Minutes of the expert groups

Brussels, 11 December 2017

Minutes of the 42nd meeting of the EQF Advisory Group
4-5 October 2017, Brussels (BE)

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

The agenda of the meeting, and the minutes from the meeting of 14-15 June were approved with no further comments.

2) NATURE OF THE MEETING

The EQF AG consists 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 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 AG. In total, 61 persons participated in the meeting on 4-5 October 2017.
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 (24-25 June 2017) (cf. Note AG 42-1)

No questions were raised on note AG42-1 on relevant developments in the European cooperation on education, training and employment.

COM informed the participants on the future network grants. Funding will be available for three-year grants instead of annual grants starting from 2018. This change is an attempt to increase the strategic reflection. Under the new invitation countries can opt for a single grant, two different grants or three separate grants for Europass, EQF and Euroguidance activities. A joint network meeting will take place in Brussels on 11 October.

Furthermore, COM informed the participants that an invitation to request grants for setting up and further development of national databases for qualifications is under preparation. The invitation will be launched soon.

1.2. Information on the Bologna Process

The Council of Europe (CoE) informed the group about the meeting with national correspondents that was organised on 5 September in Strasbourg. More than 20 countries were represented. Among the topics on the agenda was the impact of the new EQF recommendation on the QF-EHEA. Some of the challenges discussed at the meeting regarding the QF-EAHE included:

- training of HE institutions regarding the learning outcome approach;
- How QF supports recognition of qualifications and how to deal with qualifications issued before the existence of an NQF;
- how HE institutions tackle validation of non-formal and informal leaning;
- awareness of the QF-EAHE among the stakeholders;
- the link between QF-EAHE and EQF;

CoE also informed the participants about the Belarus roadmap for HE reform. Special attention is paid to topics such as institutional autonomy and access to HE in Belarus.

The Bologna Follow-up Group is in the finalisation phase for the preparation of the ministerial conference that will take place in Paris on 24-25 May 2018. The next Bologna Follow-Up Group meeting will be held in Tartu (EE) in November.

Finally, CoE informed the group about the revision of the Diploma Supplement. The advisory group is currently finalising the report on the matter. The draft final report was discussed during the September meeting in Tirana, Albania.

Comments (DE, FR, CoE)

Some of the participants informed the group that in some countries there are on-going discussions about levels 6-8 and whether these levels should be opened up to qualifications from the dual VET system. A lack of dialogue between VET and HE should be solved at national level, especially in order to ensure permeability of the system and discuss issues around level 5 in particular.
Conclusions
COM will take into account that there is an interest to discuss and exchange experiences on this point.

1.3. Information from the Presidency
The Estonian Presidency briefly informed the meeting about achievements in the past three months and up-coming events (cf. ppt).
Within the education and training area, the priorities include:
- Council Conclusions on modernisation of HE and schools;
- The Council Recommendation on graduate tracking;
- The revision of the Europass framework; and
- New approaches to teaching, learning and innovation.
One of the Presidency’s top priorities is to conclude revision of the Europass Decision (cf. the next agenda point).

2. NEW SKILLS AGENDA FOR EUROPE

2.1. Updates on the revision of the Europass Decision
COM provided an update on the revision of the Europass Decision. The Estonian Presidency has made good progress and has obtained a mandate to take the discussion to the European Parliament. The ambition is to make swift progress and reach a political agreement within this semester. The main open issue relates to the governance.

2.2. Presentation of the EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals
COM provided an update on the EU Skills Profile tool (cf. ppt)
The objective of the tool is to quickly make a diagnosis of the skills profile of incoming migrants. The tool is online and free of charge. The target user group consists of national authorities and other services in early contact with the third country nationals, e.g., in refugee camps. The tool is multilingual and includes all EU languages (apart from Irish) as well as Turkish, Arabic, Farsi, Pashto, Sorani, Somali and Tigrinya.
A beta-version of the tool was released on 20 June. It is available at ec.europa.eu/migrantskills.
The planned release for public use and dissemination of the tool is late October.

Comments and answers (COM, CoE, DK, TR, IE, UEAPME)
- The participants emphasised the importance of the outreach to the bodies in a position to use the tool and increase their awareness. COM acknowledged feedback from the bodies using the tool is very important. One of the features under consideration is to create modular sections.
- CoE recalled the development of the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees – a document providing an assessment of their higher education qualifications. This tool is complementary to the EU Skills Profile tool.
- Some participants invited the COM to examine possible connections with other existing tools such as Europass and Eures.
Some participants requested information on the possibility of adding languages, such as Dari, which is one of official languages of Afghanistan. COM said that adding new language can be considered.

Conclusions

COM concluded that the success of the EU Skills Profile tool depends on its good use by counsellors, advisors and other professionals. Tutorials and manuals are being prepared in cooperation with experts.

3. REFERENCING

3.1. Overview of national developments related to the implementation of the EQF (cf. Note AG42-2)

COM presented Note 42-2 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).

22 countries have indicated EQF levels on qualifications, and 14 countries have included EQF levels in databases. So far, five countries have linked their database to the LOQ-portal, and 15 countries are included in the comparison function of the LOQ to compare qualifications.

Comments and Conclusion (ES, FI, RO)

- FI confirmed that they will present the referencing report in December.
- RO informed that they would like to postpone its presentation to 2018.
- ES will present its referencing report in 2018.
- AT informed that its NQF is now fully operational.

COM thanked the participants for the information provided to the update note and invited the participants to inform COM if anything needs to be updated.

3.2. Outstanding questions related to the referencing report of Slovakia

SK presented the outstanding questions related to the referencing report to the EQF AG (cf. ppt.) The first version of the referencing report was presented at the 33rd EQF AG of December 2015. Since then, a number of steps have been taken to implement the Slovak Qualification Framework (SKKR). The SKKR has acted as a catalyst for communication, transformation and regulation. The SKKR has eight levels, i.e., general education at levels 1, 2 and 4; VET at levels 2 to 4, but possible also at level 5 and even level 6 at a later stage; occupational qualifications at levels 2 to 7 and HE at levels 5 to 8. The current version of the referencing report is not used for self-certification to the QF-EHEA. The self-referencing report will follow at a later stage.

A National Qualification Register has been established and a public database is available at a website. All qualifications published in the register include a qualification card containing a qualification standard and an assessment standard.

SK emphasised that the entire journey of developing and implementing the SKKR has been an interactive process involving many stakeholders.

SK then briefly went through the ten referencing criteria. Regarding Criterion 1, SK mentioned that the three components of the governance structure are still functioning, but this will change. International experts have taken part in the preparation of the report, including two members of the EQF AG, and they have provided valuable input, which has been taken
into account in accordance with Criterion 7. Regarding Criterion 10 concerning EQF levels on evidence of achieved qualifications, the Slovak government has decided that the final date for this will be the end of 2018.

Comments (BE (FL), Cedefop, CoE, DE, FR, IE, PL, SI)

- The participants congratulated SK on a clear and well-structured report. The updated report addresses most outstanding questions and demonstrates that clear improvements and progress have been made in the past 2 years. The revised report is a presentation of the current state of the implementation of the SKKR. Reform is taking place in SK, but the report is also very clear about the challenges and the necessary steps for further implementation, both of which increase the report's credibility.
- More information was requested on the relationship between the HE sub-framework and the QF-EHEA.
- The issue of multi-cultural approach is absent from the report; but the question still remains. More information on this topic was requested.
- Some clarification was requested in relation to linking the national qualification database to LOQ and ESCO.
- The participants requested more information on whether partial qualifications are levelled or not.

Answers and conclusions

- SK explained that the HE qualification framework will be part of the SKKR. The HE system is going through a reform process and special importance is given to QA of qualifications and institutions. SK reminded the participants that this process needs time.
- Professional qualifications are not considered to be partial but are part of an occupational route. These qualifications will be levelled.
- On the multi-cultural approach, SK explained that previous problems related to integration have been solved by the law.

COM concluded this agenda point by congratulating SK and welcomed the country as the 33rd country having referenced to the EQF. SK was invited to come back in a few years’ time and provide an update.

3.3 Open discussion on the EQF AG workplan 2018-2019 (EQF and VNFIL) (cf. Note AG42-3)

COM drew attention to note AG42-3, which contains a draft workplan for the EQF AG for 2018-2019. Based on the features of the 2017 EQF Recommendation and the Recommendation on validation, and further to the discussion by the EQF AG in its 14-15 June meeting, 10 fiches have been developed to guide the work of the group.

The proposed work programme currently consists of seven fiches on EQF and three fiches on VNFIL. The group was invited to discuss and the general model of the work plan, the fiches and consider whether the priorities of the AG are well-reflected in the roadmap.

Comments (AT, BE (FL), CoE, EL, FR, IE, IT, LU, LV, PT)

The participants welcomed the note and as necessary and appreciated the structured approach, arguing that it can be a good foundation for a coordinated and consistent work of the AG. However, a prioritisation of topics will be necessary and these should be further discussed in the AG. Some topics are easy to deal with while others will need a longer time horizon.
Moreover, the work plan should allow for a margin for other topics that might come up within the next two years. It was also suggested to add a fiche on quality assurance. Some participants argued that the involvement of NCPs should be emphasised and that pilot projects could be added to the list of working methods. The participants also asked to refer to the ecosystem around the EQF.

Comments per fiche are represented in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EQF Fiches</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Referencing report and related tasks</td>
<td>- It should be taken into account how the referencing reports are related to the QF-EHEA.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Some participants wondered why ESCO was not mentioned in the fiche.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Some participants argued that the Level 5 questions seems important for further discussions and should be included either in Fiche A or Fiche E (on levelling).</td>
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<td>- The importance of the impact of NQFs on societies is important. The issue should be emphasised - e.g., in Fiche C (updating).</td>
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<tr>
<td>B. EQF levels and guidance for communicating</td>
<td>- The participants suggested rephrasing the section mentioning that the EQF contributes to meeting the requirements of supply and demand in the European Labour market.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Updating the referencing report</td>
<td>- Several participants argued that the content of this fiche is very important and should be taken forward as a priority.</td>
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<td>- Clarification was requested on whether different types of updates could be feasible – such as an ‘update light’ and what elements would trigger an update of the report.</td>
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<td>D. Learning outcomes (LO)</td>
<td>- The participants clarified that the focus of the fiche should be on both LO and qualifications in order to improve understanding and how LO can be a driver for change, especially in the area of HE.</td>
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<td>- The participants argued that the NCPs should be taken on-board on this issue. QFs have different functions in the various MS. One way to address these differences is to work in clusters so that NQFs with the same objectives learn from each other.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- As an input to the work, the Cedefop handbook on LOs will be ready very soon and will be circulated.</td>
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<td>E. Levelling qualifications</td>
<td>- The participants emphasised the importance of Level 5 for permeability.</td>
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<td>- Levelling qualifications is closely linked to recognition. This should be reflected in the fiche.</td>
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<td>- The participants argued that transparency of the levelling process is very important also with regard</td>
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to international qualifications.
- Some participants requested more information on the commonly agreed guidelines mentioned in the ‘next steps’ section.
- The participants suggested using the experiences from previous PLAs such as the one in Berlin and in Warsaw and from the horizontal comparison exercise as an input to this fiche.
- It should be made more clear why it is important to compare qualifications and the general context should be referred to.

F. International qualifications

- Some participants suggested to be more ambitious and build on the new recommendation.
- The participants recommended looking into the output from the working group on international qualifications to strengthen this fiche.
- Participants argued that it would be important to understand why some countries accept international qualifications and others do not.
- Some participants argued that a consistent levelling of international qualifications is an issue for the EQF but especially for NQFs. It is an important element also because of its effect on recognition.
- The issue of international qualifications that are integrated in a national qualification are an important issue for this fiche.

G. Third countries’ national and regional qualifications frameworks

- Some participants argued that with the new recommendation in place, progress should be made within this area.
- The participants requested that the political and strategic view be included in the fiche. Important to be clear on the approach towards other frameworks. Important is also the difference between national and regional frameworks.

VNFIL Fiches

A. Tasks related to the 2012 Recommendation

- The participants argued that the need of gathering data for validation is not captured by the fiche and that a link from LO for validation needs to be made, and, finally, the QA aspect of validation.
- The participants requested a reformulation on how to embed new tools such as open badges.
- The participants argued that the link between the first and second fiche on VNFIL should be stronger.

B. One-off report

- LU will be the first country to present the one-off report. The report will be distributed by mid-November. DE, AT and IE have accepted the role of discussant. However, all AG members are invited to
study the report and participate actively when the report will be discussed by the EQF AG.

C. Synergies VNFIL and Upskilling Pathways
- The participants agreed on the content of the fiche, but some expressed concerns about the workload and asked specifically for transparency about the responsibility of drafting the report on the progress of the upskilling pathways.

Conclusions
COM thanked the group for their remarks. Written comments are welcomed until 20 October. In December the work programme will be discussed again including timing and priorities so that in the priority areas the work can start from early 2018 onwards.

3.4 ESCO Qualification pillar (cf. Note AG42-4)
Further to the presentation on the ESCO qualification pillar at the EQF AG of June, COM presented an update on the state of play of ESCO and the planned next steps (cf. ppt.)
The first version of ESCO was launched in July 2017. The three pillars of ESCO now contains 2,942 occupations, 13,485 skills/competences, and 2,414 qualifications. The ESCO conference will be held on 9-10 October to discuss the first version of ESCO.

The qualification pillar now contains qualifications from Greece and Latvia so far. Later this year, Croatia, UK-Scotland, and Turkey will follow. Technical support has been provided on how to link national databases to ESCO and a new call for the setting up and further development of databases to be linked to the LOQ and, on a voluntary basis to ESCO, will be launched soon.

COM showed a video on the use of the Qualification Dataset Register (QDR) which is a software component that allows providers of data on qualifications to upload datasets for publication on both LOQ and ESCO portals. The QDR is not live yet but the link and a user guide will be distributed.

The next step for ESCO is to populate the qualification pillar continuously, explore different methods on how to annotate LOs with ESCO skills and to agree with the EQF AG on how to include international and sectoral qualifications in ESCO.

COM opened for a discussion structured around three questions: general remarks around the qualification pillar; annotation of learning outcomes and QA of the international and sectoral qualifications.

Comments and answers (AT, BE (FL), CoE, DE, FR, IE, NO)
The participants underlined the importance of learning outcomes for qualifications and that the process of annotating them with the ESCO skills should be explored prudently. Studies and pilots on annotation should be carried out with the quality assurance of the annotation process at the core. Participants also pointed out that it would be useful to hear more from colleagues’ experience of annotating and foster exchanges of views also via working groups. The meeting asked for more information on the structure or hierarchy of the second pillar of ESCO (Skills/Competences) as this is important for the annotation.
The participants requested more information on the overall data scheme, including the link with Annex VI of the EQF Recommendation and how data are entered. Clarifications were also asked on the use of the term open data. The meeting acknowledged ESCO as an instrument to take stock of potential qualifications relevant for the European labour market. However, for this purpose, the participants requested more information about the relevance criteria and mechanism to filter and select qualifications. Some participants expressed concern as to how to link the national qualification databases to ESCO as the databases are not structured all in the same way, least of all the LO. Participants also asked clarifications on the relationship between ESCO and EURES regulation.

**Answers and conclusions**

COM explained that the metadata schema fully reflects Annex VI. Countries can link their national database to the QDR through an automatic process. Institutions can decide to describe the LO of their qualifications using the ESCO Skills/Competences. However, when qualifications enter in ESCO the content is not changed. Open data means only open access. For the moment only national qualifications are included in QDR and ESCO. With respect to international qualifications and QA, the next steps for ESCO depends on the work of the EQF AG. Currently, the process of including international and sectoral qualification has been put on hold. The implementing act on ESCO further to the Eures regulation will only refer to the skills and occupational pillars of ESCO, not the qualifications pillar.

COM acknowledged the request for more information about the questions raised during the discussion on ESCO. COM proposed organising a workshop on annotation to look into this issue in more detail. A working group could be another way to build up knowledge within the group. COM will follow up on this matter.

3.5 **Updates on the World Reference Levels expert group meeting organised by UNESCO (PPP)**

COM updated the AG on the World Reference Levels expert group meeting organised by UNESCO in Paris on 29-30 June. The work is based on the Shanghai Consensus Agenda to explore the possibility of developing international guidelines on quality assurance for the recognition of qualifications based on learning outcomes and consider a set of world reference levels (WRLs) to facilitate the international recognition of TVET qualifications. TVET qualifications are at the core, but the work is not limited to TVET.

Some progress in the international cooperation has been made since Shanghai. This includes setting up an international network linking the existing Regional Qualifications Framework. COM briefly presented the technical work carried out so far (cf. ppt.). There is limited field-testing of the tool ongoing. The aim of the work should be to increase transparency. It is important that the EQF is represented in this work as it is the most advanced regional reference framework in the world.

**Comments and answers (Cedefop, IE)**

The participants argued that an extra layer of frameworks is neither necessary nor desired. However, systematic cooperation at regional level is an added value and the World Reference Level Forum itself is important.

**Conclusions**

COM will continue to follow the work and debrief the AG.
4. VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

4.1 Update 2018 European Inventory on VNFIL

COM informed the meeting that it is currently assessing the offer received for the 2018 Update of the Inventory, which will include country reports and thematic reports. COM invited the group to propose possible themes for the thematic reports.

Comments (EE, ETF, IE, LV, NO, TR)

Several participants informed the meeting that their national ministries serve as quality assurance bodies for the country reports for the European Inventory on VNFIL. However, the QA is a substantial piece of work as the data sent to the ministries sometimes lack quality. They asked to be briefed beforehand about the scope of the report and the expected workload. Information was requested on the steps after 2018.

Clarification was requested on the relationship between the inventory and the one-off report.

Approaches, methods and instruments for validation of VNFIL of migrant populations (refugees, migrants) was proposed as theme for one of the thematic reports of the Inventory. The aim would be to take stock of lessons learned and existing good practices from the large variety and high number of ongoing initiatives and projects in many EQF countries.

Answers and conclusions

COM thanked the group for the comments on the quality assurance process of the national reports for the European Inventory. This will be emphasised towards the contractor. The group will be updated on the scope of the report at the EQF AG meeting of December.

COM informed that the European Inventory provides a state of play in all countries on VNFIL. The one-off report, on the other hand, is the national political answer to the Council Recommendation. The Recommendation invites the Commission to report to the Council on the experiences gained and implications for the future.

COM informed the meeting that written suggestions for thematic reports are welcome in the next two weeks.

4.2 Continuation of the discussion on the links between the Upskilling Pathways and the VNFIL

COM drew attention to note 42-5 on Building Synergies between VNFIL and the Upskilling Pathways Initiative. The Upskilling Pathway Initiative was presented at the 41th EQF AG meeting in June 2017. A key message from that meeting was that links should be strengthened between validation and Upskilling Pathways.

COM has commissioned a study on skills audits (on-going), as they are an essential part of Upskilling Pathways. COM also suggested planning a common PLA on Validation and Upskilling Pathways.

Comments (EE, FR, IE, IT, LV, NO, RO)

The participants had no general comments on the approach taken. Some participants requested the opportunity to provide feedback on existing measures in writing.
LV informed that discussion on the topic has just started. Different projects and stakeholders are involved. NO briefed the group about a new trial on synergies between validation and EQF using ECVET. The target group is adults outside education and working life, including migrants. The objective of the trial is to provide a permanent connection to working life. RO informed about an upcoming mutual learning workshop in Romania focusing on Upskilling Pathways. Further mutual learning workshops will also be conducted in six other countries. IT informed that is working on a project to map the best practice on the territory using also its experience from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). Self-assessment tools to evaluate adult competences are being introduced by the Italian PES in order to better profile adults in line with Upskilling Pathways.

Answers and conclusions

EQF AG members are encouraged to bringing stakeholders together from all the different eco-systems surrounding VNFIL to learn from best practice. COM informed that as part of ESF funding, small grants already exist to bring together stakeholders and creating capacity building. COM will follow up with concrete activities and keep the AG.

4.3 Outcome of the PLA in Lisbon (PT) on the role of non-governmental stakeholders in implementing the 2012 Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning (cf. PLA Outcome note)

The LLL-platform presented the main outcomes of the PLA in Lisbon on the role of non-governmental stakeholders in implementing the 2012 Recommendation on VNFIL. Around 80 persons participated in the event, which was very successful.

At the PLA, a number of best practices were shared. Most of them are funded by Erasmus+. The PLA included presentations by public authorities, social partners and other stakeholders. The PLA revealed a different level of involvement of the various stakeholders in the validation process. Non-governmental actors and the social partners are mostly only involved in the validation process to a limited extent. One way to overcome this challenge would be to involve these stakeholders from the very beginning.

The EQF AG was invited to read the note from the PLA including the main conclusions. A more detailed PLA report will be circulated to the group later.

Comments (BE (FL), CoE, COM, IE, LLL, UEAPME)

Several participants thanked the LLL-Platform for a productive PLA. Some participants put forward that to prove costs and returns on investment are key issues when it comes to validation. Other follow-up PLAs to examine the topics emerged from this PLA would be useful.

Some participants argued that validation leading to qualifications is more useful from an employer’s point of view. Participants asked about the possible distinction between validation of soft skills and technical skills leading to a qualification. During the PLA it emerged that young entrepreneurs have a different viewpoint on this than large and more established employers.

The participants argued that ways to overcome interpretation problems of vocabulary need to be found. To meet this challenge, the LLL-Platform plans to come up with a user-friendly vocabulary. Another weak aspect of validation that should be further addressed is the lack of data.
Conclusions

COM mentioned that the 2012 Recommendation is very broad and refers to a set of principles of validation. These principles can be applied to different sectors. How the MS should apply the principles is not subject to the Recommendation. COM reminded that the Recommendation contains politically agreed definitions. COM emphasised that the activities related to VNFIL are closely related to the broader eco-system, including EQF. Links with the future Europass Advisory Group will also be very important.

5. PRESENTATION OF THE THREE PILOT PROJECTS ON INTERNATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Commission clarified that the launch of the call in 2015 preceded the adoption of the Commission proposal on the revision of the EQF in 2016 and that the pilot projects have been duly informed about the recommendation on international qualifications as included in the EQF Recommendation of 2017.

The three projects are:

1. RAINBOW – Relating international qualifications to the EQF in the area of welding
2. TALQ - Transparency in Arts Levels and Qualifications
3. SIQAF - Relevance of Sector and International Qualifications and Frameworks to the EQF in the field of sports, outdoor and active leisure

The projects and the discussion that followed are briefly summarised below.

RAINBOW – Relating international qualifications to the EQF in the area of welding

The European Welding Federation briefly presented the Rainbow project (cf. ppt.). The project is developing potential criteria for relating the International Welding Qualification systems to the EQF and to establish a common alignment methodology that could serve as a model and source of inspiration. The methodology will be based on a minimum set of learning outcomes, assessment criteria, expected workload for students, and allocation of ECVET credit points. It also includes quality assurance principles, mechanisms and quality criteria for awarding qualifications.

The preliminary conclusions and recommendations from the project are:

- International Sectoral Qualifications (ISQ) are important because they respond to existing needs and are recognised by stakeholders.
- ISQs should relate to the EQF to facilitate EQF acceptance by the industry and international stakeholders.
- All EU National Authorities should consider using the same procedures and methodologies to integrate ISQs.
- Misalignment when referencing ISQs to the EQF does not help the reliability and transparency of the EQF.
- Clear criteria, rules and requirements should be accepted by all to guarantee that the quality of ISQs be referenced into NQF and EQF.

The project will run until July 2018.

Presentation of TALQ – Transparency in Arts Levels and Qualifications
The **Accademia Teatro della Scala** briefly presented the TALQ project (cf. ppt.). The project proposes a research activity to map national qualifications and certificates to ESCO-based international profiles. The investigation activity represented the basis to identify and test possible procedures, approaches, and quality criteria shared and applicable at European level.

The target profiles are the following ESCO profiles:

- Lightning technician
- Lightning operator
- Lightning designer

The project aims at providing an exhaustive mapping in at least 10 eligible countries, starting from a quick scan of the whole EU. TALQ will search and analyse contents and structures of existing training and formal education systems, matching them with information on the labour market and qualifications and mapping them against the ESCO skills/competences of the chosen profiles. The first results show that ESCO can be considered a realistic tool.

The process of associating the EQF level to the European qualification will be based on the work of a group of experts chosen by the stakeholders and will use a quantitative as well as a qualitative approach to reach consensus. Moreover, TALQ will take advantage of the investigation to develop a common set of quality assurance principles and quality criteria for the assessment, validation, and award of qualifications. The aim is to implement a standard pattern that can be applied and customised to similar profiles within and outside the sector of reference.

**Presentation of SIQAF – relevance of sector and international qualifications and frameworks to the EQF the field of sports, outdoor and active leisure**

EuropeActive briefly presented the SIQAF project. Originally, the project had three aims:

- Propose how a sector/international qualification framework could be related to the EQF. But because the new EQF Recommendation makes it clear that a direct linkage of qualifications to the EQF is not possible the project has been changed accordingly.
- Quantify and qualify the criteria required, and the way that they would have to be applied to the process, and as such that they will embed convincing and plausible quality assurance criteria.
- Explain how a sectoral qualifications system/framework needs to establish a body for the demonstration of good governance and gain its validation from employers, employees, VET experts, accreditation bodies and other stakeholders in their sector.

Although the revised recommendation makes it clear that direct referencing of international qualifications to the EQF is not possible, informal alignment between sectoral qualifications frameworks and the EQF takes place.

When investigating possible solutions to facilitate the inclusion of international qualifications in NQFs the project representatives pointed out that to go through all 43 NQFs is hardly feasible. The representatives of the project also said that they had approaches several national qualification authorities but obtaining no results.

So far, a sector definition in ESCO has been developed as well as occupational descriptors. Furthermore, occupational standards have been developed and LOs have been formulated based on these standards. The approach has been tested in eight countries.
The participants asked specific and general questions related to the pilot projects presentations. Specific questions related to what kind of qualifications were addressed in relation to national frameworks and whether information on national qualifications levels had been verified with the NQFs. Some participants raised the question why the same types of qualifications are levelled differently – either as a consequence of different interpretation of level descriptors or because of contextual factors.

Clarification was requested from the RAINBOW project as to whether the ambition would be automatic recognition.

Specific questions and comments on the TALQ project referred to the meaning of competences, the possible overlap between the occupational and qualification pillar of ESCO, pointing out the study seems to result in developing an occupational rather than a qualification profile and relating it to an EQF level. Participants reminded that EQF levels cannot be given to an occupational profile.

Clarification was requested from the SIQAF project on the responses received by the NQFs-NCPs when these were approached.

More general remarks related to the importance of having the right credentials when approaching public authorities. Participants pointed out that depending on the development of NQFs, countries can be more or less inclined to accept international qualifications in their systems. In some cases international qualifications are part of broader qualifications included in the NQF. In order to ensure that level descriptors are well understood and applied a common approach should be found.

Answers:

The RAINBOW project clarified which quality agencies were contacted and explained that information on the levels of national qualifications comes from the members of the EWF and such information was not checked with the NCPs. Regarding automatic recognition, the RAINBOW project replied that it would favour having such mechanisms.

TALQ project replied to the comments on competences explaining that they only refer to the second pillar of ESCO on skills and that the TALQ project is developing a qualification and not an occupational profile. In fact, the research focused on national training programmes. Moreover, there is no intention or ambition to harmonize occupational profiles.

SIQAF clarified that 8 NQFs were approached and the reply was that it was not technically possible to include the qualifications and that other national routes should be used.

Conclusions

COM thanked the representatives from the three pilot projects for their rich and informative presentations, which provided valuable input to the EQF AG work programme. COM reminded that formal direct referencing of international qualifications to the EQF is not possible and that the sectors participating in the 3 projects should get in touch with the national qualifications frameworks. COM further informed that international qualifications will be an important area of work for the near future. It will keep the pilot projects updated on EQF AG work with regard to international qualifications.

COM presented Note 42-6 on the PLA workplan for 2017-2018 in the framework of EQF AG.

The Peer Learning Conference on assessing the impact of NQFs "Do national qualification frameworks make a difference – how to measure and evaluate NQF impact?" is scheduled for 9-10 November 2017 in Thessaloniki. It will be hosted by Cedefop and organised in cooperation with QQI and the Commission. The term Peer Learning Conference is used to reflect the fact that the event will cover a wider audience (in particular the research community) than in a normal PLA.

Cedefop informed the group that the purpose of the PLA is to try to answer whether national qualifications frameworks make a difference to policies and practices and to the learners and citizens that they are supposed to benefit.

The key questions for the event are:

- What would be lost if your country did not have an NQF?
- What kind of evidence is currently available to provide insights into the impact of NQFs?
- What kind of evidence may be required in the future to measure and evaluate the impact of NQFs?
- What kind of European cooperation on NQF impact assessment is possible and desirable?

The structure of the event will be a combination of plenary sessions and workshop sessions which will address impacts of NQFs from a policy and research perspective.

The PLA on funding validation is scheduled for 14-15 December 2017 (back-to-back with the next EQF AG meeting) and will be hosted by BE. BE briefly presented the details on the PLA on funding validation. The aim of the PLA is to

1) clarify different ways in which validation is funded; and
2) come up with recommendations on how the uptake of validation can be improved.

The costs and benefits of validation will be illustrated through national and regional examples. The AG was invited to give good examples to be shared.

Additional PLAs related to EQF were presented. SK proposed a PLA on assessed and intended learning outcomes that could take place in April 2018 in Bratislava. AT would like to host a PLA on horizontal comparison in the second half of 2018 during the AT Presidency. Unless other countries volunteer PL could host the second PLA on horizontal comparison. HU may host a PLA on communication and databases.

Within VNFIL-PLAs, COM has proposed three PLAs for 2018. No hosts have volunteered yet. COM informed that it is also planning a validation event in 2018.

Comments and answers (BE (FL), Business Europe, FR, HU, PL, TR, IE, PL):

Regarding the PLC on NQF’s impact several participants recommended keeping the number of country cases limited to six.

The participants were informed about an event on international qualifications that will take place in Prague as the same time as the PLA in Thessaloniki.
Regarding the event on validation in 2018, some participants suggested to use the topics proposed in the PLA work plan as a basis for the event.

The participants suggested that a PLA on Level 5 and levelling would be interesting.

The participants noted that an alignment between the PLA programme and the EQF work plan is needed.

**Conclusions:**

COM invited the AG to inform the group of planned events in order to avoid overlapping of dates with EQF AGs and PLAs organised within the context of the EQF AG.

COM invited the group to further reflect on the proposed PLA workplan and come back to COM within two weeks. A more detailed plan for 2018 will be presented at the EQF AG meeting of 12-13 December 2017.

7. **EQF CONFERENCE**

This agenda point was postponed. To the meeting of 12-13 December.
CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS/OPINIONS

**EQF Referencing process & information**

SK presented outstanding questions to its referencing report at the meeting, which was accepted by the EQF AG. SK is the 33rd country having referenced to the EQF.

FI, RO, IS, IT, NL informed the meeting about their plans regarding presentations on referencing reports and updated reports.

COM updated the group on national developments related to the implementation of EQF (note 42-2).

COM told the meeting that the information on the LOQ portal has now been revised based on the 2017 EQF Recommendation.

**EQF AG workplan 2018-2019**

The AG discussed its workplan for 2018-2019 in relation to both the EQF and the VNFIL recommendations. The AG welcomed the use of the fiches and the roadmap to coordinate and guide its work the next 2 years. Some members found the work programme too ambitious and invited to a further reflection on priorities. The ten individual fiches were discussed. The fiche on updating the referencing (Fiche A) was perceived as one of the most important to take forward. Among AG suggestions and remarks, the importance of referring also to the ecosystem around NQF-EQF emerged.

**Information point on the Bologna process**

The Council of Europe informed the participants about the outcome of the meeting with national correspondents of the QF-EHEA that took place on 5 September in Strasburg. The discussion about Level 5 for EQF and QF-EHEA and the relationship between the two frameworks emerged as one of the main challenges.

**New Skills Agenda for Europe and other relevant initiatives**

**Revision of the Europass Decision**

On 27 September Coreper reached agreement to start Trilogue discussions between the Parliament, Council and Commission, which will start on 10 October.

**EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals**

COM presented the EU Skills Profile Tool announced in the New Skills Agenda for Europe in 2016 and launched in June 2017. The tool is now being fine-tuned and there will be a new release in October 2017.

**ESCO**

COM presented an update on the ESCO qualifications pillar. ESCO is now live. Greece and Latvia have published their qualifications databases on the qualification pillar. Croatia, UK-Scotland and Turkey will follow soon.

COM showed a video on the use of the qualifications database register (QDR) to link qualifications to both ESCO and the Learning Opportunities and Qualifications portals. COM also informed the participants on the upcoming invitation to submit a grant request for the setting up and further developments of databases.
The EQF AG discussed some of the issues around annotation of LO in ESCO and the use of the QDR, as well as quality assurance of international qualifications directly included in ESCO.

Presentation of the three pilot projects on international qualifications and quality assurance

The three ongoing pilot projects1 on international qualifications (Rainbow – Relating international qualifications to the EQF; TALQ - Transparency in Arts Levels and Qualifications; SIQAF - Relevance of Sector and International Qualifications and Frameworks to the EQF) were presented and discussed. Among the main issues emerged:

- Informal referencing of international qualifications to the EQF is a reality.
- There is a risk that the same international qualification - when in NQFs – may be referenced to different EQF levels.
- The option of going through all European NQFs is not feasible for organisations with limited capacity.

Lack of information and transparency, lack of cooperation and common criteria as well as low levels of trust were identified as possible reasons for the current situation. The projects are exploring possible quality assurance criteria and mechanisms that may support the EQF AG work on international qualifications. The TALQ project is also developing a European qualification profile building on the ESCO skills/competences pillar.

World Reference Levels (WRLs)

COM informed the participants about the 6th meeting of the WRLs expert group held Paris in June 2017 at UNESCO. UNESCO has now launched a limited field testing of the tool to gather feedback.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning

COM presented the timetable of the presentations on the one-off reports on validation (note 42-2).

COM is now evaluating the offer received for the 2018 Update European Inventory on VNFIL and invited the EQF AG to make proposals for the thematic studies.

Some delegations complained about the quality of the last country reports and that the scope was not always clear to the researchers.

The discussion on possible synergies between VNFIL and Upskilling pathways (UP) continued, and the importance of bringing together stakeholders and create capacity building was stressed.

Peer Learning Activities

In presenting the main conclusion of the PLA ‘The role of non-governmental stakeholders in implementing the 2012 Recommendation on VNFIL’ (Lisbon 21-22 September), LLP stressed the importance of putting together stakeholders and involving non-state actors when outing in place validation arrangements. One-sided involvement of stakeholders, different

1 Call for proposal EACEA 48/2017 – Key action 3 – Support for policy reform: Quality assurance at EU level for enhanced transparency and recognition of skills and qualifications
relevance of transversal skills according to the sector, return on investment and the existence of a lack of data on validation emerged as interesting topics on which to follow up.

COM presented the PLAs workplan (note AG 42-6) anticipating that it will be further elaborated according to the AG workplan, which already contains some new PLAs proposals.

COM has sent out the invitations to the peer learning conference ‘Do national qualifications frameworks (NQF’s) make a difference – how to measure and evaluate NQF impact?’ that will take place at Cedefop's premises in Thessaloniki on 9-10 November. EQF AG and EQF NCP may nominate one representative/external expert each. Registrations will close on 20 October. Cedefop presented the draft programme.

BE (fr) presented the programme of the PLA ‘Funding validation – costs and benefits’. The PLA will take place on 14-15 December back to back with the EQF AG of 12-13 December.

4) NEXT STEPS

EQF Referencing process & information

- FI and IS are scheduled to present the referencing and the updated referencing reports respectively at the EQF AG of 12-13 December 2017. The reports must be submitted one month ahead of the meeting.
- RO will address pending issues in 2018.
- NL will present its updated report in 2018, and IT plans to do so in 2018 or 2019.

EQF AG workplan 2018-2019

- AG to send written comments on note AG 42-3 by 20 October.
- AG to reflect on the next two years’ priorities to be discussed at the AG on 12-13 December. The outcome will then be reflected in the roadmap annexed to the workplan.
- COM to revise the workplan according to the AG oral and written comments and to circulate the revised note for discussion at the AG of 12-13 December.
- COM to further elaborate the fiche on the updating of referencing reports for the December meeting.

Information point on the Bologna process

- COM will take into account the interest in discussing issues concerning Level 5 for EQF and QF-EHEA as well as the relationship between the two overarching frameworks.

New Skills Agenda for Europe and other relevant initiatives

Revision of the Europass Decision

- AG members to disseminate the tool among relevant stakeholders for its use and for sending feedback on possible improvements.

ESCO
COM to take initiative to organise a workshop to further discuss annotation of LO in the qualification pillar of ESCO.

COM to continue updating the group on ESCO developments.

**Presentation on the three pilot projects on international qualifications and quality assurance**

- COM to keep the AG updated on the developments of the projects.
- COM to further develop the fiche of the workplan on international qualifications (fiche F) in view of the EQF AG meeting on 12-13 December.
- EQF AG members to explore mechanisms and criteria to support the inclusion of international qualifications in NQFs and ensure their consistency.

**World Reference Levels (WRLs)**

- COM will continue updating the EQF AG

**Validation of non-formal and informal learning**

- LU will present its one-off report on validation at the AG of 12-13 December. AT, DE and IE will take part in the discussion.
- EQF AG members to send proposals for possible thematic studies for the 2018 Update European Inventor by 20 October.
- COM to inform the EQF AG on the scope of the country reports at the EQF AG on 12-13 December and to clearly communicate with the contractor avoid repetitions of the problems that occurred in connection with the 2016 Inventory Update.
- COM to follow up the discussion on VNFIL-UP with concrete activities and promoting exchange of information.

**Peer Learning Activities**

- EQF AG members to send proposal for PLAs on EQF and VNFIL by 20 October.
- LLP and CEV in cooperation with Cedefop and COM to draft the report of the PLA on the role of non-governmental stakeholders in VNFIL.
- COM to circulate the report on horizontal comparison and the related PLA.
- COM to send out the invitations for the PLA ‘Funding validation – costs and benefits’. The PLA will take place on 14-15 December back to back with the EQF AG on 12-13 December.
- COM announced that it intends to organise an event on VNFIL in the form of a ‘festival’ next year. AG members suggested feeding the programme with some of the proposed PLAs currently in the PLA workplan.
- COM to replace the PLA on credits with a PLA on EQF level 5 (proposed by FR).
- AT confirmed its interest in hosting a PLA in the second semester of 2018.
- PL expressed interest in hosting one of the two PLAs on horizontal comparisons.
- EQF AG members were invited to share information on interesting events also to avoid overlaps with EQF AG activities.

**5) NEXT MEETING**

**Planned EQF AG Meetings in 2017**
- December 12-13 in Brussels

6) LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Presence list 42nd EQF meeting 4-5 Oc