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Lifelong learning: horizontal policy issues and 2020 strategy
Unit A.3: Skills and Qualifications strategies, multilingualism policy.

**Joint meeting of the European networks EUROPASS, EUROGUIDANCE
and EQF NCPs**

6 Nov 2013

Hotel La Plaza, Brussels, Belgium

Minutes

Agenda

09.00-09.30 Welcome coffee.

09.30-09.40 Meeting: welcome and approval of the agenda

Ana Carla Pereira, Head of Unit, EAC A3: Skills and Qualifications; multilingualism policies

09.40-11.00 Policy updates from DG EAC

Update on the latest policy developments in EU's Education and Training policies.

- Opening up Education (DG EAC A3)
- Latest developments on ESCO (DG EMPL)
- Commission's Communication on the internationalisation of higher education (DG EAC C4)
- Latest development on Erasmus+ (DG EAC B3)
- Latest initiatives on Youth Employment (DG EAC A1).

11.00-11.15 Coffee break

11.15-12.45 Brief presentations of Europass, Euroguidance and EQF NCPs

Common presentation of the work of Europass, Euroguidance and EQF-NCPs by a national representative per network and DG EAC.

12.45-14.00 Lunch

14.00-14.40 The European Area for skills and qualification (EASQ) - perspectives.

Presentation by Mr Pierre Mairesse, Director Dir. A, DG EAC.

14.40-16.00 EASQ and Europass, Euroguidance and EQF NCPs: options for the future (2014 and beyond).

Discussion on the implications of the EASQ for the European networks.

16.00-16.30 Implications of the New Financial Regulation under Erasmus +.

Presentation by the EACEA

16.30-17.00 Any other business

Evening Joint dinner with the representatives of the group "Qualifications Frameworks for the European Higher Education Area"

All meeting documents and presentations have been uploaded at the meeting's site <http://EUnetworks-meeting.teamwork.fr>

Meeting: welcome and approval of the agenda

Ana Carla Pereira, Head of Unit, EAC A3: Skills and Qualifications; multilingualism policies

Ana Carla Pereira (DG EAC) welcomed the participants to the first joint meeting of the three networks. In presenting the agenda she emphasised the main reasons for the meeting:

- To discuss the commission's idea on a European Area for Skills and Qualifications (EASQ) with the networks directly involved, to share initial thoughts and explore the role of the different networks in this process.
- To present the networks to each other in order to foster cooperation and synergies by sharing information on roles and tasks in each network.
- To present and discuss further topics relevant for all three networks.

Policy updates from DG EAC

Update on the latest policy developments in EU's Education and Training policies.

Opening up Education (DG EAC A3)

Ana Carla Pereira (DG EAC) presented the policy initiative on Opening up Education (OUE) (cf.Prezi).

Questions, comments and answers

- Is the Communication on Opening up Education available?
 - The participants will be provided with the link to the corresponding webpage.
- Will the portal of on Opening up Education be linked to Ploteus?
 - This will be discussed in the context of EASQ and Opening up Education. One of the aims of streamlining tools will imply bringing together various web tools. At the moment the joining of EQF Portal and Ploteus is under process; further actions are yet to be conceived.

Ana Carla Pereira added that the development of Europass Experience has been put on hold due to the development of the EASQ. A Commission report on the Europass evaluation will be published on Dec,2013, one of the results will be that the structure of Europass might need evolution in order to cope with changes such as online learning etc.; adding Europass Experience to the structure at this point seems untimely.

She stressed that issues of informal and nonformal learning are still important, but the Commission sees a need for a more flexible framework allowing for a more tailor-made approach in the use of Europass. The success of Europass CV exceeds that of the other documents by far, so the question has to be asked if we have the right tools. Also, the legal

base of Europass does not allow for any change – adding Europass Experience as a new document would need a long bureaucratic process.

Latest developments on ESCO (DG EMPL)

Martin le Vrang (DG EMPL) presented the European Taxonomy of Skills, Competences and Occupations (ESCO) (cf. prezi).

Questions, comments and answers

- What are the Commission's plans with the different portals? If EURES will have to work with ESCO – what about PLOTEUS and EQF Portal? If ESCO has to be included or integrated, the member states have to raise funds for that work.
 - The ESCO portal is not to be merged with other portals as it is very limited in scope. ESCO rather helps to access the content of classifications by providing a standardised classification.
 - Ana Carla Pereira (DG EAC): In the context of Erasmus+, the Commission has foreseen a feasibility study on the interconnectivity of different portals with their respective databases and services (e.g. Europass, EQF Portal, PLOTEUS). In this study, the possibility of bringing ESCO into the interconnectivity process will be surveyed.
- Will the Europass CV be integrated in EURES?
 - Philippe Tissot (CEDEFOP): It will be possible to upload the Europass CV on EURES, as well as to extract it from EURES in a correct format, thus assuring interoperability.
 - Martin le Vrang (COM DG EMPL): ESCO will also be used for matching as soon as it is integrated in both portals.

Commission's Communication on the internationalisation of higher education (DG EAC C4)

Ragnhild Berg (DG EAC, Unit for International Cooperation and Programmes) presented the Commission's Communication on the internationalisation of higher education (HE) outside the European Union (cf. ppt).

Questions, comments and answers

- Why is internationalisation not pursued for education as a whole, i.e. General Education, HE and VET?
 - The current programmes support cooperation with HE institutions in third countries; cooperation on other levels of education is already established on European level, and there is some cooperation outside the EU, too.

- Do these programmes cooperate with EHEA? And will Europass be relevant for countries outside Europe?
 - There is cooperation with EHEA in the form of regular meetings. As for Europass – this initiative was developed in a different setting. The question whether Europass will be relevant for countries outside Europe will be addressed in discussing possible options for the future of Europass.

Latest initiatives on Youth Employment (DG EAC A1)

Silvia Kalman (DG EAC) reported the latest EU initiative on the reduction of youth unemployment (cf. ppt).

Sigve Bjorstad (DG EAC) summed up information about the alliance for apprenticeships, a common initiative by DG EAC and DG EMPL (cf. ppt).

Ana Carla Pereira (DG EAC) pointed out that seeing guidance as a basic principle in the youth guarantee, a cooperation with Public Employment Services on national level seems fruitful. She invited participants to see how guidance can play a role in the implementation of the youth guarantee on national level.

Latest development on Erasmus+ (DG EAC B3)

Jose Pessanha (DG EAC) presented the main features of the new programme (cf. ppt).

Ana Carla Pereira (DG EAC) remarked that the support for the networks will be done through Key action 3 in Erasmus+ "Support for policy reform" and will be dealt at central level by the EACEA (Executive agency).

Koen Nomden (DG EAC) explained implications of the transition period for specific calls: the mandate for the national centres is in preparation. The Commission is working on the calls for proposals for the networks, and they will be sent out still this year. The deadline for submitting applications will be six weeks from then, taking into account Christmas holidays. It can be expected that for 2014, there will not be many changes compared to 2013.

Member States will receive a letter from the Commission asking to designate respective centres and contact points. These designations should be sent back to the Commission as soon as possible as they will be needed for contractualisation. Then the mandates of centres and contact points will be in place. The relevant information will be circulated soon.

Questions, comments and answers

- What if there is a law designating the national organisation responsible for the network? Is that enough or is the letter of designation necessary?
 - Submit the letter and attach the law to it.
- The EU stresses often the need to increase quality and status of VET; yet, most of the money in education and training and Erasmus+ goes to HE. Distribution of funding should be more balanced if we want to improve the status of VET.

- The funding is a decision of the legislator; but the importance of mobility is relevant. It reflects the success of the former Erasmus programme that it is being extended beyond present objectives and promotes further mobility. It was felt that resources attached to VET commensurate with the capacity of the financial structures – the funding has to be regarded as complementary to other sources of funding, e.g. ESF. In that way the view could be rebalanced.
- Will the action on volunteers and youth also include young people who are still in school as a target group?
 - Further information on that topic will be provided.
- Who will have to send the designation letter - the ministry?
 - Koen Nomden (DG EAC): The Commission will write to the relevant institution which will then distribute the information.
- Will cooperation programmes with e.g. Canada, USA, Korea, Japan be continued in Erasmus +?
 - This policy cooperation will continue as Erasmus Mundus is integrated in Erasmus+. There will be the same types of actions for mobility in and outside the EU.

Ana Carla Pereira (COM DG EAC) complemented that written information on volunteering action and on mobility outside the EU will be provided.

Brief presentations of Europass, Euroguidance and EQF NCPs

Common presentation of the work of Europass, Euroguidance and EQF-NCPs by a national representative per network and DG EAC

A short survey among the participants showed that although only few countries have a structure that coordinates the cooperation of the three networks there were hardly any participants who had met representatives from the other networks in their country for the first time in this meeting.

Presentation of Europass

Pedro Chaves (DG EAC) presented the Europass network from an European point of view complemented by Susanna Kärki (FI) who provided information from a national point of view, with Finland as an example (cf. ppt).

Questions, comments and answers

- Ana Carla Pereira (DG EAC) asked the representatives from the Euroguidance network and EQF NCPs if they have learned anything new from these presentations. The answers were as follows:

- The Austrian representative had not known that people were not aware that the certificate supplement is a part of Europass.
- The Greek representative reported a close cooperation between the networks in Greece but still recommended more frequent meetings.
- Pedro Chaves (DG EAC) asked the Euroguidance representatives if citizens asked them about Europass or if Euroguidance people provided information on Europass.
 - According to the Greek representative, guidance counsellors are trained about Europass, and more activities are being planned. The Greek Euroguidance team also addresses audiences in specific events on Europass for career planning, and all Euroguidance centers use Europass.
 - The Italian representative informed about a survey with focus on the impact of Europass on the labour market. She also stressed the importance of cooperation between networks on institutional level which is quite strong in Italy.
- When CVs have the form of Youtube videos etc, will it be able to integrate that in Europass?
 - Ana Carla Pereira (DG EAC) answered that Europass should be flexible enough to address various demands such as new ICT approaches in documenting skills. There is a need for collective reflection on the way Europass documents should look like. Any information of the impact of Europass on national level is welcome, as well as suggestions on how Europass could look like in the future. The legal basis for Europass is extremely rigid; all current Europass documents are identified in the founding regulation and cannot be changed. A more flexible legal base is needed to provide Europass with the flexibility to adapt to changing needs.
 - Pedro Chaves (DG EAC) indicated that Europass encompasses wide target audiences- for instance youngsters with their first CVs have to be taken into account as well as older target groups that are not so used to using CVs.
 - Susanna Kärki (FI) stressed the notion of accessibility connected with Europass and the understanding of Europass as a basket of different tools: It is possible to use a different CV format but include other Europass tools in it.

Presentation of Euroguidance

Chiara Riondino (DG EAC) provided information on Euroguidance in general, Concetta Fonzo (IT) reported on Euroguidance in Italy (cf. ppt).

Questions, comments and answers

- In Austria, all tools are administered in one organisation, too, and this is very fruitful. Cooperation with other bodies on national level boost each initiative.

Presentation of EQF NCPs

Pedro Chaves (DG EAC) gave an overall presentation on the EQF NCPs, Stefan Skimutis (SE) introduced the Swedish EQF NCP as an example (cf. ppt)

Questions, comments and answers

- Ana Carla Pereira (DG EAC) asked about the coordination between networks in countries without a single umbrella organisation – is there a duplication of work, or is efficiency provided?
 - In Latvia, even for Euroguidance there are different agencies responsible. But there are joint activities on different levels: regular meetings with networks to discuss activities, find synergies and create common projects, produce common publications for dissemination and organise common seminars. The network websites providing information on the other networks have banners leading to the other networks.

The European Area for skills and qualification (EASQ) - perspectives.

Presentation by Mr Pierre Mairesse, Director Dir. A, DG EAC.

Pierre Mairesse (DG EAC) presented the current state of play on EASQ (cf. ppt).

Questions, comments and answers

- Won't EASQ be implemented very slowly, with all the consultations, studies etc. connected with it?
 - In these initiatives the Commission has not only to identify the right issues but has to consider the political pace as well. In 2014 a solid basis on skills and qualifications will be built for next five years.
- What about tools like ECTS that belong to another political process? And why the Directive on professional qualifications is not include on the tools to be evaluated? As education and training are subsidiarity matters what are the limits for and responsibilities of the Commission's actions? Geographical and legal perimeters are to be reflected upon: EQF is an EU tool, the Qualification framework for HE is from the Council of Europe... how is this considered in order not to become counterproductive?
 - Up to now Recommendations were used – they were good, short, but not legally binding. In liaison with challenges like the current crisis, it will become visible if this is good instrument. As for responsibility and subsidiarity: This question is relevant for all EU competencies – what is the role on the European level when implementation happens on a national level. These questions will be interesting in the revision of EASQ – it has to be made sure we do not internationalise everything.
- Will the Directive for Regulated Professions be considered in EASQ's context?
 - Work on this Directive was rather technical, it considered learning outcome-based qualifications but being obliged to accept other outputs such as hours of trainings. The work done in the context of this Directive is also related to the political pace.

- Ana Carla Pereira (DG EAC): There will be a follow-up of the Directive. One of the elements agreed upon is the establishment of common European frameworks in some regulated professions. There is a scope to include a learning outcomes approach and the EQF approach as part of common training frameworks to be developed. Work on these will start now, and it will be up to the educational world to feed into that reflection.
- With EASQ, can we work with the existing tools and there will not be any others?
 - There is no plan for new tools. Five years ago the Commission proposed the European Skills Panorama and ESCO as new tools in “New Skills for New Jobs”. Introducing them was right because they tackle the issue of intelligence [in a way that went beyond the existing tools]. We can see a fatigue of new tools, so we started to reflect on a map of our tools. We are aware that issues like the registration of skills and qualifications, validation and recognition, intelligence have to be covered. But we cannot promise that all tools will be rationalised, in terms of coherence and simplification.
- It is a question of targeting, marketing - who are the target groups of different tools, how to communicate with them? It is necessary to clarify the thinking in target groups.
 - We do not want to harmonise but we need a clear strategy concerning the tools that are targeted, coherent and useful for the citizens. It is also a question of balance: there should be no more small tools, but also not one big solution. Balance is also needed between a sectoral and a cross sectoral approach.
- The impact of instruments depends on their implementation; thus voluntary implementation with legally non binding regulations is limited. Is this approach enough? The focus of EASQ should be on the learner side; are there ideas to include the world of work (employers) so that they can feel that they also own the initiative like the educational world does?

The question of voluntary vs. imposing something is not specific to this kind of problem, it is common on EU level to have this balance between voluntary action/compulsory action to Member States. For EASQ we need political reflection and consultation on these issues. As for ownership: it is important to provide a possibility for employers to understand skills, mapping between needs and delivered skills. On Commission level, there will be cooperation with DG EMPL; cooperation and dialogue with the social partners is on the agenda for EASQ. Our current priority is skills for the labour market as key element for the new strategy. It is good to see the networks together, and there is a need to prepare initiatives with other networks, too.

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EASQ and Europass, Euroguidance and EQF NCPs: options for the future (2014 and beyond).

Discussion on the implications of the EASQ for the European networks.

Koen Nomden (DG EAC) presented issues for discussion. The participants worked in groups of four people, discussing four questions in ten minutes each. The answers were reported by some groups; written answers from the other groups were collected.

Questions, comments and answers

- What is your current level of cooperation with other national centres / coordination points/networks in the area of education/ training and employment? Any overlaps in activities between different networks on national level?
 - The degree of cooperation between the networks differs between the countries. In some countries, there are tendencies to separation of activities while other countries practice closer cooperation. Having several networks under one umbrella organisation is seen as fostering cooperation.
 - The organisation maybe be related to the size of the country – it was observed that smaller countries might have closer cooperation. In one small country, one person was responsible for all three networks.
 - Cooperation is also a matter of informal networking, not only bound to organisational conditions.
 - In some cases representatives from networks did not know each other; in some countries EQF NCPs in particular were not familiar to the representatives of Europass and Euroguidance.
 - Though organisations might be separate, practically all countries have cooperation on the practical level: there are e.g. joint conferences, meetings, workshops and trainings; common information material is elaborated.
 - One area with broad overlap is on procedures on application and reporting. It is questioned whether to use the word “overlap” or rather “synergy”. Most countries see these tools as different and touching different target groups.
- Suggestions for simplifying and improving the coherence of European transparency and recognition tools (EQF, Europass, ECTS, ECVET, ESG, EQAVET).
 - The regulations and responsibilities for the tools have to be considered in creating coherence and closer links between tools.
 - Target groups have to be considered, too – Europass e.g. is mostly used by citizens, but citizens need not know in detail how EQF works, this is government level.
 - User-friendliness should be enhanced as many tools are very complex for users. Less acronyms and more graphics should be used.

- Issues of target groups and user-friendliness should be met with corresponding communication or marketing strategies.
- Cooperation between the networks should be more intensive, e.g. fostered by Sinapse or by meetings like this one.
- Learning outcomes should be used as a common language to bring the tools together. But the concept of learning outcomes has to be shared – it was questioned whether e.g. various educational institutions share a concept of learning outcomes.
- What is the value added of one stop shops providing integrated services such as European services on learning opportunities, guidance and recognition? What could its features be?
 - An integrated simplified service could be better for the end-user – one phone number, one contact point, one platform to e.g. build electronic portfolios, link them with job opportunities across Europe via EURES and ESCO.
 - Topics to be considered are quality assurance (with quality also being related to resources), user-friendliness, data protection and possible oversimplification.
 - The scope of the one stop shop will have to be balanced in terms of target groups and institutional arrangements: wider and more target groups require more diversified services, but on the other hand the one-stop shop should not turn out to be a department store.
 - The one-stop shop needs to be stable in order to survive political change, e.g. new governments.
- Suggestions for the design of future IT tools to improve European services for citizens in recognition and transparency of skills/qualifications?
 - The development phase of existing tools should be finished and then integrated. Instead of creating new tools, promotion for existing tools should be improved, e.g. by use of social media. More financial resources are needed for creating better availability.
 - It is important to ask the right group about the design – not necessarily the network representatives. Existing platforms should be opened up – the necessity of usernames and passwords was questioned.
 - ESCO must be connected to the EU tools; as for design, it should be kept simple and interactive. At the same time a variety of services should be provided, e.g. information on national verification databases and recognition procedures, a common backbone like the European Skills Passport; the possibility to add and shop different documents, add a video of a skill acquired in an informal or non-formal setting or to prove language literacy.

- There could be a European backpack for every citizen to be used also with mobile devices. Badges for mobility or MOOCs could be created and, included in the backpack, they can be used in the context of guidance, or for official recognition. There should be an umbrella site where users are guided by questions (“What do you need?”) further on to the proper site of the relevant tools.

Ana Carla Pereira (DG EAC) subsumed the results presented by the groups: Different layers to work on EASQ have to be addressed. Some questions are more of a practical nature and help to reflect on how to move on the level of tools, networks, portals to address citizens.

She commented on the question if synergies or more coherence means less funding. In Erasmus+ the funding will be at the same level. But it is clear that if in Member States all networks work under one umbrella it can be questioned if the way it is organised now is the most efficient one – are three networks needed? It is also about helping countries where coordination is more difficult – for end users much of what we do in layers of differentiation is not so relevant. On implementation level it needs balance – what is specific to each network, what is of a more common nature? In terms of the development of IT tools it is clear that no new tools should be developed, but there should be an evolution of existing tools. And if we have certain portals – should this be supported by a service at national level?

Funding for 2013 and 2014 will allow for developing databases that are fundamental to provide this level of information, e.g. learning opportunities databases and qualifications databases. Today there is PLOTEUS, it will be joined with the EQF Portal and get a complete facelift which will enable use in tablets and smartphones: the new face of this portal will meet some of the concerns raised here.

When no data on national level is provided there is no point in keeping the portal. PLOTEUS has 8 countries interconnected, EQF Portal no countries. So first there will be interconnection for those who have databases; the other countries are supported in creating the databases.

In the future there might be scope for interconnectivity - there will be a feasibility study about bringing all elements together in one place for the European citizen. This platform will be backed up by service on national level.

The roadmap for EASQ sees a launch for public consultation in 2013 – the networks are invited to participate in this consultation, either online in a questionnaire or in a position paper. Parallel, there will be a Eurobarometer survey addressing some of these issues to find out about obstacles to describe skills and competences and get them recognised. The results of the consultation and survey will be included in a conference before summer 2014.

Implications of the New Financial Regulation under Erasmus +.

Presentation by the EACEA

Marie-Pascale Balcon (EACEA) presented the new financial regulations under Erasmus+ (cf. ppt). Ana Carla Pereira (DG EAC) invited those who had to leave earlier to ask questions per e-mail.

Questions, comments and answers

- The final 2013 report for Euroguidance is due on March 13th 2013?

- This will be checked, but it should be Feb 21st.
- Does these rules apply to EQF NCPs, too?
 - The same rules apply, even if the type of grants are different (activity grants and operating grants)
- With late January as deadline for applications what is the eligibility period?
 - With a submission in January/February eligibility can start on Feb 1st, but this will be clear in a few days – there are still discussions on that topic.
- If an authority has more than one network, is there a designation letter for each, and if there is a law is a designation letter still needed?
 - What is important is a letter resp. an extract of law where the network name is stipulated.

Ana Carla Pereira (DG EAC) added that if a document is submitted in the original language the Commission will receive it; no translations are needed.

- What about predetermined costs – for 2013 or 2014?
 - Applies to 2013 contracts Europass/Euroguidance, details in contracts. Give proof concerning staff costs, travel costs, ... further questions – send a mail!

Any other business

Philippe Tissot (Cedefop) provided information on the latest developments in the Europass portal (cf. ppt).

Ana Carla Pereira (DG EAC) concluded the meeting.