

Maastricht Communiqué
on the Future Priorities of Enhanced European Cooperation
in Vocational Education and Training (VET)
(Review of the Copenhagen Declaration of 30 November 2002)

- On 14 December 2004, in Maastricht, the Ministers responsible for Vocational Education and Training of 32 European countries¹, the European Social Partners and the European Commission agreed to strengthen their cooperation with a view to
- modernising their vocational education and training systems in order for Europe to become the most competitive economy, and
- offering all Europeans, whether they are young people, older workers, unemployed or disadvantaged, the qualifications and competences they need to be fully integrated into the emerging knowledge based society, contributing to more and better jobs.

POLITICAL CONTEXT AND PROGRESS

The Council (Education, Youth and Culture) agreed on 12 November 2002 a Resolutionⁱ on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training. This was then endorsed by the Ministers of Vocational Education and Training of the EU Member States, the EFTA/EEA and candidate countries (the participating countries), the Commission and the European Social Partners at their meeting in Copenhagen on 29-30 November 2002, as the strategy for improving the performance, quality and attractiveness of VET (Copenhagen Declaration).

The Council and Commission Joint Interim Reportⁱⁱ *‘Education and Training 2010’* to the Spring 2004 European Council summarises the first concrete results of the Copenhagen process, and recognises its role in encouraging reform, supporting lifelong learning and developing mutual trust between key players and between countries.

The Interim Report calls for the development of European common references and principles as a matter of priority, and their implementation at national level, taking account of national situations and respecting national competences. Since November 2002, the Council has reached political agreement on a number of concrete results emanating from enhanced cooperation in VET and lifelong learning, in particular in relation to human capital for social cohesion and competitivenessⁱⁱⁱ, guidance throughout life^{iv}, principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning^v, quality assurance in VET^{vi} and the Europass single framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences.

In February 2002, the European social partners launched a cooperation process by adopting a Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications^{vii}. Through the annual follow-up reports, employers and trade unions make a concrete contribution to the Lisbon strategy.

In two years the Copenhagen process has succeeded in raising the visibility and profile of VET at the European level and in the Lisbon strategy. Participating countries and stakeholders have come to a common understanding of the specific challenges at stake, have agreed on strategies to address these challenges, and have developed concrete means to support their implementation.

¹ From the 25 EU countries plus the 4 candidates countries and the 3 EFTA/EEA countries (i.e. the same countries that were in Copenhagen plus Croatia).

CHALLENGES IN ORDER TO MEET THE LISBON OBJECTIVES

The Copenhagen process will continue to set political priorities for achieving the Lisbon objectives in the field of VET, within the context of the *Education and Training 2010* work programme. The strengthening of VET at the European and national levels, through voluntary and bottom up cooperation, should be an essential component for the achievement of a genuine European labour market and a competitive economy, alongside the legislative regime for the recognition of professional qualifications and the European Employment Strategy. However, greater emphasis should be placed on action to implement agreed objectives at national level, taking into account common European references and principles. In reviewing the focus of the Copenhagen process for 2005-6, full consideration has also been given to the challenges highlighted by the study^{viii} commissioned by the European Commission to assess progress of VET systems and by the Kok reports 2003^{ix} and 2004^x. These challenges include adequately reflecting changes in the labour market which have an impact on the nature of developments in the field of VET.

The Joint Interim Report identifies a number of levers and priorities for reform in key areas, to make European education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010 and lifelong learning a concrete reality for all. These include the need to mobilise the necessary investments effectively and to focus on the development of key competences of citizens throughout life, for example learning to learn, innovate and develop a spirit of enterprise.

The necessary reforms and investment should be focused particularly on:

- the image and attractiveness of the vocational route for employers and individuals, in order to increase participation in VET.
- achieving high levels of quality and innovation in VET systems in order to benefit all learners and make European VET globally competitive.
- linking VET with the labour market requirements of the knowledge economy for a highly skilled workforce, and especially, due to the strong impact of demographic change, the upgrading and competence development of older workers.
- the needs of low-skilled (about 80 million persons aged between 25-64 years in the EU) and disadvantaged groups for the purpose of achieving social cohesion and increasing labour market participation.

VET is increasingly taking place at all educational levels and, therefore, the parity of esteem and links between VET and general education, in particular with higher education, need to be fostered by innovative strategies and instruments at the national and European levels. This should include designing VET systems which attract more students to higher qualifications. This will contribute to innovation and competitiveness.

THE NATIONAL LEVEL: STRENGTHENING THE CONTRIBUTION OF VET SYSTEMS, INSTITUTIONS, ENTERPRISES AND SOCIAL PARTNERS TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE LISBON GOALS^{xi}

PRIORITY SHOULD BE GIVEN TO:

- i) the use of common instruments, references and principles to support the reform and development of VET systems and practices, for example regarding transparency (Europass), guidance throughout life, quality assurance and identification and validation of non-formal

and informal learning. This should include the strengthening of mutual links between these instruments and the raising of stakeholders' awareness at national, regional and local levels in Member States to enhance visibility and mutual understanding;

- ii) improving public and/or private investment in VET, including by public–private partnerships and, where appropriate, by the "training incentive effects of tax and benefit systems"^{xii} as recommended by the Lisbon European Council;
- iii) the use of the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund to support the development of VET. Subject to an agreement on the future EU structural funds, and in accordance with the policy orientations of those funds during 2007-2013, they should support the key role of education and training in promoting economic development and social cohesion, as well as the "Education and Training 2010" objectives, in particular the needs of small and medium sized enterprises, the innovative reform of VET systems and the related challenges of, on the one hand, equipping young people with the key competences they will require throughout life and, on the other, renewing and updating the skills of an ageing population.
- iv) the further development of VET systems to meet the needs of people or groups at risk of labour market and social exclusion, in particular early school leavers, low skilled, migrants, persons with disabilities and the unemployed. This should be based on a combination of targeted investment, assessment of prior learning and tailored training and learning provision.
- v) the development and implementation of open learning approaches, enabling people to define individual pathways, supported by appropriate guidance and counselling. This should be complemented by the establishment of flexible and open frameworks for VET in order to reduce barriers between VET and general education, and increase progression between initial and continuing training and higher education. In addition, action should be taken to integrate mobility into initial and continuing training
- vi) the increased relevance and quality of VET through the systematic involvement of all key partners in developments at national, regional and local level, particularly regarding quality assurance. To that effect, VET institutions should be enabled and encouraged to participate in relevant partnerships. More emphasis on the early identification of skills needs and planning of VET provision is particularly important and key partners, including the social partners, will play a major role in this.
- vii) the further development of learning-conducive environments in training institutions and at the workplace. This entails enhancement and implementation of pedagogical approaches which support self-organised learning and utilise the potential provided by ICT and e-learning, thus improving the quality of training.
- viii) continuing competence development of teachers and trainers in VET, reflecting their specific learning needs and changing role as a consequence of the development of VET

THE EUROPEAN LEVEL: DEVELOPING TRANSPARENCY, QUALITY AND MUTUAL TRUST TO FACILITATE A GENUINE EUROPEAN LABOUR MARKET^{xiii}

PRIORITY SHOULD BE GIVEN TO:

- i) the consolidation of priorities of the Copenhagen process and facilitating the implementation of the concrete results.
- ii) the development of an open and flexible European qualifications framework, founded on transparency and mutual trust. The framework will provide a common reference to facilitate the recognition and transferability of qualifications covering both VET and general (secondary and higher) education, based mainly on competences and learning outcomes. It will improve permeability within education and training systems, provide a reference for the validation of informally acquired competences and support the smooth and effective functioning of the European, national and sectoral labour markets. The framework should be underpinned by a set of common reference levels. It should be supported by instruments agreed at European level, particularly quality assurance mechanisms to create the necessary mutual trust. The framework should facilitate the voluntary development of competence based solutions at the European level enabling sectors to address the new education and training challenges caused by the internationalisation of trade and technology.
- iii) the development and implementation of the European credit transfer system for VET (ECVET) in order to allow learners to build upon the achievements resulting from their learning pathways when moving between learning systems. ECVET will be based on competences and learning outcomes, taking account of their definition at national or sectoral levels. It will take into account the experience of the ECTS in the field of higher education and the Europass framework. The practical implementation should include the development of voluntary agreements between VET providers throughout Europe. The system will be broad-based and flexible to enable its progressive implementation at the national level, with priority given initially to the formal learning system.
- iv) the examination of the specific learning needs and changing role of vocational teachers and trainers and of the possibilities of making their profession more attractive including continuous updating of their professional skills. Teachers and trainers should be supported in their essential role as innovators and facilitators in the learning environment. A coherent framework should be envisaged to support the improvement of the quality of vocational teaching and training.
- v) the improvement of the scope, precision and reliability of VET statistics in order to enable evaluation of progress in making VET efficient, effective and attractive. Adequate data and indicators are the key to understanding what is happening in VET and what additional interventions and decision-making are required by all parties involved.

IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOW UP

- i) All actors in the field of VET - providers, employers, trade unions, branch organisations, chambers of commerce, industry or crafts, employment services, regional bodies and networks, etc. – are invited to take their responsibilities and to contribute to making effective the implementation of the Copenhagen process at all levels. National networks on

- which all relevant stakeholders, especially ministries, social partners and regional authorities, are represented should be established.
- ii) In accordance with the Joint Interim Report, the education and training processes should be rationalised and streamlined at European level by bringing the priorities of the above conclusions and the Copenhagen process groups within the framework of the Education and Training 2010 work programme. This should be based on the experience of working methods under the Copenhagen process.
 - iii) The Advisory Committee on Vocational Training will be fully involved in the implementation and follow up.
 - iv) Proposals for a European Qualifications Framework and European Credit Transfer System for VET should be prepared and examined.
 - v) A coherent approach and closer cooperation should be developed, both at national and European level, with:
 - Higher Education, including developments under the Bologna process
 - European Economic, Employment, Sustainable Development and Social Inclusion Policies (in terms of guidelines and National Action Plans)
 - Pre-accession instruments and funds
 - and between research, practice and policy by networking and exchange of innovation and good examples of policy and practice.
 - vi) Information on progress made and future actions for development of VET, involving all relevant stakeholders at national level, should be provided as part of the integrated biennial report on Education and Training 2010 in the context of implementing national lifelong learning strategies. This should incorporate the above national level priorities and provide the basis for stimulating the exchange of experience not only between participating countries but also between social partners and other relevant stakeholders on a transnational basis.
 - vii) Closer links should be developed with the social partners at European, national, regional and sectoral levels, taking into account the work priorities defined in their framework of actions for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications.
 - viii) Effective and full use will be made of Leonardo da Vinci and the future integrated action programme in the field of lifelong learning to support the development, testing, and implementation of innovative actions to advance VET reform.
 - ix) Cedefop and ETF will continue to support the implementation of the Copenhagen process and use their networks (e.g. ReferNet, National Observatories) and electronic media, to assist with reporting, monitoring progress, and exchange of experience, in particular through:
 - the dissemination of good policy and practice in lifelong learning
 - the mapping of sectoral activities
 - the use of the Leonardo da Vinci study visits to support mutual learning and peer review.

- x) Another Ministerial meeting will be held in two years, to evaluate implementation and to review priorities and strategies for VET within the Education and Training 2010 work programme.

ⁱ Finally adopted on 19 December 2002, JO C13, p. 2-4, 18.1.2003

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

ⁱⁱⁱ 14354/03 EDUC 167 SOC 438, November 2003

^{iv} 9286/04 EDUC 109 SOC 179, May 2004

^v 9600/04 EDUC 118 SOC 253, May 2004

^{vi} 9599/04 EDUC 117 SOC 252, May 2004

^{vii} ETUC, UNICE, UEAPME, CEEP, 28 February 2002

^{viii} Achieving the Lisbon goals: The contribution of VET, October 2004

^{ix} ‘Jobs, Jobs, Jobs’, Report of the Employment Taskforce, November 2003

^x ‘Facing the challenge: The Lisbon strategy for growth and employment’ Report of the Kok High Level Group on the Lisbon Strategy, November, 2004

^{xi} Corresponding to priority levers one and two of the Interim Report: “Focus reform and investment on the key areas” and “Make lifelong learning a concrete reality”

^{xii} Presidency Conclusions - point 23.

^{xiii} Corresponding to priority lever three of the Joint Interim Report: “Establish a Europe of education and training”.