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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Accompanying document to the

Proposal for a

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

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

IMPACT ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

**[SEC(2008) 440
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SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE REFERENCE FRAMEWORK FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (EQARF)

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

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

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

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

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

The Framework comprises:

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

¹ For the purposes of the Recommendation, definitions which apply are based on Cedefop's Glossary on Quality in Training (working paper, November 2003) <http://communities.trainingvillage.gr/quality>

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

The impact assessment examines five possible options.

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

The Commission, in comparing the strengths and weaknesses of the above options, has elected to propose option 4, which would enable in co-operation with the Member States and the social partners, to address the challenges identified and find appropriate solutions. This option, which also corresponds most closely to Member States' and stakeholders'

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expectations, would provide the best basis for the successful implementation of the Framework and for achieving its real added value in terms of increased effectiveness, better consistency of quality developments between countries and enhanced transparency of VET systems, thereby supporting mobility and lifelong learning. It would also be consistent with the approach taken under the EQF and ECVET initiatives.

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

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

Quality Assurance: What is involved?

- (1) *The effectiveness and efficiency of training provision in meeting the evolving needs of society, the economy and individuals, has to be regularly evaluated, monitored and improved, on the basis of evidence.*
- (2) *Quality assurance is a means to achieve this. It is to be seen as an instrument for continuous improvement of VET, based on a quality cycle establishing the appropriate interrelation between planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment and review of VET. Quality assurance should therefore imply a systematic approach. It should also include ways in which the performance of VET can be managed and monitored, and use measurement to support review and improvement of VET at system and provider levels.*
- (3) *This approach to quality assurance is reflected in the general principles for quality assurance in education and training contained in Annex 3 to the Recommendation on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). It also underpins the establishment of the Framework.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Framework should be a flexible instrument capable of developing further as a result of practical experience, at both European and national levels. The CQAF approach was endorsed by the Council.

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

The Framework is proposed on the basis of Article 149 and Article 150 of the EC Treaty. These articles provide that the Community supports the action of the Member States in the

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

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

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

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

field of education and vocational training and explicitly refer that "the Community shall contribute to the development of quality education" and that "Community action shall aim to (...) improve initial and continuing vocational training (...)". Furthermore, the Treaty refers that the activities of the Community shall include a contribution to education and training of quality⁷.

⁷ Article 3, paragraph 1, (q).