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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION

on recognition of qualifications for
academic and professional purposes

SUMMARY

The recognition of training qualifications at the service of a European area for the professions and for training

The most tangible aspect for the citizen of the Community of no internal frontiers is that of free movement. The right of residence, the right to work, whether as a salaried worker or self-employed, within the territory of a Member State other than one's own, and the mobility of students and young people, are the Community-established precedents from which the European citizen can now benefit. Article 8A of the Treaty on European Union, springing from the fundamental principle of non-discrimination on grounds of nationality, relates the free movement of persons to the idea of citizenship of the Union. The concept of free movement is thus at the root of the functioning of the European area for the professions and training, for which recognition of qualifications for academic and professional purposes is the principal mode of action.

Community experience in the area of recognition of academic and professional qualifications is particularly rich. There are, amongst these fields of recognition, characterised by different legal bases, certain differences determined by the nature of the purpose to be pursued: instruments for professional recognition, essentially of a legal nature, have as their objective the establishment of a European area for the profession; instruments for academic recognition, of an exhortational nature, aim to reinforce the European dimension of teaching.

However, the two areas of recognition have one fundamental objective in common: the elimination of obstacles to professional and student mobility arising from the existence of twelve national education systems. The mechanisms used to overcome these obstacles react to a common need: to give the person coming from one Member State and in possession of a qualification from another Member State similar possibilities of operating in the Community environment to those available to him or her in the Member State where the qualification was obtained.

Within the European Union, professional and academic recognition is the means by which the distinctiveness of national systems of education, guarantors of national cultural identities, is reconciled with the right to mobility for European citizens who wish to give a European dimension to their training and to their professional activity, be it as independent agents or salaried personnel.

The search for a greater interactivity between the various objectives of recognition of qualifications appears to be necessary. It is, in consequence, helpful to assess how and in what ways:

- the actions concerning the academic recognition of qualifications and periods of study between the Member States and, more generally, cooperation in education and professional/vocational training, whether existing now, or envisaged under the new Articles 126 and 127 of the Treaty on European Union, can facilitate free movement of professionals;

- the systems for recognition of qualifications for professional purposes, set up further to the Directives allowed for by Article 57 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, can, conversely, facilitate mobility taking place during studies and, more generally, increase the effectiveness of actions meant to stimulate cooperation in education and professional/vocational training.

There are several cross-over points between these two areas from which can be drawn benefit.

- Recognition for professional purposes is largely based, practically speaking, on university-level training. Sometimes there is direct compatibility, in that the qualification gained in itself has value for practising professionally in the home State where it has been awarded, or that a qualification awarded in the host State can confer rights to professional practice in this State. When the activity is not a regulated profession in the State concerned (and therefore not subject to any Directive), the qualification acts as a mark of professional credentials.
- Recognition for academic purposes inevitably has a certain impact for the profession. Once a university has agreed recognition for a period of study, or of an intermediate award to allow further study, this Decision indirectly favours eventual professional practice in that State.
- The importance for and necessity of continued training helps to break down marked divisions between professional activity and further study or updating. Professional experience itself is an element of training which must be taken into consideration.

In order to benefit from these contact points it is particularly helpful to coordinate actions relating to recognition for professional and academic purposes, and make them more consistent one with the other. While continuing to respect their specificities, it should be possible to develop a series of synergies to further a real European area for the professions and for training.

Four fields of action for developing synergies between academic and professional recognition.

This Communication is a first reflection on the development of synergies between the different types of recognition of qualifications. The Commission intends to involve the other institutions in this debate and to stimulate thorough discussion at all levels in the Member States.

In launching this debate, the Commission has identified four paths to follow in order to develop the synergies between the different types of recognition of qualifications.

These are as follows:

- information
- creation of academic and professional networks
- joint adaptation of courses
- evaluation of quality

The development of high quality information sources would contribute to the knowledge of the various educational systems of the Community. The understanding of the teaching methodologies of other countries would help cooperation at the level of universities by helping to reinforce the principle of mutual trust leading to recognition of qualifications for professional purposes.

Various information mechanisms have been identified: the creation of national reports covering content of courses; the organisation of the professions together with their access routes; the creation of a directory of regulated professions in the Member States; the setting up, from existing information and documentation centres, of a network of multi-purpose national centres; the organisation of information seminars.

The establishment of academic and professional networks would be a core mechanism for exchange

of information between the various parties concerned as well as for obtaining a deeper knowledge of the issues surrounding the various forms of recognition.

Such fora for academics and professionals, whose setting up would be left to the initiative of the players concerned, would allow debate both on course development and development of the profession concerned in order to anticipate future needs.

Joint adaptation of courses, already successfully operating under the ERASMUS, COMETT and LINGUA programmes, should be reinforced. The Commission will encourage initiatives to adapt teaching or the professions, especially those which relate to the regulated professions which come under the sphere of the general systems of professional recognition. These initiatives will help reduce existing differences in content of the various courses and increase the amount of automatic recognition in the overall process.

The assessment of quality is another tool which allows the development of synergies. Training itself will be the principle beneficiary of this exercise, which will provide the opportunity for each establishment to identify its weaknesses and to show up its strong points. Strengthening of mutual trust is supported by the operation of quality assessment systems in the Member States. Bringing assessment systems, current or future, into contact with each other, and including members of the professional and business world, will be one way of facilitating recognition.

CONCLUSION

Based on these four fields, the Commission seeks to strengthen the initiatives which it has already undertaken in this area and to establish new ones coming under its competence. In parallel, the Commission wishes to launch a debate to deepen at all levels this reflection on synergies between the two areas of recognition. The Commission welcomes, before 1 July 1995, any contribution from the other institutions, the Member States, and the interested parties, in order that the construction of an open space for the professions and for training may be progressed.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the ways forward proposed in the White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment for regenerating economic development within Europe is adaptation of the education and vocational training systems. According to the White Paper, "in an extension of existing programmes and regulations, and against the backdrop of the implementation of the guidelines for future education and training programmes, the first objective should be to develop still further the European dimension of education", particularly by establishing "a genuine European area of – and market in – skills and training by increasing the transparency, and improving the mutual recognition of, qualifications and skills"¹.

Further, the Commission in its White Paper on European Social Policy - a way forward for the Union², having established the importance of these issues for the free movement of persons, envisages evaluating the measures already undertaken at the level of the Union in support of mutual recognition of qualifications. This also covers measures concerning correspondance of qualifications with a view to exchanging experience and information, and greater transparency for both employers and employees. It also hopes to encourage academic recognition of qualifications and periods of study in order to foster student and researcher mobility.

The Community institutions have already taken numerous measures to help improve recognition of training qualifications between Member States, thereby removing obstacles to the free movement of persons arising from the diversity of national education systems. The recognition of qualifications for academic purposes which has developed through bilateral and multilateral agreements and under the ERASMUS programme has enabled students to take advantage of periods of study in other Member States without disrupting their academic career. Similarly, recognition of qualifications for professional purposes, organised under various Directives, has enabled persons completing their vocational training in one country to practise their profession in another. Measures on academic recognition and vocational/professional recognition have not, however, been planned and undertaken as a coherent whole.

The Commission has now, from the basis of a study commissioned from a group of experts, established a means for deeper reflection on identifying and encouraging the possibilities for coordinating the two types of recognition. This involves representatives of both academic and professional circles and the members of the various committees involved in operating the two systems being brought together for the first time in an ad hoc advisory committee³. To streamline the debate, this group initially restricted its deliberations to higher education qualifications and those professions requiring qualifications at this level.

The intention in this Communication is to give an overview of steps already taken by the Community in the areas of academic and professional recognition and use this as a basis for analysing the similarities, differences and points of contact between the various forms of recognition to establish the potential for coordination between them, while respecting the various competences of these two domains of recognition. Finally, this Communication makes several proposals for concerted action by the various parties involved in recognising academic and professional qualifications in order to improve their general functioning.

¹ White Paper Growth, Competitiveness, Employment, Chapter 7, point 7.4

² see Chapter IV, point 7

³ This committee also included representatives of countries linked to the European Community through the Agreement on the European Economic Area, representatives of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the Union of Industrial and Employers Confederations of Europe (UNICE)

A COMMUNITY MEASURES IN THE AREAS OF ACADEMIC RECOGNITION AND PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION

The distinction generally made between recognition of qualifications for academic purposes and for professional purposes does not give a sufficiently clear picture either of the various needs in the area which have gradually surfaced within the European Community, or of the steps taken to meet them. A more detailed classification has therefore been used in this Communication, comprising four subcategories.

In the professional sphere, anyone obtaining one or more qualifications in a particular country entitling them to practise a specific profession in that country can, without difficulty, use those qualifications to enter that profession in the country concerned. Anyone wishing to enter their profession in another country, however, will in most cases find themselves in one of two situations, as follows:

1) *De jure* professional recognition

Authorisation to work in a specific profession in a particular country is legally subject to the possession of one or more relevant diplomas issued in that country. In this case, the host country assesses how far qualifications obtained abroad correspond to those required at home and, if they are not considered equivalent, the candidate is required to repeat all or part of his training. This aspect of transnational relations was identified back in 1957 by the authors of the EEC Treaty as one of the obstacles which must be eliminated if a common market were to be achieved. With this in mind, the Community was empowered to adopt Directives establishing systems for professional recognition. Today, all regulated professions requiring specific qualifications under the system of any Member State are accessible to citizens of the Union who have obtained their qualifications in another Member State, and this by virtue of a set of Directives, some specific, applying to particular regulated professions⁴, some general covering other professions of this type⁵;

2) *De facto* professional recognition.

The profession is not regulated in the host country. The person concerned faces a different problem, namely that the host country is unfamiliar with his "foreign" qualifications. Such candidates are at a disadvantage relative to their competitors who have been trained in the host country. This handicap can only be reduced by improving information on existing national training so as to provide a basis in each Member State for the professional recognition of the various diplomas awarded throughout the Community which qualify the holder for the same profession.

In the field of education, the European Community cannot adopt the same objective as in the professional sphere of establishing a single market encompassing the entire range of training available in all educational establishments in the Member States and the entire range of demand for courses. The aim here must be to give a European dimension to the national education systems while maintaining their specific national characteristics. Recognition of academic qualifications can here be divided into two subcategories:

⁴ For example the Directives on doctors adopted in 1975, which were subsequently legally encoded following many amendments. Cf. Directive 93/16/EEC, 5 April 1993, OJ L 165, 7.7.1993.

⁵ Directive 89/48/EEC, 21.12.1988 on a general system for the recognition of higher education diplomas awarded on completion of vocational training of at least three years' duration. OJ L 19, 24.1.1989.

3) cumulative academic recognition

This system encourages the traditional form of mobility whereby a student completes a course of studies in one country, obtaining the corresponding diploma, and progresses to the next stage in a different country which recognises the qualification obtained in the home country:

4) Academic recognition by substitution

Under this system, the student takes certain subjects integral to his/her course in another Member State, the study periods spent abroad being recognised by the educational establishment with which the student has originally registered. This system is likely to be of interest to a larger number of students and has the advantage of developing close cooperation between educational establishments in different Member States.

These considerations were outlined in a pilot programme on education adopted in 1976 by a Resolution of the Council and of the Ministers of Education meeting within the Council,⁶ the Community having no specific powers in this area. They were subsequently affirmed in 1987 by the student mobility scheme ERASMUS, adopted by a Council Decision⁷ based on Articles 128 and 235 of the EEC Treaty. This programme gives priority to the second type of student mobility, offering grants to higher education establishments and students participating in transnational inter-university cooperation programmes (ICP), both on condition that the period of study abroad is recognised on a substitution basis. In view of its considerable success, the ERASMUS programme is to be extended in the form of a new Community programme, SOCRATES⁸, proposed by virtue of the new powers acquired by the European Community in the field of education and vocational training under the Treaty on European Union (Articles 126 and 127 of the EC Treaty).

Any general description of Community measures on academic and professional recognition would be incomplete without mention of two important complementary measures:

— outlawing of discrimination based on nationality. Any such discrimination standing in the way of the free movement of economic agents was eliminated by Articles 48, 52 and 59 of the EEC Treaty which were made directly applicable by the Court of Justice in 1974. Discrimination prejudicing access to vocational training, such as higher enrolment fees for foreign nationals, were only considered to fall within the scope of Article 7 of the EEC Treaty from 1985 ("Gravier" case 293/83);

— the right of entry and residence within the territory of any Member State for nationals of other Member States. For the purposes of engaging in economic activity, these rights were guaranteed by Directives adopted by the Council between 1964 and 1973, based mainly on Articles 49 and 56 of the EEC Treaty, but this was not extended to students until two successive Council Directives, the first issued in 1990, pursuant to Article 235 of the Treaty⁹, and the second in 1993 applying Article 7 of the Treaty¹⁰, replacing the previous one which had been declared void by the Court of Justice.

⁶ Resolution of 9 February 1976 comprising an action programme in the field of education. OJ C 38, 19.2.1976

⁷ Council Decision of 15 June 1987, as amended on 14 December 1989, adopting the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS). OJ L 166, 25.6.1987 and L 395, 30.12.1989.

⁸ Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and Council establishing the Community action programme Socrates, OJ C 66, 3.3.1994 and C 164, 16.6.1994.

⁹ Council Directive of 28 June 1990, on the right of residence for students (90/366/EEC) OJ L 180 of 13.7.1990

¹⁰ Council Directive of 29 October 1993, on the right of residence for students (93/96/EEC) OJ L 317 of 18.12.1993

This brief survey of activity over the first thirty-five years of the European Community prompts three observations.

- 1 Recognition of qualifications, for either professional or academic purposes, rests on two separate legal bases, both including three identical individual rights – non-discrimination on the basis of nationality, the right of entry and the right of residence – but which apply to two different areas, that of professional activities and that of studies.
- 2 In 1958, the Community received the powers necessary for ensuring freedom of movement for economic agents within a common market, and also had certain powers in the field of vocational training under Article 128 of the EEC Treaty, which came within the chapter on "social policy" and which was interpreted at the time as applying only to technical training, the Community having no powers under the EEC Treaty in the field of education. This was a real omission in a Treaty which, while concerned with setting up an economic Community, also aimed to bring the peoples within the Community ever closer together. Over the years, this became increasingly clear, and all the Community institutions, including the Court of Justice, began to take steps to remedy the situation. This imbalance between Community powers in the economy and in education resulted in action on academic recognition being undertaken much later than that on recognition for vocational purposes, and prevented the two areas from being developed as a coherent whole.
- 3 The situation has now changed, the Treaty on European Union having just given the Community explicit powers in the areas of education and vocational training (new Articles 126 and 127 of the EC Treaty) particularly with a view to encouraging academic recognition. The question now is therefore whether, despite the differences between the four types of recognition, there is sufficient similarity for a certain amount of joint action to be planned which would be likely to improve their operation.

B DIFFERENCES, SIMILARITIES AND COMPLEMENTARITY IN THE VARIOUS TYPES OF RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

Two analyses are needed to establish the points of contact and divergence between the four types of recognition, the first to look at the actual situation with its specificities, which highlights the differences, and the second to establish the similarities through identifying common characteristics. Juxtaposition of the two will show where they can be combined to mutual advantage.

1 The differences

The first analysis prompts the conclusion that the policy objectives of professional and academic recognition are quite different, the former being a way of establishing a single market offering each individual wider scope for employment in his given occupation, ultimately generating greater economic prosperity than several closed markets, while the latter aims to give a European dimension to education in each Member State, thereby improving the quality of education in the Community generally. Obviously, different methods are required to achieve these different objectives. This is clearly illustrated in the examples below:

- a) The effort to establish a single market has created an entitlement benefitting individuals, based on the Treaty, whereby vocational qualifications acquired in one Member State must, for the purposes of employment in a given profession, be taken into account and be fully or partially recognised in another Member State. To encourage the development of the European dimension in education, the Community has tended to use incentives, mainly financial, addressed in the first place to the educational establishments invited to participate, and subsequently to the students, to enable them to exploit the new training possibilities created through this participation. Under this particular form of Community action, academic recognition of training diplomas is not an individual right drawn from the Treaty, but rather the fruit of voluntary cooperation and Community financial support, for which it is a precondition.
- b) With a view to completing the single market, Article 57 of the EC Treaty provides for adoption of binding legislation to institute *de jure* professional recognition and, if necessary, to standardise the national training courses concerned, while the new Article 126 of the EC Treaty encourages the development of the European dimension in education, including the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study, expressly excluding obligatory harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States.
- c) The two categories of academic recognition and *de jure* professional recognition stem from legislation, since mobility in all three cases is governed by regulations on curricula or the right to exercise the professions concerned. *De facto* professional recognition has a different basis, however, being rather a matter of growing social awareness constituting a sociological phenomenon which can be encouraged by appropriate action but not legally imposed.
- d) In the absence of specific historical links between Member States, *de jure* professional recognition is generally based on comparison of the level, duration and content of training courses. This method is generally used for the purposes of academic recognition of diplomas, but is inappropriate for *de jure* professional recognition from an institutional standpoint in a Community of Member States on the way to becoming a union, because in this case a profession organised on a national basis but covering the same activities in

all countries and destined for organisation on a European basis will automatically have to accept that members of that profession in each Member State provide services of equivalent quality and that their training must also be considered equivalent. This psychological development has given rise to a new legal construction according to which any person competent to practise a profession in one Member State is presumed to be adequately qualified to practise the same profession in all the other Member States. In this situation, *de jure* professional recognition is based mainly on a comparison not of training but of fields of activity.

2 The similarities

The first analysis can only give a full account of the reality of a complex situation if it is counterbalanced by a further analysis to establish the characteristics common to all four types of recognition of qualifications.

- a) All four appear to be inspired by the same principle of remedying the similarly negative effect, deriving from the same cause, on the free movement of persons within the Union. The coexistence of twelve national education systems inevitably creates obstacles to the mobility of both professionals and students, if the person concerned, having been trained in one Member State, wishes to work or study in another. The way to overcome these obstacles lies precisely in the four forms of professional and academic recognition which all depend on the single principle of the host Member State accepting the validity of a (short or extended) training period in another Member State.
- b) In practice, recognition of qualifications for professional purposes most often applies to university education. Occasionally, there can be a direct equivalence, where the diploma certifies a certain level of practical and theoretical training and in itself qualifies the holder to practise a regulated profession. In the case of non-regulated activities, the diploma serves as evidence of professional credentials.
- c) The importance of and need for continuing training is helping to blur the distinction between professional activity and continued studies with a view to obtaining higher professional qualifications.
- d) Finally, at different stages in their career, the same people can be affected by different forms of recognition. They may wish to exercise their right to freedom of movement either to pursue their studies or make professional use of their qualifications, or both successively.

3 The points of contact

Having analysed the question of academic and professional recognition from two opposing angles, the next step is to identify clearly the points at which they can be complementary in order to establish which measures are most likely to allow coordination. While their differences prevent them from being interchangeable, the four types of recognition do interact to a limited extent.

- a) Cumulative academic recognition and *de jure* professional recognition show the most similarities. In principle, however, they are legally distinct and are not interchangeable as they serve different ends. This is why in most Member States, decisions on academic recognition for further study are taken by educational establishments or the government department to which they are responsible, while *de jure* professional recognition is the responsibility of the authorities in charge of the regulated professions and, while in some Member States the authorities responsible for the recognition of academic qualifications

are prepared to carry out a similar function to facilitate practice of a particular profession, in others they are not.

- b) In view of the failure up till now of attempts to facilitate *de facto* professional recognition, after the first general system for recognising diplomas was adopted in 1988, the idea emerged of regulating the non-regulated professions to enable them to be covered by the same system. Such a proposal is obviously extreme and must be rejected. This is a further illustration of the fact that it is impossible to replace one system of recognition with another.
- c) *De jure* professional recognition has no effect on cumulative academic recognition except in the case where a practising professional decides to take up further study in the host Member State which has recognised his/her professional qualifications.
- d) The two types of academic recognition can facilitate the two types of professional recognition, but only where they apply to a significant proportion of the training which will subsequently be taken into account for professional purposes. However, as a result of the Community institutions' policy in the ERASMUS programme, the most common situation in the academic sphere is recognition by substitution and, where these concern short periods of study, they are unlikely to have much bearing on professional recognition based on theoretical and practical training of three, four, five years or more.

On two other levels, however, one political, one practical, there is an obvious link between academic and professional recognition:

- a) In the European Union, the four types of recognition of qualifications are the means by which the specific characteristics of national education systems, which safeguard national identity, can be reconciled permanently with the right to freedom of movement to which all citizens of the European Union seeking a European dimension to their training or professional activities are entitled.
- b) While the possibility of coordination through direct interaction between the various types of recognition is limited due to the specific nature of each, it may be possible to create and develop a certain synergy stemming from activities which improve the functioning of several types, thus increasing their efficiency and reducing their cost.

Various proposals along these lines are described below.

C MAIN AREAS FOR ACTION TO DEVELOP COORDINATION BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

Four main areas for action have been identified, aiming to create coordination between the different types of recognition of qualifications:

Information, academic and professional networks, jointly agreed adaptation of training and the assessment of training quality.

1 Information

The diverse nature of the education systems in Europe means that detailed knowledge is required not only of how courses are organised but also of the traditions and general ethos of each system. Understanding another country's methods depends on being well informed, and facilitates cooperation between universities as well as helping to consolidate mutual confidence as a basic prerequisite for the recognition of qualifications for professional purposes.

Exchange of information and cooperation between the organisations responsible for information are included in the activities envisaged in Articles 126 and 127 of the EC Treaty and the secondary legislation derived from Article 57 EC. The Community action programmes in the fields of education and training, SOCRATES and LEONARDO, are designed to provide a systematic and effective basis for increasing this cooperation.

Moreover, the development of trans-European networks, the interconnections of networks, and interactions between systems, will allow citizens and European organisations freely to have access to a common information area. Teleworking, distance teaching and the establishment of a university network have all been identified by the Commission as priority areas of application:

It is essential for there to be an overview of existing material, given that these are quite extensive, whether in the form of studies or databanks. This overview will facilitate the best use of existing material as well as enabling new information needs to be identified.

- a) Quality information sources must be developed which can be used for the recognition of qualifications for various purposes by the parties concerned (universities, professions, competent authorities, etc.).

Information for this purpose could be improved by instituting (or developing) national reports with reliable data on the content of training, the organisation of the profession(s) concerned, access routes to those professions, and the fields of activity they cover in the different Member States. For the information to be as precise as possible, the reports should be drawn up by discipline, using a standard structure. This would be particularly apt for the professions which are not covered by one of the seven sectoral systems for recognition of diplomas (the medical and paramedical professions and architects).

For professional recognition, specialist national reports have been created for most of the professions covered by the sectoral Directives (eg doctors). Similar work could be undertaken for certain other professions.

The Commission is currently organising, under the ERASMUS programme, evaluations of university cooperation in fifteen subject areas. These evaluations can be seen as preparation for national reports on the organisation of studies by discipline in each Member State.

To enable the general systems of recognition to be applied properly, it would also be helpful to draw up a directory of regulated professions in the Member States, listing their respective fields of activity. The Commission is currently examining the feasibility of such a directory, which could complement the vademecum on the general system for the recognition of vocational qualifications (Directives 89/48 and 92/51/EEC), currently being prepared.

- b) This information would facilitate and extend the activities of the existing documentation and information points (National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC), contact points for the implementation of the Directives on recognition, and the national EURYDICE units).

At the initiative of the Commission, coordination of the activities of these various bodies has already been undertaken at Community level with the organisation of joint meetings. A desirable next step would be to branch out from these documentation and information points and gradually set up national centres operating as a general information bureaux.

The function of such national general information bureaux would be to provide essential information on studying or working in the Member State concerned or on how to take advantage of the right to freedom of movement in another Member State. The service would be available to the various parties involved in the recognition of qualifications, students and professionals. A network of national information bureaux could then be set up, drawing upon the ORTELIUS data bank currently being compiled on higher education, which should also include data on the regulated professions.

The information bureaux must have access to adequate financial and human resources to enable them to function properly. In order to achieve the best dissemination of information on recognition of qualifications and training, there must be coordination at Community level with the Euro-Info-Centres, the EURES network and all the other networks.

- c) Information seminars could be organised in the Member States for the parties responsible for recognition of qualifications nationally, in order to disseminate the results obtained in respect of both recognition for continued study and in the professional domain. This would be a practical way of coordinating the various measures taken and ensuring a multiplier effect.

These seminars would cover: training systems in the various Member States, the way in which professions are organised, systems for recognition of diplomas, Community action on education, national measures for implementing Directives, the European credit transfer system (ECTS) and mechanisms for recognition giving access to further study. A general approach to the requirements and methods of recognition could be combined with a more specific approach by discipline.

This would provide a basis for more comprehensive knowledge of other national systems and awareness of the actual possibilities offered over the European area to holders of a qualification obtained in the Member State concerned, whether for the purposes of further study or of practising a profession.

The seminars would be open to representatives of the authorities responsible for the recognition systems, international relations and admissions offices of universities, representatives of ERASMUS ICPs and other partnerships, and representatives of professional organisations.

2 Academic and professional networks

Another positive step would be to set up discipline-based European Fora for academics and professionals, along with their respective administrative authorities from the various Member States. This would enable representatives of the professions to gain a more accurate picture of what to expect from holders of qualifications issued in other Member States and to find out about current and prospective innovations. The representatives on the academic side would find out more about how professions operate in other Member States, the needs identified and probable future trends.

As a whole, this would provide a good basis for forecasting developments in both the training and professional areas, and thus improve the capacity to anticipate requirements, the need for which was stressed in the White Paper. There are many questions which could usefully be discussed at European level: How is training likely to develop in a given field, in view of social requirements and actual or potential scientific progress? What new disciplines and professions are likely to develop or be created? What are the future conditions likely to be for professional practice for a given group of activities? These are the kind of questions which could be discussed jointly within the academic and professional networks.

These networks' function should be to coordinate or conduct debate on these topics, the results then being circulated to professional organisations, universities, national authorities responsible for the recognition of qualifications and any other interested parties.

The creation of the networks should be left to the initiative of those directly involved and their activities should receive funding in the most appropriate form from the Member States and the Community. New actions envisaged under the new Community programmes SOCRATES and LEONARDO could make a worthwhile contribution, although the approach under these programmes is different from that suggested in the preceding paragraphs. The experience of certain Member States who have organised fora or information days for academics and professionals should also be taken into account. Equally, the programme on Targetted Socio-Economic Research, within the Fourth Framework Programme of RDT could make a significant contribution to this area.

3 Jointly agreed adaptation of training

Jointly agreed adaptation both of course organisation (division into modules, creation of interdisciplinary modules, introduction of credit systems, changing of teaching methods, etc) and of content (jointly agreed curricula, joint creation of higher education courses, etc), has been the most dynamic result of the inter-university cooperation encouraged by the Community over the past few years through programmes such as ERASMUS, LINGUA and COMETT.

The mobility created under these programmes, especially the ERASMUS programme, which has benefited some 300 000 students and 50 000 teachers, has been instrumental in achieving this adaptation in all areas of study, and contributed to improving the quality of higher education in Europe. Adaptation has been based on the pooling of experience and innovative ideas and can be seen in changes freely agreed to by all parties, enabling diversity to be reconciled with the need for mutual recognition of qualifications.

Adaptation of training is decided within a group of partner universities after joint appraisal of their respective courses. It can take the form of development of existing curricula or the joint establishment of new ones. In practice, it can involve pooling of resources among the universities

wishing to cooperate to improve the content of their own courses or participate in the creation of new ones.

Adaptation of course content by joint agreement is also an objective pursued by the European umbrella organisations representing the national professional associations belonging to a particular discipline, because for these latter, seeking to standardise the relevant training and national codes of practice are the two most effective ways of controlling their own future and moving towards becoming a European profession. It was with this in mind that associations covering various disciplines (veterinary science, occupational therapy, optometry, etc) undertook to define jointly with educational establishments the most appropriate training for their respective activities. Joint initiatives to adapt training, whether originating in the educational establishments or within the professions themselves should therefore be encouraged, particularly those which concern regulated professions falling within the general systems for the recognition of diplomas set up in 1988 and 1992. Such measures contribute to reducing the substantial differences in the content of various training courses, thereby increasing the possibility of automatic recognition of qualifications without the need for corrective measures (adaptation periods or aptitude tests).

The incentives under the SOCRATES programme, and particularly the ERASMUS chapter dealing with the European dimension of higher education, will give even more impetus to the voluntary adaptation of courses. The potential for forecasting afforded by the abovementioned networks and the partnerships between higher education establishments and the business world envisaged in the LEONARDO programme could also contribute to this voluntary adaptation process, which makes a substantial contribution to the growth and competitiveness of the European Union.

A further positive step would be to encourage cooperation enabling all or part of the additional training period which must be completed between qualifying and becoming a full member of the profession (e.g. lawyers, the health professions and teachers) to be undertaken in another Member State.

4. Quality assessment

Achieving high quality education is one of the Union's fundamental objectives, one which can contribute substantially to growth and competitiveness. Given the diversity of national education systems and the cultural traditions of the various Member States, the criteria defining quality must be established jointly at Community level.

In view of this, the Commission, at the request of the Ministers of Education, has just launched two pilot projects on evaluation of higher education in two major disciplines - engineering and communication sciences. The forty-six establishments involved in these pilot projects will use joint guidelines based on existing evaluation systems in Europe and will help their own national authorities to introduce evaluation systems which are in line with those of other Member States.

Actual training will be the main area to benefit, since the exercise will enable each establishment to identify its strengths and weaknesses by drawing up "peer-reviews" - self-assessment reports to be discussed with groups of experts. The national committees set up for the purpose of these pilot projects should include members of the professions and the business world in order that assessment may be made as to the appropriateness of training for the needs of the employment market as well as the specific needs of each profession itself.

Setting up a standard methodology for quality assessment in the Member States will strengthen the mutual confidence which is essential for recognition of qualifications at all levels.

The results of these pilot projects will be examined in depth, together with the professional and business world, in order to extend such assessments to other disciplines.

CONCLUSIONS

The Commission views this Communication as a first stage in considering how best to coordinate the various types of recognition of qualifications. It intends to reinforce initiatives it has already undertaken in this area, as well as undertake new ones falling within its competence that are likely to ensure coordination in this significant field, which aims to facilitate the free movement of persons and services and the right of establishment, and to strengthen the European Union's position in the world employment market. The Commission, moreover, intends to extend the debate in the future to all levels of training, including vocational training. Higher education is therefore merely the first step.

The main objective of this Communication is to involve the various Community institutions in this debate and promote discussion at all levels in the Member States (higher education establishments, competent national authorities, the professional arena, the business world) to enable all those concerned to make a contribution according to their competence and specialist activity.

The Commission welcomes reactions before 1 July 1995 from the Community institutions and from interested parties, who are invited, by preference, to present these reactions in conjunction with counterparts from other Member States.

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