



Brussels, 25 January 2019

Meetings of the EQF Advisory Group and ESCO Member States Working Group, 5-6-7 February 2019

MSWG 9-1 Note AG 49-1 / JAG 2-1

Note on relevant developments

This note provides an overview on relevant developments in European cooperation in education, training and employment¹.

The Skills Agenda for Europe

Graduate tracking initiative

The kick-off meeting was held on 8th October 2018 in Brussels and much of the 1st meeting was dedicated to discussing how best to organise the work of the group to achieve the objectives set out in the Council Recommendation. On the basis of the contributions by experts, DG EAC (B1) was able to formulate 6 concrete work packages to steer the work of the group across the next 5 meetings, set up 4 sub-groups and taskforces to take forward the mandate of the group and define the desired outputs and publications that the group will produce by the end of its mandate in May 2020. The next meeting of the Expert Group will be held on 26 and 27 February 2019 in Brussels.

The Cedefop Founding Regulation

The European Parliament and the Council adopted in December 2018 the revised Founding Regulation of Cedefop.

The main objective of the revision was to align the provisions of the Cedefop's Founding Regulation of 1975² with the Common Approach on decentralised Agencies as endorsed

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

by the Commission, the Council and the Parliament in 2012. This approach provides guidance for streamlining the governance and management of decentralised agencies and improves their functioning (more balanced governance, improved efficiency and accountability and greater coherence).

The revision offered also the opportunity to update the objectives and tasks of Cedefop to current reality by including the field of skills and qualifications policies. The up-dated mandate of the Centre - as outlined in the revised Regulation - reads as follows: *“Cedefop’s objective shall be to support the promotion, development and implementation of Union policies in the field of vocational education and training as well as skills and qualifications policies by working together with the Commission, the Member States and the social partners. To that end, Cedefop shall enhance and disseminate knowledge, provide evidence and services for the purpose of policy making, including research-based conclusions, and shall facilitate knowledge sharing among and between Union and national actors.”*

Copenhagen process/European VET policy

The ACVT Opinion on the future of VET

The context

On 3 December 2018, the tri-partite Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT) adopted unanimously an Opinion on the Future of Vocational Education and Training (VET) Post-2020.

The Opinion sets a shared vision of governments, trade unions and employers' organisations from EU Member States and partner countries on how to make VET systems fit for addressing the future societal and economic challenges.

The Opinion highlights:

- the dual objectives of VET for fostering **social inclusion** and **excellence**,
- the role of VET in supporting acquisition of **job specific** and **transversal skills**, and
- calls for a better **balancing** of investment and funding between **initial** and **continuing VET**.

² See for the full text of Regulation (EEC) No 337/75 of 10 February 1975 establishing a European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training:
http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/Consolidated_version_Founding_Regulation_EN_01975R0337-20041221-en.pdf

The Opinion calls for the set-up of **excellent, inclusive and lifelong VET** and defines

- the **building blocks** of future fit vocational education and training
- three **key objectives** to achieve this vision related to the
 - i. *content of VET,*
 - ii. *provision of VET and*
 - iii. *governance of VET systems.*
- stakeholders views on the main features of the future European cooperation in VET and possible **actions to be carried out at European level.**

Linking with the Strategic Framework for Education and Training

The Opinion represents an input for the future Commission proposals for a renewed VET policy framework, as successors of the current VET reform agenda defined in the 2010 Bruges Communiqué and the 2015 Riga Conclusions.

The VET policy priorities are an integral part of the current ET2020 Framework, and the on-going reflection on the future of VET, will be fully integrated in the comprehensive post 2020 Strategic Framework for Education and Training.

Expert group 'Platform of European associations of VET providers'

In 2015, the European Commission set up an expert group of European Associations of VET Providers³ as a follow up to the 2010 Bruges Communiqué, which called for cooperation with VET providers' organizations at European level. The involved associations in the group are EfVET (www.efvet.org), EUproVET (www.euprovet.eu), EVBB (www.evbb.eu), EVTA (www.evta.vet) as VET centered organizations, and EURASHE (www.eurashe.eu) and EUCEN (www.eucen.eu), representing cross-cutting sectors of relevance, i.e. higher education and lifelong learning.

The main activities of the group, according to the mandate for 2017-2020, are the cooperation with the EU Commission on the Vocational Skills week (awards, presentations), 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. The group also prepared a position paper on the future of VET.

The expert group contributes to a Cedefop Community of learning providers set up in February 2017, with the objective of deepened cooperation, mutual learning, identification of relevant good practices and production of concrete practical guidance on

³ See for the Mandate of the expert Group:

<http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=groupDetail.groupDetailDoc&id=21426&no=3>

selected themes. The ultimate goal is to help the VET providers' community to be ready for the future challenges and increase the impact of EU level cooperation in the field of VET in the context of a changing role of VET and of VET providers. The overall purpose of the Cedefop Community is to start from learning providers' priorities and produce concrete practical guidance for them on selected themes, identify relevant good practices and make use of relevant European activities and results.

For the 2017-20 period, three themes have been selected by common agreement to be dealt with in three parallel sub-groups:

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.

The Cedefop Community met in March 2018. The work on the three topics has been progressing with the collection of good practices and suggestions on, for example, the simplification of Erasmus+ mobility. Further work of this Community will also be linked to the ET2020 WGs on VET and digital competences.

European Vocational Skills Week

The 3rd European Vocational Skills Week was held in Vienna successfully on 5 to 9 November 2018. It featured more than 1800 associated events/activities leading up to the Week that reached 2.4 million people. A communications campaign included social and traditional media coverage (reach of 34.5 million), 5 videos (viewed over 1 million times), website development (90,000 visits), toolkits, press releases, newsletters, share-your-story options, support to the Vienna events, and more. More than 600 people took part in the Vienna events. Nominees for 15 awards were profiled at the Awards Nominee Celebration in Vienna, and the online voting for these attracted 9,400 voters. 26 Vocational Skills Week Ambassadors worked hard to publicise VET through social media (650 posts) and traditional media (170 mentions). The European Vocational Skills Week 2019 will take place in Helsinki, Finland, from 14 to 18 October, for which initial preparations have begun. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/vocational-skills-week/>

European Alliance for Apprenticeships

The 5th anniversary of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships was celebrated in Vienna in November last year. We welcomed over 30 new members, amongst them 11 Austrian companies. Since the launch five years ago, 282 members have joined the Alliance. In total they have pledged more than 906,000 apprenticeship offers.

The Alliance will be further developed and strengthened also with support from the new Apprenticeship Support Services. There will be several EAfA events taking place throughout 2019, starting with an event in March organised together with the European Parliament and MEP Jean Arthuis, focusing on the mobility of apprentices (ErasmusPRO).

Apprenticeship Support Services:

The adoption of the Council Recommendation on European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships was a key milestone in 2018. The Commission will provide all support to MS in the implementation of this initiative, in particular through the launch last November of a new Apprenticeship Support Services.

The objective of Apprenticeship Support Services is double:

- i. to support MS in reforming their apprenticeship schemes;
- ii. and to scale up EAfA work through the provision of different services to EAfA stakeholders.

The Services are being developed gradually around 3 pillars: knowledge hub (for all), networking hub (for EAfA stakeholders) and bench-learning (for MS).

Bologna process

As we informed the EQF AG already last year, in the current phase of the Bologna process, until the next ministerial conference in June 2020, activities will focus mainly on strengthened implementation of key commitments made for structural reforms in the countries of the European Higher Education Area.

The newly adopted peer support system should help to reach a more even implementation of the key commitments. Three thematic peer groups have been formed, with the following objectives:

- Peer Group A: Set up a three-cycle system compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area and first and second cycle degrees scaled by the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System;
- Peer Group B: Ensure compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention;
- Peer Group C: Develop quality assurance in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

The first meeting of Peer Group A took place on 15 January, in Helsinki. The meeting provided a basis for common understanding of the different qualification frameworks, it

was agreed that publicly available information on self-certification needs to be improved. The group is planning different peer learning activities, among others on self-certification, multiple purposes of qualification frameworks by stakeholders and on the link between qualification frameworks and quality assurance. There will be also a conference on ECTS. Dates are still to be confirmed.

On the top of these more "classical" type of events, deeper peer support activities, focusing on the concrete needs of particular countries, are planned to be organised. The peer group is currently working on the identification of these needs and on the way how deeper peer support could be set up.

Peer Group B on recognition will meet on 31 January, in Tirana.

Peer Group C on quality assurance met on 3-4 December, in Tbilisi. Similarly to Peer group A, the group will focus on a number of issues in the framework of the peer group meetings and PLAs, but a study visit scheme is also planned, to enable peer support between a small set of countries.

The Commission will support this strengthened support system, to ensure that countries that lag behind can accelerate their reforms. The evaluation of a designated call (Erasmus+, Key Action 3) is on-going, and a similar call is planned to be published in May 2019.

ESCO

The Commission is preparing a framework to measure technical, business and quality Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). With these KPIs, it will measure successful business uptake, the quality of the classification and technical compliance with the data model. The Commission will implement this strategy in cooperation with stakeholders (e.g. PES) and users of ESCO (e.g. implementing platforms). In this context, the Commission did two study visits to its users Textkernel and Eures in December 2018, to gather information on their implementation of ESCO, in particular feedback on benefits from the usage of ESCO and areas where ESCO could be improved.

Following discussions with the ESCO Maintenance Committee, the Commission is also currently working on a skills structure (hierarchy) for the ESCO Skills Pillar. The structure will enlarge and improve the current ESCO search engine. The work is starting in January 2019 with a view of concluding with the structure groups around mid-2019.

In June 2018, the Commission launched a study on how to ensure the quality of international qualifications (to be) included in ESCO and on how to establish a

methodology to potentially link qualifications and the ESCO skills pillar. The study was finalised in December 2018 and its results will be published early 2019.

European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

The EQF Advisory Group (AG) is in charge of following up both the implementation of the EQF Recommendation of 22 May 2017 and the recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning of 20 December 2012.

By January 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, as well as Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, plans to reference in 2019.

The main areas of current work are:

- **Updating and reviewing EQF referencing reports:** Member States are invited to “review and update, when relevant, the referencing of the levels of the national qualifications frameworks or systems to the levels of the EQF” (Recommendation Nr. 2). It is up to each Member State or other participating country in the EQF AG to determine when it considers an update of the referencing report to be relevant. Possible reasons could be a change in scope of the NQF, changed procedures for allocating levels to qualifications, substantial changes in quality assurance arrangements and when a more mature operational stage of implementation of the framework has been reached. UK-Scotland presented its updated referencing report to the AG in December 2018 and the Netherlands, UK-England/Northern Ireland, UK-Wales have confirmed their plans of doing so in the course of 2019.
- **Reaching consistency in the allocation of levels to qualifications** based on learning outcomes across countries in order to achieve transparency and comparability of qualifications (Recommendation Nr. 9). A project group will start early 2019 and will analyse a number of qualifications across borders.
- **International qualifications:** setting up of procedures on information exchange and consultation between Member States in relation to international qualifications when these are included in national frameworks (Recommendation Nr. 11). The purpose of these procedures is to ensure consistency in the allocation of a level to the same international qualification across countries. A project group addressing the setting up of these procedures started working in September 2018 and should finish its work in 2019.
- **The third country dimension:** Recommendation Nr. 13 asks 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. This

work should lead to a better mutual understanding of third country qualifications in Europe and of European qualifications outside Europe.

- **Communication:** more national frameworks are now in an operational stage and a larger number of end users is reached (e.g. through EQF levels on certificates and supplements). So far communication actions on the EQF and related NQFs have been quite limited in scope. In 2019 there will be more focus on communicating the EQF and NQFs (Recommendation Nr. 12). As part of this activity more qualifications databases and registers should be linked to the Learning Opportunities and Qualifications Portal.

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. Five countries (DE, LU, LV, AT and PT) have already presented their one off paper to the EQF AG and one country (DK) will present its report during the 49th AG meeting.

European Inventory

The inventory is progressing as planned, with the aim of being published in mid-2019. 20 reports have been already been checked by the EQF AG members. 12 reports are currently being checked by the EQF AG and 3 reports will be shortly sent to the EQF AG representatives. As in previous inventory updates, the country reports are the responsibility of the authors and the EQF AG member is requested only to do a fact check and make sure that the information provided is accurate. Once the reports have been checked by the EQF AG and considered final, the analysis of the information will start to build the synthesis report.

Validation of Prior Learning Biennale (Berlin, May 2019)

Preparation is progressing towards the third Validation of Prior Learning Biennale, which will take place in Berlin on 7-8 May 2019. The Commission, together with Cedefop, ETF and other institutions are involved in the preparatory work, as part of the efforts to maintaining a community of practice on validation. A meeting of the EQF AG focusing specifically on validation one off reports will be held on 6 May 2019 in Berlin.

Evaluation of the Council Recommendation on VNFIL

The Commission has selected the contractor that will carry out a study to support the evaluation of the 2012 Recommendation. Country reports produced for the update of the Inventory, revised by EQF AG members, will be a major source of information. Other sources will include an internet based public consultation and two expert meetings, one on the role of employers and other labour market actors in validation arrangements and another on how validation arrangements relate to national qualification frameworks and the shift to learning outcomes and flexible learning pathways.

Guidance

A study on “Lifelong Guidance policy & practice in the EU: trends, challenges and opportunities” has recently started. It will be carried out by the University of Warwick’s Institute for Employment Research with key experts from the University of Jyväskylä’s Finnish Institute for Educational Research. The scope of the study, which has a duration of 13 months, will be to:

1. Gather, analyse and synthesise evidence on the nature of lifelong guidance policy in the EU focusing on systems and structures;
2. Examining recent advancements in lifelong guidance practices, including emerging trends, new actors, new practices driven by technology opportunities and
3. Identify possible areas for further development co-operation and coordination.

A first expert workshop to collect feedback from relevant stakeholders on preliminary findings is planned for mid-May.