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Directorate General for Education and Culture  
A3 - Skills and qualifications Strategies; Multilingualism policy  
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### **EFEE Position paper on the European Area on Skills and Qualifications**

EFEE welcomes this EC review of the current European policies and tools for transparency and recognition of skills and qualifications for supporting growth and competitiveness.

EFEE agrees with the EC on the sense of urgency to speed up the implementation of the existing policies and tools and the revision of their features in order for the tools and policies to be fit for supporting opportunities offered by technological development and internationalisation.

We also appreciated the initiative of DG EAC of organising a meeting with the social partners on 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2014 in order to explain the broader context of this public consultation and the roadmap envisaged by the EC on this matter. It enabled us to have a constructive dialogue and exchange our views.

This public stakeholder consultation being of a quite technical nature, EFEE considers the best way to provide for a valuable contribution is in a two-fold manner. Our national members have been requested to participate in the on-line survey regarding the more technical questions, providing for more details on the current obstacles to the recognition and transparency of skills and qualifications, and suggesting possible solutions.

This position paper is intended to provide a more policy-oriented position.

#### **Update, simplify, coordinate and evaluate**

EFEE recognises the impact and importance of the current European policies and tools like the

- European qualifications frameworks (QF EHEA<sup>1</sup> and EQF<sup>2</sup>)
- Common European *quality assurance arrangements* (EGS<sup>3</sup>, EQAR<sup>4</sup> and EQAVET<sup>5</sup>)

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<sup>1</sup> Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area

<sup>2</sup> European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning

<sup>3</sup> European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

<sup>4</sup> European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

<sup>5</sup> European Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training

- European *credit systems* (ECTS<sup>6</sup> and ECVET<sup>7</sup>)
- Tools for the documentation of qualifications, skills and learning experiences (Europass CV, European Skills Passport)
- European cooperation on the recognition of qualifications (ENIC/ NARIC<sup>8</sup>, Lisbon Recognition Convention<sup>9</sup>, the Directive of the recognition of professional qualifications (2005/36/EC)
- Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/C 398/01)
- European tools for *labour market intelligence*: the European Skills Panorama, the ESCO<sup>10</sup>
- *Information websites and services*

We are aware of the important role they play and have played in the recognition and transparency of learning experiences in Europe.

EFEE strongly supports the Commission's focus on **learning outcomes** as the most important priority for quality education rather than on means such as the learning duration, class education hours or size of classes.

In order to ensure that the **student and the learner are at the focus centre**, there should be permeability of education and training sub-systems and flexible learning pathways for individuals within and across borders.

We are convinced that the current existing qualification, transparency and recognition tools and policies can contribute to that permeability and would recommend the EC to assure **synergy** and **coherence** between the various instruments. Education employers and practitioners working in the education sector call for a serious **update** and **simplification** of most of the tools. Since it has been a while since some of the tools were first created, they need to be modernised and fit for the current education context. They should **link different education and training sectors** and guarantee **quality assurance** in all sectors. The European Commission can play a **leadership role** in **evaluating** and **updating** the tools in order to help Member States and social partners to **modernise** their education systems and the professionals working in these systems. But this can only be achieved if all stakeholders at all levels are consulted.

In the past, some of the existing tools and instruments were created without any consultation of social partners, neither at European nor at national level. We therefore urge the EC to not only work closely with national and local authorities of the Member States, but also listen carefully to the suggestions of national social partners and the direct users of the instruments. Ministries of Education, National Agencies, National Contact Points should work closely with the national social partners. The European Commission should **support and stimulate this social dialogue**. The EC can also improve the **coordination** of the tools at EU level, and the **communication** among the different units of DG EAC.

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<sup>6</sup> European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

<sup>7</sup> European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training

<sup>8</sup> National Academic Recognition Information Centres,

<sup>9</sup> Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO

<sup>10</sup> European multilingual classification of Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations

Concerning the current “passes” that have been developed through the European sectoral social dialogue, AgriPass, the sport and fitness competence frameworks, the European Qualification and Skills Passport (QSP) in the Hospitality Sector and the EMU pass in the metal sector, we wonder whether there would in fact be an added value in trying to coordinate all of them since sectors have their own specificities.

However, in case there is a specific request for coordination from these sectors, EFEE recommends the EC to help the sectoral social partners responsible for the passes to **coordinate** and **update** the passes.

### **Stronger focus on more relevant skills**

EFEE recognises the value of the European Key Competences Framework as an important tool that contributes to the discussion on skills mismatches in the current labour market and the need to better anticipate future skills’ needs. In a world where change is continuous, it is not possible for education and training providers or enterprises to predict accurately what specific competences will be required in the workplaces of the future. Accordingly, the emphasis has switched to the provision of key competences, and the inculcation of attitudes that provide workers with the capacity and the willingness to go on learning for the whole of their lives so that they may be able to adapt effectively to the changes that will affect their lives.

Notwithstanding the fact that for some sectors specific skills are very important, the European Key Competences Framework has been the basis for our current work on contributing to the improvement of the skills and competences for those working in the public services. EFEE has recently been working jointly with CEEP on “Matching education with the needs of the public services.” During this project, we raised awareness among our national members (employers in education and employer organisations of Services of General Interest) of the importance of these transversal skills and competences for pupils and students - the future European workforce - but also for the current workforce.

As education employers, together with the teacher unions, we have a dual role to play; we need to make sure that the skills of our teachers, our professors, our researchers and our school leaders are excellent, up-to-date and modern. EFEE works jointly with its members to continue our efforts in providing the optimal teaching and learning climate, fostering a culture of openness and continuous learning for all.

At the same time, we as social partners in education must ensure that those we educate have the competences required by a modern society.

In short, further awareness raising on the European Key Competences by the EC would be welcomed by EFEE. We are of the opinion that too much focus is paid to the international rankings according to the PISA results of the OECD, which measure only the most traditional academic subjects and do not provide a full picture of the whole range of modern skills and competences.

Employability and good education are more than excellent PISA results, or adapting our current school systems to the labour market of tomorrow. It is about educating civilised human beings and having the right transversal skills and competences to be able to **adapt to the ever-changing demands of the labour market.**

Taking into account that curriculum design and assessment of educational attainments fall strictly under the competences of Member States, EFEE recommends the EC to further contribute to strengthen this debate by continuously raising awareness of the European Key Competences Framework, while working jointly with the national and regional authorities of the Member States and the national social partners. Peer Learning Activities could be very helpful.

It is also important that the EC takes a leading role in continuing this debate with the officials of the OECD, the OECD being the driving force of the PISA tests.

### **Further strengthening links between education and the labour market**

EFEE agrees with the EC that modernising education and training systems will help raise skill levels and also boost the transversal skills needed by labour markets, such as digital, language and entrepreneurial skills.

EFEE is committed to focus on the modernisation of the education sector as we believe that, in order to reply to the changes in demand, the provision of education, schools and universities of the 21st century should be up-to-date and modern and should provide for a professional working environment for our teachers, professors and researchers and an interesting learning community for our pupils and students.

We do think that the initiatives like the EQF, ESCO, European Skills Panorama and the sector skills alliances might contribute to better linking the labour market with the education and training sector. However, besides discussing tools and instruments, we are of the opinion that better results can be achieved if employers work more closely with education providers.

In this respect, we refer to the policy recommendations of our work on this issue: [Matching education with labour market needs.](#)

Employers need to expand the amount of well-structured workplace learning made available to workers so that their competences may more closely match workplace requirements. While the vocational aspects of the curriculum in schools/colleges inevitably lag behind the competences required in the workplace, work-based learning (apprenticeship, internship, etc.) can compensate for this. Here, the dual system of education and training that operates in countries such as Germany or Austria has distinct merit. In the United Kingdom the work of the sector skills councils goes a significant way towards ensuring that skills training is significantly influenced by workplace needs.

Information and guidance systems need to be improved to provide reliable information and guidance on current and future skills needs and up-to-date job profiles for labour market entrants.

### Communication and reaching out to the European citizens

Communication is key. Not only in coordinating and updating the existing instruments but also in connecting with the users, be they students, workers, youth, adults, teachers, school leaders, policy makers in education, employers or trade unions.

An important question remains. What does the EC intend by the European Area of Skills and Competences? According to us, the EC should first set out and specify its goals and priorities and then reach out for public support through a consultation process. Not the other way around. Even, and especially, in the area of education that does not fall under the direct mandate of the EC.

As a consequence, the specific ideas and roadmap of the EC on this European Area should be better communicated to all stakeholders of this public consultation. Without knowing where the EC is exactly heading to, neither European citizens nor policy makers will reach out to help. This roadmap should be closely linked to the EU2020 benchmarks and the European Semester structure.

Online Information Points can help to spread the message. EFEE supports the idea of the EC to provide learners and workers with a single access point to obtain information and services on learning opportunities, career guidance and recognition of qualifications for employment purposes or further learning. We recommend the EC to look at existing structures and networks and contact points like Europe Direct, National Agencies, Eurodesks and Eures advisors, and not to invent an additional contact point. Information obtained should be in a national language, easy accessible and user-friendly.

We also think that schools and universities are excellent information points for spreading information on European opportunities.

### Concluding remarks

This current public consultation might be an important step in taking on board the views of a wider public, especially those of employers, but there is certainly a need for continuous consultation of social partners further in the process, both at national and European level.

More specifically, it seems also clear that a more consistent involvement of the **European Social Partners in education** as well as national social partners in education is necessary to guarantee a further qualitative development and improvement of the existing tools and instrument.

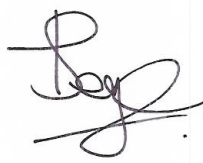
EFEE therefore urges DG Education and Culture (DG EAC) to offer us the opportunity to take an active part in the current working groups that exist at European level such as the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT), the Bologna Follow-up Group, the VET Business Forum, or being involved in the European Centre for the Development of Vocation Education and Training.

We are convinced that EFEE could bring an added value to these groups, being the representatives of employers in education and representing a whole variety of diverse members; ministries of

education, local and regional authorities, national education councils, associations of colleges and universities, etc.

Such an opportunity would also be in line with our mutual agreement on an enhanced cooperation between the European Social Partners and the services of DG EAC, as was decided at the High Level meeting with Commissioner Vassiliou of 16<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

Yours sincerely,



Bianka Stege

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