



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

Agreement on EQF a major step forward for education and training

Brussels, 16 November 2007. UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers’ organisation, warmly welcomed the political agreement on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) reached by the Education Council in Brussels yesterday (Thursday). According to UEAPME, the EQF is one of the major achievements in the field of education and training at EU level in the last years and a decisive step forward to increase transparency, comparability and recognition of professional qualifications. This should in turn foster access to lifelong learning and improve professional and geographical mobility in the European labour markets, to the benefit of workers and companies alike. UEAPME called on Member States to follow up the political agreement on the EQF, a non-binding recommendation, through a concrete transposition at national level.

“The EQF marks a clear shift from the traditional approach, by rightly focusing on ‘learning outcomes’ and acquired competences instead of ‘learning inputs’ strictly based on the content and duration of training”, stated **Liliane Volozinskis**, UEAPME Director in charge of Social Affairs and Training Issues. *“This move will make it easier to match the needs of companies and training institutions, and provide a better recognition of informal learning and on-the-job training, which are mostly provided by crafts and SMEs in Europe.”*

The descriptors of the 8 “reference levels” defined by learners’ knowledge, skills and competences adopted by the Education Council bring together for the first time the “Bologna process” for higher education and the “Copenhagen process” for vocational education and training. Putting on an equal footing vocational training with “classic” higher education results is a highly political decision that Ms Volozinskis appreciated: *“This will foster parity of esteem between the vocational training route and the general education pathway from the basis to the top level. The word ‘excellence’ does not belong only in Universities any more”,* she said.

Commenting on the procedural aspects of EQF, Ms Volozinskis insisted on the need for Member States to step up their efforts in order to be ready by the set deadline. Promising signs came already this year, with 25 Member States out of 27 gearing up to the adaptation or creation of their own national qualification framework and implementing national reforms of their education and training systems. Moreover, Ms Volozinskis stressed the importance of pilot projects to further develop and field-test the EQF concept. The EU level will be of the utmost importance in this respect to ensure coherence and coordination of the different national frameworks. Finally, UEAPME said that it is of the utmost importance to fully involve social partners in this process both at EU and national level and expressed its wish to be part of the “EQF Advisory Group” to be created soon.

“Member States have shown their political willingness to advance the EQF dossier with yesterday’s agreement. We trust that they will maintain their full commitment towards the new “learning outcomes” approach in the coming months and years and take true ownership of such a radical change. Only a revolution in mentality will ensure that the EQF will not remain a dead letter”, concluded Ms Volozinskis.

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EDITORS’ NOTES: UEAPME is the employers’ organisation representing crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 84 member organisations, which represent crafts and SMEs across Europe, covering over 12 million enterprises with 50 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner.

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