Note on relevant developments

Joint note for the Europass Advisory Group and EQF Advisory Group

This note provides an overview on relevant developments in European cooperation in education, training and employment[1].

1. <u>The Skills Agenda for Europe</u>

Implementation of the EQF Recommendation

By May 2019 a total of 35 out of 39 EQF countries have referenced their national qualifications frameworks or systems to the EQF. This includes 27 EU Member States. The last Member State, Spain, will reference in 2019.

The revised 2017 EQF Recommendation invites Member States to review and update their referencing to the EQF when relevant, which helps to ensure that the information underpinning the referencing is accurate, transparent and reflects any relevant changes at national level. In December 2018 UK-Scotland presented an updated referencing report and the Netherlands, UK England and Northern Ireland and UK-Wales will do so at the EQF AG meeting of 11-12 June.

In the context of the EQF AG, the project group on international qualifications recently concluded its work. The group discussed a procedure for exchanging information on national decisions regarding the levelling of international qualifications in NQFs referenced to the EQF. The proposed procedure will be discussed at the EQF AG meeting of 11-12 June.

The project group on Horizontal Comparison had its first meeting on 25 April and the work of the group should finish by the end of 2019. The group will work on the consistency of levelling qualifications based on learning outcomes across countries in order to achieve transparency and comparability of qualifications.

Another important area of work in the context of the EQF AG is communication and use of qualifications databases. To this end, a PLA on qualifications databases took place on

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[1] Updates on the EQF referencing process are given in a separate note (Cf. note 49-2).

21-22 March in Budapest. The purpose of the PLA was to discuss and exchange experiences regarding the development and use of national qualification registers and databases and their connection at European level. Another PLA to exchange good practices of communication strategies and dissemination activities and approaches will take place in the second half of 2019.

Part of the revised 2017 EQF Recommendation is the third country dimension which invites the Commission in the context of the EQF AG to explore possibilities for the development and application of criteria and procedures to enable, in accordance with international agreements, the comparison of third countries' national and regional qualifications frameworks with the EQF. At the EQF AG meeting of 11-12 June, the possibility to set up a project group to work on this area will be discussed.

Implementation of the new Europass

Work is ongoing on the development of the new Europass platform in line with the Europass Decision adopted in May 2018. The Commission has launched a project website with information and updates on the development of the new Europass here: https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/europass

New Europass e-Portfolio

The new platform will offer a set of Europass web-based tools including the Europass e-Portfolio. The e-Portfolio will support four particular activities: help individuals be reflective; support individuals in their personal development; showcase individuals' information; and, assess individuals' skills.

The Europass e-Portfolio will include the following elements:
1. Profile: allow individual end-users to create a personal profile of their skills, qualifications and experiences. The profile will also include a Library for storage of digital documents; Goals for identifying interests, preferences and goals; and a Skills Profiler for compiling information on the user's skills into structured information.
2. Editor: allow individual end-users to create and edit documents (e.g. CVs, cover letters), choose templates to complete their CV.
3. Skills Match: allow individual end-users to search or receive suggestions of learning and career opportunities from Union services, Member States (e.g. through EURES) and third parties (e.g. online platforms that have interoperability agreements with Europass).
4. Application Tracker: support individual end-users to prepare and track applications for learning and job opportunities through their e-Portfolio.
5. Individual end-users will have the option to use the web-based tools without registering and creating a profile. However, if they register and create a profile they will have access to additional features such as storage of documents in the Library.

Users will control all their personal data. The Commission is undertaking a full Data Protection Impact Assessment to ensure full compliance with GDPR and other data protection requirements. Some anonymised information will be collected for statistical purposes as is the practice with the current Europass.

The potential use of ESCO in the e-Portfolio in the Europass platform will be subject to testing and in line with the position of Member States (as per Recital 17 of the Europass Decision). A first release of some elements of the e-Portfolio is expected in June 2019. User testing will be organised through the National Europass Centres and other stakeholders. The Commission is also developing content for inclusion on the new Europass platform.

Europass Digitally-Signed Credentials

Work is ongoing on the development of the Europass framework for Digitally-Signed Credentials to enable the easier understanding and verification of qualifications, and other evidence of learning.

The DSC Framework will benefit users in the following ways:

- By offering a secure, trustworthy and fraud-resistant system that ensures data privacy and data protection.
- By offering a common technical approach for issuing digitally-signed credentials so that certificates from one Member State can be understood and verified in any other.
- By supporting learners to provide evidence of their learning in electronic format to employers or education and training providers.
- Employers, education and training providers and other bodies will be able to check that certificates and other qualifications are valid and authentic. They can also have easy access to background information on qualifications, and other evidence of learning.

The DSC Framework will not replace quality assurance, accreditation or other national public or private systems but will offer technical solutions that issuers, holders and recipients of digital credentials can use. The technical framework will be built on open standards, compatible with as many established standards as possible, and be made available for use on a voluntary basis, free-of-charge to users.

Eleven countries have expressed interest in pilot testing of the technical framework for Europass digital credentials. The following countries responded to an invitation from the European Commission in March 2019 to test the framework: Czech Republic,Germany, Estonia, Greece, Croatia,Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, S lovenia and Slovakia. The Commission will work with the interested countries to support the testing in line with national practices for different types of credentials.

State of play on the study on the movement of skilled labour

As an action of the Skills Agenda, in order to better understand the flows and the measures taken by Member States to retain or attract skilled labour, an independent study was commissioned by the European Commission to examine "brain flow" inside the EU, focusing on people with high and medium skills levels. This study was published in November 2018.

Drawing upon the findings of the study, the European Commission will organise a peer learning workshop on 4 June 2019 to share experience between policy makers of how some countries or regions are addressing brain flow. What examples exist of initiatives to attract or retain skilled labour and how can these be shared among other stakeholders?

The workshop will focus on practical experience, with the goal of supporting mutual learning on how countries, regions or sectors are addressing both the positive and negative consequences of the movement of skilled labour.

Graduate tracking initiative

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC), in collaboration with the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL), have set up an expert group on graduate tracking following the adoption on 20 November 2017 of the Council Recommendation on tracking graduates.

The main output of the group will be the Council Recommendation implementation report, due in May 2020. The kick-off meeting was held on 8 October 2018 in Brussels. Approximately 60 experts were present, of which 15 VET experts. The 2nd meeting of the Expert Group took place in February 2019, its 3d meeting will take place on 11-12 June. The Expert Group has set an ambitious work programme to address a range of objectives, through four Taskforce' groups.

1. The first taskforce will explore the feasibility of diverse EU-level data collection options and recommend the most feasible methodological framework, all with the aim of achieving regular, comparable and comprehensive data on higher education and VET graduate outcomes across Europe.
2. The second taskforce is examining how best to capture and exchange data on graduates who migrate across countries. The group plans to run a hypothetical 'pilot', developing an approach to sharing data on migrants, assessing the challenges in doing so and highlighting lessons learned and implications for Member States more broadly.
3. The third taskforce is examining administrative data-based graduate tracking systems currently in place across Member States. The group is focusing on three broad domains: socio-biographical and socioeconomic information; information on education and training; and information on employment or further education and training. A list of core variables has been identified and members are currently providing detailed information on the availability of these variables in their country.
4. The fourth taskforce is focused on assessing VET graduate tracking. With VET tracking typically less well developed across Member States, this group will examine capacity building with a view to ensuring data availability and quality across the countries. The group will produce a set of guidelines and standards to support these objectives.

2. Copenhagen process/European VET policy

Expert group 'Platform of European associations of VET providers'

The 'Platform of European Associations of VET providers' set up in 2015 by the European Commission as a follow up to the 2010 Bruges Communiqué cooperates with the EU Commission on the Vocational Skills week (awards, presentations, sharing of good practices), dissemination of EU initiatives at grass root level and suggestions to EU

level, reflection on the post 2020 VET, permeability between VET and HE, etc. Its mandate is coming to an end in 2020 and will be evaluated in the next months.

The Platform contributes to a Cedefop Community of learning providers set up in February 2017, with the objective of deepened cooperation, mutual learning on selected themes. For the 2017-20 period, three themes will be dealt with in three parallel sub-groups focussed on the collection of good practices:

1. Learning providers and the challenge of TEL (Technology Enhanced Learning): enhancing teachers' and trainers' skills,
2. Learning providers and EU mobility: reinforcing learning attractiveness and employability,
3. Learning providers and migration: empowerment and integration through learning.

During the European Vocational Skills Week in Helsinki in October 2019, the Community will meet to develop a final report with recommendations and good practices and present these to other VET stakeholders.

European Vocational Skills Week

This year the [European Vocational Skills Week 2019](#) will take place in Helsinki, Finland, from 14 to 18 October. Some 40 meetings will take place, and logistics provision will be put in place to anticipate the attendance of up to 1000 people. Included in the meeting schedule will be a major conference on VET for All – Skills for Life, a conference on VET in and for the world, another landmark meeting of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, an awards ceremony and dinner, and a closing celebration. A communications campaign is nearly ready to go. This will include social and traditional media engagement, a mapping of Week-associated events/activities, videos, communications toolkits, press releases, newsletters, share your story options, support for 20-30 Ambassadors, and support for a series of awards.

European Alliance for Apprenticeships

The 5th anniversary of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) was celebrated in Vienna in November last year. The Alliance welcomed over 30 new members, amongst them 11 Austrian companies. Since the launch of the Alliance in 2013, almost 300 members have joined the Alliance. In total they have pledged more than 906,000 apprenticeship offers.

There are several EAfA events taking place throughout 2019. It started with an event in March organised together with the European Parliament and MEP Jean Arthuis, focusing on the mobility of apprentices (ErasmusPRO), and with an event 20-21 May in the Czech Republic focusing on the role of Chambers, organised in cooperation with the Czech Chamber of Commerce. The EAfA meeting during the Skills Week in Helsinki will focus on apprenticeships for adults.

In addition, a European Apprentices Network was launched in May 2017 in order to give voice to European Apprentices and support EU policy making and implementation of apprenticeships policies.

Apprenticeship Support Services:

The adoption of the Council Recommendation on European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships was a key milestone in 2018. As the key follow-up action to the Council Recommendation on EFQEA, the Commission launched an Apprenticeship Support Services at the European Vocational Skills Week in Vienna in November 2018. The aim is to support Member States in their reform process to improve apprenticeship systems. The Support Services are built around three pillars:

- A knowledge-hub to share and access information relevant to apprenticeship design and delivery and to have a simplified access to apprenticeships related studies, evidence or statistical data;
- A networking hub to facilitate the exchange of ideas and the development of cooperation amongst stakeholders;
- Bench-learning (based on the PES bench-learning model combining benchmarking with peer learning) to provide a structured process and approach to mutual learning among Member States on improving their apprenticeship systems.

While the first two pillars are open to all EAfA stakeholders (EU Member States, Candidate Countries and EFTA members, as well as businesses, social partners, chambers, VET providers, regions, youth representatives and think tanks) the bench-learning pillar is targeting EU Member States.

Peer learning activity on the benefits of credit systems for curricula, qualifications and validation, on 22-23 May 2019, in Tallinn

The PLA will investigate the practices for the use of ECVET principles in VET curriculum design and the recognition of prior learning in countries that have established a credit system in VET. In particular, the participants will present and discuss the specific concepts and methods applied and how the use of credit, credit points and credit systems support the design of VET qualifications and curricula and the recognition of prior learning. Five EQF AG members will participate in the PLA.

3. **Bologna process**

In the current phase of the Bologna process, until the next ministerial conference in June 2020, the activities of the different peer groups and advisory groups will focus mainly on strengthened implementation of key commitments made for structural reforms in the countries of the European Higher Education Area. An Advisory Group is working on a document to be signed by ministers next year, on how governments could support innovation in learning and teaching. An Advisory Group on the Social Dimension is working on a similar document, specifically in this domain. The Commission is supporting the implementation of the commitments of the Paris Communiqué by a designated call (Erasmus+, Key Action 3). A similar call is planned to be published soon.

ECTS conference in Prague

The conference on ECTS will take place on 4 June in Prague. The conference is organized within the framework of the Thematic Peer Group A on Qualification Frameworks which was established by the BFUG to promote the implementation of the Key Commitment 1: a three-cycle system compatible with the overarching frameworks of the EHEA and first and second cycle degrees scaled by ECTS. One of the subthemes of the Peer Group is the complete implementation of the ECTS User's Guide.

The conference will focus on what national governments should do to implement a credit system for higher education in line with EHEA commitments and is open to representatives of EHEA governments, representatives of national agencies responsible for ECTS and/or EHEA issues and QA agencies representatives.

Joint meeting of the ENIC-NARIC networks

The next joint meeting of the ENIC-NARIC networks will take place in Cologne, 16-18 June 2019. It will discuss relevant developments concerning the Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad. In line with the Paris Communique of the Bologna Ministers, the challenges and pre-conditions of recognising short cycle qualifications will be discussed. The ENIC-NARIC networks will also explore digital credentialing (during which the Europass digital credentials framework will be presented) and the validation of informal and non-formal learning outcomes from a lifelong learning perspective. Finally, a workshop will be dedicated to reflections on international level 'Framework to Framework' comparisons, using EQF as a translation device. Here the comparison of Quality and Qualifications Ireland, the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework and the New Zealand Qualifications will be presented.

Erasmus without Paper

Erasmus without Paper is an umbrella term for a series of projects that digitise and streamline Erasmus+ Mobility management procedures for students and universities. This includes sending and receiving Transcript of Records for the recognition of credits earned abroad and filling in and approving the Online Learning Agreement, where course selection and recognition is agreed upon by the student and sending and receiving universities.

The Online Learning Agreement can be connected to online course catalogues so the information about courses can be automatically added to the document, thus minimising the chances of errors. These developments also help facilitate "Automatic Mutual Recognition" in line with the Council Recommendation, by contributing to more transparent and efficient digital processes.

The aim is to gradually scale up this initiative to all student mobility, i.e. beyond the Erasmus+ programme, as part of the wider European Student Card initiative.

The Official launch of Erasmus Without Paper Network took place in Ghent, December 2018. The network streamlines data exchanges between universities to facilitate

Erasmus+ student mobility. For more information on how universities can adopt digital programme management, we invite them to visit the [EWP Competence Centre.](#) [The Open Source University Alliance](#) has been launched to support and promote joint development of IT solutions and minimise costs. The platform is also useful to discuss digital solutions for higher education in Europe in general.

Higher Education Institutions can also include the testing of the available functionalities and the implementation of digital programme management in an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership, in line with the priorities laid out in the 2019 and 2020 Erasmus+ Annual Work programme.

4. ESCO

Following discussions with the ESCO Member States Working Group and the ESCO Maintenance Committee, the Commission is currently working on a skills structure (hierarchy) for the ESCO Skills Pillar, which will enlarge and improve the current ESCO search engine. The work started in March 2019 with a view of concluding with the structure groups around mid-2019. The Commission will also start working in June on the transversal skills of ESCO with a view to improve and expand them. The two work strands (skills hierarchy and transversal skills) will run in parallel and in close cooperation, in order to have aligned results since both work strands refer to the same ESCO Skills Pillar.

Following the discussion in the joint meeting of 6 February 2019 between the EQF Advisory Group and ESCO Member States Working Group, the Commission launched a pilot for linking learning outcomes of qualifications with ESCO skills. This aims to enrich information on qualifications, so that employers can more easily grasp the labour market value of a qualification (in particular in a cross border context) and individuals can see their chances on the labour market improved through a better matching based on richer qualifications information.

The pilot will examine a limited number of diverse qualifications with different description styles, which will be sourced from National Qualification Frameworks that have been referenced to the EQF (covering both VET and Higher Education qualifications). Four countries will actively participate in the pilot and two countries will be observer. A workshop will be organised with these six countries on 19 June. The Pilot will last until late 2019 and should result in an IT to support for automated linking between learning outcomes and ESCO skills.

Finally, the Commission will soon start work for scoping ESCO's next major version (version 1.1). The aim is for ESCO to remain fit-for-purpose for the use in various IT applications that deliver services to end-users and to reflect changes such as new occupations; new knowledge, skills and competences in education and training curricula; technological development; and new expectations by IT end-users.

Through this scoping work, ESCO will be updated in a cycle consisting of four phases: 1) preparatory phase including the collection, analysis and structuring of feedback; 2) scoping of the new version of ESCO; 3) knowledge engineering of the reference version,

including quality assured translation in all ESCO languages; and 4) release of ESCO version 1.1 on the ESCO portal. The scoping will include consultation phases with Member States, currently scheduled for mid-2020, early 2021 and mid-2021, before ESCO version 1.1 is published in December 2021.

5. Validation of non-formal and informal learning

One off reports on validation

In the context of the EQF AG, Member States have agreed to present one off reports on their policy response to the Recommendation. Eight countries (DE, LU, LV, AT, PT, DK, PL, NO) have already presented their one off report to the EQF AG and one country (FR) will present its report during the EQF AG of 11-12 June.

European Inventory

The inventory update is progressing as planned, with the aim to be published before the end of 2019. All country reports have been checked by the EQF AG members. Analysis of information from the existing country reports has started and a first draft of the synthesis report is now being finalised. Preliminary findings were shared at the 3rd Biennale on validation of prior learning taking place on 7-8 May in Berlin.

Draft thematic reports on the following themes are now being finalised:

- Bridging the Gap: Validation creating routes and links between sectors
- Validation of non-formal and informal learning for migrants and refugees
- The role of validation in an upskilling pathway for young NEETs, adults with low-skill levels and long-term unemployed
- How digital forms of assessment and self-assessment might place a new challenge and opportunity for assessment methodologies
- How social partners (chambers of industry and commerce, trade unions) and other labour market-related stakeholders are involved in validation arrangements

The following three case studies on international practice will also be included in the Inventory:

- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in Nova Scotia (CAN)
- Integration of validation of non-formal and informal learning into credit-based learning recognised by the Hong Kong Qualification Framework (HKQF)
- National System of Certification of Labour Competences - ChileValora- Chile

Evaluation of the Council Recommendation on VNFIL

The study to support the evaluation of the 2012 Recommendation. The evaluation study will add additional empirical evidence on the implementation of the Recommendation and the impacts it has had including on final beneficiaries of validation. The draft final

report, which will be one of the sources for the Commission reporting to the Council on the implementation of the Recommendation, is planned for mid-November 2019.

The inception meeting took place on 14 May. While the study will use findings from the European Inventory on validation as a major factual knowledge base, it also envisages:

1. an analysis of relevant literature,
2. about 120 key informant interviews,
3. an open public consultation (June to September),
4. two expert group meetings in Brussels, probably after mid-October.

As concerns key informant interviews, taking into account the discussion in the extraordinary EQ AG meeting of 6 May 2019, the contractor will:

- propose an interview to each EQF AG member;
- ask each EQF AG member to suggest a person to be interviewed.

Validation of Prior Learning Biennale (Berlin, 7-8 May 2019)

The Validation of Prior Learning [Biennale](#) took place in Berlin back to back with the extraordinary meeting of the EQF AG on validation. The Biennale gathered around 300 participants, a mixture of social partners, researchers, practitioners and policy makers. The participants worked on the development of a Document, the Berlin Declaration, that is meant as a grassroots push for both stakeholders and policy makers to make validation policies more efficient and effective.

6. Upskilling pathways

Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults - Taking stock of implementation measures

The implementation report on Upskilling Pathways was published as part of the European semester package on 27.02.2019, as a [Commission Staff Working Document (SWD (2019) 89 final).](#) The Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways provides that at the latest by mid-2018, Member States should offer access to upskilling pathways to low qualified adults to acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital competence and/or a wider set of skills, knowledge and competences by making progress towards a qualification at EQF level 3 or 4. This should follow a three step approach, consisting of a skills assessment, a tailored learning offer and validation and recognition of the skills acquired. The stocktaking of the report draws on the information provided by the Member States on the measures that they have outlined for the implementation of the Recommendation. This information is supplemented with relevant data from the National Reform Programmes, European and international statistical data. The report concludes that more action is required from Member States if they are to achieve the objectives of the Recommendation. The Romanian Presidency is preparing Council Conclusions to help increase commitment to reach more of the currently over 61 million adults aged 25 to 64 in the EU who need upskilling opportunities. The Council Conclusions are expected to be adopted by the Education Council on 22 May 2019.

Second Policy learning forum on upskilling pathways: a vision for the future

Cedefop, together with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), is organising on 20 and 21 May 2019 in Brussels, the Second Policy Learning Forum on upskilling pathways: a vision for the future.

Cedefop's Fora on upskilling pathways are a series of events aimed at providing a platform for countries to come together to learn from one another and explore common challenges in upskilling and reskilling adults with low level of skills.

Building on the outcomes and common challenges identified in the first PLF of 2018, the second PLF will have a focus on Analytical Framework for Upskilling Pathways developed by Cedefop as tool for supporting countries in the implementation process.

Conference: "Adult upskilling and reskilling, Balancing the labour market", Bucharest, 6-7 June 2019

This Romanian Presidency Conference will provide a forum for discussing the key findings of the Stocktaking Report on Upskilling Pathways. It aims to generate a new momentum for sustaining implementation efforts in the future, identifying innovative solutions and financing mechanisms for the delivery of upskilling and reskilling opportunities for all.

Guidance

A study on "Lifelong Guidance policy & practice in the EU: trends, challenges and opportunities" is ongoing. A first expert workshop to collect feedback from relevant stakeholders on preliminary findings took place on 15 May.

The 2019 edition of the European Vocational Skills Week will take place from 14- 18 October 2019 in Helsinki. On 16 – 17 October the conference "VET for All- Skills for Life" Conference will take place with 6 parallel workshops taking place on 17 October. One of the workshops will discuss and generate insights into possible ways to coordinate the provision of guidance and validation. Cedefop and the Commission will co-organise the workshop.

7. Cedefop publications

Cedefop's European NQF inventory 2018 has been published

The country chapters for the 2018 update of the European Inventory on national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) have been drafted in close cooperation with the EQF AG members and EQF NCPs. The chapters draw on a number of sources including the European Commission and Cedefop survey on implementation, communication and use of NQF/EQF, referencing reports, legal tests, policy documents and studies at national and European level.

The European NQF inventory – available since 2009 – offers a wealth of information on the state of the art of 39 European countries' national frameworks and on how they relate to the EQF, including NQFs overview tables. A briefing note is also available.

Online job vacancies and skills analysis

This [publication](#) outlines the main features of online job vacancies and the key characteristics of Cedefop's new system to collect and analyse them. It accompanies the first release of results based on the collection and analysis of online job vacancies in seven EU Member States.

Over recent decades, online job portals have become an important recruitment and job search tools. Beyond assisting skills matching, the job vacancies these portals gather can also be used to analyse labour market trends in real time, generating evidence that can inform education and training policies and help ensure that people's skills meet the needs of rapidly changing workplaces.

Skills for green jobs: 2018 update - European synthesis report

Cedefop, in cooperation with the ILO, has updated a European synthesis report of 2010 on 'green skills' and 'green jobs' in six EU countries (Denmark, Germany, Spain, Estonia, France and the UK). The [report](#) examines the major changes in green jobs and employment since 2010, and analyses the regulations and policies supporting green skills and employment, including the surrounding institutional set-up and the role played by social partners. It also highlights good practices, including green skill anticipation mechanisms, relevant vocational education and training and higher education, active labour market policies and retraining measures, and the role of the private sector.

Spotlight on VET – 2018 compilation - Vocational education and training systems in Europe

Concise, clear and concrete pictures of countries' vocational education and training systems: this is what the Cedefop Spotlight on VET series offers. Building on individual country Spotlights, this [publication](#) brings together the main features and data of VET in the EU, Iceland and Norway.