AG37-1

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Note on relevant developments
Follow-up to the thirty-fourth meeting of the EQF Advisory Group, 14-16 June 2016 in Brussels (cf. action points and the draft meeting minutes):

The referencing process

The Commission provided, on the basis of information provided by the countries, an updated note with the overview of the national referencing process of the EQF and the implementation of the second milestone. (Cf. note 36-2).

VNFIL

Online Database: In March 2016 a database on validation was deployed to the Cedefop webpage (See here). The database links the European guidelines for validation of non-formal and informal learning (2nd ed, 2015) with the European inventory on validation (update 2014). It is work in progress and improvements will be realised in 2017.

The database provides an overview of how countries are meeting the various challenges of establishing validation arrangements in Europe. For each chapter of the European Guidelines a table with information from each country is available.

All information has been extracted from the ‘country fiches’, which were put together as part of the European Inventory update and are based on country researchers’ responses to a set of predefined questions.

European Inventory: The quality assurance phase of the 2016 update of the European inventory has been finalised. As in the case of 2014 contribution from EQF AG has been crucial to assure quality outputs. All country reports have been proofread and are ready for publication. In addition to EQF AG input, the Steering committee (Formed by Cedefop, ETF and the Commission) and up to two external experts per country have also provided feedback.

Analysis of the data collected (through country fiches) is underway and will form the basis for the Synthesis report and executive summary to be published in Cedefop’s webpage in December 2016.

Four thematic reports were published in June 2016:
- Validation and open educational resources (OER)
- Funding validation
- Validation in the care and youth work sectors
- Monitoring the use of validation of non-formal and informal learning

Cedefop’s conference: How to make learning visible: Strategies for implementing validation of non-formal and informal learning, Thessaloniki 28-29 November.

The programme for the conference is finalised and almost all speakers are confirmed. We have more than 120 registered participants. There are limited places available, so if EQF AG members have not registered and are interested in assisting, please get in contact with Cedefop. Programme and registration can be found here.

Cedefop/ OECD expert forum: Upskilling, reskilling and employing adult refugees, 3 October, Rome, Italy.

Cedefop and the OECD are co-organising a one day experts’ forum on the role of VET and VET-related measures to help adult refugees, including people in clear need of international protection, to quickly integrate in the labour market and on how countries have responded to the recent arrivals.

The event aims at supporting exchange of national experiences and discussing possible European VET and VET-related solutions that could support relocation of adult people in clear need of international protection on the European territory, favouring a rapid labour market integration and possible co-operation mechanisms between a transit country and a host country.

Copenhagen process / Bruges / Riga

In its meeting on 21-22 June 2016 the ECVET network, including the ECVET users’ group and national implementation bodies, held a preliminary discussion on the opportunity to revise ECVET in the context of the Skills Agenda. A working group set up to bring forward this reflection met on the afternoon of 22 June and on 15 September. At this stage of the debate, a certain consensus has emerged that ECVET should no longer aim at acting as a common credit point system. Development should therefore focus on other elements related with supporting flexible VET pathways. The working group will meet again in November, also taking into account the debate in the wider ECVET Forum (10-11 October 2016 in Rome).

For information, a leaflet on the Riga Conclusions is available in all EU languages on the Europa site.

Higher education

The preparation of the graduate tracking initiative as announced by the New Skills Agenda for Europe is progressing. The extent to which higher education prepares students adequately for the modern world is a common concern in public debate in many, if not all, Member States. At present, our ability to assess how well higher education is working is limited by a lack of consistent and comparable data: on what students actually learn in higher education (their learning outcomes) and on how graduates go on to use
and build on what they have learnt in higher education. To address the information gap in
the second area, the Commission has proposed a new initiative to increase the feedback
gathered from and about higher education graduates at national level and on a cross-
country basis in Europe. The initiative on graduate tracking will seek to help Member
States develop existing tracking systems, build new systems where they don’t exist and
complement efforts at national and institutional level with additional comparable
European data. The proposals will be published in the second quarter of 2017.

The annual ENIC-NARIC meeting took place on 19 – 21 June in Amsterdam. The main
point on the agenda was the recognition of qualifications held by refugees and the good
practice that is spreading on this issue, especially in the countries that have received the
most refugees over the last two years. Work will continue on this issue, building on the
identified good practice in NARICs. The meeting also focused on international academic
recognition conventions outside of Europe and the work on a possible, future global
convention on academic recognition.

A study on the feasibility of digitalising the Diploma Supplement to ensure better use
among end users such as employers and higher education institutions has started. The
report is to support the work of the relevant Bologna Process Advisory Group which is
currently drafting recommendations to the Council of Europe, UNESCO and the
Commission on a revised Diploma Supplement. The study report on the feasibility on
digitalising the Diploma Supplement will be published in the second quarter of 2017.

ESCO

The Commission launched an on-line consultation process with the Member States
through the Member states Working Group on ESCO (MSWG) on ESCO’s English final
draft. The consultation took place between 1 July and 9 September 2016. The
consultation focused exclusively on the occupations and skills/competences pillars of
ESCO.

Its aim was to invite the Member States Working Group to provide comments on the
adequacy of the final draft to:

- allow for mappings between the national classification systems and ESCO
- allow for a more precise exchange of information in EURES than with the
currently used ISCO-08 classification.

A total of 20 countries participated: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark,
France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland,
Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

With regard to the two questions, the feedback on the “fit for purpose” of ESCO was
overall positive. However, some Member States raised concerns on the technical
implementation of the mappings and suggested improvements to the classification, in
order to increase its consistency.

The Commission organised a webinar on 27 September to inform on and discuss with the
Member States the results of the consultation and its follow up. The second phase of the
consultation, foreseen at the end of 2016, will cover the occupations and
skills/competences pillars in all EU official languages, including Icelandic and Norwegian.

The Commission continues carrying out voluntary technical support visits to countries willing to create/adapt or adjust their national qualifications databases and linking them to the European portals (LOQ and ESCO). Since March 2016, ten visits have been performed, with very positive feedback from the visited countries: Belgium/Flanders, Latvia, Italy, Greece, United Kingdom/Scotland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, Iceland and Turkey. Visits to Bulgaria, Croatia and Norway are planned for the coming weeks. These visits have helped the countries to solve technical issues when developing their databases, but also the Commission to better understand the qualifications system of the different Member States and to refine the qualifications metadata schema.

A pilot project on ESCO qualifications pillar was carried out between November 2015 and April 2016, led by DGIT under the coordination of DG EMPL. It showed how information on qualifications coming from different providers and in different formats can be represented in a uniform way in Commission portals and how this metadata can be further exploited, mainly for search functions. A second phase of this pilot, starting in October 2016, will explore how to detect and locate duplicate information and how to annotate learning outcomes with ESCO skills/competences.

The Commission is planning to carry out a study on how to annotate learning outcomes with ESCO skills. The study will mainly focus on the methodology and will provide some guidelines to the users wishing to annotate learning outcomes with ESCO skills/competences. The start of the study is planned for the beginning of 2017.

Learning outcomes approach

The Cedefop study on "The application of learning outcomes approaches across Europe" has been published.

On 13-14 October Cedefop will organise the second policy learning forum on "Defining and writing learning outcomes for VET qualifications". The PLF targets national and sectoral experts directly involved in the writing of learning outcomes for VET qualifications. Building on the positive outcomes of the first PLF organised in 2015, the aim of the PLF is to strengthen the exchange of experiences related to the writing and use of learning outcomes in VET qualifications. While the learning outcomes approaches are now firmly embedded in the majority of European VET systems, mutual learning across national and institutional borders is still limited. The first PLF organised in September 2015 emphasised the need for a more permanent ‘community of practitioners’ that will act as a platform of exchange. The focus of the PLF will be the findings of Cedefop’s comparative study of 10 learning outcomes based VET qualifications, being carried out in 25 countries inside as well as outside Europe and Cedefop’s ‘Handbook on writing learning outcomes’.