



## Expert workshop

### Making learning progression a reality – Building on lessons from European transparency tools

## Background note

### Objective and aim of the workshop

Over the past two decades, numerous policy initiatives have tried to reduce barriers to lifelong and life-wide learning at both national and European levels. Often focusing on the increase of **transparency** <sup>(1)</sup> of programmes, qualifications and systems and the promotion of **transferability** <sup>(2)</sup> of learning outcomes <sup>(3)</sup>, these initiatives are at the core of efforts to modernise education, training, and learning.

The [workshop](#) provides an opportunity for policy-makers, experts and researchers to reflect on the coherence, sustainability and impact of these initiatives. Taking the turn of the century as a starting point, it tries to answer the question whether the combined impact of policies have made it easier for individual citizens to enter and re-enter education, training and learning and to build successfully on the outcomes achieved. Departing from Cedefop's ongoing research in this area, workshop participants are invited to take a step back and reflect on the overall and long-term role played by relevant policies.

Keynote speech and presentations, panel discussions and breakout sessions will address and discuss three main questions:

1. *To what extent have policies promoting transparency and transferability influenced European and national lifelong learning policies?*
2. *Are these initiatives connected? Do they support or contradict one another?*
3. *How can European and national policy initiatives in this area be assessed based on sustainability and impact?*

Discussion outcomes will shape the next steps of Cedefop's [Transparency and transferability of learning outcomes](#) (2021-24) project. See Annex I for more information on the study.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Cedefop (2014) defines transparency of qualifications as degree of visibility and legibility of qualifications, their content and value on the (sectoral, regional, national or international) labour market and in education and training systems.

<sup>(2)</sup> Cedefop (2014) defines transferability as the degree to which knowledge, skills and competences can be used in a new occupational or educational environment, and/or be validated and certified.

<sup>(3)</sup> What a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process.

## European and national initiatives supporting transparency and transferability of learning

Learning takes place in all areas of life. Individuals should be able to combine and accumulate learning experience across institutions, sectors, even countries, and (re)-enter education, training and learning throughout their life based on their needs and circumstances. This can happen if education and training systems follow a learner-centred approach, focus on the individual, and support flexible learning pathways.

European and national initiatives aim to remove a set of **barriers** limiting the ability of individuals to pursue lifelong and life-wide learning. These include:

1. learning outcomes acquired outside formal education and training institutions – for example, at home, work, while volunteering or in leisure time – are less visible and only trusted and accounted for to a limited extent;
2. complexity and diversity of education, training and learning systems. This makes it difficult for individuals to keep track of and manage their learning pathways, especially for reskilling and upskilling;
3. lack of trust or weak interconnections between education and training systems and subsystems ('silos'), limiting the transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes across institutional, sectoral or national borders.

The past two decades <sup>(4)</sup> saw the introduction of numerous European and national initiatives and instruments aimed at increasing the flexibility of European education, training and learning systems in support of lifelong and life-wide learning. Policies promoting a shift towards more open and flexible systems seem anchored in the following **principles**.

1. Using **learning outcomes** for designing education and training and for valuing learning taking place outside formal learning contexts. This has underpinned and influenced most European initiatives, notably the work on qualifications frameworks, credit systems and validation arrangements. Developments related to ESCO from 2010 and the key competence for lifelong learning from 2005 and onwards also fall within the broader promotion of learning outcomes.
2. Increasing the **transparency** of qualifications and systems. This is at the core of a range of initiatives, including qualifications frameworks (QF-EHEA established in 2003; the EQF established in 2008 and revised in 2017) and Europass (introduced in 2004 and revised in 2018). The new Europass launched in 2020 further strengthens the focus on transparency by introducing one single entry point giving individuals education, training and learning access at European level.
3. Allowing for and ensuring **transferability** of learning outcomes. Also at the core of many initiatives, it concerns the gradual introduction of ECTS in higher education from the early 2000s, the launch of ECVET in 2009 and initiatives related to validation of non-formal and informal learning from 2004 and 2012. Transferability is also addressed through various initiatives promoting cross-border recognition of qualifications, such as the Directive on recognition of professional qualifications from 2005; the launch of the EQF in 2008; the Council recommendation on automatic recognition (2018). The work on key competences can

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<sup>(4)</sup> At European level, the perspectives of the *Memorandum on lifelong learning* have been followed up through a succession of policy cooperation frameworks. The overarching Education and Training 2010 and 2020 processes, the Bologna higher education process and the Copenhagen VET process stand out, covering a wide diversity of distinct initiatives, instruments and principles. In recent years these processes have been complemented by two 'editions' of the Skills Agenda (2017 and 2020) and two versions of the European Education Area initiative (2019 and 2021).

also be seen in this context, emphasising the transferability of core and transversal skills and competences. The most recent European initiatives related to the individual learning accounts and microcredentials also aim at increased flexibility of education and training systems.

While the terminology used in this area is diverse and evolving – for examples focusing on recognition, validation, mobility, permeability and quality – a shared objective is to allow individuals to enter, re-enter and combine learning throughout their life. Many initiatives are promoted for example under the heading of mobility of learners and employees, but this is not possible in practice without transparency and transferability of learning outcomes.

It is worth noting that while European policies influence national practices and reforms, the opposite is frequently also the case. For example, the European efforts to promote a learning-outcomes-based approach reflect developments at national level dating back to the 1970s and 1980s. National efforts aimed at strengthening transparency and transferability of qualifications through qualifications frameworks and arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning started at national level in the early 2000s. Similarly, countries are introducing modularised or unit-based education and training systems to increase flexibility and allow learners to define progress based on their individual needs and circumstances.

The key question is whether this multitude of European and national initiatives contributes to more flexible education, training and learning systems and whether they make a difference to individual learners, by supporting lifelong and life-wide learning. Discussions and reflections on these aspects can provide important insights into strengths and weakness in pursuing lifelong and life-wide learning, and provide direct input into future European and national policies.

## **Annex I**

### **Ensuring transparency and transferability of learning outcomes – Analysing two decades of European and national initiatives**

In the beginning of 2022 Cedefop launched a 3-year study on [transparency and transferability of learning outcomes](#).

#### **Overall objective**

The overall objective of the study is to analyse European and national progress in promoting lifelong and life-wide learning, notably by improving the transparency and facilitating the transferability of learning outcomes acquired in formal, non-formal and informal settings. The study takes a comprehensive (cross-institutional, cross-sectoral and cross-national) perspective and looks at developments over the past two decades (2000-2021).

#### **Purpose**

1. The study should provide insight into the extent to which national and European policies of the past two decades have contributed to more flexible education, training and learning supporting lifelong and life-wide learning.
2. The study should go beyond the analysis of single, distinct initiatives and provide an overarching and comprehensive picture of policy initiatives at European and national levels and the way these are interconnected.
3. The study should offer insights into the consistency, sustainability and impact of policies in this area.

As many evaluations and research approaches looking at these developments are of a limited time span, the study should look at development over the past two decades. This combination of a comprehensive and long-term view offers a better basis for identifying successful and less successful approaches. Using the individual as a reference point makes it possible to identify whether or not a shift has taken place from a provider and system perspective to an individual and user perspective.

#### **Work assignments**

The study is divided into four interconnected work assignments:

1. mapping European policies supporting transparency and transferability of learning outcomes and analysing their connections, synergies and overlaps, as well as their impact;
2. providing an overview of relevant national policy initiatives in the EU-27+ countries, as well as in-depth analysis of such policies in eight countries, describing their links, contradictions and impact;
3. analysing the impact on individual citizens and identifying what has changed in making it possible for them to (re)-enter and combine education, training and learning, over time and across different institutions, sectors and countries;
4. developing a set of policy scenarios towards 2040 illustrating alternative policy choices and their implications at European and national levels.

### *Work assignment 1*

The purpose of this work assignment is to look at **the combined contribution** of European policies and initiatives seeking to increase transparency and facilitate transferability of learning outcomes. It should map and analyse developments since the turn of the century and across different institutional areas and sectors. Building on this overview, the work assignment should analyse the objectives and orientation of initiatives and the extent to which they support, complement, revise or contradict one another. The long-term perspective taken provides an opportunity to assess connections and synergies between initiatives. Mapping and analysis should pay attention to the sustainability and longer-term impact of initiatives.

The research will provide a **comprehensive overview of relevant European initiatives**, the relationship between them, and the extent to which they contribute to change. The following research questions guide this work assignment.

1. Which European policy initiatives, since 2000 and across levels and sectors, address:
  - a. transparency of learning outcomes (addressing formal qualifications as well as outcomes of non-formal and informal learning);
  - b. transferability of learning outcomes (addressing formal qualifications as well as outcomes of non-formal and informal learning).
2. What is the orientation of the initiatives and which objectives have been set?
3. How are initiatives connected to one another and how do they support or contradict one another?
4. How can European policy initiatives in this area be assessed based on sustainability and impact?

### *Work assignment 2*

The purpose of this work assignment is to look at the extent to which national policies (over the past two decades) have contributed to more flexible education, training and learning systems making it possible for individuals to enter and re-enter and combine learning throughout their life. It will analyse the objectives and orientation of initiatives and reforms and consider the extent to which they support, complement, revise or contradict one another, focusing on their sustainability and longer-term overall impact. The following research questions guide this work assignment.

1. Which national initiatives and reforms, since 2000 and across levels and sectors, address:
  - a. transparency of learning outcomes (addressing formal qualifications as well as outcomes of non-formal and informal learning);
  - b. transferability of learning outcomes (addressing formal qualifications as well as outcomes of non-formal and informal learning).
2. What is the orientation of these initiatives and reforms and which objectives have been set?
3. How are initiatives and reforms connected to one another and do they support or contradict one another?
4. How can overall national initiatives and reforms in this area be assessed based on sustainability, synergies and impact?

These research questions will be asked in depth for a selection of eight countries. The results of this in-depth focus should inform the development of a general mapping of the remaining countries. The work assignment will also consider the extent to which European initiatives have influenced national policies.

### *Work assignment 3*

Building on the findings of work assignments 1 and 2, this work assignment changes focus from institutions and systems towards individual citizens. It will analyse how lifelong and life-wide opportunities have evolved and changed for individual learners between 2000 and 2020 in eight selected countries. It will identify typical user groups allowing for an analysis of how European and national policies combined influence their initial training, as well as up- and reskilling throughout their life and across institutions, sectors and countries.

1. Which obstacles to lifelong and life-wide learning, focusing on transparency of systems and transferability of learning outcomes, existed in 2000?
2. Which obstacles to lifelong and life-wide learning, focusing on transparency of systems and transferability of learning outcomes, existed in 2020?
3. Which European and national initiatives and reforms have made a difference to individual learners and their need to access, enter, re-enter and combine learning throughout their life?

### *Work assignment 4*

Based on the findings of work assignments 1, 2 and 3, this final work assignment will develop a set of policy scenarios for 2040 pointing to alternative policy choices and their implications, at European and national levels.

1. Which alternative scenarios, with reference to WAs 1-3, can be outlined for European policies on lifelong and life-wide learning towards 2040?
2. Which alternative scenarios, with reference to results of WAs 1-3, can be outlined for national developments of lifelong and life-wide learning policies towards 2040?