



EUCIS-LLL

Report from the Twenty-eight meeting of the EQF Advisory Group 2-3 December 2014, Brussels

Developments on the European level

ET2020 Review

The institutions are looking at the new governance of the ET2020. The reaction of the Council representation bodies on the revision of ET2020 and more particularly of the 5 headline targets, is for the stability of headline targets. It was mentioned that the two targets related to education should be kept. The political agenda for education, employment and for skills should find its way in this process and it is good for all relevant stakeholders to stay tuned on these developments.

Annual work programme

European Commission will adopt its work programme 2015 on 16 December 2014; it will identify plans for 2015 and possible work for 2016.

Update on the Bologna process

The [Bologna process](#) is a voluntary process for all European countries (47) except Belarus (Cultural Convention of the CoE). The challenge is to keep the momentum on the process and also to ensure the autonomy of higher education institutions. It is still not clear where the process is going, i.e. if the Secretariat is a technical or more political body.

Feedback from CEDEFOP Conference

Main message is that the conditions are there to move from a tool-to-tool approach to a more coordinated approach between EQF and credit tools as well as between sectoral tools (ECTS-ECVET...). The concentration should be on a number of services (guidance) to put forward those tools to end-users; transparency was a key word such as the promotion and recognition of learning outcomes ("front office"). The "back office" is about creating more synergies between the tools. This is in line with the results of the EAQS that showed the need to reach end-users and create more synergies.

A proposal to revise the Europass will be launched next year (impact assessment early 2015) and that is to be confirmed in the annual work programme. The different actions will not be under a single package (EASQ).

Some participants expressed worrying notions about the fact that EURES new regulation mentions ESCO while this tool is not finalised yet. Furthermore, some issues were raised about this tool. Education seems to have been forgotten in the negotiations. Now that the unit is under DG EMPL there is no balance to push the education agenda in this process. The Italian presidency proposed to have an expert body to advise the development of ESCO.

How ESCO is going to be organised (AU) as there are a great number of overlaps? A debate is needed across the DGs. The Commission is obliged to ensure coordination because of these changes; i.e. if revision of the EQF recommendation, they will decide to go to the Education Committee if it's related to ESCO it's the ESCO board... They will propose an informal group of MS where they invite them to (via perm rep) to follow this work. More consultation of MS until there is an act to have a more formal group. In the meantime the ESCO board will continue. The participation of DG EAC in the board of ESCO is being discussed right now; on DG EMPL side there is a will to have this tandem.

Concerns were expressed about the revision of EQF and ESCO being done without people working in the field of education. Also a voice was raised that national education ministries should be alerted about this process.

Overview of national developments of NQFs

Presentation of the timeline of referencing (AG28-2).

In the UK there is no willingness to do the labelling whereas the NQFs is well referenced to EQF.

2013: (21) AT, BE-vl, BE-fr, BG, CZ, DE, DK, EE, FR, HR, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, SI, UK

2014: (2) ME, NO

2015: (10) EL, ES, FI, HU, MK, KY, SE, SK, TK, RO

The overview shows that 2014 has not been a very active year. Need to work on trying to identify and overcome bottlenecks. The Commission proposed to come to the MS to help explain what is the EQF.

A discussion also touched upon that Switzerland could be invited to the group. There was also an interest from our partners to look at the EQFs developments. Some issues with Kosovo's request to be part of the Bologna process (was given a negative answer).

Validation: state of play at the national level: Luxembourg

The participants of EQF AG were presented the Luxembourg's validation system. There are three steps in it: analysis by the validation commission, decision, certification or complementary evaluation. They have three years to fill in the gaps. There is no cost of individuals to do the assessment; and the system also offers support ranging from information, counselling in what to select to explain the experience based on the framework (referential), guidance in the production of the dossier) during the whole process. The aim is to enable learners to express their learning outcomes. 1221 admissibility introduced, 942 acceptable, 353 dossiers were

analysed 124 full, 66 partial validation, 164 refused (on 31st June). It was also noted that the qualifications demanded vary in time (e.g. hairdresser, administrative assistant, cook...). Additionally, something to be looked on is that who pays for the systems as for example regarding higher education, it depends on the higher education institutions.

Question (UK): a system and framework are very systematised. The challenge is the demand as the flow through is restricted, is the system capable of managing the demands? This can result in low numbers of validation. How does this go with the decentralisation of the system?

Response: the number of applicants represents the demand, and has nothing to do with the capacity – the numbers are growing. About decentralisation it was answered that it is not an

option for a small country, the system is centralised in its functioning but the validation takes place throughout the country. Those who fail are mainly those who do not request the support, their dossier might not be bad but it is not explicit enough as regards the framework. The two-step dossiers can be an obstacle and could be improved. Luxembourg will therefore analyse the dossier and their use. The state pays for the commissions to read the dossier, to meet and discuss and to do the evaluation (mise en situation, entretien). There is an investment from the state to address those who are under qualified (cheaper than bringing them back to school). The social value of the qualification is very strong.

Comment: (FR) more a phenomenon of blockages exist for some qualifications, the numbers of the jury are not paid, so there is sometimes a problem to find the jury members which can lead to longer procedures and thus reach out to drop-outs. Other sources of support from the regions can and have to be found; otherwise there is not a systematic support to learners. A very small number of candidates do not find a support.

Answer: (LUX) for the moment the discussion goes on only about alternative assessment methodologies. The social partners stress that if someone acquires a diploma then (s)he should know how to write. The idea is to adapt it but not suppress it.

Report from the PLA in Cork

- Learning outcomes should be immediately understandable by all actors involved - for example, to avoid generic action verbs such as “being familiar with”).
- Include only the necessary details/information
 - have it fit for purpose and open to VINL
- Take the horizontal (dimensions of learning) as well as the vertical (degree of complexity) into account
- Have an eye on sources and references, i.e. degree profiles
- Concerning assessment: LO are not sufficient on their own, assessment methods shall be associated with learning outcomes in order to facilitate validation (the way to present evidence shall be foreseen when we define the LO)
- Have respect for same standards and assessment criteria
 - flexible methods should really be flexible
- Assessment approach should not more/less strict in formal settings and in validation
 - According to principle of fairness
- Remember the crucial role of assessor
- Apply the quality cycle
- Recall the key qualities what partnerships can offer - putting people together mutually is beneficial
- Recall the role of awareness raising and capacity building
- Stress the importance of counselling and advise for applicants (validation)
 - Identified challenges were: the use terminology and the usage of examples, which are integrally connected to clarifying the context. Moreover, finding a cross-sectoral perspective was seen as something to improve.

Discussions on the ways forward:

- format of writing LO needs further cooperation, also in terms of guidelines and a common format
- possible solutions include a community of practice, support for the development of an inventory of learning
- An idea of working in clusters was presented

Topics to be further explored:

- The links between education and employment (PLA FR)
- The costs and benefits of validation
- Skills audit
- The value of qualifications without formal counterpart
- The national approaches to set up validation arrangements (inventory)
- An overall ownership of the process (government, social partners...)

(FR) stressed that terminology is very important of what is meant and comprehended by “validation”. The meaning is very strict in France; the “positioning” of adults in higher education is continuing education in France whereas this was presented as validation in Ireland. In the French case it was presented as a social equity measure, the PLA is to show that is at the crossroad of global and individual strategies (at the level of an enterprise, social branch, state, local authorities). Another aspect will be about the success of those initiatives: what are the necessary conditions (guidance, preparation of advisors, organisation). The last axe is about the funding of validation.

Questions raised by other participants concerned about quality assurance, intercultural dimension and the need for having communities of practices (Council of Europe representative); The role of teachers in the ongoing cultural shift to LO's and whether teachers are qualified to assess learning outcomes as training teachers is very costly (UK). The Commission explained that QA was a key element in the debates as well as teachers.

EUAPME representative posed a question about intended and reached learning outcomes, and how is the QA process meant to ensure this match and what should be the common format. In the answer, the Commission representative informed that EC will present an overview of the outcomes of different events on learning outcomes in a February meeting and make proposals on ways forward.

The VNFIL approach of the Council of Europe and the European Commission through the Youth Partnership

Tensions exist between formal and non-formal education. The Youth Partnership presented the outcomes of youth work, such as the acquisition of soft skills and the specific nature of non-formal education (organised, not certified, intentional, self-assessed most of the time). Pathways 2.0 is a strategy from 2004 aimed towards recognition of NFL/NFE and of youth work. In it, there are 4 dimensions of recognition: political, social, formal and personal (self-recognition). A follow-up group has been set up; there is an action plan up to 2016 and additionally, they are currently revising the European Portfolio for Youth Leaders and Youth Workers.