Follow-up to the thirty-eight meeting of the EQF Advisory Group, 8-9 December 2016 in Brussels (cf. action points and the draft meeting minutes):

This note provides an overview on relevant developments in the European cooperation in education, training and employment. Updates on the referencing process are given in a separate note (Cf. note 39-2).

As a follow-up to the Skills Agenda and the Youth Initiative adopted by the Commission in December 2016, the Commission will present a renewed EU strategy for higher education in May. This will be part of a wider package of measures, including actions for schools, to support the development of education and training systems in the EU. The new higher education strategy will cover skills development, inclusion and social engagement, innovation and system funding and governance and propose specific EU-level actions in these areas to support Member States and institutions.

The Skills Agenda

A call for proposals to support EU partnerships in the context of the Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills was launched on 26 January under Erasmus + programme. The Blueprint is a new framework for strategic cooperation between key stakeholders in a given economic sector to deliver sector-specific skills solutions. Key stakeholders include: business, trade unions, research, education and training institutions, public authorities. Six sectors were chosen to pilot the Blueprint: automotive; defence; maritime technology; space/geo information; textile, leather clothing & footwear; and tourism. Complementary calls will be launched under the EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME) to support communication, awareness raising and consensus building activities. A second round of implementation in other sectors will be addressed. For more information: http://europa.eu/1gc96YU

The European Commission's first Vocational Skills Week successfully took place on 5 to 9 December 2016, with 8 meetings in Brussels attended to the tune of 1500 people.
Most crucially, 983 events were organised in Member States, such as conferences/workshops, open-door events or competitions, reaching out to 785,000 people and 37 million social media reaches. The Week, one of the actions announced in the Skills Agenda, focussed principally on excellence and quality in VET, following up on the conclusion of governments and stakeholders (Riga, June 2015) to raise awareness of young people, their parents, and all sorts of other learners, that vocational education and training (VET) is an attractive choice which leads to positive employment prospects. The second Vocational Skills Week is planned to take place in November 2017.

Within the Vocational Skills Week, a major European Conference on Adult Skills was organised on 6 and 7 December 2016, gathering 260 participants from all over Europe. A key objective of the conference was to spread the word about the Recommendation ‘Upskilling Pathways: new opportunities for adults’ (final adoption 19 December 2016) through which EU Member States committed to helping adults who struggle with literacy, numeracy or digital skills. The new initiative will give them a chance to have their skills assessed, to follow a tailored package of learning to improve their skills, and to have their new skills validated. The conference provided participants with concrete examples of good practice.

On 7 December 2017 the Commission release its package on Investing in Europe's Youth. In the Communication with this title, it is announced that the Commission will present a proposal for a Quality Framework for Apprenticeships and an activity (ErasmusPro) to boost opportunities for long-term placements in companies abroad. The first action will take the form of a legislative proposal for a Council Recommendation, to be presented in 2017, building upon massive work by social partners, supported by the opinion on quality and effective apprenticeships and work-based learning agreed by the tri-partite Advisory Committee on Vocational Training.

ErasmusPro will be an activity within the Erasmus+ programme, aimed at increasing the share of long-term VET mobility, which has fallen from 7% in Leonardo da Vinci to less than 1% in the current programme. Building upon the results of two pilot projects sponsored by the European Parliament, it will support placements during 6 to 12 months. Specific eligibility and award criteria will be defined in the Erasmus+ programme guide for 2018 and a share of the budget will be allocated in priority to such projects.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning

The European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning has been finalised and the draft publication is in editing process. Cedefop will publish the synthesis report as a printed booklet and in the web page together with the country and thematic reports in February.

The conclusion of the conference - How to make learning visible Strategies for implementing validation of non-formal and informal learning, Thessaloniki 28-29
November has been published along with the presentation and the report of the conference in Cedefop’s web page, here.

**Bologna process**

The kick-off meeting for projects supporting better implementation of Bologna Process commitments took place on 16 – 17 January. Projects include supporting e.g. better implementation of the ECTS system, putting in place external quality assurance measures, appointing national experts to support institutions and promoting mobility for underrepresented student groups.

The Annual Meeting of the Network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC) took place on 1 December 2016 in Brussels. The centres among others had the opportunity to discuss their views on the Diploma Supplement in the proposal for a revised Europass Decision and the issue of possible digitalisation of the Diploma Supplement based on a study on this topic currently being carried out on behalf of the Commission.

**ESCO**

The Commission's Directorate General for Translation (DGT) has finished translating the English version of the ESCO occupations pillar into all other EU official languages. Translations to Icelandic and Norwegian will be ready by the end of February. The Commission will soon (beginning of February) launch an on-line consultation process with Member States through the Member states Working Group on ESCO (MSWG) to have their feedback on ESCO linguistic versions (official languages). The consultation process should last four weeks. Currently DGT is translating ESCO skills pillar into all languages. A second round of on-line consultation on ESCO skills by Member States will be done next spring once translations are ready.

The third meeting of the Member States Working Group (MSWG) took place in Brussels on 12 December 2016. The main goals of the meeting were: a) to report to Member States on the results of the first phase of consultation on the English pre-release version of ESCO and to introduce the second phase of consultation on the ESCO linguistic versions; b) to provide Member States an update on the last policy developments related to ESCO (Skills Agenda, EURES, Europass); c) to present to Member States the results of pilot projects using ESCO and d) to present the updated ESCO calendar (two rounds of Member States consultations before launching of version 1 before the summer).

**Revision of EQF Recommendation and Europass Decision**

In mid-December the SK Presidency has circulated a Presidency draft of the revised text of the EQF Recommendation. From January 2017 the Maltese presidency has taken over the discussion. On 6 February the Commission and the Education Committee will
discuss the revised text of the proposal. Updates on major developments will be given orally at the EQF AG meeting of 8-9 February 2017. The revised Recommendation should reach the Education Council in May.

The Europass proposal will continue to be discussed on 6 February in the Education Committee.

**Relevant studies and publications**

Cedefop has launched a study on initial VET qualifications at EQF levels 3 and 4. The key objective of this study is to deepen understanding of initial vocational education and training (IVET) qualifications and types of qualifications, assigned to levels 3 and 4 of the European qualifications framework (EQF) through the respective national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). It will map the qualifications (types) linked to the EQF levels, analyse their roles and functions, collect and analyse evidence on how learning outcomes are used for designing and levelling IVET qualifications to NQF/EQF levels and (levelling) methods used. The analysis will focus not only on the technical evidence, but also on providing a better understanding of the contextual factors in designing and levelling IVET qualifications at EQF levels 3 and 4. The study covers 26 EU and EEA countries that have completed the referencing process by mid-June 2016. Eight (8) in-depth case studies will further research and analyse key emerging issues from the overview and analysis.

The following **joint technical reports** have been published on the Commission's website:

- The joint study on EQF and New Zealand Qualifications Framework will follow soon.