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'COPENHAGEN PROCESS'
QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VET
TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP PROGRESS REPORT

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I. INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance and development in Vocational Education and training (VET) is a key instrument in supporting the transition to a knowledge-based society, namely by increasing the effectiveness of VET ‘outcomes’ in terms of improving the match between demand and supply, employability, and access to training. Furthermore, its role is crucial in increasing mutual trust in training provision in the European Union, and thereby supporting mobility and lifelong learning.

Given the diversity and complexity of the VET-systems and the quality approaches within and across Member States, there is need to improve the transparency and consistency of policy and practical developments in the field of quality assurance in order to increase mutual trust.

The target set by the **Barcelona European Council in 2002** of making Europe’s education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010 puts the quality issue at the heart of the community policy agenda in a relatively long timescale.

The **Council Resolution¹ and the Declaration² of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training on the Promotion of Enhanced European Co-operation in VET** (*‘Copenhagen process’*), was a fundamental step forward towards the Barcelona target.

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. Both the Resolution and the Declaration define the principles underpinning enhanced co-operation in VET.

The initial focus of the Copenhagen process 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.

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 participate in and provide technical and scientific support to the technical working groups and the European Training Foundation (ETF) has been liaising with the candidate countries not represented in the group.

This process is being co-ordinated by the ‘Copenhagen Co-ordination Group’ (CCG), which also gives 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.

By the end of 2004, the ministers responsible for VET, the European Commission and the Social Partners review progress and give advice on future priorities and strategies (meeting in Maastricht, December 2004).

¹ 19 December 2002 (JO 2003/C 13/02)

² Adopted in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002

As an outcome of subsequent cooperative work on Quality Assurance between the Commission, the Member States, social partners, the EEA – EFTA and the candidate countries, a **Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF)** has been developed through consensus building and stock taking from the experiences of Member States.

This framework is designed to support the development and, where necessary, the reform of quality systems in VET, in Member States. It provides a common reference system and concrete reference tools to help Member States and participating countries to improve, monitor and evaluate their own policies and practices in the field of quality assurance.

A main principle underpinning enhanced co-operation in VET is that this should be based on the target of 2010, set by the European Council in the context of the Education and Training 2010 work programme.

The **2004 Joint interim report of the Council (Education) to the European Council, on the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme**³ includes the main achievements of the ‘Copenhagen process’ and gives emphasis to the role of the common quality assurance framework. It stresses the need for a European Qualifications Framework to support an effective European labour market, and in this context considers that

‘the common quality assurance framework for the vocational education and training (as part of the follow-up to the Copenhagen Declaration) and the "development of an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines for quality assurance"⁴ (in conjunction with the Bologna process and as part of the work programme on the objectives of education and training systems) should be top priorities for Europe’⁵.

The **Education Council of 28 of May 2004, in its Conclusions on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training** (http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/et_2010_en.html), endorses the CQAF approach. The Conclusions stress that a Common Quality Assurance Framework ‘can contribute to increasing transparency and consistency between Member States policy initiatives, while fully respecting their responsibility for the development of their own systems’, and ‘constitutes an appropriate common European framework and systematic approach to quality assurance (...)’. The Council invites both Member states and the Commission, within their respective competencies, to:

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

³ Joint Education Council/Commission Report on the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy: “Education & Training 2010: the success of Lisbon hinges on urgent reforms”, 26 February 2004

⁴ “Realising the European Higher Education Area”. Communiqué from the Conference of Ministers responsible for higher education in Berlin on 19 September 2003.

⁵ Objective 3.5: Strengthening European co-operation.

More recently, the **Council Conclusions on the Future priorities of enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET)**, reviewing the Council Resolution of 19 December 2002⁶, agrees that,

- **‘at the national level**, priority should be given’ (namely),
to ‘the use of common instruments, references and principles to support the reform and development of VET systems and practices, for example regarding (...) quality assurance (...)’, including ‘the strengthening of mutual links between these instruments and raising stakeholders' awareness at national, regional and local levels in Member States’ (...) and,
to ‘the increased relevance and quality of VET through the systematic involvement of all relevant partners in developments at national, regional and local level, particularly regarding quality assurance’.
- **‘at the European level**, priority should be given’ (namely) ‘to the consolidation of priorities of the Copenhagen process and facilitating the implementation of concrete results’ (...).

Furthermore, the Council invites the Member states and the Commission, ‘within their respective competences, (namely)

- **to rationalise and streamline, in accordance with the Joint Interim Report, the education and training processes at European level** (...) within the framework of the Education and Training 2010 work programme,
- **to provide information on progress made and future actions** for development of VET involving all relevant stakeholders, at national level as part of the integrated biennial report on "Education and Training 2010", in the context of implementing national lifelong learning strategies.

Finally, the adoption of the **Recommendation of the Council and of the European Parliament on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education**, aimed at contributing ‘*in a concrete way to the aim of mutual recognition of quality assurance systems and assessments across Europe*’, will undoubtedly open new paths for cooperation and cross fertilisation between VET and Higher Education initiatives on quality assurance and providers assessment.

On 14 December 2004, the ministers responsible for vocational education and training, the European Commission and the Social Partners held a meeting in Maastricht to review progress, acknowledge achievements so far and give advice on priorities and strategies, in order to follow up the progress made since Copenhagen in 2002. This meeting was followed by a wider conference of stakeholders to discuss concrete implementation issues.

The present report gives an overview of the main outputs of the European Co-operation in VET in the period 2003-2004. Nevertheless, a **particular emphasis is given to practical initiatives that have been taken at both national and European levels, and which are in line with the Council Conclusions** of May and November 2004.

This report has been drawn up for the attention of the Copenhagen Coordination Group, the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training, and the Directorates General for Vocational Training, as part of the reporting activity foreseen in the TWG’s mandate.

⁶ Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the Future priorities of enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET) (Review of the Council Resolution of 19 December 2002), 29 October 2004 (http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/et_2010_en.html).

II. OVERVIEW OF MAIN RESULTS⁷

The **Council Resolution and the ‘Copenhagen Declaration’** set out the policy agenda for 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 a Technical Working Group (TWG) according to a mandate drawn up by the Commission and endorsed by the ACVT, which translates the content of the policy agenda in terms of operational objectives and gives timetable guidelines.

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.

This mandate provided the basis for the TWG’s work programmes for 2003 and 2004.

The work programme for 2003 was primarily focused on the development of an ‘operational approach’ for quality assurance in VET⁸. In accordance with its mandate the TWG finalised a background paper on the *use of existing national and international standards and norms* (point 1 of the mandate)⁹. It also identified a *common core of criteria* (point 2 of the mandate)¹⁰ and a *set of indicators* (point 3 of the mandate)¹¹ for quality development at European level.

⁷ Access to all documents mentioned as a result of the TWG’s work is provided in Cedefop’s Virtual Community: <http://communities.trainingvillage.gr>

⁸ in ‘First report of the Technical Working Group QUALITY IN VET’, January 2003 - September 2003

⁹ see ‘Quality standards and norms in European VET’, September 2003, by Kim Faurschou ,

¹⁰ see ‘The Common Reference Framework on Quality in VET’, September 2003, by Kim Faurschou

¹¹ see ‘A limited set of coherent quality indicators’, September 2003, by Erwin Seyfried

Considering that a systematic approach is necessary to guarantee effective Quality Assurance (QA), the core criteria were identified in relation to a systemic and operational framework (point 4 of the mandate): the *Common Quality Assurance Framework* (CQAF)¹², which includes practical tools, such as the *European guide for self-assessment*¹³.

THE CQAF

The CQAF can be considered as a *cross reading instrument* designed to help policy makers and practitioners to get a better insight of how the existing quality assurance models work, to identify areas of provision that need improvement, and take decisions on how to improve them based on *common quantitative and qualitative references*. It can be applied at both the system and VET provider levels and allows for capturing and classifying best practice within and across Member States.

The CQAF consists of four features:

- a **model**, to approach quality assurance and development of VET provision at the appropriate levels in Member States;
- a **method for assessment and review**: the emphasis has been given to self assessment, combined with external evaluation;
- a **monitoring system**: to be identified as appropriate at national or regional level, and possibly combined with voluntary peer review at European level;
- a **measurement tool**: a set of reference indicators aiming at facilitating Member States to monitor and evaluate their own systems at national, regional or local levels.

The *model* comprises four interrelated elements:

- Planning
- Implementation
- Evaluation and assessment
- Review

These elements constitute the quality cycle, and for each one of these, as well as for the methodology, which is a transversal dimension of all of them, core quality criteria have been commonly agreed.

As regards **assessment and review**, self-assessment, combined with periodic external monitoring by an independent and appropriate third party body, has been considered as a relevant method/tool to assess and evaluate quality, and to ensure and develop quality at system and provider levels. The TWG has devised sample self-assessment guidelines for both levels, as a European guide.

Monitoring systems, mechanisms and procedures are to be identified as appropriate at national or regional level, as they are part of the regulation function in governance and can be as diverse as the national systems, sub-systems and institutions themselves.

The **measurement** of quality and its components on all levels is a key issue in quality management. The CQAF proposes a common set of indicators to measure and assess the quality of VET.

¹² 'Fundamentals of A 'Common Quality Assurance Framework' (CQAF) for VET in Europe

¹³ see 'An European Guide on Self-assessment for VET providers', September 2003, by Lise-Lotte Ravnmark,

THE EUROPEAN GUIDE FOR SELF-ASSESSMENT

As part of the TWG's mandate, a European guide to self-assessment was developed, building upon 'good practices' in Member States.

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 countries. It contains also a guide for performing self-assessment at systems level and gives an overview of different existing frameworks for self-assessment.

The TWG 2004 work programme focused on practical initiatives taken at National and European levels, and aims at fine-tuning and appraising the relevance of the CQAF through the implementation of some of the activities foreseen in the co-operation framework (point 5 of the mandate).

The **Virtual Community** set up and run by Cedefop since 2003 has been providing information to Member States and relevant stakeholders on developments and outcomes from the work of the group. Furthermore, **targeted awareness raising events** have been organised for the new Member States and the candidate countries (point 6 of the mandate).

Regular reports have been made to the Copenhagen co-ordination group and the ACVT (point 7) and the Commission presented in 2003 a proposal for further work (point 8).

There is a common understanding of the fact that the work carried out in 2003-2004 within the co-operative framework launched by the Copenhagen Declaration, responds to all points of the **two year mandate of the group. This mandate can therefore be considered as fulfilled as well as the bulk of the Work Programmes for 2003 and 2004.**

The **Lisbon goals**, 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, **requires nevertheless sustainable cooperation at European level and effective commitment of Member states and participating countries in implementing concrete actions.** These should consolidate and enhance the relevance of the achievements made so far, throughout more inclusive networks associating social partners at all levels and a wider geographical area.

The Council Conclusions from May and November confirm the need for such work within and across countries in line with the achievements reached so far through European cooperation.

III. PRACTICAL INITIATIVES

1. INITIATIVES AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

At European level, concrete initiatives have been taken to promote the CQAF. These involved relevant stakeholders at different levels and provided some first elements for the assessment of the relevance of the common framework.

The European cooperation launched by the 'Copenhagen process' has been a lever for fostering consensus building on common proposals and guidelines for voluntary initiatives to be taken at national and European levels. It has also a lever for encouraging the implementation of these initiatives, and thereby streamlining the CQAF principals and criteria.

Up to now, such initiatives have relied on promotion by the TWG and the Commission, with the technical and scientific support of Cedefop and the contribution of the European Training Foundation. Initiatives taken at European level can be clustered as follows: *'Peer learning' visits; Studies; Information/Awareness raising activities; Increasing the synergy with the LdV Programme.*

1.1. 'Peer learning' visits

Particular importance has been given to peer learning visits as a means of taking forward the work of the TWG. They facilitate the exchange of good practices and mutual learning at systems and institutional levels by activating information flows and enhancing knowledge on how the different quality systems in Europe work, and contributing thereby to achieving European objectives. While primarily focused on the identification of transferable elements of selected 'good practices' for peer countries willing to develop their own policies or policy approaches, this method can also contribute to policy development in the 'host country'.

A **European peer learning work programme** was outlined by the group for 2004. The visits build on the core elements and principles of the Common Quality Assurance Framework to organise the exchanges of experience and the debates. They are supported by 'cross country analysis' which provide the input to the exchanges and debates, monitoring, assessment and final reporting. The programme addressed both systems and providers levels and focused on selected priority topics.

1.1.1. Work programme

Four peer learning visits were organised in 2004, on **specific priority topics**.

<i>Peer learning Visits</i>	<i>Host Country:</i>	<i>Participating Countries</i>	<i>Schedule of visits</i>	<i>Schedule of 'cross country analysis'</i>
<i>1. Peer learning on Quality Indicators + 'cross country analysis'</i>	Finland	A, I, F, DK, D, N, S	June 2004	March-July
<i>2. Pear learning on 'improving the matching between supply and demand', (concrete cases of selected sectors/branches) + 'cross country analysis'</i>	France	P, ROM, NL, IRL, A, DK	June 2004	April-September
<i>3. Pear learning on self-assessment of training providers + 'cross country analyses'</i>	United Kingdom	ROM, NL, FIN, D, S, P, N, I, A, DK	October 2004	August-November

4. Peer learning on models and practices for quality assurance + cross country analysis	Denmark	D, I, P, ROM, NL, S, N, IRL, A, FIN	October 2004	May-November
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1.1.2. Methodology

The visits were organised on a voluntary basis. For each priority topic, the host countries were identified on the basis of what was considered to be relevant or good practices in the field concerned. The peer countries were identified on the basis of their specific interests, according to the national priorities. Each one of the four peer learning visits was organised following a specific method aimed at supporting the exchange of experience and mutual learning between Member States. All parties involved (host and peer countries) made active contributions to the organisation of the visits, which benefited from the technical and scientific support of Cedefop. The methodology has been shaped throughout the process of implementation of the TWG working programme. Its main elements can be described as follows.

- ***A common analytical framework***

The peer learning visits did not start from scratch. Each peer learning visit was based on the common reference framework (CQAF) which the TWG group had developed and agreed beforehand. This framework served as a “common European language” - a key to understanding the different national systems, and the reference for the exchanges of experiences and debates.

- ***Focused exchange of experience***

Each peer learning visit was focused on a specific element of the CQAF, while keeping the entire framework as reference:

- the quality indicators developed by the TWG was the starting point of the peer learning visit in Finland;
- the process of matching supply and demand is a main issue of the quality assurance process, and therefore of the CQAF (planning, versus relevance of outputs and outcomes of training/learning): this issue was addressed at sector level in the peer learning in France;
- the role of self-assessment in quality assurance, and the European guide for self-assessment as a common reference tool, were the focus on the peer learning visit in UK;
- the CQAF was mirrored at the peer learning visit in Denmark in the light of the Danish approach to quality in VET.

- ***Provision of information on national systems (first step of the cross country analysis)***

Each peer learning visit was prepared on the basis of the information provided on the national systems by all the participating countries (host and peer countries). This information was collected through a specific semi-standardised thematic questionnaire, to be fulfilled preferably by the future participants in the visits. The information collected was analysed according to the different issues at stake and summarized, pointing out common key issues that should be addressed in the debates. Whenever possible, this first stock taking working paper integrated cross country comparisons and clustered national approaches according to different models, highlighting some strengths and weaknesses of such models.

This procedure was welcomed not only because it provided relevant background information from all participating countries, but also because of the side-effect of self-reflection on each one’s own national background. As such, the procedure provided a means for fostering sensitivity and raising awareness of common problems.

The national information as along with the stock-taking paper was disseminated to the participants in the peer learning visits and will also be widespread to a world wide audience, via the virtual community for quality assurance, set up by CEDEFOP.

- ***Organisation of the learning process during the visit***

The analysis of the national contributions led to the identification of common crucial questions, and thereby contributed to the outlining of the work programme of the visit. This was drawn up by the host country, with the support of a competent expert designated by Cedepop to provide scientific support to each one of the visits.

During the visits, presentations were made by various national actors, tackling the relevant subject from different angles. These started with the policy aims, the current situation and the further perspectives of the approaches to quality assurance and development in the country. Further contributions addressed the operational and technical elements of the quality system, thereby providing full range information on the host country.

The contributions of government representatives were followed by stake-holder presentations and, last but not least, by visits 'in situ' and presentations of VET-providers, which could be looked at as good practice examples. Most of the presentations were based on specific documents which later on could be disseminated. The discussions allowed for some comparisons between different national approaches and experiences which were presented by the peer countries. The host country experience served mainly as a mirror for one own's national approaches and for a critical testing of the relevance of the CQAF.

- ***Drawing conclusions***

Each peer learning visit ended with a final round-up session in which the participants had the opportunity to draw up some preliminary conclusions. These focused both on the potentials for further cooperation at European level and on possible activities that could be launched by the participating countries. At the same time, the exchanges allowed for further consolidation and refinement of the CQAF.

The main lessons to be learned have been documented in final short reports summarizing the results of each peer learning visit, i.e., mainly the conclusions for the European debate. These papers are being finalized and inserted in the virtual community for quality assurance, to enable a wider dissemination of results to a larger audience.

- ***Assessment of the visits***

The assessments of the peer learning visits have been made by CEDEFOP through a semi-structured questionnaire to be fulfilled by all participants. An additional qualitative evaluation took place during the TWG meetings.

The evaluation focused not only on the conclusions concerning the content, i.e. quality assurance in VET, but also on the procedural and organizational aspects of the visits. This allowed for a continuous improvement of the working methods and is thereby progressively leading to the fine tuning of a 'new' type of instrument for European cooperation, which has proven to be effective and productive: peer learning.

1.1.3. Main issues and conclusions¹⁴

→*Peer learning on quality indicators* (Helsinki-Finland, June 2004)

The Finish case provides an example of good-practice in using in an effective way the set of quality indicators agreed at European level, both at the systems level and at providers' level.

In the light of a national system with high standards in VET, the European set of indicators has proven

- to be broad and specific enough to cover the main dimensions for quality
- to be practical and sufficiently operational
- to be applicable on VET-systems level as well as on providers level
- with reasonable efforts for data collection
- leading to useful results which
- contribute to the improvement of quality in VET.

The exchanges of experience and the debate were supported by a prior data collection made by the participants in their country, in order to test the feasibility of the indicators.

A slight fine-tuning of the European set of indicators was made, following the visit. This gave also evidence of the need for further work on comparable data.

→*Peer learning on improving the match between supply and demand at sectoral level* (Paris-France, June 2004)

The French approach to vocational qualification development is strongly sector based, with little or no regulation from the public sector. This approach contrasts with the cases of some of the 'peer countries', where a wider intervention of the public sector in organising training provision brings some answers to the problem of a 'no man's land': the cross-sector qualifications.

The cases of the Building/Construction and Printing/Graphics sectors, presented by sector representatives including the Social partners, revealed important differences of approach in searching for adequate answers to sectoral skills needs. These answers can vary from the 'all public' to the 'all sector', subject to specific arrangements.

To a large extent these differences are linked to the size and economic importance of the sectors as well as to the tradition of co-operation between these and the public sector. But factors such as the pace of specific techno-organisational change, the homogeneity/heterogeneity of qualifications within the sector, and workforce mobility tradition, certainly influence the arrangements and the initiatives for training provision.

The visit allowed for the identification of key areas to be taken into account by further cooperation and networking on methods of improving the match between supply and demand, which is to be regarded as a major quality criterion within quality assurance models for VET. One example of these would be a more in depth study involving the analysis of the complementarity and the capacity of existing observatories to provide qualitative and quantitative coherent data in the short, medium and long terms.

¹⁴ For each one of the 'peer learning' visits, a stock taking report was drawn up. These, and whenever possible, the documents provided during the visits, are provided on Cedefop's Virtual Community on Quality Assurance in VET.

→*Peer learning on self-assessment* (Coventry-UK, October 2004)

The British approach to ensuring the quality of training providers/provision provides a good example of a self-assessment based quality system, linking annual self-assessment of providers to external inspection once every 4 years. In England, colleges have been required to submit self assessment reports annually to the funding body since 1994. This practice for annual self assessment was extended to work-based learning providers in 1997 and subsequently to all types of providers in the post-16 sector in 2001. The funding bodies take account of the self assessment and inspection results in the planning and purchasing of provision in local areas. This approach is clearly focussed on the learner, in terms of meeting their individual needs and their learning experience. Particular regard is given to equal opportunities and health and safety for learners. This particular strength should be stressed as an example of good practice.

The visits to training providers from different sectors (including employers) made evident the role that self-assessment can play in a quality assurance system in VET, when linked to external verification and where results are transformed into a development plan. In this process, all providers are required to benchmark their performance against national data on learner achievements and other core performance indicators and agree challenging improvement targets as part of their development plan with the funding body. The existence of adequate context conditions, centralised specific tools and guidelines addressed to providers and to inspectors seems crucial.

The UK system places self-assessment as an integral part of the provider business management process. Staff at all levels in the organisational structure participates in the self-assessment process and take ownership for quality improvement in their respective programme areas. In the long run, the benefits of the whole procedure must become visible. External verification should work in an interactive way, based on the principles of partnership, and have a formative function in order to encourage the members of the relevant organizations to overcome their weaknesses.

Inspection results are published for all providers and are used along with other published data on learner achievements to inform the choices made by prospective learners. The annual self-assessment reports are not currently published. Publication of the self-assessment results was a major subject in the discussions as this raises the question of the balance between the commitment of informing 'clients' on the quality of provision and the risk of biasing the competition between providers, by providing internal information.

The strong emphasis given by the British approach to the inspectorate system, contrasts with the case of some of the peer countries (e.g. Denmark), where investment in such a system is much lower. The reason for this choice lays probably on the important involvement of Social partners in the VET system and on a 'mutual trust' consensus which is probably easier in small countries.

→*The peer learning on the relevance of the CQAF* (Copenhagen-Denmark, October 2004)

The peer learning visit in Denmark gave evidence of the consistency of the CQAF with existing systems in participating countries, and confirmed its relevance in different contexts, even if further evidence and fine-tuning is required to consolidate these first conclusions. Due to the nature of the topic (the quality management system as a whole) and the strong involvement of the Danish social partners in training policy, this visit benefited from the participation of a wide range of stakeholders including an important participation of representatives from Social Partners.

It was stressed by different participants that the CQAF,

- can provide a common language at European level which allows for the identification of common elements, similarities and differences of the national systems,

- acts as a supporting tool for understanding different European approaches to quality in VET,
- allows for the identification of strengths and weaknesses of the different approaches,
- allows for mutual learning.

This visit allowed for progress in comparing different national approaches to quality in VET as a consequence of knowledge acquired progressively through previous peer learning visits. The critical issues can be summarized as follows:

- quality development should be considered as a continuous process and quality assurance should be addressed as a permanent topic in the discussions amongst the stakeholders for VET (even when this is not high on the policy agenda...),
- the identification of good practices illustrating the cooperation between different levels and stakeholders (national, regional, local, sectors),
- there is need to analyse different types of interfaces combining internal and external evaluation, related to context dimensions (including the issue of means for the transparency of assessment).

As an overall conclusion, it became obvious that the CQAF can be relevant in supporting further development in VET quality systems. The need to strengthen the community efforts for the wider dissemination of this framework was underlined.

1.1.4. Assessment of the visits

An assessment questionnaire to be completed by participants was distributed for the first time at the Coventry visit. The questionnaire was then also sent to participants in previous visits. The following assessment is based on 39 responses from the participants (out of 65): 22 in Copenhagen; 8 in Coventry; 4 in Paris; 5 in Helsinki. The answers (see below) reflect mainly the participants' opinions on the Copenhagen 'peer review' where assessment was already integrated as a systematic procedure.

THE PARTICIPANTS' OPINIONS

1. Overall appreciation of the peer learning visits:

Almost all participants found that the peer learning visits were transparent, tackling crucial issues, and that discussions were open and frank. This instrument is considered as an invaluable tool to understand different VET quality systems and how Member States and other stakeholders deal with problems at praxis level.

2. Success factors:

- focus on one well defined issue,
- the visits are based on robust background and preparatory work,
- obligation for each participant to prepare the visit by completing a thematic questionnaire which recalls the state of art in their own country,
- exchange of experiences between relevant experts/stakeholders in their field for almost 2 days without the interruption of their everyday professional life,
- participants had expertise and/or institutional competence,
- country reports are a tool for understanding specific background contexts,
- participants have the opportunity to develop personal and professional contacts with the experts of the host country,

- external expertise supports the preparatory work and takes stock of the visit's content,
- monitoring in the host country can really benefit from external appraisal by "critical friends".

3. *To be improved:*

- the content of the thematic questionnaires should be closer to the discussions to be held.
- need for further support whenever any concrete transfer of experience is envisaged.
- a summary of the VET system and the quality approach of the host country should always be available before the visit.

4. *Follow-up given/envisaged by peer countries:*

- In some countries (host and peer), the information on the peer learning visits will be published in the respective institutions' journals; the partnerships/co-operation with other stakeholders allow for the dissemination of this information in a wider circle of VET providers.
- Further co-operation activities are being initiated for example, a bi-lateral institutional partnership between some countries (Austria and Denmark, Slovenia and Finland), and a network between three countries on the specific issue of quality of apprenticeship (Norway, Sweden and Italy).
- Information on the content of the review to be provided to the competent Ministry and the experts in the field of VET.
- Insight gained through peer learning will be recorded and disseminated through a report on each visit.
- use knowledge on the strong participation of the social partners within the quality system in certain countries and facilitate the contacts with the national social partners and in networking with them.
- make use of the outcomes of the peer visit when updating recommendations to VET providers and submitting LdV projects.
- take on board the relevant experience of other countries when reviewing and assessing training supply.

5. *The future:*

- peer visits should become a regular activity of the work on quality in VET.
- suggestion of topics for further peer learning have been made (see 'Proposals for the future')

1.2. Studies

A study has been launched by Cedefop in order to further investigate how and under which conditions output standards are introduced and used in a number of Member States to measure the expected effects of VET at system, VET provider and individual levels. A comparison between the various national approaches will be made and proposals for further work at European level in this field will be formulated, and related to the overall common framework. This work is to be finished in May 2005.

1.3. Information/Awareness raising activities

1.3.1. The Virtual Community on Quality Assurance in VET

The virtual community (VC) for quality assurance in VET is both an important internal working tool for the TWG and at the same time an instrument for the dissemination of information and experience to the outside world. Nearly, all of the discussion papers and documents which have been produced by the TWG have been continuously uploaded onto the VC. The TWG worked as the nucleus for progress on quality issues and for enhanced exchange of experience at European level, whereas the virtual community provided for transparency of this process.

In parallel with the implementation of the peer learning programme, new folders have been opened up in the VC for each of the peer learning visit subjects. These folders in the VC helped

- to collect the relevant data for cross country analysis,
- to prepare the peer learning visits as all information material was distributed via the VC,
- to provide for the documentation of the peer learning processes,
- to give detailed information on the approach to quality assurance of the host country where the visit took place and
- to contribute to the dissemination of good practice examples and lessons learned as a result of the peer learning visits and cross country analysis to the affiliated members or the world outside the TWG.

All the presentations and papers related to the peer learning visits have been placed in the VC and can be used by all of its members. On average around 10 to 15 papers, giving detailed information and presentations at each peer learning visit – are accessible on the VC.

- ***The virtual community and the LdV Programme***

The VC has been presented at two different Leonardo da Vinci conferences in Brussels. It has been visited by more than 250 people closely involved in the work with projects in the LdV programme. Furthermore, the VC has been a supporting tool for the LdV programme, due to the fact that quality was one of the main priority areas for the projects. Many members and visitors of the VC have benefited of all the materials on the CQAF, quality indicators, and self-assessment that are accessible at the VC.

- ***Stock-taking information on new developments on national level***

There are some countries where national developments and discussions about quality issues in VET are more intense than in others. This is not only the case for the countries which participated in the peer learning visits, from which detailed descriptions about the national political background and the current tendencies concerning quality in VET are available on the VC. It is also the case for those countries where new systems for quality assurance are established at national level, i.e., in the new Member States, candidate countries or other European countries. Thus, the VC has collected documents and discussion papers describing, for example, recent developments for quality assurance in Slovenia (which is not represented in the TWG) as well as in Switzerland.

The documents describing national features are welcomed by many VC-members. As most of the members work both at national and European or international level this national information is used as a reference frame for one own's experiences and thus as a resource to support the developments in the home country.

- ***Future potentials of the VC***

The VC on quality assurance in VET is used by a growing number of members from all over the world with a clear focus on European countries and a strongly increasing interest in the new Member States and the accession countries. However, there are some countries from which participation is still low. In this case a strategy to contact national organizations who might help to distribute information about the existence of the VC should be outlined aiming at broadening the participation in those countries.

An analysis of the member profiles has shown that most of the VC-members are interested in practical developments about the implementation of quality assurance systems combined with researching activities. Most of the members are interested in European as well as in national developments.

Thus, the coherent information about the different approaches to quality assurance in the countries which participated in the peer learning visits is of extraordinary value for all the members of the VC. The information which has been provided as a result of the TWG activities can be used from different angles. One is to have a reference frame for comparing the developments in one's own country with those in other countries and to make use of the information which is provided from other countries in order to support the reflections in one's home country. Furthermore, the existing information can be used as a starting point for comparative research and reflections as many of the members expressed their interest of being involved in research activities.

Altogether, the VC has proven its worth of being a resource data centre and discussions about quality in VET on national and European level and this should be further supported by appropriate monitoring. In some cases, it could be considered to strengthen the national branches of the VC, for example by open up corners for national discussions and debates or national exchange of papers and documents.

1.3.2. Awareness raising events

Two major events took place at European level in 2004 aimed at raising awareness of and building on the Common Quality Assurance Framework, in the new Member States and/candidate countries.

- ***'Quality assurance in education and training in Romania. European perspectives'***: a conference was organised in Sinaia in February 2004 by the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, together with the Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family, and representatives of Social Partners. It aimed at disseminating information on the CQAF and the self assessment guide, as well as at discussing implementation issues for the Romanian context.

The Commission, Cedefop and the European Training Foundation participated in this event which was attended by aprox. 200 persons representing schools, universities, CVT providers, school inspectorates, national bodies responsible for quality assurance in education and training, and social partners' organisations. The Conference allowed the development of some relevant milestones in quality development in education and training in Romania (see below in 'Initiatives at national level').

- ***'Quality in vocational education and training (VET): policy developments at European level and their relevance for Acceding and Candidate Countries'***: a seminar was organised in Prague in April 2004 by the European Training Foundation in cooperation with and contribution by the European Commission and Cedefop. It aimed at awareness raising among the participants from the new member states and candidate countries on European policy proposals and action in the area of quality assurance in VET.

The conference allowed for sharpening and enriching mutual understanding of the situation and developments in the countries participating in the seminar, and the strengths and

weaknesses of the existing quality assurance systems. It also led to some proposals on ways of fostering the association of the new member states and candidate countries, with the activities developed by the TWG.

1.4. Increasing the synergy with the LdV Programme

Linking policy developments at European level in the field of quality assurance in VET and the Leonardo da Vinci Programme has been a major concern in the TWG's work. This has been translated into a number of concrete actions aimed at cross fertilising the TWG's outputs and project development:

- A study was launched on the results of the relevant projects carried out under the first phase of the programme. This study, which is almost finalised, provides an overview of the principal trends and show some significant contributions brought by the programme to the field of quality management.
- Thematic monitoring activities allowed for close work with National Agencies in mainstreaming the TWG's main conclusions in the follow-up of projects and information activities addressed to promoters (namely conferences, workshops, and a specific web site).
- The quality topic has been better focused in the first and second calls for proposals, in line with the developments of the TWG's work.
- Documentation on the CQAF is provided to the assessors of LdV proposals in order to provide key criteria for examining the proposals.

Besides, the forthcoming integrated lifelong learning programme leaves clear room for specific project development on quality assurance in VET.

2. INITIATIVES AT NATIONAL LEVEL

As mentioned before, the CQAF builds on the existing experience in Member states. It reflects a consensus on the key issues (common references) to approach quality assurance and development. It has also been underlined that the CQAF should be considered as *a cross reading instrument* designed to help policy makers and practitioners to get a better insight of how the existing QA models work, to identify areas of provision that need improvement, and take decisions on how to improve them based on *common quantitative and qualitative references*. This highlights the rationale of the initiatives taken within countries and aimed at fostering the use of the CQAF.

The initiatives taken in Member States and candidate countries on quality assurance in VET, which took into consideration the CQAF, vary from country to country in terms of objectives, nature, content and stakeholders involvement.

In some cases, the CQAF acted as a 'mirror' by providing clear references to review existing policies and procedures and develop new ones. It enabled to capture and codify existing good practice as well as to identify areas of provision needing improvement.

The reference framework was used in other cases as one of the elements in the public debate on quality assurance, namely within the process of the reform of the VET Systems.

In other cases, the CQAF was a lever for the design and implementation of a more consistent quality assurance policy in VET. Finally, it also inspired several pilot projects in particular on self-assessment of training providers.

The following examples illustrate the types of initiatives taken by national/regional/local authorities¹⁵. By no means do they reflect the Member states' policies and instruments for approaching quality in VET: only initiatives dealing specifically with the use of the CQAF are illustrated in this section. For more extensive information on country specific approaches, please refer to the Cedefop's Virtual Community on quality in VET.

AUSTRIA

The CQAF main features correspond to the existing approach to quality development of the VET system. A number of initiatives being taken forward have been inspired by the CQAF:

- In the beginning of this year the CQAF has been chosen as a reference point for the development and implementation of a huge quality assurance process for the VET-school system (Q.I.S.: 'Quality in Schools'), involving the relevant departments in the ministry, the regional school authorities as well as several school managers. This is a bottom-up initiative which tries to encourage schools to take over quality assurance and quality improvement in an autonomous way, by establishing a top quality assurance system for school administration at all levels: national, regional, institutional (<http://www.qis.at/english/E1.html>).
- The CQAF will be further used to check if this new national system also fulfils the requirements of a European model.

NETHERLANDS

The main elements of the CQAF were already partly implemented, as part of the national approach to quality development. Specific initiatives have been taken in order to promote the use of the CQAF.

- The Ministry of Education informed and consulted relevant stakeholders, about the fundamentals of the European Framework and the progress in the TWG. Some parties participated in the peer reviews. The council of providers, and the national body for vocational guidance, were asked to spread this information to the training providers and relevant bodies for vocational training.
- The international steering committee (at ministry level, with the participation of highly relevant stakeholders) preparing the EU events on VET at Maastricht in the Netherlands (December 2004) is being informed on the activities and progress of the TWG on Quality in VET.

PORTUGAL

The *Direcção-Geral de Formação Vocacional/Ministério da Educação* (Directorate General for Vocational Education and Training/Ministry of Education), which is responsible for the IVET system operation, intends to promote the fundamentals of the 'Common Quality Assurance Framework' (CQAF) in initial vocational education and training for young people and Adult Education, and focus on self-assessment.

¹⁵ The examples are based on the contributions made by the members of the TWG

IRELAND

- The CQAF main features correspond to the national model to quality development and in a certain extent it has influenced the FETAC¹⁶ policy on quality assurance at provider's level. Chief among these is the methodology for the self assessment of training providers. The indicators proposed by the CQAF have also influenced FETAC policy development.
- A Conference on Quality Assurance in VET is to be held in the autumn 2005, involving relevant stakeholders from several Member States and aiming at disseminating information about the CQAF within the context of existing Quality Assurance practices in a variety of EU states. The relevance of the indicators to the various national systems being described will form part of the information interchange.

It is hoped that this conference will take forward the aim of national bodies forming sustainable and voluntary transnational networking so as to enhance cooperation and mutual trust among EU Member States' VET systems.

ROMANIA

The CQAF has inspired several initiatives taken by the Ministry of Education and Research. This process started with a European conference held in February 2004 in *Sinaia* (*see above 'awareness raising activities'*) aiming at launching a wide and inclusive debate on quality assurance in education and training from a European perspective, and in particular on the CQAF.

The Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Labor, Social Solidarity and Family and the National Adult Training Board (NATB) underlined the interest of using the CQAF as a flexible model for developing a national quality system and adopted several recommendations from the conference.

1. Launching the draft law on quality in education and training in Romania.
2. Adopting self-assessment (SA) as the methodology for introducing a quality system at the provider level in the VET system.
3. Piloting the setting up of a manual for SA in schools. This manual is an adapted version of the European self-assessment guide and it will be applied by 22 VET schools in Romania, acting as resource centers within the reform plan financed by EU Phare program.
4. Piloting an inspection manual based on the self/assessment and external evaluation methodology described in the European guide for self/ assessment. The manual is to be used by the school inspectorates in those counties where the pilot resource centers are implementing the self-assessment manual.
5. Considering elements of the CQAF in current developments at higher education level.

Implementation activities following on from these recommendations are currently ongoing.

¹⁶ FETAC, the Further Education and Training Awards Council, was established on 11 June 2001 under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999. It is the single national awarding body for the further education and training sector in Ireland.

NORWAY

- The CQAF will be part of the national strategy of the Cooperation Body for Vocational Education and Training which is in charge of establishing a **National Action Plan for the Quality in Vocational Education and Training**. The plan, which brings together the Directorate of Education, the Cooperation Body for Vocational Education and Training and the Ministry should be developed in July 2005 and its implementation should start in the autumn.
- A pilot project has been launched “The apprentice inspectors”, developing an electronic questionnaire where apprentices and students can report their own opinion on learning conditions, equipment, learning environment according to educational objectives. The CQAF references (Quality Circle and self assessment) are being used to check whether education and training are planned, implemented and assessed according to the objectives designed.

ITALY

The model for planning VET activity, which is adopted by regional governments, corresponds to the CQAF principles; the recent introduction of Accreditation for VET providers allows Regions to select providers on the basis of quality criteria, and links it with financing. Other pilot initiatives have been put forward to promote the use of the CQAF.

- ***Quality Chart***

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

- ***Guide on Self Assessment***

The guide on self assessment prepared by the TWG has been translated into Italian and it is now adapted. ISFOL will test it with some VET providers. After this experimental phase it will become available to the entire VET System.

- ***Analysis of the quality of Regional systems***

An evaluation model has been designed to check the quality of the regional training system using a complex set of indicators, which follows the logic of the CQAF; a pilot study has recently been undertaken in three regions, Lombardia, Val D’Aosta and Trentino.

- ***Indicators and self- evaluation***

A coherent set of indicators has been developed in the province of Trento for the self-evaluation of schools. General and vocational schools have to send their data through the web, and the system gives them back their indicators (context, input, process and outputs) compared with provincial averages. A self-evaluation report must be presented by schools, on the basis of these schools.

DENMARK

Quality strategies at provider level aiming at quality assurance and development are based on self assessment and correspond to the principles of the CQAF. They expand with indicators to monitor output and outcomes.

- A seminar was organized in June 2004 for the VET-colleges and social partners to present and discuss the CQAF. 45 colleges were represented and gave their suggestions on the framework.
- A meeting for the Vocational Advisory Committee was held in August. The aim was to inform and debate the initiatives in the Copenhagen-process and at the first opportunity to discuss the CQAF.
- The social partners (confederation of trade unions and confederation of employers), the Danish Evaluation Institute as well as representatives from 2 colleges participated actively in the peer review on quality management approaches that took place in Denmark (October 2004). The CQAF was used as a reference system supporting presentations and debates.
- Monitoring of systematic quality assurance approach (self-evaluation/CQAF-principles) is under consideration aiming at getting a better view and documentation of quality assurance at provider level in VET. The Vocational Advisory Committee will be involved.

FINLAND

- A project has been launched by the Ministry of Education to update and develop the quality recommendations for providers of educational services, for educational institutions and apprenticeship training. One of the goals of the project is to develop the concrete methods and practical tools to support VET-providers and schools in their efforts to promote quality assurance management, and in particular in referring this to the CQAF dimensions. The recommendations shall also be updated and developed according to the dimensions and criteria of the CQAF.
- European Conference on Quality Assurance in VET – Exchange of good practice and institutional co-operation will be held in February 2005. The aims are to promote the exchange of good practice and institutional co-operation in quality management and assurance and the use of the CQAF.

GERMANY

There are a number of initiatives being taken forward which have been inspired by the CQAF.

- The German Federal Ministry of Education and Research started in 2001 an initiative to examine and develop quality in continuing vocational training. In this context, several projects have been launched. The debate at European level that led to the setting up of the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) had an influence on some of these projects.
- The CQAF was presented at the opening event of the call for the new Leonardo da Vinci programme (LdV) in Bonn (April 2004), in Berlin (June 2004) and in Munich (July 2004). The participants were encouraged to submit proposals focusing on "Quality Assurance in VET" and give attention to the CQAF principles and criteria.
- The topic of Quality Assurance in VET was discussed with different stakeholders at a meeting on educational and vocational guidance in Bonn, in June 2004. As a result, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research will launch a project on the development of quality standards for quality assurance in guidance.
- Quality assurance in VET was also discussed in meetings with specific groups, such as the Multi Media and Business.

UNITED KINGDOM

Main parts of the CQAF were already mostly implemented, as part of the national approach to quality development. There are also a number of initiatives being taken forward that have been proposed by the CQAF.

- The Department for Education and Skills, working in partnership with the Inspectorates, Funding Body and key stakeholders, is currently developing a common set of measurement tools (success measures) which can be applied across the post-16 sector to evaluate performance and inform policy development. The common set of measures (including learner success rates; value added and distance travelled for young people and adults; destinations; employer engagement; staff qualifications; learner satisfaction; Value for Money indicators; and measures for non-accredited learning) have been extensively trialled and tested in 2004 and will be piloted nationally in 2005 with the aim of full implementation in 2006.
- A new National Quality Improvement Body is being established by April 2006 to provide a single focal point for quality improvement activity. The remit and functions of this new national body will be shaped by the design principles of the CQAF which are based on developing a capability to plan, implement, evaluate and review quality improvement strategies. In parallel, there is a policy shift to reducing the accountability burdens by introducing light touch inspections for top performing providers and creating a strong network of self-regulating providers.
- A key element of the CQAF is to promote the sharing of good practice. In England, excellent providers receive additional funding to take forward innovation work and to disseminate their good practice to other organisations to help them improve. This is proving to be an effective method for bringing about improvements. The Inspectorates also gather good practice and make this available to providers through a website database.

SWEDEN

In Sweden, VET is part of the traditional education system. The measurement of quality covers therefore the whole education system and not just the VET. Specific initiatives have nevertheless been taken to increase quality in VET, among others, for improving cooperation between the school and the local industry. The CQAF main features correspond to the rationale of such initiatives.

Self assessment is a key tool in the Education quality system. Annual quality accounts of schools and municipalities provide for an assessment of how far the school has come compared with the national goals and identify the measures being taken to achieve them. An online system is in operation since 2001 providing information on the results and quality of schools, supported by extensive statistical data. These data approach the impact of education both in terms of school and labour market perspectives

The CQAF, and in particular the 'European self assessment guide' and the common set of indicators, can help policy makers and practitioners to get a better insight of how the existing tools work, to identify areas of provision that need improvement, and consider how to improve them based on common quantitative and qualitative references.

These are some concrete examples of using the CQAF as a supporting tool for quality development in VET at national level. In the near future, the consolidation of this framework will face the challenge of expanding in a wider geographical area and that of including a wider range of stakeholders. At the same time, it will also face the challenge of sustainability, motivation of stakeholders, coordination, monitoring and follow up. At this stage, it urges the examination of the conditions which make it possible to cope with these challenges in the future, in an effective and realistic way.

IV. PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE

Progress towards the policy aims underpinning the implementation of the TWG's mandate, e.g. *promoting mutual trust in training systems and provision across Europe and thereby increasing mobility and facilitating access to lifelong learning*, requires **further action geared to ensuring continuous development and sustainable cooperation in a wide geographical area**, namely through increasing networking at all levels.

The **Council Conclusions on the Future priorities of enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET)** of November last, reviewing the Council Resolution of December 2002, agrees on priorities to be given at European and national level in the field of quality assurance (see page 5). Furthermore the Council invites the Member states and the Commission to take actions in this field 'within their respective competences'.

Future action should therefore be developed at both national and European levels, within a broad and inclusive cooperative framework which can guarantee coherent, sustainable and consistent developments on quality assurance in VET within and across the European Union.

1. The common quality criteria agreed at European level and brought together by the CQAF provide for greater consistency for quality assurance development in VET across Europe and give adequate references to support the process of striving to implement effective Quality Assurance Systems.

The effectiveness of this process relies to a large extent on the **commitment of Member States and other participating countries, as well as that of a wide range of stakeholders at different levels**. In order to take forward the Council Conclusions, Member States and participating countries should specifically identify the **future actions they are willing to launch together with all relevant stakeholders** for quality development of VET, as part of the integrated biennial report on "Education and Training 2010".

This could include:

- Identifying a nodal point at national level to ensure monitoring, follow-up, assessment and reporting, as well as networking at the European level;
- Fostering networking of relevant stakeholders around practical initiatives;
- Develop a strategy to ensure cooperation between the different subsystems and levels of the VET systems;
- Organising the debate on main achievements and further developments at different levels;
- Defining clear policy guidelines to stimulate transparency of methods, criteria, assessment results and accountability;
- Setting up feed-back procedures and mechanisms for change;
- Using the common set of indicators to monitor and evaluate systems;
- Providing information on trends and progress made, as well as on good practices and innovation.

Such actions would be developed on a voluntary basis, and 'make best use of existing and future national and Community policy instruments'.

2. At European level, further work on **specific topics** is needed:

- *patterns and standards to ensure the quality of VET providers from the perspective of the national VET-systems (accreditation, approval, licensing, or other methods giving visibility and credibility to the quality of providers...),*

- **feed-back procedures and mechanisms for change** (at both systems and at providers' levels: relationships between assessment procedures and improvement of quality; standards for development plans),
- **stakeholder involvement in quality assurance procedures** (teachers/trainers; social partners; institutions management staff),
- **quality assurance in and during work experience settings** (within the apprenticeship system, or the part of education system that takes place in companies),
- **interfaces between internal self-assessment and external verification procedures,**
- **further fine tune measurement tools and indicators** (effective measures for data collection),
- **mechanisms to assess the outcomes of learning** (follow-up to work on indicators),
- **mechanisms to improve the transparency and the public dissemination of information on the quality of training providers and provision,**
- **mechanisms to translate and adapt goals across different levels and to enhance the quality of the planning process,**
- **exploring ways of developing provider capacity to enable them to become self regulating** (based on effective self-assessment and action planning): how to best support providers to make improvements.

These topics can be dealt with through different (or a combination of) instruments, such as pilot projects, transnational peer learning visits, studies and others, as appropriate.

3. Exchange of experience and mutual learning should remain the rationale underpinning the **European cooperation** for enhancing the quality of VET in the European Union and to increase its transparency. **Peer learning** is an important instrument in this regard, supported by cross country analyses based on the CQAF references.

In this regard, the following should be envisaged:

- Fine-tune the 'peer learning' methodology, based on effective assessment of existing experience¹⁷;
- Identify priority topics together with the specific and transversal related issues;
- Use systematically the CQAF to support 'peer learning' visits, and in particular to capture 'good practices' as well as weak points of different VET and quality systems, and to give 'coherence to diversity'.

Peer learning offers a rather light and flexible platform for sharing experience and mutual learning. Other forms of work with peers could be envisaged such as peer review and peer counselling for concrete implementation projects, whenever an agreement is made in this respect between countries and/or providers. The latter go far beyond the mutual learning approach which has been followed up to now and require more structured and complex working methods and procedures.

For some specific topics, studies and analysis should be carried out either to support peer learning, or to make progress in existing knowledge at European level.

4. Increase synergies with the **LdV programme**:

- Raise the awareness of National Agencies to policy developments in this area and encourage them to support stock-taking from project results and appropriate networking for project

¹⁷ A relevant contribution in this regard could be brought by the ongoing Leonardo da Vinci Project "Peer Review as an Instrument for Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement in Initial VET in Europe - Exchange of Experience and Development of a European Manual" which started in October 2004.

development (in operational terms, this could mean to strengthen the role of NAs in thematic monitoring and create links between the thematic groups).

- Continuous stock taking of project related outcomes and follow-up of ongoing projects.
- Encourage focusing LdV projects on the weak points of the quality assurance and development approaches identified in Member states, by using the CQAF.

5. **Improve synergies** within the ‘Copenhagen Process’, as well as with the Education and Training 2010 work programme and the ‘Bologna’ Process in Higher Education, particularly in view of the forthcoming development of the European Qualification Framework, following the Council/Commission Joint Interim Report ‘*Education and Training 2010*’, to the European Council in March 2004. Namely,

- clarify the role and possible further developments of Quality Assurance in the perspective of the future European Qualification Framework;
- enhance cross fertilisation with Higher Education developments (e.g. defining indicators, output standards, criteria for accreditation or approval of institutions, ...);
- approach quality assurance as a supporting element of a European Credit Transfer System.

6. Ensure further effective support from the European Training Foundation in **taking forward the proposals made at European level into policy debate and practical initiatives in candidate countries**, and in particular in promoting the involvement of these in peer learning initiatives, and in strengthening exchange of information and dissemination activities towards these countries and possibly beyond.

7. A clear **information/dissemination strategy** is needed, enabling the involvement of a wider range of stakeholders and countries in the work carried out at European level. Concrete initiatives should be envisaged in this context.

- Set up common guidelines for such an information/dissemination strategy and plan.
- Consider ways of engaging those member states and candidate countries that haven’t yet participated in the cooperative work at European level and the timeframe for doing so.
- Develop practical guidelines and other materials (such as manuals) supporting the use of the CQAF, and in particular, target groups specific materials.
- Develop targeted strategies for the different types of stakeholders, taking as a starting point, their specific interests and working contexts.
- Organise meetings and conferences in Member States with the participation of experts and different stakeholders’ representatives from other countries.
- Assess the funding implications in fostering the use of the common framework - to help develop the understanding of the most cost effective ways of delivering practice on the ground and provide a clear policy link between funding and quality development.

In a mid-term perspective the activities carried out at national level together with the work on European level should allow for a comparative view of the VET-systems in the European Union. Information about the quality approaches in the national VET-systems has become more and more detailed throughout the TWG’s work and will certainly increase through future activities. In this perspective,

- An on-going process of documentation of national approaches towards quality, should be assured at European level,
- The data collection should be organised in a comparative perspective, thus
- Laying the ground for enhanced bench-learning activities on European level.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The achievements made so far are the result of an integrated approach to cooperation which brings together technical and scientific work, practical initiatives and political support, at both European and national levels. The need to consolidate, strengthen, disseminate and further develop these achievements is obvious. Following on from the Council Conclusions of May and November 2004, a number of proposals for action at National and European level have been made and are presented in this report.

The Technical Working Group on Quality in VET has played an important role in the European cooperation in this field through consensus-building on common and concrete proposals on tools and implementation mechanisms. They have been relaying proposals and recommendations to national policies, launching and monitoring practical initiatives at national level, stock taking from existing good practices at national level, and organising and implementing 'peer learning' visits on concrete issues.

This role became possible to a large extent due to the profile of the members, who combine in the majority of cases, effective expertise and institutional capacity, covering both initial and continuing training (this, to a lesser extent).

Further cooperative work aimed at ensuring more extensive, inclusive and sustainable initiatives implies re-thinking the existing organisational and operational settings at different levels. The existing technical working group should therefore be adapted or phased out during 2005.

A platform of exchange of experience, debate and consensus-building at European level (TWG-like) remains necessary in future work in order to foster consistency of initiatives across Europe, raise awareness among the relevant stakeholders, relay monitoring, follow-up and appraisal of such initiatives and ensure networking of national nodal points. This is a key condition in striving for coherence, progress, innovation and sustainability in the field of quality assurance and development in VET.

The future organisational settings for European cooperation in this field should be examined by the Member States and the Commission within their respective competencies, along with the evolving features of the 'Copenhagen' and 'Objectives' processes. This should reflect the links between quality assurance in VET and Higher Education in the perspective of a European Qualification Framework.