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Subject : Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the future priorities for enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training (VET)

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Delegations will find attached the text of the above conclusions as adopted at the Education, Youth and Culture Council on 21 November 2008.

**Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council,  
on the future priorities for enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training (VET)**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES, MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL,

**AWARE that:**

1. On 12 November 2002 the Council approved a Resolution on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training<sup>1</sup>. This subsequently served as the basis for the declaration adopted by the Ministers responsible for vocational education and training (VET) of the EU Member States, the EFTA/EEA and candidate countries, and by the Commission and the European Social Partners at their meeting in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002, as the strategy for improving the performance, quality and attractiveness of VET, commonly referred to as the "Copenhagen process".

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 13, 18.01.2003, p. 2.

2. A first review of the process undertaken in Maastricht on 14 December 2004<sup>2</sup> noted in particular that progress had been made in the development of a number of common tools and principles, and linked the process firmly to the Lisbon Strategy and the 'Education and Training' work programme. A second review carried out in Helsinki on 5 December 2006<sup>3</sup> emphasised the need to maintain impetus and to ensure continued implementation of the principles and instruments adopted.
3. The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning<sup>4</sup> advises Member States to develop the provision of key competences for all as part of their lifelong learning strategies, in order to offer all young people the means to develop such competences to a level which forms a sufficient basis for further learning and working life.
4. 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<sup>5</sup> reaffirm that there is a need to continue to improve the quality of data produced by the European Statistical System.
5. The Council Resolution of 15 November 2007 on new skills for new jobs<sup>6</sup> highlights the urgency of anticipating future skills needs in order to equip people for new jobs within the knowledge society, by implementing measures which aim at matching knowledge, skills and competences with the needs of the economy and preventing potential gaps.

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<sup>2</sup> Council doc. 9599/04.

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 298, 8.12.2006.

<sup>4</sup> OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> OJ C 311, 21.12.2007, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> OJ C 290, 4.12.2007, p. 1.

6. The 2008 Joint Progress Report of the Council and of the Commission on the implementation of the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme<sup>7</sup> stresses that further work is needed to improve the quality and attractiveness of VET, and that work on an updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training should begin.
7. The European Council on 13 and 14 March 2008<sup>8</sup> outlined the priorities for 2008–2010 and stressed the fact that "*investing more and more effectively in human capital and creativity throughout people's lives are crucial conditions for Europe's success in a globalised world*". In response to the increasing skills shortages in a number of sectors, the Council invited the Commission to present a comprehensive assessment of the future skills requirements in Europe up to 2020, taking account of the impacts of technological change and ageing populations.
8. 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<sup>9</sup> promotes mobility and lifelong learning by facilitating the recognition of learning outcomes from one training system to another and from one country to another.
9. The Council conclusions of 22 May 2008 on promoting creativity and innovation through education and training<sup>10</sup> advocate that greater synergy should be fostered between knowledge and skills on the one hand and creativity and innovative capacity on the other, at all levels of education and training. In addition, the proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the European Year of Creativity and Innovation in 2009<sup>11</sup> is aimed at supporting the efforts of the Member States to promote creativity through lifelong learning, as a driver for innovation and as a key factor for the development of personal, occupational, entrepreneurial and social competences.

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<sup>7</sup> Council doc. 5723/08.

<sup>8</sup> Council doc. 7652/08, paragraph 13, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> OJ C 111, 6.5.2008, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> OJ C 141, 7.6.2008, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Council doc. 8935/08.

10. The Council conclusions of 22 May 2008 on adult learning<sup>12</sup> recognise the key role which such learning can play in meeting the goals of the Lisbon Strategy, and particularly in enabling workers to adapt technologically and in responding to the specific needs of older workers and migrants.

**UNDERLINE that:**

1. Vocational education and training (VET) is an essential part of lifelong learning which covers all relevant levels of qualification and which should be closely linked to general education and higher education. Lying at the heart of both employment and social policies, VET not only promotes competitiveness, business performance and innovation in the context of a globalised economy, but also equity, cohesion, personal development and active citizenship.
2. To allow the possibility of flexible career paths that may be adapted to citizens' needs throughout their lives, efforts should be made to forge closer links between all forms and contexts of learning.
3. Improving creativity and innovation is particularly important for VET. To achieve this, the acquisition of key competences for lifelong learning should be actively promoted.
4. In order to meet the needs of the labour market, alternance schemes - which combine learning in educational institutions and at the workplace - should be encouraged, and training for adults in enterprises and in higher education establishments developed.

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<sup>12</sup> OJ C 140, 6.6.2008, p. 10.

5. Anticipating skills needs, gaps and shortages - in addition to identifying new and emerging job requirements at European and at national levels - are necessary conditions for implementing VET policies which respond to the needs of individuals, society and the economy.
6. Information, guidance and counselling services should form a coherent system which enables European citizens to manage their learning and career paths and to cope with transition throughout their lives.
7. To respond to the demand for high-level qualifications, the role of higher education in vocational education and training and in enhancing labour market integration should be increased.
8. Promoting the mobility of workers, learners and trainers from one system to another, and from one country to another, requires the implementation of the common European tools for the transparency and recognition of qualifications, such as Europass, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the future European Credit System for VET (ECVET).
9. Implementation of the common European tools entails the use of quality assurance mechanisms and the realisation of the future European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQARF), which are crucial to establishing mutual trust whilst promoting the modernisation of education and training systems.

## **RECOGNISE that:**

The Copenhagen process defined ambitious priorities at European level and at national level. It has led to significant changes in national policies and to the creation of major tools for the transparency and the recognition of knowledge, skills and competences, as well as for the quality of the systems.

At European level, updated working methods have raised the awareness of those involved and encouraged them to make use of the tools available.

In particular the EQF is a major factor in promoting and facilitating the establishment of national qualifications systems and frameworks on the basis of learning outcomes, and thus in modernising and enhancing the status of VET.

Furthermore, the Copenhagen process has contributed to increasing the role of VET in implementing the Lisbon strategy with regard to its three dimensions: competitiveness, employment and social cohesion. Accordingly, it needs to take into account the priorities of the future strategic framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training, in which it is fully integrated.

In this context VET should retain its specific nature. It is a shared responsibility which closely involves the Member States, the social partners and the sectoral organisations in all stages of the process - a necessary precondition for the quality and efficiency of VET.

**STRESS that:**

1. An approach should be adopted which allows the various tools to be implemented in a coherent and complementary manner.
2. It is necessary to provide citizens and all other stakeholders with in-depth information on the common tools in order to facilitate their use.
3. The measures outlined in these conclusions are voluntary and should be developed through bottom-up cooperation. The successful development and implementation of the tools requires the commitment of all stakeholders.

**AGREE that:**

The priorities and guidelines established under the Copenhagen process since 2002 remain valid. Accordingly, it is necessary to pursue their implementation, and to address the following four priority areas for the period 2008–2010:

**1. IMPLEMENTING THE TOOLS AND SCHEMES FOR PROMOTING COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET) AT NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN LEVEL**

It is important to develop national qualifications systems and frameworks based on learning outcomes, in coherence with the European Qualifications Framework, and to implement the future European Credit System for VET (ECVET), together with the future European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF), in order to strengthen mutual trust.



With this in mind, the following should be developed:

- pilot projects, appropriate methods and support tools;
- schemes and tools for validating non-formal and informal learning outcomes, combined with the implementation of national qualifications frameworks, the European Qualifications Framework and the ECVET system;
- quality assurance instruments;
- consistency between the various tools.

## **2. HEIGHTENING THE QUALITY AND ATTRACTIVENESS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS**

### *Promoting the attractiveness of VET to all target groups*

- Promoting VET among pupils, parents, adults (whether employed, unemployed, or inactive) and enterprises, e.g. by continuing to organise skills competitions such as Euroskills.
- Ensuring non-discriminatory access to and participation in VET and taking into account the needs of people or groups at risk of exclusion – in particular early school leavers, low-skilled and disadvantaged people;

- Facilitating access to information, lifelong guidance and counselling services through successful implementation of the Council Resolution of 21 November 2008 on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies<sup>13</sup>;
- Facilitating paths enabling people to progress from one level of qualification to another by strengthening links between general education, VET, higher education and adult learning.

*Promoting the excellence and quality of VET systems*

- Developing quality assurance mechanisms by implementing the future EQARF recommendation; participating actively in the European Network on Quality Assurance in VET with a view to developing common tools, as well as supporting the implementation of the EQF by promoting mutual trust;
- Increasing investment in the initial and in-service training of those involved in vocational education and training: teachers, trainers, tutors, guidance officers;
- Basing VET policies on reliable evidence supported by rigorous research and data, and improving the statistical systems and data concerning VET;
- Developing national qualifications systems and frameworks based on learning outcomes which are easy to understand and guarantee high quality, whilst ensuring compatibility with the European Qualifications Framework;

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<sup>13</sup> Council doc. 15030/08.

- Promoting innovation and creativity in VET and implementing the Council conclusions of 22 May 2008 on promoting creativity and innovation through education and training;
- Developing language learning and adapting it to the specific characteristics of vocational education and training;
- Improving the permeability and continuity of learning paths between VET, general education and higher education.

### **3. IMPROVING THE LINKS BETWEEN VET AND THE LABOUR MARKET**

With this in mind, the following would be desirable:

- Continuing to develop forward-planning mechanisms, aimed at focusing on jobs and skills at national level and across Europe, identifying potential skills gaps and shortages and responding to the future skills and competence needs (both in quantitative and qualitative terms) of the economy and undertakings, particularly SMEs, in accordance with the conclusions of the European Council of 13 and 14 March 2008 and with the Council Resolution of 15 November 2007 on new skills for new jobs;
- Ensuring that the social partners and economic stakeholders are properly involved in defining and implementing VET policies;

- Improving guidance and counselling services in order to ease the transition from training to employment and thus contribute to the objectives set out in the Council Resolution of 28 May 2004 on Strengthening Policies, Systems and Practices in the field of Guidance throughout life in Europe<sup>14</sup>; participating actively in the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network;
- Strengthening the mechanisms, including those of a financial nature (both public and private), aimed at promoting adult training - in particular in the workplace, with a special focus on SMEs - in order to contribute to better career opportunities and business competitiveness. In this respect, the measures outlined in the Council conclusions of 22 May 2008 on adult learning should be implemented;
- Developing and implementing the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes;
- Increasing the mobility of people undergoing work-related training, by strengthening the existing Community programmes in support of mobility, in particular for apprentices. The conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council on 21 November 2008, on youth mobility<sup>15</sup> should contribute to this process;
- Increasing the role of higher education in vocational education and training and in enhancing labour market integration.

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<sup>14</sup> Council doc. 9286/04.

<sup>15</sup> Council doc. 16206/08.

#### **4. STRENGTHENING EUROPEAN COOPERATION ARRANGEMENTS**

- Improving European cooperation arrangements in the field of VET, in particular by increasing the efficiency of peer learning activities and capitalising on their results in terms of national policies;
- Ensuring the integration and visibility of VET among the priorities of the future strategic framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training, while ensuring a proper link between VET and school education, higher education and adult learning policies; strengthening links with European policies on multilingualism and young people;
- Consolidating exchanges and cooperation with third countries and international organisations, such as the OECD, the Council of Europe, the International Labour Organisation and UNESCO in particular. The right of participation of all Member States in this work should be ensured.

#### **INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION, WITHIN THE LIMITS OF THEIR RESPECTIVE COMPETENCES,**

to implement the measures set out in the above four areas, with regard to the priorities of the Copenhagen process for the period 2008–2010, by means of:

- appropriate public and private funding, using relevant EU resources such as the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund and loans from the European Investment Bank to support reforms at national level in accordance with Member States' priorities, and the Lifelong Learning Programme to support the effective implementation of Community tools;

- continuation of work focused on improving the scope, comparability and reliability of VET statistics, in close collaboration with Eurostat, the OECD, Cedefop and the European Training Foundation (ETF), and the development of a more explicit VET component within the coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks. The right of participation of all Member States in this work should be ensured;
- further developing activities on the anticipation of skills needs and skills mismatches, in close collaboration with Cedefop, ETF and Eurofound;
- information exchange with third countries, in particular with the countries covered by the enlargement policy as well as the European neighbourhood policy.

Cooperation in such work should be inclusive and involve all Member States, the Commission, candidate countries, EFTA-EEA countries and the social partners.

Cedefop and the European Training Foundation will continue to support the Commission, in particular in the monitoring and reporting of progress in implementation.

Special attention should be paid to progress on VET in the reports on the future strategic framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training and on the national Lisbon reform programmes.