Note AG 46-1
Note on relevant developments
Follow-up to the 45th meeting of the EQF Advisory Group, 17-18 April 2018 in
Bratislava (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 46-2).

The Skills Agenda for Europe

1) Key Competences for Lifelong Learning

On 22 May, the Council adopted a revised recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, the aim of which is to update the current recommendation from 2006 and take account of changes such as digitalisation and evolving labour markets.

2) 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 in Council on 18 April 2018 (as an ‘A point’ without further discussion). The final Decision was published in the Official Journal on 2 May 2018.

A new informal expert group (Europass Advisory Group) to support the Commission with implementation of the Europass Decision will be established shortly and a call for expressions of interest will be published in the coming weeks.

Business analysis to shape the new Europass services and technical infrastructure will continue, and proposals discussed with the new 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**

1) **Future of VET**

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, based on 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.

2) **Apprenticeships**

The Commission will launch in the second half of 2018 *Apprenticeship Support Services*, to support the introduction or improvement of apprenticeship systems within Member States, Candidate Countries and EFTA members. The Apprenticeship Support Services will be built on three pillars:

1. A knowledge-hub to share and access information relevant to apprenticeship design and delivery;
2. A networking hub to facilitate the exchange of ideas and the development of cooperation amongst stakeholders;
3. Benchlearning (based on the PES benchlearning model) to provide a structured process and approach to mutual learning.

These services are one of the initiatives under the European Framework for quality and effective apprenticeships, published in May 2018.

3) **Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways**

The call for proposals "Support for the deployment of skills assessments in the implementation of “Upskilling Pathways”" (VP/2018/008, EaSI programme) has been published in May 2018. The specific objective of this call is to support the deployment of the provision of individual skills assessments (including for literacy, numeracy and digital skills) for low skilled / low qualified adults.

The call is addressed to national and/or regional authorities in Member States and other EaSI participating countries (if they so wish) and aims to support the implementation of the Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways. The total budget earmarked for the EU co-financing (max 80%) of projects under this call is estimated at EUR 1 500 000. The **deadline for submitting proposals is 13/07/2018**. For any further information potential applicants should write to empl-vp-2018-008@ec.europa.eu.

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4) European Vocational Skills Week

The European Vocational Skills Week – Discover your Talent! will in 2018 be held for the third time, to showcase VET excellence and how VET can contribute to personal development and to worthwhile careers.

Once again, the Commission will undertake a Europe-wide communications campaign aiming to reach national, regional and local levels, with social and traditional media tools, audio-visual products, and promotional products. Week Ambassadors will be appointed and awards will be organised (for companies, VET providers, teachers and trainers, etc.).

Most importantly, the Commission will again open up a registration and mapping system for associated events/activities across Europe - local, regional, national, Employers Days, open doors, conferences, skills demonstrations etc. The registration and mapping will provide the chance for publicity for the activities featured.

Continuing with the main aim to highlight the attractiveness of VET, there will in addition be a focus on the future of VET, in terms of digitalisation, validation of non-formal and informal learning and the importance of the skills for the 21st century.

This year, the Week itself will take place in Vienna, Austria, under the Austrian Presidency of the European Union, during the week of 5 to 9 November 2018, when several meetings will take place. For example, the Directors-General for Vocational Training will meet over two days. Cedefop will hold a major conference on the future of VET.

Also the EQF Advisory Group can get involved! Organise your own event on VET excellence, promote the week and its awards to your stakeholders.

Bologna process / Higher Education

The Ministerial conference of the European Higher Education Area took place in Paris on 23-25 May 2018. Ministers signed the Paris Communiqué.²

Key points for the future of the Bologna Process are:

- strengthened implementation;
- more focus on innovation in learning and teaching;
- "European universities" might be game changers of the higher education landscape in Europe which will pave the way for the ‘universities of the future’ with the implementation of European inter-university campuses, built around ‘challenged based’ curriculum. The ‘European universities’ initiative is an EU initiative and funding (for pilot phase and full roll-out) will be channelled via the Erasmus+ programme.

The newly adopted peer support system should help to reach a more even implementation of the key commitments. Although joining the Process is voluntary, countries committed to implement reforms. The Commission will support this strengthened support system, to ensure that countries that lag behind can accelerate their reforms. The Bologna peer review system could be built on

² http://www.ehea2018.paris
the tried and tested 'ET 2020' toolbox with peer learning and peer counselling activities, which would be a useful and complementary capacity-building tool for countries lagging behind.

The European Education Area will build on the achievements of the European Higher Education Area. It will enable EU Member States to do more and move faster to make their education systems better, more competitive and inclusive, while providing inspiration to non-EU countries and the European Higher Education Area as a whole.

Ministers adopted the short cycle as a stand-alone qualification within the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (Annex III of the Communiqué). The Paris Ministerial Communiqué recognises that each country decides whether and how to incorporate short cycle qualifications within its own national framework, the Communiqué underlined the role ECTS-based short cycle qualifications play in preparing students for employment and further studies as well as in improving social cohesion.

Ministers also approved the proposed revised Diploma Supplement and its explanatory note (Annex IV) and committed to working for its adoption in identical versions within the respective frameworks of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and Europass. To further promote student and graduate mobility, ministers expressed their support towards initiatives such as the digitalisation of the Diploma Supplement, and committed to support higher education institutions to pursue further student data exchange in a secure, machine-readable and interoperable format, in line with data protection legislation.

The next Ministerial conference will take place in Italy, in 2020.

Further reference:
Brochure "The EU in support of the Bologna Process"
Latest Bologna Implementation report

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. It is organised by Cedefop in cooperation with the European Commission and UNESCO.

Building on the positive outcomes of the first PLF in 2015 and second PLF in 2016, the event will take forward issues identified in the 2017 European Handbook on how to define, write and apply learning outcomes and strengthen the exchange of experiences related to the writing and use of learning outcomes internationally: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4156

It aims to gathering a limited number of experts from Europe and beyond, the event will provide an opportunity to share experiences and identify areas for further development and future cooperation. Discussions will focus on the following three main topics:
a) The conceptual roots of the learning outcomes approach
b) The role of learning outcomes in governing education and training
c) Learning outcomes as a common, international language

The discussion on the topics listed above will feed into a future revision and strengthening of the Handbook.

ESCO

The 25th ESCO Maintenance Committee meeting took place on 23 April 2018. This was the first meeting of the new Maintenance Committee, which was appointed following a call for experts. The objectives of the meeting were to introduce ESCO and its state of play for the new members, to discuss a new hierarchy for the skills pillar and agree the 2018 working programme for the Committee. The next Maintenance Committee is taking place on 5 June. An ESCO Member States Working Group meeting is foreseen for 18 June.

The ESCO Team is currently preparing a framework to measure technical, business and quality Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). With these KPIs, the ESCO team will measure successful business uptake, the quality of the ESCO classification and technical compliance with the data model. This framework was submitted to the Maintenance Committee for consultation. Following their input, the Commission will develop tools to measure and implement the KPIs through small-scale software applications. In addition, the Commission will prepare a draft KPI dashboard, will start to measure first business KPIs and present them at the next Maintenance Committee meeting. The Commission is also currently preparing and discussing with the new ESCO Maintenance Committee a new skills structure for the ESCO Skills Pillar. The new structure will enlarge and improve the current ESCO search engine.

The Commission is currently drafting the Implementing Acts required by article 19 of the EURES Regulation to guide and support Member States to map their national classifications to ESCO, or adopt ESCO directly into their systems. Once these Acts are adopted (forecast for September 2018), Member States will have 3 years to comply with the requirements of the Regulation. Two Member States-Slovenia and Ireland- have already started the process and will probably adopt the ESCO skills pillar as their new national skills classifications. The Commission will offer Member States technical support and trainings on this mapping exercise as of September. The Commission has also carried out a pilot project with Sweden and Austria on how to map national skills classifications to the ESCO skills pillar.

**Update on the study on the Qualifications Pillar of ESCO**

For ESCO to fulfil its ambition to provide a tool supporting transparent and interconnected labour markets and education and training systems, its further development - in particular of the qualifications pillar - is envisaged. The Commission has initiated a study that addresses questions relevant for the further development of the ESCO qualifications pillar. The study will be executed by Ecorys and will focus on two distinct but interrelated sub-questions:
(I) 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?

(II) 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 started in May and one of its main aims is to identify a possible set of minimum criteria on quality of qualifications to be fulfilled before inclusion in ESCO. For this matter, experts will be consulted through a workshop. Members of the new EQF AG Project Group on International Qualifications have been invited to participate on behalf of the EQF AG. The workshop will take place in Brussels on Tuesday 19th June. The study will run until the end of this year and the EQF AG will be informed of progress.

**Joint Policy Network Meeting**

A Joint Policy Network Meeting representing Euroguidance Centres, National Europass Centres and EQF-NCPs took place on 17 May in Brussels. The meeting’s aim was to discuss recent developments in the area of education, training and employment and update the centres on their most recent grant application foreseen for the years 2018-2020. In the afternoon two parallel workshops discussed the experience of the centres as a contribution to building the New Europass Portal.

**Education package**

The Commission published on 17 May a package of proposals on education³, consisting of a policy Communication on the European Education Area and proposals on:

- A Council Recommendation on automatic mutual recognition of diplomas and the outcomes of learning periods abroad⁴
- A Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems⁵
- A Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages⁶

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• 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

Work will now begin on the negotiation and implementation of the package.

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

The European inventory 2018 update is progressing. The state of play, foreseen results of the Inventory and the EQF AG involvement were discussed at the 45th EQF AG meeting of 17-18 April. First drafts of country reports are being finalised and will be distributed to the EQF AG later in the year.

The Validation Festival will take place from 14-15 June 2018 in Brussels.

**European Semester 2018 Spring Package**

On 23 May the Commission presented the 2018 country-specific recommendations (CSRs), setting out its economic policy guidance for Member States for the next 12 to 18 months.

Country-specific recommendations provide tailored advice to individual Member States on how to boost jobs, growth and investment, while maintaining sound public finances. The Commission publishes them every spring, as part of the European Semester, the EU’s annual cycle for economic and social policy coordination. The recommendations adapt priorities identified at EU level in the Annual Growth Survey and at the euro area level in the recommendation for the economic policy of the euro area to the national level. They give guidance on what can realistically be achieved in the next 12 to 18 months to make growth stronger, more sustainable and more inclusive, in line with the EU’s long-term jobs and growth plan, the Europe 2020 strategy.

The spring package shows that Europe's economy is experiencing favourable conditions. It is growing at its fastest pace in a decade, employment is at a record high, investment is recovering and public finances are improving.

This year, the recommendations dedicate special attention to social challenges, guided by the European Pillar of Social Rights proclaimed in November 2017. There is a particular focus on ensuring the provision of appropriate skills, the effectiveness and adequacy of social safety nets and improving social dialogue.

Countries are also recommended to carry out reforms that prepare their workforces for the future, including future forms of work and increasing digitalisation; reduce income inequalities; and create employment opportunities, for young people in particular.

Next Multiannual Financial Framework

On the 2nd of May 2018 the Commission presented the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework, aimed at providing resources for “a Union that protests, empowers and defends”. The proposed seven year budget amounts to €1,135 trillion in commitments, equivalent to 1.11% of the EU 27’s gross national income.

The structure of the budget has been simplified, bringing the number of programmes and funds from 58 to 37. More flexibility is envisaged between programmes and a ‘union reserve’ is planned to respond to emergencies.

The budget is organised around eight priorities: (i) single market, innovation and digital; (ii) cohesion and values; (iii) natural resources and environment; (iv) migration and border management; (v) security and defence; (vi) neighbourhood and the world; (vii) European public administration; and (viii) instruments outside the MIF ceilings.

The eight framework priorities include a total of 17 formal headings of the budget.

Priority (ii) Cohesion and values is the reference for three budget headings; 5 Regional Development & Cohesion, 6 Economic & Monetary Union, and 7 Investing in People, Social Cohesion & Values.

Heading 7 Investing in People, Social Cohesion & Values includes the programme Erasmus+ and the European Social Fund (including Migrant integration and Health), along with the programmes Creative Europe (including Media), European Solidarity Corps and Justice, rights and values.

A major change consists in the proposal to double the budget of Erasmus+, bringing it to 30 billion, to “allow more young people to move to another country to learn or work”.

The European Social Fund (ESF), which should include previously separate programmes such as the Employment and Social innovation programme, is envisaged to be endowed with a budget of about 100 billion.

Commission proposals for Erasmus and ESF+ adopted on 30 May 2018

- Link to Erasmus proposal and related document:
- Links to ESF+ proposal and annex:

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