



Political and legal framework for the development of training policy in the European Union

Part I - From the Treaty of Rome to the Treaty of Maastricht

Introduction

The vocational training policy framework examined comprises the European *acquis communautaire*, which is the body of community law which places obligations on Member States or individuals in respect of vocational training. In this article the *acquis* is interpreted in a broad sense to include:

- (a) European Community legal instruments – regulations, directives, decisions and recommendations;
- (b) judgements of the European Court of Justice;
- (c) non-binding policy statements – conclusions and resolutions of the Council of Ministers – communications and white and green papers from the European Commission and joint opinions of the social partners.

This article examines the development of the policy framework from the perspective of successive treaty articles directly relating to vocational training policy. It does not cover those articles in the treaties, or the policy developments concerning the European Social Fund.

Over the period 1957 to 1992, economic and social change steadily raised the profile and importance of vocational training. The policy framework in the EU has been adapted on many occasions to take account of changing circumstances and has supported the development of vocational training as a key instrument of employment and active labour market policy.

The article shows how the policy framework established by the European *acquis* has supported the development of vocational training principally in two ways. Firstly, it has encouraged debate among Member States enabling national issues to be discussed more widely and areas of common interest to be identified. In this way, the European Union has acted as an important reference point for the development of national vocational training policies. Secondly, various initiatives and programmes over the years have supported practical measures, including pilot projects and exchanges of information and people. These have facilitated cooperation between many different parties throughout Europe in seeking to improve vocational training.

The framework for the common vocational training policy of the Treaty of



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This is the first of two articles looking at the development and implementation of the vocational training policy framework in the European Union, from the founding of the European Economic Community under the Treaty of Rome in 1957 to the Treaty on European Union signed at Amsterdam which came into force in May 1999.

This article looks at the period covering the common vocational training policy established under the Treaty of Rome up until its replacement by the Treaty on European Union agreed at Maastricht in 1992, which introduced a Community vocational training policy. The period from 1992 to the present will be considered on the second article which will be published in the next issue of the European Journal.



“(...) the common vocational training policy of the Treaty of Rome was established in a legally binding decision (...)”

“From the political perspective, the common vocational training policy was to involve close and varied cooperation among Member States. It was defined as coherent and progressive action to be carried out at both Member State and European level to implement (...) the 1963 decision.”

“(...) the common vocational training policy was not the same as common policies in other areas, for example, in agriculture, transport or competition. (...) In the area of vocational training, efforts were to focus not on the structure or organisation of vocational training but on bringing about a convergence of standards, in terms of qualifications, certificates and examinations.”

Rome was established in a legally binding decision in 1963¹. It was subsequently adapted over the years through non-legally binding policy statements, which as well as giving political direction, provided for some practical measures to be funded. Despite not having legal force, the policy statements and the measures they introduced were effective because they received firm political backing from the Member States at a senior level.

However, in the early 1980s, it was agreed to fund European Union action, in respect of vocational training as well as in other areas, only through legally-binding instruments. This, together with European Court of Justice decisions, led to concern among Member States over the extent of Community influence over national education and vocational training policy. In consequence, the common vocational training policy of the Treaty of Rome was changed in 1992 to a Community vocational training policy to support and supplement national actions, so making explicit what was implicit before, that responsibility for the content and structure of vocational training rests with the Member States.

The above developments are mapped out in this article. It also illustrates how the social partners have exercised growing influence over the development of policy and examines the contribution of vocational training to the free movement of workers.

The Treaty of Rome: a common vocational training policy

As part of its social provisions under the Treaty of Rome to establish the European Economic Community, Article 128 stated that the Council of Ministers shall lay down:

...general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy capable of contributing to the harmonious development both of the national economies and of the common market.

These were agreed in the Council Decision of 2 April 1963¹ laying down general principles for implementing a common

vocational training policy (**see Box**). The 1963 decision set out the types of cooperation envisaged and, despite subsequent changes to the Treaty, it remains in force.

From the political perspective, the common vocational training policy was to involve close and varied cooperation among Member States. It was defined as coherent and progressive action to be carried out at both Member State and European level to implement the ten principles in the 1963 decision.

The decision provided for various types of cooperation to implement the principles, including studies and research, exchanges of information and experience. A certain degree of harmonisation was also foreseen. The eighth principle stated that a common vocational training policy must be framed to enable levels of training to be progressively harmonised, with a view to the mutual recognition of qualifications. However, cooperation was not to be limited to all the Member States acting at the same time over the same issues. The decision encourages the European Commission to conclude multilateral or bilateral agreements, should the occasion arise.

Responsibility for implementing the principles lay with both the Member States and the European Commission. But the decision made no clear demarcation of responsibility between them as to how the principles should be implemented. Although it defined the areas covered by the common vocational training policy, namely training for all young people and adults who might be, or are already, employed in posts up to supervisory level, it did not define vocational training.

However, the common vocational training policy was not the same as common policies in other areas, for example, in agriculture, transport or competition. In these latter areas, the decision-making powers at European level – also known as Community competence – were extensive, and, as appropriate, Member States were obliged to change national systems or arrangements to comply. In the area of vocational training, efforts were to focus not on the structure or organisation of vocational training but on bringing about a convergence of standards, in



terms of qualifications, certificates and examinations.

Implementing the common vocational training policy

Taking the 1963 decision as the policy framework, implementation began with the institutionalisation of the role of the social partners alongside the Member States in the development of policy, with the setting up of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training² (ACVT), in December 1963, to give opinions on questions of general importance or of principle concerning vocational training. This was followed by a European Commission recommendation initiating a reporting procedure to exchange information and experience on vocational guidance³. Work was also carried out on harmonising training levels to promote free movement of workers, and, in 1970, the Council adopted a recommendation on the European vocational profile for the training of skilled machine tool workers⁴. However, the European Commission concluded in 1971⁵ that work undertaken following the 1963 decision had not yielded the expected results. The reasons cited were a lack of experience in methods to turn abstract principles into working projects, insufficient distinction between short and long-term projects and inadequate resources.

The era of resolutions

From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, implementation of the common vocational training policy was characterised by a series of non-binding resolutions by the Council of Ministers (the approach was different in areas concerning the free movement of workers which is discussed later). These resolutions established the policy framework, setting out the key policy areas in which cooperation should take place. They acted as reference points for the development of national policies by reflecting the major economic and social debates in which vocational training had a role. They also outlined various measures to implement the policy framework and, as appropriate, indicated the

action to be taken at European level and to be carried out by the Member States. By adapting the 1963 principles to modern needs, the resolutions developed vocational training into a more sophisticated instrument of labour market policy, as well as a tool for promoting social aims.

Following the 1971 guidelines calling for a renewed effort in vocational training, the first resolution was agreed in 1974⁶. It reinforced the importance of the common vocational training policy and the progressive attainment of its objectives. It provided for the establishment of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (commonly known by its French acronym 'Cedefop'). Set up in 1975⁷, the centre was to provide technical expertise and information on vocational training, compile and distribute documentation, stimulate research and work on the approximation of training standards to promote the free movement of workers.

Economic and social change in the 1970s also encouraged the use of vocational training to realise social aims by targeting measures at specific groups.

The first group to be targeted for special help was handicapped people in 1974⁸. The next was young people. The Council introduced a range of measures based on two resolutions, one in 1976⁹ to improve the transition from school to working life and another in 1979¹⁰ on linking work and training for young people.

Vocational training was also developed as an instrument for promoting equal opportunities. The equal treatment directive in 1976¹¹ required Member States to ensure access to vocational guidance and vocational training without discrimination on the grounds of sex. In recognising that equality of opportunity for access to training is essential if equality of opportunity in employment is to be a reality, it defined a role for vocational training in creating a more equal society.

The problem of rising unemployment by the early 1980s affected all age groups. Long-term unemployment, in particular, was increasing substantially (by the mid-1980s over half of the unemployed had been out of work for over a year). These difficulties raised expectations about the

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“In response to the challenges posed by change over the years, the Member States had pooled their experience. Benefiting from the wider European debate, they agreed resolutions that implemented and developed the common vocational training policy through a framework that was not legally binding, but which had strong political backing. In this way, the European level became established as a reference point for the development of national vocational training policies.”

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role of vocational training as an instrument of labour market and employment policy. Vocational training was seen as having a central role in improving the match between the demand for and supply of labour, helping people who were long-term unemployed and, as a new role, promoting the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The early 1980s were also marked by a growing awareness of the impact of new technology as a major driving force of change. In a resolution in 1983¹², the Council accorded a major role to vocational training in equipping workers with the capacity to adapt to changes brought about by new technology, an adaptation essential not only to keep down unemployment but also to exploit the economic potential of new technology and encourage its widespread implementation.

In July 1983, the Council updated the common vocational training policy framework through a resolution on vocational training policies in the 1980s¹³. Its aim was to strengthen the implementation of the common vocational training policy and it outlined the strategic role of vocational training which was to be developed as:

- (a) an instrument of active employment policy to promote economic and social development and adjustment to the new structure of the labour market;
- (b) a means of ensuring that young people are properly prepared for working life and their responsibilities as adults;
- (c) an instrument for promoting equal opportunities for all workers as regards access to the labour market.

The resolution reflected the way in which economic and social change during the 20 years after the decision laying down the principles for the implementation of the common vocational training policy had significantly altered the profile and importance of vocational training. It was now seen as strategic to the achievement of both economic and social aims.

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agreed resolutions that implemented and developed the common vocational training policy through a framework that was not legally binding, but which had strong political backing.

In this way, the European level became established as a reference point for the development of national vocational training policies. This role was reinforced by the European Council which in a resolution in July 1983 committed Member States to ensuring that all young people who wished, especially those without qualifications, could benefit from a six-month or, if possible, a one-year full-time basic training programme, work experience, or a combination of the two.

While the European Union acted as a reference point, Member States retained freedom to decide how to implement the common vocational training policy and kept control over the structure, content and organisation of vocational training in their own countries. The resolutions, as appropriate, distinguished between action at European and Member State levels. Furthermore, the 1983 resolution emphasised the need for flexibility in the implementation of policies at European level and the need to respect the diversity of national systems. Although there was cooperation in areas of common interest, it was not seen as leading to vocational training systems becoming more alike, but rather as Member States approaching similar problems in different ways.

The resolutions were innovative in introducing new forms of cooperation, which, over the years, had deepened and widened. They incorporated reporting procedures to analyse the experience of Member States in particular areas, including study visits for specialists and workshops for teachers and trainers of teachers, experimentation through pilot projects, joint undertaking of research, networks, cooperation over statistics, exchanges of information and experience and the establishment of technical expertise in Cedefop. Cooperation, therefore, was not just at the policy-making level and between government representatives, but also between researchers and practitioners, directly involving those most closely concerned with the problems identified.



However, the development and implementation of the common vocational training policy through non-legally binding resolutions, backed up by commitments at a senior political level, changed in the mid-1980s, following an agreement between the European Communities' institutions that European funding should be sanctioned by a legal instrument based on the Treaty. This change was to have important repercussions.

The age of the action programme

During the period 1986 to 1991, a number of European vocational training action programmes were established through legally-binding decisions based (but not always exclusively) on Article 128 of the Treaty of Rome. Each programme was concerned with a specific aspect of the common vocational training policy, developing the role of vocational training in adapting to change (Comett I & II and, 1986¹⁴ and 1989¹⁵, and Eurotecnet, 1990¹⁶), supporting young people (Petra I and II, 1987¹⁷ and 1991¹⁸), improving continuing training (Force, 1990¹⁹) promoting cooperation in higher education (Erasmus, 1987²⁰), language learning (Lingua, 1990²¹) and support for people with disabilities (Helios I and II, 1988²² and 1993²³).

The action programmes built upon well-established methods of cooperation – pilot projects, networks, exchange programmes and research. Cooperation continued at both policy-making and practitioner levels.

However, the requirement to have legal instruments to fund Community actions led to differences, not over the types of cooperation, but over the definition of vocational training and consequently over the extent of EU competence over the development of national policies.

Developments leading to a treaty change

Until the action programmes, the only legally-binding instrument based on Article 128 of the Treaty of Rome was the 1963 decision setting out the principles for the implementation of the common vocational training policy and the estab-

lishment and rules of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training. For an instrument to be agreed under Article 128, only a simple majority of the Council was required. Consultation with the European Parliament was not mandatory.

The Comett decision, establishing the first action programme, was adopted in 1986 under Articles 128 and 235 – the 'catch-all' article enabling action to be taken where specific treaty articles did not exist. Adding Article 235 required unanimity in the Council, after consulting the European Parliament, to agree to the proposal. This dual legal base process was subsequently used to agree the Erasmus in 1987. However, the European Commission's proposal to amend the Erasmus programme in 1989²⁴ proved problematic, not because of its measures, but because it was based only on Article 128, dropping the additional reference to Article 235 which had been used to adopt the original programme. The Council added Article 235, but this was contested by the European Commission in a case before the European Court of Justice (ECJ)²⁵.

The Erasmus case revealed sharp differences between Member States and the European Commission over the extent of Community competence in the area of vocational training. Member States were concerned about the possibility of Article 128 being used to introduce, by a simple majority of the Council, legal obligations to implement the common vocational training policy. Furthermore, they were concerned over the extension of the policy into education, as the Erasmus programme dealt with university exchanges.

The ECJ decided that it was not necessary to add Article 235. Referring to earlier judgements, the ECJ concluded that Article 128 did provide for legal measures that could impose corresponding obligations of cooperation on the Member States, including those that might require changes to the organisation of their education and vocational training systems. The ECJ also stated that, for the most part, higher education came under the remit of a common vocational training policy, as education which prepares for a particular profession, trade or employment is vocational training, and, in general, university education fulfils these conditions.

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“The [ECJ] judgement interpreted Article 128 and the 1963 decision in a way which, to the Member States, extended the scope for action at the European level in the areas of education and vocational training. (...) Alongside what they saw as a weakening of their position, the Member States became increasingly concerned over the prospect of a legally-binding European-wide instrument on access to vocational training.”

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The judgement interpreted Article 128 and the 1963 decision in a way which, to the Member States, extended the scope for action at the European level in the areas of education and vocational training. This was of concern to them since the Council of Ministers in 1974 had stated that cooperation in education must make allowance for the traditions of each country and the diversity of their respective policies and systems. Vocational training resolutions over the years had also distinguished between actions at Member State and European levels. In addition, the action programmes contained references to the need for action at European level to respect the diversity of custom and practice and the powers of national law. However, while these distinctions, which were such an important part of policy in the past, might not be ignored, they now appeared weaker and likely to have less influence on shaping future action by the European Union.

Alongside what they saw as a weakening of their position, the Member States became increasingly concerned over the prospect of a legally-binding European-wide instrument on access to vocational training. These concerns were fuelled by the Social Charter of Fundamental Workers’ Rights adopted during the French presidency in 1989, which was a non-binding document listing a number of ‘rights’ for workers²⁶. It included the right of access to vocational training throughout working life and proposed setting up continuing training systems providing for training leave. The possibility of a proposal for a legally-binding instrument on access to vocational training introducing statutory entitlements to training leave – which if proposed under Article 128 would require only a simple majority in the Council to be adopted – led to considerable unease and intense political debate.

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On one hand, there were grounds for strengthening the role of the European level in vocational training policy. Following the Single European Act of 1986 and the drive to complete the single market by the end of 1992, the pace of European integration had quickened. The completion of the single market was an objective shared by all and Member States accepted that vocational training was important to the single market. The economic and social changes that had encouraged closer cooperation in the area of vocational training, were acting as a force for the creation of the single market, but were also being speeded up by it. Technological change required higher skill levels generally, and a European Union-wide entitlement to training leave would ensure that even those unlikely to receive vocational training would have greater access to it.

On the other hand, particularly from the perspective of Member States, the key principle of subsidiarity – that the European level should act only where objectives could not adequately be achieved at national or local levels – and whether action in this area was desirable at European level (even though it was just a possibility), irrespective of the degree of support for any such proposal, was critical.

A number of factors needed to be taken into account. One was the impact on existing national arrangements. There was entitlement to training leave in many Member States, but arrangements were varied and not universal. The problem, however, was not one of administrative inconvenience. The organisation and systems of vocational training in the Member States reflected the different choices made over the years in the light of their differing social, economic and cultural characteristics. These, in effect, were the outcome of striking a sometimes delicate balance between a wide range of interests – of national, regional and local government, the social partners, vocational training providers, certification bodies, sector and trade associations, professional bodies and individuals – and which involved the expenditure of large sums of public and private money on vocational training. The impact on these various interests within the Member States – some of which would favour action at European



level on access while others would not – in terms, for example, of the additional cost to businesses could not be overlooked. For instance, the social partners indicated that where entitlement to training leave was a matter dealt with by collective agreement, it should remain so.

Also at stake was the question of precedent. Even if a Member State supported legally-binding action at European level on access, there would be no guarantee that future proposals in the area of vocational training would be palatable. Given that such a proposal could be adopted by a simple majority in the Council, a Member State could find itself having to implement nationally a policy it did not support. Such a precedent could also be far-reaching following the rulings of the ECJ, which had, to a considerable extent, brought higher education firmly into the remit of a common vocational training policy.

In this case, politics overruled economics. The Member States decided that, although vocational training was important to the single market, politically it was more important for them to retain full responsibility for it. Times had changed since Article 128 and the 1963 decision. The objective of close cooperation leading to the harmonisation of standards in vocational training, that had seemed appropriate for a Community of six founding Member States in 1957, was no longer suitable for a Community of 12, with more countries negotiating to join. Differences in vocational training systems and arrangements in Member States and their close attachment to them, coupled with the importance of education to their culture and the structure of their society, led Member States to conclude it was necessary to look again at the idea of a common vocational training policy and what it meant.

The Inter-Governmental Conference that opened in 1991 planned the steps towards economic and monetary union and provided Member States with the chance to revise the social chapter of the Treaty of Rome, including Article 128. They took the opportunity. The common vocational training policy was replaced by a Community vocational training policy to support and supplement activities of the

Member States under Article 127 of the Treaty on European Union, signed in Maastricht in 1992²⁷. Action under Article 127 was to be decided in the Council by qualified majority after consultation with the European Parliament and no longer by simple majority. It was made clear that Member States were responsible for the content and organisation of vocational training, and harmonisation of their laws and regulations concerning vocational training was specifically ruled out. Education was separated from vocational training policy and was given a separate legal base in Article 126, upon which future cooperation in this area was to be based. Harmonisation in education was also ruled out.

After the Maastricht Treaty was signed, but before it came into force, a non-binding recommendation on access to continuing training was agreed in June 1993²⁸. It was the last act under the common vocational training policy.

It did not seek to regulate vocational training systems and, interestingly, made no reference to training leave. Instead, its proposals centred on enterprises, encouraging them and local and regional development authorities to regard continuing vocational training as a strategic planning tool and expenditure on it as an investment.

The recommendation in many ways anticipated the new policy of supporting and supplementing action at Member State level. In eschewing regulation and in outlining a market-oriented, ‘bottom-up’ policy approach to the development of continuing vocational training to complement the practical approach of its action programmes, the recommendation set the tone for future developments.

A new treaty, but not a new policy

By the changes introduced by the Maastricht Treaty, the Member States did not – and did not seek to – alter the nature of vocational training policy followed under the Treaty of Rome. They continued the approach that had characterised the common vocational training policy.

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The five aims of the Community vocational training policy in the Article 127 of the Maastricht Treaty reflected the major policy areas established under its predecessor. The changes had been introduced to rule out the possibility of intervention at the European level in Member States’ vocational training systems, while continuing the various forms of practical cooperation.

In addition to the new article on vocational training, the Maastricht Treaty included, as an annex, an agreement on social policy²⁹ (the social protocol) concluded between all Member States with the exception of the UK³⁰. The social protocol provided for contractual agreements between the social partners at EU level, which could then be implemented by the Council on a proposal from the European Commission. The social protocol was very cautious in its treatment of vocational training. Any contractual agreements between the social partners in the area of vocational training were limited to the integration of people excluded from the labour market and any such agreements were to be without prejudice to the vocational training article of the Treaty. This demonstrates that although the 11 Member States which had signed the social protocol supported a greater role for the European Union in social policy, they still wished to avoid any legally-binding proposals that might impinge upon their responsibility for the content and organisation of vocational training, as well as any proposals for harmonisation.

Vocational training and the European social dialogue

Through their role on the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training established in 1963, the social partners contributed to the development of, first, the common and, second, the Community vocational training policy. They have increasingly influenced developments since the Single European Act (SEA) of 1986, which encouraged social dialogue at European level, through their joint opinions on issues, including vocational training³¹

The joint opinions reflected the trends of economic and social change that shaped the development of training policy from the social partners’ perspective. They encouraged the use of vocational training as an instrument of active employment policy to promote adaptation to change, the integration of young people into the labour market, social inclusion and equal opportunities.

The social partners’ joint opinion of March 1987 on training and motivation, information and consultation highlighted the importance of the introduction of new technologies being accompanied by vocational training. Citing the joint opinion, the social partners were included in the committee overseeing the implementation of the Comett II programme established in 1988. This acted as a precedent for subsequent programmes – Force, Petra II and Eurotecnet.

The social partners also contributed to the development of the Community vocational training policy agreed in the Maastricht Treaty. Their joint opinion on the future role and actions of the Community in the field of education and training of July 1993 (followed by another in April 1995) drew attention to major objectives and challenges in terms of skill requirements. The social partners’ concerns – adapting to change, improving training to help integration into the labour market and bringing together the worlds of education, training and work – were all reflected in the policy aims set out in the Treaty.

The agreement on social policy (the social protocol), annexed to the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 – incorporated into the Treaty negotiated at Amsterdam in 1997 – was, moreover, based almost entirely on a text jointly agreed by the social partners in October 1991. The agreement represented an important step forward as it provided for contractual agreements to be implemented through legally-binding action by the Council on the basis of a proposal from the European Commission.

As well as influencing the broad framework, the social partners have also contributed to developments in specific areas. Their joint opinion on ways of facilitating the broadest possible effective ac-



cess to vocational training opportunities in 1991 formed the basis of the access recommendation adopted in 1993, after much debate. Their joint opinion on vocational qualifications and certification of October 1992 emphasised the importance of transparency in qualifications in order for employers across Member States to understand their content. This was reflected in the Council resolution on transparency of vocational qualifications agreed in December 1992.

Vocational training and the free movement of workers

There have been a number of ways in which vocational training has been used to promote the free movement of workers. These have centred on mobility programmes and on different initiatives to enable qualifications acquired in one Member State to be used to obtain a job in another, in particular, through mutual recognition, harmonisation of training levels, comparability of qualifications and transparency.

The first exchange programme for young workers was adopted in May 1964³². Although not strictly part of the common vocational training policy, an aim of the programme was to use the opportunity of working for a period in another Member State as a means of improving the training of young people. A second programme was introduced in July 1979³³ and a third in 1984³⁴. From 1991, work placements for young people in vocational training were included in the Petra II programme and subsequently in the Leonardo da Vinci programmes³⁵.

Directives on the mutual recognition of qualifications recognise the right of people to work in an occupation in another Member State without discrimination³⁶. Many of the early directives were transitional arrangements pending mutual recognition of the relevant laws. But negotiation proved arduous (for example, the directive on toxic products took six years to bring into effect), even after the Single European Act in 1986 made it possible to obtain agreement by qualified majority voting. However, directives for the gen-

eral recognition of university qualifications and other vocational qualifications for regulated professions were adopted in 1988³⁷ and 1992³⁸.

Unlike mobility programmes and mutual recognition, the harmonisation of training levels was a specific element of the common vocational training policy included in the eighth principle of the 1963 decision. As such, its focus was on vocational training for workers up to supervisory level. In 1970, the Council adopted the recommendation on the European vocational profile for the training of skilled machine-tool workers, which was to be a reference point for the vocational training programmes and qualifications for several different occupations in this category. It comprised a lengthy list of the aspects regarded as minimum requirements to qualify for the occupations covered and even gave an overall pass mark to meet the requirements. It also listed the qualifications in each Member State which were recognised as meeting the European profile. As a recommendation, the profile was not legally binding, but there was a strong political commitment to implementing it. This approach, however, was brought into question in 1971 by the Council wanting to know how the profiles were to be updated in the light of changes. The approach was replaced in 1974 by a policy of approximating training standards – a subtle but significant shift away from the harmonisation foreseen in 1963 towards a more flexible approach.

Work on the approximation of training standards led to the decision in July 1985³⁹, on the comparability of vocational training qualifications. It set out a five-level structure as a point of reference to identify the respective levels of vocational qualifications and certificates of different countries. Use of the structure was not compulsory and comparisons were not legally binding. But although the structure helped to improve understanding of qualification systems, it was complex and unable to reflect labour market requirements owing to the pace of change. What was needed, it was argued, was more accessible information for employers and the social partners to be able to determine the suitability of someone trained in one Member States for a job in another.

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Consequently, the debate moved towards improving the ‘transparency’ of vocational qualifications.

Transparency expresses the need to make qualifications more visible and comprehensible. In December 1992⁴⁰, the Council shifted the focus from centrally-regulated approaches to the need for individuals to provide information on their vocational and training, skills, competences and experience. The Council also suggested that this information might usefully be presented in a common format.

Concluding remarks

Vocational training policy European level can be described as action oriented. The Community has acted as a strong reference point for the development of vocational training policy in Member States and has supported cooperation through practical action, such as pilot projects and exchanges of information and people.

Over the years, the policy framework established by the ten principles of the 1963 decision was adapted and redefined through various non legally-binding, but strongly supported, political statements, such as Council resolutions, and European Commission communications. The social partners also contributed increasingly to the development of the policy framework, through their joint opinions, in particular. Driven by forces of economic and social change, the policy framework supported the development of vocational training as a powerful tool of employment and active labour market policy. Important roles for vocational training were defined in improving employment prospects through facilitating adaptation to change, supporting the integration of

young people, and other groups, into the labour market and promoting equal opportunities.

The change in the treaty, and the move from a common vocational training policy to a Community policy to support and supplement activities in Member States, was an important event. The need to have a legal base for funding Community action, as well as judgements by the European Court of Justice which, in the view of Member States, extended Community competence in this area, affected and changed the nature of cooperation between the Member States and the European Community. The Member States, concerned over the prospect of Community-wide legally-binding regulation of their vocational training systems, took the opportunity to revise the Treaty. But the changes they made preserved the nature of the policy that had been pursued up until 1992 and maintained the delicate balance between their national interests and those of the Community, by ruling out harmonisation of vocational training systems and reaffirming that responsibility for their content and organisation lay with the Member States. The Maastricht Treaty, therefore, effectively continued the original policy, as witnessed by the five aims of vocational training set out in the Treaty, which, as before, identified it as an important tool of employment and active labour market policy.

Furthermore, the developments in relation to mutual recognition, harmonisation, comparability and transparency can be seen in parallel to the general development of the vocational training policy framework. The changes represent a shift way from a centralised, legislative approach towards a more user-oriented approach to promoting mobility. An approach, moreover, which takes account of national diversity.



Council Decision of 2 April 1963 laying down the principles for implementing a common vocational training policy

First principle

A common vocational training policy means a coherent and progressive common action which entails that each Member State shall draw up programmes and shall ensure that these are put into effect in accordance with the general principles contained in this decision and with the resulting measures taken to apply them.

The general principles must enable every person to receive adequate training, with due regard for freedom of choice of occupation, place of training and place of work.

These general principles must deal with the training of young persons and adults who might be or already are employed in posts up to supervisory level.

It shall be the responsibility of the Member States and the competent institutions of the Community to apply such general principles within the framework of the Treaty.

Second principle

The common vocational training policy shall have the following fundamental objectives:

- to bring about conditions that will guarantee adequate vocational training for all;
- to organise in due course suitable training facilities to supply the labour forces in the different sectors of economic activity;
- to broaden vocational training on the basis of a general education, to an extent sufficient to encourage the harmonious development of the personality and to meet requirements arising from technical progress, new methods of production and social and economic developments;
- to enable every person to acquire the technical knowledge and skill necessary to pursue a given occupation and to reach the highest possible level of training, whilst encouraging, particularly as regards young persons, intellectual and physical advancement, civic education and physical development;
- to avoid any harmful interruption either between completion of general education and commencement of vocational training or during the latter;
- to promote basic and advanced vocational training and, where appropriate, re-training, suitable for the various stages of working life;
- to offer every person, according to his inclinations and capabilities, working knowledge and experience, and by means of permanent facilities for vocational advancement, the opportunity to gain promotion or to receive instruction for a new and higher level of activity;
- to relate closely the different forms of vocational training to the various sectors of the economy so that, on the one hand, vocational training best meets both the needs of the economy and the interests of the trainees and, on the other hand, problems presented by vocational training receive the attention which they deserve in business and professional circles everywhere.

Third principle

When the common vocational training policy is put into operation, special importance shall be attached:

- to forecasts and estimates, at both national and community levels, of the quantitative and qualitative requirements of workers in the various productive activities;



- to a permanent system of information and guidance or vocational advice, for young people and adults, based on the knowledge of individual capabilities, training facilities and employment opportunities, operating in close cooperation with the productive and distributive sectors of the economy, vocational training services and schools;
- to the opportunity for every person to have recourse to the system provided for above at any time before choosing his occupation, during his vocational training and throughout his working life.

Fourth principle

In conformity with these general principles and in order to attain the objectives stated therein, the Commission may propose to the Council or to the Member States, under the Treaty, such appropriate measures as may appear to be necessary.

Moreover, in close cooperation with the Member States, the Commission shall carry out any studies and research in the field of vocational training which will ensure attainment of a common policy, in particular with a view to promoting employment facilities and the geographical and occupational mobility of workers within the Community.

Furthermore, it shall draw up a list of training facilities in the Member States and compare them with existing requirements with a view to determining what actions to recommend to the Member States, indicating an order of priority where necessary; should the occasion arise, it shall encourage the conclusion of bilateral or multilateral agreements.

The Commission shall follow the developments of such measures, compare the results thereof and bring them to the notice of the Member States.

When carrying out the tasks assigned to it in the field of vocational training, the Commission shall be assisted by a tripartite advisory committee, whose composition and rules shall be laid down by the Council after receiving the opinion of the Commission.

Fifth principle

In order to promote a wider knowledge of all the facts and publications concerning the state and development of vocational training within the Community, and to help keep current teaching methods up to date, the Commission shall take all suitable steps to collect, distribute and exchange any useful information, literature and teaching material among the Member States. It shall ensure in particular the systematic distribution of literature relating to innovations already in use or to be introduced. For their part, the Member States shall give the Commission all the necessary help and support to carry out these various tasks and, in particular, shall provide any useful information concerning the present state and development of national systems of vocational training.

Sixth principle

In cooperation with the Member States, the Commission shall encourage such direct exchanges of experience in the field of vocational training as are likely to enable the services responsible for vocational training and specialists in such field to acquaint themselves with and study the achievements and new developments in the other countries of the Community in matters of vocational training.

Such exchanges shall be brought about in particular by means of study seminars and by programmes of visits and stays at vocational training institutions.

**Seventh principle**

The suitable training of teachers and instructors, whose numbers should be increased and whose technical and teaching skills should be developed, shall be one of the basic factors of any effective vocational training policy.

Member States shall, with the assistance of the Commission where necessary, encourage any measures which are likely to contribute to the improvement and development of such training, in particular measures to ensure a continuing adjustment to progress in the economic and technical fields.

The training of instructors recruited among specially qualified workers shall be encouraged. Harmonisation of instructor training shall be sought; all exchanges of experience and other similar appropriate means, and in particular, those mentioned in the sixth principle, may be used towards such harmonisation.

Special measures shall be taken in the Community countries to promote the basic training and advanced training of teachers and instructors for work in the less favoured regions of the Community and in developing states and territories, in particular those associated with the Community.

Eighth principle

The common vocational training policy must, in particular, be so framed as to enable levels of training to be harmonised progressively.

In cooperation with the Member States, the Commission shall, according to requirements, draw up in respect of the various occupations which call for specific training a standardised description of the basic qualifications required at various levels of training.

On this basis, harmonisation of the standards required for success in final examinations should be sought, with a view to the mutual recognition of certificates and other documents confirming completion of vocational training; the Member States and the Commission shall encourage the holding of European competitions and examinations.

Ninth principle

In order to contribute to the achievement of an overall balance between the supply of and demand for labour within the Community, and taking into account the forecasts made for this purpose, the Member States and the Commission may cooperate in taking adequate steps, in particular when drawing up suitable training programmes. Such steps and programmes must aim at the rapid training of adults and vocational retraining, taking into account the situations caused by economic expansion or recession, technological and structural changes and the special requirements of certain occupations, occupational categories or specific regions.

Tenth principle

In the application of the general principles of the common vocational training policy, particular attention shall be given to special problems concerning specific sectors of activity or specific categories of person; special measures may be taken in this respect.

Measures taken with a view to attaining the objectives of the common vocational training policy may be jointly financed.



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