



PANORAMA

Assuring the quality of VET systems by defining expected outcomes

A cross-country analysis
in seven Member States



Cedefop

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Europe 123
GR-57001 Thessaloniki (Pylea)

Postal Address:
PO Box 22427
GR-55102 Thessaloniki

Tel. (30) 23 10 49 01 11
Fax (30) 23 10 49 00 20
E-mail: info@cedefop.europa.eu
Homepage: www.cedefop.europa.eu

Aviana Bulgarelli, *Director*
Christian Lettmayr, *Deputy Director*
Juan Menéndez-Valdés,
Chair of the Governing Board

Foreword

Interest in quality and improving the quality of vocational education and training (VET) systems has increased over recent years, mainly due to growing awareness of the key role VET plays in economic competitiveness and social inclusion.

At EU level, one of the objectives of the Lisbon strategy of March 2000 is to transform Europe into a knowledge-based society, while the Barcelona European Council of December 2002 set the target of making Europe's education and training systems a world quality reference standard by 2010, putting quality at the heart of the European policy agenda for education and VET.

Quality assurance plays a decisive role in modernising European VET systems and improving their performance and attractiveness. To achieve better value for money, VET systems need to respond more effectively to the changing demands of labour markets, hence increasing the effectiveness of VET outcomes by improving the match between demand and supply in education and training.

Cedefop developed the present study to gain better insight into how targets and outcome standards are defined, assessed and used in a number of Member States to monitor and control the quality of the VET provision at system, VET-provider and learner levels. This work falls within the overall context of the European qualifications framework which is very much concerned with learning outcomes and competences.

Cedefop felt it was time also to capitalise on the knowledge and information previously acquired by commissioning a peer learning visit concerning the accreditation approaches of VET providers (Rome, 2005) on one hand, and a study on quality standards and norms in European VET (Technical working group on quality in VET, 2003b), on the other.

Cedefop considered it was also time to further analyse the sensitive issue of the accreditation/validation of training programmes, services or VET providers, which can be done only using predetermined standards/outcomes.

Finally, Cedefop felt it should examine in greater depth the shift which has been observed at system level from an input to an outcome approach and from policy based on providing resources to one based on measuring and evaluating the results and outcomes delivered.

The present study was therefore launched to investigate how and under what conditions output/outcome standards have been introduced and used in Denmark, Germany, Ireland, France, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom to measure the intended effects of VET at system, VET-provider and individual learner levels, a trend to be seen in many VET systems.

As is generally acknowledged, there is a definition problem in the field covered by this report. The terms 'outputs' and 'outcomes' are used interchangeably. In addition, the term 'standards'

may be used in at least two ways: in absolute terms, to refer to the highest possible level of performance to be attained, or relatively, to refer to an average level.

To overcome this difficulty and enable the international reader to follow smoothly the present text, which is of a technical nature, it was agreed to use the term ‘targets’ for the VET systems and the VET providers, and the term ‘output/outcome standards’ only for learners.

The same concern for clarity has necessitated the inclusion of a short summary with the most important points at the end of each chapter.

Cedefop considered the present study should also provide a systematic presentation of the strengths and weaknesses encountered in using outcomes, an important aspect for better understanding of the quality management of VET and its impact in the seven Member States investigated, which have largely different VET traditions and approaches. Chapter 4 deals with these strengths and weaknesses and ends with a recapitulatory table.

The study also looks at the question of what makes a quality outcome standard or target – what are its characteristics and how best can it be implemented. The proposal made is based on the national experiences analysed, an international bibliography, previous work on quality in VET under the European forum (2001-02) and by the Technical working group (2003-04), and the considerable expertise of the project team. Cedefop firmly believes that the study provides some important insights, given the current absence of common European outcomes/standards.

Cedefop considers its best reward will be to see this study contributing to a more precise definition of the quality assurance dimension of the European qualifications framework and serving as a reference point in the much sought after dialogue between higher education and VET, an objective not yet attained.

Aviana Bulgarelli
Director, Cedefop

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- Ireland: Marie Gould (Further Education and Training Awards Council), Barbara Kelly (ENQA-VET and Further Education and Training Awards Council) and Margaret Kelly (Department of Education and Science);
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- the Netherlands: Thea van den Boom (ENQA-VET and Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Directorate for Vocational and Adult Education), Roy Tjoa and Siep Jurna (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Directorate for Vocational and Adult Education), Hugo Hopstaken and Sjoerd Roodenburg (COLO-bureau, Zoetermeer);
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The outcomes of this study were presented to and endorsed by the ENQA-VET at its general meeting on 5-6 October 2006.

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Executive summary

The arguments for the use of standards and especially output standards are closely related to the links between resources and outcome, as the example from UK shows:

‘In the past, the debate around the public services centred just on how much governments were investing – both in terms of money, and in terms of other resource “inputs”, including the number of doctors, nurses, teachers and police officers. Since the introduction of public service agreements, the debate has shifted. Now we can measure how effectively resources are being used and whether services are delivering the outcomes that will really make a difference to people’s lives.’

The purpose of the study was to investigate how targets and standards are set for the system as a whole, for the providers and for the individual learners in seven countries: Denmark, Germany, Ireland, France, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

The main targets (outcome standards) at system level may be set in the annual Finance Act, public service agreements or by defining basic performance levels. The specific targets concern students’ and adults’ achievements, dropout rates, participation rates, diploma or qualification rates, satisfaction rates or employability rates.

The main targets (outcome standards) for providers are floor targets relating to accreditation, criteria and parameters concerning self-evaluation and external evaluation and voluntary targets, such as success rate and grades.

Outcome standards for individual learners are set as part of the different national qualifications frameworks or region-specific standards – either by parliaments and ministries, national technical authorities, regional political authorities or in consultation with the social partners.

Rewards and penalties are in many countries a natural consequence of the work with output standards. Providers who do not reach floor targets may lose their accreditation or funding or have their managers removed – more positively, this means that ministries may offer providers additional funding if they attain a number of goals.

The major trends mentioned by the countries surveyed include the use of output standards instead of input and process standards, the use of financing based on results, clearer, simpler accountability and incentives for delivering improvements in public services, common award structures and new forms of training and examination. However, there has not been a complete change, focusing only on output and transparency, but rather these tools complement the traditional standards used.

The challenges relating to output standards are many and will constitute an important part of the work to be done in the coming years.

The key challenges include decentralisation and autonomy, the complexity of social development and the influence of context, the long-term impact of targets, the potential conflict which may arise between quantity and quality, the statistical burden and the involvement of different stakeholders are among the key challenges.

Potential initiatives at European level may have two main objectives: to monitor the development of European policies, and to confront and to discuss the experience gained. This can be done through further research, by thematic groups on the definition of targets at system and provider level and/or by organising peer learning to discuss the experience of target setting. Further studies might focus on which targets and standards exist, how are they measured and what the links are between inputs, processes and outputs.

1. The study

1.1. Purpose

This study focuses on how specific objectives and the relevant expected outcomes are set for VET through the definition of targets and output/outcome standards. Specific objectives can be set for the entire system (in this case the term ‘objective’ or ‘targets’ is mainly used), or for the providers (in this case the term ‘targets’ is mainly used), and for the individual learners (in this case the term ‘outcome standards’ is mainly used).

A target or output/outcome standard may be defined as a statement, approved and formalised by a recognised body, which defines the results to be achieved in a given context. This statement may be defined quantitatively (by stating absolute or relative figures or by using indicators) or qualitatively, by specifying a direction to be followed or an objective to be achieved.

Detailed planning of the educational activity, through the definition of clear and specific objectives, and of the relevant outcomes, is the first step in the common quality assurance framework (CQAF) ⁽¹⁾ drafted by the Technical working group on quality in VET (TWG). A previous study headed by the TWG highlighted the growing emphasis placed on the setting of standards in the VET system, and the shift from focusing on input and process standards (the subjects to teach, the lessons, the teachers, etc.) to focusing on output standards.

The trend towards a VET system involving the setting of specific standards may be called into question by two other processes that currently characterise the VET system:

- the need for flexibility arising from the continuous evolution of the labour market, which is inimical to the definition of strict standards which take a long time to change;
- the trend towards autonomy and local empowerment, as a result of which regional and local authorities want to express their own needs concerning the setting of the standards, rather than merely accepting a decision taken centrally.

This study therefore looks at the following issues:

- why is the definition of targets and standards important to ensure a quality system?
- is there a trend in the Member States towards a more extensive use of targets and standards?
- how are targets and output/outcome standards defined?

⁽¹⁾ Presented later in this chapter.

- are standards used at all levels: system level, provider level, sectoral level and individual learner level?
- is this trend consistent with the demand for greater flexibility and decentralisation?
- what are the results of and the risks inherent in this process?

1.2. Definitions

In the international literature on education and training the term ‘standard’ is used in at least two ways. Sometimes it is used to indicate the average measure of a reference group of the population. In the debate on education, observations along the lines of ‘we have to raise our standards’, are quite usual, meaning that average pupil performance should be improved. Here the term ‘standard’ is being used relatively.

‘Standard’ may also be used in an absolute sense, however; in that case it is employed to indicate the level of performance to be achieved. The measure of performance is drawn from expert consensus or from institutional acknowledgement of a fixed measurement. The word ‘benchmarking’ is also used to set the level of the performance, but in many countries it is often used to compare different entities with a view to improving performance.

When used in the first way (relatively) the level of the standard is measured *ex post*, on the base of average performance. When used in the second way (absolutely) the level is established *ex ante*. Thomas and Peng (2002) noted that even in official documents the word standard is used with in both ways, which gives rise to some ambiguity.

In the TWG report on quality, *Quality standards and norms in European VET* (2003b), the term standard was defined as ‘a statement, approved and formalised by a recognised body, which defines the rules to follow in a given context or the results to be achieved’. Such a statement may be couched in quantitative terms, stating absolute or relative figures or using indicators, or in qualitative terms, using wording which has to be specific and accurate.

Accurate definition is necessary because standards have to be applied in different contexts and should be easily verified to avoid varying interpretations. This definition of the term ‘standard’ also clarifies the relationship between standards and indicators: indicators are the instruments that can be used to fix the level of the standard and to measure whether the standard has been reached or not.

In VET, the term standard is mostly used to refer to the definition of the knowledge, skills and competences that students or trainees should acquire and demonstrate to obtain a particular qualification (or diploma). The standard is therefore the result expected from individuals after a period of school, training or work.

The Cedefop study *European structures of qualification levels* (Cedefop; Westerhuis and Sellin, 2001) states that ‘a standard reflects what the (future) employee/professional must

know and be able to apply in professional practice, which are laid down in documents and are recognised by public authorities and/or social partners. Standards can be stipulated in awards, exit qualifications, certificates, diplomas or other evidence of a study programme’.

However, the term standard, in the sense of standard measure, can also be used in other contexts. For example standard measures can be used to define how much money a school may receive for each pupil (input standard) or how many hours a particular subject should be taught (process standard), or to lay down the results expected from the educational and VET system (output/outcome standards).

A further distinction can therefore be made between input and process standards and output standards (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004, p. 107):

- input standards are standards regarding the resources (for example staff, students, materials) which should be available in the institution;
- process standards are standards regarding the activities taking place inside the institutions to generate output;
- output standards are standards regarding the products of the processes in the institutions, and therefore lay down the level of the performance to be attained.

In the UK and Ireland, in referring to the expected results of a school or the system, the term ‘target’ is more frequently used to describe the statement of specific objectives and expected results. This study therefore uses the term ‘targets’ to describe specific objectives to be achieved at system level or by individual providers, and the expression ‘output/outcome standards’ to describe specific objectives to be achieved by learners.

The European benchmarks (European Commission, 2005), which were set as part of the Lisbon process⁽²⁾, can also be considered as targets, even if in that context the word ‘benchmark’ has been used, in order to stress the idea of a comparison intended to foster a dynamic process of development.

A final conceptual distinction is between output and outcome standards. The expression ‘outcome standards’ is frequently used to define student or trainee performance. The above-mentioned Cedefop study (Cedefop; Westerhuis and Sellin, 2001) uses the word ‘outcomes’ to mean the results of the educational and training process.

The distinction between output and outcome is a very fine one and is not always evident in practice; the theoretical difference is that output is the intentional, direct effect of a process; there is a linear cause and effect relationship between the process and the output, that is to say that the output is what is expected once the process has been completed.

⁽²⁾ In Lisbon on 23-24 March 2000 the European Council set a strategic goal for the European Union to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.

The outcome is the actual result of the process; it is the consequence of the process itself, but may also be affected by other variables; for example, the rate of employment after a course may be described as the outcome of the training activity, because there are other external factors, such as the economic situation, which affect students' performance on the labour market (Allulli, 2000). There may also be unintended outcomes, that is to say results that were not intended.

In discussing individual learning performance, it is very difficult to say what the direct effect of a training activity is, and what the effect of the environment is. The distinction between output and outcome can therefore be quite ambiguous, and even in the literature the distinction is not always made clearly and rigorously.

To summarise, this study will use the term target to describe results officially expected from systems (for example 'at least 80 % of young people in the country must obtain a secondary school diploma') and providers (for example '80 % of the students trained should have found work six months after the course'), and the expression 'output/outcome standard' to describe the results officially expected from learners (for example 'to obtain the qualification pupils should be able to ...').

1.3. Participants

The cross country analysis involved the following countries: Denmark, Germany, Ireland, France, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

The information comes from an analysis of the existing literature and official documentation, from the answers given to a questionnaire sent to experts and officials from the countries examined, and from personal interviews conducted in the seven countries.

1.4. Motivation and trends

As described in greater detail elsewhere in this report, different countries have historically differed in the emphasis they place on input and process standards on the one hand and output standards on the other. However, the overall evolution of VET systems in recent years suggests a general trend towards a greater emphasis on output standards than on input and process standards.

There are many reasons for this shift. Basically, the growing complexity of society and of the labour market means individuals and providers need more freedom to organise their own training pathways. Flexible rules for the organisation of training activities are therefore important. On the other hand, however, this organisational freedom requires a stronger consensus and monitoring of the outputs/outcomes of the system. The decentralisation of education systems is a challenge for the traditional mechanisms for management at system

level and requires new tools for monitoring the development and the performance of the different actors and of the system as a whole. Measuring and monitoring the system by means of indicators established in defining targets and output standards is one tool which can be used to achieve quality assurance and development.

Targets and output standards can therefore be seen as a natural consequence of the focus in the last decade having been on making education and other public services more transparent and flexible. Public accountability is one of the benefits of using clear performance measurements or output standards.

The following points illustrate this trend towards more flexibility, focusing on outcome monitoring and results:

- the growing demand for autonomy from educational institutions is an example of the need for more flexibility at local level in organising activities;
- the growing importance attached to non-formal and informal learning and to the acknowledgment of prior learning is another example of the shift of attention from the definition of learning pathways to the certification of results, irrespectively of how those results have been obtained;
- the need to differentiate training provision, according to the needs of students and trainees, to ensure they achieve the best possible results, also exemplifies the need to allow flexibility in training provision, while placing the main emphasis on monitoring the final results;
- finally, the setting of international sectoral standards and the definition of the European benchmarks show how different organisations and different countries share the same ultimate objectives and are interested in pursuing them in spite of their education and training provision being sometimes very different.

The quality of a system is increasingly associated with the definition of the expected results in measurable terms and their monitoring. After its initial study on standards, the TWG therefore decided to launch a more in-depth study on output standards. This focus on targets and output standards does not mean that input standards should be forgotten or abandoned. In every country there is a balance between the two, and this balance has to be preserved to maintain a good system of quality management.

The seven European countries which have been investigated are all using targets and standards in managing their VET systems, but there is a difference between the Mediterranean countries, which have mainly developed standards related to the organisation of the system (input and process standards), and the countries in northern Europe, which have always given greater emphasis to standards related to results (output standards).

In Italy and France, and above all in VET which falls under the auspices of the Ministries of Education, the system defines the rules: how the educational institutions should be organised, what qualities teachers should have, how many students should be in a class, how many hours

each subject should be taught, curricula, etc. VET is mainly monitored formally, through inspections assessing whether the rules have been respected.

This approach does not exclude the possibility of attention also being paid to outcomes. Historically, the French Ministry of Education has also attached considerable importance to the setting of output standards, through the definition of *référentiels*, which are the standards for expected learner achievement. Italian curricula define the contents of the teaching but those contents are to a certain extent also intended to be a statement of what students should learn.

In the United Kingdom and Ireland providers have always had more freedom in organising their activities but, on the other hand, they set very precise standards for the results of the educational and training process.

Minimum targets are also seen as an instrument for VET providers to assure and develop quality and to be more effective. In the UK, floor targets are designed to identify underperforming providers and ensure that decisive action is taken where they fall below the minimum expected level.

The rationale behind the use of output standards can be illustrated by the development in Denmark.

The Danish perception of quality

Systematic quality assurance with a focus on objectives such as completion rates, employability, satisfaction among stakeholders and societal value, etc., is a relatively new issue in education, and did not appear on the political agenda until the late 1980s. Quality is not an absolute concept, however; it is rather a complex concept, which depends on the stakeholders' values, objectives, resources, policies and context. As such, quality in education and teaching is continuously defined through political debate and by the democratic process.

As regards a national definition of quality, the Danish Ministry of Education has formulated it as follows in its description of the quality strategy for the VET sector:

'[...] it is not possible to say anything definitive and universal about quality in an education system. It is neither possible nor desirable to authorise one specific concept – be it in regard to methods or objectives and values. This is a basic democratic principle, which takes into consideration the fact that it is possible to achieve the same goals by different routes and with different means and methods.' (Department for Vocational Colleges. *Quality strategy for the vocational college sector*. 2nd ed. (Theme booklet; 6-96, p. 7)).

In Denmark, quality in VET is perceived primarily in regard to providers and learners, with the aims of ensuring correspondence between the national VET objectives and the local VET programmes, and of securing the quality of the individual providers.

In 2002 the Danish Parliament passed a law making it obligatory for all educational institutions to publish the results of the assessment of the pupils/students/trainees as an average in a subject/level (for the institution as a whole). In 2004/05 the government intended to try to make it obligatory to make public the results in respect of six indicators developed by the Ministry of Education. Some of them are already made public.

1.5. The common quality assurance framework (CQAF) and the rationale behind use of targets and output/outcome standards

A major outcome of the work of the TWG is a proposal on a 'common quality assurance framework' (CQAF). This is designed to help Member States and participating countries to develop, improve, monitor and evaluate their own systems and practices, supported by a common reference system and concrete reference tools. It helps thereby to increase transparency and consistency between the policy initiatives in the different Member States, while fully respecting their responsibility for the development of their own systems. The CQAF was developed by taking stock of existing experience and knowledge in and across Member States and establishing a consensus with a view to identifying and analysing 'good practice'. This process provided a robust basis for debate, mutual learning and consensus building on common proposals.

The CQAF constitutes a European reference framework to ensure and develop quality in VET, building on the key principles of the most relevant existing quality assurance (QA) models. It may be considered as a cross-reading instrument. It can help policy-makers and practitioners get a better insight of how existing QA models work, to identify areas that need improvement, and decide how to improve them using common quantitative and qualitative references. It can also for capture and classify best practice in and across Member States.

The CQAF can be applied at both system and VET provider levels and, therefore, used to assess the effectiveness of VET. It emphasises the improvement and evaluation of ‘outputs’ and ‘outcomes’ of VET in terms of increasing employability, improving the match between demand and supply, and promoting better access to lifelong training, in particular for disadvantaged people. In total, the gains from the use of the CQAF are effectiveness, transparency and mutual trust in VET systems, within and across countries.

Quality assurance and development are a continuing process. The CQAF itself is not an exception. It must be regularly reviewed against particular contexts and existing quality approaches through the assessment of practical initiatives undertaken in different settings, while keeping its main feature of ‘context independence’. This is a delicate exercise where feedback plays a key role in reviewing the common references (quality criteria and indicators) of the framework, thereby improving its European added value.

The model (described in detail in Annex 1) includes the following interrelated elements:

- planning,
- implementation,
- evaluation and assessment,
- review,
- methodology.

In the CQAF model, the fundamental importance of specifying sound objectives (targets and standards) in measurable terms is quite evident:

- the targets and the standards are the main results of the planning phase, when the target to reach is clearly stated and agreed;
- the targets and the standards are the clear and shared point of reference which steers the implementation phase;
- the targets and the standards provide the fixed measure or indicator against which the results of the activity can be evaluated.

As the previously mentioned report on standards by the TWG on quality says: ‘Without the existence of ‘standards’, it is impossible to speak of quality or indeed to apply elementary quality management principles such as ‘quality assurance’ (= making sure that standards are always met), and ‘quality improvement’ (= raising the standards, or increasing the numbers that achieve the standards). With properly defined standards, it becomes much easier to adopt

any type of quality approach (for example self-assessment), and also to advance in the direction of benchmarking' (Technical working group on quality, 2003).

Setting targets and standards is important to assure quality in a system, because they:

- provide clear objectives, which are essential for steering the activity;
- are the results of a concerted process, which involves, or should involve, all the stakeholders;
- are universally acknowledged and shared;
- are known by all people working in the system;
- are easy to evaluate, since they are stated in unambiguous terms;
- allow comparison of systems, since their transparency makes it possible to compare the results of different processes.

Historically, all countries have used standards in managing their systems. Indeed, without the existence of input, process and output standards there can be no system. Every system is based on shared rules regarding its management and objectives.

1.6. Introduction to presenting data

This study starts with a presentation of the use of output standards and targets in the seven Member States studied. The link between the use of output standards and assessment and accreditation processes are also dealt with in this section. There is then a section presenting the actors involved in the process of setting standards. The next section deals with the perceived strengths and weaknesses in the different approaches to the use of standards. The trend towards an increasing focus on output standards and results in general is discussed in the following section. The last topic is the possible difficulties in the implementation of initiatives to promote the use of output standards.

To illustrate the trends regarding all the above-mentioned topics, examples are used from each of the seven Member States in the study. To give an overview of the topic, the main trends are summarised in a table at the end of each section. Finally, the main results of the study are summarised and suggestions for future progress presented.

2. Standards and targets

Standards and targets can be set at system, provider and individual levels. The following section presents the definitions of standards and targets in the different countries. Some common themes and topics are introduced and relevant examples from the countries presented, including examples of how standards and targets can be linked to the processes of assessment and accreditation.

2.1. System level

The degree to which output targets have been defined at system level varies from country to country. As mentioned above, some countries are still mainly focused on input and process standards, but there is a trend towards the increasing use of output targets.

2.1.1. Italy

In Italy there is a strong tradition of setting standards at system level, but they are mainly concerned with the definition of inputs and processes.

In the vocational education system, run to date by the Ministry of Education, the quality of educational institutions has traditionally been assured by the definition of national curricula and by national examinations set externally at the end of upper secondary school. This applies to vocational schools, such as the *Istituti Professionali*, as to others. Formal inspections are also carried out to ensure that the rules are being followed. In the vocational training system, which is managed by regional authorities, only some of the regions have a tradition of setting targets at system level.

2.1.2. France

The *Loi d'orientation pour l'école* ⁽³⁾ laid down the following objectives for the education system: that within 10 years all pupils should achieve at least the level of the *certificat d'aptitudes professionnelles* or of the *brevet d'études professionnelles* (first level of occupational qualification) while 80 % should reach *baccalaureat* level. Despite significant improvements during the period considered, these objectives were not met: today, between 7 % and 8 % leave without any qualifications. The rate of success at *baccalaureat* level is approximately 70 %.

⁽³⁾ Act No 89-486 of 10 July 1989, Section 3.

As a result, these objectives were revised and supplemented by a new *Loi d'orientation* adopted in 2005 ⁽⁴⁾, with the objective of guaranteeing that 100 % of pupils would obtain a diploma or a recognised qualification at the end of their initial training and that 80 % would reach *baccalaureat* level. A further objective is for 50 % of all pupils to go on to obtain a higher education diploma.

The *Loi organique relative aux lois de finances* (LOLF) introduced a major innovation into the French system. This Act has radically changed the public financing philosophy, moving from a model of simply financing an activity to one of financing an activity with a view to obtaining a specific result, described in measurable terms. Each ministry therefore has to specify in measurable terms the objectives to be reached, rather than simply requesting the resources to develop an activity.

Ministries were preparing their activity programmes containing actions, objectives and indicators. The Ministry of Labour was considering introducing action to facilitate access to qualifications, which includes the following objectives and indicators:

- (a) to improve access to qualifications and employment through the development of apprenticeships; the indicators are:
 - weight given to apprenticeships as part of the second professional cycle (levels IV and V);
 - weight given to higher level apprenticeships as part of the apprenticeship system as a whole;
 - weight given to apprenticeships in large enterprises.
- (b) to improve access to qualifications for employment through the development of *contrats de qualification*; the indicators are:
 - dropout rate,
 - rate of recognised qualification.

Other objectives include improving access to qualifications through *VAE* (*Validation des acquis de l'expérience*), etc. Specific targets will be set for certain objectives.

The Ministry of Education was also preparing its activity programme. One of the objectives which it was considering was to improve the rate of young people continuing their studies entering employment at the end of secondary school. The indicators are the rate of:

- continuation into higher education of people who obtain the *baccalaureat*;
- continuation into STS (*Section de techniciens supérieurs*) of people who obtain a technical *baccalaureat*;

⁽⁴⁾ *Loi d'orientation et de programme pour l'avenir de l'école*: Act No 2005-380 of 23 April 2005.

- young people employed seven months after the end of upper secondary school (excluding those who go on to further studies).

It is too early to say what consequences this approach will have at local level. It is interesting to observe that a contracting process is in operation between the Ministry of Education and the local *académies* in Education Priority Areas (*Zones d'éducation prioritaires*). The Ministry of Education sets the objectives every *académie* has to reach over the following three years and concludes a contract with the *académie*; this contract specifies the objectives to be reached, as well the resources which the ministry will provide to help the *académie* to reach them. The objectives are described in qualitative terms; no precise targets are set, but a list of indicators is attached which have to be used to monitor the progress of the *académie* towards the objectives.

2.1.3. United Kingdom

In England public service agreements (PSA) establish precise goals for key service improvements, including in education and training. The current PSA targets were published in the Public Expenditure White Paper in July 2004 (HM Treasury, 2004). In setting and implementing these targets, the aim has been to maintain continuity while reducing the number of national targets, simplifying the way that targets are expressed and focusing on the key policy outcomes sought.

The intention is to set targets within a devolved accountability framework in which decisions are made as close to the frontline as possible so that local and regional services are fully responsive within a clear set of national standards.

Targets are therefore as follows:

- (a) Objective III: All young people reaching the age of 19 should be ready for skilled employment or higher education:
 - increase the proportion of 19 year olds who achieve at least level 2 by three percentage points between 2004 and 2006, and a further two percentage points between 2006 and 2008, and increase the proportion of young people who achieve level 3. Reduce the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training by two percentage points by 2010.
- (b) Objective IV: tackle the adult skills gap: increase the number of adults with the skills required for employability and progression to higher levels of training through:
 - improving the basic skill levels of 2.25 million adults between the launch of Skills for Life in 2001 and 2010, with a milestone of 1.5 million in 2007;
 - reducing by at least 40 % the number of adults in the workforce who lack NVQ 2 (National Vocational Qualification) or equivalent qualifications by 2010. Working towards this, one million adults in the workforce should achieve level 2 between 2003 and 2006.

There was a separate PSA target for apprenticeships (the numbers completing apprenticeships should have risen by three quarters). That target, once achieved, would be replaced by a performance indicator.

The Learning and Skills Council has been putting national PSA targets into language that makes them more practicable to use as local targets. Regional Skills Partnerships have been given a greater role in the regional application of national targets. A local public service agreement (LPSA) is a voluntary agreement negotiated between a local authority and the government. The overall aim of LPSAs is to improve the delivery of local public services by focusing on targeted outcomes with support from government.

In Scotland six key performance indicators have been identified to monitor the achievement of the lifelong learning policies outlined in *Life through learning, learning through life* (Scottish Executive, 2003).

These indicators are as follows: a reduction in the proportion of 16-19 year olds not in education, training and employment; an increase in support to 16-19 year olds from low income families to stay on at school and/or further education college; an increase in graduates as a proportion of the workforce; a reduction in the proportion of working-age adults whose highest qualification is below SCQF level 5 (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework); a reduction in the proportion of 18-29 year olds whose highest qualification is below SCQF level 6; an increase in the proportion of people in employment undertaking training (Cedefop; Cuddy and Leney, 2005).

The Department for Education and Skills is convinced that effective skills and qualifications programmes can help to lever up economic performance in ways that would accelerate the Lisbon process. The national skills strategy provides a sound basis for taking the necessary further action to address the key areas for development to meet the Lisbon priorities on skills.

2.1.4. Ireland

Sustaining progress: national social partnership agreement 2003-2005 (Government of Ireland, 2003) includes a special initiative entitled Tackling Educational Disadvantage – Literacy, Numeracy and Early School Leaving. The special initiative incorporates the headline target on early school leaving contained in the national anti-poverty strategy and the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-05, namely to reduce the number of young people who leave the school system early, so that the percentage of those who complete upper second level or equivalent rises to 90 % by 2006 (in recent years 3.2 % of pupils have left school without completing lower second level education, and a further 15.3 % leave school after compulsory (lower second level) schooling but without an upper second level qualification).

Other key targets are to:

- halve the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties by 2006;

- reduce the proportion of adults aged 16-64 with restricted literacy levels to 10-20 % by 2007;
- provide a Back to Education Initiative offering flexible part-time options for adults, prioritising those with less than upper second level education, and providing 20 000 extra places annually by 2006.

The actions in regard to literacy and completion rates in schools involve the development of a more integrated approach to the delivery of programmes aimed at combating educational disadvantage, the continued development of the School Completion Programme, the roll out of services by the National Educational Welfare Board and the development of an enhanced strategy on Traveller education.

The report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education (2001) also sets specific targets for the higher education sector:

- increase the proportion of new entrants to higher education who have disabilities from 0.9 % in 1998 to 1.8 % by 2006;
- increase the proportion of entrants to higher education full-time courses who are mature students from 4.5 % in 1998 to 10 % in 2006;
- increase the proportion of entrants to higher education part-time courses who are mature students from 22 % in 1998 to 30 % in 2006;
- increase the proportion of entrants to higher education who are socially disadvantaged students from 16 % in 1998 to 27 % by 2006.

Ireland is also committed to contributing to the achievement of the EU benchmarks.

2.1.5. Germany

In Germany there are no specific quantitative targets at system level. However, several policy goals have been formulated, each of which is linked to a number of output indicators.

The trends for different output indicators are monitored in the *Berufsbildungsbericht* (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2005b) and the *Berichtssystem Weiterbildung* (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2005a). The policy goals and their corresponding output indicators in both initial and continuing VET include the following:

(a) **Initial VET** (see Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2005a, p. 6-11):

Policy goal:

1. to provide all applicants who are ready for vocational training with a training place.

Output indicators for this policy goal:

The number of training applicants by 30 September.

2. to provide those who are not yet ready and those who are not able to find a training place with alternative training facilities (for example courses for occupational orientation, pre-vocational training year, basic vocational training year, etc.).

Output indicators for this policy goal:

The number of training applicants who have not found a place in dual-system training.

3. to achieve a balance between demand and supply on the training place market.

Output indicator for this policy goal:

The training places supply-demand ratio.

The supply of training places is calculated on the basis of the number of new training contracts concluded by 30 September plus the number of unfilled training vacancies registered with the Federal Employment Services. The demand for training places is calculated as the number of new training contracts concluded by 30 September plus the number of applicants still seeking places who are registered with the Federal Employment Services. There is also a supply of and demand for training places which are not registered and hence cannot be verified statistically.

- (b) **Continuing VET** (see Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2005b, p. 11-14):

Policy goal:

To involve as many persons as possible in the process of lifelong learning.

Output indicator for this policy goal:

Rate of participation in vocational and general continuing training.
(*Gesamtteilnahmequote an beruflicher/allgemeiner Weiterbildung*).

2.1.6. The Netherlands

Educational institutions in the Netherlands are free to choose their own model of quality assurance, but the following regulations apply:

- quality assurance should cover the central responsibilities of the institutions: qualifications, accessibility, effective educational tracks, study and career-choice information;
- all stages of the quality assurance cycle should be carried out:
 1. formulating goals or quality standards, targeted results;
 2. determining assessment methods (including measuring instruments) and establishing the role of external parties involved in assessment;
 3. establishing/measuring the results achieved;
 4. evaluating the results achieved with respect to goals/standards;

5. (in the event of shortcomings) instituting improvement measures;
 6. where necessary, adjusting the goals and measurement instruments;
- outside experts and other educational institutions should be brought in to evaluate quality;
 - examination bodies should be brought in for external evaluation (outside legitimacy) of the quality of examinations.

The Netherlands' use of the five EU benchmarks (early school leavers, maths, science and technology, level of education, reading skills and lifelong learning) was determined by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science on the basis of priorities in its policy agenda, but consideration was also given to the strong and weak points in the Dutch system as revealed by international comparisons. The strong points of the Netherlands include, for instance, the good reading skills of pupils and the high number of adults participating in learning activities. Weak points include the high number of early school leavers and the low number of graduates in science and technology.

The Netherlands has decided at governmental level to adopt the goals set by the European Council (Education) and has established clear targets and guidelines for the work to be done in the years ahead:

1. **Early school leavers.** In 2000, the proportion of Dutch 18-24 year olds who were not enrolled in education and had not obtained a certificate in upper secondary education was 15.5 % (in 2002: 15.0 %).

The Netherlands' goal is to reduce the proportion of early school leavers by 50 %, down to 8 %, by 2010.

2. **Maths, sciences and technology.** The number of graduates and doctoral students in maths, sciences and technology in the Netherlands in 2000 was 5.8 for every 1 000 inhabitants in the age group 20-29 (in 2003: 7.3).

The Dutch objective is to have 15 % more graduates of higher maths, sciences and technology programmes by 2010 than in 2000, and to achieve a more balanced spread between men and women.

3. **Educational level of young people.** In 2002, 73.3 % of 20-24 year olds in the Netherlands obtained a basic qualification: HAVO (higher general secondary education), VWO (university preparatory education) or MBO-2 (senior secondary vocational education).

The goal is to increase the percentage to 85 % by 2010.

4. **Reading skills.** In 2000, only 9.6 % of Dutch 15-year olds had poor reading skills (skills of level 1 or below in the PISA study). In 2003, the figure was 11.5 %.

The Dutch objective is to maintain reading skills at this level, which is excellent from an international perspective.

5. **Lifelong learning.** In 2000, 15.6 % of Dutch 25-64 year olds were involved in learning activities (in 2003: 16.5 %).

In the years ahead, the aim of the Netherlands is to get as close as possible to the level of the two best-performing countries in Europe (Denmark and Sweden).

In the Netherlands there is also a trend towards qualification standards involving attainment targets. 20 % of the funding of educational institutions is dependent on attainment. The diploma rate is expressed by the number of students who obtain a diploma, and can be seen as counter-balancing the problem of early school leavers. The diploma rate is a clear attainment or output standard.

On early school leavers and lifelong learning (Lisbon goals) the government requires the Regional Education Centres to formulate realistic goals together with the stakeholders in the region. The results are measured and benchmarked.

According to the Lisbon agenda, the number of early school leavers should be reduced by 50 % by 2010. With respect to lifelong learning, at least 12.5 % of the population should be participating in education and training.

2.1.7. Denmark

In Denmark standards are not set by law, but by governmental regulation. There is to be an Act of Parliament on educational programmes which will provide for the Minister of Education to lay down specific regulations concerning scales for assessing pupil/student performance.

Standards will then be set in ministerial orders; for example, at student level, a student might have to obtain at least a mark of '6' ('pass') in his or final examination/test ⁽⁵⁾.

There are several specific targets to be attained at national level. In 2001 85 % of all pupils had to receive a 'youth education' entitling them to further education at university level, or VET giving them the competences to work in a skilled trade. By 2015 the figure should be 95 %.

Currently, 95 % start a youth education after the completion of primary school. In Denmark there are nine years of compulsory schooling, which means that young people are around 15 years old when they finish primary school. However, too many drop out of youth education programmes. Only around 78 % complete them, a decline from the 83 % who completed such programmes some years ago.

⁽⁵⁾ The scale is as follows: the marks '00', '03' and '5' are 'fails'; the mark '6' is a 'pass' but not as good as 'average' which is an '8'. the marks '9', '10' and '11' are above average and very satisfactory. A '13' is outstanding – and only used exceptionally, as is '00'.

In addition to these specific targets, a set of six indicators were selected in 2003. Four of them are of special interest and relevant to VET (initial and further). As a start, Denmark decided to focus on six indicators measuring output/outcomes in the education system in general. They are:

- (1) average grades based on a subject/educational programme at an institution. This does not include the adult vocational training system, where it is the proportion of participants who complete a course satisfactorily that is counted;
- (2) rate of completion (education programme);
- (3) time taken to complete an education/programme;
- (4) early school leavers: when do pupils/students drop out?
- (5) employment rates (excl. general education);
- (6) rates of further education – below general secondary education/VET level (i.e. excl. VET).

It is the government that sets the achievement goals for each of these indicators. The indicators are inspired by the work done at European level, but do not follow it religiously. All the indicators are under development, because at the moment methods for collecting data, validation and presentation are being elaborated.

2.2. Provider level

Targets can also be defined at provider level, but this kind of target seems to be less common than targets at system level. Targets at provider level seem to be more general, and some of the initiatives can be defined only as indicators to monitor the results, rather than targets. Although there are no specific targets in any of the countries looked at, the trend towards a greater focus on output is also evident at provider level. Moreover, targets at provider level are often linked to the accreditation process, in which the providers have to comply with certain requirements to be accredited.

2.2.1. Italy

In the vocational education system run by the Ministry of Education, it is the task of the schools to translate the general goals laid down at national level into more specific objectives. Such planning must be presented as part of the *POF (Piano dell'offerta formativa – Educational Provision Plan)*. Most schools mainly use the plan to describe their activities, but some also present more specific objectives or targets. The schools are also compelled to follow a great many rules regarding the quality of the provision: these rules may relate to the characteristics of the building, of the equipment, of the teachers, etc. There are no standards for outputs. In recent years, as part of the process of increasing school autonomy, more and

more attention has been paid to school results, but this has not so far led to the definition of school targets.

As regards the VET system managed by regional authorities, an accreditation system has been developed for providers who want to receive regional funding. To be accredited the providers must respect five criteria, the majority of which relate to *input and process standard*, but for one criterion (efficiency and effectiveness of previous activities) *certain outcomes have been defined which the training provider has to achieve*. The parameters and indicators laid down at national level for this criterion require the effectiveness of previous activities to be demonstrated. To receive accreditation, the training providers must show that:

- at least 70 % of students on a course obtain a qualification at the end;
- a certain percentage (to be established on the basis of the conditions on the regional labour market) of students find employment or continue their education after the end of the course;
- at least the 60 % of users/operators/final beneficiaries express a positive opinion the end of the course.

Regions may modify the targets according to their social and economic context. To be accredited, and to retain accreditation, VET providers must therefore demonstrate that they meet these requirements. The regional and autonomous provincial authorities have to assess whether they do so.

2.2.2. France

The education system has no specific targets for providers, but every year the Ministry of Education compares the results of secondary schools by examining pupil performances in the *baccalaureat* examination. The comparison also takes into consideration the influence of social and cultural context on pupils' performances. Three indicators are therefore calculated for every school:

- success rate at *baccalaureat* (percentage of pupils who pass the final examination);
- success rate at secondary school (percentage of pupils entering the school who obtain the *baccalaureat*);
- success rate (pupils who obtain the *baccalaureat*) among pupils leaving school.

For each indicator the average school performance is compared with the expected performance. The expected performance takes into consideration the social context and the pupils' age. In this way is possible to establish the 'added value' of each school.

The aim of the Ministry of Education, in publishing these indicators, is twofold:

- to improve the accountability of the schools;
- to provide each school with a tool to improve its effectiveness.

The indicators (and in particular the national or the local average and the expected result) can be used for comparison but they can also be seen as minimum or floor targets to be reached by schools.

In continuing vocational training, the objectives for private providers are laid down in the contracts established between regional authorities and provider.

Private and public providers often use quality approaches to support their efforts to improve and to send out signals to the market and so acquire a competitive advantage. Moreover, such approaches are mainly based on process standards and not results standards.

A programme was launched some years ago to link provider funding with trainees' performances but it was abandoned because it was found that there was a danger that providers would select the best trainees, in order to improve their performance.

2.2.3. United Kingdom

The Department for Education and Skills published a strategy for the further education sector (*Success for all*) in November 2002 (DfES, 2002), setting out a commitment to investment and reforms across the sector. The reforms are designed to raise standards, increase responsiveness and participation, and to improve outcomes for learners and employers. New success rate floor targets (minimum levels of performance) have been introduced for providers, which set clear expectations about minimum acceptable levels for learner outcomes.

Colleges had until 2005/06 to meet or exceed these floor targets. Separate success rate floor targets are set for long-term and short-term qualifications and these are set at different levels for general further education (GFE), sixth form colleges and specialist colleges, i.e. the long-term qualification target is set at 45 % for GFE colleges and 55 % for sixth form colleges.

Targets for apprenticeships are based on an overall sector-wide success rate for completion of an NVQ or a Modern Apprenticeship Framework. Two floor targets of 35 % and 40 % have been set to reflect the performance differences in current levels of success across the sector. Floor targets are designed to identify underperforming providers and ensure that decisive action and intervention is taken where providers fall below the minimum expected level. Where a provider fails to make progress, the Learning and Skills Council may decide to withhold funding, either fully or in part. The Secretary of State may replace any or all governors and or dissolve/establish corporations.

In addition, all colleges agreed improvement targets for 2003-06 with their local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for student numbers, success rates, employer engagement, and teacher qualifications for 2003-06; with annual milestones as part of their three year development plans. These targets are intended to improve value for money by raising performance across

the sector. Parallel development work was underway to define a value for money indicator for the sector for introduction by 2005/06.

The Department for Education and Skills, working in partnership with the inspectorates and the LSC, was also taking forward work to develop new success measures for providers to be piloted in 2005 and introduced in 2006. This work was to consider what constitutes success across the full range of different types of provision offered by the sector. The measures would focus on learner outcomes, including new measures of value added and distance travelled and measures for strengthening institutional performance and engaging employers.

2.2.4. Ireland

The work of both the award councils (HETAC – Higher Education and Training Awards Council and FETAC – Further Education and Training Awards Council) is focused on agreeing the quality assurance arrangements of providers, validating programmes, recognising awards and engaging in periodic monitoring and review.

It is the responsibility of the provider to establish procedures to quality assure its programmes in accordance with the criteria published by FETAC. These criteria cover such areas as:

- communications with staff, learners and other stakeholders;
- equality planning and delivery;
- staff recruitment, induction and development;
- programme design, delivery and review;
- assessment arrangements, including security, internal coordination and consistency with national standards, feedback to learners and appeals;
- access, transfer and progression, including entry, equality, and arrangements for recognition of prior learning;
- protection for learners in the event of a programme ceasing;
- self-evaluation and review, including learner involvement and external evaluation.

It is the responsibility of FETAC to agree on the procedures with the provider and to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their implementation. In addition, the Qualifications Act sets out parameters for ‘self-evaluation’ by the provider allied with external evaluation. Each programme offered by a provider and the services which relate to it must be evaluated by the provider with the involvement of learners. External evaluation is also required. It is the responsibility of the providers to devise their own policy and procedures for self-evaluation, however. FETAC has identified some elements of good practice which should be considered by providers when developing their policy. These include both quantitative and qualitative elements, for example the design of systems which will enable the provider to generate quantitative data on programmes on an ongoing basis.

2.2.5. Denmark

The providers have no fixed figures to achieve for the number of students completing VET education. The main arguments behind this are that the providers are working within different local and regional contexts. These external conditions mean that the possibilities and opportunities open to providers may be very different. However, there are criteria concerning the financial situation of the educational institutions. Accreditation is not used in the VET system (initial (IVET) and continuing (CVET) vocational education and training), but it has been used for a short time in further education (2.5 year/3.5-4 years).

The Ministry of Education receives the results concerning national written tests in specific basic subjects (external examiner). If the results at a college are bad, which means below an average of '6', the Ministry of Education asks the college for an explanation. In Denmark the marking system goes from 0 to 13, and if the marks are below 6, the student has failed.

The ambition is to collect and publish national results, to make it possible for a college to compare its own results to the national average. The Ministry of Education can use the information to contact the college, if the results are very poor. At the moment methods for assessing college/provider performance are being developed. The Ministry of Education is working to find methods out of identifying colleges which should be assessed more thoroughly.

2.2.6. Germany

In initial VET in Germany, there are no quantitative targets or standards which have to be met by a company, in order to be approved as a training provider. There are of course clearly defined qualitative criteria that have to be fulfilled by companies and by the training staff responsible⁽⁶⁾. For companies, the most important output indicators are the success rates and grades of the trainees in their final examination, but these indicators are only applied by the providers voluntarily.

With regard to vocational schools as the partners of companies in initial VET, there are pilot projects in all the *Länder* focusing on quality development and assurance based on both quantitative and qualitative targets and standards.

Research shows that many providers in continuing VET already use quality assurance tools (for example ISO9000ff and self-evaluation) (Balli et al., 2004). There is therefore often an emphasis on voluntary standards. The quantitative output standards in publicly funded continuing VET, which the Federal Employment Agency has introduced as criteria for public funding, are an exception to this. According to these quantitative standards, providers of publicly funded training courses have to achieve a 70 % labour market placement rate within

⁽⁶⁾ Vocational Training Act 2005, Part 2, Division 3, Sections 27, 28.

six months after training. Otherwise, further courses of the provider in question will not be funded.

2.2.7. The Netherlands

Several standards are in use in the Netherlands. They include standards on accessibility, sustainability (for example learning environment, teaching materials), qualifications (transfers within school, combating the phenomenon of early school leavers), self-regulation, suitability management and organisation.

Standards are also used in the process of accreditation of companies offering apprenticeships. Vocational schools also have to meet a number of standards regarding for example timetables, education programmes and contracts with the students. There are also specific qualification standards for teachers.

Some quantitative targets relating to the early school leaver rate have to be met. Lifelong learning participation rates and desired outcomes at system level have to be formulated by each Regional Training Centre. According to the Lisbon agenda, the number of early school leavers should be reduced by 50 % by 2010. With respect to lifelong learning, at least 12.5 % of the population should be participating in education and training.

The providers have to contribute to the same targets as described for the system level.

Through the inspectorates, the ministry has tried to motivate providers to establish some form of targets for self-assessment. The comprehensive formats/masters which have been developed are not used by providers at the moment. It seems to be difficult to motivate them to work further on quality, especially when the use of the formats/masters for self-assessment is voluntary.

2.3. Individual level

Definition of output/outcome standards for learners is another area of importance. The development of such standards varies between the countries.

2.3.1. Italy

In the vocational schools managed by the Ministry of Education young people can obtain a qualification after a three-year course and a diploma after a further two years. The quality of the education system was traditionally assured by the definition of national curricula and by national examinations at the end of upper secondary school. There were provisions stipulating what teachers had to teach rather than what pupils had to learn, though it was implicit that the

pupils should also learn what was taught. In any event, no precise standards were defined, but what had to be taught and how was described in detail.

The situation is now changing, since even the Italian Constitution guarantees school autonomy. The decree on school autonomy ⁽⁷⁾ states that schools are autonomous bodies for teaching, organisation, research purposes, while the ministry sets specific learning targets.

As part of the implementation of Act No 53 ⁽⁸⁾, which was introduced in 2003 to reform the educational and vocational system, the Ministry of Education issued a decree stipulating that it, together with the regional authorities, would be responsible for setting the minimum learning standards for initial VET.

The social partners must be consulted regarding the definition of occupations in the various sectors of the economy.

There is a new form of post upper secondary VET provision (*Istruzione e Formazione Tecnica Superiore*, higher technical education and training), for which the certificate of *specializzazione tecnica superiore* certifies competences using units or modules.

As regards the VET system managed by regional governments, Italy has to date had a highly differentiated system of qualifications.

To make the system more consistent, a Ministry of Labour decree (May 2001) introduced a national certification system, based on the definition of minimum outcome standards. This decree has not been applied so far, partly because in the meantime constitutional reform has given more power to regional authorities. A committee set up by the regions is working to find a way of harmonising different regional approaches to create a more consistent national qualification system based on minimum common standards.

In the meantime some regions, such as Emilia Romagna, Piedmont and Tuscany, have also been developing their own qualification system. These systems concern initial and continuing VET, and are based on outcome standards related to competences that young people or adults must master to work in different occupational fields.

2.3.2. France

In France, the term closest to ‘standard’ is ‘frame of reference’ (*référentiel*), developed by the Ministry of Education in the early 1980s.

⁽⁷⁾ *Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica 8 marzo 1999, n. 27, ‘Regolamento recante norme in materia di autonomia delle istituzioni scolastiche’.*

⁽⁸⁾ *Legge 28 marzo 2003, n. 53, ‘Delega al Governo per la definizione delle norme generali sull’istruzione e dei livelli essenziali delle prestazioni in materia di istruzione e formazione professionale’.*

The development process for *référentiels*, as applied to Ministry of Education diplomas, distinguishes between three forms of frames of reference:

- a professional activity frame of reference, a document that describes an individual activity in an occupational context;
- a certification frame of reference for the occupational field, which describes the skills to be acquired in that field, in order to be able to perform the vocational activity concerned;
- the examination regulations, which set the conditions for validating skills.

The professional activity frame of reference (*référentiel d'activités professionnelles*) provides the context for the certification and the examination frames of reference; it specifies (Cedefop; Westerhuis and Sellin, 2001):

- the role and the general goals of the qualified worker,
- the functions,
- the activities,
- the specific tasks related to the activities.

The certification frame of reference (*référentiel de certification*) in each occupational field describes three aspects of what a student is expected to master in order to obtain a certificate:

1. know-how (*le savoir faire*), namely:
 - capacities in general areas of activity (for example, ability to analyse, prepare, communicate and implement);
 - competences, that is to say the specific tasks which a qualified person should be able to perform (for example, select the necessary documents for a particular activity).
2. associated knowledge, that is to say the information which an individual needs to perform the activity;
3. general knowledge (French, mathematics, social and professional skills, physical education).

2.3.3. United Kingdom

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) constitute the system for the certification of the attainment of national output/outcome standards.

NVQs are based on national occupational standards, which are set by sectoral bodies (Sector Skills Councils).

The first National Qualifications Framework (NQF), incorporating both academic and vocational segments of the system, was introduced in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2000.

NVQs and SVQs are organised into a consistent classification based on the competence levels required.

Table 1: The national qualifications framework in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Framework level	Level indicators	Examples of qualifications
Entry	Entry level qualifications recognise basic knowledge and skills and the ability to apply learning in everyday situations under direct guidance or supervision. Learning at this level involves building basic knowledge and skills and is not geared towards specific occupations.	Qualifications are offered at entry 1, entry 2 and entry 3, in a range of subjects
Level 1	Level 1 qualifications recognise basic knowledge and skills and the ability to apply learning with guidance or supervision. Learning at this level is about activities which mostly relate to everyday situations and may be linked to job competence.	NVQ 1; Certificate in plastering; GCSEs Grades D – G; Certificate in motor vehicle studies
Level 2	Level 2 qualifications recognise the ability to gain a good knowledge and understanding of a subject area of work or study, and to perform varied tasks with some guidance or supervision. Learning at this level involves building knowledge and/or skills in relation to an area of work or a subject area and is appropriate for many job roles.	NVQ 2; GCSEs Grades A* – C; Certificate in coaching football; Diploma for beauty specialists
Level 3	Level 3 qualifications recognise the ability to gain, and where relevant apply a range of knowledge, skills and understanding. Learning at this level involves obtaining detailed knowledge and skills. It is appropriate for people wishing to go to university, people working independently, or in some areas supervising and training others in their field of work.	Certificate for teaching assistants; NVQ 3; A levels; Advanced extension awards; Certificate in small animal care
Level 4	Level 4 qualifications recognise specialist learning and involve detailed analysis of a high level of information and knowledge in an area of work or study. Learning at this level is appropriate for people working in technical and professional jobs, and/or managing and developing others. Level 4 qualifications are at a level equivalent to certificates of higher education.	Diploma in sport and recreation; Certificate in site management; Certificate in early years practice

Framework level	Level indicators	Examples of qualifications
Level 5	Level 5 qualifications recognise the ability to increase the depth of knowledge and understanding of an area of work or study to enable the formulation of solutions and responses to complex problems and situations. Learning at this level involves the demonstration of high levels of knowledge, a high level of work expertise in job roles and competence in managing and training others. Qualifications at this level are appropriate for people working as higher grade technicians, professionals or managers. Level 5 qualifications are at a level equivalent to intermediate higher education qualifications such as Diplomas of higher education, Foundation and other degrees that do not typically provide access to postgraduate programmes.	Diploma in construction; Certificate in performing arts
Level 6	Level 6 qualifications recognise a specialist high level knowledge of an area of work or study to enable the use of an individual's own ideas and research in response to complex problems and situations. Learning at this level involves the achievement of a high level of professional knowledge and is appropriate for people working as knowledge-based professionals or in professional management positions. Level 6 qualifications are at a level equivalent to bachelors degrees with honours, graduate certificates and graduate diplomas.	Certificate or diploma in management
Level 7	Level 7 qualifications recognise highly developed and complex levels of knowledge which enable the development of in-depth and original responses to complicated and unpredictable problems and situations. Learning at this level involves the demonstration of high level specialist professional knowledge and is appropriate for senior professionals and managers. Level 7 qualifications are at a level equivalent to master's degrees, postgraduate certificates and postgraduate diplomas.	Diploma in translation; Fellowship in music literacy
Level 8	Level 8 qualifications recognise leading experts or practitioners in a particular field. Learning at this level involves the development of new and creative approaches that extend or redefine existing knowledge or professional practice.	Specialist awards

Source: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), The National Qualifications Framework, from the QCA website: http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_5967.aspx [cited 22.8.2007].

An NVQ shows that an individual can do the work for which it has been awarded to national standards. There are no restrictions on the way, the time and the place where the candidate develops his or her abilities. The qualification can be achieved, in fact, by every individual in a position to demonstrate that he or she has reached the standard required by the assessment procedure. NVQs require candidates to demonstrate the competences acquired in terms of the practical abilities necessary to work at a particular job. The candidate has a portfolio that testifies the acquired competences.

NVQs are expressed in units (typically 8 to 12 units making up a qualification). Each unit is expressed in the form of:

- sectors (a description of the area of competence; a unit typically includes between 3 and 8 sectors);
- performance criteria (describing the outcomes on which a judgement of competence can be made);
- range (describing the different aspects, contexts, etc. wherein competence should be demonstrated);
- evidence requirements (the type of evidence which should be used as the basis of the assessment of competence);
- underpinning knowledge/knowledge requirements (the knowledge, principles, theory, etc., related to the area of competence described in the sections).

In the Scottish National Vocational Qualifications (SNVQ) system, units are specified in terms of:

- outcomes,
- performance criteria,
- evidence requirements.

The regulatory authorities – the QCA, the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC) and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment in Northern Ireland (CCEA) – are responsible for developing a consistent framework which includes all accredited qualifications.

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is based on 12 levels. Level 1 represents outcomes designed for learners with severe and profound learning difficulties, while level 12 contains outcomes associated with doctoral studies.

2.3.4. Ireland

The National Framework of Qualifications was launched by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland in October 2003. The framework comprises 10 levels, each of which is defined in terms of general standards of knowledge, skill or competence. These generic standards determine the outcomes to be achieved by learners seeking to gain an award at each level within the framework. The 10 levels will accommodate awards gained in schools, at the workplace, in the community and at training centres, colleges and universities, from the most basic to the most advanced levels of learning. Learning achieved through experience in the workplace or other non-formal settings will also be recognised for awards purposes.

The intention is not just to provide a frame of reference for existing awards: the awards councils will develop systems of new awards for the National Framework of Qualifications.

These new awards will be made on the basis of learning outcomes defined in terms of standards of knowledge, skill and competence. The outcomes-based nature of the new awards is a significant change from the practice in many existing awards systems, in that it is moving away from awards based on inputs, or on duration of programmes, focusing assessment on performance.

At each level in the framework there are one or more award-types. The award-type concept is central to the framework, as it is the mechanism through which individual or named awards are included. An award-type is a class of named awards that share common features and levels. Award-types are independent of fields of learning. For example, an Honours Bachelor Degree is an award-type, whereas an Honours Bachelor Degree in business management is a named award.

Each award-type has its own award-type descriptor. The descriptor sets out the key features, profile and overall standards of the award-type. On this basis, a range of named awards can be developed for each award-type.

It is the responsibility of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland to define levels and develop award-type descriptors.

The 10 levels in the framework encompass the widest possible spread of learning. Level 1 awards, for example, recognise the ability to perform basic tasks, while Level 10 awards recognise the ability to discover and develop new knowledge and skills at the frontier of research and scholarship. The framework model also provides for a variety of award-types. Together, the levels and award-types form a flexible mechanism that can provide recognition for all learning achievements.

FETAC's specific role is to determine the standards of knowledge, skill or competence for named awards at levels 1-6 of the national framework of qualifications. It has recently published its policy on determining standards (FETAC, 2005b) following widespread consultation and a review of practice in Europe, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia.

2.3.5. Denmark

In Denmark there are three general rules for passing examinations and obtaining a certificate:

- pupils/students must obtain at least a '6' in their final test / 'journeyman's' test;
- a '6' may be required in specific subjects – this varies from programme to programme;
- the student's average marks (based on teacher assessment and tests/examinations with external examiners) must be at least a '6'. As mentioned earlier, the Danish marking system goes from 0 to 13, and all marks below 6 are fails.

The objectives are set and described in terms of qualifications and competences for each type of education and each subject. High professional standards are required in the final examinations.

The trade committees for several VET programmes are formulating the journeyman's examination to be used. This means that they are setting the standards both in the curriculum and in the examination.

One of the best indicators for the whole education system is the proportion of students who find a job in the sector/occupational field. The average at the moment is 80 %. If fewer than 70 % of the students find work, the trade committees are invited to a meeting. There are no obligations on the individual providers in this regard, however.

Motivation and competence for further and higher education:

The proportion of students continuing into further education is recorded, but it has no consequences for the individual. Special entrance-levels are defined in general and for specific subjects as a precondition for access to further education. Assessment of the person's prior learning is included. However, it is often difficult to have such learning acknowledged – especially for admissions to further education/university.

2.3.6. Germany

The *Länder* have been responsible for education in both the primary and the secondary sector since their foundation after 1945. To safeguard the transparency and comparability of initial VET there is complex cooperation among the various actors, involving representatives of the business sector and the State, both federal and regional (the *Länder*). That cooperation covers all structural and content-related aspects of training and assessment as well as the actors' shared responsibility for trainees, who are trained in the 'dual system' of companies and vocational schools.

A project application to develop a new occupation or modernise an existing one can be made either by the federal government or by the *Länder*. The initiative frequently comes from the employers' organisations and sometimes from the unions. In the case of a federal application, the relevant federal ministry, normally the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology (BMWi), defines the basic criteria for the vocational training in question (including the name of the occupation, the duration and structure of the training, the framework curriculum for in-company training, and a rough outline of the necessary qualifications), in agreement with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and with the participation of specialised organisations of the social partners and the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB). A federal/*Länder* coordinating committee then decides on the new structure, i.e. the modernisation or creation of the relevant occupation. The relevant drafts are then prepared in separate bodies: the draft of the training regulation is prepared by federal experts, while the draft of the framework curriculum is prepared by *Länder* experts as

members of the framework-curriculum committee. Coordination is in the hands of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder*.

The social partners are involved in preparing and coordinating the draft versions, and relevant decisions are made jointly by all parties concerned. Their consent ensures that a relevant regulation is prepared and implemented promptly. The next step is a joint meeting chaired by the BMBF and involving representatives of relevant top-level associations, federal and *Länder* experts and the BIBB, to finalise the content and scheduling contained in the drafts of the new training regulation and framework curriculum.

After being discussed by the *Länder* committee and the BIBB's Standing Committee, the drafts are approved by formal decision of the Federal/*Länder* coordination committee. When this entire process has been completed, the training regulation is adopted and published by the responsible federal ministry, by agreement with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), and the framework curriculum is published (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2003:22).

Standards for learners are described in the training regulations as part of the examination requirements. For example, the final examinations must demonstrate that the student has mastered the necessary vocational skills, possesses the necessary vocational knowledge and qualifications, and is acquainted with the subjects taught at part-time vocational school as an essential part of his or her initial training.

2.3.7. The Netherlands

Qualifications and attainment targets are not always presented and described as output standards, but individual learners do have to reach a number of standards during their education. These standards are set as part of the requirements for obtaining certificates and in the different examinations.

COLO (the Dutch Association of Centres of Expertise on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market) represents 19 'Centres of Expertise' each of which is concerned with a particular sector of business or industry. COLO is responsible for a number of activities related to qualifications:

- evaluation of foreign diplomas;
- recognition of professional qualifications;
- issuing Europass certificate supplements;
- acting as national reference point.

COLO works to translate and transform the needs of the labour market in different sectors into competence profiles. On the basis of these profiles COLO participates actively in the creation of the qualification structure and, subsequently, a structure for training and examination. This

work is part of the system for setting the relevant output standards for students in each sector and type of education.

Output can also be measured more indirectly by using satisfaction as an indicator of output standards having been met. This is done by surveying satisfaction levels in workplaces and especially those which provide apprenticeships. There are no standards for the level of satisfaction, but the answers give a good indication of the perceived quality, from the point of view of the workplace. This satisfaction rate covers both direct satisfaction with the student and, indirectly, satisfaction with the education or training as a whole.

2.4. Sectors

Many vocational fields are interested in using international standards, in particular those which have an international dimension or which require very high specific competences because of the critical nature of the working processes concerned.

There are two approaches which can be used to set such standards. The first is a top-down approach, involving the European Commission or representative bodies at European level; the second is a bottom-up approach, as has been advocated by sectoral associations which has become popular, both nationally and internationally.

First of all, mention must be made of the European social dialogue, which dates back to the 1970s, and has continuously raised issues relating to education and training at sectoral level. Several sectors have, in particular during the 1990s, agreed on education and training strategies. In the last five years agreements have been reached for the hairdressing and sugar sectors (1998), fisheries (2000), maritime transport (2001), postal services, banking and agriculture (2002). These agreements have not been developed on the basis of one single format, and the level of detail varies considerably, as does the practical impact on education and training. In total, more than one hundred agreements have been concluded since the start of the process.

The transport sector, for example, has a long tradition of setting international standards for qualifications, as can be seen in air and sea transport. While ideas are normally taken forward through international bodies such as the International Maritime Organisation, the proposal for an EU Directive on the training of truck drivers (European Parliament, 2003) provides an interesting example of how to develop sectoral qualifications. The directive is intended to lead to a fundamental harmonisation of basic and further training (in the EU), which should increase the mobility of workers; for this reason a worker's place of residence, and likewise his or her language, should not be criteria which might impede the exercise of the occupation following completion of basic and further training.

The directive outlines a vocational training structure to be introduced in all Member States (compulsory minimum training, full basic training and continuous training) organised

according to a set of detailed minimum vocational training requirements. The proposal stipulates in detail the time frame for the introduction of the provisions, procedures for testing and examination, the certificates to be granted as well as rules regarding exemptions from training.

Another sector interested in setting international standards for qualifications because of the critical nature of the working processes concerned is the welding sector. The Euroweld project, funded by the European Commission and coordinated by the European Federation for Welding, Joining and Cutting (better known as the European Welding Federation (EWF)), aims to develop and implement a common European system for the certification of welders. Other international forms of certification for very specialised welders are issued by other specialised international certification agencies.

A further high profile example of promoting qualifications at the sectoral level is the project '*professionalisation durable*' ('sustainable professionalisation'). This project was developed and promoted by the French Ministry of Education during 2000/2001 and can thus be described as a 'top down' rather than a 'bottom up' initiative. Nine countries have been directly involved in the project (Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Hungary and the UK) and the European Commission has supported the project financially as an exploratory action. The aim of the project is to develop a methodology for the construction of common European qualification standards (*référentiels*) at sectoral level. Those countries participating in the project are invited to use these standards as a basis for professional diplomas that will be mutually recognised throughout Europe. Since it started in autumn 2001, the project has developed and tested its methodology in two sectors, resulting in standards/*référentiels* for hotel receptionists and car industry logistics.

In foreign language teaching, foreign language schools have agreed to develop common scales for the awarding of certification. One example is the Alte (Association of Language Testers in Europe) scale, which is used by many foreign languages teaching schools and makes comparable the certificates awarded by different schools. Unesco has also set up a common reference framework for languages, which encompasses the different certification systems.

In Denmark the sectors work as an integrated part of the education system and are able to ensure that their particular requirements and demands are covered:

- the trade committees in all VET programmes set the objectives for the subjects and for the programme. Only in the more general basic subjects like Danish, English, etc., is the curriculum set for VET by the Danish Ministry of Education;
- the trade committees in several VET programmes are formulating the journeyman's examination to be used. This means they are setting the standards both for the curriculum and for examination;
- the employability rate – one of the six indicators – is used and assessed at sectoral level in Denmark. The criterion is 70 % employability. The employability of trainees completing their education in 2003 is assessed, for example, in 2004. Maternity leave is taken into

account. Of course, the result varies depending on the general rate of employment. Regional differences also occur. In general the employability rate is approximately 80 % when assessed in this way;

- every low score must be examined thoroughly because in many cases the problem might not be the programme. The Danish Ministry of Education invites the trade committees (branch/sector) responsible for VET programmes which have a score below 70 % to an annual meeting to discuss the programmes (access, supply/demand of trainees and workplaces which conclude contracts with trainees, objectives and content of the programme (curriculum), performance (students final examinations) and other information/evaluations);
- the ministry does not specifically use information from colleges' quality assurance systems, though this does form part of its overall quality approach;

Finally, regarding information technology, the ECDL (European Computer Driving License), which came into being for commercial purposes, now covers a range of computer skills and is regarded as an international standard in the field.

2.5. Summary of using targets and output/outcome standards

System level:

At the moment not all countries have developed targets, though the European benchmarks which derive from the Lisbon process are taken into consideration in many countries. One of the most common targets is for a certain proportion of the population or of a certain age group to meet specific educational standards and levels. The main target is to increase the overall educational level. There are also examples of other kinds of targets which are not related to the population as a whole but to specific groups, with a view to achieving greater equality and improving the position of weaker sections of the population.

Table 2: Targets and output/outcome standards at system level, by country

Targets and standards at system level	Country
<p>Standards at system level relate mainly to inputs and processes.</p> <p>Attention is being devoted to the achievement of European benchmarks.</p>	Italy
<p>100 % of pupils should obtain a diploma or a recognised qualification at the end of their initial education or training.</p> <p>80 % should reach <i>baccalaureat</i> level.</p> <p>50 % should obtain a higher education diploma.</p> <p>Following the <i>Loi organique relative aux lois de finances</i> (LOLF), at the time of writing the ministries were preparing their activity programmes containing actions, objectives and indicators, for 2006. The Ministry of Labour was considering introducing an action entitled '<i>facilitating access to qualifications</i>', which includes the following objectives and indicators:</p> <p>(a) to improve access to qualifications and to employment through the development of apprenticeships; the indicators are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • weight given to apprenticeships as part of the second professional cycle (levels IV and V); • weight given to higher level apprenticeships as part of the apprenticeship system as a whole; • weight given to apprenticeships in large enterprises. <p>(b) to improve access to qualifications for employment through the development of <i>contrats de qualification</i>; the indicators are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dropout rate, • rate of recognised qualification. 	France

Targets and standards at system level	Country
<p>Public Service Agreements (PSAs):</p> <p>Objective III: All young people to reach age 19 ready for skilled employment or higher education.</p> <p>Increase the proportion of 19 year-olds who achieve at least level 2 by three percentage points between 2004 and 2006, and a further two percentage points between 2006 and 2008, and increase the proportion of young people who achieve level 3. Reduce the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training by two percentage points by 2010.</p> <p>Objective IV: Tackle the adult skills gap</p> <p>Increase the number of adults with the skills required for employability and progression to higher levels of training through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improving the basic skill levels of 2.25 million adults between the launch of Skills for Life in 2001 and 2010, with a milestone of 1.5 million in 2007; • reducing by at least 40 % the number of adults in the workforce who lack NVQ 2 or equivalent qualifications by 2010. Working towards this, one million adults in the workforce to achieve level 2 between 2003 and 2006. 	United Kingdom
<p>The percentage completing upper second level or equivalent to reach 90 % by 2006.</p> <p>The proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties should be halved by 2006.</p> <p>The proportion of adults aged 16-64 with restricted literacy levels should be reduced to 10-20 % by 2007.</p> <p>The proportion of socially disadvantaged entrants to higher education should be increased from 16 % in 1998 to 27 % by 2006. For the disabled the proportion should increase from 0.9 to 1.8 %.</p>	Ireland
<p>The number of early school leavers should be reduced by 50 % by 2010.</p> <p>The proportion of the population participating in education and training should be at least 12.5 %.</p>	The Netherlands
<p>There are no specific output standards, but several indicators are in use, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of applicants by 30 September; • training places supply-demand ratio; • rate of participation in vocational and general continuing training. 	Germany
<p>In 2001 85 % of all pupils were supposed to receive a youth education entitling them to go on to further education at university level, or at a VET school providing the competence to work in a skilled trade. By 2015 this should be 95 %.</p>	Denmark

Provider level:

Some countries have specific targets at provider level. However, in general a lot of countries use broad and general indicators rather than specific targets at this level. In some cases the targets are closely related to the accreditation process, but in general many initiatives are

intended to increase the focus on results. Publication of school results is another initiative which illustrates the trend towards a focus on outputs without having specific standards.

Table 3: *Targets and standards for providers, by country*

Targets and standards for providers	Country
Standards related to the accreditation of providers: At least 70 % of students should obtain a qualification at the end of the course. A particular percentage of students should find employment or go on to further training after the end of the course. At least the 60 % of users/operators/final beneficiaries should express a positive opinion at the end of the course.	Italy
No specific targets but the following indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>baccalaureat</i> success rate (percentage of pupils who pass the final examination); • secondary school success rate (percentage of pupils entering the school who go on to obtain the <i>baccalaureat</i>; • success rate (pupils who obtain the <i>baccalaureat</i>) among pupils leaving school. 	France
The targets for apprenticeships are based on an overall sector-wide success rate for completion of an NVQ or completion of a Modern Apprenticeship Framework. Two floor targets of 35 % and 40 % have been set to reflect the performance differences in current levels of success across the sector.	United Kingdom
No specific targets, but providers have to meet certain criteria in their programmes, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assessment arrangements, including security, internal coordination and consistency with national standards, feedback to learners and appeals; • protection for learners in the event of a programme ceasing; • self-evaluation and review, including learner involvement and external evaluation. 	Ireland
In initial VET most of the targets used by providers are voluntary, for example the lowering of dropout rates. In publicly-funded continuing education training courses have to achieve a 70 % labour market placement rate within six months after training.	Germany
No specific targets, but the results from schools are collected and published.	Denmark
Standards for accessibility and sustainability (for example learning environment, teaching materials). Standards for qualifications (transfers within schools, combating early school leaving).	The Netherlands

Individual level:

In most cases, there are national standards regarding output standards for learners to achieve, and therefore the variation between the countries is limited. In some there are several levels, at which different levels of qualifications and competences are required. The level of flexibility in the approach towards the use of individual output standards varies from country to country.

In a couple of countries the term ‘output standards’ is not used, as the focus is still on input and process, for example what the teacher should teach, and how much time pupils should spend at vocational school. None the less, the trend is towards greater focus on output.

Table 4: Standards for learners, by country

Standards for learners	Country
<p>No precise standards have been defined so far for vocational education, but there are quite detailed curricula. The decree on school autonomy (DPR n. 275/99) states that schools are autonomous bodies for the purposes of teaching, organisation, and research, while the ministry sets specific learning targets.</p> <p>The regions have not to date implemented a national certification system.</p> <p>Some regions, such as Emilia Romagna, Piedmont, Tuscany, are developing their own qualification system. These systems concern initial and continuing VET, and are based on outcome standards related to competences that young people or adults must master to work in occupational fields.</p>	Italy
<p>The certification frame of reference (<i>référentiel de certification</i>) describes three aspects of what a student is expected to master in order to obtain a certificate:</p> <p>(a) know-how (<i>le savoir faire</i>), namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• capacities in general areas of activity;• competences, that is to say the specific tasks which a qualified person should be able to perform; <p>(b) associated knowledge, that is to say the information which an individual needs to perform the activity;</p> <p>(c) general knowledge.</p>	France
<p>National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) constitute the system for the certification of the attainment of the national output/outcome standards.</p> <p>NVQs are based on national occupational standards, which are set by sectoral bodies (Sector Skills Councils).</p> <p>NVQs and SVQs are organised into a consistent classification based on the competence levels required.</p>	United Kingdom

Standards for learners	Country
<p>The national framework of qualifications comprises 10 levels, each of which is defined in terms of general standards of knowledge, skill or competence.</p> <p>These general standards define the outcomes to be achieved by learners seeking to gain an award at each level within the framework.</p>	Ireland
<p>General rules for passing examinations and obtaining a certificate:</p> <p>(a) pupils/students must obtain at least a ‘6’ in their final test / journeyman’s test;</p> <p>(b) a ‘6’ may be required in specific subjects – this varies from programme to programme;</p> <p>(c) the students’ average marks (based on teacher assessment and tests/examinations with external examiners) must be at least a ‘6’.</p>	Denmark
<p>The final examinations must demonstrate that the student has mastered the necessary vocational skills, possesses the necessary vocational knowledge and qualifications, and is acquainted with the subjects taught at part-time vocational school as an essential part of his or her initial training. Examinations are based on the initial training regulations.</p>	Germany
<p>Qualifications and attainment targets are not described as output standards, but individual learners do have to meet several standards which are set as part of the requirements for obtaining certificates and in the different examinations.</p>	The Netherlands

2.6. Assessment and accreditation linked to targets and output standards

As mentioned earlier, there is a close relationship between output standards and assessment and accreditation, as the standards are often used as an integral part of the accreditation or assessment procedure. The use of standards can be linked both to the assessment of learners and the assessment of providers.

2.6.1. Italy

The new Act reforming the education and training system sets out, in line with constitutional requirements, the basic tasks of the regions in organising the VET system. The decree concerning secondary level stipulates that the national evaluation system is intended to verify whether the basic tasks are being accomplished. The hub of the system is an operational agency, *Invalsi* (national agency for school system evaluation); the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and the regions are represented on the *Invalsi* board. As regards VET, other agencies working in this field will also be involved in evaluation work.

In provider assessment, self-evaluation reports and on-the-spot inspections are used to ensure that providers meet the conditions for accreditation. Usually, a provider seeking accreditation

submits an application and undertakes to meet the accreditation standards; supporting documentation must be enclosed. If the desk analysis made by regional officers is positive, the provider receives temporary accreditation, which becomes definitive (for two or three years) after an on-the-spot inspection.

In vocational schools managed by the Ministry of Education, learners' achievements are usually assessed by the class teacher. At the end of upper secondary school there is a final examination involving an examination committee comprising an external chair and class teachers.

To obtain a qualification from VET programmes provided by regions, it is necessary to pass a final examination held in the presence of a committee made up of an external representative (a public official from the regional administration) and class teachers.

2.6.2. France

For the assessment of national targets, each programme presented in the Finance Act has to be accompanied by an annual projection of performance, comprising in particular 'a presentation of the activities to be carried out, the associated costs, the aims, and the results achieved and expected for the years to come, measured by means of precise indicators, the reasons for the choice of which must be given' (*Loi organique relative aux lois de finances*, Section 51). Approval of the Finance Act is an important Parliamentary activity.

To assess the learner's achievement of the standards, the examination regulations (*règlements d'examen*) define the rules for examinations in general in full-time training:

- nature of tests;
- form of assessment (written, practical, oral, continuous assessment);
- coefficient assigned to each test;
- duration of each test.

Each test is modelled according to the skills that it assesses, the associated knowledge that it validates, the medium through which it is administered and the nature of the performance expected of the candidate.

As regards the validation of professional experience, the evaluation of qualifications is the responsibility of an assessment board appointed by the competent CPNE (*Commission Paritaire Nationale de l'Emploi*). It involves qualification tests and an evaluation of occupational competences as displayed in a work situation.

2.6.3. United Kingdom

Until 2000 the National Advisory Council for Education and Training Targets (NACETT), an employer-led body set up in 1993 by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), was the government's principal advisory body on the achievement of education and training targets. From 1 April 2001 the Learning and Skills Council took over its responsibilities for advising the government on post-16 national learning. LSC reports allow annual monitoring of the advancement of the educational and training system towards the objectives set.

The quality assessment of training providers/provision is based on a system that links annual self-assessment to external inspection. The funding bodies take account of the self-assessment and inspection results in the planning and purchasing of provision in local areas. Self-assessment is linked to actions for self-improvement where findings are transformed into a development plan. In this process, all providers are required to benchmark their performance against national data on learner achievements and other core performance indicators and agree challenging improvement targets with the funding body as part of their development plan. Guidance and good practice has been produced for providers and tailored programmes of support are made available to enable them to improve their self-improvement practices.

Inspection results are published for all providers and are used along with other published data on learner achievements to inform the choices made by prospective learners. The annual self-assessment reports are not currently published.

The assessment of people seeking to qualify is organised by assessment centres (training centres or further education colleges) which are certified by an awarding body. Candidates can be assessed for an entire NVQ/SNVQ or for single units.

Assessment would cover:

- skills to specified standards;
- relevant knowledge and understanding;
- the ability to use skills and to apply knowledge and understanding to relevant tasks.

Awarding bodies must maintain a register of all their external verifiers and provide such information to the regulatory authorities on request.

2.6.4. Ireland

As regards providers' assessment, a self-evaluation report has to be submitted by providers to FETAC as part of quality assurance; providers are required to devise a policy and process for self-evaluation of programmes. This must incorporate both qualitative and quantitative components.

As an integral part of quality assurance, FETAC also undertakes external monitoring and evaluation against previously set criteria. This process includes the collection of quantitative

information, on the basis of which data and trends can be analysed. Two evaluators are assigned per provider to evaluate provider quality assurance; they work with detailed criteria and a consensus is required. FETAC evaluates and assesses the findings.

As regards learners' assessment, a consultation document has been prepared; these are the proposals:

- assessment is the responsibility of the provider;
- assessment must be conducted in a fair and consistent manner;
- providers must put in place appropriate policies and procedures regarding assessment;
- FETAC must agree to the providers' quality assurance arrangements regarding assessment prior to the commencement of the programme;
- FETAC monitors programmes to ensure providers carry out fair and consistent assessments;
- achievement of level 1 and level 2 major awards will not be graded;
- achievement of level 1 and level 2 minor awards will be classified as successful;
- learners who do not achieve the required standard for the minor award are referred for further learning;
- all awards can be obtained through the recognition of prior learning.

2.6.5. Denmark

The 'backbone' of the Danish quality strategy is self-evaluation by the VET institutions. All providers are required to evaluate their own performance and the courses they provide on a regular basis. The results of these self-evaluations must then be made public on their websites.

By law, all VET providers must have a quality management system and a quality plan⁽⁹⁾. Further, the national quality rules stipulate that the quality plan for self-evaluation must include a number of priority areas decided at national level.

In IVET, providers are required to have:

- a quality management system;
- procedures for self-evaluation in eight priority areas⁽¹⁰⁾;
- a follow-up plan and a plan for the public dissemination of results.

⁽⁹⁾ Consolidated Act on VET, No 183 of 22/01/2004, Section 4(3).

⁽¹⁰⁾ These are: strategic development (management tools, pedagogical tools, networks), resources (allocation and daily operation), and development activities.

However, colleges are free to choose their own quality concept, and there is no national model or system which the individual provider is obliged to use. One of the reasons for this is that VET providers vary considerably in terms of size, organisational culture and the VET they provide, so they must have the option/freedom to adapt a quality strategy to the local needs and the local culture. To observe the quality rules, most colleges have created a new function of ‘quality coordinator’, with particular responsibility for quality management.

Although internal self-evaluation constitutes the ‘backbone’ of the Danish quality strategy, external evaluation is also essential, and is gaining in importance. The focus is on how to improve the external, national evaluation of VET, on the basis of the information supplied by the providers.

The Danish Ministry of Education is the main authority for education and training in Denmark, and has overall responsibility for the way the system functions. For VET, the ministry plays an important role in both the approval and inspection of the VET that is provided. It:

- confers upon institutions the right to provide specific VET programmes. The providers must fulfil several conditions, and if these are not fulfilled approval may be revoked;
- continuously monitors VET providers/provision, by systematically collecting data on educational results (intake, trainee flows, completion rates, marks, employment, etc.) and finances;
- inspects the legal, financial and pedagogical aspects of VET. The process of inspection takes various forms, and is based on several inputs. These include desk research and analysis on the basis of selected data, and meetings with and/or visits to selected institutions, particular types of colleges and trade committees.

The following information is included in the ministry’s inspection of quality at vocational colleges: annual reports, websites, and data on completion rates, dropout rates, grades, and transition rates to employment and further education.

The ministry plays an indirect role in inspection by tightening up monitoring, by introducing a new form based on six quality indicators concerning output and outcomes.

The aim of the new system is to make the overall monitoring of quality in the Danish education system more systematic, and to provide a better foundation for the external evaluation of quality. The new system makes it possible to screen all educational institutions on an annual basis, and thereby to identify institutions showing dissatisfactory results or quality in the training they provide.

This indicator-based monitoring system will encompass the entire education system. Within VET, the indicators have been adapted to IVET and CVET. In IVET, all six indicators are considered relevant, whereas in CVET, only completion rates are relevant for the short CVET modules. So here, other indicators will be developed, most likely on the basis of the current national self-evaluation tool, with greater focus on the effect of the training.

Assessment of attainment of standards and the role of standards is the job of both the Ministry of Education and the trade committees (for each sector). No precise criteria are formulated, however, except for employability.

Completion rates for the final examination and the programmes are important indicators but no precise criteria have so far been set. Any abnormality gives rise to further supervision.

Assessment of attainment of standards set by a sector is also the job of both the ministry and the sector trade committees. Statistics are also discussed every year in the Council for Vocational Education.

2.6.6. Germany

At regional level, the chambers of commerce and the craft chambers in particular have important responsibilities. They are responsible for advising and monitoring the companies providing training. They also have to review the suitability of the companies and the aptitude of their training instructors.

In the dual system the standards for final examinations are regulated by the Vocational Training Act: ‘The object of the final examination shall be to determine whether examinees have acquired the necessary vocational competence. In the final examination examinees shall demonstrate that they have mastered the necessary vocational skills, possess the necessary vocational knowledge and qualifications, and are acquainted with the subjects taught at part-time vocational school as an essential part of their initial training. The examination shall be based on the initial training regulations’⁽¹⁾. The trend is towards more flexible testing rather than towards either more or less testing.

Compared to initial VET, continuing VET is subject to a much lesser degree of regulation. There are some state recognised *Aufstiegsfortbildungen* (‘upgrading training courses’) with regulated examination standards (for example for the examinations to become a master craftsman, a qualified foreman or a qualified tradesman). In large part, however, the examinations in continuing VET are not standardised or there is no examination at all.

2.6.7. The Netherlands

Examinations clearly reveal whether participants have actually mastered the intended learning goals. Besides the quality of education, institutions are also responsible for the quality of examinations and, consequently, for quality assurance and public accountability in this regard.

To provide an additional guarantee, external controls (external legitimacy) are prescribed to ensure the quality of examinations. A separate private entity, the *KwaliteitsCentrum*

⁽¹⁾ Vocational Training Act 2005, Part 2, Division 5, Section 38.

Examining (KCE – Quality Centre for VET Examinations) has been assessing the quality of examinations since 2004.

Characteristics of the new examination system:

- there are national standards for the quality of examinations, formulated by the KCE;
- educational institutions remain responsible for the quality of examinations, along with (improving) internal assurance (that the examinations meet the standards) and public accountability for the quality of examinations and for performance;
- external assurance (making sure that the examinations comply with the standards) is the responsibility of a single authority, the KCE;
- without a statement of approval from the KCE, the Minister will withdraw an institution's right to hold examinations. Institutions that cannot hold examinations must contract them out to a qualified educational institution or specialist examination body that is capable of doing so;
- the Inspectorate conducts external reviews of the quality of the KCE's performance;
- a stronger role for the Centres of Expertise (see 3.2.3; collaboration with the KCE on internal assurance and on the practicalities of holding examinations for the practical component of training courses);
- a better positioning of the entire examination process in education as a whole; parties holding each other accountable for their responsibilities in the process.

The Centres of Expertise (including social partners and sectors of industry), the Regional Training Centres (RTCs), the Inspectorate and the government are all involved in the assessment of the actors concerned. Regional/local authorities, experts, students and their representatives play a less prominent role. In the future regional and other stakeholders (especially students and teachers and the labour market) will have a greater say in setting standards and assessing the performance of the RTCs.

There is also a trend towards good governance in VET: to strengthen the educational boards of RTCs and internal monitoring, legislation governing the RTCs Supervisory Boards is being drawn up.

The Inspectorate, the Quality Centre for VET Examination (KCE) and the Audit Department of the ministry all play an important role in assessing whether targets are being met. The Inspectorate's assessment also takes into account the views of relevant stakeholders. The Inspectorate starts with an assessment of the self-evaluation of the RTCs. As regards the assessment of attainment of targets set by a sector, the teachers, the KCE and the tutors in the work training place (apprenticeships) are important actors.

2.7. Summary of accreditation and assessment linked to targets and output standards

There is a close relationship between the use of targets, output standards, assessment and accreditation, both at individual and provider level. At provider level, self-evaluation is often used as a quality assurance tool. A common feature for many countries is that both external and internal evaluation is used in assessment and accreditation.

Table 5: *Accreditation and assessment linked to targets and output standards, by country*

Accreditation and assessment	Country
<p>The assessment of learners in vocational schools is usually carried out by the class teacher.</p> <p>At the end of upper secondary school there is a final examination involving a committee comprising an external chair and class teachers.</p> <p>To obtain a regional qualification it is necessary to pass a final examination held in the presence of a committee made up of an external representative (a public official from the regional administration) and class teachers.</p> <p>Self-evaluation reports and on-the-spot inspections are used to ensure that providers meet the conditions for accreditation.</p>	Italy
<p>The assessment of people seeking to qualify is organised by assessment centres (training centres or further education colleges) which are certified by an awarding body.</p> <p>Assessment of people seeking to qualify would cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • skills to specified standards; • relevant knowledge and understanding; • the ability to use skills and to apply knowledge and understanding to relevant tasks. <p>The quality assessment of training providers is based on a system that links annual self-assessment to external inspection.</p>	United Kingdom
<p>The examination regulations define the rules for examinations in general in full-time training:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nature of tests; • form of assessment (written, practical, oral, continuous assessment); • coefficient assigned to each test; • duration of each test. 	France
<p>A self-evaluation report including both quantitative and qualitative components is required from the providers.</p> <p>FETAC also undertakes external monitoring and evaluation against previously set criteria.</p>	Ireland

Accreditation and assessment	Country
<p>It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the trade committees to check whether the standards and targets are attained.</p> <p>No precise criteria are formulated except concerning employability</p>	Denmark
<p>Educational institutions are responsible for the quality of examinations, and for internal quality assurance (making sure that the examinations meet the standards) and are publicly accountable for both the quality of examinations and for the institution's performance.</p> <p>External quality assurance (making sure that the examinations comply with the standards) is the responsibility of a single authority, the KCE.</p> <p>The Regional Training Centres have to carry out self-evaluations.</p>	The Netherlands
<p>The chambers of commerce and the craft chambers are responsible for monitoring the companies which provide training, to ensure the quality of the training and the instructors.</p> <p>The examination rules laid down in the training regulations concern both formal and content-related aspects.</p>	Germany

3. Actors involved in setting targets and standards

This chapter examines the actors who are involved in the process of determining targets and standards. A range of different actors are involved and the findings are presented separately for system, provider and individual level.

3.1. Actors in setting targets at system level

In general it is common for a broad range of actors to be involved in defining standards at system level. The most important include governments, the VET providers themselves and the social partners.

3.1.1. United Kingdom

The shape and content of the national targets are discussed with partner bodies and organisations including the Learning and Skills Council, Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), the Sector Skills Development Agency, the Confederation of British Industry and the Trade Union Congress.

The Learning and Skills Council has been putting national public service agreement (PSA) targets into language that makes them more practicable to use as local targets. They are phrased so as to leave scope for institutional negotiations with local Learning and Skills Councils about what each institution will deliver and how it will deliver it.

Regional Skills Partnerships have been given a greater role in the regional application of national targets. The shared aim of skills, productivity and employment provides greater potential for agencies to collaborate at regional and sub-regional level. Moreover, the new arrangements for tasking RDAs involves them in the process of agreeing PSA targets and working with them to identify those measures which best reflect the RDA contribution to meeting the targets. Institutions negotiate with the LSCs their own three-year development plans setting out what they will achieve. These are linked to funding plans.

3.1.2. Italy

As has already been discussed, at national level Italy has general goals rather than quantitative targets to be achieved by the entire system. These goals are set out in national and regional legislation, and are the result of a political process, which usually also involves the social partners.

3.1.3. France

At system level the definition of national targets is mainly a political responsibility, with the active involvement of the public administration which, under the *Loi organique relative aux lois de finances* (LOLF), is technically responsible for proposing objectives and indicators and ensuring their achievement. The local administrative level is also involved, through the definition of *contrats d'académie* with educational institutions.

3.1.4. Denmark

Parliament is responsible for legislation on the education system and its individual parts, such as VET.

The Ministry of Education lays down regulations based on that legislation and other rules and principles.

The social partners give advice and also have a significant influence at provider level through their participation in local trade committees. A network of councils, committees and advisory bodies, with equal representation of parties, works closely together with the Ministry of Education on all levels and almost all aspects of VET. As regards quality, the social partners are involved in all stages of quality assurance and development, from laying down objectives for VET programmes, cooperating with VET providers, examinations and certification, and continuous monitoring of labour market trends, to adapting programmes to new conditions and requirements.

One of the main objectives of involving the social partners is to ensure the relevance and quality of VET programmes in relation to the labour market. Trade committees are responsible for the continuous adaptation and development of the programmes. The committees monitor skills development in the labour market, and then recommend changes to existing programmes. They may also recommend establishing new VET programmes, or the discontinuation of outdated ones. The role of the social partners is to ensure that VET matches the needs and demands of industry and the labour market at both national and local levels.

Another important aspect of the trade committees' quality assurance is approval of training places. The trade committees are responsible for inspecting and approving companies that want to take on trainees, on the basis of defined criteria. To be approved, a company must have a certain level of technology, and a variety of tasks to be performed that will ensure the trainee a full range of activities and tasks corresponding to the qualification requirements of a skilled worker.

3.1.5. The Netherlands

In the Netherlands a broad spectrum of actors are involved in setting standards to be reached by the entire system.

The capstone of quality control is external supervision by the Inspectorate. Changes to the 1996 legislation also necessitated changes in the design of external supervision. Essentially, the Inspectorate had to turn:

- from a strong emphasis on monitoring compliance with legislation by individual institutions and reporting on quality only as it related to the education system as a whole;
- to a situation in which assessment primarily focuses on how well individual institutions carry out their tasks.

This change was effected through the creation of an integrated institutional monitoring system.

The part played by the Inspectorate in monitoring the quality of education is a consequence of the government's new role as a customer. This is in contrast to its traditional regulatory role, which involved monitoring compliance.

The Adult and Vocational Educational Act (WEB) governs the tasks of the Inspectorate. Essentially, its monitoring duties are twofold: monitoring compliance, focusing particularly on the formal, statutory requirements, and monitoring the quality of institutions' quality assurance activities. In any event, institutions are required by law to carry out four central tasks.

The Centres of Expertise develop the standards for qualifications which feature in VET education programmes. These bodies represent employers, employees and Regional Training Centres equally.

In setting standards for the supervisory framework, the Inspectorate involves the Regional Training Centres, the Council of VET Providers, the Council for Agricultural Education Centres (the *AOC Raad*) the Association of Netherlands Municipalities, the Centres of Expertise, social partners and student representatives (through the vocational training young people's organisation JOB). The government gives final approval (to formalise the standards).

3.1.6. Germany

Initial VET: see above in Section 2.3, where the roles of the federal and regional governments and the social partners are described.

Publicly funded continuing VET: as already mentioned, the Federal Employment Agency is trying to introduce output standards for publicly-funded training courses. In addition, providers in this training area have to have quality management systems if they want to obtain accreditation for publicly funded courses. For details concerning this accreditation see the *Anerkennungs- und Zulassungsverordnung – Weiterbildung – AZWV*.

3.2. Actors in setting targets for providers

At provider level too, the trend is for a lot of actors to be involved in the process of setting standards.

3.2.1. Italy

As regards the results to be achieved by providers, standards for accreditation, which also set certain minimum targets, are mainly defined by the Ministry of Labour and regional representatives. The social partners are also consulted.

3.2.2. Denmark

In Denmark the Ministry of Education and the social partners/trade committees play an important role. However, for most IVET programmes the provider (college) sets the final examinations in programmes where a journeyman's test is not used.

External examiners – typically representatives from local enterprises/trade committees – assess the performance of individual students. Examinations typically consist of different forms of test: written, practical, oral presentation and examination. The form of assessment varies enormously among the 100 VET programmes which exist, on account of traditions in the different sectors, the duration of the programmes, the objectives, etc. Programmes may last for anything from 1.5 years to 4.5 years. The average is 3.5 to 4 years with 50 %-66 % as workplace training.

3.2.3. The Netherlands

All relevant actors are involved in setting provider targets in the Netherlands, through a new framework involving supervision by the Inspectorate and the KCE (quality centre for VET examinations). Compliance with any new legislation introduced by the government is monitored by the Inspectorate. The supervisory framework under the Inspectorate is intended to foster the process of quality improvement among providers.

3.2.4. Germany

As mentioned earlier, the output standards in initial VET are closely connected to the training regulations. The output standards are therefore primarily shaped when an existing training regulation is modernised or a new occupation developed.

This process is organised in the following way. In the dual system, vocational training takes place both in companies and in vocational schools. As a result, the subject matter (or training content) taught in these two learning locations needs to be coordinated, along with the

relevant scheduling, in keeping with the training regulations for the relevant occupations and pursuant to framework curricula. A special procedure has been developed for this, providing for close cooperation between the Federal Government and the *Länder* and giving the social partners (employers' and employees' representatives) an important role.

It has already been mentioned that the Federal Employment Agency is trying to introduce output standards for certain publicly funded training courses. In addition, providers in this field have to have their own quality management systems if they want to obtain accreditation for certain publicly funded courses.

3.3. Actors in setting standards for learners

At the individual level the trend is also for a lot of the relevant stakeholders to be involved in the process.

3.3.1. United Kingdom

The process of defining of the standards for learners involves many actors: the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) has the overall responsibility in UK for developing occupational standards and licensing Sector Skills Bodies. In the Occupational Standards Programme, the SSDA works in conjunction with Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) through the Projects and Standards Approval Group (PSAG).

In England the QCA is responsible for the national qualifications framework. One of the most important features of the QCA's work in recent years has been the heavy involvement of different partners in the qualifications system reform process. There are two levels of involvement:

- the sectoral level, through the Sector Skills Councils, where employers play an important role in planning and developing new qualifications;
- the local level, through 47 Learning and skills Councils, where local actors are influential in planning and financing training activities.

The Sector Skills Councils are employer-led, independent organisations that covers a specific sector across the UK. The four key goals are to:

- reduce skills gaps and shortages;
- improve productivity, business and public service performance;
- increase opportunities to boost the skills and productivity of everyone in the sector's workforce;

- improve learning supply including apprenticeships, higher education and National Occupational Standards (NOS).

They are funded by Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and overseen by the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA); their job is to identify, define and update employment-based standards of competence for agreed occupations. A group made up of the regulatory authorities and the UK administration then assesses these standards against certain criteria. National Occupational Standards form the basis for NVQs.

The awarding bodies are responsible for arranging the assessment of competence and the award of qualifications. They have a dual role. Together with sector bodies, they are jointly responsible for NVQ assessment methods based on the assessment strategy of the sector bodies, and they are also responsible for the implementation of individual NVQs. They approve centres that wish to offer assessment for NVQs and monitor the assessment process and award NVQs and unit certificates. They undertake external verification to ensure that candidates are being assessed fairly and consistently across all centres. The QCA takes the final decision about the validation of any new qualifications that are proposed.

In Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) accredits all Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs).

3.3.2. France

As regards standards for learners, quality control of the frame of reference is the responsibility of *Commissions professionnelles consultatives* (Vocational Consultative Committees) (CPCs) which are part of the Ministry of Education. The committees are made up for four sets of representatives:

- employer representatives, including, if necessary, representatives of the public sector and craftsmen, proposed by the most representative organisations;
- employee representatives, proposed by the most representative unions;
- government representatives;
- qualified individuals.

The *Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle* (CNPC, National Committee for Vocational Certification) was set up in 2002, involving representatives from different ministries, social partners, chambers of commerce and regional delegations. This committee is responsible for developing the national repertory of vocational qualifications and for ensuring comparability with certificates throughout Europe.

3.3.3. Italy

The social partners also play a fundamental role, as part of the process of setting vocational output/outcome standards, in determining the standards to be reached by learners.

At national level the process has not yet been finalised, but every official document concerning the future design of the system mentions the role of the social partners, assigning them two tasks:

- promoting national and local surveys on occupational and training needs;
- taking part in national and regional committees for the definition of vocational output standards.

For example, the decree on the setting of a qualifications system devised by the Ministry of Labour (May 2001) provides for the establishment of sectoral committees comprising representatives of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, regional authorities and the social partners.

3.3.4. Ireland

As stated in the document *Policy for determining standards* (September 2005b), FETAC is to establish a process for the development of award standards from levels 1 to 6 that will enable and facilitate the participation of key stakeholders and in as far as possible incorporate existing principles and processes and thereby build on national best practice and expertise.

FETAC Council

The role of the Council is to strategically plan the development of award standards to ensure further education and training awards are responsive to national, economic, industry and social needs. The Council will promote, facilitate and enable a partnership model and quality-assure the process for determining standards through the establishment of a Standards Advisory Board and Standards Development Groups, which will undertake the development and review of standards across all fields from level 1 – level 6 for awards consistent with FETAC’s published guidelines and criteria. A register of Standards Development Groups will be maintained by FETAC.

A formal working arrangement between FETAC and the Standards Development Groups will be established in the form of a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’.

FETAC will publish guidelines, including specific criteria and procedures both for the establishment and registration of Standards Development Groups and for the development of standards for named awards. FETAC will also publish guidelines and procedures for the structure of awards including guidelines for profiling awards in terms of the mix of knowledge, skill or competence.

Within these guidelines and procedures Standards Development Groups working in partnership with FETAC will undertake the development and review of standards for named awards. These standards will be determined by the Council on the advice of the Standards Advisory Board. The standards determined by the Council will be published and available for quality assured providers to develop programmes for validation.

Executive

The role of the executive is to manage the process and to ensure that standards are developed according to best national and international practice. The executive will:

- coordinate the awards plan and the development and review of standards;
- ensure that Standards Development Groups are established and registered in accordance with FETAC guidelines and procedures;
- monitor the proposed standards developed by the Standards Development Groups to ensure consistency with FETAC policies and procedures;
- agree a Memorandum of Understanding with each Standards Development Group, and monitor ongoing progress;
- prepare reports for presentation to the Standards Advisory Board and the Council.

Standards Advisory Board

A Standards Advisory Board will be established to advise the Council in relation to the development of standards. The board will report directly to the Council. It will include high level expert membership from key stakeholders including industry, employers, trade unions, learners, sectors including the community sector, former awarding bodies, statutory bodies, education and training (including further and higher education and training), and international expertise. Members will be selected based on their specific expertise and experience in relation to standards development. It is envisaged that the board will have up to 20 members. The Chair of the Board will be a Council member.

The role of the Standards Advisory Board is to:

- quality assure the process by which standards are developed for all FETAC awards;
- advise the Council across a range of fields on the standards of knowledge, skill and competence required for named awards from levels 1-6 in the National Framework of Qualifications.

Membership of the Standards Advisory Board will be for a period of four years.

Standards Development Groups

Stakeholders working in partnership with FETAC will develop the standards for named awards through the establishment of Standards Development Groups.

Standards for named awards are developed by a Standards Development Group prior to recommendation to the Council via the Standards Advisory Board. It is envisaged that where appropriate, Standards Development Groups would be led by or include significant involvement of existing nationally funded bodies and/or industry/sectoral-led bodies with significant remit for developing standards in specific fields. This would include for example the Irish National Training and Employment Authority (FÁS), the Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority (Teagasc), the National Tourism Development Authority (Fáilte Ireland), the Health and Safety Authority and other statutory/non statutory bodies. A register of Standards Development Groups will be maintained by the executive. Stakeholders will be invited or may apply to FETAC to register as a Standards Development Group. New Standards Development Groups will be established and registered if the proposed awards development is in line with the Award Plan.

The specific role of the Standards Development Group is to undertake the development and review of standards of knowledge, skill or competence for named awards from levels 1-6 in the National Framework of Qualifications in accordance with FETAC criteria and guidelines. See Appendix 6 of the document 'A policy for determining standards' for terms of reference.

The Standards Development groups will set award standard for each award, appropriate to the specific level, type and purpose of the award and the mix of knowledge, skill or competence.

Standards Development Groups will agree a formal working arrangement with FETAC in the form of a *Memorandum of understanding*. This will include identification of specific deliverables and time lines, e.g. planned named awards within an agreed timeframe.

Standards development groups, as required by their terms of reference, will be expected to consult widely and to include appropriate stakeholders and expertise.

3.3.5. Denmark

Both for 'basic' subjects such as English, Danish and history, and for 'VET' subjects the Ministry of Education and the social partners (with employers represented by the sector trade committees at both national and local level) together set the standards to be reached by the individual. The trade committees have considerable influence over both the final examination and the content, as described above.

3.3.6. The Netherlands

Qualification standards and competences are developed by the centres of expertise. Standards have to be formally approved by the government.

The Association of centres of expertise on vocational education, training and the labour market (COLO) also plays an important role, as it has two tasks:

- to create national qualifications;
- to find firms to provide apprenticeships and to accredit them.

There are centres of expertise for each sector of the labour market. COLO can thus be seen as an actor setting output standards both at system and at individual level.

3.3.7. Germany

As mentioned above in Section 2.3.6, a great many actors are involved in setting standards for vocational training in Germany. This is also the case as regards standards at individual level, which mainly take the form of training regulations drawn up in collaboration between the BIBB, federal and *Länder* experts and representatives from relevant associations. The supreme authority is the Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

3.4. Summary of the actors involved

In general a great many relevant stakeholders are involved in the process of setting standards at all three levels, but the countries differ as regards who is and especially how they are involved. In most of the countries looked at, central government plays a key role, but some have chosen a more regional approach.

Table 6: Actors involved in setting standards, by country

Actors	Country
The Ministry of Labour, the regional representatives and the social partners are all involved in defining targets and standards.	Italy
The shape and content of national targets are discussed with partner bodies and organisations. The Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) has overall responsibility for developing occupational standards and licensing Sector Skills Bodies. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) are responsible for the National Qualifications Framework.	United Kingdom

Actors	Country
<p>The Vocational Consultative Committees (CPCs) are responsible for ensuring the quality of the frame of reference. The committees are made up of four sets of representatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • employer representatives, including, if necessary, representatives of the public sector and craftsmen, proposed by the most representative organisations; • employee representatives, proposed by the most representative unions; • government representatives; • qualified individuals. <p>A <i>Commission National de la Certification Professionnelle</i> (CNPC, National Committee for Vocational Certification) has also been introduced, with the task of developing the national repertory of vocational qualifications.</p>	France
<p>FETAC will establish a process for the development of award standards that will enable and facilitate the participation of key stakeholders.</p>	Ireland
<p>The Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). The Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology (BMW). The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB). The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the <i>Länder</i> in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK). The social partners. At provider level there is close collaboration between companies and vocational schools.</p>	Germany
<p>Parliament adopts legislation on the education system and its individual parts, such as VET. The Ministry of Education sets out regulations based on that legislation and other rules and principles. The social partners advise the ministry and determine detailed content.</p>	Denmark
<p>The Regional Training Centres. The Council of VET Providers. The Council for Agricultural Education Centres. The Association of Netherlands Municipalities. Centres of Expertise on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market. COLO, Association of Centres of Expertise on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market. Social partners and students' representatives. The government gives final approval.</p>	The Netherlands

4. Strengths and weaknesses

4.1. Italy

Strengths

One of the strengths of the new school and VET reform as regards quality assurance is the establishment of a national evaluation system, which will also cover initial VET. It will allow checks on pupils' and schools' performance and facilitate a move away from the current quality assurance system based on the monitoring of input and process standards to a new system focusing on the assessment of outcomes.

Another important innovation is the introduction of an accreditation system for VET providers. Accreditation guarantees that providers have the necessary prerequisites to carry out a high-quality training activity; it also allows the regional VET systems to remain very flexible, because they are able to choose the best training projects each year.

Weaknesses

The heterogeneity of the regional VET systems is a weak point in the Italian system. Quality assurance is mainly concerned with planning (through the *ex ante* evaluation of the projects presented by VET providers) and implementation (through the use of accredited VET providers). There have been very few attempts to monitor the quality of VET outcomes.

The lack of clear national output/outcome standards is another weak point. The transition is still under way from a centralised system, based on delivery and monitoring of rigid input and process standards, to a decentralised system, based on autonomous schools and regional administration of VET. National and regional output standards to steer the system more flexibly thus still need to be defined, even if they are mentioned in all the reform bills.

4.2. France

Strengths

Strong points include:

- the innovation in the way the annual Finance Act is structured. There has been a move away from the traditional accounting document where the funding accorded to ministries' activities was very strictly defined, to a strategic instrument, where specific and precise goals are stated, and funding is linked to the achievement of those goals through planned activities. This is a very important change in the philosophy of the administration and is a very useful example for all those public administrations which traditionally focus on establishing procedures (and monitoring compliance with them) rather than on setting and

pursuing specific and clear goals and targets. This approach puts goals and targets at the centre of political and administrative action and very precise choices have to be made.

- The *Contrats d'Académie* between the Ministry of Education and local education authorities, should be also mentioned, as new instruments for managing local processes; they stipulate the objectives for each local authority, and a set of indicators is defined to help monitor whether or not they are being achieved.
- There is a strong tradition in setting learners' standards (*référentiels*) for the diplomas awarded by the Ministry of Education; this process assures the involvement of the key stakeholders, goes hand in hand with continuous research, and allows diplomas to be updated regularly.
- Innovations have been introduced by the *Loi de la modernisation sociale*; these include the national repertory of vocational qualifications and greater scope for acknowledging previous experience, through the process of *Validation des acquis de l'expérience* (VAE). These new features of the French qualifications system enhance the principle that a qualification should be awarded on the basis of what one knows and is able to do, rather than on the type of education followed.

Weaknesses

Two points of weakness in the French system should be mentioned:

- the indicators for the qualifications awarded by organisations other than the Ministry of Education are defined very precisely by each sector or company. Their heterogeneity prevents relevant models being proposed in this context;
- while at system level there has been considerable progress through the LOLF in the direction of setting and evaluating clear targets, the same cannot be said as regards providers. Here there is still no policy of regulating the system through the definition and evaluation of expected outcomes.

4.3. United Kingdom

Strengths

The effort to improve continuously, defining specific targets to be reached, with the involvement of all the stakeholders, is remarkable, and it is allowing the achievement of significant results; according to the Learning and Skills Council, the goals and specific targets set as part of the programme Success for All are having a significant impact (LSC, 2004).

The trend towards fewer nationally set targets and greater scope for locally determined outcomes and methods of delivery is also a striking part of the Success for All process.

As regards standards for learners, the development of a common code of practice for awarding bodies delivering NVQs, and the recognition that, although there is a clear need for

occupationally specific qualifications, there will also be a need for employer demand for qualifications to be sector and cross-sector based, has led to greater fitness for purpose in the development, delivery and assessment of NVQs.

Weaknesses

The efforts made so far to organise a flexible, transparent, open, unitised, system of credits and qualifications have still not been fully successful. The QCA document *New thinking for reform* (QCA, 2004c) describes the critical points of the National Qualifications Framework ‘The National Qualifications Framework, while representing a large portfolio of highly respected qualifications, is not meeting the full range of skills and learning needs. This means that too much training goes on unrecognised, leaving learners unable to progress or gain professional qualifications as they learn. Many employers are, therefore, investing in training programmes that are not subject to national quality assurance standards’.

4.4. Ireland

Strengths

The National Framework of Qualifications provides a consistent national system for awards. The Qualifications Act makes the learner the central driving force in all education and training activities. Clear access, transfer, progression and mobility routes are now open to all learners through quality assured awards.

In relation to quality assurance processes for further education and training, the key strength is enabling and building capacity at provider level, so that providers take responsibility for maintaining and improving the quality of the education and training they provide.

In relation to output standards for a qualification/award, the main strength of the new proposals is that this is a national process enabling participation of all key stakeholders and ensuring coherence and consistency of national standards for awards in further education and training.

Weaknesses

Perhaps the two main barriers to improving the status, flexibility and attractiveness of Initial VET are rigidity and a lack of integration. While the National Framework of Qualifications and the design of quality assurance and programme validation arrangements are intended to be flexible, delivery of programmes continues to be through systems which are predominantly focused on full-time learners. Guidance and information services are fragmented, although improving, and quality assurance processes have not up to now taken an explicit and systemic total quality management approach. In addition, the system is just beginning the transition towards implementing the new procedures.

FETAC is addressing all of these challenges and is devising guidelines on all its policies and procedures.

A communications strategy has been put in place which is reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Ensuring providers and other stakeholders are fully informed is imperative. FETAC undertakes regular briefing sessions with providers and works closely with provider groups both through formal and informal consultation processes.

Implementation will be phased, working in partnership with stakeholders to identify and overcome difficulties.

Progress will be reviewed at identified time periods for each function.

4.5. Denmark

Strengths:

The main strengths of the Danish approach are that the standards and indicators are common to the whole of the VET system, and VET education is accepted at a national level. This provides the opportunity for comparisons to be made and in some instances even for benchmarking. The six indicators mentioned above are widely accepted as important, and they reinforce governmental requirements.

However, the data should be seen in an educational context, and it is difficult to draw precise conclusions. It is very often at governmental level that initiatives are taken to define indicators, but in relation to institutional benchmarking, it is more useful if the indicators are formulated by the providers. There have been several well known instances of this in Denmark.

Weaknesses:

One of the main weaknesses is that it takes time for the system to adjust to sudden labour market demands. Further, it is difficult to formulate indicators which are operational, precise and valid, as some of the objectives are difficult to measure.

Some of the indicators, such as general economic conditions and the labour market (for example the employability rate which is not usually dependent on the performance of providers), are outside the control of providers. The economic conditions are much more decisive than the place where the trainee was educated (college and company).

4.6. Germany

Strengths:

The detailed training regulations ensure to some extent that the content taught and tested is uniform for every recognised occupation. Employers can therefore trust the skills of employees who have gone through the dual system. The development process for training regulations, with its close integration of all stakeholders concerned, guarantees that the content of training meets the requirements of enterprises. Training in which competences are acquired in two locations – company and vocational school – ensures the desired quality. Against this background the training regulations and the way they are developed enjoy a very good reputation in Germany.

Compulsory output standards in publicly funded continuing VET ensure that the providers of training courses inform themselves about the actual needs of the (regional) labour market and that they try to develop relationships with employers.

The standards for publicly financed continuing VET result in transparency, and the same is the case for the test criteria set by regulation. Finally, the policy goals are accepted in the field in VET.

Weaknesses:

Despite the standardised training regulations, the quality of training varies to some extent from company to company and from region to region. If the training quality of companies were monitored as well as the skills of the trainees perhaps quality would be better.

There are also weaknesses with regard to the standards for publicly funded continuing VET. If the quality of the training is judged only on the labour market placement rate the context is neglected. There are many reasons which may explain why a person was not able to find a job after training (for example high unemployment rate, illness, low motivation). Output indicators alone should not therefore be used to judge the quality of training providers (Stock, 2005).

4.7. Netherlands

Strengths:

One of the most important strengths of the Dutch system is the involvement of the labour market, through its role in the Centres of Expertise and COLO. The labour market thus sets policy goals together with the actors in the VET field.

Another strength is the self-assessment report which VET providers have to submit and which forms the basis for inspections. Finally, the involvement of relevant stakeholders in general promotes transparency and accountability both at provider and system levels.

Weaknesses:

The main weakness of the Dutch system is that there are too many different qualifications and the descriptions of the qualification targets to be attained are too detailed.

Further, results and effectiveness are not well defined and monitored and a better evaluation of policy is needed. It is still very difficult to verify the quality and quality assurance of an educational institution by looking at students' results. The Netherlands does not want to focus only on output standards. The consequence of using output standards is that the results are often very black and white and relevant background information is not taken into account.

The framework for quality assurance and improvement established by the Inspectorate seems to be very comprehensive but difficult to use or to motivate VET providers to use. The measurement of results in particular is relatively 'soft and broad', which makes it difficult to see if output standards are being met.

Supervisory boards for each provider – which are obligatory – are being developed. They used to focus mainly on financial matters, but now they are responsible for the quality of education too.

From the point of view of COLO, the major challenge is the lack of cooperation between schools and enterprises. VET providers are currently considered to have too much influence.

4.8. Summary of strengths and weaknesses

As regards the strengths and weaknesses mentioned by the countries, the conclusion is that the involvement of stakeholders and national standards are seen as the main strengths. With regard to the weaknesses, the trend is not so clear but most concern the trade-off between flexibility and clarity in the definition of the standards. Measurement problems are also mentioned as a weak point. However, in general the standards themselves are seen as strengths for the education system.

Table 7: Summary of strengths and weaknesses, by country

Strengths	Countries
Involvement of the stakeholders in the process.	The UK, Ireland, the Netherlands, Italy, France, Germany
National targets and standards.	France, Ireland, Germany
National targets adapted to local contexts; local agreements.	The UK, France
The standards and indicators are common for the whole of the VET system, and VET is accepted at national level.	Denmark, France, Germany (except indicators), Ireland
Prior learning assessment.	France, the UK, Ireland

Strengths	Countries
Compulsory standards for IVET in the dual system guarantee mutual trust on the part of employers and job-seekers.	Germany
The introduction of a national evaluation system. The introduction of an accreditation system for VET providers.	Italy
Weaknesses	
Lack of clear standards and targets at provider level.	France
Lack of national standards – variation between the regions.	Italy
Some of the objectives are difficult to measure.	Denmark
Too many qualifications and too detailed descriptions of how targets are to be achieved.	The Netherlands
There are a lot of new initiatives. The challenge is to ensure the correct implementation. Lack of flexibility and integration.	Ireland
In continuing VET the context is often neglected in the use of output indicators.	Germany
Not all training programmes are included in the National Qualifications Framework. A lot of employers invest in programmes not subject to national output standards.	The UK

5. Trends in setting targets and output/outcome standards

A lot of initiatives in quality assurance are under way in all the countries, and the trend is clearly towards further use of output standards and more focus on results in general, at all three levels. Accreditation systems are also being introduced or improved in many countries.

5.1. Italy

Italy is in the midst of a process of decentralisation, with increasing emphasis on the definition of output standards, rather than input and process standards, in line with the growing autonomy of VET providers. This means that the traditional approach of setting standards and using them to regulate the system and monitor its quality is no good anymore.

Everyone agrees that the old standards, based on inputs and processes, can no longer be used to manage the system, and that it is much more sensible instead to give providers the freedom to organise themselves, while the central level (national or regional) monitors outcomes.

However, there is considerable uncertainty about:

- the nature of these standards (how they should be formulated);
- the role of central and regional governments in establishing them;
- the level of detail they should involve;
- the degree of flexibility providers should have.

The introduction of the accreditation system will enhance the quality of training delivered by providers. In particular, all providers have to achieve certain output standards (proportion of pupils completing the training; proportion of pupils satisfied with the course; proportion of pupils finding work after the course).

5.2. France

As regards system targets, the *Loi organique relative aux Lois de finances* (LOLF) has meant major innovations. This legislation has radically changed the philosophy behind the public budget, moving away from the concept of merely funding an activity to the concept of funding the activity with a view to obtaining a specific result, described in measurable terms. This means that specific targets have to be set every year by the different ministries as part of the Finance Act.

As regards standards for learners, the need to make qualifications relevant to the workplace has resulted in a re-examination of how the certification frames of reference (*référentiels*) are defined. The frames of reference produced in this context are increasingly turning to a description of what is being certified, what that means and how it can be used in a job, or indeed in an activity as part of a more cross-disciplinary function encompassing several occupational fields. Moreover, the need for validation of lifelong experience and training means that consideration is needed to be given to qualifications which take the form of ‘modules’, ‘units’ or ‘credits’ which can be built up to allow access to a qualification after a combination of different kinds of learning.

The Act of 17 January 2002 introduced a national repertory of vocational qualifications. This does not bring together all qualifications awarded in France but only those clearly established and recognised by the State and the social partners, for example:

- diplomas awarded by the ministries;
- qualifications awarded by institutions or public, commercial or private organisations;
- certificates awarded by sectoral organisations approved for registration by a CPC.

The national repertory is now the general framework into which the new landscape of qualifications in France will have to fit.

The emergence of training on the job and in a dual setting (work and college) imposed a new logic on the evaluation of achievements. There was a realisation that general or professional competences could be acquired in places other than schools or training centres.

This change has come about gradually. Lately, the idea has grown and become established that work itself is a form of training and therefore allows the acquisition of competences which can be considered sufficiently structured to be taken into account for the purposes of VET; trainees can thus be exempted from part of a course (1985 decree concerning higher educations), from part of the examinations for an official national qualification (*Loi relatif à la validation d’acquis professionnels* of 1992), or from all such examinations (*Loi de modernisation sociale* of 17 January 2002).

5.3. United Kingdom

As regards the setting of goals and targets for the system and the providers, the Department for Education and Skills paper, *Success for all* (DfES, 2002), declared the intention to establish a new planning, funding and accountability system, based on greater partnership and trust. Against a clear framework of national standards, the DfES is committed to decentralised delivery and responsive local and regional services in a way that is consistent with equity and efficiency. A shift towards fewer nationally set targets and greater scope for locally determined outcomes and methods of delivery is crucial to that process.

The DfES has been working with delivery partners to create sharper, simpler accountabilities and incentives for delivering improvements in public services. The front line is therefore increasingly involved in the targets process.

To empower local decision-making and longer term planning, local LSCs and providers will be given three-year funding. Institutions negotiate with the LSC their own three-year development plans setting out what they will achieve; these are linked to funding plans. Local LSCs will have maximum flexibility to move money between years and share this freedom with providers. For colleges in the FE sector, higher funding rates linked to performance will also be introduced.

The LSC has also introduced floor targets for providers, based on success rates. The LSC will intervene where it finds providers who fail to meet agreed standards; there will be additional rewards for top-performing providers, including financial rewards, building on the current arrangements for Learning and Skills Beacon Status.

As regards the qualification system, a unit-based, credit framework as part of the Framework for Achievement (FfA) it is now developing.

To integrate the various typologies of professional qualifications and to introduce more homogenous criteria to assure the transparency of NVQs at all levels and above all between England, Ireland, Wales and Scotland, the QCA, the LSC and the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) have proposed the development and implementation of a unit based, credit framework. The Framework for Achievement (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2004b) will be a stable framework in which to present a wider range of achievements than presently recognised within the NQF.

The FfA will include all formally assessed achievements and will articulate with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) and higher education credit systems in England and Northern Ireland. Moreover it will facilitate credit transfer arrangements with European credit systems.

The FfA will allow qualifications to be built up from units with credit as the currency of achievement. FfA qualifications will organise achievements into useful structures. The FfA will be capable of including all achievements of all learners that conform to the specifications of the framework as well as all qualifications for adults and all vocational qualifications in England outside higher education.

5.4. Ireland

Policy implementation issues in education and training are addressed by government departments in consultation with the social partners. There are national forums to facilitate enhanced collaboration between education, training, industry and community interests, and

local structures (for example county/city development boards, area-based partnerships) to provide for integrated working at local level.

Learning for life: white paper on adult education (Government of Ireland, 2000) reflected on the role of adult education in society and, in setting out principles, policies and strategies, identified a range of areas requiring investment and development.

The policies outlined in the white paper were complemented by the work of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning, which was established by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in collaboration with the Department of Education and Science and reported in 2002. The focus of the taskforce was on the labour market aspects of lifelong learning and concentrated on the key themes of:

- developing and implementing a National Framework of Qualifications;
- ensuring basic skills for all;
- providing comprehensive guidance, counselling and information;
- addressing delivery, access and funding measures;
- providing better opportunities for workplace learning, and learning for workers.

As regards initial VET, the main thrust of education and training policies was to improve its status, flexibility and attractiveness, and included the development of a National Framework of Qualifications by the National Qualifications Authority to improve access, promote flexible assessment and accreditation processes, and enhance mobility across the further and higher education and training sectors.

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) has defined specific policies, actions and procedures through which it will meet its objectives in this regard. They are set out under four themes:

- credits;
- transfer and progression routes;
- entry arrangements;
- information provision;

As regards output standards for individuals, in summer 2005 FETAC published the document *Towards the development of a common awards' structure for the further education and training sector* (FETAC, 2005c); this document groups key proposals under four main headings:

- award structure;
- award level;
- award volume;
- award profile.

Proposals relating to award structure reflect FETAC's overall approach to the construction and composition of named awards.

Level indicates the progressive hierarchy of achievement. NQAI's level synopses and indicators of framework levels, are the basis on which the level of learning is defined.

Volume indicates the amount of learning undertaken to achieve an award. It is the term used by the NQAI to indicate the size of the learning package associated with an award-type.

Profile provides an outline or picture of the nature of the learning undertaken in order to achieve an award and specifically, in the case of FETAC awards, the 'mix' of knowledge, skill and competence outcomes to be achieved.

5.5. Denmark

In general the trend in Denmark is towards a greater focus on objectives than on input and processes, and there is also a trend towards flexibility in educational approaches. For the last 10 years much more flexible and individual pathways have been introduced, and different kind of educational approaches/methods have been seen as a positive thing. However, dropout rates have increased over the same period.

There is also a trend towards greater linkage between funding and output indicators. Extra is available on the basis of specific factors, for example completion rates/numbers of students, apprenticeship contracts and documentation of effort, and publication of results on the web (number of contracts, teachers' further training, colleges' plans for teachers' further training, ability to use ICT skills in teaching, etc.).

Since 2002 colleges have had to have their own website and to provide specific information and documentation on it, thus changing their websites from a marketing instrument into a kind of 'statement of intent'.

Individual pathways are to the fore as regards how a trainee completes a VET programme. In Denmark these pathways are based on an assessment of the trainee's prior learning (formal/non-formal). An individual educational plan is drawn up for every trainee. This is done electronically and is part of a special programme (Elevplan), which most technical colleges use.

It is possible for trainees to obtain further qualifications in basic/academic skills when taking a VET programme/apprenticeship, and they may prolong the duration of their training / the contract agreed with an enterprise. Statistics are available on the proportion of young people continuing on to further education. There is a big variation from one VET programme to another (of between 8 and 50 %).

5.6. Germany

In Germany there is an ongoing debate on what is described as a ‘training place contribution’. In 2004 the idea was put forward that companies should ensure that at least 7 % of their employees were apprentices, and that those which did not provide training places or had only a few apprentices should be required to pay a special fee. The incoming money would be used to support companies that exceed this quota. To avoid this regulation, the employers’ associations reached an agreement with the Federal Government in June 2004, committing themselves to create 30 000 new training places each year for the following three years. In addition, 25 000 places for pre-vocational training were also to be provided annually (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2005a, p. 50-53). In September 2005 the parties to the agreement concluded that the goals had been achieved and that they had established a positive balance between supply and demand. The trade unions, however, who had not signed the agreement, describe this conclusion as a ‘statistical trick’.

This discussion shows that on the one hand there is political pressure to set quantitative targets for the VET system. However, it is not easy to decide if these targets have been achieved.

2005 saw the revision of the Vocational Training Act. The new Act encourages stakeholders to develop new forms of training and examination. The trend is towards more flexibility in the VET system and the new Act introduces a lot of improvements (Sondermann, 2005). When it adopted the revised Vocational Training Act, the Federal Parliament (*Deutscher Bundestag*) also decided to pay much more attention to the quality of training, and called on all parties concerned to intensify their efforts to improve quality assurance systems for practical application in all VET learning locations.

In publicly-funded continuing VET there is at present a mixture of more central control and more flexibility. Providers have to have a quality management system, however they still have the flexibility to design the system as they see fit. Nevertheless, the large funding cuts in this area of continuing VET limit providers’ options (Stock, 2005).

Since the late 1990s there has been a trend towards a greater focus on demand in continuing training. Through tests of continuing VET programmes, seals of approval and professional guidance, prospective trainees can obtain more information on the quality of training programmes and providers to enable them to make an educated choice.

5.7. The Netherlands

The trend is towards greater transparency and public accountability in the delivery of education, and towards more management through output standards and the performance of VET providers and less through input and throughput standards. This means not only measuring output standards in terms of qualifications, but also measuring the satisfaction of

the stakeholders (students, parents, companies, teachers, etc.). Self regulation of VET providers is emphasised, as is greater horizontal accountability to stakeholders in the region and less vertical supervision (governance model).

The government has recently started a process in which the institutions are invited to formulate their goals with respect to early school leaving and lifelong learning, both part of the Lisbon agenda. It is planned to extend this process to other policy areas after evaluating this first step.

The Netherlands already has an instrument to measure outcomes, in that it monitors where students find work and whether the job corresponds to the education followed.

The trend in the Netherlands is to encourage agreements between educational providers and regional stakeholders on performance, transparency of results and public benchmarking of performance.

Supervision by the Inspectorate is to be reduced on account of the expectation of greater stakeholder involvement, horizontal accountability and internal supervision.

The output standards to be met by students – expressed indirectly by the number of qualifications which can be obtained – have recently been reduced rather drastically. The situation is still so new that COLO does not know what the reaction from the different actors and especially from the schools may be.

COLO expects greater focus on portfolio presentations from each student. The new system will combine existing diplomas and give a new and broader process-oriented dimension to the new diplomas. However, this may put pressure on the diplomas and to some extent reduce the public's faith in them.

Thinking on educational outcomes has partly been inspired by international considerations. Europe profiles itself as a knowledge-intensive economic region and the Netherlands intends to occupy a strong position within this region. Education is an important marker in seeking to achieve this. The degree to which education contributes to the knowledge economy is thus an important gauge of the results produced by the Dutch education system. The level of education achieved can serve as an indicator of this contribution, as is the trend in the number of qualified students (in terms of volumes and level).

5.8. Summary of trends

The main conclusion is that there is a trend towards the further use of output standards at the expense of input and process standards. In general, there is a strong tendency to focus on results in the initiatives taken in the countries in this study. Another trend in many countries is towards decentralisation. This means growing autonomy for VET providers and greater opportunities to gear the system to local needs.

Table 8: Summary of trends, by country

Trends	Country
<p>There is a trend towards greater use of output standards instead of input and process standards. An accreditation system for VET providers has been introduced.</p> <p>There is an ongoing process of decentralisation and growing autonomy for VET providers.</p>	Italy
<p>There is a new form of financing based on results instead of activities. A new general framework for qualifications (repertory) has been introduced.</p>	France
<p>Sharper, simpler accountabilities and incentives for delivering improvements in public services.</p> <p>A new unit-based credit framework to create transparency and homogeneity has been developed.</p> <p>There is a trend towards greater involvement of local stakeholders.</p>	United Kingdom
<p>A lot of new initiatives, with the focus on accreditation and assessment.</p>	Ireland
<p>Greater focus on output standards than on input and process standards.</p> <p>Greater focus on linking funding to output indicators.</p> <p>More openness on the part of providers, both with regard to results and programmes.</p>	Denmark
<p>As initial VET has always been shaped by both regional and federal forces there is no trend towards further decentralisation. Nor is this thought desirable. As far as the implementation of quality development and assurance is concerned, all <i>Länder</i> have introduced pilot projects in vocational schools.</p> <p>Greater focus on demand in continuing VET.</p>	Germany
<p>Greater focus on output and transparency.</p> <p>More responsibility/self regulation at provider level in combination with greater horizontal accountability to stakeholders in the region and less vertical supervision.</p> <p>Inspiration from international considerations.</p>	The Netherlands

6. Challenges for implementation

As already mentioned, in the last few years VET systems as a whole have been marked by a general trend towards according a greater role to targets and output/outcome standards than input and process standards. This is not without its problems. This chapter presents a number of key challenges in the implementation of output/outcome standards.

6.1. Decentralisation and autonomy

Most of the countries analysed are facing:

- a process of decentralisation, giving more power to regional or local communities;
- a process of increasing autonomy, giving more freedom to providers to organise their own activities.

What are the consequences of this decentralisation process for the setting of standards and, in particular, targets and output/outcome standards? What is the role of the central and of the local actors in defining them? Theoretically, the local actors should define input and process standards, while it should be the responsibility of the central actors to define expected outcomes. This distinction is not always clear, however. Sometimes local authorities argue that local needs have to be taken into account in defining targets or output/outcome standards and seek to play a significant role in that process. As a result, new instruments are required to regulate the system.

In Italy devolution is increasing throughout public services. In particular, regional governments have been given almost total autonomy as regards vocational education and training. Schools too are becoming increasingly autonomous, having acquired a certain degree of independence from the Ministry of Education. The new Italian Constitution has introduced the concept of basic performance levels as the minimum requirements that all the regions have to meet.

The Italian Constitution stipulates that the State, at national level, reserves to itself the right to set what are known as *livelli essenziali delle prestazioni* (basic performances levels). The rationale behind this principle is to ensure the system is consistent and guarantee the same level of quality throughout public services, even if they are managed by regions or local authorities.

A contract process to determine standards is now under way, involving central government and the regions. It is not clear so far what the conclusion of this debate will be, but it will have considerable consequences for the way standards are set.

In France, there is also a move towards decentralisation, but it is less developed than in Italy. The contract agreements between the Ministry of Education and the local *académies*, which for every *académie* set the objectives to be reached over the following three years, use

performance indicators to monitor the process. However, the indicators qualitative, and do not set precise targets.

In England, Regional Skills Partnerships have been given a greater role in the regional application of national targets. The new arrangement for Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) foresees their participation in agreeing PSA targets and working with the Regional Skills Partnerships to identify those measures which best reflect the RDAs' contribution to meeting the targets.

In the Netherlands, an 1996 Act concerning decentralisation and the merger of schools was the first step, and a turning point in the process. It is still very difficult to get stakeholders involved. Very few want to take on the responsibility. Decisions have to be taken and problems dealt with at school level, and the stakeholders have to see what is in it for them. The schools want to pursue these developments with more active stakeholders, but the challenge is to motivate them.

As pointed out above, through the involvement of the various partners in initial VET (federal and regional bodies, social partners) there has been no need in Germany for greater decentralisation. The training regulations serve as a reliable basis for high quality training. However, the quality of the training varies from company to company. It might be possible to reduce these differences by introducing process-oriented management tools in the companies.

In Denmark the decentralisation process is well advanced and includes a number of different activities and elements both at system and provider level.

One element in the Danish quality strategy that has become increasingly important over the years is 'output monitoring'. Whereas the focus in the 1990s was primarily on the process, and motivating VET providers to set up quality assurance and development systems, the trend is now to promote quality by providing incentives. VET providers have to fulfil specific policy goals to receive earmarked funding.

In IVET, this new principle is called 'value for money'. The Danish Ministry of Education specifies the priority areas, and offers the providers additional funding if they attain a number of goals regarding quality, for example. The providers are encouraged to initiate activities within these fields. In 2004, the ministry defined four priority areas concerning quality:

- learners' systematic quality development at colleges, specifically focusing on proficiency and flexibility;
- teachers' strategic skills development, specifically aimed at motivating them to update and renew their professional skills, and to use new forms of teaching and working, for example teaching skills using information technology;
- the professionalisation of school management;
- strengthening colleges' contact with enterprises and the local community.

At the end of the year, colleges have to report on local quality activities that have been initiated, and their results, in order to have the quality funding released. The information has to be published on the institution's website, and a report (which takes the form of responses to a questionnaire) must be sent to the ministry.

6.2. Precision and flexibility

Another crucial aspect of setting standards is precision. On the one hand, the more specific and precise a standard is, the easier it will be to measure whether it has been achieved. It will also be easier to ensure that the results are similar everywhere and can be transferred and compared, even in very different contexts.

On the other hand, there is a risk that a very precise target or standard may not be adaptable to different contexts and local needs. This is why England is moving towards fewer and broader nationally set targets. Moreover, a precise target risks giving rise to unintended adverse effects if, in respecting the standard, other important aspects of VET are forgotten.

In the Netherlands too, qualifications are being defined more broadly than before, but this may also give rise to problems: will schools be able to use these broader qualifications and still produce students who meet the needs of the labour market.

However, very precise standards for individuals are not easy to adapt to ever-changing labour market demands either, and nor do they give teachers the freedom to adapt the curricula to the local context or individual needs and attitudes to learning.

Denmark reduced the number of qualifications some years ago, introducing a smaller number of new and often broader educational areas/topics. This was done in close cooperation with the social partners and led to descriptions of several new and broader qualifications within each educational area/topic.

6.3. Involving stakeholders

The process of defining a standard requires the involvement of all the principal VET stakeholders: central government (more than one department might be interested), local authorities, employers (represented by different associations), trade unions (there is usually more than one), teachers and experts. The process may be long and complex, and it requires time.

In Italy, despite the general legislation on certification introduced in 2001, the process of setting national standards for national qualifications is still under way; only in the new Higher VET provision have the standards for some technical profiles been defined. In the other countries the process of setting and revising standards usually takes five years.

All the countries rely on the involvement of formal stakeholders, mainly for standards set for individual learners. The process involves different institutional agencies and many stakeholders, including social partners, provider representatives, sometimes representatives from local authorities, etc.

The process of standard (*référentiel*) definition in France

In general, every specific diploma is reviewed every five years.

Any member of a CPC (Vocational Consultative Committee) can make a request to update or review a diploma or create a new one. The standard procedure is then followed. When a CPC decides to create or reform a diploma, it sets up a subcommittee with an expert working group.

The process of creating a new diploma is divided into four steps:

- *phase d'opportunité* (opportunity to create or reform a diploma);
- definition of the *référentiel des activités professionnelles* (or *référentiel de l'emploi*), on the basis of an analysis of the future development of the occupations where the diploma concerned is required;
- definition of the *référentiel de certification du domaine professionnel*, which specifies the competences needed for the *référentiel professionnel*;
- the last step (developed under the direct responsibility of the ministry) concerns the methodology of evaluation, which could be global or in single units.

With rare exceptions, the procedure for creating or reviewing a diploma lasts one to three years, from the starting of the process to implementation of the revised diploma or introduction of the new one. The precise time span depends on the nature of the change involved:

- setting up new diplomas may require the installation of equipment in schools and training for teaching staff, activities that take longer;
- conversely, it is difficult to reduce the time span to under a year because of the constraints imposed by the organisation of the school year and examinations.

In the UK the process of defining standards for individuals involves many actors: the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) has overall responsibility for developing occupational standards and the licensing of Sector Skills Bodies. In the Occupational Standards Programme, the SSDA works in conjunction with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) through the Projects and Standards Approval Group (PSAG).

In England, the QCA is the body responsible for the National Qualifications Framework. One of the most important features of the QCA's work in recent years has been the heavy involvement of different partners in the qualifications system reform process.

The Sector Skills Councils have the task of defining occupational standards, which have to be accredited by the QCA and are the basis for the NVQ standard developed by the awarding bodies.

The awarding bodies are responsible for the award of qualifications and arranging the assessment of competence. They are also responsible for the implementation of individual NVQs. The QCA has the final say on the validation of any new qualification proposed.

In Scotland the SQA accredits all Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs).

A lot of different actors are also involved in the Netherlands, and the problem is that they do not always agree on which approaches and standards are appropriate:

- the schools are supposed work together with local firms and with the national Centres of Expertise (COLO) for the different sectors of the labour market. The main challenge here is that the schools and industry in principal do not agree on the number of qualifications, nor thus on output standards;
- the schools are mainly interested in there being as few qualifications as possible, while the labour market actors are in favour of having many, sector-specific qualifications and output standards. This is a fundamental debate which can be seen in several European countries, articulated mainly by the social partners.

In Denmark the perception of quality and the approaches to quality in the VET system reflects the values upon which it was built, its structure, the role of the stakeholders, the prevailing governance principles, and of course, the overall historical and cultural context. When describing the Danish approach to quality in VET, it is important to emphasise three main characteristics of the VET system:

- it is a highly decentralised system in which the VET providers have a great deal of autonomy to adapt the VET they provide to local needs and demands. Quality assurance and development have been on the political agenda in Denmark since the beginning of the 1990s, when the Danish Ministry of Education changed course from central governance to framework governance based on ‘taximeter’ grants for each student. The aim of the new guiding principles was to improve the overall responsiveness and effectiveness of the VET system. The VET providers were to be relatively autonomous, enabling them to respond more rapidly to changes in the labour market arising from technological, organisational and societal changes;
- it is a system in which the social partners play an institutionalised role at all levels, from the national councils⁽¹²⁾ that advise the Danish Minister and Ministry of Education on VET, to the local training committees which advise the VET providers on local education

⁽¹²⁾ The Advisory Council for Initial Vocational Education and Training (*Rådet for de grundlæggende erhvervsrettede uddannelser* – REU) and The Council for Adult Education and Training (*Rådet for Erhvervsrettet Voksen- og Efteruddannelse* – REVE).

plans. This is true of both IVET and CVET (¹³). This tripartite structure plays a significant role in all the quality aspects of VET:

‘The end users of the skills and competences produced by VET are centrally integrated in the formulation of standards, the running of production and the testing of performance’ (Nielsen, 1995, p. 4);

- this means that procedures for quality assurance and development are integrated into the VET system. It is a rather tight-knit system, due to the continuous dialogue between all the stakeholders at all different levels of the system, and the fact that those in positions of power are very close to one another, both culturally and geographically. Denmark is a small country, the various stakeholders know each other and work together across the system, and there is widespread confidence and mutual trust among them. They share the common overall objective, which is to ensure good VET programmes, for the benefit of the individual learners, enterprises, the labour market and society as a whole. So despite a relatively vague definition of quality, a common quality criterion is, as it were, also woven into the very fabric of the Danish VET system.

6.4. Need for ongoing research

The definition and monitoring of standards requires a scientific and statistical apparatus. When a standard relates to the system as a whole or to providers, a good statistical system is needed which allows sound indicators to be defined to monitor the progress made by the system and the providers towards the targets set.

When standards relate to the definition of the knowledge and the competences to be acquired by the end of the VET programmes, in order to gain the qualifications needed for a particular job, research has to be carried out into professional requirements. It is necessary to know not only what current demand is, but also how the profession is changing, so that people can be trained not only for the present but also for the world of work in the future. Standards which are sound and do not become outdated in a few years are what is needed.

In France, important support comes from Céreq (the *Centre d’Etudes et de Recherches sur les Qualifications*), which is permanently involved in qualitative and quantitative research into the needs of different sector, through the analysis of labour market changes.

In Ireland research and analysis is a key component in the process of setting standards. This includes European and international benchmarking of the standards. To ensure maximum economic relevance, award standards incorporate sectoral and occupational research and

(¹³) IVET here encompasses the EUD (*Erhvervsuddannelser*) programmes which are provided by technical, commercial and combined colleges. CVET encompasses the adult vocational training programmes which are provided by technical, commercial and combined colleges, and by adult vocational training centres. The same providers may provide many different VET programmes.

analysis. Development of standards for awards which have a specific occupational focus are based on a thorough analysis of the sector and the specific occupations within it. This includes:

- types of occupations within the sector,
- knowledge, skill and competence requirements,
- changes to existing occupations,
- award requirements,
- statutory and/or legal requirements,
- European and international benchmarking.

In Ireland there are several statutory agencies, committees and subcommittees with a specific remit for research and forecasting future skill needs and informing education and training policies. For example, since its establishment in 1997 the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs has had a considerable input into education and training policy at all levels.

In the Netherlands too, it is stressed that output standards need to be measured and evaluated according to how they contribute to the overall quality of the education system. For the time being, however, it appears that measuring the results of using output standards would be both difficult and premature.

With regard to one of the major objectives of the education system, namely transfer ratios between types of education, it is difficult to measure the contribution of standards and performance in terms of labour market demand. The main challenge here is the context, which is not stable. This makes direct comparison impossible, and this is a considerable challenge when it comes to implementation of output standards.

6.5. Rewards and penalties

The setting of a target or of a standard is usually associated with the idea of rewarding those people or institutions which are able to achieve it or penalising those which fail to do so.

The typical reward for learners who achieve the required standards is the award of the qualification (when the standard has been achieved in full) or of one or more credits (when the standard has only partially been achieved). By using credits, standardised qualification frameworks make it easier also to reward people who do not achieve the standard in full. Many countries have set a national qualifications framework, to enhance the transparency of the system and to allow credits to be accumulated and awarded throughout the education system.

At provider level, the results of attempts to give extra money to those providers which have been able to achieve certain targets have been controversial. For example, there is some

concern that providers would stop accepting more difficult pupils, in order to achieve better results. When considering the results, it is always necessary take into account the context in which the providers operate, so as not to penalise those working in disadvantaged areas. In France, when analysing school performance in the *baccalaureat* examination, the results are weighted according to social context.

Another strategy is the setting of floor targets (minimum performance requirements). Providers which do not reach those targets may lose funding, or have their managers removed. An example of the use of floor target can be seen in the UK:

Floor targets for providers

In England, new success rate floor targets have been introduced, which set clear expectations about minimum acceptable levels for learner outcomes. Colleges had until 2005/06 to meet or exceed these floor targets. Separate success rate floor targets are set for long-term and short-term qualifications and these are set at different levels for general further education, sixth form and specialist colleges, i.e. the long-term qualification target is set at 45 % for GFE colleges and 55 % for sixth form colleges. Targets for work-based learning provision are based on an overall sector-wide success rate for completion of an NVQ or a modern apprenticeship framework. Two floor targets of 35 % and 40 % have been set to reflect the performance differences in current levels of success across the sector.

Floor targets are designed to identify underperforming providers and ensure that decisive action and intervention is taken where providers fall below the minimum expected level. Where a provider fails to make progress, the LSC may decide to withhold funding, either fully or in part. The Secretary of State can replace any or all governors and can dissolve/establish corporations.

In addition, all colleges have agreed improvement targets with their local LSC for student numbers, success rates, employer engagement, and teacher qualifications for 2003-06, with annual milestones as part of their three-year development plans. These targets will improve value for money by raising performance across the sector.

In the Netherlands, the new Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB) gives the Minister the power to impose two types of sanctions on institutions:

- withdrawal of privileges (authority to award certificates and/or government funding) for courses where there is non-compliance with statutory provisions (i.e. on training, examinations, quality assurance, public accountability) or in the event of poor quality over a protracted period;
- withholding or suspension of funds when activities conflict with statutory provisions.

These potential sanctions give the government ‘a big stick’ in persuading institutions to take suitable improvement measures. The intention is to refine further the instruments for administrative intervention; there should be a made-to-measure response.

Italy has linked minimum performance targets to accreditation; providers which are not able to perform above the minimum standards level cannot be accredited and therefore cannot receive regional government funding.

Requirements for the Italian VET providers regarding effectiveness of previous activities

Requirement	Indicator
Implementation rate	Participant hours budgeted /participant hours realised
Drop-out rate	Students still attending in the second half of the course/students registered
Training success rate	Students attending/students qualified during the second half of the course
Rate of employment/further education/training	Students employed or in other education or training/students qualified
Satisfaction rate	Positive opinion of users/operators/final beneficiaries

As regards targets to be achieved by the system, there are no specific positive or negative consequences for those responsible for managing the system. The most important consequence is a gain or loss of credibility at national or local level.

6.6. Summary of the implementation process

Table 9: How the challenges in the implementation process are tackled

Challenges in the implementation process	How they are tackled
<i>Decentralisation gives more power to regional or local communities.</i> <i>Autonomy gives more freedom to providers to organise their own activities.</i>	Italy The State reserves the right to set what are known as ‘ <i>livelli essenziali delle prestazioni</i> ’ (basic performances levels) to maintain consistency throughout the system and so guarantee the same level of quality in public services, even if their management is in the hands of regional or local authorities.
	France The contract agreements between the Ministry of Education and the local <i>académies</i> set the objectives every <i>académie</i> has to achieve over the following three years, using performance indicators to monitor the process.
	England Regional Skills Partnerships have been given a greater role in the regional application of national targets.

Challenges in the implementation process	How they are tackled
	<p>The Netherlands The 1996 Act concerning decentralisation and the merger of schools was the first step, and a turning point in the process. work is being done to increase the involvement of stakeholders. The schools want more active stakeholders, but the challenge is to motivate them.</p> <p>Germany There is no trend towards decentralisation.</p> <p>Denmark Denmark has developed a highly decentralised system where the VET providers have a great deal of autonomy in terms of adapting the VET they provide to local needs and demands, to respond more rapidly to changes in the labour market arising from technological, organisational and societal changes.</p>
<p><i>Targets and standards: precise or broad and flexible</i></p>	<p>United Kingdom There is a trend towards fewer and broader nationally set targets.</p> <p>The Netherlands Qualifications are defined more broadly than before (competence profiles).</p> <p>Denmark Denmark reduced the number of qualifications some years ago, introducing a smaller number of broader educational areas/topics.</p>
<p><i>The process of defining standards requires an involvement of the principal VET stakeholders. This is quite a long and complex process and requires time</i></p>	<p>Italy The process of setting national standards for national qualifications is still under way.</p> <p>France The procedure for creating or reviewing a diploma lasts one to three years, from starting the procedure to implementing the revised diploma or introducing a new one</p> <p>United Kingdom The process of defining standards for individuals involves many actors: the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) working in conjunction with the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) through the Projects and Standards Approval Group (PSAG). In England, the QCA is responsible for the National Qualifications Framework. The Sector Skills Councils define occupational standards, which are the basis for the NVQ standard developed by the awarding bodies.</p> <p>The Netherlands A lot of different actors are involved and they not always agree on which approaches and standards are appropriate. The schools are more interested in having a small number of broad qualifications. The labour market actors are in favour of a larger number of sector-specific qualifications and output standards, however.</p>

Challenges in the implementation process	How they are tackled
	<p>Denmark</p> <p>The social partners play an institutionalised role at all levels. This tripartite structure plays a significant part in all VET quality aspects: it is a rather tight-knit system, as a result of the continuous dialogue between all the stakeholders at all different levels of the system. The stakeholders share the common overall objective, which is to ensure good VET programmes.</p>
<p><i>The definition and monitoring of standards requires a scientific and statistical apparatus</i></p>	<p>France</p> <p>Important support in this area comes from the research conducted by Céreq (<i>Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les Qualifications</i>).</p>
	<p>Ireland</p> <p>Research and analysis is a key component in the process of setting standards. To ensure maximum economic relevance, award standards incorporate sectoral and occupational research and analysis.</p>
	<p>The Netherlands</p> <p>The Netherlands stresses that output standards need to be measured and evaluated in terms of how they contribute to the overall quality of the education system.</p>
<p><i>There is some controversy about rewarding those people or institutions which are able to achieve standards or penalising those which fail to do so.</i></p>	<p>Italy</p> <p>Providers who do not reach floor targets may lose accreditation.</p>
	<p>United Kingdom</p> <p>Providers who do not reach floor targets may lose their funding or have their managers removed.</p>
	<p>The Netherlands</p> <p>The new Adult and Vocational Education Act (WEB) gives the Minister the power to impose two types of sanctions on institutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> withdrawal of privileges; withholding or suspension of funds.
	<p>Denmark</p> <p>The Ministry of Education specifies the priority areas, and offers providers additional funding if they attain a number of goals in fields such as quality.</p> <p>At the end of the year, the colleges have to report on local quality activities that have been initiated, and the results obtained, in order to have quality grants released.</p>

7. Synthesis and suggestions for future progress

7.1. Synthesis of the cross-country analysis

The starting point of this study, following on from the results of the first report on standards prepared by the Technical working group on quality (2003), was the hypothesis that many European countries were attaching increasing importance, in assuring the quality of the VET system, to the setting of expected outcomes, through the establishment of targets for the system and for providers and the definition of outcome standards for learners.

This reverses the traditional approach to quality assurance pursued in certain European countries until a few years ago (and which some continue to use), which was based on defining and monitoring input, resources, procedures and processes.

The study made of the VET systems in Denmark, Germany, Ireland, France, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom has largely confirmed this hypothesis: in most of the countries looked at, the definition of targets and outcome standards is an important instrument of quality assurance.

In Italy, there are no specific targets for the system, but the European benchmarks are an important point of reference. Training providers now have to respect floor targets regarding the efficiency and the effectiveness of their activities, and an important debate on the definition of standards for learners is taking place. Finally, the reform Act No 53/2003 has introduced basic performance levels for VET which will have to be achieved by the regional authorities.

In France, the *Loi organique relative aux Lois de finances* (LOLF) has introduced a fundamental innovation, by providing for the annual Finance Act to be expressed in terms of objectives to be reached, rather than only activities to be financed. The Ministries of Education and of Labour therefore define national targets. The Ministry of Education concludes contracts with local *académies*, stipulating objectives which are monitored through a set of indicators.

Qualifications awarded by the French Ministry of Education are standardised through the definition of *référentiels*, which state exactly what people have to learn and the competences they must acquire. The national repertory means that all qualifications can be included in a common framework.

In England, public service agreements establish precise goals for key service improvements, including education and training. The achievement of these targets is contracted out to local authorities, and for the local context is taken into account when funding for the local authorities is being decided.

Standards for learners are traditionally set through National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs). The first NQF was introduced in 2000 for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, incorporating both academic and vocational segments of the system. The new Framework for Achievement will make it easier to acknowledge competences wherever they are acquired, including in the form of units.

In Ireland some targets have been set for the system, and indicators are now being determined for monitoring providers. The most important innovation is the establishment of a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) encompassing all qualifications. The NFQ was launched by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) in October 2003 and comprises 10 levels. Each level is defined in terms of general standards of knowledge, skill and competence. These standards define the outcomes to be achieved by learners seeking to gain an award at each level within the framework.

In Denmark there is general agreement about using indicators. They have been used for several years in different areas of education and in VET. As a start, a set of six indicators was chosen in 2003. Four of them are of special interest and relevance for VET (initial and further). All six measure output/outcomes in the education system in general.

The Danish national objectives – which can be seen as output standards – focus on the number of pupils who obtain a youth education entitling them to go on to further education at university level or VET which provides them with the competences to work in a skilled trade. Indirectly this also covers the dropout rate.

No specific plans or levels of attainment concerning the Lisbon process and objectives have been formulated, but the Danish national objectives do have certain features in common with the European objectives.

The use of indicators plays an important role in the quality assurance system in Germany too. However, the use of explicit and quantitative output standards is limited to the system level. At provider level most of the standards are voluntary – this ensures the flexibility of the system. In initial VET the standards at individual level are fixed by the national training regulations. In continuing VET, there is less regulation. The trend is to focus on the demand side, and to adapt the training to the demands of the labour market.

In the Netherlands there is a general focus on results and outputs in vocational training, and a lot of standards and indicators are in use. At system level, the five European benchmarks are used as the main frame of reference. At provider level, the use of output standards is linked to the accreditation process, as the providers have to live up to a set of specific criteria. The focus on results is also seen in training institution funding, 20 % of which depends on attainment targets.

7.2. Final recommendations

The definition of expected outcomes, setting specific and measurable targets and standards to be achieved by the entire system, by providers and by learners, is a strategic tool for managing VET systems, and for assuring their quality.

This report has described how and why some European countries have adopted or are moving towards this approach in managing their VET systems. Targets and outcome standards:

- provide clear objectives, which are essential for managing training activities;
- are the result of a process which involves the stakeholders;
- are universally acknowledged and shared;
- are familiar to all people working in the system;
- motivate people to achieve concrete results;
- are easy to evaluate, since they are stated in unambiguous terms;
- allow systems to be compared, since their transparency makes it possible to compare results achieved in different places;

Finally, the distinction between outcomes, which are defined and monitored at central level, and processes, which are flexible (people are free to choose how they will achieve the final result), is a basic prerequisite for the acknowledgment of non-formal and informal learning.

Managing VET systems (or indeed other public services) through the definition of expected outcomes is therefore a step forward in assuring a quality system. As the foreword to the White Paper on Public Service Agreements (PSA) 2005 – 2008 (HM Treasury, 2004) states:

‘In the past, the debate around the public services centred just on how much governments were investing – both in terms of money, and in terms of other resource ‘inputs’, including the number of doctors, nurses, teachers and police officers. Such resources are essential, and we are continuing to invest at significant levels across government. However, since the introduction of PSAs, the debate has shifted. Now we can measure how effectively resources are being used and whether services are delivering the outcomes that will really make a difference to people’s lives.’

The move towards giving greater emphasis to outcomes in managing systems is not without its problems. To recap, the key challenges in implementing targets and output/outcome standards include the following:

- *The process of decentralisation and autonomy*

Most of the countries looked at are engaged in a process of decentralisation, which gives more power to regional or local communities, and a process of increasing autonomy, which gives more freedom to providers to organise their own activities. Theoretically, local actors should define input and process standards, while central actors should set expected

outcomes, but this distinction is not always clear. Sometimes local authorities argue that the needs of the local area have to be taken into account in defining targets or output/outcome standards, and they want to play a greater role in the process.

- *The complexity of social development and the impact of context*

Whether or not certain objectives (for example for scholarisation rates) can be achieved may depend not only on educational activities but also many other social factors, which are very difficult to manage and monitor. Such factors can make it difficult to achieve targets, despite policy-makers or administrators' best efforts. The context also affects people's achievements and must therefore be taken in consideration at both national and local levels.

- *The long-term impact of targets*

Some targets take some years to achieve, in particular at system level. This has also been found with the European benchmarks. They represent the long-term effect of policies, which means that in the short term it is difficult to judge the quality of VET provision only by evaluating the results.

In the meantime, to establish whether policies are effective or not it is necessary to set indicators to monitor policy implementation (process indicators).

- *The potential conflict between quantity and quality*

Most targets are expressed in quantitative terms. The pressure to achieve them, at system or at provider level, can result in the qualitative aspects of education and training being forgotten, for example the need to lower the dropout rate may push the system and providers to lower the qualitative standards of courses. It is therefore always necessary to monitor both quantitative and qualitative achievements at all levels.

- *The statistical burden*

Sometimes targets are complex and difficult to measure. A sophisticated statistical apparatus may be needed to monitor whether they are being achieved or not, and this could be burdensome.

- *Precision and flexibility*

Another crucial aspect in setting standards concerns how precisely standards are defined. On the one hand, the more accurate and precise the standard is, the easier it will be to measure whether it has been achieved. It will also be easier to ensure that the results are very similar everywhere and can be transferred and compared, even in very different contexts.

On the other hand a very precise target, or standard, may not be adaptable to different contexts and local needs. It may have unintended and undesirable effects if, in respecting the standard, other important aspects of VET are neglected.

- *Stakeholders' involvement*

All the main actors need to be involved in the setting of standards. The process of defining a standard should involve the principal VET stakeholders: central government (this could mean more than one government department), local authorities, employers (which may be represented by a number of different associations), trade unions (there are usually several), teachers and experts. It is quite a long and complex process and requires time.

- *Updating standards*

Established outcome standards for learners can become outdated because the needs of the labour market change very rapidly. They therefore need to be updated continuously.

- *Rewards and penalties*

Attempts to give extra money to those providers which are able to achieve the targets set have been controversial. There is some concern that providers would not accept more difficult pupils, in order to achieve better results. When considering the results, it is always necessary take into account the context in which the providers operate, so as not to penalise those working in disadvantaged areas.

As regards the targets to be achieved by the system, there are no specific positive or negative consequences for those responsible for managing the system. The most important consequence is a gain or loss of credibility at national or local level.

Taking into consideration these challenges and the experience of the countries analysed for this report, the following recommendations may be made for setting targets and standards.

National level

At national level it proved to be useful to set some specific targets to drive the system; these targets should:

- be few in number;
- be stated in measurable terms (through indicators or other quantitative definitions);
- be easy to measure;
- be very clear;
- cover both quantitative and qualitative aspects;
- be well communicated: all the people involved in the system, and a large proportion of outsiders should be familiar with them.

The system managers (policy-makers, administrators) should be given enough time to achieve the targets, on account of the complexity of what is involved. The targets should also be discussed with national stakeholders; a broad consensus should be obtained on the targets to be achieved, so that all those involved are committed to their achievement.

Since the process of achieving targets is a long-term one, national targets should be accompanied by more strategic indicators which act not as targets in themselves but rather as tools for monitoring implementation. They may relate not only to outcomes but also to inputs and processes, to see whether the system is moving to the right direction.

Local level

National targets should be differentiated at local level, to take into account the different contexts. The process of differentiation at local level should be discussed with local stakeholders. It is essential that local communities feel involved in the process of setting targets, so that they are committed to achieving the objectives.

For providers, two types of target could be set: top targets, representing the adaptation, at provider level, of the national targets, and floor targets, representing the minimum quality level to be achieved.

Whether full funding or the allocation of extra funding should be linked to local performance is very controversial; this approach could cause some distortion in provider behaviour. In many circumstances a better image for well-performing areas or providers is a reward in itself. If special funding is provided on the basis of local performance, particular attention should be paid to monitoring possible unintended effects (pupil selection, lowering of standards, etc.).

Some initiatives should be adopted to deal with providers which do not respect floor targets; these may range from more thorough inspections to the removal of local administrators. Special support should also be organised to help in more difficult areas.

The system for achieving the targets should also be supported through the diffusion of good practice, using examples from those areas or providers which achieve the best results.

7.3. Future developments at European level

In seeking to describe how certain European countries manage their VET systems and assure their quality by defining expected outcomes rather than the activities to be carried out, this study has found that the process has reached different stages in different areas:

- many countries have gone a very long way towards defining standards for individuals; a lot of initiatives are under way, standards for learners have usually been set and national frameworks have been defined or are in the process of being so; moreover, there is also a remarkable level of debate and extensive literature on the subject at national and international levels;
- as regards the setting of targets for the system or for training providers, initiatives (with the exception of one country) are only just getting under way, if they have started at all; some are still only pilot projects; there is virtually no technical literature on the arguments at either national or international level.

In this situation, it is therefore of great interest, at European level, to examine in greater depth the setting of targets for managing the system (at national and regional levels) and for VET providers, to verify whether this approach works.

One of the benefits of working together at European level is the opportunity it affords to compare experiences from the many different Member States, as has been done in this report. However, those experiences are still insufficient to allow clear conclusions to be drawn and norms to be laid down for the use of targets. The present report has carried out a first analysis but, as has been said, it would be very interesting to follow further the development of the initiatives described, since most of them are just starting. This would provide an opportunity to verify what happened, what went well and what the less successful points were.

Further research is needed on the advantages and disadvantages of working with targets and on working in different contexts and in different ways.

Future European initiatives in this regard might include:

- monitoring the development of the policies of the European countries that have adopted this approach;
- examining and discussing the experience gained, with the aim of supporting those responsible for managing such initiatives and other countries that are interested in going down the same road.

In practical terms, consideration could be given to:

- commissioning a report in 2007 to verify the results of the initiatives that have been under way in recent years in the countries covered by the present survey, and possibly other countries that have started a similar approach;
- constituting a thematic group (as part of or in connection with the network on quality) on the definition of targets at system and provider level to discuss the results of and difficulties with this approach;
- organising peer learning visits to the countries which have more experience of setting targets for the system or providers so as to be able to describe their experience and examine the results with other interested countries.

The issues for debate should be how to set targets for the system and for providers, taking into consideration:

- the process of decentralisation and increasing autonomy;
- the stakeholders' involvement (analysis of the many different ways in which stakeholders are involved in the setting, measuring and applying targets all over Europe);
- the complexity of social development and the influence of context;
- the long-term impact of targets;
- the potential conflict between quantity and quality;

- the statistical burden (methods for data collection and the use of data in relation to the achievement of targets);
- the challenge of precision versus flexibility;
- the fact that the use of rewards and penalties and the links between targets and accreditation of VET providers can be a topic for further work.

The use of targets and output standards in higher education and the potential links to VET can help improve quality in a lifelong learning perspective. There is still a shortage of this kind of data and several selected case studies would be very helpful and hopefully inspiring – both for higher education and for VET (for example regarding the use of rewards and penalties).

Last but not least, it is hoped that the conclusions of and the work that has gone into the report can and will be used in many Member States. All might both reflect on and learn from the experiences of the participating Member States.

List of abbreviations

BIBB	Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training
CQAF	Common quality assurance framework
CVET	Continuing vocational education and training
ENQA-VET	The European network on quality assurance in VET
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
GFE	General further education
IVET	Initial vocational education and training
LOLF	<i>Loi organique relative aux lois de finances</i>
LPSA	Local public service agreement
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
NQAI	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
NQF	National qualifications framework
NVQ	National vocational qualification
PSA	Public service agreement
PSAG	Projects and standards approval group
QA	Quality assurance
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
SCQF	Scottish credit and qualifications framework
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
SSDA	Sector Skills Development Agency
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualification
TWG	Technical working group on quality in VET
VET	Vocational education and training

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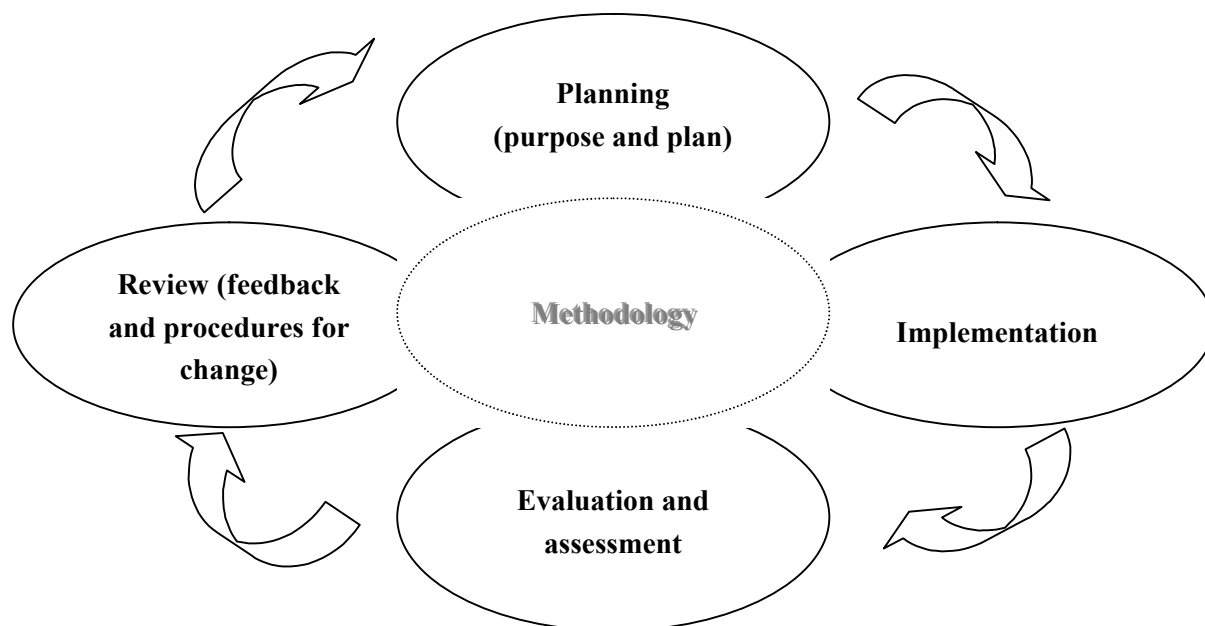
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Annex 1: The CQAF model

The common quality assurance framework model



Source: Technical working group on quality in VET, 2003a.

Planning (purpose and plan)

This phase relates to setting clear and measurable goals regarding policies, procedures, tasks, and human resources. It also relates to defining input and output standards linked with goals to support the design and implementation of quality assurance, as well as with providing reference points for certification of individuals or accreditation of VET institutions and/or programmes.

Goals and objectives should be formulated in clearly understandable terms and, as far as possible, they should be combined with definitions of measurable indicators as this allows for checking the achievement of the planned objectives, at later stages.

Quality in VET is not primarily a technical issue. It is always linked to specific policy, institutional or/and individual goals and objectives to be achieved, according to different time frames. Therefore, it is crucial that relevant national, regional and local stakeholders take part in the decision-making process on goals and objectives concerning VET quality.

A crucial question at European level is in how far European objectives for the improvement of the VET systems are reflected in the goals and objectives which are to set up in the planning phase of a quality system. European cooperation involving Member States, the Commission,

candidate countries, EFTA-EEA countries and the social partners is an appropriate instrument to contribute to answer to this question.

Implementation

It is essential to establish key principles that underpin the implementation of the planned actions to ensure effectiveness in achieving the planned goals and objectives. These principles have to be coherent with the goals that have been set.

Such coherence can be achieved in many ways, for example through regulations, funding incentives, provision of guidelines on how to proceed at local level, building capacity of key actors on quality issues through training, combination of internal quality systems at provider level with external inspections, etc. Whichever approach is chosen, it is essential that expectations are transparent and that the procedural steps, including time-spans and tasks to be fulfilled are clear for all the relevant actors involved. Developing ownership and personal motivation among staff, trainers and trainees, are important preconditions to achieving coherence between goals, objectives and implementation.

Evaluation and assessment

This covers continuous evaluation – of programme provision by objectives including learner data; and assessment – of achievement of outcomes at system and individual levels. It implies designing evaluation mechanisms according to the context, defining the frequency and scope of evaluations, and providing evidence of the findings of the evaluation to those concerned, including strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations for action.

In general, the assessment and evaluation phase consists of two parts, i.e. the collection and processing of data and the discussions on the results which have been achieved. An important challenge is to avoid the collection of useless data. The effectiveness of assessment depends to a large extent on a clear definition of the methodology and frequency of data collection, and on the coherency between data collection and both the pre-defined indicators and the goals and objectives to be achieved. The relevant stakeholders, i.e. current and former trainees, staff, employers and trade union representatives should be involved in the discussions arising from evaluation results.

Review (feedback and procedures for change)

Quality assurance and development is a continuous and systematic process. It must undergo constant review combining self-assessment with evaluation by an external body, processing feedback and organising procedures for change. Despite the fact that the other elements of the

quality cycle are valuable only when conclusions are drawn, and lessons are learned and put into operation, the analysis of the quality management systems which have been reviewed so far shows that, in practice, this last phase of the cycle is quite often the weakest: i.e. revision of planning, fine-tuning of quality objectives and of quality management activities.

A key factor in this process is to make publicly available the results of the quality assessment procedure and to foster an open debate with the relevant stakeholders on the factors which might have contributed to certain results. Further, the organisation of benchmarking processes between comparable settings can strengthen mutual learning, especially when combined with incentives for good practices and for further improvement.

Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training)

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To improve quality in VET, objectives must be established and translated into targets and expected outcomes.

Cedefop commissioned the present study to get a better insight into how targets and outcome standards are defined, assessed and used in Denmark, Germany, Ireland, France, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

Since quality is always linked to specific policies, institutions and individuals, the study refers to the quality of VET provision at system, VET-provider and learner levels.

**CEDEFOP**European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

Europe 123, GR-570 01 Thessaloniki (Pylea)
PO Box 22427, GR 551 02 Thessaloniki
Tel. (+30) 23 10 49 01 11, Fax (+30) 23 10 49 00 20
E-mail: info@cedefop.europa.eu
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