Brussels, 1 December 2016

EQF Advisory Group, 8-9 December 2016, Brussels

Note AG38-1
Note on relevant developments
Follow-up to the thirty-seventh meeting of the EQF Advisory Group, 4-5 October 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 38-2).

New Skills Agenda for Europe

The Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council of 21/22 November reached political agreement on the Council Recommendation on "Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults" (formerly the "Skills Guarantee"). It aims to provide opportunities for low-skilled adults to acquire a set of skills, knowledge and competences relevant for the labour market and active participation in society. These opportunities should consist of three steps:

- skills assessments;
- tailored and flexible learning that meet the needs of the candidate and local, regional and national workforce needs;
- recognition of the skills that people acquire and support for progression towards a full qualification.

The Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council further adopted a Council Resolution on "A New Skills Agenda for an Inclusive and Competitive Europe". The resolution highlights in particular:

- the fact that education and training should not only prepare people for the labour market, but should also contribute to social inclusion and to the development of engaged and active citizens
- the need for excellent teachers and trainers
- closer links between education and training and the world of work
- development of the flexible mindsets and curiosity needed to adapt to future needs
- efficient and effective coordination at EU level in the area of education
- adequate EU funding for actions under the New Skills Agenda

AG38-1
The Education Committee has started negotiations on the Europass proposal on 9 November and will have a further discussion on 2 December to discuss the full text of the proposal. The Maltese Presidency will continue the discussions based on a Presidency text that should be available mid-December.

The Education Committee finalised the first reading of the text of the proposed revision of the EQF Recommendation on 9 November when the recitals were discussed. The SK Presidency will prepare a Presidency draft of the text which will be circulated to the Education Committee around mid-December. As from January the Maltese Presidency will take on the discussions from there with the purpose of concluding the discussions and adopting the Recommendation under their Presidency.

Preparation of the Vocational Skills Week has continued at European and national level, with more than 660 events throughout Europe. The Week will be opened on 5th December by Commissioner Thyssen in a vocational school in the port of Antwerp and closed in Brussels by Vice-President Dombrovskis, Commissioner Thyssen and MEP Jean Arthuis, Chairman of the Budget Committee of the European Parliament. European events will include a conference on adult skills, the EQAVET Forum and the VET-Business Forum.

The studies on Obstacles to Recognition of Skills and Qualifications and on International Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks and Systems have been published on the Commission's website.

**VNFIL**

**European Inventory:**

Analysis of the data collected has been finalised and the draft publication is pending only small adjustments. The Inventory will be published in Cedefop’s webpage in January 2017.

**Cedefop conference on how to make learning visible Strategies for implementing validation of non-formal and informal learning, Thessaloniki 28-29 November:**

The conference had more than 200 registered participants from 32 countries. DG EMPL together with Cedefop presented first results of the European Inventory. Participants were a good mixture of policy makers, practitioners and researchers. The conference reflected on past achievements and progress in the last 20 years, using a participatory approach. It showed that although there has been development in terms of policies, more needs to be done in terms of implementation, especially concerning raising awareness and coordination of validation initiatives. More information on the conference can be found in Cedefop’s web page, [here](#).

**Copenhagen process / Bruges / Riga**

Member State and social partner representatives in the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training agreed on an “Opinion addressed to the European Commission on A Shared Vision for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships and Work-based Learning...
(WBL)”, aiming at stepping up reforms and implementation for quality and effective apprenticeships and WBL and an improved coordination of the various stakeholder actions. The Opinion calls on the Commission to provide a proposal on a number of issues, while also recognising that steps need to be taken by Member States and social partners. This is a timely contribution, taking into account the emphasis on the quality of apprenticeships and the mobility of apprentices given in the 2017 Commission Work Programme. The text Opinion is currently undergoing a final written consultation, after which it will be made public.

The ECVET Forum took place on 10-11 October 2016 in Rome, gathering about 200 participants representing national bodies, social partners and other stakeholder, in particular form than 50 VET providers (the special target group for this year). The Forum confirmed widespread consensus on the benefit that the use of small sets of learning outcomes can bring to make vocational skills development more flexible, and the need to revise ECVET towards a framework of clear principles to be supported by guidance tools. A comprehensive report will be published in the ECVET Magazine during the Vocational Skills Week.

Higher education

The second round of proposals submitted under the Erasmus+ Call to support the implementation of the objectives of the European Higher Education Area has been finalised. All proposals submitted were successful in receiving funding. This means that a total of 24 Erasmus+ programme countries have received funding for projects supporting e.g. better implementation of the ECTS system, putting in place external quality assurance measures, appointing national experts to support institutions, promoting mobility for underrepresented student groups and organising peer-learning activities. All projects run from 2016 to 2018.

The annual NARIC meeting will take place on 1 December in Brussels. One of the main points on the agenda includes practices for the recognition of third-country nationals and projects launched to support improvement of procedures in Latin-American countries and South-Mediterranean countries, the latter with a particular focus on refugees.

ESCO

The Commission’s Directorate General for Translation is currently translating the English version of the occupations pillar of ESCO into all other EU official languages plus Icelandic and Norwegian. Once this process is concluded (expected by mid-December) the Commission will launch an on-line consultation process with the Member States through the Member states Working Group on ESCO (MSWG) to have their feedback on these ESCO linguistic versions. The consultation process should last until end of January 2017 (to be confirmed).

The mandate of the ESCO Board reached its end (it was effective until the publication of ESCO v1) and its last meeting took place in Berlin on November 8th last. The future governance of ESCO is currently being discussed between the Commission and the Council in the context of the proposed Europass Decision. The Commission wishes to maintain the ESCO Maintenance Committee in the future ESCO governance, with a renewed mandate and composition.
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

Cedefop’s second policy learning forum (PLF) on learning outcomes for VET qualifications, on 13 and 14 October in Thessaloniki, provided the follow up to the last year’s PLF. It focused on "Defining and writing learning outcomes for VET qualifications". National and sectoral experts directly involved in writing of learning outcomes for VET qualifications as well as international experts and researchers from 28 countries participated in the PLF. Building on the outcomes from the first PLF in 2015, there was an effort to strengthen, deepen cooperation, indicate challenges and possibilities for countries to cooperate. During the event, participants exchanged experiences in the plenary sessions and in the working groups while a good common ground was established for the future steps in this area.

Cedefop research in the field was discussed at the forum, including two comparative studies: one on learning outcome application in 33 European countries, carried out in 2014-15, and another of 10 learning outcomes-based VET qualifications currently being carried out in 25 countries across the world (13 in Europe and 12 in the rest of the world). In addition, the forum explored the way forward. The development of a handbook, the first draft of which was presented to participants, was perceived as a tool for cooperation, adding value to what is happening at national level and acting as an entry point to an extensive collection of national and sectoral examples and cases, allowing stakeholders to concretely compare approaches applied across (and beyond) Europe. Additionally, there was a strong support of the countries to create a permanent network on learning outcomes bringing together practitioners and ensuring continuity and stability in this work.