Follow-up to the thirty-fourth meeting of the EQF Advisory Group, 3 – 4 February 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).*

**Peer learning activity in Luxembourg on "how qualifications frameworks can support recognition of qualifications"**

A PLA on "How can qualifications frameworks support recognition of qualifications" was held in Luxembourg on 17 – 18 March 2016, hosted by the Ministry of Education, Children and Youth of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, in cooperation with the Commission and Cedefop. The topic was discussed in three main sessions in on the basis of presentations and experiences putting in relation qualifications frameworks to the EU-Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications and its Common Training Frameworks (CTFs), to the Lisbon Recognition Convention, and to qualifications not covered by the Directive and the LRC. Main results were the need to have fully operational national qualifications frameworks for using them in the recognition procedures, the lack of clarity regarding the future CTFs, and the fact that this PLA was a starting point for further reflection.

**VNFIL**

**PLA on making visible and valuing skills and competences of refugees**

A PLA on "how to make visible and value skills and competences of refugees" was held in The Hague in the Netherlands on 28-29 April 2016, hosted by the Dutch National Coordination Point ECVET and NLQF, in cooperation with the Commission and Cedefop. The PLA looked at current measures and tools at national level from the Netherlands, Germany and Sweden. This was followed by example from current developments at European level, looking at the cooperation in the ENIC-NARIC network and at the Third country Skills profile Toolkit currently developed by DG EMPL. The
PLA showed that countries with high numbers of refugees have developed simple but efficient first contact identification tools and further guidance and bridging measures. Sharing of best practices will be necessary for those countries that have not yet established such practices. EU initiatives such as the Skills Profile Tool would also be of assistance for such countries.

European Inventory

As part of the 2016 European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning a series of four thematic reports are under preparation which take a closer look at specific aspects relevant for the development of validation arrangements in Europe. The reports treat the following themes:

- validation in the care and youth work sectors: this looks into how validation arrangements link to specific sectors of care and youth work;
- monitoring validation: this provides an overview of the way the use of validation of non-formal and informal learning is recorded across Europe;
- funding validation: this presents an overview of funding sources for validation of non-formal and informal learning and discusses associated issues such as sustainability and accessibility of validation arrangements;
- validation and open educational resources (OER): this focuses on validation of learning acquired through OER, for instance through participation in massive open online courses.

For the light update of the country reports members of the EQF AG responsible for VNIL have been contacted for their feedback (so far received from 18 countries).

Cedefop is organising a conference on validation, “Making learning visible: European conference on validation of non-formal and informal learning”, taking place in Thessaloniki 28-29 November 2016. The conference is organised in cooperation with the Commission and will present results of the 2016 Inventory update as well as explicitly address the challenges in meeting the 2018 deadline for establishing national validation arrangements in Member States.

Copenhagen process / Bruges / Riga

The Commission is organizing the first European VET skills week in order to increase attractiveness of both initial and continuous vocational training and showcase the best of VET in terms of excellence and innovation. This event will take place in Brussels from 5 to 9 December 2016 and will consist of events organized with stakeholders in Brussels, while also calling for strong involvement of stakeholders at Member State level and within Member States to organize open doors events, workshops, and conferences, on the topic of VET. The Commission will be organising a significant communications campaign to support the VET Week.
Higher education

The Commission, DG EAC, carried out a consultation as part of the review of the Higher Education Modernisation Agenda. The consultation closed on 29 February, and results from the consultation will be published as part of the Skills Agenda.

The Erasmus+ funded NARIC projects for the period of 2016-2018, including the project aimed at developing a Toolkit (revised guidelines, e-learning seminar, possible new, supportive tools etc.) for credential evaluators to support better recognition of qualifications held by refugees, have been launched.

The BFUG meeting in the first half of 2016 took place in Amsterdam on 7-8 March 2016. The meeting was the first BFUG meeting following the agreement on the 2015-2018 work plan in late 2015. The discussions at the meeting therefore focused on taking stock of progress in the various set up groups working on the objectives in the Yerevan Communiqué. The discussions at the BFUG meeting also centred on the sustainability of the Bologna Process and the underlying structures of cooperation.

Within the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), the Structural Reforms Working Group (SRWG) and Pathfinder Group on automatic recognition (PfG) have recommended the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO to review the Diploma Supplement with a view to ensuring it reflects recent developments in higher education, including the development of learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks; is relevant and up-to-date for the purposes of mobility and the recognition of qualifications; promotes employability and takes into account the possibilities for providing up-to-date information through use of modern information technology, including the digitalisation of the Diploma Supplement itself.

Taking into account the recommendations of the SRWG and PfG, an Advisory Group has been set up within the BFUG, following the last ministerial meeting of the Bologna Process in May 2015, to present a proposal for the revision of the DS model by 2017 to support the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO in reviewing the DS. A parallel study has been commissioned on the digitalisation and use of the DS which could provide input and analysis to feed the discussion and activities of the Advisory Group.

UNESCO meeting of regional qualifications frameworks

The 3rd UNESCO Congress on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Shanghai on 14-16 May 2012 invited the UNESCO Director-General to explore the possibility of identifying a set of world reference levels (WRLs) to facilitate the international comparison and recognition of TVET qualifications. An international expert group was set up by UNESCO in 2013 and have met regularly since 2014. The Commission, Cedefop and ETF have participated in the group's meetings. Members of the group questioned the added value of a set of global reference levels (and the feasibility of carrying out a formal ‘referencing ‘to these). The group instead recommended giving priority to more systematic exchange of experiences between
existing and emerging regional qualifications frameworks (RQFs). The meeting in Cape Town the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of May addressed the following:

- Update on regional developments: notably the south East Asian regional qualifications framework is now operational and the first country (Malaysia) is expected to reference by 2017. Decision has furthermore been made to start developing an African continental qualifications framework.
- Discussions on common technical and conceptual issues: the meeting discussed the Initial findings of the Cedefop/ETF/UNESCO comparison of learning outcomes based VET qualifications (in 30 countries across the globe). This analysis will provide basis for joint work between the RQFs on the learning outcomes approach. An initial analysis of level descriptors was also presented. Discussions were also held on qualifications types and the intersection between VET and HE qualifications.

\textit{ESCO}

The Commission is currently 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). In April and May 2016 Latvia, Italy, Greece and Scotland received these visits. They allowed for exchange of information between the Commission and national stakeholders on their qualification systems and the current state of development of national qualifications databases, facilitated to both sides a clear picture on the technical means and national resources to link these databases to EU portals and enabled further talks on other ESCO related issues. Belgium (Flanders), Sweden, Spain, Croatia, Slovenia, Germany (tbc) and France (tbc) have also showed interest to have these visits in a near future.

The Commission has asked the recently created Member States working group on ESCO to give general feedback and appreciation of ESCO's content before the launching of its version 1, currently forecasted for December 2016. This feedback will be done in two phases: the first one in June/July for the content in English and the second on the last quarter of 2016 for the translated content (in the other 23 official languages). The Commission expects that this assessment will contribute to a smoother implementation of ESCO.

The Commission consulted experts and stakeholders on the ESCO content for the remaining 16 economic sectors through an online consultation. The 1st round of the ESCO online consultation started 14 October 2015 and closed 31 December 2015. In order to improve the content of ESCO, the Commission took all comments into account and liaised directly with the experts on their implementation. The Commission also organised a 2nd round of the ESCO online consultation to solve contentious cases and receive input on occupations that were not reviewed during the 1st round. This 2nd round of the online consultation was closed by end of April 2016. Its results are currently being integrated in the next ESCO's development phase.
The EURES new regulation entered into force on 12 May 2016 and is replacing the overall provisions on the exchange of information on job vacancies, job applications and CV’s across Member States (“clearance”) found in Chapter II and Article 38 of Regulation 492/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council on freedom of movement for workers within the Union, as stipulated in Article 46(d) TFEU.

The overall purpose is making EURES an effective tool for employment through fair intra-EU labour mobility, which will be in a position to address certain imbalances on our labour markets (high unemployment co-existing with unfilled job vacancies because of skills gaps and mismatches). It introduces the following main improvements:

- Achieve on the EURES portal a virtually complete supply of job vacancies, with job seekers in Europe having access to the same vacancies, in combination with an extensive pool of CV’s available ("transparency of labour markets");
- Enable the EURES portal to carry out matching through a critical mass of job vacancies and CV’s across Member States, using a European classification of occupations and competences (ESCO) to ensure semantic interoperability ("automated matching");
- Allow for a broadening of the network beyond public employment services in order to integrate new service providers to deliver such services in line with the quality standards such as private employment services, social partner organisations, third sector organisations etc. (improved access and impact);
- Offer services to assist job seekers and employers interested in intra-EU matching, placement and recruitment ("minimum set of support services throughout the EU").

The Regulation also introduces an obligation to extend the current exchange of labour market data to apprenticeships and traineeships which constitute a growing way to access labour market in particular for young people. The apprenticeships and traineeships to share in EURES are those related to an employment relationship as that is the scope of EURES under the Treaty but Member States may exclude offers related to categories of traineeships and apprenticeships which, having mainly a learning component, are part of national education system or which are publicly funded, as part of the Member State’s active labour market policies.

To allow for sufficient preparation by Member States, two sets of key provisions enter into effect on 13 May 2018: the obligations for Member States to introduce national admission systems to broaden the network and the rules relating to the expansion of the exchange of job vacancy and CV data.

**Council Recommendation on integration of long-term unemployed into the labour market**

The Council Recommendation on Long-term unemployment was adopted on 15 February 2016. It should lead to simplified, more transparent access to support for individuals. It encourages increased registration and an assessment of individual potential and barriers to employment before 18 months of unemployment. The job integration agreements will
mainstream individualised, tailored support combining active measures, employment services and social support. The recommendation puts forward a single point of contact, to simplify access to support and boost administrative delivery for this group.

Investing in capacity building for the single point of contact will be necessary with the aim of obtaining more effective service and more logical allocation of cases among authorities. Member States will agree on monitoring arrangements in 2016. The Commission will actively support the use of the 25 billion Euro already programmed in the area in the ESF for improving the support to the long-term unemployed along the lines proposed in the Recommendation.

**Learning outcomes approach**

A comparative study by Cedefop on "The application of learning outcomes approaches across Europe" will be published beginning September 2016. This reference publication maps and analyses the shift to learning outcomes in education and training policies and practices in 33 European countries. Particular attention is paid to the use of learning outcomes in different sub-sectors of education and training - in general, vocational, higher and adult education and training. Ten case studies in nine countries elaborate on the use of learning outcomes in the design and delivery of programmes and curricula for teacher education programmes.

An ongoing study looks at the role of learning outcomes in supporting dialogue between the labour market and education and training: the case of vocational education and training. In a first stage, this study compares the content and profile of 10 ‘similar’ VET qualifications in 10 European countries. UNESCO and ETF have decided to join this study allowing for a ‘global comparison’, addressing these VET qualifications in more than 30 countries across the world. The study will also involve a close cooperation with World Skills, seeking to build on the international network of skills experts. The first results of the study will be disseminated around the Summer of 2016.

In January 2016 a two-year research project on the impact of globalisation on VET in Europe was launched. The study looks at how national VET systems strengthen the quality and relevance of national qualifications in an international context, especially in sectors where global trends and technological advancements are evident. The study covers 15 countries and five sectors affected by globalisation: road transport and logistics, hospitality, automotive manufacturing, information technology and healthcare. Final findings are expected at the beginning of 2018.