



EU Work Plan  
for Sport

2014-  
2017

## Expert Group on Human Resources Development in Sport

Practical guidance on compliance of  
national qualifications with international  
qualification standards of international  
sport federation

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## **1. Introduction**

With its Resolution on an EU Work Plan for Sport 2014-2017 providing for Member States and Commission action, and building on the achievements from the first EU Work Plan for Sport 2011-2014, the Council has further strengthened the framework for European cooperation on sport.

Based on the Report from the Commission on its implementation of the EU Work Plan 2011-2014, the Council decided to give priority to a number of themes (integrity in sport, economic dimension of sport and sport and society) and key topics for the duration of the 2014-2017 Work Plan, and agreed on specific outcomes in line with these priorities (Annex I of the Resolution).

In order to support the implementation of the Work Plan and the outcomes more particularly, the Council agreed on the establishment of five Expert Groups. The Member States and the Commission were invited, within their respective spheres of competence, to continue close cooperation at expert level.

This paper is an outcome of the works of the EU Expert Group on Human Resources Development in Sport (XG HR). It specifically responds to the questions on the integrative approach to the compliance of national qualifications with international qualification standards of international sport federation. In particular, it explores how to achieve an agreement on the steps to be taken to devise curricula with different training providers. The steps identified should encourage the alignment and implementation of regulatory interfaces between training providers and/or institutions.

The work has been done with a view to offering recommendations and a practical guidance to allow the alignment of:

- standards and qualifications of international federations
- standards and qualifications of member states
- the European Qualifications Framework.

It should be noted that in this framework, the Expert Group puts the emphasis on the alignment and acknowledgement of formal and non-formal work as well as encouraging better transferability between the Non-Formal and Formal VET System.

During the works of the XG two additional documents were prepared:

- A questionnaire with regard to the Member States which takes into account the methodology underpinning the qualification standards of international sports federations.
- "A mapping of existing international qualification standards of international sport federations" (annexe 1).

## **2. Findings**

The first EU Work Plan for Sport (2011-2014) clarified that there was a wide range of rules in professions and associated qualifications in the EU Members States.

There is very much a 'mixed economy' of how sporting professions are regulated. This varies from country to country, and also profession to profession. In certain countries, the sporting professions or related ones are regulated by the Member State. In other countries, the regulation is entirely delegated to sports federations, other institutions or organisations. In other countries, there is no mandatory regulation to have training, qualifications or certification recognised by a competent authority<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, the European system of training and employment rules in the sports sector is characterised by an extreme diversity. The range of training includes (this list is not exhaustive):

- state training and diplomas
- training delivered by universities
- state and/or university training conducted in collaboration with federations
- federal awards uniquely delivered by federations
- federal awards uniquely recognised by the State
- MSc programmes for physical and sporting activities in sports training
- training devices put in place by National Olympic Committees
- certificates delivered by professional sports bodies or ancillary services,
- commercial awards with (commercial authorisation) allowing to engage in activity (for example, open a gym).

Therefore, for similar activities, the level of training, qualification or certification required in different countries of the EU is very heterogeneous. It should also be noted that diplomas or training for the same level do not necessarily cover the same professional activities, in particular, because the national qualifications correspond to the country's labor market.

Regarding the links between the national and international federations, the situation is also vary variable, and notably depends on the nature and degree of organisation associated with the discipline.

Collaborations have been put in place in the form of a symposium or of seminars organised by some of the European federations and / or the international federations concerned. In these circumstances, the certificates can be issued but they fall under the 'certificates of that time'.

Nevertheless, on the basis of the model "*informal networking*", a number of rich and fruitful exchanges have been made on the topic of plans, methods and contents of training through these collaborations.

In these different situations, informal or formal relationships have been established between the training co-ordinators of national and international federations.

However there seems to have been minimal agreement reached about formal co-operation between national and international federations.

In addition, according to the EU Expert Group on Education and Training (operating under the 1<sup>st</sup> EU Work Plan 2011-14), it is a challenge for national federations to align their existing qualifications to the rules (stipulations) providing to them by both their national governments and their international federations. The mid-term report of the Expert Group on Education and Training shows that in some countries, those who have international qualifications must still validate it within their home country, to allow them to work within that country. This has been reported across 14 sports.

The same report makes known that there have been obstacles which harm the recognition of "skills and qualifications" in an international context when they have been developed through a domestic programme, and vice versa.

The most important of these barriers are:

- The use of 'learning outcomes' which are improving but often with different approaches amongst countries or varying systems of training
- Difficulties to integrate sector qualifications within the NQF
- A slow implementation of a national framework of certification
- Ambiguous criteria for referencing to the EQF
- The national system is closed to international sector qualifications.

The following four important challenges can be drawn out from this assessment and contextualisation of the market. There is a need to:

- **Support the transparency**, comparability and quality of sports qualifications, by integrating them into the National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF), and reference them to the EQF;
- **Create the conditions to validate and recognise** the acquired competencies in the national context and / or in a European or international setting, for all sports professionals;
- **Improve the recognition** of learning outcomes acquired between the non-formal and formal sectors;
- Help organisations and individuals to be **more professional** in their approach. This would enable them to engage with lifelong learning linked to their career aspirations, and to respond better to employment opportunities across the EU.
- to make sure that there is a good match between the **training and the needs of employers / public bodies and end users** (for example, sports clubs, private/public associations, universities, businesses, professionals, learners and sportspeople of any level).

To facilitate mobility across EU Member States there must be mechanisms of validation and recognition of the relevant competencies acquired from different contexts, training programmes and geographical jurisdictions.

In order to facilitate the movement of learners, students and employees to add value in a range of contexts, it is necessary to implement the relevant NQF.

The major tools which were put in place during recent years (e.g.: Bologna and Copenhagen processes):

- a system of 3 cycles (License, Master, Doctorate) in Higher Education and issuing of credits European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (ECTS);
- European Qualifications Framework (EQF) to compare qualifications levels in the EU (the levels that are referred to the EQF and not the certifications themselves such as diplomas / certificates). It is the EU Member States that are responsible for establishing the reference of their levels to the EQF;
- Europass to make your skills and qualifications clearly and easily understood in Europe;
- The European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET);

- The development of an ongoing system of classification of aptitudes, competencies, qualifications and professions European Skills Competencies, Qualification and Occupations (ESCO).

The objective of these European tools is to promote the transparency and comparability of skills and qualifications in order to improve, in particular, the recognition processes of all forms of learning and mobility.

However, it is observed that the implementation of these tools is sometimes difficult and not always well understood. Several difficulties can be noted such as not clear links between the tools as well as lack of sufficient information regarding the implementation. This situation can affect the evolution of national systems and their transparency.

In this context the XG HR would like to suggest offer the following practical guidance.

### **3. Recommendations**

It seems appropriate that organisations which design qualifications and/ or their providers of training use a **reference tool** for their level of qualification.

This tool should be based on a clear model using the appropriate language and common standard terms. It appears essential to harmonise the main terms and their definitions (based on European definitions), or at least to discover the similarities that exist between different providers over the vocabulary used. The terms should be transparent and rigorously defined.

Aligned to this it is recommended that:

- The development of the tool refers to the work of Cedefop
- ECVET is used when developing the structural elements of the tool, as this contains the professional content of qualifications
- There is alignment with ECTS to enable the attribution of credits from and to university education from Higher Level Qualifications

The XG, HR of the Commission recommends that this **reference tool** should be constructed around the following elements:

- Every **job/role profile** and **professional profile** should identify the goals, tasks and activities required for each job.
- The **job/role profile** should also describe the **level of intervention** required by the objectives, tasks and activities described for the person to carry out. For example, the public audience she is responsible for, the places and

spaces in which she operates and the working environment and resources she must manage.

- The **job/role profile** should be linked to the level of qualification and training in relation to what the person is responsible for.
- The **job/role profile** is comprised of the **job competencies** which in turn are derived from the **list of competencies required** to accomplish the tasks and activities described. The job competencies do not need to tackle the tasks directly.
- The **job/role competencies** should include the competencies which need to be evaluated. Apart from those areas that "the competencies don't correspond to this evaluation", **the process and procedures of evaluation** should be precisely defined so that there can be positive feedback, constructive criticism against the criteria.
- The **job/role competencies** could be validated by **an initial training course** and/or continued by **the acquired validated experience**. This could take into account previous training and experience, and any outcomes acquired validly by mobility.
- The job competencies should be developed into units of **learning outcomes**. This way of proceeding limits an overly structured methodical framework which would however allow a structured evaluation plan. The implementation of the ECVET recommendation would provide an opportunity to define these learning outcomes and to facilitate the recognition and the transfer between different training providers and or certifiers.

The training courses should be clear about:

- a. The consideration of **pre-requisites**, specifically competencies relating to the training
- b. The streamlining of the **methods put in place to develop the competencies identified**
- c. The **results expected under apprenticeships and/or training courses** (*principal of "learning outcomes"*) corresponding to the overall defined competencies. This will allow the learner to master, understand or be capable of doing it after having finished the period of training. It is also the whole of the competencies which an individual has acquired that is relevant or to demonstrate the outcome of an apprenticeship.
- d. The **notion of theoretical workload**: indicates the time, explains the quantity of work, and identifies the hours of the training / qualifications that every unit requires in principal for candidates to attain the required results. These consist of activities and training that operate face-to-face, **in person** (with a coach), some examples are: attendance at courses (theoretical and practical), participating in workshops, seminars, carrying out practical work, directed work, observing sessions,

performing work where it is necessary to prepare and submit it for evaluations. What's **not** necessary to do face-to-face, **in person** such as preparing practical work, directed work where there is studying in an independent and personal manner for exams. This type of learning would allow the attribution of a number of different credit types of using the ECTS system.

e. **The methodologies and teaching tools used to disseminate the training:** examples are training, training focusing on interactive/participatory teaching, micro teaching working in directed/semi directed workshops, to self-training, personal research, case studies, e-learning.

f. **The types of lesson support and mechanisms through which they will be provided** to the learners, for example, document wallets, syllabus, books, portfolios, websites, electronic platforms, software.

g. Starting from the premise that "the competencies don't seem to fit with his evaluation", **the process and procedures of evaluations** should be very clearly explained. They are designed to measure the level of competency and the level of competencies should be clearly explained. The evaluation could include qualitative and quantitative components, actions or results attained in terms of training. The definition of criteria, indicators, or of precise benchmarks designed to determine how the objectives/results are attained seem to be a minimum requirement and also the description of the units of learning.

h. **Coaches' competencies' and experiences', Supervisory Standards and Materials** should also be defined.

The methods for a reinforced co-operation should have already been developed and been implemented in some scenarios. The ERASMUS programme has already been somewhat successful in achieving this goal of recognition of training or of competencies by putting in place these tools and allowing the transfer of learning outcomes. The current programme allows recognition and validation of acquired competencies in the context of a mobility framework. These competencies can be acquired in formal, informal or non-formal settings. The ERASMUS programme is based in the recognition of competencies, in part, due to these co-operative backgrounds.

The Member States and the European Commission should improve the communication of the existing programmes, notably concerning the expectation on sporting federations to promote the co-operation between different recipients of educational training and professional training in sport.



#### **4. Conclusions**

A reference tool taking into account the above information would enable clarity, comprehension, transparency of training and qualifications across Member States.

In turn this would allow the comparison of knowledge, aptitude, competencies and qualifications. Having this clarity would equally benefit the training courses and learners as it would allow for an appropriate method of training.

This step would also allow a move towards the assurance of global coherence in this areas. This would be the case in both regulatory organisations which certify these training providers, and also with the European referencing tools, most notably the EQF and ESCO.