
First evaluation of Europass

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Executive Summary - Final Report to the Directorate General Education and Culture of the European Commission

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Executive Summary

In August 2007 the European Commission (DG Education and Culture) commissioned ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd. to undertake the “First Europass evaluation”. The evaluation put a particular focus on the relevance of the Europass framework and its implementation structure as well as on the level of achievement of the initiative’s global, specific and operational objectives.

The Europass Initiative

The single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications, Europass, was established by the Decision 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 15 December 2004. The framework currently comprises five transparency tools:

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

The overall objective of the initiative is to increase the mobility of people in geographical, educational and job-related terms and the overarching aims of the Europass initiative are to help to increase awareness and access of transparency instruments amongst learners, teachers, trainers, employers and admission staff of educational institutions; to improve the communication impact of existing transparency instruments; to improve information on issues related to transparency and mobility and; to inspire the development of additional transparency instruments.

The initiative is implemented by the National Europass Centres network under the coordination of the European Commission. The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) hosts the Europass website and participates actively in the monitoring and development of the Europass tools.

Purpose and scope of the evaluation

The legal background for this evaluation is Article 15 of the Decision 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences, which states that:

“by 1 January 2008 and then every four years, the Commission shall submit to the European Parliament and the Council an evaluation report on the implementation of this Decision, based on an evaluation carried out by an independent body”.

Thus, the emphasis of the evaluation has been placed on the relevance of the Europass framework and its implementation structures and the level of achievement of the initiative's operational and specific objectives. In other words, the evaluation focused on the degree to which the transparency tools made available to citizens, companies and educational institutions by Europass are *potentially* useful and relevant for these stakeholders and the extent to which these are *actually* being used and the effects of this use. On this basis, the evaluation provided recommendations for improvement of the Europass framework and its implementation structures. As such, the evaluation had to balance an emphasis on the “forward-looking” function of evaluation (i.e. what lessons could be learnt for future implementation), with a backward-looking function (which sought to provide accountability for funds spent).

The evaluation covered the period from the start of the implementation of the initiative (1st of January 2005) until the signature of the contract for this assignment (13th August 2007). In terms of geographical scope, the evaluation covered the entire Decision (32 countries). It made use of documentary review, around 50 interviews with stakeholders (EU institutions, National Europass Centres (NECs), social partners, students unions, recruitment agencies, chambers of commerce,), an online survey of individual beneficiaries (which received around 1,450 replies) and an e-mail survey of other stakeholders (which received over 90 replies from NECs, EURES, Bologna Promoters and other stakeholders) to document its findings.

Whilst the main focus of the evaluation was the overall Europass framework and implementation structure, some attention was also given to the assessment of the individual instruments that make up Europass, and their relation to other transparency initiatives and complementary policy developments.

The remainder of this executive summary presents the main findings and recommendations of the evaluation.

Main findings

The evaluation confirmed that there is a need for transparency instruments that facilitate geographical, educational and occupational mobility. As policy documents and mobility research emphasise, one of the main challenges that people face when trying to move is making their skills and competences clear. The evaluation found that Europass transparency documents have the potential to facilitate mobility and that they can be considered a relevant tool for people who are interested in working or studying abroad, having also the potential to provide significant advantages to employers.

Europass has a very wide target group and aims to facilitate very different types of mobility. In fact, the initiative could benefit from making clear the existing limitations in terms of its possible contribution to facilitating mobility (e.g. the contribution of Europass to mobility varies by type of mobility and there are other obstacles to mobility than lack of transparency of competences). Stakeholders indeed considered Europass –in particular the Europass CV- to currently be more relevant to the needs of educational institutions than employers, given the current format (in particular in terms of length) and nature of the tools as well as the recruitment practices prevalent in both types of institutions. Europass is also considered more relevant for international than for other types of geographical or occupational mobility. So, overall, Europass is considered more relevant in relation to the least common forms of mobility.

In the main, the various components of the Europass intervention logic are consistent with each other and non-contradictory although some fine-tuning in this respect is still possible – see section on recommendations below. The coherence and complementarity of Europass with related funding programmes –e.g. part of the EU Lifelong-Learning programme-, policy developments –such as the development of competence-based systems and the development of common academic standards- and national and European initiatives to record competences has been found to be clear. Limited risks of overlap exist with some specific initiatives, but these are not acute and the Commission is taking appropriate steps to make different tools compatible (for instance in relation to Youth Pass), so that these risks do not develop further in the future.

The evaluation has also clearly shown that there is a high level of satisfaction from users with respect to the Europass documents. Most stakeholders reported in our evaluation surveys that the Europass documents had improved in terms of their structure and format in relation to the period pre-2005. The Europass CV received particularly strong support, with over four fifths of stakeholders approached in the evaluation reporting that the CV is a well structured and a useful tool. In short, Europass documents allow a clearer communication of individuals' skills and competences and facilitate the comparison of candidates for both lifelong learning and occupational vacancies. Europass thus allows for a more standardized and easier exchange of information about qualifications between organizations and sectors, thereby facilitating the understanding of them. Thanks to the standardized approach it is much easier for employers and academic institutions to determine individual's qualifications and competences. Students at college/ university and those in employment for more than five year are those who find the Europass tools more useful in presenting their qualifications and skills in a clearer way.

The guidance offered for the use of the tools was also highly appreciated: over 80% of respondents to our beneficiaries' survey reported that completing the CV online using the tutorials and examples provided made completing the CV easier, although they also often demanded further guidance and examples of the use of this tool. Some scope for improvement in the structure, format –in particular in relation to the simplification of the documents- and support in the access and use of the documents was also evidenced during the evaluation and recommendations in these respects are offered below in this Executive Summary –a more detailed account is provided in the full evaluation report.

The usefulness of Europass for its users is manifested in the increased take-up of the initiative. Statistics show a constant increase in the use of the Europass transparency documents. CEDEFOP reported over 8 million visits to the Europass portal it manages until September 2007, resulting in over 6 million downloads of examples, templates, instructions and over 2 million CVs having been created online. Users, moreover, encompass a wide range of age groups, occupational statuses –although with a prevalence of the education sector, public and service sector- and education levels –even though those with higher education levels tend to make more use of the CV. An equivalent volume of activity just in relation to the CV until 2010 would by far exceed the Commission target in relation to the take-up of the instruments as a whole, set at the beginning of the initiative. While the Europass CV is clearly achieving very high take-up levels, data on the take-up of other transparency tools cannot be judged due to its lack of completeness.

Take-up is aided by the existence of a dedicated web portal for the initiative, which is the responsibility of the Commission but was designed and is managed by CEDEFOP. The website, which is considered clear by a vast majority of beneficiaries surveyed for this evaluation, makes directly available to users part of the Europass transparency documents. All NECs have also set up national Europass internet sites, which provide general as well as country-specific information on Europass and links to the European portal. These national websites were often described as professional and of high quality during the evaluation in-depth interviews.

Take-up is also partly stimulated by the activity of the Europass implementation structure. By mid-2005, as we have referred above, all National Europass Centres were set up and started operation, many of which were also implementing other European actions in the area of Education and Culture. A strong structure at national level (as opposed to European level) is regarded as necessary to promote Europass effectively and be able to link and communicate effectively with the relevant stakeholders that is necessary to engage with the initiative to make it successful. Yet, the current evaluation of Europass could only benefit from the analysis of one full year of NEC activity. Further evaluations will therefore naturally shed more light over the quality of NEC activities.

Most stakeholders approached during the evaluation were content with the activities undertaken by NECs. The degree of focus and clarity of objectives in their work programme has been improving over time and the degree of fit between objectives and activities in practice is also solid, although there are large differences in the level of activity between different NECs in practice. In relation to the degree of communication with other guidance centres, at this point in the implementation of the initiative it is necessary, however, to initiate closer links to Euroguidance, NARIC, the National Agencies of the Lifelong Learning programme or EURES in order to further the integration of the Europass documents with the activities of these other centres at national level. Some countries have led the way in this respect and their examples of good practice should be followed by a larger number of countries. Further awareness raising amongst the general public would also be likely to increase the take-up of the initiative and some stakeholders have thus suggested that dissemination activities should be more embedded as part of the activities of the Europass implementation structure. The evaluation further suggests that the quality of NEC reporting on their activities has varied so far, and that the initiative would benefit from strengthening reporting activities in the future.

As for the impact of the initiative, Europass has resulted in clear benefits to a large number of people. Over a fourth of Europass users considered that Europass had helped them to gain access to opportunities for learning and employment across Europe to a very large or to a large extent and over a fifth considered that it had done so to a moderate extent, according to our survey of beneficiaries. Only 13% considered that Europass had helped them in this respect to a small or a very small extent. When looking specifically about whether Europass had helped respondents to change job or location, we see that around 15% of respondents (around one in seven) reported that Europass had helped them to do this. This would still be a sizeable number of people. If we consider that at least 2,000,000 people had created a Europass CV in its first two and a half years of existence, Europass could have directly helped over 300,000 individuals in their mobility experience, a remarkable figure. Further impact of the initiative could be expected as it becomes more widely known –Europass Mobility and the two Supplements are those instruments which require further advancement in this area.

Europass has so far proved to be achieving its expected results at a low cost, therefore showing good efficiency levels. The EU budget for the initiative is €2.1 Million per year (2005, 2006 and 2007). Most of it (€2 million) is used to co-finance the National Europass Centres, for which participant countries need to contribute with an equivalent figure. An additional €0.5 Million were spent by CEDEFOP in order to set up and do the necessary maintenance of the Europass portal it manages. Under conservative estimates, the overall cost of each Europass document would have been under €5.75. The cost per Europass CV which aided individuals to materialise mobility experiences would have been in the region of €39. This provides, in the view of the evaluator, high value for money.

The costs in terms of the development of the Europass framework mainly relate to the time-costs associated with the development of the tools. Small teams have worked in this area and their action has been efficient in the view of the evaluator.

In the terms of the efficiency of the National Europass Centres network, as mentioned above they are co-financed through a global grant of €2 million per year from the European Commission and receive equivalent national contributions, a financial allocation that NECs reported to be inline with the volume of activities they had to undertake. Yet, the evaluation revealed that levels of activity vary importantly by country analysed, with some NECs having achieved a much higher level of activity than others –at a similar cost. Most NECs, nevertheless, reported an increased volume of activity since 2005. Given the constant levels of funding they have received, this would signal an increase in their efficiency levels. Indeed, when judging the efficiency of the NEC network, it is important to keep in mind that the network has been in operation for two years only at the time of the evaluation, and that there may be some "set-up costs" in terms of human and financial resources invested during this period. If additional funding was to be available for the initiative, most NECs reported that this should be in further promotional activities, to reach a larger audience. In the same way, hiring more personnel to boost the interaction with all stakeholders and with guidance centres was also mentioned as a possible useful investment of additional resources by NEC coordinators.

The Europass initiative, in spite of its positive results, is –as already mentioned- still at a very early stage and at this point, the sustainability of the initiative without EU funding would be low. If no further EU support was received by the initiative the implementation structures, according to stakeholders, in particular NECs, would be likely to disappear. The picture depicted by NECs is similar in relation to the sustainability of the positive effects of the initiative if EU support was withdrawn. Only 5% of NECs considered that the positive effects would almost certainly continue, whereas almost a quarter of NECs considered that they would not continue. More time and support is needed so that users and stakeholders get to be more familiar with the framework and Europass becomes more widely used in education and employment, after which the initiative would be more likely to persist even if EU funding ceased.

The European added value of the Europass initiative is clear. The nature of the initiative is in itself aimed at facilitating mobility across countries, as well as sectors. It addresses a European need and we have also seen that Europass is tightly tied to other European developments. The European added value results from EU support and a European-wide approach (a single basic document framework is used for the whole of the EU), which –if successful- would be more efficient than a proliferation of, say, similar bilateral or even multilateral activities undertaken at regional and national levels. The evaluation revealed how there is a need to have a common framework in Europe to boost mobility in the single market and how the fact of having common documents, which do not change from country to country a crucial factor to achieve higher levels of success and efficiency in this field. Furthermore, without the European approach, there would be a serious risk of losing coherence and visibility. It is estimated that around 600,000 users less (around 30%) would have made use of the Europass CV and Language Passport if these were not delivered through a European service.

Recommendations

Following on from the main findings and conclusions of the evaluation process, the evaluator provided twenty one recommendations in relation to the main topics covered in the evaluation, including that:

Relevance

- Future efforts for dissemination and development of the tools concentrate particularly on occupational mobility (the most frequent type of mobility), including international occupational mobility (a type of mobility that is expected to increase in the future and in relation to which Europass could offer a clear added-value –see also recommendation on European Added Value below).

Coherence and complementarity

- The complementarity of Europass with current education and training programmes is enhanced to ensure that the use of Europass documents becomes universal in those programmes whenever complementarities exist between the two.
- Closer cooperation with those entities developing similar transparency initiatives is further developed so that the relationship between Europass tools and other transparency documents is clear to users and duplication of efforts is avoided.

Effectiveness

- Future developments pay particular attention to the improvement of the Europass CV, the most valued and potentially useful tool of the framework according to beneficiaries, including the production of a shorter version of the CV in cooperation with employers and recruitment agencies, whilst the necessity and/ or improvement of the Europass CV sections on 'desired employment', 'personal skills and competences' and 'additional information and annexes' is re-assessed.
- Links with guidance centres and the business community are strengthened through the activity of NECs, -this could include the signature of agreements with guidance centres on the dissemination of Europass tools, as it has already happened in some countries.
- Further examples of the use of documents, in particular showing how the documents can be adapted and targeted to alternative uses, are made available to users through the Europass website and that work continues in the development of support materials – including detailed guidelines on how to formulate skills and competences on the basis of activities, mobility periods and experience.
- The Commission encourages that other bodies in addition to NECs, such as Chambers of Commerce and educational institutions, issue Europass Mobility more often.
- The Diploma Supplement is developed to take greater consideration of learning outcomes in its template.
- Data is collected at national level on the take-up of all the Europass tools and that the monitoring systems for the Europass implementation framework in general are strengthened through the introduction of a structured system of indicators of activity at the same time that greater guidance in relation to the relevance and comprehensiveness of the information to be provided in NEC Annual Activity reports is given to NECs by the Commission.
- The links between Europass and other initiatives in the area of transparency of competences is more clearly explained to potential beneficiaries.
- DG EAC encourages the use of the Europass CV within the different DGs of the Commission and other EU services.

Efficiency

- Consideration is given to increasing the communication and information campaigns budget for NECs if these are required to undertake further Europass promotional activities.

Sustainability

- Wider take-up of the initiative is stimulated as the best way to ensure sustainability of results in the event of discontinuation of EU funding for the initiative.

European added value

- Future developments of the initiative take into consideration the particular value of Europass for international mobility to aim to enhance it even further (in particular international job-mobility), without detriment to enhancing its value for facilitating national or regional mobility whenever possible.