

# Finnish Presidency Questionnaire to DGVT members

Summary of replies

Ministry of Education, Finland

7.6.2006

## 1. General appraisal of the Copenhagen process (Question 1.1)

On a whole, the countries and the European social partners take a very positive view of the process and its impact.

The Copenhagen process is considered as effective in promoting the visibility of vocational education and training. As a result there is higher awareness of VET issues both at European and at national levels.

First and foremost, the process is regarded as a political process. The process has been successful in emphasising to the political decision makers the importance of the VET sector in the framework of Lisbon strategy. "VET has gained political status at European level which it did not have before".

The priorities of the process were generally seen to be in line and contemporaneous with the national developments. For this reason it is difficult to measure the impact of the process and separate it from national developments. Several countries in any case reported that the process has strengthened the national focus on VET and inspired national reforms, e.g. in quality assurance. This is in particular valid in the new Members States and applicant countries which have been introducing changes in their training systems and practices.

Alongside the political dimension the other central role of the process has been the development of European instruments, aiming in particular at enhanced transparency of competences and qualifications, and at facilitating transnational mobility. In this respect, the process is considered to have paved way towards a European labour market and a European area for VET parallel to the European area for Higher Education.

Thirdly, the process has supported European cooperation. It has enabled the participating countries to consider their policies in light of experiences from other countries and has provided a framework to share ideas and results.

The "democratic" or inclusive nature of the process, i.e. the discussion / consultation method used in the process was underlined. This has enabled the involvement of national stakeholders and keeping them informed on topical issues. Several referred to the EQF consultation as a good example. This working method has supported the bottom-up dimension of the process and has had a positive impact on cooperation between different stakeholders. It was felt that this type of European and national cooperation could have a wider impact beyond the process itself.

## 2. Perceived difficulties and obstacles (Q1.2)

A few respondents cited that the time needed for the process and reforms as the main difficulty. It was stressed that alone the sheer complexity and diversity of the VET sector in Europe slows down the work; and the need to involve stakeholders at the national level has also time implications.

Some respondents also mentioned the lack of human resources in national administrations - follow-up and implementation require resources, in particular taking the expansion of the process (Maastricht) and the number of priorities into account.

It was regretted that the process has so far taken place mainly at expert level and is currently still too much top-down driven. The process may be perceived as less concrete and having a lower profile than the Bologna process and is not known to a wider public. Individuals and working life actors were esteemed to still have difficulties in seeing the concrete results or benefits of the process. "A future challenge would be raising the key stakeholders' awareness of the process."

A further difficulty raised by many concerned the dissemination of results and outcomes. It was proposed that in future more emphasis should be put on the transfer of results to VET providers and working life.

Regarding the priorities of the process, concern was expressed that - whilst the focus has been on issues concerning transparency and mutual recognition - less attention has been paid to the image and attractiveness of the vocational route.

Finally it should be noted that several countries didn't report any difficulties or obstacles.

### **3. Copenhagen process as part of the Education and Training 2010 work programme (Q1.3)**

Generally the respondents considered the linking of the Copenhagen process with the Education and Training 2010 work programme as very positive. In particular this is seen to have contributed to making the process more visible at the political level.

Furthermore, the link is expected to facilitate synergies and transfer of experiences with Bologna process. This was considered important as there is a need to ensure a more integrated development of VET, HE and General Education in a lifelong learning context. The joint expert group for EQF, and the focus on learning outcomes, were mentioned as one positive example of this. Another example is Europass, which is now in use in both VET and Higher Education. "Copenhagen process resulted in distinguishing identity of VET; Maastricht Communiqué, together with Education and Training 2010 work programme contributed to creation of friendly environment for strengthening links to general and higher education."

However, concerns were also expressed. It was noted that there may be lack of understanding of the role VET has in achieving Lisbon goals. It was proposed that there seems to be "a tendency to forget special features of VET". It was underlined that special actions dedicated to VET will also be needed in the future, even if the results are utilised in the LLL context.

Further, it was commented that the latest Joint Interim Report did not pay enough attention to VET and Copenhagen process.

Creation of a coherent European lifelong learning strategy in which IVET and CVET have a major role was called for.

#### **4. Main focus for the period 2007-2008; Helsinki Communiqué and the Council Conclusions (Q1.4 & Q 1.7)**

It was proposed that the key issue for the Helsinki Communiqué and the accompanying Council Conclusions should be to make clear the vital contribution of VET to the Lisbon Agenda and the Education and Training 2010 work programme. The main objective should therefore be to send a clear message that investment in skills and vocational training contributes to achieving the Lisbon goal of greater economic growth and employment. The Communiqué and the Conclusions should help raise the profile of VET at Heads of State level. "VET is as important as HE".

To illustrate this, a concrete and realistic set of actions should be presented. There should be a limited number of priorities, concrete deliverables and clear targets for implementation. The approach should be holistic and the interdependency of different initiatives should be made clear. "It is important to ensure the transparency of the goals and priorities of the process."

The clear message from respondents was that it is important to stay focussed on the current priorities. The future work should first and foremost concentrate in continuing the development of EQF, ECVET and quality assurance and in ensuring their implementation at European and national level.

Of the other current priorities, it was proposed to highlight e.g.:

- investment in and financing of VET
- attractiveness and image of VET
- better governance of VET systems
- development of VET statistics and creation of a framework for strategic benchmarking and indicators.

Several underlined the need for more active evaluation and collection of results, experiences and know-how, and sharing them, e.g. through peer learning activities. It was proposed that a systematic approach is needed with clearly defined roles at European, national and institutional level.

Several respondents proposed that the division between national and European level priorities introduced at Maastricht be kept.

#### **5. Priorities at the European level (Q2.1 & Q2.2)**

All replies suggested that the emphasis at European level should be on further developing and testing of the initiatives already started.

As main future priorities, most referred to developing, testing and implementing EQF and linking to it national qualification systems. Developing and testing ECVET is another key priority. The main aim over the next two-year period should be to ensure that these instruments will function as intended and to start their implementation, also at national level.

A further priority, linked in the introduction of EQF, should be the implementation of CQAF through European Network for Quality Assurance.

The widespread implementation of EUROPASS should also be ensured. An evaluation of Europass was proposed to support its further development.

It was underlined that, when developing these instruments, their contribution to the Lisbon strategy and to strengthening the European labour market should be made clear. Likewise the link with Higher Education and the Bologna process should be assured (e.g. ECVET-ECTS and ensuring that VET and HE competences are comparable in EQF). Development and implementation at sectoral level should be further emphasised.

Several called for more work to be done to create a common statistical framework and indicators. This is seen as necessary to support the process and to enable progress to be measured (leading to "evidence based training policy"). This work should be based as much as possible on existing data and cooperation with other organisations such as OECD. To support future work, it was suggested that more information is needed on investments in and financing of VET. Better understanding of different funding principles and practices should be further supported by transnational surveys.

It is worthwhile noting that there were almost no references to training of teachers and trainers as a European level priority. A proposal however was made that experiences related to the training of teachers and trainers should be more actively shared between countries.

## **6. Priorities at the national level; their relevance and proposals for priorities for 2007-2008 (Q3.1, 3.2 and 3.3)**

The national level priorities agreed in Maastricht were considered to be highly relevant to national contexts. There is a strong correlation between the priorities of the process and national VET policy development. The relevance of the individual priorities obviously varies, depending of the national settings.

As with the European level priorities, most countries considered that the existing priorities are still relevant and proposed that no new priorities would be needed for the next two-year period.

In particular, it was underlined that more time was needed for implementation of the common European instruments and frameworks at the national level, e.g. ECVET, CQAF, and in particular EQF and its link to national qualifications. It was proposed that more attention should be also paid to implementation of political agreements, such as that on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

However, several suggested that the national level priorities should be more focused and that there should be clearer targets. In particular it was proposed that more attention should be paid to better governance within Member States to deliver the VET agenda and use of financial resources more effectively. Within this context, more emphasis should also be put on institutional development and intensified cooperation with working life. It was further proposed that more work should also be done to raise the attractiveness and image of VET and to promote it among enterprises, pupils and parents.

All the priorities should be seen in the wider LLL context with the overall aim to ensure access to training for different learner groups, in particular adult learners.

## **7. Implementation mechanisms (Q4.1)**

Most respondents considered that the current mechanisms are sufficient and that there is no need for new mechanisms.

However, a clear message to emerge was that more stress should nevertheless be put on sharing information, exchange of good practices and experiences, and dissemination of outcomes. The process should be able to point to concrete achievements to support implementation and transfer of the results.

The Commission was invited to moderate networks and exchange of good practices and experiences. It was proposed that peer learning activities should be further developed and should be used in a decentralised way so that countries can learn effectively from them. Cedefop study visits could support the process even more than today.

Many recalled that EU support would be needed for testing and implementation, in particular through funding to pilot projects. The new LLL programme was seen as a key in supporting implementation of the European level priorities and their testing. At national level, development and implementation should be actively supported by ESF and ERDF.

More information on the process and its results should be provided to stakeholders - VET Providers and working life, were suggested.

## **8. Reporting (Q4.1)**

The current reporting was largely considered as adequate. Some more focusing and streamlining of the reports on the Copenhagen process and the Education and Training 2010 work programme might be possible to reduce the amount of reporting, but generally caution was advised against any major changes.

It was stressed that VET should be highlighted more in the 2010 reporting - It was further emphasised that future reports the challenge would be to identify key outcomes and concrete deliverables that can be reported to European Council to raise the profile of VET. Clearer targets, e.g. use of fewer, more strategic indicators, would support the process and its reporting and make the results more visible.

## **9. Involvement of VET providers (Q4.2 and Q4.3)**

There is a general consensus that the involvement of VET providers is crucial for the success of the process. Countries have been using various means to inform providers, such as seminars and conferences (e.g. Europass launch conferences were mentioned), bulletins, and websites. Several reported that stakeholders have been involved in the consultation processes (in particular EQF), and some countries mentioned using national networks to support the process.

A good practice reported on by one country referred to publicising the process and its outcomes in national publications.

The involvement of VET providers was seen to happen in phases. A few respondents proposed that the VET providers should be more involved than currently, whilst some warn that it might be too early to involve them very actively at the current stage of the process.

In the coming years, a clear need was seen to involve a larger number of VET providers in testing the instruments arising out of the policy development process, e.g. through the LLL programme, ESF and through national actions. The sectoral approach was considered as a good mechanism for involving providers and other stakeholders.

It was underlined that the majority of VET providers will be involved only when the instruments and tools are brought into use at national and regional levels. To ensure their widespread use the instruments should therefore be transparent: interconnected and user-friendly. It was proposed that the providers should be able to influence the development already when concepts are being developed. The European consultations and national dialogues provide a forum for this. It was proposed to be strengthened this participation e.g. by inviting representatives of VET providers already to working group and meeting stages.

Finally it was recalled that the involvement of VET providers is primarily a national responsibility.

A proposal was made to involve also the pupils and their organisations in the work.

#### **10. Cooperation with third countries (Q1.6)**

Most welcomed was exchange of information and expertise with third countries. It was emphasised that it is important to ensure that 3rd countries are aware of EU goals. In particular, the outcomes of the process were considered to be useful for the neighbouring countries, such as acceding countries, the West Balkans and South Mediterranean countries. ETF's role in this work was emphasised.

However, caution also was advised. The general view was that it would be too early to open the process before the various instruments, e.g. ECVET, have been implemented. In the short term, the process should therefore be first consolidated by the countries currently participating, "too rapid an enlargement could only hamper the whole process". It was suggested that the approach at this stage should be more to exchange information, e.g. through peer learning.

On the other hand - given the diversity of European VET systems - once agreed, the tools and instruments are likely to work also in other countries. Even so, it was underlined that the use of common instruments, such as EQF, by 3rd countries should be based on mutual trust secured e.g. by quality assurance mechanisms.

Another view, expressed by many, was that cooperation with OECD and high performing economies such as Australia and New Zealand, or USA and Japan could already now bring added value to the process. Gathering experiences from other comparable countries would be enriching and could already at this stage introduce new information and points of view to the process.

## **11. Focus beyond 2010 (Q1.5)**

Globalisation and emerging markets will continue to be the main future challenges for VET and the Copenhagen process. High quality of VET and continued raising of the level of skills and competences and are crucial in ensuring the competitiveness of the European economy and workforce. Greater efforts should be made to explore future skills needs on the labour market, and at the same time the creation of new jobs and new forms of work in Europe should be supported whilst taking care of the traditional skill areas.

It was proposed that specific attention should be paid to financing of and investment in IVET/CVET, including shared responsibilities of public and private sectors. It was suggested that a specific benchmarks should be introduced, e.g. for participation in VET / adult learning and for investment in VET.

Several replies propose that reducing barriers and strengthening interfaces between different levels and forms of education and training (general education - VET; VET - HE) should remain a key priority for future. This should happen in the framework of a coherent LLL strategy.

Other specific proposals included e.g.:

- research on VET;
- putting more emphasis on commercial training;
- European "pupil card" (similar to European student card);
- Longer periods of mobility for trainees and the required support structures.

Several call for an assessment of the process and its outcomes before setting concrete priorities for the period beyond 2010. It was also underlined that the current objectives will not lose their pertinence by 2010. The full implementation of the tools currently under development, e.g. EQF and ECVET is foreseen to extend over many years. Likewise cooperation on quality assurance needs time. Persistency and a long-term perspective were called for in order to reach the goals.