Learning Opportunities in Europass

Follow-up to the subgroup on Learning Opportunities

Fourth Meeting of the Europass Advisory Group
12 and 13 June 2019

1. Purpose of the document

This discussion paper summarises the main outcomes of the temporary subgroup on Learning Opportunities in the new Europass. Based on the outcomes the Commission has proposed a number of next steps to support provision of information on learning opportunities in the new Europass.

The Europass Advisory Group is invited to give feedback on the key messages and proposed next steps.

2. Background

The 2018 Europass Decision sets out that the Europass platform shall provide information on learning opportunities, notably -

Article 3(2) [...] The Europass online platform shall provide available information or links to available information on the following topics: (a) learning opportunities; [...]

Article 7 (1) Each Member State shall be responsible for the implementation of this Decision at national level through the relevant national services and without prejudice to national arrangements in terms of implementation and organisation.

In that regard Member States shall: [...] (d) make information on learning opportunities, qualifications and recognition practices available on the Europass online platform, including through links to relevant national websites; [...]

2. The provision of information to the Europass online platform under Article 3(2) shall not create any additional obligations for Member States.

Following the Advisory Group meeting of 14 March 2019 a temporary subgroup was established to discuss an approach to learning opportunities in the new Europass.

The following members were nominated; no requests to participate were refused:

- **11 Member State authorities:** Belgium, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, North Macedonia, Slovenia and Sweden;
- **4 stakeholder organisations:** European Volunteer Centre (CEV), European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE), Eurochambres and Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLP)

3. Process

The Subgroup met twice in Brussels.

The first meeting on 10 April discussed:

- *'For whom':* Who will be the users of information on learning opportunities in the new Europass?
- *'Why':* What are the needs of these users based upon your experience?

- *'What': What kind of learning opportunities should be visible via Europass to meet user needs?'*

The second meeting on 16 May discussed:

- *How can we implement the ambition for learning opportunities in the new Europass based upon key messages of 'what' should feature as expressed in the first meeting?*
- *What national (or other) sources of information exist on types of learning opportunities and experiences of technical solutions to presenting such information*
- *How do we structure/present/maintain/update content so that it is user friendly and relevant?*
- *Are there gaps that we don't yet know how to plug? Are there priorities for action in Phase 1 implementation*

In between meetings, members added to a list of potential sources of information on learning opportunities (which had been drawn up by the Commission based upon feedback included in an earlier survey of national practices on learning opportunities (see EPASS 3-6 from the Europass AG meeting of 14 March 2019)).

Group membership can be found in *Annex 1*

The list of potential sources for learning opportunities is *Annex 2*

4. Key Messages

Target audience – 'for whom'

The main user group for the learning opportunities part of Europass was identified as: -

Geographically Mobile learners (or individuals considering mobility), in particular in the higher education and training sector and higher VET.

In addition, the following potential user groups were highlighted: -

- Guidance practitioners, who advise their clientele on learning mobility, but also on other matters linked to studying, training, working, career planning and so on
- General public, including parents of young people
- Employers and HR professionals, who are interested in staff development
- Credential evaluators, who are giving advice or are taking formal decisions on recognition of learning opportunities completed in another country

Objective – 'why'

Participants advised that information on learning opportunities should:

- support mobility (for learning, training, working and volunteering).There was consensus that most (potential) individual users or those advising them are likely to have access to national/regional information but reliable information on learning opportunities outside their country is more difficult to find
- support education and training choices and transitions between work and learning

- support lifelong learning
- several participants underlined that trustworthiness/quality of the content is a likely motivation for using a platform such as Europass.

Overall, participants felt that the Europass platform should demonstrate the value of an EU-wide portal that is not led by commercial operators

Content – 'what'

Participants highlighted the following general principles regarding the types of learning opportunities that should be included in the new Europass:

- Learning should be understood as broadly as possible - not just courses leading to qualifications.
- Diverse modes of learning should be included (full-time/part-time, short/long courses, classroom, online; blended learning) and contexts (classroom, training, work, and volunteering, internships/traineeships, apprenticeships and language learning).
- The quality of learning opportunities should be robust.
- There was a proposal for a quality assurance mechanism, engaging individual end-users in reviewing learning offers, but a significant number of participants advised that only publicly quality-assured learning opportunities should be considered.
- Information on context and support is needed, such as access to guidance and tools to support career management and learning, as well as practical information on national systems (i.a. qualifications landscape, living conditions, access to courses/programmes, recognition of previous learning and work experiences, funding schemes, legal requirements) and support structures

Regarding the specific types of learning opportunities to be included:

- o There was broad consensus that learning opportunities at EQF levels 3-8 should be included as priority:
  - o Such learning opportunities, which are included in national education and training systems and/or qualifications frameworks, are quality assured in national contexts;
  - o This would encompass a range of opportunities from higher education and training, vocational education and training, upper secondary education and adult education opportunities. It would also capture online learning where this is part of national qualification frameworks.
- o A number of representatives also highlighted the value of including information on volunteering opportunities, especially considering that volunteers are identified as a Europass target audience in the Europass Decision.
- o A number of representatives also highlighted the importance of being open to non-formal learning opportunities which are not included in national qualifications frameworks. These

could include industry-oriented learning opportunities (e.g. a 3-week Artificial Intelligence course) or other learning of potential interest to Europass users, especially users who may be combining learning with other activities such as work.

How

o A phased approach was supported as the most realistic approach to provision of information on learning opportunities in the new Europass.

o Participants stressed that technical solutions should be used to avoid manual input or uploading to limit the administrative burden. Learning opportunities should be drawn directly from existing repositories such as national databases of qualifications insofar as possible.

o When considering which 'ponds to fish in' for content, a gap was highlighted between the aspiration to deliver comprehensive and diverse content with the availability of reliable sources.

o Webcrawling was highlighted as a potential way to obtain more diverse content but it was felt that this comes with challenges in verifying quality. Specific websites could be scraped if there is confidence in the quality of the offer included in those sites

o Regarding volunteering opportunities two possible avenues were highlighted:

i) openness to the inclusion of volunteering opportunities where these were already included in EU level portals eg. European Solidarity Corps;

ii) a possible checklist or guidelines on things to look out for when considering volunteering opportunities as a standalone text rather than the inclusion of specific individual volunteering opportunities. There was some caution expressed, however, regarding the 'guidance' nature of such an approach.

o Updating information – there was clear consensus that responsibility should rest with the provider. In some cases, national authorities have mechanisms in place to ensure that providers eg. training organisations updates are automatically updated to national databases

o Discussion on how individual users should receive information on learning opportunities included both 'pushing' suggested opportunities to match information in the users Europass profile, and 'pulled' opportunities resulting from a search facility. Some participants indicated a preference for a user-profile entry point to tailor searches.

o Participants stressed the importance of accessibility in the context of presenting the information on learning opportunities on the platform.

4 Next steps

o   The Commission proposes that practical work on the inclusion of learning opportunities in the new Europass platform should be taken forward in a phased approach.

o   As first priority, in phase 1 learning opportunities at EQF levels 3-8 should be addressed. To take this forward the Commission will review the list of sources (Annex 2) provided by Europass AG, and Working Group members to:

   (1) identify sources that include EQF 3-8 learning opportunities; and

   (2) work with national authorities to establish readiness to connect with the Europass platform

o   The Commission will also investigate other EU sources of information on learning opportunities (e.g. Solidarity Corps) in line with the principles above

o   The data model, minimum criteria and other technical information (ie data needed on each learning opportunity such as programme title, duration etc) will be drafted by the Commission and shared with the Europass Advisory Group and relevant stakeholders for consultation. In doing so, the Commission will ensure consistency with the data model for qualifications. Several participants of the working group indicated their willingness to help with technical work.

o   The learning opportunities phase 1 functionality of Europass will be included in the testing foreseen Autumn 2019

o   **For Phase 2**, the Commission will explore how volunteering opportunities and other non-formal learning opportunities which are not already included in NQFs could supplement the Phase 1 information. This will be brought back to the Advisory Group for discussion.

Annex 1: Participants

Annex 2: List of potential sources