INTRODUCTION

The thirtieth meeting of the EQF AG was attended by representatives of 29 countries, and by representatives of social partners and stakeholder organisations. In addition, representatives from the European Commission, Cedefop, the European Training Foundation, the Council of Europe, and external experts to the Commission also attended. Furthermore, a delegation from the United Arab Emirates participated as observers.

COM chaired and opened the meeting. The agenda was accepted without further comment. The action points of the twenty-ninth meeting of the EQF AG of 3-4 February 2015 were also adopted without comment.

1. RELEVANT DEVELOPMENTS IN EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

COM referred to the latest developments and follow-up to the meeting of the EQF AG of 3-4 February 2015 (cf. Note AG30-1).

COM also informed the EQF AG on the ongoing work on the joint report on the ET2020 impact (until September), to be then discussed at the Council meeting in November 2015. A first policy exchange among ministers will start soon, still under the Latvian Presidency, with the main work taking place over the summer. COM informed participants that they might be approached by their national delegations to contribute to this exchange.

Information on developments in Copenhagen Process

COM informed the group that a meeting of Ministers in charge of VET will take place on 22 June 2015 in Riga, under the Latvian Presidency. One of the key aspects will be the VET deliverables for the period 2015-2010. The number of priorities has been reduced to

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1 Please note: all meeting documents and Power Point presentations have been uploaded to the e-community of the EQF Advisory Group: http://europa.eu/sinapse/directaccess/qualification_framework
five, covering work-based learning, quality assurance, continuous VET, key competences, and the professional development of VET teachers and trainers.

Information on developments in the Bologna Process

Council of Europe informed the group about current developments in the Bologna Process. The Yerevan Ministerial Conference will take place on 14-15 May 2015. For the first time, the Communiqué to be adopted will also include a structure of the work programme for the period 2015-2018. France will take over the Bologna Secretariat and will organise the next Ministerial Conference in 2018.

Council of Europe also referred to two studies which will be of interest to the group: a study comparing certification reports (how they are built and structured); and a study on how the Lisbon Recognition Convention is considered in national legislation. At an upcoming UNESCO expert meeting (24-25 April), the possibilities for the development of a global recognition convention will be further explored.

Link between qualifications frameworks and recognition processes

COM raised the idea of inviting a representative of the ENIC-NARIC network to become a member of the EQF AG, and invited the group to share their views on this idea.

Comments, questions and answers (reactions from DE, FR, HU, IT, NO, Council of Europe):

- Whereas the suggested exchange with the ENIC-NARIC network was clearly welcomed, the group seemed to be divided on the idea of an ENIC-NARIC representative being invited to join the EQF AG. Several participants clearly welcomed the idea, while others expressed certain reservations (e.g. based on the fact that most ENIC-NARIC centres focus on academic recognition only).
- Granting ENIC-NARIC an observer status at EQF AG meetings or inviting them to specific EQF AG meetings only were suggested as alternatives to a permanent representation within the group.
- It was stated that when referring to recognition in this context, it should be made clear that the EQF can support recognition, but it is not a tool for recognition.

COM emphasised that although the EQF is not a recognition tool it is important to understand the link between the two areas.

Information from the Presidencies

Luxembourg briefly presented the main priorities of their upcoming presidency (early-childhood education and care and early-school leaving) and provided a first overview on events which could be of interest to the EQF AG.

2. OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS RELATED TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EQF

COM presented the updated roadmap on referencing and requested feedback on the referencing plan overview (cf. Note AG30-2, ppt). COM requested countries to indicate
their planned presentation date, and to communicate any changes to the schedule as soon as possible. Comments regarding the expected presentation dates:

- The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia could not confirm the date for the presentation of their referencing report yet, possibly in December 2015 or beginning 2016.
- SE confirmed their intention to present their referencing report in December 2015.
- ES and FI plan to present their referencing report in 2016.

With regard to the 2nd EQF milestone, COM invited countries to communicate any relevant updates. No comments received.

COM also provided an update on the status of the ‘Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe’ web portal. All but two countries have already published their EQF referencing reports on the portal. With regard to the ‘Find and compare qualifications framework’ feature on the website, the situation is more problematic, as many countries are still not represented. COM reminded the group of the importance of the website to promote the EQF and to present the progress made, by providing comprehensive, updated and complete information.

3. **UPDATE ON PLA PLANNING 2015//16**

COM presented an updated on the peer learning activities planned for 2015/16 (cf. ppt). For the remainder of 2015, the following three PLAs are currently being prepared:

- PLA ‘International Sectoral Qualifications’, 16-17 June 2015, in Sofia (BG) – **postponed to autumn**; draft programme to be presented to the EQF AG in May
- PLA ‘Levelling of Master Craftsman Qualifications’, 30 Nov - 1 Dec 2015, in Berlin (DE), in conjunction with EQF AG meeting # 33;
- PLA ‘VNFIL and its link to employment’, end of 2015 (tbc), in Paris (FR), a draft concept will be presented at the EQF AG meeting in May.

COM also presented a provisional plan for peer learning activities to be held in 2016:

- PLA on the second EQF milestone ‘Communication strategies at national level’, February 2016: countries are invited to signal their interest in hosting this PLA;
- PLA on recognition, March 2016, in Luxembourg;

4. **REFERENCING: REPORT ON THE PLA ON LEVELLING QUALIFICATIONS**

Agieszka Chłoń-Domińczak (PL) presented the key outcomes of the peer learning activity ‘NQFs on the Go: Allocation of Qualifications to Levels’, which was held on 16-17 March 2015 in Warsaw, PL (cf. ppt). This PLA was hosted by the Educational Research Institute (IBE), Poland, in cooperation with the Educational Authority of Hungary, the European Commission and Cedefop. The event was attended by 64 participants from various European countries.

The aim of this PLA was to take stock of the experiences acquired during the first referencing period in assigning NQF levels to qualifications and referencing national qualifications frameworks (NQF) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) levels; and to take a closer look at the use of EQF referencing criteria 2 and 4.
PLA participants discussed the involvement of stakeholders in the levelling process, in particular which stakeholder groups to address at which stage of the process, and how to best prepare them for their tasks. One workshop group prepared a set of ‘possible general parts’ of a process of allocating qualifications to a NQF level, as a potential guideline for countries. Some of the further aspects discussed at the PLA included: the different approaches to levelling (individual qualifications or blocks of qualifications); the use of subsidiary indicators for levelling; the limits of the linguistic/technical approach to levelling; the conception of levels (i.e. ‘vertical dimension’); the linkages between referencing criteria.

5. **EXTERNAL COOPERATION**

Report on the study visit to New Zealand and Australia on the alignment of frameworks
(cf. Note AG30-3, ppt)

COM reported on the study visits undertaken to New Zealand (COM, Cedefop, IE) and to Australia (COM, Cedefop, AT, FR, UK) at the end of February and beginning of March, respectively. During the study visits, the delegations had the opportunity to talk to experts in charge of the administration of the qualifications frameworks, with bodies/persons in charge of funding, quality assurance and qualification recognition, as well as with industry stakeholders. Both study visits also included a limited number of field visits. The discussions between the technical working groups and Australia and New Zealand were perceived as very fruitful and as a valuable contribution to the mutual understanding between the EU and AUS/NZ.

The study visits helped to better identify the commonalities and differences between the frameworks. There is significant coherence between the frameworks on several key strategic principles, such as the learning outcomes approach or quality assurance. For the technical working group it was particularly interesting to learn how these mature frameworks (AQF, NZQF) are used: how they are used for cooperation; how they approach assessment; how they look at achieved outcomes. Within both frameworks, quality assurance is a key priority. In both Australia and New Zealand, education plays an important role as an export product.

The presentation concluded with an outline of the draft structure of the technical alignment reports.

State of play of the alignment processes with HK, NZ, AUS (cf. ppt)

COM provided the EQF AG with an update on the current status of the alignment projects with the Australian, New Zealand and Hong Kong Qualifications Frameworks (AQF, NZQF and HKQF) (cf. ppt). The AQF-EQF alignment project is most advanced. A draft joint technical report will be presented at the May meeting of the EQF AG. The NZQF-EQF and HKQF-EQF alignment reports will follow in summer 2015.

Based on the results of the three alignment projects, and taking into account the further dimensions of external cooperation, COM will prepare a Note to serve as a basis for further discussion within the EQF AG.

Comments, questions and answers (reactions from DE, FI, FR, MT, NO, UK, Cedefop, Council of Europe, UEAPME):

- 4 -
Members of the technical working groups were impressed by the frankness with which the discussions with New Zealand and Australia were taking place.

- Despite the similarities and commonalities identified, it is important to closely examine the differences. Sometimes, the AQF and NZQF use similar terms as the EQF, however based on different concepts.

- Recognition: Both Australia and New Zealand have ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention, and recognition issues were briefly discussed with Australia and New Zealand. There is awareness among all parties that the alignment reports refer to technical work only and will have no impact on recognition.

- Economic dimension: One of the lessons learned from the study visits is that the economic (commercial) dimension of qualifications frameworks must be taken into account. Both Australia and New Zealand actively use their frameworks as a communication and marketing tool for their internationalisation; education is an important export product.

- Several participants expressed the request to have a broader and more strategic discussion on external cooperation (‘the role of the EQF in the world’), to gauge countries’ perspectives on the future direction of the EQF.

COM emphasised that third countries’ interest in the EQF is growing, but that the current mandate provided by the EQF Recommendation restricts the EQF AG’s possibility to take action in this regard. COM also pointed out that the ongoing work with Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong is purely of technical nature. Discussion at political level will only take place at a later stage, and only if there is agreement by Member States to take the issue of external cooperation forward.

Overview on EQF references in agreements

ETF presented the key findings of the research on references to the EQF and related themes in EU international agreements with EU neighbourhood countries (cf. ppt). The results of this research show that such references are numerous and can take different forms. Examples include references to the EQF, to NQF development, to cooperation in education and training, to mutual recognition of qualifications or references to minimum training required in certain sectors. These references can be found in different types of documents, such as association agreements, education and training agreements, and trade and economic agreements.

EU Association Agreements with Morocco, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova include more or less direct references to the EQF. The agreement with Morocco clearly refers to a ‘rapprochement' towards the EQF. In the case of Georgia and Ukraine, the EQF Recommendation has been added as an annex to the agreement. The agreement with Moldova, by contrast, does not mention the EQF but refers to NQF development. Only the agreement with Morocco is currently in full application.

Comments, questions and answers (reactions from BE, DE, FR, UK, Council of Europe, ETF):

- Several participants stated that they know about similar references to the EQF (or related topics) in other documents. An EU-funded project in India was cited as an example. In addition, the EU also provides financial support to NQF development projects in third countries (capacity building projects).
- There was agreement among the group that clear and well-founded criteria will be needed to decide on countries’ membership (as observer or full member) within the
EQF Advisory Group. The approach used towards one country might create expectations with other countries. This aspect also refers to the representation of bodies within the EQF AG (such as the proposed invitation of an ENIC-NARIC representative).

COM informed the group that Morocco has requested to participate at the EQF AG as observer. Bosnia and Herzegovina have issued a request to become a permanent member of the EQF AG, and Kosovo has specifically requested referencing to the EQF. Both have the status of potential candidate countries. Albania is currently the only candidate country not represented within the EQF AG. COM thus suggested approaching Albania, to ensure that all candidate countries receive equal treatment.

COM agreed to prepare a comprehensive overview on references to the EQF and potential commitments of the EU in various types of agreements, although this might not be finalised until the May meeting of the EQF AG. For the case of Morocco, the group will have to discuss in particular the implications of a ‘rapprochement’ to the EQF.

6. **The Future of Referencing – Presentation of the Finalised Note**

COM presented the finalised Note on the future of referencing (cf. Note AG 30-4; ppt), which had been revised based on feedback received from the group. The Note distinguishes two main objectives: improving the ‘technical’ referencing; and assessing the impact of the EQF.

The improvement of ‘technical’ referencing in particular refers to updated versions of referencing reports, updated information on national and European websites, and to the proposed ‘health checks’ which aim to explore the consistency of referencing a certain (group of) qualifications across countries. These ‘health checks’ could be carried out by sub-groups of the EQF, which would be granted a mandate with limited validity in time for this work.

*Note AG 30-4* suggests the impact assessment of the EQF to be carried out on a voluntary basis only. The proposed format includes the production of a written report on impact, discussion with the EQF AG, and possibly a country visit by EQF AG members to the respective country. The Note also lists possible parameters to be addressed in assessing the impact of the EQF (items (i) to (iv) on page 5).

**Comments on improving the ‘technical’ referencing** (reactions from AT, BE, DE, FI, FR, IT, MT, PL, SE, UK, Council of Europe, UEAPME)

- Participants welcomed the revised Note and acknowledged the progress achieved compared to the previous version.
- Participants also welcomed the idea of ‘health checks’ across (groups of) qualifications. The methodology for these checks however would still have to be devised in more detail. Participants also suggested finding a more suitable (less judgmental) term for this exercise. The idea of engaging NCPs in this task was viewed upon critically by several participants. It was noted that these checks must not go beyond the mandate provided by the EQF Recommendation.
- Item 5 (p. 3) should refer to ‘types of qualifications’ instead of ‘types of education’. COM also clarified that the purpose of this item is to present in clarity which qualifications are included in a framework and which are not. This is not about listing every single qualification excluded from the framework.
• Using qualifications frameworks for recognition (cf. item 7 on p. 3): Participants expressed reservations towards the wording of this point, and towards the reference to ENIC-NARIC centres in the context of developing, implementing and referencing qualifications.

• Further suggested aspects to be covered in the referencing reports: the interaction between qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and recognition; the interaction with the Bologna Process.

• Participants pointed out that the implications of a possible revision of the EQF Recommendation should already be considered at this stage.

Comments on assessing the impact of the EQF (reactions from AT, BE, EE, FI, FR, IT, LI, NO, UK)

• Scope of assessment: It was suggested for the document (in particular the section on parameters) to distinguish between the analysis of the impact of the EQF at national level and the impact of the NQF at national level.

• Some of the suggested parameters were perceived as rather political, depending to a significant extent on countries’ political situation. It was suggested putting more focus on assessing the cooperation between countries, and on European mobility.

• The challenges of obtaining measurable impact data were addressed. Still, the use of quantitative indicators should not be excluded per se.

• It was suggested that impact assessment should also refer to the implementation of other EU Recommendations, such as the EQAVET Recommendation and the Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

• It was noted that the proposal does not refer to a timeline or schedule.

• Study visits: Participants had divergent views on the suggested study visits. Some clearly welcomed the idea, whereas others issued specific concerns. Participants also raised the issue of cost related to the suggested study visits. COM emphasised that the preparation and organisation of study visits would lie within the responsibility of the respective country, but a possible co-funding through COM could be discussed.

• Self-assessment and peer review were suggested as alternative approaches for the impact assessment.

• Participants raised the question whether such impact assessment would better be carried out at European level. COM pointed out that the suggested impact assessment is not to be confused with an evaluation of the EQF. Such an evaluation was carried out at European level in 2013.

COM concluded this session by summarizing the main points of discussion. Part a) of Note AG 30-4 will be finalized based on the comments received during this meeting and submitted in writing after the meeting. COM agreed to prepare a proposal for a methodology of the ‘health checks’, if possible suggesting a new term. Part b) on the assessment of impact of the EQF will require further discussion within the EQF AG. COM invited countries to submit their comments in particular on the suggested parameters of impact assessment (cf. items (i) to (iv) on p. 5 of Note AG 30-4).

7. ESCO AND THE EQF

Martin le Vrang (COM) provided the group with an update on recent developments in ESCO (cf. ppt), focusing on the integration of qualifications into ESCO. Qualifications which are linked to the NQF (and thus referenced to the EQF) will be integrated in ESCO through the national qualifications databases or repositories which are linked to the EQF
portal. Other qualifications (such as driving licenses, language certificates, certificates issued by software vendors) will be directly integrated in ESCO.

For the technical integration, source data must be in linked open data (LOD) or xml format. In the long term, LOD will be the preferred approach, as the data remains in the national database under the Member States’ control, and there is no need for manual data imports and versioning. The core data set for the integration of qualifications (such as title of the qualification, awarding body, EQF level, etc.) has already been agreed on by the joint EQF Portal/Ploteus group. The common format for learning outcomes descriptions and any further data to be included (e.g. data related to quality assurance) are aspects to be further discussed by the EQF AG.

Fit-for-purpose testing of ESCO is carried out through several different pilot projects (e.g. mapping pilot, pilot applications with PES, cooperation with DG DIGIT). COM invited countries to suggest further possible pilot projects for this fit-for-purpose testing. The release of ESCO version 1 is planned for end of 2016. Semantic annotation with ESCO can start from 2017 onwards.

Comments, questions and answers (reactions from BE, DE, FR, HU, MT, NO, SE):

- Participants welcomed the presentation of an update on developments in ESCO. It was however suggested to re-discuss the integration of qualifications into ESCO at the May meeting of the EQF AG, based on a COM note in relation to the common formal for learning outcomes. This would allow countries to first consult their national levels in this matter.
- Implications on countries’ ongoing work on national databases: It was pointed out that previous Commission Calls did not refer to any requirements for the description of learning outcomes in national databases. Following the presentation, participants raised the question whether national work on this aspect should be put on hold until the EQF AG agrees on a common format.
- Difference between ‘annotation’ and ‘tagging’: The group asked for further explanations as to the ‘annotation’ in relation to the term ‘tagging’ which was previously presented to the ESCO Board on one occasion in this context.
- It was pointed out that the 2016 launch date should be referred to as ‘launch of ESCO version 1’ instead of ‘launch of ESCO’, in order to avoid wrong expectations.
- The group requested to be informed about ESCO developments on a regular basis, in particular on executive decisions taken and on the results of the current testing and pilot projects.
- Participants also raised the issue of data security and data ownership in this context.

COM informed the group that the description of qualifications, including the format for learning outcomes, in ESCO will be discussed in further detail at the May meeting of the EQF AG, based on a Note prepared by COM. Responding to a request for a broader discussion on ESCO, COM informed participants that this would have to take place at a later meeting.

8. UPDATE OF THE REFERENCING REPORT OF ESTONIA

Estonia presented the updated version of the Estonian referencing report of 2011, taking into account the ‘VET Institutions Act and Standard for VET’ adopted in 2013 (cf. ppt). The Estonian Qualifications Framework (EstQF) is an overarching framework, established by the Occupational Qualifications Act in 2008. It consists of four sub-frameworks: for general education, VET, HE and professional qualifications with sub-
framework specific descriptors and relevant quality assurance systems. The EstQF includes only state-recognized qualifications.

The 2013 VET Institutions Act defined new types of VET qualifications linked to the EstQF, promotes the extensive use of the learning outcomes approach, establishes a new quality assurance structure for VET, and defines the Estonian VET credit points for measuring learning volumes. The new ‘Standard of VET’ defines uniform requirements for VET curricula (initial and continuous VET) and types of qualifications.

Comments, questions and answers (reactions from BE, MT, Cedefop, Council of Europe, ETF):

- The group thanked Estonia for the presentation of their updated referencing report.
- It was noted that the report now much better describes the interaction between VET and HE, compared to the previous version.
- Participants however also pointed out that more information would have been requested on the implementation of the framework, its acceptance among stakeholders, the challenges encountered during the process, the lessons learned, and the sustainability of stakeholder involvement.
- Types of qualifications: It was suggested providing a detailed definition of a type of qualification. Furthermore, the difference between formal and occupational qualifications of the same level could be explained in more detail.
- Estonia’s progress in implementing the second EQF milestone (EQF levels on certificates and diplomas) was noted as a very positive development.
- The differences between Qualifications awarded by formal VET and occupational Qualifications was not further explained in the updated report, despite the need to do so, as expressed in the joint Cedefop/Council of Europe note on the Estonian referencing of 2011. The same goes for the provision of definitions on qualification types, which would be useful to provide given the fact that the EstQF uses the same level descriptors as the EQF.

COM thanked Estonia for the update, which proofs the need for providing a reliable picture of the current situation. It invited Estonia to integrate the comments and to submit the report for publication on the Portal.


The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia presented the status play of their referencing report (cf. *ppt*). With approximately 2 million inhabitants, it faces a high unemployment rate (27.8 %) and particularly high youth unemployment (50.4 %). The Macedonian NQF development process began in 2002 with initial initiatives and proposals. Between 2008 and 2010, the NQF-EHEA was developed. In 2012, the work on the NQF for lifelong learning was launched.

The central aims of the NQF are to reflect the national education system, to boost reforms and the modernisation of the education and training system, and to support various stakeholders in their understanding of the system and its qualifications. The NQF is an 8-level framework, with sub-levels on levels 5 to 7, reflecting different volumes of learning. There are plans to set up a comprehensive register of qualifications, which will be made up of four different sub-registers for general education, vocational education and training, higher education and non-formal education. The inclusion of qualifications into
the register will be based on a specific procedure. The referencing report will be presented in the second half of 2015, as a joint report (EQF referencing and QF-EHEA self-certification).

Comments, questions and answers (reactions from FR, HR, MT, UK, Council of Europe, ETF):

- FYROM received compliments on their presentation and the work achieved so far. The EQF AG acknowledged the effort undertaken by the Ministry of Education and the various stakeholders within the referencing group. It was however also pointed out that some inconsistencies remain which must be clarified.
- The Inventory and Analysis of Qualifications exercise, which had been prepared with support from the ETT, was considered as an important element to better understanding the position of the various groups of qualifications.
- Participants were interested in learning more about the use of NQF sub-levels and their rationale, in particular as it had been stated that they did not result from different levels of learning outcomes but from different volumes of learning (i.e. different number of ECTS credits).
- Participants noted that the third cycle included a reference to ECTS credits.

Language diversity: In the municipalities where the minority languages are spoken by at least 20% of the municipal population, those languages are co-official along with Macedonian. Primary and secondary education is provided in four languages: Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish and Serbian (only primary). This rule also applies to higher education (e.g. Tetovo University).

- The group asked further explanation about the VET the credit system in which one credit covers 30 hours of 45 minutes each.

The Commission invited FYROM to address the comments and questions in the further work in relation to referencing. FYROM confirmed that it intends to reference its framework to the EQF in December 2015 or early 2016.

10. PRESENTATION OF THE HANDBOOK ON LEARNING OUTCOMES

Cedefop provided an outline of their current work on a ‘handbook on the writing and application of learning outcomes’ (cf. ppt). According to current plans, the handbook will be available mid-2016. Using a format similar to the one used for the Guidelines on validation of non-formal and informal learning, this handbook will refer to an extensive collection of specific examples on how to write and apply learning outcomes. The handbook will be based on existing research on the topic of learning outcomes (i.e. without intending to ‘reinvent the wheel’), synthesising existing information in a systematic manner. The handbook aims to clarify existing options and their implications, acknowledging the fact that no single (one-fits-all) solution exists. This handbook will be designed to directly support national policymakers, social partners and practitioners involved in and responsible for the implementation of learning outcomes.

The handbook will address the following four key elements: a conceptual clarification of the learning outcomes approach; definition and writing of learning outcomes; the application of learning outcomes in practice; the review and renewal of learning outcomes. The ultimate intention of this handbook will thus be to support countries’
mutual learning and communities of practice on the writing and application of learning outcomes.

On 24 September 2015, Cedefop will organise a policy learning forum on the writing of learning outcomes for VET standards and curricula. At the event, a more detailed outline of the handbook will be presented. This will be the first event in a series of Cedefop events to provide practical support to the work of national experts and stakeholders. Cedefop also informed the group about their recent study on learning outcomes, covering 33 countries (not yet published).

Comments, questions and answers (reactions from AT, BE, DE, EE, FR, IT, MT, PL, Council of Europe, ESU)

- Participants warmly welcomed Cedefop’s plans for creating the handbook, and in particular its focus on delivering practical support to national experts and stakeholders working with learning outcomes.
- Participants appreciated that the work will take a cross-sectoral perspective, considering both vocational education, higher education and also general education.
- It was pointed out that there should be consistence with the work ongoing in ESCO.
- Participants commented that the handbook should also refer to the different scientific origins of the learning outcomes approach.
- Suggested further aspects to be covered: stakeholders’ views (including students); the relevance of assessment criteria in this context; the potential use of matrices to combine disciplines and learning outcomes.
- Several participants stated their availability to support Cedefop’s work by providing related documents (studies) and examples.

11. VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

VNFIL approach in Poland

Poland presented the state of play of validation in the Polish integrated qualifications system (IQS) (cf. ppt). In the past few years, laws for general education, higher education and vocational education and training in Poland were changed to accommodate the possibility of validation. As a result, every school certificate and diploma can be obtained through an external, extramural exam. In VET, each unit and each qualification may be acquired through validation of non-formal and informal learning. In higher education, for each study programme, learning outcomes and validation procedures must be described.

One of the key elements of the integrated qualifications system (IQS) is the introduction of a standard for describing qualifications awarded outside formal education, which requires that every qualification description must include information on the validation process for every unit of learning outcomes. The respective law on the formal introduction of the IQS is currently being prepared; its adoption will depend on the outcome of the upcoming parliamentary elections (autumn 2015). Several pilot projects on the implementation of the IQS are currently ongoing. In the area of higher education, there are several ongoing case studies on the validation of prior learning.

Comments, questions and answers (reactions from BE, FR, NO, UK, Cedefop, Council of Europe):

- Cost of validation: In the formal system, the cost is borne by public sources. Validation techniques used and the number of exams are important aspects.
- Validation in higher education: carried out in the form of an individual-based approach; validation in terms of ECTS credits will be possible, the number of ECTS credits learners can obtain through validation will however be limited.
- Validation in VET can be obtained for a full qualification.
- Public acceptance of validation: Although not a country with much tradition in validation, Poland experiences little resistance towards validation (in terms of reliability and credibility). There is more resistance towards the inclusion of non-formal qualifications into the framework.
- Further aspects discussed by the group included: the training of assessors; the involvement of stakeholders (e.g. from non-formal learning); the possibility for validation candidates to receive supplementary education and training.

Revised European Guidelines for the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

COM informed the EQF AG that the Guidelines are currently being finalised and that a revised version of the Guidelines, will be distributed to the EQF AG and stakeholders who participated in the April 2013 validation seminar in Mechelen. This process of consultation is expected to be finalised before summer 2015 (depending on the nature and extent of feedback).

Roadmap on arrangements on the validation of non-formal and informal learning

COM presented the agreed roadmap for arrangements on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, focussing on activities planned for 2015 (cf. Note 23-2). In this context, COM invited countries to present to the EQF AG, on a voluntary basis, their national roadmaps for validation. It was emphasised that this would not be for the purpose of monitoring countries, but rather to allow sharing experience and approaches across countries. Italy and the European Youth Forum signalled their interest in sharing their experience with the EQF AG in the second half of 2015.

COM also informed the group that the Economic and Social Committee is currently preparing a position paper on validation, from the perspective of civil society. Although less focused on systematic validation arrangements, this paper might be an interesting contribution to discussions within this group.

12. CONCLUSIONS AND AOB

Upcoming dates:
- 16-17 June 2015, Peer Learning Activity on International Sectoral Qualifications, Sofia (BG) (postponed to autumn 2015)
- 5-6 October 2015, 32nd meeting of the EQF Advisory Group, Brussels (BE)
- Autumn 2015 (tbc), Peer Learning Activity on validation and its link to employment, Paris (FR)
- 30 November – 1 December 2015, Peer Learning Activity (‘Levelling the master craftsman qualification’), Berlin (DE)
- 2-3 December 2015, 33rd meeting of the EQF Advisory Group, Berlin (DE)

Delegations from Morocco, Kosovo and India will participate as observers at the May meeting.
COM informed the EQF AG of its intention to launch an impact assessment on the revision of the EQF Recommendation. To this purpose, COM invited countries to brief their political levels on the work carried out in this context since 2008. If there is agreement on a revision of the EQF Recommendation, proposed changes will not only refer to external cooperation, but will also refer to International Sectoral Qualifications and to continuous referencing.
Annex: List of participants

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<td>Ministère de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles</td>
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