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Developing competence for sustainable management in European handicraft

European Qualification and Consulting Concept – starting points from Euro Crafts 21 perspective

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The Leonardo da Vinci project Euro Crafts 21 is carried out under the administration of plenum - society for holistic sustainable development and the Factor 10 Institute Austria. The objective of the project is to establish a significant added value in the vocational education in Austria and the participating partner countries (Finland, Germany, Slovakia, Spain and Hungary). This will be achieved through the innovation transfer of an already completed pilot project - aiming the development and testing of an overall qualification and consulting concept for sustainability management in the handicraft branch of North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany).

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1. Background – sustainable management as a question of qualification

It is adequately proved that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in which sustainable management is firmly established in the corporate strategy and in the every-day working processes obtain a competitive advantage (see e.g. Mandl, Dorr 2007, European Commission 2007). Generally speaking, the main driver for environmental innovations such sustainable management is cost pressure along the value chain (Fichter, Arnold 2003.24f). Thus, Sustainability measures are rather aimed at saving material, energy and waste management costs than at 'saving the environment' (ZIT 2004.19).

Apart from these externally driven measures, the internal capability of enterprises to initiate innovations and to successfully implement these in the long term largely depends – besides organizational and technical conditions - upon the people who work in the respective enterprise (Henning, Oertel & Isenhardt 2003.133) and their qualifications and competencies (Hartmann, Brentel & Rohn 2006). An important condition for realising a sustainable management is knowledge and (further) training of decision makers and employees in the companies. It is a necessary condition to enhance the status of professional and methodical knowledge as well as competencies concerning sustainability in general and sustainable management in particular.

2. Sustainable Development and the project Euro Crafts 21

Sustainable Development is a megatrend and a challenge of the 21st century. Businesses increasingly consider the aspects of sustainability management as a factor of success for their future development. Various experiences show that the integration of economic, ecological and social components into daily business policies and - processes influences a more positive, innovative and future-oriented development of enterprises. Qualifying measures of the vocational education will thus have to consider these aspects in the future more strongly.

Most SMEs in Europe are located in the crafts sector. For the European craft sector appropriate qualification and consulting possibilities in the context of Sustainable Development are still missing especially for employees in small-sized enterprises. Yet, due to

the employment figures (European Commission 2009.15ff) and the huge significance concerning the importance for the support of jobs and the influence regarding growth, innovation and initiative, the European craft sector is a significant target group for an enhancement of a more sustainable global business.

For this reasons, the European project Euro Crafts 21 within the framework of the EU Life Long Learning Program (Leonardo) was started (duration: 2008-2010) and a German project was selected for realizing an innovation transfer of its project product, a “Qualification and Consulting Concept” for Sustainable Management (WHKT no year listed). The German Qualification and Consulting Concept (in the following: QCC) was developed in a national context of selected craft enterprises and was rated as very useful because of its (European) relevance, the modularity and flexibility on a structural level and its excellent documentation.

Within Euro Crafts 21, the former German project product was adapted, expanded and transferred to five European countries: Austria, Finland, Hungary, Slovakia and Spain. Target groups for the development of competencies in the field of sustainable economy and management within the European craft sector were educational staff at further vocational education and training institutes, enterprises owners and business executives as well as consultants and multipliers (Rohn, Bliesner 2009). The main aim of Euro Crafts 21 was the further development, a pilot testing and the dissemination of the adapted and expanded German QCC as well as a valorisation strategy. Main result of the project Euro Crafts 21 is an internet tool which different qualification modules in the context of sustainable development in the craft sector (see: www.eurocrafts21.eu). All results of the project are described at the project homepage (see: www.eurocrafts21.eu/project).

In terms of education policy and economic strategy, the project is well placed among political efforts to achieve a more sustainable mode of production. The project is embedded into the Lisbon and EU Sustainability Strategy as well as the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development and is supposed to contribute essentially to their implementation.

3. Situation of the European handicraft sector

There is no standardised definition of the ‘Crafts sector’ in the EU that would lead to comparable regulations and structures in the Member States. Thus, regulations vary among the European countries. Still, there is some common ‘European ground’ to build on:

According to current adopted EU legislation, enterprises are defined according to their size as micro, small, medium or large. Entrepreneurs are defined along two categories: Legal persons (registered according to the commercial code) that engage in so called reporting trades (bounded and free crafts) or physical persons (registered according to the trades code) that engage in licensed trades.

In general, craft business is a registered activity which requires vocational competencies proven by a certificate of a vocational school or other evidence as to the proper completion of an apprenticeship or training course, necessarily documenting at least three years of experience in the field. Comparing the crafts sector in the EU, three different types of countries can be distinguished:

1. Traditional arts-oriented craft-cultures , mainly enterprises of 1-3 employees (rather to be found in Southern Europe)
2. Countries where crafts are strongly regulated according to qualification levels etc. and enterprises have 6-7 employees on average (e.g. Germany, France, Austria, Poland)
3. Countries where no national regulation concerning crafts exists and where the understanding of craft as an economic and organisational entity is non-existent or weak (e.g. UK, Netherlands, Greece, some new Member States)

On the European level, crafts industry policy is integrated in a SME - policy as the sector-specific problems are considered to be very similar to the situation in small and medium sized enterprises. With regard to the organisational level, the following main differences can be identified among the Member States of the EU:

Public chambers can mainly be found in the “old” European Member States (about 60% public and 40% private) while private chambers dominate the new EU Member States (80% private and 20% public). As to the chambers’ tasks and functions, in most of the countries, the main function is to give enterprises a “powerful voice”. Furthermore, they, most often, are responsible for further education and they are usually permitted to give the public authorisation for carrying out the trade.

In some countries, enterprises do not have the duty to become members of a chamber which leads to low membership numbers. The definition and the appreciation as well as the organisation of chambers in the crafts sector vary enormously in the different EU Member States. Chambers have different forms of organisation and are integrated differently into the

political processes. Only chambers with a public status have an immediate influence on political processes and an administrative function.

4. The Qualification and Consulting Concept

The QCC is designed to integrate the guiding principle of sustainability into existing business processes in SMEs. It considers the context of SMEs in the craft sector, in particular, that they are driven by day to day business and can afford little additional resources (UNEP 2003.5) but still wish to improve their competitive position by incorporating sustainability (Fraunhofer IAO 2010). The QCC considers existing business processes that take place in SMEs, and frames these within the guiding principle of sustainability - in contrast to an additional measure, this approach offers a framework in which the implementation of steps towards more sustainable business processes can be mentally categorized and, thus, implemented more easily, since the concept is based on existing structures and operations. Sustainability as integrated element can be identified within the content of the QCC and its approach in consulting, assessment and qualification.

The QCC is a modular concept that is composed of basic and specialized modules freely chosen, and made up of components and learning materials (see figure 1). The concept can be enlarged on every of this levels by adding a whole new module, a single component (new subtheme) or/and a new learning material. This is due to the fact that qualification needs can vary drastically across countries and enterprises.

The basic modules (marked with „B“) contain the core aspects necessary for the qualification in sustainable business in the crafts sector and consist of an introduction to the topic of Sustainable Development (B1) and of module B2: Self-Check Crafts - self-assessment of sustainable management in craft businesses (see figure 2). Module B1 and B2 can basically be used independently, but module B1 creates the basis for the instrument Self-Check Crafts concerning sustainability issues. The special modules (marked with „S“) serve to address the qualification needs that are a result of the self-assessment (see figure 3).

By realizing country-specific pilot-testing with trainers and enterprises, the special qualification demands of the partners countries of Euro Crafts 21 were identified and were in a second step transferred into concrete qualification materials. The, thus, expanded concept now includes 14 special modules, illustrated in the following figure 2.

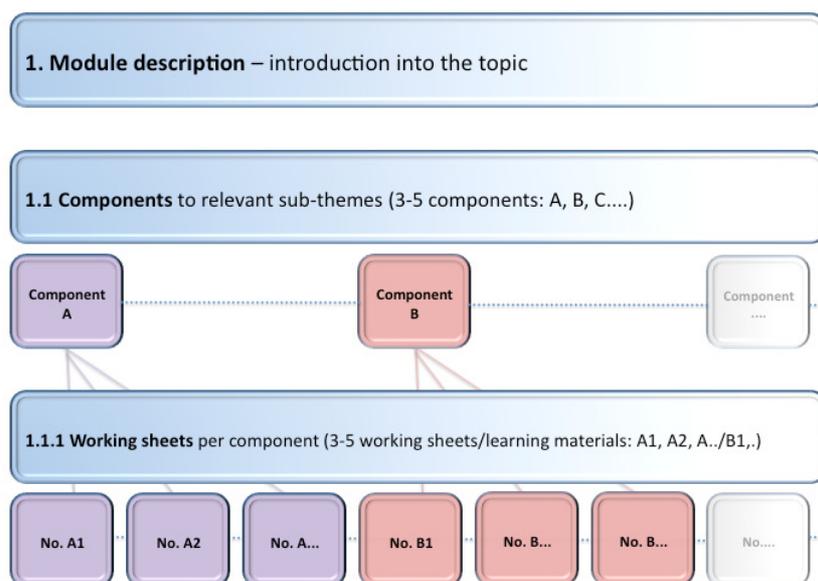


Figure 1: Structure of the Qualification and Consulting Concept (own source)

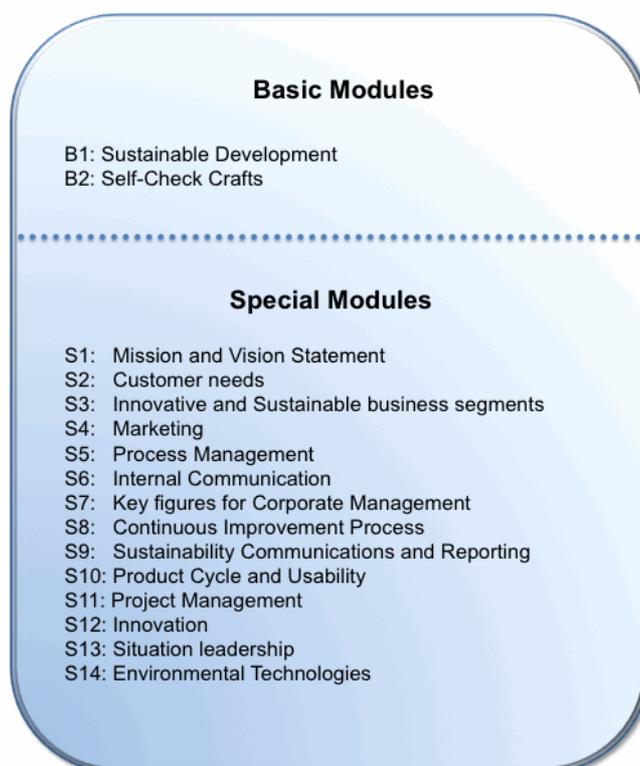


Figure 2: Modules of the Qualification and Consulting Concept (own source)

5. Promotion of sustainable management through competence development

The QCC deals with competence development on different levels and stages of the concept. The approach of the QCC brings together advisory and qualifying aspects that consider the particularity of SMEs in the craft sector: scarce time, financial and human resources limit possibilities for implementing training for sustainability on own initiative (UEAPME 2010). Enterprise owners and business executives, therefore, need a flexible approach and often a certain degree of support. Besides the target group of enterprises, the competence development of Euro Crafts 21 aimed at the qualification of educational staff at vocational education and training institutes, at consultants and multipliers. This target groups of cause included the project partners involved in Euro Crafts 21, as they were acting in the role as trainers or did professionally work as for example teachers or consultants.

Besides the competence development of the participating partners realised when doing intercultural exchange, the fields of competence development of the different target groups can be specified by focusing on selected working phases of the project – the Train-the-Trainer Workshops and the pilot testing activities.

To transfer the German QCC to the European partner countries, a Train-the-Trainer (TtT) concept was developed. With regard to the next steps in Euro Crafts 21 project, the aim of the TtT-workshops was to attract some trainers to go through the following pilot-testing's in the project with some enterprises. During 1.5 day workshops, content and structure of the QCC was explained and experienced by trainers, teachers, consultants and multipliers of the craft sector. During the workshops, the participants gained competencies concerning the use of the QCC as well as professional and methodological knowledge. The TtT-workshops included informational input-parts and active working-parts. Using concrete learning material of the modules, the participants, on the one hand, made an active experience with the existing material. On the other hand, they became more familiar with the structure of the QCC. With regard to intercultural competencies they experienced the German approach and perspective on dealing with sustainability in the context of small and medium sized enterprises of the craft sector.

Taking a deeper look on the learning materials of the QCC different starting points and preconditions for competence development can be identified. The learning material is offered in the format of working sheets. Competence and knowledge acquisition through direct

reference to the participants' individual scope of action is supported through the different level of prior knowledge the working sheets are dealing with. The modules as well as the components and learning materials are independently usable, so no fixed order has to be followed. Although the learning material has been designed for the target group of managers in the crafts sector, the provided working sheets, methods and media can be useful and educational to a wide range of users from the highly advanced to the one with no previous knowledge. The working materials aim at different levels of competence development: reflection, cooperation and communication, participation, dealing with information as well as professional expertise.

Realising pilot testing's with the QCC in the partner countries as a next step, enterprises were involved. Objects of the **pilot testing** with the enterprises were the basic modules (B1 & B2) and the adaption and implementation of existing German special modules of the QCC, followed by the development and pilot testing of new country specific special modules (see figure 3). During this pilot testing process, the involved trainers experienced a deepening qualification by guiding the enterprises through the process and using the QCC in real working life. Enterprise owners, business executives and craftsman were qualified not only by going through the exercise of special modules, but also during the self-assessment (basic module 2). Self-assessment is a typical instrument in consulting processes in order to identify the problem areas and improvement potentials in a business. The QCC envisions that after an introduction to the topic of sustainable economic activity (B1), companies perform a Self-Check Crafts to clarify their training needs (B2). The aim of the approach Self-Check Crafts is to point out specific needs for information, training and development in crafts businesses, based on strengths and potentials that they have recognized themselves by conducting the Self-Check Crafts in their companies. Compared to many other evaluation tools and/or company assessments, the Self-Check Crafts provides the advantages of involving employees, of developing participants' self-appraisal competence and of contributing to increased motivation by enabling target-oriented discussion.

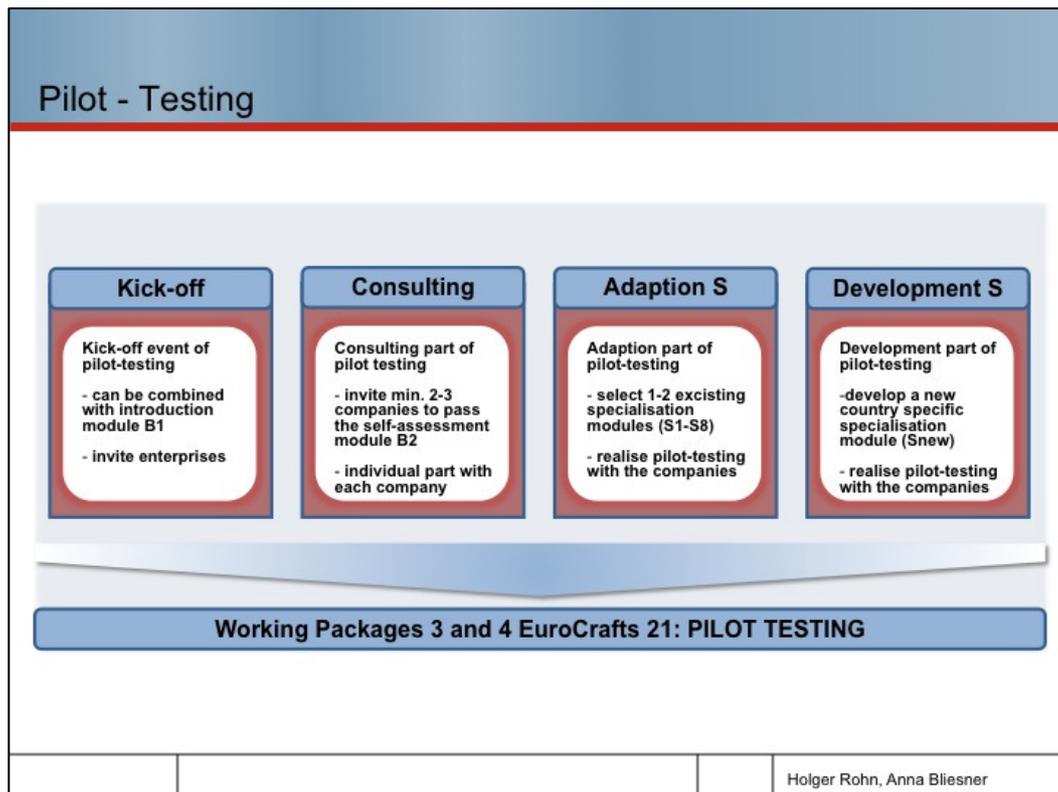


Figure 3: Pilot-Testing Process within in the project Euro Crafts 21 (own source)

6. European perspectives in Euro Crafts 21

The aim of the project Euro Crafts 21 was – as described earlier - the transfer of experiences of a qualification and consulting concept about Sustainable Development (Sustainable Management) in the handicraft sector of Germany to five other countries in the European Union. The transfer countries were: Austria, Finland, Hungary, Slovakia and Spain.

This transfer of an innovative concept has been realised with the following aspects (examples), which represent the European perspective of the project Euro Crafts 21:

- Significant parts of the learning content and working materials have been translated into five European languages;
- The starting material was reviewed by all partners in terms of relevance to the transfer countries, that means, at the beginning of the project needs analysis in the partner countries were conducted at the opinion of important national stakeholders has been collected;

- The learning contents and working materials of the original product have been adapted to specific country situations, based on the above mentioned needs analysis and responses from national stakeholders, that means, it was supplemented country-specific aspects of the modules or varies (for example, best practice examples not from Germany but from the partner countries);
- All implementation activities (e.g. train the trainer workshops or workshops with enterprises) have been evaluated and the results of these evaluations were considered in the adaptation of work to give the former material from Germany a better European dimension;
- The project EC21 produced - compared to the initial project – also totally new S learning modules (six new modules including new working materials), which reflect contents and aspects, which are of specific relevance for the participating European partner countries in comparison to the original German view;
- During the project, it was also found out, that some methodological elements of the German original materials had to be change for the European perspective (for example, in some EU countries different systems in the use of notes/grades exists, and harmonised notes/grades as a feedback from participants for example in workshops played an important role for the quality management of the European project EC21. For this reason some of them had to be adapted to the European level;
- The module S4 "marketing" was of special interest for all EU partner countries in EC21 and of particular relevance. Therefore, the German starting material of S4 was not only translated into five partner languages, but a full adaptation was realized, considering all different perspectives from five EU countries also on contents, methods or best practise examples from each country. The work for this was substantial. The module S4 can thus be seen as a total S4 European learning module that involves full all requirements of the five (six) included EU countries.

The measures described above are only part of the measures carried out in the project EC21 in order to change the former material from Germany to a European level, at least in part based on the five completely different partners in EC21 and their starting points.

In order to support the overall European understanding and philosophy of the project EC21 of all partners a **definition for the term "Handicraft"** ("Sustainable Handicraft") was carried out:

“Crafts and small enterprises typically rely on their local roots, and make an essential contribution to local development and social integration. They create jobs, provide vocational training and ensure the transfer and continuous improvement of specific know-how characterised by a high degree of manual skills and a strong involvement of entrepreneurs. Europe's competitiveness is based principally on quality in all respects, be it in education, innovation, products, and services or in shaping the enterprise environment. Crafts and small enterprises play a crucial role in this context. They stimulate entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity, all of which are the core components of a modern European economy that can stand up to the challenges of the 21st century.”

7. Euro Crafts 21 – starting point: Conceptual Framework for a European Qualification and Consulting Concept (EQCC)

Based on the lessons learnt (see: “implementation reports” of the partners, described at www.eurocrafts21.eu/project) the project team of Euro Crafts 21 is able to develop some recommendations for a European Qualification and Consulting Concept. The following recommendations have to be understood with regard to the background of the project and the specific experiences the project partners made when working on the targets of Euro Crafts 21. The following recommendations offer valuable perspectives and suggestions but do not claim to be universally valid. Further recommendations have been made by the partners of the project (see: “recommendation report”, described at www.eurocrafts21.eu/project).

The work on Euro Crafts 21 has shown that the innovation transfer of the German approach was successful and that the QCC as an instrument is useful also for European contexts (see Rohn, Bliesner 2010). During the project, the QCC attained a higher level when being adapted and enlarged on a European level in the purpose of a European Qualification and Consulting concept (in the following: EQCC). Taking into account the lessons learned, the obvious question is what adaptations and what kind of further development is necessary to build up a fully developed EQCC. First ideas are explained in the following:

- **Ways: In which way(s) is the EQCC to be further developed?**

Based on the project Euro Crafts 21, the basic product that is to be advanced to a full-value EQCC is, at the moment, a modular concept that is available for the target groups in form of

an online-tool. It needs to be analysed whether such an online-tool could be freely accessible for supplements. This way, an instrument could be offered for the experiences, ideas and qualification necessities of a large target group in European vocational education. In this context different forms of networks on communication platforms could be initiated (f.i. usergroups, forums).

Furthermore, it needs to be examined to what extent the EQCC should refer to concepts of Blended Learning in its implementation by trainers of vocational training who consult companies with the help of the EQCC. As Blended Learning combines and unifies two forms of learning (face-to-face learning and E-Learning), it could help to prevent excessively time consuming periods of face-to-face learning and could make long-term qualification measures more feasible. Experiences from project work in the Euro Crafts 21 during the implementation of the Train-the-Trainer instructions suggest the exploration of further forms of dissemination of an EQCC. In this context, offering diverse forms of media, f.i. films, blogs, etc., might as well be interesting.

- **Educational system: On which level of the (national) educational systems is it to operate?**

Whereas in the framework of the project Euro Crafts 21 so far mainly the sector of non-formal (vocational) further education was addressed, the question arises whether advancement might serve the integration of target groups on additional levels of the educational systems. In Finland, for instance, the Train-the-Trainer workshop raised great interest not only among the 'main' target group of the trainers but also among students. An analysis of the curricula of relevant fields of study might reveal to which extent these already contain topics like sustainability and sustainable business etc. and where there are possible 'points of entry' to integrate aspects of sustainability. This would create a remarkable value added for education in the tertiary sector in Germany and on comparative levels in the educational systems of other European countries. Consequently, an adjustment of the curricula on different levels of the European educational systems should as well include a qualification of teaching staff. Trainees of crafts enterprises could be a further target group for the EQCC in formal vocational training and further education.

- **Educational policy: How can it be linked and aligned to European educational policy?**

Educational policy is central to the endeavours for the establishment of a Sustainability-orientated economy on the European level. With regard to the subject matter of Euro Crafts 21 the efforts of European educational policy with reference to the development of skills and to European comparability are central and provide 'guidelines' for the development of an EQCC.

Qualification and the development of competencies in the corporate context serve the aim to enable the employee to get involved in innovation processes with his/her expert (technical) know-how. Furthermore, knowledge and skills that go beyond the expert qualification are very important. Such skills are methodological and social skills to constructively involve with changing processes of sustainable business, to initiate these and keep them running.

With regard to the existing product of Euro Crafts 21 it can be stated that this 'competence approach' is implicitly represented in the didactic design of the tested and further developed QCC but should be made more explicit, still, in the advancement process. With reference to European educational policy and the attempts to achieve comparability of competencies on the European level and in terms of a stronger output-orientation, educational objectives of the respective modules or of separate learning material should be made explicit and clear in the framework of monitoring educational goals. This is the first prerequisite for the achievement of European comparability with respect to the learners' competencies, skills and qualifications. It, furthermore, serves the alignment with the European Qualification Framework (EQF).

Before designing educational material in alignment with the eight levels of the EQF, a terminology discussion is due. The EQF describes people's actions with reference to the three dimensions "knowledge", "skills" and "competence" on eight levels (European Commission 2008). Still, the terminology with respect to these three dimensions is not homogeneously used or consensually agreed upon, neither on the national nor on the European level – consensus-building in this reference is already a challenge in the context of a cooperation project (Bliesner 2009.55-58). Nonetheless, this is a main aim in European competence-oriented cooperation¹ in which further European instruments and concepts such as the "European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training" (ECVET) and the activities with regard to the aim "European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training" (EQAVET)² should, as well, be integrated.

¹ For the latest 'state of the art' in this respect see Higher Education Authority, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland 2010.

² For Germany: National Reference Point for Quality Assurance in Vocational Training (DEQA-VET) affiliated to the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training.

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