I

(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

RECOMMENDATIONS

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND COUNCIL

RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

of 18 June 2009

on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training

(Text with EEA relevance)

(2009/C 155/01)

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 149(4) and Article 150(4) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee (¹),

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions (²),

Acting in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 251 of the Treaty (³),

Whereas:

(1) The transition to a knowledge-based economy (Lisbon European Council 2000) requires modernisation and continuous improvement of vocational education and training (VET) systems in response to rapid change in the economy and society, so that they can help increase employability and social inclusion and improve access to lifelong learning for all, including disadvantaged people.

(2) The Barcelona European Council in 2002 set the target of making Europe's education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010.

(3) The Lisbon Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs 2005-2008 call upon Member States to develop affordable, accessible lifelong learning systems responsive to the changing needs of the knowledge-based economy and society. Adaptation and capacity-building of education and training systems is necessary to improve their labour market relevance. The objectives set in education and training policy should therefore increasingly complement those of economic and labour market policy in order to combine social cohesion and competitiveness.

(4) Following the Council Resolution of 19 December 2002 on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training (⁴) (the Copenhagen process), and as an outcome of subsequent cooperative work between the Commission, the Member States, social partners, the EEA-EFTA and the candidate countries on the Quality Assurance priority, a Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) has been developed, taking account of existing experience and 'good practice' in the different participating countries.

(5) According to the 2004 joint interim report of the Council and the Commission to the European Council on the Education and Training 2010 Work

Programme ([1]), the CQAF for the VET (as part of the follow-up to the Copenhagen Declaration) and the development of 'an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance' ([2]) (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.

(6) The Education Council in May 2004 ([3]) endorsed the CQAF approach and invited Member States and the Commission, within their respective competencies, to promote it on a voluntary basis, together with relevant stakeholders.

(7) The European Network for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training ([4]) provided a European platform that made possible appropriate follow-up to the Council Conclusions of 2004 and the Helsinki Communiqué, and facilitated sustainable cooperation between countries.

(8) In 2006, the Helsinki Communiqué underlined the need to further develop and implement common European tools specifically aimed at VET, by drawing on the principles underlying a CQAF, as referred to in the May 2004 Council Conclusions on quality assurance in VET, in order to promote a culture of quality improvement and wider participation in the European Network for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training.

(9) This recommendation establishes a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (the Framework) as a reference instrument to help Member States to promote and monitor continuous improvement of their VET systems based on common European references, which builds on and further develops the CQAF. The framework should contribute to quality improvement in VET and to increased transparency of, and consistency in, VET policy developments between Member States, thereby promoting mutual trust, mobility of workers and learners, and lifelong learning.

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

(11) The framework should be applied at the VET-system, VET-provider and qualification-awarding levels. It provides a systemic approach to quality, covering and interrelating the relevant levels and actors. The framework should give strong emphasis to monitoring and improving quality by combining internal and external evaluation, review and processes for improvement, supported by measurement and qualitative analysis. The framework should be a basis for further development through cooperation at European, national, regional and local levels.

(12) In providing for concrete means to support an evaluation and quality-improvement culture at all levels, this recommendation contributes to the use of evidence-based policy and practice, as a basis for more efficient and equitable policies, in accordance with the 2006 Conclusions of the Council and the representatives of the governments of the Member States on efficiency and equity in European education and training systems ([5]).

(13) This recommendation provides for a framework for the identification, support and exchange of best practices not only at national but also at local and regional levels in all relevant networks, including the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework network.

(14) This recommendation takes into account the 'Common Principles for Quality Assurance in Education and Training' that are included in Annex III to the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning ([6]) (EQF). The Framework should therefore support the implementation of the EQF, in particular the quality of the certification of learning outcomes. It should also support the implementation of other European instruments, such as the European Credit System for VET, and the Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

(15) Given its non-binding nature, this recommendation conforms to the principle of subsidiarity referred to in Article 5 of the Treaty insofar as its objective is to support and supplement Member States' action by facilitating further cooperation between them to increase

([1]) OJ C 104, 30.4.2004, p. 1.
([2]) 'Realising the European Higher Education Area': Communiqué from the Conference of Ministers responsible for higher education, Berlin, 19 September 2003.
([3]) Council Conclusions on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training, 28 May 2004.
([4]) The European Network for Quality Assurance in VET was established in October 2005 by the Commission following the favourable opinion of the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training. Its members have been designated by Member States, candidate countries, EFTA-EEA countries and the European Social Partners' organisations, in accordance with an explicit procedure.

([5]) OJ C 298, 8.12.2006, p. 3.
([6]) OJ C 111, 6.5.2008, p. 1.

transparency of VET and to promote mobility and lifelong learning. It should be implemented in accordance with national legislation and practice. This recommendation conforms to the principle of proportionality referred to in that article because it does not replace or define national quality assurance systems. The Framework does not prescribe a particular quality assurance system or approach, but provides common principles, quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators that may help in assessing and improving existing systems and provision of VET.

(16) The reference indicators proposed in Annex II are intended to support the evaluation and quality improvement of VET systems and/or providers in accordance with national legislation and practice, and to serve as a 'toolbox' from which the various users may choose the indicators they consider most relevant to the requirements of their particular quality assurance system. In terms of their nature and purpose, they should be distinguished from the indicators and benchmarks referred to in the Council conclusions of 25 May 2007 on a coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks for monitoring progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training (¹).

(17) The framework, if used and further developed by the Member States, could help them to further improve and develop their VET systems, support lifelong learning strategies, further European labour market integration and the implementation of the EQF and promote a culture of quality improvement at all levels, while respecting the rich diversity of national education systems.

(18) This recommendation should contribute to modernising education and training systems, improving the effectiveness of training by seeking to ensure that people do not leave without qualifications, improving the inter-relationship of education, training and employment, building bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning and expanding the awarding of qualifications on the basis of experience acquired,

HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT MEMBER STATES:

1. use and further develop the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (the Framework), quality criteria, indicative descriptors and reference indicators as set out and further described in Annexes I and II, to further improve and develop their VET systems, support lifelong learning strategies and the implementation of the EQF and

of the European Quality Charter for Mobility, and promote a culture of quality improvement and innovation at all levels. Extra emphasis should be placed on the transition from VET to higher education;

2. each devise, not later than 18 June 2011, an approach aimed at improving quality assurance systems at national level, where appropriate, and making best use of the framework, involving the social partners, regional and local authorities, and all other relevant stakeholders in accordance with national legislation and practice;

3. participate actively in the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework network (the framework network) as a basis for further development of common principles, reference criteria and indicators, guidelines and tools for quality improvement in VET at national, regional and local levels, as appropriate;

4. establish, where this does not already exist, a Quality Assurance National Reference Point for VET that is linked to the particular structures and requirements of each Member State and that, in accordance with national practice, brings together existing relevant bodies and involves the social partners and all stakeholders concerned at national and regional levels, in order to ensure the follow-up of initiatives. The reference points should:

— keep a wide range of stakeholders informed about the activities of the framework network,

— provide active support for the implementation of the work programme of the framework network,

— take concrete initiatives to promote further development of the framework in the national context,

— support self-evaluation as a complementary and effective means of quality assurance which allows the measurement of success and the identification of areas for improvement in respect of the implementation of the work programme of the framework network,

— ensure that information is disseminated to stakeholders effectively;

5. undertake a review of the implementation process every four years — such review to be incorporated into every second national progress report drawn up within the context of the future strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training — on the basis of reference criteria to be defined under the framework network in cooperation with the Commission and the Member States.

(¹) OJ C 311, 21.12.2007, p. 13.

ENDORSE THE COMMISSION'S INTENTION TO:

1. support Member States in carrying out the above tasks, in particular by facilitating cooperation and mutual learning, testing and developing guidance material, and providing information on quality developments in VET across Member States;

2. promote and participate together with the Member States in the framework network, contributing to policy development in this area through concrete proposals and initiatives, as appropriate;

3. ensure follow-up to the implementation of this recommendation by presenting a report every four years to the European Parliament and the Council on the experience gained and implications for the future, including, if necessary, a review of this recommendation conducted in cooperation with the Member States and involving the various stakeholders;

4. undertake, on the basis of that report and in cooperation with the Member States, an evaluation of the implementation of this recommendation and, if necessary, its revision.

Done at Brussels, 18 June 2009.

For the European Parliament	*For the Council*
The President	*The President*
H.-G. PÖTTERING	Štefan FÜLE

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INTRODUCTION TO THE ANNEXES

This recommendation establishes a European quality assurance reference framework ('the framework') which comprises a quality assurance and improvement cycle (planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment and review/revision) based on a selection of quality criteria, descriptors and indicators applicable to quality management at both VET-system and VET-provider levels. The aim is not to introduce new standards, but to support Member States' efforts, whilst preserving the diversity of their approaches.

The Framework should be regarded rather as a 'toolbox', from which the various users may choose those descriptors and indicators that they consider most relevant to the requirements of their particular quality assurance system.

The proposed descriptors (Annex I) and indicators (Annex II) are provided as guidance only and may be selected and applied by users of the Framework in accordance with all or part of their requirements and existing settings.

They may be applied to initial vocational training (IVT) and/or continuous vocational training (CVT), depending on the relevant individual characteristics of each Member State's VET system and the type of VET providers.

They are to be used on a purely voluntary basis, taking account of their potential added value and in accordance with national legislation and practice. They should be considered neither as benchmarks, nor as a means of reporting on, or drawing comparisons between, the quality and efficiency of different national systems. The responsibility for monitoring the quality of these systems remains entirely with the Member States.

ANNEX I

THE EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE REFERENCE FRAMEWORK: QUALITY CRITERIA AND INDICATIVE DESCRIPTORS (¹)

This annex proposes common quality criteria and indicative descriptors to support Member States, as they deem appropriate, when implementing the Framework (²).

Quality Criteria	Indicative descriptors at VET-system level	Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level
Planning reflects a strategic vision shared by the relevant stakeholders and includes explicit goals/objectives, actions and indicators	Goals/objectives of VET are described for the medium and long terms, and linked to European goals	European, national and regional VET policy goals/objectives are reflected in the local targets set by the VET providers
	The relevant stakeholders participate in setting VET goals and objectives at the different levels	Explicit goals/objectives and targets are set and monitored
	Targets are established and monitored through specific indicators (success criteria)	Ongoing consultation with relevant stakeholders takes place to identify specific local/individual needs
	Mechanisms and procedures have been established to identify training needs	Responsibilities in quality management and development have been explicitly allocated
	An information policy has been devised to ensure optimum disclosure of quality results/outcomes subject to national/regional data protection requirements	There is an early involvement of staff in planning, including with regard to quality development
	Standards and guidelines for recognition, validation and certification of competences of individuals have been defined	Providers plan cooperative initiatives with other VET providers
		The relevant stakeholders participate in the process of analysing local needs
		VET providers have an explicit and transparent quality assurance system in place
Implementation plans are devised in consultation with stakeholders and include explicit principles	Implementation plans are established in cooperation with social partners, VET providers and other relevant stakeholders at the different levels	Resources are appropriately internally aligned/assigned with a view to achieving the targets set in the implementation plans
	Implementation plans include consideration of the resources required, the capacity of the users and the tools and guidelines needed for support	Relevant and inclusive partnerships are explicitly supported to implement the actions planned
	Guidelines and standards have been devised for implementation at different levels	The strategic plan for staff competence development specifies the need for training for teachers and trainers
	Implementation plans include specific support towards the training of teachers and trainers	Staff undertake regular training and develop cooperation with relevant external stakeholders to support capacity building and quality improvement, and to enhance performance
	VET providers' responsibilities in the implementation process are explicitly described and made transparent	
	A national and/or regional quality assurance framework has been devised and includes guidelines and quality standards at VET-provider level to promote continuous improvement and self-regulation	

(¹) For the purposes of this recommendation, definitions which apply are based on Cedefop's Glossary on Quality in Training (working paper, November 2003).
(²) A further set of selected quality indicators is detailed in Annex II.

Quality Criteria	Indicative descriptors at VET-system level	Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level
Evaluation of outcomes and processes is regularly carried out and supported by measurement	A methodology for evaluation has been devised, covering internal and external evaluation	Self-assessment/self-evaluation is periodically carried out under national and regional regulations/frameworks or at the initiative of VET providers
	Stakeholder involvement in the monitoring and evaluation process is agreed and clearly described	Evaluation and review covers processes and results/outcomes of education including the assessment of learner satisfaction as well as staff performance and satisfaction
	The national/regional standards and processes for improving and assuring quality are relevant and proportionate to the needs of the sector	Evaluation and review includes adequate and effective mechanisms to involve internal and external stakeholders
	Systems are subject to self-evaluation, internal and external review, as appropriate	Early warning systems are implemented
	Early warning systems are implemented	
	Performance indicators are applied	
	Relevant, regular and coherent data collection takes place, in order to measure success and identify areas for improvement. Appropriate data collection methodologies have been devised, e.g. questionnaires and indicators/metrics	
Review	Procedures, mechanisms and instruments for undertaking reviews are defined at all levels	Learners' feedback is gathered on their individual learning experience and on the learning and teaching environment. Together with teachers' feedback this is used to inform further actions
	Processes are regularly reviewed and action plans for change devised. Systems are adjusted accordingly	Information on the outcomes of the review is widely and publicly available
	Information on the outcomes of evaluation is made publicly available	Procedures on feedback and review are part of a strategic learning process in the organisation
		Results/outcomes of the evaluation process are discussed with relevant stakeholders and appropriate action plans are put in place

ANNEX II

A REFERENCE SET OF SELECTED QUALITY INDICATORS FOR ASSESSING QUALITY IN VET

This Annex proposes a comprehensive set of selected quality indicators which can be used to support the evaluation and quality improvement of VET systems and/or VET providers. The set of indicators will be further developed through European cooperation on a bilateral and/or multilateral basis, building on European data and national registers.

In terms of their nature and purpose, they should be distinguished from the indicators and benchmarks referred to in the Council conclusions of 25 May 2007 on a coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks for monitoring progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training.

Furthermore, the table of indicators does not include aggregated indicators at national level in cases where these do not exist or are difficult to obtain. The aggregation of such indicators at national level can be carried out at a later stage on the basis of a joint agreement between the Member States, the Commission and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework network.

Indicator	Type of Indicator	Purpose of the Policy
Overarching Indicators for Quality Assurance		
No 1 Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers: (a) share of VET providers applying internal quality assurance systems defined by law/at own initiative (b) share of accredited VET providers	Context/Input indicator	Promote a quality improvement culture at VET-provider level Increase the transparency of quality of training Improve mutual trust on training provision
No 2 Investment in training of teachers and trainers: (a) share of teachers and trainers participating in further training (b) amount of funds invested	Input/Process indicator	Promote ownership of teachers and trainers in the process of quality development in VET Improve the responsiveness of VET to changing demands of labour market Increase individual learning capacity building Improve learners' achievement
Indicators supporting quality objectives for VET policies		
No 3 Participation rate in VET programmes: Number of participants in VET programmes [1], according to the type of programme and the individual criteria [2]	Input/Process/Output indicator	Obtain basic information at VET-system and VET-provider levels on the attractiveness of VET Target support to increase access to VET, including for disadvantaged groups

Indicator	Type of Indicator	Purpose of the Policy
No 4 Completion rate in VET programmes: Number of persons having successfully completed/abandoned VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria	Process/Output/Outcome indicator	Obtain basic information on educational achievements and the quality of training processes Calculate drop-out rates compared to participation rate Support successful completion as one of the main objectives for quality in VET Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups
No 5 Placement rate in VET programmes: (a) destination of VET learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria (³) (b) share of employed learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria	Outcome indicator	Support employability Improve responsiveness of VET to the changing demands in the labour market Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups
No 6 Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace: (a) information on occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training, according to type of training and individual criteria (b) satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences	Outcome indicator (mix of qualitative and quantitative data)	Increase employability Improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups
Context information		
No 7 Unemployment rate (⁴) according to individual criteria	Context indicator	Background information for policy decision-making at VET-system level
No 8 Prevalence of vulnerable groups: (a) percentage of participants in VET classified as disadvantaged groups (in a defined region or catchment area) according to age and gender (b) success rate of disadvantaged groups according to age and gender	Context indicator	Background information for policy decision-making at VET-system level Support access to VET for disadvantaged groups Support adapted training provision for disadvantaged groups

Indicator	Type of Indicator	Purpose of the Policy
No 9 Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market: (a) information on mechanisms set up to identify changing demands at different levels (b) evidence of their effectiveness	Context/Input indicator (qualitative information)	Improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market Support employability
No 10 Schemes used to promote better access to VET: (a) information on existing schemes at different levels (b) evidence of their effectiveness	Process indicator (qualitative information)	Promote access to VET, including for disadvantaged groups Support adapted training provision

(¹) For IVT: a period of 6 weeks of training is needed before a learner is counted as a participant.
    For lifelong learning: percentage of population admitted to formal VET programmes.
(²) Besides basic information on gender and age, other social criteria might be applied, e.g. early school leavers, highest educational achievement, migrants, persons with disabilities, length of unemployment.
(³) For IVT: including information on the destination of learners who have dropped out.
(⁴) Definition according to ILO and OECD: individuals aged 15-74 without work, actively seeking employment and ready to start work.