



QQI

Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann
Quality and Qualifications Ireland



Report on the meeting of the 2018 EU Reference Group of Agencies of the DES



Removing
barriers to work
and study



Tuesday 9th October
Davenport Hotel | Dublin

QQI, in collaboration with Léargas and Euroguidance at the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE), hosted the 6th meeting of the EU Reference Group.



Agenda



Opening Address

Angela Lambkin, Head of Information Services, QQI

9:30 - 9:45 Registration & Networking

9:45 - 11:00 Welcome, introduction and Poster Updates

Welcome and introduction, Angela Lambkin, Head of Information Services, QQI

Session 1 - Updates:

- **Erasmus+ Adult Education, School, VET and Youth - Fionnuala Broughan, Léargas**
- **Higher Education - Eimear Hayes, HEA**
- **European Lifelong Learning Guidance Policy Network/ Euroguidance & Ploteus - Hazel Stanley, NCGE**
- **EQF - Beata Sokolowska, QQI**
- **Europass & NARIC - Angela Lambkin, QQI**
- **Q & A**

11:00 Networking Break

11:15 Raising Awareness on Mobility

Session 2 - Raising Awareness on Mobility

Chair: Oisín Hassan, USI

Speakers:

- **Dr Máiréad Moriarty, University of Limerick**
- **Adrian Sheehan, Colleges Wales**
- **Lisa Collett, ECCTIS UK**
- **Charis Hughes, Léargas**

12:45 Q & A/ Panel Discussion

13:15 Lunch and Close

Secretary: Keith Brumfitt



Erasmus+

Report of the Sixth Meeting of the Irish Reference Group for EU Initiatives in Education and Skills

INTRODUCTION

1. The meeting took place in Dublin on 9 October 2018. It was attended by approximately 50 delegates drawn from the wider further and higher education sector.
2. The meeting's focus was on European initiatives which support and promote mobility. (A copy of the meeting agenda is attached as an annexe.)
3. On behalf of QQI, participants were welcomed by Angela Lambkin, Head of Information Services (including Europass and NARIC Ireland). Angela reminded everyone that the presenters would refer to Europass, Euroguidance, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), Erasmus+ and other European initiatives. This annual meeting would identify a range of current initiatives, share emerging findings from new projects and discuss potential developments affecting learner mobility.
4. The meeting would be divided into two sessions:
 - session one would be the regular feature of Reference Group meeting and provide an update on existing developments;
 - session two would be an opportunity to hear about new initiatives in the field of mobility. This session would be chaired by Oisín Hassan¹ from the Union of Students in Ireland ([USI](#))
5. Angela concluded the introduction by outlining QQI's work in relation to mobility and referred participants to QQI's 2019-2021 strategy (Adding Value to Qualifications²).

¹ Oisín Hassan is the USI's nominated representative on QQI's Board <https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/QQI-Board.aspx>

² <https://www.qqi.ie/News/PublishingImages/Pages/QQI%E2%80%99s-Statement-of-Strategy-2019-2021-%E2%80%93-Adding-Value-to-Qualifications/QQI%27s%20Statement%20of%20Strategy%202019-2021.pdf>



Session 1 – chaired by Angela Lambkin

- This session included five short presentations.
- Fionnuala Broughan, Communications Manager, [Léargas](#) described the organisation's work on mobility over the past year. Fionnuala explained Léargas had allocated more than €13m to Erasmus+ in 2017. This included support for 201 projects and nearly 12,000 individuals. Léargas' funding for Erasmus+ will be €16 million in 2018 and €17 million in 2019. Fionnuala set out the following 2019 priorities for Léargas:
 - ✓ continue to promote mobility with a focus on inclusion and diversity;
 - ✓ continue to support those who are running mobility projects;
 - ✓ continue the research into the impact of the Erasmus+ programme;
 - ✓ prepare for the new Erasmus+ programme;
 - ✓ get ready for Brexit.



- Eimear Hayes, Policy Officer at the Higher Education Authority's ([HEA](#)) looked at work to support Erasmus+ in the higher education sector. HEA has seen a 10-15% annual increase in the number of students and members of staff involved in mobility. In 2018, HEA allocated €10 million to Irish HEIs – this covered more than 5,000 mobile learners. About 10% of HEA's funding goes to mobility projects with non-Member States.
Eimear outlined some upcoming events including:
 - ✓ the launch of the 2019 Erasmus+ call;
 - ✓ the publication of HEA's internationalisation of higher education report;
 - ✓ a photographic exhibition with the French embassy;
 - ✓ regional workshops on the benefits of the Erasmus+ programme.Eimear concluded by commenting that mobility in the higher education sector is developing well but the challenge is to build on recent success in the light of funding challenges.
- Hazel Stanley, Euroguidance Officer in the [National Centre for Guidance in Education](#) which aims to promote best practice in guidance counselling and provide policy advice on guidance. Hazel outlined the following pieces of recent work:
 - ✓ NGCE's work with the [European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network](#) (ELGPN) in 13 Member States and [Cedefop](#) in Greece;
 - ✓ training and support for guidance counsellors who work with Irish students in international schools;
 - ✓ the [Euroguidance](#) network's provision of an on-line course³ for guidance counselors who support students who wish to study abroad;

³ This is the Mobility Guidance Course is available at <https://euroguidance.ie/cpd-mobility-guidance-counselling>

- ✓ Euro-quest materialsⁱ for transition year students who are thinking about where they may study. These materials have been piloted in 15 schools. Hazel noted that Ireland has a target of 20% of higher education students spending time abroad as part of their degree. Hazel also commented, in response to a question from participants, that the recognition of learning in other countries is not seen as a barrier to students' mobility in the higher education sector.
 - Beata Sokolowska, QQI, provided an update on EQF developmentsⁱⁱ. Beata noted that the Irish system was initially referenced to the EQF in 2006 (and re-referenced in 2009). The work has now begun to re-reference the NQF to reflect changes over the last ten years. Beata outlined two developments associated with the NQF/EQF – these both involve the development of mutual recognition based on a signed memorandum of co-operation with New Zealand that focus on supporting learner mobility:
 - ✓ [QQI](#) has published a Guide on Comparing Qualifications in Ireland and Hong Kong;ⁱⁱⁱ
 - ✓ the guidance for New Zealand is expected early in 2019.
 In response to a question on why these countries were selected, Beata explained there had been an existing agreement between QQI and New Zealand on higher education and it was thought helpful to widen this to all qualifications. For Hong Kong the decision was based on testing the idea of comparing Irish qualifications system with Hong Kong qualifications system. In both cases, the EQF was used as a translation grid as both Hong Kong and New Zealand referenced their frameworks to the EQF. Beata also noted that each memorandum covered qualifications at all levels included within the respective frameworks across all sectors.
6. To conclude the first session Angela Lambkin outlined potential Europass⁴ developments. These include consultation and discussion about a new, more interactive platform. This new platform could include extra information for those wishing to train or study abroad; make closer connections to other European instruments; and be based on an e-portfolio approach. In advance of any agreement on a new platform, QQI is continuing with 'business as usual' by promoting Europass.
7. Angela also explained the work which is completed by NARIC⁵ Ireland. NARIC's main work is to provide advice on foreign and Irish qualifications. This advice is mainly provided through an on-line service and in 2017 there were 70,000 website users. Enquirers are directed to the Q-help pages on the QQI site (<https://qhelp.qqi.ie/>) as this helps QQI to meet their GDPR requirements. In 2017 users from Brazil, UK and Poland were the biggest visitors to the site.

⁴ <https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Qualifications-and-Skills.aspx>

⁵ <https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/NARIC-Ireland.aspx>

8. Angela described NARIC's work on a number of Erasmus+ projects. As NARIC is a small unit, it seeks to form partnership with other organisations in order to complete these projects. Angela briefly outlined the following projects:
 - Q entry: working with CIMEA (Italy) to establish a public information database on upper secondary/school leaving qualifications
 - E Valuate: for MOOCs: a review of practices associated with MOOCs and SPOC's and how to evaluate in the context of access to HE
 - React – refugees' qualifications: developing expertise in evaluation of undocumented refugees
 - Arnet – automatic recognition: moving on towards automatic recognition by drawing together best practice across the networks and identifying issues

9. Following the presentations, there were two general observations:
 - it may be worth looking at what can be done to strengthen learners' personal and social development. This would support learners' resilience which is increasingly becoming more important in an environment where the labour market continues to evolve rapidly; the use of artificial intelligence is leading to fewer jobs in some sectors; and employers are looking for staff who are able to demonstrate a broad range of technical and non-technical skills;
 - in relation to the mapping work between qualifications frameworks in different countries, it is worth noting that a 'level to level' process does not always fully reflect the complexity of different qualification systems. Employers often look for skills, competences and behaviours rather than the level of a learner's qualification. In this context mutual recognition is most effective when it extends beyond matching the level of a qualification and encompasses all that is being sought by learners and employers.

Session 2 – chaired by Oisín Hassan

10. The second session was divided into two sections. Each section contained two short presentations followed by questions to the speakers. At the end of the session Oisín invited participants to comment or ask further questions.

11. The first section included presentations from:

- Dr. Máiréad Moriarty, Assistant Dean for International Affairs in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Science at the University of Limerick. Máiréad is also the Chair of the University of Limerick's *Sanctuary* Steering Committee⁶ and, in this role, spoke about the university's work with refugees and asylum seekers. As a *University of Sanctuary*, there is a focus on providing opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to study for a third level qualification. Máiréad noted that refugees and asylum seekers faced many barriers including financial restrictions; language; the absence of a national policy; a lack of flexibility in the Irish higher education sector and the way in which the social welfare system is organised. The University tends to offer students a place on a 'general' degree e.g. Business Studies or Arts as this enables them to acquire competences and skills which can be used in many contexts. This helps students if they have to unexpectedly leave the higher education sector.
- Adrian Sheehan from Colleges Wales⁷ outlined recent work in Wales to support European mobility. Adrian commented on the similarities between Wales and Ireland in relation to mobility and noted that:
 - ✓ the main priority in Wales is the re-referencing of the UK's National Qualification Frameworks to the EQF. This work has been agreed by ministries in the four countries in the UK. This re-referencing is necessary as the UK reports are ten years old and there has been a number of changes to the qualification systems;
 - ✓ Brexit is creating uncertainty in the field of mobility even though the UK's awarding bodies are keen to maintain systems which support mutual recognition of qualifications and develop further their links with other parts of Europe;
 - ✓ colleges in Wales are involved in many Erasmus+ projects. At the moment, there is a particular focus on the sports and fitness sector;
 - ✓ the policy position on refugees and asylum seekers is decided by the UK government. Currently the Welsh government is consulting on the possibility of becoming a country of Sanctuary based on the work which is taking place in four 'cluster' areas.

⁶ <https://universities.cityofsanctuary.org/>

⁷ Colleges Wales (<http://www.collegeswales.ac.uk/>) is the coordinating body for the colleges in Wales). It holds a number of contracts for European initiatives from the Welsh government- these include the EQF, ECVET and EQAVET. Colleges Wales is one of four coordination points in the UK.

Questions and reflections

What is the Department for Education's view of integrating refugees and asylum seekers into education systems?

Máiréad commented that seven higher education institutions are recognised as a University of Sanctuary and there is a national steering group which brings together expertise and experience. This steering group has prepared a paper setting out some early ideas which would support the creation of a national policy. The next step for the steering group is to engage with other government departments. The decision on whether to create a national policy resides with government – the steering group's work has been designed to support reflection across government departments.

- As Arabic is likely to be the largest refugee language it is important to recognise the demand from business. Arabic is one of the eight key languages in the national foreign language strategy^{iv}.

What could be the impact of Brexit?

While this is unknown it is worth noting that the UK government's briefing notes have included references to Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020^v

12. The second section included presentations from:

- Lisa Collett, Head of Global Division at UK NARIC, described the following projects:
 - ✓ supporting refugees' access to higher education through the Toolkit for Refugees project^{vi}. To support this work NARIC has published guidance (the EAR manual^{vii}) for admission officers on recognising degree and study overseas;
 - ✓ work with Syria's Interim Government on secondary qualifications;^{viii}
 - ✓ the development of a qualification profile which supports Syrians living in Jordan. So far 250 refugees have completed a profile and NARIC UK is preparing a statement for each person;⁸
 - ✓ a new project on Aligning Badges, ESCO and the Certificate Supplement (ABECS) has just started and aims to support mobile learners;
 - ✓ work with the Council of Europe to recognise refugees' qualifications (the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EPQR⁹)).

⁸ <https://www.naric.org.uk/naric/Newsletters/March%202018.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/recognition-of-refugees-qualifications>



- Charis Hughes, Communications and Impact Research from Léargas, presented the Léargas study on the impact of Erasmus+ international work placements for VET learners from Ireland ^{ix}. The impact study is based on 36 projects from 2014-2016, involving almost 1,300 learners.

Key findings included:

- ✓ Enhancing technical and professional skills is VET learners' key motivation for participation in Erasmus+; 89% stated their skills had increased because of their placement.
- ✓ Participation increases the professional opportunities and competences, intercultural skills, and personal skills of VET learners.
- ✓ The placements also increase language skills and the sense of 'feeling European', though not as emphatically.
- ✓ Placements have benefitted the wider vocational system in Ireland by increasing connection with employers and influencing changes in curricula and systems.

Charis also mentioned the vocational skills week¹⁰ across Europe and the opportunity to organise events in Ireland.

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/social/vocational-skills-week/evsw2018_en



Questions and reflections

- **Are EPQRs accepted by higher education institutions?**

Lisa explained that each national authority decides whether the EPQR is appropriate in their situation. In this context individual higher education institutions are able to make admission decisions on individuals.

- **What does the evaluation show?**

There had been a lot of promotional material to support the EPQR but there had been no impact study on its development and the use of the EPQR toolkit.

- **How are placements abroad accredited or recognised in the higher education sector?**

Charis commented that Erasmus+ encourages recognition of placements through tools such as Europass. Decisions on recognition are made by individual further education institutions and form part of their agreement with partner organisations. In Léargas' impact study, learners were asked about how their time in another country was recognised once they returned to their home institution. The responses from the learners suggested there was some confusion about what the term 'recognition' means, and that learners would benefit from more information on the concept of recognition.

13. As there were no further questions, Oisín thanked all the speakers for their presentations and invited Angela to close the meeting. Angela thanked the speakers from session one and two, Oisín for chairing the second session, the participants for their active engagement in the discussions and the QQI colleagues who had organised the event.

Speakers



Fionnuala Broughan, Léargas

Erasmus+ Adult Education, School, VET and Youth,



Eimear Hayes, HEA

Higher Education



Hazel Stanley, NCGE

Euroguidance & Ploteus



Beata Sokolowska, QQI

EQF



Angela Lambkin, QQI, Europass & NARIC



**Oisín Hassan, USI
Chair**



Dr Máiréad Moriarty, University of Limerick



Adrian Sheehan, Colleges Wales



Lisa Collett, UK NARIC, ECCITS Ltd.



Charis Hughes, Léargas.



**Keith Brumfitt,
Secretary**



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Caillochtá agus Caillochtá Éireann

The Sixth meeting of The Irish Reference Group for EU Initiatives in Education and Skills

Date: 9th October 2018

Venue: Davenport Hotel, 8/10 Merrion Street Lower, Dublin 2

Agenda

09:30

Registration

09:45

Welcome and introduction

Session 1 – Poster Updates

- Erasmus+ Adult Education, School, VET and Youth, Fionnuala Broughan, Léargas
- Higher Education, Eimear Hayes, HEA
- European Lifelong Learning Guidance Policy Network/ Euroguidance & Ploteus, Hazel Stanley, NCGE
- EQF, Beata Sokolowska, QQI
- Europass & NARIC, Angela Lambkin QQI
- Q & A

11:00

Networking Break

11:15

Session 2 – Raising Awareness on Mobility

Chair: Oisín Hassan, USI

Speakers:

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Lisa Collett, ECCTIS UK

Charis Hughes, Léargas

12:45

Q & A/ Panel Discussion

13:15

Lunch and Close

Secretary: Keith Brumfitt

Endnotes

Euro-quest materials

ⁱ <https://euroguidance.ie/euro-quest>

EQF developments

ⁱⁱ <https://qhelp.qqi.ie/learners/what-is-the-european-qualifications-framework-efq/>

Guide on Comparing Qualifications in Ireland and Hong Kong

ⁱⁱⁱ Comparing qualifications in Ireland and Hong Kong. https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/36563-IRELAND-HONG%20KONG%20Booklet_FINAL.pdf

National foreign language strategy

^{iv} <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Curriculum-and-Syllabus/Foreign-Languages-Strategy/Foreign-Languages-Strategy.html>

Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020

^v <https://www.gov.uk/search?q=erasmus>

Toolkit for Refugees project

^{vi}

https://www.nokut.no/globalassets/nokut/artikkelbibliotek/utenlandsk_utdanning/veiledere/toolkit_for_recognition_of_refugees_qualifications.pdf

EAR manual

^{vii} <http://eurorecognition.eu/Manual/EAR%20HEI.pdf>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - Syrian Interim Government Qualifications

^{viii} <https://www.naric.org.uk/naric/documents/contributions/Executive%20Summary.pdf>

^{ix} Making waves in Vocational Education and Training

https://www.leargas.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Leargas_Impact_Study_Erasmus_VET_Placements.pdf