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Lifelong learning: policies and programme
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**MEETING OF THE NATIONAL REFERENCE POINTS
CCAB – 17-18 NOVEMBER 2011
DRAFT MINUTES**

This meeting organised by the Commission with the support of EQAVET secretariat, brought together the representatives of twenty national reference points from the EU Member States, the social partners, the European Commission, Cedefop and the EQAVET Secretariat. Apologies were received from Greece, Liechtenstein, Norway and Netherlands. The Social Partners were represented by the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (UEAPME). The meeting provided an opportunity to review progress on the establishment of the NRPs, to discuss the first results of the EQAVET secretariat survey 2011 and to explore the ways NRPs can most appropriately be supported in their work.

1. WELCOMING WORDS AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The representatives of the Commission, João Delgado (head of the VET policy and LDV programme unit) and Sophie Weisswange (The Chair of the meeting) welcomed the participants.

In his welcoming words of this first national reference points meeting since the adaptation of the Bruges Communiqué, Mr Delgado reminded the participants about the important role of the national reference points in implementing the European quality assurance reference framework in VET and in ensuring the effective dissemination of information about EU developments in quality assurance in VET. He highlighted the current synergies between the European frameworks and tools in VET and stated that the role of quality issues will continue to be important also for the next generation of the LLL programme.

The Chair clarified that the update on Adult learning was added to the agenda of the 17 November morning session. With this modification, the agenda of the meeting was adopted.

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2. UPDATE ON ADULT LEARNING

Maïke Koops (DG EAC/B.3) presented the latest developments of a thematic working group on quality in Adult learning. In contact with training providers of different sectors, the objective is to examine the use of quality indicators on national and European level. Ms Koops underlined the link to EQAVET's work because EQAVET has already created structures and process as well as political awareness of quality issues. Joint frameworks for vocational and non-vocational sector could be envisaged in order to define indicators and enhance user awareness. The Commission welcomed the interest of Adult learning sector in EQAVET's activities and stressed the importance of synergies.

3. UPDATE ON POLITICAL CONTEXT

Sophie Weisswange provided an update on the latest EU policy developments in education and training, in relation to:

A) Recent events:

- VET conference in Warsaw organised by the Polish presidency,
- DGVT meeting in September, organised jointly with Adult learning,
- ACVT meeting in November gathering representatives of governments and social partners from Member States. Updates on ECVET, EQAVET, EQF, the joint seminar as well as preparation of a recommendation in non-formal learning were given.

B) Ongoing work in line with the objectives of Bruges communiqué:

- Activities related to VET excellence including current work towards organising Business-VET forum, which is planned to take place on the 7th and 8th of June, 2012,
- Recently published results of Eurobarometer survey on "Attitudes towards VET",
- World Skills 2011 event in October in London, with the presence of the Commissioner.

C) The work of the Education committee, namely:

- Adoption of the benchmark for learning mobility by the Education committee in October. The formal Council adaptation is likely to be done at the end of November.
- Adoption of Council Resolution on Adult Learning.

D) The future programme "Erasmus for all" 2014-2020. The programme will be adopted by the Commission by the end of the year and will be examined by the Council and the Parliament next year.

Ms Weisswange also mentioned the forthcoming events organised by Cedefop: a workshop on the EU tools, 22 November and a conference called "The role of Social

partners in implementing European Tools Principles", 24-25 November (European Parliament, Brussels).

Following a request on having a policy briefing on the Eurobarometer survey on "Attitudes towards VET", the link to the website containing further information on the survey is given here: http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/news3068_en.htm

4. UPDATE ON EQAVET NATIONAL REFERENCE POINTS

A tour de table was organised based on the template that had been distributed in advance and a detailed update was given by the majority of the participants.

With regard to the state of play of the national reference points, it was noted that a new national reference point had been appointed in Sweden, some internal changes had taken place in the bodies responsible of EQAVET, notably regarding additional personnel.

Some national reference points mentioned that the organisation website still needed to be put in place or updated but the majority of the NRPs seemed to have a functional website with a link to EQAVET website. Some had also invested in the translation of the webpage into English.

In addition to this it was mentioned that in several countries laws with reference to quality assurance in VET were recently adopted or in preparation. The fact that some national legislation mentioned the national reference point was considered as an important signal.

When it comes to the support the NRPs wished to receive, the following issues were mentioned:

- Support was needed in the communication of the recommendation and enhancement of awareness of EQAVET in the national context
- Deeper knowledge of the approaches of the other Member States was welcomed
- Links to other tools and synergies were welcomed as well as "good news stories" on how the labour market benefits from VET
- Use of the results of the Eurobarometer
- Some NRPs encountered difficulties in implementation due to the complex regional structure of the Member State in question or due to the division of quality issues between ministries responsible for education, labour etc.
- Cooperation between NRPs as part of Leonardo 2012 call.

5. UPDATE ON EQAVET WORK

A) Sean Feerick, director of the EQAVET secretariat, provided an update on the Annual Forum organised on 31 March and 1 April 2011 in Budapest. The main focuses were: the support to developing a quality culture for VET providers and strengthening work with social partners. The fact that stakeholders don't distinguish between the tools was also underlined. The importance of dissemination and information sharing as well as the use of the EQAVET website was welcomed. The next Annual Forum will be held on 29-30 March 2012 and will be followed by two national reference points' information seminars

with key stakeholders and 15 NRPs in each (presumably in Greece in May and in France in September 2012).

B) Keith Brumfitt, expert of **working group 1** on guidelines, made a description of the work reached so far. He explained that current work consists of adapting the web material used on system level to providers' level. For those only recently using quality assurance six "building blocks" were proposed whereas for more experienced users more detailed explication on descriptors and indicators was prepared. 50 national case studies (2 per each member) as well as 10 European wide examples will be examined in the next working group meeting. The challenge is to cover all the levels (IVET, CVET, adult education) and to keep the guidance simple.

C) Maria-Emilia Galvão, expert of **working group 2** on indicators, made a description of the work reached so far. She explained the purpose and content of the Guide on VET providers' self-monitoring by using the EQAVET indicators. The Guide explores four steps of the self-monitoring cycle which helps notably the VET providers to put in place a self-monitoring plan. (For more information, see slides attached).

6. PRESENTATION OF THE EQAVET SECRETARIAT SURVEY 2011

Arancha Oviedo-García from EQAVET secretariat presented the first results of the survey. The presentation covered the following four sections:

1. National VET policy and the national approaches to QA in-line with the EQAVET reference framework
2. Quality assurance national reference points
3. The use of EQAVET indicative descriptors at system and providers level for IVET and CVET sectors among MS
4. The use of EQAVET indicators for IVET and CVET sectors among MS

A copy of the slides with tables and figures was distributed to the participants.

7. WORKING GROUPS

The national reference points then gathered in workshops in order to exchange views on the results of the survey. The objective was to discuss the exploitation of the results of the survey as well as the methodology used. The results of the workshops provided the following conclusions:

The survey was considered as a good exercise that should be repeated. The filling in of the survey revealed some difficulties in the cooperation between IVET and CVET authorities and was as such an interesting catalyst of the dialogue of the actors in VET.

Some Member States also pointed out some unclear points in the recommendation itself. However the revision of the recommendation text requires a complex inter-institutional process. The possibility of changing the annexes will be explored by the Commission.

Most of the results corresponded to the expectations of the national reference points. The fact that the some of the indicative descriptors were less used indicates that more attention is needed on these issues.

At this stage, an official publication of the survey was not considered useful: the survey is first and foremost a supplementary tool for the use of EQAVET network.

It was agreed that an updated version of the survey with some additional quantitative questions will be sent to the national reference points next summer in order to give the Commission further information for the reporting of 2013.

The objective of the survey was not to do benchmarking or comparison but to give the Member States the possibility to learn from each other. Member States welcomed a possibility to use the survey as a basis for a peer learning exercise in which countries that had similar results could have a closer look on some points together. This possibility should be explored.

8. UPDATE ON LDV PROGRAMME AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Felix Rohn (DG EAC/B4) presented the evolution of the priority coverage of the Leonardo de Vinci projects in 2008-2011 including Transfer of Innovation (TOI) and Development of Innovation (DOI) projects as well as Networks. The undeniable conclusion was that the share of projects focusing on quality issues had decreased rather dramatically. This was partly due to introduction of new priority areas, partly due to stricter redefinition of the quality priority in the 2011 call. Mr Rohn invited the participants to discover QALLL projects on the Adam Portal as well as the success stories published on the DG EAC website.

Furthermore, Mr Rohn presented the priority areas of the 2012 call. (For more information, see slides attached).

One of the NRPs asked whether a national reference point can apply as a project partner. It was noted that as a rule, a national agency responsible for LDV programme can not apply and consequently the interpretation depends of the possible institutional links between NRP and the national agency. A clarification on this issue will be communicated. NRPs were invited to promote participation of other national stakeholders such as social partners or national institutions.

As a response to a question on how to avoid frequent weaknesses in a proposal, Mr Rohn underlined the following aspects: The description of the project should be well structured and clearly mention the objectives, products, budget and expected results. The proposed products should be sustainable, i.e. respond to a real need of the sector.

9. PRESENTATION OF EQAVET PROJECTS

First, Antony Camilleri, from EQAVET promotion and knowledge management unit, provided an update on the activities of the unit which is responsible for building synergies among the projects and enhancing visibility of the project results. He gave an update on the conclusions of the first synergy building seminar held in Vienna underlining the importance of national political support for NRPs as well as better use of identified best practices. The EQAVET promotion and knowledge management unit will provide a supplement for the EQAVET newsletter in December. (For more information

on the ongoing activities and upcoming events see slides attached as well as the EQAVET projects' website).

Secondly, the following presentations gave an insight of the five projects, including the objectives, activities, products and expected results:

A) The German project ENIQAB (Europeanization of the National Initiative for Quality Assurance and Development in VET) was presented by Thomas Gruber. The project focuses on the quality of the in-company training and the VET-trainers through 10 pilot projects.

B) Michaela Jonach presented the Austrian project VET-CERT which aims at guaranteeing that persons dealing with quality management in VET institutions have the necessary competencies and making these competencies transparent through a certification process.

C) The Romanian project Promoting Quality - QUALVET@RO was presented by Dana Stroie. The objective is to elaborate and pilot a communication strategy for the Romanian National Reference Point of EQAVET in order to implement the EQAVET Recommendation, the policies and the instruments elaborated within EQAVET.

D) Horace Caruana from Malta presented the fourth project: QA-VET. The project aims at reviewing and developing Quality Assurance standards in Maltese VET institutions as well as raising awareness among local VET providers on the importance of Quality Assurance for VET courses.

E) Due to absence of a representative from the Netherlands, the last project update was given by Antony Camilleri. The NLQAVET projects focuses on collecting good practices into an online inventory which enables VET institutions to overview the progress of the quality assurance processes and to situate themselves. Five schools will participate in testing the implementation of EQAVET.

10. UPDATE ON EQF, ECVET AND JOINT SEMINAR

A) Anita Kremo (DG EAC/A2) provided an update on the implementation of the EQF. She explained that to this date 12 Member States have presented their national referencing report to the EQF advisory group. Other countries are planning to present their report either by the end of this year or during the year 2012. The objective is also to support coherence and consistency of the implementation through thematic approaches as well as through communication. Ms Kremo also emphasised the importance of synergies with other LLL tools and the joint seminars. (See slides attached)

B) Erik Hess (DG EAC/B4) provided an update on the ECVET activities and outcomes of the year 2011, including the Annual forum organised in June 2011, workshops for ECVET users' group and network as well as Cedefop monitoring report. A call for national team of ECVET experts (similar to ECTS experts in higher education) was organised in order to set up teams to work as a link between policy level and practitioners. The next Users' Group meeting will be held 30 November 2011. Mr Hess highlighted that ECVET and quality assurance issues are closely linked, for example when it comes to mobility: common standards and rules are needed to establish mutual trust.

C) Finally, Sophie Weisswange provided an update on the joint seminar held in Bonn on 14-15 November. This was the first time a joint event was organised for the three tools (EQAVET, ECVET, EQF) and it provided an opportunity to exchange ideas on common problematic, namely the issue of learning outcomes. Three case studies from different sectors were examined. One of the main conclusions of the meeting was that the focus on Learning Outcomes (LO) means changing attitudes, namely redefining assessment criteria and efficiency in packaging the LO into units (ECVET). This process has an impact on all the stakeholders. Three key-words / approaches can be defined for further action: synergy, simplification and sustainability. While several common challenges still remain to be solved, a step by step strategy will be followed through common actions:

- Organisation of similar meetings in the future
- Coordination between secretariats
- Closer cooperation between national reference points, national agencies and users' groups of all the three tools

11. CONCLUSION

The chair of the meeting congratulated the NRPs, the working groups and the secretariat for the good work undertaken. In line with the conclusions of the workshops, she emphasised that the survey was a good experience and a useful monitoring tool which opens the possibility to repeat the exercise in 2012, including perhaps some questions on the other tools. Development of a holistic vision on the tools and joining efforts remains one of the most important the current objectives.

The next Annual Forum will be organised on 29-30 March 2012.

