Note AG 45-1

Note on relevant developments
Follow-up to the 43rd meeting of the EQF Advisory Group, 12-13 December 2017 in Brussels (cf. action points and the draft meeting minutes):

This note provides an overview on relevant developments in European cooperation in education, training and employment. Updates on the referencing process are given in a separate note (Cf. note 45-2).

New functional E-mail address to communicate on LOQ and ESCO

A new E-mail address was launched for exchanges of information on qualifications and learning opportunities, namely qualifications@ext-ec.europa.eu

Any exchanges on the electronic publication of qualifications on either the LOQ portal or on ESCO should go through this functional address.

The existing contract with Intrasoft for LOQ maintenance has come to an end, but continuity of day-to-day services for the portal is ensured, as is the possibility for country visits as a form of technical support.

The New Skills Agenda for Europe

1) Key Competences for Lifelong Learning

On 17 January the Commission adopted its proposal for a Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. The draft revision sets out a series of recommendations for Member States and the Commission to reinforce the development of key competences across different settings. The draft proposal changes the focus of ‘Communication in Mother Tongue’ to that of ‘Literacy’ and changes ‘Learning to Learn’ to ‘Personal, social and learning competence’ thereby broadening the focus of both original competences. Discussions on the proposal are ongoing in the Education Committee, chaired by the Bulgarian Presidency. Member States have given a broad welcome to the proposal with the bulk of discussion focused on literacy and language competence and the specific recommendations to Member States. Adoption of the proposal is expected by 23 May Education Council.
2) European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships

The Council (EPSCO) adopted on 15 March 2018 a Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships, following the Commission’s proposal of October 2017. Building among others upon the opinion of the tripartite Advisory committee on Vocational Training, and based on the consultation with social partners, the Framework sets out 14 criteria to define quality and effective apprenticeships, ensuring both the development of job-related skills and the personal development of apprentices. It takes into account the diversity of vocational education and training (VET) systems across the EU and respects the Member States’ competence in the area of VET.

The Commission will now develop a set of support services for knowledge sharing, networking and benchmarking to assist Member States and relevant stakeholders to implement apprenticeships schemes in line with the European framework. Its formal launch is foreseen on 8 November 2018 in Vienna, when celebrating 5 years of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships during the 3rd European Vocational Skills Week. The Commission will report to the Council on the implementation of the Framework by 15 March 2021.

3) Europass

Political agreement was reached between the European Parliament and Council on the revision of the Europass Decision on 13 December 2017. The final text was adopted by the European Parliament in plenary on 15 March 2018 and final adoption in Council is expected during April 2018 (as an ‘A point’ without further discussion).

A new informal expert group to support the Commission with implementation of the Europass Decision will shortly be set up and a call for expressions of interest published in April.

Business analysis to shape the new Europass services and technical infrastructure will continue, and proposals discussed with the Europass Advisory Group. Synergies between Europass and EURES online services will be explored to improve user experience, aiming for a more seamless service which respects the distinct features and legal base of both EURES and Europass.

Copenhagen process/European VET policy

In view of preparing a proposal for the post-2020 VET policy, the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT) has decided to work towards an Opinion of the Committee on the Future of VET, expected to be adopted in December 2018. This Opinion, which will be based on inputs from all relevant stakeholders and research and evidence provided by the Commission, Cedefop and ETF, will represent the basis for the Commission Proposal on the future VET policy beyond 2020 to be indicatively adopted in the first semester 2019 and aligned to the proposal for the renewal of the ET2020 framework.

Bologna process / Higher Education

1) Bologna process
The Paris Communiqué of the EHEA Ministers to be adopted on 24 and 25 May 2018 will announce the establishment of the short cycle qualifications as an integral part of the “Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area”.

2) Renewed agenda for higher education
On 20-21 November 2017 EU Education Ministers adopted Council Conclusions responding to the renewed EU agenda for higher education put forward in the Commission Communication of 30 May 2017. The overall aim is to modernise higher education so that it keeps up with a rapidly changing world. The conclusions invite Member States to focus on actions in four areas: promoting excellence in skills development, addressing the needs of a diverse student body and supporting academic staff, contributing to innovation in the wider economy, and promoting efficiency and developing further quality assurance in the higher education system.

The focus now is on the implementation of the 20 actions. The first action was the adoption of the Council Recommendation on Graduate Tracking on 20-21 November 2017. An informal Commission expert group of graduate tracking experts in VET and higher education will become operational in the next few months, to facilitate mutual learning and exchange between the Member States on how best to implement the recommendation. A study is planned to track progress in implementing the recommendation.

In addition, to improve the availability of comparable data at EU level and allow EU-comparative analyses of graduate outcomes, a pilot European graduate survey was launched in January 2018 with a lifespan of two years. The Eurograduate survey will be piloted in 6 to 8 countries (Norway, Greece, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Croatia and potentially Lithuania and Czech Republic, if additional Erasmus+ funding is approved). An overwhelmingly positive response on the call for participation in the pilot from 20 Member States shows a great interest in this initiative. The countries currently not piloting the project will be able to explore options for aligning their existing national surveys with the European graduate survey in the framework of the Commission expert group on graduate tracking, with the ultimate aim to fully roll out the graduate survey to all EU Member States. The survey will capture Bachelor, Master and tertiary short cycle graduates one and 5 years after graduation assessing their labour market integration, their perceived skills, career paths and working conditions and how other contextual factors (primarily socio-demographic and economic) affect them.

Learning outcomes

The third policy learning forum on learning outcomes
The third Cedefop policy learning forum (PLF) on learning outcomes will take place in Thessaloniki on 21-22 June 2018 in cooperation with the European Commission and UNESCO.

Building on the positive outcomes of the first PLF in 2015 and second PLF in 2016 and more broadly on the work on world reference levels, led by UNESCO, the aim is to strengthen the exchange of experiences related to the writing and use of learning outcomes internationally. The PLF will target national and international experts involved in development of learning outcomes of national frameworks and more broadly regional frameworks. For more details, please consult the Save the date message.
Global inventory of national and regional qualifications frameworks 2017

The Global inventory is the result of collaborative work between Cedefop, ETF, UNESCO and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Both volumes of the Global inventory of national and regional qualifications frameworks 2017 have been published:

Volume I: Thematic chapters
Volume II: national and regional cases

National qualifications framework developments in Europe 2017

Cedefop has published National qualifications framework developments in Europe 2017. This publication, providing an overview of national qualifications frameworks in 39 countries and how they link to the EQF, celebrates the tenth anniversary of the EQF process and its contribution to transparency and comparability of European qualifications and trust in NQFs as guardians of the quality of qualifications.

Based on the publication a short overview table of national qualifications developments is available. The Briefing note - Qualifications frameworks in Europe 2017 developments was published.

ESCO

The Commission launched on 13 December 2017 a call for candidates for the new ESCO Maintenance Committee (MAI). 68 applications were received from across Europe. Overall, the quality of the applications was very good. The Commission has selected 22 member for the new MAI. The list of new members was sent to the EQF AG on 5 March 2018.

The mandate of the MAI will run from 2018 to 2022. It will above all be responsible for providing expertise concerning the continuous updating, improvement, management and dissemination of the ESCO classification. The first meeting of the new MAI will take place in Brussels on April 23 2018.

On the last meeting (21 February 2018) of the ESCO Member States working group (MSWG) the Commission informed the group on the content of the two draft implementing acts referring to ESCO under article 19 of the Eures Regulation, related to the mapping of national occupations and skills classifications to ESCO. These implementing acts are currently being drafted by the EURES Unit of DG EMPL. The final draft is expected to be ready for consultation with other Commission services in April, and then presented to the Eures Committee (probably on their meeting of 14 of June) for adoption.

Regarding the ESCO qualifications pillar the Commission, is in the final stage of concluding a contract for a study addressing the following questions:
• How should relevant quality assurance arrangements be shaped and implemented for the further development of the ESCO qualifications pillar to include private, sectoral and international certificates and qualifications?
• How is it possible, conceptually and technically, to link the learning outcomes of qualifications included in the ESCO Qualifications pillar, with the ESCO skills pillar?

The study is planned to take place between May and December 2018. The EQF AG will be consulted throughout the process. The Commission will ensure that potential synergies between the study and the work of the group on International qualifications will be made.

**Digital Education Action Plan**

On 17 January 2018 the Commission adopted, as part of the Digital Single market, a Digital Education Action Plan which outlines how the EU can help people, educational institutions and education systems better adapt to life and work in an age of rapid digital change by:

• making better use of digital technology for teaching and learning;
• developing the digital competences and skills needed for living and working in an age of digital transformation; and
• improving education through better data analysis and foresight.

Initiatives include supporting schools with high-speed broadband connections, scaling up a new self-assessment tool for schools on the use of technology for teaching and learning (SELFIE) and a public awareness campaign on online safety, media literacy and cyber hygiene.

As part of the Digital Education Action Plan the Commission announced development of a technical framework for issuing digitally-certified qualifications. Such digitally-certified qualifications are electronic documents issued by education and training institutions to confirm the award of a qualification to a person. Once digitally signed by the issuing institution, the digitally-signed qualification becomes a genuine document in which third parties, such as employers, education and training institutions, can trust.

The action aims to develop a European technical solution that can be used by Member States, education and training institutions or other organisations to issue digitally signed qualifications. The framework will be implemented through the new Europass platform, where users will be able to store and share their digitally signed qualifications. It will be based on open standards so that it can be used by Member States and stakeholders in their own specific contexts.

It will be developed in a way, that it is fully compatible with the EQF and ESCO: In cases where a qualification has an EQF level, the issuing institution should be able to indicate this level on the document. Voluntarily, an issuing institution will also be able to use ESCO terminology in the document, e.g. when describing learning outcomes.

Alongside the action plan, a 'Staff Working Document' was adopted which goes into more detail on the Commission's approach to digital education.

**Proposal for a Council Recommendation on common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching**
Adopted on 17 January 2018 this initiative proposes ways in which education can help young people understand the importance of and adhere to common values set out in Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Union. It aims at strengthening social cohesion and contributing to fight the rise of populism, xenophobia, divisive nationalism and the spreading of fake news. The proposal also strengthens inclusive education to promote quality education for all pupils as well as the European dimension of teaching, so children also learn about Europe's common heritage and diversity and get a good understanding of the functioning of the EU. To support these aims, the Commission will take steps to increase virtual exchanges among schools, notably through the successful e-Twinning network, and boost school mobility through the Erasmus+ programme.

**Education Summit, 25 January 2018**

The Summit explored how to capture the latest knowledge and insights in order to work towards a European Education Area, built on common goals, by 2025, in particular making mobility a reality for all, creating a network of European Universities and promoting lifelong learning.

The participants emphasised the need to also focus on the teaching profession, promoting education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, as well as common values and the European identity, and to address the technological revolution and ways for better attuning education systems to future challenges.

**Education package**

The Commission is expected to adopt in mid-May a package of proposals on education, with a policy Communication on the European Education Area and proposals on:

- A Council Recommendation on the mutual recognition of diplomas
- A Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems
- A Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages
- Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the framework for European cooperation in the youth field (EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018) and on a new cooperation framework post 2018
- A new European Agenda on Culture

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

The European inventory 2018 update is progressing. Data collection tools have been completed and a presentation to the EAF AG on their quality assurance involvement is foreseen. The state of play of the Inventory and the foreseen results will be presented at the 45th EQF AG meeting of 17-18 April.

The study on mapping Skills audits in and across EU Member States is close to being finalised. Contractors are now reviewing the final draft. The study results will be presented at the 45th EQF AG meeting of 17-18 April.
The Cedefop contract for a study of 20 months looking into the synergies between validation and guidance was signed at the end of December 2017. The study will investigate the necessary conditions, synergies and efficiency gains of linking validation and career guidance and counselling services through case studies.

Cedefop organised a PLF together with the EESC on upskilling pathways on 7-8 February 2018 in Brussels. The event had around 100 participants, including as a main target group ACVT members, as the ACVT has a support role to the Commission regarding the follow up on the implementation of the Recommendation on upskilling pathways. The event focused on examining common challenges across countries in the implementation of the different phases of the upskilling pathways. One of the working sessions was focused on validation. Information on the event can be found at: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/upskilling-pathways-discussed-joint-cedefop-eesc-policy-learning-forum

The Commission will organise from 14-15 June 2018 in Brussels the European Validation Festival where 250 participants will come together to share practices and exchange ideas and knowledge on validation of informal and non-formal learning. These stakeholders will come from inside and outside Europe and represent all areas and levels of education and training, employment, youth activities and civil society. The EU Validation Festival will complement the institutional process initiated by the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, feed into it and prepare the ground for future developments in the field.