applied at both the system and VET provider levels and can therefore be used to assess the effectiveness of policy initiatives and VET provision.

The following diagram presents the different stages and objectives of the work done:





The Common Quality Assurance Framework has a number of characteristics, which allow it to be put to widespread use; namely that it:

- builds on the experiences of the Member States
- followed a consensual approach to identify the areas and the criteria that are considered crucial for quality assurance and enhancement
- raises questions and suggests possible answers (quality criteria) at systems and provider levels, while not prescribing ‘how to do things’
- is consistent with the main steps and questions of other relevant existing instruments, and in particular the EFQM¹² and ISO¹³
- has an easy approach, to a rather complex matter

It associates the following four interrelated elements which are explained in detail below:

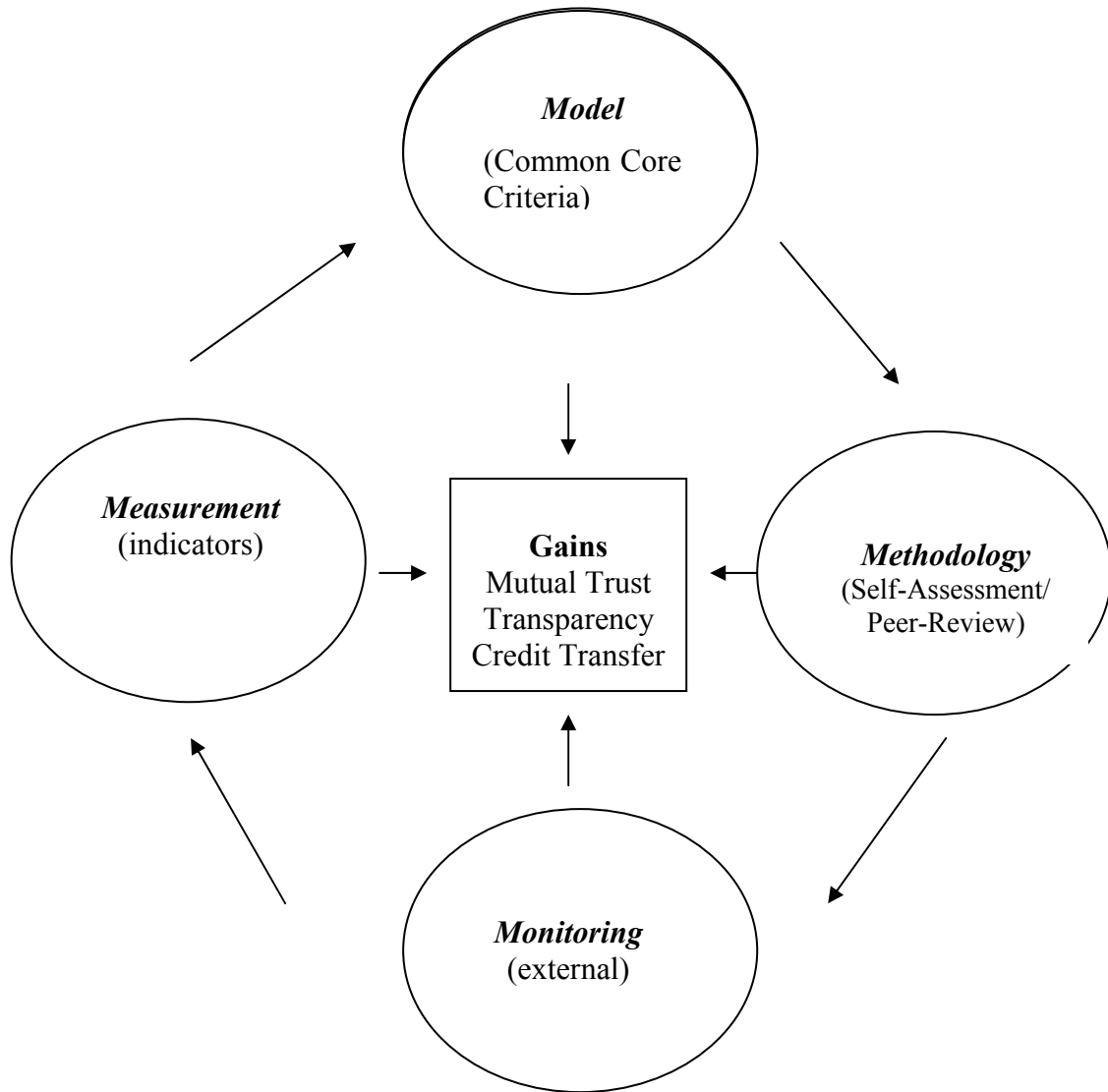
1. ***A model***
2. ***A methodology***
3. ***A monitoring system***

¹² European Foundation for Quality Management EFQM Excellence Model: a non-prescriptive framework based on nine criteria. Five of these are 'Enablers' and four are 'Results'. The 'Enabler' criteria cover what an organisation does. The 'Results' criteria cover what an organisation achieves. 'Results' are caused by 'Enablers' and feedback from 'Results' help to improve 'Enablers'. (in The European Reference Model on Quality in VET, Working paper version 6, by Kim Faurschou September 2003)

¹³ International Organisation for Standardisation, based in Geneva, Switzerland. Founded in 1947 for the purpose of advancing standardisation around the world, this non-governmental organisation now comprises over 130 member countries. Each country is represented by its respective national standards body and participates in developing standards to facilitate trade of goods and services in the global marketplace. The ISO 9000 series of standards represents the essential requirements that every enterprise needs to address to ensure the consistent production and timely delivery of its goods and services to the marketplace. These requirements make up the standards that comprise the quality management system, and their generic nature allows for their application in any type of organisation.

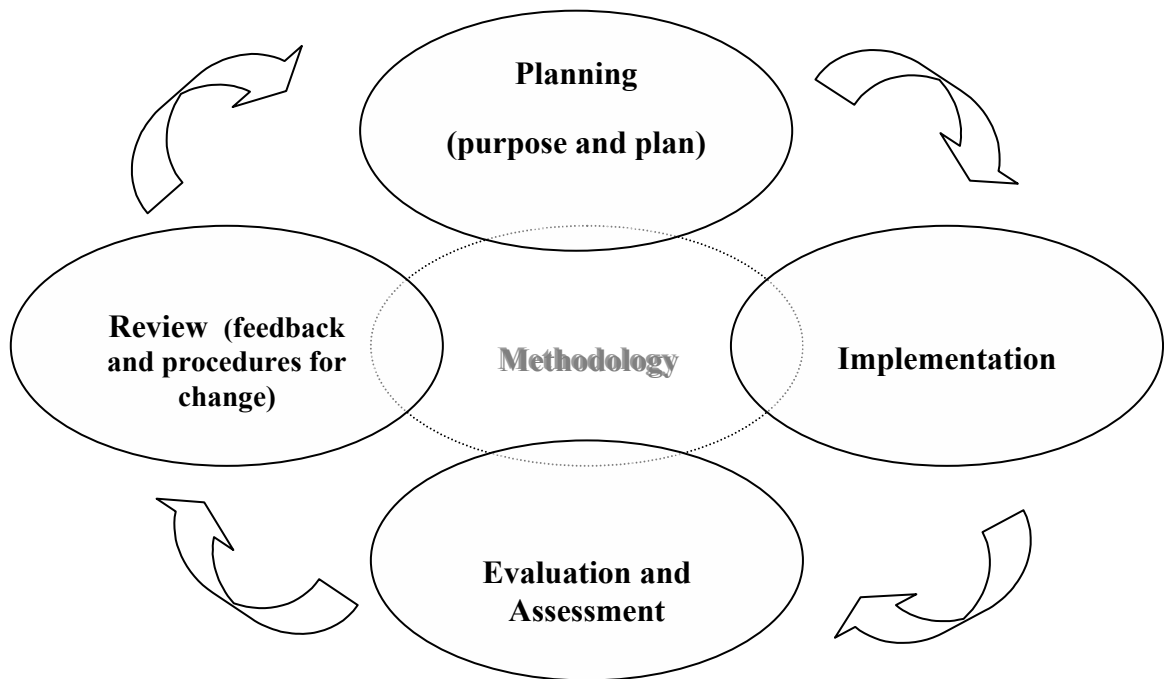
4. *A measurement tool*

A COMMON QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK



A. A model

This model can apply to both systems and provider levels and allows for the identification of best practice of current provision across Member States. The model includes the following steps:



- **Planning** - setting clear and measurable goals across the organisation regarding policies, procedures, tasks, people, is a crucial issue in Quality Assurance.
- **Implementation** - the way the planned actions are implemented, the key principles underpinning the implementation process, and the coherence between these and the goals which have been set, are key elements for the effectiveness of results and therefore for Quality Assurance.
- **Evaluation - of programme provision** by objectives including learners ; **Assessment - of learners' achievement of outcomes**

The evaluation by systems or providers of their systems/programmes is a fundamental part of Quality Assurance. There is no single way in which evaluations will be made. Evaluation mechanisms can be designed according to the context. The frequency and scope of evaluations should be emphasised. The product of the evaluation should be a report, containing the findings of the evaluation and including strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations for action.

The assessment of learner's achievements of outcomes is fundamental, as all programmes leading to awards must ensure fair and consistent assessment of learners based on award outcomes.

- **Review (feedback and procedures for change)**- the model should be under constant review. This is in keeping with the improvement focus inherent in Quality Assurance.

B. A methodology

Methodology is a transversal dimension and as such is present throughout all the steps of the model. It includes decisions about actors, the design of assessment and evaluation tools, the procedures for planning, implementation and feedback and the decisions that combine all steps in order to create a unified system.

But it constitutes also a full element of the model in its own. The TWG considers that Self-Assessment is a relevant methodology for Quality Assurance at systems and provider levels, and it has devised sample self-assessment guidelines.

C. A monitoring system

Member States need to put in place appropriate monitoring systems at systems and provider levels, where relevant stakeholders, and namely the Social Partners, are associated. This needs to be based on common core principles including external monitoring and feedback. This monitoring activity will complement the Self-Assessment evaluations made by providers and can incorporate the findings of evaluation reports.

D. A measurement tool

In order to contrast and compare Member States' systems and providers, a common measurement system could be adopted. This can be based on common reference indicators, as devised by the Technical Working Group, although some of these are particularly appropriate to the system level. Such indicators can also be used as 'spot lights' that draw attention to the VET process at national level, and as a basis for exchanges of experiences and good practices.

The logic of the ***Common Quality Assurance Framework*** builds on the key principles of the most relevant existing quality assurance models. Therefore, it ***must not be considered as a new model, but as a cross reading instrument which can help policy makers and practitioners to get a better insight of how the existing models work, and how to improve them, on the basis of a commonly agreed core of criteria and a set of indicators at European level.*** The instrument allows also for the identification of the weak and strong points of the different models and their implementation, and can thereby provide the basis for the identification and exchanges of good practices.

The potential of the framework for policy decision making in the field quality assurance in VET can be particularly relevant in countries where quality systems are not formally developed. In fact, it provides for a systemic framework on which policies can build upon, and gives key references for making choices to approach quality assurance.

The quality core criteria and the set of indicators (points 2 and 3 of the TWG's mandate) associated to this framework, correspond in fact to the operational approach foreseen at point 4. The aim is to provide for a comprehensive and systemic approach to quality assurance and development, whereas fragmented and isolated results would be rather meaningless.

3.2 The core quality criteria

Building on the work of the former European Forum, the quality criteria were allocated to four interrelated steps,

- Purpose and plan
- Implementation
- Assessment and evaluation
- Feedback and procedures for change, and to

Methodology, as a transversal dimension.

The analysis of the contributions previously provided by the European Forum, and afterwards, by the TWG, highlights a variety of specific answers to the broad question of how, in the Member States, the different aspects of quality in VET are dealt with. Some concrete examples are presented in the thematic working document, to illustrate this variety.

Therefore, the methodology that has been followed consisted first on the identification of the key questions pinpointing the main issues for each one of the steps of the quality assurance process. The core quality criteria are presented in the form of possible answers to be given to these questions at systems and provider levels (see annex 3). Examples of quality standards, which are being used by Member States, are described and referenced to each one of the steps of the model in the above-mentioned working document.

The underlying principle of such an approach is to fully respect the different options in Member States as regards quality development, while providing common reference criteria aimed at increasing transparency and consistency between different Member States' policy initiatives and actions.

The added value of this Common Quality Assurance Framework, which aims at being both comprehensive and simple, has to be assessed at systems and provider levels by Member States, in order for them to gain experience and to provide broad and in-depth feedback on its strengths and weaknesses. This process will take time as it presupposes the learning of systems and organisations as a whole.

3.3 A set of coherent quality indicators for VET

It is part of the mandate of the TWG “to develop of a limited set of coherent quality indicators for VET at systems level, on the basis of good practice.” As a first exercise, the members of the TWG reviewed the set of indicators, which had been developed by the European Forum.

Two rationales have guided the selection of adequate indicators: the first one was to support the application of quality management systems at both VET provider and systems levels. The second rationale was to link quality management activities to objectives agreed at European level for the VET systems. These are to increase the employability of the workforce, to improve access to VET, especially for the vulnerable groups of the labour market, and to improve the match between VET supply and demand.

The selection process made by the TWG lead to a proposal with a small number of very condensed and concise indicators, together forming a limited set of coherent indicators for quality (see Annex 4).

3.3.1 Indicators for quality assurance

Indicator No 1: ***share of VET providers applying QM-systems respecting the Common Quality Assurance Framework, by type of approach used***

The main reason to include this indicator is to support and to give an impulse to the implementation of quality management (QM) systems among all European countries and VET providers. The indicator will be especially useful when it is linked to other indicators that reflect the European policy objectives. Furthermore it will be a crucial question whether the QM systems which are applied include the core criteria of the common quality assurance framework.

Indicator No 2: ***investment in training of trainers***

The Copenhagen declaration states that giving attention to the learning needs of teachers and trainers within VET is one of the most crucial factors for improving the quality of VET. Therefore, this indicator is essential for the improvement of quality in VET. Although it is difficult to base the information on quantitative data, the TWG decided to keep it as part of the set of indicators. Investments will be considered as a proxy for the importance given to training of trainers. One possibility for quantification could be the number of days devoted to the training of trainers per student.

Indicator No 3: ***unemployment according to groups***

This indicator provides contextual information, which is important for both the objectives of better employability and improvement of access. Data can be obtained through Eurostat.

Indicator No 4: ***prevalence of vulnerable groups***

This indicator provides also contextual information, which is particularly relevant for the policy objective of addressing improved access of vulnerable groups to VET. For some vulnerable groups clear definitions at European level are available and for those groups data can be provided through Eurostat. Those groups are the following:

- early school leavers (drop-outs)
- young unemployed people (under 25 years of age)
- long-term unemployed people (more than one year)
- older people (over 55 years of age)
- handicapped people (according to national definitions).

It is not realistic to arrive at comparable data for other vulnerable groups at European level.

Indicator No 5: ***participation rates in Initial Vocational Training (IVT) and lifelong learning (LLL), by type of VET courses***

While considered in general as quite useful especially for Continuing Vocational Training (CVT) this indicator is also quite relevant for IVT. As regards participation in IVT a particular

attention should be given to context factors of national / regional education systems, which may strongly influence data (e.g. countries with high participation rates in Higher education).

For the moment it is proposed to stick to the data provided through Eurostat surveys of CVT where participation at enterprise level and rate of participation in VET courses by economic activities etc. is measured. Seen from the background of the policy objective to improve access to VET, the participation rates of vulnerable groups are an important output indicator and the information is all the more valid if it can be compared to the contextual data on prevalence of vulnerable groups in a certain context (indicator no 4).

Indicator No 6: ***percentage of participants who started and successfully completed VET (by type of VET courses)***

This indicator is of central importance as it delivers the main output data for the employability objective. This is especially true when the data on completion rates can be compared to participation rates (indicator no 5). In this case it is possible to obtain drop-out rates, which is another valuable indicator of quality.

Indicator No 7: ***destination of trainees sixth months after training***

The destination of trainees is an important outcome indicator for the employability and the matching objective; and in a longer-term perspective it also could make sense to use this indicator for gaining additional information on the objective of better access to training. The main categories should be as following: being in further training activities, being employed, being unemployed, not being available for the labour market (for example because of illness). Data must be obtained by follow-up leaver surveys. It would be useful to get additional information from the persons who are employed if their job is in the field in which the training was made (employed in job related to training). It is proposed to include this indicator in the Labour Force Survey.

Indicator No 8: ***utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace, from the perspective both of the employer and the employee***

Even though it is difficult to measure, the utilisation of this indicator was considered as being very important as an outcome indicator for the policy objectives of employability and better matching. Also from the point of view of private and public enterprises this indicator is of central importance. Practical experiments should be carried out with this indicator by organising randomised sample studies in Member States interested in this kind of data. Another possibility could be to extend the regular European Community Household Panel (ECHP) surveys on job satisfaction (JSAT).

Indicator (descriptor) No 9: ***(quality of) existing mechanisms to adapt vocational education and training to changing demands in the labour markets***

There is a broad range of mechanisms to adapt VET to developments in the labour markets. They include for example skills forecasting and procedures for updating professional profiles. There is no other choice than to stick to qualitative information and to learn more about the different mechanisms that are in use.

Indicator (descriptor) No 10: (quality of) *existing schemes to promote better access including orientation, guidance and support schemes*

According to the experiences that have been collected from the Member States it seems that too many different schemes to promote better access are in operation at national, regional and local level, which makes it difficult to get reliable and comparable data. Therefore this information is proposed as a soft indicator.

3.3.2 The common quality assurance framework and the set of indicators

Altogether the proposed indicators cover the different steps or the whole cycle of the VET quality management process, i.e. they do not stand in isolation but are related to one another, they include contextual information as well as data relating to input, process, output and outcome. A certain focus has been given to indicators that are oriented towards the measurement of outputs and outcomes of VET. It should also be noted that all indicators referring to the level of individuals are to provide information according to gender.

Most of the indicators are also interlinked with each other, i.e. additional information can be obtained by linking and comparing the results for certain indicators with those of others. For example, by comparing completion rates (indicator no. 6) with participation rates (indicator no. 5) it will be possible to get an idea on drop-out rates; by comparing participation rates with data on prevalence of certain groups (indicator no 4) it will be possible to evaluate accessibility.

For three of the chosen indicators (see annex 4) already existing data sources at European level can be exploited; for two indicators existing surveys might need an extension. Additional data collection will be necessary for three indicators (share of VET providers using QM systems; investment in training of trainers; utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace).

There are different possibilities to link the set of indicators to the Common Quality Assurance Framework.

In principle the subject of indicators is important in each of the four steps of the framework: in the first step the use of indicators needs to be planned. In the second step there must be implementation activities for data collection to make sure that in the third step assessment and evaluation activities can take place on the basis of reliable information. In the last phase all indicators have to be taken into consideration, as practical consequences might be drawn from each of them. The set of indicators, as well as the procedures applied for data collection, should be reviewed, assessed and adapted where necessary.

Another possibility for clear and operational understanding of the linkage between the set of indicators and the common quality assurance framework is to see the indicators as objectives and part of the measurement instrument for the improvement of quality. In this case, they should be primarily allocated to the planning and the assessment phases. As a first step, objectives would be formulated and broken down into measurable indicators. Subsequently, assessment and evaluation achievement would be measured and compared to the indicators previously set, enabling thereby the evaluation of the fulfilment of goals.

3.3.3 How to work with indicators

In their main function the proposed set of indicators should serve as a recommendation to policy developers at systems level to apply them and to make use of them in a European perspective.

Besides collecting statistical information and including the proposed set of indicators in QM approaches it seems necessary to collect more information on how different quality systems in Europe work with indicators. This exercise should include the question whether and how the basic data as defined for the set of indicators are collected and how this information is used in procedures for change.

Future work with the proposed set of indicators should give statistical evidence of the current state of data on the quality of VET systems across Europe. Once the relevant data for the proposed indicators is prepared, and a baseline for improvements towards the European policy objectives is available, progress could be measured and comparison between systems would be possible.

3.4 The use of standards and norms

According to the mandate of the TWG, the work on standards and norms should focus on the analysis of the experiences of their use in different countries and at different levels. These experiences cover international, national, regional and sectoral standards and norms. Rather than representing a systematic data collection, contributions from Member States refer to experiences that can be considered as 'good practices'. This led to a report based on the analysis of the contributions from the members of the TWG, which should be considered as a background paper aiming at deepening insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the application of standards in different settings.

Standards are closely linked with goals and can be of two types (or a combination of them): specifications for the minimum content of a VET programme (= input approach), or targets for minimum competences to be acquired after the VET programme (= output approach). They can support the design and implementation of quality assurance approaches, as reference points for certification of individuals or the accreditation of VET institutions and/or programmes. In this paper we will use a broader typology with input standards, process standards and output standards.

In almost every Member State the approaches are quite different for initial and continuing VET. In general, there are also considerable differences within continuing VET, and between publicly and privately provided training, since these provisions pursue different objectives.

The analysis that has been carried out revealed therefore that standards and norms have to be differentiated between the different segments of VET: CVT, IVT (schools), IVT (apprenticeship), IVT (tertiary sector). These segments correspond in fact to different contexts, which require specific answers.

In centralised systems, goals are set at central level, often by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour. These goals can be very concrete and directly useful for regional authorities, VET providers and teachers/trainers, or can be very broadly defined. In decentralised systems, VET providers need implementation mechanisms to translate broad political goals into goals that can be used in daily activities.

At system level one can already witness a trend whereby political objectives (e.g. dropout rates) are translated into measurable goals and hence standards. At institutional level, many VET providers have adopted QM systems, which include generic and specific management and process standards. Sometimes this is done at the request of the bodies that finance their operations.

The key questions as regards the use of standards are:

- How and when to use standards?
- Who develops the standards?
- Who authorises the standards?
- Who verifies whether the standards have been achieved or not?
- What is done when standards are not achieved?
- Who modifies the standards?
- Which standards are currently used in the national VET system (and which ones are likely to be used in the future)?

Each Member State has set a number of

- *Input and process standards that apply to systems and providers,*
- *Output standards that apply to systems, providers, individuals*

Most of the *input and process standards that apply to systems* are set by law. The existence of standards itself is seen as a major strong point. The actors and the processes, by which standards are set up, are considered highly important. A major weakness of these standards is linked to their implementation and measurement. The major trends observed are flexibility, transparency and transfer possibilities between the educational sectors.

Greater flexibility, decentralisation and transparency are among the major trends in input and process standards that apply to the system level. Some Member States mention that they are going to change the focus from input and process standards into output standards: the quality of individual results/ progress made after training.

The *input and process standards that apply to providers* are numerous and focus principally on standards related to staff qualifications, resources, examination and qualification requirements. The standards are set by a number of different organisations ranging from governments to regional authorities and private organisations.

A huge number of strong and weak points are mentioned by the Member States. Improvement of quality is considered the major strong point. The major weaknesses reported are related to the control mechanisms, the large number of rules, the different regional approaches, and the lack of systemised data on results in education.

The trends observed here relate to transparency of results, increase of competences of VET providers, greater autonomy, development of common quality standards and of a quality testing system.

Concerning the *output standards that apply to systems*, in recent years the focus has changed from input to output standards in a number of Member States. Most of the output standards are at the same time policy goals e.g. the ones related to dropouts, quality, and effectiveness of training. Governments and the national VET-bodies set most of them. The main strong points of

these output standards are their national consistency and their close relation to policy goals. Their weak points refer to problems of defining and measuring them.

One of the trends of the output standards that apply to systems is a greater focus on objectives than on input and process, and an agreement with the VET sector (and in future with each VET provider) on measuring goals, results (output) and effectiveness (outcome) of VET. Another common challenge in many Member States is the increased demand for internal QM.

A range of organisations from Ministries to certification agencies set the *output standards that apply to providers*. Here the major strength is reported to be the flexibility of the approach. Some of the trends are greater openness of VET providers, better horizontal dialogue between stakeholders and certification of quality standards developed by the providers themselves.

On the other hand these standards have a number of weaknesses. These include difficulties in creating national standards and formulating operational indicators, as well as the lack of information on the graduates' skills and competences in the labour market.

Trends for the output standards that apply to the providers are strongly connected to the stakeholders. A stronger dialogue and agreements between these on quality assurance, transparency and accountability are the main positive points. A greater emphasis is given to linking grants to output indicators and to a greater transparency of activities and outcomes.

A number of *output standards apply to individuals* e.g. qualifications, competence-based learning, testing criteria. Governments, national and regional bodies are mainly responsible for setting these standards, which are considered clear and specific, providing transparency and an accurate description of competences. The main critical points are partly related to the difficulties in measuring and assessing competences and goals, and the companies' lack of information about the competences acquired.

In this area, the introduction of credit systems, the definition of national qualification frameworks and a greater focus on individual programmes, are among the major trends reported by the Member States.

3.5 Practical tools : ‘*An European guide to self-assessment*’

As part of the TWG’s mandate, a European guide to self-assessment was developed, based on a cross analysis of cases of ‘good practices’ in Member States.

VET systems and providers face an increasing need to improve their effectiveness in reacting to rapid changes in economic and social environments, giving adequate responses to stakeholders’/users’ needs and using new technologies.

Self-assessment helps VET providers to analyse their responses to these challenges, and to provide adequate feedback on areas needing change. It allows for:

- a systematic and general overview of all the activities in the VET institution;
- the possibility to acknowledge the coherence between what the organisation does and the results achieved;
- an impact on learning;
- a list of priority areas for improvement;
- continuity in quality improvement, as evaluation is part of planning activities and progress of events;
- shared participation in the process allowing for increasing motivation for change;
- flexibility and adequacy of action as it focuses on local needs.

At system level, self-assessment helps to improve good governance which is necessary to provide adequate statutory provisions, to allocate the necessary resources, to check results and provide feedback in due time, enabling VET-providers to respond and carry out the necessary changes.

From a system-level point of view, self-assessment provides:

- a systematic and general view of all the activities performed by all VET-providers;
- continuity, since evaluation is a natural part of planning and activities;
- effectiveness, since decisions are taken at grassroots level and the evaluation data are relatively easily utilised;
- flexibility and appropriateness, since activities can be tailored to local needs from the beginning.

The European guide for self-assessment is primarily addressed to VET providers and gives guidance on ways of performing self-assessment, with concrete quality criteria and explanatory statements, illustrated by examples from different VET systems. It contains also a guide for performing self-assessment at system level and gives an overview of different existing frameworks for self-assessment.

Besides this European guide, other supporting tools have been developed within the TWG’s work programme.

The Virtual Community¹⁴

Inspired by the experiences of ‘communities of practice’ in other fields, Cedefop proposed, as a direct support to the Copenhagen process, the establishment of a virtual community (VC) to foster transnational knowledge-sharing and communication among a variety of stakeholders in the field of Quality Assurance in VET. The VC allows for a better support and enhancement of the exchange of experiences and co-operation in this field, thus confirming the principle of knowledge socialisation.

Cedefop is in charge of monitoring the development of the VC on Quality Assurance in VET, in close co-operation with the Commission and the TWG. The VC is accessible at the following URL: <http://cedefop.communityzero.com/quality>.

The VC content was structured in accordance with the main topics of the TWG’s mandate, and features a number of tools which allow for different actions and interactions among the VC members. So far the main discussion and knowledge-sharing tools are:

- Discussions
- Contributions and articles
- Files
- Calendar
- Notes and Announcements
- Polls

Annex 5 provides an overview of the VC’s ‘look’. A link to the website of the European Forum on Quality in VET (2001-02) (<http://www2.trainingvillage.gr/etv/quality>) was created in order to make available the outcomes of the overall work on quality carried out so far.

The access to the VC tools differs according to different groups of members:

- ‘core group’: members assuring the animation, moderation and administration of the VC
- ‘inner circle’: members of the TWG
- ‘outer circle’: members belonging to organisations such as Cedefop and ETF, experts working with the TWG, and various officials of the EU.
- ‘affiliated group’: members from national governments, different kinds of organisations, the National Agencies responsible for the thematic monitoring of the projects on quality in VET (LdV programme), and members of the other VCs set up by Cedefop.

Anyone wishing to use the platform must register either after receiving a specific invitation from the platform’s administrators or after sending a membership application to them. Members then receive a username and password, allowing them to log into the platform.

The mapping of Quality Assurance Institutions

¹⁴ See Virtual Community ‘Quality Assurance in VET’ Report, September 2003, by Tina Bertzeletou and Elisa Mancinelli

A mapping of bodies responsible for quality assurance of VET systems (initial and continuing training) in the Member States has been launched, utilising 'grids' for data collection. The aim is to get a better insight of "who is doing what" in this field and thereby to foster the exchange of experience and co-operation between institutions with similar functions and agendas. The information collected will be available soon to all users of the Virtual Community on Quality in VET.

The grids seek to provide information on the kind of organisation (centralised public administration, or decentralised public administration, or standardisation body, social partners or sector/professional organisation) which is responsible for quality assurance in VET, and with which responsibilities regarding three policy steps: definition of the national strategy/ies on Quality in VET, assessment and review.

Several Member States have already filled in these grids, making a first evaluation of this tool possible.

This work has been supplemented by a list of bodies operating in the field of accreditation and standardisation at European and International levels in various sectors including education.

Each accreditation body is presented by name, acronym, internet address, availability of on-line directory and publication of journals or of on-line information notes. Special reference is made to the existence of standards that are available electronically.

Glossary

A working document with English and French terms relating to quality in VET has been elaborated. This document is at this stage for the exclusive use of the members of the TWG.

4 OUTLINE PROPOSAL FOR A CO-OPERATION FRAMEWORK

4.1 Guiding principals and areas for co-operation

In recent years various forms of policy co-ordination between the Member States have been implemented. This is the case in policy fields where legal enforcement and harmonisation are not at stake, and instead the exchange of good practices, models and methods, are considered appropriate means for policy learning, to support Member States to progressively develop their own policies and to achieve greater convergence towards European objectives.

The exchange of good practices, models and methods through transnational co-operation, on the basis on commonly agreed reference principles, criteria and indicators is therefore the basic principal underpinning the implementation co-operative framework on Quality Assurance in VET.

The operational frame defined by Open the Method of Coordination (OMC) which is set out in the conclusions of the Lisbon European Council of March 2000¹⁵, marks a crucial step forward in this context.

As described in the Lisbon conclusions the OMC seeks to spread good practice and to ensure greater convergence towards the agreed EU goals. It consists in identifying common goals to be achieved by Member States, in defining, where appropriate, qualitative and quantitative

¹⁵ See <http://ue.eu.int/en/Info/eurocouncil/index.htm>

indicators and benchmarks, and in periodically reviewing progress through monitoring, evaluation and peer review. The OMC marks a new stage in European education and training policies by¹⁶:

- concentrating more on the objectives to be achieved through long-term political commitment and precise identification of targets;
- drawing greater benefit from exchanges of experience;
- jointly discussing similar problems and appropriate solutions, particularly through peer reviews;
- close monitoring of progress, using indicators and benchmarking.

The gradual integration of the Enhanced Co-operation in Vocational Education and Training in the follow-up of the 'Objectives Report' would therefore benefit the monitoring and follow-up of the implementation of the TWG proposals, through the OMC.

The working methods, outputs and proposals of the TWG are clearly compatible with the OMC principles. The integration of the 'Copenhagen' and 'Objectives' processes is only being carried out gradually, however. In the meantime, the strong commitment of the Copenhagen Co-ordination Group is needed to ensure that the outputs of the TWG's work are consolidated, through an experimental application phase.

The results of the TWG's work and its proposals are a first tangible output of the Enhanced European Co-operation process in the field of quality assurance. The 'Copenhagen process' should now put a strong emphasis on fostering political commitment and action, in order to ensure a sustainable follow-up and further development of the achievements made so far.

This first outline for a co-operative framework has to be considered as 'experimental', in the perspective of the evaluation of the TWG's proposals in different societal settings. These proposals, developed through bottom-up co-operation, should be implemented voluntarily and involve Member States, the Commission, candidate countries, EFTA-EEA countries and the Social Partners.

The specific aim of co-operation at European level in the field of quality assurance and enhancement in VET is that of helping Member States to progressively increase the transparency, the effectiveness and the consistency of their actions in the fields that have been dealt with by the TWG:

- *Models and practices for quality assurance*
- *Quality indicators*
- *Standards and norms*
- *Self-evaluation approaches*

The TWG has agreed to focus co-operation on the following steps:

1. test the added value of the Common Quality Assurance Framework, against existing practices

¹⁶ Elements taken from the First report on the activities of the Working Group 'MAKING THE BEST USE OF RESOURCES', February 2003 - June 2003

2. improve this framework
3. promote the use of the framework, to improve existing approaches to QA, to identify 'good practices' and to facilitate mutual learning.

Transnational co-operation will focus and build on the operational approach and instruments developed so far. Its implementation should as far as possible rely upon existing instruments at national and European level, and in particular on the LdV Programme. A particular emphasis should be given to specific tools and in particular to *peer review, networking and benchmarking* (as a mutual learning on processes, based on common reference points).

4.2 Peer review

A peer review plan could be an appropriate way of taking forward the work of the TWG. This plan could (i) facilitate the exchange of good practices and learning at systems and institutional levels; (ii) contribute to gaining more information on how the different quality systems in Europe work and achieve European objectives.

Such a plan should be organised both at the systems and providers levels, on a voluntary basis, and build upon the core elements and principles of the Common Quality Assurance Framework. In concrete terms, it should consist of a review of the approaches for quality assurance in VET at national, sectoral and institutional levels based on the elements, criteria and indicators of this framework, and provide in-depth information on specific issues. The reviewing process should be undertaken by prominent stakeholders (representatives from relevant ministries or semi-state institutions, VET providers, Social Partners, etc.) who are responsible for the design of VET policies.

While primarily focused on the analysis of the transferability of 'good practices' to the peer countries willing to develop their own policies or adapt similar policy approaches, peer review can also contribute to policy development in the 'host country'.

As part of the co-operative framework peer review programmes could be set up at European level, as recommended by the participants of the Helsingør conference in Denmark in 2002¹⁷, and focusing on:

- ***Models and practices for quality assurance*** covering the steps of the Common Quality Assurance Framework, the main actors included, the purpose for implementation, feedback-mechanisms, etc.
- ***Quality indicators***: experiences with the application of the set of quality indicators, definition of problems with certain indicators, implementation and communication strategy, incentives for application, data collection procedures, comparability of results, use of results which have been achieved, feedback procedures.
- ***Standards and norms***: output standards, accreditation of training institutions (definition of norms, application procedures, incentives and sanctions, etc.)
- ***Self-evaluation approaches***: training for self-evaluation, criteria for successful application of self-evaluation tools, combination of internal and external evaluation procedures, etc.

¹⁷ Conference under the Danish Presidency on quality in VET, HELSINGØR, 19-20 September 2002

With 2 to 3 best practice examples for each priority, peer review programmes could be drafted for the next 1-2 years. A specific annual working plan consisting of a certain amount of peer reviews programmes (5 to 10) could be agreed by the CCG.

Objectives of peer review programs on quality in VET

- To identify and to assess good practices
- To assess how good practices can be effectively transferred to other Member States
- To disseminate good practices

CEDEFOP, could be invited to organise and support the peer review process, by collecting and disseminating the relevant information, bringing together the ‘host country’ and the ‘peer countries’ by organising the programmes, and ensuring a follow-up of the overall conclusions to be transferred to the European level. The Virtual Community could be used as an instrument for dissemination of information and results, as well as for discussions.

4.3 Networking

Networks could play a key role in the **exchanges of good practices** and dissemination of the results of the TWG’s work and contribute thereby to their evaluation and fine-tuning. The proper functioning of networks requires adequate monitoring and follow up in order to secure compliance with targeted aims and to take stock of achievements. This calls for specific arrangements at national, regional and local levels, as well as within the LdV programme and the ‘Copenhagen process’.

The LdV Programme provides different measures that enable transnational co-operation and the development of networks focused on concrete projects. This instrument is therefore key to building on the achievements of the TWG.

The second call for proposals (2003-2004) puts a particular emphasis on the topic ‘Quality’ in VET, under Thematic Action 1 (centralised measure). Nevertheless, other measures of the programme could be used, aiming at enhancing quality in VET:

- ***Mobility*** (decentralised measure¹⁸) allows for (i) the organisation of transnational projects of exchanges targeting human resources managers in the business sector, and vocational training programme planners and managers (ii) Study visits for those responsible for vocational training on the themes proposed by the Commission.
- ***Pilot projects*** (decentralised measure¹⁸): support for transnational pilot projects to develop and transfer innovation and quality in vocational training.
- ***Language competences*** (decentralised measure¹⁸): support for projects to promote language and cultural competences in vocational training, including language audits.

¹⁸ except projects submitted by European organisations

- **Transnational networks** (decentralised measure¹⁸): support to the activities of multiplayer vocational training networks, bringing together in the Member States, at the regional and sectoral level, the public and private players concerned.
- **Reference material** (centralised measure): support for actions to establish, update and disseminate reference material
- **Joint Actions** (centralised measure): support for joint actions with other Community programmes

Examples of topics for project development:

- Comparing different Quality Assurance systems in different settings, against the Common Quality Assurance Framework
- Test the use of the set of quality indicators in VET assessment
- Collect and compare existing Peer-Review practice
- Compare existing Self-Assessment guides
- Compare strengths and weakness of output standards set by member states at individual and system levels, (work carried out so far shows these become more and more relevant in all countries)
- Compare the use of models for accrediting VET providers (ISO, EFQM...).
- Develop e-learning training tools for QM in VET
- Develop ‘Friendly competitions’ between trainees from vocational schools and apprentices from different countries (e.g. to build a house of wood or bricks and make electrical work and plumbing...). The selection of schools and enterprises should be based on common quality criteria, and the programme could be supported by television, broadcasted to Europe and possibly linked to the bi-annual ‘World Skills Competition’ programme.

While fostering transnational co-operation and networking, these LdV measures don’t necessarily fully respond to the need for the sustainability of structured institutional co-operation, which is necessary to promote effective political commitment on monitoring, follow-up and transfer of results.

Therefore, it seems crucial to foster voluntary and structured networking for the development of concrete work programmes, around specific topics such as (i) ***quality assurance methods and procedures***; (ii) ***standards, norms and criteria (accreditation of training providers, outcomes standards)***; (iii) ***self-assessment of training providers***. These networks should associate:

- representatives from the ministries, the Social Partners and other authorities, which are responsible for quality in VET in the different countries, in order to organise exchange of good practice examples and mutual learning, and to monitor and assess co-operation;
- national, regional and sectoral agencies, which are responsible for quality assurance in different contexts, aiming at developing a common procedure of implementing the Common Quality Assurance Framework within the existing systems for quality assurance;

- VET-providers who are willing to put into practice the Quality Assurance Framework developed by the TWG and compare experiences and results.

Some particular arrangements could be envisaged with this purpose, under the LdV accompanying measures. For instance, whenever the topic of quality assurance is selected within the yearly call the Commission will examine any grant request made by relevant stakeholders, for specific events aiming at **promoting bi/multilateral institutional co-operation projects on topics mentioned above**. Cedefop will be invited to examine the possibilities that could be offered by the Study Visits Programme in this regard.

Likewise, the Commission will examine any grant request for **giving support to a meeting of agencies or representatives of networks of bodies responsible for quality assurance** in the Member States. The purpose would be to disseminate information on the Common Quality Assurance Framework and to support its implementation within the national systems, these agencies acting as ‘multipliers’ in the field of quality assurance.

4.4 Benchmarking: mutual learning on processes, based on common reference points

Benchmarking is usually used for the purpose of comparison between organisations willing to improve their performance. These comparisons are made against key figures and results from peers.

The single comparison of results does not necessarily allow to draw conclusions or derive guidance on how to change and improve activities, in order to meet higher levels of performance, as the context has to be considered as well as the (political) goals which have been set.

Whenever benchmarking follows on from a self-assessment process, this provides insight into specific areas for improvement, and ‘benchmarking partners’ are chosen on the grounds of their success in these areas, measured against clear references. This makes it possible therefore to focus on process, even if the departing point is the results of performance.

The underpinning principle for the development of Quality Assurance within the ‘Copenhagen process’ is that of exchanging good practices and models, on the basis of common principles and criteria. Thus, benchmarking should be seen as a learning process (‘bench-learning’) for quality development, focused on working procedures, process-design and methods. It should provide for an insight into how procedures can be changed, by comparison with peer organisations, branches or sectors which have been more successful, this success being measured against reference points that should be commonly agreed.

Summing up the meaning and outcomes of benchmarking:

- To compare results against others, on the basis of common reference points, to be able to identify good practices
- To identify benchmarking partners on the basis of methods, processes, educational programs and services; to provide evidence of recognised experience and high level of

achievements

- To learn from experience and “good practice” procedures and adapt them for implementation into the organisation or system.

The Leonardo da Vinci programme could provide for the development of benchmarking networks and pilot projects focused on the issues dealt with by the TWG. Allowing for the identification of ‘best practices’ or “good practices” in certain relevant fields, benchmarking can thereby help to better target the key points on which the development of transnational exchange of experiences and projects could be more effective.

The Virtual Community could also play an important role in organising a supporting system to help organisations to find and contact suitable partners for benchmarking. The VC could contain information on the organisations that have used benchmarking, their sector and size in terms of personnel and contact persons.

In the longer term, it could be appropriate to develop a VET database with an on-line evaluation form, as is possible through the CAF¹⁹ for public administrative organisations. This would enable organisations to record the results of their self-assessment on a web-site. An evaluation form can be filled in on-line after the self-assessment has been conducted. The results achieved will remain anonymous, but the organisation gets a feedback on its scoring against the average of other (similar or comparable) organisations that have used the system. A call for benchmarking partners in specific areas could be a part of the specification.

5 MAIN CONCLUSIONS

Some preliminary conclusions may be drawn at different levels on the basis of the implementation of the TWG’s results to date.

5.1 Policy level

- The TWG recommends the **voluntary utilisation of a Common Quality Assurance Framework** which includes:
 - a process of goal setting,
 - the policies and procedures designed to deliver the goals
 - a monitoring and formal evaluation system
 - a system of responding to the findings of the monitoring and evaluation
- Member States are invited to make arrangements, on a voluntary basis and together with the relevant stakeholders, to translate the common principles and criteria of the Common Quality Assurance Framework into practical initiatives at national, regional and local levels, aiming at improving both their quality and VET systems. They should ensure effective co-ordination and follow up of such initiatives between the

¹⁹ The CAF (Common Assessment Framework) is the result of the cooperation between the EU ministers responsible for Public Administration

different bodies and actors concerned, involving government, social partners and other relevant stakeholders. The common reference indicators should be used to monitor and evaluate progress made.

Basic principles underlying the implementation of the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF)

- 1) Member States are independent in the selection of the procedures and methods for quality assurance and take into consideration their particular contexts and institutional conditions.
- 2) The underlying principle of the CQAF is to fully respect the different options in Member States as regards quality development, while providing a common reference strategy based on a model, criteria and indicators in order to contribute to increase effectiveness, transparency, trust and consistency of policy initiatives and actions in this field.
- 3) At this stage, the implementation of the CQAF guidelines has to be considered as ‘experimental’, in the perspective of the evaluation of their relevance in different societal settings. ‘Application’ may have different meanings, according to the specific contexts. It may mean verifying the added value of such a framework against existing practices in terms of how it may improve them. It can mean using it as a reference for any choice of quality assurance system where no explicit system exists. Finally, it can also mean using it as a reference tool for mutual learning, identification and exchange of good practice.
- 4) The guidelines of the TWG do not prescribe *how* providers are to operate their Quality Assurance System but *specify* the areas of provision which are considered crucial to quality delivery and for which providers would be expected to establish and develop Quality Assurance policies and procedures.
- 5) The effectiveness of the TWG’s proposals, which are to be implemented by the Member States on a voluntary basis, rely mainly on policy commitment at national level, within a European co-operation process. This calls for sustainable institutional co-operation for exchanges of good practices.
- 6) Member States should apply adequate procedures, methods and indicators to assure quality in VET, related to the objectives set by the Lisbon Council.
- 7) Quality assessment should focus both on system and provider levels, within an interrelated framework, involving the relevant actors.
- 8) At each level relevant stakeholders should play an active role in the definition, the implementation and the evaluation of quality assurance in VET.
- 9) At VET provider level a combined application of internal and external procedures for quality assurance is necessary.
- 10) The results of implementing quality assurance should be published to a wide public in an adequate way.
- 11) Member States should implement in their VET systems a decision making structure, to evaluate the results of the quality assurance process, provide feedback and, whenever necessary, give guidance and ensure procedures for change. Social Partners and other relevant stakeholders should be associated to this process.

- To ensure the transparency and the sustainability of Quality Assurance policies for VET in the European Union, Member states are invited to **report on a two-yearly basis at European level** to the CCG on initiatives taken and on the resulting progress in the context of VET policies (at systems and provider levels). Such reporting, which is in line with the principles of the OMC foreseen by the Lisbon European Council, should at this stage be considered in the context of structured exchange of experience between Member States. It

should be based on a commonly agreed set of reference indicators reflecting the EU policy objectives for quality assurance in VET and include comprehensive information on national policy initiatives. This report could also give an input to the Social Dialogue on Education and Training at National and European levels.

- To encourage and promote greater transparency and mutual trust across Member States, a **comparability process is recommended**. The purpose of such a process is to enable providers, branches or sectors to compare and contrast the quality of their organisation's procedures against peers. This can be a powerful and effective tool in improving the level of vocational education and training provision within and across Member States. The TWG advises that the common reference points and indicators should form the basis of comparison. If Member States incorporate the reference points and indicators in the guidelines given to their providers, then the information needed for comparison should be available.
- The Common Quality Assurance Framework and the TWG's work on the issue of input and output standards and norms across Member States can contribute to help Member States to develop accreditation systems of training institutions, on the basis common principles and criteria. **To promote this work further, a seminar could take place in Ireland in Spring/Summer 2004**. Ireland is currently involved in implementing such a policy.
- Co-ordination at European level should put greater emphasis **on increasing synergies between the work of the TWG on quality with that of other relevant working groups**, both within the 'Copenhagen' and 'Objectives' processes. As a consequence, the work programme of the TWG could go into depth on some specific issues, in relation with the topics of these working groups.
- Means to **associate countries which are not members of the TWG** in the work of quality should be reinforced, in particular through the commitment of the Copenhagen Co-ordination Group and a more active and effective information strategy at European level. The Virtual Community could play an important role in this regard
- **The European Training Foundation is invited to contribute to** enhancing co-operation in the field of quality assurance in VET, by organising, in co-operation with the European Commission and Cedefop, **appropriate awareness raising activities towards the candidate countries**. These activities should aim at disseminating the results of the TWG reached so far and promote the voluntary participation of these countries in the implementation of the proposals coming out of this group. For this purpose, a conference could be held in the beginning of 2004.
- **Member States should make an effort to combine existing instruments at national and European levels** in order to fully exploit their capacity to contribute to enhancing transnational co-operation in the field of quality assurance and development in VET, on the basis of the Common Quality Assurance Framework developed by the TWG. Complementarity between the LdV Programme with other relevant policies, instruments and actions such as the Employment policy and the ESF could open wider perspectives for policy development.

5.2 Operational level

- The implementation of the proposals made by the TWG, and in particular the Common Quality Assurance Framework, must undergo an 'experimental' phase in Member States, aiming at assessing their relevance in different societal settings. This phase should be

implemented voluntarily and involve Member States, Candidate Countries, EFTA-EEA countries and the Social Partners.

- The co-operative framework to implement the Common Quality Assurance Framework as outlined by the TWG, should be focused on the areas that have been dealt with by the TWG:

Models and practices for quality assurance

Quality indicators

Standards and norms

Self-evaluation approaches

- Several instruments/tools should be exploited to implement this framework:

Peer review

A peer review plan is an appropriate means to take forward the issues the TWG has dealt with so far. With 2 to 3 good practice examples for each priority peer review programmes at systems or institutional levels could be drafted for the next 1-2 years. A specific annual working plan consisting of a certain amount of peer reviews programmes (5 to 10) could be agreed by the CCG.

Networking

Networks could play a key role in the exchanges of good practices and dissemination of the results of the TWG's work and contribute thereby to their evaluation and fine-tuning.

The LdV Programme provides different measures that enable transnational co-operation and the development of networks focused on concrete projects. This instrument is therefore key to building on the achievements of the TWG.

In order to respond to the need for sustainability of structured institutional co-operation networks, which is necessary to promote effective political commitment on monitoring, follow-up and transfer of results, some particular arrangements could be envisaged under the LdV accompanying measures (yearly calls for grant requests). These could concern specific events aiming **at promoting bi/multilateral institutional co-operation projects in the field of quality**, and if possible, **an annual meeting of agencies or networks of bodies responsible for quality assurance** in the Member States.

Furthermore, structured and systemic test of the added value of the Common Quality Assurance Framework against existing practices could also be organised and promoted on a bi- or multilateral basis, as part of institutional co-operation. Cedefop will be invited to examine possible means to support such activity.

Benchmarking

This could be used as a mutual learning tool for the management of quality development in VET. It could focus primarily on the institutional, branch or sectoral levels, and give particular emphasis to the processes leading to 'best results' among peers, measured against common reference points. The LdV programme and the VC could play a key role in this regard.

- The role of the VC must evolve in order to give proper support to the various developments of the co-operative framework.

5.3 The TWG

- The working principles, methods and procedures followed to date should be assessed. Corrective measures could follow, based on this assessment.

At this stage, the following preliminary conclusions can be drawn:

- the field of continuing training and the private sector should be more adequately represented in the group;
- a strong effort should be made in order to ensure, directly or indirectly, a more extensive participation of the candidate countries;
- the co-ordination at local level in the Member States should be reinforced. The members of the TWG can play an important role in this regard.
- the use of external expertise should be enlarged i.e. funding provided.

5.4 The Work programme

- The work programme of the TWG remains valid, but the next step should imply a stronger emphasis on the development of the co-operation framework.
- At national level, some goals at system and providers level could be formulated. In setting such goals, a particular emphasis should be given to the organisation of relations between ‘centralised’ and ‘decentralised levels’. This would include implementation mechanisms, setting standards and the use of indicators. Eventually the sectoral approaches could be exploited in this context.
- Data for the proposed indicators should be collected for each country and methodological and operational problems are to be solved in a co-operative way. This would allow for a more precise formulation of indicators for which data already exists. Cedefop could be invited to ensure the follow up and analysis of the use of indicators.
- The work on indicators should be further developed and focus on the following aspects:
 - strengthen links with the indicators developed by “the standing group for indicators” within the “objective process”;
 - operationalise the new indicators proposed within the Common Quality Assurance Framework;
 - further develop and test specific indicators at provider level.
- Some additional work could be envisaged following on from the results of other TWGs and aiming at establishing the appropriate links between these and the specific issue of quality. For instance:
 - the relevant results of the work carried out on ‘sectoral initiatives’, could be taken over by the TWG on quality with the active involvement of Social Partners, following two directions: quality criteria of (i) methodological frameworks developed by sectors to improve the matching between supply and demand; (ii) methodological frameworks used by sectors to identify the quality of training provision;

- another issue could be that of the identification of common quality criteria for ‘recognition of non-formal learning’ and for the development of a European Credit (Transfer) System for VET (ECVET). For this purpose, full stock should be taken of the work developed by the earlier European Forum on Quality on common quality criteria for certification and examination;
 - the issue of the quality assurance of teachers and trainers’ qualifications could be addressed, in connection with the work of Group A (‘Improving the Education of teachers and trainers’) of the Objectives process. This work could be done in two directions: (i) defining common core criteria and methods for the identification of the learning needs of teacher/trainers in VET; (ii) identifying common quality criteria for the qualification of teachers and trainers in different learning environments, with particular reference to tutors in the apprenticeship systems;
 - finally, the work to be carried out in the field of the accreditation of training institutions could include the issue of ECTS/ECVET. The question would be that of providers’ strategies enabling credit transfer.
- A strategic communication plan could be drawn up in order to ensure a more inclusive participation of stakeholders (training institutions, national, regional and local authorities, Social Partners, companies, trainers, trainees) to the work carried out at European level in the field of quality. This communication plan should include a strategy to motivate the different stakeholders to the use of the Common Quality Assurance Framework. This is a key element in fostering a culture of « shared ownership » of quality assurance between the various actors and to encourage individual and institutional awareness to this question. The potential of the VC should be fully exploited in this regard.

ANNEXES

**Increased co-operation in vocational education and training:
Membership of the TWG on quality in VET**

Georg Piskaty - UNICE
georg.piskaty@wko.at

Petri Lempinen - ETUC
petri.lempinen@sttk.fi

Juergen Horschinegg – Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur, A
juergen.horschinegg@bmbwk.gv.at

Monika Schidorowitz – Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, D
Monika.schidorowitz@bmbf.bund.de

Nicky Perry – Adult Learning Inspectorate, UK
nicky.perry@ali.gov.uk

Philip Pedersen – Ministry of Education, DK
philip.pedersen@uvm.dk

Barbara Kelly – Further Education and Training Awards Council, IRL
bkelly@fetac.ie

Diane Spilthoorn – Education Department, B
diane.Spilthoorn@pi.be

José Alberto Leitão – Ministry of Education, PT
Jleitao@anefa.pt

Giorgio Allulli – Ministry of Labour, I
giorgio.allulli@libero.it

Pierre le Douaron – Ministère des Affaires Sociales, du Travail et de la Solidarité, F
Pierre.le-douaron@travail.gouv.fr

Leena Koski – National Board of Education, FIN
Leena.koski@oph.fi

Kari Berg – Ministry of Education and Research, N
Kari.berg@ufd.dep.no

Adela Rogojinaru – National Center for Technical and Vocational Education Development, RO
Adela@tvvet.ro

Thea van den Boom – Ministry of Education, NL
t.b.m.vandenboom@minocw.nl

Ylva Malm – National Agency for Education – S
Ylva.malm@skolverket.se

TWG ON QUALITY IN VET
WORK PROGRAMME (JAN. - SEPT. 2003)

DESCRIPTION OF TASKS	MONTH								
	JAN	FEB	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPT
STAGE 1									
1. The use of standards and norms : data collection in MS and candidate countries									
2. Review of core quality criteria for QM									
3. Review of quality indicators by MS and candidate countries									
4. 'Mapping' of bodies responsible for QM									
5. Bring the 'Virtual Community' online									
6. Final drafts of the interim and thematic reports of the Forum									
7. Final draft of the 'mapping' of quality indicators									

STAGE 2									
DESCRIPTION OF TASKS	JAN	FEB	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPT
1. Review of data on the use of standards and norms and write a draft report									
2. Intermediate report on quality criteria for QMAs									
3.'Check list' on quality criteria for QMAs (draft)									
4. Intermediate report on quality indicators									
5.'Guidelines' for the self-assessment of training organisations									
6. Guidelines for 'peer review'									
7. Contribution towards interim report for the 'objectives process'									
8. 'Mapping' of bodies responsible for QM (draft)									
9. Evaluation of the 'Virtual Community'									

STAGE 3									
DESCRIPTION OF TASKS	JAN	FEB	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPT
1. Outline for an 'operational framework'									
2. Outline for a 'co-operative framework'									
3. Final draft report on quality criteria for QM									
4. Final draft report on indicators									
5. Final draft report of the Working Group									
6. Update of Cedefop's report 'Quality in initial and continuing training'									

Further stages will be defined according to the assessment of the final report of the working group by the Commission, the coordination group and the ACVT (October 2003)

QUESTIONS AND CORE QUALITY CRITERIA FOR POSSIBLE ANSWERS RELATING TO EACH OF THE STEPS OF THE COMMON QUALITY ASSURANCE MODEL

Planning: purpose and plan

Key Questions	Possible answers at system level – core quality criteria	Possible answers at VET-provider level – core quality criteria
Are your goals/objectives clear and measurable?	The European and national goals or purposes for VET are known throughout the relevant stakeholders. Existence of systematic procedures to identify future needs. A number of minimum objectives/standards have been set.	The European, national and local goals are all known throughout the whole organisation.
What are the goals/objectives of your system/organisation in relation to VET?	(Description of the goals/objectives)	(Description of the goals/objectives)
Are the European goals* and objectives included in the goals you have set?	An action plan has been drawn up to achieve the European goals.	Focus on few of the European goals in co-operation with VET providers from other Member States.
How does your organisation assess to what degree these goals/objectives are fulfilled?	The goals are communicated to the providers. Results on specific indicators are systematically collected.	Self-evaluation process takes place every second year. Departments make reports to management level on specific indicators.
Describe the procedure for the planning process within the quality approach in use.	(Description of the procedure)	(Description of the procedure)

* E.g. goals on matching VET demand and supply, promoting access, accommodating the training needs of vulnerable groups.

Implementation

Key Questions	Possible answers at system level – core quality criteria	Possible answers at VET-provider level – core quality criteria
How do you implement a planned action?	<p>By legislation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad and narrow regulations, laws, rules • National quality approach • Demand for a quality approach at provider level <p>By funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on input • Based on output <p>By the contribution of the Social Partners</p> <p>By the work of the VET providers</p>	<p>Existence of a systematic quality approach and plan.</p> <p>Sharing this with the other actors.</p> <p>Involvement of local actors and adaptation to local needs.</p> <p>Investment in training of staff.</p> <p>By developing and communicating a staff policy based on the strategies and the planning of the VET provider organisation.</p> <p>Aligning tasks, authority and responsibilities.</p>
Describe the key principles in the procedure of the implementation process.	<p>Giving the full responsibility for implementation to VET-providers.</p> <p>Setting up a number of minimum criteria the providers have to meet.</p> <p>Given a specific quality approach to be used by all providers.</p>	<p>By organising and by allocating funds to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance and resources • Partnership • Leadership • Process management • Training of trainers • Didactical material <p>Demand for transparency and coherence with goals.</p> <p>By involving different stakeholders in the work.</p> <p>Ensuring good working conditions and facilities throughout the organisation.</p>

Assessment and evaluation

Key Questions	Possible answers at system level – core quality criteria	Possible answers at provider level – core quality criteria
<p>Describe your process for assessing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input? • Processes? • Output? • Outcome results? 	<p>By the use of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control systems • Inspectorates • Public access to the Web • Benchmarking (with other providers) • By national standards on input, processes and output. <p>By assessing coherence between results and policy priorities.</p>	<p>By the use of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-evaluation • External inspection • Internal quality control <p>The actual results compared to the expected results. Results of teaching and learning. Staff-oriented results. Key performance results. Societal results.</p>
<p>How do you ensure that your assessment and evaluation is relevant and systematic?</p>	<p>By systematic procedures for data collection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of indicators • Measurements 	<p>By asking the users.</p>
<p>Which stakeholders participate in the assessment and evaluation process?</p>	<p>The system level and the Social Partners. A Quality Institute</p>	<p>Managers, teachers, students, parents and the employers of the students.</p>
<p>What roles do the different stakeholders play?</p>	<p>Participation of the relevant stakeholders in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiatives Decisions Evaluation Certification Political support Legitimacy of political decisions. 	<p>The relevant stakeholders participate in a broad range of activities e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiatives Decisions Evaluation Certification The link to the Labour Market.
<p>When do you assess and evaluate (frequency)?</p>	<p>On the occasion of VET reforms, every third to fifth year.</p>	<p>After completing education. During the period when the students attend school.</p>

Review: Feedback and procedures for change

ANNEX 3

Key Questions	Possible answers at system level – core quality criteria	Possible answers at provider level – core quality criteria
How do you organise feedback and the procedures for change in your organisation?	The feedback procedures are defined by regulations and revised and changed through reforms of the VET system e.g. every 3 to 5 years.	Feedback and the procedures for change are an integral part of the provider's own learning organisation.
How do you ensure systematic feedback?	Feedback follows a predefined plan. Feedback takes place on an ad hoc basis.	Each department has to report to management in accordance with a fixed plan.
How do you make the feedback on quality in VET transparent?	By placing the data and the conclusions on the homepage. By arranging a number of seminars /conferences on quality in VET.	All the information is accessible on the provider's homepage or on paper.
How do you ensure that the results of the assessment/evaluation are being used?	By the transparency of the work. By inspectors. By establishing complaint procedures. By sanctions and rewards/funding.	By a combination of control and development meetings with the different departments. By the participation of all the relevant stakeholders in the work.
How do you relate goals/objectives to the assessment and evaluation?	On the occasion of the reforms. When the annual tenders are awarded	At meetings at departmental and college levels as a systematic part of the decision-making structure.

Methodology

Key Questions	Possible answers at system level – core quality criteria	Possible answers at provider level – core quality criteria
In what way do you use a systematic quality assurance approach?	Following the usual procedures of the Ministry.	Choice of the quality approach on the basis of a standard quality system, e.g. ISO or EFQM.
What is the role of self-assessment in your Quality Assurance approach?	Self-assessment is applied at all levels, within a co-ordinated framework. SA provides a systematic and general view of all the activities performed by VET-providers.	Self-assessment is organised in a systematic way, as a means to improve the performance of the organisation, as it highlights priority areas for improvement. Self assessment is used as a basis for benchmarking
Which stakeholders are involved in the different steps of your quality approach and in which roles?	At national level the social partners play a major role together with the political actors. Accreditation agencies plays a major role	A number of different actors - from Social Partners, to parents and students (clients) - are involved. External consultants participate in some parts of the activities.
Which tools and procedures do you use for data collection, measurement, analysis, conclusions and implementation?	A number of tools and procedures at system level have been developed e.g. common questionnaires and scales for measurement.	Development of common questionnaires, instruments for measuring quality, benchmarking, etc. together with a selected group of other VET-providers.
How do you motivate the actors to play their role properly?	The external actors are motivated by political influence and participation in the Advisory Board on VET. Close co-operation with the world of work.	The external actors are motivated by their influence over the VET providers, e.g. as board members. Internally, the main motivation is personal development. Consideration for the image/results of the institution
What strategies assure the implementation of change?	The political decision-making process and the many different stakeholders' involvement in the process. The market forces create the pressure for change.	The systematic structure of the quality system includes clear strategies for change.
In what way do you use external assessment?	In the event of problems and as a result of a national assessment plan.	Audit following our plans.

A coherent set of quality indicators (selected by the TWG)

level	no	OVERARCHING INDICATORS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE			source
context/input	1	share of VET-providers applying QM-systems respecting the Common Quality Assurance Framework by type of used approach (for example: ISO, EFQM)			new
input/process	2	investment in training of trainers			new
		INDICATORS ACCORDING TO QUALITY OBJECTIVES			
		employability	access	matching	
context	3	unemployment according to groups	unemployment according to groups	-	Eurostat
context	4	-	prevalence of vulnerable groups	-	Eurostat
input/process	5	participation rates in IVT and LLL	participation rates in IVT and LLL (compared to prev. of vuln. groups)	participation rates in IVT and LLL	Eurostat
output					LFS/CVT
output /outcome	6	successful completion of training	successful completion of training (compared to prev. of vuln. groups)	-	LFS
outcome	7	destination of trainees six months after training: further training, employed (in job related to training), unemployed, etc.	-	destination of trainees six months after training: further training, employed (in job related to training), unemployed, etc.	New

outcome	8	utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace	-	utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace	New
		QUALITATIVE INFORMATION			
context/input	9	-	-	mechanisms to relate developments in labour market to VET-systems	to be included in core criteria
process	10	-	schemes to promote better access (orientation, guidance, support)	-	to be included in core criteria

- all data referring to individuals to be desegregated according to gender

Overview of the VC's content

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