

[DOI: 10.20472/IAC.2015.015.100](https://doi.org/10.20472/IAC.2015.015.100)

DIMITRA TH. KONSTANTINIDOU

UNIVERSITY OF MACEDONIA, GREECE

ANASTASIA A. PAMPOURI

UNIVERSITY OF MACEDONIA, GREECE

EUROPEAN POLICIES ON LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE USE OF EQF, EUROPASS AND COUNSELING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN GREECE

Abstract:

European Union, recognizing the value of lifelong learning and its importance for the development of “the economy of knowledge”, adopted a series of texts through which six tools and principals were proposed to promote transparency of qualifications and mobility of European citizens for education, training and work. Three of these are being investigated in this paper, in relation to Higher Education: the European Qualifications Framework, Europass with five individual documents and lifelong Counseling and Career Guidance. The paper also examines EU's policy for the creation of the European Higher Education Area, aiming at the development of partnerships, the quality of education, and the encouragement of European citizens’ mobility and transparency of qualifications. The results of our survey showed that the National Qualifications Framework has not been fully legislated yet and it is at the final stages of preparation for implementation in Greece. As far as Europass is concerned, its use is proposed by some Career Offices. Although its main use for work or studies and training is widely accepted abroad, in Greece Europass is not so much recognizable. In Counseling, the most popular services of Career Offices are the provision of advice to undergraduate and graduate students and to masters’ graduates. A problem that has been recorded is that Career Offices have resource problems, mainly lack in finance and personnel. Although Career Offices offer quite significant services for students’ and graduates’ smooth transition from Higher Education to the labor market, their work is not adequately recorded.

Keywords:

European Qualifications Framework, Europass, Counseling, Career guidance, Higher Education Institutions, European policies, Lifelong learning, Bologna process

Introduction

European Union early realized that education and vocational training would be the prominent reason for keeping Europe at the first line as “the economy of knowledge”. European policies on lifelong learning were voted as early as 1970, showing a growing interest in education and vocational training. Human capital theories recognized and emphasized the importance of education and vocational training for developing skills and growing competences.

Higher education has also been appointed as a means of overcoming the economic crisis that occurred in late '00s. Innovation, knowledge and research that are highly connected to Higher Education Institutions are the hope for transcending the economical crisis and entering a new era.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the policies suggested by European Union on lifelong learning and higher education, as well as the implementation of tools and principles referring to lifelong learning. In addition, the aim of the research was to investigate the implementation of these policies, tools and principles in Greek Higher Education Institutions.

European policies on lifelong learning

Policies encouraging lifelong learning, even if having not been expressed very clearly, started as early as 1957, when the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community was signed in Rome. Treaty of Rome anticipated for vocational re-training of people changing work places due to financial reorganization and industrial production (Sipitanou, 2014).

Later on, in 1992, the Treaty of European Union (European Council, 1992), known as the Maastricht treaty, raised the issue of education for European members, suggesting, among others, mobility of students and teachers within European countries, recognition of diplomas and other educational titles, cooperation among educational institutions and sharing of information and best practices among educational organizations. Teaching of European languages was strongly suggested along with cooperation among enterprises, universities and research centers as a condition for technological enlargement and competitiveness of economy. Maastricht treaty and other policy documents that followed inserted the issue of quality in education, strongly occurring in many ways until today.

Europe of Knowledge has been recognized since then as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship.

Lisbon treaty (European Union, 2007) realized the importance of education and training as a main pillar for growth and suggested measures to help bonding among European member countries and their people by means of exchange of students, workers and trainers. During years followed Lisbon treaty, European policies turned towards mobility and cooperation among European citizens, establishing common European consciousness. *“Providing high-quality education and investing more and more effectively in human capital and creativity throughout people’s lives are crucial conditions for Europe’s success in a globalised world”* (European Commission, 2008 pg. 4) was stated by European Commission as an answer to globalization, low level of

adults' qualifications, youth unemployment and demographic change. Lifelong learning came then as an answer to all these problems.

During this period, between 2004 and 2008, E.C. suggested some tools and principles to promote quality of education, cooperation, mobility and qualifications' transparency. The suggested tools were:

- European Qualifications Framework (EQF)
- European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)
- Europass
- European Quality Assurance framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)
- Principles and guidelines for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning
- Principles on lifelong guidance and counseling

The European Center for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) was involved in the suggestion and application of these tools. A Conference¹, observing the extent of implementation of the tools, took place in Thessaloniki and the conclusion was that the tools can really support and promote transparency of qualifications, mobility and quality assurance when they are implemented in cooperation between them.

Strategy for Europe 2020 (European Commission, 2010), aiming at a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, stated clearly the goals and suggested interventions for actions in national and European level. These goals regarding education were reduction of early school leavers to less than 10% and rise of higher education diplomas awarded at age group of 30-34 to 40% by year 2020. These goals can be achieved and support cooperation between competent bodies, mobility, lifelong learning, open access to higher education and social cohesion.

All European policies texts mentioned above and many more declared clearly the importance of common European thesis in economy, administration and culture. European identity maintaining the particularities every member state has will be a strong factor for growth and differentiation of our global village.

European policies in Higher Education

Sorbonne declaration of 25th May 1998 stressed the Universities' central role in developing European cultural dimensions and emphasized the creation of the European Area of Higher Education as a key way to promote citizens' mobility and employability as well as continent's overall development. This could be done by promoting cooperation of institutions, remove barriers and develop a framework of teaching and learning which could enhance mobility.

Bologna declaration in 1999 (European Commission, 1999) was a milestone in Higher Education, a big step on changing higher education as it was known until then. Basic principles of autonomy and independence in higher education institutions as well as freedom in research and teaching, with institutions open to dialogue, would be the ideal places for students, teachers and every person that wished to learn. Higher education institutions would be the trustee of European humanitarian tradition and the

¹"Stepping up the pace: the next stage of European Tools for transparency, recognition and quality for learning and work", Thessaloniki 27 & 28 November 2014.

catalyst for different cultures and civilizations. Bologna declaration was the first step for the creation of European Higher Education Area (EHEA), creating common ground among institutions all over Europe and reforming the framework of Higher education in Europe. Today 47 countries, including many non-EU member states, took part in Bologna process and accepted the main points. These points are promotion of mobility, employability and growth of Europe. EHEA should also be a model universally and attract students from all over the world. "Internationalization" of higher education became a key issue in debates and policies in Europe in the 1990s (Teichler, 2010). Through study programs' reform main issues of Bologna declaration are to be answered. These are adoption of common recognized titles and common way of description of educational results, quality and mobility for students and teachers. All these are key points for "internationalization" of higher education.

To promote comparison of academic results and mobility the following measures were suggested:

- Easily recognizable and comparable titles with the use of Diploma Supplement, which is the template to describe the content of studies in order to empower transparency
- Two cycles of studies: Bachelors' with three years of studies and Masters', including Doctorate studies
- European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), that counts and presents the time spent over each study unit
- Promotion of mobility for students, teachers, researchers empowering free movement for studies, work and research
- Cooperation among institutions concerning quality assurance
- Promotion of European dimension in higher education by more lessons and units with content regarding European Union

Transformation of Higher Education in Europe should be done with respect to local educational systems, languages and differences of people, aiming at a stable and worldwide recognizable EHEA (Zmas, 2014).

Bologna declaration is very important and was followed by meetings which took place every two years since 1999, when declaration was signed, until 2010, when EHEA was being implemented. During these meetings some changes over the first decisions were agreed such as the following (Eurydice, 2012): Studies are now offered in three cycles, Bachelor, Masters and Doctorate. All stakeholders of higher institutions should participate in decisions i.e. students, teachers, and administration personnel. Diploma Supplement and ECTS are used to assess the work load; mobility for students and teachers is steadily promoted, quality assurance is applied to all higher institutions participating in Bologna process.

Tools and principles on lifelong learning

While trying to provide a systematic way to validate and document knowledge, skills and competence, EU suggested the use of six tools and principles, which were developed at different speeds over the period 2004 – 2009: European Qualifications Framework (EQF), European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), Europass, European Quality Assurance framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), Principles and guidelines for identifying and validating non-

formal and informal learning, Principles on lifelong guidance and counseling (CEDEFOP, 2011).

Present research deals with European Qualifications Framework, Europass and Counseling and their implementation in Higher Education Institutions in Greece.

European Qualifications Framework (EQF) as it is presented in National Organization for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEPs) "Greece referencing report" which was published in 2014, is a common reference, a mechanism for recognizing qualifications across Europe easier. It constitutes of eight levels which cover the entire range of qualifications from compulsory to higher education. Each level is defined by descriptions of the knowledge, skills and competences which determine the learning outcomes for this particular level. *Learning outcomes* is one of the key words in EQF and the reason of reformation on education systems all over Europe. Learning outcomes refer to what a person knows, understands and is able to do upon completion of a learning process, regardless the time spent or legal framework i.e. formal, non-formal or informal learning of the process.

There are benefits by the use of EQF and the rest of the suggested tools and principals for all citizens, as they can present systematically the content of their qualifications. Also, trainees and employees have a comparability tool for their qualifications when they wish to change educational path, job or country. Employers have a "quick reading" on potential employees' knowledge, skills and abilities which are reflected in qualifications. Thus, lifelong learning becomes attractive to people, as they know that through EQF they can evaluate, validate, recognize and certify qualifications gained through participation in lifelong learning programs.

Europass is a portfolio of five documents and, as EQF, targets to make people's skills and qualifications more visible, encouraging also mobility for work or study. Today is available in 26 languages. The five documents are (CEDEFOP, 2012):

1. Europass Curriculum Vitae
2. Europass Language Passport
3. Europass Mobility
4. Europass Certificate Supplement
5. Europass Diploma Supplement

Europass CV is a type of curriculum vitae with units of education and training, work experience, personal skills like communication, organizational and managerial, computer skills, in general all those that are recognized as soft skills by EC.

Europass Language Passport presents a person's level of language knowledge, on mother language and others. User can identify the knowledge of other languages in speaking, writing and listening in three levels. Both Europass CV and language passport can be filled in by the person involved through the <https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu> platform in all European languages.

Europass Mobility records details of the contents and the results in terms of skills and competences or academic achievements of a period that a person of whatever age, educational level and occupational status has spent in another European country.

Europass Certificate Supplement is an accompanying document to the degree from non university education institutions (those of EFQ level 5), institutions of vocational training, giving more information on the content of vocational qualifications, like duration of studies, subjects taught, professional qualifications and professional rights.

Europass Diploma Supplement is accompanying the diploma awarded from universities and gives more information on University studies including the subjects studied and the grades achieved.

Counseling is the third part of our research in higher education. Lifelong guidance and counseling aims to promote equality of access to lifelong learning, to learning outcomes and to participation in the labor market. All citizens can and should receive guidance in matters of education, training and business participation. Especially, citizens in danger of exclusion, such as single parents, Roma people and early school leavers, should benefit from counseling. Counseling and guidance are of close meaning to us. A counselor should communicate with the interested person, look for possible work or educational roots, and suggest solutions in problems of unemployment, low skills level or need for education. A person receiving counseling should decide on their own what root to follow, after a thorough discussion and work with the counselor. In Higher Education Institutions counseling is provided through Career Offices.

In particular, according to Harvey and Bowers-Brown (2003), the upgrading and improvement of central services usually offered via the agency of Career Offices to undergraduates and graduates in their search for work, along with work-experience opportunities are some of the policies implemented by Higher Education Institutions in order to better prepare students for their integration to the labor market. Internship programs as integrated or non-integrated in the programs of study also constitute a means for bridging the gap between higher education and the labor market, developing graduates' employability skills and make their transition from education to work easier (Pampouri, 2011).

Higher Education and Career Offices in Greece

In Greece in November 2014, when the research was conducted, 22 Higher Education Institutions (Universities) and 14 Higher Technological Institutions were active. All these Institutions serve a total of nearly 300.000 students in 124 Schools which cover nearly every scientific and vocational subject². Among these 36 Institutions, 25 Career Offices were being operated³.

Career Offices offer their services to students in two main ways, by giving information on scholarships, learning and work opportunities and by counseling on educational roots and employment possibilities. They usually serve students, undergraduate and master or doctorate students, but also high school students by giving them information on possible study subjects.

Research on EQF, Counseling and Europass in Higher Education in Greece

EQF and the National Qualifications Framework, which will "translate" EQF to National data and degrees, should be approved by European Committee. Until the time our

² www.statistics.gr, Greece in numbers 2014.

³ However hard we tried to communicate with the rest C.O. it was impossible, since they suspended their operation due to financial issues.

research took place in November 2014, EQF and NQF were not yet implemented in Greece. Implementation means that there is an obligation for Universities and other Institutions to write down on the degree or diploma the EQF and NQF level. NQF in Greece was first approved in April 2014 but there are still some significant changes to be implemented. So the only authorized body to give information on EQF implementation was National Organization for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP). The answer to our communication was that EQF and NQF are not in full implementation and we still have some negotiations with competent Bodies.

Regarding Counseling and Europass, a questionnaire of 20 questions divided in three sections (demographic information, counseling and europass) was sent through www.surveymonkey.com to all operating Career Offices. At the time of research, 25 Career Offices were active. Then 22 fully answered questionnaires were returned to us.

Results of survey

The Career Offices that participated in the research were established and operated for the first time since 1977 until 2009, depending on the Institution and the time of Institution's first academic year. The personnel range from 1 to 16 employees, in various working relations (civil servants, employees, in contract, volunteers, and internship students). Institutions, and consequently C.O., serve between up to 1000 students to more than 20.000 in seven bigger Institutions such as the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and others.

Regarding Counseling, one of the questions referred to the diffusion of information as far as C.O.'s activities are concerned. The answers given were interesting and, to a point, expected. All C.O.s use their internet site to promote their upcoming events. 90.9% use e-mail to communicate their actions to university community. A significant 77.3% prints and sticks posters, 68.2% uses announcement boards, 66.7% prints brochures and other leaflets giving information and only a 59.1% uses social networks to promote their work, although social networks are very popular amongst students.

Another question investigated the services offered. So Counseling either personally or in small groups was highest of all, as well as information on postgraduate studies abroad. Next, with a high score answer, was Information on postgraduate/Master studies in Greece and Career days, an event in which employers contact students or graduates and have a simulation of interview. Such virtual interviews give students the chance to have an important experience on job related interview and employers the chance to find highly qualified personnel which can be hired after graduation. Some other C.O. activities were the provision of information on professional rights, mentoring on a network, telecounseling and in rather frustrating 14% information on research project, diminishing the role of research, which is high in order in European policies.

Career Offices mainly cooperate with employers, Research Institutions and other Higher Education Institutions, Trade Unions, Foreign bodies and N.G.O. Associations.

Our research pointed out a difficulty in the way the C.O.s record the services they offer to target groups and how much they succeed in transitioning graduates to the labor market. Half of them conduct absorption studies but not in a regular basis and not for all graduates. Nearly a quarter of them contacts employers and graduates in a feedback process to see if there was an employment. Only one C.O. implements an

integrated information system, another one keeps monthly statements of performance and another one, on voluntary basis, gives graduates to fill in a form on targets' fulfillment. All these ways are highly ineffective in monitoring the work done by the C.O.s and cannot prove their usefulness. As education and quality are nowadays connected with each other, there should be a better way of monitoring the services offered by C.O.s and in that way show the importance of their role.

The final question referring to Counseling was connected to any problems C.O.s face on implementing counseling. Two were the main problems, as C.O.s' employees recognized them: Lack of resources and particularly of human resources and the withdrawal of services during the periods between operational programmes. Both problems could be solved if C.O.s had been integrated in Institutions' organization chart and had steady financial recourses. In that way, C.O.s' services would be offered on a continuous basis with no withdrawal and the resources could be better organized. In that way a continuous presence of well trained and experienced personnel would be a benefit for C.O.s' operation.

Regarding Europass, C.O.s recognizes most of the five templates. They mainly suggest Europass CV for studies and employment abroad, as in Greece employers don't seem to accept it. Counselors in C.O.s characterize Europass CV as impersonal and they realize that it mainly presents experience, which graduates and students usually lack. Also, there is no section on research interests, which could be very helpful in the case of academic or research career. Regarding utility of templates, opinions differ, from extremely positive to extremely negative.

Discussion

Bologna process leads to cooperation among Higher Education Institutions aiming and promoting the following issues:

- Quality of studies and all services offered to students
- Transparency of study titles and institutions' operation
- Mobility of students and trainers

All these reinforce the effort of European Council to make European Higher Education Institutions attractive to international students.

Qualifications Framework has not been implemented in Greece yet. When negotiations with stakeholders conclude and NQF is fully implemented, there will be transparency and acknowledgement of qualifications acquired through formal education which will be classified in the appropriate level. At the same time, people will be able to certify knowledge, skills and abilities gained in work mainly through on the job training, mentoring and vocational training or even through non-formal and informal learning.

As far as implementation of suggested tools and principals in Higher Education Institutions in Greece are concerned, we see that NQF has significantly been delayed. Europass and its templates are known but not to the extent they could be and have not broadly been used. Language passport has become known and been accepted. Greek tend to learn more than one foreign languages and they wish to prove it through foreign language accreditation (CEDEFOP, 2014). Mobility increases steadily over the past decades in Higher Education mostly through Erasmus mobility program. Counseling follows pan-European principles and stakeholders providing counseling,

like Career Offices in Higher Education Institutions, develop a variety of activities. However, entrepreneurship does not exist to the extent that it is requested by the European Union. Only 59% of Career Offices offer seminars on that issue and the results cannot be measured and be evaluated (Konstantinidou, 2015).

The main problems being realized by Carrier Offices' employees at Greek Higher Education Institutions were two. Firstly, C.O.s' resource problem, lack in finance and personnel. This may be solved when Carrier Offices get integrated into Institutions' organization chart and eliminate the non operating periods. This will give the opportunity to have trained and experienced personnel, which will greatly facilitate their operation.

The second problem that our research showed is that C.O.s do not record adequately their effectiveness. Since monitoring of offered services is necessary for quality assurance, there should be a more effective monitoring system. Cooperation between Carrier Offices and the exchange of already used methods, such as integrated information system, regular contact with employers or graduates etc, would lead to a common protocol regarding monitoring, which would help the C.Os to designate the services they offer (Konstantinidou, 2015).

References

- BOLOGNA FOLLOW UP GROUP (2009) *The Bologna Process 2020 – The European Higher Education Area in the new decade*. Available from: www.highereducation.ac.cy/pdf/Bologna_Policy_Forum_Statement_29April2009.pdf [Accessed: 24 January 2014].
- CEDEFOP (2011) *Shaping lifelong learning: making the most of European tools and principles*, Briefing note. December 2011. Available from: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/9065> [Accessed:25th July 2013]
- CEDEFOP (2012) *Europass 2005-2020: Achievements and prospects*. Briefing note, May 2012. Available from: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/9069> . [Accessed:14th July 2014]
- CEDEFOP (2014) *Europass website activity report 2014 (Greece, in Greek)*, August 2014.
- EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES – COUNCIL (1992) *Treaty of European Union*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. Available from: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content> [Accessed: 11 March 2014].
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION (1999) *The Bologna declaration of 19 June 1999*. Available from: www.magna-charta.org [Accessed: 27 February 2014].
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2007) *Amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community (2007/C 306/01)* Available from: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:2007:306:FULL&from=EN> [Accessed: 21 February 2014].
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2008) *The Bordeaux Communiqué on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training*.
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2010) *EUROPE 2020 A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, Brussels, 3.3.2010 COM (2010) 2020 final
- EURYDICE, (2012) *The European Higher Education Area in 2012: Bologna Process Implementation Report*
- HARVEY, L. & BOWERS-BROWN, T. (2003) The employability of graduates: cross-country comparisons. In Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Research Conference 2003 *Learning by Comparison: International Experiences in Education and Training: A Selection of*

Papers. Research Report: CR2003. Available from:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/CR2003.pdf> [Accessed: 19 October 2010].

KONSTANTINIDOU D. (2015) *European policies on lifelong learning and the implementation of European Qualification Framework, Europass, and lifelong guidance in Higher Education Institutions in Greece*. Master thesis, University of Macedonia.

MINISTERS IN CHARGE FOR FRANCE, GERMANY, ITALY AND THE UNITED KINGDOM (1998) *Joint declaration on harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system*. Sorbonne. Available from: http://www.ejea.info/Uploads/Declarations/SORBONNE_DECLARATION1.pfd [Accessed: 28/2/2014]

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR THE CERTIFICATION OF QUALIFICATIONS AND VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE (2014) *Greece EQF referencing report*. Available from: http://www.swfm-gf.eu/main/wp-content/uploads/GREECE-REFERENCING-REPORT_January-2014.pdf [Accessed: 11/3/2014]

PAMPOURI, A. (2011) Internship as a means of connecting Higher Education and the labor market, in the framework of Lifelong Learning. In KARAVAKOU, V. (ed.). *Lifelong Learning: Interdisciplinary Approaches*. Thessaloniki, University of Macedonia Press.

SIPITANOU, A. (2014) *Policies of European Union on lifelong learning*. Thessaloniki, Macedonia University Press.

TEICHLER, U. (2010) Internationalizing Higher Education: Debates and Changes in Europe. In MATTHEOU, D. (ed.) *Changing Educational Landscapes*. London, Springer.

ZMAS, A. (2014) Global impacts of the Bologna Process: international perspectives, local particularities. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*. [Online] 31 March 2014 DOI: 10.1080/03057925.2014.899725 [Accessed: 23rd July 2014]