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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Accompanying document to the

Proposal for a

**RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
AND OF THE COUNCIL**

on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning

IMPACT ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

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SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF THE CREATION OF THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

In a Europe characterised by rapid technological and economic change and an ageing population, lifelong learning, comprising both education and training, has become a necessity. The need for a continuous updating and renewal of citizens' knowledge, skills and competences is crucial for the EU's competitiveness and social cohesion. The realisation of lifelong learning, however, is complicated by the lack of communication and co-operation between education and training providers and authorities between different systems and in different countries. The resulting barriers hinder individual citizens from accessing education and training and make it difficult for them to combine qualifications from different institutions and so pursue lifelong learning. Additionally, the lack of arrangements allowing citizens to transfer qualifications from one learning context to another can potentially create barriers to worker and learner mobility within the European labour market.

This impact assessment sets out the various options DG EAC has considered in seeking to find solutions to these issues. It underlines the added value a European Qualifications Framework (EQF)¹ would bring in facilitating lifelong learning and reducing barriers to mobility across Europe.

As set out in this impact assessment and in the draft Recommendation, the EQF would act as a translation device and a neutral reference point for comparing qualifications and facilitating their transfer throughout Europe. It would also be a catalyst for reform of education and training systems and the achievement of real lifelong learning. The development of the EQF is therefore central to the fulfilment of the EU's objectives in the Lisbon Partnership for Growth and Jobs.

The EQF would be based on a set of 8 reference levels of learning outcomes covering all learning, including general education, vocational training and higher education and would be supported by an agreed set of principles and criteria. Member States and sectors wishing to use the EQF as a reference would be expected to commit themselves to these principles and criteria. However, the EQF will not replace national qualifications levels and is not intended to take over any of the established roles of national systems or frameworks. (Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty exclude any regulatory action in the field of education and training. Any EU policies in this field should instead support and supplement the action of Member States while fully respecting their responsibility for content and organisation of education and vocational training.)

The first option considered involves taking no action (that is, no action by the European Union) and would entail allowing the current arrangements for comparability, transparency and transfer of qualifications to continue. This option, however, would not meet the demands of Member States for a common European reference or instrument to address the problems outlined above.

¹ An information note on terminology is included at the end of this IA.

A second option is a Communication from the Commission. However, a Commission Communication is not an instrument which would involve the Member States or the European Parliament in its adoption. This option would therefore not generate the necessary political commitment from the Member States to implement the EQF at the national level.

A third option is a Commission Recommendation under Article 150 of the Treaty which relates to vocational training. However, this alternative excludes Article 149 relating to education which is an essential component of the EQF. Also, it would entail using an instrument which, as with option 2, would not involve Member States or the European Parliament in the formal adoption and so would still not generate the degree of political commitment required to implement the EQF.

A fourth option considered is to establish the EQF via the legislative instrument of a Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council, under Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty. This instrument would cover both education and training, which are of equal importance as objectives and components within the EQF's lifelong perspective. It would recommend that the EQF be used by Member States on a voluntary basis as a translation device for comparing qualifications and facilitating their transparency and transfer throughout Europe.

A fifth option is to implement the EQF via the legislative instrument of a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council, under Article 150 of the Treaty. However, this alternative once again excludes Article 149 relating to education. Also it would be a Decision adopting principles and obligations for those Member States which relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF. However, the overwhelming consensus of stakeholders (Member States, social partners, sectors and others) is that an EQF should be entirely voluntary.

In this context, it is worth clarifying that irrespective of the instrument chosen, this instrument would not apply to situations covered by Directive 2005/36/EC² on the recognition of professional qualifications which is the only legally binding instrument conferring rights and obligations on both the relevant national authority and the migrant. In situations not covered by the directive, the EQF will enable comparisons to be made via the national qualifications systems/qualifications framework used in the Member State where the migrant trained and the national qualifications systems/qualifications framework of the (other) Member State where s/he works or studies.

DG EAC, in comparing the strengths and weaknesses of the above options, has elected to propose option 4, which would enable the Commission – with the co-operation of the Member States and the social partners – to address the challenges identified and find appropriate solutions. This option also corresponds most closely to Member States' and stakeholders' expectations. It would provide the best basis for the successful implementation of the EQF and for achieving the real added value the European dimension can bring for citizens in the field of lifelong learning and mobility through qualifications and qualifications systems.

² OJ L 255, 30.9.2005, p. 22.