



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 29 October 2004

13832/04

**EDUC 204
SOC 499**

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

from: the General Secretariat of the Council
to: the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States
meeting within the Council

No. prev. doc.: 13637/04 EDUC 196 SOC 491

Subject : Draft Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of
the Member States meeting within the Council on the Future priorities of
enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET)
(Review of the Council Resolution of 19 December 2002)

At the end of the meeting of the Permanent Representatives Committee of 27 October 2004, the Chair found that the above Draft Conclusions as set out hereafter were unanimously agreed.

Should this agreement be confirmed, the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council could adopt the Conclusions.

Draft Conclusions
of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting
within the Council on the Future priorities of enhanced European Cooperation
in Vocational Education and Training (VET)
(Review of the Council Resolution of 19 December 2002)

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

AWARE that

The Council (Education, Youth and Culture) approved on 12 November 2002 a Resolution on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training¹. This was then largely reflected in the declaration adopted by the Ministers of Vocational Education and Training of the EU Member States, the EFTA/EEA and candidate 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 process).

The Council and Commission Joint Interim Report² *'Education and Training 2010'* (26 February 2004) to the 2004 Spring European Council, includes a progress report on the first concrete results of the Copenhagen process, and recognises its role in encouraging reform, supporting lifelong learning and developing mutual trust between Member States as well as between all key players in VET.

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 Member States' competences.

¹ Adopted on 19 December 2002. OJ L3, 18.1.2003, p.2.

² 2004 Joint Education Council/Commission Report on the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy: "Education & Training 2010: the success of Lisbon hinges on urgent reforms".

Since November 2002, the Council has adopted a series of acts resulting from enhanced cooperation in VET and lifelong learning, in particular in relation to human capital for social cohesion and competitiveness¹, guidance throughout life², principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning³ and quality assurance in VET⁴; it has also adopted a common position on the Europass single framework for the transparency of qualifications and competencies.

RECOGNISE that

The Copenhagen process has raised the profile of VET at the European level and in the Lisbon strategy. Member States and stakeholders have reached a common understanding of the challenges, agreed on strategies to address these and developed means of implementing these strategies.

However, to achieve the Lisbon goals for education and training, a greater impetus is needed in relation to VET within the context of "Education and Training 2010". Greater emphasis is needed under the Copenhagen process on implementation at national and EU levels, taking particularly into account common European references and principles as agreed by the Council.

STRESS that

The Copenhagen process will continue to set political priorities for achieving the Lisbon objectives in the field of VET within the "Education and Training 2010" work programme, in order to attain a genuine European labour market. The Joint Interim Report identifies a number of levers and priorities for implementation based on reforms and investment in key areas to make education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010 and lifelong learning a concrete reality. These include the need to mobilise the necessary investments effectively and to focus on the development of key competencies of citizens throughout life, for example learning to learn, innovate and develop a spirit of enterprise.

¹ OJ C 295 of 5.12.2003.

² 9286/04 EDUC 109 SOC 179, May 2004.

³ 9600/04 EDUC 118 SOC 253, May 2004.

⁴ 9599/04 EDUC 117 SOC 252, May 2004.

In conformity with the principles of the Council Resolution of 19 December 2002, "measures should be voluntary and principally developed through bottom-up cooperation".

VET is increasingly taking place at all educational levels and, therefore, the complementarity and links between VET and general education, in particular with higher education, need to be particularly addressed.

AGREE that

At the national level, 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 raising stakeholders' awareness at national, regional and local levels in Member States to enhance visibility and mutual understanding;
- ii) improving, where appropriate, the "training incentive effects of tax and benefit systems" as recommended by the Lisbon European Council¹;
- 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 and the challenge of renewing and updating the skills of an ageing population.

¹ Presidency Conclusions - point 23.

- iv) the further development of VET systems to meet the needs of people and 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 relevant 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 skill 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 competencies development of teachers and trainers in VET, reflecting their specific learning needs and changing role as a consequence of the development of VET.

AGREE that

At the European level, priority should be given to:

- i) the consolidation of priorities of the Copenhagen process and facilitating the implementation of concrete results.
- ii) the development of an open and flexible European qualifications framework, founded on transparency and mutual trust, which will stand as a common reference covering both VET and higher education, based mainly on competencies and learning outcomes.
- iii) the development and implementation of a European Credit Transfer System for VET (ECVET) in order to allow learners to build upon the achievements resulting from their learning pathways when moving from one national VET system to another.
- iv) the examination of specific learning needs and changing role of vocational teachers and trainers and of possibilities of making their profession more attractive, including the continuous updating of their professional skills.
- v) the improvement of the scope, precision and reliability of VET statistics in order to enable evaluation of progress.

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE COMPETENCES

- To rationalise and streamline, in accordance with the Joint Interim Report, the education and training processes 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.

- To prepare and examine proposals for a European Qualifications Framework and a European Credit Transfer System for VET.

- To develop a coherent approach and closer cooperation, both at national and European level, with:
 - Higher Education, including developments under the Bologna process
 - European Economic, Employment, sustainable development and Social Inclusion Policies (for example in relation to National Action Plans)
 - and between research, practice and policy by networking and exchange of innovation and good examples of policy and practice.

- To provide information on progress made and future actions for development of VET involving all relevant stakeholders, at national level as part of the integrated biennial report on "Education and Training 2010", in the context of implementing national lifelong learning strategies.

- To develop closer links with key partners, including the social partners at European, national, regional and sectoral levels, taking into account the social partners' "Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competencies and qualifications"¹.

- To use fully the current Leonardo da Vinci programme 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.

¹ ETUC, UNICE, CEEP, UEAPME, 28 February 2002.