Vocational training: comparability of vocational training qualifications between Member States (repeal. Decision 85/368/EEC)

2007/0234(COD) - 06/11/2007 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to repeal Council Decision 85/368/EEC on the comparability of vocational training qualifications between the Member States of the EC.

PROPOSED ACT: Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council.

CONTENT: The current proposal forms part of the simplification programme within the Commission Legislative and Work Programme for 2007, which aims to simplify the regulatory environment for business and other stakeholders. The Commission considers that Council Decision 85/368/EEC is redundant and should therefore be repealed for the following reasons:

-implementation of the Decision has not been effective in achieving the comparability of vocational qualifications for the benefit of workers seeking employment in another Member State.

-the methods and approach used to describe and compare qualifications provided for in Decision 85/368 /EEC differ from those currently applied in education and training systems;

-the Decision is superseded by the adoption of the Recommendation on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning.

Council Decision 85/368/EEC introduced a system for the comparability of vocational education and training (VET) qualifications. In practice the system proposed by the Decision proved cumbersome and implementation at best partial. Procedures for defining job descriptions and comparing qualifications, involving the Commission, Cedefop and Member State experts, were established. However, a report prepared for the Commission in 1990 detailed the difficulties in this process and acknowledged the slow pace of progress - by 1990 data on the comparability of qualifications had been published for only 5 of the 19 specified sectors, covering 66 occupations. The process of recording, describing and comparing qualifications had proven slow and unwieldy.

The Decision also proved too inflexible to adapt to changing needs. Although it referred to the need to adapt to new situations brought about by technological change, the Commission, Cedefop and the Member States came to accept that the centralised approach chosen, and the constant and rapid evolution of qualifications, soon made the published information out of date. The 1990 report had emphasised that the system would only be effective if used by Member States. In reality the work carried out at the European level had little impact at the level of national and sectoral stakeholders.

For all these reasons, implementation of the activities specified in the Decision was soon abandoned.

The European Qualifications Framework, or EQF, will seek to replicate the broad objective of the 1985 Decision, in aiming to facilitate the comparison of qualifications and thereby the mobility of workers. In comparing the two, the Commission points out that the 1985 Decision took a top-down approach requiring intensive co-operation between experts from different countries to update the list, amend descriptions of occupations and qualifications, and add new qualifications. The fact that only a limited field of occupations was covered reflects the impracticality of such an approach.

The EQF adopts a voluntary and decentralised approach where the Community provides a common reference point while detailed decisions are left to competent bodies at national and sectoral level. The arrangements envisaged for the referencing work within countries are not unduly burdensome. Countries relate their levelsof qualifications to the EQF, so that any qualification falling within a particular level in their national framework or system can be given an EQF level rating. The EQF thus provides a common language to describe and understand qualifications. The national decisions on placing qualifications in the EQF levels are then submitted to the EQF Advisory Group which ensures the quality of the process. The EQF thus addresses the limitations of the 1985 Decision at two levels: by focusing on improving the transparency of qualifications, and by introducing a decentralised approach for co-operation more appropriate to the increasing complexity of qualifications in Europe. While the EQF will be the instrument which most closely pursues the aims and functions the 1985 Decision could not fulfil, there are other instruments and measures at European level which promote transparency and increase transferability of qualifications. These include Europass, the European Credit Transfer System for higher education (ECTS), the 2004 Council Conclusions on the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning and the Ploteus portal.

Lastly, the Commission points out that the mutual recognition of qualifications in the area of regulated professions is ensured by Directive 2005/36/EC.