COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 24.01.2000
COM(1999) 709 final

2000/0022 (COD)

Proposal for a

RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

on European cooperation in quality evaluation in school education

(presented by the Commission)

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

1. INTRODUCTION

Quality in school education is a priority for the Member States, every school in Europe is intrinsically concerned with quality, and the first priority of every teacher is the quality of pupils' learning. As stated in Article 149, the Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States. European Community encouragement, support and facilitation of the exchange of information and experiences can instigate innovative measures in improving this quality.

In order to strengthen cooperation at European level in the field of evaluation of quality in school education various activities were undertaken in 1995-1998. Senior Education Officials met twice in 1995 to discuss quality evaluation in school education. Following four calls for proposals in 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998, the Commission allocated financial support for studies, study visits and conferences focusing on the quality of school education.

When the Commission expressed its intention of launching a pilot project on Quality Evaluation in School Education at the beginning of 1997, this was strongly supported by the Ministers of Education at the Council meeting on 6 May 1996. The Ministers stressed the need to step up co-operation at European level in this vital area. Later the Council of Ministers at their meeting in Brussels on 20 November 1997 further underlined the importance of improving quality in school education by the adoption of a Council conclusion in the field[1].

The pilot project on quality evaluation in school education was conducted in 1997 and 1998 in cooperation with the competent authorities in the Member States. The aim of the pilot project was to further raise awareness of the need to evaluate secondary education in Europe, to enhance existing national procedures, to give a European dimension to quality evaluation, and to support the exchange of information and experiences[2].

The results of the pilot project were included in an interim report[3] and in the final report[4]. In national reports, the impact of the project on schools in different countries is evaluated. In some countries, the pilot project has fed into new laws, notably in the Netherlands, Austria and Greece. In Italy, the project gave input for the implementation of school autonomy. Portugal continue to run the pilot project progressively involving more and more schools in the endeavour. In Norway, it has inspired a White Paper on quality evaluation. The German speaking countries

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1 Council conclusions of 16 December 1997 on the evaluation of quality in school education (98/C 1/03).

2 The methods of evaluation employed in the pilot project was described in the "guidelines for participating institutions", and "a practical guide to self-evaluation", translated into all community languages and distributed to all 101 schools taking part in the pilot project.

3 Evaluating quality in school education; A European pilot project; Interim report. May 1998.

4 Evaluating quality in school education; A European pilot project; Final report. June 1999.

(Germany, Austria, Luxembourg and Liechtenstein) are continuing school meetings on a trans-national level.

2. CONTEXT

Article 149 of the EC Treaty states that the Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.

There are many aspects to quality in education. The quality of a system or an arrangement cannot be defined in absolute terms. Quality depends on the objectives set, the means whereby they are to be attained, and the conditions under which they are being achieved. Developments in society imply changes in the demands of the quality of educational provisions. Quality in education depends on the stakeholder interest (who is assessing the quality of the educational provisions: a student, a teacher or a parent).

The definition of quality in education is a political debate and part of the democratic process. The debate is about objectives, means to achieve the objectives, economic priorities, knowledge about education and learning processes, and the needs and wishes of citizens.

On different levels of the education system, quality evaluation functions as an instrument to measure and evaluate whether the education system lives up to the objectives set. Evaluation implies dialogue between all concerned parties, and through proper follow-up adjustment is made to fulfil new quantitative and qualitative criteria.

Most European educational systems have experienced great changes over the last two decades. One of the main forces at work is decentralisation. A greater degree of decision-making power is devolved to local levels of the education system and institutions are becoming more autonomous. In a sense, decentralisation is an instrument to take the political debate or the democratic process on what constitutes quality down to lower levels of the education system.

There are basically two perspectives of quality evaluation: external evaluation and self-evaluation. External evaluation is an attempt by the central government to ensure that quality education is provided, and that schools use resources efficiently. External evaluation is the mean to control and guide schools from central level. In the perspective of bringing the democratic debate on quality in education down to local levels, self-evaluation is empowering schools themselves to undertake the task. Self-evaluation is an instrument to organise the democratic debate on what constitutes quality in school education at local level. Self-evaluation often asks for the involvement of all relevant actors, and it provides instruments to support decision making and learning.

Quality indicators or benchmarks are data helping stakeholders at all levels when evaluating the quality of the educational provisions. Organisations, business enterprises, schools or universities become more intelligent by virtue of having at their

disposal data which can help them to see more clearly. Data providing lenses through which to understand the world of school and classrooms.

The point of establishing European level cooperation on quality evaluation and on quality indicators is obviously not to produce evaluation models, which can be generally introduced. It is precisely the diversity and wealth of methods and approaches used nationally which will generate a fruitful exchange of information, which can contribute to improving an enriching existing assessment arrangements. Any action at European level must therefore be based on the different national contexts and the historical, social, cultural and political situation in each country.

3. LEGAL BASIS FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

For the area of education and training, Articles 149 and 150 state that the Community's role is to encourage cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, to support and supplement their action while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education and training systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.

The Recommendation respects the diversity of the European education and training systems and builds on voluntary cooperation and adaptation. Community action in the field could have an added value in so far as the exchange of information and experiences set one's own national system in perspective, and might inspire innovations.

2000/0022 (COD)

Proposal for a

RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

on European cooperation in quality evaluation in school education

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Articles 149(4) and Article 150(4) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission[1],

Having regard to the opinion of the Economic and Social Committee[2],

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions[3],

Acting in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 251 of the Treaty,

Whereas:

(1) High quality education is an objective for all Member States.

(2) The resources devoted to education have increased in all industrialised countries during the last decades. Education is seen as the solution to problems of employment and social cohesion. Lifelong learning is the key to controlling one's future on a professional and personal level. High quality education is essential in the light of labour market policies, and the free movement of workers within the European Union.

(3) In the area of labour market policies the Council adopts each year a set of employment guidelines building on quantitative target and indicators. In the 1999 employment guidelines[4], Guideline 7 states that Member States will "improve the quality of their school systems in order to reduce substantially the number of young people who drop out of the school system early. Particular attention should also be given to young people with learning difficulties". In Guideline 8 of the proposed 2000 employment guidelines[5], the Commission is proposing that specific reference be made to developing computer literacy, to equipping schools with computer equipment and to facilitating student access to the Internet by 2002, which should positively impact on the quality of education and prepare the young for the digital age.

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1 OJ C

2 OJ C

3 OJ C

4 Council Resolution of 22 February 1999 on the 1999 employment guidelines, OJ C 69, 12.3.1999, p. 2.

5 COM(1999) 441 final.

(4) In order to achieve the objective of high quality education, a whole range of means are available. Quality evaluation is a method of monitoring and creating learning and improving schools, which are capable of transmitting knowledge and equipping students in the Community with the appropriate skills, qualifications and attitudes which are essential to meet future challenges.

(5) The Commission conducted a pilot project on quality evaluation in higher education in 1994 and 1995. Council Recommendation 98/561/EC of 24 September 1998 on European Cooperation in quality assurance in higher education[6] underlines the importance of the exchange of information and experiences and cooperation regarding quality assurance with other Member States.

(6) The Socrates programme, in particular Action III.3.1, invites the Commission to promote the exchange of information and experience on questions of common interest. Evaluating quality in school education is one of the priority themes of the said Action.

(7) The Commission has, since March 1996, launched various studies and operational activities to examine the question of evaluation from different perspectives with the aim of describing the wide variety and wealth of approaches and education evaluation methodologies used at different levels.

(8) The Commission conducted a pilot project during the academic year 1997/1998 in 101 upper and lower secondary schools in the countries participating in the Socrates programme. An Advisory Working Party that brought together Member States' appointed experts on education evaluation assisted the Commission in the implementation of the project.

(9) The participants in the project, including representatives of the 101 schools, decision-makers from national administrations, researchers, and school stakeholders adopted a declaration during a final conference in Vienna on 20 and 21 November 1998. That declaration states that "The Pilot Project has raised the awareness of quality issues in our schools and in almost all our schools, the project has helped to improve the quality of education during the project period[7]".

(10) All 18 countries (EU Member States and Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein) taking part in the pilot project have written national reports exploring the impact of and their experiences during the pilot project. Those National Reports are predominantly positive and stress the importance of learning from one another internationally through the exchange of experiences and of good practices.

(11) The final European report[8] emphasises a range of methodological elements as important elements for successful self-evaluation. Those elements include networking nationally and internationally and support and encouragement from national level.

(12) In its conclusions of 16 December 1997[9], the Council stated that evaluation is also an important element for assuring and where appropriate, improving quality.

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6 OJ L 270, 7.10.1998, p. 56.

7 At the final conference of the pilot project in Vienna on 20 and 21 November 1998, the participants adopted a declaration.

8 Evaluation quality in school education, A European pilot project, Final report, June 1999.

(13) It is necessary to take account of the principle of subsidiarity and Member States' exclusive responsibilities for the organisation and structure of their education systems, as well as the autonomy and independence of their educational institutions,

I. RECOMMEND:

THAT MEMBER STATES SUPPORT THE IMPROVEMENT OF QUALITY IN SCHOOL EDUCATION, BY:

1. Supporting and, where appropriate, establishing transparent quality systems with the following aims:

(a) to safeguard the quality of school education as a basis for lifelong learning, within the specific economic, social and cultural context of each Member State while taking due account of the European dimension,

(b) to encourage school self-evaluation as a method to create learning and improving schools, within a balanced framework between school self-evaluation and any external evaluations,

(c) to clarify the purpose and the conditions for school self-evaluation, and to ensure that the approach to self-evaluation is consistent with other forms of regulation;

2. Supporting and, where appropriate, developing systems of external evaluation with the following aims:

(a) to monitor and provide methodological support and encouragement for school self-evaluation,

(b) to provide an outside view of the school ensuring that it is in a process of continuous improvement;

3. Encouraging and supporting the involvement of all school stakeholders in the full process of evaluation in schools with the following aims:

(a) to add a decisive and creative element to school self-evaluation,

(b) to ensure shared responsibility for the improvement of schools;

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[9] OJ C 1, 3.1.1998, p. 4.

4. Supporting training in the management and the use of self-evaluation with the following aims:

(a) to make school self-evaluation function effectively as an instrument strengthening schools' capacity to improve,

(b) to ensure an efficient dissemination of examples of good practice and new instrument within self-evaluation;

5. Supporting schools' capacity to learn from one another nationally and on a European scale, with the following aims:

(a) to identify good practices, efficient tools and benchmarks,

(b) to form networks to support each other and provide outside impetus to the evaluation process;

6. Encouraging the cooperation between the authorities responsible for quality in school education and promote European networking:

This cooperation could cover some of the following areas:

(a) the exchange of information and experiences, in particular on methodological developments and examples of good practice,

(b) the development of comparable data, indicators and benchmarks on national education systems to compare strength and weaknesses with a view to exchanging good practices,

(c) the building of European expertise in the area, which could be made available for authorities in Member States concerned,

(d) promoting contact between experts internationally.

II. INVITE THE COMMISSION:

1. to encourage, in close cooperation with the Member States, and on the basis of existing programmes, and subject to their objectives and normal, open and transparent procedures, the cooperation referred to in point 6 between the authorities responsible for quality in school education, also involving organisations and associations of school education institutions with a European remit and the necessary experience in quality assessment and quality assurance;

1.1. 2. to establish a database for the dissemination of tools and instruments of school self-evaluation. The database should also contain examples of best practice within school evaluation. The database should be accessible on the Internet;

3. to present triennial reports to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on progress in the development of quality assurance systems in the various Member States and on cooperation activities at European level including the progress achieved with respect to the objectives referred to above.

Done at Brussels,

For the European Parliament
The President

For the Council
The President

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

1. TITLE OF OPERATION

European Parliament and Council Recommendation on European Cooperation in Quality Evaluation in School Education

2. BUDGET HEADING(S) INVOLVED

The A-part of the general budget, section III (Commission).

The establishment of the database will involve budget item B3.1001 of the Socrates programme.

3. LEGAL BASIS

Articles 149 and 150 of the EC Treaty

4. DESCRIPTION OF OPERATION

4.1 General objective

The logic of the recommendation is to obtain a mandate to establish a European network of institutions working in the field of quality evaluation, indicators and benchmark.

4.2 Period covered and arrangements for renewal

The recommendation is indefinite.

5. TYPE OF EXPENDITURE OR REVENUE

The implementation of the recommendation implies the establishment of a database for the dissemination of tools and instruments of schools- self-evaluation. The database should also contain examples of best practice within school evaluation. Within the framework of the recommendation two expert meetings are foreseen per year.

6. FINANCIAL IMPACT

The implementation of the recommendation implies the establishment of a database. A call for proposal is envisaged.

6.1 Itemised breakdown of cost

Commitment appropriations EUR million (at current prices)

Breakdown	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006 and subs. Yrs	
Establishment and running of database	0.05	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	
Total	0.05	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	

6.2 Schedule of commitment and payment appropriations

EUR million

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006 and subs. Yrs	Total
Commitment appropriations	0.05	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.25
Payment appropriations							
Year n n+1 n+2 n+3 n+4 n+5 and subs. yrs							
Total							

The amount is found within existing resources of DG Education and Culture.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENDITURE (SECTION III, PART A OF THE BUDGET)

Actual mobilisation of the necessary administrative resources will depend on the Commission's annual decision on the allocation of resources, taking into account the number of staff and additional amounts authorised by the budgetary authority.

7.1 Effect on the number of posts

Type of post		Staff to be assigned to managing the operation		Source		Duration
		Permanent posts	Temporary posts	Existing resources in the DG or department concerned	Additional resources	
Officials or temporary staff	A B C	0.5 0.25 0.25		0.5 0.25 0.25		
Other resources						
Total		1		1		

7.2 Overall financial impact of additional human resources

EUR

	Amounts	Method of calculation
Officials Temporary staff Other resources (indicate budget heading)	108 000	108 000 x 1/an (A1, A2, A4, A5 and A7)
Total	108 000	

The amount is found within existing resources of DG Education and Culture.

7.3 Increase in other administrative expenditure as a result of the operation

EUR

Budget heading	Amounts	Method of calculation
A-7030	19 500	2 meetings x 15 participants x 650 euros
Total	19 500	

The expenditure set out in the above table under heading A-7 will be covered by credits within the DG Education and Culture global envelope.