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Better EU tools and services for skills and qualifications (Europass)

Accompanying the document

Proposal for a DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

on a common framework for the provision of better services for skills and qualifications (Europass) and repealing Decision No 2241/2004/EC

{COM(2016) 625 final}

BETTER EU TOOLS AND SERVICES FOR SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS (Europass)

Contents

Introduction

This Staff Working Document provides the analytical basis for the proposals for better tools and services for skills and qualifications made in the context of the New Skills Agenda for Europe adopted by the Commission on 10 June 2016[1]. The document first presents the challenges and problems with current tools and services for skills and qualifications. It then attempts to provide effective solutions by proposing a number of policy options for which the envisaged impacts are analysed. Finally it gives an overview of stakeholders' consultations carried out in preparation of this initiative.

The proposals include a revision of the Europass Decision (Decision No 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council). The revision will seek to enhance Europass, and address its relationship with a number of other related tools as well as the national support services associated with these tools.

Difficulty in obtaining recognition of skills and qualifications and insufficient access to related information and support continue to limit mobility for employment or learning in the EU and more widely. The revision of the Europass Decision will seek to enable tools and services to better support transparency and understanding of skills and qualifications.

1. Background and state of play

In the context of an evolving working environment and labour market, with high unemployment rates but also a lack of suitable skills in some areas or sectors, skills services can help support exchange of information and better understanding of skills and qualifications available. This facilitates transparency, mobility and ultimately employability. Transitions from learning to employment, from one job to another or from one learning pathway to another are increasingly common today. Additionally, in many cases individuals may have acquired a wide range of skills but these may not be immediately visible to those looking to understand an individual's skills or qualifications. Where skills are not identified they cannot be subsequently understood and recognised thus denying an opportunity to the holder of the skills to demonstrate what s/he has learnt or knows to do. Such problems are particularly acute for third-country nationals and the potential contribution of migration to assuage the skills needs of the labour market remains virtually untapped[2]. People's skills need therefore to be clearly documented and understood.

The causes of barriers to understanding and comparability are often complex. The EU has continually sought to be a source of support for system reform, shared understanding and co-operation between and within Member States to address barriers to mobility. Huge amounts of information are already available at EU and national level. However, this is often presented in different ways; languages and standards used in different systems or platforms are not necessarily compatible and cannot therefore be easily exchanged or re-used. This forces

[1] A New Skills Agenda for Europe, COM(2016)381.

[2] Lack of transparency and comparability of qualifications means, for example, that the EU labour markets do not use efficiently the skills of third-country nationals with tertiary education among which two-thirds are inactive, unemployed or over-qualified for their jobs, Eurostat, EU-Labour Force Survey (2014).

people to reintroduce the same information over again according to the different tools used. Moreover, information provided by different tools often overlaps, is incomplete and leads to confusion among users who may be discouraged from using the tools.

Individuals today, whether looking for employment opportunities or making decisions on what and where to learn or study or on routes to become mobile, need access to information, means of assessing their skills, and means of presenting information about their skills and qualifications easily and clearly. Equally, employers and other organisations need to find more efficient and effective ways of identifying and recruiting appropriately skilled people. Information must be exchanged by and between systems, organisations and individuals. The information may be in the form of advice and guidance for individual job-seekers or learners; information to establish trust and support transparency and recognition of skills and qualifications; or technical information to allow systems exchange information more easily.

The EU has responded over time to support effective exchange of information in the area of skills and qualifications by developing a range of tools and services. To date, these tools and services have largely been developed on a case-by-case basis, by separate services with a minimum of integration and collaboration. This approach has had impact on the reach, potential and perception of the added value of each tool. Ultimately, users have not enjoyed the full intended benefits of each tool and service and this has not helped to reduce barriers to mobility and the integration of European labour markets.

Further, the tools and services of themselves have not evolved in a systematic way to meet the expectations and needs of users and cater to how information is exchanged and managed in today's economy. Moreover, they are not always flexible enough to accommodate ongoing and future developments and opportunities. Any tools and services must consider digitalisation and enhanced online availability as well as complementary support offered by human networks to ensure access for all to skills services.

The initiative for better tools and services therefore aims at ensuring that tools and services reflect the needs of users in the first place and are developed to be coherent, relevant, user friendly and future-proof. Considerations are two-fold: i) tools and services must reflect the needs of users in the light of changing demands and trends in the labour market and education and training sector; ii) tools and services must be developed so as to be accessible to a wide variety of users and embrace technology. The prompt for this initiative is a revision of the Europass Decision, an established EU framework that exhibits many of the issues described here. A number of other related tools and services for skills and qualifications are also addressed here.

In this context, several consultations have taken place with stakeholders to gather input for the way forward.

In 2014 a public consultation was carried out for the preparation of an initiative at the time known as "European Area for Skills and Qualifications"[3]. In that context, the effectiveness of existing skills tools was addressed. In 2014 a special Eurobarometer was also issued on the European Area for Skills and Qualifications which also addressed the views of individuals on the tools and their effectiveness.

[3] *Towards a European Area of Skills and Qualifications – Results of the public consultation*, Brussels, 17 June 2014. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/consultations/documents/skills-results_en.pdf

The public consultation found there was significant room for improvement in the current landscape of web tools in the area of skills and qualifications; there was also strong support for a merge of Europass documents. Results furthermore indicated that there was potential interest for the creation of a "one-stop shop" providing integrated services covering the full range of European services on learning opportunities, career guidance and the recognition of qualifications. Current tools for transparency were not found fully suitable for recognising the outcomes of digital learning.

More recently, in 2016, several targeted consultations were carried out on the elements of this proposal. In particular, social partners provided their feedback as well as the policy networks supported by Erasmus+ (EQF National Coordination Points, National Europass Centres and Euroguidance Centres).

Social partners agreed on the challenge represented by the current fragmentation of services for skills and qualifications and therefore the idea of more integration and synergy was welcomed, also in relation to the integration of national networks of existing contact points. For them, closer links to national skills agencies/observatories of government and social partners should also be established. The Europass framework is generally appreciated for its closeness to individuals; in particular the Europass CV is a well-known and much used common format which can increase transparency and comparability. Improvements are however needed, in particular for the Diploma Supplement (document explaining the nature, level, context, content and status of a higher education qualifications) and the Certificate Supplement (similar document issued for vocational training). The higher education Diploma Supplement, developed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO, is widely used in the 48-countries of the Bologna Process. Within this Process, work to revise the Diploma Supplement is ongoing, to ensure it reflects the latest developments in higher education and is relevant for students and for employers. Improvements are also needed regarding the Certificate Supplement. Efforts to treat certain elements consistently between the two Supplements could be helpful in raising visibility and reinforcing use.

One of the main outcomes of the policy network consultation was the need to focus more on guidance issues, which cannot be properly addressed via web-based tools and services but need a presence and face-to-face approach to users. This need to address the role of guidance was also raised during consultation with Civil Society. Requests for simplified administrative procedures and longer-term planning compared to the current annual exercise were also made. This would be in line with the Commission's proposal to simplify operation and financing of the networks.

The following sections introduce and offer background to the range of EU tools and services for skills and qualifications currently available (Section 1.1). Specific problems to be addressed are described (Section 2) and options for achieving better tools and services are proposed (section 3) and potential impact of these described.

1.1 Overview of available tools and services

1.1.1 Europass

The single European framework for the transparency of qualifications, **Europass**, was established by the Decision 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 15 December 2004[4].

The overall objective of the initiative is to increase the mobility of people in Europe for education and employment purposes. This is being achieved chiefly by increasing awareness of and access to transparency instruments amongst learners, job-seekers, employees and employers, and education and training institutions among others. The initiative is implemented across Europe by the network of National Europass Centres (NECs), Cedefop, with the support from EACEA under the overall management of the European Commission (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion).

At the core of the existing Europass Framework is a portfolio of documents that act as uniform tools for transparency of skills and qualifications and for mobility. The documents, identified within the Europass Decision, include:

- the *Europass Curriculum Vitae* (CV) completed by any individual to report on his/her qualifications, professional experience, skills and competences;
- the Europass Language Passport (ELP) completed by any individual to report on her/his language skills;
- the *Europass Certificate Supplement (ECS*) issued by the authorities that award vocational educational and training certificates, to add further information on these certificates so as to make them more easily understandable especially by employers or institutions outside the issuing country;
- *the Europass Diploma Supplement (EDS)* issued by higher education institutions to their graduates along with their degree or diploma to make these educational qualifications more easily understandable, especially outside the country where they were awarded;
- *the Europass Mobility Document* (EMD) for recording any organised period of time that a person spends in another European country for the purpose of learning or training – completed by the home and host organisation.

There has been some additional technical development of Europass over time, including:

- Development of a tool to design a cover page to complement the Europass CV;
- Development of the Europass Skills Passport – an electronic portfolio for storing the Europass documents;
- Adaptation of CV editor for use on mobile devices;
- Enhancements of the CV tool to make it more interactive;
- An initiative to improve the interoperability of Europass with other services; and,
- On-going development of the Europass portal.

[4] OJ L 390, 31.12.2004, p. 6.

Europass offers huge potential for development based on its achievements to date. Since 2005, Europass has had more than 126 million website visits; over 93 million document templates have been downloaded while more than 60 million Europass CVs, by far the most popular tool, have been created online[5]. The Europass brand has become more established over time, and its remit offers an opportunity to increase its scope and improve services offered through the framework to meet the needs and requirements of the users within the labour market and education and training sectors.

An evaluation of the Europass Framework carried out in 2013[6] highlighted a number of achievements. Europass documents have proven relevant to all groups of stakeholders and have contributed to helping people change their job or location (CV, Language Passport and Certificate Supplement were all reported to be instrumental in this by more than 60% of their surveyed users) and gain learning opportunities such as admission to educational institutions (46.3% of Certificate Supplement users, 49.9% of Language Passport users, and smaller proportions of surveyed users of other documents).

Moreover, Europass played an important role in mobility within the same country (40% of surveyed users were domestically mobile) and indeed the documents have become widely used within countries such as Italy and Spain, which display above average usage rates of the CV, while in France the Europass Mobility has been adapted for use by individuals to reflect on their own skills.

Some limitations however were also reported. In particular, Europass has been shown to reach mainly individuals, administrations and public institutions and had limited reach among employers[7]. This is despite employers and mobility for employment purposes being a key goal of Europass and indeed it is only through use by employers that Europass can achieve wider use and establish its full value. In general there is an ongoing lack of knowledge about the Europass service, its documents and their purpose: in the 2013 evaluation of Europass almost 61% of surveyed non-users reported that they had never heard of Europass documents. Similar conclusions were drawn from other consultations and studies carried out after the evaluation. More information on the current limitations of EU tools and services will be provided in section 2.

Europass sits among a number of tools and services which have application and use at system level, within sectors, by groups of practitioners and for the public. The evaluation and the public consultation mentioned before, in particular, have found that Europass and other tools and services are not offered in a sufficiently integrated way to provide coherent and accessible information, guidance, and services for skills and qualifications. Users and stakeholders have questioned the stand-alone nature of many tools and services, the ease of access to quality information on skills and qualifications, overlap in types and functions of tools and services and disparate support from services offered at national level.

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[5] Europass 2020: A vision for meeting the current and future needs of modern European citizens in recording and promoting skills, qualifications and experience. Europass Innovation Working Group, April 2016.

[6] http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/evaluation/search/download.do;jsessionid=Dq4rTThVgYXFvXVGzY59vHwhngnbxL5l4xRsCMxTl5LHTvBnqTqm!1601440011?documentId=8026737

[7] *Stepping up the pace - Conceptual and technical reflections on how to take forward European tools for education, training and employment*, Cedefop, 2014.

The following section describes a number of these tools and services to establish the issues addressed by this initiative. The tools and services are described in two sets: first, those that are being addressed directly within this initiative, and second those that synergies and co-operation should be pursued with.

1.1.2 Other tools and Services directly addressed in initiative:

Learning Opportunities and Qualifications Portal (LOQ)[8]**:** The LOQ provides information and links on opportunities to learn or study in another EU country. The portal also provides information on qualifications in Europe and information on the European Qualifications Framework[9], national qualifications frameworks and how they compare. More information on the role of EQF in supporting transparency and understanding of skills and qualifications is described in depth in Annex III. Input on learning opportunities to the LOQ portal is provided and maintained by **Euroguidance** [10] **,** a national network that promotes the European dimension in lifelong guidance and provides quality information on lifelong guidance and mobility for learning purposes. Euroguidance operates through a network of national centres (Euroguidance centres). An EQF National Coordination Point (NCP) is set up in each country that participates in the EQF and coordinates the EQF implementation at national level. They provide the information on qualifications and the national qualifications frameworks and how they compare to the EQF.

EU Skills Panorama[11]**:** The EU Skills Panorama is an online tool providing central access to data, information and intelligence on skill needs in occupations and sectors. It provides a European perspective on trends for skills supply and demand and possible skill mismatches, while also giving information about national data and sources. The EU Skills Panorama is managed by CEDEFOP.

ESCO [12] **:** ESCO (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations classification) is a reference terminology for skills. It will be used to describe skills needed in a specific job, but also the skills a person acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning. Online services such as EURES, Europass, the EU Skills Panorama, career guidance services and job boards will use ESCO so that they can offer multilingual services, exchange information between them and make skills gaps visible. ESCO will also help education and training institutions to understand the needs of the labour market and thus bring education and employment closer together.

1.1.3 Synergies with other services related to skills and qualifications

The following tools also provide services in relation to skills and qualifications:

EURES[13]**:** EURES (the European Employment Services network) is a cooperative network between the European Commission and partner organisations, which may include public employment services (PES), private employment services (PRES), trade unions, employers' organisations and other relevant actors in the labour market. It is responsible for exchanging

[8] Learning Opportunities and Qualifications Portal: https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/
[9] Information on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF): https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f[0]=im_field_entity_type%3A97#
[10] Euroguidance: http://euroguidance.eu/
[11] EU Skills Panorama: http://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en
[12] ESCO: https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal/home
[13] EURES: https://ec.europa.eu/eures/public/homepage

information and facilitating interaction among its stakeholders in order to help make the free movement of workers a reality. EURES provides free assistance to jobseekers wishing to move to another country and provides advice on living and working conditions in the EEA. It also assists employers wishing to recruit workers from other countries and in cross-border regions. EURES operates through a network of EURES Advisers, and the EURES portal, which provides access to job vacancies and information on job mobility in Europe.

ENIC-NARIC [14] **:** The ENIC-NARIC portal provides support for academic recognition practices for higher education. The portal is supported by two networks. The ENIC Network (European Network of National Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility) was established by the Council of Europe and UNESCO to implement the Lisbon Recognition Convention and to develop policy and practice for the recognition of qualifications. The NARIC Network (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) aims at improving academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study in the Member States of the EU, EEA countries, and Turkey. The network operates through a network of national centres and also maintains a central website.

For documenting skills, synergies could be envisaged also with **sectoral passes** issued for specific sectors (such as tourism and hospitality) or with the **Youthpass**[15]**,** a European tool used for projects funded by Erasmus+/Youth in Action to assess and validate the skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning in youth work. Participants in projects reflect, assess and describe what they have done and show what they have learnt. The certificates are issued by SALTO Training & Cooperation Resource Centre[16].

1.1.4 National support services for skills and qualifications

A number of national support services have been established to promote awareness and support implementation of the tools outlined above. The services addressed through this proposal are the following:

1.1.4.1 National Europass Centres

Currently 38 countries participate in Europass[17]. Each participating country has designated a National Europass Centre. These centres are established through the current Europass Decision; in 2016 34 centres made an application for co-financing by the Commission.

The National Europass Centres are responsible for promotion of the Europass portfolio and engage in a range of activities to create awareness of the documents and support their use. Activities are targeted at varying audiences. They target individuals to create awareness of Europass and their entitlement to receive the Europass Diploma or Certificate Supplement and to promote the benefits of documents they can themselves complete (the Europass CV and Europass Mobility). They target organisations, including education institutions, that have a direct role in the implementation of Europass documents (in particular the Diploma and

[14] ENIC-NARIC: http://www.enic-naric.net/

[15] Youthpass; https://www.youthpass.eu/en/youthpass/

[16] SALTO-YOUTH is shorthand for Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities within the Erasmus+ Youth in Action EU Programme: https://www.salto-youth.net/

[17] Activities of the centres are co-financed through the Erasmus+ programme (co-financing of max 50 per cent for the annual grants for Europass). The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, by delegation from the Commission, is in charge of the financial management of the grants to the centres,

Certificate Supplements). They also target employers and recruiters with information on the use and benefits of the Europass documents.

The centres also operate within a network that is also established through the Europass Decision.

1.1.4.2 EQF - National Coordination Points

Further to the 2008 EQF Recommendation all participating countries have set up NCPs[18] to support and coordinate a transparent referencing of the national qualifications systems to the EQF. Furthermore the Recommendation invites the NCPs to publish the result of the referencing process, to provide access to information and guidance to stakeholders on how national qualifications relate to the EQF through national qualifications systems and to promote the participation of all relevant stakeholders, including, in accordance with national legislation and practice, higher education and vocational education and training institutions, social partners, sectors and experts on the comparison and use of qualifications at the European level[19]. The EQF-NCPs would typically expect to meet as a network 1 – 2 times a year and would also meet with national correspondents for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as a way to ensure co-operation between those responsible for the EHEA and EQF Frameworks.

1.1.4.3 National Euroguidance Centres

Euroguidance is a European network of National Euroguidance Centres active in 38 countries. In 1992 the European Commission took the initiative to form a European Network of national resource and information centres for guidance, which later became the Euroguidance Network. Euroguidance was established as one of the three strands of the PETRA programme[20]. Euroguidance centres work in support of two common goals: to promote the European dimension in guidance and to provide quality information on lifelong guidance and mobility for learning purposes. The main target group of Euroguidance is guidance practitioners and policy makers from both the educational and employment sectors in all European countries. They work to link together guidance systems in Europe and promote mobility, helping guidance counsellors and individuals to better understand the opportunities available throughout Europe.

2. Challenges ahead

Despite the achievements obtained thus far, currently the general problem is that the tools and services discussed here do not exploit their full potential and do not offer all the added value they potentially could. Several online tools and other services coexist but do not necessarily talk to one another or work in synergy, so that users do not get the full intended benefits of the service. This has an impact on mobility, recognition of skills and qualifications and ultimately on the integration of European labour markets. Any response must consider digitalisation and

[18] Activities of the centres are co-financed through the Erasmus+ programme (co-financing of max 75 per cent for EQF-NCPs). The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, by delegation from the Commission, is in charge of the financial management of the grants to the centres,

[19] The EQF-NCPs also receive financial support for the development of national databases for qualifications, to be linked to the Learning Opportunities and Qualifications Portal.

[20] Council Decision 87/569/EEC of 1 December 1987 concerning an action programme for the vocational training of young people and their preparation for adult and working life, OJ L 346, 10/12/1987, p. 31.

an enhanced online presence for these tools as well as complementary support offered by human networks for those that may not have necessary digital competences and may in fact be the largest potential beneficiaries of skills services. Finally, evidence shows that awareness of the services[21] available is generally limited among the potential beneficiaries, despite some success stories such as Europass.

The following sections describe five key challenging areas to be addressed within this initiative; the causes and implications of each are described, including references to feedback and evaluation, where relevant. The problems address both the limitations of the existing tools and services in serving the current needs of users but also raise the key issue of enabling tools and services to evolve to meet changing needs and be future-proof.

2.1 Exploiting the full potential of Europass to meet evolving needs

The current Europass Decision has the clear initial goal of increasing transparency by establishing a portfolio of documents that individuals can use to 'better communicate and present their qualifications and competences throughout Europe'[22]. Its scope is limited to documentation with the current Decision setting out a clearly defined and closed set of documents.

Despite some development, in particular in the Europass portal, the service is still spoken of and understood as a set of five document templates. Such a focus on documents means Europass has not evolved to meet the transforming demands of the labour market, changes in education and training provision and the new ways in which people communicate their skills and qualifications and manage personal information[23]. There is demand from employers for information to assist them understand and recognise all forms of skills acquired by potential employees; education institutions equally are interested in skills and experiences of individuals that may be seeking validation of learning or entry into programmes; and individuals are learning and acquiring new skills in new ways and a service such as Europass should enable them communicate these skills and have them understood and valued. The importance of life skills and transversal skills was emphasised during consultations on the Skills Agenda by civil society. In 2015 the Commission launched a study on the feasibility of a tool for self-assessment of transversal skills[24] by individuals. The study established the potential value of such a tool but also affirmed the increased emphasis on transversal skills in recruitment practices.

There is clear ambition and interest from stakeholders, and the centres involved in delivery of Europass, to develop the service to meet users' needs. Centres have requested amendments and new elements in Europass based on their experience of promoting the framework and getting feedback from users. Users require and expect more than document tools[25]. National

[21] Second Europass evaluation, http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/evaluation/search/download.do;jsessionid=Dq4rTThVgYXFvXVGzY59vHwhngnbxL5l4xRsCMxTl5LHTvBnqTqm!1601440011?documentId=8026737

[22] Article 1 of Decision No. 2241/2004/EC.

[23] *Europass 2020: A vision for meeting the current and future needs of modern European citizens in recording and promoting skills, qualifications and experience*. Europass Innovation Working Group, April 2016.

[24] *Feasibility Study and Technical Specification on the Development of a Citizen Tool for Transversal Skills - Final Report*, PPMI, January 2016.

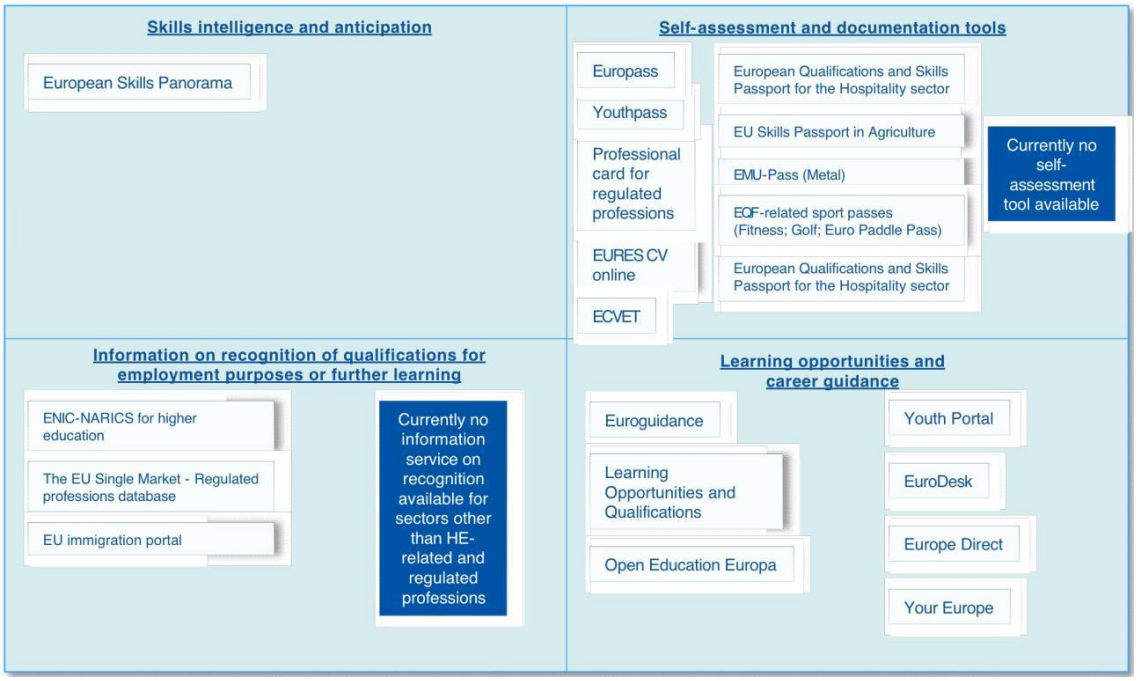
[25] The stakeholders' consultations carried out in 2016 confirmed this. See section 3.2 of the Staff Working Document accompanying the Communication "A New Skills Agenda for Europe", SWD(2016) 195 final.

Europass Centres have tried to respond to these needs. Centres are required to submit annual activity reports to the Commission. A synthesis report was prepared to summarise the main outcomes[26]. According to the findings, National Europass Centres have explored diversified means of communication (social media, online etc.), they have promoted the documents through other services such as guidance services that can guide individuals in completing the documents; and provide links to other sources of complementary information such as recognition services. It remains however that the primary Europass product is five document templates. The templates have changed minimally in ten years; they do not facilitate users to record and capture information and the document tools are presented and promoted in isolation from information, guidance and links to other services.

2.2 Overcoming the limited efficiency and user-friendliness of services due to stand-alone online tools

Europass does not exist in isolation. At least 16 different initiatives on or around skills and qualifications provide learners, workers, employers and other stakeholders with information and support across the EU. Seven different portals address lifelong and career guidance; three different initiatives provide services on recognition of qualifications for employment purposes or further learning; at least 14 different European initiatives exist for documenting skills and qualifications, some of general nature and some sector specific. Sections 1.1.2 and 1.1.3 described a number of other tools and services dealing with skills and qualifications developed to address different policy areas and different challenges. These tools have mostly been developed in a fragmented way, without clear co-ordination in the delivery and promotion as well as without technical integration.

Here is a picture of the current situation:



[26] *Synthesis Report - Activities undertaken by the National EUROPASS Centres (NECs) under the Restricted Call EACEA 06/2014*, EACEA, 2016.

Some of these tools overlap in purpose and in target audiences. In 2015, the Commission launched a study on the feasibility of streamlining online tools and services for skills and qualifications[27]. The study collected information on and analysed seven portals related to skills and qualifications (EURES, Europass, ESCO, Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe, ENIC-NARIC, EU Skills Panorama and European Youth Portal[28]) to better capture the challenges that target users or/and stakeholders face. The table below illustrates the range of users of the portals analysed and the overlapping in target audiences.

	END USERS				STAKEHOLDERS				
	Jobseekers	Employers	Students	Young People	Higher Education Institutions	Public & Private Employment Services	Policy Experts	Youth Work Organizations	Technology Developers
ENIC-NARIC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
ESCO					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
EU SKILLS PANORAMA					✓	✓	✓		
EURES	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
EUROPASS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
EUROPEAN YOUTH PORTAL				✓	✓			✓	
LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AND QUALIFICATIONS AROUND EUROPE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

✓ Primary target
✓ Secondary target

Source: IT feasibility study for one single integrated service for online skills and qualification

Very often the tools provide similar information, in attempts by each to connect and link with other services, but the information is provided in different formats or may be incomplete without systematic or co-ordinated updating or sharing of information.

The effect is that users are unclear on the purpose of the tools, cannot be assured of the relevance and currency of the information they access, and cannot complete linked processes within a single location. Users' needs vary, traversing topics of education and training and employment; however information and tools that may be of much use are housed in different locations with any linking between each managed on an ad-hoc basis so that a user cannot intuitively navigate tools. In the context of the IT feasibility study mentioned above[29] a survey of stakeholders involved in promoting and use of online tools for skills and qualifications was also carried out to gather the views of a wider pool of stakeholders. A total of 298 respondents provided answer to a questionnaire.

According to the findings, moderate satisfaction with the current seven EU online platforms for skills and qualifications emerged: 59.3% of respondents considered the tools moderately effective and only 24.1% effective or really effective. Overall, the usefulness of the content provided was satisfactory with all the platforms but the update of the content of the seven platforms was considered mostly moderated. According to 75% of participants, Europass content is “Very useful". Europass rated highly also for added value, together with Youth Portal and EURES, with over 88% of respondents agreeing on added value. There is room however for improvement to clarify the purpose/objectives and services of each platform.

[27] *IT feasibility study for one single integrated service for online skills and qualification – Tools as-is analysis, Everis*, 17/12/2015.
[28] https://europa.eu/youth/EU_en
[29] Ibid.

In general, one of the points for improvement that generated a significant consensus among stakeholders was the need for a better integration among platforms. Such poor levels of co-ordination and integration between the services also counteract the important effort and resources committed to managing and promoting each tool. The overall effect is that users do not use, or do not see the value in using a tool, defeating the purpose of having these tools in the first place.

Examples of overlap include:

	Mobility					
	Employment		Education and vocational training		Moving to work/ study in another country	Youth information
	Jobs & Ocupation	Skills & Competences	Qualifications & Recognisition tools	Education & Vocational training offer		
ENIC-NARIC			✓	✓	✓	
ESCO	✓	✓	✓			
EU SKILLS PANORAMA		✓				
EURES	✓	✓		✓	✓	
EUROPASS	✓	✓				
EUROPEAN YOUTH PORTAL	✓			✓	✓	✓
LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AND QUALIFICATIONS AROUND EUROPE			✓	✓	✓	

Source: IT feasibility study for one single integrated service for online skills and qualification

The IT study also highlighted that operation and provision of these services is determined by institutional structures, with each looking to offer information within the context of their own objectives, rather than in conjunction or synergy with other services. Therefore multiple sources of similar information are presented, but often in different formats with no assurances as to updating and relevance. Ultimately user needs are secondary within these terms for development and provision of tools and services.

Users and stakeholders have signalled the need to reduce this fragmentation and simplify current services. The public consultation carried out in 2014 on the European Ares for skills and qualifications[30] identified much room for improvement in the current landscape of tools and services in this field. Markedly low numbers of respondents found tools and services highly or somewhat effective. Only 4% of respondents found European tools for the documentation of learning experience totally satisfactory, with 44% finding them somewhat satisfactory, 27% somewhat unsatisfactory and 19% totally unsatisfactory. Results called for greater integration of services - including their supporting platforms: 44%% of respondents strongly and 33% partially agreed that the creation of one-stop shops providing integrated services on learning opportunities, career guidance and recognition of qualifications for employment purposes or further learning would be beneficial. The same call for better integration and cooperation with other online services was reiterated more recently by the Europass Innovation Working Group[31].

[30] *Towards a European Area of Skills and Qualifications – Results of the public consultation*, Brussels, 17 June 2014. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/consultations/documents/skills-results_en.pdf

[31] Ibid, p. 10.

The stand-alone nature of tools also has implications for how information on labour market and skills intelligence (LMSI) features in tools and services used by individuals and organisations. The EU Skills Panorama (EUSP), as referenced above, is the EU's portal for LMSI that brings together datasets and evidence from various sources, which are analysed and transformed into LMSI. The wider New Skills Agenda for Europe acknowledges the importance of LMSI and understanding skills trends (see section 2.3 of the Staff Working Document accompanying the communication[32]). On transparency and understanding of skills and qualifications, LMSI can be an input into career guidance and counselling and potentially influence individual attitudes to learning and career choices[33]. Individuals could benefit greatly from information to improve their understanding of skills trends and their knowledge of labour markets. For now, while the EUSP evolves in the quality of the information it collects and produces, it remains that it is only accessible through a single stand-alone site rather than in conjunction with other related services.

2.3 Improving insufficient digital compatibility and out-dated nature of online skills tools

Digitalisation and fundamental shifts in how technology is used in recruitment, information management, education and training provision means that this focus on documentation is no longer compatible with an objective to aid transparency and understanding. Organisations such as employers and education institutions more and more use web-based tools and technology such as big data and data crawling for sourcing candidates and filtering applications. Any tools offered to organisations must respond to the effectiveness and efficiency of handling data that they require.

As for individuals, there is increasing use of new ways to document skills and experiences, such as open badges[34] and this has to be taken fully into account. Compatibility with social media, apps, and other devices is another important issue to be tackled. Over the years Europass has responded to some of the challenges and such achievements are a stepping stone for the further developments that are necessary to address evolving needs and situations.

[32] Analytical underpinning for a New Skills Agenda for Europe, SWD(2016) 195 final.

[33] *Staff Working Document accompanying Commission Communication on the Europass Decision*, Cedefop, 2016 (input to the Skills Agenda; not published). CEDEFOP manages the EUSP. See also section 2.4.1 of the Staff Working Document accompanying the New Skills Agenda for Europe (SWD(2016) 195 final)..

[34] Open badges are digital indicators of skills learned inside or outside the classroom. They function as being a seal (or badge) that an issuer (e.g. a training provider) attributes to an individual to certify that s/he has acquired a given knowledge or skill or has gone through a given experience. Being digital they can be incorporated to any documentation on the individual, e.g. CV or social media profile. Being open implies that its usage is not limited to any technology or platform but can be incorporated in any digital setting. See http://openbadges.org/

In other areas of life, potential users can access and manage online and digital services for personal use, for example to get information on specific topics, or to support organisational functions, with ease. Such services are adapted for access on multiple devices, easy sharing and exchanging of information in reusable formats with intuitive layouts for all types of users[35]. EU tools and services have evolved in technological terms but not sufficiently. In a 2015 survey of stakeholders[36] on the platforms, additional functionalities were cited as an area for improvement for Europass, ESCO, EURES, Youth Portal while users of every platform surveyed called for better integration of platforms.

Any potential co-ordination between the tools and services is hindered by the variety of system architectures, technology models and hosting environments. As such both the front and back end of EU tools and services is complex and counterproductive to their goals[37].

Europass and other related EU tools and services need to be interoperable with each other and other similar services, to enable easy sharing of information. Currently individuals that may be looking to complete a single process cannot reuse information, despite the time it may take to upload it in one setting (e.g. completing the Europass CV); they instead need to input such information again to use it elsewhere (e.g. in the application system used by a recruiter). Organisations are unable to effectively exchange information on candidates, vacancies, learning opportunities, and qualifications. As such a wealth of information is denied for policy makers and those involved in skills intelligence and analysis; and employers and education and training institutions are unable to easily filter information on candidates and skills.

2.4 Increasing awareness among the end-users of existing services for skills and qualifications

A symptom of the problems discussed here is that awareness and use of the tools and services is very low. According to the survey conducted in the context of the IT feasibility study mentioned above, the current EU online skills and qualifications services environment is complete but complex. Most of the required information regarding mobility, occupations, skills, education and qualifications is provided by one of the services. However, the current lack of integration between the portals makes it difficult to provide the user with a clear and complete picture of the services offered in the area. The portals' objectives are not easy for users to understand and this results in a lack of clarity on the purpose, audience, content and services for each portal in the existing service environment. This is especially the case for the technical/specialised end-user oriented portals. The service with the most satisfied result is Europass, with 80% of participants responding that it is "Easy" or "Very easy" to understand and access the service. As far as the Youth Portal is concerned, the picture obtained is rather similar to Europass (77% "Easy" or "Very easy"). With ESCO, 77% said that they find the ease of using the service to be from "Moderate" to "Very difficult".

This means that the tools and services have not reached intended users and more fundamentally that the tools have not signalled and proven their full value. Development of distinct tools, separate branding, separate promotion and separate operation dilutes the

[35] Ibid, Europass Innovation Working Group, April 2016.

[36] Stakeholders' survey results (5.10.2015); undertaken as part of Commission IT Feasibility Study for one single online service for skills and qualifications.

[37] Ibid.

potential for each tool and service to reach and serve intended beneficiaries. In 2014 the special Eurobarometer issued on a European Area for Skills and Qualifications addressed the perception that individuals had on skills tools and their effectiveness. Findings showed that only 21% of individuals have heard of the European Qualifications Framework, including 9% who said they knew the EQF level to which their qualifications correspond[38], while only one third (34%) of individuals were aware of even one of the different ways of documenting skills and qualifications. This lack of awareness was particularly serious among some groups: only 7% of those with lower level qualifications were aware of Europass, despite this being a key group in need of support and services to assist their learning and employment needs[39].

The second evaluation of the Europass framework covering the period 2008-2012 confirmed that the unemployed, a key target group for Europass, represented only 12.8% of users[40] calling into question the impact and value of EU tools and services.

Users of the Europass documents according to their educational/occupational status

Educational attainment	All the Europass documents*	Europass CV	Europass Language Passport	Europass Certificate Supplement	Europass Mobility
Primary education	1.1%	1.4%	1.2%	1.0%	0.7%
Secondary (academic route)	16.4%	12.4%	13.6%	15.3%	24.1%
Secondary (vocational route)	14.4%	8.7%	8.7%	23.3%	17.0%
Post-secondary non-university education	14.2%	10.0%	10.0%	20.5%	16.1%
Undergraduate degree	21.2%	28.0%	24.6%	16.8%	15.3%
Post-graduate degree	30.8%	37.1%	39.0%	21.5%	25.6%
Doctorate	1.9%	2.4%	2.9%	1.6%	1.2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Second evaluation of the Europass framework

The availability of easier-to-access, more user-friendly and better integrated services through a reduced number of access points or portals should improve visibility of the services themselves and thus increase awareness. This would have a positive impact on use for all potential users. For the groups that are currently most difficult to reach, services provided on the ground at national level could raise awareness on the tools available and help those who may not have access to, or the skills necessary, to use digital and online tools and services on skills. Simplified access, more modern and visible tools and services would also be more

[38] These and other figures quoted from Eurobarometer were obtained from *Special Eurobarometer survey 417- European Area of Skills and Qualifications. Report*. Full report can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_417_en.pdf

[39] Those stating not having at least a lower secondary level of education.

[40] Figures from the second evaluation of Europass (table 26), available at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/evaluations/docs/education/europass2013_en.pdf

attractive for employers, who could also benefit from better cooperating centres at national level as proposed by the revised Decision.

Regarding guidance services, both the 2014 Eurobarometer and the public consultation on the European Area of Skills and Qualification survey showed that only a quarter of respondents have used a career guidance service (mostly while they were still in education) but a majority agreed that guidance services were useful for making the right choice for further studies[41]. The same survey showed that younger age groups and those with higher levels of education are more likely to have used a guidance service. Statistical data gathered by the Commission in conjunction with representatives of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) on guidance activities at Member State level shows there is incomplete information available[42], due to variation in structures and practices. What is clearly in evidence however is the scale of guidance services in many Member States; data provided by Member States showed guidance activities are organised across multiple sectors and structures with some stating that every teacher within every institution acts in a guidance capacity for individuals.

The issues and causes behind use of guidance services extend beyond issues of awareness; however the role of guidance services impacts significantly on awareness of tools and services. Guidance has the potential to be a point of convergence for the tools. A guidance perspective can direct the development of the tools based on the expertise of practitioners equally to be a key outlet for promotion and awareness of the tools. (Self) assessment of skills, including transversal skills, is an element where guidance services could provide support in the use of self-assessment tools and be in their turn supported when providing guidance.

2.5 Increasing cooperation and communication among national centres to improve the effectiveness and reach of tools and services

The role and activities of the national centres supporting implementation and promoting the tools and services discussed here are set out in section 1.1.4. The operation and levels of communication and cooperation between these centres have an impact on the effectiveness of the tools and services.

The EQF – NCPs, the National Europass Centres and the National Euroguidance Centres are each subject to separate administration and reporting on an annual basis. Each of the three types of centres has separate branding and online presence at national level; each centre manages separate communication and activity programmes. Although good practice exists in some Member States, currently there is little or no overall systematic co-operation or communication between the centres at national level; these working practices and distinct operation means often there is no sense of a coherent service offered on skills and qualifications at national level.

Evaluation reports of activities by the centres have found that centres are not fully reaching all users and have been found to address some of their objectives in part only; there is unclear

[41] Ibid, p. 6.

[42] The data gathered identified over 30,000 guidance professionals active in the 21 countries that responded. In many cases respondents stated there was no national collection of such data and that the data provided did not necessarily cover the full range of guidance services.

information on the impact of their work and centres do not often form long-term strategic views or plans[43].

Analysis of activity reports submitted by centres for 2014[44] show that centres use similar forms of promotion (publications, social media, attendance at public events) and each reports similar difficulties in reaching users and engaging with stakeholders across sectors including employers. Data shows there is poor awareness of these centres among potential beneficiaries, and that centres are not always easily accessible. A Eurobarometer survey found that only 18% of respondents stated that they were aware of at least one of the European information points or services[45]. This is despite Europass centres being established for over 10 years. So too, the synthesis reports[46] of the activities found that EQF, Europass and Euroguidance centres do not reach all their intended audiences and in particular do not appear to reach disadvantaged groups.

> *Impact on role of guidance:* The current operation of centres at national level has particular impact on the role of lifelong and career guidance services. Feedback from the ELGPN and Euroguidance[47] has identified that the importance of guidance services is not visible and interaction between guidance and other services does not occur on a systematic level. This prevents the input by guidance services on the development of tools and services despite the fact that guidance services interact most often with individuals, i.e. the intended beneficiaries of a number of the tools and services.

Countries have appointed designated bodies to manage Europass, EQF and Euroguidance centres and they are organised differently as regards the number of designated bodies and the number of actions (centres) put in place in a country. The table below gives a snapshot of the number of bodies managing Europass, EQF and Euroguidance centres by country in 2016.

Three actions in one country			**Two actions in one country**		**One action in one country**
1 body	2 bodies	3 bodies	1 body	2 bodies	1 body
AT	EE	BE	FR	BG	BA
DK	FI	CY	PL	ES	LI
EL	HR	CZ	RS		
IS	IE	DE	SK		
IT	LT	HU			
ME	LU	RO			
	LV	UK			
	MK				
	MT				

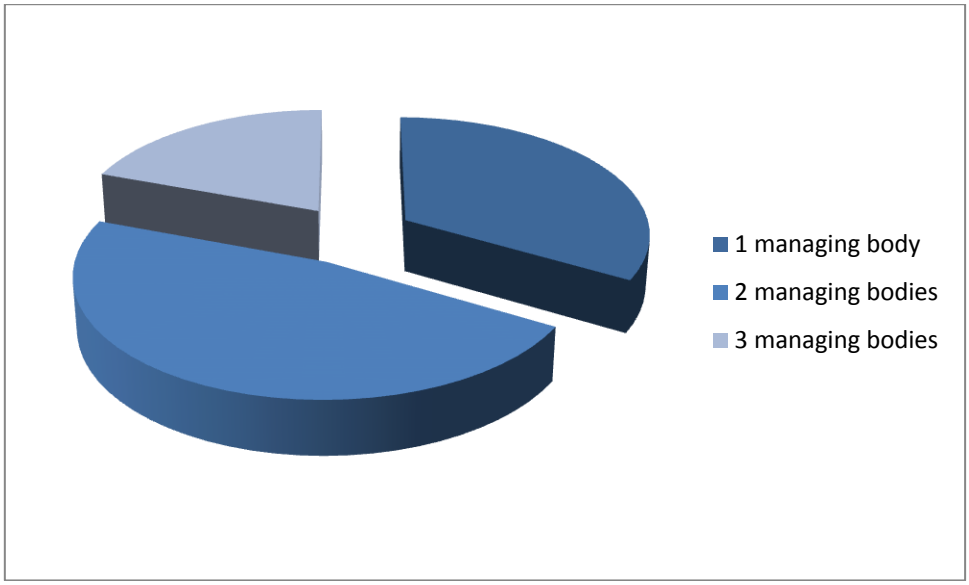
[43] Synthesis reports of activities undertaken by National Europass Centres, Euroguidance Centres, EQF-NCPs; unpublished.

[44] Synthesis Reports of the activities of the centres in 2014,Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2015, unpublished.
[45] The "points or services" listed in the question were Europass contact centres; Your Europe; EURES; Europe Direct; Eurodesk and Euroguidance.
[46] Synthesis Reports of the activities of the centres in 2014, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2015, unpublished.
[47] Collected through the stakeholder consultation for the new skills agenda for Europe.

	NL NO PT SE SI TR				

Source: EACEA 2016.

This data shows that currently in 12 countries one single body hosts all the national centres of the country, in 17 two bodies host all the centres and in 7 countries there are three different bodies managing the centres.



In general, national centres have reported benefits and efficiencies achieved from more systematic co-operation both between centres and where centres are housed together. In countries where the centres are hosted by the same organisation the centres report[48] positive outcomes in terms of both quality and efficiency of activities; even though they currently still need to submit separate applications for financing, prepare separate programmes of activities and submit separate final reports. Overall, any co-operation that does occur at national level occurs mostly on a case-by-case basis and only in relation to specific actions or initiatives on the part of the centres rather than on a systematic basis.

3. Possible ways forward

This section presents the baseline scenario and four main options for the future development of EU tools and services for skills and qualifications. The options are devised so as to address the problems identified above. They are not mutually exclusive and rather build on one another. They are set out progressively so as to propose the minimum of changes which should occur to offer better documentation tools with Option 1; the second option would develop a more comprehensive online service (Option 2); Option 3 would promote better

[48] Synthesis Reports of the activities of the centres in 2014,Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2015, unpublished.

cooperation between national centres and the fourth option would establish a role for the Commission in development of open standards in the area of skills and qualifications (Option 4). This section describes each option, their impacts and how they will address specific problems as well as any implications on governance and associated costs.

3.1 Baseline scenario

The baseline scenario implies no significant change in the current tools and services for skills and qualifications. No legislative framework would be revised nor would structural changes in the online tools and networks be implemented. Only case-by-case improvements of different skills services would take place and no further complementarity or interoperability would be explored.

This scenario offers no basis or flexibility to pursue improvements to documents to respond to users' current and future needs and address issues of overlap or relevance of the documents. Any improvements to online tools and services would be on a case-by-case basis with limited potential for better efficiency and focus on user needs. Services and tools would continue to operate independently, providing similar information, in different formats. This scenario entails no activity on interoperability and any adaptations to technology would be restricted and undertaken on ad hoc basis. No specific actions or co-ordinated efforts would be carried out to promote and increase awareness and use; therefore, it would be unlikely that low levels of awareness and use could be addressed effectively.

Regarding the national centres, the Commission would work to encourage greater cooperation and communication between the existing national centres but the status and separate organisation of each centre would remain in place. The Commission has already begun organising joint meetings as a vehicle to promote the value of cooperation and communication; however the number of participants at the meetings, and the established remit of each network, has meant such meetings have not successfully fostered cooperation at national level.

3.2 Option 1 - Enhancing documentation and online presence

This option would establish the conditions to allow on-going enhancement of the Europass portfolio of documents to allow for the effective and transparent communication of skills and qualifications. Documentation has been the core activity of the existing Europass framework, and, as described above, the form of the current Europass Decision has limited potential for changes to the existing documents and for any wider development of Europass services.

This option would achieve a fundamental shift in how Europass could evolve by establishing the conditions for a more flexible approach to design and development of Europass documents. The new Decision would not specify templates for documents but instead establish a mandate for the development of tools for documenting and sharing information on skills and qualifications, including editing documents, in line with the evolving needs of users and shifts in labour market practices and education and training provision.

The impact for implementation would be that the Commission, Member States and stakeholders could work on developing new and varied tools and formats, on an on-going basis, in response to users' needs rather than adhering to templates established at one point in time with limited possibilities of updating. Europass would establish itself as a **service** offering relevant documentation tools for end users.

The necessary counterpart to new formats and varieties of documentation tools would be that they should also be designed, supported and presented in line with changes in technology. This has been pursued to an extent in the development of Europass to-date; however any such development has occurred within the limitations of the existing five document templates. Implementation of this option would also entail renewing the online presence of the tools and would enable creating, editing and sharing of documents in more innovative ways to meet both user expectations and the reality of how information is shared in today's employment and education sectors. This would also allow enough flexibility to cater for any future developments and changes in technology and practices.

This option would actually focus on documents in isolation, but as described above there are other documentation tools in existence which serve similar or overlapping purposes and the impact of each in turn is diluted from a user perspective. As such this option would also propose pursuing further synergies with other document tools as a minimum requirement to re-inforce the value of documentation tools supported at EU level. The result would be a more coherent provision of documentation tools at EU level that enabled easier sharing of information and improved the clarity, effectiveness and user-experience.

This option would propose to retain the Europass brand for these document services, which would become a unifying brand. The data presented earlier shows that Europass has a history of impact and growth in use and recognition, and clarity around its purpose. The 2015 stakeholder survey already mentioned[49] shows that 94% of the participants feel that Europass is a useful tool. Since the portal has been released in 2005 yearly visits have increased gradually year by year, showing remarkable growth between 2012 (14,812,624 visits) and 2013 (20,897,010 visitors). Social partners and national centres consulted in the context of this initiative both remarked on the achievements and well established Europass brand. A single brand would allow for simplified communication and branding and create potential for strong positive associations with EU documentation tools and establish their added-value.

The limitations of this option would mainly be that the changes envisaged would not extend to the other online tools and supporting services described above (see sections 1.1.2, 1.1.3 and 1.1.4). The necessary complementarity and further synergy with services such as guidance, skills intelligence and information for learners and job-seekers would not be achieved. The development and evolution of the documents, while positive and necessary, would occur alone without effectively tackling the full range of issues that have impacted the efficiency of the framework.

The option would involve a revision of the Europass Decision, although limited in scope. The operation of the national centres would not be addressed.

The following governance and costs considerations arise within this option:

- Any re-design or new approach to development of Europass documents would require consultation with co-owners and stakeholders (as examples, the Language Passport is part of the European Language Portfolio developed by the Council of Europe while the Diploma Supplement is a joint initiative by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and Unesco). However, as detailed in previous sections, stakeholders as well as

[49] Stakeholder survey, *IT feasibility study for one single integrated service for online skills and qualification*, Everis, 17.12.2015.

users have made suggestions and noted the need to change and modernise the Europass documents.

- The promotion of synergies between Europass and other documentation tools would require negotiations with other Commission services, organisations and Member States and also exploratory and developmental technical work to establish synergies.
- On costs, some development costs are envisaged for the enhanced online presence of the document tools, however a portion of these could be accommodated in the already established budget for maintenance of the Europass site; additional financial costs may be covered by Erasmus+.

For 2015, the cost of hosting Europass by Cedefop amounted to € 300.000.

Summary of strength and weaknesses of the option

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
More flexible and adaptable to digital needs. Simplification of documentation of skills. Reduced overlap, increased efficiency and awareness. Limited impacts in terms of costs.	Limited to Europass and documentation only. Most services would still be stand-alone initiatives. Support services provided by networks not addressed.

3.3 Option 2 – Better integration of services

This option would establish an integrated online offering of tools and services, both for documentation of skills and qualifications and a range of related information and services. These services would be offered within a web-portal, with information presented in an intuitive way to meet the needs of different user groups. ESCO would serve as common terminology to describe skills, competences, qualifications and occupations within the tool. The operation of the national centres would not be addressed within this option.

This option would transform the offering of online tools and services for skills and qualifications, Europass would no longer be operated as a portfolio of documents but as a progressive service designed to meet user needs, as necessary. Users could access the information and tools they need to document their skills and qualifications, including those acquired through non-formal and informal learning. In addition, complementary information on learning opportunities, skills intelligence, guidance services, validation of non-formal and informal learning, and information on recognition practices and decisions could each be offered within a single online location.

The comprehensive tool would allow completion of processes for different users within a single web-portal and the synergies and links with other services would mean the number of sites visited separately is reduced. The potential would be significant, and value clear, in enabling a job-seeker or individual looking for career or education or training information complete linked transactions within one main location. Stakeholders, including the national centres, have cautioned against creating a web tool that is difficult to navigate; nevertheless,

the need for modernisation and further digitisation was clearly expressed. The Commission is fully mindful of this concern and has focused any initial conceptual and technical work on user cases and how the tools could serve different types of users in a simpler and more efficient way.

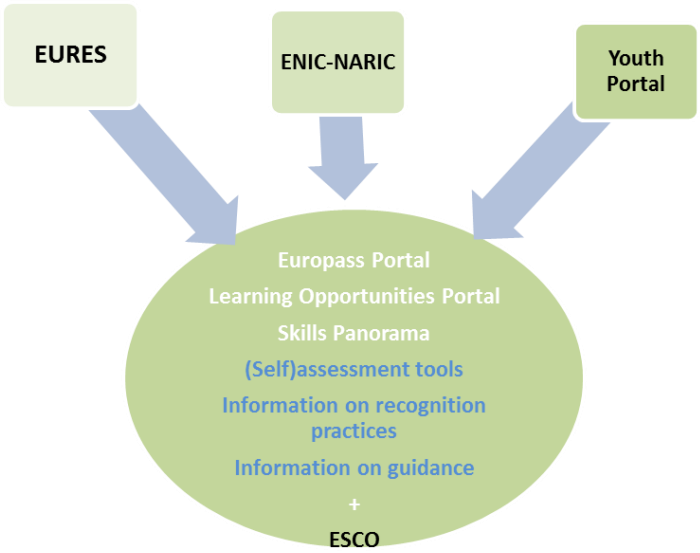
As described in 1.1.2, a number of tools exist, in a document format, to assist self-assessment of skills by individuals. The development of a more comprehensive online service would facilitate development of other forms of tools, such as interactive tools for assessing and understanding skills in specific areas. Importantly, developing such tools through an online system – allowing for interactivity and innovative features, rather than creating document templates – would be most effective and would cater to the potential differing needs and skills levels of users. The assessment experts consulted in the IT feasibility study agreed that to produce comprehensive and valid results, the self-assessment exercise should have a selection of different assessment exercises, namely a self-assessment grid, multiple choice self-assessment questions, scenario-based items and interactive (e.g. game-based) self-assessment.

The efforts and resources in managing and developing the existing tools would see the output and added-value of each reinforced in the new online setting. Marketing, communication and promotion activities would be simplified, through use of a single brand with benefits on visibility and ultimately outreach of the services. The offering of these services through a main web portal would instil co-operation and sharing of information and best practices by EU level services creating possibilities for further development of tools and services. Development of one main service would allow for greater differentiation and specification for different users, extending the use and comprehensiveness of the tool rather than developing stand-alone tools and services as has happened on an ad-hoc basis to date. Future development could include information that is not yet captured in a single location. For instance, information on recognition practices and decisions, in the EU context, has mostly focused on access to regulated professions and on recognition of higher education qualifications. The skills required by today's and most likely future labour market are of course acquired across different sectors of education and training, as well as in more diverse settings. Validation and recognition of skills acquired through such paths are crucial; the integrated tool could offer information on validation and recognition practices and decisions to guide individuals and organisations to have skills properly valued.

So too, information on labour market and skills intelligence would become an inherent part of tools and services accessed by users, allowing possibilities for data and trends on skills supply and demand to inform decision-making, at individual, organisation and policy level. This could contribute, among other things, to tackling skills mismatches by directing choices towards learning paths and careers with better prospects for individuals and give useful information to recruiters and education and training organisations on skills needed. As described above, currently data and information on skills intelligence is housed in a single location – the EU Skills Panorama (EUSP). Information on skills needs and demands, in different sectors, countries and regions will assist those considering employment options in other locations as well as other occupations (in addition to the policy-makers and other practitioners already served through the EUSP). A key role of the EUSP and Labour Market Skills Intelligence (LMSI) more generally is the presentation of key messages in a meaningful and easily interpretable way, so that LMSI could feature in a single tool in ways that are easily understood by individuals based on their needs, interests and skill levels. All this would be underpinned by the possibilities offered by technology, in particular through web-crawling and big data analysis, which would allow gathering information from a wider range of sources and therefore help create a more reliable set of data. To systematically include the information

and data produced by the EUSP in a comprehensive tool for skills and qualifications would create awareness of the role of such intelligence information.[50]

A possible configuration for the integration of services and links and synergy with other tools would be as follows:



Arrows indicate synergies or links to be established with the integrated service. In white are existing portals; blue indicates new features of the tool. ESCO would be the common terminology.

As to limitations associated with this option, the supporting services offered by physical bodies at national level would not be addressed. Accordingly, the person-to-person supports associated with these services, as well as the promotional activities at national level would not be formally co-ordinated.

The following governance and cost considerations arise within this option:

- Negotiations with all relevant partners responsible for the governance, hosting and maintenance of the wider range of tools and services considered under this option would be necessary.
- On costs, initial development costs are envisaged. The impact of such costs would depend on the technical solution found to reinforce synergies and complementarity. Possible alternatives go from simplifying current tools and reduce some overlapping to the fullest integration of main services available. A balance should be struck between costs and benefits of the alternative chosen. Importantly, once established, financial gains can be achieved through reduced costs, such as hosting, for multiple sites.

Cost analyses of current portals for skills and qualifications have been carried out in the feasibility study for the integrated service. Currently, the separate online tools and web portals carry the following costs:

[50] According to the 2014 public consultation on the European Area for Skills and Qualifications, the European Skills Panorama was considered useful only by 27% of respondents. However, 53% of respondents strongly agreed and 31% partially agrees that forecasts on skills supply and needs should be better integrated in education and training strategies. Meanwhile, a new release of the Skills Panorama was launched in December 2015 with enhanced features.

Portal	Budget	Task
Europass	€ 300.000 (2015)	Hosting by Cedefop
EU Skills Panorama	€400.000 (2015) + 100.000 (2015-2016)	Launch of new version + further improvements
Learning opportunity portal	approx. €200.000/year	Maintenance
ESCO	€325.000 (2015)	Hosting and maintenance
EURES	€ 3 million/year	Development, hosting and maintenance

Part of the supplementary costs needed may be covered under the current Union financial provisions such as Erasmus+. For 2016, the Erasmus+ Workprogramme already includes activities to develop web services on skills for an estimated amount of €2.500.000. As services will be integrated into the new Europass platform, a number of platforms should cease to exist. This should help achieve substantial savings in financial resources primarily through the integration of the hosting, maintenance and support of the different IT tools and communication activities. This should amount to around €450.000 per year.

Summary of strength and weaknesses of the option

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
In addition to Option 1: Extension of benefits of Option 1 to a wider range of EU tools and services. More user-friendly and user-oriented solution.	Some issues of governance. Short-term costs. Consideration of web presence strategy of the Commission. Support services provided by networks not addressed.

3.4 Option 3 – Better coordination of support networks

This option entails establishing coordination points at national level to coordinate activities currently associated with the National Europass Centres, EQF National Coordination Points, and Euroguidance Centers. A single body within each Member State would be the main beneficiary of EU funding and the main interface with the Commission in relation to the activities currently carried out by the national centres. It is also proposed that the financial allocations would be made on a multi-annual basis to allow longer-term planning of activities. The coordination point in each country would bring greater coherence and simplification to the operation of national centres and may support greater cooperation among services to enhance the transparency and understanding of skills and qualifications, to support lifelong learning and career guidance at national level. The coordination point could also act as a point of convergence for other linked services such as development of skills intelligence. Communication and promotion activities could get reinforced by a more coherent and synergicistic approach. This would in turn increase visibility of work carried out on the ground and therefore improve outreach to users and stakeholders, which was one of the problems mentioned in the evaluation and consultations.

During consultation on the Skills Agenda in March 2016, concern was expressed on the proposal to set up National Skills Coordination Points taking over the activities of the current networks. Some Member States would prefer to maintain the current situation where the three networks are mostly separate entities under different administrations and invited the Commission not to impose organisational arrangements that would be against the subsidiarity principle. This option proposes that a single body within each Member State is responsible for co-ordination of activities associated with implementation of the Europass Decision and linked tasks related to the EQF, validation, skills intelligence and guidance. Importantly, they would be the main beneficiary of EU funding and the main interface with the Commission. The designation of National Skills Coordination Points as the main interface and beneficiary of Union funding will therefore support simplified administration and reporting and can support greater cooperation and coordination between these national services, including the existing National Europass Centres, EQF National Coordination Points and the Euroguidance network without prejudice to national arrangements in terms of implementation and organisation. As illustrated in section 2.5, this is already happening in several countries.

The following governance and cost considerations arise within this option:

- Upon designation of the National Skills Coordination Points, any decisions about implementation and coordination arrangements at national level are at the discretion of Member States.

- Existing budget allocations for the national level centres will be grouped into a single allocation by country that will be awarded to a single beneficiary in each Member State on a multi-annual basis. This measure would not impact the overall amount allocated by the EU budget to the centres, which in 2006 amounted to €7,300,000. Administrative simplification will ensue in terms of reporting and multiannual financing compared to the current annual exercise. If administrative simplification entails savings in terms of (human and) financial resources, these could be better used to the benefit of the services provided. Steps to simplify administrative work were already taken within the call for policy networks under the Erasmus+ Workprogramme 2016; further steps are currently investigated, such as a multiannual planning and

financing of activities based on feedback received by the policy networks and one lead beneficiary of the funding.

Summary of strengths and weaknesses associated with this option:

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
In addition to Option 1 and 2: National coordination points to bring greater coherence and support more systematic cooperation among existing centres. The administrative burden for the Commission associated with two or three centres per country to be reduced. Multi-annual basis for funding allowing for more strategic long term planning by the centres. Administrative burden for Member States reduced in line with putting in place multi-annual funding, and efficiencies achieved through requirement of a single grant application and final report per country.	Some initial work required on the clear articulation to Member States of the role of the national coordination points to ensure clarity and continuity of the existing functions and objectives of the national centres.

3.5 Option 4 - Better Interoperability between tools

Within this option, the Commission would aim to develop the future European tools and services for skills and qualifications in a manner that ensures a high level of interoperability between its own tools, but also with tools and services provided by Member States or private actors. The operation of the national centres is not addressed within this option.

The Commission would develop standards such as metadata schemata, semantic assets[51] in its online service(s) and make them publicly available for re-use to support interoperability

[51] Metadata schemata is a description of metadata elements, their possible values, the obligation level of the values and the relationships between these metadata elements. The expression 'semantic asset' means a collection of highly reusable metadata or reference data such as code lists, taxonomies, dictionaries or vocabularies which are used for system development.

between systems. These formats and standards would be used by default in EU service(s) and put at disposal of all stakeholders. To ensure that these standards can be used by various partners, the Commission would develop these open standards in close cooperation with Member States and stakeholders. Where applicable, these open standards would build on existing standards, in particular the standards for data exchange in EURES, ESCO, EQF and the ISA Core Vocabularies[52]. This is key to avoiding the duplication of work and creation of stand-alone services discussed throughout this paper.

This option would aim to enhance and simplify communication between future European tools and services for skills and qualifications, and provide the crucial connectivity of language, data and information between the various tools and services under consideration.

The impact would be that the information would be transmitted and exchanged more effectively between various tools and services.

Higher levels of interoperability would enhance the user experience, as the information in one tool could be reused in others. A jobseeker could for example prepare a CV in Europass, and reuse this CV to register on the EURES Job Mobility Portal, to complete his/her social media profile, to apply for a job online and to register for training, without the need to re-enter the data each time. This would provide the user with a seamless experience in which he/she could use several tools to achieve one task, such as finding a job abroad, or identifying new training opportunities that would increase his/her employability.

The ability to exchange data across various tools would allow the tools to become more innovative linking domains of education and training offers with labour market information. Interoperability would also support big data analysis of skills supply and demand - if data in various sources such as job boards, company websites or platforms such as EURES were interoperable, it could be monitored in real time - allowing easier identification of new and emerging trends.

Open standards would be developed in cooperation with Member States and stakeholders. This would allow reuse by a large number of organisations and support to all types of transactions in the labour market and in education and training.

The Commission would coordinate the development of these open standards. Member States and stakeholders such as social partners, employment services, online service providers, statistical institutes, education and training providers would be invited to contribute to the development of the standards.

The following governance and cost considerations arise within this option:

- Negotiations with other Commission services and Member States for the development of standards to ensure coherence with work already being carried out, in particular by EURES.

- To develop standards and enhance exchange and reuse of personal information, some IT developments would be needed, including a possible solution for data storage. This would imply additional costs. Budget may be covered by EU budget (Erasmus+) for IT development.

[52] http://ec.europa.eu/isa/actions/documents/eudig12a-1401-i01-core-vocabularies-lr_en.pdf

- Any processing of personal data (e.g. exchange of personal data and possible data storage) shall be carried out in accordance with EU law on the protection of personal data[53] as well as the national implementing measures thereto.

Summary of strength and weaknesses of the option

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
In addition to Options 1, 2 and 3: Access, exchange and use of data and information from a wide-range of sources. Maximising interoperability between EU services and more widely.	Negotiations with owners and users of relevant information and data. IT development and data storage costs. Data protection issues. Support services provided by networks not addressed.

3.6 Comparison of options

Evidence available shows that continuing delivery and operation of existing tools and services as they stand now does not address any of the problems raised.

Option 1 would have a major impact on documentation tools for skills and qualifications introducing flexibility and modernisation. The documentation of skills and qualifications would be simplified, overlapping reduced with consequent increase in efficiency and awareness. The integration of documentation tools with other services for skills and qualifications, such as information on skills intelligence, for instance, would not however be addressed and therefore impact would be more limited compared to other options.

Option 2 proposes a more integrated service which would build on the positive impacts of Option 1, with a more efficient approach to a wide range of EU tools and services beyond just documentation tools. ESCO would serve as a common terminology to describe skills,

[53] In particular Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 1995 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data (OJ L 281, 23.11.1995, p. 31) and Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2000 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies and on the free movement of such data (OJ L 8, 12.01.2001, p. 1); to be replaced by Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation) - OJ L 119, 4.5.2016, p. 1–88), applicable as of 25 May 2018.

competences, qualifications and occupations. There would be multiple gains in terms of effectiveness and efficiency in comparisons with the baseline scenario and Option 1: improved synergy and flexibility, increased user-friendliness, reduced duplication, effective promotion and responsiveness to current technological developments.

Option 3 is distinct in that it addresses the operation of national centres, which can offer interpersonal services, where the other options propose changes to online tools and services. Through this option the presence and operations of the centres will both be simplified through the establishment of the National Skills Coordination Points. The Coordination Points would act as a mechanism to simplify financing, administration and reporting processes between the EU and Member States. The Coordination Points will have the potential to work in closer cooperation more easily and explore new synergies that bring together their perspectives and expertise.

Option 4 would offer new possibilities to access, exchange and use data and information from a wide-range of sources that is not available in any form in the baseline scenario and in previous options. Interoperability between EU and other tools and services would be maximised.

4 Concluding remarks

The four options presented would each improve the current state of play of EU tools and services for skills and qualifications. The options are progressive in that they each build on the preceding one but so too could be adopted in isolation. This Staff Working Document concludes that the four options presented here must be adopted together – this is the most effective way to address all the challenges posed. Feedback from users, stakeholders and Member States shows that stand-alone services, developed in piecemeal fashion are not meeting the needs of users. Equally, the national services should work in closer cooperation to support implementation and awareness. A new approach, that sets the conditions for development of tools and services in a coherent way, in line with changing demands including new technology, must be assured. With an approach that seeks to offer a comprehensive set of user-friendly tools in a single online location, with coherent national support, the added value of the tools will be more easily established. When users see the value the issues of awareness and use will be addressed in turn.

As a whole, the initiative on better tools and services for skills and qualifications will offer new opportunities to users and other stakeholders to manage and access information on skills and qualifications more easily and in a wider more complete context. The options proposed are future-oriented as they ensure sufficient flexibility to adapt to current needs as well any future evolutions that may be difficult to envisage today.