

**IRISH PRESIDENCY: CONFERENCE ON COMMON THEMES AND APPROACHES ACROSS
HE AND VET IN EUROPE, 8 MARCH 2004.**

**CONCLUSIONS OF N. VAN DER PAS, DIRECTOR GENERAL
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1. General points relevant to all workshops

There is an urgent need for more cooperation and communication between the main actors in VET and HE, in the context of Education and Training 2010. Successful initiatives should be brought together from Copenhagen and Bologna in order to promote mutual learning and greater compatibility.

The issue of stakeholder involvement in the Copenhagen process needs to be addressed. A better link must be established between policy and providers / practitioners – this is important for the credibility of the process and for effective implementation at the national level.

2. Quality Assurance

We are not aiming for a single European system for quality assurance covering HE and VET, but there is a need for a platform for exchange and mutual learning.

Practical proposals would be 1. to establish regular cooperation between networks of agencies for quality assurance in HE and VET at European level. Such cooperation could focus on the development of common methodologies and criteria; and 2. to organise peer review on which both sectors are represented.

3. Credit systems

The ultimate aim should be to have a single system of credit transfer and accumulation for lifelong learning.

This means that from the outset the mechanics of credit transfer (based on notional workload and the use of credit), need to be compatible across both HE and VET. At the same time specificities, for example in relation to reference levels and stakeholders, also need to be addressed.

An important starting point would be to develop principles for credit transfer, which are applicable to both HE and VET. These principles are crucial in relation to ensuring compatibility between the systems, and in securing stakeholder acceptance.

4. Qualification frameworks

It is crucial to aim for a single qualifications framework for lifelong learning at European level. This is essential for the development of the European labour market

A comprehensive framework is of course more difficult to implement, but makes more sense in the long-run from the learner's point of view.

In many countries stakeholders are calling for such a European framework in order to mobilise and guide reform and the development of new national frameworks, whilst not imposing on Member States responsibilities. The development of a European framework should draw on the experiences of those countries that already have national frameworks.

The European framework should at least provide the skeleton on which national frameworks can build. This means that we need agreement on reference levels as a first step. Agreement by end of 2004 on common reference levels for VET, based on learning outcomes, is essential.

A specific working group, representing both higher education and VET within the Education and Training 2010 work programme, should be given the responsibility to develop a blueprint for the European qualifications framework as soon as possible.

5. New models in HE and VET

VET already plays an important role in the tertiary sector, the HE-VET distinction is therefore not always valid. We need to focus more on the vocational aspects of higher education, for example in relation to the development of qualifications and competences at sectoral level. This is essential in order to make HE more relevant to the European labour market.

This means that at higher education level a shift in perspective from providers to learning outcomes and competences is essential. (The Tuning project has moved in this direction, as have a number of initiatives in VET – these experiences have to be brought together).

It is important to ensure the participation of social partners in the definition of learning outcomes at higher education level – traditionally these are determined by academics from an institutional perspective.