

## COUNCIL RESOLUTION

of 19 December 2002

## on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training

(2003/C 13/02)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Whereas:

- (1) Education and training are indispensable means for promoting employability, social cohesion, active citizenship, and personal as well as professional fulfilment.
- (2) Vocational education and training systems play a key role in providing competences and qualifications. Developing a knowledge-based Europe is a major challenge to the vocational educational and training systems in Europe and to all actors involved. In this context it is important to ensure that the European labour market is open and accessible to all.
- (3) Vocational education and training in the European Union comprise a wide diversity of legislation, education and training structures and key actors including both governments and the social partners and the enlargement of the Union will increase this diversity. Creating a European area of knowledge is the way both to build on this diversity, but also to sustain and protect it.
- (4) The action set out in this resolution respects the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and in particular its Article 14, which declares that everyone has the right to education and to have access to vocational and continuing training.
- (5) The Lisbon European Council in March 2000 recognised the important role of education as an integral part of economic and social policies, as an instrument for strengthening Europe's competitive power worldwide, and as a guarantee for ensuring the cohesion of our societies and the full development of its citizens. The European Council set the strategic objective for the European Union to become the world's most dynamic knowledge-based economy. The development of high-quality vocational education and training is a crucial and integral part of this strategy, notably in terms of promoting social inclusion, cohesion, mobility, employability and competitiveness.
- (6) The report on the 'Concrete future objectives of education and training systems', endorsed by the Stockholm European Council in March 2001, identified new areas for joint actions at European level in order to achieve the goals set at the Lisbon European Council. These areas are based on the three strategic objectives of the report, namely improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the European Union, facilitating access for all to education and training systems, and opening up education and training systems to the wider world.
- (7) Recommendation 2001/613/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 July 2001 on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, young volunteers, teachers and trainers <sup>(1)</sup>, and the action plan on mobility endorsed by the Nice European Council, December 2000, listed a series of measures to promote mobility.
- (8) In Barcelona, in March 2002 the European Council endorsed the work programme on the follow-up of the objectives report calling for European education and training to become a world quality reference by 2010. Furthermore, it called for further action to introduce instruments to ensure the transparency of diplomas and qualifications, including by promoting action similar to the Bologna process, but adapted to the field of vocational education and training.
- (9) The Resolution on lifelong learning <sup>(2)</sup> was adopted by the Council on 27 June 2002. In particular, under the priority of valuing learning, the Resolution, responding to the Lisbon and Barcelona conclusions, forms a basis for the initiative towards closer cooperation in vocational education and training, *inter alia* in the fields of transparency, recognition and transferability, quality and transnational projects. This was previously confirmed by the Resolution on skills and mobility <sup>(3)</sup> adopted by the Council on 3 June 2002.

NOTES that the transition towards a knowledge-based economy capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion brings new challenges to the development of human resources;

NOTES that the adaptability and employability of young people and adults, including older workers, depend strongly on access to high-quality initial education and training and the opportunity to update and acquire new skills throughout working life;

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ L 215, 9.8.2001, p. 30.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ C 163, 9.7.2002, p. 1.

<sup>(3)</sup> OJ C 162, 6.7.2002, p. 1.

NOTES that increased cooperation in European vocational education and training at all levels, including formal and non-formal learning, must be pursued within a lifelong learning perspective, emphasising the need for appropriate links between initial and continuing education and training. These links are necessary to overcome fragmentation between different forms of provision and to make full use of the positive diversity of vocational education and training currently to be found within Europe;

NOTES the relevant activities already under way in a number of Community agencies, for example Cedefop and the European Training Foundation, informal forums at Community level, for example, the meetings of the Directors-General for Vocational Training, the existing forums on transparency and quality, as well as within relevant international organisations and stresses the need for complementarity between them;

NOTES that the European social partners have agreed in the context of the European social dialogue on a framework of actions for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications. The member organisations of the European social partners will promote this framework in Member States at all appropriate levels, taking account of national policies and practices;

NOTES that the conference on 'Increased cooperation in vocational education and training' in Brussels, June 2002, with the participation of Member States, the Commission, candidate countries, EEA countries and the social partners, highlighted certain working principles and priorities for increased cooperation in vocational education and training;

STRESSES that it is necessary to strengthen and develop closer European cooperation in vocational education and training to support the idea that citizens can move freely between different jobs, regions, sectors and countries in Europe;

STRESSES that there is a need to improve the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training in Europe;

STRESSES that enhanced cooperation should be based *inter alia* on the following working principles:

- cooperation should be based on the target of 2010, set by the European Council in accordance with the detailed work programme and the follow-up of the Objectives report in order to ensure coherence with the objectives set by the Council,
- measures should be voluntary and principally developed through bottom-up cooperation,
- initiatives must be focused on the needs of citizens and user organisations,

- cooperation should be inclusive and involve Member States, the Commission, candidate countries, EFTA-EEA countries and the social partners,

STRESSES that within this closer cooperation special consideration should be given to the principle of gender mainstreaming and social inclusion.

REAFFIRMS:

1. Its commitment to enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training in order to remove obstacles to occupational and geographic mobility and promote access to lifelong learning. This involves taking steps to increase transparency and recognition of competences and qualifications within vocational education and training systems and to promote closer cooperation regarding quality in European vocational education and training systems as a sound basis for mutual trust.
2. That further cooperation in vocational education and training should be enhanced by the actions and policies developed primarily in the context of the report on the 'Concrete future objectives of education and training systems', taking into account the Resolution on Lifelong Learning, but also in the context of the European employment strategy. Important means to achieve these ends are the Community education and training instruments in particular the Leonardo da Vinci programme, the European Social Fund, and initiatives for e-learning and foreign languages.

ACKNOWLEDGES that priority should be given to the following:

European dimension

- Strengthening the European dimension in vocational education and training with the aim of improving closer cooperation in order to facilitate and promote mobility and the development of interinstitutional cooperation, partnerships and other transnational initiatives, all in order to raise the profile of the European education and training area in an international context so that Europe will be recognised as a worldwide reference for learners.

Transparency, information and guidance

- Increasing transparency in vocational education and training through the implementation and rationalisation of information tools and networks, including the integration of existing instruments such as the European CV, certificate and diploma supplements, the Common European framework of reference for languages and the Europass into one single framework.

- Strengthening policies, systems and practices that support information, guidance and counselling in the Member States, at all levels of education, training and employment, particularly on issues concerning access to learning, vocational education and training, and the transferability and recognition of competences and qualifications, in order to support occupational and geographical mobility of citizens in Europe.

#### Recognition of competences and qualifications

- Investigating how transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of competences and/or qualifications, between different countries and at different levels, could be promoted by developing reference levels, common principles for certification, and common measures, including a credit transfer system for vocational education and training.
- Increasing support to the development of competences and qualifications at sectoral level, by reinforcing cooperation and coordination especially involving the social partners. Several initiatives on a Community, bilateral and multi-lateral basis, including those already identified in various sectors aiming at mutually recognised qualifications, illustrate this approach.
- Developing a set of common principles regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning with the aim of ensuring greater compatibility between approaches in different countries and at different levels.

#### Quality assurance

- Promoting cooperation in quality assurance with particular focus on exchange of models and methods, as well as

common criteria and principles for quality in vocational education and training.

- Giving attention to the learning needs of teachers and trainers within all forms of vocational education and training.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES:

- to take the appropriate steps to initiate the implementation of the priorities set out in this resolution,
- to build on and adapt existing structures and instruments in Europe relevant to the above priorities, and establish, where appropriate, links with work in the context of the Bologna declaration,
- fully to involve the key players, particularly the social partners, and the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training,
- to involve, in accordance with existing objectives and agreements, the candidate and EFTA-EEA countries in this process,
- to enhance cooperation, where appropriate, with relevant international organisations in particular, the OECD, Unesco, ILO and the Council of Europe in the development of vocational education and training policies and concrete actions,
- to submit a progress report as part of the report on the follow-up of the future objectives of education and training systems as requested by the European Council for its spring meeting of 2004.