More quality to
the quality policy of education

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Outline of the report

This report focuses on central questions in the quality policy of education. The writers of the background material, having experience of different duties both in administration and in research, wish to bring up questions on which attention should be paid in the near future, and to examine the methods for improving quality by European cooperation. Questions on general education, upper secondary education, vocational education and training, adult education and higher education will be dealt with simultaneously.

The report includes references to recommendations and publications of the European Union, reports compiled within the OECD, and certain scientific publications. The references are listed at the end of this report. The data on the competitiveness of European education has been collected by Mr Reijo Laukkanen, representative of Finland in the OECD. The opinions occurring in the report are the responsibility of the writers.
I PRIORITY IN QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

1. Quality of education as the object of development and evaluation

Developing and evaluating the quality of education draws more and more attention, not only in the European Union but even worldwide. In Europe experimenting and developing quality strategies and different quality control techniques is active. For example EU and OECD have reinforced this trend by their own calls for new structures and new approaches to quality assurance (see e.g. Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century, 1998, and Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 1998).

There are several reasons for the growing interest, e.g. the massification of university education, the development of distance education, cutbacks in budgetary funding, and the rapid internationalization of both studies and education institutions, the development of transnational higher education through franchises, brand campuses and similar arrangements, and the need for student mobility and the related mutual recognitions between states. All these features should be viewed from the standpoint of assured quality.

The quality of education can be defined by different approaches, which are quite closely connected to the trends in the research of pedagogic and education during the past decades. David Garvin has defined the following five approaches for understanding the contents of the term \textit{quality}.

- Quality as innate excellence, as simply the best. This implies that it can only be understood through comparison with objects that display its characteristics. This is the transcendent or philosophical approach.
- Quality based on measurable attributes. This implies that quality can be measured and could be defined as product based approach.
- Manufacturing-based approach which means that quality is understood as conformance to requirements.
- Performance/price ratio. This is used a lot in industry and business and can also be termed the value-based approach.
- User-customer-based approach. (Van der Berghe, 1995).

These definitions approach quality from different standpoints but are not contradictory. In the 90s, for example, a customer-based, market-based approach has been central, whereas the first of these definitions represents the traditional vision of education. Characteristic for these trends is the fact that they also reveal clearly different trends in management cultures, which in turn are strongly connected to the orientation of education policy which has taken place within the administration.

Regardless of the point of view, attention may focus on different parts of education, such as learning, teaching, effectiveness in promoting cohesion or preventing exclusion, the economic efficiency of education, or management.

\textbf{Essential for the concept of quality is finding the attributes which help to clarify the appropriateness and compatibility of the objectives of education activity and the measures taken, and the correspondence of goals set and outcome achieved.}
The above-mentioned approaches have generated different methods for defining and evaluating quality, which have also been used in defining the quality of education. The most well-known instruments for defining quality are techniques based on various recommendations, rating or standards, e.g. the ISO 9000 standards. There are several versions of techniques based on the customer-based approach, e.g. Total Quality Management. Different applications based on these techniques have been developed in several countries with varying success. The European quality award criteria have been released quite recently and are used in particular for evaluating the activity of organisations in a manner applicable even for the production of public services.

Most problematic in developing and evaluating education has been the fact that these quality award techniques for defining quality usually originate from evaluating the activities of organisations producing commodities, not public services. Another problem is that they enable only the evaluation of various sectors of the activity (e.g. consideration for the customers' needs), but an in-depth definition of the quality of the activity eventually requires a set of criteria based on scientifically produced information.

Quality in education is determined by the learner's actions, i.e. learning, not by the actions of the provider of education. The situation is, therefore, more complicated than that of a conventional producer of services.

Using different methods for evaluating education has helped both the administration and the education institutions to realise that cooperation between administration, researchers and teachers is needed in order to develop quality evaluation methods. It is necessary because extensive theoretical and practical knowledge on the essence of the activity is needed, in particular as the different sectors of education, from pre-school education to vocational adult education and training, vary greatly.

The discussion on quality has recently expanded to cover education in general, but the development of quality evaluation systems has been particularly intensive in vocational education and higher education (see Shaw 1999, El-Khawas 1998 and Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century 1998). Vocational education is undergoing major changes in several European countries, and the increasing challenges of working life have set new requirements for education. Defining various competence requirements and quality requirements of education has thus been updated to correspond to the needs of the evolving working life.

It has been for long the tradition of higher education institutions to develop high-quality scientific research, and the quality of education has not received equal investments. This is a reason why development of quality systems and evaluation of the quality of education has recently become a priority in many European countries (Evaluation of European Higher Education 1998, Brown 1998).

The challenges of quality assurance and development are different in general education for children and young people. Experimental research on the psychology of learning and pedagogics, conducted in the recent decades, has been part of the development work for quality in education (see e.g. Simons 1999). National evaluation systems measuring learning results, and inspection systems focusing on the evaluation of
teaching environment and the quality and legitimacy of teaching have been used as quality evaluation systems by the administration.

Developing quality in the field of general education is indeed largely dependent on the information based on scientific research and evaluation systems already in use. However, the challenges for quality development in the new millennium are great, because the skills provided by education have to be reconsidered as the society and working life grow more complicated and diversified (see e.g. Koski 1999).

2. Quality assurance

In most EU countries the education institutions have gained more autonomy and are in charge of the quality of the education they provide. Nevertheless, public authorities, representing the general interests of the citizens, have frequently taken action to stimulate quality assurance in education institutions, promoting procedures and attempting to create the conditions for productive work.

It is central for quality policy to develop quality assurance systems and quality improvement systems based on them. The term quality assurance can be used here to refer to all the policies, processes and actions of public authorities through which, at the national level, the quality of education is maintained and developed. The main objective of national quality assurance systems is to provide information and understanding about how education is functioning, what the results are and how it can be improved, and to take responsibility for creating favourable conditions for quality. Another equally important objective is to provide an opportunity for education institutions to account to their communities for the work delivered and the use of the public resources provided. Quality assurance in genuine quality work is focused on the core process of activity.

In order to produce real benefit for the development of the field of education, it is essential that quality development is targeted on matters relevant for education, i.e. on supporting core processes. The core of quality policy of education should be safeguarding the conditions for learning. Crucial for the quality of education are:

1. the objectives of education, competency level and curricula
2. learning environment, competency of the teaching staff and efficient working practices within the community
3. independent evaluation of the effectiveness of education and learning results
4. a functioning steering system of education and sufficient financial resources.

Financial resources are essential for securing the conditions for learning.

Quality assurance is increasingly influenced by the fact that the quality of education institutions cannot be defined with one single system; there are numerous institutions with different objectives, methods and practices, and with varying possibilities of activity.

Definition of the target of quality of education can be made by the users of educational services, commissioning parties, supporters and financers. The public authorities, providers of education, labour market organisations, business life, cultural or religious
associations and researchers can thus act as definers of quality and representatives of the providers of the activity or commissioning parties. Usually students or their parents and representatives of working life represent the users of educational services.

The ideal outcome in creating quality policy can be achieved by conducting discussions in equal partnership between as many parties as possible. By doing so it is easier to commit to the development of the quality of education. (see e.g. Greene 1999.) A broad-based social discussion on the objectives and quality development needs of education creates the conditions for securing the financial resources of education.

3. Challenges for education policy

The importance of creating efficient quality assurance systems for national and international education policy will increase in the future, but the task will also become more difficult. As the roles of education institutions and instruction change, the amount of distance education and the transnational degree programmes grows, the needs of working life and quantity of information increase and international student exchange multiplies, it will be essential to determine who is responsible for the quality of education and how the standard of education could be demonstrated to people who need the information, such as the authorities and representatives of working life, students and the personnel of education institutions.

International cooperation in quality policy will confront e.g. the following development trends:

- pressures for the harmonization of education systems in different countries
- international learning standards, specified for each profession and discipline
- identification of the general competencies or skills level in different phases of studying
- development of degrees corresponding to the international baccalaureate degree

Contrary trends and requirements in education policy may present difficulties such as:

- uniformity vs. diversity in structures and educational provision
- education for masses vs. special group instruction
- stability vs. flexibility
- academic knowledge vs. social relevance
- traditional vs. new disciplines
- globality vs. locality

In the future, one of the central conflict issues in quality policy will be the pressure to harmonize European education and simultaneously emphasize the different character, different needs and possibilities of individuals, education institutions and countries. The mobility of labour force and students favours harmonization and encourages to determine minimum standards for education on different levels and in different disciplines. On the other hand, the increasing variety of requirements in working life and the need for professionals in different fields, as well as the emerging innovations and securing individual possibilities of study, demand the widening of differences. As education at all levels is increasingly connected to on-the-job learning, due to the
principle of lifelong learning, defining common learning standard is practically impossibly on any other level than a very general one.

The need for swift changes will increase, particularly in vocational secondary and tertiary education and training. Simultaneously, there are several factors slowing the change down. Factors like the expensiveness of education institution facilities, such as the modern ICT equipment, laboratories and teamwork rooms, the slow retraining of teachers and the difficulties in anticipating future trends guarantee that change can never be as rapid as it should.

The significance of traditional subjects will undergo inevitable changes, and the academic division by subject in every form of education does not respond to the needs of the society. More and more subjects shall be integrated, new combinations relating to the real world and problem-centric approaches shall be formulated. There are already positive experiences of this, both in secondary and tertiary education.

On the other hand, there is a need to preserve the traditional academic drift, which manifests itself e.g. in the long-term harmonisation of university education. A quotation from the Bologna declaration is an example of this: "Establishment of a system of credits – such as in the ECTS system – as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognised by receiving Universities concerned."

Especially at the university level the role of education institutions is simultaneously becoming both global and local. On the other hand there is both international competition and international cooperation between them. Both of these standpoints must be taken into consideration when speaking of the quality of education and evaluating it.
II SECURING THE CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING – THE CORE QUESTION IN QUALITY POLICY

This chapter examines the objectives of education, learning environment, collecting evaluation information and the steering system of education from the standpoint of quality policy. These can be regarded as the central elements, the quality of which must be secured for a functioning education system.

The competence requirements for teachers and personnel in the field of education are also important for determining quality objectives, as is the functionality of the steering system of education.

For developers and decision-makers it is important that there is a functioning evaluation system producing in-depth information from the various sectors of education. Securing the conditions for learning process entails that there is reliable information on the effectiveness of the activity, i.e. how well the targets set have been achieved.

1. The social relevance of the objectives of education and transparency in setting them

The most important factors in the effectiveness of education are the official objectives of education and a curriculum based on them. This is valid both for comprehensive school and for vocational education. In the field of higher education institutions the competence produced by the education and the contents of implemented programmes are central issues.

On European level, the social relevance of education has been a central issue in the recent discussion on the quality of education, which has manifested itself particularly in the efforts of improving the interaction between education and working life. Integrating education into the society has clearly added to the development pressures of vocational education, and to the needs to rearrange the contents of education and to redefine objectives. Advanced competence-based qualification systems in vocational education create new kind of facilities to acquire competence and qualifications through individual study programmes.

Essential for the quality of education are up-to-date objectives and contents of the curriculum, and their scientific, cultural and social relevance. For attaining the objectives, teaching shall be meaningful, it shall prepare the students for internationality and rapid changes in the society and build a positive future.

Increasing the equality of citizens in the rapidly evolving knowledge-based society has been seen as an important objective. Wide-ranging general education and a practical approach are therefore central principles in the basic education of children and youth. In order to keep the general level of education up-to-date, study opportunities with unrestricted access must be provided for adults.

The White Paper *Teaching and Learning Towards the Learning Society* (p. 44) emphasizes the importance of a good basic education, i.e. a good command of reading, writing and mathematics. The native language has a central role in the
curriculum of comprehensive education, which is essential for equal possibilities for development. A good command of language is essential for every other form of studying, and it gives an individual the possibility for personal development.

A good general education in Europe also includes competency in foreign languages so that dialogue is possible between different nationalities. The significance of the objectives mentioned above is further strengthened by a research showing that the idea of the most important topics at school is fairly common around Europe. As regards school subjects, most of the European countries included in the research (e.g. Austria, Belgium (Flemish Co), Switzerland, Denmark, Finland, Portugal, France, The Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom) regarded mathematics, native language and natural sciences as very central. Most of them also considered that foreign language teaching is essential. Opinions on the schools' effectiveness varied greatly in different countries (OECD, Indicators of Education systems. 1995, 70–86).

In the modern society, where changes in knowledge are rapid and the mobility of the population increasing, education is expected to provide more than the basic skills and competences mentioned above. The social relevance of curricula is essential for ensuring that comprehensive education and the education of youth support young people in their growth into active citizens and workers.

In European context there have been discussions between researchers about life skills meaning learning to learn skills, communication skills, socials skills, health knowledge, civics and ability to use information technology (for instance The European project ”Learning to learn as a part of Cross Curriculum Competencies ”, Helsinki, March 1999).

The area of life skills has clearly become more topical, not only in comprehensive education but also in vocational education and in upper secondary education. More and more people will find themselves working in very different occupations and have the need to attend to continuing education and specialist training – not only for reasons relating to working life but also because of social mobility. The increasingly complicated service society requires learning to learn, social skills and wide-ranging civic skills.

Abilities to acquire information and communicate, as well as a sound critical approach to the supply of information are preconditions for processing information of varying standard and originating from different cultural backgrounds. The way of living indisputably influences an individual's well-being. Due to the spreading of substance abuse into younger and younger population groups, it is justified to integrate knowledge and attitudes related to health more efficiently into the curricula.

Keeping the qualifications of professional skills up-to-date entails that each education institution has sufficiently contacts with different interest groups (workers, employers, professionals of research and education) so that the contentual relevance of the objectives of education and the curricula can regularly be checked.

Defining the social objectives of education and the quality of core processes demands transparency and extensive dialogue both at national and at international level. Increasing the possibilities for cooperation between public authorities, local authorities,
representatives of working life, researchers and other important stakeholders in planning and implementation of education makes it easier for education to react on urgent education needs. Cooperation between home and school in the field of preschool and comprehensive education guarantees that the development of school is conducted in a real partnership with the parents.

The national autonomy of the curricula of general education and vocational education and training and the programmes of higher education institutions and universities is essential. Scientific work of high quality and well-profiled programmes provide ideal conditions for diversified and competitive education and innovation. It would be favourable for the social relevance of curricula if they could be developed in such a manner that they encourage young people to promote their own well-being and to respect their environment, to be active in the fields of work and culture, and that they would further social mobility in the society.

2. Ensuring the quality of learning environment

A well functioning learning environment can be viewed from the level of the education system and the education institution. At a national level the financial and administrative functionality of the system entails monitoring constantly that the system corresponds to the customers' requirements.

At the level of the education institution, the part of human actors is crucial. A modern teaching process, well steered and aware of the needs, phase and resources of the students is a vital support for the development of the students' intellectual skills. This entails that the teacher keeps up with the times and is active in the society, and that he or she utilises in work and education the new instruments for acquiring information, information technology and other forms of electronic communication.

In the evaluations of the learning results in comprehensive school it has been noticed, both in evaluating mathematics and natural sciences and learning to learn skills, that the working culture of the school has an impact on the pupils' results (Korhonen 1999). A similar observation was also made during the evaluation of vocational education and training in the field of machinery, metal technology and electrical engineering in Finland. This evaluation showed that the teachers had a more positive image of the working environment than the students (Räisänen et al., 1999, p. 341). The same evaluation also noted that the important contacts between teachers and working life are not sufficient, at least as regards education in the field of machinery, metal technology and electrical engineering (p. 194). The results strengthen for their part the idea that the basic and continuing education of teachers is significant with regard to the development and evaluation of the quality of education.

The need for integrating teacher education into the quality of education is evident in the discussion of recent years. In the report ”Moving Towards a Learning society” the writers have posed a very good question: How can one hope to have a high quality of basic education, if quality is not a prime objective of teacher training? (Cochinaux and de Woot 1995, 101) Niemi argues that if teacher training is effective, it should have effects on teachers so that teachers again have an impact on school life meaning school
culture, and students learning and also on other forums of society such as democracy, justice and human rights (Niemi 1996, 21).

The extensive report on teachers’ needs for continuing education has shown that teachers keep up with the times and need continuing education not only for changes resulting from administrative reforms but also in order to upgrade their knowledge of their own subject. This concerns the teaching staff both in general education and in vocational education and training (Jakku-Sihvonen and Rusanen 1999). In the teachers’ opinion, continuing education is particularly meaningful when based on both theoretical and practical knowledge (Meriläinen 1999).

The role of the principal in creating the working culture and atmosphere of the school is central. In developing the quality of education it is in particular the management competence of the principals that make the difference; therefore, special attention should be paid on the principals’ education.

In the qualifications of teachers in higher education institutions both scientific competency and teaching skills are emphasized. The increase in the transparency and contacts with working life in higher education institutions underline the importance of teaching skills. On the other hand, the massification of universities entails the maintenance of scientific standards, so that the institutions could continue their basic task, creating and disseminating new knowledge.

The high standard of equipment in the learning environment is essential for introducing modern information technology and other necessary instruments to the students. Education institutions should be aesthetic and pleasant due to the fact that the students spend a considerable share of their time in them. The level of equipment in both vocational education institutions and the scientific departments of universities has a major influence on how the education serves working life and business life.

In building school facilities in the future, more attention should be paid to the increasing amount of cooperation between education institutions and other parties. Working methods geared to activate students require new architectural solutions.

The appropriateness of teaching material and the social and scientific relevance is central for the success of education. Quality of materials should be given due consideration, since it is not only inspected printed material, but also acquired through various electronic sources. Teaching material is central when children and young people form their visions of the world.

Developing the learning environment to meet the needs of today entails that attention is paid in various sectors and levels of education to teacher training and continuing education for principals. Requirements of modern media and different teaching methods should be taken into account in building and renovating education institutions. The diversity and modernity of teaching material is essential for developing quality. The responsibility of the Ministry is to provide favourable conditions and financial resources to secure the quality of education.

3. Independent evaluation information and utilising it
Evaluating the attainment of the objectives of education is central for quality assurance. In the future, the significance of evaluation will increase on all levels. In particular the rapid massification of tertiary education, greater diversity, varying modes of instructional delivery, the growth of private and enterpreneurial units, and the expansion of educational offerings by distance learning have lead to an increase in the need for quality control, both nationally and in individual education institutions. Profilisation in education institutions and adopting diverse roles, such as closer contacts with working life or contributions to local, regional or national needs have an influence on the collecting of follow-up information on school.

In the future, four different types of evaluation should be developed:

- self-evaluation, where the education institution conducts evaluation on its own activity
- internal evaluation within the field of activity, where higher authorities evaluate the activities of subordinate authorities or an education institution,
- external evaluation, conducted by a party independent of administration, and
- international cooperation in evaluation, where the quality of national evaluation systems will be developed, thus securing in each country a high quality of education in the European framework.

The evaluation of the outcomes accountability of the providers of education is important. At the level of education institutions it is important to produce information revealing the effectiveness of education and the attainment of common objectives.

Transferring the decision-making power to education institutions has served the purpose to charge the institutions with responsibility for the quality of their activity. It may result in the institutions wanting to choose how and to whom the quality accountability is focused. It is evident that the importance of self-evaluations will increase. Public authorities can take measures to support the raising of the level of self-evaluation by means of personnel training, learning material production, etc.

Although the sufficient independence of education institutions is a prerequisite for development, information on the national status of education is needed. Since the role of the Ministry is to create the national education policy and finance education, the ministries need well reported and analysed evaluation information on the efficiency, economy and effectiveness. The attainment of objectives set by statutes and statements related to education policy, and the correspondence of national outcome to outcome in other countries shall be monitored and evaluated on the national level (See Framework fo Evaluating Educational Outcomes In Finland 1999)

The political decision-makers shall also have access to information revealing the citizens' expectations and satisfaction related to education, particularly with regard to the quality of the objectives of education and on education's capability to serve the personal growth of individuals.

Particular attention in the steering system of the administrative field should be paid on securing that the evaluation information is as independent as possible from the activity of officials in charge of the development of the activity. This will ensure that the information produced will not be filtered through the actors responsible for the
development of the activity but is a genuine description of the situation in the field and will be submitted directly to the political decision-makers and the Ministry officials preparing the decisions.

The political decision-makers must also have access to independent evaluations; otherwise all development would be based on officially set objectives and measuring the achieving of them. It must therefore be specifically decided, to what extent and in what kind of situations evaluation information should be ordered from independent institutions, both domestic and foreign.

In most EU countries independent or partly independent units have been established to evaluate education on various levels. These quality assurance agencies sit between the public authorities and the education institutions. Taking their terms of reference either directly from government or from negotiated agreements between governments and institutions, the agencies fulfill main functions: check accountability and produce information for development.

The emergence of the quality assurance agencies is thus a reflection on the need for new control mechanisms of governments in a situation characterised by increased decentralisation and the need for support to the educational institutions to meet the new challenges in terms of institutional management, quality management of teaching and learning, research in education as well as administration. For instance on the university level these agencies have concentrated on evaluation of programmes and subjects, evaluation of education institutions and accreditation.

In assessing the quality of national evaluation system it shall be examined how reliable and up-to-date information on the daily activity of educational institutions and especially on learning results on all levels of education political decision-makers have access to, regardless of the who the provider of education is. The Ministry should get extensive and independent information directly from the evaluating party.

To produce comparable evaluation information it would be useful to develop a European system for collecting data so that different indicators can be designed for useful comparisons. There is an expert group working for the purpose.

A question worth considering is to what extent would it be possible to create self-evaluation practices by administrative measure. Would supporting evaluation increase the interest of teachers, students and their parents to actively utilise evaluation information?

The evaluation system for education must be geared to produce extensive and up-to-date, national and international information on the central activities of the education system for the use of political decision-makers. The evaluation system shall function in such a manner that the objects and grounds of evaluation are public and known by the objects of evaluation, and that they are based on the objectives of activity.

**Utilising evaluation information is one of the critical points of evaluation activity. There is still progress to be done in order to design and implement effective procedures for the use of evaluation outcomes (follow-up).** Evaluation information should be utilised determinedly both in preparing statutes and planning the
allocation of budgetary funds of education and in planning annual activity. The utilisation of evaluation outcome would improve if separate resources for rewarding high-class achievements and good practices could be appointed for the use of the Ministry and the political decision-maker, and separate resources to be allocated to necessary reparation and renovation.
4. **The quality of the steering system of education and the competence of the staff**

The functioning of the steering system of education is essential for the management of quality policy. Administration should be modern and have good quality of service. This entails that the activity of the authoritises is based on the implementation of political objectives in such a manner that the steering system, from state level to measures concerning an individual citizen, is predictable and coherent. Also, coherence is necessary with regard to the measures taken by different levels of administration.

Steering financial resources should be based on the objectives set to education, and the monitoring of the use of resources shall be public.

Quality assurance of the entire field of education entails focusing on the competence requirements of the staff. Quality policy should specify the basic qualifications for personnel in important preparatory work to ensure the credibility of the personnel in the field of education among the clientele, i.e. teaching staff, students, parents and working life.

In evaluating the working processes in the field of education, a feature which becomes accentuated is the personnel's capability to enter into dialogue with political decision-makers and different actors, in particular with regard to defining the objectives of education and utilising evaluation information in the preparation of political decisions.

**Competence of teachers, principals and personnel in administration is a central quality factor in the education system. Statutes should support the implementation of the equality principle of education. The efficiency and coherence of the steering system must be actively monitored. Financial resources for education should be allocated in such a manner that they support the realisation of the objectives of education in the best possible way.**
III QUALITY POLICY SUPPORTING EDUCATION POLICY

The basis of quality policy is the factors which are in the field of education considered most important for the positive development of the society. In the European discussion on education the central themes are

- equality in education
- lifelong learning
- support to innovations and creativity
- securing competitiveness

1. Equality in education – a permanent European ideal

Equal opportunities for personal development and self-enhancement according to individual skills is the central content of educational equality. One of the indicators of the quality of education policy is that students coming from different cultural, religious and ethnic background have equal opportunities to pursue even most demanding careers. It is also important for the equality policy of education that education supports various forms of creative artistic and scientific talent.

Due to the expanded unemployment and migration a growing number of people are confronting the risk of exclusion as users of the cultural services provided by the society, and as promoters of a humane and democratic development of the society. Quality policy of education can promote the possibilities of an entire age group to acquire basic education of such a quality that everyone has the equal citizen's skills, guaranteed by European citizenship, and good possibilities for personal development.

Equality between sexes is one of the most important goals in democratic educational policy. This means that men and women have equal opportunities to develope their skills. One indicator for equality in education is that people belonging into special groups get practical help for being able to study in as demanding programs as possible without having any practical obstacles. This objective is generally regarded as very important in the field of education. An extensive research among adult population has shown that assisting people with learning difficulties and other support measures for improving the prerequisites for learning are regarded as most important tasks of school (OECD 1995, 86).

In many European countries there are geographical regions, where providing education services may require special arrangements. Accessibility of education is essential for achieving the objective of educational equality. Another indicator for the efficiency of the education system is the access to post-comprehensive general and vocational education of children and young people living in different circumstances.

Quality policy of education can also be used to secure that nobody has to drop out of basic education due to financial problems. Removing financial obstacles is an important means of promoting social cohesion.

For the realisation of the objective of equality in education political decision-makers must have access to comparable information on the conditions of activity
and the learning results of different education institutions. Evaluation information based on international cooperation and comparison is also important because it often helps to discover features which for some reason have been ignored on the national level, but which may need developing or correcting. For the realisation of the objective of equality in education the decision-makers should have access to information, based on active follow-up, on how education has promoted social mobility, and which measures have been most effective in preventing exclusion.

2. Lifelong learning – the main principle of the development of the education system

The significance of lifelong learning has grown particularly fast in the recent decades. Partly the rapid changes in working life, partly the relatively poor level of education among the elderly workers have demanded a very fast increase of the provision of both formal, certificate-oriented education and continuing education improving vocational qualifications in most of the European countries.

The principle of lifelong learning is generally accepted in Europe. It has been stated in the White Paper that learning is good for economic prosperity and for social cohesion. A good example of the extensive need for lifelong learning and its meaning is stated in the final resolution of a seminar held during the German Presidency, in spring 1999: ”General, political and vocational education must be strengthened in order to make lifelong learning for all members of the society possible. This comprises offerings of organised learning by continuing education institutions, self-directed learning and support for individual learning activities, also in the forms of informal learning and learning in the social environment.”

Combining formal and informal education will be a particularly great challenge, already in the near future. Informal education is here used to refer to open, non-planned learning at work and outside of work, learning by doing, by experience and by chance. It is a basic form of human learning which is not adequately acknowledged and supported by formal education systems in different countries. ”Lifelong learning for all” principle cannot be realised unless this idea of ”Informal learning of all” is not included in the new society of learning and the culture of learning.

In some countries the recent discussion has been transferred from the harmonization of teaching arrangements, curricula or materials to ensuring learning results. More attention should be paid to the results, even in the standardisation discussions of international education, instead of focusing on the similarity of teaching processes.

One solution for the systematisation of informal learning and for securing the level of learning is the system of competence-based qualifications, under development in several countries. It is particularly appropriate for secondary and tertiary level education for demonstrating the level of learning, and also for managing the objectives of individual, often unsystematic learning. The requirement level of competence-based qualification is determined, but the method by which the level is achieved can vary.

There have been findings in some countries indicating that the willingness to informal, learning increases with age, but participation in formal education decreases. For
instance, according to a German report, some 50% of the working population has read professional literature during their working years; more than 50% say that they have learned through experimental learning, by watching, comparing, trying etc. One third said that they had participated in informational events (Dohmen 1999.)

On the other hand, only some 50% of the working population in different European countries participates in continuing or supplementary education. The other half is on the verge of exclusion from the rapid development. It will be a considerable challenge for the authorities to secure appropriate provision of education and, on the other hand, to provide adults the opportunity to prevent their own exclusion by means of new learning. This entails supporting education organisations and securing the social support for adults’ education.

For instance in England there are clear findings on the fact that where employee development schemes offered workers entitlement for funding learning, access to advice and the freedom to study anything at all, startling changes in the pattern of participation can be secured. Blue collar workers, with no previous post-school learning participate as actively as white collar managers.

The role of education institutions providing adult education must undergo profound changes in order to be able to support learning. Until recently, concentration of teaching and learning in separate specialised school-like institutions has been a basic principle of public education. Education institutions must cooperate more efficiently with other institutions, organisations, companies, firms, service enterprises etc. They have to create networks with the main centres and points of intersecting in the communities, where people work, live and learn. Educational institutes must become some kind of learning-service-centres for the support of the situational problem-solving learning.

An overall educational strategy on lifelong learning should be submitted to the Government. A priority is securing the possibilities for education for people facing exclusion. The starting point for education arrangements should be learning, not only the education organisation and teaching like before. Lifelong learning should be seen as a shared responsibility involving the Government, other public authorities and bodies, employers, providers and individuals.

3. Supporting innovation and creativity

One form of achieved equality is that the most talented and creative individuals are given the opportunity to full development. Profilisation of schools has been a traditional means in Europe for supporting the development of gifted individuals. However, working life in the 21st century demands creativity, problem-solving abilities and discovery of new possibilities from wider groups of workers.

In other words, more and more excellent professionals with the ability to further the development of the society will be needed in the future. On the other hand, the need for professionals with high level of education increases as the tasks become more complicated. Measures have been taken in several countries already to meet the future needs by increasing the enrolment in higher education institutions.
Securing the possibilities for the development of the talented is one of the prerequisites of international competitiveness. Supporting talents and innovations is most advanced in those universities which have established centres of excellence.

A centre of excellence can get a research and training unit comprising one or more high-level research teams for attaining the international forefront in its field of specialisation. Units of research and development serve the purpose of securing the national competitiveness. Such units have also been supported on the basis of the quality of education (see Hämäläinen ja Moitus 1999). They have, *inter alia*, the following objectives: improving the quality and relevance of education and stimulating ongoing development of education, as well as encouraging this financially.

Securing the possibilities for development for the talented concerns all levels of school, but in particular at the university level the possibilities of the talented should be safeguarded due to the trend of massification. Working life needs continuously innovative and competent workers to develop its own activities. Development possibilities for gifted individuals in different fields should be secured. It is good for the entire society to provide equally good possibilities for education both for individuals specialising in the field of culture and the arts, and for those innovative experts entering the world of science, industry and business.

**Supporting high-quality innovation and creativity follows the same principles as sports. Producing sufficiently top-ranking individuals for developing the society involves educating vast masses of students. Even within comprehensive education individual studying possibilities can be provided for individuals with capacity to deviate from the basic qualifications level.**

4. **Competitiveness of European education**

In discussing the competitiveness of education in Europe, objects of examination could be learning results, competitiveness of industry, level of unemployment and the sufficient supply of appropriately trained labour force. Although all social problems cannot be counted as the responsibility of the school system, education either opens possibilities or builds obstacles for the development of the various sectors of the society.

One indicator of the competitiveness of European education is the level of learning results in comparison with e.g. Asia and the United States. According to the studies conducted by OECD, there is no common European level of education; instead, the differences between the European countries are considerable. Improvement is needed, however, in knowledge in the field of mathematics and natural sciences. Knowledge of languages and cultures is of a high standard, although not extensive.

Quantitative planning is also a central part of the quality of education. At present one of the bottlenecks in development is the lack of people with a high-standard education in mathematics and natural sciences. This manifests itself in particular as the lack of workers developing and needing technology in most of the European countries. This question was particularly topical in the informal meeting of the EU Ministers of Industry held in Finland in early July 1999.
One of the quality criteria of European education is the ability to react and anticipate in the field of vocational education and training. Both basic education and retraining must adjust to the new educational needs, more difficult to anticipate, by increasing the enrolment in some sectors and decreasing it in others, and with radical changes in the curricula.

Another important indicator of competitiveness in education is the marketing of European education services outside Europe. In particular on the university level study programmes are transferred between countries to a considerable extent. European universities must learn to compete in this with American, Canadian and Asian universities. Even other universities than the English-speaking ones should become more active in this respect.

Securing the conditions for European scientific higher education institutions and utilising the produced information in every form of development of education is important for the competition even in the future. It is important, that in the field of investments more attention is being paid to the education of research officers in Europe to secure the rapid dissemination of innovations.

The international comparison of education is conducted between individual countries, which entails that every Member State is compared with all the others. This approach is appropriate, because the decisions in education policy are made on the national level. It is, nevertheless, essential to see to it that the standard of educational well-being is raised in the entire Community, which makes it a competitive whole internationally. Therefore, this report aims at examining the overall profile of the EU countries. ¹

The context of education

The duration of education has extended in every country, which shows in the high level of education among the younger generations. When we examine the entire population between 25 and 64, it becomes evident that the number of population in the EU without secondary level education is over the average. The share of people who have completed secondary education of the above-mentioned population group is under the OECD average. The amount of people with university education is 12 %, whereas the corresponding figure in the United States is 26 %. Also the differences between Member States are considerable. The highest percentage referring to population with university education in the EU is 23 % and the lowest 6 %. These facts make it particularly important to implement lifelong learning in the European Union.

In the future the level of education of the entire EU population will be high. This can be predicted by the fact that in 1996 the number of people with secondary level education is regularly greater than the corresponding age group in the United States, Canada or Australia. The highest numbers, however, are those of Korea and Japan.

The share of people between 5 and 29, i.e. in the age of active education, of the EU population in 1996 was some 79 million, which means that more than one fifth of the

¹ The data is based on the statistics in the publication Education at a Glance - OECD indicators 1998. The statistics have been used to calculate country means ja EU total figures. The latter means are weighted and the calculations are submitted by the OECD Secretariat. Weighted means have been calculated using the data base of OECD. The data is mainly from 1996.
entire population is receiving education. That share would even greater, if the people in pre-school education and education for older generations would be included. There are, however, significant differences in participating in education between the EU countries. The highest number of people between 5 and 29 in education is 70.8 %, the lowest 52.3%.

A five-year old entering the lower stage of comprehensive school in Europe can expect an education of 16.8 years, exactly the same as in the United States. Several European countries have already exceeded this average, although the longest duration of education is the Australian average, 19.3 years.

**Expenses of education**

With relation to the GNP, the EU countries use for education, all levels of education included, more money than the average in the OECD countries, but less than in the United States or in Canada (the comparison includes subsidies to the private sector and households). This does not, however, concern tertiary education, where the EU average is 1.3%, the US average 2.4 % and the Canadian average 2.8 %. In the EU countries the smallest figure is 0.8 % and the highest 2.3 %.

The resources used per student reveal that the pre-school education and secondary education are typically more expensive in the EU than in other countries, lower stage comprehensive education as expensive as elsewhere, and tertiary education less expensive. In the United States the sum used per university student is almost three times the money spent on a EU student. In the strategy of Japan, Korea and the United States there is a significant difference in weighting between the investments in secondary and tertiary education in favour of tertiary education. This is true also in the EU, but the difference is less drastic than in the above countries.

**Content of education and hours**

The curricula of lower secondary education in the EU differ to some extent from the American ones. The share of hours used for modern foreign languages is twice as much as in the American curricula, for religion five times, and for technology twice. On the corresponding educational level in the United States much more hours are used for mathematics, natural sciences, sports and vocational studies than in Europe.

In all school education in the EU the number of teaching hours is smaller than in the United States. The annual difference in hours at the lower stage education in the EU and in the United States is 136, at the upper stage 257, and in general secondary education 290.

The division of tertiary degrees between different subject categories does not display significant differences. It is, however, worth noticing that the universities in Canada and the United States produce a significantly greater number of degrees in humanities than the universities in the EU. Although there are other differences, comparison is difficult, because the degrees are divided between university and non-university sectors in different ways in different countries.
Special challenges

Youth unemployment (in the age group 15–24) is a particularly serious threat in the EU countries. As the rate increased in the OECD countries from 11.5 % in 1990 to 12.8 % in 1998, the numbers in the EU were 15.7 % and 19.1 %. Unemployment percentages of women are higher than those of men. Risk of unemployment is greater for people with less education. The situation is thus most difficult for those without a certificate from secondary education. A central task is, therefore, to make a certificate from secondary education the basic degree for everyone.

Another problem in some EU countries is dropping out of tertiary education. In Japan, 90 % of starters complements the degree. In many EU countries the corresponding amount is between 75 and 80 %, but in some countries notably lower. The criteria for entering an education institution differ from one country to the other, so that a direct comparison of numbers is not reliable. It does show, however, that counselling should be improved.

The third special challenge is the implementation of the strategy for lifelong learning. The strategy covers all education from pre-school education to adult education. A specific challenge in the EU countries is meeting the educational needs of the older generations.

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IV EUROPEAN COOPERATION FOR DEVELOPING THE EVALUATION OF THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

EU, OECD and Unesco have already started important development work for evaluating the quality of education. Wide-scale international cooperation will be needed in the continuation to spur the process of developing new alternatives and building inter-country agreements for using new ways to assess and validate learning across settings. Cooperation is needed in particular for developing evaluation methods by exchanging experiences, training the staff together and starting joint experimental projects.

This chapter presents examples of potential areas for European cooperation. There is clearly a need for developing common indicators and evaluation systems for them, sharing good practices and creating networks. Networks help to support the development of quality assurance staff, recruitment and education of experts and the development of evaluation methods.

1. Follow-up indicators in the use of comparative evaluation

With regard to the development of the school system it is important to receive comparative information of the school environments in other countries. In this sense various follow-up indicators are practical instruments for administration. In the European Union the production of indicators could be combined with the results from the Ines project of OECD. Development work of indicators, initiated by DG XXII, related to the quality of education is under discussion. The Working Committee in Quality Indicators in Education started in 1998. Its work has progressed rapidly, and the suggestions for the first European quality indicators in education may be expected during 2000.

Indicators for the objective of equality in education and indicators measuring the success in life skills are interesting in the European context. The development of indicators is supported by an ongoing project with eight Member States participating. There is already a Finnish version of a set of tests intended for 12-year-old and 15-year-old children applicable as a basis for an indicator for learning to learn (Learning to Learn as a part of Cross Curriculum Competencies, Sokrates 3.1. project 1999.)

2. Cooperation in the development of methods for assessment

International cooperation in the development of evaluation methods is highly topical. Due to the difficult and laborious nature of the development of evaluation methods, cooperation between Member States would be most useful both in selecting the objects of evaluation and in developing the evaluation methods.

A. Testing school achievements in basic education

In most European countries there is a national system for assessing school achievements at least at the end of comprehensive education. In compulsory education much attention should be paid to both core skills (basic academic skills) and life skills. In the EU Act on the quality of education at school, dated 16 December
1997, it is stated that "the function of school is to help the pupil to adopt values, knowledge and skills which he or she may utilise in continuing education and as a European citizen. The assessment of these achievements is essential for defining the quality of the school and the teaching it offers."

Evaluation of educational achievement cannot be only assessing traditional qualities meaning basic academic skills such as in native language, mathematics and science or other academic based school topics but also the qualities people need every day: This means that the students' cross curriculum competencies or even broader concept life skills have to be evaluated. These qualities consist of learning to learn ability, communications skills (meaning social skills, oral and written communication, ability to use information technology), motivation for lifelong learning and skills in civics and European citizenship and knowledge and attitudes in the area of health education. These qualities have to be evaluated and for that purpose there is a need for cooperation in order to develop new methods for assessing these qualities.

The following is a description of areas where European cooperation for developing methods of assessment is needed in particular.

**Learning-to-learn skills**

The evaluation of learning-to-learn skills focuses attention especially on the essential skill which cannot be produced in the studies of any separate subject or course: the ability to acquire, process and assimilate new pieces of knowledge. This object has been neglected both in evaluation and research but it is indisputably important. Students’ self-confidence and positive self-image as a learner are the essential bases for evaluation. The evaluation of the learning-to-learn skills is directed to all levels of education, starting from the pupils at the lower stage of the comprehensive school. Evaluation must focus on what kind of self image the students have as learners, what kind of motivation they have, what kind of skills of solving problems and processing information they have, and what kind of initiative they have as learners.

European cooperation in this field has already been started through the Sokrates 3.1 initiative, coordinated by Finland, where the Finnish set of tests is applied in other EU countries as well.

**Communication skills**

Communication skills are very a important part of modern education at all levels. With regard to the skills achieved, the objects of evaluation include the skills at visual, oral and written communication, as well as interaction and negotiation skills, cooperative skills and the ability to utilize new information and communication technology. At the comprehensive school special attention must be paid to the social skills. In vocational education of both youth and adults, in addition to the above mentioned, evaluation must also focus on the interaction and negotiation skills and to the abilities to utilize the media and technology.

**Motivation for lifelong learning**
Motivation for lifelong learning is one of the most essential objects when evaluating the effectiveness of education. By means of education an individual must be given a positive attitude towards the significance of education in a changing world. The positive attitude towards learning should be so well adopted during education that, irrespective of age and starting level, the students are interested to learn new things and to acquire themselves the skills which support their own development. The aim is that during their education the students acquire, besides the ability to adapt themselves to changes, also the desire to develop themselves continuously both in their vocation and in their personal life.

Civics and European citizenship

Even in compulsory education every child should develop a basic understanding of how the surrounding society function, as well at local and at national level. Children also should understand what the main idea of the European union is. That is why the assessments should have also as on object the basic knowledge of one’s rights and duties in democratic society. In compulsory education every child should be prepared for being a citizen so that they get information of local decision making processes and what kind of public services are offered.

Health Education

Health Education is a duty of the schools which seems to become more and more important. For instance in many Asian countries this is a very carefully followed topic in national curricula (An International Comparative Study of School Curriculum1999). A prerequisite for mental and physical well-being is that the citizens have sufficiently basic knowledge on how to take care of personal health, where to go for health services, and how to prevent illnesses. In preventing substance abuse the school has a shared responsibility with the homes.

Including these themes in the assessment programmes is necessary in order to provide the Ministry with a realistic view of the well-being of children and young people, and of their readiness to participate in the life of the society as equal citizens in the fields of education, culture, work and politics.

B. Competencies achieved in vocational education

Vocational education and training should also be evaluated carefully because in that area there is a clear and common need for development. Comparing training programs best practices could be shared. For efficient developmental work ministries need information how well the competencies have been achieved on different programs and how well students are employed.

In vocational education for youth competence demonstration based assessing as well as national standards relating to that, are being developed for assessing students’ achievements. Creating methods for evaluating competence and establishing an evaluation system entails wide-scale cooperation but would certainly be useful for the development of vocational education in different countries. As regards assessment of learning results there is a need for assessing competencies in general basic skills, theoretical knowledge and competencies.
Skills and competencies should be evaluated so that the examinee may be awarded a certificate which contains enough information for working life and further education. Assessments based on competence demonstration are useful for vocational education and training for both youth and adults.

C. Need for cooperation on the level of higher education

Close cooperation is needed on the level of higher education also in defining the basic competence requirements, in particular in areas where there is a lot of student exchange and the international mobility of labour force is significant. For instance in engineer education European cooperation for defining basic competence requirements has already been started. Defining the results of education is another area worth developing.

A great amount of development work is needed for assessing learning results, curricula and education organisations. Usually quality in these areas has been defined by using control groups. In the future, defining and assessing quality will require the participation of more and more representatives from different interest groups of working life, society and politics. Questions concerning the utility of universities at local, regional, national or international level, the effectiveness and economic efficiency of their activity, the correspondence between education and research and the society will then become more central in quality evaluation.

Distance education and student exchange bring up the question whether it is useful to assess studying processes, as the the learning situations are no longer connected to the activity of one single education institution, but there is a variety of ways and contexts of learning. As learning takes place increasingly at work, other universities or foreign countries, via Internet or in the library, the traditional means to assess education are no longer relevant. Change in the learning situations force attention to questions of how learning can be assessed and monitored when it takes place apart from the instructional process or away from the sponsoring institution. When a student participates in international programmes, learning takes place in different places at different times and the sponsoring institution has limited control over the circumstances in which it takes place.

When the focus of assessment and inspection is on learning and other results, the quality assurance agencies and other corresponding organisations are facing new challenges. It would be useful to use European cooperation for providing an answer to the question how is learning monitored and how can the coherence of a program be assessed across different instructional settings, including cultural and linguistic differences and differences in how educational programmes are structured. Procedures to allow credit transfer or to give recognition to degrees earned in other countries also offer useful precedents for further work to equate distance learning or study abroad with traditional units of academic learning.

D. Methods for self-evaluation at schools and institutions

Methods for self-evaluation have already been developed in European cooperation. European cooperation in the area of best practices is an excellent way of developing
quality. A good example is the "Pilot project on quality evaluation", which involved 101 European schools. The schools had the opportunity to exchange experiences, and a report on the project is freely available. The project demonstrated how useful it is to gather together teachers and representatives of administration who have used assessment in development in different ways (Education, Training and Youth, Final Report, 1999.)

Educational institutions must be encouraged to provide quality information for their own purposes. Good quality assurance provides education institutions with the means of satisfying themselves that their educational objectives are being achieved and will continue to be achieved in future.

E. Cooperation in accreditation

In vocational education and training the development of quality standards and creating of confirmed accreditation practices in the European area offers an opportunity to improve the quality of education. Subject-specific, bilateral and multilateral evaluation projects, which could be used for developing methods as well as for comparing skills, should be launched in this sector. In using different evaluation method it is worth remembering that none of them can alone fulfill the needs of the evaluation of education. Accreditation is appropriate for assessing the various factors of input-based education, but output-based evaluation is equally necessary.

International cooperation in evaluation will be widespread at least in disciplines with considerably international cooperation and mobility. Examples of these fields in secondary and tertiary education are e.g. navigation, technology, trade and health. The need for accreditation-like evaluation of minimum standards becomes particularly highlighted in international quality assurance cooperation. This is intended for fulfilling the needs created by the mobility of students and labour force; exchange students need information on the standard of education institutions, and employers need some kind of guarantee of the competence of people who have a certificate from a certain line of education.

At the university level the active student exchange and the increasing mobility of labour force have created pressures for developing a common European accreditation practice. This demands a strong national accreditation system in each Member State, which can be supported by international cooperation. Simultaneously, because of open European market, there is a need for an European dimension in quality assessment and in the future it will not longer be possible to look at quality in a national framework only.

3. Comparing the systems of quality assessment

The ministry has several ways to define the framework for evaluating educational outcomes. In some countries there is a need to define standards of performance indicators that can be used at different levels: national indicators, regional or local or schools level depending on how detailed information is needed.

Many European countries have a centrally planned inspection system for evaluating learning environment, competence of teachers and organisation of education on a local
level, which intends to secure that political decision-makers receive detailed information on the quality, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the activity, meaning its legitimacy and appropriateness.

There are countries where the whole evaluation system is based on inspection. Usually inspection system has also various levels: national, regional and even local inspection. What ever the evaluation system is, the most important principle is that evaluation information is produced by various methods and the information is used efficiently as support in development.

In many countries there is a system corresponding to the matriculation examination (baccalaureate system) at the end of upper secondary education. In vocational education assessing core skills and competencies vary greatly.

There are some small-scale comparisons of the differences between evaluation systems. The QUALS project, coordinated by Scotland, has already been implemented as a part of the Socrates 3.1 programme. The purpose of the project was to introduce the inspection and evaluation practices in different Member State to the inspectors from the standpoint of quality assurance (The final report will be released in 1999). Judging by the report it would seem that a profound comparison of systems would give many useful information for further development of the activity.

**Comparative assessment of the European evaluation systems may improve the abilities to develop an evaluation strategy for the education system in different countries.**

4. **Expert exchange and register of evaluation staff**

By supporting expert exchange in the field of evaluation, experts responsible for quality assessment may visit national centres for studying the implementation of evaluation projects, evaluation systems and methods. Development of expertise by means of excursions would also ensure that there are competent European evaluation professionals available in the European Union when national authorities or ministers are in need of independent evaluation for assessing the education system or a part of it. Creating a register of evaluation professionals in Europe is one way of rising the standard of evaluation.

5. **Networks of officials and researchers**

Networks should offer an opportunity to extend the experience of Member States in the field of quality assurance in higher education beyond their own borders and allow all the actors to share and help develop ideas and practices.

Networks can help to generate ideas which lead to practical cooperation projects and benefit the development of quality assessment methods and exchange of experiences. Several European cooperation projects implemented or under discussion in the field of evaluation have been initiated by the European network for policy makers.
Units specialized in the evaluation of universities are establishing a European network, which will support the development of university evaluation. There are similar, recently established networks in the field of research at university level. Initiatives generated in various expert networks are a useful and flexible help for the personnel of the ministries. The use of experts in these networks for own initiatives, and getting new ideas for quality development work is practical and cost-efficient.

In the field of vocational education and training a network should be built for developing the quality of vocational education, so that European cooperation on the development needs of vocational education could be started.


There is good reason to arrange conferences for developing the quality of education in the near future. Representatives of administration and research could use these conferences for sharing information on the development of the quality of education. The series of conferences could focus on securing the quality of learning environment in comprehensive education, upper secondary education, vocational education, adult education and university-level education in such a manner that the effectiveness of education would be subject to a wide range of discussions concerning the cost-efficiency, efficiency and impact of education. This kind of negotiation between researchers and administration could offer new ideas for developing qualifications and defining processes of objectives, and for the development of teacher training in different forms of education institutions.

7. Sharing good practices in the administration of education

The ministries should, to as large an extent as possible, evaluate the quality of their own activity and develop methods appropriate for assessment.

Development of quality strategies initiated in the sphere of public administration has regrettably often been limited to self-evaluation of organisations on different levels of education, partly conducted by the organisation itself, partly by an external consulting agency. In order to create a quality strategy reaching to the level of the actual target activity serving the citizens, i.e. an education institution, the Ministry needs a multi-level model, which both cooperates with horizontal actors and also produces vertical information, from the grass root activity to decision-making. It is, therefore, necessary to create forums for discussion for activity aiming at actual quality development, where ministries from different countries can get new ideas for developing their own activities.

The project Best Practice Initiative, involving the quality development of the activity in the entire public administration was launched in Vienna in November 1998. The original aim was to develop a European quality award tool for public administration. The project will have a steering committee meeting under the Finnish Presidency, and quality conference in Portugal in 2000. The project aims at promoting the quality work in different fields of administration so that they could create own quality strategies for developing their administrative activity.
Comparative evaluation of the steering systems of the education system is a concrete measure, which can help to gather best practices for spurring the national development work.
V CONCLUSION

This report describes the central questions in European policy for the quality of education. The starting point was the idea that a high standard of education gives the Europeans the means for survival in the tumult of changes, and that it also contributes to a more positive future. International competitiveness entails investments in human capital. Good education increases tolerance and mutual understanding. A premise for education should be to offer every individual education adapted to personal needs and possibilities. Ensuring competitiveness entails that education encourages creativity.

International dimension is increasingly important and requires shared understanding and discussion to ensure that appropriate and effective quality assurance mechanisms and structures can be created and deployed to meet the resulting challenges. Effective quality control increases the transparency of education and supports international student exchange and the construction of common curricula, and ensures opportunities for continuing education in different countries.

It is essential for the development of the school system that the relation between national officials and education institutions is characterised by dialogue and trust. The national quality assurance systems should balance the internal and external needs of the education system.
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A Letter

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