

Readability of qualifications: a question as old as Europe

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Summary

The readability or transparency of qualifications – both terms are equivalent – has been a European concern since the Treaty of Rome was signed. The aim is to bring about a better match between the supply and demand for skills, making it possible to transcend the particular situation of individual countries, to foster the movement of workers in a European labour market. Therefore, the proposed European qualifications framework (EQF), the encouragement given to the different States to develop national systems and frameworks in the same field can be considered the most recent forms of modernisation proposed to meet this concern. One of the aims of this article is to review this historic dimension, partly to prepare a European project and partly to set up national systems for States which are in a very different situation and have different options with regard to the building and development of their own vocational training systems.

For Europe, the question of the transparency/readability of qualifications has given rise to many different types of proposals right from the outset, as we shall show in the first part of this text. It is also clear that this is not part of a linear progression and that several approaches expressing the different concepts of the role of vocational training and the working of the labour market have been developed and are running in parallel.

On the other hand, States have been considering the aims of their initial and ongoing vocational training systems, in more or less detail, and the role to be played by qualification. None of these really proposes a stabilised model and all are constantly evolving. For that very reason, any coherence between these models necessarily involves the search for converging dynamics. This question is considered from two different angles in the second part of the article:

- (a) by identifying certain stages that appear to follow on from each other fairly systematically in all national qualification systems, and by describing them in greater detail for certain illustrative cases;
- (b) by evaluating to what extent the European objectives can be part of the convergence of the dynamics mentioned above.

The definition of the Lisbon objectives or the Maastricht priorities, then, were by no means the start of this process, but they did provide a new impulse by stating the priority role of helping society to advance and putting education and training in the spotlight. How has this new impulse taken account of existing dynamics? What forms of friction and fraction appear?

That is the subject of part three of this work, which seeks to draw conclusions. It examines the conditions for setting up new instruments and observes that this question leads us to rethink some of the main principles governing the building of a European vocational training policy.

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1. Introduction

The fourth Cedefop research report invites the reader to consider the link between ‘modernisation’ and ‘qualifications systems and frameworks’. A relatively in-depth bibliographical analysis has shown that the term ‘modernisation’ was widely used, without users feeling the need to provide a more precise definition. Proof of this can be seen in the Communication from the European Commission, *Modernising education and training: a vital contribution to prosperity and social cohesion in Europe* (EC, 2005a). This communication lists a series of objectives to be attained – including the establishment of a European qualifications framework (EQF) – and provides no other indications as to the meaning to be attached to the term ‘modernise’. Without prejudging the debate that will surround this word in the following pages, but merely to make clear the spirit underlying it, we would like to quote Catherine Grémion in the conclusion she made to the colloquium *Le service public en recherche: quelle modernisation?»: ‘all things considered, modernising is therefore essentially about producing meaning. But how can we be sure that the change that is brought about is going in the right direction? Any change in meaning involves risks, hence the importance of becoming aware, of taking the time to stop and reflect along the way’ (Grémion, 1996).*

Indeed, for decades now, both at EU level and in most EU Member States individually, and more broadly at global level for the developed countries, there has been a renewal of the formulation of the relationship between training, work and employment which is manifested in two ways:

- (a) a systemic concept of vocational training;
- (b) the organisation of qualification as an element providing structure to this systemic design.

Various countries have made different proposals according to their different times, political intentions, and national contexts. The OECD has assessed their contribution to the development of lifelong learning. Since the Treaty of Rome, the European Community, which later became the European Union, has employed different approaches, the most recent of which was to set up a EQF (EC, 2004) which promotes the creation of a knowledge society.

1.1. A systemic design of vocational training systems

The world of vocational training has undergone far-reaching changes over the last 50 years. Increasing importance has been attached to such training, and this has progressively led to its being structured as an autonomous system, which we shall briefly outline below. This is how most European countries and the EU institutions have affirmed the need to provide professional qualifications to all young people. This has led to considerations on the link between general and vocational training, both in terms of defining the contents of programmes and organising pathways. Today this link is an important subject of debate,

especially in the light of parity of esteem. In a different connection, the measures taken to foster vocational training and lifelong learning have led to a diversification of the target groups, ways of responding to their needs and providers of training and certification. Several subsystems have been set up or reinforced, aimed at specific target groups or have been created by regions, sectors, professions, and so forth. These have led to issues of comparability, readability and quality on both a national and a European level, with the challenges inherent in that approach. As Rogers says: ‘It is especially important to resolve the tensions between the concern to create certification and qualification structures within a coherent, credible and practical overall system open to everyone, and those supporting the promotion of quality improvement’ (OECD, 1996, p. 133). More recently, questions on the nature and acquisition of professional experience have led to the observation of the existence of several modes of access to learning, generally categorised as formal, non-formal and informal learning. It is true that this triad has been criticised, as in its day was the distinction between knowledge, know-how and skills, considered as the constitutive parts of competence (Winterton et al., 2005). However, both of these categorisations raise questions as to the nature of professional knowledge, in terms of its status, which is more than mere applied theoretical knowledge, its acquisition, which cannot be reduced to the traditional teaching relationship, and its assessment, which cannot be dealt with under the arrangements for academic knowledge. This is why emphasis has been placed on skills-based assessments, and more recently on learning results, and experiments on the outcomes of prior learning.

A series of different elements have thus helped to define the identity and specificity of the vocational training system, with encouragement provided by the EU bodies for countries in which it was particularly poorly structured (Imaginario, 1996; Masson, 2003). At the same time, the debate has gradually focused on certification. Much has been said about the decoupling of training and certification, considered innovative by some and risky by others, with special emphasis placed on setting up national vocational qualifications (NVQ) in England. However, that seems rather excessive, and should rather be studied in a new perspective of the analysis of the relationship between training and employment, bearing in mind the diversification of the sites and modes of training (Bouder et al., 2001).

1.2. Qualifications: an element providing structure to the system

For many years it was considered to be the natural result of training characterised by the duration of learning, to which it did not provide any added value, but by analogy with the theory of human capital, qualifications have now acquired a specific status. Akin to the economic thinking that identified and expressed this development using theories of filter, investment in forms and signals, sociological theories on the relationship between qualifications and posts have flourished, followed by debates on falling educational standards and over-education (Teissier and Rose, 2006).

We can explain the emergence of this phenomenon through three reasons:

- (a) in light of the developments described above, certification is now the only stable manifestation of the recognition of professional qualities, regardless of the way in which they were acquired. In other words, in a system of vocational training subject to powerful tensions, in the face of different teaching concepts and practices, the increasing number of training bodies, the large population groups concerned, certification is like an anchor, or even a lifejacket, making it possible to compare an individual's skills on a labour market spread over an increasingly wide area and to evaluate the efforts made by each country in this domain;
- (b) in terms of the readability of the relationship between training and employment, certification is a nodal point, in that it represents the interface – the transcoder – between skills acquired through training, whatever formal shape such training entails, and the skills required to perform a job. This is becoming increasingly important because the effects of tertiarisation and the flexibility of organisations are making the contents of employment increasingly difficult to prescribe. They should, therefore, lie outside a narrowly-specialised approach and should be cross-cutting and transferable, clearly defined by certification, which should also lay down the conditions for portability (Colardyn, 1996) of qualifications within a perspective of occupational mobility, either by stating the professional targets to be attained, corresponding to several jobs, or by listing the skills acquired, which can be transferred to several jobs. The supply of certification can be considered to contribute in an increasingly significant way to organising the demand for qualifications or skills. As for the representation of a labour market that defines which qualifications need to be created, we would be moving towards an inverse model in which certification would contribute to structuring the contents of the activity. Finally, from a more pragmatic standpoint, certification for Europe could be taken as a sort of bridgehead for harmonising training systems in the Member States, to the extent that it makes it possible to circumvent the subsidiarity principle governing these systems. This is why one of the aims behind the setting up of a EQF is to serve as a model and an incentive to countries seeking to set up their own national framework, in order to bring about supranational convergence. In sum, vocational training would be a matter to be decided by each Member State, in accordance with the particularities of each society, but certification would be a European issue to allow the construction of a single labour market and to foster the movement of workers within this market.

1.3. Towards transparency of qualifications and certifications?

The search for transparency of qualifications can be considered as the general goal pursued by the movements mentioned above, which are thus part of the principle of modernisation in the sense proposed by Grémion (Commissariat Général du Plan, 1996, p. 1). Qualifications systems, therefore, bring about a dual readability:

- (a) with regard to increasingly complex vocational training systems, allowing individuals to define their certification route by juggling with the combination of formal, non-formal and informal learning;
- (b) with regard to the labour market, by ensuring the translation of qualifications acquired by the individual into skills making up his/her job.

This links up to the ideal of free movement of workers within a single European market. We could even include the idea of the free movement of students in a unified supply of certification. This is what emerges strongly from the OECD study mentioned above, which highlights a number of convergences in different countries: ‘most of the member countries of the OECD follow a certain number of common guidelines. This is especially the case in the search for greater flexibility in the training system, which has led several countries to set up more modular qualifications systems, the will to base vocational training on broader foundations and [...] the trend further to decentralise responsibilities for training and to develop adult training’ (OECD, 1996, p. 8). Nevertheless, the same document is somewhat reserved about a natural trend towards harmonisation: ‘the characteristics of certification mechanisms are closely dependent on the overall design of the training system and the aims assigned to it. Following countries and the place of vocational training throughout the system, the role of certification is rather to recognise a qualification with regard to a job (valid therefore for the labour market and especially for companies). Certification can also seek to recognise a specific professional level or knowledge.’ (OECD, 1996, p. 8).

In this context, the draft EQF emerges as a sort of process accelerator, a catalyst to convergence, with a drive belt effect: ‘envisaged as a meta-framework that will enable qualifications frameworks at national and sectoral level to relate and communicate to each other thus developing transparency at the European level. The framework will facilitate the transfer, transparency and recognition of qualifications as learning outcomes assessed and certified by a competent body at national or sectoral level [...]. While an EQF should be implemented on a voluntary basis and would not entail any legal obligations, its role would be to foster change by supporting and informing reform at national and sectoral level’ (EC, 2005b, p. 7).

This perspective lies at the heart of the questioning behind the following text. Indeed, if the question of transparency of qualifications in Europe has acquired a new dimension and a greater importance since the 2000 Lisbon Council, it is worth remembering that it already had a long and chaotic history, if only to show that tools are never neutral, rather like the notion of transparency. On the other hand, different Member States are using different approaches and are at different stages in building their vocational training and qualifications systems, offering a wide range of situations and projects which would be extremely difficult to bring together. This fact especially justifies the need to put Community action principles into perspective in the field of vocational training and certification, especially with regard to the establishment of a knowledge society.

2. The Europe of certifications

Since the first Treaty of Rome, Europe has focused on qualification and its recognition, even if the concept of certification appeared relatively late on. This led to the setting up of very different measures and processes – which currently coexist – and are embodied in different systems of certification corresponding to contrasting models that define the relationship between training and employment and the working of the labour market. This was also visible in the changes in the structures set up to deal with these questions and the methods used to bring them about. In short, these past 50 years have seen many great leaps forward and changes in direction showing:

- (a) hesitations, trial and error, false starts, resurgences and interlacing in an attempt to find a single concept of progression that can be programmed to reach a single system;
- (b) that we are still finding our way forward, still writing this story and implicitly bring to the fore the question of whether it is not sometimes better to manage contradiction rather than seeking compromise at any price.

The following presentation identifies four movements corresponding to the arrangements mentioned above. In order of appearance, they are directives, education and training, correspondence and transparency; and the education and training 2010 objectives. For each of these, we will indicate the mode of governance that applies and the measures that it mobilises. Higher education will be covered separately, because traditionally in Europe there has always been a lot of attention focused in this area.

2.1. The directives

The story begins with the signing in 1957 of the Treaty of Rome setting up the European Economic Community and the Common Market. As far as the issues covered in this article are concerned, the most important element is contained in the chapter on ‘freedom of establishment’ and concerns very particularly ‘diplomas, certificates and other evidence of formal qualifications’ (Art. 57, see Box 1).

- (a) In order to make it easier for persons to take up and pursue activities as self-employed persons, the Council shall, on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the Assembly, acting unanimously during the first stage and by a qualified majority thereafter, issue directives for the mutual recognition of diplomas, certificates and other evidence of formal qualifications.
- (b) For the same purpose, the Council shall, before the end of the transitional period, acting on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the Assembly, issue directives for the coordination of the provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the taking up and pursuit of activities as self-employed persons. Unanimity shall be required on matters which are the subject of legislation in at least one Member State and measures concerned with the protection of savings, in particular the granting of credit and the exercise of the banking profession and with the conditions governing the exercise of the medical and allied, and pharmaceutical professions in the various Member States. In other cases, the Council shall act unanimously during the first stage and by a qualified majority thereafter.
- (c) In the case of the medical and allied and pharmaceutical professions, the progressive abolition of restrictions shall be dependent upon coordination of the conditions for their exercise in the various Member States.

From this Treaty onwards, the certification of professional qualifications has been covered by rules that are mandatory in the Member States, as they flow from Directives.

These texts of Community law aim to ensure ‘mutual recognition of diplomas, certificates and other evidence of formal qualifications’, initially for unsalaried activities. They specifically targeted the liberal professions. Following the logic of a common market, lack of mutual recognition of qualifications concerning these professions and their use was a contravention of the freedom of establishment ⁽¹⁾, therefore hindering freedom of the market. They should therefore be dealt with in a particular way and could not be circumvented. Within the European Commission, the Directorate-General for the Internal Market was therefore granted responsibility for preparing and monitoring these directives, a responsibility which it still exercises.

The Directives concerning the liberal professions are the best known, as are the difficulties and delays involved in their adoption. Although freedom of establishment was formally acquired for architects in 1965, it was only granted to doctors in 1976, nurses, dentists and lawyers in 1979, and pharmacists in 1987 – 30 years after the Treaty was signed.

⁽¹⁾ Part 2, Title III, Chapter 2 of the Treaty.

In fact, some 15 Directives were adopted over the years, including all the professions regulated in some countries even if they are not in others (for example ‘master craftspeople’ which do not cover the same specialities from one country to the next, a whole series of professions in maritime transport, etc.). The successive extensions of the scope of the Directives have also included wage-earning professions. Most of them require ‘recognition on the basis of coordination of minimum training conditions’ (EP and Council, 2005, p. 35).

The Directive on the general system for the recognition of qualifications was published in 1999. It stipulates that ‘a Member State may not, on the grounds of inadequate qualifications, refuse to permit a national of another Member State to take up or pursue any of the activities listed in Part One of Annex A on the same conditions as apply to its own nationals, without having first compared the knowledge and skills certified by the diplomas, certificates or other evidence of formal qualifications obtained by the beneficiary with a view to pursuing the same activity elsewhere in the Community with those required under its own national rules.’ (EP and Council, 1999). The activities concerned cover nearly all economic activities. Here again, training and its contents are at the very heart of the definition of certification, leading to the corresponding amendments in national contents.

Since September 2005 a single Directive (EP and Council, 2005) has consolidated all the mandatory rules applicable in this field. Its title refers to the ‘recognition of professional qualifications’ and, in line with all the previous versions, these professional qualifications are defined on the basis of the duration and/or contents of the training programmes that allowed them to be obtained. A list is generally included of the bodies that are authorised to issue the diplomas or qualifications to be recognised in this framework.

The Directive uses a scale of five training levels to classify the different types of training, diplomas and qualifications. These five levels are firstly defined on the basis of the certification attributed (attestation of competence; certificate or diploma) and refer to the organisational structures of the education and training systems (primary, secondary, post-secondary, higher education). For each level, they specify an equivalence between general, technical and professional teaching.

The first way of approaching transparency of qualifications was, therefore, the rule of law. It bases Europeanised certification on a foundation of training content and on the renown – the quality – of the (national) players who provide it and are expressly mentioned. These two pillars are also the foundation upon which the trust of the States in terms of certification and qualification rests. The Directives approach lays down the first principle of European regulation, known as the ‘Community method’ of integration through law ‘which transfers sovereign powers to supranational bodies with the right to legislate, but also the power to sanction States that do not respect the rules’ (Georgopoulos, 2005, p.1). The European Court of Justice deals with complaints concerning non-respect of the texts.

The Directives on the recognition of professional qualifications fit into a professional market pattern. The regulated professions are the symbol of this and act as a filter for qualifications

and their certification on the labour market. As regards the issues discussed in this article, the Directives were an important instrument in bringing together training contents linked to the awarding of evidence of formal qualifications. Certification skills represented the lever that made this convergence necessary.

During this time, Community concerns about education and vocational training were diversifying. Nonetheless, all the work done within the Directives has long been considered as something set apart from the concerns of most of the experts working in the field of training: this work concerned legal and legislative engineering and the fact that they have an influence on the contents and modes of organisation of education and training systems was not taken into account. Thus, initiatives in the specific field of education and training rapidly developed at Community level in almost total ignorance of the work done in a Directorate General whose named purpose had little to do with them. The nearly simultaneous publication of the last Directive that defined five levels and the EQF proposing eight such levels is the most recent example of this phenomenon.

2.2. Education and training

2.2.1. The European Social Fund

An analysis of the history of Community education and training policy brings us up against another kind of paradox. The Treaty of Rome clearly excluded education and educational policies from the scope of Community powers and recognised them as falling exclusively under national sovereignty. However, vocational training was governed by employment policy and, therefore, Community powers under the responsibility of the ministers responsible for it ⁽²⁾. That is why the implementation of Article 123 of the Treaty of Rome creating the European Social Fund and Article 128 which opens Community powers to vocational training comes under the responsibility of the Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs.

Box 2: Treaty of Rome – Article 128

The Council shall, acting on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee, lay down general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy capable of contributing to the harmonious development both of the national economies and of the common market.

⁽²⁾ For countries like France, in which initial vocational training was organised under the auspices of the national education ministry, this meant that until the end of the 1990s this ministry was absent from Community decisions on vocational training, because it was not invited.

From 1961, the Commission documents mention ‘[...] the creation of a European information, documentation and research centre whose terms of reference were to disseminate documentation and information on vocational training, and to study, as directed by the Commission, technical questions associated with the realisation of a common policy.’ (Petrini, 2004, p. 47). This aim is reiterated in 1972 in the form of a ‘European institute for the scientific study on vocational training.’ (p. 52). However, Cedefop was not effectively set up until 1975 (Section 2.3). A common vocational training policy never saw the light of day. For the European Social Fund, vocational training was understood at the time as the professional retraining of employees (‘re-education’ was the term used at the time!). However, the European Social Fund became the chosen instrument for the different waves of new Member States for setting up their initial and ongoing training policies, and particularly for learning. In fact, the bulk of European investment in vocational training actions is made by the European Social Fund and mainly concerns the sectors of the public that are most at risk on the labour market, especially young unqualified school-leavers. In this context, it is not a matter of certification.

2.2.2. An institutional development in several stages

In parallel, a number of initiatives for bringing together the practices and systems of the Member States were made. The education ministers met for the first time in 1974 without a legal base, driven only by political aims. The previous year, in 1973, the Directorate-General responsible for research had begun to include educational matters among its activities and it was this Directorate-General that implemented the very first decisions taken in this field. Initially ⁽³⁾, there was cooperation on four themes:

- (a) ‘cooperation among universities with particular reference to student exchanges;
- (b) equal opportunities for girls in secondary education;
- (c) the education of second-generation immigrant children;
- (d) the transition of young people from school to adult and working life’ (Sellin, 1999, p. 18).

In 1981, responsibility for education and training actions was passed to the Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs, where it gave rise to the setting up of a specific Directorate within the Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs, different to the unit responsible for managing the European Social Fund. Other areas for cooperation were also added at that time: ‘new technologies, the promotion of occupational and management training in small and medium-sized enterprises and new local employment initiatives, continuing training and alternating training’ (Sellin, 1999, p. 18). These diverse and fragmented actions from 1985 onwards led to the creation of other, no less diverse and fragmented European programmes in the field of education and vocational training: PETRA,

⁽³⁾ The rest of this section is broadly based on the work of Sellin (1999).

for the transition from school to working life; FORCE, for the development of vocational training in companies; Eurotecnet, for the promotion of innovation in vocational training as a result of technological changes; IRIS, for promoting equal opportunities for women in vocational training; Erasmus, Comett, Lingua, etc. In 1989 Education and Vocational Training DG became a Human Resources Task Force responsible for managing all these programmes. The organisational structure of the Task Force provided greater operational facilities to the activities as it came under the direct authority of the Commissioner and the Director General.

This retrospective study shows how Community responsibility for education and training became progressively institutionalised. However, concerns about qualifications and certification are hardly mentioned as such. They are sometimes included in certain of the projects financed by the different programmes. One of the most striking examples from the early 1990s was the Euroqualification project, cofinanced by the European Social Fund. It brought together the bodies responsible for adult vocational training in 11 of the 12 Member States of the time. A large number of its activities were aimed at common validation/certification of different training specialities.

A quantum leap was achieved with the Maastricht Treaty. Signed in February 1992 and entering into force more than one year later, in November 1993, the Treaty was decisive for two reasons: it defined a new element of political governance – the subsidiarity principle – and it included education and training policies in the various policies to which this new subsidiarity would thenceforth apply.

Box 3: Maastricht Treaty – Article 3B

According to the subsidiarity principle ‘the Community shall take action [...] only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved by the Community’.

In education and training, the content of the actions in which the Commission could be involved was covered by Articles 126 and 127 of the Treaty. Certification appeared in the domain of education, when it involved encouraging ‘the academic recognition of diplomas and study periods’, but that does not concern vocational training *stricto sensu*.

A significant institutional change consecrated the new importance of education and training in EU policies very soon after the Treaty entered into force – a new Directorate-General was created in 1995. It was the 22nd and was named Education, Training and Youth Directorate-General. The Task Force was dissolved, and the new initiatives in education and training would henceforth emanate from this Directorate-General. A new Community legitimacy was born. The Directorate-General was to change name in 2000 (Directorate-General for Education and Culture – DG EAC) while maintaining the same powers, notably responsibility for the application of subsidiarity within its field.

The new Directorate-General would gradually lay the foundations of a certain kind of European communication in education and training. When it was set up in 1995, it was responsible for rationalising the different programmes, grouped together or recast into two main ones: Leonardo da Vinci (for vocational training and Article 127 of the Maastricht Treaty) and Socrates (for education and Article 126).

Through these programmes – using its annual programme and the choice of the themes of its calls for tender – it would bring forth new initiatives in the field of certification, education and training. A number of projects aiming to gather together the contents of existing training and qualifications, but also to build new qualifications, were born and died.

The main player in this subgroup was the European Commission, which proposed areas for experimentation to the decentralised players. These areas concern both training and certification and, more recently, validation of outcomes. Their validity was limited to the partners involved and despite significant efforts to publicise and publish them, their impact on national measures was low-key. A number of summaries were made of these works, but their implications for the national systems were not really considered and taken on board either upstream or downstream.

It is perhaps no coincidence that it was this same DG EAC which in 2004 made the proposal, currently under discussion, for a EQF, one of the aims of which, although perhaps not consciously expressed, seems to be to push national systems forward through certification. Is this evidence of a certain ‘tiredness’ of trying to generate developments ‘from within’ and trying subsequently to achieve this with the help of an external instrument?

2.3. Correspondence and transparency of qualifications

This strand of European efforts in the field of certification was launched under the responsibility of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop). This body was created in 1975, at the same time as the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound). The institutional life of Cedefop and its developing relationships with the various services, Directorates and Directorates-General of the Commission have been marked by a certain amount of hesitation and some negotiation concerning the sharing of responsibilities (Varsori, 2004). These two bodies legitimately set up to act in the field of vocational training were to abide by different principles and modes of action.

This section covers two of the processes that were initiated and led mainly by Cedefop. In fact, they both follow very similar principles of action which in both cases consist of explaining the contents of training and/or employment included in the qualifications held by individuals.

Subsequent to its three-year work programme adopted in 1985, the Centre brought into ‘its

regular fields of intervention [...] new issues as well, for example the harmonisation of workers' qualifications in the various Member States and the use of new technologies in vocational training, in particular information technology. The first objective gave rise to a detailed study in which many Cedefop officials were to be involved [...] (Varsori, 2004). We shall start with that one.

The correspondence operation consisted of comparing term by term the contents of the working activity expected from the different professions defined by their title. In this exercise, the term training content is no longer used, and is replaced by activity content, what one should know how to do ('job descriptions for occupations or groups of occupations' [Council, 1985]). In the different countries, this depends upon the ways in which employment is organised, the results of collective bargaining and the professional classifications resulting from them. This was a highly controversial and long-winded exercise that did not provide many advantages in practice. It concerned professions at 'qualified worker' level ⁽⁴⁾ in 19 sectors.

It was then that a five-level scale was drawn up. Each level is defined on the basis of two dimensions: the nature of the training providing access to the level and the professional activity generally reserved for the holders of such training. It is not a question of certification *stricto sensu*, but there is an underlying hypothesis of a correspondence between training and employment. Despite the title 'activity content', one of the main benchmarks is nonetheless mainly the organisation of school curricula. Even though it is considered to hold them back, the organisation of education and vocational training systems is still the basic reference for understanding qualifications levels.

'The enormous work undertaken to draw up this correspondence system may appear disproportionate in view of the results achieved. [...] the search for a common definition leads to establishing a sort of lowest common denominator among countries and requires a great many notes to be taken on the peculiarities of each country [...]. The definitions achieved do/did not correspond either to a European situation, which (was) in any case purely abstract, nor to any real national situation' (Merle and Bertrand, 1993).

The operation itself was abandoned, owing to the lack of any real prospect of implementing it ⁽⁵⁾. The results led to the preparation of a standard information sheet, which should be especially useful to migrant workers who need to have their qualifications better recognised. The last correspondence tables were published in the Official Journal of the European Communities in December 1993. The possibility should not be ruled out that its principles of action, including the 'information sheet' and especially the level grids, may have inspired certain later activities, including that of the Transparency Forum. This Forum also sought to complete the certification signal and to influence its form. Indeed, adopting a new approach,

⁽⁴⁾ Assimilated to European level 2.

⁽⁵⁾ This was in spite of a solution from the November 1990 Council which 'decided on extending the work [...] to the other professions on all levels of vocational training'.

Cedefop set up the European Forum on the transparency of professional qualifications with the agreement of the European Commission in 1998. It brought together the social partners and national authorities responsible for education and vocational training and aimed to find new solutions to make the content of professional qualifications easier to understand. Two documents were drafted from the existing material which completed and commented on individual pathways and all forms of qualifications held by individuals: the European Curriculum Vitae and the descriptive supplement of the certificate. This was therefore essentially an investment in form, which does not in any way change the signal itself but clarifies it somewhat. Qualification is understood to cover training, whether or not it has led to the awarding of a certificate, professional experience and a whole range ‘of personal skills and competences’ acquired in the course of everyday or professional life. At this point, the aim was not to create a super framework to define categories in which to place these different qualifications and competences. The proposal was to classify them by explaining what they were.

This work was then assessed by the ministers of education and vocational training in their Copenhagen Declaration of November 2002: they were to take these as the basis for requesting the setting up ‘of a single framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences’ (EP and Council, 2004). To achieve this, the Forum was replaced by a technical working group responsible for establishing a link between the previous work, other international efforts (diploma supplement and language passport⁽⁶⁾) and the ‘Europass Training’ courses.

In its current form, Europass, which was adopted in December 2004, can be considered to be the ‘child’ of these approaches. It is based on an approach involving a portfolio of skills including qualifications, among other information. Instead of putting all the contents of education or professional activities into perspective, the certificate supplement (for professional education) or the diploma supplement (for university education) lists the ‘elements of competence’ acquired through the training followed. These act as the link with the job by listing the sectors of activity or types of job accessible to the holder of the document.

This sets up a ‘practice’, which does not follow such formal principles of regulation as a Directive, but is nonetheless rendered mandatory for all players. We could be tempted to think that this was sufficient with regard to the aims of transparency and readability. Subsequent developments would seem to indicate that this was not the case.

⁽⁶⁾ Developed by UNESCO and the Council of Europe.

2.4. The education and training 2010 objectives

2.4.1. Knowledge society

A new qualitatively significant stage was again reached in March 2000 at the Lisbon European Council. From this date onwards Community initiatives increased in the field of education, training and, slightly later, in certification. Everything was happening very fast, and we could be forgiven for wondering whether this haste did not tend rather to compromise the content.

On behalf of a new strategic aim set in Lisbon ‘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’ ⁽⁷⁾ education and training were granted a vital mission: ‘to adapt both to the demands of the knowledge society and to the need for an improved level and quality of employment’ ⁽⁸⁾. Three priorities were set, one of which was to improve the transparency of qualifications.

Following these orientations, the Commission was asked to present a series of proposals setting out the future aims of education and training and a work programme for achieving them. These proposals were then adopted by the Barcelona European Council in 2002, as was the more detailed programme baptised ‘Education and Training 2010’. The subtitle ‘Diverse systems, shared goals’ is important because it acts as a bridge to a new mode of European governance – the open method of coordination – unveiled in Lisbon. This method aims to transcend national and societal differences by setting a series of guidelines and common aims that all of the parties undertake to attain. These aims are accompanied by indicators and a Community timetable, with each Member State undertaking to take the necessary national or regional measures to achieve the common goal. Each Member State is free to choose how to do this as long as the common goal is reached. A process of assessment, monitoring and peer review makes it possible to make any necessary adjustments to the guidelines and objectives. ‘This mutual exchange of information on the basis of common denominators should lead to a progressive convergence among the States in the fields concerned by the experiment’ (Georgopoulos, 2005).

The open method of coordination (OMC) is synonymous with institutional rebalancing. ‘Within the OMC [...] the Commission is not the driving force of integration. The centre of gravity is shifted towards the European Council (Georgopoulos, 2005), an eminently political body. [...]. It is surely not by chance that these alternative modes of regulation appear in domains where it is especially difficult to convince the Member States to give up their power to the Community, whilst the convergence of national policies seems indispensable for the advancement of European integration’ (Georgopoulos, 2005).

⁽⁷⁾ Presidency conclusions, point 5.

⁽⁸⁾ Idem, point 25.

These domains include vocational training and education. The Education and Training 2010 programme set out a list of 13 operational aims, which 8 and then 12 working groups were responsible for specifying and later for putting into practice. A series of indicators accompanies the list. In March 2002, certification proper was still not covered by any of what were known as the Lisbon objectives or indicators.

Professional teaching and training were hardly touched by the process of rapprochement at work. However, when the Directors-General for vocational training met in Bruges in November 2001, they started a process to consider the way in which professional teaching and training could also benefit from closer cooperation. And in fact this is how certification found its way to the heart of the discussions.

The proposals of the working group that had been set up were approved politically at the March 2002 Barcelona European Council. The Education and Vocational Training Council and the subsequent Copenhagen European Council, both in November 2002, laid down four more specific priorities linked to systems of vocational education and training (VET); strengthening the European dimension and cooperation between VET systems; transparency, information and guidance; recognition of competences and qualifications; quality assurance. The Bruges-Copenhagen process was born. Once established, it was placed within the broader framework of the Lisbon objectives for 2010. People talk of the contribution of VET to the Education and Training 2010 objectives: vocational education and training both set apart although they are fundamental for the Europe of knowledge, which till then had remained somewhat general and elitist in nature.

Among the second and third of what are defined as the Copenhagen priorities is a very direct indication of the two opposing aspects of the interest in the certification of qualifications: one of them establishes Europass (see above) – in other words, an approach essentially based on a portfolio of skills that seeks to bring together job providers and job seekers; the other suggests the idea of creating ‘reference levels, common principles for certification and common measures, including a credits transfer system for vocational education and training’ (Council, 2003, p. 4), which is part of a much more normative approach to organising a European system of qualifications. This second approach materialised around the proposal for a EQF and a system of credits that can be exchanged for vocational training (the ECVET).

2.4.2. European framework and credits

One of the working groups that emerged from the Bruges-Copenhagen process was responsible for developing a methodology for setting up a credit transfer system for vocational training. At the end of 2003 this group, via Cedefop, mandated the UK’s qualifications and curricula agency to organise a group of experts to study the conditions under which a scale of levels of qualifications could generate areas of trust among European VET partners. This trust could be used to build an agreement on an, as yet, undefined European system of credits (Coles and Oates, 2005). A document proposing an eight-level scale was drawn up in the three months between December 2003 and March 2004. The

authors insisted on the fact that such a level scale would not be sufficient in itself and that trust would depend on the existence of a complete framework explaining the levels through the use of descriptors ⁽⁹⁾ which the study proposed to define both from the use to which they could be put by the labour market (learning expressed in terms of results) and from the training system (the study and training pathways followed previously). In addition to this was a concern for quality checks on the processes, which would not be carried out by this group.

In parallel, Cedefop mandated the Higher school for Commerce group in Toulouse to undertake a study on the types of knowledge, skills and competences (Winterton et al., 2005) that should help in creating descriptors by levels. Its impact on the final shape of the official proposal from the Commission for a EQF was not clarified, as the European Commission took the initiative with regard to the different working groups that emerged from Lisbon and Copenhagen Councils by tabling a proposal in November 2004 for a EQF. To a certain extent, this proposal overtook the work done hitherto on the transfer of credits: instead of completing them, which the group had been working to achieve, it preceded them by defining a EQF which sometimes appears to overlap the considerations of the group without actually matching them. Moreover, the group rejected the last-minute proposal for adoption made just before the presentation to the group of Directors-General for vocational training. While the plan had been for the levels to help to classify credits, the EQF began by defining levels without paying attention to their relationship with such credits. In fact, this equivalence has still not been established.

This EQF proposed to create a common reference stated in terms of learning outcomes expressed in ‘knowledge, skills and competences’, classified into eight levels, as a benchmark for comparing the different existing national qualifications. It would be left up to the Member States to classify the qualifications on this new scale. A peer review exercise would, however, serve to provide overall consistency of the new system.

At present we therefore have: a proposal for a EQF which was submitted for consultation at European level; a proposal for a European system for the accumulation and transfer of credits exchangeable for VET (ECVET), redrafted following the publication of the EQF, which should be submitted for consultation at European level during 2006; and an initial reflection on the interpretation of the notions of knowledge, skills, and competences on an international level. There is still a great deal of confusion surrounding the process by which such proposals could be linked, because for the time being the groups are working separately. Cedefop’s decision to join the virtual communities ⁽¹⁰⁾ dedicated to the first two dossiers could be a first step towards a more general consideration. In any case it posits the hypothesis that EQF and ECVET should be part of the same process, as exchangeable units and levels were the factors

⁽⁹⁾ One of the authors had previously been working for the OECD providing advice and monitoring their ‘activity’ on ‘the role of the national systems of qualifications in promoting lifelong learning’. This summary report was published in 2005 under the title ‘Moving Mountains – How can qualifications systems promote lifelong learning?’ (OECD, 2005a).

⁽¹⁰⁾ Effective since 15 May 2006.

that brought together the forms of organisation of the European universities and their teachings (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998).

2.5. The university sector: a precursor and source of inspiration?

The exemplary nature of the initiatives taken by university teaching has often been highlighted and in fact they represent an additional strand that complements all of the initiatives already described.

The developments that took place in the university sector were started outside Community circles, and especially by the universities themselves. The universities then turned to Community policies as the basis for their project. From the outset, the legitimacy of a Community action was thus ensured by the main decentralised players. However, it should not be forgotten that European universities have been cooperating ever since they were first set up. More recently, before the Community became involved, other international organisations had already invested heavily in universities. The member States of the Council of Europe signed a *European Convention on the equivalence of diplomas leading to admission to universities* (Council of Europe, 1953) and in 1959 the *European Convention on the academic recognition of university qualifications* (Council of Europe, 1959).

In September 1988, 80 European universities signed the *Magna Charta Universitatum* in Bologna establishing the principles and means of cooperation among European universities. Among the resolutions taken was one on ‘a general policy of equivalent status, titles, examinations (without prejudice to national diplomas)’⁽¹⁾. From that year, a project organised within the Erasmus programme set a six-year period from 1988 to 1995 for testing the feasibility of a system of transferable credits between universities. A 145 establishments took part and 5 pilot subjects were included: management, chemistry, history, mechanical engineering and medicine. The scope of this feasibility test was extended in 1995 to other specialities and establishments. There was an effort to include non-university establishments among these.

This ‘snowball’ process that was started and continued with the support of European programmes received its initial political approval with the Maastricht Treaty. At the Sorbonne in May 1998 and Bologna in June 1999, the initiative that emerged from the establishments became an entirely separate Community policy: ‘Towards a European higher education area.’ The foundations were laid for today’s generalised system: ‘[...] two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate, should be recognised for international comparison and equivalences. Much of the originality and flexibility in this system will be achieved through

⁽¹⁾ Text of the Magna Charta is available from Internet: <http://www2.unibo.it/avl/charta/charta.htm> [cited 19.9.2007].

the use of credits (such as in the ECTS scheme) and semesters.’ (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998). ‘This will allow for validation of these acquired credits for those who choose initial or continued education in different European universities and wish to be able to acquire degrees in due time throughout life.’ (Bologna Declaration, 1999).

In 1997, the Council of Europe and Unesco joined forces in Lisbon to sign a joint *Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in the European region* (Council of Europe, 1997a). Both initiatives gradually crossed and complemented each other. The Community initiatives tended to be more normative while the others were more diplomatic in nature. Thus, when the Bologna Declaration (1999) on the Community process demanded the generalised implementation of the diploma supplement⁽¹²⁾ – a document attached to a higher education diploma explaining the contents and level of studies that led to the awarding of said diploma – it takes on board an initiative and a document drawn up by Unesco. Likewise, ‘the ENIC network, established in June 1994, replaced the previous separate networks of the two organizations [Unesco and the Council of Europe]. It cooperates closely with the NARIC network of the European Union’⁽¹³⁾ (Council of Europe, 1997b).

However, the Community and international work programmes were running in parallel rather than together.

At Community level, it was quality assurance that led to the most recent developments in the field of certification. At the 2001 Prague conference of higher education ministers closer cooperation between recognition and quality assurance networks) was encouraged. This was repeated in 2003 at the Berlin conference (ENQA, 2001; 2003), and covered two approaches:

- (a) the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was mandated to set up a reference framework and spread their good practices (ENQA, 2001);
- (b) a joint quality initiative was organised among countries with comparable quality assurance systems and more precisely accreditation agencies (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK)⁽¹⁴⁾.

Work was carried out in these two frameworks in a fairly autonomous way with a certain ‘tension’ between different cultures of assessment. One culture involves guaranteeing quality through peer review and the other through standardised assessment processes by external bodies. This gives rise to two kinds of products:

- (a) *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area,*

⁽¹²⁾ Cf. paragraph on Europass. This Diploma supplement, also covered in the Certificate supplement, recalls the ‘information file’ prepared during the ‘correspondence’ period mentioned above.

⁽¹³⁾ ENIC: European Network of Information Centres.
NARIC: National Academic Recognition Information Centres.

⁽¹⁴⁾ see in Internet: <http://www.jointquality.org> [cited 20.9.2007].

prepared by the ENQA and published in 2005 (ENQA, 2005);

- (b) a list of generic descriptors of qualifications corresponding to a Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate qualification applicable throughout Europe. They are commonly known as Dublin descriptors and were adopted in the joint quality initiative in 2002. This document regulates the competences that must be acquired to obtain a Bachelor's or Master's degree in a supradisciplinary way.

However, it was in Berlin in 2003 that it was first suggested 'to elaborate a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems, which should seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile'. The Dublin descriptors should help in setting up the 'overarching framework of qualifications for the European higher education area.' (Berlin Communiqué, 2003, p. 4).

This higher education-specific process, developing at its own pace and with its own rules, was 'caught up with' by the processes emerging from Lisbon and Copenhagen. The choice to set up a single EQF for all forms of general and vocational education and training, defined in terms of results to be attained, led to the higher education cycles and their diplomas being included in the general system. However, the descriptors proposed for the EQF are different to the Dublin ones and the question remains as to why the Dublin descriptors were not used. Furthermore, it still remains to be seen what the real interface between the real practice of the establishments and the existence of this grid will be. In the meantime, it has mostly been added on to the real situations that had been set up in their absence. Advances in higher education are therefore at once cited as examples and inspirations. But could they then be 'threatened' by external developments?

Higher education certainly was the precursor of a concerted approach in terms of common levels and exchangeable transferable credits. However, to get as far as it did, it has had to build upon a long history of cooperation and dialogue, a shared interest of organisations in the face of wider competition and material and cultural 'survival tactics' – which is what has given them their legitimacy. What about schools and vocational education? Are we not asking them to do in less than 10 years (by 2010) what higher education took nearly 50 years to achieve? The national VET systems are characterised by a high heterogeneity and less experiences with international/European cooperation at institutional level. The task is huge (Le Mouillour and Teichler, 2004).

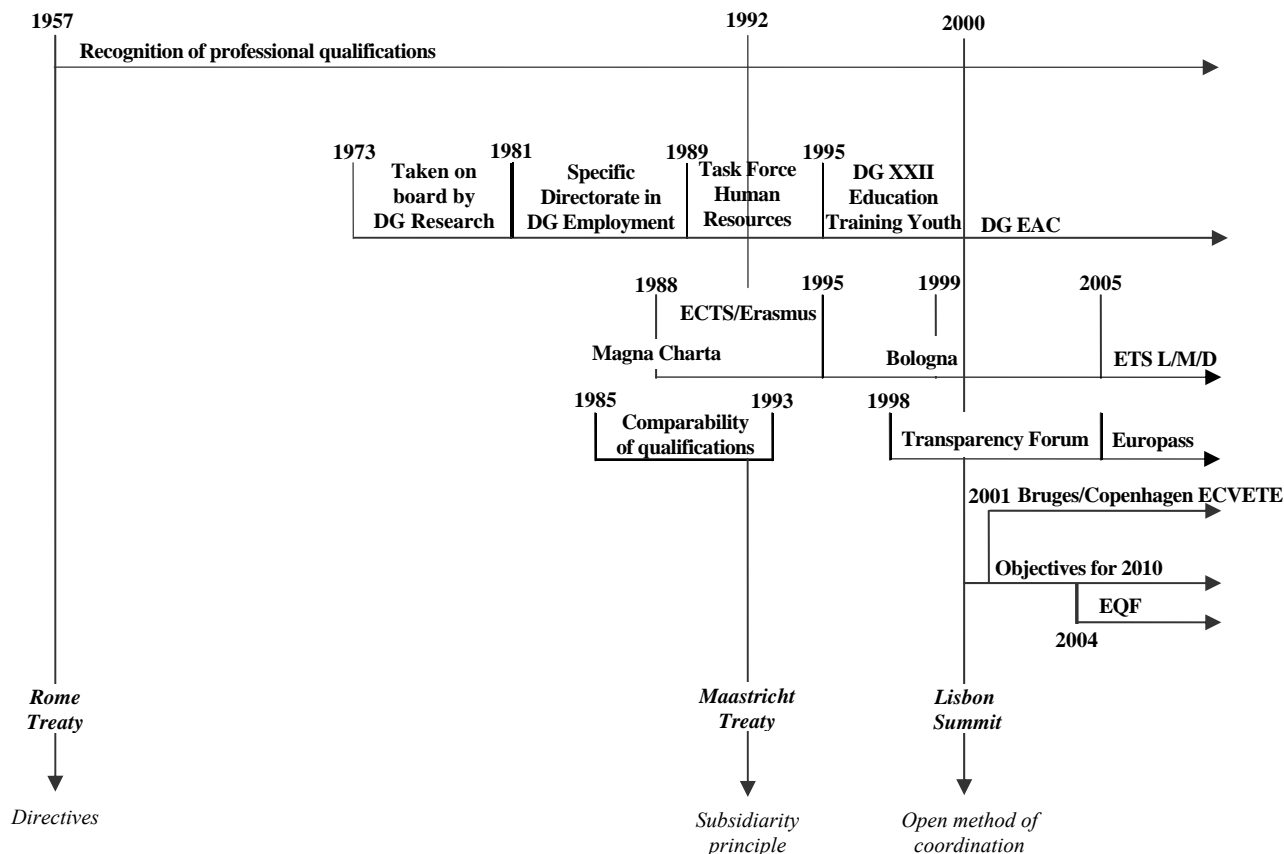
Starting from these relatively fundamental differences, can we really expect the practices developed by higher education to serve as inspiration for what is being sought at the other levels of qualifications? And if so, under what conditions? (Le Mouillour and Teichler, 2004).

2.6. Where are we now?

Figure 1 lists the different initiatives described and makes it possible to view all that are still active at EU level in the field of training, qualification and certification, which are indicated

with an arrow.

Figure 1: Community level initiatives on training qualifications and certifications



An attempt to introduce some transparency has manifestly led to a mushrooming of concepts. We are rather left with a sense of fragmentation of different ideas: directives, correspondence, transparency, a common reference framework, accumulating credits, etc. These concepts can be explained, as we have outlined, by an analysis of the progression in modes of governance, but they are divergent in their content (training, professional activity, competences), the definition of their levels, the working of the labour market on which they are based, their European ‘managers’ and national partners, the degree of commitment of their players and the way in which these players are appointed.

With regard to this last aspect, we can see the temptation to criticise European wastefulness, the scapegoat regularly criticised for everything that is wrong, blamed for imperialism and incompetence, either alternately or simultaneously. Another reading is to admit that the contradictions and uncertainties shown up in the previous analyses are the expression of a reality under construction, with all its contradictions and uncertainties. This latter analysis was chosen in the following development and is based on the way in which the old, new or future Member States position themselves with regard to the setting up of a system of vocational training, the nature of the frameworks that can encourage them to be built and the

role played by certification.

3. From the States' point of view

The following development aims to state clearly the national situations with regard to EU proposals on the harmonisation of qualifications. It is based on two starting premises:

- (a) not all the States are at the same stage in building and designing their vocational training system. To what degree are they ready to adhere to the European proposals?
- (b) more particularly, one of the stated aims of the draft EQF is the 'pull effect' of such a framework for States that have still not set up their own national qualifications framework. We shall, therefore, try to find out how the countries concerned can and want to make the most of this proposal.

3.1. Data and methods

To do this, we were able to use the national experts' reports and the answers to the *Questionnaire for the European Directors-General for vocational training* (Annex 1) produced as part of the preparation work for the Maastricht conference of 14 December 2004 entitled *Achieving the Lisbon goal: the contribution of VET* (Leney, 2004). These documents were addressed to 31 countries: the EU-25 plus Bulgaria, Liechtenstein, Iceland, Norway, Romania and Turkey. The response to the questionnaire is not available for the Czech Republic. This already points to limitations as to the meaning of national representativeness in vocational training: separate answers from Flanders and Wallonia means that a distinction can be made between them, but what of the UK, where it is acknowledged that Scotland has one concept of vocational training and a very different qualifications framework to England and Wales? Likewise, how can we deal with countries where the regional authorities have a broad degree of autonomy, such as Spain and Italy? As things stand currently, we can but raise the question, aware that this problem is not fundamental to our concerns. Finally, national monographs focusing on the setting up of qualifications systems were added to this basic material.

Then there was a question of method: was it necessary to use a restrictive definition of the terms 'qualifications systems and frameworks', like those proposed by the OECD (OECD, 2006) or to see the way in which each State understands these terms? The first solution would have had the advantage of simplicity, but unfortunately it was inapplicable. In fact, available documents show a certain divergence in the definitions they propose (Section 4.3.1). The second solution was therefore adopted. The starting principle was that all countries had a system of certification, however incomplete, imprecise or implicit, that this certification system could be related to the system of vocational training of which it was a part and was characterised by qualifications frameworks that specified the conditions for building and assessing these. In this connection we take a different view to the OECD work mentioned above, which defines a kind of 'ideal-typical' qualifications system and we consider national qualifications systems as products that are situated in space and time.

3.2. National qualifications systems and frameworks

3.2.1. A process being created over time

Training systems are not all at the same level in the different countries and the admission of the new Member States has only accentuated this phenomenon (Masson, 2003). The answers from the different countries reveal a sort of chronological model with a series of principal stages that define what we can consider as an obligatory pathway followed by all the national systems:

- (a) the setting up of a national system of exams providing a guarantee of the quality and cohesion and the regularity of the assessment process;
- (b) the building of standards (frames of reference) that define both the objectives of training in terms of what the individual should know and the criteria and situations of assessment;
- (c) a ‘permeability’ phase that seeks to create pathways, diversify routes, establish gateways. Worthy of note at this stage are the debates on the degree of generalisation and specialisation of vocational training and their modularisation;
- (d) the most specific debates on certification appear with the drawing up of national lists and considerations on the validation of prior learning and experience.

Table 4 illustrates this progression by indicating the countries that have put special emphasis on one or other dimension. It should be possible to refine these different phases, as there is a certain overlap between them. In sum, a certain amount of regularity observable is one area to be explored in order better to understand the phenomenon. We should add that this succession should be left open and not completed. Is the draft EQF the next stage? Only time will tell.

Table 1: *Stages of development of national qualification*

Stages systems	Country examples
National examinations	Bulgaria, Poland
Setting up of standards (reference frameworks)	Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary
Link upper secondary, initial training-vocational training	Austria, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia
Register of qualifications	Austria, France (<i>répertoire national des certifications</i>), Hungary (national register of qualifications), Spain (<i>Catálogo nacional de cualificaciones profesionales</i>), the UK (National qualifications framework)
Accreditation of prior and experiential learning	Finland, France, Slovenia.

Each of these phases constitutes a kind of equilibrium that can be characterised by a system of certification organised around frameworks that are particular to it. As for the notion of level, countries that do mention levels simply refer to the ISCED nomenclature, without further comment. The questionnaire did not ask respondents to develop this issue, which makes it impossible to know the degree to which it is used in all the countries. Nonetheless, it is possible to approach this question by looking at fairly divergent national cases.

3.2.2. On certain uses of levels

All national systems involve a hierarchy of training pathways, accompanied by a hierarchy of qualifications which they are a means to achieve. VET are placed higher or lower in this hierarchy in accordance with the history of education systems, employment and professional relations (Dauty, 2006). Nevertheless, the formalisation of a nomenclature of qualification levels has not always been felt to be either useful or necessary.

However, at the latest since the progressive setting up of the European labour force surveys and the adoption in 1985 of a five-level nomenclature adapted from the United Nations ISCED (Section 2.3), the Member States have been obliged to take a stance with regard to such a classification of their education and training.

Later, the debates fuelled by the wave of reforms (including the NVQ) which swept through the qualifications systems of the English-speaking world (England/UK, Ireland, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand) in the 1990s increased the attention paid to these issues of levels. More recently, the decision to make greater and almost systematic use of benchmarking between countries to set up the open method of coordination (Section 2.4.1) concerning non-obligatory EU policies led to the need for such divisions into levels to make it easier to quantify 'education-leavers'.

Therefore Member States have only begun specifically to classify their programmes and qualifications in the last 20 years. We shall now use three examples – Germany, Spain and Scotland, which are the three case studies in the comparison – to illustrate the way in which national systems are modelled or re-modelled around the notion of levels.

3.2.2.1. Germany

Qualification levels are the backbone of the German employment system in that, conventionally, qualifications and diplomas structure classifications. The links between qualifications and classifications are organised around two levels of qualification – an initial level corresponding to the dual training diploma and an advanced level corresponding to diplomas proving vocational training.

Revolving around these two levels are several systems of qualification that are distinguished in terms of the two or three management methods governing such qualifications: those regulated on federal, *Länder* or consular chamber level. These systems coexist but there is no

horizontal link between them, which led the Germans to consider that their system cannot constitute a framework in the European sense of the term (Westerhuis, 2001), as the subsystems are totally separate from each other.

Each of the systems grants the right to the use of qualifications (*Facharbeiter, Meister*) that link up to a hierarchy of responsibilities in employment. There is therefore a strong link both to the organisation of training and the organisation of the labour market, whoever manages the qualifications system concerned.

In 2001, Westerhuis proposed the following classification of professional qualifications granted by the three subsystems:

Table 2: *Classification of professional qualifications*

	Qualifications regulated at federal (national) level	Qualifications regulated by the <i>Länder</i> (federal states)	Qualifications regulated at chamber level
ISCED level 3	State-recognised traineeship qualifications – <i>Facharbeiter</i>	Assistant qualifications (particularly in the services sector and for technical functions in scientific fields)	
	Qualifications in the health care sector	Qualifications in the health care and social services sector	
ISCED level 4	<i>Meister</i> qualification in the crafts, agriculture, institutional management or industry	State-certified, etc. (<i>Techniker, Betriebswirt</i> or <i>Gestalter</i> in conjunction with a specialism)	e.g. <i>Fachwirt</i> in banking, programmer, restoration mason, etc.
	Certified, etc. (e.g. <i>Fachwirt</i> in industry, social counsellor)	Advanced vocational qualifications in the health care and social services sector	

Source: Westerhuis, 2001.

The raging debates that had preceded this classification by ISCED levels could be a foretaste of the debates surrounding a European common framework. The difficulties were linked to the fact that the ISCED nomenclature uses durations of education to define its levels and the principles of organisation of the dual system did not stipulate any prerequisites in terms of education: only a mandatory school leaving certificate is required. There is, therefore, a difference in the level of education among the holders of a dual diploma ⁽¹⁵⁾. However, the

⁽¹⁵⁾ In fact, in 2002, out of the 568 000 young people who completed their dual training, 31% had a primary school leaving certificate, 37% a 16+ secondary school certificate, and 14% a general or technological baccalaureate (*Berufsbildungsstatistik*, 2002).

system considers that the acquisition of vocational training must be considered as a unit in itself, independently of what preceded it, especially as this is the cornerstone of the system of social and conventional relations. After many years of discussion, the end of training diploma is now classified under ISCED level 3.

This German example makes it possible to measure the societal importance of the certification of qualifications and thus the resistance to change that it can generate. This of course does not mean to say that new practices could not be set up as a result of internal or external pressures. Two recent examples directly linked to the notion of levels clearly show this: the definition of an ICT (information and communication technologies) pathway and the introduction of a level below that of the dual diploma:

- (a) in 1997, four new initial training professions and their respective qualifications were defined in the ICT sector when previously there had only been two, which had become obsolete (Reuling and Hanf, 2002). On this occasion, a long training and qualifications pathway was introduced that envisaged a progression through vocational training in three stages known as specialists, operational professionals and strategic professionals. The first level defined 29 profiles of specialists, one of which must be acquired to move towards one of the four profiles (qualifications) of the second level and then one of the two profiles (qualifications) of the third. This was the first time a long and differentiated progressive pathway had been defined that went beyond the traditional split into two levels. In addition, access to the 29 specialist profiles was not reserved for the holders of diplomas of one of the four basic professions but was also open to people from different professional origins. It was thus now possible to enter the qualifications hierarchy laterally, which is consistent with the workings of a qualifications framework. Other sectors were to follow (Reuling and Hanf, 2002);
- (b) in 2003, a supplementary level was brought into initial training, targeting what were known as less theoretical professions or simple professions (¹⁶). This training takes two years instead of three and corresponds to unskilled or low-skilled jobs in companies, mainly small and medium-sized enterprises. The first cohorts of school-leavers are currently coming onto the labour market and their progress is being analysed.

If we add to all of this the schooling of the dual system (¹⁷) authorised by the new law on vocational training, it is easy to see the pressures placed on a firmly-rooted and stabilised system that is attempting to respond to different internal and external demands. Attempting to maintain the balance without staying still. Knowing whether change always spells progress. What role would still be available to certification?

The fact remains that Germany is one of the first countries to have declared already that it intends to set up a national qualifications framework in the image and likeness of those

¹⁶) Driver, dressmaker, qualified postal worker, etc.

¹⁷) Meaning exclusively school-based professional training, without work experience.

recommended in the consultation for the EQF.

As for the progression grid presented in Section 3.2.1, Germany could be placed in c) and more than likely in d) as work is underway on the compatibility of a validation of outcomes using professional certification structures.

3.2.2.2. *Spain*

The starting situation (¹⁸) for Spain is totally different. Its vocational training system is very fragmented, highly regionalised and was only formalised in terms of national qualifications very recently. In the early 1990s it was considered important to set up a national reference to act as a link and a form of regulation among different practices: at that time there was talk of ‘building collective benchmarks in a system with a low level of professionalisation’ (Lefresne, 2001).

When Incual, the *Instituto Nacional de las Cualificaciones* [national institute for qualifications] was set up in 1999, its main aim was to prepare a national system of professional qualifications based on a national catalogue of qualifications (CNCP). At that time three systems had just been set up: the national education ministry issued qualifications for initial training (vocational training qualifications); the labour ministry provided them for jobseekers (professional certificates); and the social partners issued qualifications for ongoing vocational training. The national catalogue of qualifications was made official through a law in 2002 followed by a decree in 2003. The first qualifications entered the catalogue through a decree of February 2004. In other words, these are very recent developments and, therefore, the Spanish system can only be described in terms of its potential. However, as far as the subject of this article is concerned, the processes followed and the choices made are important.

The first of these choices was not to try to make the existing qualifications systems correspond with each other. The creation of the Spanish framework does not, therefore, adhere to the same principles of action as the Scottish one (Section 3.2.2.3). The Scots opted to have three blocks of qualifications in correspondence within one framework (Young, 2004). Here, new employment reference frameworks were created, with the help of a ‘house methodology’ drawn up by the Incual, which brings together the definition of competence units and training modules under the definition of vocational qualification. In fact, the national qualifications catalogue is coupled with a modular vocational training catalogue. In this way, each file defining a qualification includes the following headings: general competence, competence units, professional area and associated training. Competence units and associated training are then split up into work experience and performance criteria, and the other into training modules. The training modules include a standardised definition of the professional profile of the trainer, specifying his/her minimum level of education and

(¹⁸) In 1986, when Spain joined the EEC.

professional experience. This varies according to the level of qualification thus defined.

This very strong link between certification and training in fact both contrasts with and contradicts the stated principles behind the setting up of an EQF-style framework. The possibilities for validating outcomes are not excluded, but for the time being they are secondary in importance and will only be considered later in the process. As for the progression grid shown in Section 3.2.1, we could certainly situate Spain at the end of b) and probably in c).

The units and modules thus defined must be applied to the qualifications already existing at the time the national catalogue was set up. These qualifications are supposed to use them to upgrade or redefine their own qualifications or certificates and their training contents. It is uncertain whether vocational training for employees can be part of these mechanisms. For the time being it is excluded from them and these mechanisms only concern qualifications issued by the national education ministry and the employment ministry.

The formalised use of levels in training and certification is not part of the Spanish culture. In social practice, there was a break around the holding of the *Bachillerato*, which determined the student's fate on the labour market and of course in subsequent studies. It is these vague European desires, like the ISCED, which led to the implementation of a structure on five levels, the real use of which still seems not to have really stabilised. In fact, the catalogue rests on the definition of these five levels, but by the end of 2004, only the qualifications on the first three (the lowest) had been drawn up. The level descriptors work on the basis of professional activities that the individual must know how to perform. The level is, therefore, determined by links to employment and is different to the ISCED model that was announced.

The Spanish example is important because it describes the different functions of a system of certification. The fact that it was only recently created shows this even more clearly. In the words of one analyst of the system 'the national catalogue of qualifications and its annex, the modular catalogue of vocational training, join at the meeting place of three spheres – employment, education and economy' (Parra Abad, 2001).

In this case we not only see the play between these three spheres, but also between the central state and the autonomous regions, several of which had already set up their own qualifications system (e.g. the Basque Country). Through its catalogue of professional qualifications, the central state thought it could be an obligatory reference, at least in the field of certification: according to the same analyst, the Spanish federal state, like the German federal state, could maintain its authority over the building of qualifications and reference frameworks while fully delegating the relevant theoretical and practical training to decentralised levels. Nevertheless, the question of levels and their capacity to regulate the labour market or at least hiring arrangements remains entirely unsolved. There is no guarantee or certainty concerning the social use of the system and its inclusion in collective bargaining agreements, for example, which play a structuring role in the organisation of the labour market, is not ensured.

The Spanish experience should, therefore, be used as a test bed from which to draw lessons

for a European system.

3.2.2.3. *Scotland*

The principles behind the organisation of qualifications in Scotland are clearly stated in their title: Scottish credit and qualifications framework. In other words, the choice was made to create a national framework using existing qualifications systems from elsewhere, and to organise them by levels and value of credits. This operation began in the mid-1990s and only concluded in late 2001.

The Scottish framework attempts neither to create new qualifications, nor to set about defining standards that would correspond to them. Its basic structure rests upon an adaptation of the two existing main public systems: Scottish Qualifications Authority diplomas and higher education diplomas. To these were added Scottish vocational qualifications, which are the Scottish version of the English NVQs, relatively widely used in the regional system. Nonetheless, there are difficulties inserting these into the established framework in that the five levels of the Scottish vocational qualifications are broader than the 12 levels of the Scottish framework.

The 12 levels of the structure reflect the hierarchy of the education/training pathways. They bring together general and vocational teaching from secondary to higher level in a single hierarchy. They are designated by the qualifications (diplomas) to which they correspond. The definition of the levels as provided by its managers is as follows: 'levels reflect the degree of complexity within a given group of results (to be acquired by) learning' (SQA, 2003). They are not linked to a given number of years of study.

The Scottish qualifications framework does not link up to training specialities. It is up to the professionals, in other instances and using other mechanisms, to make the link between generic level and specialised content descriptors of education or work experience.

An additional specificity of this Scottish framework is that it goes hand in hand with the setting up of a system of exchangeable credit units. The Scottish designers of the system consider that the level attributed to the qualification is an important and reliable item of information for the employer, while the levels attributed to the units and the credits associated to them only have any significance for the individuals and their training routes (SQA, 2003). The role of the framework is therefore twofold: to indicate the signal function of the qualification and to facilitate the progress of individuals.

To date, such a link between EQF and ECVET has never yet been made at European level. However, the fact that the Scottish example is so often cited does lead us to think that such a link is planned. Scotland could therefore be a two-pronged model pointing the way to future developments.

3.2.3. Conclusions to be drawn from these particular cases

These examples show at once how different countries have participated in a common approach to build a system of qualifications, pathways, gateways, and the particular way in which they participate. Although there is a certain convergence of the ways in which this process has occurred, the specific results are quite diverse. Good practices would therefore concern the way in which this step was taken rather than the concrete results achieved.

It would be very instructive to develop a detailed mode of analysis following the example of the three countries mentioned above for all the States, and thence to monitor the way in which they bring these Community actions into practice.

3.3. Towards a European system and framework?

The three examples given above clearly show the diversity of the modes and conditions governing the way in which national systems adapt. There is nothing unusual about the gap between national situations and European objectives, indeed it would be worrying if it were the other way around, as it is the role of the political instances to propose utopias, in the sense used by Henri Desroche who said: ‘this form of criticism of existing society often provokes a kind of prospective imagination both to perceive the unknown possibilities in the present and to guide us towards a new future: it thus sustains the dynamics of society by the trust it places in the inventive forces of human hearts and minds’⁽¹⁹⁾. It remains to be seen what, in the current situation, can contribute to these dynamics – or oppose them.

3.3.1. Mobilising European objectives

One of the questions in the preparatory document to the Maastricht conference (Annex 1) sent to the national authorities is entitled *Coherence between national and EU policies*. It required to choose among the following statements the situation that best corresponds to ones country to describe the level of coherence between ones country’s policies and the Lisbon and Copenhagen processes:

- (a) there is coherence between the national policy and the European vocational training policy;
- (b) the Lisbon and Copenhagen processes have no direct influence on national policy. They are however broadly compatible;
- (c) the national policy and the Lisbon and Copenhagen priorities are divergent.

The answers are indicated in the Table 3. We can see immediately that no country mentions any divergence between its national policy and that of the EU. On the contrary, 21 of them

⁽¹⁹⁾ Article on ‘Utopia’, Encyclopaedia Universalis.

insist on the coherence between both and the remaining 10 indicate a wide level of compatibility.

Table 3: Coherence between national and EU policies

Coherence	Broad compatibility	Divergence
Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the UK, Wallonia	Austria, Cyprus, Flanders, Greece, Liechtenstein, Malta, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Turkey	

If we consider that the ‘coherence’ column expresses the strongest convergence with the Lisbon and Copenhagen objectives, it can be seen to be the situation for the majority. Furthermore, among the countries that indicated ‘broad compatibility’, the comments – some of which were better informed than others – show two types of reservations that do not concern the objectives themselves, but rather:

- (a) the way the EU works, and what we could call its ill-structured centralism;
- (b) the low degree of development of the vocational training system of certain countries, which currently feel unable to meet such objectives.

It would therefore not be an exaggeration to say that the Lisbon and Copenhagen objectives are a mobilising force for the different States.

3.3.2. European objectives that are not very unifying

This overall agreement with the objectives of the EU policy by the representatives of the States nonetheless translates into a fairly different understanding of what vocational training systems should do. This is shown clearly by question 12 (Annex 1): ‘the final question ask you to anticipate what may be the outcomes of aspects of your national strategy and policies for VET in the year 2010’. It was set out as follows: ‘Below you will find a number of paired statements. They represent a range of planning priorities and outcomes. Please indicate for each pair of statements where – on a continuum –your country plans, realistically, to be in 2010 on the basis of current trends and expectations. If you give equal weight to both statements, your response will be on the middle point’.

Annex 2 lists the different expectations and illustrates the points on which there was agreement and the diversity of the national positions. Beyond a purely numerical description of the results, we can see that the position described as ‘middle’ is, exceptionally, the one with the most answers. The only quasi-Gaussian distribution concerns the question on the target and main aim of lifelong learning: to provide a good start for ‘the young’ or to provide

ongoing support for ‘the old’. In the other cases, the trends that emerge do not correspond to differences in numbers with regard to an average making up a kind of centre of gravity, but express fairly opposing positions. This reinforces the value both of convergences and divergences and contradicts the representation of a common dynamics from which national variations would correspond to the speed at which they take part.

Aside from that, the points of agreement concern two subjects:

- (a) the unanimous recognition – to varying degrees – of the importance of the social partners in defining policy and decision making in vocational training;
- (b) the goal of fostering the acquisition of skills rather than knowledge that is attributed to vocational training.

There are divergences in other aspects. Slightly more countries consider that:

- (a) vocational training should respond to the needs of the labour market, rather than to general aims of society or individual development;
- (b) vocational training is mainly acquired from working life;
- (c) public bodies are the main agents of change in vocational training;
- (d) most teachers and trainers come from the world of work.

Finally, we can consider that the strongest opposition is expressed with regard to:

- (a) recourse to the ICT, which most countries consider should be firmly rooted in the working and production process, rather than in simulated activities or long-distance learning;
- (b) European cooperation which, still for a majority, aims to create a flexible European labour market rather than protecting the groups or professions on the labour market.

In fact, it seems rather that each country can find something it likes, but with different presuppositions, and this hinders consensus and makes compromise difficult. Here is an example regarding the setting up of a EQF:

- (a) it is almost unanimously acknowledged that vocational training should foster the acquisition of skills rather than knowledge, which fits in with the spirit of this framework;
- (b) however, at the same time, training should respond to the general aims of society or of individual development;
- (c) the importance of the social partners in decision-making is stressed, but the draft framework is much less decisive on this matter;
- (d) finally, there is continuing opposition between two concepts of the labour market, one based on flexibility, the other on the role of the professions, and the European framework attempts precisely to propose a third way.

3.3.3. A fragmented consensus

In order more precisely to assess the weight of a supposed European model, each country's position has been considered with regard to the corresponding situation for each opinion coupled with the mode most frequently chosen by all the countries, with the hypothesis that the countries closest to this situation could be considered as the representatives and the standard-bearers of this model (²⁰).

In that regard:

- (a) Lithuania, Malta and Slovenia are closest, with seven out of nine of their replies corresponding to it;
- (b) next come Finland, Flanders, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg and Wallonia, with six answers agreeing out of nine;
- (c) Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus (with one question unanswered), Hungary, Norway, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Sweden are closer to a higher degree than the average, with five answers agreeing out of nine;
- (d) Spain and Greece are further from the model, with four replies out of nine;
- (e) Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Turkey and the UK have three out of nine;
- (f) France and Slovakia only have two out of nine.

Above and beyond this evidence of a certain fragmentation, it is hard to find any strong connection between the countries within each group, and efforts to find any statistical proximity based on an analysis of the data do not provide any conclusive results: the convergence between States is circumstantial rather than constant and the European objectives are sufficiently diversified to bring countries together without unifying them.

3.4. Conclusion

The Community objectives do act as a lever to foster the development of national systems. Nonetheless, they do not appear to draw these States close enough together for it to be possible to envisage the appropriation and implementation of a single qualifications framework on a European level. This observation links up with Michael Young's recommendations and warnings. Starting with an observation of the difficulties encountered when national qualifications frameworks, including those of extra-Community countries such as Australia and New Zealand, were being set up, he insists on the need to adopt an 'incremental approach', stating: 'The countries that have tried to make a radical one-off break

(²⁰) For the question on the origin of trainers and teachers, this led to two arrangements being maintained, corresponding to those mentioned most frequently and with the same number of answers.

with their previous qualifications systems have had the most acute difficulties. A radical break gives neither practitioners nor other stakeholders any benchmarks to test the new ideas about outcomes and levels against their experience. Incremental approaches minimise the likelihood that polarised positions are established' (Young, 2005).

It seemed that the Europeans wanted to advance as quickly as possible, but the decision-making process set up in September 2006, in the form of a draft recommendation, envisaged a staggered approach, setting a horizon of 2009 for implementing equivalences between the national systems and the EQF system. However, this new deadline shows a desire to lend some solidity to the Lisbon objectives, as interim reports have shown up worrying delays in their execution (Leney et al., 2004): hence, the 2004 declaration of the European Council stating that a greater boost should be given to VET within the Education and Training 2010 work programme. But above and beyond this desire for results, we feel that there is an underlying question of what this transition to a knowledge society really means.

4. From ‘free movement’ to the ‘knowledge society’

By stating the need for a knowledge society in 2000, the Lisbon summit profoundly changed European orientations which up to that time had been guided by the objectives of the free movement of goods, people, services and capital, enshrined in the 1957 Treaty of Rome. From a certain point of view, that represents a break with the previous situation, which shows particularly clearly in the proposal for a new social model in which the place reserved for building, acquiring, spreading and using knowledge – in the broadest sense of the term – occupies a central role. We are therefore witnessing a sort of metamorphosis of European destiny and, paradoxically, this metamorphosis rests on one of the elements over which Europe has least control and power to act, education and training.

As with any metamorphosis, it involves painful upheavals, it requires changes that can only be understood after they have taken place, it throws up questions about which elements should be kept, which changed, and which removed. It attempts to bring new principles into old rules, imagines hypothetical measures for an unknown future and sometimes, perhaps, it tries to slow down change. That was how the open method of coordination and the draft EQF were created, how calls for transparency and mobility in a totally different context were maintained, and how a whole host of proposals that sometimes overlap and sometimes contradict each other blossomed forth in many different places.

The following section interprets the current situation as a period of change, rather than of modernisation – unless we consider the two terms to be synonymous. To do this, it goes back to notions of readability, transparency and mobility whose evocative power progressively turns into a kind of litany. It also dwells upon the draft EQF which is the catalyst behind current debates.

4.1. Readability/transparency and circulation of knowledge

Three types of criticism are levelled at the notions of readability/transparency:

- (a) the first concerns the presupposition that readability (or transparency) is something that everybody wants. This is not the case however, and many companies, especially the more innovative ones, deploy great efforts to preserve their skills. There are also examples from the education system itself. For example, in France certain private paying bodies have refused to register the qualifications they issue in the national register of qualifications, because they would have to make public certain elements of the training they provided and assessments they carried out, allowing everyone to use them and thus aiding their competitors;
- (b) the second involves the complexity of the measures set up to ensure this transparency/readability. In the words of Boudier, transparency can be the mother of

opacity (Bouder, 2005);

- (c) the third and last refers to the different meanings covered by these terms depending on what concept one has of the workings of the labour market and the relationship between training and employment. The developments in the first part of this text provide an illustration of this.

As for the aims of a knowledge society, are these terms ‘recyclable’? The natural tendency would be to respond in the affirmative. From a semantic viewpoint, we should point out that the term ‘readability’ is preferable to ‘transparency’, as the latter term implies a desire for invisibility, while certification aims to be – indeed it must be – the most visible sign possible. If not, one of the characteristics of the knowledge society is to place the movement of knowledge on the same level as that of goods, people, services and capital. It therefore goes without saying, for example, that individuals should have the best information possible to build a modular certification route within lifelong learning. Levels, ECTS and ECVET are especially important in this area.

On the other hand, one could imagine that, with the help of the volatility of the contents of employment, certification will play an increasingly important role in its link with professional classifications, with the employer aiming to build a pool of skills which can then be optimised under relatively uncertain production conditions. The implementation of lists of national qualifications in different countries proves this need. It remains to be seen what principles of readability they mobilise, and if such principles satisfy the needs of the different users, or whether different tools need to be developed according to these users. Furthermore, inasmuch as a knowledge society aims to foster the acquisition of knowledge, it seems necessary for these tools to be considered dynamically and to outline the possibilities that each qualification offers to move towards others.

4.2. What do we mean by mobility?

‘The work aimed at preparing systems of recognition, correspondence or comparability was initially based on the hypothesis of a development of occupational mobility between Member States. This hypothesis does not seem to be borne out either by the statistics on recent developments, or by the more qualitative investigations carried out in companies’ (Bertrand, 1996, p. 85). The Lisbon objectives are part of a general continuity in designing a change in orientation that stresses mobility linked to initial or ongoing training, as they mention the desire to create, reinforce and facilitate the European labour market, to foster and facilitate mobility between Member States, which includes the perspective of continuing to study and encouraging and organising education and lifelong learning.

If we focus initially on professional mobility, Bertrand considers that it affects two categories of people – cross-border workers and executives. The movement of the first group is regulated by local systems in which the equivalence of qualifications plays no role. ‘In most

cases, cross-border workers are fairly low-qualified and the problem of the recognition of qualifications hardly ever arises. Nor is it a problem when there is a high demand for workers, as employers are less demanding about qualifications (this is the case of Luxembourg). The most important factor is wage levels, which are set according to specific data from the labour market, and depends more on the employer's assessment of the competence and efficiency of the worker than on any formal evaluation. This is also the case for those professions in which mobility is traditionally strong, such as hotels and catering: foreign workers are considered on the basis of references on their previous experience and on the specific demonstration of their skills much more than on their diplomas' (Bertrand, 1996). For executives, problems of the equivalence of qualifications do arise with regard to the determination of salaries and so companies have drawn up their own progression scales. It is difficult to know whether these 2 categories will still be dominant in 10 years time, but the figures available ⁽²¹⁾ show that European mobility is extremely limited:

- (a) fewer than 2% of EU-25 citizens live and work in a different Member State from their country of origin – a proportion that has hardly changed for the last 30 years (Source: Eurostat);
- (b) cross-border commuting between Member States (with no residence change) has been steadily increasing over recent years, but still remains quite low. Belgium has the highest rate, with 1.7% of its working residents working in neighbouring countries. On average only 0.2% of the EU-15 working population commutes between Member States. (Source: Update on mobility and migrations, 2001/0082, Employment and Social Affairs DG, Unit A1, 2002);
- (c) according to a European Commission report on the free movement of workers since the 2004 enlargement [...] mobility from Central and Eastern Europe has generally been lower than foreseen. In all countries, with the exception of Austria (1.4% in 2005) and Ireland (3.8% in 2005), nationals of the new Member states (EU-10) represented less than 1% of the population of working age. (Source: Report on the Functioning of the Transitional Arrangements set out in the 2003 Accession Treaty, February 2006)'.

We should add that this ideal of mobility has been seriously dented by the measures taken to restrict its application following enlargement. We could point out in passing that the different 'relaxation measures' allowing workers from the new Member States to settle in other states are specified in terms of professions or domains of activities that hark back to a professional working principle of the labour market that is identical to that underlying the Directives.

The reality of intra-European occupational mobility therefore still needs to be put to the test, as does the way in which qualifications systems and frameworks can contribute to it: will the mere existence of the tool be able to generate the process?

⁽²¹⁾ The statistics used above are from the website concerning European worker mobility year: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/workersmobility_2006/index.cfm?id_page_category=FF [cited 24.9.2007].

Turning now to student mobility, Bertrand states: ‘it can be seen as an aim in itself (making Europe progress by intermingling its young population), but also as a prerequisite to occupational mobility (studying in several countries would help to overcome the psychological and practical obstacles to this mobility, if only for the language aspect)’ (Bertrand, 1996, p. 86). It is also true that the different European exchange programmes have been quite successful, but no analysis has been made of their contribution to further mobility. Nevertheless, there is a considerable gap between higher education, in which the mobility principle seems to have been fully accepted and is part of a well-rooted tradition, and secondary education, especially vocational education, where there is still a great deal to be done: the setting up of the ECVET is just one example. Finally, the most recent phenomena of protests against the ‘invasion’ of certain university specialities, especially *numerus clausus*, by foreign students, shows that implementing this mobility on a large scale could be especially delicate.

On the other hand, there is one form of mobility that has little attention paid to it, but which should play an increasingly important role in lifelong learning: mobility from the workplace to the training site. It is true that this is an area that seldom involves cross-border movements, but its working rules should be as fair as possible for everyone.

So, aside from the significance attributed to it and the space assigned to it, mobility, which was considered as something that would be intrinsically desirable to European citizens and culture, is more of a reality to be created, however necessary it is considered, than a desire to be satisfied, and this rather changes the way that we refer to it when justifying the implementation of new mechanisms and measures.

4.3. Back to the EQF ⁽²²⁾

Bearing in mind what was said in the introduction to this section, the European framework can be considered as an ongoing transition mechanism, which proposes a design for the future and should therefore reject or transform elements of the past, however arbitrary that may seem, to affirm the irreversible character of the change. In a way it is a matter of ‘forcing destiny’s hand’, of exercising a ‘symbolic violence’ as Pierre Bourdieu might say. In this case, and in light of the previous developments, we can consider four essential points with regard to the chances of success:

- (a) the normalisation of the notions of qualifications system, qualifications framework and the relations between them;
- (b) the choice to put training systems to one side in order to go deliberately into the regulation of the relationship between training and employment through the notion of certification in relation to the labour market;

⁽²²⁾ See Bohlinger and Münk in this Volume.

- (c) the concept of professional knowledge expressed through an eight-level grid;
- (d) the coexistence of this system with others.

4.3.1. Imposing a conceptual apparatus

The distinction between qualifications systems and frameworks seems to be developing progressively. Bearing in mind the short time available to deal with this issue in the article, we could mention:

- (a) the proposals from Westerhuis, which remain fairly ambiguous. ‘The scope of a classification system for qualifications can be described using three criteria: whether or not the application and use of the system is broader than purely for the identification and regulation of curricula and diplomas of formal VET programmes; whether or not a system is a comprehensive framework, incorporating qualifications of different levels while these levels are defined in a coherent way; whether or not the system is monopolistic in the sense of comprising all obtainable qualifications and that no other system is being used’ (Westerhuis, 2001, p. 17). ‘Qualifications frameworks are, by definition, reference systems. Frameworks establish relationships between teaching and learning outcomes and performances demanded by business and industry, on the one hand, and general or vocational qualifications and diplomas delivered by a given education or training system on the other’ (p. 91);
- (b) in 2003, the International Labour Office considered that a qualifications framework ‘consists of appropriate, transferable, broad and industry-based and professional competency standards, established by the social partners, that reflect the skills required in the economy and public institutions, and vocational and academic qualifications; and a credible, fair and transparent system of assessment of skills learned and competencies gained, irrespective of how and where they have been learned, e.g. through formal and non-formal education and training, work experience and on-the-job learning; a credible system of certification of skills that are portable and recognized across enterprises, sectors, industries and educational institutions, whether public or private’ (ILO, 2003);
- (c) in June 2005, the European Commission working document *Towards a European qualifications framework for lifelong learning* defines such a framework based on the work of the OECD: ‘a qualifications framework is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved. This set of criteria may be implicit in the qualifications descriptors themselves or made explicit in the form of a set of level descriptors. The scope of frameworks may be comprehensive of all learning achievement and pathways or may be confined to a particular sector, for example initial education, adult education and training or an occupational area. Some frameworks may have more design elements and a tighter structure than others; some may have a legal basis whereas others represent a consensus of views of social partners. All qualifications frameworks, however, establish a basis for improving the quality, accessibility, linkages and public or labour market recognition of

qualifications within a country and internationally’ (EC, 2005b, p. 12);

- (d) at the same time, the OECD wrote ‘several countries have created national qualifications systems. In the UK, for example, the NVQ system covers a wide range of standards for professional skills for different sectors, which can serve as a ‘currency’ within a system based on outcomes. Apprentices and employers know the competences covered by each NVQ, which also cover smaller groups of outcomes (modules). Spain is currently following a similar approach: competences acquired through different channels – ordinary education system, work experience or training provided by the public employment service – will henceforth be recognised by means of a single qualifications framework [...]. An important initiative was taken recently in this domain by the EU when it created a European competences passport known as the Europass. It provides EU citizens with a single document containing all the information on the training they have completed, the competences acquired and the diplomas obtained. It can be used all over Europe. A more ambitious project is planned in this field with the setting up of a EQF to facilitate communication between the various existing systems and to provide a common reference for preparing national qualifications frameworks’ (OECD, 2005a, p. 44-45);
- (e) at the end of 2005, Young examined the distinction between systems and frameworks: ‘the main features that distinguish national qualification frameworks from existing qualifications systems can be summarised as follows. All qualifications are described in terms of a single set of criteria, ranked on a single hierarchy of levels, classified in terms of a single set of occupational fields, described in terms of learning outcomes (that are expressed independently of the site, institution and form of pedagogy curriculum), defined in terms of elements (sometimes referred to as units or unit standards) and ascribed a volume in terms of credit expressed as notional learning hours’ (Young, 2005, p. 40-41);
- (f) finally, according to the latest report from the OECD, ‘qualifications systems include all the aspects of the activity of a country which leads to the recognition of a training outcome. These systems include resources (for developing and operationalising national or regional qualification policies, institutional processes, quality assurance processes, processes for assessing and attributing qualifications, recognising competences and the other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. Qualifications systems can be more or less integrated and coherent. For example, a qualifications system may or may not be equipped with a qualification framework [...]’ (OECD, 2006, p. 9). The definition of the qualification framework has already been given in point c) above.

As we can see, these definitions are convergent overall, but not really stabilised, and the many articles written about them of late would suggest that the disagreements have not yet been settled. For example:

- (a) why are frameworks with a legal base played off against those that reflect a consensus among the social partners?
- (b) with regard to the latest OECD report (OECD, 2006), is a framework such an ethereal or

independent object that it should not have to face up to certain contingencies of the systems? For example: ‘operationalising [...] policies, institutional processes, quality assurance processes, processes for assessing and attributing qualifications, recognising competences’. A European framework will have to face all these issues, resolve them and organise solutions to them. Will it then become a system?

Is it the right time to build a durable system despite the uncertainties that still revolve around these notions, or should we continue the debate? The politicians have taken the initiative by setting the dates on which the decisions should be taken. Before long we shall be able to follow the way in which the positions of all the different players have evolved.

4.3.2. Links between the qualifications framework and the training system

This is one of the points over which the authors mentioned in the previous passage disagree. While Young favours maintaining links with the formal training system, its pathways and duration, the draft European framework states its wish to break with it. We can also see from the different versions of the project that these references were deliberately removed: certain previous versions proposed a correspondence with the ISCED levels, others with the grid proposed by the 2005 Directive. A deliberate choice was thus taken to break with that system, arguing that these references are too heavily influenced by the formal training system. This is clearly a swing towards assessing a person’s qualities according to the demands of the labour market. At first sight, that represents a major risk in terms of principle:

- (a) economic analyses strongly dispute the model of a single labour market. Such analyses coincide on the fact that there are already segmentations in this market on a national level, and the principle of the Directives on a European level confirms this situation. In this context, certification can play the role of a filter, a signal, or have no function at all (Bouder et al., 2001);
- (b) current developments in working activities, marked by dematerialisation and tertiarisation, could be increasingly difficult to define if not in terms of the knowledge which they mobilise;
- (c) users could be wrong-footed by this change of references, especially as no system of equivalence is proposed to help people to move from the old system to the new one. That could then lead people to turn against the system (making the old categories correspond to the new ones in spite of everything) or to feelings of inertia.

It is true that the proposed grid does include a ‘knowledge’ heading which could act as a safety lock and serve as a bridge to a more traditional view of qualification levels. Be that as it may, it still seems very unwise to attach the greatest importance to the labour market while this market is itself increasingly subject to far-reaching changes, which will not cease to increase within a knowledge society. This was made even more patent in the answers to the national questionnaires (Section 3.3.1), where all the countries support the idea that by 2010 the aim of vocational training will be to foster the acquisition of skills rather than knowledge,

and openly accept the principle of learning outcomes. It could be feared that we have underestimated the capacity of vocational training systems to change, which in turn leads to the labour market being singled out as the main factor of innovation, thus further opening a breach that would in fact reduce the establishment of a knowledge society.

4.3.3. An arguable design of professional knowledge

The eight levels proposed by the EQF take up the commonly recognised distinction between knowledge, skills and competence. It would be too ambitious to try to summarise all the debates around the principle and categories of this distinction. Allow us merely to say that it is extremely formal: we can suppose that the higher the level of knowledge, the easier it is to acquire skills and the easier to acquire the capacity to adapt, take on responsibility, be autonomous, in other words, competence. Conversely, it would be hard to imagine skills being independent from competence when professional didactics insist on the passage from skills to knowledge (Savoyant, 1996). In a way this is reassuring, because quite probably the intervals between level assessments for each of the criteria could be relatively small. This is borne out by the results of certain experiments in France ⁽²³⁾. It remains to be seen whether it was necessary to follow this approach to achieve results close to those in the current situation.

On the other hand, there is no mention of professional fields or specialities to help place the diplomas. This is one of the concerns very often raised in the questionnaires provided for the Maastricht assessment: the implementation of qualifications lists, reflections on questions of the degree of professional specialisation, mainstreaming, building common curricula and specialisation modules are a concern that is very often expressed. We could say that this does appear in the concept of skills, but a much more elaborate methodological tool than the one proposed in the grid would be required to identify them. We would therefore be inclined to think that the proposed framework is deliberately theoretical, allowing users to develop it according to their own technical qualities. However, there is perhaps a risk of sidestepping the main aims of the project, i.e. fostering mobility and establishing closer links between qualifications to make it easier to pass from one to the other. Put differently, the European framework proposes a strong hypothesis, according to which the closeness between qualifications rests more upon the proximity of classification within a hierarchical grid, expressed in a very theoretical way, than on any closeness of content of activities within the professions or sectors of activity. That said, the hypothesis deserves to be put to the test, as we can observe significant gaps between training specialities and posts held, but this lack of adaptation would not lead us to conclude that just anyone could go anywhere, and furthermore the theoretical investigations mean attention must be paid to transferable

⁽²³⁾ While the French response was being prepared, efforts were made, in the systems of reference of professional activities of some diplomas, to distinguish those that referred to knowledge, skills and competences, and to assign them to one of the eight EQF levels. Overall, for a particular diploma, there was a certain homogeneity between the levels assigned to the three headings, and the differences between them did not exceed one level. However, this was still very experimental.

competences linked to different specialities (Bruyère and Lemistre, 2006).

4.3.4. Coexistence with alternative systems

As we showed in section 1, we are moving in a relatively unstable and constantly-shifting domain for which we should consider several possible developments. The quality of a system also lies in its capacity to tolerate the existence of other systems that may appear outdated or relatively unimportant. Turning to the different systems mentioned in this text:

- (a) the compatibility of the European framework with the recommendations of the Directives requires a harmonisation of the levels used in both approaches;
- (b) this European framework is not incompatible with multinational (including European) definitions of reference systems, insofar as these allow it to be applied, which does not seem very restrictive;
- (c) it can coexist with Europass without profoundly changing it, as certification is just one of several elements in this portfolio of competences;
- (d) it could clash with the setting up of sectoral measures or branches, especially if these are recognised internationally, via European social dialogue. One example would be qualifications for people working in transport, or sport, which have their own system of recognition and progression and therefore would not be likely to be interested in being part of a European framework, especially as some of them are part of a worldwide framework.

In conclusion, this is a risky proposal, the decisions taken thus far do not indicate that this risk will decline, and it will neither be easy nor quick to apply. On the other hand, the consequences of failure would not be too serious, if we accept that the investment involved has paid off in terms of the debates, experiments and exchanges it has generated.

5. Back to modernisation

The setting up of national or EQFs is part of a long-winded effort to harmonise qualifications, as described in Section 2. At the end of this exploration which has revisited the origins of European action in this sphere, and observed and analysed the hesitations, prevarications and U-turns involved, we could be tempted to say that the first step in modernising is to remember. The Treaty of Rome dates from 1957. Europe no longer has the right to commit errors of youth – it has a past and a history. Qualifications frameworks are only a part of this history, but are not the end of it, and there is no way of knowing whether they will represent a determined step forward, an approach to be built upon by others in the future, or a project that will never fully see the light of day.

It is true that they come at a particular moment in time, redefining the EU's objectives of creating a knowledge society, tackling the field of vocational training, which up to now has been relatively fragmented in the EU institutions and fiercely watched over by the States that are extremely attached to their own prerogatives. This should make us wonder about reorganising structures and rearticulating the powers that should quite logically flow from these new objectives, as well as a new use for the Socrates and Leonardo programmes, which could be ideal sites for experimenting with modernisation and leading change.

Indeed, Section 3 shows that if the European objectives mobilise nationally, they do not really unify. For the time being, each country seems to be following its progress, and adhering in general terms to the main guidelines sketched out in Lisbon and Copenhagen, which they in fact took part in defining, but applying different meanings and priorities to them. The harmonising role played by the setting up of national qualifications frameworks is not necessarily well-looked upon by the Member States. In fact, for those who already have such systems it would involve revising these, sometimes in great depth, proposing a model which in a small number of States is still at an experimental stage. Furthermore, the desire to put the guidelines provided by training systems to one side and to place more attention on the signals provided by the labour market brings in a break that is all the more difficult to accept in light of the increasingly unstable and changing nature of this market.

The current state of the debate on the creation of a EQF leads us to believe that the question of readability of such qualifications will be solved by creating an instrument described as 'neutral' by its promoters. It would be interesting to round off this paper by clarifying what this neutrality needs to be in order to achieve its aims.

First of all, it must be assigned the function of an interface between the fields of education, training and the labour market: This exercise is all the more complicated because we also have to overcome the multiplicity of approaches surrounding recognition of qualifications in the national arenas, and – within such arenas – the weight of local and sectoral specificities.

Above and beyond these environmental constraints, the creation of such an instrument is part of a history that cannot be ignored and is expressed in at least two ways:

- (a) the meeting of two European Directorates-General – Internal Market and Education and Culture – whose aims seemed far enough from each other when they were set up for there not to be any overlapping of their prerogatives. It would be useful now to envisage such an occurrence and perhaps also to extend that to other units concerned by these questions (for employment, for example);
- (b) the ideals – the ‘utopias’ – which they brought forth. Since the Treaty of Rome, the notions of transparency and readability of qualifications, mobility of people, and the single labour market have been mentioned very frequently, and their power to mobilise has progressively dwindled until it is nothing more than a ritual incantation.

Perhaps it is now time to go back to more fundamental considerations of these aims, especially when the setting up of a knowledge society considerably changes their scope and meaning. Three ways forward are possible in light of the previous statement:

- (a) to consider the diversity of the labour markets, the reality of which is clearly shown by the different modes of recognition mentioned above. It would thus be possible to bring together Directives and labour markets, Europass and the desire to match the supply and demand for skills, EQF and an intermediary mode of regulation between the previous two. For these three situations, the notions of readability and mobility correspond to very different realities;
- (b) a return to the debate on the relationship between training and employment, where we can see a sort of reversal of the paradigm. While training, especially vocational training, was considered as a response to the needs of the labour market, which was more or less well-adapted and rapid, it seems to be called to play an increasing role as a structuring element with regard to this market. An economist would say that supply has an increasing influence over demand, and we could even wonder whether this separation will still remain valid, as the distinction between training systems and production systems will diminish;
- (c) finally, observing the terrain, it would be interesting to check whether there is any sort of ‘genetic’ development of the qualifications systems and frameworks, to find out whether it is more beneficial to foster an incremental development, in the words of Young, or to encourage the simultaneous adoption of a common framework.

As always, we might say, it is when changes are most profound that the search for something to hold onto becomes most pressing, and this is true for this period. That is why it is such a propitious time for the emergence of a flood of new proposals. However, the feeling of urgency to make these proposals public does involve a risk – that of likening their conceptual foundations and the ways in which they can be applied. These are three uncertain situations involved in the building of history, and we must learn how to observe developments, accept hesitations and share hopes.

One essential point is, therefore, to allow the systems we want to set up to be as open-ended as possible, which could also be seen to fit in with the characteristics of modernisation, if we

bear in mind the words of Ernst Jünger: 'snakes are blind when they shed their skin'.

Annex 1: Presentation of the questionnaire to the Directors-General

Part A: Successful aspects of your national system of VET, innovation and challenges

Question 1: Successful aspects of your current VET system

Please indicate up to five aspects of your current VET provision that you consider to be successful in terms of your national objectives.

Question 2: Current priorities for VET reforms and innovations in your country.

Please identify up to five current reforms or innovations that you expect to have an impact on the effectiveness or efficiency of VET in your country. You should refer here to policies and innovations whose implementation has begun over the last 4 years, and to any reforms/innovations that are currently at the planning stage.

Question 3: Challenges

Please provide a brief outline of one or two reform(s) in VET over the past few years that have not yet achieved the expected aims.

Part B: The relationship between national processes and the Lisbon priorities

Question 4a: Coherence between national and EU VET policies

Please identify in the boxes below the level of coherence that exists between your national policy for VET and the EU Lisbon and Copenhagen processes.

Question 4b: Comment

Question 4c: Consultation and collaborative mechanisms

Part C : Key VET objectives that are identified in the Lisbon process

Please give a brief indication of specific policies that are being considered or used in your country in relation to European priorities for VET. Each policy area mentioned below corresponds to an objective for VET that is identified in the Lisbon or Copenhagen agreement.

Question 5: Increasing the flexibility of VET routes/the VET system for young people, adult learners and industry (e.g. vertical and horizontal flexibility, individual education pathways, modularisation).

Question 6: Recognition of non-formal and informal learning (learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure) as a measure to improve the national VET system.

Question 7: Measures to improve the professionalisation and competences levels of VET teachers and trainers (Pedagogy, expertise, assessment, etc.)

Question 8: Making best use of private and public funding, so as to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of VET (e.g. employers' contributions and training, division of roles between government and localities, co-financing schemes combining public-private resources, delegation of financial responsibilities to schools).

Question 9: Enhancing the involvement of firms, sectors and branches of industry in order to improve VET system's ability to develop skills and qualifications (e.g. sector/regional partnerships, shift in emphasis from supply to demand side).

Question 10: Developing measures (such as credit transfer systems) to increase the comparability, recognition and transferability of skills and qualifications between different countries and levels, with a view to promote a European labour market.

Question 11: Forecasting and anticipating future labour market needs for skills in an uncertain economic climate.

Part D: Outcomes in 2010?

Question 12: The final question asks you to anticipate what may be the outcomes of aspects of your national strategy and policies for VET in the year 2010.

Annex 1: Presentation of the questionnaire to the Directors-General



Achieving the Lisbon Goals:
The contribution of VET

Questionnaire for the European Directors General for Vocational Training

Please complete and return this questionnaire by email to:

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Please save the questionnaire on your hard drive, complete and return.
Although the writing boxes are expandable, please keep your answers brief.
To answer a particular question: click on the left hand side of the writing box.
To go to the next question: use your mouse or your 'page down' button.

The deadline for return of the completed questionnaire is 25 May 2004.

Part A: Successful aspects of your national system of VET, innovation and challenges

Question 1: Successful aspects of your current VET system

Please indicate up to five aspects of your current vocational education and training (VET) provision that you consider to be successful in terms of your national goals.

Notes: For each successful aspect, please indicate the following:

Aspect of the system: an indication or name, with a one or two sentence description
Indicators of success: verifiable indicators (quantitative or qualitative) that can provide evidence of success
Further references: publication, website or email address where further information can be obtained

i.	A. Aspect of the system:	
	B. Indicators of success:	
	C. Further reference(s):	
ii.	A. Aspect of the system:	
	B. Indicators of success:	
	C. Further reference(s):	
iii.	A. Aspect of the system:	
	B. Indicators of success:	
	C. Further reference(s):	
iv.	A. Aspect of the system:	
	B. Indicators of success:	
	C. Further reference(s):	
v.	A. Aspect of the system:	
	B. Indicators of success:	
	C. Further reference(s):	

Question 2: Current priorities for VET reforms and innovations in your country.

Please identify up to five current reforms or innovations that you expect to have an impact on the effectiveness or efficiency of VET in your country. You should refer here to policies and innovations whose implementation has begun over the last 4 years, and to any reforms/innovations that are currently at the planning stage.

Notes:

In B, please indicate whether the reform is at planning or implementation stage. Please also indicate under C the intended aims or objectives of the reform

i.

A. Name or title:	
B. Stage of development:	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation
C. Aims:	
D. Indicators of success	
E. Reference(s) to documents/ websites	

ii.

A. Name or title:	
B. Stage of development:	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation
C. Aims:	
D. Indicators of success	
E. Reference(s) to documents/ websites	

iii.

A. Name or title:	
B. Stage of development:	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation
C. Aims:	
D. Indicators of success	
E. Reference(s) to documents/ websites	

iv.

A. Name or title:	
B. Stage of development:	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation
C. Aims:	
D. Indicators of success	
E. Reference(s) to documents/ websites	

v.

A. Name or title:	
B. Stage of development:	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation
C. Aims:	
D. Indicators of success	
E. Reference(s) to documents/ websites	

Question 3: Challenges

Please provide a brief outline of one or two reform(s) in VET over the past few years that have not yet achieved the expected aims.

i.

A. Name/ title	
B. Brief description and reference	

ii.

A. Name/ title	
B. Brief description and reference	

Please explain briefly why the expected aims have not been achieved so far, and which approaches are being used to remedy this.

--

Part B: The relationship between national processes and the Lisbon priorities

Question 4a Coherence between national and EU VET policies

Please identify in the boxes below the level of coherence that exists between your national policy for VET and the EU Lisbon and Copenhagen processes.

Please click the box that, in your view, in general describes your national situation most accurately

- Coherence exists between the EU and national policies for VET.
 The Copenhagen or Lisbon processes do not directly influence national policies. But they are, nevertheless, broadly compatible.
 National priorities and policies and the Lisbon and Copenhagen priorities are divergent.

Question 4b Comment

The degree of coherence between European and national policies for VET may differ in different policy areas. Please comment on the relationship between European and national policies in areas that you consider to be particularly important.

--

Question 4c Consultation and collaborative mechanisms

A key aim for VET is described in the Copenhagen Declaration as:

"We aim to increase voluntary cooperation in vocational education and training, in order to promote mutual trust, transparency and recognition of competences and qualifications, thereby establishing a basis for increasing mobility and facilitating access to lifelong learning".

Do you consider that the consultation and/ or collaborative mechanisms involving the different actors (public authorities, social partners, sectoral bodies, industries etc.) that operate in your country help or impede the realisation of this aim?

Note: Please specify favourable and impeding mechanisms at the regional or sector, national and European level

Favourable mechanisms

Regional or sector level	National level	European level

Mechanisms that impede:

Regional or sector level	National level	European level

How can any of these mechanisms be improved at the regional or sector, national and European levels?

--

Part C: Key VET objectives that are identified in the Lisbon process

Please give a brief indication of specific policies that are being considered or used in your country in relation to European priorities for VET. Each policy area mentioned below corresponds to an objective for VET that is identified in the Lisbon or Copenhagen agreement.

Note: These questions also ask you to comment on 'drivers'. 'Drivers' are the actors or pressures that create and inhibit change.

Question 5:

Increasing the flexibility of VET routes / the VET system for young people, adult learners and industry. (E.g. vertical and horizontal flexibility, individual educational pathways, modularisation)

Key policy:	
Stage of development:	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation
Key drivers:	
Indicators of success:	
Further reference(s):	
Comments (if any):	

Question 6:

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning (learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure) as a measure to improve the national VET system.

Key policy:	
Stage of development:	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation
Key drivers:	
Indicators of success:	
Further reference(s):	
Comments (if any):	

Question 7:

Measures to improve the professionalisation and competence levels of VET teachers and trainers. (Pedagogy, expertise, assessment etc.)

Key policy:	
Stage of development:	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation
Key drivers:	
Indicators of success:	
Further reference(s):	
Comments (if any):	

Question 8:

Making best use of private and public funding, so as to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of VET (E.g. employers' contributions and training, division of roles between government and localities, co financing schemes combining public-private resources, delegation of financial responsibilities to schools)

Key policy:	
Stage of development:	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation
Key drivers:	
Indicators of success:	
Further reference(s):	
Comments (if any):	

Question 9:

Enhancing the involvement of firms, sectors and branches of industry in order to improve VET system's ability to develop skills and qualifications (E.g. sector/ regional partnerships, shift in emphasis from supply to demand side)

Key policy issues/ strategy:	
Stage of development:	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation
Key drivers:	
Indicators of success:	
Further reference(s):	
Comments (if any):	

Question 10:

Developing measures (such as credit transfer systems) to increase the comparability, recognition and transferability of skills and qualifications between different countries and levels, with a view to promoting a European labour market.

Key policy:	
Stage of development:	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation
Key drivers:	
Indicators of success:	
Further reference(s):	
Comments (if any):	

Question 11:

Forecasting and anticipating future labour market needs for skills in an uncertain economic climate.

Key policy:	
Stage of development:	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation
Key drivers:	
Indicators of success:	
Further reference(s):	
Comments (if any):	

Part D. Outcomes in 2010?

Question 12: The final question asks you to anticipate what may be the outcomes of aspects of your national strategy and policies for VET in the year 2010.

Note:

Below you will find a number of paired statements. They represent a range of planning priorities and outcomes. Please indicate for each pair of statements where – on a continuum – your country plans, realistically, to be in 2010 on the basis of current trends and expectations. If you give equal weight to both statements, your response will be on the mid point.

	<<	<	<>	>	>>	
VET focuses on equipping learners with competences	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	VET focuses on equipping learners with subject knowledge
Lifelong learning has as its first priority meeting the needs of 'older learners'	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	As its first priority LLL provides a 'strong start' (early childhood up to 16)
Meeting specific labour market goals is the dominant focus in current VET policies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Meeting broader societal and personal development goals is the dominant focus in current VET policies
ICT in vocational learning mainly involves simulated activities or distance learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	ICT in vocational learning is embedded into work and business processes
VET is provided mainly in school – based pathways	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	VET is provided mainly in work-based pathways
Most VET teachers and trainers come straight from an educational background	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Most VET teachers and trainers come from working life
A social partnership model is the norm for VET policies and decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	VET policies and decisions mainly depend on single players (state, employers etc.)
Multinationals and actors in the private sector are the main agents of change in VET policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Public actors (government, ministries, agencies) are the main agents of change in VET policy
National VET policy protects specific groups or professions in the domestic labour market	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	European cooperation means that that a flexible European labour market is becoming a reality

Annex 2

To anticipate what may be the outcomes of aspects of your national strategy and policies for VET in the year 2010

	<<	<	◊	>	>>	
A social partnership model is the norm for VET policies and decisions	Denmark Estonia Germany Hungary Iceland Italy Luxembourg Netherlands Norway Poland Spain Wallonia	Bulgaria Cyprus Finland Flanders Greece Ireland Latvia Malta Romania Slovakia Slovenia Sweden Turkey	Austria France Liechtenstein Portugal UK			VET policies and decisions mainly depend on single players (state, employers, etc.)
VET focuses on equipping learners with competences	Denmark Germany Finland Ireland Netherlands Romania Slovakia	Austria Bulgaria Cyprus Estonia Flanders Greece Hungary Iceland Italy Latvia Lithuania Luxembourg Malta Norway Poland Portugal Slovenia Spain Sweden Wallonia	France Liechtenstein Turkey UK			VET focuses on equipping learners with subject knowledge
Meeting specific labour market goals is the dominant focus in current VET policies	Estonia	Denmark Germany Hungary Iceland Lithuania Portugal Slovakia Spain Turkey UK	Austria Bulgaria Finland Flanders France Greece Ireland Latvia Malta Romania Slovenia Wallonia	Cyprus Italy Liechtenstein Luxembourg Norway Poland	Netherlands Sweden	Meeting broader societal and personal development goals is the dominant focus in current VET policies

	<<	<	<>	>	>>	
Lifelong learning has as its first priority meeting the needs of 'older learners'	Iceland	Cyprus Denmark Estonia Hungary Italy Latvia Portugal Romania Wallonia	Bulgaria Finland Flanders Greece Ireland Lithuania Luxembourg Netherlands Spain Sweden Turkey UK	Austria France Germany Liechtenstein Malta Norway Poland Slovenia	Slovakia	As its first priority LLL provides has 'strong start' (early childhood up to 16)
VET is provided mainly in school-based pathways	Sweden Slovakia	Cyprus Estonia Flanders Greece Italy Lithuania Spain	Austria Bulgaria Finland France Iceland Ireland Latvia Portugal Slovenia UK	Denmark Hungary Liechtenstein Luxembourg Malta Netherlands Norway Poland Romania Turkey Wallonia	Germany	VET is provided mainly in work-based pathways
Multinationals and players in the private sector are the main agents of change in VET policy		Flanders Greece Hungary Romania UK	Denmark Estonia Finland France Germany Italy Liechtenstein Malta Netherlands Slovakia Turkey Wallonia	Austria Bulgaria Cyprus Iceland Ireland Latvia Lithuania Luxembourg Norway Poland Portugal Slovenia Spain	Sweden	Public players (government, ministries, agencies) are the main agents of change in Vet policy
Most VET teachers and trainers come straight from an educational background		Bulgaria Greece Slovakia Spain Turkey	Estonia Flanders France Ireland Italy Latvia Luxembourg Portugal Romania Slovenia UK Wallonia	Austria Cyprus Denmark Finland Germany Hungary Liechtenstein Lithuania Malta Norway Netherlands Poland	Iceland Sweden	Most VET teachers and trainers come from working life

	<<	<	<>	>	>>	
ICT in vocational learning mainly involves stimulating activities or distant learning*		Flanders Slovakia Turkey	Austria Bulgaria Denmark Estonia France Greece Ireland Iceland Italy Portugal Romania Spain	Finland Germany Hungary Latvia Lithuania Luxembourg Malta Norway Netherlands Poland Slovenia Sweden UK Wallonia	Liechtenstein	ICT in vocational learning is embedded into work and business procedures
National VET policy protects specific groups so professions in the domestic labour market		France Greece	Bulgaria Cyprus Lithuania Norway Portugal Spain Turkey UK	Austria Denmark Estonia Finland Flanders Germany Hungary Iceland Ireland Italy Latvia Liechtenstein Malta Netherlands Romania Slovakia Slovenia Sweden Wallonia	Luxembourg Poland	European cooperation means that a flexible European labour market is becoming a reality

NB: *No reply from Cyprus

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List of Abbreviations

DG EAC	Directorate-General for education and culture
ECTS	European credit and transfer system (higher education)
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
ENQA	European association for quality assurance in higher education
EQF	European qualifications framework for life-long learning
Incul	<i>Instituto Nacional de las Cualificaciones</i> ES [National Qualifications Institute]
ISCED	International standard classification of education
NVQ	National vocational qualifications
OECD	Organisation for Economic and Cooperation Development
ICT	Information and communication technologies
Unesco	United Nations educational, scientific and cultural organisation
VET	Vocational education and training