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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

from : the General Secretariat of the Council

to : the Council

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Subject : Draft Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning

Delegations will find enclosed a text of the above Draft Conclusions as they result from the discussion of the Permanent Representatives Committee on 14 May 2004. At the end of the meeting the President found that, apart a DK Parliamentary scrutiny reservation, there was a unanimous agreement on the text.

Should this agreement be confirmed, the Council and the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council could adopt the enclosed conclusions.

Draft Conclusions
of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States
meeting within the Council on Common European Principles
for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning

THE COUNCIL AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE
MEMBER STATES MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL,

Aware that

In the context of the principle of learning throughout life, the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning aim to make visible and to value the full range of knowledge and competences held by an individual, irrespective of where or how these have been acquired. The identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning take place inside and outside formal education and training, in the workplace and in civil society.

Identification and validation are key instruments in enabling the transfer and acceptance of all learning outcomes across different settings. Identification records and makes visible the individual's learning outcomes. This does not result in a formal certificate or diploma, but it may provide the basis for such formal recognition. Validation is based on the assessment of the individual's learning outcomes and may result in a certificate or diploma¹.

Education, training and employability were recognised by the European Lisbon Council in March 2000 as an integral part of economic and social policies needed to attain the strategic goal of Europe becoming the world's most dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010.

In follow-up to the report on the concrete future objectives of European education and training systems (March 2001), the detailed work programme adopted by the Council (14 June 2002), called for the development of ways to officially validate non-formal learning experiences.

¹ The term validation is used in a very specific sense in the above text but is used differently in the Member States. For some, the term is broadly used to encompass the identification as well as the assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

The Commission White Paper entitled '*A new impetus for European Youth*' (21 November 2001) which set out a new framework for European co-operation on youth affairs, stressed the importance of non-formal learning and education.

The Council Resolution on Lifelong Learning (27 June 2002) invites the Member States to encourage co-operation and effective measures to validate learning outcomes.

The European social partners' '*Framework of actions for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications*' (14 March 2002) underlines the point that the recognition and validation of competences and qualifications is both a shared objective and a main priority for action at the European level.

The Copenhagen Declaration (30 November 2002) and the Council Resolution (19 December 2002) on the promotion of enhanced European co-operation in vocational education and training acknowledged that priority should be given to developing a set of common principles regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning with the aim of ensuring greater comparability between approaches in different countries and at different levels.

The Council and Commission Joint Interim Report (26 February 2004) to the Spring European Council, '*Education and Training 2010*', states that the development of common European references and principles can usefully support national policies. Although such common principles do not create obligations for Member States, they contribute to developing mutual trust between the key players and encouraging reform. The Joint Interim Report specifically calls for the development of common European principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Recognise that

The Member States, the Commission, the EEA-EFTA and accession countries and the social partners at European level, in following-up the Copenhagen Declaration, the Council Resolution and the work programme on the Future Objectives, have made progress in developing common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning serves the needs of the individual learner. They support social integration, employability and the development and use of human resources in civic, social and economic contexts. They also meet the specific needs of those individuals who seek integration or re-integration into education and training, the labour market and society.

A diversity of approaches and practices of identification and validation exists and is emerging at European national, regional and local level.

A diversity of stakeholders is also involved. They are, amongst others, providers and competent authorities in formal education and training, social partners in the workplace and non-governmental organisations in civil society. While identification is a matter for all stakeholders, as well as for the individual, in a certain number of Member States validation is only a matter for the competent authorities in accordance with national legislation.

Stress that

Common European principles are necessary to encourage and guide the development of high-quality, trustworthy approaches and systems for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

They are necessary to ensure the comparability and wide acceptance of different approaches and systems in the Member States. They also enable the transfer and acceptance of all learning outcomes across different settings. They take particular account of the needs and entitlements of individuals.

The following common European principles, are addressed to the Member States, the Commission and stakeholders who are engaged in the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning. They are, to be applied on a voluntary basis. They fully respect the rights, responsibilities and competences of the Member States and stakeholders. They inform the development of systems and approaches to identification and validation and do not prescribe any particular approach or system.

The common European principles reflect the cooperative work at European level in follow-up to the Copenhagen Declaration, the Council Resolution of 19 December 2002, the work programmes on the Future Objectives and, in particular, the Joint Interim Report “ *Education and Training 2010* “, February 2004. The principles are set out under the following main headings:

- *Individual entitlements*

The identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning should, in principle, be a voluntary matter for the individual. There should be equal access and equal and fair treatment for all individuals. The privacy and rights of the individual are to be respected.

- *Obligations of stakeholders*

Stakeholders, should establish, in accordance with their rights, responsibilities and competences, systems and approaches for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning. These should include appropriate quality assurance mechanisms. Stakeholders should provide guidance, counselling and information about these systems and approaches to individuals.

- *Confidence and trust*

The processes, procedures and criteria for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance mechanisms.

- *Credibility and legitimacy*

Systems and approaches for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning should respect the legitimate interests ensure the balanced participation of the relevant stakeholders.

The process of assessment should be impartial and mechanisms should be put in place to avoid any conflict of interest. The professional competence of those who carry out assessment should also be assured.

INVITE, IN RELATION TO THE IDENTIFICATION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING, THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE COMPETENCIES

To disseminate and promote the use of the common European principles.

To encourage the European social partners, in the context of social dialogue, to use and adapt the common European principles for the specific needs of the workplace.

To encourage non-governmental organisations engaged in providing lifelong learning opportunities to use and adapt the common European principles as appropriate.

To support the exchange of experiences and mutual learning including the development of a European Inventory on the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

To strengthen co-operation with international organisations with a view to achieving synergies in this field.

To develop and support coherent and comparable ways of presenting the results of the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning at European level, and consider how the existing instruments in the Europass framework for transparency of qualifications and competences can contribute to this.

To consider how the common European principles could support ongoing work on credit transfer and accumulation, quality assurance and guidance and, in general, contribute to the development of a European Qualifications Framework which was called for in the Joint Interim Report of the Commission and Council, February 2004.

To support the development of quality assurance mechanisms and, in particular, to consider how to promote the professional development of those who carry out assessment, for example, through support networks aimed at developing and disseminating good practice.