

Brussels, 6 June 2012

EQF Advisory Group, 11-12 June 2012, Brussels

Note AG 15-7

Procedural conclusions of the EQF portal Steering Group

This note reports on the conclusions of the EQF portal steering group meeting of 6 June 2012.

1. Joint EQF/Ploteus portal

A Commission note on the technical coordination between the Ploteus and EQF portal and a proposal for their future inclusion in a joint web portal is annexed. The note has been presented to the EQF Portal Steering Group to inform and nourish the debate. The annex highlights the changes proposed by the EQF Steering Group.

The Commission will hold a similar debate with the Ploteus Coordination Group and the Euroguidance network.

In the discussion it was clarified in particular that:

- The information services of EQF and Ploteus would not be merged, but made available to users as separate services within a joint portal. The term "joint portal" should be used from now on, instead of integrated portal, to avoid misunderstanding.
- Section 4 of the note enumerates four steps: the first three are technical steps (joint internal project) and are already decided, while the fourth (presenting users with a joint web portal) has a policy dimension. The three technical steps are valid and justified, no matter whether the portals remain separate or become a joint public portal.
- The Steering Group agreed with the COM proposal to start using the existing core common platform for both EQF and Ploteus portals but continue to display the services in separate portals to the user at least until mid-2013.
- The Steering Group agreed to discuss the policy implications of joining the two portals into a single joint portal until mid-2013. Issues regarding quality assurance, governance structures, branding and users' needs should be given particular attention.

- The Steering Group agreed on the importance of discussing these issues together with the Ploteus Coordination Group. The creation of a "EQF/Ploteus portal Steering Group" is supported.
- The COM plan is to make the joint portal available to the users by mid-2013. This plan shall be shaped and can be revisited in function of the results of discussions with the new "EQF/Ploteus portal steering group".
- Although "EQF/Ploteus portal steering group" shall replace the EQF Portal Steering Group and the Ploteus Coordination Group, the EQF Steering Group shall remain operational to discuss issues specifically related to the EQF Portal (ex: search criteria) in the near future and at least until both portals remain separate.

Actions:

The Commission to seek, in coordination with the relevant networks, for more information on the information needs of the intended users of both portals.

The Commission to organise common meetings of the EQF Portal Steering Group and the Ploteus Coordination Group (the joint EQF/Ploteus steering group), between now and mid-2013; the joint group will carefully consider all aspects of a joint portal and its advice will be of high importance for the way in which the joint portal will finally be shaped.

2. Search criteria for the EQF portal: Learning outcomes descriptions

The Commission contractor summarised a draft report on the use of learning outcomes based descriptions in national databases of qualifications.

The report will be finalised by 30 June 2012, also based on comments from that the steering group could send until 15 June, and then disseminated by the Commission to the EQF AG and NCPs.

There was agreement that the huge variety of approaches adopted by countries in their databases, each developed with specific purposes, required more information and analysis before final decisions are taken on the information structure of the European interface. This exercise would prove among other very helpful for countries that were in the phase of designing new databases.

Action. The Commission to prepare by the end of June a proposal for a template for the information structure, based upon the categories already identified and proposed (cf. note EQF AG 9-3, meeting of 6 April 2011). The draft template should be sent in particular to the countries that have already referenced to the EQF, with all others EQF AG members and NCPs in copy, with the request to comment on the current or planned availability of relevant data in national databases.

Based on comments, the Commission would prepare a proposal for a final template to be discussed by the EQF portal steering group.

3. Search criteria for the EQF portal: Mapping ISCED thematic areas

The Commission contractor summarised a draft report on the opportunities for mapping ISCED thematic areas the subject areas used in a sample of 10 national databases of qualifications. It appeared that such a mapping was a simple task for some countries, but

possibly more challenging for others and indeed be very challenging for a couple of databases.

The report will be finalised by 30 June 2012, also based on comments from that the steering group could send until 15 June, and then disseminated by the Commission to the EQF AG and NCPs.

The open issue could be summarised as choosing between two options:

- A. To adopt, possibly with some changes, an existing classification such as ISCED, being aware that mapping was challenging for some countries and that the classification had been developed for statistical purposes, rather than information retrieval;
- B. To engage in the development of a new proposal for thematic areas, being aware that it was a demanding task and that mapping would be necessary in any case.

There was agreement that at this stage it was not possible to express a preference for one option. In particular, more information was needed, on the one hand on the opportunity for joint development with ESCO and on the other hand about an on-going revision of the ISCED classification.

Action. The Commission to prepare September a note reviewing facts and options on the issue of thematic areas as a search criterion over national databases of qualifications.

4. Interconnection of national databases

The Commission outlined the main features of the interconnection procedure of national databases to the common technical platform.

- The steering group agreed to proceed with the technical development, also in contact with national database services, though interconnection could only become operational after all decisions on the information structure had been taken.

Action. The Commission and its contractor to contact the relevant services at national level for preliminary exchanges about the technical features of the interconnection.