Minutes of the expert groups

Brussels, 29 September 2017

Minutes of the 41th meeting of the EQF Advisory Group
14-15 June 2017, Brussels (BE)

1) APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND OF THE MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The agenda of the meeting was approved.

Representatives from BE (Flanders) and FR commented on the draft minutes of the 40th EQF AG meeting. Concerns were raised whether the Cedefop handbook on learning outcomes is ready to be published, even though they had expressed concerns concerning chapter VII. Cedefop informed that it was useful to get feedback from the EQF AG on the Handbook on learning outcome that is indeed moving towards finalisation. Cedefop has adopted some of the comments raised during the previous EQF AG meetings. Most importantly, it is no longer called a common format for learning outcomes but guidelines or basic principles that can be used by countries when presenting LO. The revised version will be circulated.

With these comments, the minutes and the draft action points from the 40th EQF AG meeting were accepted.

2) NATURE OF THE MEETING

The meetings of the EQF AG are restricted to EQF AG members. The EQF AG is composed of representatives from the 39 countries that currently participate and have committed to the EQF process. In addition, representatives of education and labour market stakeholders at European level are part of the group. COM opens and chairs the meetings, and the Council of Europe, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the European Training Foundation (ETF) and external experts take part in the meetings to support COM and the members of the EQF advisory group.

In total, 56 persons participated in the EQF advisory group meeting of 14-15 June 2017. A new representative on behalf of the VET providers was welcomed to the AG.

3) LIST OF POINTS DISCUSSED
1. RELEVANT DEVELOPMENTS IN EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

1.1 Information on the latest developments as a follow-up to the last meeting (28-29 March 2017) (cf. Note AG 41-1)

COM presented note AG41-1 on relevant developments in the European cooperation on education, training and employment. A number of central elements are presented very briefly in this note including: *The New Skills Agenda for Europe; Copenhagen process & European VET policy; Bologna Process, Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL), ESCO, The European Pillar of Social Rights and the Commission’s White paper on the Future of Europe.*

Among other items, COM informed the participants that a public consultation on the review of the Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning was concluded on 19 May 2017. On 20 June 2017, the EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals will be launched. Finally, the study to support the revision of the Diploma Supplement and analyse the feasibility of its digitalisation at European level will be published during the summer of 2017.

Comments (BE (FL)), PL

The participants requested more information on the envisaged proposal for a new council recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships and why the legal basis for this recommendation is restricted to Article 166 of the Treaty.

The participants commented on the work of the quality assurance working groups on schools and expressed interest in receiving the group’s draft report.

Answers and conclusions

Concerning the new council recommendation on apprenticeships, COM will investigate and update the EQF AG on the legal basis activated. Furthermore, COM will look into the possibility of circulating the draft report on quality assurance in general education.

1.2. Information on the Bologna Process

The Council of Europe (CoE) informed the meeting about the ministerial conference that will take place in Paris on 24-25 May 2018 where the different working groups in the context of the Bologna process will present their results.

CoE informed the participants about the meeting with national correspondents on the QF-EHEA that will take place on 5 September 2017 in Strasbourg. Among the topics on the agenda are the impact of the new EQF recommendation on the QF-EHEA; validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education and how transversal competences, such as competences for democratic citizens, are reflected in the qualification frameworks at national level.

Both the meeting on the Global Convention on Higher Education and the expert group meeting on the World Reference Levels of Learning Outcomes in which regional QFs from around the globe participate will take place at UNESCO on 29-30 June 2017. The preparatory
work on the Global Convention seeks to address the triangle of quality assurance, qualification frameworks and recognition. The adoption of the Convention is planned for 2019.

Finally, CoE informed the meeting about the Passport for Refugees to describe the qualifications of migrants without documentation. There are already beneficiaries of the passport, which was based on work conducted by the Norwegian ENIC-NARIC Centre.

Comments (FI)

FI has been involved in drafting the text for the global convention on higher education. The text is based on existing written conventions and will be circulated to the Member States (MS) for commenting. For the EQF AG, the main interest is the link to qualification frameworks.

Conclusions

COM will participate in the expert group meeting on world reference levels of learning outcomes and in the global convention on higher education.

1.3. Information from the Presidency

The Maltese Presidency briefly informed about the achievements of the past six months.

- Council conclusions on "Investing in Europe's youth with particular regard to the European Solidarity Corps", and on "Inclusion in diversity to achieve high-quality education for all" – adopted in February
- Council Conclusions on the "Role of youth work in supporting young people’s development of essential life skills that facilitate their successful transition to adulthood, active citizenship and working life" and on "Strategic perspectives for European cooperation in the youth field post 2018" were adopted at the EYCS Council meeting in May.

1.4. Update on ESCO

COM presented the general purpose of ESCO as well as the latest developments of the project. ESCO is structured in three pillars: occupations, knowledge/skills/competences and qualifications. Stakeholders and experts have been involved in the development of the occupations and skills pillar of ESCO through strategic and technical expert groups (ESCO Board, ESCO Maintenance Committee), sector reference groups, an online consultation and several consultations with Member States. ESCO will be translated into all EU official languages as well as Norwegian and Icelandic.

The third pillar (qualifications) is of different nature from the other two pillars: it displays already existing information on qualifications following a double approach: indirect and direct inclusion. Qualifications that are part of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs), included in national qualifications databases, and referenced to the EQF will be indirectly linked to ESCO. Qualifications that are awarded by private providers and which are not part of NQFs
and thus do not present an EQF level will be displayed in ESCO via direct inclusion. COM wishes to continue discussing with the EQF AG the conditions for the inclusion of these private qualifications in ESCO, in particular concerning the quality assurance of such qualifications. For this COM also informed the group on the ongoing pilot projects testing how qualifications can be included and published in the portal.

Populating the qualification pillar is still a work in progress. MS can link their national qualifications databases to ESCO. For this, they need to comply with the technical requirements established in the calls for proposals of 2014, 2015 and 2016. Once the databases are developed, MS need to enter their data in the Qualifications Dataset Register (QDR), a central European point which will republish the information on European portals. Countries that developed their databases following the 2014 call will have their qualifications published in LOQ, and if they wish so, in ESCO. In the future, the two platforms will most likely be integrated into the Europass platform.

COM further explained its approach towards annotation of learning outcomes which consists in adding additional information (in this case, the information provided by a ESCO skill concept) to already existing content (the learning outcome of the qualification), which remains unchanged. This process needs to be further developed. A methodology will be available in the future for MS wishing to annotate their qualifications with ESCO skills concepts.

The first full version of ESCO (ESCO v1) will be launched on 27 July 2017 and a presentation conference is foreseen on 9 and 10 October 2017. A pre-release version of ESCO v1 is available at http://prerelease.escoportal.eu

Comments (AT, BE(FL), CoE, DE, ES, ETF, EUA, FR, IE, LT, NO, PL, RO, UEAPME)

- The participants requested more information about the level of detail of the learning outcomes (LO) to be included in ESCO. LO can be very detailed and, within the HE area LO is often only available at provider level. Some participants requested more information on the process of annotation and the administrative burden related to this.

- More information was requested on how MS would be consulted regarding the data on qualifications, which will be displayed by COM. Some participants requested more information about the new call on databases. In relation to the grants, some participants pointed out that if a grant is awarded, beneficiaries are obliged to sign up for ESCO. Some participants asked for clarifications regarding the legal basis of ESCO.

- Some participants questioned the feasibility of linking occupations and qualifications. Not all qualifications can be linked directly to occupations. This is especially the case for qualifications within the HE area. Concerns were expressed that ESCO will signal that skills and qualifications are only of value if they relate to an occupation.
Several participants expressed concerns about the quality assurance of private qualifications entered into ESCO. Some participants argued that private qualifications should only be allowed in ESCO if already included in a national qualification framework. There is a risk that providers of ‘fake’ qualifications (so-called ‘diploma mills’) will misuse ESCO for reaching a wider audience. FR informed the participants that they have strategies for quality assurance of international qualifications, which could be useful for the ESCO project. The participants argued that including some private qualifications in a testing phase and leaving out others can be a delicate matter from a market point of view.

Answers and conclusions

Regarding LO, COM explained that ESCO will display the content provided by MS and COM will not interfere with the description of the LO. Regarding annotation, the owner of the qualification is responsible. Semi-automatic suggestions may be provided in the future to facilitate this task.

COM acknowledged that the QA aspect of qualifications is essential. However, COM has no mandate to evaluate and assess the quality of qualifications. COM explained that a general disclaimer will be added to ESCO allowing to distinguish qualifications coming from national qualifications databases and qualifications directly introduced in ESCO. It admitted that quality assurance of qualifications from private providers remains a key focus area for ESCO.

COM argued that it is very difficult to create a legal basis for ESCO to cope with QA for private qualifications. No EQF levels will be displayed for private qualifications but end-users will benefit from having an overview of private as well as public qualifications relevant to the labour market in ESCO.

Regarding the concerns on linking occupations and qualifications, COM explained that this link is optional, and is only reproduced when it exists at Member State level. ESCO will not by itself link qualifications to specific occupations.

COM explained that the QDR will be the central point for both the LOQ and the ESCO portal.

2. REFERENCING

2.1. Overview of national developments related to the implementation of the EQF (cf. Note AG41-2)

COM presented Note 41-2 providing information on the status of the 39 countries that participate in the implementation of the EQF. In total, 32 countries have referenced their NQF to the EQF (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, FR, HR, IE, IS, IT, LI, LV, LT, LU, HU, ME, MK, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, SI, SE, TR, XK, UK).
COM gave updates on the current situation and demonstrated some improvements on the LOQ Portal including the links to other sources of information from Cedefop, European Higher Education Areas and a register of Commission expert groups.

Comments and Conclusion
SK informed the meeting that it will postpone its presentation on outstanding issues until the EQF AG meeting in October 2017.
COM thanked the participants for the information provided and invited the participants to inform COM if anything needs to be updated.

2.3 Outcome of the PLA on Horizontal Comparison in Warsaw (PL) and discussion on the way forward

PL presented the main outcomes of the PLA on horizontal comparisons held in Warsaw 18-19 May. The objectives of the PLA were:
- to test the fiche for making comparisons in the context of the qualification ‘hotel receptionist’;
- to provide additional evidence for the horizontal comparison pilot project; and
- to formulate recommendations for further work by the AG on the horizontal comparison of levelled qualifications.

The PLA was conducted around workshops, and 12 countries had prepared a fiche for ‘hotel receptionist’. Some concluding remarks:
- further work on the fiche is necessary;
- information gained through horizontal comparison exercises is useful when updating EQF referencing reports. Consequently, more horizontal comparison exercises are needed/encouraged; and
- elaboration of guidelines for the HC exercise is necessary.

The main question answered during the PLA was whether the horizontal comparison work should be continued. The clear answer to this question was positive. The HC team suggested to have dedicated PLAs aimed at further developing and testing the fiche and elaborating the guidelines. The final HC project report will be completed after the EQF AG meeting and circulated to the participants.

Comments and answers (FR, LU, SK, VET provider)
Some participants informed the meeting that there are several projects on ECVET looking into how to go from one country to another. Thus, working with other groups could be useful for the next phase of the HC project.

Conclusions
COM concluded this agenda point and confirmed that the conclusions from the HC PLA and the reflection on the HC final report will serve as input to the work programme of the EQF AG.
3. **NEW SKILLS AGENDA FOR EUROPE**

3.1. **Updates on the revision of the Europass Decision and the EQF Recommendation**

COM provided an update on the revision of the Europass Decision and the EQF Recommendation, through a PPT presentation.

The Council adopted the new EQF Recommendation on 22 May 2017. The 2017 Recommendation repeals and replaces the 2008 Recommendation. The key words are consolidation, continuity and deepening. The governance of EQF implementation continues at EU level with the EQF AG.

COM also briefed the meeting about the new Europass decision, which is a co-decision between the Council and the Parliament. Two committees in the Parliament are working on a joint report, which will give input to conclude the process of the Europass decision. The report will be adopted on 21 June 2017.

The Estonian presidency will start negotiations on the new decision in July 2017. The decision might be adopted in November 2017.

**Comments (AT, BE (FL), CoE, ETF, FR)**

The participants noted that Annex VI in the new EQF Recommendation is for all qualifications – also international qualifications.

Some participants argued that the focus of the new recommendation should be comparability of qualifications and that this part is missing from the COM presentation to some extent. However, the participants acknowledged that comparability is not the only purpose of qualification frameworks. Participants suggested adding a couple of slides on the main objectives of EQF and on the links with validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The meeting requested more information on the status of ECVET, drawing the attention on the fact that link between NQF and credit systems should be promoted when appropriate.

**Answers and conclusions**

Concerning ECVET, there is no concrete announcement about a revision.

COM appreciated the comments on the importance of comparability of qualifications and will add a slide to the standard presentation on the revised EQF Recommendation to make it clearer. The presentation will also be made available to the EQF AG members for their use.

3.2. **Open discussion on the future implementation of the EQF Recommendation (cf. Note AG 41-3)**

COM presented a note as a starting point for discussing the future implementation of the EQF Recommendation. There are still some remaining tasks under the 2008 recommendation – most importantly completion of the initial referencing reports and dealing with outstanding issues related to the referencing.

COM then briefly went through the various recommendations in the 2017 Recommendation and the issues related to each recommendation. In the coming years, updating the referencing
(Recommendation 2) will become more important. So far, BE (FL), EE and MT have already updated. COM support includes co-financing activities at national level; PLAs and peer counselling; country visits, updating guidance notes and studies. Furthermore, Cedefop and ETF will participate actively in the work.

Based on the note and the presentation, COM invited all AG Members in a 'tour de table' to give their first reactions in a very brief comment, addressing which topics and they consider to be a priority and which working methods they consider most appropriate.

Comments (tour de table)

Most participants appreciated the note as a first draft. Several participants pointed to levelling and learning outcomes as crucial elements for discussion in the AG. Future work on levelling should build on horizontal comparison. Some participants indicated *learning outcome implementation, assessment criteria and validation* as crucial for work of the AG.

Communication was also considered to be a key subject by several participants. Branding and marketing of the EQF and focus on end-users should be strengthened. In this context the importance of engaging employers and civil society in using EQF was also stressed.

Some participants pointed to *international qualifications* as a focus area. The focus should not only be sharing information, but also identifying inconsistencies between levelling, for example.

Some participants argued that the AG should focus on the *deepening process* before broadening the work to third countries’ national and regional qualifications frameworks. However, other participants argued in favour of a *broadening process* as well.

Some participants requested more information about *referencing updates* and expectations in this regard. The participants requested supporting documents on how the recommendations could be implemented. Some participants argued that the reporting obligation of EQF AG members should not be expanded.

Several participants argued that *sharing working methods* in general is central to the work of the AG and could be supported through PLAs, ad hoc working groups or study visits, as it will be unfeasible to deal with all topics in depth during only five annual meetings. The working groups should have a budget to cover the expenses of the involved participants.

The *cooperation with stakeholders* and social partners should continue to be a key focus area. Coordination with other advisory groups should also be prioritised.

Some participants informed the meeting that working with the implementation is not a ministerial priority. In the Nordic countries, ministries are working at the policy level. Consequently, it should be on the agenda of the AG how the *NCPs could be more involved* in the implementation of the Recommendation.

Answers and conclusions

COM thanked for all the contributions and invited participants to submit written comments on the note by 30 June 2017. The October meeting of the EQF AG will continue the discussion,
based on a broader note for an EQF AG work plan, addressing the implementation of both the EQF and VNFIL Recommendations.

4. VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

4.1 State of play of initiatives in the context of VNFIL

COM drew attention to note 41-5 on the presentation of one-off reports in the context of the implementation of the Council Recommendation on VNFIL which was circulated as a final version. COM also informed the meeting that a new call on the European Inventory will soon be launched.

Presentation on the study of Mapping Skills audits in and across EU MS

ICF International presented the work programme for the study on mapping skills audits in and across EU MS. The study has a very broad scope meaning that Public Employment Services, private employment agencies, counselling services, immigration services and private recruitment and restructuring companies are covered in 16 countries/regions. However, the study will not provide a comprehensive picture of each country but merely a picture of practices across countries and reveal the methods that are the most effective. A typology of skills audits is one of the key deliverables. The final report should be submitted in January 2018.

Comments (BE (FL), CoE, FR, PT)

The participants requested some clarification on the focus of the study. More specifically, the question was raised whether it is the functioning of the skills audits or the results that is the main focus of the study. Furthermore, the costs of skills audits and a distinction between public and private skills audits could be of interest of the study as well. Is the aim of the skills audit certification, employment or entering education?

Answers and conclusions

ICF International confirmed that the focus of the study will be on both the process and the results.

Effectiveness is a key challenge. The focus will not only be on how many people participate in skills audits but also on long-term effects (employment and further education).

The financing of the skills audits will be part of the analysis, and the distinction between public and private skills audits is part of the preliminary typology.

The results of the study will be presented to the EQF AG – most likely during the February 2018 meeting.

4.2 Presentation on the links between the Upskilling Pathways and the VNFIL

COM presented possible synergies between VNFIL and upskilling pathways. 64 million adults in Europe are low-qualified. Half of this group is in employment. However, the employed group is very diverse, and the other half of the group is either inactive or unemployed.
Upskilling pathways are targeted at adults with a low level of skills, knowledge and competences without upper secondary education. This target group rarely participates in life-long learning, e.g., due to lack of motivation or lack of information about the possibility of validation.

The aim of upskilling pathways is to increase literary, numeracy and digital skills and/or upskill to a qualification at EQF level 3 or 4. The upskilling pathways initiative consists of three key steps:

1. Skills assessment
2. Providing a learning offer
3. Validation and recognition

Delivery will build on what already exists and better coordination among different actors will be promoted. COM will support MS financially by using existing funds – especially ESF. According to the national contexts, countries may decide to focus on target groups that are considered relevant at national level (unemployed, migrants, young people, etc.). By the end of 2018, COM will report on measurers delivered at national level. In 5 years, COM will report on progress.

A key message from COM was to create and reinforce linkages between the Upskilling Pathways initiative and the validation recommendation. COM ended the presentation with three questions to the EQF AG members.

1. Where do you see the main opportunities for building synergies and coordination between Upskilling Pathways and validation arrangements? Are such initiatives being discussed at national level?

The participants argued that there are some overlaps and synergies. Nevertheless, the current linkage between the two initiatives is not clear.

SK explained that a system of validation has been established side by side with an initiative on upskilling.

HU is seeking to build synergies at national level. FI pointed to the importance of learning outcomes when referring to validation and possible needs for upskilling.

FR explained that all upskilling initiatives include validation and are completely mixed together in France. This is also the case in LU.

2. As we enter a new phase of implementing and enhancing EQF/NQFs, could Ups implementation be an opportunity to link more adult education qualifications to NQFs & EQF?

HU explained that they plan to design a basic skills framework inspired by European good practices.

Some participants argued that qualifications for adults are not distinguished from other type of qualifications, as a consequence NQFs already include such qualifications (LU, PT)
3. **How can the 2018 reporting exercises on validation and upskilling pathways reinforce each other?**

The participants pointed out that on validation there is no formalised form of reporting. Only the one-off report.

NO has initiated an upskilling measure in 2017. This measure will be included in the one-off report.

**Further comments (BE (FL), CoE, LV, PL, IE)**

Several participants pointed out that they need to discuss the questions raised by COM at home, before an official position can be communicated to the EQF AG.

Some participants requested more information on how young adults dropping out of school are included. The problem of lack of data and the usefulness of initiatives as graduate tracking was underlined. The participants also pointed out as some NQFs include qualifications obtained through validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Finally, the participants raised the question on how recognition of new skills is included?

**Answers and conclusions**

COM explained that people eligible for Youth Guarantee support are not part of the target group for Upskilling pathways.

COM explained that recognition across borders is not at the core of Upskilling pathways. For some people in the target group of Upskilling pathways, even moving 10 km to participate upskilling is a challenge. The importance of tailored strategy for adults that do not want to go back to formal school settings was also underlined.

A thematic report on the implementation of Upskilling pathways will be part of the 2018 Update of the European Inventory on validation.

Participants will have the possibility to give further information on existing synergies between validation and upskilling at national level at the EQF AG meeting of October.

5. **OVERVIEW ON THE EXISTING ACQUIS AND INITIATIVES AT EU LEVEL ON THE ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS AND RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS FOR THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONALS**

Representatives from DG EMPL, DG EAC and DG HOME informed the EQF AG on the existing acquis and initiatives at EU level on assessment of skills and recognition of qualifications for third-country nationals.

**Presentation on skills, education and integration**

COM (DG EMPL) provided an overview of the refugee situation in Europe focusing on evidence on how integration programmes help to increase the employability of refugees.

The inflow of arrivals has increased considerably since 2014. In 2016, more than 1.7 million migrants are likely to be granted refugee status in Europe. Even though there are considerable variations across EU MS regarding the number of refugees, educational background of
refugees and employability, refugees in general encounter a difficult situation on the labour market compared to natives. A large share of the refugees wants to work, but encounter obstacles to entering the labour market - most importantly language barriers and lack of recognition of qualifications.

Studies show that education matters a lot in terms of access to the labour market and that integration programmes are an enabler for lowering the barrier to the labour market by upskilling refugees or by validating and recognising skills and qualifications obtained abroad.

**Acquis and initiatives at EU level on the assessment and recognition of skills**

COM (DG HOME) provided evidence of significant under-use of migrants’ skills in the EU. What matters in a labour market context is the origin of a qualification. Non-EU diplomas have less currency than those from EU countries. There is evidence that formal recognition of qualifications does help migrants finding a (better) job.

Currently, there is no specific EU-wide system of recognition of qualifications for third-country immigrants. In 2016, COM proposed a revision of asylum-related EU acquis, and in June 2016 COM proposed a revision of the Blue Card Directive, which is a tool used to attract third country nationals with higher professional qualifications.

**Information about initiatives on academic recognition**

COM (DG EAC) presented a toolkit developed by ENIC-NARIC centres to address the low employment rate of highly skilled migrants. The aim of the action is to contribute to the development of an appropriate common recognition toolkit to ensure effective and streamlined recognition of academic qualifications. Country profiles for Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Eritrea, Afghanistan have been developed until now. The toolkit will be available from the autumn for the ENIC-NARIC centres but also for higher education institutions as well as NGOs working with migrants.

**Skills profile tool for third country nationals**

COM (DG EMPL) presented the skills profile tool for third country nationals. The aim of the skills profile tool is to support early profiling of the skills of refugees, migrants and other third country nationals. It is specifically designed to be used by national authorities responsible for reception and integration of refugees, reception centres, employment assistance services, education and training advisers, social services, NGOs and charitable organisations offering services to refugees and other third country nationals.

The added value of the tool is the bilingual user-interface, the flexibility of the tool and the functionalities. The tool will be available in all EU and EEA languages and in Arabic, Farsi, Pashto, Sorani, Somali and Tigrinya,

The tool will be launched on 20 June 2017, and incremental improvements are expected during the rest of 2017.

**Comments (BE (FL), CoE, PL)**
Article 7 of the Lisbon Recognition Convention is the legal basis for the assessment of non-documented qualifications. However, very few countries have a legal basis for the implementation of Article 7.

Some participants expressed the importance of raising awareness on existing initiatives across different institutions, organizations and other actors as well as final users. Even at national level lack of coordination and synergies between stakeholders is evident.

Some participants requested more information on whether financial support is available to support language training since the ability to speak the language of the host country is a key factor for employment of refugees and migrants. The importance of financial support also when taking other training and education courses was argued.

The participants advised COM not to launch a tool too early, even if incremental improvement is foreseen. If the tool is launched too early, the trust of end-users in the tool might be lost.

In relation to the skills profile tool the participants asked more information about the transfer of data and the issue of data protection.

**Answers and conclusions**

COM informed the meeting that an online linguistic tool introduced for students going into mobility programmes is already available. 100,000 licenses have been set aside for migrants. The tool is not only a test but also a support tool. So far, 50,000 licenses have been used, and 5,000 migrants have completed the test.

COM acknowledged the need to coordinate between the various tools and initiatives offered. The toolkit and the skills passport share some of the same principles, but they have different purposes.

The skills profile tool can be completed by an individual, although an interviewer is involved. The information entered into the tool travels with the individual. In that regard, there is no problem with data protection. In case an organisation wants to share the information with several organisations, there will be a data protection issue.


COM presented Note 41-4 on the PLA workplan for 2017-2018 in the context of EQF AG.

A conclusion of the PLA in Warsaw was that two additional PLAs are needed – one concerning the fiche and one concerning the guidelines.

A VNFIL PLA is planned for 21-22 September 2017 in Lisbon. Programme and invitation have been sent out. The number of participants is limited to 60. EQF AG members are invited to forward the invitation to relevant stakeholders.

A PLA on assessing the impact of NQFs is scheduled for 9-10 November 2017 in Thessaloniki. It will be hosted by Cedefop in cooperation with IE.
A PLA on funding validation is scheduled for December 2017 and will be hosted by BE. A programme will be presented at the next EQF AG meeting in October.

SK has proposed a PLA on assessed and intended learning outcomes in April 2018 in Bratislava.

AT confirmed their commitment in PLA during its Presidency in 2018 on a theme agreed by the EQF AG (the suggested topic of credit systems being considered as pre-mature).

Conclusions

COM invited AG members to express their interest in hosting a PLA e.g. on skills audits, QA of validation and communication & databases.

COM concluded there will be a discussion on how to prepare an integrated workplan for the next EQF AG.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS/OPINIONS

The EQF referencing process & information

State of play in the EQF referencing process
- COM updated the group on the state of play in the EQF referencing process (note 41-2):
  o 32 countries have now referenced to the EQF. For the meeting no presentations of referencing reports were scheduled.
  o SK postponed its presentation on outstanding issues to EQF AG meeting of 3-5 October 2017.
  o HU has sent the data to be included in the interactive table in the LOQ portal and PT will do that by the end of 2017. When these two countries are included, comparisons of national qualifications from 15 countries will be available.
- COM presented to the group the new section of note 41-2 indicating that currently 5 countries have their national databases linked to the LOQ portal.
- COM showed to the group improvements made to the LOQ portal, in particular the links to other sources of information has been improved (Cedefop, European Higher Education Area, Register of Commission Expert Groups).

The EQF referencing process: work programme of the EQF AG
- COM and Cedefop presented note 41-3 for discussing the future implementation of the EQF Recommendation.
- A tour de table took place during which each EQF member, as an initial contribution to the discussion, was invited to indicate the main priorities it sees for the EQF AG’s work. Levelling and learning outcomes, as well as communication and international qualifications emerged as the most relevant topics to be addressed. Small working groups, targeted PLAs, activities involving practitioners and other groups and country visits emerged as preferred working methods.

Working group on horizontal comparisons of levelled qualifications:
- The chair of the HC group presented the outcome of the PLA that took place in Warsaw on 18-19 May. The importance of carrying on with horizontal comparisons was stressed and agreed in the group. Among the recommendations for further work
the possibility of having two PLAs, one aimed at further developing the comparison fiche and the other at elaborating guidelines for its use was suggested.

Information point on the Bologna process
- The Council of Europe informed about the ministerial Conference that will take place in Paris on 24-25 May 2018 where the different working groups in the context of the Bologna process will present their results.

- CoE informed on the meeting with national correspondents on the QF-EHEA that will take place on 5 September in Strasbourg. Among the topics on the agenda are: the impact of the new EQF recommendation on the QF-EHEA; validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education and how transversal competences such as competences for democratic citizens are reflected in the qualification frameworks at national level.

- On 29-30 June both the meeting on the Global Convention on Higher Education and the expert group meeting on the World Reference Levels of Learning Outcomes in which regional QFs from around the globe participate will take place at UNESCO. The preparatory work on the Global Convention seeks to address the triangle of quality assurance, qualifications frameworks and recognition. Time planning for the adoption of the Convention is 2019.

- CoE finally informed on the Passport for Refugees developed by the ENIC-NARIC centre in Norway to describe the qualifications of migrants without documentations.

New Skills Agenda for Europe and other relevant initiatives

Adoption of the revision of the EQF Recommendation:
- On 22 May the Education, Youth Culture and Sports Council adopted the revised EQF Recommendation. The text will soon be published in all official languages in the EU's Official Journal.

- COM presented the revised EQF recommendation, addressing both elements of continuity and new elements.

Revision of the Europass Decision
A Progress Report was presented to the EYCS Ministerial Meeting (22-23 May). The Parliament has also begun discussions under the joint responsibility of both the EMPL and CULT Committees. Both committees are expected to adopt their joint report on 21 June. Negotiations on the Council will continue under the Estonian Presidency, the next meeting of the Education discussing Europass will take place on 4 July. The start of the Trilogue between Council, Parliament and Commission is expected to start in the autumn.

EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals
COM informed on the launch of the Skills Profile Tool on 20 June.

European VET Policy
Com informed the group on the Commission proposal for a Council recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeship.
ESCO
COM presented the general purpose ESCO as well as the latest development of the project. The different nature of the occupations and skills pillar against the qualifications pillar was put forward. Within this last pillar, the difference between direct and indirect inclusion of qualifications as well as the functioning of annotating learning outcome was explained. Several EQF AG members emphasised the risks related to direct inclusion as long as no proper quality assurance and validation mechanism is in place. The functioning of the qualifications dataset register as a technical instrument to voluntarily display qualifications in both ESCO and LOQ portal was clarified.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning
- COM informed that the call for tender for the 2018 update of the European Inventory on VNFIL will soon be launched.
- COM communicated that note 41-5 on the presentation of one-off reports on validation is now considered the final version.
- As a contractor selected for the study on skills audit, ICF presented the scope and methodologies of the study that will be conducted in the following 8 months.
- COM presented possible synergies between VNFIL and Upskilling pathways (UP) asking the group to share possible ideas and describe the situation at national level. In most Member States work on the EQF and on the Upskilling Pathways initiatives takes place in different organisational settings.
- COM proposed to follow up on the issue and suggested the possibility for a joint PLA on validation and Upskilling Pathways.

Recognition of qualifications of third-country qualifications
An informative panel composed by DG EMPL, DG EAC and DG HOME took place on existing acquis and initiatives at EU level on the assessment of skills and recognition of qualifications for third-country nationals. A presentation on empirical evidence on the importance of recognition of qualifications for labour market integration of migrants was followed by presentations focused on the Blue Card Directive, the Skills Profile Tool and the ENIC-NARIC Toolkit.

Peer Learning Activities
- COM presented note 41-4 on the PLAs work-plan for 2017-2018 in the context of the EQF AG.
- In the note a new section with conclusions from PLAs that took already place has been included. Moreover, the publication of the PLA final report on the LOQ portal has been added in the table of the distribution of tasks.
- Invitations for the PLA on the role of non-governmental stakeholders in implementing VNFIL have been sent out and registrations will close on 10 September. European social partner organisations and civil society organisations participating in the EQF AG have the possibility to nominate two representatives.
- The PLA hosted by Cedefop in collaboration with IE on assessing the impact of NQFs will take place on Thessaloniki on 9-10 November.
- AT expressed its willingness to change the topic of the PLA from EQF & credit systems to a topic seen as more relevant in the context of the future work programme of the EQF AG.
– SK proposed to have the PLA on Assessed & intended learning outcomes in April 2018.
– IE suggested to have a PLA work plan linked to the EQF AG work programme, including the topic of international qualifications.
– COM emphasised that the PLA programme will be subject to permanent discussion with adjustments according to the needs of the EQF AG’s work.

4) NEXT STEPS

The EQF referencing process & information
– COM to revise information on the LOQ portal in view of the recently adopted EQF recommendation.
– COM to include the reports of the three pilot projects comparing EQF with the qualifications frameworks of Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong.

The EQF referencing process: work programme of the EQF AG
– EQF AG to comment on note 41-3 on discussing the future implementation of the recently adopted EQF Recommendation by 30 June.
– COM to present a revised note in order to continue the discussion on the future work programme for the EQF AG for the EQF AG meeting of 3-5 October; the note should strengthen the focus on remaining tasks from the 2008 Recommendation and include clearer guidance for the updating of the report
– COM to put forward a roadmap with priorities and possible PLAs for the next 2 years to be discussed at the EQF AG meeting of 3-5 October.
– COM to include VNFIL in the work programme.

Working group on horizontal comparisons of levelled qualifications:
– COM will circulate the final HC report.
– The two suggested PLAs will be included in the PLA work programme for discussion in the AG.

Information point on the Bologna process
– COM will participate in the expert group meeting on the World Reference Levels of Learning Outcomes and in the joint session addressing the Global Convention on Higher Education.

New Skills Agenda for Europe and other relevant initiatives

Adoption of the revision of the EQF Recommendation:
– COM to fine-tune the PPT presentation on the EQF revision and to share it with EQF AG members for their use.

Proposal for a Council recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeship
– COM to report on the articles activated for the above mentioned Commission proposal.

ESCO
- COM to continue updating the group on ESCO developments.
- COM to liaise with FR that proposed to point to existing national strategies to ensure quality assurance.
- COM to address how the issue of quality assurance for international qualifications for direct inclusion in ESCO can be tackled and to report on the outcomes of the ongoing pilots.

**Validation of non-formal and informal learning**
- COM to include DE for 2018 in the timetable of presentations one-off report.
- LU to possibly present its one off report at the EQF AG meeting of 3-6 October 2017, depending on updated information on national legal developments.
- COM to follow up the discussion on synergies between validation and Upskilling pathways in future EQF AG meetings.

**Peer Learning Activities**
- COM to include in the proposed PLA plan the themes emerged during the meeting as well as possible other themes linked to the work programme of the EQF AG. The proposals will then be discussed during the EQF AG of 3-5 October 2017.
- BE to present at the EQF AG of October 2017 the programme of the PLA on "Funding validation" that will take place in December 2017.
- COM and Cedefop to circulate before the EQF AG meeting of October 2017 the programme of the PLA on "Impacts of NQFs" that will take place in November 2017.
- AG members to express interest to host the PLAs proposed by COM on "Skills audit", "Quality assurance of validation" and "Communication and databases".
- COM to consider including information on PLAs in the revised version of the note on future implementation of the EQF.

5) **NEXT MEETING**

**Planned EQF AG Meetings in 2017**

- October 3-5. The meeting will be a 2-days meeting. Dates will be fixed soon.
- December 11-13
6) LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Participant list
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