

# BLUEPRINT

Compendium report of the intellectual outputs, findings, and recommendations



BLUEPRINT for skills cooperation and employment  
in Active Leisure 2018-2020

(Grant Agreement Number 590345-2017-2686)

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## Acknowledgements

The BLUEPRINT for skills cooperation and employment in Active Leisure project could not have been completed without the contributions of many organisations, individuals and experts in the field of education, training and from across the European Active Leisure sector. Notable thanks must of course go to the project partners who have executed the project plan with the utmost commitment and professionalism, and therefore we would like to extend our gratitude to the following partners and individuals:

- EuropeActive: Cliff Collins, Julian Berriman, Elisabeth Thienemann, Kévin Haddad and Antigone Vatylioti
- European Confederation of Outdoor Employers: Dr Herman Smulders, Jean-Yves Lapeyrère and Michalis Tsoukalis
- European Network of Sport Education: Dr Karen Petry and Louis Moustakas
- Fundación Vida Activa Saludable: Alberto Garcia and Associate Professor Xián Mayo Mauriz
- Gdansk University of Physical Education and Sport: Associate Professor Dr Anna Szumilewicz
- International Council for Coaching Excellence: Dr Sergio Lara-Bercial and Dr Ladislav Petrovic
- Sport Ireland: Michael McGeehin, Fiona Larkin and Tony Wright

The BLUEPRINT project was also supported by several key experts who greatly assisted in its delivery. A thank you is especially deserved for:

- Steve McQuaid
- Andy Grant
- John Stringer

We would also like to acknowledge and thank those people and organisations especially the who responded during the several rounds of consultations and surveys and attended the Sector Skills Alliance and skills foresight meetings. Their replies and contributions have helped shape the final recommendations and outcomes of this report and the direction of future qualifications for fitness professionals and outdoor animators.

Finally, we would like to thank the Sport Unit of the Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture for the confidence in, and support they have given to, EuropeActive to undertake this project that will help underpin future policy and actions to develop cooperation in skills and employment for the Active Leisure sector.

## Disclaimer

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

## Introduction

The objectives of the BLUEPRINT project were to maintain momentum in developing and putting into practice the eight stages of developments, conditions and requirements which had been established in the SIQAF pathway. The outcome has been to review, test and trial the delivery of a fully quality-assured education and training programme for current and future instructors and animators in the Active Leisure sector.

The BLUEPRINT project was broadly arranged into four main objectives:

1. Objective I  
To create an evidence base to identify skills gaps in the active leisure sector.
2. Objective II  
To promote the benefits of the learning experience and gaining of the qualifications for developing wider skills for employability and personal well-being as well as supporting the growth of the community.
3. Objective III  
The contribution of active leisure to the employability of young people and the creation of jobs in the sport and active leisure-related labour markets.
4. Objective IV  
To develop a Blueprint for Skills Cooperation and Employment in Active Leisure.

The project was then divided into 12 different intellectual outputs (IOs) which were fully explored and are reported in this document:

1. Blueprint for Skills Cooperation and Employment in Active Leisure,
2. Research of EU28 on current use of qualifications based in Active Leisure,
3. Skills foresight,
4. Scoping of the European Awarding Organisation for the Active Leisure sector,
5. New and updated qualification for fitness (personal trainer) and outdoors (animator) for pan-European use,
6. Application of ECVET and ECTS to new qualifications,
7. Promoting benefits of the learning experience and employability (of young people) in Active Leisure,
8. Validation of informal and non-formal learning in Active Leisure,
9. Testing, trialling and refining development of new qualifications, awarding organisation and recognition of prior learning,
10. Active Leisure qualifications incorporated into National Qualification Frameworks,
11. Recognition of individual achievement through a professional card system,
12. Maintaining the role of the sector skills alliance for Active Leisure.



The progress of a number of IOs were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic although principle objectives have all been met. It is also appropriate to note that one of the contributors to the BLUEPRINT project, and President-elect of EC-OE Mr Michalis Tsoukalis died of COVID-19 in March 2020. The final conference held on 18th November 2020 was dedicated to his memory.

In recent years EuropeActive and the project partners have been integrally involved with the European debate on developing the concept of international qualification 'integration' with national qualification frameworks and broader referencing to the European Qualification Framework. This is seen as critical to the improved delivery and recognition of qualifications across the Active Leisure sector and a sensible reaction to the implied structures of Article 40 of the Directives 2005/36 EC and 2013/55 EU concerning common training frameworks, common training tests and the outcome of individual achievement through a professional card system.

The BLUEPRINT project proposed specifically to address through the model of the pathway developed during the SIQAF project and completed in early 2018 when the BLUEPRINT project started. The circle of the pathway leading to continuous improvement was tested through the BLUEPRINT intellectual outputs which are recorded in this document in full. The project benefited from a number of interactive sessions which encouraged open debate and discussion around the skills and employment agenda.

Here's an overview of the different meetings and events which have punctuated the project:

**Partner meetings:**

- Brussels, 6-7/02/2018
- Cologne, 10-11/09/2018
- Leeds, 12-13/03/2019
- Madrid, 11-12/09/2019
- Dublin, 4-5/02/2020
- Online, 24/11/2020

**Technical Expert Group meetings:**

- Brussels, 24/05/18
- Brussels, 28/06/19
- Online, 20/05/2020

**Final Conference:**

- Online, 18/11/2020

**Sector Skills Alliance (SSA) for Active Leisure meetings:**

- Warsaw, 14/11/2018 (full SSA)
- Cologne, 04/04/2019 (Fitness)
- Online, 20/05/2019 (Outdoor)
- Brussels, 27/06/2019 (Fitness)
- Brussels, 27/06/2019 (Outdoor)

- Brussels, 27/06/2019 (full SSA)
- Copenhagen, 20/11/2019 (Fitness)
- Online, 10/11/2020 (full SSA)

The project was structured to ensure a detailed plan for delivery through coordinated actions and within a realistic timeframe to maximise the resources and support available. Because of the extent of the field work and consultations/research, and the fact that proposals should be reviewed over time, the project was based on the maximum allowable in the Erasmus+ Programme for three years.

The project started with an agreed work plan, detailed administration procedures, timeframes and expected outcomes. By focusing on the existing pathway proposal, the scope of the project was kept highly intensive and deliverable, and included a number of open discussions through the sector skills alliance meetings. Other areas of project activity were systematically reviewed in a timely way to measure their individual effectiveness and performance.

The overall management was the responsibility of EuropeActive who prepared separate agreements for each partner that included their obligations, an outline of the grant available, their tasks and responsibilities through the project collaborative partnership arrangement. To support the project delivery there was administration and operational handbooks, a quality plan, and a dissemination strategy to measure its delivery and ultimately its effectiveness. John Stringer of Berkeley Associates was appointed as the independent external evaluator.

The BLUEPRINT project set some ambitious and far-reaching expectations in terms actions and outcomes for the interested groups and actors who all have a role to play in improving employment and skills delivery across the Active Leisure sector. The outcomes and conclusions contained in the Executive Summary below (BLUEPRINT for skills cooperation and employment in Active Leisure) together with the IO's forming this report are aimed at these target groups:

- The European Commission
- Member States and their relevant agencies
- Sporting federations
- Academic institutions
- Vocational Education Training (VET) bodies
- The thousands of enterprises across Active Leisure
- Individual fitness and outdoor trainers and animators

The question posed for the final conference was 'Are we on our own?' and included 3 videos specially made for the occasion. Because the conference was held virtually much of the context, progress and outcomes were consolidated into the videos to save time, but to keep a permanent record of what, and why things took place. The Executive Summary provides the answer to the question as agreed by the delegates and project partners and sets the framework for how the sector is going to continue to develop and innovate in the critical area of skills cooperation and employment.

Brussels, December 2020.



# **Intellectual Output 1:**

## **BLUEPRINT for Skills Cooperation and Employment in Active Leisure 2018-2020 and Executive Summary**

## English Version:

### BLUEPRINT for Skills Cooperation and Employment in Active Leisure 2018-2020 and Executive Summary

From 2008 onwards the term Active Leisure has been used to describe the two sub-sectors of fitness and outdoors. In the following years a more complex and cross-sectoral relationship has developed and there have been consistent annual increases in numbers of people participating, the number of enterprises involved, and the numbers of people being employed with specialist skills.

Broadly, the Active Leisure sector promotes active, healthy lifestyles through activities, or events and exercise. They are commonly provided under the direction of qualified animators or instructors so that the activities are tailored to match the abilities of the participants and to meet their needs in an enjoyable and safe way.

The political landscape for Active Leisure is extraordinarily strong, and with the societal and health benefits of physical activity being increasingly recognised, the historic connection with sport has grown more distant. Both fitness and outdoor activities are largely based on non-competitive and not on rules-based organised activities. This further differentiates it from other recreational sporting activities.

The continued growth of Active Leisure has put an emphasis on establishing credible and reliable pathways for education and training systems, but which has not yet been fully recognised in employment conditions. The two recognised main sector associations of EuropeActive and the European Confederation of Outdoor Employers (confirmed by the Eurofound Study of 2013), have cooperated to develop comprehensive solutions for understanding and also innovating to support the sector's development, and with an increasingly diverse range of products and services being offered by its entrepreneurs and operators.

In the context of the earlier EU-funded action SIQAF <sup>1</sup>, the BLUEPRINT project has put into practice, tested, evaluated and recorded the implementation of its principle objective to develop a 'harmonisation' of sector-specific qualifications within a context of wider recognition and acceptance. In a cycle of continuous improvement and based on the SIQAF pathway the BLUEPRINT project has put into practice the eight stages of its development and requirements. These are to be considered and accepted from the representative and authoritative voice of Active Leisure, and especially in the delivery of a fully quality-assured education and training programme for its instructors and animators.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.active-leisure-alliance.eu/projects/active-leisure-egf>





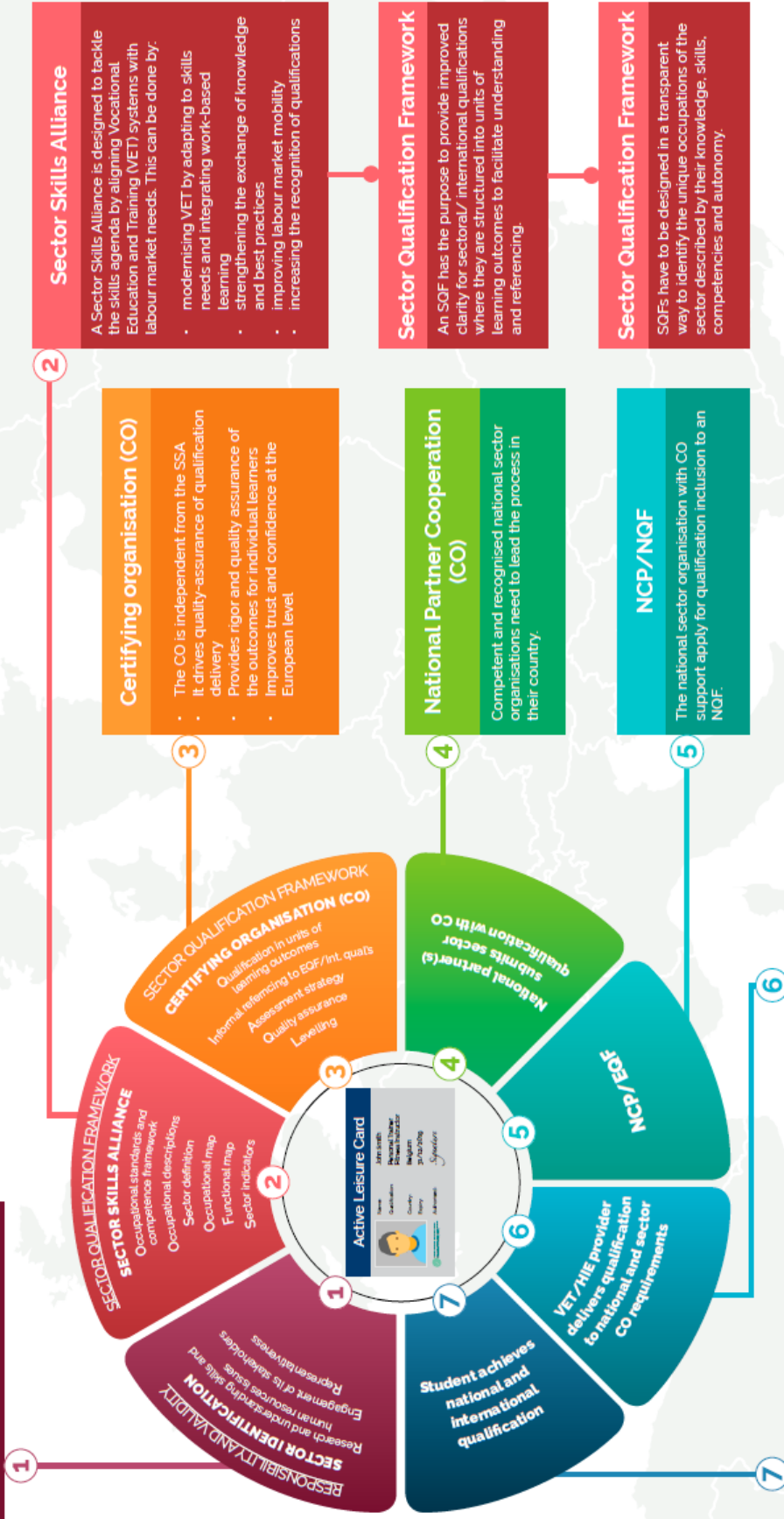
## **The Pathway for developing and recognising qualifications for instructors and animators in Active Leisure**

The prospect of a changed and challenging landscape of a post-COVID world has accelerated thinking in realising new opportunities for the Active Leisure sector, where recovery and growth should be founded on sound evidence and good practice. To be convincing to its own stakeholders, in respect for the perspective of Member State positioning on their sovereign responsibilities in education and training, and also to consider the policy implementation of European Instruments has meant a thorough interrogation of the pathway and its outcomes. This is to give validity and certainty to the BLUEPRINT for the sector's development and success in the implementation of its skills strategy. The Sector's ability to adapt and to be agile has already shown it has a resilience and ability to evolve, embrace digital technologies, and to be creative in supporting its millions of users who want to have fun, and to improve their health and wellbeing.

The growing 'healthy lifestyle for all' concept is something which will resonate loudly in the coming years, and which will demand an even higher supply of skilled workers and business solutions.

## REFERENCING INTERNATIONAL & SECTOR QUALIFICATIONS WITH NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN FRAMEWORKS

**Sector Identification**  
Understanding the sector, its stakeholders and size is the key to effectively supporting the employers and skills development.



### “Are we on our own?”

Cooperation and consideration have become key words in the way that the Active Leisure sector must move forward to realise a new and enhanced position as part of more broadly conceived healthcare services. This must be done by acknowledging the increasing recognition of the importance of healthy lifestyles for all policy actions and the role of health-enhancing physical activity. This cooperation must be balanced, however, to appreciate the resources which are available, and where key objectives can be realistically achieved. This especially relates to the way that the Council Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework position with regards to international qualifications has not progressed in the way envisaged. Working in close cooperation with national coordination points to put Active Leisure qualifications onto NQFs is too-resource intensive for both the sector organisations and NQFs and therefore is not a realistic expectation as a short-term outcome.

Although there are already some Active Leisure qualifications on NQFs, the broader scheme of the possible adoption and incorporation of these by other NQFs is not a way forward. Therefore, to keep momentum and meet sector demand, the BLUEPRINT has proposed that the sector organisations continue to develop their own tried and tested systems to broaden the reach and appeal of its qualifications. The answer to the question posed at the BLUEPRINT final conference on 18th November 2020 “Are we on our own?” is yes, and the Active Leisure sector does have the thinking and instruments together with its representativeness to carry-out this continued programme of qualification development and delivery. However, it is also fully recognised that this can only be successful in the long-term through partnerships with the Member States and its agencies and with the assistance, support, and compliance of the European Commission.

The stages of the pathway were divided into reports based on the intellectual outputs of the project, which covered:

- Research on the use of Active Leisure Sector qualifications
- Skills foresight for Active Leisure
- A certifying organisation for Active leisure qualifications
- Updating of Active Leisure qualifications (based on skills foresight)
- The application of ECTS and ECVET to Active Leisure qualifications
- Promoting the benefits of learning and employability in Active Leisure
- The validation of informal and non-formal learning in Active Leisure
- The testing and trialling of the updated Active Leisure qualifications
- Active Leisure qualifications incorporated into NQFs
- The recognition of personal achievement through a professional card system
- Maintaining the role of the Sector Skills Alliance for active Leisure

The reports can be downloaded at [Blueprint for Skills Cooperation and Employment in Active Leisure | EuropeActive EU Affairs](#).

## French Version:

Plan de coopération en matière de compétences et d'emploi dans le cadre des  
Loisirs actifs 2018-2020 et résumé

Depuis 2008, le terme Loisirs actifs est utilisé pour décrire les deux sous-secteurs que sont l'exercice physique et l'activité en plein air. Dans les années qui ont suivi, une relation plus complexe et intersectorielle s'est développée et l'on a observé une augmentation annuelle constante du nombre de participants, du nombre d'entreprises impliquées et du nombre de personnes employées dotées de compétences spécialisées.

De manière générale, le secteur des Loisirs actifs promeut des modes de vie sains et actifs par le biais d'activités, d'événements et d'exercices. Ils sont généralement organisés sous la direction d'animateurs ou d'instructeurs qualifiés pour que les activités soient adaptées aux capacités des participants et répondent à leurs besoins de manière agréable et en toute sécurité.

Le paysage politique pour les Loisirs actifs est extraordinairement robuste, et les avantages sociaux et sanitaires de l'activité physique étant de plus en plus reconnus, le lien historique avec le sport s'est estompé. Les activités physiques et les activités de plein air s'articulent en grande partie sur des activités hors compétition et non sur des activités organisées axées sur des règles. Cela les différencie encore des autres activités sportives récréatives.

La croissance continue des Loisirs actifs a mis en exergue la mise en place de filières crédibles et fiables pour les systèmes d'enseignement et de formation, qui n'ont pas encore été pleinement reconnues dans les conditions d'emploi. Les deux principales associations sectorielles reconnues, EuropeActive et la European Confederation of Outdoor Employers (confirmées par l'étude Eurofound de 2013), ont coopéré à la mise en place de solutions globales de compréhension et d'innovation pour soutenir le développement du secteur. En outre, leurs entrepreneurs et leurs opérateurs présentent une gamme de produits et de services de plus en plus diversifiée.

Dans le cadre de la précédente action financée par l'UE, SIQAF<sup>2</sup>, le projet BLUEPRINT a permis la mise en place, le test, l'évaluation et l'enregistrement de la mise en œuvre de son objectif principal, à savoir « l'harmonisation » des qualifications sectorielles dans un contexte de reconnaissance et d'acceptation plus larges. Dans un cycle d'amélioration continue et sur la base du SIQAF, le projet BLUEPRINT a permis de mettre en place les huit étapes de son développement et ses exigences. Elles doivent être perçues et acceptées sous le prisme représentatif et qui fait autorité des Loisirs actifs et tout particulièrement dans la réalisation d'un programme d'enseignement et de formation dont la qualité est assurée pour les instructeurs et les animateurs.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.active-leisure-alliance.eu/projects/active-leisure-egf>





## La voie à suivre pour développer et reconnaître les qualifications des instructeurs et des animateurs de Loisirs actifs

La perspective d'un paysage transformé et émaillé de difficultés dans un monde post-COVID a accéléré la réflexion pour réaliser de nouvelles possibilités pour le secteur des Loisirs actifs ; la reprise et la croissance devraient y reposer sur des preuves solides et de bonnes pratiques. Pour convaincre ses propres parties prenantes, dans le respect du positionnement des États membres sur leurs responsabilités souveraines en matière d'enseignement et de formation, et aussi pour examiner la mise en œuvre politique des Instruments européens, une analyse du parcours et de ses résultats s'est imposée. Le but étant de conférer validité et certitude au BLUEPRINT pour le développement et la réussite du secteur dans la mise en œuvre de sa stratégie sur les compétences. La faculté du secteur à s'adapter et à faire preuve de flexibilité a déjà prouvé sa résilience et sa capacité à évoluer, à adopter les technologies numériques et à être créatif pour soutenir ses millions d'utilisateurs qui veulent se divertir tout en améliorant leur santé et leur bien-être.

Le concept en plein essor de « *mode de vie sain pour tous* » suscitera une vive attention dans les années à venir, et cela entraînera une demande accrue pour des travailleurs qualifiés et des solutions d'entreprise.

**Identification du Secteur**

La compréhension du secteur, de ses intervenants et de sa taille est l'élément clé permettant de soutenir de façon efficace les employeurs et le développement des compétences.

1

**RESPONSABILITE ET VALIDITE**

Capacités de recherche et de compréhension et questions de ressources humaines  
Représentativité  
Engagement de ses rivières

2

**Organisme de certification (OC)**

- L'OC est indépendant de l'ACS
- Il est à l'origine de l'assurance qualité de la délivrance de certifications
- Il garantit la rigueur et l'assurance qualité des résultats pour les apprenants individuels
- Il améliore la confiance au niveau européen

3

**Alliance Sectorielle pour les Compétences**

Une Alliance sectorielle pour les compétences a vocation à traiter de la question des compétences en alignant les systèmes d'Enseignement et formation professionnels (EFP) sur les besoins du marché du travail. Ceci peut être assuré par :

- une modernisation de l'EFP en l'adaptant aux besoins en compétences et en intégrant la formation par le travail
- un renforcement de l'échange de connaissances et de bonnes pratiques
- améliorer la mobilité sur le marché du travail
- une augmentation de la reconnaissance des certifications

4

**L'étudiant obtient une certification nationale et internationale**

Celui qui assure l'EFP / TES fournit une certification correspondant aux exigences des OC nationaux et sectoriels

5

**Partenaire de coopération National (CO)**

Des organisations sectorielles nationales compétences et reconnues doivent piloter ce processus dans leur pays.

6

**Cadre de Certification Sectorielle**

Un CCS a pour objectif d'offrir une plus grande clarté aux certifications sectorielles/ internationales lorsqu'elles sont structurées en unités d'acquis d'apprentissage pour faciliter la compréhension et le référencement.

7

**Point de Contact National/ Cadre National de Qualification**

L'organisation sectorielle nationale, avec le soutien de l'OC, postule pour l'inclusion des certifications auprès d'un CNC.

8

**Cadre de Certification Sectorielle**

Les CCS doivent être élaborés de façon transparente afin d'identifier les professions uniques du secteur décrites par les connaissances, les aptitudes, les compétences et l'autonomie.

9

**Etablissements de formation professionnelle (EFP) et d'enseignement supérieur**

L'EFP et les organismes d'enseignement supérieur travaillant dans les conditions et selon les exigences nationales en vigueur délivrent la certification en partenariat avec l'OC.

10

**Réalisation des Objectifs D'apprentissage**

La certification délivrée doit répondre aux exigences nationales et européennes et l'OC ajoute sa validation.

11

## Reconnaissance/Carte Professionnelle

L'apprenant individuel est reconnu par le biais d'un processus d'enregistrement sectoriel ou international afin d'encourager la reconnaissance et la mobilité.



## « Sommes-nous seuls ? »

La coopération et la prise en considération sont devenues des mots clés dans les efforts du secteur des Loisirs actifs pour se doter d'une position nouvelle et améliorée dans le cadre de services de santé conçus de manière plus large. Pour ce faire, il convient d'apprécier la reconnaissance croissante de l'importance de modes de vie sains pour toutes les mesures politiques et du rôle de l'activité physique favorable à la santé. Toutefois, cette coopération doit être équilibrée pour comprendre les ressources disponibles et les domaines où des objectifs clés peuvent être atteints de manière réaliste. Cela concerne particulièrement la Recommandation du Conseil relative à la place du cadre européen des certifications vis-à-vis des certifications internationales, qui n'a pas progressé de la manière escomptée. Travailler en étroite collaboration avec les points de coordination nationaux pour insérer les certifications Loisirs actifs dans les CNC demande trop de ressources tant pour les organisations sectorielles que pour les CNC et, par conséquent, n'est pas une attente réaliste à court terme.

Bien qu'il existe déjà certaines certifications en matière de Loisirs actifs dans les CNC, le programme plus large visant à une potentielle adoption et intégration de ces certifications par d'autres CNC n'est pas une voie à suivre. Par conséquent, afin de maintenir l'élan et de répondre à la demande sectorielle, il est proposé dans le BLUEPRINT que les organisations sectorielles continuent de mettre au point leurs propres systèmes éprouvés afin d'élargir la portée et l'attrait de leurs certifications. La réponse à la question « Sommes-nous seuls ? », posée lors de la conférence finale BLUEPRINT du 18 novembre 2020, est oui. Le secteur des Loisirs actifs dispose des capacités de réflexion et des instruments ainsi que de sa représentativité pour mener à bien ce programme continu de développement et d'exécution des certifications. Toutefois, il est également pleinement reconnu que ces efforts ne peuvent être couronnés de succès à long terme que par le biais de partenariats avec les États membres et leurs agences, ainsi qu'avec l'assistance et le soutien de la Commission européenne.

Les étapes du parcours ont été divisées en rapports axés sur les résultats intellectuels du projet, qui couvraient :

- La recherche sur l'utilisation des certifications du secteur des Loisirs actifs
- Une anticipation des compétences pour les Loisirs actifs
- Un organisme de certification pour les Loisirs actifs
- Une mise à jour des certifications en matière de loisirs actifs (sur la base de l'anticipation des compétences)
- L'application de l'ECTS et de l'ECVET aux certifications en matière de Loisirs actifs
- La promotion des avantages découlant de l'apprentissage et de l'employabilité dans les loisirs actifs
- La validation de l'apprentissage informel et non formel dans les Loisirs actifs
- L'essai et le contrôle des certifications à jour en matière de Loisirs actifs
- L'insertion des certifications en matière de Loisirs actifs dans les CNC
- La reconnaissance des réalisations personnelles dans le cadre d'un système de cartes professionnelles
- La préservation du rôle de l'Alliance sectorielle pour les compétences pour les loisirs actifs

Les rapports peuvent être téléchargés ici : [Plan de coopération en matière de compétences et d'emploi dans le cadre des Loisirs actifs | EuropeActive EU Affairs](#).

## German Version:

### BLUEPRINT für einheitliche Kompetenzen und Beschäftigung im Active Leisure-Sektor 2018-2020 und Kurzfassung

Seit 2008 kooperieren die Fitness- und die Outdoor-Branche unter dem gemeinsamen Oberbegriff „Active Leisure“. Seitdem hat sich eine komplexe und branchenübergreifende Partnerschaft entwickelt, an der von Jahr zu Jahr mehr Menschen und Unternehmen beteiligt sind, die gemeinsam immer mehr Mitarbeiter mit entsprechenden fachlichen Kompetenzen beschäftigen.

Grob gesprochen fördert Active Leisure durch Aktivitäten, Veranstaltungen und sportliche Betätigung einen aktiven und gesunden Lebensstil. Üblicherweise werden sie von qualifizierten Animatoren oder Trainern angeleitet, so dass diese Aktivitäten auf die Fähigkeiten der Teilnehmer abgestimmt werden können und deren Bedürfnisse auf angenehme und sichere Art und Weise erfüllen.

Das politische Umfeld für den Bereich Active Leisure ist außerordentlich günstig, wobei die sozialen und gesundheitlichen Vorteile von körperlicher Aktivität immer stärker in den Vordergrund rücken und die historischen Verbindungen zu herkömmlichen Formen des Sports schwächer werden. So fehlen den meisten Aktivitäten im Fitness- und Outdoor-Bereich der Wettkampfcharakter und feste Regeln. Dadurch unterscheiden sie sich von anderen Formen der sportlichen Aktivität in der Freizeit.

Da der Active Leisure-Sektor ständig weiter wächst, liegt ein Schwerpunkt auf der Entwicklung nachprüfbarer und zuverlässiger Wege der beruflichen Bildung, die sich jedoch bei den Beschäftigungsbedingungen noch nicht vollständig widerspiegeln. Die Vielfalt der von Unternehmen und Betreibern angebotenen Produkte und Dienstleistungen nimmt ständig zu; auch deshalb haben die beiden wichtigsten Branchenverbände EuropeActive und European Confederation of Outdoor Employers, die allgemein anerkannt sind (wie auch eine Studie von Eurofound aus dem Jahr 2013 bestätigt), gemeinsam umfassende Lösungen entwickelt, um die Entwicklung des Sektors besser zu verstehen und Innovationen zu fördern.

Das grundlegende Ziel der inzwischen abgeschlossenen EU-finanzierten Maßnahme SIQAF<sup>3</sup> war es, die branchenspezifischen Qualifikationen zu „harmonisieren“ und dadurch eine breitere Anerkennung und Akzeptanz zu erreichen. Mit dem Projekt BLUEPRINT sollten die Ergebnisse umgesetzt, getestet, ausgewertet und systematisch erfasst werden. In einem Kreislauf ständiger Verbesserungen und auf der Grundlage des SIQAF-Fahrplans wurden im Projekt BLUEPRINT die acht Stufen der Entwicklung und Anforderungen in die Praxis umgesetzt. Diese sollen von den maßgebenden Vertretern der Active Leisure-Branche berücksichtigt und übernommen werden, insbesondere in Bezug auf ein Ausbildungssystem für Trainer und Animatoren mit umfassender Qualitätssicherung.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.active-leisure-alliance.eu/projects/active-leisure-egf>



## **Fahrplan zur Entwicklung und Anerkennung von Qualifikationen für Trainer und Animateure im Bereich Active Leisure**

Die Aussicht auf ein verändertes und schwieriges Umfeld nach der COVID-Epidemie hat das Nachdenken über neue Möglichkeiten für den Active Leisure-Sektor beschleunigt, bei denen wirtschaftliche Erholung und Wachstum auf zuverlässigen Daten und bewährten Verfahren basieren. Damit der Fahrplan und dessen Ergebnisse die Akteure der Branche überzeugen, die Perspektive der Mitgliedstaaten in Bezug auf ihre souveränen Kompetenzen im Bereich der allgemeinen und beruflichen Bildung respektieren und auch die politische Umsetzung europäischer Instrumente berücksichtigen, mussten sie sorgfältig überprüft werden. Dieser Prozess sollte gewährleisten, dass der BLUEPRINT für die künftige Entwicklung der Branche und die erfolgreiche Umsetzung ihrer Qualifikationsstrategie stichhaltig und sicher sind. Die Branche hat bereits bewiesen, dass sie widerstandsfähig und agil ist, sich anpassen kann und in der Lage ist, sich weiterzuentwickeln, digitale Technologien einzusetzen und ihre Millionen Nutzer kreativ dabei zu unterstützen, Spaß zu haben und ihre Gesundheit und ihr Wohlbefinden zu verbessern.

Die Forderung „*gesunder Lebensstil für alle*“ wird in den kommenden Jahren immer lauter werden und die Nachfrage nach qualifizierten Arbeitnehmern und guten Branchenlösungen erhöhen.





## „Stehen wir allein da?“

Kooperation und Rücksicht sind Schlüsselbegriffe, an denen sich der Active Leisure-Sektor ausrichten muss, wenn er eine neue und führende Position als Teil eines weiter gefassten Gesundheitswesens einnehmen will. Dazu müssen bei allen politischen Maßnahmen auch die zunehmende Bedeutung eines gesunden Lebensstils und die positiven Auswirkungen von körperlicher Aktivität auf die Gesundheit anerkannt werden. Diese Kooperation muss jedoch ausgeglichen sein, damit die verfügbaren Ressourcen gewürdigt werden und gleichzeitig realistisch eingeschätzt werden kann, welche grundlegenden Ziele erreichbar sind. Dies bezieht sich insbesondere darauf, dass die Empfehlung des Rates über den Europäischen Qualifikationsrahmen bei den internationalen Qualifikationen noch nicht die vorgesehenen Fortschritte erzielt hat. Eine enge Zusammenarbeit mit den nationalen Koordinierungsstellen, um Qualifikationen im Bereich Active Leisure in nationale Qualifikationsrahmen (NQR) zu integrieren, übersteigt die Ressourcen der Branchenverbände und der Koordinierungsstellen und ist daher kurzfristig nicht realistisch.

Obwohl einige NQR bereits Active Leisure-Qualifikationen enthalten, ist die mögliche Anerkennung und Übernahmen dieser Qualifikationen in andere NQR nicht der richtige Weg. Um die erreichte Dynamik zu nutzen und die Bedürfnisse der Branche zu erfüllen, schlägt das Projekt BLUEPRINT daher vor, dass die Branchenverbände ihre eigenen erprobten und bewährten Systeme weiterentwickeln und Reichweite und Attraktivität ihrer Qualifikationen erhöhen. Auf der Abschlusskonferenz von BLUEPRINT am 18. November 2020 stand die Frage im Raum: „Stehen wir allein da?“. Die Antwort lautet „Ja“, aber die Active Leisure-Branche verfügt über die richtige Denkweise, die Instrumente und eine starke Branchenvertretung, um diesen Prozess der Entwicklung und Vergabe von Qualifikationen weiter fortzusetzen. Allerdings erkennt sie auch ohne Vorbehalt an, dass dieser Prozess langfristig nur durch Partnerschaften mit den Mitgliedstaaten und deren Behörden sowie mit Hilfe, Unterstützung und dem Einverständnis der Europäischen Kommission erfolgreich sein kann.

Der Fahrplan ist in Stufen gegliedert, die auf den Berichten über die Analyseprodukte des Projekts zu den folgenden Themenbereichen basieren:

- Forschung zur Nutzung von Active Leisure-Qualifikationen
- Prognose zu den Kompetenzen im Active Leisure-Sektor
- Eine Zertifizierungsstelle für Active Leisure-Qualifikationen
- Überarbeitung der Active Leisure-Qualifikationen (auf der Grundlage der Kompetenzprognose)
- Anwendung von ECTS- und ECVET-Punkten für Active Leisure-Qualifikationen
- Aufklärung über die Vorteile von Lernen und Beschäftigungsfähigkeit im Active Leisure-Sektor
- Anerkennung informeller und nicht formeller Lernergebnisse im Active Leisure-Sektor
- Test und Erprobung der überarbeiteten Active Leisure-Qualifikationen
- In NQR integrierte Active Leisure-Qualifikationen
- Anerkennung persönlicher Leistungen durch ein Berufsausweissystem
- Stärkung der Rolle der Kompetenzallianz für den Active Leisure-Sektor

Die Berichte können unter folgendem Link heruntergeladen werden [Blueprint for Skills Cooperation and Employment in Active Leisure | EuropeActive EU Affairs](#).



## Spanish Version:

### Proyecto BLUEPRINT para la cooperación en habilidades y empleabilidad en el ocio activo 2018-2020 y resumen ejecutivo

En el año 2008 se empezó a utilizar el término "ocio activo" para describir los dos subsectores de fitness y actividades en el medio natural. A partir de entonces hubo una relación más compleja e intersectorial y un aumento anual constante de personas y empresas participantes, así como de personas empleadas con habilidades especializadas.

En términos generales, el sector del ocio activo promueve estilos de vida activos y saludables a través de actividades, eventos y ejercicio. Estas actividades se ofrecen habitualmente bajo la dirección de entrenadores o instructores cualificados para que se adapten a las capacidades de los participantes y satisfacer sus necesidades de manera divertida y segura.

El panorama político del ocio activo es muy sólido. Los beneficios de la actividad física para la sociedad y la salud tienen cada vez mayor reconocimiento, por lo que su conexión tradicional con el deporte se ha debilitado. Tanto el fitness como las actividades en el medio natural se llevan a cabo en gran medida mediante actividades organizadas no competitivas y no basadas en normas. Esto lo diferencia aún más de otras actividades deportivas recreativas.

El crecimiento continuo del ocio activo subraya la importancia de establecer procedimientos creíbles y fiables en los sistemas de educación y formación que aún no tienen pleno reconocimiento en condiciones de empleo. Las dos asociaciones principales reconocidas del sector, EuropeActive y European Confederation of Outdoor Employers (confirmadas por el informe de 2013 de Eurofound), han colaborado para crear soluciones integrales de comprensión e innovación y apoyar el desarrollo del sector con una gama cada vez más diversa de productos y servicios ofrecidos por empresarios y operadores.

En el contexto de la iniciativa SIQAF financiada por la UE<sup>4</sup>, el proyecto BLUEPRINT ha puesto en práctica, probado, evaluado y registrado la aplicación de su objetivo principal: desarrollar una «armonización» de las cualificaciones específicas del sector en un contexto de reconocimiento y aceptación más amplio. En un ciclo de mejora continua basado en el procedimiento SIQAF, el proyecto BLUEPRINT ha aplicado las ocho etapas de su desarrollo y sus requisitos. Estas etapas deben ser consideradas y aceptadas por la voz representativa y autorizada del ocio activo, especialmente en la ejecución de un programa de educación y formación para instructores y entrenadores de calidad garantizada.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.active-leisure-alliance.eu/projects/active-leisure-egf>



## El procedimiento para desarrollar y reconocer las cualificaciones para instructores y entrenadores de ocio activo

La perspectiva de un panorama cambiante y desafiante de un mundo pos-COVID ha acelerado la idea de lograr nuevas oportunidades para el sector del ocio activo, donde la recuperación y el crecimiento deben basarse en pruebas sólidas y buenas prácticas. Ser convincentes para las partes interesadas en lo que respecta a la perspectiva de la posición de los Estados miembros sobre sus responsabilidades soberanas en materia de educación y formación, así como considerar la aplicación de políticas de los instrumentos europeos, ha implicado un análisis exhaustivo del procedimiento y sus resultados. El objetivo es dar validez y seguridad al proyecto BLUEPRINT para el desarrollo y éxito del sector en la aplicación de su estrategia de habilidades. Además de su capacidad de adaptación y agilidad, el sector ha demostrado resiliencia y capacidad para evolucionar, adoptar tecnologías digitales y apoyar con creatividad a sus millones de usuarios, que desean divertirse y mejorar la salud y el bienestar.

El concepto cada vez más extendido de *"estilo de vida saludable para todos"* resonará con fuerza en los próximos años y exigirá una mayor oferta de trabajadores cualificados y soluciones empresariales.

## Sector Identification

**G**



2

**RESPONSIBILITY AND VALIDITY**  
**SECTOR IDENTIFICATION**  
Research and understanding of  
human resources issues  
Engagement of its stakeholders  
Representativeness



- 

## 4

achieves  
onal and  
ernational  
qualification

## NCP/NQF



The qualification is delivered to meet national and European requirements with the CO adding its validation.

Working within any prevailing national conditions and requirements the VET and higher education providers deliver the qualification in combination with the CO.



Individual learner recognised through sector or international registration process to support increased awareness and mobility



## “¿Estamos solos?”

La cooperación y la atención ya son palabras clave a la hora de pensar en la evolución necesaria del sector del ocio activo para mejorar su posición y ocupar un lugar nuevo en la oferta de servicios sanitarios más amplios. Para ello es necesario admitir el reconocimiento cada vez más generalizado de la importancia del estilo de vida saludable en todas las iniciativas políticas y el papel de la actividad física en la mejora de la salud. Sin embargo, esta cooperación debe ser equilibrada para poder apreciar los recursos disponibles y saber qué objetivos clave se pueden alcanzar de manera realista. Esto se refiere especialmente a la Recomendación del Consejo sobre el Marco Europeo de Cualificaciones respecto a las cualificaciones internacionales, un tema en el que no se ha logrado el avance previsto. Trabajar en estrecha colaboración con los puntos de coordinación nacional para incluir las cualificaciones del ocio activo en los Marcos de Cualificación Nacional (NQF, por sus siglas en inglés) consume demasiados recursos tanto para las organizaciones sectoriales como para los NQF y, por lo tanto, no es una expectativa realista como resultado a corto plazo.

Algunas cualificaciones de ocio activo ya se han incluido en los NQF, sin embargo la idea más general de que sean adoptadas e incorporadas por otros NQF no es un camino a seguir. Por lo tanto, para conservar el impulso actual y satisfacer la demanda del sector, el proyecto BLUEPRINT ha propuesto que las organizaciones sectoriales continúen desarrollando sus propios sistemas probados y ensayados a fin de ampliar el alcance y el atractivo de sus cualificaciones. La respuesta a la pregunta formulada en la conferencia final de BLUEPRINT del 18 de noviembre de 2020 "¿Estamos solos?" es sí, y el sector del ocio activo tiene las ideas y los instrumentos necesarios, además de su representatividad, para llevar a cabo este programa continuo de desarrollo y aplicación de cualificaciones. Sin embargo, también se reconoce plenamente que el éxito sólo será a largo plazo, a través de asociaciones con los Estados miembros y sus organismos y con la ayuda, el apoyo y la conformidad de la Comisión Europea.

Las etapas del procedimiento se dividieron en informes basados en los resultados intelectuales del proyecto, que abarcan:

- Investigación sobre el uso de cualificaciones del sector del ocio activo
- Previsión de las habilidades de ocio activo
- Una organización que certifique las cualificaciones de ocio activo
- Actualización de las cualificaciones de ocio activo (basada en la previsión de las habilidades)
- La aplicación de los principios de ECTS y ECVET a las cualificaciones de ocio activo
- Promover los beneficios del aprendizaje y la empleabilidad en el ocio activo
- La validación del aprendizaje informal y no formal en el ocio activo
- Pruebas y ensayos de las cualificaciones actualizadas de ocio activo
- Incorporación de cualificaciones de ocio activo a los NQF
- Reconocimiento del logro personal a través de un sistema de tarjeta profesional
- Mantener la función de la Alianza de Habilidades Sectoriales para el ocio activo

Los informes se pueden descargar en [Proyecto Blueprint para la cooperación en habilidades y empleabilidad en el Ocio Activo | EuropeActive EU Affairs](#).



# **Intellectual Output 2:**

## **Provision and Use of Qualifications in Active Leisure**



## Provision and Use of Qualifications in Active Leisure

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*Date of Publication: 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020*

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## 1. Introduction

Active Leisure is defined as a combination of fitness and outdoor-based activities that are generally unstructured and non-competitive. These activities promote active, healthy lifestyles through activities, events and exercise. They are commonly provided under the direction of qualified animators, instructors and trainers so that the activities are tailored to match the abilities of the participants and to meet their needs enjoyably and safely (EuropeActive, 2018).

This sector is incredibly important to the economic and social fabric of the continent. Fitness alone is now the largest participation physical activity in Europe with over 62 million consumers, generates 26.6 billion Euro in revenues, and employs over 750,000 people (Deloitte, 2018), while the outdoor sector is also a major driver of physical activity participation and tourism across the continent. In Northern Ireland, for example, the outdoor sector contributes to between 20 and 25% of employment and value-added in the broader 'sports economy' (Gratton and Kokolakis, 2013).

As Active Leisure continues to grow in scale and importance throughout the European Union, the sector has intensively worked on its own skills agenda. As such, it recognises the importance of the need for an implementation plan based on the policy recommendations of the Expert Group on Human Resources Development in Sport and the EU New Skills Agenda. Accordingly, the Blueprint for Skills Cooperation and Employment in Active Leisure project focuses on developing new skills for current and future workers, improving the employability of young people, and supporting entrepreneurship and growth across the sector. Concretely, this means the development of new, European-wide qualifications and the establishment of a related awarding or certifying organisation.

To achieve these objectives, it is therefore essential to identify and map out the existing professional qualifications and the extent they are used by both employees and employers throughout the EU. This knowledge will then allow us to understand the current status quo around the continent, and have the information needed to identify challenges, opportunities, and gaps in the project.

To do so, both the fitness and outdoor sectors are analysed separately. Within each sector, this paper looks at the overall qualifications that exist, the extent to which employees use qualifications, and the extent employers request qualifications. Based on this information, conclusions are then drawn for each sector, culminating in final thoughts and recommendations for the overall project.

Data for this paper was obtained through a combination of methodologies. A literature review for the Active Leisure sector was undertaken to provide a summary and explanation of and current state of knowledge related to qualifications in Active Leisure, as well as to obtain data related to the existence, prevalence and use of qualifications in each sector. This literature was sourced through academic journals as well as through policy documents and industry reports. Further information was also obtained through interviews with professionals working in the sector.

Also, publicly available job postings from major fitness companies were collected and subjected to document analysis. This analysis allows for a better understanding of the qualifications requested by employers and breaks down the postings according to several factors, including if qualifications are requested and, if so, what kind.

## 2. The Fitness Sector

### 2.1. Qualifications in the Fitness Sector

Though the fitness sector is often predominantly associated with personal training, the range of qualification areas is indeed far more varied and encompasses a wide range of disciplines and target groups. The European Register for Exercise Professionals (EREPS) (2019) recognizes qualifications for personal trainers, fitness instructors, group instructors, Pilates teachers, as well as various qualifications related to specific groups or needs, such as weight management or active ageing. At present, EREPS is entirely self-regulated. Its standards are developed by EuropeActive and used by training providers who can voluntarily apply for third-party accreditation of their programmes.

Qualifications in these subjects can be obtained through vocational training programmes and certificates of varying depth, or through an academic programme such as a Bachelor or Master's. These qualifications are offered by a range of providers, including in-house training from sport clubs, academic institutions and other third-party providers.

Given the range of topics and offers, there is, therefore, a considerable amount of qualifications and training providers. These qualifications and certifications are however not always aligned to uniform standards and not always recognised in other countries. To help remedy this, the EREPS was launched in 2007 to “act as an independent register of instructors, trainers and teachers working in the European health, fitness and physical activity sector” (European Register of Exercise Professionals, 2015). Working with numerous national registers, EREPS supports the application of common European standards and the mobility of exercise professionals (European Register of Exercise Professionals, 2015).

The European Register for Exercise Professionals (2019) organises its different qualifications informally along the European Qualification Framework (EQF), ranging from EQF Level 2, reflecting basic knowledge in the selected topic, to EQF Level 5, representing comprehensive knowledge in the topic (European Commission, 2019a). As such, related Bachelor Degrees would be classified as EQF Level 6, Master Degrees as EQF Level 7 and Doctoral qualifications as EQF Level 8 (European Commission, 2019a). It must be noted that the level 6 and level 7 qualifications as mentioned below in *Table 1* are not based on standards. They are to be considered as a combination of academic content meeting a profile together with professional practice.

EuropeActive has developed a full qualification for Personal Training, informally referenced to the EQF at level 4, which is described in units of learning outcome and includes a full assessment strategy. The equivalency of this qualification can already be seen on some national qualification frameworks (NQF) such as in Belgium, Poland, and the UK.

The vocational occupational standards that define the knowledge, skills, competencies, and range of autonomy were first developed by the EuropeActive Standards Council and, from 2014 onwards, by the Professional Standards Committee (European Health and Fitness Association, 2015). Table 1 shows examples of the use of the vocational occupational standards through formal education delivery (informally referred to EQF):

Level	Qualification	Provider	Country
<b>EQF Level 2</b>	Fitness Assistant	EFAA Opleiding en Training	NL
<b>EQF Level 3</b>	Group Fitness Instructor	Université de Strasbourg	FR
<b>EQF Level 4</b>	Personal Trainer	FIVESTARS FITNESS	ES
		AT WORK	DK
	Pilates Teacher	A.F. STUDIES	EL
<b>EQF Level 5</b>	Weight Management Exercise Specialist	ISSA Europe	IT
<b>EQF Level 6</b>	<i>(BSc (Hons) Fitness and Personal Training)</i>	Solent University	UK
	<i>(BSc (Hons) Sport and Exercise Science)</i>	Leeds Beckett University	
<b>EQF Level 7</b>	<i>(MSc Exercise Science and Coaching)</i>	German Sport University	DE
<b>EQF Level 8</b>	<i>Not applicable</i>		

*Table 1. EQF Levels and Sample Fitness-related Qualifications*

Though many qualification providers are becoming more aligned with national and European registers, this has not been universally adopted throughout the industry. Indeed, with 160 accredited EREPS providers, numerous major fitness clubs and academic institutions are still not part of the EREPS system, while some European countries, such as Germany and Sweden, have still not set up national registers.. Nonetheless, there is some significant development taking place. National registers, as part of the EREPS programme, exist or are in development in Belgium, Finland, Ireland, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom through the Chartered Institute of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA). Overall, EREPS currently has registered over 10,000 members in 32 different countries, (European Register of Exercise Professionals, 2015).

## 2.2. Employee Use of Fitness Qualifications

Through data obtained through surveys of fitness professionals commissioned by EuropeActive, we can obtain a partial picture of the type of fitness qualifications most used in Europe. Out of a total of 2774 responses from within the EU, we can see that a majority of professionals – 51% - possess some form of basic or comprehensive vocational qualification (EuropeActive, 2016). Table 2 presents an overview of these statistics.

No qualification	Basic vocational qualification	Comprehensive vocational qualification	Bachelor's degree	Graduate degree	Ph.D. / doctorate programme	Other:
5%	17%	34%	18%	13%	1%	12%

*Table 2. Highest level of fitness-related education among EU respondents (EuropeActive, 2016).*

The survey, though instructive, is not a perfect representation of the industry. The responses obtained do not form a representative sample of fitness professionals in Europe or the individual countries. Indeed, only 13 EU countries received more than 50 responses. Furthermore, while this survey does indicate the level of qualification achieved by these professionals, it does not offer specifics in terms of the providers or exact fields studied.

## 2.3. Employer Use of Fitness Qualifications

To supplement the findings from EuropeActive's survey, desk research was conducted into the type of qualifications required by the top-10 fitness employers in Europe. Specifically, job postings from February 2019 were extracted and analysed to assess several data points, including the level of the job, if any qualifications are required and, if so, what kind of qualification. The goal was to be able to assess if major employers consistently require qualifications and if these qualifications are aligned to national or European structures such as national REPS, EREPS or the EQF. As job postings tend to be standardized, only one job posting per job title was extracted and analysed.



Data Name	Description
<b>Employer</b>	Who is the employer posting the job posting?
<b>Subsidiary (If applicable)</b>	If applicable, is this job posting for a specific subsidiary/brand of the employer?
<b>Country of Post</b>	In which country is the job located?
<b>Title</b>	What is the title of the job posted?
<b>EREPS Equivalent Title</b>	Based on the title and posting, what is the equivalent EREPS job title?
<b>Qualification Required</b>	Is there a qualification required for this job (yes /no)
<b>Specific Qualification</b>	If yes, is there a specific qualification mentioned (yes/no)
<b>If yes, which</b>	If yes, what is the name of that qualification
<b>EQF Alignment</b>	If a qualification is required, is it referred to a specific EQF level?
<b>If yes, which level</b>	If an EQF level is mentioned, which level is it?
<b>Fitness Experience Required</b>	Is a certain amount of experience required (yes/no)
<b>Experience instead of Qualification</b>	Can accumulated experience act instead of the requested qualification?

*Table 3. Data extracted from fitness job postings.*

Of the 30 job postings analysed, the majority of them either preferred or required applicants to have a relevant fitness qualification. However, the nature of that qualification was often unclear, as nearly half of the postings did not specify the name or level of the desired qualification. Furthermore, only one posting explicitly referred to the European Qualification Framework (EQF) and two postings referred directly to a national or European Register of Exercise Professionals. However, in the annual Employer Skills Survey conducted by EuropeActive in 2019, 56% of the employers who responded (nearly 2,000) confirmed that they knew of EREPS. From this, we can see somewhat of an imbalance between awareness and actual usage of EREPS.

Qualification Requirements			Specific Qualifications		
<b>No</b>	5	17%	<b>Yes</b>	17	57%
<b>Yes, desired</b>	2	7%	<b>No</b>	13	43%
<b>Yes, required</b>	23	76%			

*Table 4. Summary of fitness job postings.*

### 3. The Outdoor Sector

The Outdoor Sector is incredibly broad and diverse and has begun to gain greater shape and clarity through a continuum of three projects aiming at the definition and development of the sector. The EQFOA project (*European Qualification Framework for Outdoor Animators*), which ran from 2006 to 2008, aimed to create a first description of the outdoor sector and the competences needed to work in the sector. The EQFOA project described the sector as mainly using non-competitive “outdoor activities and related activities as the basis for delivery” and further divided it into outdoor recreation, outdoor education, and development training (EQFOA, 2006a). And, indeed, this focus on non-competitive activities has since then continued to be a focal point for EC-OE (Smulders, 2015). Following EQFOA, the CLO2 project (*Professional training & mobility for Outdoor Animators in Europe bridging the gap between sector Competences @ Learning Outcomes*), which ran from 2008 to 2010, aimed to “refine the Competence Framework developed during the previous EQFOA project”. Concretely, this meant weighting the importance and level of each competence while aligning them with the EQF levels (CLO2 Project, 2010).

These two projects fed into the ELESa project (*European Learning Syllabus for Outdoor Animators*), which ran from 2013 to 2015 and which resulted in the creation of a comprehensive syllabus for outdoor animators usable in Higher Vocational Education, VET and adult learning contexts and applicable to a variety of outdoor activities. This syllabus outlines modules related to various outdoor-specific soft skills, such as pedagogy or safety management, and proposes further technical skills related to 16 different activities (European Confederation of Outdoor Employers, 2015). Regarding the latter technical skills (hard skills), what is important is that professionals can demonstrate those skills in ‘the appropriate natural and technical environment’ irrespective of how those skills were obtained. From the very start of the ELESa project, the consortium agreed that Outdoor Animators should meet the ‘Professional Technical Capacity’ (PTC) requirements (as put forward by the sector) in at least 2 outdoor activities and acquire technical competence in these outdoor activities outside of the ELESa process (European Confederation of Outdoor Employers, 2015).

Today, the outdoor sector extends to over 60 different activities, ranging from skiing, to hiking, to canoeing and so on. As a practical mapping of outdoor activities which are the vehicles for a wide range of objectives, the consortium of the EQFOA project decided to compose an arbitrary list of ‘outdoor activities’, from a pragmatic point of view (EQFOA, 2006a). A full list of these activities is below in Table 5.

Lakes and Sea	Snow	Earth	Stream	Air
Beach Games	Alpine Skiing	4x4 Driving	Canoeing	Hot Air Balloon
Board Surfing	Cross-country	Abseiling	Fishing	Parachuting
Bodyboard	Skiing	ATB Biking	Hydro Speed	Paragliding
Surfing	Ice Fishing	Bungee Jumping	Kayaking	Parapenting
Buggy Sailing	Ice Skating	Canyoning	Rafting	ULM Flying
Canoeing	Kick Sledding	Caving	Rapid Swimming	
Deep-Sea Fishing	Kite Skiing	Cycling		



Diving	Mountaineering	High Ropes		
Jet Skiing	Musher	Hiking and		
Kayaking	New tools	Walking		
Kite surfing	Sledging	Horse Riding		
Parasailing	Ski Joering	Nature		
Sailing	Ski Trekking	Discovering		
Wakeboarding	Snowboarding	Nordic Walking		
Water Skiing	Snowmobiling	Orienteering		
Wind Surfing	Snowshoeing	Quad Riding		
	Telemark Skiing	Rock Climbing		
		Roller Skating		
		Via Ferrata		

Table 5. List of Outdoor Activities (European Confederation of Outdoor Employers, 2015)

The EQFOA project also created some first definitions of the main roles in the sector, establishing definitions for four main roles as described in Table 6 below.

Title	Description
<b>Coordinator/Supervisor of Animators</b>	Responsible for coordinating activities among outdoor animators, assistant outdoor animator and specialized outdoor animator;
<b>Outdoor Animator</b>	Responsible for leading and supervising activities;
<b>Assistant Outdoor Animator</b>	Technical assistant with a recognized level of specific expertise generally lower than is required for an outdoor animator;
<b>Specialized Outdoor Animator</b>	Technical adviser/expert specialized in a specific area (canoeing, walking, hiking, etc.)

Table 6. Main Job Profiles in the Outdoor Sector (EQFOA, 2006b)

Based on the list of activities and definitions provided above, one can locate various qualifications across the EU and informally align them to the aforementioned EQF framework (European Commission, 2019a).

Level	Qualification	Provider	Country
<b>EQF Level 2</b>	<i>None located</i>		
<b>EQF Level 3</b>	<i>None located</i>		
<b>EQF Level 4</b>	<i>None located</i>		
<b>EQF Level 5</b>	Curso de Especialização Tecnológica em Turismo de Natureza e Aventura	Escola do Turismo de Portugal	PT
	DEUST (Animation et Gestion des Activités Physiques, Sportives et Culturelles)	Université de Bourgogne	FR





	Outdoor Animator	EC-OE / BFNO <sup>5</sup>	BE/FL
EQF Level 6	(BA Hons) Adventure and Outdoor Management)	Solent University	UK
	(BA Physical Education with Outdoor Education)	Leeds Beckett University	
EQF Level 7	(M.Sc. Sport Tourism and Recreation Management)	German Sport University	DE
EQF Level 8	Not applicable		

Table 7. EQF Levels and Sample Outdoor-related Qualifications

Table 7 should be considered as a framework to try to better understand the use of qualifications in the Outdoors. The EQF level 5 qualifications listed in this table are respectively the Portuguese, French and Belgian / Flemish versions of ELESAs. Moreover, it must also be noted that the level 6 and level 7 qualifications as mentioned in Table 7 are not based on the ELESAs standards. These Outdoor training programs, offered as ‘minors’ at Bachelor and Master levels, are to be considered as a combination of academic content, meeting a profile together with professional practice. From the very beginning, the ELESAs training syllabus was informally positioned at EQF level 5 which means ELESAs is dedicated to vocational education offered by Short Cycle Higher Education.

### 3.1. Provision of Qualifications in the Outdoor Sector

Because of the size and importance of the Outdoor sector, it is currently quite difficult to obtain a clear fully comprehensive picture of the prevalence and type of qualifications most commonly obtained by workers in the Outdoor Sector. Researchers and policymakers with some distance to the Outdoor scene tend to identify at least three factors that can contribute to this situation:

- The lack of outdoor specific occupational codes,
- The absence of comprehensive mapping,
- The general lack of available data.

To document the provision of qualifications in the Outdoors the abovementioned factors will be used as a stepping-stone to further scrutinise the EU Outdoor qualifications scene.

#### 3.1.1. Occupational codes

The International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) is “a tool for classifying and aggregating occupational information obtained by means of surveys or statistical research” (International Labour Office, 2012). Very similar to ISCO but more appropriate for the classification of occupations at a European level are the NACE codes (*Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté européenne*). However, both in ISCO and in NACE, there has long

<sup>5</sup> BFNO: Belgian Outdoor Employers Federation.

been a lack of a specific outdoor-related occupational code, and this absence continues in the present iteration of the ISCO now ISIC (*International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities*) and NACE (International Labour Office, 2012; EQFOA, 2006a). For example, in NACE the closest related category for the outdoors is 93.29: “other amusement and recreational activities” but this includes many related occupations as well (European Commission, 2010). The same issue is also present in the European ESCO codes (*European Skills/Competences qualifications and Occupations*) where various outdoor-related occupations (e.g. ski instructor or outdoor animator) are folded within broader codes (European Commission, 2018). Given this constraint, using publicly available statistics, it is currently not possible to analyse the qualification levels of workers in the outdoor sector alone.

Outside of these official statistics, there has been limited comprehensive mapping activity undertaken. One of the outcomes of the above-mentioned CLO2 project (see p. 8) was to map the Outdoor labour market. From the beginning, the project encountered difficulties in collecting data and stated i.e. that, “in countries investigated the precise identity of the sector is not strongly established, a specific definition of the field is still missing, and a systematic analysis of the sector is far to be achieved”. Referring to qualifications the report simply noted “a high level of heterogeneity within the countries investigated” (CLO2 Project, 2010).

In response to this type of obstacles, the outdoor employer federation EC-OE (*European Confederation of Outdoor Employers*) was created in August 2008 and focused on identifying, describing and defining the Outdoor sector (Smulders, 2015). Regarding qualifications, the creation of EC-OE was paramount for the sector to finally deliver the ELESa European Learning Syllabus for Outdoor Animators (European Confederation of Outdoor Employers, 2015).

### 3.1.2. Comprehensive mapping

Without going into further detail and as mentioned above, it is important to stress that ELESa was informally positioned at EQF level 5. Therefore, the functioning of education and training structures within the context of EQF was further scrutinized during the ELESa project. Five different types of institutions/organisations delivering outdoor-related training and education across the EQF levels were identified. These are:

- Tourism and Sport Education;
- Secondary education (post-primary);
- Vocational Education & Training;
- Non–University Higher education;
- University Higher Education.

Across the EU, there is a diversity of programs and awards offered at EQF level 5. Some of these are aligned with the Bologna process and are folded into the Short Cycles in Higher Education (Kirsch and Beernaert, 2011). From the mapping of the Outdoor educational environment, it was concluded that the ELESa is the only training program exclusively dedicated to the Outdoors (European Confederation of Outdoor Employers, 2015). Since the delivery of ELESa in 2015, at least three national members of EC-OE (APECATE: Portugal, France Plein Air: France and BFNO: Belgium / Flanders) have successfully

introduced ELESa at their National Coordination Point (NCP), which means that in these countries ELESa is now officially referenced against EQF level 5.

As a report on labour market intelligence - with an emphasis on the need for qualifications - is a prerequisite for referencing qualifications to EQF, Flanders, France and Portugal are probably the only Member States that have this kind of information. But this documentation is difficult to retrieve as it is available only in the national language and filed in an 'official' national database (e.g. AKOV BE/FL, 2018). Nevertheless, national facts and figures can be collected near the concerned employer federations.

### *3.1.3. Lack of data sharing*

On the activity-specific level, it is often argued that there is a lack of concerted data collection and sharing. Even within the comparatively well-developed Alpine Ski sector, a recent mapping report by DG EAC on behalf of the European Commission concluded that "while in some countries detailed information on ski instructor qualifications/training is easily obtainable through desk research, in other countries very little, unstructured or even no information can be obtained through desk research" (European Commission, 2015). Nevertheless, a few years later the commission managed to list 26 ski qualifications registered in 24 Member States (European Commission, 2019c). However, at least some outdoor-related international organisations delivering and/or validating qualifications can be located. Some of these international organisations are organised along national sport federations, others have a more or less private and activity-specific character, for example:

- Diving: PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) offering 9 qualifications;
- Mountaineering: IFMGA (International Federation of Mountain Guides Associations) offering an IFMGA mountain guide qualification;
- Ski: ISIA (International Ski Instructors Association) offering quality standards to assist its members in developing qualifications.

Apart from the above mentioned larger international organisations some smaller non-for-profit organisations – often with limited membership - do also offer specific hard skill qualifications as is the case for activities such as canyoning, rafting and mountain bike. Continuity in delivering courses and qualifications at this level however is questionable.

At a national level indisputably a multitude of 'sport' qualifications are available and used. Considering the Outdoors one can refer to qualifications as for kayak, horse riding, orienteering, caving, hiking, climbing, sailing, ski, etc. The common denominator of these 'sport' qualifications however is that they are all activity-specific and technical (hard skills). In general terms, these qualifications are developed to assist clubs and federations to improve the level of performance and in many cases, the ownership of the qualifications lies with the National Governing Bodies (NGBs).

Traditionally, NGBs, professional organizations and Member States certify about 95 % of all outdoor animators. In general, these NGBs base their progression on 3 different levels of expertise. As there are 28 Member States the total number of Outdoor qualifications equals approximately: 28 MS X 64



key activities (see *Table 5*, p.9) X 3 levels. In other words, there is a theoretical potential of 5.376 Outdoor qualifications in use in Europe.

Nevertheless, it is not realistic to expect that in every Member State, qualifications for all of the 64 listed Outdoor activities would exist. To obtain a more accurate insight on the existing qualifications relevant for the Outdoors EC-OE executed a limited investigation into 14 Member States and into 7 key activities that are considered pertinent to the sector. This analysis resulted in identifying 161 qualifications.

Blueprint: Outdoor qualifications analysed								
	Mountain Biking	Climbing & High ropes	Hiking	Sailing	Canyoning	Canoe, Kayak & Raft	Ski & Snowboard	Total
Austria							3	3
Belgium		2					3	5
France	2	3	4	2	1	5	2	19
Germany							7	7
Greece				1	1	1	3	6
Holland					2	7	3	12
Ireland	4	4	1	4		9	4	26
Italy							1	1
Poland							3	3
Portugal							5	5
Slovenia	2						3	5
Spain							3	3
Switzerland		2	1	1			3	7
United-Kingdom	10	2		30		12	5	59
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>161</b>
Notes:								
Coaching & sporting qualifications have been excluded								
We do know that other qualifications in these member States and these activities do exist, but we have not had access to them								

*Table 8. EC-OE investigation in 14 Member States and on 7 key Outdoor activities*

There will always be exceptions to the rule but virtually none of the sport-related qualifications pay attention to ‘delivering a service to a clientele’ e.g. in the tourism business. The latter precisely being of paramount importance for the commercial delivery of Outdoor activities as conceived by EC-OE. To use a witticism: “the outdoors don’t need a F1 pilot to drive the school bus”.

On the contrary, the bus driver needs to be able to coop with children, their parents, the school, respect speed limits, drive safely, and so on.

Though in some cases (e.g. in Flanders) the ‘official sport qualifications’ delivered by the competent administration (Sport Vlaanderen) are indeed referenced against EQF, on the other hand, they are not eligible to be used at secondary, VET or higher educational levels.

To get a professional qualification referenced against EQF and consequently usable for educational purposes, it is a requirement that the formal application for referencing must be introduced by the representative national sectoral employer organisation. Hence why the ELESa qualification is eligible for referencing against EQF and for the time being ELESa is the only Outdoors training program that has been referenced against EQF.

In conclusion, the popular argument put forward that it might be quite difficult to collect data on Outdoor related qualifications throughout the EU can be supported to a certain degree. However as has been documented above, knowing where to search and consequently digging profoundly into the subject one can come across hundreds (even thousands) of related qualifications but without doubt, it is up to the Outdoor sector to at least indicate where data can be found.

## **3.2. Use of Qualifications in the Outdoors**

### *3.2.1. National-level Use of Qualifications*

France is one of the most demanding Member State when it comes to the use of qualifications. Through the ‘Code du Sport’ (1984) France regulated all sport and physical activities in such a way that anyone wanting to organise or teach a physical activity against remuneration is obliged to hold the activity-specific French qualification (Legifrance, 1984). In case someone wants to teach or organise more than one activity it is even compulsory to hold a qualification (brevet d’état) for every single activity one wants to engage in. Ironically, a French court ruling (2005) stating that leisure activities – in this case: paintball - cannot be considered a sport because of the absence of competition, regular training and agreed rules.

*Considérant qu’il ressort des pièces du dossier que le « paintball », largement pratiqué comme une activité de loisir, ne s’adresse pas nécessairement à des sportifs qui recherchent la performance physique au cours de compétitions organisées de manière régulière sur la base de règles bien définies ; qu’ainsi, en se fondant, pour refuser à la FEDERATION DE PAINTBALL SPORTIF l’agrément qu’elle sollicitait, sur le motif que le paintball ne présente pas le caractère d’une discipline sportive au sens du I de l’article 16 précité de la loi du 16 juillet 1984 (Smulders, 2015).*

Notwithstanding this remarkable court ruling regarding the outdoor activity paintball, and by extension all other Outdoor activities, the French Ministère des Sport kept on taking people to court (mostly non-French EU citizens) for organising or teaching Outdoor activities in France without the proper qualification.

The paradox and irony of this regulation is that on the one hand the EU promotes mobility of workers throughout the EU and on the other hand a Member State, in this case, France, deliberately restricts this mobility. The latter dramatically leading to numerous, expensive and long-lasting court cases as

well as to Parliamentary questions at both the EU and national levels. To a lesser degree, Austria and Italy (Trentino region) apply a similar regulation particularly (but not exclusively) for ski instructors.

### 3.2.2. *Regional-level Use of Qualifications*

The position of Trentino is remarkable in this context as it is only the region and not the EU Member State 'Italy' that seems to regulate the ski instructor profession. In 2019 the Flemish MEPs Anneleen van Bossuyt (ECR) and Ralph Packet (ECR) introduced a written question to the Commission on this issue. The answers provided by Commissioner Ms Bieńkowska (dd. 21 May 2019) on behalf of the European Commission are straightforward and stipulate that Directive 2005/36/EC as amended by Directive 2013/55/EU (European Parliament, 2013), is also applicable to the Autonomous Province of Trentino. Moreover, Ms Bieńkowska even stated that the Autonomous Province of Trentino is not entitled to impose additional conditions or demand the fulfilment of additional requirements.

EN

E-001544/2019

Answer given by Ms Bieńkowska on behalf of the European Commission  
(21.5.2019)

Directive 2005/36/EC as amended by Directive 2013/55/EU is applicable to all Member States, including Italy and its Autonomous Province of Trento. Any EU citizen can rely on the provisions of Directive 2005/36/EC, when seeking the recognition of a professional qualification or professional experience in another Member State. This also includes EU citizens with a Belgian ski instructor qualification aiming at establishing or providing services in the Autonomous Province of Trento.

Where Directive 2005/36/EC regulates a subject-matter exhaustively, such as the documents and certificates that applicants might be required to submit, it is not possible to impose additional conditions or demand the fulfilment of additional requirements.

The Commission is currently assessing numerous issues regarding the transposition and application of the Professional Qualifications Directive, including the articles above, in several infringement proceedings with the EU Member States, including Italy (European Parliament, 2019a).

Though France is commonly considered to be amongst the more demanding of all EU Member States regarding the recognition of professional qualifications, at least acts as one identity, and consequently, decisions on qualifications are valid on a national level.

In EU Member States such as Spain and Portugal, things become more complicated because (outdoor) professions tend to be regulated at the regional level. In Spain (17 autonomous regions) the Outdoors is regulated in such a way that per region one needs a specific 'regional permission' (qualification) to be eligible to deliver Outdoor services. To work across Spain a Spanish Outdoor professional theoretically would need 17 regional admittances.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> These regional issues are reported to the European Confederation of Outdoor Employers (EC-OE) by the member employers federations ANETA (ES) and Apecate (PT).



In Portugal, the autonomous regions (islands) Madera and Azores regulate the Outdoor profession whilst the Portuguese mainland does not impose any regulation/restriction at all. Consequently, Outdoor professionals from Madera or the Azores can work all over the country whilst 'mainland' Portuguese are not entitled to work on the autonomous islands.

Ironically, both Spain and Portugal do apply the EU Directives on the recognition of professional qualifications and as such enable the mobility of workers from outside their respective countries. The latter means that within Spain, EU citizens - following the rules set out in the EU Directives – are free to move and work whilst the radius of action for Spanish citizens is limited to their home region. In Portugal on the other hand - depending on the region - some Portuguese Outdoor professionals seem to be more equal than others. Outdoor professionals from Madera and the Azores are free to operate on mainland Portugal, whilst mainland Portuguese Outdoor professionals cannot even revert to EU legislation if they want to work on the autonomous islands. After all, the Directive 2005/36/EC is an agreement between the EU Member States and not between Autonomous Regions.

### 3.2.3. *European-level Use of Qualifications*

In general terms - but certainly very important for the Outdoor sector - and over the years, the EU has progressed on the issue of the recognition of professional qualifications. The Directive 2005/36/EC amended by Directive 2013/55/EU pointed out how Member States should approach the recognition of professional qualifications and as such enhance the mobility of workers in the EU. Meanwhile (as per 18 January 2016) the above-mentioned directives have been transposed into French legislation, but in 2020 the French 'protectionist' reflex has not yet come to an end. The above-mentioned court cases in France mostly run along the lines set out by these EU Directives.

At the EU regulatory level, the use of two outdoor-related qualifications (mountain guide and ski instructor) has been dealt with and in both cases, a different regime or pathway was applied. In both cases, however, it is pointed out that the proposed solution does not replace the traditional procedures under the Professional Qualifications Directive, but it does offer an advantageous option for professionals who wish to work either temporarily or permanently in another EU country (Adamis-Csazar *et al.*, 2019).

#### *Mountain guide*

Since January 2016, a European Professional Card (EPC) has been implemented for five professions, including Mountain Guides (European Commission, 2016). The application mechanism behind this professional card is such that, provided a profession is regulated:

- The home country assists the applicant and certifies the authenticity and validity of the documents.
- The host country authorities are in charge of the application.



This procedure implies that a host country that has not regulated the Mountain Guide profession cannot deliver an EPC for Mountain guide. To avoid obstruction by the host country the 'Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2015/983' also stipulated that:

- If the host country does not make a final decision within a set deadline, recognition will be granted automatically.
- If the host country refuses to issue an EPC the competent authority has to guide on how to appeal the decision.

The administration of the EPC is fully digitalised and bases on the Internal Market Information System (IMI). According to statistics (2016-2019) provided by IMI, 10 Member States have regulated the Mountain Guide profession, 3.426 applications were submitted and 2.493 EPCs were issued (European Commission, 2019b).

Mountain guides											
Host >	AT	CZ	DE	FR	IT	PL	RO	SE	SI	SK	ALL
AT			4	223	266		1		1	1	496
BE	2			1	2						5
CZ	16			9	11	1		5		9	51
DE	186	3		155	166	2	3	1	11	10	537
DK				2	1						3
ES	2			54	13						69
FI	1			2							3
FR	37				777	2	1	2	3	2	824
IT	29		2	189				7			227
PL	5	2	1	4	3		5		1	42	63
SE	7			25	23						55
SI	8			18	19					1	46
SK	15			25	10						50
UK	7		1	23	32	1					64
ALL	315	5	8	730	1323	6	10	15	16	65	2493

Table 9. EPCs for Mountain guides issued between 2016 – 2019

### *Ski instructor*

The recognition of ski qualifications has always been a tricky problem in particular between the Alpine countries Austria, France and Italy on the one side and the remaining Member States on the other side.



Skiing started as early as the '60s in Austria, France, Italy, and Switzerland and rapidly developed a domestic mass-market. On the other hand, this commercial outdoor activity only developed mass-market appeal in the '80s for British holidaymakers while other nations such as Russia became mass consumers as late as the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Due to financial and economic benefits linked to the development of tourism in the Alpine countries, local ownership has been of paramount importance over the last three decades and rapidly transformed major destinations in the EU into 'protectorates' organised around strong corporations using their lobby power to keep the labour market as closed and as exclusive as possible to 'the locals'. Hence, the issue of the 'regional use of qualifications' as discussed above (see p. 16).

Nevertheless, after many years of hard work by the European Commission on the one hand and continuous pressure piloted by several (ski instructor) organisations on the other hand, the EU facilitated the recognition of ski qualifications only and exclusively for the highest national qualifications by applying article 49b of Dir. 2005/36/EC on 'common training test'. As of the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 2019, the 'Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/907' came into force. Annex 1 of the delegated regulation lists 26 national ski instructor qualifications eligible for EU recognition (European Parliament, 2019b)<sup>7</sup>.

As is the case for the EPC Mountain guide qualification, the administration (control and validation) of the delegated regulation will also be done through the use of the IMI system. Because of the very recent introduction of the Delegated Regulation 2019/907 facts and figures on the use of the delegated act are unavailable at this point. Basically, and parallel to some practical clauses regarding the recognition of the mountain guide qualifications, it is essential to note that:

- The Delegated Regulation does not replace Directive 2005/36/EC amended by Dir. 2013/55/EU. The directive remains applicable for all (ski) qualifications.
- The Delegated Regulation is only applicable for the highest ski instructor qualifications as listed in Annex 1 of the Delegated Regulation.
- Ski instructors eligible for using the delegated regulation must declare themselves in the host Member State (provided the profession is regulated in the host MS).

## 4. Conclusions

### 4.1. Challenges in The Fitness Sector

Though the fitness sector is reasonably well developed in terms of defining and tracking the qualifications in its sector, improvement can still be made by both employees and employers in uniformly adopting a standardised set of qualifications or requirements. From the employee perspective, the EuropeActive survey shows that 18% of respondents either have no qualification or

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<sup>7</sup> See also BLUEPRINT IO 10 Active Leisure Sector qualifications incorporated into NQFs.

do not possess an exercise-related qualification (EuropeActive, 2016). In an industry with over 750,000 employees, that means that over 135,000 of them do not have a related qualification.

The abovementioned EuropeActive survey also forecasted a 4% annual growth indicating that – based on the 2016 figures – every year the sector would need an estimated 30.000 extra fitness trainers. Moreover, a recent CEDEFOP survey showed that, at the European level, there were currently 88,000 fitness job vacancies, and that with a 4% annual growth there is a current demand for approximately 180,000 (= 88.000 + 3x30.000) additional fitness trainers (Cedefop, 2019). These two factors – the number of employees without fitness-specific qualifications and the growing demand for workforce – point to an ever-greater need for more qualified employees and more accessible, widespread qualifications. And, indeed, this education is crucial as international research has shown that exercise professionals can be integral parts of the overall allied health system (Warburton and Bredin, 2009). The top-10 fitness employers in Europe also do not uniformly require qualifications, but the vast majority of employers either desire or require a qualification. Indeed, the analysis of job postings showed that 77% of the analysed job postings require a qualification. Instead, what is more, problematic is that, of those job postings, only 57% ask for a specific qualification or qualification standard.

Furthermore, the quantity of qualification providers that are part of EREPS remains limited. With currently just over 160 organisations on the list (European Register of Exercise Professionals, 2019), there is still ample room for growth in that area. EuropeActive is putting significant resources to promoting the use of its occupational standards and the introduction of its Personal Trainer qualification onto national qualification frameworks and in line with the expectations of the Expert Group on Skills and Human Resources Development (DG EAC / Sport Unit).

For some years the fitness sector has taken a two-pronged approach in order to generate a maximal level of buy-in and adoption of its proposed qualifications. Namely, that means both further engagement with employers and training providers plus the recognition of individual achievements through EREPS.

Employers require continued lobbying, education and incentives to consistently demand European-standard qualifications of their employees. In the end, this should translate to more employers specifically requesting EREPS-recognized qualifications in their job postings. These job postings reflect real positions that need to be quickly filled at the local level and represent a relevant measure of employer adoption and are an invaluable tool to communicate to potential employees the exact type of qualification they are expected to have to work in the industry. Along with the technical skills needed to ensure quality, soft and social skills must be part of any European-wide qualification as well. Research on the European fitness sector has shown that social skills can sometimes be more highly valued than technical skills (Lloyd, 2008; Lloyd and Payne, 2018).

However, EREPS-recognised qualifications must also become easier to access for the potential employees. Thus, it is important to maximize the number of EREPS-recognized qualification providers around the continent. One potential way of boosting this number is to map out and approach providers that are likely of high quality and work with them to fold them into the current EREPS structure.



Research conducted by EuropeActive shows a strong trend for the need for higher-skilled fitness trainers – especially, to work alongside other healthcare professionals. There is a need for closer cooperation with universities to deliver these higher-skilled fitness trainers at EQF levels 5 and 6. A few universities already embed some vocational training in their academic programmes but more needs to be done. For example, a group of 20 European universities together with EuropeActive, the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA) and the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) are currently cooperating to develop a qualification at EQF level 5 which covers the area of fitness trainers working as specialists alongside health professionals.

#### 4.2. The Provision and Use of Qualifications in the Outdoor Sector

The Outdoor sector is immensely broad, stretching across numerous activities which makes it quite difficult for an ‘outsider’ to grasp the provision and the use of qualifications in the Outdoor sector. However as has been documented above, knowing where to search one can come across hundreds (even thousands) of related qualifications.

It must be mentioned that umbrella structures for certain activities have been working for a long time on the development of common professional standards across the EU, namely in Mountaineering and Skiing and that others like Mountain Biking, Rafting and Canyoning are currently working on similar issues.

In this context, however, it must also be stressed that ‘mutual’ recognition of professional qualifications has no link with ‘Member State’ recognition of qualifications. Both types of recognition are completely different issues and mixing them up very often creates profound misunderstandings. The structure of the qualifications, although not recorded in detail, is generally as such:

- Most qualifications are issued by professional organizations and federations, otherwise called National Governing Bodies (NGBs) which represent an estimated 80% of certifications. In any case, certification is widely supervised by the private sector;
- The remaining 20% is being delivered by the State as well as by (higher) education, although the bulk of these certifications are those delivered in France;
- The level of training is in most cases (informally) positioned at EQF level 3 as an entry to the profession, level 4 for the ‘middle-man’ and EQF level 5 for the most senior qualification;
- As for the content of the training, it is essentially technical.

Although issued in different Member States by uncoordinated organizations, certain key matters are systematically included in the Outdoor training. Most training, however, happens to be structured around the following items:

- Qualifications are normally split within 3 levels determined according to content and duration and for a vast majority not referring neither to Learning Outcomes nor to the EQF.
- Face-to-face learning plus professional experience typically totals up to +/- 800 hours

- Soft skills such as ‘language’ and ‘group management’ may represent 1 or 2% of the face to face time whilst ‘communication concepts and principles’, ‘emotional intelligence’, ‘social skills’, ‘psychology’ or ‘interpersonal relationship’, in general, are not taken into account.

The trend in all of these qualifications remains to produce highly competent technicians who, depending on the concerned Member State and the concerned activity, may even be technically overqualified and as such not matching the expectations of employers. In some extreme situations, the training offered is so technical that it even disqualifies potential newcomers who probably would be excellent outdoor animators but who simply cannot match the ‘obtained technical skills’ - that later on prove to be unnecessary – with the requirements to handle the clientele of the employers.

Combining the indispensable and vital soft and hard skills required to become an Outdoor Animator was the challenge EC-OE engaged in and which after +/- 10 years of hard work, in 2015 finally resulted in the ELESa training syllabus for Outdoor Animators. Anno 2020 the ELESa syllabus is still the only training program exclusively dedicated to the Outdoors.

Since the delivery of ELESa in 2015, at least three national members of EC-OE (APECATE: Portugal, France Plein Air: France & BFNO: Belgium / Flanders) have successfully introduced ELESa at their National Coordination Point (NCP) which means that in these countries ELESa is now officially referenced against EQF level 5. In three more Member States EC-OE members are progressing along the same lines (HATEOA: Greece, VeBON, The Netherlands and SOA, Switzerland).

#### 4.3. Regulated Professions: The Crux for Protectionism (In Active Leisure)

In general terms, the concept of a ‘regulated profession’ does not seem to be of great concern to the larger public within the EU. EU citizens enjoy travelling and don’t bother too much about minor inconveniences they might experience such as crossing borders from Schengen MS to non-Schengen MS or having to exchange money when entering or leaving non-euro-zone MS. Nevertheless, over the years the EU did encounter problems with the regulation of professional qualifications linked to the mobility of professionals within the EU. Gradually the EU succeeded in achieving agreements on the recognition of professional qualifications for a limited number of professions.<sup>8</sup>

These professions were finally incorporated in Directive 2005/36/EC under a specific Chapter III: *Recognition on the basis of coordination of minimum training conditions*. As from 2005 on, the recognition of (all other) professional qualifications is regulated by Dir. 2005/36/EC amended by Dir. 2013/55/EU. This directive no longer focuses on identifying and defining specific professions but deals with the recognition of professional qualifications in a general and systematic way.

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<sup>8</sup> Doctors of medicine; Nurses responsible of general care; Dental practitioners; Veterinary surgeons; Midwives; Pharmacists and Architects.



In most cases, when it comes to regulating professions, initially one can expect positive appreciation from both the professionals involved as well as from public authorities. The professionals often consider 'official recognition' as their ultimate goal to prove they are engaged in a responsible, high-quality profession, while also closing the profession to certain people or groups. Public authorities on the other hand tend to motivate regulation to prove they are capable administrators and governors, promote safety and protect the interests of consumers.

Nevertheless, within the shortest time and regardless of all respectful intentions, regulating a profession - and certainly regulating a profession within the Active Leisure Sector - inevitably ends up in some level of protectionism and the derived limitation of mobility. The initial 'good intentions' nearly automatically get put aside, even forgotten and replaced by considerations such as 'protecting my job' against perceived non-qualified competitors. Hence, conflicts of interest, disagreement, unbridgeable differences of opinion and court cases, etc., whilst e.g. the initial focus on safety and the delivery of well-organized services to the clientele are pushed to the background.

An example in this context is the case of a Greek citizen willing to launch a fitness centre in Athens. A prerequisite to run a fitness centre in Greece is to possess a Greek diploma in Physical Education (as such already a violation of EU legislation). The lady in question however holding the Greek nationality, unfortunately also holds an Italian diploma in Physical Education and consequently was refused to start her fitness business in her home Member State.

The abovementioned examples from Trentino, France, Spain, Portugal and also Greece clearly illustrate the process of derivation from idealism to protectionism. And above all, Spanish and Portuguese citizens - having to comply with regional regulations - are even deprived of benefitting from Directive 2005/36/EC within their own country. After all, the Directive 2005/36/EC is an agreement between the EU Member States and not between Autonomous Regions.

It must be taken into account that every EU Member State is entitled to regulate professions. But on the other hand, if a Member State decides to regulate a profession, it must also adhere to the guidelines set out by Dir. 2005/36/EC.

Other countries such as Belgium, Germany and the UK have not regulated active leisure professions and therefore don't experience professional or mobility issues within and between their regions. These Member States seem to prove - at least for the active leisure sector - that regulating professions can be contra-productive in promoting mobility.

Based on the above-mentioned observations and particularly regarding the conflict of interest between regionally regulated professional qualifications, it probably would be worthwhile to examine the possibility of introducing the recognition of EU sectoral or international qualifications as a means to solve the mobility problem of professionals within the EU and also solve the mutual mobility between regions. The latter being complementary to the existing EU Directive 2005/36/EC amended by Dir. 2013/55/EU.



It must be taken into account however, that within the European context of subsidiarity regarding education by the Member States, harmonizing qualifications does not automatically lead to juridical sound solutions for the EU-wide recognition of specific professions.

#### **4.4. Certification Organisation for Active Leisure**

Ultimately, the sector aims to give birth to a Certification Organisation for the Active Leisure Sector that is recognized, valid and used across the EU, hence enhancing the use of qualifications and mobility of employees in the sector and throughout the EU. Therefore, employers and employees must have confidence in the qualifications being offered by both EuropActive and EC-OE.

From an EC-OE point of view as is demonstrated in the ELESAsyllabus that a Certification Organisation for Active Leisure must not be conceived as a treat or conflicting with existing technical qualifications managed by NGBs or other relevant (inter)-national organisations. The ELESAs Outdoor Animator is a standardised fit for purpose training program build upon 12 Module Descriptors and 16 Professional Technical Capacities (PTCs). Every Outdoor Animator should take the common training program (the 12 Descriptors) plus demonstrate a specialisation in min. 2 outdoor activities (out of the list of 16, but extendable).

Regarding these PTCs, there are no restrictions or guidelines on how or where the potential candidate must get his or her technical training for any specific Outdoor activity. However, a dedicated assessment will check if the candidate can demonstrate the PTCs as requested by the sector. The Fitness sector, though less complex than the Outdoor sector, can certainly, and probably more easily fit into a Certification Organisation for Active Leisure.

#### **4.5. Active Leisure, the EQF and NQFs – Current Position**

International organisations and some NQFs have recognised that there are a growing number of sectors which already informally use the EQF and informally reference their ‘qualifications’ to EQF and that some form of cooperation is desirable. The original 2008 working document of the EQF provided the possibility of sector qualification frameworks to be directly linked to the EQF, and this was confirmed at the Dublin Castle EQF Conference in April 2010. However, in the New Skills Agenda review, containing the Council Recommendation on the EQF in May 2017 this connection was ruled out. However, the Council Recommendation on the EQF did leave some possibility of international qualifications being recognised through NQFs (European Council, 2017). It was left for a sub-group of the EQF Advisory Group to work with officers at DG EMPL to find the right form of words, which could provide a solution.

The draft proposal which was developed by the sub-group of the EQF AG was for international qualifications to apply for inclusion on a selected NQF whilst 3-4 other NQFs would independently level the qualification. If the ‘home’ NQF considered that the international qualification met its

national requirements for suitability, content, assessment, quality assurance etc. and the other NQFs agreed on its level (of the EQF), then it will be approved. This opened the prospect for other NQFs working within its approved EQF referencing to accept the same international qualification without any further deep or bureaucratic processes.

It must be recognised that the EQF is an entirely voluntary process and that this international qualification process could have opened the possibility for the wider use of active leisure qualifications to be included on many NQFs. By March 2020, however, the EQF AG had not agreed on any wording, and it seems unlikely that this will be resolved within the next few years.

#### 4.6. Proportionality Test Directive (EU) 2018/958

As discussed above on the use of qualifications in the Outdoors (see p.17), the Directive 2005/36/EC - as amended by Directive 2013/55/EU and complemented in 2019 by the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/907 (on ski instructors) - is key to understanding the EU regulation on the recognition of regulated professions.

This EU regulation has recently been enriched with a new Directive "*on a proportionality test before adoption of new regulation of professions*". This new Proportionality Test Directive (EU) 2018/958 requires Member States to limit new regulation regarding regulated professions to what is necessary for achieving the envisaged public policy objective. If Member States consider a new regulation, they need to thoroughly assess and demonstrate the proportionality of the envisaged rules.

The undermentioned citations are just the first 4 (out of 35) preliminary observations regarding Dir. (EU) 2018/958.<sup>9</sup>

(1) *"The freedom to choose an occupation is a fundamental right. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union ('the Charter') guarantees the freedom to choose an occupation, as well as the freedom to conduct a business. The free movement of workers, the freedom of establishment and the freedom to provide services are fundamental principles of the internal market enshrined in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). National rules organising access to regulated professions should therefore not constitute an unjustified or disproportionate obstacle to the exercise of those fundamental rights."*

(2) *"In the absence of specific provisions harmonising the requirements on access to a regulated profession or the pursuit thereof laid down in Union law, it is a Member State competence to decide whether and how to regulate a profession within the limits of the principles of non-discrimination and proportionality."*

(3) *"The principle of proportionality is one of the general principles of Union law. It follows from case-law that national measures liable to hinder, or to make less attractive, the exercise of fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the TFEU should fulfil four conditions, namely, they should: be applied in a non-discriminatory manner; be justified by public interest objectives; be suitable*

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<sup>9</sup> The underlining in these observations is by the author.

*for securing the attainment of the objective which they pursue; and not go beyond what is necessary in order to attain that objective."*

*(4) "Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council includes an obligation for Member States to assess the proportionality of their requirements restricting access to, or the pursuit of, regulated professions, and to communicate the results of that assessment to the Commission, launching the 'mutual evaluation process'. That process means that Member States had to carry out a screening of all their legislation on all of the professions that were regulated in their territory."*

The fifth preliminary observation gives a clear insight into the main reason and concern for why the Commission has considered it necessary to promote this directive.

*(5) "The results of the mutual evaluation process revealed a lack of clarity as regards the criteria to be used by Member States when assessing the proportionality of requirements restricting access to, or the pursuit of, regulated professions, as well as an uneven scrutiny of such requirements at all levels of regulation. To avoid fragmentation of the internal market and to eliminate barriers to the taking-up and pursuit of certain employed or self-employed activities, there should be a common approach at Union level, preventing disproportionate measures from being adopted."*

Directive (EU) 2018/958 should be transposed into Member States law by 30 July 2020 (Art.13), and so it is currently too early to estimate the scope of implementation for this new Directive. It is, however, expected that this new EU Directive will improve the quality of national professional regulation in line with better regulation principles and will prevent the creation of new unjustified barriers for European citizens.

#### **4.7. Final Conclusions: Provision and/or Use of Qualifications**

This analysis of the provision and use of qualifications (in the EU) gradually makes clear that from an operational and policy point of view one has to deal with both aspects of provision and use.

Notwithstanding the difficulties in gathering data on the provision of qualifications it is obvious that some information can be retrieved. It is also clear that the content and the level of most qualifications are not dedicated to the needs of the Active Leisure sector as conceived by the European Confederation of Outdoor Employers (EC-OE) and EuropActive. This is why, for example it took EC-OE to be engaged in a +/- 10years endeavour to create the ELISA training syllabus.

The key for vocational education is to attempt to establish some compatibility of a training programme with the National / European Qualification Framework (EQF) expectations. Without this link with the EQF it is simply impossible to integrate a training programme into any Member State vocational educational framework. If only for this reason, the focus on EQF is paramount and as a meta-framework is widely understood across the Active Leisure Sector.

Active Leisure has taken the position to informally reference its standards/qualifications against the EQF, but in recent times the Member States have taken more "control" of the EQF and consider sectoral or international organisations to be excluded.



And finally, it must also be stressed that 'mutual' recognition of qualifications e.g. by national governing bodies, has no link with 'Member State' recognition of qualifications. Both types of recognition are completely different issues and mixing them up can often create profound misunderstandings.

In view of the principle of subsidiarity, it is reasonably utopian to expect that harmonising (through the EQF) minimum training requirements will facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications in the coming years.

The development of essential skills, quality-assured training, and the recognition of individual competences, etc., are essential for the quality of the services delivered by Active Leisure providers. Holding even the highest possible (national) qualification is still no guarantee anyone will be allowed to work in another country. Even the EU piloted Mountain Guide and Ski Instructor qualifications are not to be taken for granted and there is little evidence of mutual recognition. If a profession is regulated in one Member State, it doesn't mean inter alia that another Member State will reciprocate its recognition and interference is always at stake. This is why Dir.2005/36/EC is potentially of such importance, for both employers and employees although it is a lengthy process, and needs the full support and compliance of the European Commission (DG GROW)

It is therefore essential for any employer federation such as EC-OE or EuropActive to focus on both the provision and the use of qualifications. Both issues are paramount for the functioning of their sub-sectors who have created their own demands for solutions. Moreover, this double track is also noticeable in EU decision-making where different DGs operate in the field of Education (DG EAC and DG EMPL) or in the field of the Internal Market (DG GROW) for entrepreneurship and SMEs.

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# **Intellectual Output 3:**

## **Skills Foresight (research) in the Active Leisure Sector**





## Summary of Intellectual Output 3 – English Version:

### Skills Foresight in the Active Leisure Sector

*Main Authors: Elisabeth Thienemann and Jean-Yves Lapeyrière*

This Intellectual Output involved a skills foresight, i.e. a systematic, future intelligence-gathering type of research, assisting present-day decision-making, in order to stimulate discussion and long-term thinking about the future of the Active Leisure sector – which is a dynamic sector growing annually at 4%, involving about 1 million professionals (personal trainers and outdoor animators) and 80 million clients, but facing massive skills shortages and mismatches.

After explaining in detail the methodology used for this foresight work (both for the outdoor and the fitness sub-sectors), the report outlines its main conclusions and results. The outdoor sector currently employs animators who have more than the required technical skills, but lack soft skills, which are crucial during service delivery. Not enough outdoor courses in the EU provide these soft skills (or do so, but for ‘management type’ position), hence the sector is missing an outdoor animator profile trained both on technical issues and adequate soft skills. The fitness sector is in a paradoxical situation: a continuous growth, driven by low-cost gym operators, segmentation and personalisation, but a massive skills shortage with more than 137,000 vacancies for fitness trainers across Europe. Only 19% of employers find it easy to recruit the trainers they need. Communication and customer service skills are the most sought after.

The report then outlines the key drivers for change and the direction of the Active Leisure industry. For the outdoor, in addition to environmental awareness, technology and communication are the main drivers (with an explosion of innovations, from clothes to signalling devices), making outdoor activity more accessible but also leading to new types of risk behaviours. For fitness, key drivers are health and demographics (more ageing societies, consumers’ needs shifting towards health prevention, professionals expected to address special populations groups); digitalisation and technologies (professionals seen more as experts using technology to analyse progress); and social and community dimensions (clubs expected to become places to meet and socialise and the need for a highly personalised client relationship). Economic growth and innovation will also shape the future of the sector.

The report finally draws on the foresight results and derives concrete measures that the Active Leisure sector can take today to meet future skills and employment demands. For the Outdoor, it is necessary for training providers to address soft skills and to invent new training formats, and for professionals to embrace technology. For Fitness, the growing importance of social interaction, combined with increased competition and differentiation require people skills, digital skills, specialisation and expertise (to address the needs of special population groups), as well as an attitude of lifelong learning and career development.

The conclusion highlights that this skills foresight has led to the creation of the first Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure, a central tool to continue the work over skills analysis, skills gaps, projections and recommendations. It emphasises again the crucial need to address soft skills and to embrace a more psychological and (re-)humanised approach – a quite disruptive insight for the sector, traditionally based on effort, technique, equipment and performance.



## Summary of Intellectual Output 3 – German Version:

### Prognose zu den Kompetenzen im Active Leisure-Sektor

*Hauptautoren: Elisabeth Thienemann und Jean-Yves Lapeyrère*

Dieses Analyseprodukt betrifft eine Kompetenzprognose, d. h. eine systematische Erhebung von Zukunftsdaten mit dem Ziel, aktuelle Entscheidungen zu unterfüttern und Diskussionen und langfristige Planungen über die Zukunft des Active Leisure-Sektors anzuregen, eines dynamischen Sektors mit 80 Millionen Kunden, der jährlich um 4% wächst, rund 1 Million Fachkräfte (Personal Trainer und animateure im Outdoor-Bereich) beschäftigt, jedoch massiv unter einem Mangel an Qualifikationen bzw. den richtigen Qualifikationen leidet.

In dem Bericht werden zunächst die für die Prognose genutzte Methodologie detailliert erläutert (sowohl für den Outdoor- als auch den Fitnesssektor) und dann die wichtigsten Schlussfolgerungen und Ergebnisse kurz präsentiert. Die Outdoor-Branche beschäftigt heute animateure, deren technische Kompetenzen die Anforderungen übertreffen, denen jedoch die sozialen Kompetenzen fehlen, die im Dienstleistungssektor unentbehrlich sind. Da in der EU viele Ausbildungskurse im Outdoor-Bereich diese sozialen Kompetenzen nicht (oder nur für Leitungspositionen) vermitteln, fehlen der Branche animateure, die sowohl in den technischen Themen geschult sind als auch über angemessene soziale Fähigkeiten verfügen. Die Fitnessbranche befindet sich in einer paradoxen Situation: ständiges Wachstum, das von kostengünstigen Fitness-Studios, Segmentierung und Personalisierung befeuert wird, aber ein massiver Fachkräftemangel mit europaweit über 137 000 unbesetzten Trainerstellen. Nur 19 % der Arbeitgeber haben keine Probleme, die benötigten Trainer zu finden. Die Kompetenzen, die am häufigsten verlangt werden, sind Kommunikation und Kundenservice.

Im nächsten Abschnitt des Berichts werden die wichtigsten Triebkräfte für Veränderungen und die Richtung der Active Leisure-Branche skizziert. Im Outdoor-Bereich sind neben dem Umweltbewusstsein neue Technologien und Kommunikationsmittel die wichtigsten Triebkräfte (mit einer Explosion von Innovationen von der Kleidung bis zu Signalgeräten), die den Zugang zu Outdoor-Aktivitäten erleichtern, aber auch zu mehr Risikobereitschaft führen. Für die Fitnessbranche sind Gesundheit und Demographie (alternde Gesellschaften, Verbraucher fragen vermehrt nach gesundheitlicher Prävention, *Fachkräfte* müssen sich auf unterschiedliche Bevölkerungsgruppen einstellen); Digitalisierung und Technologien (*Fachkräfte* als Experten, die Fortschritte mit Hilfe von Technologie messen) und die soziale und verbindende Dimension der Aktivität (Studios sollen Orte der Begegnung sein und eine stark personalisierte Beziehung zum Kunden begünstigen) die wichtigsten Faktoren. Die Zukunft des Sektors wird aber auch von wirtschaftlichem Wachstum und Innovationen geprägt.

Aus den Ergebnissen der Prognose leitet der Bericht abschließend konkrete Maßnahmen ab, die der Active Leisure-Sektor heute ergreifen kann, um den künftigen Bedarf nach Kompetenzen und Beschäftigung zu decken. Im Outdoor-Sektor müssen Ausbildungsanbieter auch soziale Kompetenzen vermitteln und neue Ausbildungsformate entwickeln; die Fachkräfte müssen sich für neue



Technologien öffnen. Im Fitnessbereich führen die wachsende Bedeutung von sozialer Interaktion, die Verschärfung des Wettbewerbs und die Differenzierung dazu, dass soziale Kompetenzen, digitale Kompetenzen, Spezialisierung und Fachwissen (über die Bedürfnisse bestimmter Bevölkerungsgruppen) sowie eine Bereitschaft zu lebenslangem Lernen und zur beruflichen Weiterbildung immer wichtiger werden.

Abschließend wird darauf hingewiesen, dass diese Kompetenzprognose zur Gründung der ersten Kompetenzallianz für den Active Leisure-Sektor geführt hat, einem zentralen Instrument für die künftige Arbeit an Kompetenzanalysen, der Identifizierung von Kompetenzlücken, Vorhersagen und Empfehlungen. Dabei wird noch einmal betont, wie unverzichtbar soziale Kompetenzen und ein eher psychologisch und (wieder)auf den Menschen ausgerichteter Ansatz sind – ein ziemlich revolutionärer Gedanke in einer Branche, in der traditionell vor allem Anstrengung, Technik, Geräte und Leistung zählen.



## Summary of Intellectual Output 3 – Polish Version:

### Prognoza umiejętności w sektorze aktywnego wypoczynku

*Autorzy: Elisabeth Thienemann i Jean-Yves Lapeyrère*

Niniejszy rezultat pracy intelektualnej obejmował prognozę umiejętności, tj. systematyczne i ukierunkowane na przyszłość badanie oparte na gromadzeniu danych, które ma stanowić pomoc w podejmowaniu decyzji na obecnym etapie w celu pobudzenia debaty i długofalowego myślenia o przyszłości sektora aktywnego wypoczynku, będącego dynamicznym sektorem odnotowującym wzrost rzędu 4% rocznie, który zrzesza 1 mln specjalistów (trenerów personalnych i animatorów aktywności na wolnym powietrzu) oraz 80 mln klientów, a jednocześnie mierzy się z olbrzymim niedoborem umiejętności i niedopasowaniem umiejętności do potrzeb rynku.

W sprawozdaniu, po części zawierającym szczegółowe wyjaśnienie zastosowanej metodologii prognozowania (zarówno dla podsektora aktywności na wolnym powietrzu, jak i podsektora fitness), przedstawiono główne wnioski i wyniki. W sektorze aktywności na wolnym powietrzu zatrudniani są animatorzy, którzy mają nadmiar kwalifikacji technicznych, ale niedostateczne umiejętności miękkie – kluczowe przy świadczeniu usług. Niedostateczna ilość kursów związanych z aktywnością na wolnym powietrzu poświęcona jest umiejętnościom miękkim (lub ma to miejsce tylko w przypadku kursów związanych ze stanowiskami kierowniczymi), dlatego też w sektorze tym brakuje specjalistów wykwalifikowanych zarówno pod względem technicznym, jak i posiadających odpowiednie umiejętności miękkie. Sektor fitness znajduje się w paradoksalnej sytuacji: obserwuje się nieustanny wzrost napędzany przez operatorów siłowni o niskich kosztach, segmentację i personalizację, a jednocześnie olbrzymi niedobór pracowników przekładający się na 137 000 wolnych miejsc pracy dla trenerów fitness w całej Europie. Tylko 19% pracodawców nie ma problemu z zatrudnieniem trenerów, których potrzebują. Najbardziej pożądane są umiejętności komunikacyjne i związane z obsługą klienta.

W sprawozdaniu określono też najważniejsze czynniki zmiany i kierunek, w którym zmierza branża aktywnego wypoczynku. W przypadku branży aktywności na wolnym powietrzu głównymi czynnikami napędowymi jest świadomość ekologiczna, technologia i komunikacja (wraz z eksplozją innowacji sięgającą od ubrań po urządzenia nadawcze), co czyni aktywność na wolnym powietrzu bardziej dostępną, ale też prowadzi do nowego rodzaju zachowań ryzykownych. W przypadku branży fitness kluczowymi czynnikami napędowymi są zdrowie i demografia (starzejące się społeczeństwo, potrzeby konsumentów ukierunkowane na profilaktykę zdrowotną, *specjaliści* odpowiadający na potrzeby szczególnych grup ludności); cyfryzacja i technologie (*specjaliści* postrzegani w większym stopniu jako eksperci wykorzystujący technologię do analizowania postępów); oraz aspekty społeczne i wspólnotowe (należy spodziewać się, że kluby staną się miejscami spotkań towarzyskich, a klienci będą oczekiwać wysoce spersonalizowanej relacji). Przyszłość tego sektora będą kształtować również innowacje i wzrost gospodarczy.

W sprawozdaniu omówiono także wyniki prognozy i konkretne działania, jakie sektor aktywnego wypoczynku może podjąć dzisiaj, aby sprostać przyszłemu zapotrzebowaniu na umiejętności i



pracowników. W przypadku aktywności na wolnym powietrzu konieczne jest uwzględnienie w szkoleniach dla trenerów umiejętności miękkich, tworzenie nowych formatów szkolenia oraz opanowanie technologii przez specjalistów. W przypadku branży fitness, ponieważ na znaczeniu zyskują interakcje społeczne, a jednocześnie rośnie konkurencja i zróżnicowanie, niezbędne są umiejętności w zakresie interakcji, umiejętności cyfrowe, specjalizacja oraz fachowa wiedza (umożliwiająca reagowanie na potrzeby szczególnych grup ludności), jak również podejście oparte na uczeniu się przez całe życie i rozwoju zawodowym.

We wnioskach podkreślono, że przedstawiona prognoza umiejętności doprowadziła do utworzenia pierwszego sojuszu na rzecz umiejętności sektorowych dla sektora aktywnego wypoczynku – centralnego narzędzia umożliwiającego dalszą pracę nad analizą umiejętności, niedoborem umiejętności, prognozami i zaleceniami. Ponownie zwrócono uwagę na potrzebę uwzględnienia umiejętności miękkich oraz zastosowania podejścia opartego w większym stopniu na psychologii i powrocie do humanizmu, co stanowi nieco wywrotowy wniosek dla sektora tradycyjnie bazującego na wysiłku, technice, sprzęcie i wynikach.



## Summary of Intellectual Output 3 – Spanish Version:

### Previsión de habilidades en el sector del ocio activo

*Autores principales: Elisabeth Thienemann y Jean-Yves Lapeyrère*

Este resultado Intelectual implica la previsión de habilidades, es decir, un proceso sistemático de recogida de información que ayuda a la toma de decisiones actual para estimular la discusión y el pensamiento a largo plazo sobre el futuro del sector del ocio activo, un sector dinámico que crece anualmente un 4% y en el que participan alrededor de 1 millón de profesionales (entrenadores personales y técnicos de actividades en el medio natural) y 80 millones de clientes, pese a acusar en gran medida la carencia y la falta de adaptación de habilidades.

Tras una detallada explicación de la metodología utilizada para este trabajo de previsión (tanto para los subsectores de actividades en el medio natural como de fitness), el informe expone los resultados y conclusiones principales. El sector de actividades en el medio natural emplea actualmente a animadores que tienen amplios conocimientos técnicos, pero carecen de habilidades sociales, que son fundamentales en la prestación del servicio. En la UE no hay suficientes cursos del sector de actividades en el medio natural que ofrezcan estas habilidades sociales (o que no estén dirigidos a cargos de gestión) por lo tanto, falta un perfil de técnico de actividades en el medio natural con formación técnica y habilidades sociales adecuadas. El sector del fitness se encuentra en una situación paradójica: crecimiento continuo, impulsado por operadores de gimnasios de bajo coste, segmentación y personalización, pero una marcada escasez de habilidades y más de 137.000 vacantes para entrenadores de fitness en toda Europa. Sólo al 19% de los empleadores les resulta fácil seleccionar a los entrenadores personales que necesitan. La comunicación y el servicio al cliente son las capacidades más buscadas.

A continuación, el informe describe los factores fundamentales para el cambio y la dirección de la industria del ocio activo. Además de la conciencia medioambiental, los principales motores del sector de actividades en el medio natural son la tecnología y la comunicación (con un aumento extraordinario de innovaciones, desde la ropa hasta los dispositivos de señalización), lo que facilita el acceso a las actividades en el medio natural pero también genera nuevas conductas de riesgo. Para el fitness, los factores fundamentales son la salud y la demografía (sociedades más envejecidas, necesidades de los consumidores más relacionadas con la prevención de la salud, expectativa de *profesionales* para grupos de población especiales); digitalización y tecnologías (*profesionales* que se consideran expertos en el uso de tecnología para analizar el progreso); y los aspectos sociales y comunitarios (el club como lugar de encuentro social y la necesidad de una relación con el cliente muy personalizada). El crecimiento económico y la innovación también perfilarán el futuro del sector.

Por último, el informe se basa en los resultados de la previsión para ofrecer medidas concretas que el sector del ocio activo puede adoptar hoy para satisfacer la demanda futura de habilidades y empleo. Para el sector de actividades en el medio natural es necesario que los proveedores de formación ofrezcan habilidades sociales e inventen nuevos formatos de capacitación, y que los profesionales utilicen la tecnología. Para el sector del fitness, la importancia de la interacción social, junto con el



aumento de la competencia y la diferenciación, exigen habilidades personales, digitales, especialización y experiencia técnica (para satisfacer las necesidades de grupos de población especiales), así como una actitud de aprendizaje permanente y desarrollo profesional.

La conclusión destaca que la previsión de habilidades ha facilitado la creación de la primera Alianza Sectorial de Habilidades para el Ocio Activo, una herramienta fundamental para continuar el análisis de habilidades, carencia de habilidades, proyecciones y recomendaciones. Además, subraya la necesidad imperiosa de abordar las habilidades sociales y adoptar un enfoque más psicológico y (re-)humanizado, una visión que puede resultar problemática para el sector, basado tradicionalmente en el esfuerzo, la técnica, el equipo y el rendimiento.





# Skills Foresight (research) in the Active Leisure Sector

Main Authors: Elisabeth Thienemann and Jean-Yves Lapeyrère

Date of Publication: 6<sup>th</sup> October 2020

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## 1. Introduction

In a world of a relative uncertainty, humankind has always been striving for the knowledge of the future, which contains the knowledge of the unforeseen and – in the context of labour markets – which allows sectoral stakeholders to be prepared for a fast-changing environment. More precisely, being aware of future labour market changes, may give competitive advantages to operators, training providers and professionals alike. Moreover, foresight activities provide a platform for research and data collection whilst supporting evidence-based political decision-making.

Active Leisure is defined as “... a combination of fitness and outdoor-based activities that are generally unstructured and non-competitive. They promote active, healthy lifestyles through activities, events and exercise. They are commonly provided under the direction of qualified animators or instructors so that the activities are tailored to match the abilities of the participants and meet their needs in an enjoyable and safe way” (SIQAF, 2018).

At the heart of the industry are ~1,000,000 professionals – e.g. Personal Trainers and Outdoor Animators – who need to be properly skilled to work with their 80 million clients. Alongside its economic contribution, the industry also plays a major role in supporting health-enhancing physical activity and promoting healthy lifestyles across Europe.

Despite an anticipated positive development of the sector and an annual growth at 4%, Active Leisure employers face current and future skills shortages and skills mismatches. Based on Cedefop’s skills online vacancy analysis tool ‘Skills-OVATE’ (Cedefop, 2020), the EU Fitness sector alone is seeking to fill 115,000 vacant positions across EU27 whilst employers struggle to find the staff with the right skills set: only 16% of employers find it easy, or very easy to recruit the trainers they want to work in their clubs (EuropeActive, 2019).

Economic innovation, new and emerging technologies, digitalisation, urbanisation and demographic change will largely shape the labour market of the future (Bakhshi et al., 2017). Change requires adaption of businesses and individuals alike. Forms of skills miss-match – where employers cannot recruit staff with the right or enough skills – impend innovation and growth of the sector.

In addition to direct consequences for businesses, a poorly adapted workforce has a wide-ranging impact at the public and individual level. Slowed-down or negative economic developments are associated with reduced tax income and increased public expenditures to compensate unemployment. Having not obtained or maintained a relevant skill set, individuals find themselves at higher risk of losing their job, being unemployed or having difficulties finding a new adequate position. In return, the direct benefit of flexible and responsive (Vocational) education systems are more stable work relationships and related to economic growth such as increased earning and higher living standards. Moreover, Bakhshi et al. pointed out that decent employment “critically shape how individuals view themselves, interact with others and perceive their stake in society, including their sense of control over the future” (Bakhshi et al., 2017).

Looking at the positive aspects of flexible and responsive Vocational Education Training (VET) – efficiency, innovation and development – skills miss-matches can turn into a serious financial burden for both the public and for the private sectors. A poorly or wrongly equipped work force harms sectors and can consequently put businesses at risk. Particularly service sectors are at risk in losing their clients due to a lack of efficiency, service delivery innovation.

Skilled professionals – or ‘*talents*’ as named by the ManpowerGroup (2016) – are becoming increasingly valuable for employers, particularly within the context of changing demographics and the shrinking workforce. E.g. Germany’s workforce is predicted to diminish by 10 million workers between 2016-2031. Among EU member states, France is the only country that would be able to maintain a workforce in the future to support its economic growth.

The employer organisations EuropeActive (Fitness) and EC-OE (Outdoor) represent the European Active Leisure Sector, with 180-member organisations spread across 30 European countries.

In addition, in 2013 both organisations were identified as representative employer organisations (Eurofound, 2013). In 2018, the two organisations were appointed to carry out a 3-year EU-funded project to develop a sector skills strategy (Blueprint) for Active Leisure. As one of the twelve activities (Intellectual Outputs), the organisations carried out a skills foresight to address following objectives:

- Stimulating discussion about the future and support for long-term thinking;
- Collecting and curating appropriate information by working with key stakeholders and improving shared knowledge in consequence;
- Supporting creation of networks and stimulating common action;
- Providing information to improve the quality of present-day decisions.

The activity lasted from November 2018 to June 2019 and the outputs are contained in this report, as well as in infographics and targeted information papers for the different stakeholder groups: operators, professionals, VET-providers and political decision makers at national and EU-level.

This type of activity is unique to the sector as it is the first time that employer organisations reached out to their stakeholders and collected such data on the future of skills in such comprehensive and structured way. Further to present work, an update on the Skills Foresight for Active Leisure is actually foreseen to be carried out every two years.

This report is structured in three main sections which are separately addressed by the Outdoor sector followed by the perspective from the Fitness sector. Ensuing the introduction, the second chapter presents the methodology employed for the skills foresight. Main conclusions and results are laid down in the third chapter of this report. Hence, chapter 4 outlines the key drivers for change and the direction of the industry, whilst chapter 5 draws on the foresight results and derives concrete measures that the sector can take today to meet future skills and employment demands of the Active Leisure sector.

Finally, the report closes with a conclusion.



## 2. Methodology

The foresight team of the Blueprint project were split into the sub-sectors of Outdoor and Fitness. Both research teams independently conducted skills foresight activities for each of their sectors between November 2018 and June 2019 and which were reviewed at the partner meeting of February 2020. Progress and results were shared for discussion with the Blueprint consortium on a regular basis.

Although the processes were similar, certain specificities were carried out slightly differently by each of the two sub-sectors. The descriptive of the methodology is detailed below for the Outdoor and then for the Fitness.

### 2.1. Outdoor

The methodology used by The Outdoor sub-Sector was the following one:

#### Step 1 – Phone interviews with influencers / key stakeholders based on identified themes:

- EC-OE supply of a list of 50 contacts;
- identification of key bullet points;
- calls from the 4th till the 20th of February;
- report with answers and analysis for step 2.

#### Step 2 – Direct mail online survey to identify further drivers:

- EC-OE supply of list of 1.315 contacts with key stakeholders;
- mail template created with MailChimp;
- survey created with SurveyNuts;
- report and analysis of the survey results.

#### Step 3 – Face to face interviews:

- filmed and/or recorded interviews based on the bullet points;
- report and analysis of the issues addressed.

#### Step 4 – Online Zoom Meeting:

- contact participants for a Zoom online meeting with key stakeholders from Greece, Ireland, France, Portugal and Bulgaria;
- online meeting lasted about 1 hour;
- report and analysis.

#### Step 1 – Phone interviews with influencers / key stakeholders based on identified themes

A list of 50 contacts, split within 17 different Member States was established; a template was constructed with Mailchimp to contact various key service providers. The e-mails were sent on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 2019, leaving the recipients 10 to 15 days to reply and set a date for their interviews. A list of primary questions was established and used during the interviews.

25 interviews were completed, comprising key stakeholders, Private Training Providers (PTP), service providers and training providers (HEIs) during which key issues were raised; each interview lasted for at least 10 to 15 minutes. This step was the jump start of the project; with the answers the recipients gave, the next step was already taking form. The bullet point that were analyzed were then used to build a survey that would be sent to a wider range of key deciders and stakeholders within the EU.

## Step 2 – Direct mail online survey to identify further issues

After the analysis of the first step, a survey was built based on the participants' answers. The survey was primarily created with SurveyNuts and was then added to a MailChimp template.

A list of contacts developed over numerous conferences and European meetings was collected from EC-OE. In total, over 1.100 key outdoor stakeholders were contacted. With this survey well over 150 responses were collected in 17 different Member States. The Survey was in two clear parts, where the first part was all about questions regarding the key drivers presented in the last step of the project. The questions of the survey were mostly double sided and were regarding the impact of each topic that were all key drivers.

The first question regarded the technical approach for marketing, booking, purchase, etc.:

- 70% thought that it would have a strong impact;
- 26% thought it would have a moderate impact;
- 4% thought it would have a small impact.

A total of 96% of the respondents think that this driver will have an impact on the Outdoor sector.

The second question concerned the use of technological tools during service delivery, activities, etc.:

- 36% of the respondents thought it will have a strong impact;
- 44% that it will have a moderate impact;
- 20% that it will have a small impact.

We will assume that technology as a general driver will have some strong effect on the future of the Outdoor Sector.

The third question regarded the impact the environmental respect during service delivery such as leave no trace:

- 68% considered that this topic will have a strong impact;
- 23% that will have a moderate impact;
- 9% that it will have a small impact.

In total 92% of the respondents thought that this driver will have an impact of consequent importance.

The fourth question was about active customer education and awareness to environmental issues:

- 50% of the interviewees indicated that this will have a strong impact;
- 38% that it will have a moderate impact;
- 12% that it will have a small impact.

These figures seem to indicate that further types of courses may be imagined as to respond to this key driver, but this is not identified as strongly as the issues raised by the drivers above.

The fifth question was about how human relationships should be taken into account within the business model and how this will affect the sector:

- 39% people expressed the opinion that it will have a strong impact;
- 49% that it will have a moderate impact;
- 12% think it will have a small impact.

The figures show that this driver may not be as of such importance to the respondents; it is one of the lowest 'strong impact' rated; it was also linked to the idea that it should be specifically taken into account in the business model and may have sounded somewhat too 'social' to service providers.

The next question was about the handling of urban children's needs within service delivery:

- 35% considered this issue as having a strong impact;
- 39% considered it will have a moderate impact;
- 21% that it will have a small impact;
- 5% that it won't have an impact on the sector.

It seems that respondents did not all agree on the importance of this driver as most responses were towards a moderate to small impact, with an exceptional 5% considering it should not even be taken into account.

The impact of handling of customers with special needs followed a similar pattern as:

- 35% indicated it will have a strong impact;
- 35% that it will have a moderate impact;
- 26% that it will have small impact;
- 4% that it will have no impact.

This driver is already of a certain concern in the sector, but these answers do show that the enthusiasm for this topic is more limited.

Inclusion of health and fitness issues in the services delivery was the topic of the last question of the first part of the survey and seemed to indicate more concern by those interviewed:

- 48% thought it will have a strong impact;
- 34% that it will have a moderate impact;
- 17% that it will have a small impact;
- 1% that it will have no impact.

Depending on the activity of the respondents, this driver may vary in importance, but it seems that participants think it will have a moderate to strong impact.

The second part of the survey was based on the relevance of various skills, all rated from 'generally relevant', 'relevant and to be developed' to 'essential and to be developed'.

Social and communication skills were rated as follows by respondents:

- 12% think they are generally relevant;
- 16% think they relevant and to be developed;
- 72% think that they are essential and to be developed.



Business and workplace management skills lead to the following evaluation:

- 14% think they are generally relevant;
- 66% think they are relevant and to be developed;
- 20% think that they essential and to be developed.

Animation and group management skills gave the following result:

- 11% think they are generally relevant;
- 28% think they are relevant and to be developed;
- 61% think they are essential and to be developed.

Safety and security skills were rated as:

- 12% think they are generally relevant;
- 17% think they are relevant and to be developed;
- 71% think they are essential and to be developed.

Hard and technical skills;

- 22% think they are generally relevant;
- 44% think they are relevant and to be developed;
- 34% think they are essential and to be developed.

The last question regarding **soft skills** was asking to rank them against hard skills from 0 to 100%, to find out how much the soft skills are required in the delivery of the service in comparison with technical hard skills. The lowest ranking was 30%, the highest was 100% and an average answer was established at 74% of soft skills required during service delivery.

### Step 3 – Face-to-face interviews

Over trips, meeting and conferences, interviews were filmed and recorded in different countries such as e.g. in Ireland and in Portugal.

The aim of this process was to listen to the opinions of stakeholders such as training and service providers but also a couple of students who are involved with Outdoor staff and customers. Such interviews were carried out in Tanagh, Gartan, Petersburg, Birr, Burren, Cappanalea, Schull, Kinsale, Trallee, Shielbagan and Dublin in Ireland and Lisbon and the Acores Island in Portugal.



**IRELAND:**

Nine meetings were organized with Irish Outdoor Education Training Centers (OETC) and interviews were conducted either with the Directors or with the chief instructor. In some cases, both attended the meeting and sometimes more.

These OETCs (for most of them) are part of a network depending on the Ministry of Education and present the advantage of offering both training and employment as they carry out training for instructors during winter periods as well as deliver service to a large range of practitioners in the summer period. Summer groups consist of children, adults and even elderlies for some of them, ensuring a strong experience in service delivery to all ages and all level of abilities.

The combination of both activities (training and service delivery) gives them a strong insight on the clientele's needs as well as immediate comparison abilities between the training delivered and the field competences need/supplied. With regards training delivery, the general trend of these centers is to offer an 'instructor type' training, for those who do, combined with the delivery of National Governing Bodies (NGB) qualifications.

Typical activities are hiking, canoe/kayak, single pitch climbing, mountain biking and sailing. Other activities may be present but represent no more than 10% of the NGBs delivered. They are mainly addressing 'technical issues' rather than 'soft skills' and do produce what is namely known is the Sector as 'instructors'. All interviewees, however, mentioned the need for more soft skills to be included within the training of their staff. The issue of whether this should be done via the NGB, as extra training or within a furthermore comprehensive qualification was not detailed; the necessity was clearly mentioned but definite solutions were not suggested except in 4 cases.

Some OETCs however, namely Cappanalea, Kinsale, Tanagh and Gartan also offer or are in the process of finalising a QQI<sup>10</sup> 5 and/or a QQI 6 course (EQF 4 & 5) aiming at addressing the issue of providing a broader, more 'holistic' training to NGB qualified instructors, including soft skills. In terms of service delivering, the fact that other competences were regularly required came out often.

There also were interesting discussions on the presence in Ireland of a strong tourist clientele from many different origins and the consequent necessity for both Outdoor instructors and leaders to dispose of competences linked to visits, in their cultural, gastronomic ... general aspects.

The OETCs are often supplying private service providers with their trainees and have a good relationship with them; their views seem to be shared by most private service providers; these were not interviewed.

Some programmes are offered at bachelor and master level by higher education institutes.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gqi.ie/>



It could be said that the limit to an ‘all soft skills’ aspect of the training is seen by many employers precisely in those programmes. Although they sound interesting, many commented that they cannot replace the ‘hard skill training’ of an NGB. One interviewee summed it up in a short comment: *“Between an employee with 2 or 3 NGBs and one with a dedicated bachelor, I would still employ the NGB holder”*.

The latter also makes sense since e.g. rafting, mountain biking and climbing are not just about intellectual/psychological issues.

All interviews lead to this conclusion and even the Irish sport authority ‘Sport Ireland’ did not profoundly deny this issue which corroborates a well-known situation within the EU.

#### **PORTUGAL:**

In Portugal, 5 interviews were conducted mainly with service providers. Interestingly, 2 of them were also involved in the higher education environment and had consequently a good knowledge of both aspects e.g. training and service delivering.

Although local clients are indeed concerned by the service delivery, there is a strong contingent of foreigners visiting Portugal each year and indeed, using Outdoor services. This requires a broad linguistic approach of the service, whereas English is not the native language for the vast majority of Outdoor employees in Portugal.

Another aspect of the Portuguese service delivery sits in the strong presence of cultural and historical issues and their combination with the more ‘classic’ Outdoor half day trip/service. This is also often combined with gastronomic / wine issues either as part of the service or as a strong presence in the service delivery environment.

Most discussions lead to the enhancement of the ‘soft skills’ issues and their importance in the training, but an even further dimension was even addressed as the need for ‘social skills’ was clearly analyzed. This was further explained to mention that social skills concerned skills beyond group management and/or entertainment technics during the service delivery, but also regarding ‘untypical’ outdoor service delivery.

Social behaviour organised round key topics like history, culture, gastronomy and other similar or related topics seems to have a particular importance in Portugal, compared with other western European Member States. The aspect of immersion within local life/lifestyle offered to tourists during the course of delivering the service or as a complementary service to the core Outdoor service also appeared to be of prime importance to various interviewees.

#### **Step 4 – Zoom virtual space**

An email was sent to 5 contacts in the chosen Member States so that 2 Zoom virtual meetings could be organized in order to spend some time talking about the issues and findings of the previous steps. The member States selected were, Greece, Ireland, France, Portugal and Bulgaria because they



were considered as the most pertinent. After the first meeting it was anticipated that individual meetings would be more appropriate for this step.

Individual meetings were then scheduled over 2 weeks and 5 meetings were completed. The end results were very important because they helped implement the results collected previously. During the meeting, the key drivers and topics regarding social skills were discussed, most of the participants added information from their personal experience and/or general knowledge and opinion on the matters.

## 2.2. Fitness

**Focus, objectives & research questions** – The Active Leisure Skills Foresight 2019 activity was concentrated on the systematic gathering of information, a vision-building process, and action-orientated outcome. The main rationale for the Foresight is to help meet future skill needs by providing sectoral stakeholders (employers, employees and professionals) and policy makers with relevant information. Consequently, the Blueprint project aims at supporting evidence-based decision-making by providing skills intelligence.<sup>11</sup>

A **Foresight Study** could be defined as a systematic, future intelligence-gathering and medium to long-term vision-building process aimed at identifying opportunities and areas of vulnerability to assist present-day decision-making. The key element in foresight activities is that 'they are action-oriented, in the sense that the final aim is to influence, shape and act upon the future. [...] Foresight processes and outputs should be oriented towards contributing to, facilitating or guiding the decision making process' (European Commission/ JRC 2005).

In order to refine the broad topic of Foresight research, the Blueprint team decided to focus on a Foresight scope of 11 years (2030) and defined following research questions:

- What will the Fitness Sector look like;
- How do you see employment and related roles changing;
- What kind of general and specific skills will we need;
- What does it imply for future education and training?

**Literature and statistical review** – In preparation of the Foresight activity, a range of scientific literature was consulted. This exercise supported the wider understanding of the 'Future of work and skills' topic and formed the basis for the methodology. Key literature for the development of the methodology applied was published by the EU institutions (CEDEFOP, EFT, JRC, EUROFOUND) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and consulted by the sector. A full list of the selected literature can be found in the reference list at the end of this report.

**Engagement of key stakeholders** – A key role in this process was held by the Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure, which brings together national and European sector representatives (employers &

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<sup>11</sup> Skills intelligence is the outcome of an expert-driven process of identifying, analysing synthesising and presenting quantitative and/or qualitative skills and labour market information. These may be drawn from multiple sources and adjusted to the needs of different users. To remain relevant, skills intelligence must be kept up-to-date and adjusted when user needs change. This requires the expert-driven process to be continuous and iterative. (Cedefop)



employees), public & private education and training providers, public & private universities and research centers and further sector representatives. Consequently, the involvement of sectoral stakeholders from the European Active Leisure sector was necessary to actively involve the industry, gather data and obtain peer-review results.

**Time horizon** – The skills Foresight was structured in four phases over a period of 8 months (November 2018 and June 2019) (Figure 1).

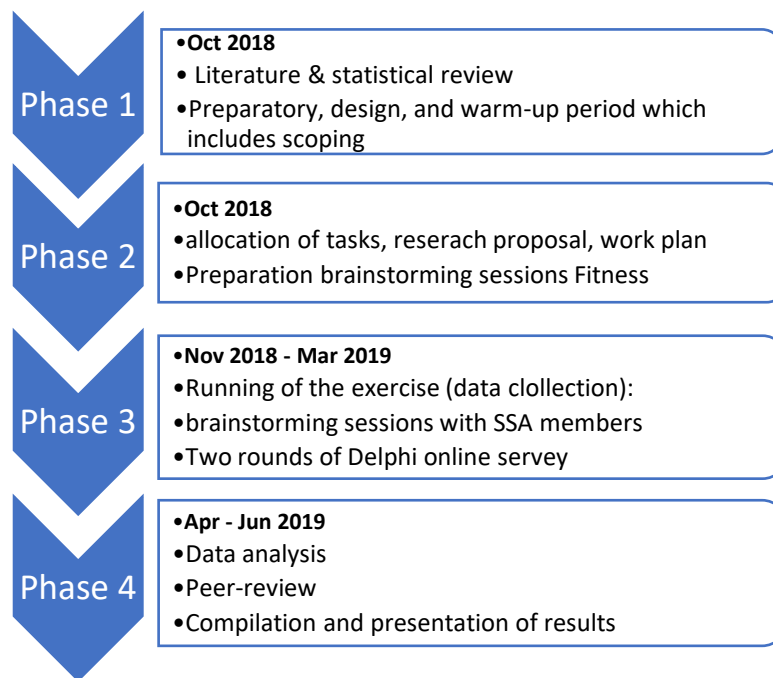


Figure 1. Research phases Skills Foresight for Active Leisure 2019.

**Delphi questionnaire** – Based on the results of the brainstorming sessions, a Delphi questionnaire was designed. Delphi involves making judgments in the face of uncertainty. The people involved in Delphi studies only give estimates. Therefore, Delphi studies always tackle issues formulated in statements about which uncertain and incomplete knowledge exists. The experts involved need to be selected on the basis of their knowledge and experience so that they are able to give a competent assessment. They have the opportunity to gather new information during the successive rounds of the process (JRC.....).

**The Delphi method** is based on structural surveys and makes use of information from the experience and knowledge of the participants, who are mainly experts. It therefore yields both qualitative and quantitative results and draws on exploratory, predictive even normative elements.

For the Foresight exercise for the Fitness sector, the questionnaire was distributed via Lime survey to a list of 152 experts:

- Vocational Training Providers,



- Government/agency/NGO/EU Institution,
- Operator (employer),
- Other,
- Researcher/ HEI,
- Other fitness professional,
- Personal trainer or higher skilled fitness professionals,
- PES.

**Round 1** – active 13 days (19/02/2019 – 3/03/2019). A reminder was sent a couple of days before closure of the survey.

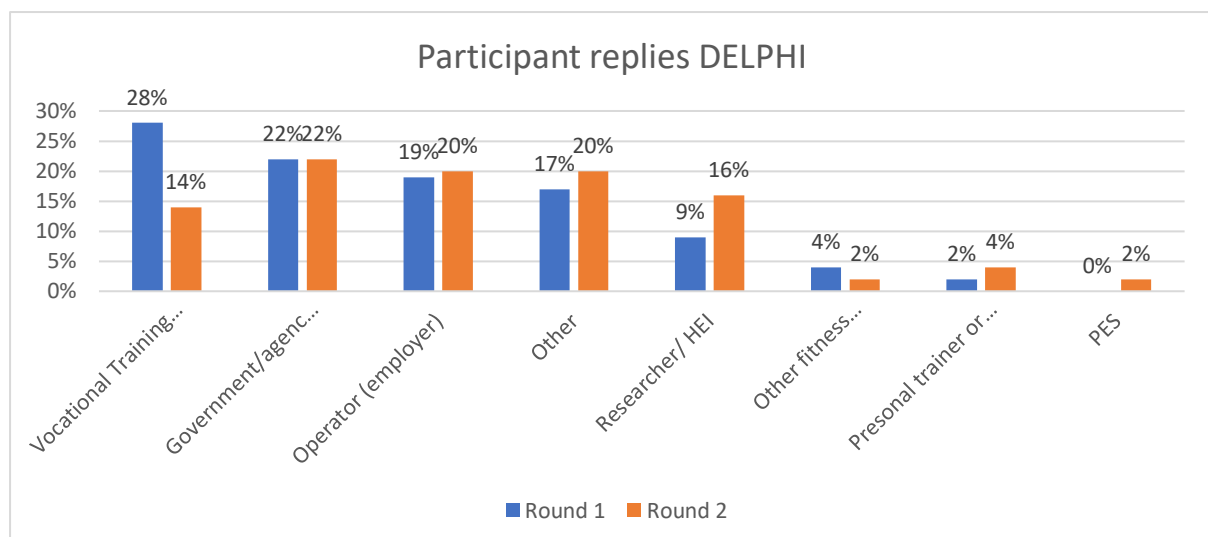
- this led to 54 replies (response rate ~ 35,5 %).

After completion of the first round of the Delphi online survey, the collected data was reviewed. Particularly open-end questions were formulated into statements in the second round for review and verification. Clear replies were not included again for verification in the second questionnaire. Consequently, the second questionnaire was shorter in lengths.

**Round 2** – active 14 days, 11/03/2019 – 24/03/2019. A reminder was sent a couple of days before closure of the survey

- 50 replies (response rate ~ 30.4 %).

Response rate is considered to be high with external respond rates usually ranging from 10-15% (internal respond rates 30-40%). The participation rate in round two was expected to be slightly lower than in the first round (Table 1).



**Table 1.** Participation rates (%) in Delphi round 1 compared to round 2.



**Phase 4** – During spring 2019, the research team reviewed the final Delphi results and presented the results to the Sector Skills Alliance sub-group for peer-review in April 2019. This process was necessary to gain additional insight and reality check. In addition, the results were presented to the Blueprint partners in June 2019 and the fitness Foresight report completed.

**Limitations** – Similar to every skills Foresight activity, there are limitations to the method. As the method requires the consultation of sectoral experts in order to obtain and peer-review data, the information of the same is reflected in the results. Delphi involves making judgments in the face of uncertainty. The people involved in Delphi studies only give estimates (JRC...). Consequently, the results of the Foresight are mirrored by experts' opinion which is the common method for Foresight work. But the information is not alone standing and analyzed in a broader context of the future of skills and employment.

Furthermore, it is crucial to understand the characteristic of vision building as part of the Foresight: a skills Foresight activity provides the opportunity for information exchange, stakeholder participation and can contribute to evidence-based political decision making. Hence a skills Foresight can be used to formulate a shared vision through consensus building.



### 3. Skills demand and employment in the Active Leisure sector: current situation

#### 3.1. Outdoor

The current situation relating to employment in the Outdoor sector is somewhat paradoxical, considering that for the moment, most service and training providers seem to be training and employing outdoor animators who dispose of more than the required and necessary technical skills, whilst they seriously lack competences in soft skills and, as brought out by an Irish colleague during one of the zooms meetings, in ‘emotional intelligence’.<sup>12</sup>

Soft and social skills are without any doubt of true importance during service delivery, according to all participants in the process described herein. Another quote on this issue, this time made by a couple in charge of a company in Portugal delivering mountain bike visits of Templar sites and castles, was, when asked to describe the type of skills they were anticipating their staff to possess: *“They can all bicycle well enough, but I need them to have solid social skills in order to adequately handle our clients”*. This quote reflects particularly well the general consensus on the topic across the EU.

Indeed, no matter how well an animator can mountain bike, the point is rather missed in terms of service delivery if he or she can’t exchange with their customers on e.g. Templar and Portuguese historical issues relating to the sites they are guiding them through.

Over each step of the project it became clearer that employers are looking for outdoor animators who do possess such soft skills, but unfortunately have to settle and ‘do’ with employees who have only – or mainly – acquired technical skills; this is due to the fact that there are not enough outdoor courses in the EU that provide the soft skills truly required.

When they actually do exist, they are often delivered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) at EQF Level 6, which corresponds to a management type position and not any more to an animator job. Furthermore, and most of the time, such courses correspond to management skills in the sport sector which requires different skills than those required in the Outdoor sector.

The average EU training situation of outdoor animators can be summed up as a dual choice for employers who, in a nutshell can:

- 1) Employ technicians at EQF level 3 or 4 holding up to 3 or 4 NGB (National Governing Bodies) qualifications, with very little knowledge and understanding of customers’ requirements on the one hand, or,
- 2) Employ people with a Bachelor’ degree at EQF 6 that provides management knowledge to future managers (who will no longer be Outdoor Animators and who have been trained on matters that are not relevant to the employers’ needs) on the other hand.

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<sup>12</sup> Further documentation on the emotional intelligence concept can be found on:  
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/02/why-you-need-emotional-intelligence>





The missing element consisting of an Outdoor Animator trained both on relevant technical issues and on adequate and pertinent soft skills and who still remains an animator (and does not become a manager) is so rare that it leaves employers in front of the basic choice between employing a pure technician or a manager, who is no longer an animator!

Another Irish colleague, who was a former Outdoor service provider and now involved at senior level with Irish NGBs, summed up the situation in these terms: *“Yes, the choice is either an NGB holder or an HEI-trained manager and as an employer, I would always have employed the NGB holder as at least I was sure that he could properly kayak my clients around”.*

Although the choice in given circumstances is understandable, the skill gap and the employers’ need for a new type of training and a new staff profile clearly appears.

It must be highlighted that present statements and summary of the training situation in the Outdoors does not mean or even suggest that trainings on offer either through the NGBs or through HEIs are not good. In fact, according to most interviewees, NGBs across the EU are described as providing excellent technical training which actually fits most sporting clubs’ needs, activities and requirements as well as most EU HEIs are training very good sports managers with all the right management skills and at the right EQF level, that fit the need of sporting structures...

The problem is therefore not so much the quality of what is on offer across the EU, but the adequacy of the learning outcomes reached by students and the competences really expected by the outdoor employers.

Furthermore, the quality of the existing training on offer is historically established in reference with the needs of the wider sport sector which, in terms of technical abilities and group management corresponding skills, has very different requirements to those of the Outdoor sector.

Indeed, the Outdoor sector does not offer technical training, technical performance and/or competitions to its clientele and hence, Outdoor Animators do not require the technical level of expertise required from sport coaches and trainers. As far as soft skills are concerned, the Outdoors does not offer services to racers or competitors but to holiday makers and tourists: with regards ‘group management’ in particular, the Outdoors caters for paying customers and not for club participants. As a consequence, the Outdoor sector’s commercial companies employ seasonal paid animators, while not for profit structures from the sport sector mostly use the services of volunteers.

Therefore, conditions of service delivery are extremely specific to The Outdoor Sector and they deeply impact the context of qualification engineering.

A classic example regarding the difference between qualifying in ‘sport’ and qualifying in the ‘Outdoors’ is given by French training relating to *“Certificats de Qualification Professionnelle”* (CQPs) which are issued and delivered through Sport Sectoral Social Dialogue. Typically, these CQPs correspond to jobs and positions within not for profit sports clubs, like training kids 3 hours on a

Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, but offer prerogatives that are legally limited to 360 hours a year.

A CQP holder – very similar to an NGB qualification holder – is therefore not only a technician, but a technician that can only really operate in-not-for-profit organisations such as sports clubs and at an average of only 7 hours a week. Such an animator however well trained, cannot be employed in a commercial Outdoor setting where the weekly workload is typically 40 hours.

This example demonstrates that the needs of the sport sector (which includes high numbers of volunteers) although highly respectable, are clearly not compatible with those of commercially based Outdoor sector.

The proximity of the Outdoor sector with the sport sector probably explains why there has been a confusion regarding required competences; however, performance and result-seeking-competition-basis of the sport sector are concepts which are alien to the Outdoor sector clientele.

As a recurrent matter, training and service providers also highlighted the fact that courses never truly specify the actual competences that an animator will obtain. Instead they only focus on how many hours they will deliver. The latter does not seem to be the way forward as courses are more and more identified through the corresponding learning outcomes rather than simple content, let alone sole duration.

On the matter of current situation relating to skills demand in the Outdoor sector, a strong importance, all through the different steps of the project, was given to social skills and emotional intelligence which are considered in high demand. It seems that the problem, nowadays, is that Outdoor Animators, although qualified in their activity, are still lacking in the social/communication skills that are required to properly handle Outdoor customers.

### **3.2. Fitness**

The Fitness industry is a global phenomenon and impacts on the everyday lives of millions of people. With the growing threat of obesity across all ages in large part caused by lifestyles that are increasingly inactive, health and fitness is a hot topic. Governments across the world are supporting initiatives that espouse the benefits of being physically active and well-known international companies provide support and sponsorship to these programmes.

The Developing, Skills, Foresights, Scenarios and Forecasts report produced by CEDEFOP in 2016 highlights that the *“European Union (EU) places great emphasis on skills anticipation and better matching.”* (Cedefop, 2016) This is reflected in the Europe 2020 strategy and, in particular, the Agenda for new skills and jobs (European Commission, 2016), which recognises that anticipation and matching approaches and methods can help develop a skilled workforce with the right mix of skills in response to labour market needs, in a way that promotes job quality and lifelong learning. The EU Skills Panorama, launched in 2012, supports the effort to provide better data and intelligence on skill needs in the labour market (Cedefop, 2012).



In 2019 Europe Active and Deloitte published the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the European Health & Fitness Market report (EuropActive, 2019). The report outlined the current situation in the European Health & Fitness Market and the key findings were:

- the European Health and Fitness market grew by 1.2% to EUR 27.2 billion in 2018;
- market growth driven by 4.6% increase in the number of clubs to 61,984 across all EU countries. Total increase in fitness club and gym members of 3.5% to 62.2 million;
- average monthly membership fees remained relatively stable;
- the top 10 European fitness operators increased their share of the European fitness market from 11.7% to 12.1%;
- average revenue per member continues to decrease, mainly due to the rise in low-cost operators;
- within the EU Germany has the largest number of employees with approx. 212,000 (22.7 per club) with Spain second with 74,000 (15.8 per club) (see table 1 below);
- in 2018 there was a total of 24 merger and acquisition (M&A) transactions identified in the European Fitness Sector.

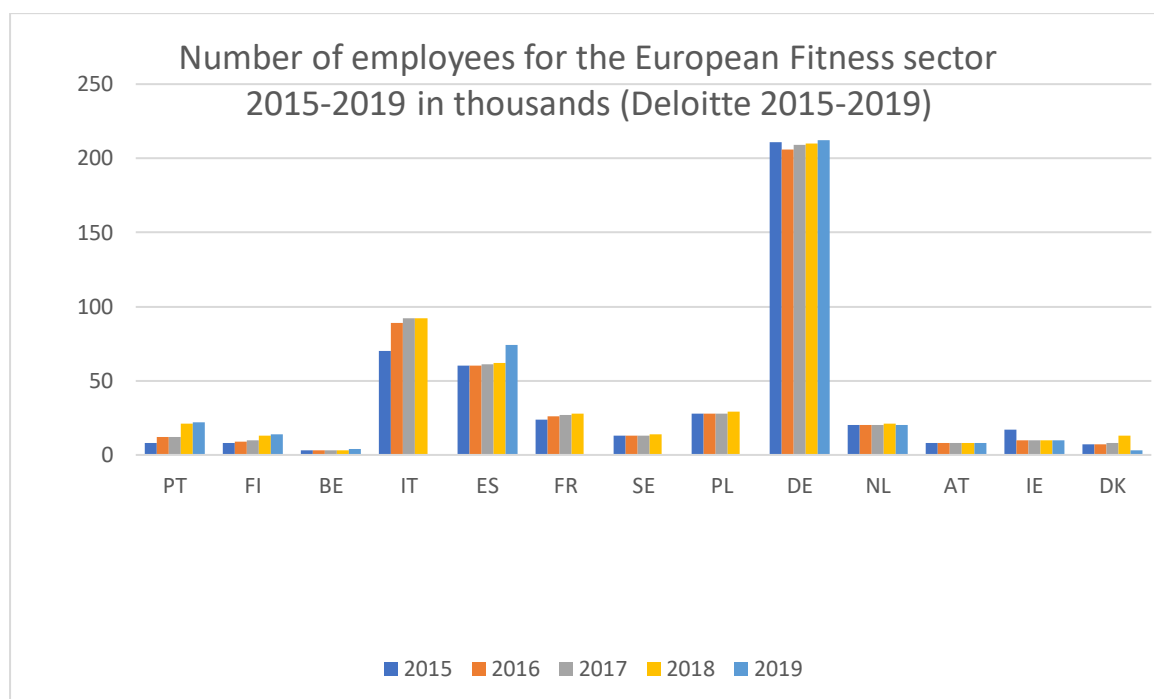


Table 2. Number of employees for the European Fitness sector 2015-2019 in thousands (Deloitte 2015-2019)

The conclusions from the Deloitte 2019 Market Report is that the European fitness sector is in a healthy position and continues to grow, mainly driven by the increase in membership of the low-cost gym operators. The natural consequence of this is that there is a continuing increase in employment opportunities. The overriding trend across Europe continues to be “segmentation and personalisation

*– listening to what members (and potential members) want and helping them to track their results and achieve their goals – and approaching this challenge with the aid of digitalisation.”*

What this indicates in terms of the skills required in the fitness sector, is that it will involve softer people skills and the harder skills of using technology effectively.

The 2019 Employer Skills Survey Results commissioned by Europe Active involved responses from over 1000 fitness clubs across Europe. (EuropeActive, 2019) This survey found that:

- only 16% of employers find it easy, or very easy, to recruit the trainers they want;
- the most important skills that an employer looks for are personal/communication skills (97%) and customer service skills (85%);
- there was a drop in the number (36%) of employers that said digital skills were important or essential;
- there was a drop in the expected skills of trainers for maintaining, cleaning and repairing fitness facilities 30%;
- there is a continuing trend for employers to provide training to new recruits (74%).

Overall, the conclusions from both the Europe Active Employer Skills Survey (2019) and the Europe Active Deloitte Report (2019) indicate that the main skills gaps for personal trainers remains in the areas of **inter-personal skills** and the ability to provide specialist services, personalized to an increasingly diverse customer base.

## 4. The drivers for change and direction of the industry

### 4.1 Outdoor

As shown above, there are clearly 3 drivers that appeared as being substantial for the growth of The Outdoor Sector. These key drivers are Technology, the Environment and Communication.

#### 4.1.1. Technological issue

After the analysis of the result of the respondent's opinion, it appeared that technological impact would make a great change and that this driver needs to be addressed.

With 97% of responses saying it would have some kind of impact, technology has been identified as essential. What participants mostly questioned, was the impact of technology on the sector and how key actors will have to find a balance to include technology without making it a priority or indeed without 'de humanising' the service. As Tomas Aylward (lecturer at IT Tralee) said during an interview: *“Digital detox is important; staff need to use technology purposely and in conscience”*.



Of course, technology is of importance, but an overuse of technology may bring a lack of social and human relationship, which in turn could impact the credibility of the sector.

Technology plays an increasingly influential and important role in outdoor activities. The last 10 years in particular, have seen an explosion of virtual and technological developments, ranging from clothes to equipment such as signaling devices, protective gear and communication, clothing, safety and/or comfort.

Each of these areas has resulted in a greater use of the outdoors, differing expectations and changing needs in public policy making.

For example, technology has increased access and transportation through improvements in overland travel such as snowmobiles and off-road vehicles (ORVs). These machines have allowed visitors to get further into remote areas faster and with less effort. Also, comfort in the outdoors has been substantially improved through lighter weight, more effective clothing, tents, boots, etc. Reduced weight coupled with greater effectiveness has resulted in more people, within a greater age range and across more ability levels, to get into extremely remote or challenging areas.

Technology has worked in two ways that relate to safety. First, improved technology has increased the level of safety available to both individuals and groups: equipment is stronger, lighter, and more versatile, though in some cases higher levels of skill and expertise may be necessary to use it.

As a consequence, new kinds of behavior have appeared such as risk taking and 'experience collecting' with a view to disseminate on social networks and place 'ticks & flags' on a world map.

The 3 deaths that occurred on Mount Everest over the spring and the new regulation in 2019 linked to access to Mont-Blanc last summer, are probably a direct consequence of modifications in the clientele's behavior, consequent to technological evolutions, as people are generally not fitter than they were 10 years ago.

Easier access due to better knowhow of the terrain, access to meteorological, topographic and background information, combined with more efficient equipment and an unprecedented desire of the population to turn one's life into a permanent 'exposed scenario' is leading to a new type of risk taking and consequently to a new type of risk management.

Places once reserved to a handful of connoisseurs are rapidly becoming worldwide known due to the internet, which also participates in changing habits and impact on the environment. It is therefore hardly surprising that, in the coming years, technology is considered as having a potential impact on the sector by 96% of survey respondents.



#### 4.1.2. Communication

Communication is the area experiencing the fastest technological growth. With the advent of GPS units, 36-mile radios, PLBs and EPIRBs (personal locator beacons and emergency position indicating radio beacons), satellite telephones, smart phone apps, and increased cellular coverage, technology now allows Outdoor leaders to know exactly where they are, how fast they are moving, and in what direction, and how to signal for help.

This may, however, also lead non-professionals to believe that they have gained knowledge; but electronic knowledge may not replace experience and in turn, lead to new types of risky behaviors.

Of course, there are further problems and dangers that come with the use of technology as it sometimes does not operate as one would want it to and one may not always be aware of how to use such devices.

Historically, information was often obtained through word of mouth, asking the area ranger, or finding a map or a brochure. Now, information is usually accessed via the Internet, automated telephone exchange, or guidebooks. Again, this ease and convenience of accessing information generally leads to increases in use, particularly in areas that have not seen much use because of their remote or difficult location.

This increased use of electronic devices, however, does not come without a price, namely for visitors finding themselves in situations far more challenging than their personal skill or knowledge levels can accommodate. Added to this, they are often in locations so remote that no one can easily get to them. Technology can also create a deceptive bubble of safety.

Other related problems may occur, and it is probably the comment made by a mushing/dog sledging service provider in North Finland that illustrated best the changes recently occurred in communication and technological issues; he quoted: *“Season went well although we had to dramatically change the service pattern by accompanying our tour leader with a psychologist. Why? Because our clients find it so silent at night that they cannot sleep, but most of all we don’t have any Wi-Fi beyond the North Pole circle and our customers lose the plot after 2 days without Internet”*.

In sum, technology has contributed to a number of benefits to both outdoor activities and participants. It has increased comfort and safety, improved access, enhanced communication, and enlarged the information base from which people make decisions. Injured participants can find themselves in situations that require search and rescue (SAR) or other forms of assistance from managing or government agencies. In such cases, technology serves to increase demands on the environment and land resources rather than decreasing them.

The communication permitted by this new technology certainly provides new opportunities and facilitates access to the outdoors, but it may also generate a new type of risk taking and risk management that is still unfamiliar.



The Sector will definitely need to investigate and address these issues in the coming years.

#### 4.1.3. Environment

With increasingly strong messages around climate change it seems that the environmental issue is inevitable.

Educating clients might not be considered to be the core business of Outdoor providers, which seems fair, knowing that the sector is an entertainment-based field and not an educational sector. Nevertheless, advice and recommendation may be provided to interested customers. However, raising awareness towards the respect of the environment is of concern and indeed, 92% the respondents think it should have an important impact on the outdoor sector.

It seems that the Outdoor sector most probably should be one of the first sectors to be impacted by the phenomenon of climate awareness. Over the last few years, climate change has been highlighted by numerous companies and is an issue that has also gone viral on the Internet.

The Outdoors is an attractive sector for tourists from all over the world; therefore, it may also be in the next few years, affected by the phenomenon of 'flight shame', that has already started in Sweden and which concerns people who are now aware that taking the plane pollutes in a great way and that any action taken against such an issue is to be considered.

Over the step of the phone interviews, the interviewees were also concerned by the increasing global warming. Some even considered that it was the responsibility of Outdoor leaders to raise awareness with the general public and that *"we are in a crisis that has never been treated as a crisis"*.

For a better health and for a generally better life, the Outdoor sector should therefore also reflect on establishing ways to raise awareness regarding the environmental impact of the activities offered and actively participate in acting against such a threat.

As for 'communication' – within the business or not – 'environmental awareness' it is of course key to its success.

Being able to communicate with partners and customers can be a true motivation, which plays a role in the productivity of the business itself. Good communication on environmental issues brings confidence and trust between Outdoor Animators but also between Outdoor Animators and their clients.

#### 4.2. Fitness

The future of how we will work and live is shaped by structural changes. The World Economic Forum (WEF) pointed out the main dimensions for labour market changes which will open a new era of work: the Human Age. The new labour market will be driven by human capital or talents which will become the differentiator (SCHWAB, 2016).



According to the WEF, the shift is mainly driven by demographic change, greater individual choice, the ongoing technological revolution and client sophistication. In accordance with EuropeActive's skills Foresight 2019, the drivers shaping the fitness sector 2030 vary slightly from the ones the WEF has identified. Based on the experts consulted for the Foresight exercise, the expectations for the future fitness (employment) market are more specific to the sector.

Foresight 2019 has identified four main drivers for change in the fitness sector:

- health and demographics;
- digitalization and technologies;
- social dimension and communities;
- economy and innovation.

These dimensions of change are the result of brainstorming sessions using Grounded Theory to build up categories (Bryman 2012, pp. 567) based on the data. The results were verified through two rounds of Delphi surveys (February-March 2019) and peer reviewed by a group of industry experts (April 2019). The categories are believed to shape the way how operators, professionals and clients will work, exercise and live in the next decade (2020-2030). Accordingly, each subject (operator, client and professional) will be presented below in the context of the identified dimension. However, it must be noted that dimensions cannot be clearly differentiated as they partial merge into each other.

#### *4.2.1. Health and Demographics*

94% of questioned experts claimed that 'Health and Demographics' is the dimension with the strongest impact on the future of the European fitness sector. Foresight participants focused on the group of clients and how health and demographic is expected to change within this group. Consequently, a shift in skills is expected to address changing clients' needs.

The WEF covered this driver for change (demographic change), however, it was rather seen from the perspective of the workers: due to the strong shift towards ageing societies, there will be a shortage of human resources which will lead to an increased competition for talents. Moreover, the world of work will need to think of new forms of work and retirement, e.g. part-time retirement models, later retirements and provision of training to keep people's skills relevant and to retain the workers with greater potential.

*The clients* – With the change in demographics towards more ageing societies, the overall health levels are expected to change as well. Due to the expected higher prevalence of (non-communicable) diseases in older age groups, consumers' needs will be shifting increasingly towards health prevention and recovery.

*The professionals* – Fitness professionals are expected to extend and maintain their skills set in the future to meet clients' changing demands and focus more on training to address special populations



groups. Moreover, Foresight participants mentioned the possibility for stronger cooperation with the health and care sector in terms of professional cooperation and public funding, e.g. financial support for fitness club subscriptions.

#### *4.2.2. Digitalisation and Technologies*

Nearly 90% of the participants foresee a strong or moderate impact of Digitalization and Technologies (D&T) on the fitness sector between 2020-2030. It is one of the most obvious and most frequent mentioned drivers for change in the Skills Foresight and the WEF lists the 'technological revolution' as one of their four selected drivers for shaping the future labour markets which is similar in scope to the ones identified by EuropeActive. However, there are many layers to this driver when viewed on from different angles.

D&T is already changing the way how people work, and the extent varies from a new tool to facilitate a task to a complete automation of a process, resulting in the replacement of the human workforce. Whilst there is the omnipresent fear of increased unemployment due to technologies, particularly due to the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI), D&T bears a great potential for the creation of new jobs and forms of work. Looking back, new forms of work always outnumbered the loss of employment due to employment market changes. For instance, it is not only the development of those technologies (research & development) but also the knowledge of using and maintaining technologies. Moreover, new forms of work such as crowd working or the sharing economy would not have been thinkable without the digital developments of the past decade.

In the context of the fitness employment market, Foresight participants shared the opinion that fitness professionals

- 1) will use technologies as a tool, e.g. to track and visualize clients' performance, etc., and
- 2) will need to facilitate the (overflow) of information for clients.

The latter refers to the fact that information will be – as it is already today the case – increasingly available to clients and professionals will need to sort this information for the client, thus, obtaining an additional role as an expert in the field of physical activity.

*The clients* – Alongside the expected impact of digitalization in the form of new technological gadgets, Foresight participants implied wider and behavioral related changes in the society: as information is becoming more accessible and available, it will be increasingly critical to be able to filter and process this information. In addition, Foresight experts consider tracking and tracing at private level will continue to increase. As it is already the case today, wearable and digital reminders will continue to become part of our lives, observing our heart rates, sleep and daily steps. In addition, digitalization and technologies will allow individuals to train by themselves with the promise to exercise whenever and wherever they want.

*The professionals* – Progressing digitalization and emerging technologies will change the way fitness professionals will work in the future. The amount of individual health information and the need to



deal with it will create a new role for fitness professionals where clients will refer to them as experts. In this context, it was also mentioned that professionals will progressively use technologies to support the evidence-approach to training. Recording clients' nutrition, training and behavior will allow professionals to analyze and visualize progress whilst maintaining their expert position.

The use of technology when working with clients, e.g. apps, was perceived as increasingly important by the skills Foresight participants.

*The operators* – On one hand, digitalization and technologies give professionals the opportunity to work more evidence-based and individualized. On the other hand, it also creates the base for increasing self-instruction and self-service in the fitness sector. However, it was pointed out that both approaches – served and self-served – will coexist. Within this context, fitness clubs are expected to have the facilities to address instructed and self-instructed clients.

The last-mentioned perspective on digitalization and technologies is the 'counter-culture' of digitalization: two out of three experts believe that it is extremely likely that there will be a counter movement to digitalization. Nevertheless, it was not perceived as a major trend but as a movement, which might coexist with the mainstream. The 'counter-culture' might want to move away from technologies and digitalization towards less structure, less gadgets and tracking whilst putting fun in focus.

#### 4.2.3. Social dimension and communities

The topic relating to 'social dimension and communities' has been selected as having a moderate to significant impact on the future of the fitness sector by 81% of the experts. This dimension was not found to be majorly significant but was rather placed on the second rank. Surely there will be an impact, however, although it was not perceived as a major dimension to the experts.

*The clients* – Increasing levels of loneliness, particularly in individual societies (opposed to collective and more traditional societies) will become a major societal challenge. With loosening family structures, changing demographics and longer retirement periods, maintaining social and mental well-being will be crucial. With retirement, for many people the social dimension of employment will be missing. Therefore, clients' needs are expected to change in the future with an increasing demand for the 'social experience'.

*The professionals* – Taking into consideration changing social situations and demographic changes, Foresight experts pointed out the great need for inter-personal skills for fitness professionals. While exercising, clients are expected to look for the social experience in the future and therefore, the creation of communities will gain crucial relevance. Service minded staff with efficient communication skills will be more important than ever and a highly personalized client relationship will be key to retain customers, e.g. greeting clients by their name when entering the gym is expected to become a standard practice in future fitness places.



*The operators* – Foresight experts saw in the increasing loneliness in future societies a gap which could be addressed by fitness clubs. As mentioned in the above section, both approaches of self-served and personalized fitness clubs are expected to coexist. Nevertheless, a higher number of experts (85%) believed that fitness places in 2030 will be personal and served whereas less experts (52%) commented that self-served clubs will be the major trend in the future. Thus, fitness places are assumed to become (more than today) a place to meet and socialize. Especially in the context of demographic change and retirement, the club will provide an opportunity for members to socialize once being outside of the employment system. In this context, fitness places might support opportunities for clients and might want to address changing expectations and demands (e.g. events).

#### 4.2.4. Economic dimension and innovation

Growing economies and innovation will shape the future of the sector. Similar to the previous described dimension (social dimensions and communities), this dimension was unanimously identified as being significant (74%); nevertheless, it was not ranked as having the strongest impact.

*The clients* – It is expected that both clients' needs, and expectations will be changing. The latter will be highly driven by innovation. With increasing competition for clients, a change in commitment and shifting attitudes is expected.

*The professionals* – Fitness professionals – similar to other sectors – will have to enter a competition with smart and digital technologies and demonstrate the added value for paying a person – and not purchasing an application instead. Therefore, most experts emphasized the need for maintaining the individual skill set and professional specialization in order to remain competitive. Hence, it was expressed that fitness professionals are expected to work both online and offline, digital skills will gain importance to manage technologies and apps as work tools.

Often driven by crowd working platforms such as Uber or Airbnb, online booking and rating of professional services were identified as highly likely to increase within the next 10 years. In this context, fitness professionals will need to be increasingly (self-)marketing and digitally knowledgeable.

*The operators* – With an expected growing world economy over the next decade, the fitness sector will continue to expand and to grow. This expectation was also reflected in the replies by the Foresight experts, who see increasing competition, particularly with regards retaining and getting new clients. Driven by innovation, operators and professionals are expected to provide consumers not only with a workout session but also with an 'experience' – a key word, which appeared frequently in expert consultations.



## 5. Meeting future skills and employment demands within the Active Leisure sector

### 5.1. Outdoor

#### 5.1.1. Education

As discussed above, there seems to be a real problem with the courses that are not bringing enough importance to social skills. Consequently, training providers may need to change/alter their courses so that the trainees can truly respond to the employer's needs. Course that focuses on the enrichment of students' soft skills competences could help service providers to better meet their clients' demand. The present situation seems however to be unsustainable in the near future for employers, employees and clients due to the lack of social skills shown by Outdoor Animators.

#### 5.1.2. Technology

In line with the communication issues, technology can also be used as a beneficial tool in future actions regarding web communication, web marketing, etc. Before, during and after an outdoor activity some sort of action can be set up to promote in the best way any outdoor company. Linked with social media, newsletters, etc., the need for outdoor information on the Internet is in high rate and if information doesn't effectively reach out to potential clients, the sector will lose clients easily and fast.

Using the Internet will not always be linked to a marketing plan alone, of course. The Web needs to be used to promote not only businesses, but also other outdoor values, such as respect regards the environment. Preservation of the environment is of clear importance to all the service and training providers that were interviewed and questioned, but also to the Outdoor sector as a whole. It is important that the sector promotes such an issue because it essentially relies on it, since the core service is delivered in the outdoors.

During the Foresight survey many service providers expressed their deep concern regarding the outdoor environment. Their opinion was that, clients and people in general don't feel personally concerned by environmental issues such as e.g. global warming. Unfortunately, most of the respondents thought that even through many actions that have been set up by the outdoor community, clients and tourist in general still don't seem to have that mindset that makes them think about the respect and well-being of the environment they are enjoying

#### 5.1.3. Development of further soft skills

Specifically, in terms of skills and employment and with customers' requirements in mind, it is essential that adapted training programmes and corresponding qualifications should be developed. In the light of the hundreds of hours of discussion summed up within the present report, the sector appears to be in need of a certification that should be delivered at EQF 5 with the view to



complement the hard skills that are adequately delivered by NGBs and/or other (private) training providers. The latter, however, should remain within the context of 'field' Outdoor Animators and indeed not lead to the transformation of animators into managers.

In order to really cater for the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century customers and clients the Outdoor education systems should change paradigm - away from classical traditional performance lead technical abilities - and enter into a new era where training standards are developed by the Outdoor sector itself.

Furthermore, it can be said that this evolution should already have been conducted some years ago and that nowadays, together with new communication, technological and environmental issues, the Outdoor sector has to evolve in 2 ways:

- 1) reconsider its intrinsic approach to soft skills;
- 2) consider its approach to the new and further soft skills required by customers.

Failing to do so, the Outdoor sector may jeopardize its future operational potential and become overtaken by self-practiced / self-organised outdoor activities that do not require the added value offered by outdoor companies and their animators. Lacking to evolve may also lead to the shift to outdoor amusement parks instead of a catered outdoor experience.

#### *5.1.4. What the future might be*

Different meetings of the newly set up Sector Skills Alliance for the Outdoors (O2SA) have recently addressed the issues described above, through a series of dedicated webinars held during the autumn of 2019 and the winter of 2020.

The growing consensus that was reached during these meetings was about the fact that qualifications are indeed to be modified as the surveys and interviews have clearly demonstrated. This however covers 2 aspects: the substance and the form.

*The substance:* in line with the results of the research, participants have acknowledged the importance of addressing soft skills like it has never been done before. It is of course necessary that Outdoor Animators should dispose of some technic, at least at a level above that of the clients they are looking after, but it is key that they should dispose of a strong background in terms of such skills as interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence, psychology, awareness and mindfulness.

*The form:* the tradition of face-to-face, on the hill or in the field courses organized from peer to peer for the last 80 years is reaching its limits. Flights, transport, accommodation, and extra spending for neighboring or far abroad destinations dictated by Outdoor locations where technical courses are being delivered are no longer 100% compatible with such issues as global warming, environment protection, species extinction and of course Covid-19 and social distancing. New formats will need to be invented, complementary to online courses that are momentarily thriving.



It is interesting to see that during the last 6 months, Outdoor training has dropped dramatically, to the point that some organisations are in jeopardy. Many Outdoor training providers are small professional organisations with relatively high administrative expenses due to membership management and course organization and their sole membership is not enough to cover their regular functioning in a period when courses have been put to a halt in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

As a consequence, it is both in their form and their substance that Outdoor training programmes will have to be altered.

## 5.2. Fitness

Several recommendations can be derived from the skills Foresight analysis. The intention of those evidence-based recommendations is to raise awareness for future labour market developments and strengthen the economic resilience of the fitness sector by turning challenges into opportunity.

### 5.2.1. Changing expectations and environments

Alongside the major dimensions presented above, the Foresight implies three more specific principles to keep in mind when discussing the future of the European Fitness Market 2030:

*Technological unemployment* – The public debate about the future of work is often affected by the “fear of technological unemployment” (CEDEFOP, EUROFOUND 2018). The term means “unemployment due to our discovery of means of economising the use of labour outrunning the pace at which we can find new uses for labour” and this definition by economist John Maynard Keynes is already 89 years old (ibid.). The description shows that the fear of losing jobs due to technological developments and the inability to find new work in the digital age comes with labour market changes and progress. At the same time, personal services in both the private (hotels and restaurants) and the public sector (various caring services) are less vulnerable to technological change (ibid.). One reason is the irreplaceable value of having a person – a social interaction – in place. Hence, there is a significant difference when the work is characterised by routines which puts the worker at a higher risk for being replaced by technology.

Keeping in mind the complex social interaction between client and fitness professional, the work force of the sector is at a lower risk to lose jobs due to digital and technological developments.

*Increased competition and consumer retention* – Nearly 9 out of 10 Foresight participants expect increased competition regarding acquisition and keeping clients in the future. The competition is driven by increased international competition, globalisation and innovation (SCHWAB 2018). At the same time, consumer sophistication is changing clients’ attitudes and consumer patterns. Already today growing personalised advertising is reinforced by algorithms and big data (ibid.). The ‘mass individualization’ is believed to be an underlying marketing element and will become increasingly important for the fitness sector as well.





*Differentiation* – The Skills Foresight for Fitness 2018 pointed out what is confirmed as well by other sources: the labour market will be increasingly fragmented, and skills will become more specialised (BAKHSHI 2017). At the same time, a specialised skills set is rather prone to changes and less flexible. Therefore, specialisations can be valuable complements to a professional's core knowledge.

Differentiation in the context of fitness services was as well identified by 80% of Foresight participants. The fitness market is not expected to enforce one business model. It is rather expected that different business models will continue to coexist: the high-end club next to the more basic one, the club with the classic equipment next to the one with minimalistic machines and props.

### 5.2.2. *The skills we will need*

*We will need the skills and the facilities to...*

*... provide clients with an 'experience'* – Communication skills and a service-mind will be needed as much as the technical skills of a future professional. Within the next years, professionals will have to compete with artificial intelligence and technologies and the added value for a face-to-face interaction has to be demonstrated. The human interaction is unlikely to disappear in service sectors however, client sophistication will add to the need for improved 'people skills'

*... increase 'specialisation'* – Alongside the occupational core skills, the specialisation of skills is expected to gain more importance, particularly to work in the field of:

- health prevention;
- special population groups (older people, and people with non-communicable or lifestyle diseases).

*... 'upskill professionals'* – With the increased need for communication, service and specialised skills, lifelong learning opportunities will be increasingly in demand. Moreover, 4 out of 5 Foresight experts believe that fitness professionals will have to cooperate with the medical and health care sector. With increasing expected demand over the next decade, skills demand might change.

*We will need skills to...*

*... maintain an attitude of learning and career development* – Lifelong learning and learning to learn, will become a necessity as labour markets and demands will continue to shift rapidly. With digital and technological progress, skills will outdate faster and will need continuous development and updates. To keep up with labour market changes, professionals are expected to actively maintain their skill portfolio.

*... use digital tools* – 3 out of 4 Foresight experts believe in the growing use of digital platforms to find and book sessions online and to rate service of professionals. Such development asks for the right competences to (self-)market expertise and maintain a professional online profile. Hence, the delivery of online training was rated as a highly common skill. Working remotely (online) with clients will provide the opportunity to expand the client base and suit members with flexible schedules.



*... be able to maintain the expert role* – Fitness professionals are expected to take on new and extended roles. Due to the increased amount of accessible information, more guidance for members will be needed. As demographic change and physical inactivity are expected to leave larger population groups living unhealthy lives, Foresight experts therefore believe that fitness professionals will need to maintain increasingly the role of a ‘healthy lifestyles coach’.

## 6. General conclusion

For the purpose of this skills Foresight report, Blueprint partners have engaged in a very comprehensive and extensive exercise carried out over a long period of time. Key stakeholders have been surveyed, interviewed, auditioned, conference called and met in an unprecedented way. The Active Leisure sector had not carried out such detailed and extensive work before.

The sum and quality of the information gathered is consequently very valuable and identified key drivers that matter to the sector in 2019/2020 and can be considered as valid and representative of the stakeholders’ view.

The fact that this Blueprint skills Foresight has led to the creation of the first Sector Skills Alliance for the Active Leisure sector is of prime importance. The sector now disposes of a tool to continue and pursue the work engaged over skills analysis, skills gaps, projections and recommendations.

For both Fitness and the Outdoors, skills that have appeared to need to be addressed, have been identified in the field of ‘soft’ skills. The latter is a reasonably disruptive conclusion in the light of the historical approach of professional training in the Active Leisure sector.

Originated in the 70s on the back of sporting activities and clearly based at first on such concepts as ‘effort’, ‘technique’, ‘equipment’ and ‘performance’, the Active Leisure sector rapidly moved towards, ‘pleasure’, ‘health’, ‘fun’. At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Active Leisure continues to evolve towards an increasing diverse clientele that now requires professionals that master a more psychological and (re-) humanised approach linked to a true modern communication issue.

In order to respond to this new evolving paradigm, the Active Leisure sector will have to continue investigating on the one hand and finetune current evolutions on the other hand to make sure that its professionals’ skills are updated to customers and service requirements.

In the years to come, no doubt that this role will be undertaken by the newly formed Active Leisure Sector Skills Alliance.



## Appendix

# Active Leisure – Current position (September 2020)

This Appendix is meant to provide an update on the latest developments (September 2020) in the field of employment and skills in the Active Leisure Sector, the research and foresight whose outputs are presented in the IO3 report having been mostly conducted from November 2018 to June 2019.

Indeed, given the rapid evolution of the Active Leisure Sector, as well as the unexpected outbreak of the Covid-19 in late 2019 and its numerous consequences on European societies and economies, we found it relevant to consider a few trends which could have impacted the findings of the IO3 report.

Thus, regarding the Fitness sector, this appendix outlines the main results of the latest employers skills survey (February 2020) (1) and the updated figures of the Skills-OVATE platform on vacancies in the Active Leisure Sector (September 2020) (2); it also examines the consequences of the Covid-19 on the fitness sector's workforce through the results of survey conducted by EREPS in July 2020 (3).

Regarding the Outdoor sector, the most relevant event so far was the establishment of the Sector Skills Alliance for the Outdoors (O2SA).

## 1. The 2020 Employers Skills Survey results

Employers representing over 2,000 clubs across 22 different European countries took part in EuropeActive's 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the annual skills survey where the findings and trends help provide the evidence and direction for future qualification and skills development of fitness professionals:

- Recruitment is now identified as a critical area for the sector with 115,000 current vacancies for fitness trainers across Europe.
- 26% of all fitness trainers are self-employed, and this percentage is expected by half of the employers to increase in the future.
- Despite a small increase, only 19% of employers find it easy or very easy to recruit the trainers they need.
- The No1 skills area that employers look for when recruiting are personal/communication skills and customer service skills (92% and 88%).
- Technical skills remain important (especially for group fitness instructors), but in decline over the years.
- Surprisingly, digital skills remain quite low in the list of requirements with just 39% of employers saying that they are important/essential.



- 64% of employers reported that they ‘always’ or ‘nearly always’ had to give additional training to their new recruits with personal/communication skills and customer service skills (55% and 61% respectively) as the highest demand. This has been an area of concern for the sector for many years but shows no sign of being resolved in current vocational training. 40% of employed said that that current training and education ‘never’, or ‘almost never’ gave fitness trainers the skills that they were looking for when recruiting.
- Over the past years there has been a constant requirement from employers (87% saying it is important or essential in this survey), that personal trainers should be able to work with more diverse populations (e.g. children, older adults, overweight, etc.).

## 2. An update on vacancies in the Active Leisure Sector

Despite an anticipated positive development of the sector and an annual growth at 4%, Active Leisure employers face current and future skills shortages and skills mismatches. Based on Cedefop’s skills online vacancy analysis tool ‘Skills-OVATE’ (Cedefop, 09/2020), the trend persists: the EU Fitness sector alone is seeking to fill 107,675 vacant positions across EU27 (137,374 vacancies when including the UK).<sup>13</sup>

## 3. The Covid-19 impact on the Fitness workforce

An internal survey on the Covid-19 impact on the employment conditions in the fitness sector was conducted by EREPS in July 2020 among 226 of its members. It indicated quite alarming results:

- Half of the fitness sector staff works on reduced hours/income, and nearly 23% lost their job (and/or were made redundant).
- Almost all fitness staff faced reduction in their employment income – with a drastic reduction of 60 to 80% for more than half of them (54%).
- Almost half (46,9%) of fitness clubs are concerned or slightly apprehensive about their clients/participants returning to training/classes in a normal fitness environment.
- Fortunately, almost 62% are still positive or very optimistic about the future of the fitness industry, with only about 10% saying they are unlikely to remain in the fitness industry post-Covid-19.

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<sup>13</sup> Source: Cedefop, <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/data-visualisations/skills-online-vacancies>



## 4. Outdoors – Current position

During a number of meetings of the newly set up Sector Skills Alliance for the Outdoors (O2SA) the findings of the present IO 3 report were further explored. These meetings were held during the autumn of 2019 and the winter of 2020.

An almost constant issue during these meetings was the absolute need for more attention to the so-called 'soft skills'.

Unfortunately, the work of this Sector Skills Alliance came to an abrupt end with the death of one of its leading figures, Michalis Tsoukias (+ 24-03-2020). Michalis was one of the first Greek victims of Covid-19.



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# **Intellectual Output 4:**

## **Scoping of the European Certifying Organisation for the Active Leisure Sector**





# Scoping of the European Certifying Organisation for the Active Leisure Sector

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*Date of Publication: 10<sup>th</sup> December 2020*

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## 1. Introduction

The Blueprint for Skills Cooperation and Employment in Active Leisure project focuses on developing new skills for current and future workers, for improving employability of young people, and supporting entrepreneurship and growth across the sector.

This paper provides an overview of the context and development of the BLUEPRINT *Intellectual Output 4 – Scoping of the European Certifying Organisation*. It should be read in conjunction with the other BLUEPRINT Intellectual Output reports to provide further background. In particular there is a direct relationship with *IO 5 – New and updated qualification for fitness (personal trainer) and outdoors (animator) for pan-European use* and *IO9 – Testing, trialling and refining development of new qualifications, awarding organisation and recognition of prior learning*.

IO4 was developed to support the mobility of skilled workers in the Active Leisure sector across member states. It was perceived as an integral part of the project to ensure that an individual who had trained in one Member State could easily move to another one, and transition into new employment with as few barriers as possible. International, or sectoral, qualifications are one way of supporting that by allowing recognition of single qualifications in multiple member states. This aspiration is very much in line with the European Union principle of free movement of labour and services and was especially expressed as a priority in the last Commission through the New Skills Agenda.

IO4 recognises that the mutual recognition of qualifications can only be effectively applied if those training institutions providing the ‘international qualifications’ are subject to a rigorous external or third-party quality assurance process. In this context, it is recognised that a common assessment practice is particularly important and has become a key focus of IO4.

During the project it was especially realised that for the fitness sector the work in this area could result in the formation of a Europe-wide Certifying Organisation to quality assure training provision across the fitness sector. Building on existing EuropeActive programmes it could help ensure the optimal implementation of the European educational standards as represented by the Fitness Sectoral Qualifications Framework (SQF). Awarding Organisations (AO) are experts in developing high quality qualifications that meet the needs of employers and learners. AOs approve/accredit centres and work with them to ensure high quality delivery of qualifications and they carry out activity designed to assure the quality of the qualifications awarded. They also develop innovative products and services to support their centres and learners.

As the BLUEPRINT project developed it was realised that the understanding of the term of an AO was explicit and that a better ‘fit’ was to use the term of a Certifying Organisation (CO).



## 2. Why is a Certifying Organisation necessary?

The necessity for such a Certifying Organisation in the European Fitness Sector was attributable to the need for several aspects, outlined below.

### 2.1. A clear separation of responsibilities

EuropeActive has been both the developer of standards and the accreditor of training providers against those standards. There is a fundamental conflict of interest here which would be resolved by a separate CO with clearly defined and distinct responsibilities. National Qualification Frameworks and systems demand a high level of impartiality between standards-setting, training delivery and examination and assessment of students. This separation of responsibilities is common in most education systems across Europe from schools upwards.

### 2.2. Bring clarity and credibility to a confused marketplace

Providing vocational training and certification of organisations and people in Europe is an open market and there already many commercially orientated bodies who carry-out these functions including US certification bodies and, UK awarding organisations. The establishing of a European Certifying Organisation with robust and transparent legal and governance structures was necessary to provide organisations and individuals with a 'one stop shop' for the quality assurance of qualifications.

### 2.3. Control in an expanding market

**As the reputation of EuropeActive grows as a quality assurance agency there was a wider demand for professional and transparent accreditation services.**

### 2.4. Need to strengthen quality assurance approach

The current EuropeActive accreditation system for training providers is not fully developed increasing the chances of abuse. There was a need to increase the robustness of accreditation systems. National Qualification Frameworks and systems demand a high level of impartiality between standards-setting, training delivery and examination and assessment of students.

### 2.5. Need to show external scrutiny



There is currently no external scrutiny of the EuropeActive accreditation processes. It was felt that the CO would need to be independent, accountable, and compliant to international standards of quality assurance in the scheme it operates to deliver qualifications. The CO needed to have the resources to operate against the certification and inspection requirements of ISO 17024:2012 to show its impartiality.

## **2.6. Protecting and benefiting from assets**

The EuropeActive occupational standards are potentially a valuable asset to EuropeActive and so their use by any organisation – including the CO - should be restricted or licensed so that they can accrue a revenue to help with future development. Additionally, if the CO is not using the standards correctly or there is a breach of licencing terms then EuropeActive could revoke their use. Conversely the CO will expect EuropeActive to keep the occupational standards up to date and in line with employer and sector requirements and expectations. The European Register of Exercise Professionals (EREPS) remains in the ownership and control of EuropeActive but the CO will reasonably expect it to be run to protect the main intention of it being an independent and credible public register for exercise professionals.

This effectively means that EuropeActive should protect these key assets and to benefit financially from their use which can be re-invested to further improve and develop future standards and to enforce graduate registration with EREPS to boost numbers and income.

## **2.7. In-line with current EU thinking in relation to the EQF**

The EQF Advisory Board has indicated that sectoral/international qualification frameworks should not be directly related to the EQF (see BLUEPRINT IO 10). Instead, this referencing should be through national qualification frameworks and the CO provides the best mechanism for this. As mentioned previously national qualification systems will require a high level of quality assurance of training delivery and the impartiality and role of the CO can fulfil these expectations.

## **2.8. Currently no European-wide quality assurance and certification body for the Fitness Sector exists**

While there are many examples of certification bodies as witnessed with the examples of the US certification bodies and UK awarding organisations active in the European fitness market (and internationally), there is no one credible Europe-wide certification body to facilitate transferability of qualifications and the promotion of employment mobility.

# **3. A proposed definition of a Certifying Organisation**

An accepted definition of a Certifying Organisation can be: An organisation that designs, develops, supports the delivery of and awards qualifications. Attaining these qualifications involves the

achievement of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) by an individual following an assessment and quality assurance process that is valued by employers, learners or stakeholders.

These definitions will also help to understand the context and role of the CO:

### **Certification**

‘The provision by an independent body of written assurance (a certificate) that the product, service or system in question meets specific requirements. Certification can be a useful tool to add credibility, by demonstrating that your product or service meets the expectations of your customers. For some industries, certification is a legal or contractual requirement.’<sup>14</sup>

### **Accreditation**

‘The formal recognition by an independent body, generally known as an accreditation body, that a certification body operates according to international standards.’<sup>15</sup>

### **An awarding body**

‘An organisation that designs, develops, supports the delivery of and awards qualifications. Attaining these qualifications involves the achievement of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) by an individual following an assessment and quality assurance process that is valued by employers, learners or stakeholders.’<sup>16</sup>

### **Certification institution/body**

The role of a certifying institution or awarding organisation is to issue ‘qualifications (certificates, diplomas or titles) formally recognising the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) of an individual, following an assessment procedure.’<sup>17</sup>

‘An organisation independent of the manufacturer that has demonstrated adequate competence, authority, and credibility to perform independent and objective audits of another organization in order to provide verification of the adequate qualification/competency of the audited organization’s personnel and evidence that the audited organization’s products satisfy applicable requirements.’<sup>18</sup>

‘A legal entity or an individual entrepreneur accredited in accordance with the established procedure to perform work in the sphere of certification.’<sup>19</sup>

‘Third-party conformity assessment body operating certification schemes for persons. A certification body can be non-governmental or governmental, with or without regulatory authority.’<sup>20</sup>

### **Certification schemes**

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.iso.org/certification.html>

<sup>15</sup>, <https://www.iso.org/certification.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://awarding.org.uk/>

<sup>17</sup> Adapted from: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/fr/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory/european-inventory-glossary#C>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.apisubscriptions.org/publications/preview.cgi?b51d0c4d-415e-4f66-91aa-0c9f0d8b895c>

<sup>19</sup> [https://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/acc\\_e/rus\\_e/WTACCRUS48A5\\_LEG\\_17.pdf](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/rus_e/WTACCRUS48A5_LEG_17.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#iso:std:iso-iec:ts:17027:ed-1:v1:en>



‘...The set of requirements put in place by industry, regulators or other entities, are the driving documents for all certifications. Without a Certification Scheme, there is no information about the criteria with which the certified product, process, or service complies. The end user of the certified “thing” does not know if the ‘thing’ is safe, or if it will provide a desired output...the requirements the product, process, or service must meet.’<sup>21</sup>

‘The role of an awarding organisation (AO) is to issue ‘qualifications (certificates, diplomas or titles) formally recognising the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) of an individual, following an assessment procedure’ (CEDEFOP, 2014). This must be done in a manner that maintains impartiality (ISO 17024: 2012), meets the requirements of the Sector and National Qualification Frameworks (SQF and NQFs), and ensures that the student is the ‘ultimate beneficiary of the education and training.’<sup>22</sup>

#### 4. Working characteristics of a Certifying Organisation

Taking an overview of the above definitions, a body that provides or awards certification will need to have some common and accepted characteristics:

To provide written assurances that a product or service meets the requirements and expectations of the users of that product or service,

To give credibility and transparency for consumers of the end product or service,

To observe listed criteria with which the certified product, process, or service complies to determine whether these criteria have been met,

Should be independent of the product design or service delivery (i.e., educational training) in order to provide independent, third party scrutiny of the involved practices and procedures,

It should be a legally established entity, but can operate with or without regulatory authority,

The certifying organisation itself should meet the requirements of an independent accrediting body for certifying organisations.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#iso:std:iso-iec:17065:ed-1:v1:en>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.eqavet.eu/>

<sup>23</sup> More information can be found here:

<https://crossfieldsinstitute.com/english-awarding-organisation/>

<https://www.fitnessmentors.com/best-personal-trainer-certification/>

<https://www.ptpioneer.com/ncca-accredited-certifications/>





## 5. EuropeActive's Certifying Organisation

### 5.1. Mission, vision and values

In considering all the above points the mission, vision and values of the proposed Certifying Organisation for EuropeActive were identified as:

- **Vision:** To be the leading body in developing, supporting, quality assuring and certifying qualifications of professionals of the European fitness and physical activity and to champion the very highest standards of education provision.
- **Mission:** To develop qualifications, assessment, resources and services for the occupations of the European fitness and physical activity industry, providing the credibility and recognition of this sector by ensuring high, comparable and standardised levels of education resulting in high customer satisfaction in order to support EuropeActive in getting More People, More Active, More Often.
- **Values:** robust, process-driven, accessible, professional, supportive.

### 5.2. Proposed governance for the Certifying Organisation

A key aspect of setting up a Certifying Organisation is to establish a workable and appropriate governance structure. The governance arrangements will need to provide solid foundations and keep the organisation, its staff, and its service users safe and secure. These arrangements will also provide visibility and transparency so the wider sectoral community and others who may look critically at its credentials can transparently see the basis on which it operates.

Governance processes will need to have strategic leadership, accountability, organisational structures and processes together with its oversight of educational and financial performance.

Strategic leadership of the CO will observe:

- establishing a clear and explicit vision for the future set by a Board of formally appointed representatives. This vision along with clear values should be communicated across the organisation,
- setting of medium to long-term strategic goals,
- setting up processes to monitor and review progress against strategic goals and to update company vision periodically,
- implementing risk management processes at every level of governance,
- exercising due diligence in reviewing the effectiveness of governance structures and processes in line with the changing needs of the organisation and its customers.

Accountability of the CO will include:

- a transparent system for performance management of organisational leaders linked strategic priorities,



- performance management of all other employees and structures for their pay and conditions of service,
- regular meetings and suitable processes to support business and financial planning,
- effective systems for managing within available resources and ensuring value for money.

Structures and processes that reinforce clearly defined roles and responsibilities of the CO will include:

- appropriate governance structures to ensure oversight of action plans,
- published details of governance arrangements including the structure and remit of the people who provide its governance and any operational groups.

### 5.3. General role and functions for the Certifying Organisation

Its principal role is to be the organisation that designs, develops, supports the delivery of and awards qualifications for the European fitness and physical activity sector. In this regard it has four key functions:

- 1. Qualification development:** translating EuropeActive standards into usable qualifications. To develop a qualification based on learning outcomes which will include an assessment strategy (e.g., how are the learners assessed in theory and practice). These qualifications should be based on commonly accepted educational standards that have been developed in consultation with key industry stakeholders including employers, training providers (higher education institutes and vocational providers).
- 2. Common assessments:** providing common assessments to be implemented by recognised training providers and taken by all individuals wishing to gain certification through the CO. In this way, the CO creates a “first-person” relationship with the enrolled students through the approved training academies leading to final examination and assessment of the students (viz. not undertaken by the training providers).
- 3. Quality assurance:** externally quality assuring the delivery and assessment of accredited courses. To approve training centres in terms of their competency to deliver and assess training which meets learning outcomes stipulated in awarded qualifications.
- 4. Certification:** end certification of the successful students who meet the learning outcomes of the qualification (both theoretical and practical). This is sometimes referred to as a “common training test” approach as envisaged in Article 49 of Directive 2013/55 EU.<sup>24</sup>

### 5.4. Qualification development

A central role of a Certifying Organisation is the development of qualifications against which training providers can deliver and individuals (students) can be assessed. Achievement against these

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<sup>24</sup> See Intellectual Outputs 2 and 11 for more information.

qualifications becomes a measure of competency and the ability to perform a particular job role as well as facilitating the comparability and mutual recognition of these qualifications.

A qualification gives a reliable indication of an individual learner's knowledge, skills or understanding and are only awarded to a learner who has demonstrated that they have a specified level of attainment through a reliable assessment method. A certificate naming the qualification is awarded to a successful learner.

Qualifications have been described as:

'...A formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent authority determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.' <sup>25</sup>

The value of qualifications in supporting mobility of employment and learning is well established:

'As sectoral actors identify a need or a desire to establish internationally valid systems of skill and competence recognition, they turn again to qualifications as the central instrument of trusted communication, backed by a strong institutional framework... It also seems that for additional, independent systems set up by private actors, qualifications are seen as an instrument of choice for allowing cross-national and cross-institutional coordination of professional content, despite the absence of licensing or mandatory training.' <sup>26</sup>

'International qualification means a qualification awarded by a legally established international body (association, organisation, sector or company) or by a national body acting on behalf of an international body that is used in more than one country and that includes learning outcomes assessed with reference to standards established by an international body.' <sup>27</sup>

A qualification sets out what an individual needs to know or be able to do in order to be given (awarded) that qualification. Most vocational qualifications are made up of a number of units of learning, each one covering a specific area or topic. In some qualifications, particularly the smaller ones, a learner may have to do all the units to get the qualification. In most vocational qualifications some of these units will be required units (mandatory) and there will be number of other units to choose from (optional).

Each unit has a number of statements that set out what the learner needs to know or be able to do. These are called the learning outcomes and they are checked (assessed) in a number of different ways. It might involve an on-line test, an observation of what the learner is doing, a written assignment, project work, an exam or compiling a portfolio of evidence demonstrating what the learning knows or can do.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32017H0615%2801%29>

<sup>26</sup> [https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/6120\\_en.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/6120_en.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32017H0615%2801%29>



To effectively fulfil its remit, the CO, must develop qualifications that are fit for purpose, containing units of learning outcomes, assessment criteria and assessment methods that are valuable to all stakeholders (e.g., employers, professional organisations, students).

The CO will need to do this in a transparent manner, and which synergises of the requirements of all European Lifelong Learning instruments of the EQF, ECVET, ECTS, and EQAVET. The CO will also need to take into account stakeholder feedback on a periodic basis, as well as any expected or additional relevant national qualification framework requirements. This collaborative consistency will help facilitate the development of which should be appreciated and recognised as transportable qualifications. Qualifications must therefore be developed following strict, transparent procedures which incorporate stakeholder feedback – and which ultimately will need to be given an approval of use through intellectual property rights/copyright of the occupational standards. Once a qualification has been launched, the CO will need to monitor, document, and respond to all feedback to ensure the ongoing validity of the learning outcomes, assessment criteria, and assessment methods in the current occupational sector.

### **5.5. Recommended stages for international qualification development**

In order to develop an international qualification that facilitates recognition in as many member states as possible it is essential to complete initial investigations of the legislations, professional standards, requirements, current delivery models and assessment strategies in each nation. Evaluation of these must begin to highlight similarities and differences that would limit/enhance its recognition and transferability.

The main intended outcome of any international qualification must be that the learner can seek employment in country(ies) of their choice, therefore the initial investigation must identify any factors which may result in limitation of achievement of the main outcome. Evaluation of whether these factors can be addressed, or risks mitigated should take place to ensure integration of solutions into the specific development.

Stakeholder feedback from employers, professional standards and recognition bodies, national communication points, technical experts is an essential component of any development. The development process must therefore incorporate collation, evaluation, and usage of this feedback to amend and adapt the development accordingly. Often feedback is gathered using working groups and consultations and findings evaluated by developers to identify the appropriate amendment.

Once a draft qualification/assessment has been developed it is important to test and trial to ensure that they are fit for purpose and facilitate demonstration of competence in the required knowledge or skill. Relevant stakeholders contribute to evaluations, tests and trials as required. Testing and trialling must be relevant to the development and diverse needs of stakeholders (including learners). It may also be necessary for some developments to perform tests, trials, and evaluations in different member states. These must be identified early in the process and incorporated into plans for development and implementation.

Recognition of qualifications is an essential factor in achieving the overall outcome of a qualification. It is highly recommended that the qualification is presented to as many relevant national representatives as possible to encourage inclusion and 'buy-in'. If this stage is delayed until after qualification launch, there is a risk that some



key considerations have not been addressed and amendment of the qualification is no longer possible. This may limit recognition and therefore achievement of the overall outcome.

## 6. Establishing a common assessment strategy

In the context of a CO assessment is:

‘The process of appraising knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences of an individual against predefined criteria (learning expectations, measurement of learning outcomes). Assessment is typically followed by validation and certification.’<sup>28</sup>

A common assessment strategy is a tool that can be used to facilitate a standardised approach to an assessment process. A Certifying Organisation should implement a common assessment strategy for the qualification that is synergised with the requirements of the occupational standards. Quality assurance can then evaluate the implementation of the common strategy to ensure standardisation and comparability between training providers across a range of nations.

The initial stakeholder feedback to the development of the PT qualification demonstrated that the key outcome was that the learner could demonstrate that they were competent against all of the standards. Assessments would therefore need to be holistic in nature and to include criteria from all of the units as this was complimented in the typical delivery model for training providers in this sector.

### 6.1. Choosing the right assessments

When designing or choosing assessment tasks it is important to remember that as well as promoting student learning, they should also provide opportunities for students to demonstrate how well they have achieved, or are progressing towards achieving the intended learning outcomes of the unit/s.

Vocational assessment is important because when a candidate successfully completes a vocational qualification, they effectively become licensed to practice. It is essential therefore, that qualification assessments are fit for purpose to ensure that – whether these qualifications are knowledge, competence or skills focused - they are assessed in ways that are valid, reliable, fair, and manageable.

Assessment can provide a CO with important data on the breadth and depth of student learning. Assessment is not just a grading exercise it is about measuring the progress of student learning and, inputs into both the process of learning and learner motivation. The type of assessment used will heavily influence how learners approach their learning and the study behaviours employed.

Considering the importance of assessment for learning, it was vital to determine the best measure of the desired learning contained within each unit. By choosing an appropriate assessment it provides the CO with valuable information about what students learned, how well they learned it, and where they struggled. Such information will provide a great deal of useful information to the CO in supporting

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<sup>28</sup> [https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4064\\_en.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4064_en.pdf)



training providers to identify any barriers to learning and to help improve their approaches to teaching.

## 6.2. Quality assurance

It will be an important function of the CO to accredit European training providers to deliver training against the CO qualification requirements for the fitness sector. As part of this quality assurance function the CO will support training providers in implementing effective internal verification (IV) processes and provide an element of on-going external verification (EV). All qualifications which have an informal referencing to an EQF level should be quality-assured to enhance trust in both their quality and level.

‘A process of quality assurance through which accredited status is granted to a programme of education or training, showing it has been approved by the relevant legislative or professional authorities by having met predetermined standards.’<sup>29</sup>

The CO will need to implement a coherent, comprehensive quality assurance process to ensure that a student is:

- Given the opportunity to learn the required content in a manner which suits their individual learning needs;
- Prepared for assessment in a fair and equitable manner (meaning their learning has included all the relevant content, delivered in a manner that suits their individual learning needs, without being given an unfair advantage);
- Assessed against the criteria in a comparable, standardised manner (each assessment centre interprets the criteria in the same way and makes similar judgements).

Quality student outcomes will be achieved by working with a range of training providers/assessment centres who will be responsible for delivering learning and performing assessments. The CO will quality assure each centre’s internal policies, procedures and practices as well as learner output (assessments) to ensure that appropriate standards are met and maintained at all times. Effective and sufficient sampling and quality assurance activities will be used to facilitate standardisation and comparability across a range of centres, in a range of countries.

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<sup>29</sup> [https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4064\\_en.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4064_en.pdf)



## 7. Implementing the Certifying Organisation and the accreditation of training providers

Over the last 2009 years and before the conception of the Blueprint Project EuropeActive, using its educational standards as its basis, has developed a system of independent quality assurance.<sup>30</sup> This system has successfully accredited over 150 training providers (including both vocational training providers and higher education institutes) across Europe and has been subject to considerable scrutiny and updating as a result of the work of BLUEPRINT. The previous system was been described as 'light touch' in its approach to the quality assurance of both the delivery and assessment of training courses aligned to the EuropeActive standards. However, as a direct result of BLUEPRINT a more comprehensive and robust system of quality assurance for European training providers is now in place which will provide the foundation for the quality assurances processes of the Certifying Organisation.

The current training provider accreditation process is undertaken by specially selected independent third-party verifiers on behalf of EuropeActive to prevent any influence on the decision-making process for political or commercial motives. The accreditation period of training providers lasts for 2 years, and then it is necessary to go through a process of re-accreditation. During this tenure, training providers may be subjected to an on-site external verification visit.

Under the Accreditation system 3 main areas of evidence are gathered:

- EQAVET evidence
- Discipline specific evidence
- Supporting evidence

### 7.1. EQAVET evidence

EQAVET is a programme of the European Commission but not all Member States have applied the EQAVET principles.<sup>31</sup>

If the training provider has EQAVET approval they must provide the contact details of the government organisation that has issued the EQAVET approval. If the training provider does not have EQAVET status for any reason, they will be required to provide the following evidence documents:

- A copy of an organogram or organisation chart that clearly shows the training department staff in detail and the person(s) with responsibility for maintaining quality assurance,
- Copies of the Curricula Vitae or resumes for all teaching, assessing and quality assurance staff,
- A copy of the company quality assurance policy/procedures that details how teaching and assessing standards are monitored and continuous improvement measures implemented, this should be including observations of the teaching and assessment process,
- A copy of minutes from a recent tutor/assessor standardisation meeting,

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<sup>30</sup> [www.europeactive-standards.eu](http://www.europeactive-standards.eu)

<sup>31</sup> [www.eqavet.eu/gns/home.aspx](http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/home.aspx)



- A minimum of three suitable independent references for the training provider (except for higher education institutions).

*The below two criteria are additional requirements to any EQAVET held by the Training Provider:*

- Statement of confirmation required from training provider with details if the training provider seeking accreditation ever had accreditation/ approval/ membership declined, cancelled or sanctions/special terms imposed upon them,
- A link to the training providers website (and online platform if applicable) – this website should support all evidence in the application i.e., course price, content (syllabus), duration, delivery methods, teacher biographies, nature of final certification/qualification issued, and any online student support offered.

## **7.2. Discipline-specific evidence**

Training providers are advised to complete a thorough referencing exercise against the relevant EuropeActive standards to ensure that a course covers all the knowledge and skills listed in the respective document for the discipline(s) being considered for application.

The Verifier will work with the training provider to gather the following evidence in preparation for review by the EuropeActive Accreditation Panel (see below).

- The type of application – new application, re-accreditation, additional discipline, satellite, affiliate. The full title of the qualification/certification,
- A short description of the qualification/certification - where applicable it must show evidence of student pre-requisite qualifications (e.g., fitness gym instructor being the pre-requisite for personal trainer),
- A course outline detailing the structure of the qualification and course delivery methods. This can be a prospectus, syllabus, course timetable, course overview or other document but must enable the verifier to identify the overall structure of the qualification in terms of the number of hours of independent study required, the number of days of face-to-face and 'live' study training, the amount of time in classroom or practical settings and the overall duration of the course,
- Qualification delivery – this must detail the delivery methods and show how much time is dedicated to each subject within the course structure,
- Method of assessment – it is expected that there will be more than one method of assessment for most courses. The practical skill-based requirements of the standards will need to be assessed using a practical assessment.



### 7.3. Supporting evidence

- A video of the practical observation assessment in which the assessor, the student and their client can be seen and heard clearly. A detailed description of what this assessment must cover is given to training providers,
- The completed assessment checklist/paperwork from the assessment in the video along with all feedback should also be submitted,
- Examples of completed student feedback questionnaires or course evaluation forms (from the last 6 months),
- A picture of the certificate issued on achievement of the qualification,
- Examples of teaching and learning resources used to deliver the qualification e.g., student manuals, lists of course texts, example presentations, lesson plans, assessment materials, handouts, or other materials.

### 7.4. Review by EuropeActive Accreditation Panel

As a final stage in the accreditation process, once the verifier has been able to collate all the required evidence and signed documentation, they will notify the EuropeActive Accreditation Panel of the application. The Panel will review the application and will either:

- Approve Accreditation,
- Seek further information and evidence,
- Decline Accreditation.

The above processes indicate that many of the quality assurance processes intended for a CO are already in place and became fully operational during the BLUEPRINT project. These processes have been further strengthened with the addition of:

- a more demanding re-accreditation processes which now involves the re-submission of much of the evidence listed above rather than a simple confirmation that nothing has changed in the delivery and assessment of training courses,
- a set of minimum requirements for learning hours for accredited training providers. It should be emphasised these do not depart from the modern learning concept, where the most important consideration is the learning output (learning outcomes), not the education process itself. Instead, the aim was to make the accreditation process for training providers more transparent and the educational and vocational programmes more comparable. By using European Credit System for Vocational and Education Training (ECVET) and European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in these learning hour requirements (please refer to IO6: Application of ECVET and ECTS to new qualifications), the intention was also to facilitate the transferability of qualifications or individual learning units between vocational education and training (VET) and higher education (HE) systems.



In reviewing the above, it should be seen that perhaps the last piece in the jigsaw puzzle of quality assurance is the specific issue of a direct relationship of the CO with learners (students). At present training providers set their own assessments, administer those assessments and certificate their learners. This means that the current accreditation team are somewhat distant from those learners and have no direct relationship with them in the certification process. This would, however, be addressed by the instigation of a common assessment protocol implemented by a European CO and, the certification of those learners who successfully complete this process by the CO. Common assessments and the implementation of those assessments are further discussed in IO 5 and IO 9.

## 8. Certification

The certification of learning outcomes can be described as:

“The process of issuing a certificate, diploma or title formally attesting that a set of learning outcomes (knowledge, knowhow, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual have been assessed and validated by a competent body against a predefined standard.”<sup>32</sup>

A Certificate/ diploma / title can be described as:

“An official document, issued by an awarding body, which records the achievements of an individual following an assessment and validation against a predefined standard.”<sup>33</sup>

It is currently the case that training providers accredited with EuropeActive both assess and certificate their own learners. Achieving this certification with an accredited provider is then accepted as sufficient evidence for entry on to the European Register of Exercise Professionals (EREPS). The intention of establishing a Certifying Organisation is to take the responsibility of both assessment and certification away from the training provider and place it in the hands of an independent third party. In this way, potential conflicts of interest for training providers would be removed and learners would be subject to transparent and accountable processes administered by an independent body.

The Certifying Organisation must have a formal procedure by which it, as the accredited or authorised agency certifies (attests in writing by issuing a certificate), that the learner has attained the necessary qualification standards and learning outcomes, that is, they have successfully completed all relevant assessments. This third-party certification can be described as professional certification, trade certification, or professional designation and is earned by a person to assure qualification to perform a job or task, that is to show competence to practice.<sup>34</sup>

Some certifications are time-limited, while others can be renewed if certain stipulations are met. Such renewal generally involves some form of continued education or commitment to a programme of lifelong learning in order to ensure currency of knowledge, skills and competences.

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<sup>32</sup> [https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4064\\_en.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4064_en.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> [https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4064\\_en.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4064_en.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> See Intellectual Output 11 for more information.



Certifications provided by a competent body in the form of an independent Certifying Organisation are portable, since they do not depend on one company or sectoral definitions of a particular job, and thereby provide potential employers with an impartial, third-party endorsement of an individual's professional capabilities.

While certification programmes are often affiliated with, or endorsed by, professional associations or trade organisations focussed on raising industry standards, it is important that they remain independent of them.

### **8.1. Certification requirements and operational procedures**

The CO must maintain sole responsibility for certification and at no point delegate this responsibility to another organisation. It could provide the initial certification for entry to the sector but also require re-certification after an identified period. This re-certification could form part of a continuing education or lifelong learning programme.

The scope of certification and the criteria for initial certification and re-certification should be clearly stated within the certification process of the CO. Similarly, the suspension or withdrawal of certification would be within the remit of the CO and the criteria for suspension or withdrawal of certification clearly stipulated. The CO must, upon application be able to provide an overview of the certification process (including certification requirements and scope, the assessments involved, applicants' rights, the duties of the certified person and any fees) and ensure that the certification scheme is regularly reviewed and validated.

The CO must be committed to impartiality in its management of those submitting for certification and not be influenced by commercial or other pressures that might threaten this impartiality. In this regard, the CO should not offer any training or education services that might better facilitate certification as this would conflict with the need for impartiality. Commitment to impartiality should be demonstrated in the CO's structure, policies, and procedures. The CO should incorporate processes that identify and document any threats to impartiality and how it has worked to reduce or eliminate these threats.

The CO should have sufficient personnel available to manage all necessary certification processes. These personnel should have the qualifications, training and experience required to perform their various duties and responsibilities in relation to the certification process. All the personnel should be fully aware of the need for confidentiality, impartiality and the absence of any conflicts of interest. The CO must manage the performance of any personnel involved in the assessment of learners and the reliability of their performance in making assessment decisions and judgements. Any issues with such decision-making must be identified, corrected and the actions taken to be fully documented.

The CO should maintain records on all certified persons in order to be able to on request confirm at any time the status and scope of their certification. These records will need to be kept for an appropriate period of time in relation to the certification cycle, i.e., the length of certification and the

requirement for re-certification. The CO should have in place an enforceable requirement where any certified person must inform the CO immediately of any matters that would impact on their ability to meet the requirements of certification.

The CO must have established security policies and procedures in place to ensure the security of any examination materials. These policies and procedures should include how assessment materials are delivered, stored, or transported and any issues arising from the repeated use of these materials. The CO must have procedures in place to ensure consistent examination administration and manage any potentially fraudulent examination practices (e.g., requiring invigilation of assessments, candidates signing non-disclosure agreements regarding assessment materials, measures to confirm the identity of candidates and checking assessment papers and results for any indications of cheating). If any technical equipment (e.g., an online platform delivering an online assessment) is used in the examination process the quality and functioning of this equipment must be ensured.

On application any candidate would need to receive an overview of the certification process and their responsibilities and rights within this process. They would need to provide a signed application for certification and within this provide all the necessary information to identify the applicant, a statement of the certification they are applying for, whether they hold any necessary pre-requisites, agreement to complying with any certification requirements and the identification of any special needs.

The CO has sole responsibility for the decision to certify and should not outsource this decision-making function. The information gained during the assessment process should be sufficient for the certification body to make an informed decision on certification. It will be necessary to retain and have reference to this information in the event of an appeal or complaint. It is vital that those making the certification decision have sufficient knowledge and experience of the certification process to determine if the requirements of certification have been met. Those making the final certification decision should not have been involved in either the training or assessment of the candidate.

Certificates issued to the successful learners will contain the following information:

- Name of the CO,
- Name of the certified person,
- A unique identification number,
- Date the certification was issued and the date of expiry,
- The qualification achieved (viz. European Personal Trainer Qualification),
- The qualification EQF level as informally referenced.

Any certified person will need to have signed an agreement that states that they will comply with any requirements of certification and will not make any misleading claims with regard to their certification and the scope of that certification. If any misleading claims or misuse of the certification is identified the CO will need to take the necessary corrective action.



## 8.2. Appeals and complaint procedures

The CO will need to have documented processes in place to receive, evaluate and make final decisions on any appeals or complaints with regards to the assessment processes or outcomes or complaints against a certified person. These processes must be fair, confidential, and impartial and the individual making the appeal should be kept in touch with the stage of that appeal. This would include notification of the receipt of the appeal or complaint and timely notification of the outcome of that appeal.

## 8.3. Management systems

The CO should have in place management systems sufficient to ensure the consistent delivery of all the above requirements and enable the regular review and updating of these systems. This system should allow the production, approval, maintenance and review of all necessary certification documentation.

# 9. Conclusion

As identified above, a Certifying Organisation has many potential functions including qualification development, assessment, quality assurance and certification. It is in these various functions that a Certifying Organisation can be seen as a 'must have' for a developing and maturing fitness sector. Ultimately, it is only when these functions are managed and controlled by an independent external body that the quality of training provision for various occupational roles can be assured across Europe. This underlines that the mutual recognition of qualifications will only be effectively achieved if the training providers delivering 'international qualifications' are subject to a comprehensive external or third-party quality assurance process.

In putting together the scoping of a Certifying Organisation many insights have been gained and lessons learned which have directly impacted on the existing qualification development and training provider accreditation processes of EuropeActive. These processes will continue to develop, but perhaps central to this development will be a move toward some form of common assessment as the basis for a CO certification. The BLUEPRINT IO 9 sets out some of the feedback received on such an assessment process during trials and testing. This will not be an easy conclusion as different countries across Europe will be at different stages of sectoral development and will have various existing regulations and systems. It will, therefore, be vital that a level of flexibility is maintained in the application of these assessment processes if they are ultimately to be accessible, accepted and implemented.

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# **Intellectual Output 5:**

## **New and Updated Qualifications for Fitness (Personal Trainer) and Outdoors (Animator) for Pan- European Use**



# New and Updated Qualifications for Fitness (Personal Trainer) and Outdoors (Animator) for Pan-European Use

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Date of Publication: December 2020

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## 1. Introduction

This paper provides an overview of the context and development of the BLUEPRINT *Intellectual Output 5 – New and updated qualification for fitness (personal trainer) and outdoors (animator) for pan-European use*. It should be read in conjunction with the other BLUEPRINT Intellectual Output reports to provide further background. In particular, there is a direct relationship with *Intellectual Output 4 – Scoping of the European Certifying Organisation* and *IO9 – Testing, trialling and refining development of new qualifications, awarding organisation and recognition of prior learning*.

As described in IO 4 qualification development is one of the main functions of a Certifying Organisation. The qualifications developed as part of this project are indicative of the qualification development process described in IO4 and feedback collected during the development process forming and informing the final outcomes in diverse ways.

The qualifications described as part of this intellectual output have been developed and updated in units of learning outcomes and are supported by a common assessment strategy.

## 2. Constructing the qualifications

### 2.1. The use of learning outcomes

At the heart of the qualifications is the use of learning outcomes (LOs) to design and implement these qualifications.

The 2008 European Qualification Framework (EQF) recommendation defines learning outcomes as:

“...statements of what an individual should know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a learning process”.

In order to understand how successful a course of learning is two things must be achieved. Firstly, the planned learning outcomes must be clearly identified – these are the goals that describe how a student will be different because of a learning experience, that is what the learner will be able to do at the conclusion of that course of study. Secondly, it must be possible to accurately measure or assess if the course of learning implemented to facilitate the learning was effective.

Learning outcomes are an established principle within the EU policy agenda for education, training and employment. They are central to the structure and content of qualifications and will determine the nature of both qualification delivery and assessment practices. The application of learning outcomes lies at the very core of the EQF. The core of the EQF concerns eight reference levels describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do – 'learning outcomes'.

The learning outcomes approach strengthens the focus on the individual learner and the level of knowledge, skills, and autonomy-responsibility s/he is expected to achieve. This is to be applauded as it moves away from a more traditional focus on the duration and location of learning to a simple



output focus. However, the application of a learning outcomes approach is flawed if the assessment and validation of those outcomes is not robust and consistent across training institutions.

Learning outcomes facilitate and underpin qualification development, training, and assessment but how those learning outcomes are organised delivered and assessed must be subject to the oversight of a recognised, independent, and impartial third- party quality assurance body (as fully described in BLUEPRINT IO4).

## 2.2. Learning outcomes as the basis for assessment

It is the learning outcome statements that have provided the basis for the development of the assessment criteria that underpin assessments outlined below. These criteria precisely describe to the learner exactly what will be required of them in the assessment process as evidence that they have achieved the various learning outcomes necessary to perform the occupational role described in the qualification. These assessment criteria generally support summative assessments at the end of the learning process but can also be used in formative assessments within the learning process.

Learning outcomes have been grouped into units of learning where these units represent the core knowledge, skills and competences required to perform an occupational role. Once these units and their associated learning outcomes were clearly defined a common assessment strategy has been developed which appropriately and effectively assesses each of the LOs contained within each unit. This common assessment strategy is a tool which can be used to facilitate a standardised approach to assessment. A Certifying Organisation as described in IO4 should implement a common assessment strategy for the qualification which is synergised with the requirements of the occupational standards. Quality Assurance can then evaluate the implementation of the common strategy to ensure standardisation and comparability between training providers across a range of nations.

When designing the Personal Training qualification, the core knowledge and skill requirements contained within the standards were developed into packages of learning outcomes or units with associated assessment criteria. The 6 units identified were:

- Role of the personal trainer,
- Functional anatomy and physiology for personal trainers,
- Nutrition and healthy eating for personal trainers,
- Understand the principles of health and fitness behaviour change,
- Collecting and analysing health and fitness assessment information,
- Training adaptation, exercise planning and programming.

It is often a challenge to relate educational inputs to learning outcomes and to fully understand the impact on student learning. Learning taxonomies are a valuable tool for classifying learning objectives. In writing the learning outcomes for the Personal Trainer (PT) qualification reference was made to Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Skills.<sup>35</sup> Bloom's Taxonomy refers to a classification of the different objectives that educators set for students (learning objectives) and is a foundational and essential

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<sup>35</sup> <https://www.pearsoned.com/using-blooms-taxonomy-to-write-learning-outcomes/>



element within the education community. There are other systems or hierarchies that have been devised in the educational and training world. However, Bloom's taxonomy is easily understood and is probably the most widely applied one in use today.

The original levels (Bloom, 1956) were ordered as follows: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation.

Full copies of both the standards for the PT occupational role and the PT qualification are available on request. As an illustration of the translation of educational standards into qualification learning outcomes and assessment criteria, we can directly compare our energy systems section of the PT standards with the same knowledge expressed in the form of a qualification.

### Energy Systems

Learners should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:

- The three energy systems used for the production of adenosine triphosphate (ATP) in working muscle - the alactic anaerobic phosphocreatine (PC) system, the anaerobic lactate system and the aerobic system
- The effect of the type of exercise, intensity, duration, fitness levels and nutritional level on the three energy systems
- The way to use the three energy systems in correlation with the goal of the client
- The way to use acute variables during training to recruit the different energy systems
- The terms aerobic and anaerobic threshold
- Effects of interval training and EPOC (excess post-exercise oxygen consumption) on the metabolism
- The ability of the body to burn fat throughout a range of intensities (not just low intensity), e.g., if the aerobic threshold is raised you can utilise fat more effectively at higher intensities
- The relationship between METs (metabolic equivalent) and kilocalories and the prediction of calorie expenditure based on body weight, exercise MET level and duration with examples of different activities and their MET values
- The methods of monitoring exercise intensity, to include: the talk test, the rate of perceived exertion (RPE) scales (6 to 20 or 0 to 10), heart rate monitoring (age- related and heart rate reserve), and the benefits and limitations of each method
- The use and amounts of energy nutrients at different intensities.



Learning outcomes	Assessment criteria	Evidence requirements
2. <i>Understand the structure and function of energy systems within the energy continuum</i>	<p>2.1. Explain the role of adenosine triphosphate (ATP) in the energy cycle</p> <p>2.2. Identify the energy systems and their role in the energy continuum</p> <p>2.3. Explain the aerobic system, its fuel, by-products and function</p> <p>2.4. Explain the lactate system, its fuel, by-products, and function</p> <p>2.5. Explain the phospho-creatine system, its fuel, by-products, and function</p> <p>2.6. Explain the effects of fitness levels and nutritional status on the ability to utilise systems in the energy continuum</p> <p>2.7. Explain the onset of blood lactate accumulation (OBLA) threshold and its function in predicting exercise ability</p> <p>2.8. Explain the maximal lactate steady state (MLSS) and its function in predicting exercise ability</p> <p>2.9. Explain excess post-exercise oxygen consumption (EPOC) and its effect on metabolism</p>	<p>2.1 Energy cycle: Priming the myosin heads, production of movement, re-synthesis of ATP</p> <p>2.2 Energy systems: Aerobic, phospho-creatine, lactate. Energy continuum: energy systems work together at all times to synthesise ATP; however specific systems will dominate depending on intensity and duration of activity. Learners are expected to understand the rough proportions of energy provided by each energy system at each level of intensity, however it is not required to know the specific percentages.</p> <p>2.3 Aerobic system – fat as fuel – dominates during very long, very low-intensity activity (synthesises many ATP per gram but slowly); carbohydrates as fuel – dominates during long, low-moderate-intensity activity (less synthesised ATP per gram than fat but process is quicker). Length of time ATP can be re-synthesised for is unlimited as long as there is a fuel source available. Aerobic system acts as the recovery vehicle for re-synthesis of ATP and as such is active during any exercise at any intensity. By-products: water and carbon dioxide.</p> <p>2.4 Lactate system – uses glycogen as a fuel. Dominates during moderate-high intensity, short-medium duration activity. Lactate is the by-product caused by the quick but incomplete breakdown of glycogen to synthesise ATP. Lactate system can provide ATP re-synthesis for 60-180 seconds maximum. By-products – lactate (to understand the current thinking around the function of lactate and that</p>





		<p>there are no definitive answers, just theories)</p> <p>2.5 Phospho-creatine (PC) system – Uses stored phospho-creatine as a fuel. Dominates during high intensity, short duration exercise. PC system can provide ATP re-synthesis for 3-10 seconds maximum. By-products: None</p> <p>2.6 Effects: Low fitness means that higher intensity systems will dominate sooner and more often during times of higher intensity activity. Poor nutrition means that there will be poor availability of fuel, particularly carbohydrates. To understand that fat stores are vast, but glycogen is stored in each muscle therefore stores can run out locally, therefore affecting function in those areas/muscles.</p> <p>2.7 OBLA: Also known as aerobic threshold. Explanation: OBLA is the point at which blood-lactate levels begin to rise. If exercise continued at this intensity, blood lactate levels would rise and then level off.</p> <p>2.8 MLSS: Also known as the anaerobic threshold. Explanation: MLSS is the point at which lactate will accumulate and blood-lactate levels will rise, even if intensity is maintained.</p> <p>2.9 EPOC: The increased metabolism caused by exercise that continues post-exercise. To understand the fact that increased intensity exercise will increase the EPOC, therefore burning more calories for longer.</p>
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As the above example illustrates, the knowledge requirements expressed within the standards have been translated into a specific learning outcome. This outcome is expressed at a particular level of Bloom's taxonomy, that is, to '**understand** the structure and function of energy systems within the energy continuum' which defines how the learner will be different because of the learning experience. This learning outcome is then realised and measured through the meeting of several identified assessment criteria which predominant use an action verb 'explain' consistent with demonstrating understanding. Consequently, rather than a simple description of the knowledge to be taught there is a clear statement of what the learner needs to be able to do at the completion of their learning which then lends itself to the development of an appropriate assessment.

### 2.3. The levelling of a sectoral qualification (informally, using the EQF levels)

Assigning a level to a qualification is possible if certain conditions are met (Fig. 1). First, a specific set of information about the qualification is required (e.g., related key professional tasks, work responsibility and autonomy). Second, the requirements of the qualification must be described in the language of learning outcomes. Then the learning outcomes should be compared to the Sector Qualification Framework (SQF) for Active Leisure (AL) descriptors <sup>36</sup> that can be done as follows:

- 1) learning outcomes for knowledge, skills and responsibilities and autonomy are treated separately and each of them is compared to the SQF AL descriptors;
- 2) some learning outcomes for knowledge, skills and responsibilities and autonomy are grouped into specific units of the qualification and these units are compared to the SQF AL descriptors.

The above methods of comparison may be used together.



Figure 1. The process of assigning a level to a qualification

We presented some examples of referring isolated learning outcomes for the Personal Trainer qualification to the SQF AL in the Table 1. Levelling the learning outcomes and finally the whole qualification we also used the "best fit" principle. This principle means that the determination of the level of the qualification is not only limited to comparing learning outcomes to SQF AL descriptors, but also requires their in-depth interpretation. For the Active Leisure sector, the question is whether the qualification confirms the achievement of learning outcomes:

1. to perform only selected tasks or a complete process of AL service delivery
2. what customer to work with – with what goals and needs,
3. related to the use of which equipment (e.g., standard or highly specialized equipment, or innovative technologies)

<sup>36</sup> See BLUEPRINT IO10 for more information.



4. what environment to work in (e.g., in typical Active Leisure facilities or natural environment associated with dangerous conditions)
5. connected with performing tasks independently or in a team, and if the latter, then what is the role of the qualification holder in the team (e.g., team member, coordinator)
6. what is the scope of responsibility for the effects of the implementation of professional tasks (including responsibility for customer health and safety) and the work autonomy?

LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR PERSONAL TRAINER QUALIFICATION		REFERENCE TO THE DESCRIPTOR IN SQF AL	SQF AL Level
The learner will:			
1.	Understand the legal and professional standards and guidelines relevant to personal training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Explains and justifies the roles and responsibilities of people working in the AL sector.</li><li>Discusses and defends the work ethics, professionalism and work efficiency in the AL sector.</li></ul>	4
2.	Know how to utilise technology to engage and support personal training clients.	Explains the rules of using and adaptation of the available resources and/or environment for the multistage delivery of AL service to achieve customer's goals (such as reduction of body mass, improvement of physical fitness and/or technical skills).	4
3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Understand the business and sales skills required to run a successful personal training business.</li><li>Be able to build a personal training business.</li></ul>	Operates within defined (operational and ethical) guidelines typical for AL services.	4
4.	Be able to evaluate customer care.	Implements feedback procedures related to the customers' satisfaction with the participation in AL activities, according to instructions.	3
5.	Be able to provide good customer care throughout the customer experience.	Delivers good customer service encouraging regular participation in AL activities.	2
		Positively interacts with AL customers, purposefully using communication and motivational tools (e.g.to promote adherence to AL activities).	3
6.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Understand the functional anatomy and physiology of the cardiorespiratory,</li></ul>	Lists benefits of particular AL activities (e.g., related to the prevention of non-	2 <u>Key LO<sup>37</sup></u>

<sup>37</sup> Key LO: Key Learning Outcome.



	<p>skeletal, muscular, nervous, and endocrine systems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the structure and function of energy systems within the energy continuum.</li> <li>• Understand the principles of movement.</li> <li>• Understand the importance of the core for efficient functional movement.</li> <li>• Understand the physiological effects of exercise and how they relate to health and well-being.</li> </ul>	communicable diseases, participation in social groups).	
		Defines the role of AL activities within today's lifestyles.	3 <u>Key LO</u>
		Explains the rules and procedures for planning, organising, conducting, monitoring, animating, controlling, evaluating and post processing of the multistage delivery of AL activities (e.g., in relation to the process of long-term exercise programs, or explains standard operation procedures for various outdoor activities).	4 <u>Key LO</u>
7.	Understand the risks of dysfunctional movement.	Recognizes and describes common hazards and risks in AL.	3 <u>Key LO</u>
8.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the components of nutrition.</li> <li>• Understand digestive function.</li> <li>• Understand a healthy diet.</li> <li>• Understand energy balance for weight management.</li> <li>• Know the current healthy eating and lifestyle recommendations.</li> </ul>	Defines terms and phenomena in other, supporting fields of the professional activity, where required (e.g., physiotherapy, cardiology, dietetics).	5
9.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be able to evaluate popular diets to identify appropriate guidance and advice</li> <li>• Be able to evaluate an individual's diet and lifestyle.</li> <li>• Be able to make recommendations to improve an individual's diet and lifestyle.</li> </ul>	Uses specialised knowledge, also from allied fields of professional work, to independently solve problems occurring during the AL service delivery in AL (e.g., related to the specific needs of the customer or demanding weather conditions).	5
10.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand how psychological theories can support behaviour change.</li> <li>• Understand factors that affect health and fitness behaviour change.</li> <li>• Understand goal setting and how it can support behaviour change.</li> <li>• Understand positive and negative stress.</li> <li>• Understand motivational interviewing and how it can support behaviour change.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizes customers' expectations, needs and motives and explains how to use them in the planning and multistage delivery of the AL activities and services.</li> <li>• Describes strategies to overcome various barriers to participation in AL activities.</li> <li>• Selects and adjusts the communication and motivational tools to the changing needs of the</li> </ul>	4 <u>Key LO</u>



		customers and to the various stages of the delivery of AL services.	
11.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand the components of health and fitness.</li> <li>Know how to perform postural, health-, fitness- and skills-related assessments.</li> <li>Be able to perform health and fitness assessments specific to the client's needs and goals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explains the rules and procedures for planning, organising, conducting, monitoring, animating, controlling, evaluating and post processing of the multistage delivery of AL activities (e.g., in relation to the process of long-term exercise programs, or explains standard operation procedures for various outdoor activities).</li> </ul>	4 <u>Key LO</u>
12.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Know how to collect subjective information from clients.</li> <li>Be able to collect relevant subjective information from clients.</li> <li>Be able to communicate in a way that enables the client to feel comfortable when providing personal information.</li> </ul>	Positively interacts with AL customers, purposefully using communication and motivational tools (e.g. to promote adherence to AL activities).	3 <u>Key LO</u>
		Selects and adjusts the communication and motivational tools to the changing needs of the customers and to the various stages of the delivery of AL services.	4 <u>Key LO</u>
13.	Be able to evaluate a client's subjective information to develop appropriate findings and recommendations.	Conducts, summarises and evaluates customers' feedback related to the delivery of AL services.	5 <u>Key LO</u>
14.	Be able to support clients making positive changes to health and fitness behaviour.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explains the possibilities of increasing the involvement of today's society in the AL activities through the proper service delivery.</li> <li>Recognizes customers' expectations, needs and motives and explains how to use them in the planning and multistage delivery of the AL activities and services.</li> <li>Describes strategies to overcome various barriers to participation in AL activities.</li> </ul>	4
15.	Know the guidelines for physical activity and exercise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describes recommendations for physical activity and health.</li> <li>Lists benefits of particular AL activities (e.g., related to the prevention of non-communicable diseases, participation in social groups).</li> </ul>	2



16.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand the principles of health and fitness training.</li> <li>Understand the principles of periodisation in developing the components of fitness.</li> <li>Know how to monitor and measure exercise intensity.</li> <li>Understand the importance of evaluation and adaptation when programming for personal training clients.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explains the rules and procedures for planning, organising, conducting, monitoring, animating, controlling, evaluating and post processing of the multistage delivery of AL activities (e.g., in relation to the process of long-term exercise programs, or explains standard operation procedures for various outdoor activities).</li> <li>Recognizes customers' expectations, needs and motives and explains how to use them in the planning and multistage delivery of the AL activities and services.</li> </ul>	4 <u>Key LO</u>
17.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be able to apply the principles of health and fitness training to exercise planning and programming.</li> <li>Be able to evaluate a session and performance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Performs multistage professional activities to implement AL services, including planning, organising, conducting, monitoring, animating, controlling, evaluating and post processing (e.g., in the process of long-term exercise program, or in the conduction of outdoor activities within standard operating procedures), adjusting the process to the changing conditions (customer's capabilities and needs and/or environment).</li> <li>Takes responsibility for the health and safety of customers during the multistage delivery of the AL activities and services, performed in usually predictable conditions (e.g., implementing exercise programmes for general populations, or conduction or outdoor activities within standard parameters like water levels, weather, etc.).</li> </ul>	4 <u>Key LO</u>
18.	Be able to use training strategies to enhance individual exercise performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selects and adjusts the communication and motivational tools to the changing needs of the customers and to the various stages of the delivery of AL services.</li> </ul>	4 <u>Key LO</u>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fosters retention and ongoing engagement with the customer.</li> </ul>	
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*Table 1. Referencing learning outcomes to the SQF AL on the example of Personal Trainer Qualification (4 SQF AL/EQF)*

The last stage is justification for assigning a level to the qualification. Individual learning outcomes specific to a qualification may be at different SQF levels. The level for the key learning outcomes (related to the most important professional tasks) should determine the level of qualification (Table 2).

SQF AL levels:	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Number of learning outcomes referred to the SQF AL	2	5	9	2
Number of <u>key</u> learning outcomes referred to the SQF AL	1	3	7	1
SQF AL level of the qualification	<b>4</b>			

*Table 2. Assigning the SQF AL level to the Personal Trainer Qualification (4 SQF AL/EQF)*

## 2.4. Establishing a common assessment strategy

In designing assessment tasks for the PT qualification, each individual unit of the PT qualification was considered in terms of learning outcomes and their associated assessment criteria. Consideration was then given to where each potential assessment fits into the “big picture” of the course, and how it maps to the overall learning outcomes and other major assessments.

In establishing the assessment criteria consideration was given to:

- Covering the main learning outcomes and their associated assessment criteria,
- How to best show that learners have achieved outcomes,
- The concepts the learner should master and at what level,
- The skills to be acquired,
- The authenticity of the task and whether it is set in a realistic context (i.e., oriented towards the world external to the course itself),
- Whether tasks are worthwhile learning activities in their own right and contribute to learning,
- The tasks are not overly repetitive for either student or assessor - they represent a productive use of time for all those involved,
- The assessment prompts student self-assessment and reflective practice,
- The tasks are sufficiently flexible for students to tailor them to their own needs and interests,





- The assessment is not likely to be interpreted by students in a way fundamentally different to that intended by those setting the assessment,
- Whether the assessment is reasonable with respect to the student and tutor workload,
- Providing a variety of assessment methods,
- The assessments permit a holistic rather than a fragmented approach,
- What assessments can be done in and away from the face-to-face learning environment,
- The time required to mark the assessment,
- Whether the assessment would be marked internally (by the training provider) or externally (by the CO),
- Whether the assessment is free from bias, transparent, valid, and reliable.

To support and inform this process the 120 participants at the International Standards Meeting in Copenhagen in November 2019 were asked to rate various elements of an assessment strategy covering online E-assessments, case study and skills observation for a PT qualification on a scale from 'not a priority' to 'essential'. The results of this survey are shown in Table 2.



How important are the following elements of the assessment strategy?	
Assessment	Av. rating from 1 'not a priority' to 5 'essential'
E-assessment: MCQ – use technology including traditional question types the use of videos and pictures	3.6
E-assessment: estimated 90-minute assessment – one assessment covering a range of unit criteria	3.5
E-assessment: Online Proctoring (Optional) – secure online in home if Centre wishes to reduce invigilation costs	2.9
Case study: one client for a progressive programme	4.1
Case study: initial assessment and client consultation	4.1
Case study: progressive planning and programming	4.2
Case study: programme rationale	3.9
Skills observation: focus around the interaction, motivation, correction and support of the individual client	4.5
Skills observation: pre-mapped Observation Checklist for assessor to utilise and provide specific feedback	3.6
Skills observation: 'Assessor Choice Client' plan in 30 minutes an appropriate 'PT Taster Session'	3.6
Skills observation: deliver an effective session with the client minimum 30 minutes which shows skills of the PT	4.2
Support and monitoring: online assessment – centrally monitored (pass rates)	3.5
Support and monitoring: case study materials – randomised sampling	3.1
Support and monitoring: skills observation materials – external verification of video evidence, EV visits	3.5

*Table 3. Rating of the elements of an assessment strategy*

The full PT qualification (available on request) provides a mapping of assessment criteria to a relevant and appropriate assessment. These assessments include a:

- Multiple choice question paper(s),
- Assignment – Developing a personal training business,
- Case study,
- Skills observations,
- Viva.

The above assessments provide a range of assessment methods and cover all the assessment criteria contained within the qualification. These assessments are laid out in a Learner Workbook (available on request) and include worksheets to be completed by the learner and opportunities for assessor feedback.



In order to ensure greater consistency and reliability of assessment the workbook also includes marking schemes and skills observation checklists. In this way, assessors can ensure that learners are meeting all relevant assessment criteria.

The original plan was to trial these assessments and the Learner Workbook with several EuropeActive accredited training providers and their learners. Unfortunately, this plan was curtailed by the Covid-19 crisis where training providers were forced to teach largely online, and to delay any assessments. In the interests of obtaining some useful feedback on the assessment strategy the qualification along with the Learner Workbook were forwarded to a number of training providers along with a number of pre-set questions. The feedback received can be found in *IO 9: Testing, trialling and refining development of new qualifications, awarding organisation and recognition of prior learning*.

### 3. Fitness personal trainer qualification overview (informally referenced to the European Qualification Framework Level 4)

#### 3.1. Qualification objective

The objective of this qualification is to provide the knowledge, skills, competencies, and autonomy required to perform the role of a Personal Trainer working with apparently healthy individuals, including:

- Understanding the roles and responsibilities of a Personal Trainer (including the relevant legislations, regulations, and guidelines for their locale),
- Understanding and being able to use technological and traditional media to plan, build, manage their business, and engage and support clients,
- Understanding and being able to engage and support clients, providing good customer care throughout the Personal Training experience,
- Understanding and being able to apply functional anatomy and physiology to personal training clients and exercise selections and programming,
- Understanding nutrition and being able to discuss healthy eating with clients, evaluating their current status and offering appropriate recommendations to improve diet and lifestyle,
- Understanding motivation and behaviour change and being able to implement evidence-based strategies to support the client and their behaviour change,
- Understanding and being able to carry out health and fitness assessments,
- Understanding and being able to design and deliver exercise plans and programmes to elicit training adaptations.

The qualification is aimed at individuals who wish to work in the occupational role of a Personal Trainer. This qualification has been referenced to the EuropeActive standards which are informally referenced to the European Qualification Framework at Level 4.

### 3.2. Qualification structure

Learners must complete all the Mandatory Qualification Units.

Qualification – Mandatory Units	
Role of the Personal Trainer	Functional Anatomy and Physiology for Personal Trainers
Nutrition and Healthy Eating for Personal Trainers	Understanding the Principles of Health and Fitness Behaviour Change
Collecting and Analysing Health and Fitness Assessment Information	Training Adaptation, Exercise Planning and Programming

Recommended minimum total qualification details are shown in the table below (expressed in hours):

Learning Hours	Guided Learning	Estimated Total Time	ECVET Credits
L3 FI pre-requisite*	48-60	150-180	6
L4 PT	80-110	275-330	11
L3 FI & L4 (combined*)	112-140	425-510	17

#### Pre-requisite before a student starts training towards the Personal Trainer qualification

\*Before starting the Personal Trainer qualification training the student should equal or exceed the knowledge, skills, competencies, and autonomy of an EQF Level 3 Fitness Instructor. These requirements are described in the EuropeActive standards.<sup>38</sup>

### 3.3. Unit Summaries

#### 3.3.1. Role of the Personal Trainer

This module provides the learner with the knowledge, skills, competencies, and autonomy to:

- Understand the legal and professional standards and guidelines for Personal Trainers,
- Know how to utilise technology to engage and support clients,
- Understand the business and sales skills required to run a successful personal training business,
- Be able to build a personal training business,
- Be able to evaluate customer care,
- Be able to provide good customer care.

<sup>38</sup> Available online: [https://www.europeactive-standards.eu/sites/europeactive-standards.eu/files/documents/standards19/Personal-Trainer\\_201905.pdf](https://www.europeactive-standards.eu/sites/europeactive-standards.eu/files/documents/standards19/Personal-Trainer_201905.pdf)



### 3.3.2. *Functional Anatomy and Physiology for Personal Trainers*

This module provides the learner with the knowledge and skills to:

- Understand the functional anatomy and physiology of the key systems of the human body,
- Understand the principles of movement,
- Understand the importance of the core for functional movement,
- Understand the physiological effects of exercise,
- Understand the risks of dysfunctional movement.

### 3.3.3. *Nutrition and healthy eating for Personal Trainers*

This module provides the learner with the knowledge and skills to:

- Understand the components of nutrition,
- Understand digestive function,
- Understand a healthy diet,
- Understand energy balance for weight management,
- Know the current healthy eating recommendations,
- Be able to evaluate diets and offer appropriate guidance, advice and recommendations.

### 3.3.4. *Understanding the principles of health and fitness behaviour change*

This module provides the learner with the knowledge and skills to:

- Understand how psychological theories can support behaviour change,
- Understand factors that affect health and fitness behaviour change,
- Understand goal setting and motivational interviewing,
- Understand positive and negative stress.

### 3.3.5. *Collecting and analysing health and fitness assessment information*

This module provides the learner with the knowledge and skills to:

- Understand the components of health and fitness,
- Know how to and be able to collect subjective information from clients and perform objective assessments of health, fitness, and posture,
- Be able to communicate with clients in a way that helps them feel comfortable providing personal information,



- Be able to evaluate a client's information to develop appropriate findings and recommendations,
- Be able to support clients making positive changes to health and fitness behaviour.

### *3.3.6. Training adaptation, exercise planning and programming*

This module provides the learner with the knowledge and skills to:

- Understand the guidelines for physical activity and exercise,
- Understand the principles of health and fitness training,
- Understand the principles of periodisation,
- Know how to monitor and measure exercise intensity,
- Understand the importance of evaluation and adaptation,
- Be able to apply knowledge to exercise planning and programming,
- Be able to use training strategies to enhance individual exercise performance
- Be able to evaluate a session and performance.

It should be noted that the development of the PT qualification and the foresight work outlined in BLUEPRINT IO 3 Skills Foresight has also been invaluable in understanding current skills gaps and in determining future skills needs. This exercise has resulted in the additions to both the PT standards and the PT qualification, specifically the inclusion of the additional learning outcomes:

- Know how to utilise technology to engage and support personal training clients,
- Understand the business and sales skills required to run a successful personal training business

The inclusion of these learning outcomes and their associated assessment criteria is a direct response to the need for Personal Trainers to work with digital tools and technologies, to be successful in an increasingly competitive environment and to provide value to their customers. These additions have already been implemented in the training programmes of many training providers across Europe and will be key in meeting future skills needs. This again illustrates the direct impact that the work of the BLUEPRINT project has had in supporting fitness professionals to thrive and be successful.

### *3.3.7. Common assessment strategy*

Developing a common assessment strategy is viewed as one of the most important aspects of being able to deliver qualifications across Europe. In a consistent and quality-assured way. Learners must complete the following holistic assessments which cover the relevant aspects of each unit:

- A multiple-choice examination,
- An assignment – developing a personal training business,
- A case study – for one personal training client,
- A skills observation – client consultation,

- A skills observation – health and fitness assessments,
- A skills observation – personal training delivery,
- A reflective evaluation,
- A viva.

## 4. Outdoor animator qualification overview (referenced to the European Qualification Framework Level 5)

### 4.1. Qualification Objective

The objective of this qualification is to provide the knowledge and skills required to perform the varied roles of an Outdoor Animator, including:

- Understanding the local environment (e.g., geography, history, meteorology, conservation areas) and being able to communicate key features, issues, safety concerns to participants in an appropriate manner,
- Understanding and being able to act as a professional when leading groups undertaking outdoor activities,
- Being able to work safely and deal with emergencies,
- Understanding and being able to manage outdoor activities, ensuring that legislations, regulations, guidelines, and best practice are always followed,
- Being able to work with groups and individuals within groups to ensure a safe, enjoyable, and valuable experience for all.

The qualification is aimed at individuals who wish to work in the outdoors delivering recreational activities to a range of participants. This qualification has been mapped to the ELESAs standards<sup>39</sup> which are informally mapped to the EQF at Level 5.

### 4.2. Qualification Structure

Learners must complete all the Mandatory Qualification Modules and a minimum of two Professional Technical Capacity modules to achieve the qualification.

Qualification – Mandatory Modules	
Outdoor Environment	Animation Skills
Outdoor Animator as a Profession	Use of Specific Technical Resources
Basic Safety Programme	Applied Psychology
Managing General Technical Resources	Pedagogy and Communication Strategies
Applied Physiology	Safety Management

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.active-leisure-alliance.eu/projects/elesa>





Workplace Organisation - Management	Workplace Organisation – Service Delivery
Professional Technical Capacity Modules	
Kayaking/Canoeing on lakes (non-inflatable kayak, inflatable kayak/fun-yak, inflatable canoe, open canoe, sit-on-top canoe)	Kayaking/Canoeing on streams (non-inflatable kayak, inflatable kayak/fun-yak, inflatable canoe, open canoe, sit-on-top canoe)
Sea Kayaking	Caving
Alpine Skiing	High Ropes Parks
Snowboarding	Top rope climbing
Hiking and Walking	Via Ferrata
Orienteering	Archery
Mountain Biking	Rafting
Canyoning	White Water Swimming

Recommended minimum total qualification details are shown in the table below (expressed in hours):

Total Qualification Time (in hours)	Directed Learning	Self-Directed Learning	Workplace Learning	ECVET Credits
3200	1200	390	1610	120

### 4.3. Module Summaries

#### 4.3.1. *Outdoor Environment*

This module provides the learner with the knowledge and skills to:

- Understand the culture, history, and local environment,
- Understand the natural and geographical environment,
- Understand and interpret international designations and areas of conservation,
- Be able to apply local knowledge when acting as an outdoor animator.

Common Assessment Strategy

The learner must complete the following assessments to achieve this module:

- A Project – Developing Local Knowledge,
- A Performance, or Practical Observation.

#### 4.3.2. *Outdoor Animator as a Profession*

This module provides the learner with the knowledge and skills to:

- Understand the role of outdoor animators,
- Be able to act as a professional outdoor animator.



### Common Assessment Strategy

The learner must complete the following assessments to achieve this module:

- A Portfolio of workplace/experiential evidence and a written report/reflective log to explain the theories applied and rationales for professional practice,
- A Performance, or Practical Observation.

#### 4.3.3. *Basic Safety Programme*

This module provides the learner with the knowledge and skills to:

- Understand the relevant regulations and legislations,
- Understand risk management,
- Be able to plan and deliver safe and effective outdoor programmes,
- Be able to deal with emergencies in the outdoors.

### Common Assessment Strategy

The learner must complete the following assessments to achieve this module:

- A Portfolio of workplace/experiential evidence and a written report/reflective log to explain the theories applied and rationales for professional practice,
- A Performance, or Practical Observation.

#### 4.3.4. *Manage General Technical Resources*

This module provides the learner with the knowledge and skills to:

- Understand how to use equipment appropriately,
- Be able to manage general technical equipment.

### Common Assessment Strategy

The learner must complete the following assessments to achieve this module:

- A Portfolio of workplace/experiential evidence and a written report/reflective log to explain the theories applied and rationales for professional practice,
- A Performance, or Practical Observation.

#### 4.3.5. *Applied Physiology*

This module provides the learner with the knowledge and skills to:

- Understand anatomy and physiology relevant to outdoor animation,
- Understand the principles of movement,



- Be able to apply anatomy and physiological understanding to outdoor animation.

#### Common Assessment Strategy

The learner must complete the following assessments to achieve this module:

- A Multiple-Choice Examination,
- A Performance, or Practical Observation.

#### 4.3.6. *Workplace Organisation – Management*

This module provides the learner with the knowledge and skills to:

- Understand relevant legislation and regulations,
- Understand outdoor tourism products,
- Be able to act as a professional Outdoor Animator.

#### Common Assessment Strategy

The learner must complete the following assessments to achieve this module:

- A Portfolio of workplace/experiential evidence and a written report/reflective log to explain the theories applied and rationales for professional practice,
- A Performance, or Practical Observation.

#### 4.3.7. *Animation Skills*

This module provides the learner with the skills to be able to animate groups in the outdoors.

#### Common Assessment Strategy

The learner must complete the following assessments to achieve this module:

- A Performance, or Practical Observation.

#### 4.3.8. *Use of Specific Technical Resources*

This module provides the learner with the knowledge and skills to:

- Know how to use resources,
- Know how to transport resources, equipment, and people safely,
- Be able to transport, prepare and use resources safely.

#### Common Assessment Strategy

The learner must complete the following assessments to achieve this module:



- A portfolio of workplace/experiential evidence and a written report/reflective log to explain the theories applied and rationales for professional practice,
- A performance, or practical observation.

#### 4.3.9. *Applied Psychology*

This module provides the learner with the knowledge to understand the human mind and its application in the outdoor context.

Common Assessment Strategy

The learner must complete the following assessments to achieve this module:

- A portfolio of workplace/experiential evidence and a written report/reflective log to explain the theories applied and rationales for professional practice.

#### 4.3.10. *Pedagogy and Communication Strategies*

This module provides the learner with the skills to be able to communicate efficiently with a range of participants.

Common Assessment Strategy

The learner must complete the following assessments to achieve this module:

- A performance, or practical observation.

#### 4.3.11. *Safety Management*

This module provides the learner with the knowledge and skills to:

- Prepare for a safe and effective session,
- Apply legislation and regulation appropriately,
- Manage emergencies and rescues,
- Report on emergencies and activities.

Common Assessment Strategy

The learner must complete the following assessments to achieve this module:

- A portfolio of workplace/experiential evidence and a written report/reflective log to explain the theories applied and rationales for professional practice,
- A performance, or practical observation.



#### 4.3.12. Workplace Organisation – Service Delivery

This module provides the learner with the knowledge and skills to:

- Be able to deliver a professional Outdoor Animation service.

Common Assessment Strategy

The learner must complete the following assessments to achieve this module:

- A performance, or practical observation.

#### 4.3.13. Professional Technical Capacity (PTC) Modules

In addition to the Mandatory Modules, learners must complete a minimum of two PTC Modules to achieve the qualification. The PTC Modules demonstrate that the learner has the required technical competence in the selected outdoor activities to apply this knowledge and skill to leading outdoor animation activities.

Common Assessment Strategy

The learner must complete a performance observation for each of their selected PTC modules.

## 5. Conclusion

The qualifications developed as part of BLUEPRINT IO5 have been designed using existing educational standards. The translation of these standards into units of learning outcomes with associated assessment criteria for each learning outcome has then allowed the development of a full assessment strategy. It is hoped that these qualifications will ultimately replace the existing standards as the reference point for training providers across Europe on which, they will base the delivery and assessment of their training courses.

The development of a common assessment strategy seeks to further standardise the outcomes of training provision across Europe. Quality assurance of the delivery of training courses is hugely important but if the assessment of those courses is largely left in the hands of training providers the potential for variable and inconsistent outcomes remain. Consequently, the introduction of a common assessment will ultimately lead to greater standardisation of the knowledge, skills and competencies of professionals working within the active leisure sector across Europe. It will allow a Certifying Organisation as described in IO4 to have a direct relationship with learners and to be wholly confident of the level of achievement of those learners. This will in turn provide a sound foundation in the promotion of the mutual recognition of European qualifications and promote the necessary conditions for a skilled and mobile workforce.



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# **Intellectual Output 6:**

## **Application of ECVET and ECTS to New Qualifications**





# Application of ECVET and ECTS to New Qualifications

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*Date of Publication: 10<sup>th</sup> July 2020*

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Appendix 1. The questionnaire on the use of the ECVET system in the fitness sector



## 1. Introduction

To achieve one of the main goals of the Blueprint project, which is the assignment of ECVET and ECTS to new qualification in the active leisure sector, it is necessary to understand what these systems are.

**ECVET, the European credit system for vocational education and training** promotes wide mobility and lifelong learning. It enables to recognise, accumulate and transfer skills and knowledge acquired during a stay in another country or using different Vocational Education and Training (VET) provider. Due to ECVET these experiences contribute to building up vocational qualifications, recognised both in the labour market and by educational institutions (CEDEFOP, 2013).

References to a credit transfer system for VET can be traced back to the Copenhagen Declaration, of 2002, where the recognition of competences and qualifications was confirmed, by the Directors General for Vocational Training (DGVET) and the European Commission, as a priority for VET (ECVET-toolkit.eu). Since then, many international projects have been implemented to set and test the principles for using ECVET in various sectors. One of the most important document, promoting the implementation of ECVET by all Member States was published in 2009 (2009/C 155/02). The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a European Credit Systems for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) confirmed common ECVET principles and provided detailed technical specifications how to use it. According to above recommendation, “ECVET is a technical framework for the transfer, recognition and, where appropriate, accumulation of individuals’ learning outcomes with a view to achieving a qualification. ECVET tools and methodology comprise the description of qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes with associated points, a transfer and accumulation process and complementary documents such as learning agreements, transcripts of records and ECVET users’ guides” (p. 15). “ECVET points provide complementary information about qualifications and units in numerical form. They have no value independent of the acquired learning outcomes for the particular qualification to which they refer, and they reflect the achievement and accumulation of units. To enable a common approach for the use of ECVET points, a convention is used according to which 60 points are allocated to the learning outcomes expected to be achieved in a year of formal full time VET” (p. 16).

ECVET was confirmed as a priority within the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013) and, more recently, within the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020) (ECVET-toolkit.eu). As part of its direct support to the EU political and institutional process underpinning ECVET, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) monitors and analyses progress made in establishing ECVET at national, regional and project levels and points to the key challenges countries are facing (CEDEFOP, 2013, CEDEFOP, 2016).

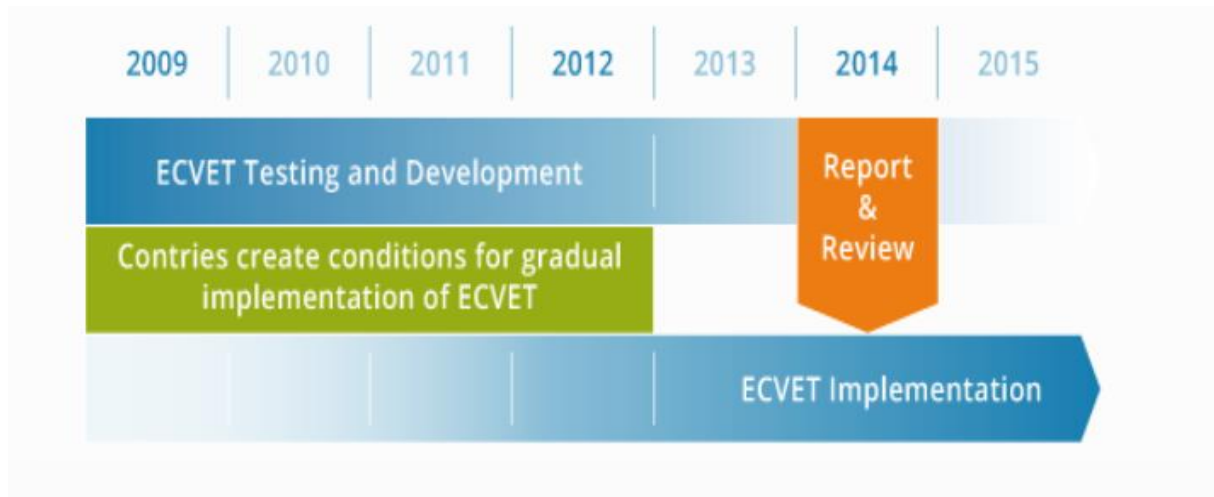


Figure 1 - The timeline of ECVET development and implementation (ECVET-toolkit.eu)

**ECTS, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)** is a tool of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) for making studies and courses more transparent and thus helping to enhance the quality of higher education (EC, 2015). ECTS was instituted in 1989 to enable the learning outcomes mobility in Higher Education. The implementation of ECTS was a response to the need to recognize the achievements of students who travelled within the Erasmus programme and benefited from education in different countries and universities.

Nowadays, ECTS credits are broadly used. ECTS can be applied to all programmes, whatever the mode of delivery (classroom-based, work-based, distance learning) or the status of students (full-time, part-time), and to all kinds of learning contexts (formal, non-formal and informal). Points are also awarded for apprenticeships and optional subjects that make up the integral part of the study programme. Thanks to this, the student has the opportunity to quantifiably present his/hers individual learning path and confirm his or her achievements from outside the given study programme. It can be beneficial both on the labour market and in undertaking further education in another field of study.

ECTS points are expressed as average workload of a learner, necessary to achieve the intended learning outcomes. 60 ECTS credits are allocated to the learning outcomes and associated workload of a full-time academic year or its equivalent; there are usually 30 credits per semester. Workload is an estimation of the time the individual typically needs to complete all learning activities such as lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, work placements and individual study required to achieve the defined learning outcomes in formal learning environments. In most Member States, the official documents have been published by national legal bodies to formalise the use of ECTS. In most countries, workload ranges from 1,500 to 1,800 hours for an academic year, which means that one credit corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of work. It should be recognised that this represents the typical workload and that for individual students the actual time to achieve the learning outcomes will vary (EC, 2015).

## 2. How the active leisure sector use ECVET and ECTS? – survey outcomes

Analytical work from recent years shows a large diversity of particular EU Member States in the implementation of ECVET and ECTS. It can be assumed that the differences in this area will be visible between sectors, both in the national and international dimension. In the available sources, we have not found studies on to what extent ECVET and ECTS systems are used in the active leisure sector. Therefore, we decided to conduct a survey on this topic among stakeholders of active leisure sector, before the application of ECVET and ECTS to new qualifications.

### 2.1. Survey methodology and participants

We conducted the survey during the 9<sup>th</sup> International Standards Meeting in Warsaw, on the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> November 2018. ISM is one of the most notable, annual events for the fitness sector, organised and hosted by EuropeActive. One of the main goals of ISMs is to improve the quality of education for exercise professionals. This event brings together key stakeholders from the fitness industry including employers, training providers, national associations and the representatives of national registers of exercise professionals from across Europe and around the globe. 104 delegates participated in the ISM in 2018.

No.	Position in the fitness sector	n <sup>1</sup>	% <sup>2</sup>
1.	Training provider	16	44
2.	Certification/accreditation body	6	17
3.	Employer/operator	2	6
4.	Supplier	1	3
5.	Government official	1	3
6.	Association/federation/NGO worker	6	17
7.	Other <sup>3</sup>	4	10
<sup>1</sup> n - respondents were allowed to provide more than one position; <sup>2</sup> % of all responses; <sup>3</sup> answers given: university worker (2), publisher (1), consultant (1)			

*Table 1 - The responders' position in the fitness sector (N=30)*

To assess the fitness stakeholders' knowledge on the use of the ECVET system in their sector we used a one-page questionnaire (Appendix 1). During a break between ISM sessions, the delegates received a questionnaire and were asked to complete and return it immediately. This methodology was intended to limit the possibility of communication between respondents or the use of any information sources. We collected 30 completed questionnaires from respondents representing 19 countries, also from outside the EU (Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Lebanon, Malta, Netherlands, Hungary, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, USA). In the

Table 1 we presented the responders' position in the fitness sector.

## 2.2. Survey outcomes

Over half of the respondents did not know what the ECVET system is (Figure 2). This is a particularly worrying result, because over 60% of respondents were people directly related to the educational processes of exercise professionals (44% training providers and 17% representatives of certification/accreditation body).

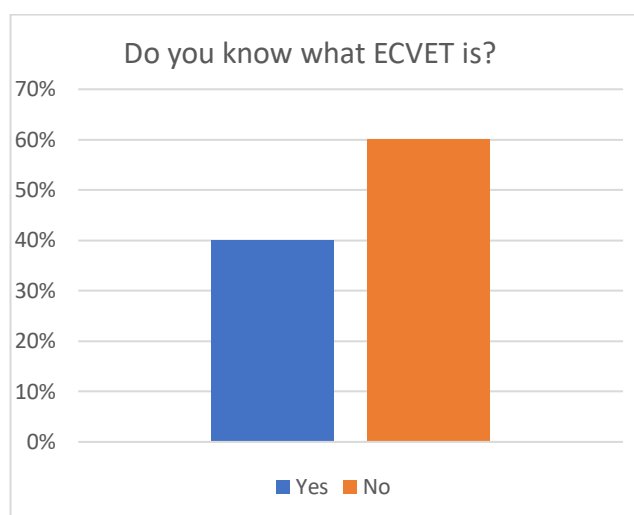


Figure 2 - Answers of respondents (N=30) to the question: "Do you know what ECVET is?"

Only 20% of respondents said that ECVET is used in their country. Others replied that they did not know or that ECVET was not used by their country (Figure 3). It should be emphasized that this response was given by eight respondents from EU member states (Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland), in which ECVET should have been implemented (CEDEFOP, 2016, 2009/C 155/02).

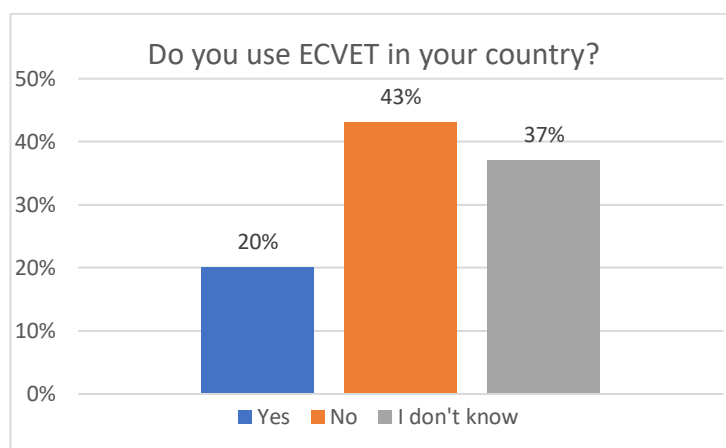


Figure 3 - Answers of respondents (N=30) to the question: "Do you use ECVET in your country?"

The respondents showed similarly low level of knowledge in answering the questions whether there were any legal regulations to use ECVET (**Error! Reference source not found.**) and whether any other credit system for learning outcomes accumulation and transfer was used in their countries (Figure 5). As alternative education credit system the respondents indicated: ECTS (one respondent from Ireland and one respondent from Belgium), the credits of Icelandic Ministry of Education (one respondent from Iceland) and the Continuing Education Credits of US – CECUS (two respondents from USA).

The research results obtained are surprising because according to the CEDEFOP report published already in 2013, "the Member States were progressing and were increasingly committed to ECVET implementation" (CEDEFOP, 2013, p. 1). Despite the fact that a large diversity was noticed at the time both in the concept of using educational points in VET and in the progress of implementation work, the use of ECVET had good prognosis.

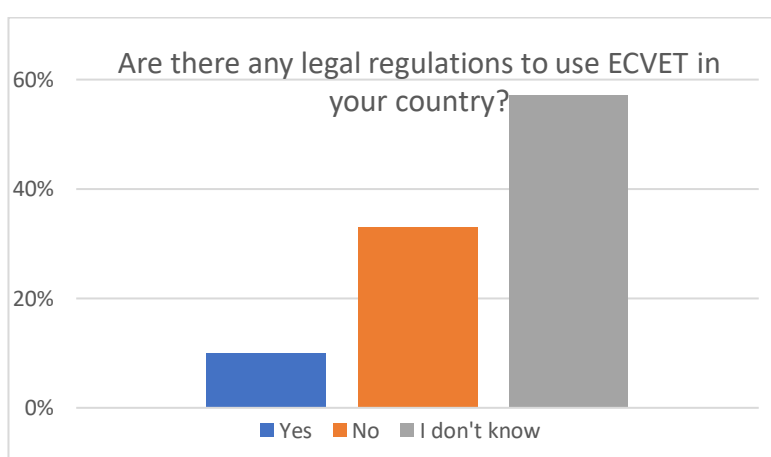


Figure 4 - Answers of respondents (N=30) to the question: "Are there any legal regulations to use ECVET in your country?"



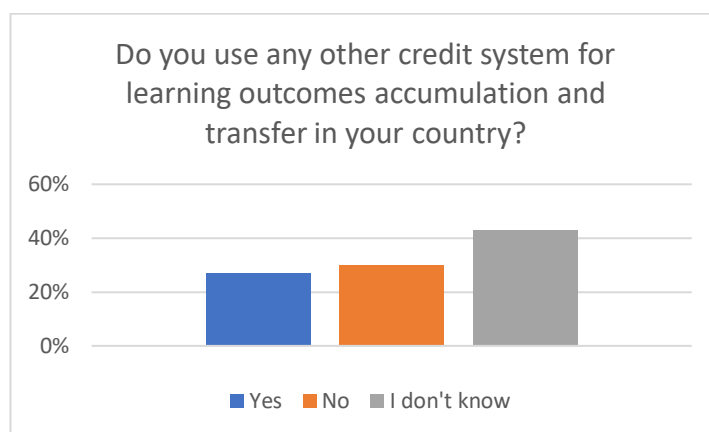


Figure 5 - Answers of respondents (N=30) to the question: "Do you use any other credit system for learning outcomes accumulation and transfer in your country?"

A positive result is that as many as 70% of survey participants said that the use of the educational credit system was a useful tool. Such answers encouraged us to continue working in this area. As regards recommendations for the development and implementation of this system, respondents indicated that the system: should "be transparent", "have clear quality standards which are measurable", "have one general way of handling", "be controlled by someone", "can be used in different sectors", "is needed to keep track of units collected", and that it should be implemented in the European Register of Exercise Professionals (EREPS).

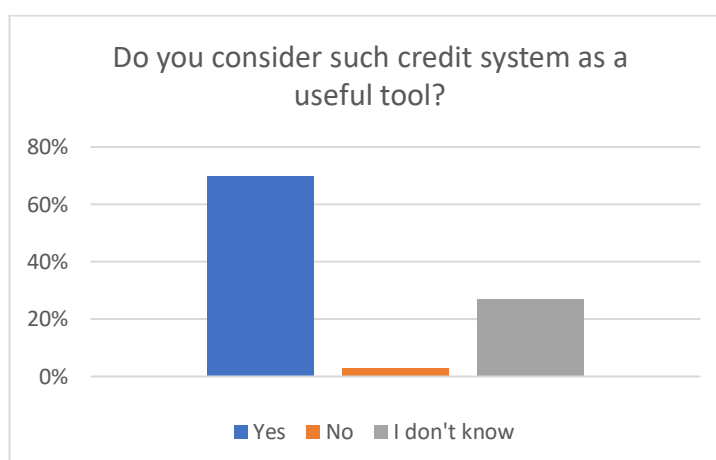


Figure 6 - Answers of respondents (N=30) to the question: "Do you consider such credit system as a useful tool?"

### 2.3. Conclusions from the survey

Despite the fact that the study group was not large, it was composed of respondents from different countries and performing different roles in the fitness sector, interested in the quality of education of exercise professionals. Based on this study, we found that:

- 1) The ECVET system has been implemented in EU member states since 2002, therefore its use should be widely known. This is especially true for people involved in the educational process, and validation and certification of qualifications, regardless of the sector. However, our research showed that the majority of the fitness stakeholders didn't know what the ECVET is, how it can be used and whether there were any regulations to use it in their countries. There is a need for extensive international activities promoting the ECVET system.
- 2) The vast majority of the fitness stakeholders considered a credit system to accumulate and transfer learning outcomes as a useful tool. Therefore, it's justified to develop recommendations how to use such a tool in this sector. Based on these outcomes we were encouraged to assign ECVET and ECTS points to exemplary qualifications from active leisure sector.

No.	Basic Terms	Definition <sup>1</sup>
1.	<b>Qualification</b>	A formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent institution determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.
2.	<b>Learning outcomes</b>	Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process and which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.
3.	<b>Unit of learning outcomes</b>	Component of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence, that can be assessed and validated.
4.	<b>Credit for learning outcomes</b>	A set of learning outcomes of an individual which have been assessed and which can be accumulated towards a qualification or transferred to other learning programmes or qualifications.
5.	<b>ECVET points</b>	A numerical representation of the overall weight of learning outcomes in a qualification and of the relative weight of units in relation to the qualification.
<sup>1</sup> According to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of the 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). Official Journal of the European Union. 2009/C 155/02.		

*Table 2 - Basic terms used in the process of ECVET allocation*



### 3. The methodology to assign ECVET and ECTS to active leisure qualifications

#### 3.1. Basic definitions

To assign ECVET points to qualifications, the definitions of ‘qualification’, ‘learning outcomes’, ‘unit of learning outcomes’, ‘credit for learning outcomes’, ‘ECVET points’ should be well understood (2009/C 155/02). They are presented above, in the **Error! Reference source not found.**

#### 3.2. The difference between ECVET points and credits

The terms of ECVET point and ECVET credit, although in practice often used interchangeably, according to above definitions don’t mean the same. The **ECVET points provide information about the qualification and the units, while the credit designates the learning outcomes the learner has achieved. In other words**, ECVET points are linked to the qualification structure and description (independent of whether someone has achieved the qualification or not). Whereas credit is related to a person and his/her personal achievement (credit does not exist on its own without someone having achieved it). What’s more, credit can be transferred and accumulated if the competent institution recognizes it as a relevant part of the qualification for which the learner is preparing or seeks recognition.

ECVET points can support the understanding of a qualification - together with units, descriptions of learning outcomes and information about the level of qualifications. The number of ECVET points allocated to a qualification, can indicate for example, that the scope of the qualification is narrow or broad. The number of ECVET points allocated to a unit provides the learner with information concerning the relative weight of what s/he has accumulated already (ecvet-secretariat.eu, 2020).

#### 3.3. The weight of a unit of learning outcomes

In ECVET, the allocation of points usually has two phases: ECVET points are allocated first to a qualification as a whole and then to its units. For a given qualification, one formal learning context is taken as a reference and, on the basis of the convention, the total number of points is assigned for that qualification. From this total, ECVET points are then allocated to each unit according to their relative weight within the qualification. For qualifications which do not have a formal learning pathway reference, ECVET credit points can be allocated through estimation by comparison with another qualification which has a formal reference context (2009/C 155/02).

According to the above EU recommendation, the relative weight of a unit of learning outcomes, with regard to the qualification and then the allocation of ECVET points, should be performed using the following approaches or a combination of them:

- Different stakeholders “value” the different units which are part of the qualification according to the relative importance of the unit’s learning outcomes for the labour market, for progression to other qualification levels or for social integration;
- Different stakeholders “value” the complexity, scope and volume of learning outcomes in the unit, in relation to the learning outcomes of the overall qualification. Skills and competences in the unit are evaluated with regard to their share in the overall skills and competences of the entire qualification;
- Different stakeholders “assess” the effort necessary for a learner (estimation of the learners’ effort, workload or learning time needed) to achieve the unit’s required learning outcomes.

Whichever method or combination of methods is chosen, the size of the unit should be reasonable – too small units could lead to fragmentation without proper understanding, and too large ones could impair mobility (BE-TWIN, 2010).

According to the ECVET Secretary, it’s important to allocate ECVET points to qualifications and not to education and training programmes. It is also possible that the same qualification can be prepared through various educational programmes (ecvet-secretariat.eu, 2020). It is a common situation in the international fitness sector, where numerous educational entities implement their own vocational education and training based on the EuropeActive educational standards.

Various methodologies of assigning ECVET have been presented in former projects (BE-TWIN, 2010, EC, 2011, ICARE, 2013, Synthesis, 2012). However, so far none of the applied methodologies has been treated as the gold standard.

### 3.4. The numeric expression of ECVET and ECTS points

The features of educational credit <sup>1</sup> :	The stakeholders of an educational process:		
	Employers	Learners	Educational institutions (HE and VET)
	need the credits for:		
Set of learning outcomes has been assessed and validated according to an agreed standard	Confirmation of good preparation for professional roles in the labour market		
is awarded when the individual has achieved the defined learning outcomes		Mobility of education and planning of an individual learning path	



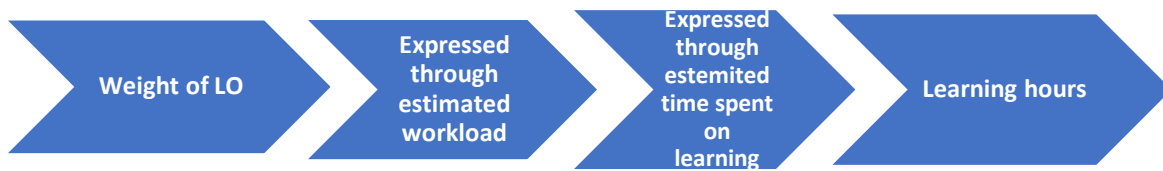
expressed in a quantitative value (e.g. credits or credit points) demonstrating the estimated workload an individual typically needs for achieving related learning outcomes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• planning time for learning</li> <li>• comparing educational offers of various institutions</li> <li>• choosing the preferred way of learning (based on guided-learning or self-learning)</li> </ul>	planning the educational process (including scheduling classes, booking classrooms and educational equipment, planning working time and teachers' salaries, setting prices and promoting the educational offer)
<sup>1</sup> Council Recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. Official Journal of the European Union (2017/C 189/03).			

*Table 3 - The importance of the educational credit features for stakeholders of educational process*

We fully agree with the changes in the educational concept in recent decades, focusing primarily on the final effect of the learning process in the form of acquired knowledge, skills and competences. However, in this project, assigning ECVET and ECTS points to the active leisure qualifications, we decided to combine two approaches to education: modern - focused mainly on learning outcomes, and more historical - directed to the educational process itself.

Although informal learning has gained in importance in recent years and Member States are encouraged to recognize and validate achievements from this learning path (2012/C 398/01), formal and non-formal learning are still important ways of gaining education and professional development. This is reflected, inter alia, in the EU recommendation on ECVET. To allocate ECVET points “for a given qualification, one formal learning context is taken as a reference” (2009/C 155/02, p. 17). Despite the fact that educational entities, especially in the field of non-formal education should still have a lot of autonomy in organizing the educational process, it is necessary to develop measurable guidelines in this regard. This will enable transparency and comparability of their educational offer and, for the learner, will facilitate mobility of education.

According to the EU recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, ‘credit’ means confirmation that a part of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of learning outcomes has been assessed and validated by a competent authority, according to an agreed standard; credit is awarded by competent authorities when the individual has achieved the defined learning outcomes, evidenced by appropriate assessments and can be expressed in a quantitative value (e.g. credits or credit points) demonstrating the estimated workload an individual typically needs for achieving related learning outcomes (2017/C 189/03). Based on this definition we analysed the features of educational credits in the context of needs of various stakeholders participating in educational process: learners, employers and educational institutions (**Error! Reference source not found.**).



*Figure 7 - The transmission of the weight of learning outcomes into learning hours*

According to the EU recommendation: ‘ECVET point means a numerical representation of the **overall weight of learning outcomes** in a qualification and of the relative weight of units in relation to the qualification’ (2009/C 155/02, p. 14). To express the weight of a particular learning outcome we can say how important or complex it is in relation to the whole qualification. However, this is only a qualitative information. To express the weight of learning outcomes (LO) numerically, we need to go to learning hours, as presented in Figure 7:

According to the EU recommendation: ‘To enable a common approach for the use of ECVET points, a convention is used according to which 60 points are allocated to the learning outcomes expected to be achieved in a year of formal full time VET’. Therefore, we can assume that 1 ECVET is 25-30 learning hours (Figure 8), similarly to ECTS (EC, 2015).



*Figure 8 - The expression of one year of formal learning as ECVET points in relation to learning hours*

The methods of ECTS assignment, transfer and accumulation differ from country to country (BE-TWIN, 2010). In some EU countries, ECTS credits are still allocated on the basis of contact hours to particular courses/modules or a combination of this approach with student workload. There is an approach that for full-time students at least a half of learning hours should be implemented through contact hours.



To date, there are no universal guidelines on how to assign ECVET points to qualifications. When preparing our recommendations in this area, we took into account both the practices used in relation to ECTS and the specificity of vocational educational and training. Since many learning outcomes are practical skills in training for exercise professionals, we've found that each hour of learning with a tutor requires at least about two hours of self-work, preferably in workplace. The ratio of 1:2, for the contact hours in relation to self-learning, has resulted in (

Figure 9):

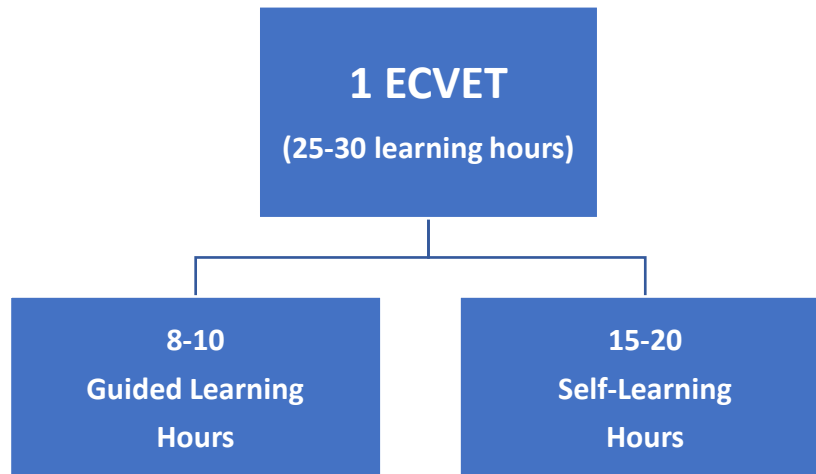


Figure 9 - Proposed structure for 1 ECVET point expressed as learning hours

There are different ranges of learning hours in educational programmes that lead to the same/similar qualifications in the fitness market. In the Blueprint project we have initiated a process to set minimum requirements for learning hours for its accredited training providers. We strongly emphasise that we do not depart from the modern learning concept, where the most important consideration is the learning output (learning outcomes), not the education process itself. Our aim is to make the accreditation process for training providers more transparent and the educational and vocational programmes more comparable. Using ECVET and ECTS in active leisure qualifications, we also want to facilitate the transferability of qualifications or individual learning units between vocational education and training (VET) and higher education (HE) systems. What's more, our approach (based on both credits and learning hours) enables educational institutions to plan the educational process (including scheduling classes, booking classrooms and educational equipment, planning working time and teachers' salaries, setting prices and promoting the educational offer). The benefits for the learners are inter alia: the possibility to plan time for learning, comparing educational offers of various institutions and choosing the preferred way of learning (based on guided-learning or self-learning) **(Error! Reference source not found.)**.

To the above ends, we have applied the concepts of allocating both ECVET and ECTS points and also Guided Learning Hours (GLH), Self-Learning Hours (SLH) and Total Qualification Time (TQT). The numerical representation of ECVET points through contact hours and self-learning is an important



element for planning, controlling and evaluating the learning process carried out by different educational entities. Values for GLH, SLH and TQT are calculated by considering the different activities that learners would typically complete to achieve all learning outcomes defined for a particular standard/qualification. We are aware that individual people need different time to learn. Therefore, in our assumption, to validate a qualification the learner does not have to prove the particular number of learning hours spent, only the achievement of required learning outcomes.

### 3.5. Guided Learning Hours (GLH), Self-Learning Hours (SLH), Total Qualification Time (TQT)

We define **Guided Learning Hours** as a measure of the time spent being taught or instructed live by a course supervisor, tutor or other appropriate provider of training.

Examples of activities which can contribute to Guided Learning Hours include:

- Classroom-based learning supervised by a tutor
- Work-based learning supervised by a tutor
- Live webinar or telephone tutorial with a tutor in real time
- E-learning supervised by a tutor in real time
- All forms of assessment which take place under the supervision of a supervisor (excluding final verification of qualifications by a person not included in the training process).

As **Self-Learning Hours** we consider the estimated number of hours a learner will reasonably be likely to spend in self-preparation/study or self-assessment, as directed by (but not supervised by) a course tutor or other course representative.

Examples of activities which can contribute to Self-Learning Hours include:

- Independent and unsupervised research/learning
- Unsupervised compilation of a portfolio of work experience
- Unsupervised e-learning
- Unsupervised e-assessment
- Unsupervised coursework
- Watching a pre-recorded podcast or webinar
- Unsupervised work-based learning

**Total Qualification Time (TQT)** is a measure of a qualification size and made up of the number of Guided Learning Hours and estimated Self-Learning Hours. It should be noted that to confirm a qualification, the learner does not have to prove the particular number of learning hours spent, only the achievement of learning outcomes.





### 3.6. Transferring ECVET and ECTS

Because in our approach both ECVET and ECTS systems are based on a similar assumption that 1 point is 25-30 hours of learner's workload, points assigned in one system can be transferred to the other system in a 1: 1 ratio. This solution is also justified by the fact that regardless of the educational system, the learner's goal is to obtain exactly the same professional competencies. For example, in the case of qualifications as a personal trainer (4 EQF), it does not matter whether the person is learning in a VET institution or gaining an additional professional qualification in the course of higher education. In each system, the learner should acquire knowledge, skills and competences to design implement and evaluate exercise program for low-risk clients (EuropeActive, 2018). The same number of points (ECVET or ECTS) should be assigned to the same learning outcomes.

A few years ago, new methods of arithmetic conversion of ECVET and ECTS points in the Banking Insurance Finance (B.I.F) Project were presented (de Lavigne, 2011). The project authors proposed point transfer between both systems, using two types of coefficient. The first of these was the EQF coefficient (related to EQF levels of learning outcomes units) and the second was the complexity of unit coefficient. The coefficients were applied to the baseline credit points which were estimated on the notional learner workload of each unit. This approach was criticized by Richard de Lavigne (2011) as too complicated, impractical and causing a lot of bias. According to de Lavigne, ECTS and ECVET may be exchanged on 1 to 1 basis under the condition that "the EQF coefficient and the complexity of unit coefficient for the course units both stand at 1". This situation obviously occurs in the case of learning units consisting of identical learning outcomes, as described above.

For applying ECVET credit transfer, already in 2009, the European Commission recommended using the learning agreement and personal transcript (2009/C 155/02). These tools have evolved a lot since then. Every year, the use of ECVET tools (the templates for Memorandum of Understanding and the Learning Agreement) and procedures (assessment, validation and recognition) have been discussed in detail in an international group of experts (Kristensen, 2019). The ECVET documentation, has proven to be a useful tool to make the learning outcomes visible, transferable and recognized, also in mobility outside the EU. The ECVET principles and particularly using the common language of learning outcomes have proven to work globally. After 10 years of implementation, the European Commission conducted broad research to explore how ECVET has developed in European countries. One of the most positive outcome was that ECVET has integrated the ECVET Memorandum of Understanding and Learning Agreement into Europass while making their use mandatory for Erasmus+ beneficiaries of VET mobility actions (EC, 2019).

In 2018 the Council Recommendation (2018/C 444/01), confirmed the importance of learning recognition across borders and specifically referenced the value and importance of transparency tools such as those developed and used within ECVET (Memorandum of Understanding, Learning Agreement). According to this document, EU Member States should make a political commitment to take steps to introduce automatic recognition between various educational system (including VET and HE) by 2025. Intensive actions should be taken in this respect in the active leisure sector, too.



## 4. Application of ECVET and ECTS to the Personal Trainer qualification

In the Blueprint project, we assigned ECVET and ECTS points to the qualifications of a personal trainer, based on the educational standard for this profession and developed by a group of experts cooperating with EuropeActive a few years ago.

The first step was to verify the qualification structure. Experts have defined professional roles (learning outcomes units), named in this document as "core knowledge and skills areas". Due to this structure, it was possible to assign ECVET points to individual units - separate 'components of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence that can be assessed and validated' (2009/C 155/02, p. 15).

The next stage was determining the weight of individual units and related professional competences by experts from the Sector Skills Alliance for the European Fitness sector. The first meeting took place in Warsaw on November 14, 2018, the second in Copenhagen, November 20, 2019. At both meetings, experts emphasized the importance of communication and soft skills in the work of a personal trainer. They recognized psychosocial competences as important as the skills to assess the client's state of health and to plan and implement a training program. Therefore, for the following units: 'Psychosocial aspects of health & fitness', 'Health & fitness assessment: collecting and analysing information' and 'Training adaptation & exercise planning & programming' a double weight was determined compared to the other units, and consequently a double number of ECVET points was allocated. In this way we obtained 11 ECVET points for eight units (**Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.**).

An important step was to find a reference point for the estimated learning hours needed to obtain all learning outcomes. On the European market, many professional courses are conducted in the VET area leading to the qualification of a personal trainer. Experts representing training providers most often considered about 300 learning hours as sufficient for this qualification. One example of formal acceptance of such a number of learning hours is the qualification of a personal trainer, included in the Polish Integrated Qualification System, approved by the Polish Sport Ministry (ZRK, 2020). This volume of qualifications, after division into 11 ECVET points, allowed to justify the assumption that 1 ECVET is about 25-30 learning hours (

Figure 9). Because in this project we adopted the principle of converting ECVET points into ECTS in a 1 to 1 ratio, we also assigned 11 ECTS points to the qualifications of the personal trainer.

We presented the above methodology to international experts at the International Standards Meeting, November 21-22, 2019 in Copenhagen. They confirmed the validity of both the number of ECVET and ECTS points assigned to the personal trainer qualification and the assumption that 1 ECVET point is 8-10 guided learning hours and 15-20 self-learning hours. It should be emphasized that these are only estimates that are to organize the educational processes proposed by various institutions. Under no circumstances a specified number of learning hours may be a required proof for the confirmation of a given qualification. The actual number of hours spent learning will vary between

learners, depending on their capabilities, previous experience, available educational resources, motivation, etc.

Personal Trainer qualification (4 EQF)						
No.	Core learning outcomes (learning units)	Assessment methods	Guided Learning hours <sup>1</sup>	Estimated Total Time (per unit) <sup>2</sup>	ECVET <sup>3</sup>	ECTS <sup>4</sup>
1.	Role of the PT	Theoretical and practical evaluations	8-10	25-30	1	1
2.	Functional anatomy	Theoretical and practical evaluations	8-10	25-30	1	1
3.	Physiology	Theoretical and practical evaluations	8-10	25-30	1	1
4.	Nutrition	Theoretical and practical evaluations	8-10	25-30	1	1
5.	Psychosocial aspects of health & fitness	Theoretical and practical evaluations	16-20	50-60	2	2
6.	Health & fitness assessment: collecting and analysing information	Theoretical and practical evaluations	16-20	50-60	2	2
7.	Training adaptation & exercise planning & programming	Theoretical and practical evaluations	16-20	50-60	2	2
8.	Business and marketing skills for personal trainers	Theoretical evaluation	8-10	25-30	1	1
TOTAL			88-110	275-330	11	11
Estimated Total Qualification Time			275-330 spread over a minimum of 4-6 months <sup>5</sup>			
<sup>1</sup> Time of 45-60 min; <sup>2</sup> Expressed in learning hours (guided and self-learning combined) <sup>3</sup> 1 ECVET is approx. 8-10 Guided Learning Hours + 15-20 Self Learning Hours (25-30 learning hours in total). <sup>4</sup> 1 ECTS = 25-30 learning hours; <sup>5</sup> To ensure the effectiveness of the education process, we recommend minimum 4-6 months of learning to obtain the PT qualification. This period also seems rational due to the time needed to accumulate knowledge and, practical and motor skills.						

*Table 4 - Number of ECVET and ECTS, Minimum Guided Learning Hours, Total Time assign to the Personal Trainer qualification*

The opinions of participants of ISM in Copenhagen were promising for the development of ECVET and ECTS systems in active leisure sector. Most of them were positive about the use of these tools (Figure 10).

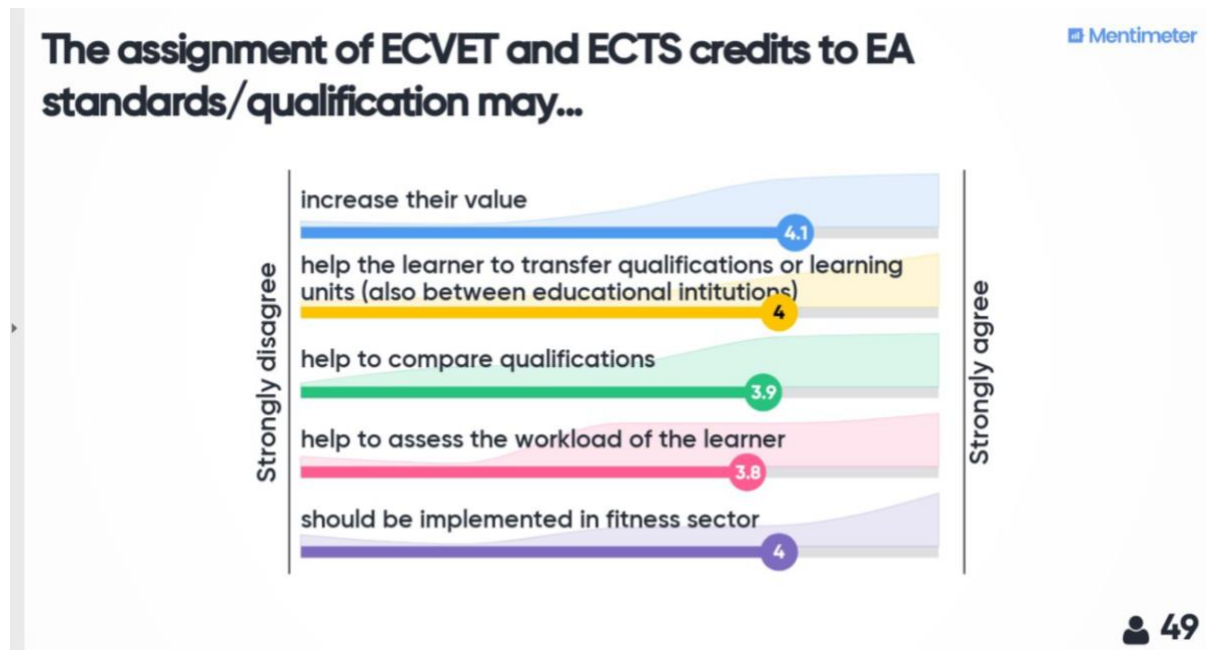


Figure 10 - Opinions of ISM participants in 2019 on assigning ECVET and ECTS points to qualifications in the fitness sector

Based on the allocation of educational points and learning hours we could develop recommendations for training providers on minimum required Guided Learning Hours, which can be used in the accreditation process. However, apart from the learning hours, we are going to carefully analyse the strategy for assessing the achievement of individual learning outcomes. We recommend exceeding these minimums if training providers recognise that more hours are needed for learners to achieve all learning outcomes indicated for a given qualification.

We assume that the EQF Level 4 Personal Trainer will have acquired all knowledge and skills required to work as Fitness Instructor. Therefore, when summarising the educational points and the time and effort devoted to the education of a personal trainer, one should consider his or her achievements from the previous level of education (Table 5).



## 5. Application of ECVET and ECTS to the other active leisure sector qualifications

Based on above methodology we assigned ECVET and ECTS also to other active leisure qualifications: Fitness Instructor and Group Fitness Instructor (Table 5) and Exercise for Health Specialist qualification (

Table 6). Successively, we will allocate these educational credits and learning hours also to other active leisure qualifications.

Fitness Instructor and Group Fitness Instructor qualifications (3 EQF)						
No.	Core learning outcomes (learning units)	Assessment methods	Guided Learning hours <sup>1</sup>	Estimated Total Time (per unit) <sup>2</sup>	ECVET <sup>3</sup>	ECTS <sup>4</sup>
1.	Human Movement	Theoretical and practical evaluations	8-10	25-30	1	1
2.	Exercise Physiology	Theoretical and practical evaluations	8-10	25-30	1	1
3.	Health and Safety	Theoretical and practical evaluations	8-10	25-30	1	1
4.	Lifestyle Management & Communication	Theoretical and practical evaluations	8-10	25-30	1	1
5.	Fitness Instructor or Group Fitness Practical Skills	Theoretical and practical evaluations	16-20	50-60	2	2
TOTAL			48-60	150-180	6	6
Minimum Total Qualification Time			150-180 spread over a minimum of 3 months <sup>5</sup>			
<sup>1</sup> Time of 45-60 min; <sup>2</sup> Expressed in learning hours (guided and self-learning combined) <sup>3</sup> 1 ECVET is approx. 8-10 Guided Learning Hours + 15-20 Self Learning Hours (25-30 learning hours in total); <sup>4</sup> 1 ECTS = 25-30 learning hours; <sup>5</sup> To ensure the effectiveness of the education process, we recommend minimum 3 months of learning to obtain the Fitness Instructor or Group Fitness Instructor qualifications. This period also seems rational due to the time needed to accumulate knowledge and, practical and motor skills.						

*Table 5 - Number of ECVET and ECTS, Minimum Guided Learning Hours, Total Time assign to the Fitness Instructor and Group Fitness Instructor qualifications*



Exercise for Health Specialist qualification (5 EQF)						
No.	Core learning outcomes areas (learning units)	Assessment methods	Guided Learning hours <sup>1</sup>	Estimated Total Time (per unit) <sup>2</sup>	ECVET <sup>3</sup>	ECTS <sup>4</sup>
1.	Role of the Exercise for Health Specialist	Theoretical evaluations	2-3	7-8	0.25	0.25
2.	Advanced Functional Anatomy and Biomechanics	Theoretical and practical evaluations	8-10	25-30	1	1
3.	Physiology & Pathophysiology	Theoretical and practical evaluations	16-20	50-60	2	2
4.	Nutrition for Health	Theoretical evaluations	8-10	25-30	1	1
5.	Psychosocial aspects of Health & Fitness: Changing Health Behaviours	Theoretical and practical evaluations	16-20	50-60	2	2
6.	Health & Fitness Assessment: Collecting and analysing information	Theoretical and practical evaluations	8-10	25-30	1	1
7.	Training Adaptations, Exercise Planning & Programming for Individuals with Controlled Medical Conditions	Theoretical and practical evaluations	16-20	50-60	2	2
8.	Participant Management and Programme Administration	Theoretical evaluation	6-7	18-22	0.75	0.75
TOTAL			80-100	250-300	10	10
Minimum Total Qualification Time			250-300 spread over a minimum of 4-6 months <sup>5</sup>			
<sup>1</sup> Time of 45-60 min;						
<sup>2</sup> Expressed in learning hours (guided and self-learning combined)						
<sup>3</sup> 1 ECVET is approx. 8-10 Guided Learning Hours + 15-20 Self Learning Hours (25-30 learning hours in total).						
<sup>4</sup> 1 ECTS = 25-30 learning hours;						
<sup>5</sup> To ensure the effectiveness of the education process, we recommend minimum 4-6 months of learning to obtain this PT qualification. This period also seems rational due to the time needed to accumulate knowledge and practical skills.						

*Table 6 - Number of ECVET and ECTS, Minimum Guided Learning Hours, Total Time assign to the Exercise for Health Specialist qualification*



## 6. Conclusions

Both systems of accumulation and transfer of educational achievements: ECVET and ECTS have evolved strongly in the last two decades. These tools increasingly support the concept of education mobility, recognition of achievements from different learning paths and the certification system, both in the area of vocational education and training and higher education. Many international projects have demonstrated the benefits of using ECVET and ECTS points, as well as instruments supporting these systems, such as the Memorandum of Understanding or Learning Agreement. However, their weaknesses are also noticeable. First of all, it is their limited scope (not all sectors use it) and the lack of understanding of their principles by average citizens of the Member States.

Our survey conducted in November 2018 showed that in the fitness sector the use of ECVET and ECTS was negligible. Fitness stakeholders, interested in the educational process for exercise professionals, mostly did not know what the ECVET system was, whether it was used in their country and whether there were any legal regulations in this respect. The positive result was that both before and after assigning ECVET points to fitness qualifications respondents positively assessed this tool. This encourages to continue the development of education accumulation and transfer systems in this industry and their promotion among various stakeholders, including educational entities from both VET and HE. It is certainly worth using good practices in these activities from other sectors.

Based on a detailed analysis of the ECVET and ECTS assumptions, we came to the conclusion that their use should combine two approaches to education: a modern concept that focuses on learning effects achieved by the learner and a traditional approach, also taking into account the educational process itself. In this work, we proposed, in addition to assigning ECVET points to qualifications, also their numerical value through learning hours (guided and self-learning hours), similarly to the assumptions of ECTS. Of course, we agree that the most important is the final effect of the education process in the form of acquired knowledge, skills and competences, regardless of whether the education took place in a formal, non-formal or informal manner. Nevertheless, an attempt to describe learning outcomes in a total detachment from the formal side of the learning process and its quantitative parameters seems to be utopian. In addition, it would not be in line with the European commission recommendation on ECVET. Experts have suggested there that as a reference for assigning points one should be using solutions from the formal education system. Lack of quantitative information about qualifications may make it difficult for the learner to plan his / her career path. That is because, it will not contain sufficient information, including about the estimated time spent on learning and about the costs, if any. In turn, educational entities will have difficulties with the educational process planning (including class planning, booking classrooms and educational equipment, planning working time and teachers' salaries, setting prices and promoting the educational offer). Therefore, unjustified avoidance of information about estimated learning hours may negatively affect the development of the education market.

Our proposal to assign both points and learning hours to qualifications has been positively evaluated by an international group of experts from our sector. In the near future, we plan to assign points and hours to other qualifications. We are convinced that this will increase both the quality and also the comparability and mobility of education in our industry.





## Appendix 1

### Questionnaire on the use of the ECVET system in the fitness sector



#### Application of ECVET and ECTS to new qualifications – BLUEPRINT PROJECT; IO6

1. Your country:.....
2. Your position in the fitness sector:
  - ☐ Training provider
  - ☐ Certification/accreditation body
  - ☐ Employer/operator
  - ☐ Supplier
  - ☐ Government official
  - ☐ Association/federation/NGO
  - ☐ Other.....
3. Do you know what ECVET is?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
4. Do you use ECVET in your country?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ I don't know
5. Are there any legal regulations to use ECVET in your country?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ I don't know
6. Do you use any other credit system for learning outcomes accumulation and transfer?
  - ☐ Yes (If yes, please describe shortly) .....
  - .....
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ I don't know
7. Do you consider credit system as a useful tool?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ I don't know
8. If yes, what would you recommend to develop and implement this system?
  - .....
  - .....
  - .....
  - .....

Thank you very much for your input!

For further questions please contact me: [anna.szumilewicz@awfis.gda.pl](mailto:anna.szumilewicz@awfis.gda.pl)



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# **Intellectual Output 7:**

## **Enhancing the Employability of Young People in Active Leisure**



## Enhancing the Employability of Young People in Active Leisure

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*Date of Publication: 28<sup>th</sup> March 2020*

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## 1. Introduction – Active Leisure in 21<sup>st</sup> century Europe

Europe faces one of its most critical periods in recent history. The economic crash of 2008 led to a devastating loss of jobs across all Member States. The impact of this crisis was felt even more amongst young people. In this climate, youth unemployment raised to unprecedented levels peaking at nearly 25% in 2013 across the Union. Despite a significant recovery, youth unemployment is still worryingly high. Framed within broader initiatives such as the Europe2020 Strategy (European Commission, 2010) several initiatives such as the Youth Guarantee (European Commission, 2013b) and Youth Employment Initiative (European Commission, 2013c) have specifically targeted this area and provided a platform for job growth.

*<<I cannot and will not accept that Europe is, and remains, the continent of youth unemployment. I cannot, and will not accept that the millennials, Generation Y, might be the first generation in 70 years to be poorer than their parents.>>*

*European Commission President  
Jean-Claude Juncker (2016)*

One the most important factors identified as key to economic progress is the development of a highly skilled, flexible, responsive and mobile workforce. However, this has also been signalled as one of the biggest challenges in the EU where a significant shortage and mismatch of skills exists. Recognising this, the European Commission created the New Skills Agenda (European Commission, 2016a) and the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations classification (EC-ESCO; European Commission, 2018a) to lead the way in the upskilling of the workforce in all member states so all EU citizens “are equipped for good quality jobs and can fulfil their potential” (European Commission, 2016a, p. 2).

Against this background, Active Leisure (AL) has been highlighted as a powerful tool for economic recovery and workforce development (European Commission, 2013a, 2016b). Moreover, Active Leisure has been recognised as having the potential to impact skill development and employment prospects in young people not in employment, education or training – the so called “NEETs”. This catalytic effect has been proposed to act in two ways. On the one hand, young people’s participation in Active Leisure has been proposed to organically lead to the development of workplace skills such as teamwork or responsibility which make young people more employable. On the other, Active Leisure has been heralded as an attractive and realistic opportunity for NEETs to undertake vocational education and training leading to enhanced workplace skills as well as future job offers.

This document therefore explores the possibilities for Active Leisure to directly enhance the employability of young people within the context of existing EU economic and educational development strategies. In doing so, this paper will:

- Define Active Leisure as a sector
- Review significant sectoral policy developments
- Highlight Active Leisure’s employability characteristics, and
- Provide policy and practice recommendations to enhance the skills of young people.

## 2. Defining the Sport and Active Leisure sector

The Sport and Active Leisure sector has been increasingly recognised as a substantial contributor to the EU's economy. The latest figures indicate that 2.12% of the Gross Domestic Product (c. €280bn) and 2.72% of EU employment (c. 5.6M people) is related to sport (European Commission, 2018). The sector, as it is conceived today, comprises of well differentiated sub-sectors. These include:

Sport which includes:

1. Professional Sport
2. Voluntary Sport
3. Social Sport

Active Leisure including:

1. Fitness
2. Outdoors

Establishing the differences between these sub-sectors is central to recognising the distinct contributions they all make to the economic and social fabric of the EU. It is also important because it provides clear boundaries that increase each sector's capacity to plan for their future development as well as their accountability to the overall sport, social and economic system.

Table 1 below offers the definition of the five sub-sectors.

<b>Professional sport</b>	Main focus is to create mass national and global spectator events (i.e., professional leagues, Olympic Games, World Championships, etc)
<b>Voluntary sport</b>	Made up of associations, which in turn come together in sports federations, and provide its members with training and competitive sporting activities
<b>Social Sport</b>	Often run by not-for-profit organizations aiming to use sport to create positive outcomes for underserved groups (i.e., people with a disability, minorities, refugees, unemployed, etc).
<b>Active Leisure (Outdoor + Fitness)</b>	A combination of fitness and outdoor-based activities that are generally unstructured and non-competitive. They promote active, healthy lifestyles through activities, events and exercise. They are commonly provided under the direction of qualified animators or instructors so that the activities are tailored to participant needs. It's organized either or by businesses, often very small businesses (SME's).

*Table 1 – Definition of the sport sub-sectors (Vocasport, 2004 and EC-OE, 2016)*

### 3. Defining Active Leisure

The Active Leisure sector is further subdivided into Fitness and Outdoor Leisure (as determined through the ESCO <sup>40</sup> referencing of the main sector occupations):

- The Fitness sector uses qualified instructors and trainers to deliver diverse, structured exercise programmes that help people of all ages and abilities to improve their health, muscle and cardiovascular endurance, coordination, balance, agility and flexibility. Fitness programmes also build a feeling of individual wellbeing that establishes and helps to maintain a healthy balance of mind, body and spirit.
- The Outdoor sector uses outdoor related activities (canoe, rafting, horse riding, ... etc.) as the basis of delivery of a recreational or personal development service. Outdoor providers do not generally offer competitions. The outdoor sector uses qualified animators or instructors to deliver these outdoor activities in a context of fun, recreation, tourism, outdoor learning or engagement with the natural environment.

Within this context, some key denominators are used to differentiate Active Leisure from the other sub-sectors. These include a) workers; b) economic sector; c) governance; d) counterparts; e) characteristics; f) job description; g) target group; h) revenue streams; i) fiscal responsibility; j) insurance; k) safety; l) liability; and m) workplace. Table 2 summarises these denominators in the Active Leisure sub-sector.

<b>Workers</b>	c. 800,000
<b>Economic Sector</b>	Fitness 93.1 / Outdoors 93.29
<b>Governance</b>	Ministry of Work/Economy/Tourism
<b>Counterparts</b>	Employees unions
<b>Characteristics</b>	Typically run by micro and SME's and a small number of larger companies; servicing individual's leisure pursuits/fitness goals; paid employees; led by animators/instructors; in the case of the outdoors, may be sold in packages, often of multiple activities; in relation to fitness, typically sold as memberships or personal services
<b>Job Description/Access</b>	Typically accessed via Vocational Education & Training or On-The-Job training.
<b>Target Group</b>	Private clients
<b>Revenue Streams</b>	Service purchase
<b>Fiscal Responsibility</b>	Liable for VAT/Tax
<b>Insurance</b>	Company and personal liability
<b>Safety</b>	Consumer safety

Liability	Civil courts
Workplace	Nature/Urban Outdoors/Gyms

*Table 2 – Denominators of Active Leisure sub-sector (adapted from EC-OE, 2016)*

It is therefore clear that Active Leisure is a well differentiated and defined sub-sector of the broader Sport and Active Leisure sector that warrants personalised and individualised attention. To this effect, the European Confederation of Outdoor Employers (EC-OE) and EuropeActive (the representative body for the Fitness industry) came together in 2012 to form the Active Leisure Alliance (ALA). The objectives of the ALA are to:

- Declare their respectful entire autonomy of representation as far as social dialogue issues in the Sport and Active Leisure sector are concerned at the European level;
- Recognise each other as particularly significant and largely unchallenged in their respective position as the EU-wide representatives of the Active Leisure Sector;
- Actively cooperate in the representation of the employers of the Active Leisure Sector, particularly for Social Dialogue issues;
- Jointly declare their immediate availability for their participation to the construction of social dialogue within the 'Sport and Active Leisure' Social Dialogue Committee;
- Jointly decide to bring the present statement to the sector's partners' knowledge and that of the European Commission. (EC-OE 2016, p.19)

In sum, the Active Leisure sub-sector has emerged over the last 20 years as a significant player in the Sport and Active Leisure sector and demonstrated a strong capacity to self-organise and regulate. The current capacity and untapped future potential for Active Leisure to increase its share of employability in the EU and to become a powerful tool for skill development specifically amongst young people will be the focus of the next section.





## 4. General employment policies in the European Union

The economic downturn brought about by the crash of 2008 led to a rapid increase in unemployment across Europe which peaked in 2013. A marked recovery trend has, however, been established over the last six years. This upward trajectory has been partially supported by a series of pan-European policies with complementary objectives.

In 2010, the European Commission launched its Europe 2020 Strategy. Conceived as a continental agenda for development *“it emphasises smart, sustainable and inclusive growth as a way to strengthen the EU economy and prepare its structure for the challenges of the next decade. As its main objectives, the strategy strives to deliver high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion in the Member States, while reducing the impact on the natural environment”* (Eurostat, 2018, p. 8). The Europe 2020 Strategy centres around the areas of employment, research and development, climate change and energy, education and poverty reduction.

The 2020 strategy has made significant progress in the areas of energy and climate change and education. Data in relation to research and development and poverty alleviation is less promising. Importantly for this report, the observed trend in the area of employment is positive. The strategy set up a target of 75% of the EU population between 20 and 64 to be employed by 2020. In 2017, the share was 72.2%, 1.1% higher than in the year prior and 2.8% off the original target with two years to go. This figure places the EU as one of the highest employment rates in the world only behind Japan and Australia (Eurostat, 2018).

In addition to the Europe 2020 strategy, the European Commission realised that one of the biggest challenges for 21<sup>st</sup> century economies is the development of a suitably skilled workforce capable of servicing the ever-changing needs of the labour market in this rapid era of technological development. To this effect, the New Skills Agenda for Europe initiative (NSAE) was launched in 2016 to *“strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness”* (European Commission, 2016a, p. 2).

The NSAE highlights the current gaps and mismatches in the EU’s workforce. On the one hand, many people work in jobs that do not match nor maximise their talents. On the other, it estimates that 40% of European employers find it difficult to access people with the required skills to allow their businesses and companies to innovate and grow. For these reasons, the NSAE sees skills as:

*“a pathway to employability and prosperity. With the right skills, people are equipped for good-quality jobs and can fulfil their potential as confident, active citizens. In a fast-changing global economy, skills will to a great extent determine competitiveness and the capacity to drive innovation. They are a pull factor for investment and a catalyst in the virtuous circle of job creation and growth. They are key to social cohesion”* (European Commission, 2016a, p2).

The NSAE proposes three work strands to close the skills shortage:

- Improving the quality and relevance of skills formation
- Making skills and qualifications more visible and comparable
- Improving skills intelligence and information for better career choices



Notwithstanding these policies and the general trend of employment growth, youth unemployment was hit particularly hard in the years following the 2008 crisis. The youth unemployment rate rose to 24% in 2013 and the rate of young people not in employment, education or training reached 13.2% in 2012. This led to a progressive shrinking and aging of EU workforce. As a result of these alarming figures, the European Commission put in place additional policies and measures to tackle this important issue.

## 5. Youth employment initiatives in the European Union

In 2013, all Member States made a political commitment *“to give every young person a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education”* (European Commission, 2016a, p2). This commitment is known as the Youth Guarantee (YG). Since the advent of the YG significant progress has been made:

- 2.3M less young people are unemployed in the EU
- 1.4M less young people are not in employment, education or training
- More than 5M young people have registered each year since 2014 and more than 3.5M took up an offer of employment, education, traineeship or apprenticeship every year.

To facilitate the roll-out of the YG, the European Commission launched the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) in 2013. The YEI targets specifically regions where youth unemployment is higher than 25% and focuses on young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs). In total, Member States have committed nearly €9bn to the YEI until 2020 and over 1.7M young people have already benefited from the initiative. Five years on from the YG and YEI, youth unemployment has outperformed the general job creation trend dropping to 15.1% and the share of 15-24 year olds NEETs has fallen to 10.9% (European Commission, 2018c).



## 6. The Active Leisure employment picture

The Sport and Active Leisure sector in general, and the Active Leisure sub-sector in particular, have shown a high degree of resilience to the slowdown in the economic cycle (European Commission, 2018c). The Workplan for Sport 2017-2020 (European Commission, 2016b) has again recognised the power of sport as driver of economic growth and skills development. Circa 800,000 people are employed in the Active Leisure sector and it accounts for 0.33% of Europe's GDP.

Notwithstanding this promising picture, there still exist barriers to employment in the Active Leisure sub-sector (EASE & UniEuropa, 2016; EuropeActive, 2018):

- A complex arrangement of full-time, part-time, seasonal/casual and second jobbers and significant numbers of self-employed workers
- Skills shortages and mismatches, particularly around the adoption and maximisation of digital technologies and the promotion of health enhancing physical activity.
- Lack of attractiveness of VET qualifications.
- Lack of labour market integration and thus limited transnational mobility of workers due to the uneven recognition of skills and qualifications across Member States.

Apart from highlighting some existing barriers to employment the above EASE & UniEurope document unintentionally also adds some confusion. Whereas the first bullet point relates to 'employment', the remaining bullet points in fact refer to 'employability'.

In order to tackle some off these issues, the Active Leisure Alliance developed a project called SIQAF (The Relevance of the Active Leisure Sector & International Qualification Framework to the EQF, 2016-2018).<sup>41</sup> The main focus of SIQAF was to explore and share the experience of the Active Leisure sector in "*referencing sectoral and international qualifications to National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)*" (EuropeActive, 2018, p.6). The principal outcome of SIQAF was the development of a 'pathway'<sup>42</sup> for the referencing of international and sector qualifications with national and European frameworks.

The Active Leisure Alliance has long recognised that skills are central to employability and prosperity. As described in the NSAE:

"With the right skills, people are equipped for good-quality jobs and can fulfil their potential as confident, active citizens. In a fast-changing global economy, skills will to a great extent determine competitiveness and the capacity to drive innovation. They are a pull factor for investment and a catalyst in the virtuous circle of job creation and growth" (p. 3).

For this reason, one of the fundamental conclusions of SIQAF was the need for each sector to develop a Sector Skills Alliance (SSA). An SSA addresses the skills agenda by aligning VET systems with labour market needs. A pre-condition for this, however, is to appropriately define the sector, including:

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.europeactive-euaffairs.eu/projects/SIQAF>

<sup>42</sup> [https://www.ehfa-membership.com/sites/europeactive-euaffairs.eu/files/projects/SIQAF/SIQAF\\_Flyer\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ehfa-membership.com/sites/europeactive-euaffairs.eu/files/projects/SIQAF/SIQAF_Flyer_EN.pdf)



- Sector indicators;
- Functional map;
- Occupational map;
- Occupational descriptors; and
- Occupational standards and competencies.

As a result of this process, a Sector Skills Alliance may be able to tackle some of the biggest challenges to employability in the sector like:

- Modernising VET by adapting skills needs and integrating work-based learning
- Strengthening the exchange of knowledge and best practices
- Improving labour market mobility
- Increasing the recognition of qualifications.

Given the above landscape, it is important to provide a basic account of the difference between employment and employability.

## 7. Employment versus Employability

### 7.1. Employment

Active Leisure is first and foremost an economic sector. Active Leisure companies and professionals, in the main, provide a service for a set remuneration and are regulated by employment and civil laws. Those working in Active Leisure are thus employed, remunerated and regulated. Employment is therefore inextricably linked to remuneration and regulation. Regulation is concerned mainly with two areas: a) access to the profession and b) service quality assurance. This emphasis on remuneration and regulation is perhaps the major difference between Active Leisure and other areas of the Sport and Active Leisure sector such as sport and community clubs or The Scouts.

### 7.2. Employability

As described in the various EU youth initiatives presented in this paper, employability is concerned with the skills, competences and attitudes that render young people more employable and thus may lead to gaining employment. Employability is all about providing the right skills to the right person at the right time for the right job. The Active Leisure sector has worked tirelessly over the last decade to ensure that the sub-sector's workforce is adequately trained and fit for purpose. Project like SIQAF (2016-2018) and the current Blueprint (2018-2020) have produced significant resources and application tools in this regard.

In the context of youth employment, employability, understood as the gaining of relevant skills, competences and attitudes, is therefore seen as the pathway to employment and prosperity. However, that is not all. Participation and/or employment in Active Leisure activities have also been

proposed as a tool to develop ‘transferable employability’ across sectors. In other words, the skills, competences and attitudes developed through involvement in the Active Leisure sector at various levels may lead to enhanced employability in other sectors.

The remaining sections of this document reflect on how the Active Leisure sector may contribute to both the employability of young people within and beyond the sector.

## **8. The Contribution of Active Leisure to employability**

### **8.1. Active Leisure education and training to promote employability**

The Active Leisure sector has made considerable progress in the last decade to ensure that all those working in the industry can gain the relevant skills and competences required to fulfil the needs of the job (EC-OE, 2015, EuropeActive programmes of EREPS and accreditation of VET providers). In this respect, the contribution of Active Leisure to the employability of young people is straight forward. Young people may enrol in Active Leisure qualifications and apprenticeship schemes wherein they will develop the relevant skills to render themselves employable in the sector and obtain the relevant qualifications required to work in the industry under current regulations.

However, beyond engaging in formal vocational education and training, participation in Active Leisure activities has also been posited as making a contribution to employability in indirect ways. The section below explores this notion.

### **8.2. Participation in Active Leisure to promote Employability**

Research shows that participation in active leisure, sport and/or physical activity during adolescence leads to, not only physical and mental health and wellbeing, but to a higher likelihood of progressing on to further education, stronger employability and increased earning capacity (Kosteas, 2012; Lechner, 2009). Some of the causes for this impact proposed by the literature include:

- Increased life-chances and opportunities via enhanced social capital, especially for “at risk” youth (O’Brien-Olinger & Bamber, 2013)
- Employer desirability for active employees (Rooth, 2010)
- Interview skills (DofE, 2009)
- Employer perceived responsibility (WOMS, 2019)
- Enhanced cultural sensitivity (WOMS, 2019)
- Development of general transferable skills (DofE, 2009)



Moreover, research shows that youth involved in active leisure activities not only lead healthier lifestyles than their non-participating peers but score significantly higher in other important measures of personal and social development such as self-esteem, hope, resistance and resilience. In addition, youth engaged in active leisure gain important so-called ‘soft-skills’ such as teamwork, responsibility and forward planning which, as stated above, are highly valued by employers (Hunter Holland et al., 2018; Starbuck & Bell, 2017).

Similar developmental outcomes have been found in studies of outdoor-based leadership awards and activities such as the Scouts (WOSM, 2019), the Duke of Edinburgh Award in the UK (2009) and the President’s Award in Ireland (2018). Interestingly, what this type of activities seems to have brought to the fore is the potential for Active Leisure pursuits to support the development of leadership skills in young people. Their recent research confirms that adolescents participating in outdoor-based leadership programmes become more autonomous, supportive, responsible, committed and community oriented than their non-participating counterparts (WOMS, 2019). Notwithstanding the above, more research is needed to pinpoint more causal and clearer links between adolescent participation in Active Leisure and enhanced employment.

### **8.3. Maximising the benefits of Active Leisure participation for young people**

Notwithstanding the value of Active Leisure participation for personal development and subsequently employability, recent research in the field of sport (Theeboom et al., 2017) shows that these positive effects do not happen by chance and that providers need to ensure that certain elements are present in the delivery of programmes to maximise success:

1. The use of activities as a means to attract targeted participants and establish meaningful relationships between providers and participants
2. Social Climate: a safe and secure environment for development
3. Individual needs assessment
4. Individual learning plans
5. Developmental workshops
6. Access to validated qualifications
7. Systematic and explicit reinforcement of desired skills, behaviours and attitudes through sport practice
8. Access to relevant work experience
9. Inclusion of explicit outcomes which strengthen employability skills
10. Explicit preparation for employment
11. Provision of ongoing support (in employment or education)



The study conducted by Theeboom (et al) may be suitable for some sectors of sport provision (i.e., sport for development funded programmes), but at the same time it highlights a significant difference between this area and most Active Leisure provision. (Smulders, 2016). Specifically, in its current guise and under the current constraints, Active Leisure providers (i.e., Fitness & Outdoors) simply do not have the time nor the financial capacity in most cases to support all the 'elements' listed by Theeboom, for example: Developing and organising 'individual needs assessment' (3), 'individual learning plans' (4), 'developmental workshops' (5). These are expensive endeavours that can only be delivered when appropriate funding is in place from the relevant agencies, as the cost of doing all of this cannot be passed on to the developing youngsters and their families.

Additionally, it must also be highlighted that in a commercial setting such as in the Active Leisure sector, it is even unlawful and consequently forbidden to 'employ' youngsters under the age of 16 / 18 years (according to the social legislation in the given EU Member States).

Based on scattered field observations and the limited literature available on employability in Active Leisure, the following section outlines a series of recommendations to this effect. But, precisely because of this lack of appropriate data, in order to formulate recommendations to 'maximise the benefits of Active Leisure participation for young people', there is no other choice than to rely on an empirical and holistic approach which offers an overarching view of the problem.



## 9. Recommendations to foster the employability of young people through Active Leisure

As pointed out in the above presented analysis, it can be said that the contribution of Active Leisure to the employability (of young people) is not easy to capture and further studies should be considered in this area. However, the findings of this report suggest that, in order to contribute to the employability of young people, the Active Leisure sector may wish to consider the following areas:

### 1. Recruitment

- a. Clear promotion of the benefits of outdoor and fitness participation and education amongst young people, their parents and carers. \*
- b. Developing attractive campaigns aimed specifically at young people and using youth-specific media outlets (i.e., Instagram, Snap-chat, etc). \*
- c. Creating a sense of belonging and being welcome to the wider Active Leisure community for young people.

### 2. Development

- a. Emphasise the development of leadership skills
- b. Develop VET learning programmes to fit the needs of the sector \*
- c. Provide explicit, current and relevant learning opportunities (i.e., work placements or apprenticeships) related specifically to certain employment prospects and linked to validated qualifications.
- d. Recognise prior learning experiences

### 3. Employability

- a. Assist when possible in developing participants' CV writing and interviewing skills
- b. Provide internships and apprenticeships to facilitate the transition from training to the workplace
- c. Establish a system of ongoing support and a supply of continuous professional development opportunities
- d. Guarantee mobility between providers and amongst countries \*
- e. Develop professional registers (i.e., such as EREPS) \*

### 4. Appropriate Delivery

- a. Act as a devoted 'sub-contractor' when collaborating with actors in the field of education (experiential learning, outdoor learning, VET providers, etc. ...)
- b. Provide for safe and well organised services

\*Primarily a responsibility for the governing bodies (i.e., EuropeActive and EC-OE)

*Table 3 – Recommendations to foster the employability of young people through Active Leisure*

Taking a closer look at *Table 3* it becomes clear that the listed recommendations are not achievable by any single provider or awarding body. Fostering employability in the Active Leisure sector therefore must be a joint endeavour of activity providers alongside their national and/or European governing bodies EuropeActive and EC-OE.



## 10. Conclusions

Active Leisure has been highlighted as a powerful tool for economic recovery and workforce development. Specifically, within the context of the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative, Active Leisure has been recognised as having significant potential to impact skill development and employment prospects in NEETs, especially those from disadvantaged groups. Therefore, Active Leisure appears to hold substantial promise to drive economic growth and development amongst European youths. However, this will not happen by chance. This paper outlines the potential developmental outcomes of participation in Active Leisure for young people and the conditions that lead to their development as well as their transfer to other environments, notably the workplace. Moreover, it provides recommendations to maximise the recruitment, development and employability potential of young people through their participation in Active Leisure.

In 2018 the High-Level Group on Grassroots Sport (HLG) underlined that sport clubs, associations and fitness facilities used as educational settings, as well as participation in grassroots sports, can make a strong contribution to informal learning and development of transversal skills, such as discipline, teamwork, leadership, problem solving, etc. As such, therefore, the Active Leisure sector could have a positive impact on helping NEETs to develop skills, overcome skills gaps and to give them some “life or transversal skills”. However, there are very few examples of how this has been put into practice. There are also policies (as outlined in this paper), that describe and promote the educational and societal potential of the Active Leisure sector. The question therefore is: Why is there such a lack of direct intervention?

The most likely reason is simply because the problem of providing opportunities to NEETs requires cooperation and some strong partners who are properly resourced in this area of expertise. At present the landscape across Europe is so varied and the responsibilities of agencies so diverse that it is difficult to really define and organise what could be considered as the crucial partners which need to be included to adequately deal with such a complex area. There is no space for well-intentioned amateurs to venture into this area which requires systematic planning, resourcing, delivery and evaluation to ensure its sustainability.

We need to be clear on what we are trying to achieve. Perhaps we need to step back and have a bit of a reality check on what we expect the sector to be able to deliver?

Three main conclusions can be drawn from this research:

1. It is essential to clearly distinguish between employment and employability. The Active Leisure sector can certainly contribute to help improve employability (of young people) but the individual activity providers simply do not have the necessary time nor the financial capacity to develop employability enhancing programs.
2. Within the context of (youth) educational development schemes, activity providers can be involved as sub-contractors in providing for safe and well organised activities.
3. Any program to foster employability (of young people) inevitably must be jointly taken care off by the activity providers and their respective employer organisations.



Finally, the Active Leisure sector needs to build structural links with the employment sector, and to be convinced that this type of programme of cooperation will be beneficial to them as well as to the participants themselves. For instance, promoting dual learning and the development of transversal skills could be an incentive for both the Active Leisure sector and the employment sector to join forces.

To make this happen, an important condition would be the creation of a joint forum to stimulate this collaborative work and to ensure a programme can be properly resourced. The evidence points at this mechanism requiring a centralised and EU-led approach to galvanise the rest of the stakeholders.

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## **Intellectual Output 8:**

# **The Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning in the Active Leisure Sector**



# The Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning in the Active Leisure Sector

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*Date of Publication: 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2020*

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## 1. Introduction

A key aspiration of the development of the Active Leisure sector in Europe is to “reflect on the changing roles of fitness and outdoor workers in developing skills to meet new digital technologies, promoting health-enhancing physical activity (sometimes with other healthcare professionals), and working with special population groups”.<sup>43</sup>

A core aspect of this is to explore what we know about how people learn, and how this is reflected in the acquisition and recognition of knowledge, skills and behaviours in the Active Leisure sector.

This document provides an initial overview of existing programmes validating informal and non-formal learning across Europe and other continents. It is perceived this document will be iterative and continue to evolve to reflect the nature of both learning and development, and the Active Leisure sector.

## 2. General Context

On December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012 the Council of the European Union provided a recommendation which encouraged Member States to put in place national arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning by 2018.<sup>44</sup> The intention was that these arrangements would enable individuals to evidence their knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside formal education and training whether that be as part of their work activities, or in other environments.

The European Commission in their document “Unlocking Talent: Validation of non-formal and informal learning” outlined three core groups who can benefit from validation:

Individuals – They can have their skills recognised, gain easier access to jobs and further learning, and become more aware of their own talents;

Employers – They can better understand and identify talent, better match skills with labour market demands, and update and renew in-company skills;

Learning providers – They can reach out to lifelong learners including specific groups such as adult learners, the unemployed and refugees, and make what they offer more flexible and inclusive.<sup>45</sup>

Other documents rehearse the arguments for the importance of this in detail. However, to provide some context, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning identify why valuing and recognising informal and non-formal learning as well as the formal opportunities is important. Acknowledging this learning *“may significantly improve individuals’ self-esteem and well-being, motivate them to further learning and strengthen their labour market opportunities. The Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of*

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<sup>43</sup> <https://www.europeactive-euaffairs.eu/projects/blueprint>

<sup>44</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF>

<sup>45</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f868457f-9b0b-11ea-9d2d-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>



*information and non-formal learning (RVA) may help to integrate broader sections of the population into an open and flexible education and training system and to build inclusive societies".* <sup>46</sup>

In essence this recognition and validation can support both individuals and communities develop. This is something which the Active Leisure sector is keen to embrace.

The engagement with the recommendation has been variable, with some Members States evolving existing activity, some developing new mechanisms for validation, and others prioritising other areas of learning and development. Some of the processes are focused through a national approach, and others through sectoral approaches. It is important to recognise this as it suggests there will need to be a prioritisation, and phased approach to supporting those involved in the development of validation processes.

It should also be noted that there are potential links to existing programmes designed to support mobility across members states such as European Credit system for Vocational Education & Training (ECVET) and European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). These programmes can align more closely to crediting informal and non-formal learning as part of an existing academic or vocational training programme, drawing credit from purposeful activity. The RVA activity is more focused on recognising an individual's skills without enrolment on a specific educational programme or course. That is not to say, the outcome of RVA activity might lead to a formal qualification, just that the formal programme is not the driver.

In the time since the 2012 recommendation <sup>47</sup> there have been two organisations who have notably provided materials to support the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and led the discussions in this area. These are:

- The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training <sup>48</sup>
- UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. <sup>49</sup>

Cedefop works to strengthen European cooperation and provide the evidence on which to base European Vocational Education and Training (VET) policy. An element of this work has been around informal and non-formal learning opportunities and has included the development of insight and publications <sup>50</sup> which explore how informal and non-formal learning is being implemented in different Member States.

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<sup>46</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000216360>

<sup>47</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning>

<sup>49</sup> <https://uil.unesco.org/>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory>



This information includes a European inventory of validation of non-formal and informal learning <sup>51</sup> which was last updated in 2018 and European guidelines on validation <sup>52</sup> which was last reviewed in 2015.

The inventory provides an overview of validation activity across 36 countries (including all Member States), and offers detailed data on the development, implementation and review of the systems in place. This provides an extremely useful reference point to explore which Members States are embracing which components of the validation process, and in what areas.

The guidelines provide an overview of the 4-step process to validation advocated across the Members States. These steps are:

- Identification
- Documentation
- Assessment
- Certification

The guidelines also include an exploration of validation contexts and validation tools.

The Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) *“is one of UNESCO’s key education-related institutes and is the only organizational unit in the UN family that holds a global mandate for lifelong learning. Taking a holistic and integrated, inter-sectoral and cross-sectoral approach to lifelong learning as the guiding paradigm for 21st century education, UIL promotes and supports lifelong learning with a focus on adult learning, continuing education, literacy and non-formal basic education. Its activities place particular emphasis on furthering educational equity for disadvantaged groups and in the countries most afflicted by poverty and conflict”*.

The Lifelong Learning Policies and Strategies programmes are aligned to this mandate and encompasses the “Recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of non-formal and informal learning”. <sup>53</sup>

UIL provide a number of useful case studies. These case studies are focused on three core areas:

- Civil society – Supporting the transition into a new society;
- Education – Supporting progression in ‘formal’ education;
- Training and the World of Work – Supporting transition and progression into work and careers.

Whilst the first two bullet points are of interest, for the purposes of this document the focus will remain on the final one (Training and the World of Work) to reflect a current priority of the Active

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3073>

<sup>53</sup> <https://uil.unesco.org/lifelong-learning/recognition-validation-accreditation>

Leisure sector.<sup>54</sup> It may be that exploration of Civil Society and Education aligned to the Active Leisure sector might be explored further in future projects.

UIL also provides a certain number of documents on the issue of RVA and for further knowledge on the issue, the reader may refer in particular to the “Guidelines for the recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning”<sup>55</sup> issued by UIL after its 2012 Oslo conference in Norway.

These organisations, and their work, underpin the core aspects of this document.

### 3. Definitions

Whilst there is inevitable discussion regarding the meaning of certain concepts, the following definitions seem to be generally accepted as valid when discussing various aspects of learning and development.

*“**Formal learning** is always organised and structured and has learning objectives. From the learner’s standpoint, it is always intentional: i.e., the learner’s explicit objective is to gain knowledge, skills and/or competences.”*<sup>56</sup>

This is the learning which is traditionally accepted in the Member States, and includes formal training, and activity which has learning as its main or sole purpose. An example would be a qualification which has a structured learning programme following a clear curriculum. Some of these qualifications may include an opportunity to recognise learning which has taken place previously either through experience (Recognised Prior Learning), or assessment (Credit Accumulation and Transfer).

The less traditional learning environments, and the ones which are the focus of this document, are the informal and non-formal opportunities.

*“**Informal learning** is never organised, has no set objective in terms of learning outcomes and is never intentional from the learner’s standpoint. Often it is referred to as learning by experience or just as experience.”*<sup>57</sup>

Using this definition, this is the learning which takes place from ‘just doing the job’. There is no focus, and no agreed destination in terms of learning, however there is learning taking place. UIL have evidence to suggest this is where most learning actually takes place in the publication “Global Perspectives on Recognising Non-formal and Informal Learning”<sup>58</sup>. This reinforces the need for

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<sup>54</sup> <https://www.europeactive-euaffairs.eu/projects/blueprint>

<sup>55</sup> <https://uil.unesco.org/lifelong-learning/recognition-validation-accreditation/unesco-guidelines-recognition-validation-and>

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/recognitionofnon-formalandinformallearning-home.htm>

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233655>



validation, however, provides its own challenges in the speculative logging of activity with potentially no learning outcomes, which might be used to evidence against assessment criteria at a later date.

Informal learning should not be confused with simple work experience as it somehow always takes people out of their comfort zone.

**Non-formal learning** is the category of learning which has caused more discussion regarding its meaning. A useful definition is:

*“Learning embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner’s point of view.”*<sup>59</sup>

So, there is an intention to learn during planned activities which aren’t specifically focused on learning. As a result of the intentional approach by the learner, this category fits well with the concept of the ‘Growth Mindset’. This is the approach where:

*“... people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work - brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment”* (Dweck, 2008).

This can be perceived as the Nirvana of learning. A position where someone has the emotional space, and associated culture, to learn at all times, and develop a love of learning.

In essence, it is approaching activities with an understanding that they can be learning opportunities if positioned correctly. This is helpful from a validation perspective, as it gives a reference point about what might be learnt during the activity.

The final definitions are those of recognition and validation.

From the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning’s perspective **recognition** is that which:

*“...renders visible and gives value to the hidden and unrecognised competences that individuals have obtained in various contexts, through various means in different phases of their lives.”*<sup>60</sup>

This supports the recognition of learning which has taken place incidentally through general activity, but also the cross-context opportunities that informal and non-formal learning offers.

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) reinforces the 2012 Recommendation.

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<sup>59</sup> [https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4117\\_en.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4117_en.pdf)

<sup>60</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233655>



*“To clarify the basic features of validation, the recommendation identifies four distinct phases: identification; documentation; assessment; and certification.”<sup>61</sup>*

The different sorts of learning can be seen as different paths which may lead to the same destination, assessed or otherwise. It is important to ensure any destination is not perceived as a final end point, more a station on the wider lifelong learning journey.

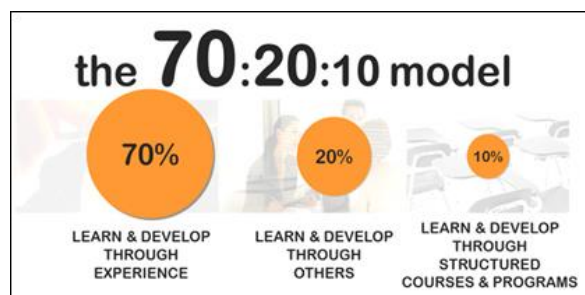
As these definitions seem to be fairly well established in the learning and development activities across the EU, it is proposed they will be used as the basis of the further discussion in this document, and generally within the Active Leisure sector.

#### 4. Learning and Development Context

We continue to understand more about learning and development, both generically, and from an Active Leisure perspective. The catalyst for this is the leap in technological solutions which are taking place. Artificial Intelligence is allowing a more detailed understanding of markets how they operate, and how people engage (from a participation and from a learning perspective).

Whilst it is important to acknowledge there is no such thing as an ‘average’ learner there are some useful models which help us understand learning journeys, and the alignment of formal, informal and non-formal learning opportunities. It should be noted that there are many other models which can provide this function, and the models outlined below are not endorsed, but do provide examples of what are currently used in people development environments.

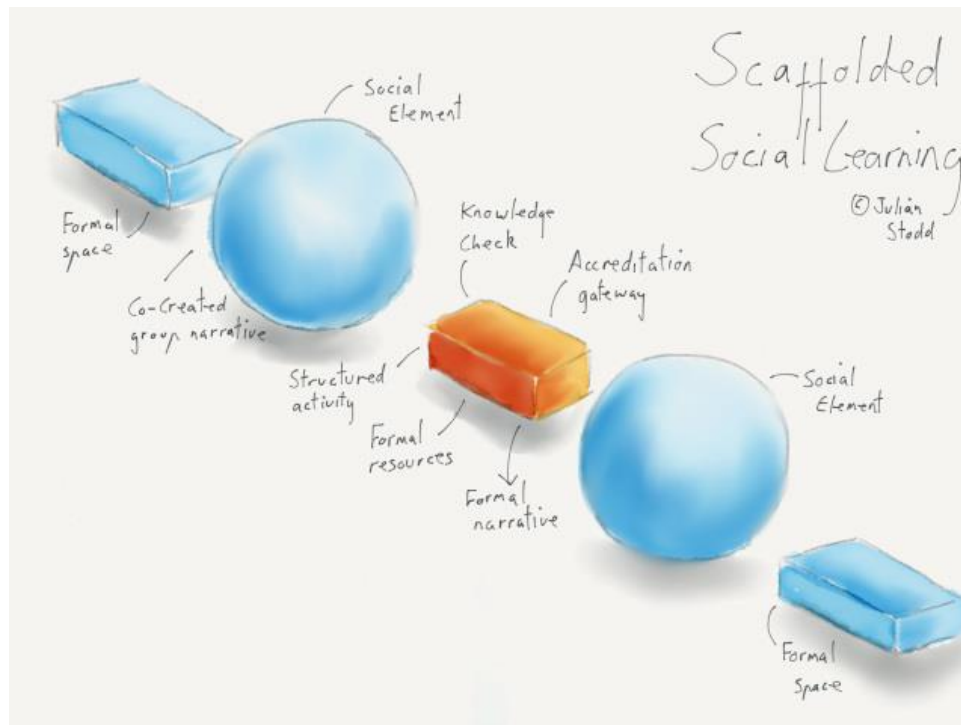
The 70-20-10 concept evolved by Charles Jennings, suggests individuals get 70% of their learning from just doing the job, 20% from engaging with others, and 10% from formal education. This is intended as a reference point to explore the opportunities offered by sectors and organisations. The model reinforces the need to embrace the validation of informal and non-formal learning. If 90% of learning could take place out of environments, we are accrediting there is clearly something wrong with the system.<sup>62</sup>



<sup>61</sup> <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/008370>

<sup>62</sup> <https://702010institute.com/702010-model/>

Another model which explores the range of different learning environments, is Julian Stodd's Scaffolded Social Learning.<sup>63</sup>



This model recognises that we learn in lots of different ways and in lots of different environments. These can include formal spaces where learning is intended and informal places where the learning may be as a result of social interaction with others, or even just browsing the internet. This model embraces that there may also be a need for formal assessment, by including the concept of an accreditation gateway.

Again, this model offers a good overview of the diversity of learning opportunities, and the need to acknowledge the less traditional learning environments.

The concept of the 'Growth Mindset' identified above (Dweck, 2008) also provides some insight into the changing context, and understanding we have of the way in which we best learn.

Whilst these are models which are open to dispute and to interpretation, they provide useful benchmarks around the potential direction of learning and development opportunities of the future.

When exploring the systems in place to validate informal and non-formal learning there should be an acknowledgement of the difference of the learning opportunities, and the assessment process. Whilst there is a link, and a need to ensure any learning opportunities are of the highest quality with the learner central to them, there should be a differentiation between a journey and a destination. The intersection of this learning and assessment is where the validation needs to take place.

<sup>63</sup> <https://julianstodd.wordpress.com/2014/11/05/scaffolded-social-learning/>

In essence the learning and development context is evolving. This evolution is based on new theories, and new technologies which allow us to connect with, and understand the needs of, our learners. By embracing this evolution in the Active Leisure sector, we are able to better recognise and accredit the learning which takes place in a range of environments.

## 5. Purpose of Validation

There can be a range of reasons why validation systems can be put into place.

Madhu Singh (2015) suggests Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) can have a role to play in a range of areas:

- paving pathways to education, training and qualifications;
- promoting workforce development and participation in the labour market;
- social inclusion and democratic citizenship;
- personal and professional empowerment.

Amongst these roles, in-depth analysis of ‘professional empowerment’ may also suggest that RVA can play a further role, though slightly unexpected at first sight.

Indeed, EU Member States, professionals and sectors have a long tradition of organising themselves in trades and other professional unions in order to set up professional rules and standards. Later on, these lead to the concept of regulated professions and further on to the passing of corresponding national legislation. The motivation of all this may be of course to protect public health and safety but it may also be to regulate access to a working market, or at least to regulate the conditions ruling the way a profession shall be exercised. This also means that the EU had eventually to determine rules in order to organise mutual recognition between Member States.

In this EU context, RVA should play a central role in empowering citizens either who have not followed a ‘classic’ study pathway, or who have later on decided to ‘pivot’ from their original trade or sector into another one. This is particularly valid if the competences relating to the new activity have been acquired through informal or non-formal training, or even through professional experience.

Considering that in the EU, the role and credibility of ‘certification’ in a broad sense, still plays a major role in many Member States, both professionally and socially, RVA although not being a substitute for certification, should play a major role in giving credibility and in ‘officialising’ an EU citizen’s uncertified pathway to knowledge, skills and competences, whichever it may be. This is particularly true in conservative or old fashioned environments.

This perspective of RVA should be aligned to future explorations of any European awarding or certifying organisations in the Active Leisure sector.

Whilst it is not suggested RVA can fulfil all these roles at once, a well-designed system could support a number of them. One important aspect is to be clear of the purpose of any proposed system.

As identified below, a number of countries already have systems developed. If a collaborative approach is to be used, it is important to embrace the purpose of these systems in the context of the strategic aims of the Active Leisure sector. By understanding and acknowledging the priorities of each of the Member States, informed decisions can be made on engagements, and the incremental development of engaging with those systems specifically for the Active Leisure sector.

## 6. Existing Approaches to Validation across Europe

To identify a clear direction for the Active Leisure sector the exploration of the validation arrangements in a number of European countries, and the associated appetite for validation in the sector is needed.

Cedefop's "European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning" (2018 update) <sup>64</sup>, and associated country reports, provides a very useful starting point for this exploration.

The project reports of 36 countries and regions comprising the EU-28 and the EFTA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland) and Turkey.

On the whole, the surveyed countries and regions have chosen to either develop arrangements with a holistic, national approach, or to develop arrangements with specific sectors.

It should be noted the three main areas of implementation are education and training, labour market, the third sector. This document is mainly concerned with the labour market elements.

The level of implementation of the system is registered against three main categories:

**"Group 1. High level of implementation** – There are several principles that have a good degree of comprehensiveness, meaning that the majority of countries have a medium to high level of implementation in relation to that principle, and that in many of the countries there are arrangements in place in the three broad areas: education and training, labour market and third sector. As such, most of the validation arrangements that exist will also have accessible guidance and counselling.

Similarly, information and guidance measures are also in place in sectors where validation exists in a large majority of countries. The link of validation and National Qualification Frameworks (NQF) also seems to be growing across the different areas in several countries. Finally having transparent and strong quality assurance mechanisms is another principle that is an integral part of the validation system in the majority of countries.

Transparent quality assurance mechanisms to support reliable, valid and credible assessment methods and tools for validation currently stand at medium-high degree of progress.

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<sup>64</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory>



**Group 2. Medium level of implementation** – The principles of compliance with standards, synergies with credit systems (ECTS and ECVET); disadvantaged groups; transparency tools show a medium level of implementation in terms of comprehensiveness.

**Group 3. Low level of implementation** – There is a large majority of countries with low level of implementation in relation to two principles. First, the training of practitioners involved in the provision of information and guidance or assessment for validation is seldom provided with the associated forms of entitlement to support their work (i.e., paid leave for training, covering the costs of the training, etc.). Second, although skills audits are available for individuals who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment in more than one third of the countries, the possibility to undergo a skills audit is not immediate or the timeframe within which it is offered is not specified”.<sup>65</sup>

There are validation arrangements in place at a high level of implementation in 12 countries or regions, a medium level in 18, and at a low level in 6.

Of the 36, 35 countries or regions have validation arrangements in place in the education and training sector, 19 in the labour market and 23 in the third sector.<sup>66</sup>

Due to the diversity of approaches, which are further explored later in this document, and differing purposes of RVAs, taken across countries it is difficult to see a single additional system for Active Leisure being adopted, supported and implemented. It is therefore suggested that a collaborative approach is taken.

When choosing partners to engage with, it is suggested that the initial engagements should take place with countries with established systems, and ones which align to the aims of developing new skills for current and future workers, for improving employability of young people, and supporting entrepreneurship and growth across the sector.

To this end the following countries or regions should be explored further: Belgium-Flanders, Belgium Wallonia, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, United Kingdom (England and Northern Ireland), United Kingdom (Scotland), United Kingdom (Wales), Montenegro, Turkey.

To help further refine this exploration there are sector specific examples of validation activity in the Active Leisure sector available from Belgium (Flanders) and Poland in Annexes 1 and 2.

Additionally, there should be a further exploration of existing projects in the sector which might embrace the concept of RVAs.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> For further detail on each country or region / area, please refer to Annex 3 of the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (2018 update): <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory>



It should be noted that many of these arrangements are based on the four elements of validation outlined above, and these elements are interrelated.

The European Inventory on Validation 2018 Update <sup>67</sup> suggests that the key challenges for the future will be:

- Building on good practice and upscaling existing projects to meet the Council Recommendations;
- Better monitoring and evaluation of specific methodologies;
- Strengthening cooperation between the core areas of implementation: education and training, the labour market, the third sector;
- Long-term financial backing for the projects.

These should also be considered when exploring any future Active Leisure activity in this area.

Additionally, the Study supporting the evaluations on the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning <sup>68</sup> provides further insight into the current general validation landscape.

Amongst other aspects the study found “future initiatives should consider the importance of developing validation arrangements in a comprehensive way to ensure their availability across all levels of education and training, all occupational sectors in the labour market as well as the third or voluntary sector”. <sup>69</sup>

This coupled with the suggestion that “there may be scope for a future EU-level intervention bringing together the principles of the the above mentioned council recommendation and those of related EU initiatives (e.g. Upskilling Pathways), to facilitate synergies between the areas of validation, labour market activation and lifelong learning” <sup>70</sup> would indicate the potential for Europe-wide coordination, exploration and data capture which the Active Leisure sector could engage with, or even lead.

## 7. Validation in the Active Leisure Sector

The specific application of the identified elements of validation in the Active Leisure Sector should be considered. These specificities should be addressed according to their order of appearance in the 4 key steps of the pathway corresponding to a Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) or more precisely to a Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) process; it should be noted that these 4 key steps should be considered, regardless of the model that may be chosen by the sector, for instance within the scope of a specific project.

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<sup>67</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory>

<sup>68</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ea175fa5-ca31-11ea-adf7-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.



As discussed earlier in the document (see p.4) the 4 key steps in the process of validation are:

1. Identification
2. Documentation
3. Assessment
4. Certification

### 7.1. Identification

This first step of the process, which aims at developing an awareness of prior achievements is generally speaking quite a challenge in that it requires to identify *“an individual’s learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning”* <sup>71</sup>.

This should be established *“through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual”* <sup>72</sup> using such methodology as face-to-face interviews or ICT tools.

In the Active Leisure Sector in particular, this phase will raise a series of issues such as:

- The mere principle of RVA is still unknown by a large part of the population, in particular from the part that has remained dissociated from educational environments and higher education. This concerns a significant part of the Active Leisure employees, which consists in individuals who have trained no higher than EQF level 4 or 5 within a professional Vocational Education Training (VET) environment.
- Furthermore, professional culture is mainly determined around ‘hard skills’ that follow professional training and assessment and where the issue of ‘soft skills’ is widely un-addressed in educational systems and consequently difficult to identify.
- Identifying Learning Outcomes in this context will therefore requires information about the concept and assistance to carry out the process.

### 7.2. Documentation

The documentation consists *“to make visible the individual’s experiences”* <sup>73</sup>; in other words, the knowledge and skills need documenting through written or any other hard support evidence.

Here again, individuals generally employed within the Active Leisure Sector may face such issues as:

- The fact that their relative short and usually fragmented studies has not developed a tradition of paperwork handling. In this circumstance, employers who are also ‘in the field’ types of

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<sup>71</sup> [https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4117\\_en.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4117_en.pdf)

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

individuals, are not either very accustomed to processes managing, recording of data and other written processes;

- The importance of seasonality in quite a number of Active Leisure occupations and the mobility that is inherent to this situation, do not work in favour of developing habits in filing paper works;
- The reasonably young age of the employees who tend to pivot to another occupation after the age of 35/40 years of age does not help either to develop processes of paperwork handling.

For phases 1 & 2 (identification and documentation) the creation of an advising body may be necessary and key for the promotion and handling of the process.

### 7.3. Assessment

Next there is the assessment of these experiences that have been documented in the previous phase.

In many European countries, assessing is traditionally made by the deliverers who have carried out the courses followed by Active Leisure staff, within a context of small seasonal businesses. Furthermore, training in these environments is still largely based on hourly models constructed and referred to in terms of content and not in terms of Learning Outcomes.

This situation may raise the following hurdles:

- Prior learning may be perceived as corresponding to a learning path of a lesser quality than that consisting in following traditional professional courses. Traditional assessing bodies, which often also happen to be the professional certification bodies may resist to an external acquisition of Learning Outcomes;
- The general absence of Learning Outcomes in professional standards in use could lead to an excuse for not being able to establish comparisons between the individual's experiences and the situation of those who have followed the course;
- Where professional private training providers are in charge of assessment, there will inevitably be a financial issue linked to the assessment and recognition of individuals who aren't funding the process themselves;

A strategic way to facilitate the assessment of prior learning consists for the Active Leisure Sector to continue determining professional standards based on Learning Outcomes.

### 7.4. Certification

This phase consists of the *"certification of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification"* <sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.



The latter requires the existence of a credible authority and a national qualification system.

This final step may lead to the following issues:

- Many Active Leisure activities see their certification being organised by the sport sector which may not be inclined to certify soft skills that are inexistent in their own standards;
- Mutual recognition across Member States being based in reality upon traditional certification, certain historical training providers may be reluctant to certify individuals who do not conform with the traditional system.

The creation of an sector certification body, as is currently being discussed across the sector, may provide a solution to some of the issues mentioned above.

Of course, the issues mentioned above could each be developed in more details in order to address the difficulties that may occur in the implementation of an RVA process in the Active Leisure Sector, but they are described to give an idea about the fact that whichever system is chosen, it will have to be sufficiently robust and efficient to resist certain of these key issues.

## 8. Operational Components of Validation Systems

To explore the application of validation systems in Active Leisure it is possible to look at examples of good practice in a range of areas of implementation and operation. A framework of components accepted by Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) practitioners implementing programmes was shared at the 2019 VPL Biennale.<sup>75</sup> These components provide a useful model to further explore the implementation of VPL. The components are:

- Organisational arrangements
- Financing
- Procedures and Instruments
- Support structures
- Post-validation pathways
- Legal foundation

By using these components, it is possible to identify what might be necessary to work on within a validation programme to ensure a more successful outcome.

It is useful to use this model to share some examples of good practice taking place. Whilst these aren't necessarily currently in the Active Leisure sector it is possible to take the learning and use it when reviewing any potential systems being used in Active Leisure.

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<sup>75</sup> <https://vplbiennale.org/>



## 8.1. Organisational arrangements

It is clear from the exploration of the case studies that effective engagement with effective VPL processes requires an intentional approach by a number of parties. It requires support from the Member States, the sector, the validation or training organisations, employers, and the participants themselves. This support may come in a range of ways:

- philosophical / cultural – underpinning acceptance of the principles of VPL
- financial – allocation of money to support the programme
- workforce-based – allocation of staff to support the programme
- temporal – allocation of time to explore and review the programme.

One model which might be worth exploring further for the Active Leisure sector is the Balancing Act Model identified by VIRKE in Norway.<sup>76</sup> This model, developed initially in the retail sector, suggest skills should be looked at by discussing the natural tension which might arise between People and Technology; Flexibility and Routines' and Pace and Presence. The model provides a way of understanding the skills which people may have, or may need, in a way which acknowledges the practical implications in the workplace.

Cork Institute of Technology<sup>77</sup> provides a good example of an education institution which has embedded a culture of validation in its own organisation, and supported employers to do the same.<sup>78</sup> This cultural acceptance of the importance of informal and non-formal learning, and the associated validation is imperative for the sustainability of any arrangements adopted or endorsed by the Active Leisure sector. The CIT programme can provide some guidelines on how to support organisations to embrace VPL.

Research in the VPL of internationally trained nurses looking to practise in Canada<sup>79</sup> also provides some useful guidance in that it suggests that it is the sector agencies of a given country who should lead the process, and this needs to be done on a voluntary basis to ensure the cultural change is embedded, and not driven by alternative agendas.

A potential partner for further exploration for how VPL might work in Active Leisure might be Finland. Their Sivos Study Centre<sup>80</sup> is an institute promoting non-formal adult education. Sivos is partly funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture and offers a collaboration across a number of government departments and sector organisations. An additional collaboration with the Active Leisure sector should be looked at to take advantage of their mature systems and embedded culture.

One additional aspect of organisational arrangements linked to VPL is the use of peer networks to review and engage with the process. This can have a significant impact on the workforce implications

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<sup>76</sup> <https://www.virke.no/om-virke/>

<sup>77</sup> <https://extendedcampus.cit.ie/rpl>

<sup>78</sup> <https://sword.cit.ie/e3lcp/17/>

<sup>79</sup> <https://vplbiennale.org/download/2489/>

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.ok-sivos.fi/en/sivos-study-centre.html>



which can be influential in how successful arrangements can be. The Peer Review VNFIL Extended projects <sup>81</sup> provides some interesting and useful learning, especially when looking at transnational arrangements, however it is suggested this level of detail should be a progression within the Active Leisure sector depending in the national arrangements the sector chooses to explore.

## 8.2. Financing

As identified above, effective VPL programmes require financial support. The financial sustainability of the programmes appears to be one of the biggest challenges of the existing programmes. They are reliant on relatively short-term funding. In time it might be felt that the VPL programmes will be subsumed into existing programmes. Whilst costs will continue to be there the activities, expectation and responsibilities would be embedded as best practice, and hopefully efficiencies found. Any developments in the Active Leisure sector should include modelling as to how the programme can become sustainable.

A range of projects can be explored to show the impact, aligned to investment.

The Ministry of Educations, Culture and Science in the Netherlands have done significant work to show the impact, both in terms of personal experiences and opportunities (Developmental Model), but also organisational and sectoral impact (Credit Exchange Model). <sup>82</sup>

The French Model of VAE identifies a range of partners who might pay for certain aspects of the process, depending in the circumstances of the individual, and the priorities of the agency. The funding may come from the candidate themselves, central government, regional authorities, private companies or social partners. As with the example from the Netherlands, the French can provide clear evidence on the impact of the work. The value depends on the perspective of the funders. <sup>83</sup>

Iceland have chosen to centralise the administration and chose to subsidise for certain target groups at certain educational levels. If others want to access the system, they might have access to some vocational funds from certain social partners. They have found that counselling has been particularly importance for successful VPL. This model seems to be successful for Iceland's needs. The centralisation might be simpler in sectors / countries which smaller populations. <sup>84</sup>

The real cost of any VPL arrangements in the Active Leisure sector should be monitored, even if these costs are subsumed be existing arrangements. This could follow the Flanders model to identify the costs. From their perspective they have a model identifying costed activities (Development, Introduction, Assessment, Aftercare) which aligns to the different stages of VPL (Identification, Documentation, Assessment, Certification). <sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> <https://vplbiennale.org/download/2482/>

<sup>82</sup> <https://vplbiennale.org/presentations/entry/428/>

<sup>83</sup> <https://vplbiennale.org/presentations/entry/464/>

<sup>84</sup> <https://vplbiennale.org/presentations/entry/92/>

<sup>85</sup> <https://vplbiennale.org/presentations/entry/131/>



### 8.3. Procedures and Instruments

There are a range of procedures and instruments that can be used to support the VPL process. Many of those currently active in Europe have been explored as part of the research for this document. Most cover all four elements of VPL identified by Cedefop to differing degrees, albeit terminology differs across the different programmes. It would appear that this is the case regardless if the programme is focused on education, training and the world of work, or civil society (the categorisation of UIL).

Some of the notable projects are:

- The Skill Lab skills assessment app.<sup>86</sup>
- The MySkills programme in Germany<sup>87</sup> – Currently the Active Leisure Sector professions aren't reflected however this could be explored.
- 'My Professional Experience' and associated cards<sup>88</sup>.

There seems to be a common consensus that each Members States' arrangements are based in the same aspirations, but are implemented in quite different ways, and with potentially different priorities. A good example has been the comparative analysis, which outlines the similarities and the differences. The outcome is that the systems are quite different, and therefore challenging to compare.<sup>89</sup>

A research piece on the quality within validation in Sweden, Denmark and Finland offers some useful information including the need for the procedures to be supported with good high-quality information, documents, and co-ordination.<sup>90</sup> This level of review continues to suggest the Nordic countries should be explored for collaborative work in the Active Leisure sector, however further research is required to ensure suitability for the Outdoors sector.

### 8.4. Support structures

As identified earlier, the research suggests the need for a holistic approach to VPL. This means even those organisations who aren't directly involved in the process can either become supportive or are supportive in their acceptance of the principles.

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<sup>86</sup> <https://skilllab.io>

<sup>87</sup> <https://vplbiennale.org/presentations/entry/94/>

<sup>88</sup> <https://vplbiennale.org/presentations/entry/278/>

<sup>89</sup> <https://vplbiennale.org/presentations/entry/348/>

<sup>90</sup> <https://vplbiennale.org/presentations/entry/97/>



A particularly notable scheme is the “Cité des métiers”, which is seen as a space to deal with professional life, including transition within professional life.<sup>91</sup>

Many examples in this area focus in on the links with existing or emerging counselling programmes (often career counselling). This aspect should be another which should be reviewed in any pilot activity in the Active Leisure sector engages in. The need to build additional capability and capacity in this area will offer challenges both financially and in the embedding of any VPL programme as the norm.

### 8.5. Post-validation pathways

There is a need to appreciate the place of VPL in the wider nature / aspects of lifelong learning. As with all aspects of VPL and Lifelong Learning, they do not operate in a vacuum, and the exploration of how they fit in the ‘bigger picture’ is something to consider. In many cases this centres on a portfolio which can be used on an ongoing basis to recognise and validate the learning which takes place over someone’s lifetime, regardless of role, organisation and sector.

This is another area which is dominated by technology and its emerging ability to provide continued support to learners outside of the formal environments.

The Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) portal developed by Chartall Business College in South Africa puts the learners at the centre of the process by ensuring they are able to interact with a range of elements of their processes: pre-RPL, during RPL, post-RPL and even as part of the wider system.<sup>92</sup>

There are a range of e-portfolios which have started to provide potentially more user-friendly ways to collate the information required before, during and after the RPL process. An example of this is the portfolio work done by Libereaux.<sup>93</sup>

Another good example of a holistic approach to the RPL process can be found in the teacher training activities at Hogeschool Utrecht, Netherlands, where they embrace the different standards which different institutions and different people have (e.g., personal standards, qualification, standards, occupational standards).<sup>94</sup> Similarly, to the Cork Institute of Technology, once embracing all agendas a system can be built to represent and align to all of them.<sup>95</sup>

### 8.6. Legal foundation

The final element which we can explore practically is the legal foundation.

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<sup>91</sup> <https://vplbiennale.org/download/2545/>

<sup>92</sup> <https://vplbiennale.org/presentations/entry/74/>

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.libereaux.nl/profile/>

<sup>94</sup> <https://vplbiennale.org/presentations/entry/313/>

<sup>95</sup> <https://extendedcampus.cit.ie/rpl>





As mentioned previously the support offered by a range of organisations appears imperative to the success of any VPL system. Those Member States which embrace the VPL concept and embed them into their statutory law, and those member states with regional governments who engage with VPL processes, are taking steps to change the culture, and positioning of lifelong learning, to embrace its importance in individual's motivation and progression. This should enable a 'normalisation' of recognising informal and non-formal learning and allow future generations to see this bona-fide learning experiences.

The French system enshrines Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) in law which then has led to an increase in learner expectation and an embedding of the principles in wider activities embraced by a range of stakeholders.<sup>96</sup> The legal embedding of RPL in Flanders, whilst not as mature as in France, has also been a focus over the last 20 years.<sup>97</sup> Here it is also becoming an expectation from the learners.

Each Member State has its own approach to how to embed RPL principles. Some of these involved enshrining in discrete laws, and some involve working with existing legal foundations and evolving them to accept RPL principles.

In any pilot activity the Active Leisure sector should include an exploration of the implications of the legal foundations from a sector specific perspective.

## 9. Recommendations

In the light of the above information the following recommendations are made for consideration:

- 9.1. The model of validation advocated by Cedefop is adopted as the framework for the Active Leisure sector.
- 9.2. The components of validation identified through the 2019 VPL Biennale are adopted as components of successful validation
- 9.3. There is acknowledgement that a single validation system for Active Leisure across all Members States would currently not be feasible.

This aligns with the engagement across NQFs for qualifications linked to the SIQAF project.

<sup>98</sup> This should be reviewed at an agreed to time to consider future developments.

- 9.4. EuropeActive and EC-OE conduct an Active Leisure specific project with an appropriately engaged country.

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<sup>96</sup> <https://vplbiennale.org/download/2498/>

<sup>97</sup> <https://vplbiennale.org/presentations/entry/675/>

<sup>98</sup> <https://www.europeactive-euaffairs.eu/projects/SIQAF>



This will allow the sector to learn from the validation experience, whilst mitigating the financial implications, and need for a specific workforce. It should be noted that anecdotally sector discussions have suggested there may be some key Member States to work with regarding the mobility agenda, and it might be possible to link with those Members States on the progress of this area.

- 9.5. Using the pilot project, the mechanism for future advice to Members States should be considered. This advice would include sector specific considerations for those developing and administering validation process. This exploration should include the identification of an existing or new organisation to support developing and offering this advice.
- 9.6. EQF level 4 Personal Trainer and EQF level 5 Outdoor Animator programmes should be a focus for any proposed project.
- 9.7. Any project has a clear purpose for validation.

It is recommended this is linked to the driving purpose of the Member States validation process but ideally should be working towards the 'promotion of workforce development and participation in the labour market'.

- 9.8. There should be further exploration of the potential relationship with ECVET and ECTS as part of any proposed project.
- 9.9. These recommendations should continue to be reviewed in the light of the other recommendations from Active Leisure projects.

Throughout these recommendations we must acknowledge that, like with the NQF's, validation must be embraced in a way which embeds the Member State's approach and philosophy to education. As a result, there is no 'one size fits all' solution, however there may be a process which is built on specific principles which might support an efficient and effective approach. This might mean the further potential to develop a process underpinned by a set of principles, built on the existing ones in each Member State, which are specific to the Active Leisure sector.



## 10. Conclusion

The validation of non-formal and informal learning is an emerging concept. In the light of the 2012 Directive, Member States are at different stages of development of their systems to support this sort of validation. The increase in appetite and expectation for this sort of validation, coupled with evolution of technology to support it, suggests it is an area the Active Leisure sector must embrace and explore further.

The paper provides a framework for what 'good' might look like in validation procedures, as identified through other sectors. It recommends an initial relationship with one or two Member States to further explore how validation might work in practice in the Active Leisure sector.

Exploring the application of validation further in the Active Leisure sector will ensure not only that it is able to support existing workers in Member States, but also help to recruit the next generation of workers in way which fits with modern learning principles.



## Appendix 1

### Validation of informal and non-formal learning in Flanders (BE)

#### Context

The competence for education in Belgium is regionalised. Hence, the Flemish agency (Flemish contact point) AHOVOKS.<sup>99</sup>

The application for recognition and substantive support of a professional qualification lays with representatives of the labour market (professional organisations) and is supported by AHOVOKS.

Professional qualifications are validated and referenced to EQF by a validation committee composed of the interprofessional social partners complemented by AHOVOKS.

#### Prerequisite conditions for the validation of informal and non-informal learning

Every application for recognition of informal or non-formal learning will be compared with the relevant recognised professional qualification. Consequently, if a profession is not officially recognised (= not referenced against EQF) validation of informal or non-formal learning is not possible.

Validation of informal and non-informal learning is handled by a 'test centre'. The recognition of such a 'test centre' lies with the Flemish Department of Work and Social Economy.<sup>100</sup>

#### Application procedure

The standard application for validation of informal and non-informal learning is a four-step procedure.

1<sup>st</sup> step: Contact a 'test centre'

This 'test centre' will guide and assist the applicant.

2<sup>nd</sup> step: Intake interview

The main objective of this interview is to create a 'skills portfolio' and to compare the portfolio with the existing professional competences.

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<sup>99</sup> <http://www.ahovoks.be/agentschap-voor-hoger-onderwijs-volwassenenonderwijs-kwalificaties-en-studietoelagen>

<sup>100</sup> <https://www.vlaanderen.be/departement-werk-sociale-economie>



In case of a positive evaluation, the applicant can proceed to an assessment test.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> step: Assessment

The practical assessment is organised through an 'Assessment centre' and consists of a practical test including a role-play game, an interview, an interactive video and a knowledge test.

### 4<sup>th</sup> step: Validation

If successful, the applicant will automatically receive his or her 'qualification certificate'.

## **Financial implications**

If the applicant is unemployed the procedure is free.

Otherwise, the maximum cost is €100.

## **Validation of informal and non-formal learning in Active Leisure**

For the Active Leisure sector anno 2020, validation of informal and non-formal learning is only possible for Fitness.

Due to the official recognition by the Department of Work and Social Economy in 2019, the Fitness Organisation (Fitness.be) is financed by the VDAB (Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training) for the validation of the Fitness instructor certificate.<sup>101</sup>

This 'official recognition' implies that the operational costs for running the 'test centre' are funded pro capita by the VDAB.<sup>102</sup>

As (anno 2020) there is no Flemish 'test centre' for Outdoor qualifications, it is not possible to apply for validation of informal or non-formal learning within the Outdoor sector. It will be up to the employer federation BFNO<sup>103</sup> to initiate the setting up of such a 'test centre'.

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<sup>101</sup> <https://www.fitness.be/nl/trainers>

<sup>102</sup> During the period 2009-2019 the Fitness Organisation relied on funding from the European ESF program.

<sup>103</sup> BFNO: Beroepsfederatie van Buitensportorganisaties.



## Appendix 2

### **Validation of Personal Trainer Qualification in Poland based on the learning outcomes achieved through non-formal and informal education**

The Polish Integrated Qualifications Register (ZRK) is a public register that collects information on all qualifications included in the Integrated Qualifications System, regardless of other registers and lists existing in Poland, created for the needs of individual ministries, industries, environments and institutions. The register was established in 2016 under the Act of 22 December 2015 on the Integrated Qualifications System and is one of the main elements of the system. From the ZRK, you can find out what specific requirements must be met to obtain a given qualification, and what institutions are authorized to certify it. The register includes the so-called full qualifications, i.e., those that are awarded only in the education and higher education systems, as well as partial qualifications, which include qualifications from vocational education, awarded after completing postgraduate studies, and also regulated, market and market in crafts qualifications.

All qualifications in the register must follow the same structure. Compulsory elements of the description are, inter alia, sets of learning outcomes with detailed learning outcomes and verification criteria. In a separate section, the requirements for validation and entities conducting validation are described, as well. All information is available on the official website of the system.<sup>104</sup>

The requirements for the qualification of the Personal Trainer are presented below (ZRK, 2020). The qualification contains four sets of learning outcomes:

1. Characterizing the basics of the personal training process (theoretical set of learning outcomes)
2. Planning the process of personal training
3. Implementation of the process of personal training
4. Introducing the participant to a healthy lifestyle

#### **Requirements for validation and entities carrying out validation**

The following methods are used to validate the qualification of a personal trainer:

1. Theoretical test
2. Analysis of evidence of learning outcomes achievements
3. Interview of the candidate with the validation committee

The verification consists of the following stages:

Stage 1. A theoretical test, the recommended form is on-line test.

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<sup>104</sup> <https://rejestr.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/>



Stage 2. A presentation of the video recording of the training unit and presentation of the training plan in electronic form: a text document, a spreadsheet or website, supplemented with:

- a) Interview of the candidate with the validation committee, or
- b) Presentation of a portfolio (analysis of evidence confirming the achievement of learning outcomes, such as: diplomas of completing training or courses on conducting the personal training process, confirmed training effects of clients along with documentation of the training process, other documented results of work).

The verification of learning outcomes is carried out by the verification commission, composed of 3 members, including the commission chairman. Each committee member must have:

- a) diploma of graduation from a university in the field of sport and exercise science;
- b) documented 3-year activity in the fitness industry or in the field of personal training (within 6 years before sitting on the commission);
- c) a minimum of 3 years of documented experience in academic work, in particular in the field of sports training theory, physiology, anatomy, sport psychology and sociology, training systems design, marketing, communication or management in sport.

In particular, it is important to ensure the impartiality of experts who carry out the validation. Experts involved in the candidate's process of education and training are not allowed to be members of the verification commission.

### **The identification and documentation of learning outcomes**

The body that performs the validation must provide the candidate with a support of an advisor during the identification stage and on the stage of documenting the learning outcomes.

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# **Intellectual Output 9:**

## **Testing, Trialling, and Refining Development of New Qualifications, Certifying Organisation and Recognition of Prior Learning**



## Summary of Intellectual Output 9 – English Version:

### Testing, Trialling, and Refining Development of New Qualifications, Certifying Organisation and Recognition of Prior Learning

*Main Authors: Julian Berriman and Cliff Collins*

This intellectual Output represents the work that has been done to test and trial the structures and tools developed in IOs 4, 5 and 8 and to elicit feedback from stakeholders and potential end users. Mostly carried out at the end of the BLUEPRINT project in 2020, it has been impacted by the COVID-19 restrictions: with the Outdoor sector almost completely shut down, this report has been based on the experience of the fitness sector alone, with a focus on gaining feedback on the qualifications developed in IO 5 and their associated assessment strategy.

The role of the proposed Certifying Organisation (CO) is to develop a common “holistic” assessment strategy, covering all the learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria contained within the Personal Trainer (PT) qualification, which consists in summary of an assignment on developing a personal training business; a case study; skills observations; a viva; and a multiple-choice question paper. Such an assessment would be implemented by all training providers looking to gain recognition against a common standard. It would allow the CO to establish a first-person relationship with learners – better ensuring the quality of the learning experience for them –, and to track the achievement rates of learners across their training providers – better identifying both good practice and poor provision.

Concretely, accredited training providers from 5 European countries (Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Belgium and Greece) were invited to canvass their opinions on the PT qualification and its associated common assessment strategy developed in the frame of the BLUEPRINT project, and to involve their learners in the trialling of an online assessment (with a random sample of 50 questions in an allotted time of 60 minutes, the pass mark being 70%). The feedback received from training providers, learners and verifiers alike indicates that there is certainly an appetite for the implementation of such a common assessment strategy, although more work is needed in order to find the right complexity, level, overcome language barriers, and gain the support of all training providers across multiple countries in this initiative.

The aspect of the recognition of prior learning (RPL) is briefly discussed, since it was an important goal of the BLUEPRINT project (IO 6) to identify a potential policy for such a process which facilitates the recognition of an applicant's or learner's prior learning, to be applied by a CO. This would require submission of the relevant evidence (for example: certificates, work experience or witness testimony) to the training organisation who would then make an RPL decision based on this evidence.

The feedback shows that a majority of training providers would support EuropeActive in implementing this common assessment strategy, pointing that flexibility, quality assurance of graduates produced and a preliminary consultation process with all key stakeholders would be required. By setting a standard that must be achieved such common assessment would in turn go a considerable way in supporting EuropeActive to assure the knowledge, skills, and competences of those entering the fitness and physical activity workforce.



## Summary of Intellectual Output 9 – Spanish Version:

### Probar, ensayar y refinar el desarrollo de nuevas cualificaciones, organismos de certificación y reconocimiento de aprendizaje previo

*Autores principales: Julian Berriman y Cliff Collins*

Este resultado intelectual representa el trabajo realizado para probar y ensayar las estructuras y herramientas creadas en los resultados intelectuales (RI) 4, 5 y 8 y obtener valoraciones de las partes interesadas y los posibles usuarios finales. En su mayor parte se llevó a cabo en la última etapa del proyecto BLUEPRINT, en 2020, por lo que se ha visto afectado por las restricciones de la COVID-19: dado que el sector de actividades en el medio natural se encuentra cerrado casi en su totalidad, el informe se basa únicamente en la experiencia del sector del fitness y se centra en la valoración de las cualificaciones desarrolladas en el RI 5 y su estrategia asociada de evaluación.

La función del Organismo de Certificación (OC) propuesto es desarrollar una estrategia común de evaluación integral que abarque todos los resultados de aprendizaje y los criterios de evaluación asociados incluidos en la cualificación del Entrenador Personal (EP), que consiste en el resumen de un trabajo sobre el desarrollo de un negocio de entrenamiento personal, un caso práctico, la observación de competencias, un examen oral y un examen tipo test. Dicha evaluación sería adoptada por todos los entrenadores que deseen obtener reconocimiento frente a una norma común. Esto permitiría al OC establecer una relación en primera persona con los alumnos, lo que les garantizaría una experiencia de aprendizaje de calidad, además de controlar el índice de rendimiento de los alumnos con sus entrenadores, lo que permitiría detectar tanto las buenas prácticas como la mala prestación del servicio.

En concreto, se invitó a entrenadores certificados de 5 países europeos (Suecia, Noruega, Islandia, Bélgica y Grecia) a recabar sus opiniones sobre la cualificación del EP y su estrategia asociada de evaluación común, elaborada en el marco del proyecto BLUEPRINT, y a implicar a sus alumnos en la prueba de una evaluación en línea (una muestra aleatoria de 50 preguntas con un tiempo asignado de 60 minutos y un porcentaje mínimo de respuestas correctas del 70% para aprobar). La valoración recibida de los entrenadores, alumnos y verificadores indica que la adopción de una estrategia de evaluación común tendría buena acogida, aunque es necesario refinarla para establecer la complejidad y el nivel adecuados, superar barreras lingüísticas y obtener el apoyo de todos los entrenadores de los países que participan en la iniciativa.

El aspecto del reconocimiento de aprendizaje previo se discute brevemente, ya que uno de los objetivos importantes del proyecto BLUEPRINT (RI 6) es elaborar una política que pueda facilitar el reconocimiento del aprendizaje previo de los solicitantes o los alumnos y que sea aplicada por un OC. Para ello sería necesario presentar las pruebas pertinentes (por ejemplo: certificados, experiencia laboral o testimonios) a la organización de entrenamiento, que luego tomaría una decisión sobre el reconocimiento de aprendizaje previo basada en estas pruebas.



La valoración muestra que la mayoría de los entrenadores apoyaría a EuropeActive en la aplicación de una estrategia de evaluación común y señala la necesidad de establecer una flexibilidad, una garantía de calidad de los titulados y un proceso de consulta preliminar con todos los actores pertinentes. Al establecer una norma que se debe cumplir, esta evaluación común ayudaría en gran medida a EuropeActive a garantizar los conocimientos, habilidades y competencias de quienes entran en el mundo laboral del fitness y la actividad física.



# Testing, Trialling, and Refining Development of New Qualifications, Certifying Organisation and Recognition of Prior Learning

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*Date of Publication: 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020*

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## 1. Introduction

This paper provides an overview of the context and development of the BLUEPRINT *Intellectual Output (IO) 9 – Testing, trialling, and refining development of new qualifications, certifying organisation and recognition of prior learning*. This IO should be read in conjunction with *IO4 – Scoping of the European Certifying Organisation for the Active Leisure sector*, *IO5 – New and updated qualification for fitness (personal trainer) and outdoors (animator) for pan-European use* and *IO8 – Validation of informal and non-formal learning in active leisure*.

The qualifications which have been developed under the auspices of the Certifying Organisation (CO) and the processes that support the implementation of the qualifications are at the heart of the development of new skills for current and future workers in the Active Leisure sector. IO9 represents the work that has been done to test and trial the structures and tools developed in IOs 4, 5 and 8 and to elicit feedback from stakeholders and potential end users of these structures and tools.

This work was envisaged towards the end of the BLUEPRINT project in 2020 and consequently has been impacted by the COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns. Most of the vocationally-based training providers have been unable to deliver many aspects of their training programmes, some stopped altogether, and others delayed teaching and assessments until much later in the year – or even until 2021. This has inevitably adversely affected attempts to get their feedback on the outcomes expected during practical testing and trialling planned for IO9. This has meant that there has been a larger focus on gaining feedback on the qualifications developed in IO5 and their associated assessment strategy. While all aspects of the Personal Trainer (PT) qualification assessment strategy have been subject to review and feedback, there has been a particular emphasis on the online assessment aspect of that strategy. This assessment, however, has some enormously important potential bearings since the implementation of a qualification with a common online assessment for training providers across Europe would be a significant step forward toward the goal of establishing greater standardisation of the qualifications that underpin the European Active Leisure workforce.

The Outdoor sector has been even more severely hit than the fitness sector in 2020 with COVID-19 with an almost complete shutdown for most of the year and so the focus for IO9 reporting has been based on the experience of the fitness sector.

## 2. A common assessment strategy

No qualification is complete unless it has appropriate assessment of the students at the end of their learning. The intention and concept of developing a common assessment strategy is to provide assessments that must be implemented by all training providers looking to gain recognition against a common standard. All identified assessments must be taken and passed by any learner in order to be certified and formally recognised as qualified to perform the job role described in the qualification. A common assessment strategy is very much in line with the implementation of a learning outcomes-based approach. Qualification inputs (e.g., delivery hours, mode of delivery) and the quality of those



inputs are always important but ultimately competency to perform a job role must be judged on outputs, that is, the ability to meet the requirements outlined in the learning outcomes.

It is the role of the proposed CO to develop an agreed common assessment strategy. This strategy was based on a series of assessments that cover all the learning outcomes and their associated assessment criteria contained within the PT qualification. In identifying and constructing these assessments a number of other factors were considered (as also described in IO5):

- Covering the main learning outcomes and their associated assessment criteria,
- How to best show that learners have achieved outcomes,
- The concepts the learner should master and at what level,
- The skills to be acquired,
- The authenticity of the task and whether it is set in a realistic context (i.e., oriented towards the world external to the course itself),
- Whether tasks are worthwhile learning activities in their own right and contribute to learning,
- The tasks are not overly repetitive for either student or assessor - they represent a productive use of time for all those involved,
- The assessment prompts student self-assessment and reflective practice,
- The tasks are sufficiently flexible for students to tailor them to their own needs and interests,
- The assessment is not likely to be interpreted by students in a way fundamentally different to that intended by those setting the assessment,
- Whether the assessment is reasonable with respect to the student and tutor workload,
- Providing a variety of assessment methods,
- The assessments permit a holistic rather than a fragmented approach,
- What assessments can be done in and away from the face-to-face learning environment,
- The time required to mark the assessment,
- Whether the assessment would be marked internally (by the training provider) or externally (by the CO),
- Whether the assessment is free from bias, transparent, valid, and reliable.

The complete assessment strategy for the PT qualification is available on request but in summary it consists of:

#### **Assignment – Developing a personal training business**

This assessment predominantly addresses the unit ‘Role of the Personal Trainer’ and more specifically relates to learning outcomes focused on the legal and professional standards and guidelines relevant to personal training, utilising technology to engage and support personal training clients, the business and sales skills required to run a successful personal training business, building a personal training business and customer care.

The tasks contained within the assessment include:

- researching the legal and professional requirements, standards and guidelines a personal trainer must follow in their country,



- giving examples of ethical and unethical personal training practice,
- researching the different types of technologies currently available to engage and support adherence to physical activity, assess health, fitness and performance and improve health, fitness and performance,
- planning a self-employed personal training business.

## Case study

This assessment involves working with a real client from the point of consultation to programme implementation and therefore, covers a wide range of learning outcomes from a number of units including, 'Understand the principles of health and fitness behaviour change', 'Collecting and analysing health and fitness assessment information', 'Nutrition and healthy eating for personal trainers' and 'Training adaptation, exercise planning and programming'.

Case study tasks include:

- Conducting a client consultation,
- Conducting medical screening and health assessments,
- Conducting a diet and lifestyle evaluation,
- Conducting a behaviour change evaluation,
- Conducting a posture and movement assessment,
- Conducting fitness assessments,
- Goal setting for the client,
- Writing a periodised programme,
- Conducting a reflective evaluation of all of the above.

## Skills observations

This assessment involves actual observations of the skills of learners in conducting consultations, assessments and personal training delivery. As again this assessment covers a wide range of skills it addresses learning outcomes from several units including the 'Role of the personal trainer', 'Collecting and analysing health and fitness assessment information' and 'Training adaptation, exercise planning and programming'.

Learners must conduct a consultation and fitness assessments under the observation of an assessor who marks the learner against pre-set assessment checklists. Similarly, the learner must perform a realistic personal training delivery session in a gym and be assessed against a pre-set skills observation checklist. The learner must then complete a self-evaluation of their own performance in each of the skills observations.

## Viva

At the end of the personal training delivery session an assessor asks a minimum of three questions from a pre-set table of questions and learners are given a maximum of 2 minutes to provide each answer, giving real world examples to illustrate their answers. This assessment covers learning outcomes contained within the unit 'Training adaptation, exercise planning and programming'.



### Multiple choice question paper

This assessment is discussed in the review of the online assessment trial below.

## 3. Feedback from accredited training providers

The following invitation was sent to training providers from 5 countries (Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Belgium and Greece) to canvass their opinions on the PT qualification developed as part of the Blueprint project and its associated common assessment strategy:

*'As part of the Blueprint for Skills Cooperation and Employment in Active Leisure EU Project, EuropeActive has been looking at some of the necessary structures and processes to put in place to offer a certification service to training providers. The intention is to design a complete assessment strategy for the Personal Trainer standard.'*

Providers were then asked to provide comments on 3 documents (please note: for commercial and IP reasons these are available on request) which explained in detail the full proposed assessment strategy:

### Document 1 – PT Qualification Summary

As described in IOS, the EuropeActive PT standards were developed into a qualification with distinct units of learning outcomes. This document gives a summary of the qualification, the units and the associated learning hours.

### Document 2 – PT Qualification Unit Breakdown

This document gives a more detailed breakdown of the qualification including the units with their learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria (i.e., the criteria that must be met for the learning outcome to be achieved). All the assessment criteria are colour-coded and matched to a particular assessment as part of a total assessment strategy. Under such a strategy every assessment criterion is assessed with an appropriate assessment.

### Document 3 – PT Qualification Workbook

This document provides a workbook for students which details an assessment plan and all the assessments required of them (e.g., assignment, case study, skills observation, viva etc). There are also some marking sheets available for the tutor who would be completing the assessment.

In relation to the above documents, the training companies were asked to provide their response to these questions:

1. *Do you think a common assessment strategy implemented by EuropeActive is a worthwhile aim? Yes/No – please give reasons for your answer.*



Generally, the responses to this question were extremely positive. A common assessment strategy to be applied by all training providers was seen as a useful tool for keeping training providers ‘on their toes’ by providing a common line and standard to be achieved by all. In this way, the quality of the educational process would be preserved, and best practice more consistently applied. Any deviations from the standards where some training providers might sacrifice quality to sell courses at more competitive prices would be exposed through a common assessment. While one reply expressed concern that some providers might see a common assessment approach as ‘authoritarianism’, and was being imposed on them against their wishes. It was felt that if such a reaction happened it might indicate that the training company had ‘something to hide’ and did not want to subject themselves to this higher level of scrutiny. In this sense, the transparency that a common assessment strategy provides was ‘an absolute necessity when standardising’.

It was also believed that having a common assessment implemented by a third-party CO would upgrade the perceived value and prestige associated with its certifications.

While responses to this question were generally positive there were some notes of caution expressed. One provider pointed out that such a common assessment does not take into consideration the different stages of market development in different countries both in terms of legal requirements and technological advancement. Consequently, setting a universal standard through common assessment based on the highest European standard could possibly exclude others from achieving certification and therefore, from obtaining work. Such concerns did not negate the value of such assessment but indicated that its introduction would best to be phased in over several years to ‘bring along’ all countries and markets. This phased approach would focus on introducing elements of the assessment strategy in an agreed order to make the necessary changes both feasible and affordable, as there would likely be significant operational and cost implications for providers.

There was also a plea for flexibility in the application of assessments. Providers should have the discretion to be able to organise the assessment in a way that works for them and their context. One respondent was a VET provider whilst also offering university programmes in a higher education setting (e.g. sports science). They believed that a common assessment would need to be adaptable to both situations and deliver models if it were to be successfully applied. This same provider also believed that a common assessment linked to learning outcomes would be useful as part of a flexible approach to validating prior learning.

*2. Do you think the qualification and assessment materials outlined in the documents are useful and represent a fair assessment of the PT qualification? Yes/No – please give reasons for your answer.*

Generally, the responses received regarding the assessment materials were very positive, quoting remarks such as:

‘...the standards and the assessment materials developed by you are most helpful and guiding.’

The qualification unit structure was well received in relation to its ease of use and for setting-up training course structures. There were, however, some concerns raised as to whether the various assessments would work in a wholly online environment and, regarding the accessibility of the



materials for those for whom English is not their first language. It was suggested that the assessments were currently very detailed and that if the language used is too technical it might result in reduced adherence and participation levels. A note of caution was also expressed to try to avoid creating an expectation of a 'one-size fits all market' that did not take into consideration all different models of training delivery and the individuality of a personal trainer role.

It was interesting to note that while some providers were concerned about not trying to apply generalised standards to all providers others expressed a need for even further standardisation. This would need moving from general, broad interpretations of qualification requirements to more precise guidelines including the provision of teaching materials (e.g., a set bibliography), stipulated learning hours for each educational unit (these are already in place), and an educational path, 'road map' or syllabus to reach the point of assessment.

3. *Do you think the assessment would be achievable for learners? Yes/No - please give reasons for your answer.*

The issue of language was raised again here recognising that many Europeans are admirably adapted in reading and speaking English, but a test adds a level of stress that can affect self-confidence and increase feelings of uncertainty, doubt, or vulnerability. Best practice would therefore be to send out the assessments in European languages.

Whether or not the assessments would be achievable would also depend on how much of the full assessment strategy would be applied and required. This again spoke to the need for a phased approach in the introduction of the various components of the assessment strategy to all time for understanding, implementation, and refinement. It was also stipulated that the assessments should be introduced as a point of reference and support for providers rather than being made obligatory.

Other providers believed that the proposed assessment strategy was entirely feasible. A variant of it had already been applied by one provider for years, without problems and with considerable success. The provider in question believed that they already covered all aspects of the strategy and in addition also provided thematic and periodic evaluation through online and live theoretical and practical tests, periodic self-assessment (by the trainee himself). These were conducted through automated online tests, additional assignments and presentations by the trainees, oral interviews with trainees and regular individual evaluation reports. They also added that they videotaped all final practical assessment exams and kept them on file for two years, so that they were available for verification and validity.

4. *Do you think training providers would be able to implement the identified assessments? Yes/No - please give reasons for your answer.*

Responses varied on this question. The majority of responses indicated that training providers would be able to implement the identified assessments although the ease of this would depend on the delivery model in place (e.g., as part of VET or as part of a higher education degree programme). It would also be important that providers' compliance to these assessments was subject to monitoring procedures from a third-party organisation. It was particularly interesting to note that the question



was raised as to whether the assessment of trainees should be done internally, by trainers of the training provider, or by third party certified evaluators, or a combination of both.

There was again a note that if the complete assessment strategy were introduced at this point many providers would not currently be able to implement it fully. The best approach would be to phase-in implementation over time so that the necessary human and financial resources could be planned and committed in a manageable way.

5. *Do you think European training providers would be happy to work with EuropeActive to implement such an assessment strategy? Yes/No - please give reasons for your answer.*

Responses to this question varied. There were those providers who were wholly behind the assessment strategy and its intentions although they were unsure as to whether other providers would be similarly supportive. While others would be content if the strategy were applied with flexibility and could be adapted to specific conditions. It was felt that acceptance might be increased if the strategy was promoted as a means of assuring the quality of graduates produced.

There was a call to establish a voluntary focus group of providers to introduce the strategy over time (between 2021-2024). This would allow everyone to be heard, ensure that providers take ownership of the task at hand and maximise the impact of the proposed strategy.

## 4. Online theory assessment

Part of the proposed common assessment strategy for the PT qualification was a multiple-choice theory assessment. The original intention of this theory assessment was to attempt to cover certain learning outcomes and their associated assessment criteria within the overall qualification. These outcomes largely focused on functional anatomy and physiology, nutrition and the components of health and fitness. However, as it has become increasingly clear that the introduction of a full assessment using multiple assessment modalities (e.g., case studies, assignment, theory assessments) might be impractical across multiple European countries the remit of this assessment has shifted. Consequently, the theory assessment trialled as part of this IO was, what might be referred to as, a holistic assessment, the intention of this holistic assessment being to cover, as much as possible, all learning outcomes covered within the PT qualification.

Initially 150 multiple choice questions were written and trialled internally with the EuropeActive internal verification team. Questions were then reviewed and adapted where necessary in light of feedback from this team. Once the final 150 questions were agreed upon these were then placed on a Moodle platform and a questions bank created. Accredited training providers from 5 European countries were contacted and agreed that their learners would be part of the trialling of this assessment. The 150 questions were then randomised, and learners were able to attempt a random sample of 50 questions in an allotted time of 60 minutes. The pass mark for the assessment was set at 70% and learners were instructed to complete the assessment under normal exam conditions.



## Results

- 69% of respondents replied 'yes' when asked if they thought that all training providers should use the same online examination for their Personal Trainer qualifications.
- 81% of respondents replied 'yes' when asked if they thought the online assessment covered the Personal Trainer course syllabus.
- 87.5% of respondents believed that the online assessment was 'moderate' in terms of its difficulty. The remain 12.5% believing it was either 'difficult' or 'too difficult'.
- 56% of respondents would prefer a greater variety of question types (e.g., pictures, drag and drop, missing words, short answers) and not just multiple-choice questions.
- 63% believed that the multiple-choice questions were either 'clear' or 'very clear', 31% 'mixed' and 6% 'unclear'.
- The average grade for the assessment was 69%, the highest mark achieved being 93% and the lowest mark achieved being 48%.
- 70% of those taking the online assessment achieved the required 70% pass mark.

From the comments received from both students and verifiers taking the online assessment the following themes and comments were identified:

## Quality of questions

- Some questions were a bit 'wordy' they could have been made simpler,
- Some questions had more than one answer,
- A greater range on types of questions would be useful to cover different learning styles,
- The level of some questions is questionable,
- It would probably be useful to consider weighting certain areas of standards in other papers to ensure the level of the paper overall is pitched correctly,
- Stating or implying 'always' or 'only' is very dangerous in fitness as it is either leading, or just plain wrong with a higher level of knowledge e.g., an experienced PT will tend to avoid a definitive as they understand the variability of an outcome due to individuality and specificity, whereas a lower-level candidate will happily reach for the definitive – this results in an unconscious bias that could result in higher level students getting the Q wrong and lower level students achieving,
- There is often a leading nature to the answers and distractors so if you take a step back you can guess the right action by the way it is worded. This would give students with better English language skills an advantage.





## Language barriers

- The questions are often overly complex and require a good understanding of English. Long questions and answers are not ideal even when testing in a native language,
- Principles, terminology and abbreviations may not be consistent across all countries e.g., Type 1, slow twitch muscle fibres, PAR-Q, PNF,
- Depending on the region, the difficulty of the questions will vary. Where an academic background, as opposed to a vocational background is more common, they will struggle in certain areas and vice versa.

## Timing and length

- 60 minutes for 50 questions for non-native speakers is not long enough,
- More time and more questions (e.g., 100 questions in 100 minutes) may be useful to ensure a more fair and accurate assessment.

## Assessment security

- With no invigilation the security and integrity of the exam is easily compromised. A learner could have other browsers open to assist with answers as the assessment was not invigilated.

## Pass mark and referrals

- Pass mark was not clear,
- Clear guidelines will need to be established as to how many times the exam can be taken.

## General

- Online assessments that incorporate multi-choice questions in an exam environment which is properly invigilated to avoid any malpractice is a necessity that provides a very clear demonstration of the persons knowledge. This type of exam is tried and trusted,
- In terms of assessment, more guidance on the practical assessments would be useful. Benchmarks of minimum requirements would be helpful to set European standard as currently this ranges hugely.

## Conclusions

Implementing a common online theory assessment across multiple countries is, at times, a rather daunting undertaking although this trialling exercise has yielded some incredibly useful information to inform future strategy in this area.

Although 70% of those taking the assessment achieved the required mark, consideration must be given to both the type of questions ask and the complexity of these questions. To some extent, language barriers will always be an issue (even if the assessment can be provided in the main European languages), so the length of questions and the simplicity of wording needs real attention. The introduction of multiple question types (not just multiple-choice questions) may well be useful in this regard. Consideration will also need to be given to the length of time allowed to take the assessment to allow for any difficulties with translation. The use of terminology and abbreviations will also need further attention as assumptions cannot be made about commonality of their use across Europe.





Procedures and software will need to be identified to ensure the appropriate levels of invigilation so that the security and integrity of online assessment is not compromised. There will also need to be clear processes in place for retaking the assessment. These processes should allow an identified number of retakes and systems should allow that these assessments are randomised on each occasion.

Despite some difficulties with single use of English as the language, the fact that 70% of those taking the assessment achieved the required mark and, that the average mark was 69% provides a general indication that the trialled online assessment provided a sufficiently realistic and demanding theoretical assessment of the PT qualification. Indications for future development might include the provision of assessments in multiple languages, the use of multiple question types, and the implementation of appropriate security and retake procedures.

## 5. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

RPL is a process which facilitates the recognition of an applicant's or learner's prior learning, either qualification-based or experiential, to grant them an exemption from studying one or more units or modules on their programme.

It is often the case that those wanting to join a particular course of study will already have accumulated some prior achievement or experience. It was an important goal of the Blueprint project to identify a potential policy for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) that could be applied by a Certifying Organisation. It was hoped that the application of such a policy would help to remove unnecessary duplication and repetition of learning. Reference should be made here to IO6 Application of ECVET and ECTS to new qualifications which describes a credit system to accumulate and transfer learning outcomes through the assignment of ECVET and ECTS points to qualifications from the active leisure sector. Such a system would be an invaluable tool in the application of the RPL processes described below.



In introducing an RPL system it was decided that the responsibility for RPL decisions should lie with training providers although they should be able to refer to the CO for guidance and support if required. Providers would need to check all evidence provided by learners, be it educational or occupational, against the units, learning outcomes and assessment criteria contained within a qualification.

The learner will need to apply for RPL if they feel their qualifications and experience merit such an application. This would require submission of the relevant evidence to the training organisation who would then make an RPL decision based on this evidence. All evidence supplied would have to be deemed to be sufficient (covering all required areas), authentic (not fraudulent) and reliable (referring to the credibility of a source that is being used as evidence e.g., witness testimony).

The learner will need to apply for RPL if they feel their qualifications and experience merit such an application. This would require submission of the relevant evidence to the training organisation who would then make an RPL decision based on this evidence. All evidence supplied would have to be deemed to be sufficient (covering all required areas), authentic (not fraudulent) and reliable (referring to the credibility of a source that is being used as evidence e.g., witness testimony).

Examples of acceptable evidence types within the RPL process would include:

- **Certificates** – original qualification certificates will be required. Photocopies will not be accepted. If any doubt exists about the authenticity of a certificate, then appropriate checks should be made, or guidance sought from the CO.
- **Work experience** – all work experiences should be clearly identified and recorded. These records need to be individually dated and signed by both the learner and a suitable representative of the employer.
- **Witness testimony** – to ensure their reliability witnesses giving testimony should be occupationally relevant and suitably qualified in relation to the learner's chosen area of study.



There are several potential outcomes to an RPL request:

### Exemption from assessment

It may be appropriate that the learner is given exemption from assessment. This may be found to be the case if a recognised certificate held by the learner is deemed to be the equivalent of an assessed unit/s of a qualification. In this case, it is important to clearly establish that all assessment criteria within a unit are covered. It would also be important that the currency of the qualification is checked (obtained in the last 3 years). If the qualification is not deemed current then the applicant will need to show evidence of their efforts, in terms of on-going continuing education or experience, that has enabled them to maintain the knowledge, skills and competencies covered by the qualification.

In the event of the implementation of a common assessment strategy for the PT qualification training providers would need to inform the CO of any RPL exemption(s) when claiming certification for the learner.

### Fast tracking to assessment

If a learner's evidence is deemed to be insufficient to approve exemption from assessment, then it may be possible to fast track the learners straight to assessment without having to engage in the related learning experiences. It will need to be established that the learner is not disadvantaged by fast tracking and realistically has the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the assessment requirements. The learner should fully agree to the fast tracking and records should be kept in the event of any appeal by the learner once the assessment has been taken.

### Insufficient evidence

If evidence is deemed to be insufficient the learner will be required to complete all lessons and assessments contained within a qualification.

In all the above cases, records should be kept of all RPL decisions and the feedback given to learners on these decisions. These will be important in the event of any appeals against an RPL decision but will also be useful for training providers in standardising their RPL processes. These records should also be maintained and available on request for CO sampling purposes. The CO would want to see an appropriate amount of rigour and attention to detail in these records.



## 6. Conclusion

It is undoubtedly true that the focus of this IO has been the implementation of a common assessment strategy in relation to EuropeActive's PT qualification. Such assessments are a critical function of the Certifying Organisation since the assessment of learning outcomes is a central principle underpinning the implementation of qualifications against the European Qualifications Framework.

Common assessments and the certification that follows would allow the CO to establish a first-person relationship with learners and in this way to better ensure the quality of the learning experience for them. To implement common assessment learners would first need to be registered by training providers with the CO which provides immediate reassurance to those learners that the training they received is being monitored and assured by a recognised, credible, and independent third party. Once implemented a common assessment would allow the CO to track the achievement rates of learners across their accredited providers and allow it to better identify both good practice and poor provision. But perhaps most importantly, by setting a standard that must be achieved such common assessment would go a considerable way in supporting EuropeActive to assure the knowledge, skills, and competences of those entering the fitness and physical activity workforce.

Finally, the feedback received from training providers, learners and verifiers alike would indicate that there is certainly an appetite for the implementation of a common assessment strategy. However, there is still some work to do in terms of pitching these assessments at the right level in terms of complexity, overcoming language barriers, and gaining the support of all training providers across multiple countries in this initiative. As marked-up in the feedback this work will be best achieved through the on-going involvement and consultation with all key stakeholders to ensure best practices and a wide acceptance of any new requirements.



# **Intellectual Output 10:**

## **Active Leisure Qualifications Incorporated into NQFs**



# Active Leisure Qualifications Incorporated into NQFs

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*Date of Publication: 28<sup>th</sup> August 2020*

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## 1. Introduction

The Blueprint for Skills Cooperation and Employment in Active Leisure project focuses on developing new skills for current and future workers, for improving employability of young people, and supporting entrepreneurship and growth across the sector.

This paper provides an overview of the context and development journey of the BLUEPRINT *Intellectual Output 10 – Active Leisure Qualifications Incorporated into NQFs*. This journey has been a fruitful and developmental one, albeit because of shifting environments and priorities, not the one expected at the beginning of the process.

It should be read in conjunction with the other BLUEPRINT Intellectual Output reports to provide further background. In particular there is a direct relationship with *IO 9 – Testing, trialling and refining development of new qualifications, awarding organisation and recognition of prior learning*.

## 2. Intention of IO 10

IO 10 was developed to support the mobility of skilled workers in the Fitness and Outdoor sectors, across Member States. It was perceived as an integral part of the project to ensure that an individual who had trained in one Member State could easily move to another one, and transition into new employment with as few barriers as possible. International, or sectoral qualifications are one way of supporting mobility by potentially allowing recognition of single qualifications in multiple Member States.

This aspiration is very much in line with the European Union principle of free movement of labour and services and was especially expressed as a priority in the last Commission through the New Skills Agenda. Specifically, IO 10 was developed to bring life to the initial direction of the Expert Group on Human Resources Development which reported in 2017 and which included a further call for more qualifications (in sport and active leisure) to be included on NQFs which in turn are referenced to the EQF.

This narrative sets the historical perspective of the importance of developing and delivering qualifications across the Active Leisure Sector. Critical to the development and implementation of this work has been a close engagement between the employer representative organisations of EHFA (now EuropeActive) and the European Confederation of Outdoor Employers (EC-OE) with the European Commission, and in coordination and respect of the national sovereign responsibilities (viz. the principle of subsidiarity), that Member States have in all areas of education and training.



### 3. Historical Developments

#### 3.1. The Fitness pathway

In 2002 the organisation we now know as EuropeActive came into existence to help support the professionalisation of the Fitness sector in Europe. At that time the perceived strategy was a two-pronged approach to develop standards for people (e.g., qualifications), and standards for places (fitness clubs and facilities).

The first priority was to consider the concept of some pan-European or a 'harmonised' approach to developing occupational standards for fitness trainers. Some initial research was done to what existed at that time, and this was considerably enhanced by the first Leonardo da Vinci funded project called EUROFIT-QST in 2004. For the first time a skills and competency framework based on a functional map of the main occupations (at that time) in the Fitness sector was defined. Eight different European countries formed the project partnership (BE, CH, FR, IE, IT, NL, SE, UK).

The project identified that there was a very mixed picture across Europe in respect of training provision, in terms of content, assessment and in the provision for overall quality assurance (especially in VET). In addition, those stakeholders in the Fitness sector were working very much in competition with each other, with very little collaboration to grow the sector for the benefit of everyone else, and to move the sector forward in a way which could be aligned with the principles of the European Union.

Even in 2002 there were already very high levels of mobility across fitness professionals not just around Europe, but across the world. There was clearly a need for better skilled workers to service the growing numbers of customers and to support their employers (fitness club operators) in a quality-managed way.

The EUROFIT-QST project was done with the background of the emerging Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), which was initiated in 2002 in the Copenhagen Declaration, and which identified three core elements to improving the content, quality and reliability of vocational education and training for the future:

- EQF (European Qualification Framework) <sup>105</sup>
- ECVET (European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training) <sup>106</sup>,
- EQAVET (European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training) <sup>107</sup>,
- A fourth pillar in the form of Europass was also a feature of the LLP.

To support the implementation of the LLP the European Health and Fitness Association (EHFA, the forerunner to EuropeActive) and SPRITO (the UK National Training Organisation for Sport, Recreation and Allied Industries) were working with partners to identify what skills were required by the sector,

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<sup>105</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf>

<sup>106</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/the-european-credit-system-for-vocational-education-and-training-ecvet\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/the-european-credit-system-for-vocational-education-and-training-ecvet_en)

<sup>107</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/the-european-credit-system-for-vocational-education-and-training-ecvet\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/the-european-credit-system-for-vocational-education-and-training-ecvet_en)



and what the associated qualifications should look like. Despite a potentially understandable level of cynicism about the possibility of getting to a point of consensus, the project developed some practical steps to forward an initial agreement between the 8 project partners in 2005.

Following the completion of the Leonardo da Vinci project EUROFIT-QST, the European Health and Fitness Association (EHFA) was restructured to enable the association to become a standards-setting body for the Health and Fitness industry in Europe. This initiative, plus the continued interest of DG EAC and the new Sport Unit of the European Commission (within DG EAC) had encouraged EHFA to take the lead, supported by SkillsActive (UK) in a second Leonardo da Vinci project called ECVET-Fitness (2007). The EUROFIT-QST project had produced a functional map, competence framework, occupational standards, learning outcomes and a verification system for the technical competence of Fitness Instructors, as well as the “soft launch” of the European Register of Exercise Professionals (EREPS).

The ECVET-Fitness project worked towards the creation of a new ECVET framework, building on previous findings of qualifications and standards which had been developed. It was expected that this would be used by Awarding Bodies and Training Providers across Europe to demonstrate the transparency of their training programmes.

With the imminent approval of the EQF the decision of EHFA was to look for some key ways that this work would support the Fitness sector by respecting the main instruments of the LLP. The integration of the framework to be developed was to be the basis of the future of the EREPS structure and website, enabling those requiring training and employers seeking to employ those with the required skills, to see quickly and easily the programmes endorsed at the European level through a transparent and independent process.

The expected impact in the longer term was planned to be:

- Increased mobility of health and fitness professionals across Europe;
- Promotion of ‘best practices’ in health and fitness instruction and training across Europe;
- The promotion of a healthy lifestyle to all European citizens;
- Improved customer confidence in fitness instruction;
- Guaranteed quality of fitness instruction and quality endorsed training centres;
- Pan-European qualification systems, which can be validated and assessed in a number of individual EU Member States.

The investment into the skills agenda and the need for better qualifications was increasing at this time as the Fitness sector was rapidly growing on an annual basis. There were notable skills gaps and shortages being identified by employers together with increasing levels of mobility which prioritised the planning for EHFA in the development of the European Register of Exercise Professionals (EREPS) in 2008. This was based on a clear set of occupational standards underpinning the three largest recognised occupations of fitness instructor, group fitness instructor and advanced instructor at the time. To improve the supply of new fitness trainers and to raise the quality of VET (Vocational Education and Training) provision, EHFA also initiated an accreditation programme which was to be overseen by independent verifiers.

A third EU-funded project called European Fitness Accreditation (2008-2010) was led by Central YMCA Qualifications in the UK (CYQ). The project reviewed and updated EHFA's standards for the three main occupations as described above. In addition, the partners researched into current trends, existing qualifications and the capacity of national associations to oversee the skills agenda in their own countries. The project included the piloting of accreditation of 14 training organisations over 2 years on what was considered necessary to create a significant start and critical mass which would be required for the future promotion of EHFA standards. These were intended as the European benchmark for VET within Health and Fitness sector, and as a step in the direction of 'harmonisation'. It proposed that there should be an integration of the occupational standards within the EREPS structure and that they would be posted onto the EREPS website with open public access. The longer-term impact was expected to be:

- Increased mobility of health & fitness professionals across Europe;
- Promotion of best practice in health & fitness instruction and training across Europe;
- Improved customer confidence in fitness instruction;
- Quality endorsed training organisations;
- Pan-European qualification systems.

In 2008 EHFA launched its own independent Standards Council comprised of experts across the sector who cooperated in the development of what became known as the Fitness Sector Qualification Framework (SQF):

EQF/SQF (Bologna Process)		
	General Population	Special Population
<b>7 and 8</b>		
<b>6</b>	<b>Advanced Health and Exercise Specialist</b>	
<b>5</b> (short cycle)		Exercise for Health Specialist Pre-diabetes Exercise Specialist Weight-management Exercise Specialist
<b>4</b>	Personal Trainer Pilates Trainer Wellbeing and Lifestyle Coach (low risk)	Youth Fitness Trainer (12-17 years) Children's Fitness Trainer (6-11 years) Active Ageing Trainer
<b>3</b>	Fitness Instructor Group Fitness Instructor Group Exercise to Music Aqua Fitness Instructor	
<b>2</b>	Fitness Assistant	Community Activator

Table 1. Fitness Sector Qualification Framework (SQF)



The first Chairman of the Standards Council was Prof. Dr Alfonso Jimenez from Madrid European University who oversaw the election of 9 independent experts from across Europe who would serve a 3-year term as Council members. They in turn organised a series of Technical Expert Groups to develop and/or review occupational standards to support the occupations listed in the SQF. The number of experts involved in this work exceeded 200.

For the first time the SQF informally referenced the fitness occupations (all supported by comprehensive occupational standards and occupational role definitions) to EQF levels, and also to the Bologna Process for higher education. By 2010 this had become quite familiar across the Fitness sector and greatly helped the individual fitness trainers and employers to understand the different occupations and their qualification levels. By this time the titles of 'basic' and 'advanced' fitness trainers had been superseded by the occupations of fitness instructor and personal trainer.

Also, in 2010 the EQF Conference held at Dublin Castle by the Commission and CEDEFOP recognised that sectors (or international organisations as they are now more commonly called) had begun to use the EQF for their own training programmes. A connection with sector qualifications was originally envisaged in the 2008 EQF framework of implementation, and during the first working programme for the EQF there was an expectation of some direct referencing or relationship between the EQF and sector qualifications. In the Dublin Castle Conference conclusions there was the statement on the expected position of Sectoral Qualifications and Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks:

*"The level of understanding that exists within and between sectors adds value to overall cohesiveness at national and European level. The relationship of sectoral qualifications to national qualifications frameworks and the two meta-frameworks (editor note = EQF and Bologna), needs to be clarified in order to realise lifelong learning and to facilitate permeability between vocational education & training (VET) and higher education (HE). Further clarity should be sought on appropriate ways to achieve such recognition through national and meta-frameworks."*

Around the same time, and also interplaying with the development of the LLP and in the specific support of mobility of workers, Directive 2005/36 EC (concerning the mutual recognition of qualifications from one member state to another) was to be reviewed. The European Commission could see that national protectionism mechanisms and other regulations presented numerous examples of how mobility was being impaired in practice, and so to give a new impetus (in Member States) the Dublin Conference committed to:

*"The proposed 2012 review of European Directive 2005/36/EC gives a timely opportunity for an update, in line with recent competence-based developments in education and qualifications systems, to clarify the interplay between the Directive and European meta-frameworks."*

### 3.2. The Outdoors pathway

Although the Outdoor sector originated independently from the Fitness sector, there have been connections and contacts over the last 15 years. It is therefore not surprising that the Outdoor sector also paid attention to the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) and the developments regarding vocational education training (VET).

An additional parallel development is that the professional federation EC-OE also emerged through cooperation in various European projects.

During the EQFOA project (2006-2008) employer federations from Belgium (BFNO), The Netherlands (VeBON), France (France Plein Air), Portugal (APECATE) and Ireland (ILAM) decided to join forces and to establish the European Confederation of Outdoor Employers (EC-OE). Unfortunately, a few years later ILAM did not survive the economic crisis in Ireland. In 2009 EC-OE welcomed Spain (ANETA), in 2010 Switzerland (SOA), in 2012 Greece (HATEOA) and in 2015 the Czech Republic (CF-OA) as new full members.<sup>108</sup> In 2019 the Belgian WANT (Wallonia) joined and finally at the beginning of 2020 IAAT (the Irish federation) and Bavarian/Verband Allgäuer Outdoor Unternehmen also became members of EC-OE.

The above mentioned EQFOA project (2006-2008) was in fact the first in a cycle of three European research projects the Outdoors engaged in.<sup>109</sup>

Project	Aim	Main Output and Deliverables
EQFOA	Describing the sector	Functional Map & Competence Framework
CLO2	Developing learning outcomes from the competencies identified in EQFOA	Learning Outcomes Framework
ELESA	Developing a number of teaching and learning modules from CLO2	Dedicated training Syllabus

*Table 2. Research projects towards a dedicated training syllabus for the Outdoor Animator*

Following on from the EQFOA (2006 – 2008) and CLO2 (2008-2010) projects, ELESA is the keystone of this three projects cycle. Its culmination is a dedicated training programme for professional Outdoor Animators to work in the sector.

From the start of this research process, the focus was always on the competences that an Outdoor Animator needed to master, in order to operate successfully in the commercial Outdoor sector. These competencies led to the identification of corresponding learning outcomes. The resultant learning outcomes were divided into Soft skills (non-technical) and Hard skills (technical), in order to clearly differentiate all the generic competencies involved in outdoor animation from the pure technical

<sup>108</sup> <http://ec-oe.eu/about-us/defining-the-outdoors/>

<sup>109</sup> <http://ec-oe.eu/ec-oe-home/ec-oe-projects/elesa/>

competences linked to an activity. This avoids falling into the trap of reducing an outdoor animator to a ‘technician’ of the outdoors.

The 40 learning outcomes generated in CLO2 are ordered into 12 Module Descriptors (soft skills). The ‘hard skill’ requirements (per selected outdoor activity) are outlined in the ‘Professional Technical Capacities’ (PTCs) Descriptors which identify the minimum technical ability / competence, required for an Outdoor Animator to operate in a given commercial setting.

From the very beginning, the ELESa training syllabus was informally positioned at EQF level 5 which means ELESa is dedicated to vocational education offered by Short Cycle Higher Education.

### 3.3. The Active Leisure Pathway

Around 2012 EHFA had started an informal cooperation with the European Confederation of Outdoor Employers (EC-OE) in recognising many synergies about defining a political position and shared competencies between some fitness trainers and outdoor animators.

This was bought into sharp focus with the start of a pilot phase of social dialogue in the sport and Active Leisure Sector started in 2012, and quickly followed by the Eurofound study of representativeness in 2013.<sup>110</sup> This Study identified that EHFA for Fitness, and EC-OE for the Outdoor sector were representative employer organisations for the purposes of social dialogue. The trial process was extended for a number of years before finally closing in 2018 without realising much progress in the field of social dialogue.

From around 2008 the description of ‘Sport and Active Leisure’ has been increasingly used to define the sector and specifically the concept of ‘for profit sport’ (including elite and sport professionals), ‘not for profit sport’ (including volunteering and grassroots sports) and ‘Active Leisure’ being a combination of the Fitness and Outdoor sectors. In 2014-15 through the European Skills Competencies Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO)<sup>111</sup> sector referencing of its main occupations, the Active Leisure sector confirmed its definition as:

*“Active Leisure is a combination of fitness and outdoor-based activities that are generally unstructured and non-competitive. They promote active, healthy lifestyles through activities, events and exercise. They are commonly provided under the direction of qualified animators or instructors so that the activities are tailored to match the abilities of the participants and meet their needs in an enjoyable and safe way.”*

*“The Fitness sector uses qualified instructors and trainers to deliver diverse, structured exercise programmes that help people of all ages and abilities to improve their health, muscle and cardiovascular endurance, coordination, balance, agility and flexibility. Fitness programmes also build*

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<sup>110</sup> <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2013/representativeness-of-the-european-social-partner-organisations-sport-and-active-leisure-industry>

<sup>111</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal/qualification>



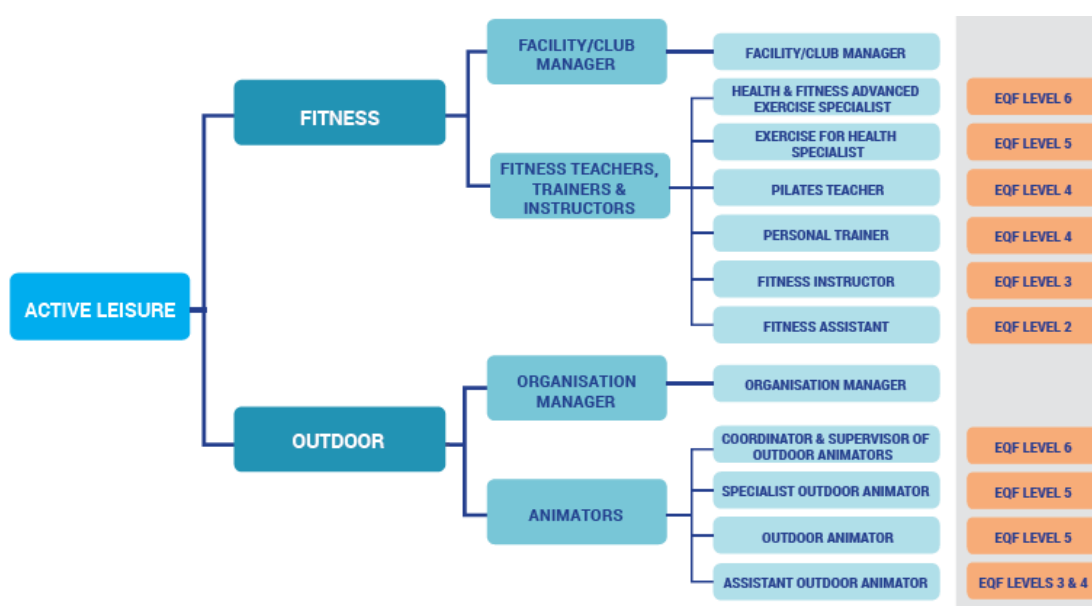
*a feeling of individual wellbeing that establishes and helps to maintain a healthy balance of mind, body and spirit.”*

*“The Outdoor sector uses outdoor related activities (canoe, rafting, horse riding, ... etc.) as the basis of delivery of a recreational or personal development service. Outdoor providers do not generally offer competitions. The Outdoor sector uses qualified animators or instructors to deliver these outdoor activities in a context of fun, recreation, tourism, outdoor learning or engagement with the natural environment.”*

As the EU-wide representatives of the Fitness and of the Outdoor sectors identified as the main actors of the Active Leisure sector according to the Eurofound Study on Representativeness and as defined within the NACE Rev.2 classifications 93.13 (Fitness facilities) and 93.29 (other amusement and recreation activities). There are an estimated 1 million workers in the Active Leisure sector.

In 2012 EuropeActive joined with the European Confederation of Outdoor Employers (EC-OE) to launch the Active Leisure Alliance, which has since developed into the Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure in 2016.

The cooperation between EuropeActive and EC-OE was deepened during the ESCO referencing work in 2014-15 and resulted in the Active Leisure sector occupational framework.



ESCO – Sport and Active Leisure Organogram\_v12 April 2015

Figure 1. Active Leisure organogram

The ESCO programme explored a range of sectors across the Member States in 2014-15. This involved the referencing of Standards and Occupational Descriptors to identify what makes different occupations unique. The referencing was completed in 2015 with the development of the SQF for the

Active Leisure Sector as shown above. Each occupation was described by the essential skills needed to be competent in that role.

EuropeActive and EC-OE were selected by the Commission for this work because they were recognised as the sector representativeness organisations. To achieve this recognition, or to make such claims, it is necessary as the start point for the international or sector organisation to establish its credibility and validity. The Eurofound Study had concluded the “rights” of EuropeActive and EC-OE, but through the earlier SIQAF project<sup>112</sup> (see also below), a further step in developing credibility was initiated through the establishing of a fully operating sector skills alliance.

There should only be one ‘rightful’ Sector Skills Alliance who can propose a qualification that purports to provide its workers with the skills they need and to meet employer needs and expectations as the representative of the sector or international organisation. The ESCO experience forced thinking around the uniqueness of the qualification supporting the occupation which means that the provenance of the organisation should be without question. This leads to the expectation of sector representativeness, inclusiveness of its stakeholders and overall objectives.

#### 4. Understanding the sector and its people

To claim to be the representative organisation requires some thought and action to determine the characteristics of what it represents – how many people, what are the key occupations, the essential skills, what are the gaps, shortages and foresight to ensure that there are enough workers in the right place with the right skills at the right time.

This also requires an implicit understanding of the capacity of training provision and their involvement with sector strategic planning. It moves beyond traditional collective bargaining and into the realms of a more inclusive way of working.

During this period an EU-funded project called DIAL<sup>113</sup> which was focused on ‘capacity-building’ for employers at a national level. This proved successful and one of the key topics was based on developing the workforce and especially the skills of workers in Active Leisure. Over 150 employers from 22 different European countries directly influenced the development and thinking of future skills needs for employees in the Active Leisure Sector.

This work was taken into a specially funded EU action called SIQAF as noted above, which put EuropeActive and EC-OE into an intense relationship with the work of DG EMPL. The project looked at all of the instruments, processes and procedures needed to ensure the outcome is transparent and quality-assured through the active leisure sector skills council. There were 5 main components to the project:

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<sup>112</sup> <https://www.active-leisure-alliance.eu/projects>

<sup>113</sup> <https://www.europeactive-euaffairs.eu/projects/DIAL>





1. The occupational standards used in active leisure are already based on the learning outcomes approach, but the project demonstrated that they have been developed in a transparent way, and that meet the approval of the principal stakeholders of the sector (viz. employers, employees, VET providers and higher education). The processes will need to be carefully explained and verified;
2. The sector will need to set-up appropriate procedures for including the (nominated) occupational standards into the SQF, and within the level descriptors of the EQF. This process will need to be a transparent and to be justified in its rigor, so that it is considered proportionate and appropriate in its application;
3. There will need to be clearly demonstrable processes and procedures to show underpinning quality assurance arrangements, and/or if this is not currently satisfactory what mechanisms will need to be put into place to provide for those reliable quality assurance processes. For any sector this is perhaps the most challenging area;
4. There is the involvement of an (international) expert(s) that will build the proposition that the requirement of showing a clear and demonstrable link between the SQF levels and those of the EQF is substantiated. The position of the external expert will also serve as the proof that the referencing of the active leisure SQF to the EQF is robust, reliable, and has been done in a transparent and open manner;
5. Of the 10 principles established by the EQF Advisory Board for the Member State NQF referencing to the EQF, numbers 1-8 inclusive were used as the basis so that, as far as is possible, and within the current terms of reference the SQF position will replicate that of an NQF.





Figure 2. SIQAF pathway diagram

It is clear from the SIQAF pathway diagram that the intention was to develop a transparent, quality-assured system which would allow for Active Leisure qualifications to be entered onto NQFs. The importance of adding sport (and active leisure) qualifications has been a focus of the work of the various DG EAC Expert Groups on skills and human resources development. It is clear that the European Commission (represented through the work of the Expert Groups of the Sport Unit) have been encouraging the wider use of qualifications in sport and Active Leisure to be included onto NQFs. The first Expert Group reporting from 2009 concluded a recommendation in 2012 at its Poznan meeting that:

*“specific attention was asked for a follow-up of the inclusion of sport qualifications in NQFs...”*

and,

*“The inclusion of all sport qualifications in an NQF should improve the transparency of the value of all qualifications to general national and international standards but also the transparency and value of the formal and non-formal education systems towards each other...”*

However, progress in this area across the wider sector has been slow in implementation. In 2020 the Expert Group on Skills and Human Resources Development guidelines informed the Croatian Presidency whose Conclusions include <sup>114</sup>:

*“9. The Council conclusions on the role of coaches in society point out that the work of coaches is associated with responsibility, skills and competences, and one of the issues mentioned refers to expanding coaches’ opportunities for lifelong learning and education. In this regard, Member States were invited to support the development of prior learning and a lifelong-learning system, and to promote, within the sports education system, a learning outcomes’ approach based on both national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) and the European Qualification Framework (EQF) goals and the inclusion, where appropriate, of coaching qualifications in NQFs with reference to the EQF.”*

In a nutshell, the incorporation of qualifications from the Sport and Active Leisure sectors onto NQFs remain a priority, but progress for a number of reasons is still limited.

The work on IO 10 has been an attempt to move this work forward, but has been hampered by two main factors:

1. the shifting political will for MS to work together on sectoral/international qualifications aligned to their NQFs and the EQF and
2. the inability of the EQF Advisory Group to determine the route(s) of recognition of international qualifications.

These are explained in BLUEPRINT IOs 3, 4 and 9 more fully.

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<sup>114</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020XG0611\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020XG0611(01)&from=EN)

Following the financial crisis (2008), the European Commission put considerable focus on the importance of the principles of the Union in encouraging reductions in national laws and restrictions which may limit the free movement of labour within the Union. The New Skills Agenda and within that the original purpose of ESCO were instruments to help in this regard.

Another route (which remains open to the Active Leisure Sector) is the utilisation of Directive 2005/36 EC as amended by Directive 2013/55 EU which positions the principle of mutual recognition of qualifications, mobility and internal market working to increase the transparency and recognition of qualifications. The application and effect of the Directive on the Active Leisure Sector is discussed at length in BLUEPRINT IO 2.

Essentially, in Article 49 of the above-mentioned Directive, there is the concept of a sector (or international organisation) to develop a multi-national qualification with the summarised outcome of:

- Common Training Framework (agreed qualification with learning outcomes, etc.)
- Common Training Test (consistent independent assessment and examination), and
- Recognition of achievement through a Professional Card (e.g., as the EREPS Programme, and for Mountain Guides for professional registration/recognition)

The Directive is highly unusual as it works through giving delegated powers to the European Commission – that is, potentially overriding national sovereignty in the area of qualification recognition because the use of the Directive is founded in European law which in this case sits above national law. However, Article 49 has been used to regulate long-lasting discussions such as for the Outdoor Sector position for ski instructors.

In 2016 the New Skills Agenda was introduced by the European Commission as an attempt to clarify skills and employment issues, and to explore a coherent plan to bring all the skills and employment issues together. It was clear there was work to be done across the EU, which mirrored some of the work the Fitness and Outdoors sector had already completed.

There was a general feeling of optimism that the embedding of sectoral qualifications would become possible through the project aligned to the ESCO project (SIQAF – The Relevance of The Active Leisure Sector & International Qualification Framework to the EQF). However, during the SIQAF project, DG Employment confirmed that this more integrated approach was not going to happen as the EQF Advisory Group had chosen a different strategy and that there was no support for sectoral qualifications to be placed wholesale on Members States NQFs as expressed in the Council Recommendations.



## 5. Challenges with the Production / Implementation of IO 10

IO 10 was an opportunity to explore what might be possible to support the initial intentions for the harmonisation of qualifications cross the Active Leisure Sector. As the new Skills Agenda draft report of findings and conclusions was published, it was clear that it was unlikely for there to be any direct relationship between international qualifications and the EQF in the foreseeable future and as originally conceived in 2008.

As discussions progressed EuropeActive were invited to the EQF Advisory Group to share a vision for the future from an international perspective. There was a mixed reception to engagement with international qualifications at this meeting, but there was a general agreement to further explore with some nations who are keen to move forward in collaboration. It was hoped some positive experiences would showcase the benefits of international qualifications on National Qualifications Frameworks.

The ELESa project provided further information and a qualification for Outdoor Animator, and the Fitness sector had developed the European Qualification for Personal Trainer (qualification, modules and assessment). The hope was that it would be possible to introduce these international qualifications into a domestic qualification. The Netherlands were keen to explore this as an option, and then to subsequently review how this might be rolled out to other Member States who were still keen to engage.

This process being formulated would mean that all due diligence would be completed in one Member State (viz. the Netherlands), and the EQF Advisory Group would then select 3-4 other MS for them to independently level the qualification against their NFQ (which in turn are referenced to the EQF). Through the proposed quality-assured process other Member States could then be more certain that the qualification was acceptable to their own NQFs, should they wish to consider adding it. Whilst there was much positive reaction to the process, the principle has still not been agreed by the EQF Advisory Group, although this was an expectation and requirement for the full development of the BLUEPRINT project based on the SIQAF Pathway.

The BLUEPRINT partners considered that there were at least 4 main options available for progressing with the recognition and incorporation of international qualifications onto NQFs – or even perhaps in a combination of more than one of them. These were presented and discussed at the Expert Group for Skills and Human Resources Development (DG EAC) at their meeting in Lisbon in May 2019. The 4 options are outlined here:

## OPTION 1

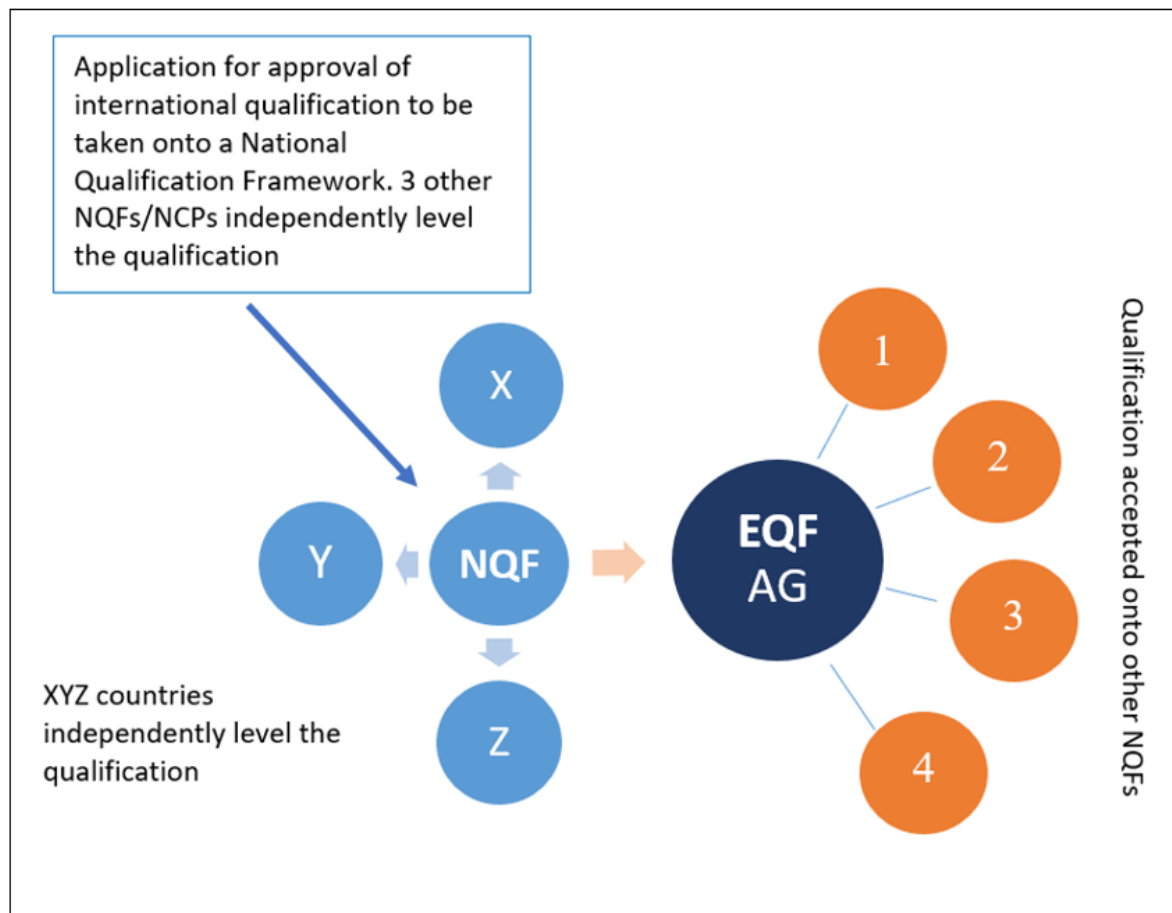


Figure 3. Application route for approval of international qualifications onto NQFs (Option 1)

This first option is based on the draft proposal of the EQF Advisory Group, but has not yet become a policy decision.

This was the preferred option of the BLUEPRINT project partners as it relies upon an open cooperation with the Member States. An application is made to a single NQF/NCP who will check all aspects of the qualification – its content, purpose, etc. and to ensure it is properly constructed in units of learning outcome. The NQF would also have to be certain of the quality assurance being provided by the international organisation (and this would most likely be through an independent process such as with a Certifying Organisation). At the same time the qualification would be sent to a further 3-4 NQFs who would independently level the qualification. The consensus result would then be put to the EQF Advisory Group who would check all processes had been completed to their expectations which would then open the opportunity for other NQFs to accept the qualification onto their own framework (and especially as it would have a 'common' EQF level).

As shown in the SIQAF pathway, above (see p.11), this route would be providing the learner with both a national qualification and a European 'stamp' as it is based on a common qualification and test.

## OPTION 1.2

As above, but via an EQF Expert Group of 3-4 NQFs who check validity of qualification and independent levelling rather than it being take through a lead NQF. It is unlikely that this proposal will be forwarded as a recommendation by the EQF Advisory Group.

## OPTION 2

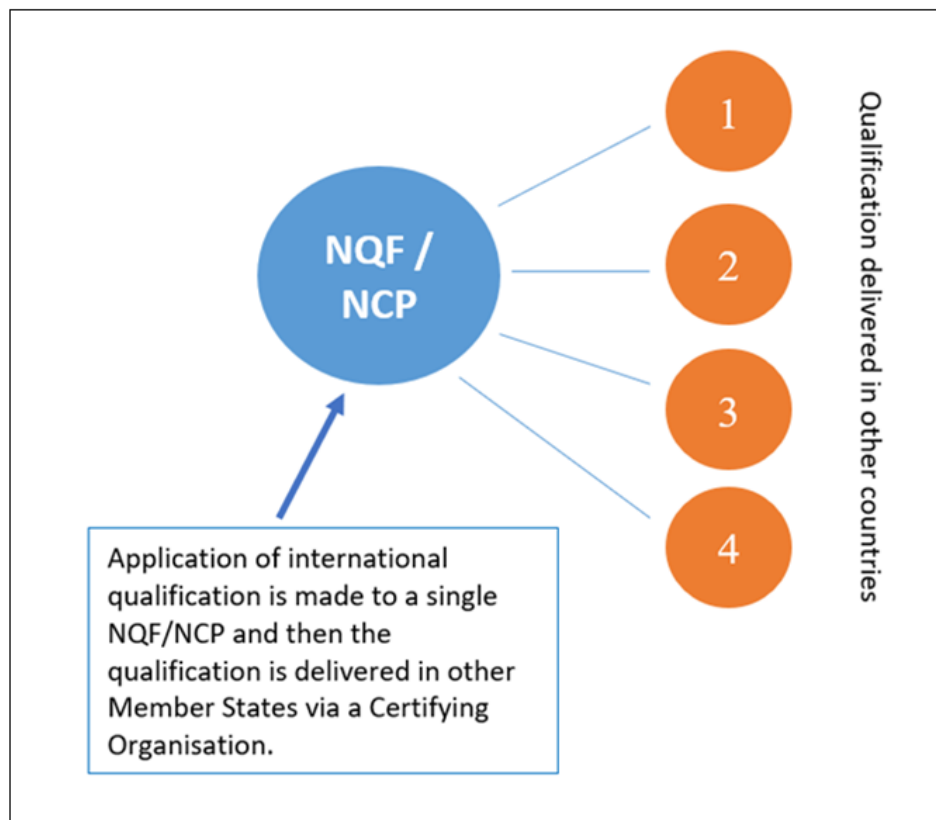


Figure 4. Application route for approval of international qualifications through 1 NQF (Option 2)

This option envisages the international qualification being submitted to a single NQF/NCP. The application would probably have to be made by a legal entity based in the country where the application is being made as it would be considered as a national qualification first and foremost. Thereafter the qualification can be delivered across Europe but based on the content and quality-assurance requirements imposed by the NQF.





## OPTION 3

Implementation of Art. 49b of the  
EU Professional Qualification  
Directive 2005/36/EC.

(European Commission, 2019)



### European Parliament Study on the Use and Potential Development of the Directive <sup>115</sup>

Directive 2005/36/EC, or the Professional Qualifications Directive (PQD), establishes an EU system of recognition of professional qualifications to facilitate intra-EU mobility of professionals. The PQD was revised in 2013 (Directive 2013/55/EU) to further deregulate and simplify the EU recognition process in order to facilitate mobility of professionals within the EU. As an example of the Directive in action from the Outdoor sector:

*The profession of ski instructor or alternatively the education and training leading to the qualification as a ski instructor is regulated in more than one third of Member States and therefore the requirements under Article 49b (2) of Directive 2005/36/EC are fulfilled. This Regulation establishes the contents of the Common Training Test ('CTT') and the conditions to be fulfilled for both participating in and passing of the CTT. The CTT shall comprise of a test certifying technical ability of ski instructors and a test certifying safety-related competences of ski instructors in accordance with the rules laid down in the 'Delegated Regulation 2019/907'. This Delegated Regulation shall be binding in its entirety and directly applicable in all Member States.*

<sup>115</sup>

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/631056/IPOL\\_STU\(2019\)631056\\_EN.pdf#:~:text=Labour%20mobility%20and%20recognition%20in%20the%20regulated%20professions,trends%20in%20mobility%20and%20recognition%2C%20focussing%20on%20the](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/631056/IPOL_STU(2019)631056_EN.pdf#:~:text=Labour%20mobility%20and%20recognition%20in%20the%20regulated%20professions,trends%20in%20mobility%20and%20recognition%2C%20focussing%20on%20the)



Importantly, the ‘Delegated Regulation 2019/907’ only applies for the highest ski instructor qualifications (as listed in Annex 1) and, moreover, the DR clearly stipulates that:

*“for ski instructors who are not eligible to participate in the CTT or who have not passed the CTT, the general framework for recognition of their qualifications under Directive 2005/36/EC would continue to apply.”<sup>116</sup>*

#### OPTION 4

Implementation of CEN  
Industrial safety standards.

(Fitness sector only)



The use of other instruments to direct VET and qualifications through a quality-assured route that improves harmonisation and the use of common standards. In 2019 Part 1 of CEN standards - EN 17229: 2019 - ‘Fitness centres - Requirements for centre amenities and operation’ came into effect in a majority of European countries.

Part 2 of the CEN standards covers the supervision (of users) by fitness staff.

The new European standards include “specifying the knowledge skills and competencies for fitness trainers to ensure that their exercise instruction is safe and effective for the users of fitness facilities”.

In describing the qualifications needed by fitness staff the norms used in the proposed CEN standards are based on EuropeActive’s occupational standards as described through the ESCO process as ‘essential skills’. Whilst the CEN standards do not have legal force they become, over time, the accepted good practices and are used to support insurance and legal decisions on whether an employer/operator has worked to relevant and industry expected guidelines. Part 2 of EN17229 will be completed in early 2021.

<sup>116</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32019R0907>





## 6. Where we are in 2020 with the use of Active Leisure qualifications on NQFs

The general view of the EQF Advisory Group seems to be that, if more than one NQF accepts the international qualification then it should be reasonable for others to accept the same qualification. This requires a high level of trust between the NQFs which at present is not evident. Given that Active Leisure qualifications (and/or the occupational standards that support them) can be found on a number of NQFs already (and in part through the BLUEPRINT project), there is an argument that other NQFs should already be more accepting of their value and appropriateness.

This is the current position of the use of Active Leisure qualifications/occupational standards.

FITNESS (Personal Trainer) In use	OUTDOORS (Animator) In use
Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia)	Belgium (Flanders)
UK	France
Poland	Greece
Netherlands	Portugal
In development	
France (CQP)	Republic of Ireland
Republic of Ireland	
Czech Republic	

*Table 3. Current use of Active Leisure qualifications / occupational standards*

## 7. Conclusions

In addition to the BLUEPRINT partners, other experts have contributed to the development and potential use of Active Leisure qualifications. The debates, reviews and discussions have considered many aspects of improving the quality-assurance and reliability of the qualifications in practice. As described elsewhere in the BLUEPRINT IO's the range of considerations has been extensive to include, for example, the purpose of delivery through a certifying organisation, and the awarding of ECVET and ECTS points. The debates were held during partner meetings but also critically in the meetings of the Sector Skills Alliance (as outlined in IO 3). This industry consultation was an important 'touch-stone' to check that the concepts and purposes were in line with employer and other stakeholder expectations.

Discussions were ongoing when the Covid-19 crisis stopped normal business with NQFs and vocational training companies, making the choices for further development and progress in this area virtually impossible. In particular there were advanced plans for EuropeActive to set-up a certifying organisation in the Netherlands in cooperation with the ‘Koninklijke Nederlandse Krachtsport- en Fitnessbond’ (KNKF) who would partner an introduction of the Personal Trainer qualification (outlined in IO 5) to the Netherlands NQF. As the EQF AG had not completed its recommendation the plan was based on option 2 as outlined above (see p.15).

Unfortunately, the COVID 19 pandemic and associated ‘shut down’ has stalled this process, to the extent it is highly unlikely that it will progress much further in the timescales of the BLUEPRINT project (2018-2020). The delivery and development partners are currently in lockdown or working with restrictions and are likely to be focussed on the practicalities of survival when they do return to work. The opportunity presented by IO 10 may well be something which will eventually be considered to support this ‘recovery’ but it is anticipated that a domestic focus for businesses across the Active Leisure Sector will be the priority initially.

A positive element is that some of the work which has been completed has aligned to IO 10. For example, the development of common assessment practices (online theory paper and online practical assessment) are proving incredibly useful tools not only during lockdown, but it is perceived they will be useful in a number of Member States in whatever the post-COVID 19 landscape looks like, but in any large scale they will be beyond the timeframe of BLUEPRINT.

It can be noted that for the Outdoor sector the ELESIA syllabus already provides for a “ready to use” common assessment strategy for the ‘hard skills’: the ‘Professional Technical Capacity’ (PTC) descriptors. The underlying assumption is that it does not matter where and/or how the candidate Outdoor Animator achieved the ability to master the agreed PTCs. What is most important is that he/she can prove his/her capacity to demonstrate the requested PTCs in the appropriate natural and technical environment as defined by the sector.

In the spirit of the intention of the Croatian Presidency Guidelines (June 2020), the Active Leisure Sector will continue to work with national partners to introduce its qualifications onto NQFs, but without the complicity of the EQF Advisory Group support through an option 1 type approach general progress will remain slow.

As other sectors have shown (such as the European Federation for Welding, Joining and Cutting), it is possible to work almost entirely outside of the EQF and NQFs for their training and certification for workers to be effective and the respected norm for their industry.

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# **Intellectual Output 11:**

## **Recognition of Individual Achievement through a Professional Card System (in Active Leisure)**



## Summary of Intellectual Output 11 – English Version:

### Recognition of Individual Achievement through a Professional Card System (in Active Leisure)

*Main Authors: Cliff Collins & Kévin Haddad*

The Active Leisure sector is characterised by high levels of labour mobility and its workers often find themselves at odds with other national requirements and the inability of some national positions to *prima facie* accept or understand non-national credentials of workers looking for employment or applying for job vacancies. This Intellectual Output discusses the importance of recognising individual achievement and the need for a recognition process structured on an EU-wide level for the Active Leisure sector, notably through a Professional Card System.

In 2016, the European Commission adopted the implementing regulation to introduce the European Professional Card (EPC), which aims to ease the free movement of mobile professionals by simplifying the procedure for getting their professional qualifications recognised in another EU country. It was introduced for five professions: pharmacists, physiotherapists, real estate agents and mountain guides, who can now pursue their professions more freely in other EU countries. Unfortunately, it is restricted only to these five professions to date. It might be extended to other professions in the future but taking into account the slow decision-making process (basically due to the rule of subsidiarity regarding educational issues applied by many Member States) a number of economic sectors (international organisations) are made to 'stand-alone'.

During the past 12 years, the Active Leisure sector has worked towards trying to establish credible standards and processes which can support its workers to obtain trustworthy and respected certifications, which can be recognised and accepted as reasonable evidence that they have the essential skills to meet employer and customer expectations for employment and engagement. There are few Member States which currently have qualifications on their National Qualifications Frameworks which are widely used and which, if tested, are accepted or recognised in other countries.

Consequently, the sector itself has been developing its own systems and processes most notably in the fitness sector with the European Register of Exercise Professionals (EREPS). The EREPS concept, based on a sectoral process of self-regulation, is used extensively in fitness education and training and follows the same process as the EPC – even informally referencing with the European Qualification Framework, which has become an industry-wide agreement on 'ways of working'.

Considering the dead-ends of EU-wide recognition attempts, the paper concludes that the Active Leisure sector will continue, at least for the fitness sector, with the further expansion of the EREPS scheme and its systems of training provider accreditation, development of occupational standards, etc., which will, over time, become the way that every fitness trainer is certified and recognised in the future.

## Summary of Intellectual Output 11 – German Version:

### Anerkennung individueller Leistungen durch ein Berufsausweissystem (im Active Leisure-Sektor)

*Hauptautoren: Cliff Collins und Kévin Haddad*

Der Active Leisure-Sektor ist von einer hohen Arbeitskräftemobilität geprägt und die Beschäftigten haben oft Probleme, weil sie spezielle Anforderungen in anderen Mitgliedstaaten nicht erfüllen und manche nationalen Stellen nicht in der Lage sind, ausländische Zeugnisse und Abschlüsse von Arbeitnehmern, die eine Stelle suchen oder sich auf freie Stellen bewerben, auf den ersten Blick zu akzeptieren oder zu verstehen. Dieses Analyseprodukt erläutert, warum die Anerkennung individueller Leistungen wichtig ist und der Active Leisure-Sektor einen europaweit einheitlichen Anerkennungsprozess braucht, am besten in Form eines Berufsausweissystems.

Im Jahr 2016 hat die Europäische Kommission die Umsetzungsverordnung zur Einführung des Europäischen Berufsausweises verabschiedet, mit dem das Verfahren zur Anerkennung beruflicher Qualifikationen in anderen EU-Ländern vereinfacht und so die Freizügigkeit mobiler Fachkräfte erleichtert werden soll. Der Ausweis wurde für die Berufsgruppen Apotheker, Physiotherapeuten, Immobilienmakler und Bergführer eingeführt, die ihren Beruf nun einfacher in anderen EU-Ländern ausüben können. Leider ist er auch heute noch auf diese fünf Berufe beschränkt. Zwar ist eine künftige Ausweitung auf andere Berufe nicht ausgeschlossen, aber wenn man die langsamen Entscheidungsprozesse bedenkt (die im Wesentlichen dem Subsidiaritätsprinzip im Bildungsbereich geschuldet sind, das viele Mitgliedstaaten anwenden) sind viele Wirtschaftssektoren (internationale Organisationen) letztendlich auf sich selbst gestellt.

In den letzten 12 Jahren hat der Active Leisure-Sektor versucht, glaubwürdige Standards und Verfahren zu entwickeln, die es den Arbeitnehmern erleichtern, zuverlässige und anerkannte Zertifizierungen zu erlangen, die als angemessene Nachweise dafür anerkannt und akzeptiert werden, dass sie über die grundlegenden Fähigkeiten verfügen, die Arbeitgeber und Kunden von den Beschäftigten erwarten. Derzeit haben nur wenige Mitgliedstaaten in ihrem Nationalen Qualifikationsrahmen Qualifikationen definiert, die flächendeckend genutzt werden und, mit entsprechendem Nachweis, in anderen Ländern akzeptiert oder anerkannt werden.

Aus diesem Grund hat die Branche eigene Systeme und Verfahren entwickelt, von denen das wichtigste das Europäische Register professioneller Fitnesstrainer (European Register of Exercise Professionals - EREPS) für den Fitnessbereich ist. Das Konzept des EREPS, das auf einem Selbstregulierungsprozess der Branche beruht, wird bei der Ausbildung von Fitnesstrainern großflächig umgesetzt und nutzt das gleiche Verfahren wie der Europäische Berufsausweis. Es bezieht sich sogar informell auf den Europäischen Qualifikationsrahmen und ist inzwischen die branchenübliche Arbeitsweise.

Da sich alle Versuche einer EU-weiten Anerkennung in einer Sackgasse befinden, kommt das Papier zu dem Schluss, dass der Active Leisure-Sektor, oder zumindest die Fitnessbranche, das EREPS-System und die Systeme zur Akkreditierung von Bildungsträgern, zur Entwicklung von Berufsstandards usw. künftig so lange ausweiten wird, bis schließlich jeder Fitnesstrainer nach diesen Systemen zertifiziert und anerkannt ist.



## Summary of Intellectual Output 11 – Polish Version:

### Uznawanie indywidualnych osiągnięć w systemie legitymacji zawodowej (w sektorze aktywnego wypoczynku)

*Autorzy: Cliff Collins i Kévin Haddad*

Sektor aktywnego wypoczynku charakteryzuje się wysokim poziomem mobilności pracowników, a osoby go tworzące często borykają się z problemem wymagań krajowych i brakiem możliwości bezpośredniego uznawania lub rozumienia zagranicznych uprawnień osób szukających zatrudnienia lub kandydujących na wolne stanowiska. W rezultacie pracy intelektualnej omówiono znaczenie uznawania indywidualnych osiągnięć oraz potrzebę posiadania uporządkowanego, ogólnounijnego procesu uznawania kwalifikacji w sektorze aktywnego wypoczynku, szczególnie poprzez system legitymacji zawodowej.

W 2016 r. Komisja Europejska przyjęła rozporządzenie wykonawcze służące wprowadzeniu europejskiej legitymacji zawodowej, której celem jest ułatwienie swobodnego przepływu specjalistów poprzez uproszczenie procedur uzyskiwania kwalifikacji zawodowych uznawanych w innym państwie UE. Wprowadzono ją dla pięciu zawodów: farmaceutów, fizjoterapeutów, agentów nieruchomości i przewodników górskich, którzy obecnie mogą praktykować swoje zawody w innych państwach UE z większą swobodą. Niestety do tej pory ograniczono się jedynie do tych pięciu profesji. W przyszłości system być może zostanie rozszerzony na kolejne zawody, ale biorąc pod uwagę powolny proces decyzyjny (wynikający z zasady pomocniczości w odniesieniu do kwestii edukacyjnych stosowanej przez wiele państw członkowskich), wiele sektorów gospodarki (organizacji międzynarodowych) musi istnieć „w odosobnieniu”.

W ciągu ostatnich 12 lat branża aktywnego wypoczynku podejmowała próby ustanowienia wiarygodnych norm i procesów, które mogłyby pomóc pracownikom tego sektora w uzyskaniu godnych zaufania i poważanych zaświadczeń, uznawanych i przyjmowanych jako racjonalny dowód, że dana osoba posiada podstawowe umiejętności pozwalające spełnić oczekiwania pracodawcy lub klienta na potrzeby zatrudnienia lub nawiązania współpracy. Niewiele państw członkowskich w krajowych ramach kwalifikacji posiada obecnie kwalifikacje powszechnie stosowane i, w przypadku ich weryfikacji, przyjmowane lub uznawane w innych państwach.

W rezultacie branża rozwija własne systemy i procesy, szczególnie w branży fitness, poprzez Europejski Rejestr Profesjonalistów Sportowych (EREPS). Koncepcja EREPS, oparta na samoregulacji branży, stosowana jest na szeroką skalę w edukacji i szkoleniach fitness i działa na takich samych zasadach jak europejska legitymacja zawodowa (odnosząc się zresztą nieformalnie do europejskim ram kwalifikacji), będących „sposobem funkcjonowania” całej branży.

Biorąc pod uwagę bezskuteczne próby stworzenia systemu uznawania obejmującego całą UE, w dokumencie stwierdza się, że sektor aktywnego wypoczynku będzie działał dalej – przynajmniej w przypadku branży fitness – w oparciu o dalszy rozwój systemu EREPS oraz system akredytacji trenerów, rozwój norm zawodowych itp., który z czasem stanie się sposobem certyfikowania i uznawania każdego trenera fitness w przyszłości.



## Summary of Intellectual Output 11 – Spanish Version:

### Reconocimiento del logro individual a través de un sistema de tarjeta profesional (en ocio activo)

*Autores principales: Cliff Collins y Kévin Haddad*

El sector del ocio activo se caracteriza por su alta movilidad laboral. Los trabajadores suelen tener dificultad para cumplir otros requisitos nacionales y para que, en algunos puestos nacionales, se acepten o comprendan a simple vista las credenciales no nacionales de quienes buscan empleo o responden a ofertas de trabajo. Este resultado intelectual analiza la importancia de reconocer los logros individuales y la necesidad de un proceso de reconocimiento estructurado en la UE para el sector del ocio activo, en particular mediante un sistema de tarjeta profesional.

En 2016, la Comisión Europea adoptó el reglamento de aplicación para introducir la Tarjeta Profesional Europea (TPE), cuyo objetivo es facilitar la libre circulación de los profesionales móviles simplificando el procedimiento de validación de sus cualificaciones profesionales en otro país de la UE. Este sistema se introdujo para cinco profesiones: farmacéuticos, fisioterapeutas, agentes inmobiliarios y guías de montaña, que ahora pueden ejercer sus profesiones con mayor libertad en otros países de la UE. Lamentablemente, sólo se aplica en la actualidad a estas cinco profesiones. Podría ampliarse a otras profesiones en el futuro, pero teniendo en cuenta la lentitud del proceso de toma de decisiones (básicamente debido al principio de subsidiariedad en materia de educación que se aplica en muchos Estados miembros), varios sectores económicos (organizaciones internacionales) se ven obligados a funcionar de manera independiente.

El sector del ocio activo trabaja desde hace doce años para establecer normas y procesos creíbles que permitan a sus trabajadores obtener certificaciones fiables y respetadas, que sean reconocidas y aceptadas como prueba razonable de que tienen las competencias necesarias para cumplir las expectativas del empleador y del cliente relativas al empleo y la contratación. Hay pocos Estados miembros en la actualidad con cualificaciones en sus Marcos Nacionales de Cualificaciones que sean ampliamente utilizadas y, tras someterlas a prueba, aceptadas o reconocidas en otros países.

Por lo tanto, el sector ha desarrollado sus propios sistemas y procesos, sobre todo en el sector del fitness, con el Registro Europeo de los Profesionales del Ejercicio Físico (EREPS, por sus siglas en inglés). El concepto del EREPS, basado en un proceso sectorial de autorregulación, se utiliza mucho en educación y formación de fitness y cumple el mismo proceso que la TPE, incluso con una referencia informal al Marco Europeo de Cualificación, que ha pasado a ser un acuerdo del sector sobre "maneras de trabajar".

Teniendo en cuenta el punto muerto en que se encuentran los intentos de reconocimiento para toda la UE, el documento concluye que el sector del ocio activo, al menos el sector del fitness, seguirá ampliando el sistema del EREPS y sus sistemas de acreditación de proveedores de formación, desarrollo de normas laborales, etc., que, con el tiempo, será la forma en que todo entrenador de fitness pueda obtener certificación y reconocimiento en el futuro.





# Recognition of Individual Achievement through a Professional Card System (in Active Leisure)

*Main Authors: Cliff Collins and Kévin Haddad*

*Date of Publication: 20<sup>th</sup> November 2020*

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## 1. Introduction

There is a familiar concept of qualifications and certifications which signify, both to the holder as well as others, a level of attainment in a subject has been achieved by an individual. At school these can be stand-alone, such as high school certificates <sup>117</sup>, or by combination represent higher achievement such as in a baccalaureate. Some levels of achievement are not really certificates at all, but a recognition of an ability, competency or skill – such as passing a theory test and practical assessment to gain a driving licence. (see Appendix 1 for a glossary of terms used in this paper)

In higher education, academic awards can be just that, and do not necessarily lead to any other outcomes, whereas other awards can be integral to professional recognition, as in the case of doctors, architects, lawyers, etc. In these cases, academic achievement is also often linked to professional experience/practice, and additional professional examinations being added to the university-required academic achievement.

In looking at the concept that some qualifications are ‘for life’ whilst others need to be constantly refreshed or updated, especially if they tied into the concept of a licence to practise or within a regulated professional as described in the European Union in Directive 2005/36 EC. <sup>118</sup> There is no need to re-take high school certificates or bachelors’ degrees, but in many occupations, there is a challenge to prove or establish who you are, what you are able to do, and what you need to do to achieve that recognition.

People learn in different ways, and in many instances and circumstances this can be outside of their formal education and through other training opportunities. Developing and maintaining skills can sometimes follow as a by-product of daily activities, even when learning was not initially intended as the primary goal or intention. In other circumstances, it can be planned as specific activity within career development. Use of the terms of non-formal learning (normally structured learning such as in-company training), and informal learning (happening naturally as part of diverse activities). The validation or recognition of these achievements are potentially problematical, particularly for vocationally based workers, and where no systems (especially national educational systems) exist to provide an individual with some form of certification (discussed in BLUEPRINT IO 8).

Sectors or international organisations (representing predominantly vocationally based workers) can provide other routes of providing recognition of achievement and many of these are in a setting of self-regulation. That is to say that there is no other legal or regulatory framework which covers their circumstances, and which can provide evidence of their ability to practise or to ply their trade. This becomes a more intense complication when the mobility issue is added – that is someone who believes they have a valid certification and recognition in their home country presents themselves in another host country.

It is a fundamental principle of the European Union to support citizens moving from one Member State to another, and the area of the recognition of workers qualifications and certifications is discussed in BLUEPRINT IO2 in respect of Directive 2005/36EC as amended by Directive 2013/55 EU and the more recent Directive 2018/958 on a proportionality test before adoption of new regulation of professions. The Active Leisure Sector is characterised by high levels of labour mobility and its workers often find themselves at odds with other

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<sup>117</sup> Certificate/diploma/title: An official document, issued by an awarding body, which records achievements of an individual following an assessment against a predefined standard. Source: Cedefop, 2008:

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory/european-inventory-glossary#C>

<sup>118</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32005L0036>

national requirements and the inability of some national positions to *prima facie* accept or understand non-national credentials of workers looking for employment or applying for job vacancies.

The European Commission's response to some national government's projection of their use of bureaucracy, intransigence and sometimes what can only be considered as downright obstruction to free movement, is enshrined in the Directive's cited above. This is especially with reference to Article 49 of Directive 2013/55 EU which envisages a sector or other organisation cooperating with a minimum of one-third of the current membership of the European Union to develop a common training framework, common training test, and the recognition of individual achievement through a professional card.

Most important for the Outdoor sector in this context is the "Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/907, establishing a Common Training Test for ski instructors under Article 49b of Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the recognition of the professional qualifications" as discussed in BLUEPRINT IO 2.

**European Commission statement:**

European Professional Card: The European professional card (EPC) is available from 18 January 2016 for five professions (general care nurses, physiotherapists, pharmacists, real estate agents and mountain guides). It might be extended to other professions in the future.

During the past 10-12 years, the Active Leisure Sector has worked towards trying to establish credible standards and processes which can support its workers to obtain trustworthy and respected certifications, which can be recognised and accepted as reasonable evidence that they have the essential skills to meet employer and customer expectations for employment and engagement. There are few Member States which currently have qualifications on their NQFs which are widely used and which, if tested, are accepted or recognised in other countries. Therefore, the sector itself has been developing its own systems and processes most notably in the Fitness sector with the European Register of Exercise Professionals.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> [www.ereps.eu](http://www.ereps.eu)

See Appendix 2 for more information on the European Register of Exercise Professionals.

## 2. What is a Professional Card?

The introduction of the EPC is potentially one of the major achievements of the modernisation intended by the Professional Qualifications Directive (2013/55 EU). It is specifically aiming to overcome the situation where some EU countries make access to a particular profession (or trade) conditional upon the possession of a professional qualification which is traditionally issued within their own country. Such a requirement represents an obstacle to the core principles of the Single Market for services as those qualified to practice the same profession (or trade) in another EU country are apparently prevented from doing so. As explained earlier as a response, the EU adopted the Professional Qualifications Directive, which provides a system of recognition of professional experience and intends to promote 'automatic' recognition of this experience across the EU.

In 2016, the Commission adopted the implementing regulation to introduce the EPC for the first five professions. They were selected among those having expressed an interest, following thorough consultations with stakeholders and Member States. General care nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists, real estate agents and mountain guides can pursue their professions more freely in other EU countries thanks to the European Professional Card (EPC). The card aims to ease the free movement of these mobile professionals by simplifying the procedure for getting their professional qualifications recognised in another EU country.

In the future, the EPC may be extended to other mobile professions (or trades) that meet the criteria set out in the Professional Qualifications Directive. This would take place after practical experience of the functioning of the procedure has been gained and consultations have been carried out with stakeholders. Since 2016 however, there have not been any other EPCs established (the position of ski instructors being slightly different).



Diagram from the European Commission showing the principle of recognition of a practice nurse between 2 Member States

The EU's Single Market Strategy should enable Europeans to work wherever they choose within the Union and on the basis that if a profession (or trade) is regulated in a host country then professionals from another Member State may need to get their qualifications recognised before they can start work in their new country. The EPC is designed to help make this process more transparent and easier. It is not a physical card as one may think of as other certificates but is accessed through an Internal Market Information System (IMI) which allows a professional (or trade) to communicate with the relevant authorities inside a secure network. The IMI also provides for an official, multilingual

communication channel between the regulating authorities for professionals in EU countries to facilitate their cooperation and enhance mutual trust.<sup>120</sup>

The concept of the EPC is that authorities in the countries of origin are responsible for checking the authenticity and validity of application documents, to ensure that only properly qualified professionals can look for work in other countries. The EPC does not replace the ‘traditional’ recognition procedures foreseen by the Professional Qualifications Directive, but it does offer an advantageous option for professionals who wish to work either temporarily or permanently in another EU country. Professionals can start their application online with their home authority (the country where they are established or where they obtained their qualifications). The application can be submitted in any EU language thanks to the structured multilingual questions and translation facilities offered by the IMI.<sup>121</sup>

In practice, it is recognised that there are limitations in the way the EPC is currently working.

### 3. The importance of certification and recognition of achievement

#### 3.1. Motivations for continual learning

Most people will agree that there is a need for continuing with our own personal development and learning, not least because we live in exceptional, and fast-changing times. Continuing education supported by certification, or the recognition of some of the outcomes<sup>122</sup>, can be an investment of time and resources, as they will help provide recognition of achievement which can be a significant benefit. For example, these may come as a job promotion, improved business performance, increased remuneration, changing role/career as our society adapts to new ways, and so on. There are perhaps 5 motivations why continual learning – and its recognition of achievement – is a good thing:

##### **Gain a competitive advantage**

Having successfully completed training that others don’t have, or for skills which are in demand, can give someone competitive advantage in the job market. If the learning outcome of the training can be recognised through certification, for example, it can really help differentiate from others in the same area of work. Being able to prove that someone has made an achievement through their commitment to training, and in understanding the importance of personal development, gives an advantage in today’s competitive market. Staying on top of trends and being pro-active in personal development should create new opportunities, but this will often require some independent recognition of its achievement.

##### **Increased efficiency**

Recognised and trusted certificates of achievement help to provide a personal presentation of skills and ability. If the additional training and learning is complementary to personal and career

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<sup>120</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/internal\\_market/imi-net/index\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/imi-net/index_en.htm)

<sup>121</sup> See BLUEPRINT Intellectual Output 2 (p. 18) for more information.

<sup>122</sup> See BLUEPRINT Intellectual Output 8 for more information.



development, and core skills of a trade, it will lead to better efficiencies which are attractive to employers.

### **Increase earning potential**

The time and effort invested in personal and career development often results in increased income. Most employers and customers (e.g., users of fitness and outdoor services), will understand the higher costs associated with specialised training and are willing to pay for instructors and animators who have higher industry certifications. In a recent study it found that even online training leading to certification could significantly increase income by anything from 20 to 40%.<sup>123</sup>

### **Expand knowledge and skills**

By acquiring new and updated relevant information or training and instruction techniques for example, will improve the ability of someone to expand their autonomy and work practice. This can open other opportunities for diversification of work practice with new skills.

### **Build professional credibility**

Certification demonstrates a commitment to superior professionalism, upholding of industry standards of good practice, and for a need of continued learning. These merits can help a worker (in this case for fitness trainers and outdoor animators) to boost their professional credibility and prestige within their own peer groups and networks. This is also true when engaging with clients and employers.

## **3.2. What is the difference between Licensing & Certification?**

Doctors, nurses, and lawyers are examples of occupations that require a 'license to practice' and have protection of their professional status in law. Licenses are mandated through regulatory or government agencies and sometimes ceded to professional institutes or chartered authorities who define the title and scope of practice. Having a certification is typically offered by a professional institute to uphold certain standards. A certification is the recognition of an individual who has demonstrated through a standardised assessment that they meet defined qualifications within a profession. For example, within the Health sector there are basic support service jobs that are overseen and supervised by a healthcare professional such as a licensed nurse, a doctor and a licensed pharmacist. Certifications can be voluntary but, in some instances, are considered essential to be part of a licensing process.

Though both are important in different ways, certification and competence mean very different things.

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<sup>123</sup> <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20160330005307/en/Study-Finds-Accredited-Online-Certifications-Increase-Salaries>

### **3.2.1 What Is Certification?**

Certification is all about credentials. It's what some people might consider 'formal' education. Professionals who are certified in their area of specialty complete a course of study, pass a written examination (and possibly in the case of Active Leisure also a practical assessment), and should continue taking professional development courses throughout their careers.

There are thousands of fitness trainers and outdoor animators across Europe, and their certificates of achievement or credentials do matter. In essence, having a relevant and recognised certificate represents a commitment on the part of the individual worker to the sector. It shows that they have set a goal for themselves and followed through to achieve it in recognition that they have. A 'third-party stamp of approval' further validates the knowledge and professionalism they gained in the process and gives added value to the certificate itself. Of course, the stamp of approval has to come from a recognised and competent body.

### **3.2.2 What Is Competence?**

Competence on the other hand, has nothing to do with professional or formal education. Instead, it refers to the skill and knowledge needed to successfully complete a task. Those who have competences are qualified to perform their work safely and often with little or no supervision. It is recognition of achievement at a particular moment in time. It takes time to develop competence, and it can be attained in a variety of ways through initial training (or what is sometimes called I-VET):

- On-the-job learning;
- Instruction;
- Assessment;
- Formal qualification.

Competent individuals require little in the way of direct supervision and have the experience and ability to carry out their project duties, recognise their limitations, and take appropriate action to prevent harm to those carrying out the work and those affected by it. Typically, in the Active Leisure Sector they will be EQF Level <sup>4</sup> and above and able to work autonomously.

### **3.2.3 Which matters more?**

While certification is an important method for gaining the key knowledge and skills necessary for a job, competency is required to complete the job properly and safely every time. Although the maxim says that 'practice makes perfect', certification alone does not equate with good practice, which is learned by undertaking relevant professional experience.



### 3.3. Conclusions on the importance of recognition of individual achievement

Certifications are often a worthwhile investment because of the many advantages they can provide throughout a career – acting as both reliable, validated confirmation of achievement as well as providing an impetus for further personal development. It is important that workers across the Active Leisure Sector keep good and up-to-date records of their certifications in an accessible format. As discussed below, this could be via a Europass or other forms of digital record-keeping (see Appendix 3).

The purpose of a (credential) certificate in any profession or trade is to both protect the public and to guarantee that a person who holds the credential has met a minimum standard for professional and ethical standards. This is a common expectation, for example, with medical practitioners. Those individuals who have passed the credentialing, or qualifying examinations for a medical profession (especially which have a legal status) have exhibited that they have met those standards of practice. Credentials also speak to a commitment to the profession and a commitment to ongoing continuing education (CPD or lifelong learning) to maintain them. Certification of the qualification indicates that someone has met a certain standard of competence which can give them competitive advantage, more job opportunities, a higher pay scale, and job security. Just about every industry or sector places a high value on degrees, credentials or certifications and for their vocational achievement.

#### 3.3.1 *The benefits of becoming certified (personal demonstration of achievement and competence)*

- Provides a foundation of broad and deep understanding and positioning within an industry;
- Demonstrates personal commitment to a chosen profession or trade;
- Allows easier recognition to support mobility because they should be certifications which are valid across European countries (whilst not necessarily guaranteeing a right of employment);
- Enjoying a competitive edge during job searching, especially when used in combination with key words or phrases associated with the essential skills of fitness trainers or outdoor animators;
- Industry employers prefer hiring professionals who have achieved an industry-recognised certification. In Active Leisure many employers will consider the initial- VET and will then go on to provide additional training support, and funding for continuing or career development education and training (C-VET);
- Improves earning potential;
- Opens the door to more opportunities for career advancement;
- Increases mobility and choices even in a tough job market.

#### 3.3.2 *Is a qualification or certification for life?*

It's not uncommon for workers to do training over the course of a few days and then complete an exam to prove their knowledge. The certificate they receive deems them compliant in that area. But what happens when they don't use this knowledge for an extended period of time? It's almost certain that they won't be able to gain competence – and that could lead to serious skills deficiencies.





In fact, researchers have studied how much learners forget and come to some interesting conclusions. While it is influenced by factors including the type of material and one's unique memory, the 'Curve of Forgetting' (see below) suggests that 50 to 80 percent of what was learned the day before is lost if nothing is done with the information. This is somewhat alarming, and probably indicates the need to continual practice, revision and checking that knowledge is being kept up to date. This is why competence is so important.

#### Forgetting curve – Wikipedia<sup>124</sup>

The forgetting curve hypothesizes the decline of memory retention in time. This curve shows how information is lost over time when there is no attempt to retain it. A related concept is the strength of memory that refers to the durability that memory traces in the brain. The stronger the memory, the longer period of time that a person is able to recall it. A typical graph of the forgetting curve purports to show that humans tend to halve their memory of newly learned knowledge in a matter of days or weeks unless they consciously review the learned material.

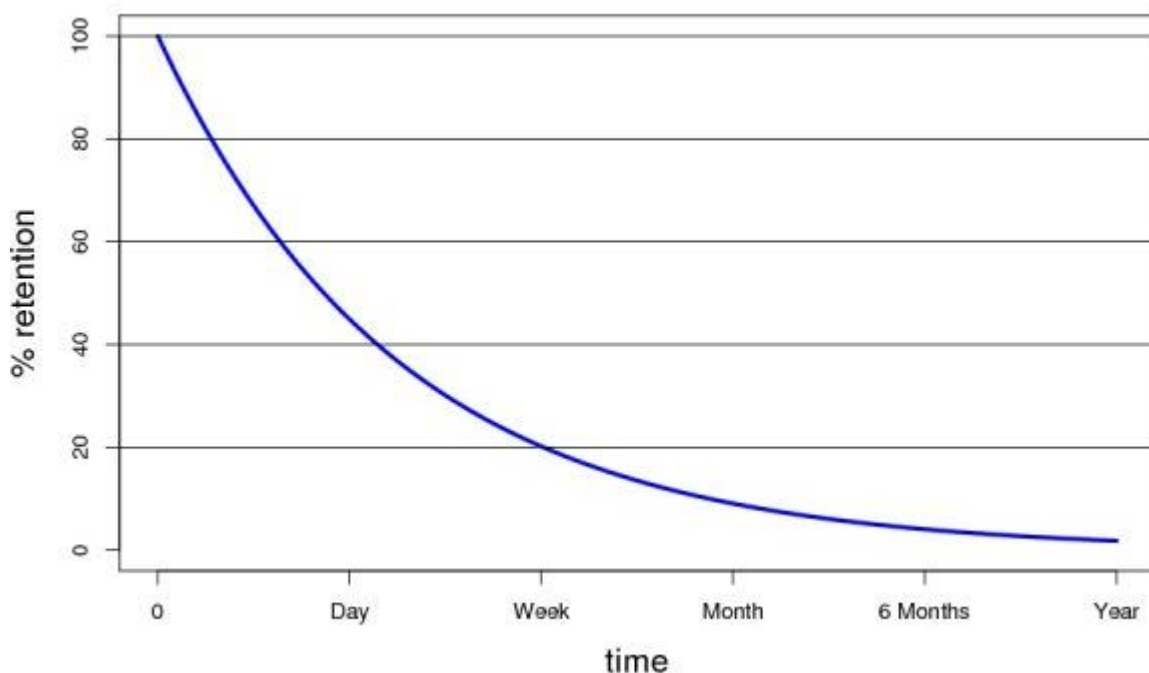


Figure 1. Forgetting curve with retention rate over time

### 3.3.3 Moving towards competence in the workplace

Focusing on competency offers a number of benefits for employers and their workers. Establishing standards and criteria to assess worker competency through a structured evaluation process is perhaps the most common route. This can help highlight what training is required by employees who exhibit competency gaps, and often small bites of 'top-up' learning are all that are required. In-house,

<sup>124</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forgetting\\_curve](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forgetting_curve)

constant reminding of job duties and functions against good operation procedures (involving risk minimisation) are typical employer processes to help maintain consistency and good service delivery in Active Leisure.

It is increasingly being recognised that employers should build and implement a system of competency frameworks for every job, including standards for competence and criteria to assess it in the key tasks and subtasks. Employers should assess worker competence by observing their work, and then act quickly to fill any training gaps. It's also critical to nurture a work culture where individuals are confident requesting training when they feel it would improve their safety and performance (learn more in *Implementing a Safety Culture*). In some countries, such as Belgium and France, there are national training funds to help employees develop new skills.

## 4. Conclusions

Certification and competence complement each other. It's important for employees to receive some in-depth training and certification but putting the training into practice is what really makes that knowledge stick and improve workplace outcomes and across Active Leisure for quality in services being provided.

Employers can begin by assigning work based on what employees can actually do, rather than what their certificates say they can do. In addition to creating a safer and balanced workplace, the competency approach can provide much-needed support to employees, which can then boost morale and even improve the company's bottom line.

The importance of recognising individual achievement has been discussed briefly in this paper. Moreover, and due to the huge mobility of both employers and workers in Active Leisure, the need for a recognition process is paramount and consequently should be structured on an EU-wide level.

Unfortunately, the use of the European Professional Card (as per 18/01/2016) is restricted to only five professions to date. The EPC might be extended to other professions in the future but taking into account the slow decision-making process (basically due to the rule of subsidiarity regarding educational issues applied by many Member States) a number of economic sectors (international organisations) are made to 'stand-alone'.

Fortunately, for the Active Leisure sector however, EuropeActive has developed the European Register of Exercise Professionals (EREPS) for the Fitness sector which can serve as an example of recognition of individual achievement (see Appendix 2). The EREPS concept, based on a sectoral process of self-regulation, is used extensively in Fitness education and training and follows the same process as the EPC – even informally referencing with the EQF –, which has become an industry-wide agreement on 'ways of working'.

Legal frameworks, tight jurisdictions, controls and even sanctions are often prohibitive and restricting to the concepts of mutual recognition and in the case of mobility of workers. It is an extraordinary

outcome that despite many potential obstacles, EREPS is now widely used, respected and understood. On the basic expectation that some structure or regulation is preferred to none at all, the principle of self-regulation or industry-based control can still be powerful and persuasive.

In many regards EREPS could be considered as an ‘informal’ professional or a sectoral solution to the individual recognition of fitness trainers in Europe. Because it is based on the development of occupational standards which have been established over time by many hundreds of experts, it is probably not a claim too far to say that EREPS does offer a practical and quality-driven system to support individual recognition of fitness trainers. Its work was significantly enhanced by the referencing of the occupational roles and essential skills in the ESCO work completed in 2015 (discussed in BLUEPRINT IO 2).

The question remaining is whether EuropeActive genuinely continues with the development of EREPS and its systems of training provider accreditation, development of occupational standards, etc., which will, over time, become the way that every fitness trainer is certified and recognised in the future. The concept of heightened quality-assurance through a certifying organisation in the development of an international qualification is further explored in the BLUEPRINT IO 4.

The option remains for the Active Leisure Sector to peruse other routes of promoting and supporting its workers recognition and mobility – such as through the formal process of Article 49 of Directive 2013/55 EU, but this could be misunderstood as the sector challenging the Member States rights and responsibilities of determining their own education and recognition systems. The Active Leisure Sector is committed to working with all stakeholders and will continue, at least for the fitness sector, with the further expansion of the EREPS scheme.

By providing a professional card system which explicitly provides recognition of a fitness trainers individual achievement they have no ability to affect the status which is given to them. EREPS can be consulted publicly, but it is centrally managed which means that individual fitness trainers cannot effectively apply or change their EREPS status given by the registration process.

The new Europass (see Appendix 3) could possibly contribute to narrow the gap for individual record-keeping.<sup>125</sup> Through Europass users are now able to create a personal profile on the online platform to describe their skills, and their learning and working experience. However, the new Europass, launched on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 (replacing of the original 2005 version), is a very open-ended tool with little control. for example, it is possible to add almost any certificate whether real or imagined to an individual Europass. The only content control mechanism seems to be self-control, but of course, this is not different from any other form of a self-developed cv. The only exception is the Europass Diploma Supplement which is validated by the issuing higher education institute.

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<sup>125</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/en/about-europass>



## Appendixes

Appendix 1 – Cedefop glossary of terms used in this paper

Appendix 2 – A Professional Card for Fitness Trainers – the experience of the European Register of Exercise Professionals (EREPS)

Appendix 3 – the Europass



## Appendix 1

### Cedefop glossary of terms used in this paper <sup>126</sup>

**Awarding body**

A body issuing qualifications (certificates, diplomas or titles) formally recognising the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) of an individual, following an assessment procedure (Source: Cedefop, 2008).

**Certificate/diploma/title**

An official document, issued by an awarding body, which records achievements of an individual following an assessment against a predefined standard (Source: Cedefop, 2008).

**Certification of learning outcomes**

The process of formally validating knowledge, know-how and/or competences acquired by an individual, following a standard assessment procedure. Certificates or diplomas are issued by accredited awarding bodies (Source: Cedefop, 2008).

**Competence**

Ability to apply learning outcomes adequately in a defined context (education, work, personal or professional development).

or

Ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development.

Comment: competence is not limited to cognitive elements (involving the use of theory, concepts or tacit knowledge); it also encompasses functional aspects (including technical skills) as well as interpersonal attributes (e.g., social or organisational skills) and ethical values (Source: Cedefop; European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2008).

**Europass**

Portfolio of five documents helping citizens to better communicate their skills and qualifications when applying for job or study in Europe. The Europass CV and the Language Passport are completed by citizens themselves; the other three documents can be issued to citizens who achieve a mobility experience in another European country (Europass Mobility) or who complete a formal programme of vocational education or training (Certificate supplement) or of higher education (Diploma supplement).

Comment: Europass promotes an adequate appreciation of learning outcomes acquired in formal, non-formal or informal settings (Source: Cedefop).

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<sup>126</sup> Adapted from: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory/european-inventory-glossary#C>

## **European qualifications framework for lifelong learning (EQF)**

Reference tool for describing and comparing qualification levels in qualifications systems developed at national, international or sectoral levels.

Comment: the EQF's main components are a set of eight reference levels described in terms of learning outcomes (a combination of knowledge, skills and/or competences) and mechanisms and principles for voluntary cooperation. The eight levels cover the entire span of qualifications from those recognising basic knowledge, skills and competences, to those awarded at the highest level of academic, professional and vocational education and training. EQF is a translation device for qualification systems (Source: based on European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2008).

### **Formal learning**

Learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment (such as in an education or training institution or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to certification (Source: Cedefop, 2008).

### **Informal learning**

Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective.

Comments:

- Informal learning outcomes may be validated and certified;
- Informal learning is also referred to as experiential or incidental/random learning (Source: Cedefop, 2008).

### **Learning**

Process by which an individual assimilates information, ideas and values and thus acquires knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences.

Comment: learning occurs through personal reflection, reconstruction and social interaction. It may take place in formal, non-formal or informal settings (Source: Cedefop, 2008).

### **Learning outcome / learning attainments**

Set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process, either formal, non-formal or informal  
or

Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence (Source: Cedefop, 2008).



### **Lifelong learning**

All learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills/competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons (Source: Cedefop, 2003).

### **Non-formal learning**

Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically does not lead to certification (Source: Cedefop, 2003).

### **Qualification**

An official record (certificate, diploma) of achievement which recognises successful completion of education or training, or satisfactory performance in a test or examination; and/or the requirements for an individual to enter, or progress within an occupation (Source: Cedefop, 2003).

### **Recognition (of competences)**

All learning activity undertaken through life, which results in improving knowledge, know-how, skills, competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons (Source: Cedefop, 2008).

### **Skill**

Ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to compete tasks and solve problems (Source: Cedefop; European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2008).

### **Vocational education and training (VET)**

Education and training which aims to equip people with knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences required in particular occupation or more broadly on the labour market (Source: adapted from European Training Foundation, 1997).



## Appendix 2

# A Professional Card for Fitness Trainers – the experience of the European Register of Exercise Professionals (EREPS)

## 1. EuropeActive background

European Health and Fitness Association (EHFA) was formed in 2002 as the not-for-profit representative organisation for the fitness industry. In 2008 EHFA opened a permanent office in Brussels, and in 2014 it changed its name to EuropeActive.

EuropeActive is governed by statutes enshrined in Belgian law. Each year there is a General Assembly of its members where the Board members are elected for a three-year period. There are approximately 160 different members of EuropeActive which include national associations, operators, suppliers, training providers and universities. EuropeActive acts as a platform organisation connecting mainly through 23 national associations across Europe who are members of EuropeActive which in turn represents more than 30,000 different fitness centres. The operation of EREPS is ultimately overseen by the EuropeActive Board who are, in turn, elected by and accountable as the representatives of its membership.

## 2. The European Register of Exercise Professionals

The European Register of Exercise Professionals (EREPS) started in 2007 and it is an independent register of instructors, trainers and teachers working in the European health, fitness and physical activity sector. Through its quality assurance process EREPS recognises that exercise professionals are qualified to do their job giving consumers, employers and partners in medical professions the necessary level of confidence in their professionalism and a structure for increased mobility of workers.

Registration means that an exercise professional has met prescribed minimum standards of good practice, including the adoption of a Code of Ethical Practice and that they are committed to raising standards through a process of continuing professional development or lifelong learning. Members of EREPS either come through accredited training providers that have gone through a robust quality assurance process or apply individually and are attributed based on their qualifications and professional experience.

23 National Association across Europe are EuropeActive members and they recognise EREPS. Not all of these countries have established National Registers although EREPS has signed Memorandums of Understanding and Trust (MoUT) with partner registers in Poland, UK, Greece, Ireland, Hungary, Lithuania, Finland, Italy, Belgium, Turkey, Russia, France, Netherlands, and India. These MoUTs are based on 5 key requirements that must be met by National Registers in order to protect standards



and support individual professionals: *To have the widest industry support from all stakeholders, including employers, training providers, other social partners, and suppliers.*

1. *To have the support of their national (or possibly regional) government.*
2. *To be an independent organisation/company and most likely a separate legal entity, with its own board of directors/trustees/governors who do not receive pecuniary benefit from its work beyond proportionate remuneration for the discharge of their duties.*
3. *It is a not-for-profit organisation, existing to support the professional recognition and raising of standards for exercise professionals and the fitness industry in its country.*
4. *To support EuropeActive and EREPS objectives and especially to further the development and improve the quality of education and training for the fitness industry and its workers.*

There are 5 stages to the process to be completed by a National Register for it to be part of the EREPS Programme and which ensures that it is quality-assured and working to mutual standards. The performance of a National Register is constantly monitored to ensure compliance with the EREPS Programme.

**Key points:**

- established for 13 years
- current membership: 11,133 (across 43 countries in Europe and Central Asia)
- independent register (not driven commercially)
- members adhere to a Code of Ethical practice
- EREPS provides one coherent body that can be referenced across multiple countries
- EREPS has members across 39 different countries in Europe and others around the world
- EREPS members are travelling around the world with its certificates and their professional needs are supported.

### 3. Standards development and the Professional Standards Committee

EREPS is regulated by the EuropeActive Professional Standards Committee (PSC) which is answerable to the EuropeActive Board. The PSC is an independent body with the mission to:

*“...develop educational standards and titles for the occupations of the European health and fitness industry, providing the credibility and recognition of this sector by ensuring high, comparable and standardised levels of education resulting in high customer satisfaction in order to support EuropeActive in getting More People, More Active, More Often.”*

The PSC has developed the EuropeActive educational standards or Sector Qualifications Framework (SQF) since 2002. These standards are informally referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The SQF describes the knowledge, skills and competencies exercise professionals need to achieve for registration. Standards development and the SQF has been done in consultation with key stakeholders (200+ industry experts) across the European fitness sector (national associations, academics, employers, training providers, practitioners, and others). This development work was supported by several EU funded actions.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> See BLUEPRINT Intellectual Output 9 for more information.

## Appendix 3

# The Europass

All citizens in Europe can create their own unique identity based on the Europass system which offers free online tools that support learners, workers and jobseekers across Europe.<sup>128</sup> It too does not have a legal or regulatory framework, but it is a highly recognised way of capturing and presenting personal achievements and experiences.

On 1 July 2020, the European Commission presented the new 'European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience', seeking to promote training and lifelong learning of Europeans and as well as setting objectives for upskilling (improving existing skills) and reskilling (training in new skills) for the next 5 years. Among its 12 actions, the new Europass platform was the first to be launched.<sup>129</sup>

## 1. What is the Europass?

Europass is a European Union (Directorate General for Education and Culture) initiative to increase transparency of qualification and mobility of citizens in Europe. The Europass framework was established by Decision 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences<sup>130</sup>, and entered into force on 1 January 2005 by its own terms. It consists in a set of online tools and information to help EU citizens describe and communicate their skills and qualifications in Europe. It aims to make a person's skills and qualifications clearly understood throughout Europe.

### 1.1. The new Europass

The Europass was recently refined, as part of the New Skills Agenda. The idea behind the new iteration is to simplify and update the Europass CV and other skills tools for the digital age. Users are now able to create a personal profile on the online platform to describe their skills, and their learning and working experience. Job seekers can store relevant documents in their personal online library and keep track of their learning and job applications. They can also share a link to their e-profile with employers, recruiters and employment services for support and advice on their careers.<sup>131</sup>

There are now 6 Europass tools available online for learners, workers and jobseekers across Europe:

- the **Europass profile**<sup>132</sup>, an overarching online platform for users to describe their skills, search for jobs and learning opportunities, manage applications, and upload their CVs and cover letters.

<sup>128</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/en/about-europass>

<sup>129</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/en>

<sup>130</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32004D2241>

<sup>131</sup> <https://www.euronews.com/2020/07/15/european-union-revamps-europass-to-get-people-working>

<sup>132</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/eportfolio/screen/profile-wizard>

- the **Europass CV editor**<sup>133</sup>, to create and promote a Curriculum Vitae.
- the **Europass cover letter editor**<sup>134</sup>, to create professional cover letters.
- the **diploma supplement**<sup>135</sup>, a document which provides information that makes it easier for employers and education institutions to understand an applicant's qualification (including course credits, grades, and learning outcomes) – see below.
- the **certificate supplement**<sup>136</sup>, which is the equivalent of the diploma supplement for vocational education, i.e. a document making it easier for employers and educational institutions to understand an applicant's vocational qualification – see below.
- the **Europass mobility**<sup>137</sup>, a document which describes in a simple and understandable manner the skills developed on a particular mobility experience.

## 1.2. A quick Europass review

According to Cedefop, 150 million Europasses have been filled out since its creation in 2005. While still relatively unknown to the wider public, **Europass documents are** now used in 34 European countries (EU countries as well as EFTA members).<sup>138</sup>

The Coronavirus pandemic recently led to a fall in Europass CVs generated: findings of Cedefop showed an average 36.5% fall in the number of online CVs generated in March 2020 compared to one year earlier, and a correlation between the number of CVs generated online and the seriousness of the coronavirus crisis in each country.<sup>139</sup>

However, the new Europass platform generated interest, with 95,514 visits and 13,600 profiles created on the launch day (351,975 visits for the first week). 26% users come from Italy, then from Spain (14%) and Greece (10%). English is the main language among the users, then French, Spanish and German; yet most of the profiles were created in Italian, then Portuguese, Romanian and Spanish. 40% are aged 24 or less, then users are aged between 25-35 (33%) and 35-45 (12%).<sup>140</sup>

## 2. The Diploma Supplement

The **Diploma Supplement** is produced by higher education institutions according to standards agreed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the UNESCO. It is part of the Europass framework transparency tools. It can be requested from the Higher Education institution where the applicant studied, and contains information confirming the type and level of qualification awarded,

<sup>133</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/eportfolio/screen/cv-editor>

<sup>134</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/eportfolio/screen/cover-letter-editor>

<sup>135</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/en/diploma-supplement>

<sup>136</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/en/europass-certificate-supplement>

<sup>137</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/en/europass-mobility-0>

<sup>138</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/europass>

<sup>139</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/statistics-and-indicators/statistics-and-graphs/impact-covid-19-use-europass>

<sup>140</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/en>

the institution that issued the qualification, the content of the course and results gained, and details of the national education system.

Graduates in all countries taking part in the Bologna Process have the right to receive the Diploma Supplement automatically, free of charge and in any major European language.

Designed as an aid to support the recognition of academic qualifications, it is an important tool of the European Higher Education Area for graduates to ensure that their degrees are recognised by higher education institutions, public authorities and employers in their home countries and abroad.<sup>141</sup> However, according to some polls, the Diploma Supplement is still relatively unknown among graduates.<sup>142</sup>

### 3. The Certificate Supplement

The Europass Certificate Supplement describes the purpose of the qualification, its level, its learning outcomes and information on the relevant education system. It can be searched by applicants in their country/vocational qualification's database or obtained by contacting their vocational institution.

### 4. Digital developments: the Europass Digital Credentials Infrastructure

July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 also saw the soft launch of the Europass Digital Credentials Infrastructure (EDCI). Digital credentials are electronically sealed digital records given to a person to certify the learning they have undertaken. They can be awarded for formal education, training, online courses, volunteering experiences and more.<sup>143</sup>

EDCI facilitates the issuing, viewing and automatic verification of credentials. Beyond contributing to the digitisation of government processes, it ambitions to ensure a common understanding of qualifications, competences, skills and types of certifications throughout the EU, to improve transparency and portability of qualifications and skills between countries, as well as reducing administrative burden for citizens, learning providers and employers.<sup>144</sup>

Through the EDCI, learners, employers, education and training providers and other bodies will be able to check that certificates and other qualifications are valid and authentic. They can also have easy access to background information on a certificate or qualification. The accreditation of the awarding body could also be verified (i.e. if an awarding body is licensed or authorised to issue a specific qualification), where applicable.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>141</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/diploma-supplement\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/diploma-supplement_en)

<sup>142</sup> <https://agence.erasmusplus.fr/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/GUIDE-Supplement-diplome-europass-2.pdf>

<sup>143</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/digital-credentials/issuer/#/home>

<sup>144</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/europass/digitally-signed-credentials>

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.



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# **Intellectual Output 12:**

## **Maintaining the Role of the Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure**



# Maintaining the Role of the Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure

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*Date of Publication: 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020*

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## 1. Introduction

In November 2016, EU-wide representatives of the Fitness and of the Outdoor Sectors identified as the main actors of the Active Leisure Sector, EuropeActive and the European Confederation of Outdoor Employers (EC-OE), strengthened their existing cooperation through the Active Leisure Alliance (ALA) by formally establishing a **Sector Skills Alliance (SSA)**.

The so-called Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure was created as an instrument in order to:

- gather relevant labour market intelligence and foresight to enable evidence-led decisions,
- understand employer needs to support growth,
- develop sustainable jobs and promote entrepreneurship,
- support the sector in addressing its most pressing challenges and achieving its medium and long-term goals,
- direct resources and coordinate the position of the Active Leisure Sector with its stakeholders, governments and institutions.

This report outlines the main characteristics of the Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure, including its aims and objectives and governance structure; then it presents its main achievements over its 3-year existence; finally, a conclusion explores ways to maintain the SSA beyond the BLUEPRINT project.

## 2. Characteristics of the Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure: a think tank of the Fitness and Outdoor Industry

The **Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure** was primarily designed to tackle the skills agenda for the Active Leisure Sector by aligning Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems with labour market needs. It offered the opportunity to increase sectoral cooperation in order to design and deliver joint curricula and methods targeting the sector specific professions and occupations while providing the identified vocational skills required by the labour market. The main goal was to establish a systemic approach to vocational training in the Active Leisure sector in order to boost the quality and relevance of VET provision and increase competitiveness and growth of the sector and beyond.



*Figure 1 - Overview of the Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure*

### **1.1. Aims and objectives of the Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure**

The objectives of the Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure are to support sectoral growth and employment for the future, and to identify sector-specific labour market needs, as well as demand for new occupation profiles and skills needed to perform in the Outdoor and Fitness sector, using scientific evidence.

The Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure has the following core, and overriding functions:

- To gather relevant labour market intelligence and foresight to enable evidence-led decisions,
- To understand employer needs to support growth,
- To develop sustainable jobs and promote entrepreneurship,
- To support the sector in addressing its most pressing challenges and achieving its medium and long-term goals,
- To direct resources and coordinate the position of the Active Leisure Sector with its stakeholders, governments and institutions.

The Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure promotes the development of vocational skills from the perspective of labour market needs (and especially as it is employer-led), and to ensure cooperation between education and employment.

The Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure addressed the challenges of vocational skills mismatches and shortages – and to give advice and direction to future skills needs for the Active Leisure Sector.

The Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure was successful in identifying priorities and timings for action and developed concrete solutions, such as directing the sector standards bodies (e.g. Professional Standards Committee) in creating and updating curricula and standards based on new research evidence and new occupational profiles.

As an Alliance it did not make rules or insist on any specific courses of action – all its outcomes were presented as being advisory. for the proposals were then put for the 2 sub-sectors of fitness and the outdoors to determine their own priorities and procedures based on the advice given by the Sector Skills Alliance.

## **1.2. Governance structure of the Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure**

The governance structure of Sector Skills Alliance was generally composed of where possible: national and European sector representatives; employer; employees; public and private education and training providers; public and private universities and research centres; national public sector representatives.

In order to be the most representative of the Outdoor and Fitness sectors, members of the Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure have included:

- employers (individual and/or organisations such an employer-based national association),
- employees (possibly trade unions),
- researchers and independent consultants,
- education and training institutions including from VET and higher education,
- suppliers,
- public authorities and other relevant Government and institutional agencies.

More precisely, the composition of each sub-sector of SSA (Fitness and the Outdoors) aimed for the following mix of representation:

- 6 employers
- 2 employees
- Research/independent consultants as required
- 2 VET providers
- 2 higher education providers
- 1 supplier
- Public and/or government representation as required
- Chairperson to be appointed
- Secretariat – EuropeActive for fitness and EC-OE for the outdoors

When acting as the ‘full’ SSA comprising the 2 sub-sectors, the composition of the was based upon:

- 6 employers
- 2 employees
- Research/independent consultants as required
- 2 VET providers
- 2 higher education providers
- 2 suppliers
- Public and/or government representation as required
- Chairperson – rotational between the 2 sub-sectors
- Secretariat – EuropeActive

### 3. Main achievements of the Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure

The first sub-group meetings (Cologne, 04/04/2019 and Brussels, 27/06/2019 for Fitness; online, 20/05/2019 and Brussels, 27/06/2019 for Outdoors) enabled them to develop sub-sectoral skills strategies to support the objectives of the expected growth for the sector.

This strategy was the first key “deliverable” identifying desirable, concrete actions and with an indicative but clear set of activities, timing and outputs, which included:

- Checking and reviewing the labour market intelligence and foresight work,
- Discussing the findings with the employer representatives to agree on the principle points needed to support growth,
- Agreeing on the main trends which are likely to affect jobs and skills needs,
- Developing a plan to suggest how to match demand and supply of skills,
- Describing the expected timeline of developing a strategy for the short and medium term.

Then, the first combined meeting of the SSA (Brussels, 27/06/2019) merged the two sub-sectors’ approaches into the first draft of the combined Active Leisure sector strategy, aiming to:

- Develop a common methodology for assessing the current situation and anticipating future needs as well as how to establish ongoing changes in trends, capacity, etc.
- Agreeing on the strategy for informing individuals, the main sector stakeholders, regional organisations, national governments and their agencies, VET providers, higher education, and the European Institutions on the key issues required for the delivery and development of skills for Active Leisure.
- Propose concrete examples of policies and initiatives aiming at addressing skills shortages and mismatches as well as fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships (e.g. between industry, social partners, education and training, public authorities) to encourage fostering support and funding for the delivery of the strategy.
- Identifying occupational profiles/roles that need to be revised or created and their corresponding skill needs as well as their required proficiency level. This may extend to sub-group working to create qualifications, etc.

The results, recommendations, and decisions of the full SSA meeting set the agenda for the second sub-sector meetings to ensure all positions have been properly considered and can be properly actioned.

Then the second sub-sector meetings reviewed how the strategic approach can be linked to the overall growth strategy of its sub-sectors, with a view to providing direction in addressing the most pressing challenges and achieving its medium and long-term goals.

The focus was put on the foresight work carried out in the frame of the BLUEPRINT project, which identified the most pressing current and future challenges faced by the Active Leisure sector. A foresight research is a systematic, future intelligence-gathering process, assisting present-day decision-making, in order to stimulate discussion and long-term thinking about the future. This research emphasised the massive skills shortages and mismatches faced by the sector and the key drivers for change and the direction of the industry, which all pointed out the crucial need to address soft skills.<sup>146</sup>

In 2020 the SSA deepened its research into employer skills needs analysing empirical results of foresight. In its work the SSA continuously took into account and to reflect upon the main policy developments and expectations in how they apply to the main EU instruments and current policies such as for ESCO, Europass, ECVET, EURES etc. At its meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2020 the members of the full SSA revisited the 2019 pledge to review its relevance in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each sub-sector also reported on their expectations for changes during the recovery period.

From the perspective of the fitness sector, particular reference were made to concerns if people would go back to the gyms and how trainers could attract new clients. There was a perception of professional roles shifting towards a concept of general well-being and with ever closer connections with health services. Specifically, some key areas of skills considerations covered and extra emphasis on:

- Communication and soft skills will become increasingly important – how to connect with people and build relations in online spaces. But these skills are lacking – how do fitness trainers deliver that?
- Better understanding of the working of the immune system,
- Developing exercises and programming with minimal equipment and based in alternative environments (i.e., not bricks-and mortar fitness clubs),
- Online exercise provision – changing exercise prescription delivery of services through online platforms.

Other key areas to consider covered limitations and safety considerations related to the online provision of fitness services, and the future role of online marketing and customer communication.

For the outdoor sector the SSA members emphasized the varied aspects of the new work reality and for the adapting of skills needed during the recovery period. These included:

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<sup>146</sup> See BLUEPRINT Intellectual Output 3 for an extensive description of the skills foresight methodology and findings.



- Individualisation of supervision and the need for continued social distancing with this presenting huge limitations,
- Improved service delivery preparation and guidance to customers,
- Adaptation of current practices around safety issues to include new group management techniques,
- Better understand the psychology of trainers – and people joining to understand that they are still exposed to covid19 even outside and need to be careful,
- Further and better ‘soft skills’ will be required in order to deliver better services, to connect with clients and to make them feel safe,
- There will also be a need for some new technical skills, with learning to use new tools and the consequences of modifications.

The members of the SSA then revisited the content of the pledge and agreed that it was still valid, but with the addition of a further point:

- Supporting, representing and inspiring the Sector to promote its political and societal importance

The updated pledge (or commitment) from the Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure agreed on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2020 is in Appendix 2.



## 4. Conclusion: Maintaining the role of the Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure beyond the BLUEPRINT project

In 4 years, the Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure has demonstrated its pivotal importance as an appropriate instrument to develop and promote standards, and to help the sector rely on a skilled workforce in the future.

As a result, the Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure Pledge <sup>147</sup> signed in 2018 was reiterated in November 2020 by all its members, showing the shared commitment to engage further in the work undertaken by the Alliance in the future.

For the fitness sector, the advisory role of the SSA will be crucial in the future. Regarding mobility for fitness professionals, it will keep promoting relevant sectorial qualifications, facilitating cross-border certification and therefore easing professional mobility in the sector.

The SSA will be permanently established as an Advisory Group to the EuropeActive Professional Standards Committee. <sup>148</sup>

For the outdoor sector the emphasis in the shorter term will be on recovery from the COVID-19 decimation of business activities with a focus on the second half of 2021 and beyond.

Overall, the shared wish of the Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure members is to continue to support economic development through exchanges of knowledge and practice between professionals, training providers and the labour market, with particular reference to the industry. The role of the SSA will be key in tackling new national and EU policy agenda priorities, such as life skills; digital skills; 'green skills' and sustainable development; transnational partnerships for the development and delivery of joint VET curricula and qualifications.

It will keep on acting as a platform to provide evidence for political (future) decision making.

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<sup>147</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>148</sup> <https://www.ereps.eu/tags/professional-standards-committee>





## Appendix 1

## EuropeActive and EC-OE joint statement on cooperation

### The Active Leisure Alliance Development of a Sector Skills Alliance




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#### EuropeActive and EC-OE joint statement on cooperation

#### The Active Leisure Alliance Development of a Sector Skills Alliance

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As the EU-wide representatives of the Fitness and of the Outdoor Sectors identified as the main actors of the Active Leisure Sector according to the Eurofound Study on Representativeness<sup>1</sup> and as defined within the NACE Rev.2 classifications 93.13 (Fitness facilities) and 93.29 (other amusement and recreation activities) which represents some 80.000 private companies, employing approximately 500.000 of the 800.000 employees of the whole "Sports and Active Leisure" Sector (Vocasport, 2004)<sup>2</sup>, EuropeActive and the European Confederation of Outdoor Employers (EC-OE) hereby confirm to extend their existing cooperation through the **Active Leisure Alliance (ALA)** which was agreed and signed in November 2012.

In recognition of the publication of the New Skills Agenda<sup>3</sup>, including the review of the European Qualification Framework (EQF), and the work of the Erasmus+ project Key Action 3: The relevance of the Active Leisure Sector and International Qualification Framework to the EQF<sup>4</sup> the principle objectives of the new cooperation between EuropeActive and EC-OE as the two originating and representative employer organisations is:

To establish a **Sector Skills Alliance (SSA)** which is designed to tackle the skills agenda for the Active Leisure Sector by aligning Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems with labour market needs. This will be done by:

- modernising VET by adapting to skills needs and integrating work-based learning,
- strengthening the exchange of knowledge and best practices,
- improving labour market mobility,
- increasing the recognition of qualifications.

The SSA for Active Leisure offers the opportunity to increase Sectoral cooperation in order to design and deliver joint curricula and methods targeting the Sector specific professions and occupations while providing the identified vocational skills required by the labour market. The main goal is a systemic impact on vocational training in the Active Leisure Sector in order to boost the quality and relevance of VET provision and increase competitiveness and growth of the Sector and beyond.

The SSA will develop vocational skills from the perspective of labour market needs (and especially as it will be employer-led), and to ensure cooperation between education and employment. The SSA will address the challenges of vocational skills mismatches and shortages - and to project future skills needs for the Active Leisure Sector.

<sup>1</sup> Representativeness study on Sport and Active Leisure industry; European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2012

<sup>2</sup> Vocasport (2004), project pages 17 & 74, supported by the European Commission (DG Education and Culture, Contract n° 2003-4463/001-001)

<sup>3</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, The Council and the Committee of the Regions – a New Skills Agenda for Europe - SWD(2016) 195

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.europeActive.eu/projects/siqaf-project>

Signed in Athens on Thursday November 17<sup>th</sup> 2016.

**Julian Berriman**  
Director of Professional Standards Committee  
EuropeActive

**Herman Smulders**  
President  
European Confederation of Outdoor Employers





## Appendix 2

## Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure Pledge (Updated November 2020)



### Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure Pledge

The Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure is committed to developing the skills and employment opportunities to meet the needs and expectations of the market.

The Alliance will do this by:

- Collecting relevant labour market information on a regular basis
- Identifying sector-specific labour market and skills needs
- Tracking trends to support new occupation roles
- Developing occupational standards and systems to develop the skills needed by its workers
- Creating forums for stakeholders and especially employers to debate and discuss skills and employment issues
- Supporting, representing and inspiring the Sector to promote its political and societal importance

The Alliance commits to inform its sector employers, employees, and training providers to help strengthen the exchange of knowledge and practice between education and training institutions and the labour market.

***The members of the Sector Skills Alliance***

**November 2020**



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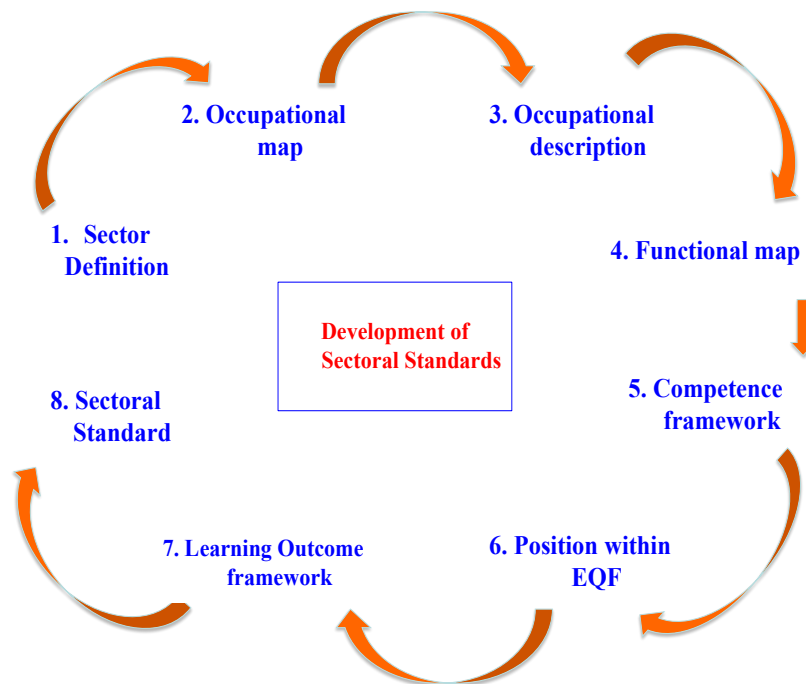


## Epilogue

With the completion of this BLUEPRINT project, the Active Leisure sector has reached a milestone. Blueprint can really be considered the cornerstone in the long search for customized training and related employment.

Since about 2003, both the Fitness and the Outdoors have covered an incredible course. Initially these sectors worked separately, but gradually the awareness grew that they faced several common challenges, not least in terms of representativeness on the one hand, and the need for appropriate vocational training and qualifications on the other. The latter resulted in the creation of the Active Leisure Alliance (ALA) in 2012.

In the early years (2003 - 2012) the focus of both the Fitness and the Outdoors was on developing their own standards. Broadly speaking, the experts from across the sector followed more or less the process summarised in Figure 1.



*Figure 1. Development of sectoral standards*

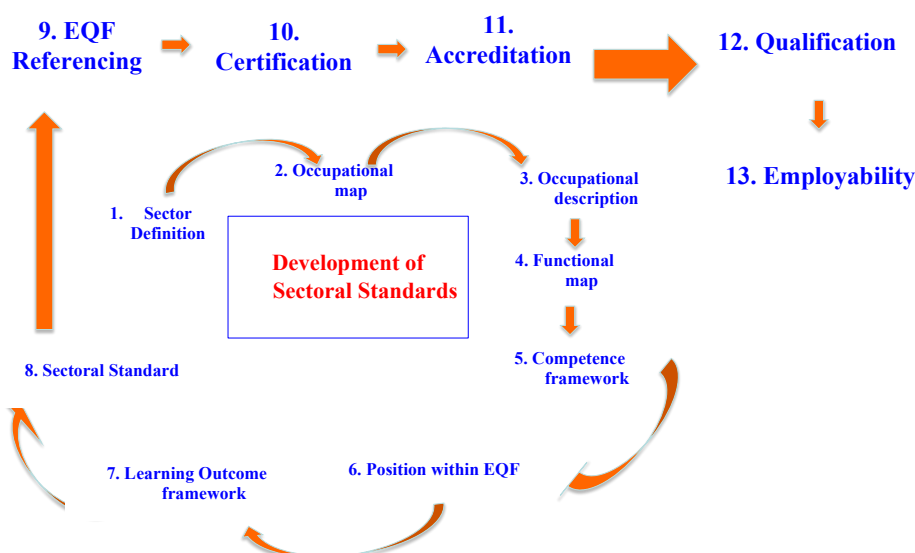
Many concepts studied and developed in this first phase towards the development of Active Leisure qualifications are based on the work of the European Union's decentralised agency Cedefop which supports the development of European vocational education and training (VET) policies and contributes to their implementation. Cedefop is the agency which helps the European Commission, EU Member States and the social partners to develop appropriate European policies in vocational education and training.



The most important elements from Cedefop's policy development that have been used by the Active Leisure partners have been:

- Lifelong Learning Programme
- the European Qualification Framework (EQF) based on skills, knowledge and autonomy
- the use and formulation of learning outcomes.

With the EU-funded SIQAF project (2016-2018) and its follow-up project Blueprint (2018-2020), the Active Leisure Alliance strived for European and national recognition of its qualifications.



*Figure 2. Pathway towards the recognition and use of Active Leisure qualifications*

Whereas SIQAF mainly focused on the integration of international and sectoral qualifications into the EQF, BLUEPRINT focused on aligning certification and accreditation procedures to Cedefop concepts and guidelines. However, in order to realise all steps as mentioned in Figure 2, energy also had to be put into scrutinising underlying matters such as:

- the use of educational credit systems (ECVET & ECTS)
- skills foresight for Active Leisure
- validating previously acquired competences
- use of a professional card/recognition of personal achievement
- developing the role of a Sector Skills Alliance for Active Leisure.

It is clear that over the years the EU – particularly through Cedefop – developed an impressive repertory of important tools regarding vocational qualifications. From a sectoral perspective it makes little sense on the one hand to strive for EU recognition of qualifications if, on the other hand, there does not seem to be the possibility to translate these qualifications into work and/or employment solutions. Therefore, and in parallel with all efforts devoted to the creation of its specific sectoral qualifications, over the years the Active Leisure Alliance also needed to keep an eye on the relevant EU legislation and policy direction.

Regarding the recognition of qualifications and the linked promotion of mobility of both employers and employees, the EU has launched many legislative initiatives.

From the Active Leisure perspective, the following initiatives can be highlighted:

- Dir. 2005/36/EC on the recognition of qualifications
- Dir. 2013/33/EU amending Dir. 2005/36/EC
- Delegated Regulation 2019/907 on a Common Training Test for ski instructors
- Dir. 2018/958 on a proportionality test before adoption of a new regulation of professions.

Not only did the EU develop all the above-mentioned tools and legislation, it also supported (apart from directly the Active Leisure sector), many other economic sectors in researching and developing sector specific qualifications. According to the 2016 ICF study, some 254 organisations were already involved in similar endeavours.

This huge interest in applying EU tools and standards by so many different economic sectors not only stresses the perceived validity of these tools, but certainly also underlines the willingness of these sectors to apply and adhere to the overarching EQF system and the related instruments.

Unfortunately, the huge financial investment by both the EU and the many economic sectors has recently been jeopardized by the Member States decision to fix rigidly to the principle of 'subsidiarity' and as such excluding the broader concept for the mutual recognition of qualifications.

The answer to the question posed during the final Blueprint conference ...

*“Are we on our own?”*

... remains ambiguous.

With the completion of this BLUEPRINT project, the Active Leisure sector is equipped and ready for its continued growth and diversification into the future. Qualifications are operational, the tools are mastered, and the relevant structures to promote these qualifications are in place.

For the moment the prevailing feeling is that the sector is 'on its own', but it is only fair to state that without the support of the Commission Active Leisure would never have reached this advanced point. Critically, the 'point of no return' has been passed.

New sectoral qualifications focussing on '*healthy lifestyles for all*' are already in the pipeline, and with the explosion of digital technologies, the possibilities and prospects for people to work in, and for millions to engage with its products and services, guarantees a very bright future for Active Leisure

On behalf of the EuropeActive and the European Confederation of Outdoor Employers

Cliff Collins and Herman Smulders  
Brussels, December 2020



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