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The Copenhagen Process – the European Vocational Education and Training policy – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What is the Copenhagen Process and who participates in it?

The Copenhagen Process was initiated in November 2002 at a meeting in the Danish capital to agree a Declaration on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training (VET). This declaration responded to a request from the Barcelona European Council in March 2002 to take action in the field of vocational training, similar to that taken under the Bologna declaration in higher education. The declaration followed a resolution of the Education Council (November 2002) on the same subject, which gives it its legal basis. The purpose of the declaration was to commit the European Economic Area countries not members of the Union, the then accession and candidate countries and the European Social Partners, along with the EU Member States (31 countries in all) and the European Commission, to the priorities and follow-up of the resolution.

What is the purpose of the Copenhagen process?

The Copenhagen process is an integrated part of the Lisbon strategy in which VET must be developed to play its active and key role in furthering lifelong learning policies and supplying the highly skilled workforce necessary to make Europe one of the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economies and societies in the world. The development of a true European labour market – an essential complement to the single market for goods and services, and the single currency – relies heavily on having a skilled, adaptable and mobile workforce able to use its qualifications and competences as a kind of 'common currency' throughout Europe. In this respect, the main aims of the Copenhagen process are the development of lifelong learning and the promotion of mutual trust between the key players.

The Copenhagen process is an accelerated measure to improve the quality and attractiveness of VET, which is lagging behind other fields of education, and to raise the parity of esteem between them.

What are its objectives?

The Main objectives set by the Copenhagen declaration are:

- Single framework for transparency of qualifications and competences;
- Cooperation in quality assurance in VET;
- Credit transfer system for VET - a system that enables individuals to progressively obtain credit points based on the competences they acquire along their vocational learning route, in both formal and informal settings. Common principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- Strengthening policies, systems and practices for lifelong guidance;
- Support to the development of qualifications and competences at sectoral level;
- Attention to the learning needs of teachers and trainers;

How are these to be achieved?

Technical working groups and expert groups have been established by the European Commission to develop common European references and principles aimed at supporting Member States' policies in the fields of quality, transparency and recognition.

What results have been achieved since 2002 which are directly relevant to citizens and enterprises?

Europass – a single framework for transparency of qualifications and competences – launched at a special conference under the Luxembourg Presidency on 31 Jan. – 1 February 2005.

Council Resolution on **strengthening policies, systems and practices in the field of guidance throughout life**, which brings a coherent approach to this topic across education and training sectors at Community and national levels.

Council conclusions on the **“identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning”** endorse a set of common European principles to help develop confidence and trust in this rapidly emerging sector.

Council Conclusions on **Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training**, which endorse a Common Quality Assurance Framework for VET providers and systems.

A basic design and the way forward for implementation a **European credit transfer system for VET (ECVET)** is presented to the ministerial meeting at Maastricht, 14 December 2004.

What impact does the process have on national VET policies and systems which are the responsibility of the Member States?

Although such common references and principles do not create obligations for Member States, they contribute to developing mutual trust between the key players and encouraging reform. They take into account the diversity and specificities of VET systems in Europe. **Table 5: The relationship between national and EU policies for VET**

Source: Maastricht study, 2004 (DGVT inquiry).	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
EU15	Belgium-WA; Denmark; Finland; France; Germany; Ireland; Italy; Luxembourg; Netherlands; Portugal; Spain; Sweden; the UK	Austria; Belgium-FI; Greece
EU10	Czech Republic; Estonia; Hungary; Latvia; Lithuania; Slovenia	Cyprus; Malta; Poland; Slovakia
Candidate countries	Bulgaria; Romania	Turkey
EEA	Iceland Norway; Liechtenstein	

National agendas are taking on board approaches and instruments defined in Lisbon and Copenhagen for lifelong learning; cooperation between European countries in VET has increased. Growing coherence or compatibility between national and European priorities can be observed. However, progress towards the Copenhagen recommendations will be made according to varying sets of priorities. European countries will continue to develop reforms most appropriate to their own diverse traditions, challenges and aims.

How does the EU compare with third countries in terms of VET policies?

In Europe, there is a close association between graduation rates in upper secondary vocational streams and lower rates of early school leaving in many countries. Participation is higher than in the main competing countries worldwide and this is an important factor in reaching the target of 85% of 18 to 22 year olds in upper secondary education by 2010.

Progression to higher education is not always easy, a factor that contributes to the smaller percentage of higher education students enrolled in VET courses in Europe than in its competitor countries in North America and Asia.

The high proportion of low skilled people in the EU means that it remains a long way from becoming the world-leader in high-quality human capital. The proportion of low-skilled and unskilled people in the EU is considerably higher than in competitor countries such as Canada, Japan, South Korea and the USA. These countries and Australia have higher participation of adults in education, especially at tertiary level. Yet continuing vocational training is weak in many systems in the EU and participation rates are alarmingly low (8.5% in 2002).

In most European countries, total per capita public expenditure is on a par with Australia, Canada, South Korea and the US, and higher than in Japan. Total private expenditure, including that by households (the US: 0.5 %, South Korea: 1.0 %, Australia: 0.7 %) is much lower in Europe, with the exception of Germany and the UK.

How will the process reduce obstacles to the mobility of citizens and the possibility to transfer their qualifications and competences throughout Europe?

The lack of mutual recognition of qualifications and competences is a major obstacle to mobility within the EU and to the development of a European labour market. Essential tools for achieving this goal are: the European Qualifications Framework, the new Europass transparency framework for citizens and European Credit Transfer Systems for higher education and VET, together with more transnational placements financed under the new generation of education and training programmes. These tools have to be strengthened and widely implemented under the particular responsibility of countries and social partners. Most countries have not yet given sufficient attention to these issues. Regular monitoring, evaluation and feedback are needed to measure progress and improve the effectiveness of measures. To promote a closer match between education and training supply and labour market demand, strong links between VET institutes and the world of work are required and should be complemented by European approaches for early identification of new and changing skill needs. Strengthening training for entrepreneurship can also reduce high failure rates among business start-ups and contribute to job creation.

What are the instruments and programmes to implement the Copenhagen process?

Member States are encouraged to use the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund to support the development of VET. Subject to an agreement on the future EU structural funds, and in accordance with their policy orientations during 2007-2013, they should support the key role of education and training in promoting economic development and social cohesion. Similarly candidate countries have access to the pre-accession funds.

Leonardo da Vinci and the future integrated action programme in the field of Lifelong learning are used effectively and to the full to support the development, testing, and implementation of innovative actions to advance VET reform

How will the proposed future EC action programmes reinforce the EU's VET policies?

In July 2004, the European Commission adopted proposals for an integrated action programme in the field of lifelong learning. It is aimed at enhancing complementarity between policies in the field of education and training and social and economic strategies, and provides a tool to support both social cohesion and competitiveness.

The integrated lifelong learning programme builds on the current Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci programmes, the eLearning programme, the Europass initiative, and the various actions funded through the Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level and to support specific activities in the fields of education and training. The programme will better support policy developments at European level in education and training, notably in relation to the Lisbon strategy, and to the strategic objectives provided in the "Education and Training 2010" work programme.

It provides an instrument for spreading innovation and good practice that would otherwise remain locked within national borders. The mobility action has a clear positive impact not only on the individuals involved, but also on the institutions with which they are involved.

What is the purpose of the Maastricht conference (14-15 Dec.) and how is it related to the conclusions of the Kok report and the Lisbon agenda?

A review of progress and priorities is foreseen every two years. In preparation, the Commission launched the Maastricht study, Achieving the Lisbon goal: The contribution of VET to examine how participating countries are doing. On 14 December 2004, ministers, European social partners and the European Commission meet again in Maastricht to set out new priorities and strategies for European cooperation in VET. These are enshrined in the Maastricht Communiqué, which focuses on implementation at national level and ensuring the full contribution of national VET systems to achieving the Lisbon goals. National priorities are agreed in areas where action is considered most urgent, for example, meeting the training needs of people and groups at risk, updating the skills of the ageing workforce, developing open and flexible systems and pathways, improving the quality and relevance of the systems and learning environments.

At the main conference on 15 December stakeholders, including ministers, policy makers, trade union representatives, employers, providers and practitioners, will engage in debate on practical implementation of the Communiqué and its priorities, and taking into account the findings of the study. Workshops are organized around three thematic areas:

- The challenges of Lisbon: assessing the readiness of VET Systems, Institutions and Companies.
- Innovation in Teaching and Learning with a focus on the role of information and communications technology (ICT) and e-learning in promoting the lifelong development of skills for the labour market.
- Towards a European labour market: mobility, transparency and recognition

Significant examples of "best practice" in VET will be presented through an exhibition in Maastricht.

For more information:

<http://www.vetconference-maastricht2004.nl/>

→ Maastricht Communiqué + Synthesis