



Brussels 27 January 2020

## **11<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Member States Working Group on ESCO, 4-5 February 2020**

### **Note ESCO MSWG 11-1**

#### **Note on relevant developments**

This note provides an overview on relevant developments in European cooperation in education, training and employment<sup>1</sup>.

#### **1. The Skills Agenda for Europe**

##### **Implementation of the Skills Agenda of 2016**

###### Update on the development of the new Europass

###### *Testing of the Europass e-Portfolio*

A next round of user experience testing is planned for February 2020 to test user satisfaction (concept, functionalities, user-friendliness) and collect feedback from potential future Europass users. The Commission aims to have the platform translated into all Europass languages by the time of the testing, to be able to test the different language versions of the tools. Feedback will feed into further development of the platform, with a view to public launch in May.

###### *Piloting of the framework for digitally-signed credentials*

Two additional countries joined the pilot of the digital credentials framework at national level – Austria and Cyprus, bringing the total up to 18 participating countries.

All information and updates on the development of the new Europass can be found here: <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/europass>.

##### **Update of the Skills Agenda for Europe in 2020**

In her mission-letter to the Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, President von der Leyen tasks Commissioner Schmit to further implement and update the Skills Agenda. The adoption of the updated Skills Agenda by the Commission is currently planned for 4 March 2020. A dedicated hearing with social partners was held on 17 January to explore

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<sup>1</sup> Updates on the EQF referencing process are given in a separate note (Cf. note 49-2).

avenues for action: 1) empowering workers to up/reskill, 2) addressing skills mismatches, 3) strengthening collective leadership on skills, as well as 4) modernising VET (see below).

## **2. Copenhagen process/European VET policy**

The Commission is continuing to work on a set of measures to support the modernisation of vocational education and training (VET).

The impact achieved by EQAVET and ECVET as well as remaining challenges were mapped and findings were discussed in the relevant governance bodies related to VET (ACVT, DGVT, EQF AG, EUROPASS AG).

The Commission intends to table a proposal for a VET Council Recommendation as part of the Update of the Skills Agenda for Europe, aiming at a comprehensive framework for future VET policy.

### **European Vocational Skills Week**

The headline results of the 4<sup>th</sup> European Vocational Skills Week in Helsinki, on 14-18 October 2019 were as follows:

- **1749 associated events/activities** in **46 countries**.....
- .....reaching **2.7 million** people.
- **1000 participants** in Helsinki.
- **96 million social media impressions**.
- Total **hashtag reach of 36.6 million**.
- Over **15.000 people voted online** in the VET Excellence Awards 2019.
- **17.000 posts** about the Week on Twitter and Facebook.
- Over **150.000 visits** to the European Vocational Skills Week webpage.
- Over **1.5 million views** of the Week videos.
- **27 Ambassadors** reached **1.25 million people**, through **4.2 million impressions**.
- **13 awards** were conferred at a dedicated awards nominees celebration.

In 2020 the Week will take place in Berlin on 9-13 November. The theme will be “VET for excellence in a digital age”, and will feature new elements such as the launch of a Skills Pact, a meeting dedicated to social partners, the mainstreaming of the international perspective, a more decentralised communications campaign and a specific meeting on Upskilling Pathways. Ambassadors will again be appointed and awards organised. A study will be launched in 2020 to review the implementation of the European Vocational Skills Week to date.

### **European Alliance for Apprenticeships**

The EAfA meeting during the Skills Week in Helsinki focused on what opportunities apprenticeships can offer to adults, what specific challenges hinder the take-up of adult apprenticeships and what strategies can be put in place to overcome these challenges. In total, 18 new organisations signed a pledge at the event, helping the Alliance to surpass the symbolic milestone of 300 pledges (EAfA currently has 314 members who pledged over 907,000 apprenticeships and training opportunities.)

### Apprenticeship Support Services:

Within its first year, the Services actively supported EAfA stakeholders and in particular Member States in promoting the supply and quality of apprenticeships: key deliverables include, among others, the gradual deployment of online training materials, a series of webinars, as well as a survey to evaluate the results of EAfA and to better understand the needs of EAfA members. 25 Member States were mobilised to take part in the benchlearning process, with the first benchlearning cycle to be launched in early 2020 with 7 MS volunteering governments (AT, BEfr, BEnl, CY, EL, MT, RO).

### **InvestEU Programme**

The InvestEU Programme aims to address the still-significant investment gap in the EU. In addition to creating jobs and enhancing the competitiveness of the Union, it aims to foster inclusive growth and strengthen investment in the social dimension of the Union, supporting the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Financing under InvestEU will consist of a budgetary guarantee of EUR 38 billion, covering four policy windows as follows: (a) EUR 11.5 billion for sustainable infrastructure; (b) EUR 11.25 billion for research, innovation and digitisation; (c) EUR 11.25 billion for SMEs; (d) EUR 4 billion for **social investment and skills**. In turn, the budgetary guarantee is expected to mobilise up to EUR 650 billion of investments in the EU, over the 2021-2027 period.

The Social Investment and Skills window will stimulate access to finance in the areas of microfinance, social enterprises, social infrastructures, education and training and skills. More specifically on skills, InvestEU intends to mobilise investment and support upskilling and re-skilling targeting all the key actors - employers, education and training providers as well as individuals. It is expected that EUR 50 billion in investments will be mobilised for projects supporting EU social and skills policy objectives.

InvestEU will build upon the positive results achieved in recent years by the Juncker Plan. The forthcoming launch of the Skills and Education Guarantee Pilot facility under the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) will continue to strengthen the social dimension of the Juncker Plan. The facility will support three categories of final beneficiaries: (i) individuals in education attainment and skills; (ii) skills transformation efforts pursued by enterprises and other organisations for improving skills and skills utilisation; (iii) providers of skills, training and education or developing projects in education field.

### **3. Recognition of qualifications**

#### **The Annual NARIC meeting 2019**

The Annual meeting of the National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union (NARIC) was held in Brussel on 29 November 2019.

The main item on the agenda were the European Education Area, the implementation of the Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad and the Invitation to submit the Erasmus+ Call for National Academic Recognition Centers (NARIC).

The meeting showed that the understanding of the concept of automatic recognition of qualifications and study periods abroad is better understood, but implementation in Member States seems to be uneven. Certain regions, like the Baltic countries, the Benelux and Nordic countries concluded regional agreements. The current automatic recognition arrangements will be extended to other countries and regions: the future agreement between the Benelux and the Baltic states will be opened to other countries with comparable higher education systems and quality assurance.

NARICs highlighted the importance of the European Universities initiative<sup>2</sup> and digitalisation to implement automatic recognition. An area for further development is recognition of short cycle qualifications, especially in countries where these are not part of the education system.

The Invitation to submit a proposal – EACEA/40/2019 “Network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC)” in the framework of Erasmus+ - Key action 3: Support for Policy reforms was published on 3 December 2019. The total budget earmarked for the co-financing of projects under this Invitation is EUR 2.000.000. The budget has considerably increased comparing to the previous years. The main priorities of the Invitation are the implementation and the support of the implementation of the Council Recommendation on promoting automatic recognition of higher education and upper secondary diplomas and the outcomes of learning periods abroad and coordination and networking among the recognition centres. The projects have to be submitted by either one NARIC or by a consortium of two or more NARIC centres. The consortium can also include one or more applicants, such as higher education institutions, students’ unions, national agencies, ENICs, accreditation bodies, national rectors’ conferences (or equivalent) and other relevant stakeholders from the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) that can play significant role in reaching the objectives and priorities of the invitation. These organisations can be partners in the consortium, however they cannot submit the proposal. The proposal can be submitted only by NARIC. The official deadline for the submission of proposals is 11 February 2020.

### **The Peer Learning Activity on Automatic recognition with the ET2020 Working Group on higher education.**

The meeting was organised together with the Norwegian government and took place in Brussels on the 3 December 2019.

The meeting provided an opportunity to learn from the diverse regional and national approaches to automatic recognition, such as the recognition based on the legally binding list of qualifications in Portugal, bilateral agreements and multilateral agreements in Benelux, Nordic countries and Baltics.

The experience from the three regions – the Baltic, Nordic and Benelux – showed the importance of trust and the value of preparation and resourcing. The Nordic region has no legal agreement but ‘de facto’ recognition, whereas the two other regions have developed formal agreements.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/european-universities-initiative\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/european-universities-initiative_en)

The meeting showed that the challenges to automatic recognition relate to the recognition of pre-Bologna qualifications, lack of political will, knowledge on recognition and European principles, as well as high number of applications from third countries in some countries.

The participants of the meeting endorsed the Commission's continuous support for the implementation of the Council Recommendation and keeping it high on the policy agenda through means such as funding support, negotiating with international players, peer learnings, exchange of information/experience, expert support, and capacity building, digital tools, monitoring, research and analysis.

### **Next steps**

The 2020 Annual ENIC-NARIC meeting in Lisbon, Portugal (7-9. June 2020)

Further steps for improving recognition practice will be continuously discussed during the next meetings of the EHEA peer group on recognition, at the next meeting of the ENIC Bureau and the NARIC Advisory Board, at the 2020 ENIC-NARIC Annual meeting and the 2020 NARIC Annual meeting. The Bologna peer groups provide a useful forum for Member States in identifying and addressing the barriers to recognition.

## **4. EQF**

### **5. Validation of non-formal and informal learning and guidance**

#### **European Inventory**

The 2018 inventory update was finalised late 2019 and will be published on Cedefop's webpage is accessible at: [www.cedefop.europa.eu/validation](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/validation)

The inventory includes a main synthesis report summarising information on 33 countries (that have participated in the inventory since 2014) and another synthesis report on Kosovo, North Macedonia and Montenegro that are new to the 2018 update.

As in previous years, there are thematic reports and 3 international case studies.

#### **Evaluation of the Council Recommendation on VNFIL**

The final report of the external study supporting the evaluation of the 2012 Recommendation on validation was submitted by the contractor on 20 January. The Commission is currently preparing a Staff Working Document on the evaluation, which should be published on 4 March as part of the Skills Agenda Update.

#### **Validation and Guidance study**

The Cedefop study on validation and guidance has been published: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/el/publications-and-resources/publications/5575>. Building on Cedefop's expertise in the two areas this study aims at exploring in what way validation of non-formal and informal learning can better be linked by the exploration of specific and selected practices.

The study – based on analysis of 13 practices from 12 countries – explores how coordination between career guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning can be improved. Results point to three factors:

- a) comprehensiveness: provision of adequate information and guidance before a decision to undergo validation is taken, throughout the entire validation process, as well as after it;
- b) coherence: use of common qualifications or competence standards, occupational standards or other reference frameworks in all the stages of the practice to identify, document and assess skills;
- c) quality of staff, resources, competences, and tools used.

The study concludes with policy recommendations on how to improve the link between guidance and validation.

## **6. Cedefop studies, pilots and events**

### **Global inventory of regional and national qualifications frameworks 2019. Volume II.**

The biannual publication of the inventory on regional and national qualifications frameworks was published by ETF in December 2019 ([https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/2225\\_en.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/2225_en.pdf)). Jointly written by the ETF, Cedefop and UNESCO and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) the report provides an update on the progress made in establishing and implementing national and regional qualifications frameworks around the world since 2017.

It includes information on national and regional developments, challenges and success factors, as well as selected cross-cutting themes.

### **Cedefop launches vocational education and training in Europe database**

A [new Cedefop database](#) was published on Cedefop's website. It is the main source of information about vocational education and training (VET) systems in the European Union, Iceland and Norway.

It aims at helping policy-makers, social partners, researchers and other stakeholders better understand similarities and differences of national VET systems through easy-to-navigate up-to-date descriptions structured by theme. The database also contains detailed information about each VET programme type, including qualification levels, share of work-based learning, providers and target groups.

The database displays information in a way that can be readily accessed and interpreted:

- offers more than 2 500 pages of data accessible through a single screen;
- allows comparing information by country and theme;
- includes national VET system diagrammes;
- generates downloadable national reports.

Cedefop has designed, piloted and populated the database in cooperation with national partners to provide access to VET system information for all, and to meet specific user needs. These needs were identified during a pan-European evaluation that preceded the database development.

Data collection is being supported by ReferNet – a network of institutions across Europe representing all EU Member States, Iceland and Norway.

### **A new study on the future of vocational education and training in Europe**

A new 3-year study has been launched. The research will allow for an in-depth understanding of the challenges and opportunities currently facing European VET, how they have evolved over time and how they vary between countries. The study will support policy makers and stakeholders in strengthening the overall relevance and quality of vocationally oriented education and training in Europe. Particular attention will be paid to the way the VET-content is changing in response to new skills demands in the labour market and society.

All assignments of the study will build on an analysis of developments during the last 25 years, thus further developing the ‘historical’ perspective and methodology applied by the [‘Changing nature and role of VET in Europe project’](#). This ‘looking back’ allow us to capture longer-term trends and to better understand the context in which strategic decisions on the future are made.

### **Study on support and incentives to learning and careers**

Two different studies have started in 2020 with the aim of analysing the costs and results (outputs, outcomes and documented impacts) of financial and non-financial support to individuals and enterprises in undertaking learning activities and developing careers.

The first study will focus on supply side interventions, including guidance, validation, assessments/referrals and basic skills training.

The second part will address mainly demand side measures, including financial incentives (such as grants, tax incentives, levy/grant mechanisms) and non-financial incentives (such as information/advice on funding opportunities, technical support in developing training) to stimulate training in enterprises. It will also cover financial instruments targeted at individuals (such as vouchers, training credits, individual learning accounts) to encourage them to participate in education and training. In the cases where no methodologies have been developed to gather data, the studies will provide methodologies and insights on how to achieve standards for data gathering and analysis.

### **European qualifications framework: zooming in on qualifications from initial vocational education and training at levels 3 and 4**

Within Cedefop’s work to make qualifications easier to understand and compare, this explorative study takes a closer look at those acquired through initial VET and assigned to EQF levels 3 and 4 via national classifications and frameworks. It explores in what they have in common, in what way they differ; what their purpose and value is on the labour market or for further learning and how they are assigned to NQFs and EQF levels.

The study covers 26 EU and ETFA countries that completed the referencing to the EQF by mid-June 2016. Eight case studies sheds some light on the different weighting of occupational and transversal skills and competences and levels of complexity and between qualifications at both levels within the same occupational area – car mechanics qualifications. The study finding will be published in spring 2020.

**Workshop on comparing VET qualifications.**

[A workshop on comparing VET qualifications](#) was held on **Thursday 28 November and Friday 29 November 2019 at Cedefop's premises in Thessaloniki, Greece.**

The workshop has built on and explored the interim findings of the Cedefop project 'Comparing vocational education and training qualifications: towards a European Comparative methodology'. Seeking to develop a robust and scalable methodology for comparing the content and profile of qualifications, the project seeks to strengthen the ability of national and international qualifications experts to learn from each other and on this basis be able to systematically improve the review and renewal of qualifications. The material feeding into the workshop can be accessed at [Cedefop's web-site](#).

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