



It is evident from the Commission's progress reports on achieving the Lisbon objectives and on the Copenhagen and Bologna processes that in general national progress towards implementing lifelong learning is stifled. It is also evident that there are common outstanding issues across all sub-sectors (general, VET, higher and adult education) that impede successful implementation of lifelong learning strategies.

The informal council meeting strongly commits to the implementation of the priorities of the Copenhagen process within the Europe 2020 national reform programmes making VET more attractive, relevant, career-oriented, innovative, accessible and flexible than in 2010.

The time is now right for European countries to review and renew their commitment to lifelong learning in concrete terms and agree a new integrated implementation strategy that spans the entire education and training sector and is aligned with national employment policies by means of the provision of lifelong guidance services.

Discussions with experts lead to the conclusion that there are three priority action lines required at national level to deepen implementation in favour of an effective lifelong learning approach.

These are:

- **The development of comprehensive national qualifications frameworks based on learning outcomes**

A comprehensive national qualifications framework is a key tool in supporting countries to bring greater transparency to their own education and training system thereby facilitating greater understanding and trust which is a pre-condition for lifelong learning. Comprehensive national qualifications frameworks, spanning general education, VET, higher education and adult education and training can be a catalyst for creating greater permeability between these sub-sectors.

The description of qualifications in the form of learning outcomes greatly supports lifelong learning as it provides an objective and transparent basis for assessing knowledge, skills and competences irrespective of where or when the learning takes place. It facilitates the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and a life wide approach to acquiring and updating skills.

Learners should be able to move more easily from one sub-sector to another over a life time. Qualification systems should be more flexible and navigable for learners and should support social



and economic development by means of more progressive access, transfer and progression arrangements.

- **The establishment of a national quality framework for education and training providers including an accreditation system**

In general countries have well established infrastructures with regard to general education. However, countries now need to look at their education provision from a lifelong learning prospective, this includes up-skilling, re-training and work based learning for adult learners and continuous access to further and higher education for all learners.

A quality framework for all education and training providers is needed and this should include arrangements for quality assuring the critical components of education and training systems. This includes internal quality (including professional development of teachers, trainers and management), an external quality prospective and arrangements to validate non-formal and informal learning and work based learning.

- **The development of national lifelong guidance services for individuals**

Given the requirement to better match supply and demand for knowledge, skills and competences it is warranted that countries strengthen their information and career guidance services to span the entire lifespan. Such an investment could have a direct impact on helping young people making a well informed choice in the education offer, and increasing the skill base and productivity of people throughout their working lives.

The above three action lines are crucial in putting in place a real and effective lifelong learning strategy, building on existing European tools and supports. They are fully compatible with the objectives and action lines mentioned in the *Europe 2020 strategy* – particularly in the Integrated Guidelines 8 and 9 – asking Member States:

- to improve the openness and relevance of education and training systems, particularly by implementing national qualification frameworks enabling flexible learning pathways;
- to develop systems for recognising acquired competencies, taking into account learning in informal and non-formal contexts;
- to ensure access to quality education and training for all and to improve educational outcomes;



- to strengthen education and career guidance combined with systematic information on new job openings and opportunities, promotion of entrepreneurship and enhanced anticipation of skill needs.

**National VET policies should contribute to these common European objectives. Focusing on VET however, these common European objectives can be achieved, amongst others, by accomplishing the following 4 short-term deliverables (2011-2014) mentioned in the Bruges Communiqué .**

**It goes without saying that all short term deliverables are of vital importance, but given the restricted time for the tour de table, we draw your attention to only 4 of them.**

Number 8:

The development of comprehensive National Qualifications Frameworks based on the learning outcomes approach, implementing the EQF Recommendation, and the use of NQFs as a catalyst for creating more permeability between VET and higher education, for developing or maintaining VET at post-secondary or higher EQF levels, and for realising flexible learning pathways.

Number 9:

Develop and promote the use of procedures for the validation of non-formal and informal learning supported by EQF/NQFs and guidance.

Number 3:

Take adequate measures to implement the EQAVET<sup>1</sup> Recommendation and make progress towards national quality assurance frameworks for VET.

Number 10:

Provide integrated (education, training, employment) guidance services closely related with labour market needs.

**QUESTIONS for debate:**

- If we agree that the time now is right for the countries participating in the Copenhagen process to review and renew their commitment to lifelong learning in concrete terms, are the above mentioned **action lines** the **right** ones from a VET policy perspective? If not, which action lines are missing?
- In your country, which of the 4 short-term deliverables mentioned above will get **first priority**? Why?

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<sup>1</sup> EQAVET: European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training