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WORK PROGRAMME 2006-2007

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I. BACKGROUND

European cooperation in the field of Quality Assurance (QA) in Vocational Education and Training (VET) aims at increasing effective progress towards achieving the Lisbon goals and 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.

Achieving the Lisbon goals and the target set by the Barcelona European Council requires great synergy between initiative's at European level and effective commitment from Member States and participating countries, not only to the process of implementing a coherent approach to quality assurance, but also to the process of encouraging and supporting each other's endeavours to achieve common goals.

The process of European cooperation **on quality assurance in VET** was initiated by the Council Resolution of December 2002 **on enhanced cooperation in VET**¹, followed by the 'Copenhagen Declaration'². It has been acting as a lever in improving quality assurance of national VET systems, through exchange of experience, debate and consensus building towards the development of common principles and guidelines, as well in fostering the emergence of pilot initiatives at both national and European level.

The European Network on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training was established by the European Commission – Directorate General Education and Culture, with the support of Member States, candidate countries, EFTA-EEA countries and the Social Partners. Launched in Dublin in October 2005³, its creation is in line with the recommendations of the Technical Working Group on quality in VET (TWG)⁴ in its 2004 Progress Report⁵.

The establishment of the European Network is a milestone towards the sustainability of European co-operation in the field of quality assurance in VET and provides an instrument enabling appropriate follow-up to the Council Conclusions of May and October 2004⁶. These invite Member States and the Commission, within their respective competencies, to promote the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF)⁷ through practical initiatives; to use common instruments, references and principles to support the reform and development of VET systems and practices; and to increase the relevance and quality of VET through the systematic involvement of all relevant partners in developments at national, regional and local level.

¹ Council Resolution of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training on the Promotion of Enhanced European Co-operation in VET, December 2002.

² Declaration adopted by the ministers responsible for VET from the European Union and candidate countries, and endorsed by the Social Partners at European level in Copenhagen, on 29 and 30 November 2002.

³ Conference on 'Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (VET): Building Sustainable European Co-operation', organised by the Irish authorities in Dublin, on 3 October 2005, with the support of the European Commission (please see WWW.QAVET.COM).

⁴ Technical Working Group set up by the Commission in 2003 in order to implement the priority given to quality assurance in VET, within the process of Promoting Enhanced European Co-operation in VET.

⁵ 'QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VET: Technical Working Group progress report', Dec 2004, p. 28.

⁶ Education Council Conclusions of 28 of May 2004, on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training; 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), of 29 October 2004 (Review of the Council Resolution of 19 December 2002).

⁷ The CQAF is a reference system designed by the TWG within the process of European Co-operation on Quality Assurance in VET and based on the findings of an inventory and analysis of QA systems in the EU, conducted by the group in 2003. Its aim is to help Member States and participating countries to develop, improve, monitor and evaluate their own systems and practices, on the basis of common principles, criteria and tools.

The Network is a platform of exchange of experience, debate and consensus-building on concrete proposals at European level, aimed at fostering consistency of policies and practical initiatives within and across countries. It will raise awareness and promote networking among the relevant stakeholders at different levels.

While guided by the principles that underpinned the role and functioning of the former Technical Working Group on quality assurance in VET, the role and approach of the Network compared to the former TWG should be progressively elucidated. To launch its activity, the Network set up its 'principles and governance guidelines'.⁸

European co-operation must be able to rely on sustainable and effective commitment of Member states and participating countries in implementing concrete actions. Appropriate and effective mechanisms and tools are required to blend and connect developments at both the national and the European level.

Member States and national stakeholders need to be motivated and supported, while concrete actions need to be planned, implemented, coordinated, and monitored at a national, regional and local level to ensure maximum coherence and consistency. To ensure close connection between developmental work and debate on the European level with real practice, i.e. VET systems and providers, national networking should support the European Network through 'QA reference points'.

The Network should therefore anchor on such reference points, which would act as a relay for different networks involving stakeholders from all QA VET systems (initial, continuing, adult, private and public), including the provider's level. This is a key condition in striving for coherence, progress, innovation, sustainability and ownership of quality assurance in the VET field.

European co-operation in VET is a voluntary process. Its effectiveness depends on the recognition of its added value in supporting national policies and initiatives to improve the quality of the VET systems. The Network should act as an 'umbrella' for various initiatives and thematic work reflecting the priorities, needs and concerns of a wide range of stakeholders at systems and providers levels and work out concrete answers, to be implemented at the appropriate levels.

The Network's Work programme (WP) has been drawn up by the Network's board. It takes over the Recommendations of the former TWG in its 2004 Report, as well as the contributions from the Network members, Cedefop and external experts. It has been finalised following the Network meeting from February 2006.

The WP covers the time period of 2006-2007. Nevertheless, the activities for 2007 will be reviewed following an appraisal of the 2006 outcomes and working methods. Furthermore, while opening up to a wide range of possible means to further promote European co-operation, in its 'Road Map' the WP focus on a limited number of activities which combine, in a realistic way, both needs and resources available.

Finally, the period covered by the current WP will also be used to lay the ground for a longer run strategic and sustainable approach to the Network's activity.

II. AIMS AND TARGETS

The Network's overall aim is to give appropriate follow-up to the Council conclusions of May and October 2004, and in particular by,

⁸ Please see 'European Network on Quality Assurance in VET : guiding principles and governance', the Board, February 2006.

- Promoting the use of the CQAF on a voluntary basis
- Fostering cooperative, inclusive and voluntary networks, at all levels.

Thereby, the Network should contribute to:

- Enhance quality assurance and development of VET systems
- Making it easy to identify the quality of VET provision and of learning outcomes within and across countries
- Increase responsiveness of VET-systems, sectors and stakeholders, to changing demands
- Foster a culture of data collection, evaluation and feedback on the quality of VET provision
- Encourage the take over of European policy goals, including issues of equity, in quality assurance approaches within countries.

The specific aims for the Network's 2006-2007 WP are:

- Promote cooperative, inclusive and voluntary networks, enabling structured exchange of experiences, project development and mutual learning within and across countries
- Foster practical initiatives and transfer of experience, involving in particular the 'new Member States' and the pre-accession countries, based on the use of the CQAF
- Promote the identification of national 'QA reference points'
- Encourage coordination of QA initiatives by the relevant stakeholders at all levels
- Plan towards a Work Programme for 2008/9 and clarify funding arrangements to cover this period.

By the end of 2007, a review of the CQAF should be undertaken, in the light of its application in Member States and participating countries, and the progress made in linking with HE. A 'light' mid term review could take place by the end of 2006, based on its applications to date.

To meet its aims, the Network will build on the achievements made to date through European co-operation⁹:

- A reference framework (CQAF)¹⁰, which complies with the core elements of the main existing QA models and provides a commonly agreed methodology, qualitative and quantitative indicators and criteria for reviewing existing models, as well as practical tools such as, for example, a self-assessment guide
- A number of principles underpinning the implementation of initiatives: mutual learning, consensus building, bottom up approach, inclusiveness, voluntary based initiatives
- A methodology of work: stock taking from existing experience and a particular focus on peer learning visits, associated to cross country analysis
- A number of cases where the outcomes of European co-operation have already been included in policy debate on the reform of VET systems and translated into practical guidelines
- A number of practical initiatives (namely pilot projects), being implemented at both National and European levels
- A community of relevant stakeholders, through the TWG and back up networks at national and regional levels

⁹ For detailed information on previous activities and outputs of European cooperation on quality assurance in VET, please see: <http://communities.trainingvillage.gr/quality>.

¹⁰ Please see 'Fundamentals of a Common Quality Assurance Framework' (CQAF) for VET in Europe, updated version of 29/09/05.

- A virtual Community, aimed at supporting both the Network's work and an information/dissemination strategy linked to European co-operation¹¹.

III. ACTIVITIES

III.1 ACTIVITIES AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

III.1.1 Priority issues

The following priority issues will be addressed within the current WP:

2006	2007
<p><u>Development of QA strategic approaches at national, regional, sectoral and provider levels, complying with the COAF:</u></p> <p><i>1. Involve all relevant stakeholders in all levels and steps of the QA cycle. Focus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>social partners</i> <p><i>2. Strengthen national frameworks governing the relations between internal assessment, external monitoring and quality assurance and development systems. Focus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>instruments to assure and develop the quality of VET providers</i> ▶ <i>outcome standards for VET</i> <p><i>3. Foster the use/fine-tune the reference set of quality indicators. Focus:</i></p> <p>▶ <i>Operationalisation of the set of indicators: identify measurement problems, critical areas for data collection and ways of using indicators to increase the quality of VET systems and providers (including benchmarking) through a pilot application in a limited number of member states (follow-up and further development of the outcomes of the previous peer learning visit in Finland, 2004). Particular attention to be given to indicators on employability and competences.</i></p>	<p><u>Development of QA strategic approaches at national, regional, sectoral and provider levels, complying with the COAF:</u></p> <p><i>1. Involve all relevant stakeholders in all levels and steps of QA cycle. Focus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>teachers and trainers</i> <p><i>2. Strengthen national frameworks governing the relations between internal assessment, external monitoring and quality assurance and development systems.</i></p> <p><i>Focus: to be decided</i></p> <p><i>3. Develop a common framework for data-collection and use of data to increase the quality of VET. Focus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>Operationalisation of the reference set of indicators: exploitation of the results of the pilot application carried out in 2006; fine-tuning of the set of indicators and further application in a wider number of countries.</i> ▶ <i>Further development of 'process indicators' in VET</i> <p><i>4. Identify policy links between funding, quality assurance and development (accountability)</i></p>

¹¹ <http://communities.trainingvillage.gr/quality>

	<i>5. Review of the CQAF</i>
<p><u>Link QA to Innovation in VET</u></p> <p><i>1. Promote quality of learning in enterprise. Focus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>SME's approaches</i> <p><i>2. Increase responsiveness of VET systems, to the needs of sectors and stakeholders. Focus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>SME's quality approaches to in company training (sectors level)</i> ▶ <i>Instruments enabling a better matching between qualification demand and training provision within sectors</i> 	<p><u>Link QA to Innovation in VET</u></p> <p><i>1. Promote quality of learning in enterprise. Focus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>quality approaches applied in enterprises</i> <p><i>2. Increase responsiveness of VET systems to the needs of sectors and stakeholders. Focus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>'client' involvement in goal setting, assessment and review of VET provision</i> ▶ <i>VET providers</i>
<p><u>Cross-fertilisation between QA developments in VET and HE</u></p> <p><i>Identify common issues and areas for joint initiatives:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>conclusions of the First Joint Quality Network Conference on HE and VET (Graz, May 2006) to be determined</i> 	<p><u>Cross-fertilisation between QA developments in VET and HE</u></p> <p><i>Follow up of the results of the Joint Quality Network Conference on HE and VET (Graz, 2006):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>create synergies; develop joint initiatives. To be determined</i>

The issues to be addressed in 2007 will be further considered by the end of 2006. The breakdown of priority issues provides guidance to the organisation of the WP activities. Nevertheless, these may start earlier than indicated and or continue beyond the year of reference.

III.1.2 Activities

The priority issues will be dealt with through different (or a combination of) activities, as appropriate, and according to the nature of their content and prior achievements made at European level:

- Peer learning visits
- Devising common principles, guidelines and criteria (thematic groups)
- Link with the LdV Programme
- Studies, cross country analysis and pilot projects
- Link with HE, EQF and ECTS/ECVET
- Information/Awareness raising

Annexes 1-4 to this WP identify the priority issues where the Network members are actively involved in, and the activities they are explicitly associated to, while contributing, inasmuch as possible, to the implementation of the overall work programme.

III.1.2.1 Peer learning (PL) visits

Peer learning visits carried out in the field of quality assurance in VET, as part of the process of **enhanced cooperation in VET** launched at Copenhagen¹², have proved to be an effective means of supporting mutual learning at systems and institutional levels. They facilitate structured exchange of good practices, activate information flows and enhance knowledge on the different quality systems in Europe, contributing thereby to achieving European objectives. While primarily focused on the identification of transferable elements and transfer conditions of selected 'good practices' for peer countries willing to develop their own policies or policy approaches, peer learning visits also contribute to policy development in the 'host country', through focused and in-depth exchanges with peers.

The peer learning visits remain therefore a core element of the Network's WP. A PL visits programme, to be implemented by countries over 2006-2007, on a voluntary basis, is outlined below. It identifies priority topics as well as the host countries. Likewise the Network itself, this programme is part of the follow-up to the Maastricht Communiqué¹³ and the visits are listed under the heading 'other main measures' in the planning framework for clusters, within the context of the Education and Training 2010 work programme¹⁴

The methodology for the organisation of the visits will follow on from previous experience acquired within both the TWG's work¹⁵ and the implementation of the 'Education and Training 2010 Work programme', together with the first results of the ongoing LdV project "Peer Review in VET"¹⁶.

In short, the CQAF will continue to serve as a "common European language" for the visits - a key to understand the different national systems, the reference for the exchanges of experiences and debates. All parties involved (host and peer countries, as well as social partners) make active contributions to the organisation of the visits. Scientific support is provided by Cedefop, aimed at establishing a comparative analysis **based on the national** contributions. Each visit is therefore supported by a 'cross country analysis' which provides the input to the exchanges and debates, monitoring, assessment and final reporting. Documents and reports are inserted in the Virtual Community on quality assurance, enabling thereby a wide dissemination of results to a larger audience.

Cedefop will provide support to the implementation the PL visits programme within its mission of technical and scientific assistance to the Commission, and according to the terms agreed in its own Work Programme.

¹² please see: <http://communities.trainingvillage.gr/quality>

¹³ Communiqué on the Future Priorities of Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training, December 2004: it went on to detail how priorities at National and European levels, defined by the Education Council Conclusions of 28 of May 2004, should be put into practice (Maastricht, December 2004)

¹⁴ for general information on the 'Education and Training 2010 Work Programme', please see http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/et_2010_en.html

¹⁵ See 'QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VET: Technical Working Group progress report', Dec 2004, p. 9

¹⁶ 'European Peer Review Manual for Initial VET', Leonardo da Vinci project AT/04/C/F/TH - 82000

PEER LEARNING PROGRAMME 2006

<i>Topics</i>	<i>Host Countries</i>
<i>Involve all relevant stakeholders in all levels and steps of the QA cycle: 'Social partners' involvement in QA'</i>	Sweden (possible co-operation with UNICE and CES)
<i>Promote quality of learning in enterprises: 'Quality assurance in initial vocational training in SMEs: the dual system'</i>	Germany
<i>Foster the use/fine-tune the existing set of quality indicators: 'The use of indicators to improve the quality of VET at providers and system levels'</i>	Finland

Additional, up to two peer learning visits on QA in VET and HE could be organised by the Commission – DG Education and Culture, during the second half of 2006, as a follow-up of the “First Joint Quality Network Conference on VET and HE”, which is organised at the initiative of the Austrian Presidency, with the support of the European Commission (Graz, May 2006).

PEER LEARNING VISITS PROGRAMME 2007

(Provisional¹⁷)

<i>Topics</i>	<i>Host Countries</i>
<i>Increase responsiveness of VET systems, to the needs of sectors and stakeholders: 'Setting output/outcome standards to increase the responsiveness of adult education to economic and individual needs (the Label GRETA Plus)'</i>	France
<i>Increase responsiveness of VET systems: 'Involving client-system in goal setting /planning, outcome standards, assessment, feedback mechanisms and review of VET provision'.</i>	Netherlands
<i>Involve all relevant stakeholders in all levels and steps of QA cycle: 'self-assessment and teachers and trainers'</i>	Romania
<i>'Review and improvement of the CQAF'</i>	Hungary

III.1.2.2 Devising common principles, guidelines and criteria: thematic groups

The need for common criteria and principles for quality in vocational education and training was underlined by the Council Resolution (Education, Youth and Culture) on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training (November 2002).

The 2004 Joint interim report of the Council (Education) to the European Council, on the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme¹⁸ 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 assurance¹⁹ (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'²⁰.

Furthermore, the Maastricht Communiqué agrees that, at National level, priority should be given 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 (...).

¹⁷ To be consolidated by the end of 2006

¹⁸ 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.

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

²⁰ idem, Objective 3.5: Strengthening European co-operation.

Devising common principles, guidelines and criteria on specific issues related to quality assurance and development in VET remains therefore a key activity in European co-operation, and in the implementation of the Network's Work Programme.

Based on commonly agreed priority areas, the following thematic groups (TH G), have been established for 2006-2007:

- ▶ **TH G1: 'Instruments to assure and develop the quality of VET providers'**
- ▶ **TH G2: 'Operationalisation of the reference set of quality indicators'**
- ▶ **TH G3: 'Strengthening links between Quality assurance in VET and HE/EQF/ECVET'**

Each thematic group will:

- Define the approach, scope, calendar and expected outcomes of the group's work
- Identify the complementarity between the group's work and other on-going activities on the same topic (eg, Leonardo da Vinci projects, peer learning activities, studies...)
- Set up organisational and operational arrangements
- Report to the GA at its meetings

The thematic groups will build on existing good practices and experience within countries identified by the Network members. The TH Gs activities require technical and scientific support to address conceptual and methodological approaches as well as trans-national dimensions. Common principles, guidelines and criteria would be devised through consensus building and used on a voluntary basis as reference tools to improve the quality of VET within and across countries.

III.1.2.3 Link with the LdV programme

The Leonardo da Vinci Programme is the main instrument to implement VET policy development at European level. The synergy between the programme and the Network's activities and cross-fertilisation of outputs is therefore of the utmost importance. Several initiatives should be taken.

- 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 development. This could mean putting stronger emphasis on the role of NAs in thematic monitoring and further strengthening links between the European Network and the LdV thematic group.
- Focus monitoring and follow-up of LdV projects on the weak points of the quality assurance and development approaches identified namely by the former TWG, the practical applications of the CQAF (i.e. pilot projects, peer learning visits) and the analysis of the results of specific LdV projects.
- **Stock taking of the results of the second phase of the LdV projects on quality management, assurance and development: analysis of the results of specific projects carried out during this phase, complementing the analysis on the first phase²¹.**
- Specific call for pilot projects, to test and foster the use of the CQAF in VET as well as cooperative networking of relevant stakeholders within and across countries, through a number of experimental applications.
- Link with 'mobility projects' and the "Mobility Quality Charter"²².

²¹ Please see 'The systems and mechanisms of quality assurance in vocational training: Analysis of the results of the projects undertaken on this theme under the LEONARDO DA VINCI programme, 1995 to 1999', Cirius (DK), Kim Faurschou, 29-1-2005.

III.1.2.4 Studies and cross country analysis

More in-depth knowledge is required to address some of the priority issues that have been listed before (please see pages 6-7) in a transnational perspective.

In 2006, two studies, initiated in 2005, will be running:

- a study on ‘*cases of good practice in quality in VET and HE*’, launched by the Austrian authorities with the support of the EC
- **Analysis of the SME’s quality approaches to in company training (several sectors, some Member States)**, launched by Cedefop

Besides, the results of a study carried out by Cedefop in 2005, on ‘Targets and output/outcome standards’, will be discussed and disseminated in 2006.

In 2007, the following studies could be launched by the Commission and/or Cedefop:

- **The VET quality approaches in sectors and Member States (follow-up of the Cedefop 2006 study on the same topic).**
- Analysis of results of the LdV projects on QA carried out during the 2nd phase of implementation of the programme
- Identification of policy links between funding, quality assurance and development (accountability)

The launching of further specific studies will depend on needs arising from the implementation of the Work Programme itself, and of resources available.

Moreover, the Network activity must rely mainly upon ‘Cross country analyses’, as supporting and stocktaking tools for peer learning and thematic groups’ activities. These analyses include the identification of ‘good practices’ against the CQAF criteria, comparisons between QA approaches taking into account the relevant societal dimensions, identification of strengths and weaknesses of different models, and drawing proposals among others, on transfer conditions.

In this context, the information on ‘good practices’ is provided mainly by the Network members, and this, according to common agreed criteria. Once collected, country related information is the object of a cross country analysis, made by external experts designated to support the Network’s activity.

III.1.2.5 Link with HE, EQF, and ECTS/ECVET

The development of the European Qualifications Framework in the perspective of the implementation a Life Long Learning policy calls for coherent approaches on Quality assurance across education and training sectors and stresses the need for cross fertilisation and possible joint developments between sectors.

The Austrian Presidency, in co-operation with the European Commission, is taking the initiative of organising a conference in Graz (May 2006) “First Joint Quality Network Conference on VET and HE”. The aim of this conference is to bridge QA in HE and VET and to identify common themes for joint development.

²² Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on transnational mobility within the Community for education and training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility, Brussels, 23.9.2005, COM(2005) 450 final, 2005/0179 (COD)

In preparation for the conference and as ‘guiding input’, a study on common issues in the field of Quality between VET and HE is being carried out on cases of good practice in quality in VET and HE (...) ‘which should take stock of and subsequently analyse:

- quality assurance and development in HE and VET at transnational, national, system and institutional level
- implementation of quality assurance and development systems and approaches in HE and VET in the Member States
- use of tools and activities developed through European cooperation in HE and VET
- existing synergies based on the achievements of quality assurance and development systems in HE and VET
- possible future cooperation models, mutual learning processes and co-operative and voluntary networks between HE and VET in this field
- “weak areas” and ‘strong good practices’ (...)

As a follow-up of the results of both the study and the conference, joint projects could be developed in areas such as:

- quality indicators
- output standards
- external verification: procedures and criteria for accreditation/approval of institutions and/or programmes. ...

Besides the link with HE and the EQF, the role of quality assurance as a supporting element of credit transfer systems (ECTS/ECVET) should be progressively worked out.

III.1.2.6 Information/awareness raising

The involvement of a wider range of stakeholders and countries in the work carried out at European level requires the development of targeted activities within a strategic approach. This could cover:

- Set up common guidelines for an information/dissemination strategy on European cooperation on QA in VET.
- Develop specific actions to reach different types of stakeholders (i.e.: social partners, employment services, regional bodies ...), based on groups specific interests and working contexts.
- Give support to meetings and conferences in Member States, with the participation of experts and different stakeholders’ representatives from other countries.
- Develop practical guidelines and other materials (such as manuals) supporting the use of the CQAF, and in particular, specific materials addressed to teachers and trainers.

In the mid-term, the activities carried out at national level together with the work at European level should allow for the development of a comparative view of the different approaches to QA in the VET-systems in the European Union. Information about the quality approaches in the national VET-systems should increase through future activities. In this perspective, an on-going process of information on national approaches to enhance the quality assurance of VET should be assured at European level: regulations, national/regional/local/sectoral guidelines, reform of VET systems, relevant results of studies and other activities undertaken by the Network

The data collection should, as far as possible, be organised in a comparative perspective, thus laying the ground for enhanced bench-learning activities on European level.

The Virtual Community for Quality Assurance (QA) in VET

The Virtual Community (VC) remains a key element in devising an information/awareness raising strategy on QA at European level. Until now, the former TWG worked as the nucleus for progress on quality issues and for enhanced exchange of experience at European level, whereas the VC has provided for transparency of this process. Going forward, this role should continue and be strengthened. A special section for communication on the network and its activities has been created for this purpose.

Subject to resources available, further information on the different approaches to quality assurance across countries should be systematically collected mainly through the peer learning visits, and treated as appropriate. An existing web tool enables Network members to update their country's information.

The VC has proven its worth as a resource data centre and as a European forum for discussions about quality in VET. This function should be further supported by appropriate monitoring.

Furthermore, the link between the VC and the LdV programme should be strengthened, by:

- Providing potential promoters with both relevant information on policy development at EU level, as well as country specific information.
- Making accessible concrete tools like the CQAF, quality indicators, and the European Self-Assessment Guide.
- Stocktaking from results of specific LdV projects.

The creation of an open website and a real library on quality in VET (hard & soft documentation) could be envisaged in a medium term perspective.

Awareness raising events

As in previous years, a major event (conference) could be hosted each year, by a country. For 2006, Austria is the organising/hosting country.

The main aim of such events is to promote the exchange of good practice and institutional co-operation in quality management and assurance, and promote the use of the CQAF.

Such conferences should also take forward the aim of national bodies to form sustainable and voluntary transnational networking so as to enhance cooperation and mutual trust among EU Member States' VET systems

The outcomes of the initiatives taken at European level should be systematically taken over in different perspectives:

- **the mid-term review of the CQAF**
- **the information/dissemination strategy**
- **the reporting activities to the Director Generals of Vocational Training (DGVT), Advisory Committee for Vocational Training (ACVT), Education & Training 2010 Coordination Group (ETCG), as well as to the biannual report on "Education and Training 2010"**

III.2 ACTIVITIES AT NATIONAL LEVEL

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

European cooperation has been a lever in fostering the implementation of voluntary initiatives at national level based on the use of the CQAF. The sustainability and further expansion of such initiatives rely to a large extent on the commitment of Member States and other participating countries, as well as that of a wide range of stakeholders. The European Network has a key role to play in this regard.

In order to take forward the Council Conclusions of May and October 2004 (see page 4), Member States and participating countries could specifically identify the future concrete actions they are willing to launch together with the relevant stakeholders, as part of the integrated biennial report on "Education and Training 2010". This might include:

- Identifying a 'QA reference point' at national level, enabling overview, monitoring, follow-up, assessment and reporting on concrete initiatives and achievements
- Setting targets at national, local and provider level
- Providing specific resources for the planned initiatives
- 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
- Hosting an international conference, on a priority topic
- Participation in and active contribution to further developments in QA on European level.
- Reporting on initiatives taken as well as on progress made, in Networks' meetings.

III.2.1. QA REFERENCE POINTS

The European Network should be anchored on national reference points that involve/liaise with a wide range of relevant stakeholders (representatives of VET providers, public bodies, social partners, enterprises ...) and ensure follow-up of initiatives as well as dissemination of information at different levels.

Each participating country needs to consider how best identify a QA reference point, according to the national context. In principle, the reference points will be based on/bring together existing relevant bodies and stakeholders but their institutional and financial support needs further consideration, as well as the ways of liaising with the European Network's activities.

At this stage, the Network identified the main tasks of a reference point, as follows:

- Keep the relevant stakeholders informed on the European Network's activities
- Provide support to the implementation of the Network's Work programme
- Promote concrete initiatives to enhance quality assurance and development in VET, using the CQAF as a supporting tool
- Encourage the translation of the CQAF into specific contexts, namely through the development of practical guides, technical and methodological aids/guidance materials
- Raise awareness of key stakeholders to the benefit of using the QA principles, methods and criteria proposed by the CQAF
- Coordinate the organisation of peer learning visits

The organisational setting and functioning arrangements of the QA reference points will be determined by each country. The VC could offer a suitable platform for discussion and exchange of experiences between reference points across countries.

Identifying a QA reference point in each Member State/Country is central to the success of the Network. It is anticipated that over time, while voluntary, a significant number of Member States/Countries will designate an appropriate QA reference point to back up the European Network's activities.

The outcomes of initiatives taken at National level should be systematically included in:

- **the mid-term review of the CQAF**
- **the information/dissemination activities**
- **reporting, linked to the biannual report on "Education and Training 2010"**

IV. FINANCING ARRANGEMENTS

While underlining the need for effective commitment of Member states and participating countries in implementing concrete actions, which can support and relay the Network's work, the current Work Programme focus primarily on initiatives to be implemented at European level.

The implementation of the 2006-2007 WP entails mixed funding arrangements and sources, which will vary, according to the nature of the activities. Given the limited resources available, activities will mainly concentrate on agreed PL visits (with the support of participating countries, CEDEFOP and the European Commission), the launch of a limited number of thematic groups (with the support of the European Commission and participating countries), links with existing/new projects (namely the LdV programme), the development of some information tools (with the support of CEDEFOP), support/participation in Presidency initiatives (contribution from the European Commission).

Nevertheless, in order to assure the effectiveness and sustainability of European cooperation, the Network should be able to define aims and plan activities on a longer run perspective. Financing is therefore a critical issue that needs further clarification over time.

Besides the implementation of the present WP, The Network's activity in 2006-2007 should allow for significant forward planning towards a Work Programme for 2008-2009 and the preparation for applying for a block grant to cover this period.

V. OPERATIONAL PLAN

Based on the priorities and activities outlined in the Work Programme an Operational Plan (formerly an annex to the WP) has been prepared by the Board for 2006-7. The Operational Plan

will be updated regularly in line with the Work Programme. The most up to date version of the Operational Plan will be available on the VC website.