

# Recognition of Individual Achievement through a Professional Card System (in Active Leisure)

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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>1</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>2</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.

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<sup>1</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>2</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32005L0036>

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 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>3</sup>

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<sup>3</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>4</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>5</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>6</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>4</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/internal\\_market/imi-net/index\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/imi-net/index_en.htm)

<sup>5</sup> See BLUEPRINT Intellectual Output 2 (p. 18) for more information.

<sup>6</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>7</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>7</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.

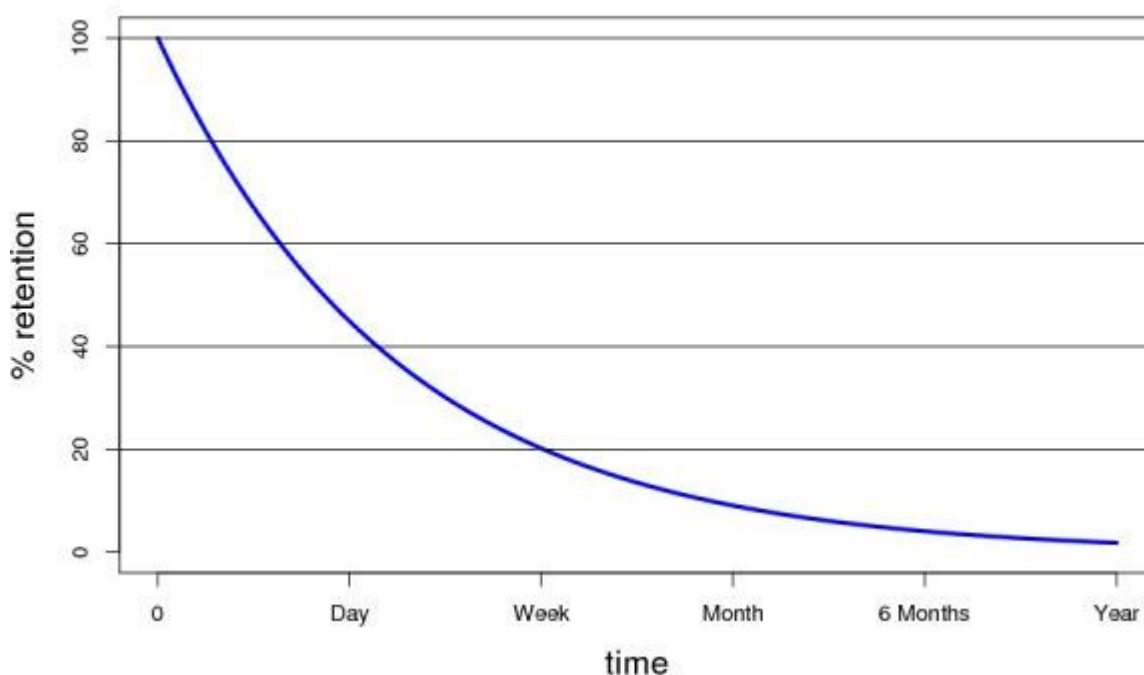
In fact, researchers have studied how much learners forget and come to some interesting conclusions. While it is influenced by factors including the type of material and one's unique memory, the 'Curve of Forgetting' (see below) suggests that 50 to 80 percent of what was learned the day before is lost 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>8</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, 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.

<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forgetting\\_curve](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forgetting_curve)

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>9</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>o</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.

## Appendixes

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<sup>9</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/en/about-europass>



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>10</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>10</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>11</sup>

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<sup>11</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>12</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>13</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>14</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>15</sup>

There are now 6 Europass tools available online for learners, workers and jobseekers across Europe:

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<sup>12</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/en/about-europass>

<sup>13</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/en>

<sup>14</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32004D2241>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.euronews.com/2020/07/15/european-union-revamps-europass-to-get-people-working>

- the **Europass profile**<sup>16</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.
- the **Europass CV editor**<sup>17</sup>, to create and promote a Curriculum Vitae.
- the **Europass cover letter editor**<sup>18</sup>, to create professional cover letters.
- the **diploma supplement**<sup>19</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>20</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>21</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>22</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>23</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>24</sup>

## 2. The Diploma Supplement

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<sup>16</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/eportfolio/screen/profile-wizard>

<sup>17</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/eportfolio/screen/cv-editor>

<sup>18</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/eportfolio/screen/cover-letter-editor>

<sup>19</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/en/diploma-supplement>

<sup>20</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/en/europass-certificate-supplement>

<sup>21</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/en/europass-mobility-0>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/europass>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/statistics-and-indicators/statistics-and-graphs/impact-covid-19-use-europass>

<sup>24</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/en>

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, 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>25</sup> However, according to some polls, the Diploma Supplement is still relatively unknown among graduates.<sup>26</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>27</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>28</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

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<sup>25</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/diploma-supplement\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/diploma-supplement_en)

<sup>26</sup> <https://agence.erasmusplus.fr/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/GUIDE-Supplement-diplome-europass-2.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> <https://europa.eu/europass/digital-credentials/issuer/#/home>

<sup>28</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/europass/digitally-signed-credentials>



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>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

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