INTRODUCTION

The thirty-six meeting of the EQF AG was attended by 56 representatives from 34 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 attended.

COM chaired and opened the meeting. The agenda was accepted. However, FR suggested that for the next meetings, the agenda could be organised with one day for validation issues and one day focusing on other issue, if possible.

There were no comments to the meeting minutes from the thirty-fourth meeting of the EQF AG on 3-4 February. Comments on the minutes can be sent in writing until the end of June.

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

Information on the latest developments as follow up on the last meeting (3-4 February 2016); (cf Note AG36-1).

Council of Europe:

- A ministerial conference was held in Brussels in March, where the framework for democratic culture was accepted and endorsed. The basic idea is to develop a competence framework for democracy similar to the language competence framework. A number of countries are now testing the descriptors in actual teaching situations.

- The issue of refugees is still high on the agenda. The Lisbon Recognition Convention's Article 7 asks the parties to promote the process of recognition of qualifications of refugees even if the qualifications are not documented. Higher education (HE) is covered by Article 7 as is access to HE, which includes school leaving certificates. The Council of Europe reminded countries about the obligation to provide education to minors below the age of 18.
The recognition of the qualifications of refugees is also on the agenda at the upcoming ENIC-NARIC meeting on 19 – 21 June 2016 in Amsterdam. Some ENIC-NARIC centres take some specific measures to give preference to the recognition of qualifications of refugees. This includes an example from Norway providing a passport for refugee qualifications and the Swedish background paper on refugees.

- A review of the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention has been conducted. Only seven countries have implemented Article 7 in legal terms.
- In September, a meeting will be organised about the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area. The main focus will be to review the actual implementation of the QF for HE and the learning outcomes approach. A report from this meeting will be provided for the next EQF AG meeting.
- It has been accepted that Belarus can join the Bologna Process. The process of Belarus joining EHEA will be closely monitored. At an upcoming meeting, the issue of academic freedom will be discussed – not only for Belarus, but in general, as a number of countries have issues with academic freedom.

**Information from Presidencies**

NL informed briefly about what has been the main focus points of the Dutch Presidency:

- The socio-economic impact of the financial crisis, refugees, and terrorism.
- New Skills Agenda for Europe – launched on 10 June.
- Action Plan for Integration ([link](#)) and a follow-up on the Paris Declaration.
- HE debates on the match or mismatch between education and the needs of the economy.
- Debate on how to enable young people to engage in a diverse, connected and inclusive Europe.

The Presidency was mainly preparatory in nature and facilitated a number of debates. The SK informed that its main focus during the Presidency will be to progress on the work related to the New Skills Agenda for Europe.

**Consultation on the European Pillar of social rights**

COM presented the consultation on the European Pillar of Social Rights ([cf. ppt](#)). The Pillar should build on and complement the EU social 'acquis' to guide policies in a number of areas that are essential for a well-functioning and fair labour markets and welfare systems. It consists of three chapters:

- Chapter I: Equal opportunities and access to the labour market (with an important focus on skills)
- Chapter II: Fair working conditions
- Chapter III: Adequate and sustainable access to social protection

The consultation will be open till the end of 2016.

**UNESCO meeting of regional qualifications framework**

Cedefop informed about the ongoing work in an international expert group set up by UNESCO on QFs (meeting in Cape Town, South Africa). So the group has mainly focused on the systematic exchange of experiences between existing and emerging regional qualifications frameworks (RQFs).

Furthermore, Cedefop informed about a Cedefop/ETF/UNESCO comparative study on 10 learning outcomes based VET qualifications across the world (25 countries covered, among which 13 European countries), to be published in 2017.

**Questions/Comments to Note AG36-1 (reaction from NO)**

Regarding the new EURES regulation, a clarification was requested on the introduction of an obligation to extend the current labour market data to apprenticeships and traineeships, however, being allowed to exclude apprenticeship and traineeships that are part of national education systems.

COM: EURES is a system of information about vacancies. It is based on the principle of freedom of movement of workers. In the information shared by EURES, there must be a link to an employment situation/contract. In dual systems, there are situations where an apprenticeship is not related to an employment situation, but is an integrated part of the education system. In these cases the obligation does not apply.

**New online system for registration and reimbursement of expert groups (AGM)**

COM informed the group about the new online system for registration and reimbursement of expert groups – called AGM (cf. ppt.). Using the system is mandatory for all expert groups. Consequently, the next EQF AG meeting will be organised using this application. The advantage of the system is that it offers a single entry point for all meetings. It speeds up the reimbursement process and notifies members of expert groups on upcoming events and important actions to be taken.

The first time an expert enters the AGM system, he or she must create a personal account. After the registration, all necessary information will be sent to the registered e-mail account. It is possible to forward information to colleagues.

For the next EQF AG meeting, it is very important that members register in due time using the system. If the registration is not received on time and confirmed by COM, the member cannot be reimbursed.

Link to the AGM system: [http://ec.europa.eu/tools/agm/](http://ec.europa.eu/tools/agm/) (also with online guidance and tutorials)

**Comments and remarks (ETUC, LV):**

- The AGM system functions very well, but messages often go directly to the spam-box.
- Deadlines for registration for meetings need to be realistic.
2. **NEW SKILLS AGENDA FOR EUROPE**

**General presentation**

COM informed about the recently adopted New Skills Agenda for Europe (*cf. ppt*). One of the grand challenges in Europe is the lack of basic skills. More than 65 million adults are without upper secondary education. At the same time, 40% of employers report difficulties with finding employees with the right skills. The new agenda aims to make sure that people develop the skills necessary for the labour market and to boost employability, competitiveness and growth across the EU.

The new agenda has three priorities areas.

**Priority area I**: Improving the quality and relevance of skills formation; actions:

- A proposal for a Skills Guarantee to help low-skilled adults acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and progress towards an upper secondary qualification (proposed in June).
- Revision of the Key Competence Framework. Two competence frameworks for digital competences and entrepreneurial competences have already been launched.
- Making VET a first choice by enhancing opportunities for VET learners to undertake a work-based learning experience and promoting greater visibility of good labour market outcomes of VET. Pathways should be more flexible and there should be more options to continue in further education.
- Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition to support co-operation among education, employment and industry stakeholders.

**Priority area II**: Making skills and qualifications visible and comparable; actions:

- A proposal for a review of the European Qualifications Framework and the related annexes for a better understanding of qualifications and to make better use of all available skills in the European labour market (proposed in June).
- A skills profiling tool to support the early identification and profiling of skills and qualifications of asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants..

**Priority area III**: Improving skills intelligence and information for better career choices; actions:

- Revision of the Europass Framework. It will be based on ESCO and open standards. The revision will also be linking Europass to the Skills Panorama and EURES.
- Sharing best practices on addressing brain drain.
- Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills to improve skill intelligence and address skill shortages in specific economic sectors.
- Graduate tracking: How do graduates perform in the labour market? The tracking provides feedback to the educational institutions.

Unfolding the skill agenda will be a joint effort, but overall it is important to notice that skills have been strengthened in the European semester.

**Comments and questions** (reactions from Council of Europe, DK, EE, EI, FR, LV, PL, UEAPME):
Further information was requested on the skill tool for third country nationals.
Will VET be included in the tool on graduate tracking?
Further information was requested on the Blueprint for Sectorial Cooperation.
The participants requested more information about the revision of the Key Competence Framework.
The participants requested more information about the link between the EQF revision and the Europass.
Some countries have already substantial experience with graduate tracking and could share some of their experiences.
Some participants expressed concern about the timeline of the launch and implementation of all the actions. It is very ambitious.
A clarification on the term 'third country national' was requested. This action point focuses on the skills and qualifications of refugees.

Replies by COM:

The skills tool for third country nationals will be a screening tool, not a recognition tool. It will link to information on education and training and work experience in the country of origin— if possible.
Tracking of VET graduates could be on the agenda later on after tracking of HE graduates.
The Blueprint is an acknowledgement of the fact that monitoring cannot be at a macro level only. The Blueprint for Sectorial Cooperation will help mobilise and coordinate key players, encourage private investment and promote more strategic use of relevant EU and national funding programmes.
The Europass proposal should be adopted in Autumn and will specifically address governance issues.
Third country nationals are all nationals residing in the EU that do not have an EU Member States' nationality.

Proposal of a revision of the EQF Recommendation

The new Skills Agenda for Europe includes a proposal on a revision of the EQF Recommendation. COM presented the main elements of the proposed revision, which should replace the European Parliament and Council Recommendation of 23 April 2008 (cf. ppt).

The core of the 2008 recommendation is maintained, with the following main areas of change:

- strengthening referencing and improving the consistency of referencing;
- update of the 2008 Recommendation to today's reality;
- common principles on quality assurance and on credits;
- better visibility of the EQF for citizens and employers
- at a later stage comparing qualifications awarded in the EU with qualifications awarded in third countries; and
- No reference to international sectoral organisations using the EQF.

With regard to the future governance of the EQF the Commission proposal refers to the Commission's intention to set up an informal expert group that should, provide, e.g., the
necessary platform for cooperation between the Commission services, Member States and relevant stakeholders in the implementation and monitoring of the revised EQF Recommendation. Furthermore the Member States should ensure the coordination of tasks implemented by EQF National Coordination Points since 2008.

Main comments and questions (DE, DK, EE, FR, IE, IT, LU, LV, UEAPME, UK)

- Governance: Some found that it was still unclear how the current work of the EQF AG will fit into the proposed platform structure and whether COM plans to create a single platform or several platforms. Several participants found that the final text of the Recommendation should be more precise on the mandate of the platform.
- Establishing links with Third countries: several participants expressed that engaging with Third Countries should not be a priority for the EQF, in particular as the EQF is not yet mature enough.
- Europass Revision: Some participants argued that the governance structure should be aligned with the Europass revision.
- More information was requested on the concept of the credit system.
- The term competence: Some participants expressed concern about changing the terminology and not using the term 'competence'. More information on this subject was requested.
- The participants acknowledged that there now is a clearer link between the VET system and EQF.
- The participants encouraged that the coherence between EQF, Europass and the Skills Guarantee becomes clearer.
- International qualifications: More information was requested on the role of international sector qualifications. Some participants argued that mentioning sector qualifications in the Recommendation would be important.
- Some participants requested more information about the future role of NCPs.
- Some participants pointed to a mismatch between the quite modest technical proposal of the new Recommendation and its very ambitious aims.

Reactions by COM:

- Governance: each country should designate one interface for funding. It is up to the national level to designate. By having one single entry point, mutual annual grants can be granted so that countries can be more strategic. Currently, COM is working with two scenarios: a) A four-year funding contract or b) A two two-year funding contract.
- Third countries: priority will be to implement the EQF within Europe. However the COM is of the opinion that it needs a mandate allowing it in the future to do work on improving the comparability of qualifications awarded in third countries.
- The proposed annex does not create a new credit system; it is based on the ECTS/ECVET principles. The proposal suggests that were credit systems are linked to NQFs, these should be compatible with the proposed principles.
- The proposal for a revised Europass Decision will be presented in third quarter of 2016. This will also address the future role of the NCPs.

COM thanked the participants for all the comments and remarks and stressed that further bilateral discussions on the text of the new recommendation are welcome, and that further amendments can be made during the negotiation phase. A joint Education and Employment Committee meeting will be held on 5 July 2016.
**Study on obstacles to recognition of skills and qualifications**

The study explores the empirical evidence on the obstacles (and underlying causes) faced by education and training providers, employers and intermediary organisations in coming to fair, efficient and effective recognition decisions, and the obstacles faced by individuals when they want to have their skills and qualifications recognised. The study does not deal with the regulated professions. It should be noted that the researchers were given a very broad mandate in the perception of recognition.

Four categories of obstacles to the recognition process have been identified:

- obstacles prior to entering the recognition process;
- obstacles when applying for recognition;
- obstacles during the recognition process; and
- obstacles after granting of partial or complete recognition.

For each category of obstacles, the study suggests a number of solutions (*cf. ppt*).

The final report should be available in July. For the next EQF AG meeting, COM will explore the possibility of a presentation from the contractor (Ecorys).

**Comments and questions (reactions from Council of Europe, IE, LU, LV, UK)**

- Recognition types: Some participants argued that more clarity on recognition types is needed on how recognition is experienced from the perspective of the beneficiaries.
- QF is often seen as a tool for recognition. Some participants asked if QFs could also be a barrier.
- Some participates requested more information about why people ask for recognition.
- When discussing recognition, endorsed self-assessment should also be taken into account. Open badges as a tool for recognition of learning is a growing phenomenon and is often trusted by employers.

COM will share the study with the EQF AG once finalised (July 2016).

**Study on Sectorial qualifications systems and frameworks and their relation to the EQF**

This study collects comprehensive information on and identifies current challenges with regard to international sectoral qualification systems and frameworks and their relation to the EQF. The 39 EQF countries are covered. The outcomes of the study will help COM to explore how to support initiatives in this area better. The final report will be circulated to the group, once ready (expected in July) (*cf. ppt*).

**Comments and questions (reactions from Council of Europe, DE, DK, IE, LU, NL, UK)**

- The participants welcomed the study and suggested that the EQF AG could be the body establishing guidance and procedures for referencing sectorial qualifications to the EQF. The burden of work would be on the applicants. In this context, it is important to keep the international dimension in mind. Some non-formal qualifications are purely national.
- The UK informed that the UK NCP decided to do a parallel study on sectoral qualification systems and frameworks in the UK. The study looks into five sectors in-
depth. The study is now about half way through. Also in Germany, a similar study is currently being carried out.

- Some participants argued that referring to QFs is normally considered to be positive, but there is also a risk of misuse. Most countries do not have procedures on how to link international sectorial qualifications to NQF.

COM will share the study with the EQF AG once finalised (July 2016).

**Study on feasibility of setting institutional arrangements and QA related to an extended scope of the EQF**

This study aims to explore possible the new tasks that might arise at European level as a result of the possible revision of the EQF Recommendation. In this respect, it will study quality assurance criteria and procedures related to international sectorial qualifications, preparatory work for the links of the EQF with third country qualifications frameworks and the management of the ESCO classification after its first full release. The study will also explore the feasibility of the development, governance and continuous updating of European core profiles of qualifications from a more theoretical perspective.

The draft final report is expected to be ready in July.

**3. Referencing**

**Overview of national developments related to the implementation of the EQF**

An overview of national developments related to the implementation of the EQF is provided in *Note AG36-02*. Kosovo\(^2\) has informed the Commission that they will not be able to present a referencing report before the EQF AG meeting in December 2016. The presentation of the referencing report from TR has to be confirmed.

**State of play of the Referencing report of Liechtenstein**

Liechtenstein (LI) presented the state of play for referencing of the NQF to the EQF (*cf. ppt*).

LI is a small country with only 37,400 inhabitants. Nearly 37,000 persons are employed in LI meaning that there is a considerable inflow of workers to the country. The economy is highly diverse and closely interlinked with that of Switzerland and Austria. Since 1991, LI has been part of EFTA.

The LI school-system is very similar to the system of Switzerland, and LI works closely together with Switzerland on education – especially on VET. LI has agreements on HE with Austria, Germany and Switzerland, where students from LI are treated on an equal footing with nationals.

LI decided to develop a comprehensive NQF in 2011. Like Austria, the so-called V-model is used. Levels 1-5 are considered to be general education. Levels 6-8 are either of a vocational or academic nature. Every year, two out of three pupils leaving secondary school in LI year decide to pursue vocational training. There are no VET-schools in LI.

\(^2\)“This designation is without prejudice to position on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence”
and a VET qualification obtained in LI is identical to a VET qualification obtained in CH.

LI is now finalising the referencing report, which will be presented at the October EQF AG meeting.

**Referencing report of Sweden**

Sweden presented their referencing report to the EQF AG (*cf. ppt*). More than 10 commissions have worked on different topics related to development of the Swedish Qualification Framework (SeQF) between 2009 and 2015. In 2014, the Ministry of Education issued the official proposal for hearing to 143 stakeholders. In August 2015, the Ordinance on the SeQF was adopted by the Swedish government. This Ordinance came into force in two steps between October 2015 and January 2016 – as a regulation of the framework and a regulation of the application for levelling.

The SeQF is a comprehensive eight level framework meant to include all types of qualifications – regardless of provider. The development has been characterised by openness, inclusiveness and dialogue with a very broad range of relevant national authorities and other stakeholders. The SeQF will be developed gradually in pace with the interest from working life and the sectors. The EQF has been the starting point for SeNQ and learning outcomes are an absolute criteria for a qualification to be adopted into the SeNQ.

**Comments, questions and answers (reactions from AL, Cedefop, Council of Europe, ETF, European Student Union, HR, IE, NL, UK):**

- The group thanked SE for the presentation of a well-structured and clear report reaching both the formal and non-formal educational sector. The inclusion of stakeholders has been very impressive. It will be an on-going challenge to keep up this momentum of stakeholder involvement.
  - SE: In September, a conference will be held in order to win ambassadors among stakeholders.
- The description of the formal system lacks some details. It is difficult to understand for persons not familiar with the Swedish educational system.
- Criterion 2: Clearly described. However, more information requested on how the vertical descriptors are dealt with.
- Criterion 4: More clarity was requested on the link between the descriptors and the objective targets.
  - SE: Guidelines for description have already been developed.
- Criterion 5: Well covered. However, clarification was requested on how QA links to the learning outcome and certification process.
- More information was requested on the co-existence of two frameworks (SeQF and the framework for higher education) and how this will develop.
  - SE: It is a political decision to work with two frameworks, but they are fully compatible. However, the SeQF is not a framework that automatically gives access to higher education. As an example, a qualification from higher vocational education, which is quite new in Sweden, does not automatically give access to universities.
- The implementation and communication strategy: More information was requested about how public understanding and adoption of the SeQF is foreseen.
• **Statements:** More details were requested on some of the statements in the report such as *why stakeholders do not like a political decision about levelling* or more information about the *opinions* of the international experts.

• **The National Council of Qualifications:** How will this council be supported?
  - SE: One of the tasks of the National Council of Qualifications will be to provide recommendations on whether a qualification can be levelled to the SeQF or not. The Council is comprised by relevant stakeholders. For now, there is no funding for the work of the council except expenses being covered. The representatives have accepted to do the work anyway.

• **QA of HE:** Which body is responsible for the QA of HE outside the formal education system?
  - SE: HE qualifications outside the formal education system is on levels 5 and 6. The QA will be done by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (MYH). Qualifications outside the public education system should use ECVET as credit system.

• **Levelling of non-formal qualifications:** Who is doing the actual levelling?
  - SE: The owner of the qualification is doing the actual levelling after a detailed application process. MYH will then have a dialogue with the owner.

In conclusion COM congratulated SE on the referencing and thanked SE for their presentation and the clear replies provided to the questions. The following points should be addressed in the finalisation of the report:

• More information on the formal education system should be given.
• More information on the discussion at the government on the level 2 and 3 should be given.
• More transparency could be added to the report to the benefit of readers outside Sweden.
• Criteria 10: this work is still in progress. However, the direction could be more clearly described.
• SE was invited to submit the finalised version.

**Working group on horizontal comparisons – state of play**

PL presented the progress made by the horizontal comparison working (composed by PL, HU, IT, LV, NO, SE, Cedefop and COM (*cf. ppt*)). The general aim of the group is to improve the way EQF levelling takes place further by piloting and testing a methodology for the comparison of levelling decisions and share experiences on existing strengths and weaknesses.

The group has decided on five categories making up the core elements of context information relevant for levelling, i.e. access rights, purpose of the qualification on the labour market, recognition practice, validation practices and learning outcomes.

For the pilot of the horizontal comparison, the group has developed a fiche and agreed to compare two qualifications relevant in all countries of the pilot group, the CNC operator and the mechanical engineer.

The preliminary conclusions are that comparing methods of levelling and comparing qualifications horizontally is possible. The working group will present a final report end
of 2016 including a work programme for 2017-2018. More countries were invited to join the group.

Comments, questions and answers (reactions from the Council of Europe, NL, SK)

- ENIC-NARIC centres face these kinds of problems all the time. They could add relevant information to this work.
- Clarification was requested on whether the same method of levelling is expected to result in the same levelling outcome?
- More information was requested on whether more qualifications will be taken into account?
- SK expressed interest in joining the work group.
- The five core elements: Additional information was requested on the selection of the five core elements.

Reactions by PL:

- It is not the intension of the work of the group that the same levelling method should result in the same levelling result. Society will influence on the levelling result.
- At this stage no more qualifications will be taken into account within the mandate of the group.
- There is no direct relationship between the five core elements and the actual levelling, but in order to draw up a more complete picture of the system, it is important to include the additional information.

4. VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

State of play of national developments on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on VNFIL

COM reminded the participants about a decision made by the EQF AG three years ago on 1) preparing a report on a voluntary basis on the state of play of national developments on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on VNFIL; 2) the development of a National Roadmap and 3) the launch of peer learning activities and share the state of play.

European Inventory on Validation 2016: thematic reports

COM presented the results of four thematic studies that will be part of the 2016 (light) Update of the European Inventory on Validation of non-formal and informal learning (cf. ppt), namely:

- Validation in the care and youth work sectors
- Monitoring validation
- Funding validation
- Validation and open educational resources

Some of the studies, especially the study on validation and open educational resources, were very explorative and in some cases, such as the study on funding validation, data were scarce. Concerning the latter, the next PLA in BE will focus on the costs related to validation. The four thematic reports will be available online within the next few weeks.
The participants requested more information about the "recognition" aspect of the validation and whether this is covered by the thematic reports.

- **COM:**

The participants requested more information about to which extent the refugee situation is covered by the reports – especially the costs of validation.

- **COM:**

Standardised data: Participants commented on the expectation that countries can provide standardised data on validation. This is not always the case. Data on validation are often qualitative data on practices. However, modern technology often allows for the use of data even if they are not centralised and standardised.

- **Refugees:** Some participants argued that using the term identification of skills and competences is more helpful than validation and recognition, when it comes to refugees. The ENIC-NARIC centres are a great source of information on this issue.

**Reactions by COM:**

- The terms recognition and validation sometimes overlap. Clarity on the use of the terms is needed and this issue is not that well covered in the report

- The refugee situation is not that visible in the report. Cedefop is working on a separate report on the subject.

**Presentation of a country approach on VNFIL – Germany**

DE presented the main elements of the German approach on validation of non-formal and informal learning (*cf. ppt*). Validation of non-formal and informal learning refers to the formal education system and formal qualifications and is an integrated part of the education system.

The external students' examination as part of the Vocational Training Act is a key piece of legislation describing examination of external students. A VET qualification can be obtained based on work experience without a formal education. The validation process follows specific procedures and steps including advice, identification and documentation, evaluation and then finally certification.

The Recognition Act is a key piece of legislation on validation of skills and competences for persons planning to move to Germany. There is a formalised procedure for validation in place including information online, advice, documentation, assessment of equivalence and finally notification. The key players in the validation process are the chambers of commerce.

Finally, DE informed about the ValiKom project. The aim is to develop an overall comprehensive validation procedure based on standards for assessing the equivalence of non-formally/informally acquired skills and formal qualification. The target group is persons with work experience. In the second half of 2018, a model for validation is expected as an output of the project.
• The target group of the ValiKom project is limited to people with work experience. Could it also cover voluntary youth workers?
  - DE: Skills and competences obtained through voluntary work can also be taken into account. One example is voluntary fire fighters.
• The participants acknowledged the German approach on validating skills and competences of refugees, but requested more information on the costs of the Recognition Act.
• More information was requested on the profile pass.
  - DE: The profile pass is a tool used prior to the recognition process. However, the profile pass is not as simple as a Europass.

Results of a consultation on validation in the Youth sector

The European Youth Forum presented the key results of a study on validation of non-formal and informal learning in the youth sector (cf. ppt) based on consultations with members of the Youth Forum. The main conclusions from the study are

• Young people are some of the main beneficiaries of a fair and efficient validation mechanism, and, as such, they need to be involved in setting up validation systems.
• VNFIL should be seen as an opportunity to provide everyone with a fair recognition of all his or her competences and skills.

Comments and questions (reactions from Cedefop, Council of Europe, European Student Union, LV)

• Terminology: A clarification about the use of terminology is needed. Obtaining skills and competences through youth work is not only about education and courses, but also about informal learning.
• The participants called for a strategy from the youth sector on how to develop fair and efficient validation.
• Some participants reminded the group that the most important driver for a young person to engage in a youth organisation is not necessarily to gain additional education. A youth organisation is also a critical free space for a young person.
• QAs of the learning provided by the youth organisations are important if the learning is to be validated.

Results of PLA on 'How to make visible and value skills and competences of refugees'

NL presented the main conclusions from the PLA held in Den Haag on 28-29 April. It focused on how to make visible and value the skills and competences of refugees by exchanging national approaches and experiences (cf. ppt). As the point of departure, all possible approaches for recognition and validation were discussed. Some of the main conclusions from the PLA were:

• A staged approach is needed – both in terms of the range of skills and competences and in terms of the timelines along which they are assessed and recognised.
• Shortest possible time from arrival to securing a job.
• Build as much information as possible at earliest possible opportunity.
• Focus on validation of the refugee, not on the administration/procedures.
• Trust and authority pervade the processes of assessment and recognition

Comments and questions (reactions from Cedefop, COM, Council of Europe, ETF)

• The skill portfolio was very central to the discussion at the PLA. Refugees should be able to identifying their own skills and developing their portfolios over time.
• Assessment approaches of work-based learning from DE and SE are important practical experiences to be shared.
• COM informed that a skills profile tool for third country nationals is under development (for the autumn).
• Armenia has received many refugees from Syria and has done a lot of work of assessment for the labour market.
• Some participants called for an approach where some of the validation processes could be done in parallel to avoid a situation where refugees are placed in a waiting position in refugee camps.
• Some participants recommended that ministers of education become more involved in the refugee challenge.

Draft programme of PLA on VNFIL, 6-7 December 2016, Brussels

The purpose of the PLA is to examine the costs and benefits of validation. In particular, it will be seeking to explore how the costs of a specific validation procedure can be calculated and which tools can be used for the calculation. Finally, the PLA will look into the funding of validation. BE-fl invited the AG members to consider whether they would be interested in participating; function as moderator, provide good practices or interesting studies. COM called for setting out tangible objectives for this PLA to achieve tangible results.

5. PEER LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Results of the PLA 'How can QFs support recognition of qualifications', 17-18 March 2016, Luxembourg

LU informed the participants about the main conclusions from the PLA held in Luxembourg on 17-18 March:

• Employers have a prerogative when it comes to recognition of qualifications.
• Certification can be helpful for recognition. However, this is not the same as recognition.
• Languages skills are essential in a recognition process.
• There is lack of clear definitions. This reflects that we do not yet have a common recognition framework in Europe.
• The interpretation and implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention varies greatly from country to country
• There is still a lack of clarity about the Common Training Frameworks (CTF). CTFs are a common set of knowledge, skills and competences necessary for the pursuit of a specific profession. They shall be based on EQF levels. There is no mandate for the EQF AG group to work on the CTF as yet.

Results of PLA on 'levelling school leaving certificates', 2-3 June in Belfast
IE and UK informed the group briefly about the main results of the PLA held in Belfast on 2-3 June. The event was focusing on upper secondary school leaving qualifications giving direct access to first cycle degree courses and their place in the EQF. Some of the main conclusions were:

- Levelling is not a process based alone on learning outcomes. Traditional placement of a qualification and political opinions have also important influences on levelling.
- Framework levelling has an impact on standards of qualifications and the maintenance of the standards.
- The use of learning outcomes for comparison of qualifications is very important. However, for transparency purposes, learning outcomes are not the only aspect.
- A great number of school leaving certificates are vocational. In principle, they give access to higher education, but sometimes, there are hidden barriers. The road ahead is not always clear for holders of vocational school leaving certificates.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND AOB

After two years, Susanne Lonscher-Räcke will be leaving the EC and return to Hamburg. Susanne’s support to the EQF AG has been highly valued and she was thanked by COM and by AG members.

Upcoming dates

- 12-13 September 2016: The Presidency Conference, Bratislava (SK)
- 3 October 2016: Unesco/Cedefop conference on refugees, Rome (IT)
- 4-6 October 2016: 37th meeting of the EQF AG, Brussels (BE)
- 23-24 November 2016: ETF Conference on 'making better qualifications', Brussels (BE)
- 28-29 November 2016: Conference on 'Making learning visible' (validation), Thessaloniki (EL)
- 6-7 December 2016: PLA on validation and costs, Brussels (BE)
- 8-9 December: 38th meeting of the EQF AG, Brussels (BE)
# Annex: List of participants

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
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