



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 5.9.2006
COM(2006) 479 final

2006/0163 (COD)

Implementing the Community Lisbon Programme

Proposal for a

**RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
AND OF THE COUNCIL**

on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning

(presented by the Commission)

{SEC(2006) 1093}
{SEC(2006) 1094}

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

1) CONTEXT OF THE PROPOSAL

Grounds for and objectives of the proposal

In a Europe characterised by rapid technological and economic change and an ageing population, lifelong learning has become a necessity. The need for a continuous renewal of citizens' knowledge, skills and competences is crucial for the EU's competitiveness and social cohesion. Lifelong learning, however, is complicated by the lack of communication and co-operation between education and training providers/authorities at different levels and in different countries. The resulting barriers hinder individual citizens from accessing education and training and from combining qualifications from different institutions. They make it difficult for citizens to move within the European labour market and to pursue genuine lifelong and lifewide learning (i.e. through all levels of education and training and using formal, non-formal and informal learning).

Consequently, the Lisbon European Council in 2000 concluded that increased transparency of qualifications and lifelong learning should be two of the main components in the efforts to adapt Europe's education and training systems both to the demands of the knowledge society and to the need for an improved level and quality of employment. This was further underlined by the Barcelona European Council in 2002 which - as an element in the strategy to make European education and training a world quality reference by 2010 - called for the introduction of instruments to ensure the transparency of qualifications. The 2002 Council Resolution on lifelong learning invited the Member States to encourage cooperation and to build bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning. This was seen as a prerequisite for the creation of a European area of lifelong learning, building on the achievements of the Bologna process in higher education and for promoting similar action in the area of vocational training.

Calls for the development of a European qualifications framework were further made in the 2004 Joint Interim Report of the Council and of the Commission on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme and, in the context of the Copenhagen process, in the Conclusions of the Council of 15 November 2004 on the future priorities of enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET). In the context of the Bologna process, the conference of ministers responsible for higher education held in Bergen in May 2005 underlined the importance of ensuring complementarity between the framework for the European Higher Education Area and the proposed European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Finally, in the context of the revised Lisbon Strategy, also the Employment Guidelines 2005-2008 stress the need to ensure flexible learning pathways and to increase opportunities for the mobility of students and trainees, by improving the definition and transparency of qualifications, their effective recognition and the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The EQF is central to the fulfilment of the EU's objectives in the Lisbon Partnership for Growth and Jobs.

This proposal responds to the political mandate described above and its emphasis on lifelong learning. The main purpose of the EQF is to act as a translation device and

neutral reference point for comparing qualifications across different education and training systems and to strengthen co-operation and mutual trust between the relevant stakeholders. This will increase transparency, facilitate the transfer and use of qualifications across different education and training systems and levels.

General context

Europe is characterised by a great diversity of education and training institutions and systems. This mirrors a widespread and strong consensus that education and training should reflect and respond to learning needs at local, regional and national level. This richness and variety of European education and training can be seen as an important asset and something which makes it possible to react rapidly and efficiently to technological and economic change.

The European Councils in Lisbon and Barcelona recognised increased transparency of qualifications as a necessary precondition for turning this diversity into an asset. A situation where education and training systems and institutions operate in isolation from each other could lead to fragmentation and hinder rather than enable citizens to develop their knowledge, skills and competences.

Transparency of qualifications is defined as the degree to which the value of qualifications can be identified and compared on the labour market, in education and training and in a wider social setting. Transparency can thus be seen as a necessary precondition for recognition of learning outcomes leading to qualifications. Increasing transparency is important for the following reasons:

- It enables individual citizens to judge the relative value of qualifications.
- It is a prerequisite and condition for transfer and accumulation of qualifications. Pursuing lifelong and lifewide learning requires that individuals are able to combine and build on qualifications acquired in different settings, systems and countries. Transparent systems make it possible to judge how qualifications can be linked and/or combined.
- It improves employers' ability to judge the profile, content and relevance of qualifications on offer in the labour market.
- It allows education and training providers to compare the profile and content of their own offers to those of other providers and thus also is an important precondition for quality assurance in education and training.

Existing provisions in the area of the proposal

Several initiatives have been taken at EU level to increase transparency, support transfer and facilitate the valuing of learning outcomes.

Council Decision 85/368/EEC of 16 July 1985 introduced a system for the comparability of vocational education and training (VET) qualifications. Based on this decision, a total of 219 VET qualifications in 19 sectors were compared and the results of this process published in the *Official Journal of the European Union*. This work proved resource-intensive and unsustainable, partly due to the centralised approach

chosen and the constant and rapid evolution of qualifications. Therefore, the work carried out at the European level had little impact at the level of national and sectoral stakeholders and the implementation of the Decision was abandoned. However, the EQF now addresses the limitations of the 1985 Decision by focusing on improving the transparency of qualifications and by introducing a decentralised approach for co-operation which reflects the increasing complexity of qualifications in Europe.

In Higher Education, significant steps have been taken towards the establishment of an overarching framework for qualifications. Building on previous agreements in Bologna (1999) and Berlin (2003), Ministers responsible for higher education in 45 European countries agreed in Bergen in May 2005 on the adoption of an overarching qualifications framework. This contains learning outcomes-based descriptors for the three higher education cycles and introduces credit ranges for the first and second of these cycles. Furthermore, Ministers committed themselves to elaborate national qualifications frameworks for higher education by 2010 and underlined the importance of ensuring complementarity between the framework for the European Higher Education Area and the EQF.

Decision No 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass) introduced a set of European instruments to be used by individuals to describe their qualifications and competences. The future development of Europass will need to reflect the establishment of the EQF. All relevant Europass documents, in particular the Europass diploma supplement and the Europass certificate supplement, should contain a clear reference to the appropriate EQF level.

The existing European Credit transfer system for higher education (ECTS) and the emerging European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) will make it easier for individuals to combine education and training provisions from different countries. While the ECTS has been developed over a period of more than 10 years and is already widely used in higher education, ECVET is currently being tested and a public consultation process will be launched shortly. Both these instruments are important initiatives providing direct support to individual citizens trying to transfer qualifications or units of qualifications across institutional and national borders. The EQF, by introducing common reference levels and promoting mutual trust, will provide a basis for strengthening and taking forward these systems.

In the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning, a set of European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning were agreed by the Council in 2004. These principles provide a basis for strengthening cooperation in the field of validation and encourage the Commission, the Member States and social partners to introduce more systematically methods and systems for validation. The implementation of the EQF must take into account these principles, in particular as the EQF's approach based on learning outcomes will facilitate the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The 'Ploteus' portal on learning opportunities (<http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus>) contributes to a better transparency of qualifications by providing information about education, training and learning opportunities in European countries. The future development of

'Ploteus' will take into account the reference levels introduced by the EQF.

Consistency with other policies and objectives of the Union

The mutual recognition of qualifications in the area of regulated professions is ensured by Directive 2005/36/EC adopted on 7 September 2005. This Directive, which consolidates, modernises and simplifies 15 existing Directives adopted between 1975 and 1999, provides for a system of automatic recognition of qualifications for professions with harmonised training requirements (doctors, nurses, midwives, dentists, veterinarians, pharmacists) and also for architects. For the other regulated professions (currently around 800 professions are regulated by one or more Member States in the EU) the system is based on mutual recognition, i.e. a person qualified to exercise a profession in a Member State, should also be authorised to practise this profession in another Member State.

The scope of Directive 2005/36/EC and of the EQF differ in that the EQF is not a tool granting rights to migrants for recognition of their qualifications acquired in one Member State with a view to exercising a regulated profession in another Member State. In such a case, only Directive 2005/36/EC imposes legally binding obligations on Member States' authorities.

Mutual recognition is also the aim of the Directive 1996/26/EC on access to the occupation of road haulage operator and road transport operator. A proposal for revision of this Directive to be examined by the Commission in 2007 will need to reflect the establishment of the EQF.

Finally, the European Council of 15-16 October 1999 stated that the legal status of third-country nationals holding a long-term residence permit should be granted a set of uniform rights as near as possible to those enjoyed by EU-citizens. Council Directive 2003/109/EC¹ provides therefore that 'long term residents shall enjoy equal treatment with nationals as regards: c) recognition of professional diplomas, certificates and other qualifications, in accordance with the relevant national procedures', including when they exercise their right to intra-EU mobility granted by this Directive. The EQF will therefore contribute to the effective application of this right in situations where Directive 2005/36/EC does not apply.

2) CONSULTATION OF INTERESTED PARTIES AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Consultation of interested parties

Consultation methods, main sectors targeted and general profile of respondents

In July 2005 the European Commission launched a Europe-wide consultation process on the EQF based on Commission Staff Working Document SEC(2005) 957. Addressing the 32 countries participating in the "Education and Training 2010" work programme, the European social partners, sector and branch organisations, educational institutions and associations as well as NGOs, an EQF blueprint was submitted for comment. As part of this consultation process, the EQF blueprint was also presented to

¹ OJ L 16, 23.1.2004, p. 44.

and debated in a range of meetings organised by national authorities, social partners, sectoral bodies and others during autumn 2005. The results of the consultation process were discussed at a conference organised in Budapest in February 2006.

Summary of responses and how they have been taken into account

The consultation process, resulting in extensive feedback from a wide range of stakeholders in 31 European countries, including the candidate countries, confirmed a broad support for the EQF. The majority of respondents agreed that there is a need for a common European reference framework. However, support was made conditional to a series of requirements and recommendations, which have been taken into account by this proposal. Particular emphasis has been given to the refinement and simplification of the reference level descriptors.

An open consultation was conducted over the internet from 5 July 2005 to 31 December 2005. The Commission received 125 responses including the results of national consultations. The results are available on the following website: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/index_en.html.

Collection and use of expertise

Scientific/expertise domains concerned

The development of the EQF proposal was made possible through extensive involvement of a range of international experts with experiences in the field of qualifications and qualifications frameworks.

Methodology used

A series of studies launched by Cedefop and the Bologna Process Follow Up Group have contributed directly to the formulation of the EQF proposal. The Cedefop (2004) report on 'European reference levels for education and training' builds extensively on relevant, international research in this field and presents the first outline of a framework covering the full range of qualifications. The report of the Bologna Follow Up Group on 'a Framework for qualifications in the European Higher Education Area' helped to identify and clarify functions of the EQF, in particular as to the relationship between the national and European level.

The EQF blueprint presented in July 2005 was based on the work of an expert group which held 7 meetings between autumn 2004 and spring 2005. The expert group focussed on the overall objectives and functions of the EQF but paid particular attention to the development of learning outcomes based reference levels. The group included representatives of all main areas of education and training (general, adult, vocational, higher education and training) as well as representatives of sectors and social partners thus making it well suited to address the challenge of developing a framework covering the entire scope of qualifications, from the end of compulsory education to the highest level of academic and professional education and training.

Following the consultation process, a separate expert group was set up to produce a simplified and revised set of reference level descriptors. This group agreed a new set of reference level descriptors which are used in Annex I of this proposal as well as a set

of key definitions underpinning this Recommendation.

Main organisations/experts consulted

Membership of the EQF expert group is set out in Commission Staff Working Document SEC(2005) 957. For the second group which worked on a revised set of reference level descriptors, Member States, candidate and EEA countries were asked to appoint competent experts, as were the European social partners.

Two external contracts were issued to support the preparations of the EQF proposal and to support the Commission in analysing the responses to the consultation process.

Cedefop and the European Training Foundation contributed actively to the work, working closely with the Commission, the external experts and the expert groups.

Summary of advice received and used

The existence of potentially serious risks with irreversible consequences has not been mentioned.

Expert advice was in particular used to prepare the reference level descriptors contained in Annex I of this proposal.

Means used to make the expert advice publicly available

The reference level descriptors agreed by the expert group were part of a document submitted to the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training, which gave a positive opinion on the main elements of the proposal in its meeting on 21 June 2006.

Impact assessment

The first option considered involves taking no action (that is, no action by the European Union) and would entail allowing the current arrangements for comparability, transparency and transfer of qualifications to continue. Directive 2005/36/EC on the mutual recognition of qualifications would continue to facilitate mobility for specified professionals whose occupations are regulated, but there would be no further action for occupations which do not fall within the scope of the Directive. In this respect, Member States would continue to cooperate to a limited extent and where advantageous through bilateral agreements but this would be complex and uncoordinated. Stakeholders would be able to continue to use transparency and mobility instruments such as the 'Europass' and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) in higher education, but none of these provide an overall framework for cooperation. This option would therefore not meet the demands of Member States for a common European reference point or instrument.

A second option is a Communication from the Commission. However, a Commission Communication is not a legal instrument and would not involve the Member States or European Parliament in its adoption. This option would therefore not generate the necessary political commitment from the Member States, which have worked closely with the Commission in developing the EQF. It would thus not have real impact and added value in terms of implementation at the national level.

A third option is a Commission Recommendation under Article 150 of the Treaty (vocational training). However, this would not be based on Article 149 of the Treaty (education) and therefore would not reflect the dual education and training components and aims of the EQF within a lifelong learning perspective. It would entail using a legal instrument but, as with option 2, it would not involve the Member States or the European Parliament in the formal adoption of the proposal and so would still lack the commitment to implementation at the national level, which is crucial to the success and continued momentum of the EQF.

The fourth option considered is to establish the EQF via the legislative instrument of a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, under Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty; this instrument would recommend that the EQF be used by Member States on a voluntary basis as a translation device for comparing qualifications and facilitating their transparency and transfer throughout Europe.

A fifth option is to implement the EQF via the legislative instrument of a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council, under Article 150 of the Treaty. Without Article 149, this would have the same disadvantage as option 3 (i.e. excluding education) and would also be a Decision adopting principles and obligations for those Member States which relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF. However, the overwhelming consensus of stakeholders (Member States, social partners, sectors and others) is that an EQF should be entirely voluntary.

The Commission carried out an impact assessment, whose report will be accessible on the Commission's website.

3) LEGAL ELEMENTS OF THE PROPOSAL

Summary of the proposed action

The proposed Recommendation establishes the EQF as reference tool for the comparison of qualification levels in national qualifications systems as well as qualifications systems developed by international sectoral organisations. The EQF's main components are a set of European reference levels described in terms of learning outcomes, and mechanisms and principles for voluntary cooperation.

It is recommended that Member States use the EQF as a reference tool to compare qualification levels used in different qualifications systems, relate their qualifications systems to the EQF by linking qualification levels to the corresponding EQF levels and, where appropriate, develop a national qualifications framework. Moreover, new qualifications and "Europass" documents should contain a clear reference to the appropriate EQF level. However, in the situations covered by Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications, these references should not affect the migrant's rights. Member States are also recommended to use a learning outcomes-based approach when defining and developing qualifications, to promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and to designate a national EQF centre to support and coordinate the relationship between the national qualifications system and the EQF, in particular by ensuring the use of quality assurance mechanisms and transparent procedures.

The proposal invites the Commission to support Member States and international

sectoral organisations in using the EQF, to establish an EQF advisory group ensuring the overall coherence of the co-operation process, and to monitor the implementation of the EQF with a view to a possible review of the Recommendation five years after its adoption. This group will consist of representatives of the national EQF centres, the European social partners and other stakeholders, as appropriate.

Legal basis

The EQF is proposed under both Articles 149 and 150 because it has a dual purpose, comprising components and encompassing objectives for both education and vocational training which are of equal importance within the EQF's lifelong learning perspective. It supports education and vocational training by encouraging mobility through citizens' transfer of qualifications between national systems and between general education, higher education and vocational training. It encourages cooperation between Member States and supports and supplements their action.

Subsidiarity principle

The subsidiarity principle applies insofar as the proposal does not fall under the exclusive competence of the Community.

The objectives of the proposal cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States for the following reasons.

The main function of the EQF is to facilitate translation between and comparison of qualifications awarded by national authorities. As a transnational problem this cannot be achieved by the Member States, in particular since the lack of mutual trust between national and sectoral stakeholders has been defined as one of the main problems causing lack of transparency and preventing transfer of qualifications.

Community action will better achieve the objectives of the proposal for the following reasons:

- The challenges related to transparency and the transfer of qualifications are shared by all Member States and cannot exclusively be solved at national or sectoral level.
- If all 25 Member States were to negotiate bilateral agreements on the subject covered by this Recommendation with all other Member States separately and in an uncoordinated way, this would result in an extremely complex and non-transparent overall structure at the European level.
- The proposal provides a common reference point and shared framework for cooperation between Member States. These functions cannot be provided by action at the national level.

The proposal therefore complies with the subsidiarity principle.

Proportionality principle

The proposal complies with the proportionality principle for the following reason:

This Recommendation conforms to the principle of proportionality because it does not replace or define national qualifications systems and/or qualifications and leaves the implementation of the recommendation to the Member States.

Existing reporting systems will be used, minimising the administrative burden.

Choice of instruments

Proposed instrument: Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council.

Other means would not be as effective. In particular, in addition to a Recommendation, the Commission also considered a Communication from the Commission and a Decision of the European Parliament and the Council. See under the impact assessment section above.

4) BUDGETARY IMPLICATION

The proposal has no implication for the Community budget.

5) ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Review/revision/sunset clause

The proposal includes a review clause.

European Economic Area

The proposed act concerns an EEA matter and should therefore extend to the European Economic Area.

Detailed explanation of the proposal

The core element of the EQF is a set of 8 reference levels which will act as a common and neutral reference point for education and training authorities at national and sectoral level. The eight levels cover the entire span of qualifications from those achieved at the end of compulsory education and training to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional and vocational education and training. As an instrument for the promotion of lifelong learning, the EQF encompasses general and adult education, vocational education and training as well as higher education. Levels 5-8 contain a clear reference to the levels defined in the framework for the European Higher Education Area in the context of the Bologna process.

The description of the 8 EQF reference levels is based on learning outcomes - in the EQF understood as the statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process. This reflects an important shift in the way education, training and learning is conceptualised and described. The shift to learning outcomes introduces a common language making it possible to compare qualifications according to their content and profile and not according to methods and processes of delivery. In the EQF learning outcomes are defined by a combination of knowledge, skills and competence. The balance between these elements will vary from qualification to qualification as the EQF covers all qualifications at all levels and

academic as well as vocational qualifications. The use of learning outcomes in describing qualification levels will facilitate the validation of learning taking place outside formal education and training institutions, which is in general seen as a key element of lifelong learning.

The EQF is also a framework for cooperation and an instrument for strengthening mutual trust between national stakeholders and also international sectoral organisations involved in education and training. The successful implementation of the EQF requires, however, that national education and training authorities and sectoral stakeholders commit to it on a voluntary basis.

The primary users of the EQF will be bodies in charge of national and/or sectoral qualification systems and frameworks. The EQF will only be relevant to individual citizens, employers and education and training providers after the referencing process has been carried out at national and/or sectoral level.

As to the involvement of sectors, the EQF will provide an opportunity for international sectoral organisations to refer their qualification systems to the EQF. The main objective in relation to sectors is to develop stronger links between the national qualifications systems and emerging international sectoral qualifications.

The development of mutual trust in the cooperation between the different stakeholders involved in education and training must be based on shared procedures and criteria. To achieve this, decisions regarding the referencing of a national or sectoral qualification to the EQF must be made public. In addition, the setting up of a European advisory body consisting of representatives from all countries using the EQF is another important element promoting common approaches.

The decision at national and sectoral level to use the EQF must be based on a commitment to quality assurance. Introducing systems for quality assurance at all relevant levels of education and training - and in relation to the cooperation process itself - is crucial for developing mutual trust. The implementation of the EQF must therefore take into account the conclusions on quality assurance in vocational education and training adopted by the Council on 28 May 2004 and Recommendation 2006/143/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 February 2006 on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education.

The implementation of the EQF requires coordination at national level. From the perspective of the EQF, the development of national qualifications frameworks would increase the potential for success.

Particular attention must be paid to the development - through testing, experimentation and direct cooperation - of support and guidance material to be used at sectoral, national and European level contributing to the consistency of the implementation process, in particular as regards the referencing of national and sectoral qualification levels to the EQF levels. The proposal recommends that national qualifications systems be related to the EQF by 2009 and that new qualifications and Europass documents contain a reference to their EQF level by 2011.

Particular attention must also be paid to the impact of a learning outcomes approach as used in the EQF on classifications of knowledge, skills and competences. Future

developments of existing statistical classifications and nomenclatures allowing for the measurement of education and training attainment such as the ISCED 97 should therefore take this into consideration.

These processes will have to be facilitated and supported at European level by the Commission and supported by agencies like Cedefop and the European Training Foundation.

Proposal for a

**RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
AND OF THE COUNCIL**

on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning

(Text with EEA relevance)

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 149(4), and Article 150(4) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission²,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee³,

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions⁴,

Acting in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 251 of the Treaty⁵,

Whereas:

- (1) The development of citizens' knowledge, skills and competence is crucial for competitiveness and social cohesion in the Community. Participation in lifelong learning and the use of qualifications should therefore be promoted and improved at the national and Community levels.
- (2) The Lisbon European Council in 2000 concluded that an increased transparency of qualifications should be one of the main components that are necessary to adapt education and training systems in the Community to the demands of the knowledge society. Furthermore the Barcelona European Council in 2002 called for both closer cooperation in the university sector and the improvement of transparency and recognition methods in the area of vocational education and training.
- (3) The Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 on lifelong learning⁶ invited the Commission, in close cooperation with the Council and the Member States, to develop a framework for the recognition of qualifications for both education and training, building on the

² OJ C , , p. .

³ OJ C , , p. .

⁴ OJ C , , p. .

⁵ OJ C , , p. .

⁶ OJ C 163, 9.7.2002, p. 1.

achievements of the Bologna process and promoting similar action in the area of vocational training.

- (4) The Joint Reports of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme, adopted in 2004 and 2006, stressed the need to develop a European Qualifications Framework.
- (5) In the context of the Copenhagen process, the Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council of 15 November 2004 on the Future priorities of enhanced European Cooperation in vocational education and training gave priority to the development of an open and flexible European Qualifications Framework, founded on transparency and mutual trust, which should stand as a common reference covering both education and training.
- (6) The Brussels European Councils of March 2005 and March 2006 underlined the importance of adopting a European Qualifications Framework.
- (7) This Recommendation takes into account Decision No 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass)⁷ and the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of [...] on key competences for lifelong learning⁸.
- (8) This Recommendation is compatible with the framework for the European Higher Education Area and cycle descriptors adopted by the ministers for higher education meeting in Bergen in May 2005.
- (9) This Recommendation does not apply to situations covered by Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications⁹ which confers rights and obligations on both the relevant national authority and the migrant. Reference to the European Qualifications Framework levels on qualifications should not affect access to the labour market where professional qualifications have been recognised in accordance with Directive 2005/36/EC.
- (10) The objective of this Recommendation is to create a common reference framework which should serve as a translation device between different qualifications systems and their levels, whether for general and higher education or for vocational education and training. This will increase the transparency, comparability and portability of citizens' qualifications in different Member States. The European Qualifications Framework should moreover enable international sectoral organisations to relate their qualifications systems to a common reference point and thus facilitate the placing of these qualifications within national qualifications systems. This Recommendation therefore contributes to the wider objectives of promoting lifelong learning and increasing the mobility of workers and learners.

⁷ OJ L 390, 31.12.2004, p. 6.

⁸ COM(2005) 548.

⁹ OJ L 255, 30.9.2005, p. 22.

- (11) This Recommendation conforms to the principle of subsidiarity referred to in Article 5 of the Treaty insofar as its objective is to support and supplement Member States' action by facilitating further cooperation between them to increase transparency and to promote mobility and lifelong learning. This Recommendation conforms to the principle of proportionality referred to in that Article because it does not replace or define national qualifications systems and/or qualifications. The European Qualifications Framework does not describe specific qualifications or an individual's competences and a particular qualification should be placed at the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level via the relevant national qualifications system.

HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT MEMBER STATES:

1. Use the European Qualifications Framework as a reference tool to compare the qualification levels of different qualifications systems within a lifelong learning perspective;
2. Relate their national qualifications system to the European Qualifications Framework by 2009, in particular by referencing in a transparent manner their qualification levels to the levels set out in Annex I, and by developing a national qualifications framework, where appropriate according to national legislation and practice;
3. Ensure that, by 2011, all new qualifications and "Europass" documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level;
4. Use an approach based on learning outcomes when defining and describing qualifications, and promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning according to the common European principles agreed in the Council conclusions of 28 May 2004;
5. Designate a national centre to support and coordinate the relationship between the national qualifications system and the European Qualifications Framework.

This centre's tasks should include:

- (a) referencing levels of qualifications within the national qualifications system to the European Qualifications Framework levels described in Annex I;
- (b) promoting and applying the principles for quality assurance in education and training set out in Annex II when relating the national qualifications system to the European Qualifications Framework ;
- (c) ensuring that the methodology used to refer national qualifications levels to the European Qualifications Framework is transparent and that the resulting decisions are published;
- (d) providing guidance to stakeholders on how national qualifications relate to the European Qualifications Framework through the national qualifications system;

- (e) ensuring the participation of all relevant national stakeholders including, according to national legislation and practice, higher education and vocational education and training institutions, social partners, sectors and experts on the comparison and use of qualifications at the European level;
6. For the purposes of the Recommendation, the definitions which apply are the following:
- (a) ‘qualification’ means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards;
 - (b) ‘national qualifications system’ means all aspects of a Member States’ activity related to the recognition of learning and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. This includes the development and implementation of institutional arrangements and processes relating to quality assurance, assessment and the award of qualifications. A national qualifications system may be composed of several subsystems and may include a national qualifications framework;
 - (c) ‘national qualifications framework’ means an instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved. This aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society;
 - (d) ‘sector’ means a grouping of professional activities on the basis of their main economic function, product, service or technology;
 - (e) ‘international sectoral organisation’ means an association of national organisations, including for example employers and professional bodies, which represents the interests of national sectors;
 - (f) ‘learning outcomes’ means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process and are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence;
 - (g) ‘knowledge’ means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practises that is related to a field of study or work. In the European Qualifications Framework, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual;
 - (h) ‘skills’ means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the European Qualifications Framework, skills are described as cognitive (use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments);
 - (i) ‘competence’ means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in

professional and/or personal development. In the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

ENDORSE THE COMMISSION'S INTENTION TO:

1. Support Member States in carrying out the above tasks and international sectoral organisations in using the reference levels and principles of the European Qualifications Framework as set out in this Recommendation, in particular by facilitating cooperation and testing, and developing support and guidance material;
2. Establish a European Qualifications Framework advisory group (including representatives of the national centres, the European social partners and other stakeholders, as appropriate) in order to monitor, co-ordinate and to ensure the quality and overall coherence of the process of relating qualifications systems to the European Qualifications Framework;
3. Monitor the action taken in response to this Recommendation and report, five years after its adoption, to the European Parliament and the Council on the experience gained and implications for the future, including, if necessary, a possible review of this Recommendation.

Done at Brussels,

For the European Parliament
The President

For the Council
The President

ANNEX I

Descriptors defining levels in the European Qualifications Framework

Each of the 8 levels is defined by a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any system of qualifications.			
	Knowledge	Skills	Competence
	<i>In the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.</i>	<i>In the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).</i>	<i>In the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.</i>
Level 1 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 1 are	basic general knowledge	basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	work or study under direct supervision in a structured context
Level 2 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 2 are	basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study	basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	work or study under supervision with some autonomy
Level 3 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 3 are	knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study.	a range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems
Level 4 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 4 are	factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	a range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the

			evaluation and improvement of work or study activities
Level 5* The learning outcomes relevant to Level 5 are	comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change review and develop performance of self and others
Level 6** The learning outcomes relevant to Level 6 are	advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups
Level 7*** The learning outcomes relevant to Level 7 are	highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields	specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams

Level 8**** The learning outcomes relevant to Level 8 are	knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields	the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research.
--	---	---	--

Compatibility with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area

The Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area provides descriptors for cycles. Each cycle descriptor offers a generic statement of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with qualifications that represent the end of that cycle.

* The descriptor for the higher education short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle), developed by the Joint Quality Initiative as part of the Bologna process, corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 5

** The descriptor for the first cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 6

*** The descriptor for the second cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 7

**** The descriptor for the third cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 8

ANNEX II

Principles for Quality Assurance in Education and Training

Quality Assurance which is necessary to ensure accountability and improvement of education and training should be carried out in accordance with the following principles.

- Quality assurance policies and procedures should cover all levels of education and training systems.
- Quality assurance should be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions.
- Quality assurance should include regular evaluation of institutions or programmes by external monitoring bodies or agencies.
- External monitoring bodies or agencies carrying out quality assurance should be subject to regular review.
- Quality assurance should include context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes;
- Quality Assurance systems should include the following elements
 - clear and measurable objectives and standards;
 - guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement;
 - appropriate resources;
 - consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review;
 - feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement;
 - widely accessible evaluation results.
- Quality Assurance initiatives at international, national and regional level should be coordinated in order to ensure overview, coherence, synergy and system-wide analysis.
- Quality Assurance should be a cooperative process across education and training levels and systems, involving all relevant stakeholders, within Member States and across the Community.
- Quality Assurance guidelines at Community level may provide reference points for evaluations and peer-learning.