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# Proposal for a European Framework on Recognition of Outcomes of Learning Periods Abroad in General Upper Secondary Education

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# **Proposal for a European Framework on Recognition of Outcomes of Learning Periods Abroad in General Upper Secondary Education**

edited by European Institute of Education and Social Policy (EIESP) and  
European Federation for Intercultural Learning (EFIL)

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## Background and aims

European Leaders have committed to work toward a European Education Area (EEA) as a way to deepen cooperation between European Union Member States and to support quality and inclusiveness of national education systems. The EEA aims to ensure that young people can receive high-quality education across the EU<sup>1</sup>. These aims are further bolstered by the European Pillar of Social Rights, establishing “the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning”<sup>2</sup>.

The 26 November 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of the learning outcomes of study periods abroad (2018/C 444/01) highlights automatic recognition as a means to promote mobility and strengthen European cooperation toward the EEA<sup>3</sup>. The recommendation advocates for an increase in mobility of general secondary education pupils and highlights that mobility may strengthen competences crucial for active participation in society and the labour market, and promote European identity.

Currently, however, pupils in upper secondary education can face a number of challenges to having their learning outcomes from study abroad recognised<sup>4</sup>. This may discourage pupils from participating in mobility. For those who do participate, it may mean that benefits, including the development of transversal competences such as intercultural competence, personal development competence, citizenship competence, and so on, are not fully valued.

*Under “automatic recognition”, the outcomes from a learning period of up to one year abroad in another Member State during upper secondary education ... are recognised in any other, with the learner not being required to repeat the programme year or achieved learning outcomes in the country of origin, [or to undergo extensive examinations] provided that the learning outcomes are broadly in line with the national curricula in the country of origin.*

(Adapted from the Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 ‘on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad’)

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<sup>1</sup> Council of the European Union, Resolution on further developing the European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems, 24 October 2019, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13298-2019-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>2</sup> European Pillar of Social rights, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights_en)

<sup>3</sup> Council Recommendation (2018/C 444/01) of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Recognition of learning periods abroad in general upper secondary education is aimed at pupils between 14 and 18 years of age. In this document, we refer to all students in this age group as general upper secondary pupils, including pupils in countries with single-structure primary education / lower secondary education as well as countries where no distinction between lower and upper secondary education is made.

The 2018 Recommendation notes that a step-by-step approach will support Member States in putting in place the conditions that will make automatic mutual recognition possible. The Expert Network, managed by a core study Consortium, convened as part of a Preparatory Action to support progress toward automatic recognition, has had the remit to develop a proposal for a European framework and guidelines based on an exchange of practices among stakeholders and governmental representatives of the Member States.

The main aims of the framework proposed in this document are to:

- Set out five key principles for automatic mutual recognition of the learning outcomes of study periods abroad for general upper secondary pupils, and recommendations for concrete steps to achieve the principles (section 2).
- Demonstrate the use of learning agreements between the pupil and their sending school, which may be used to clarify expectations regarding support for the pupil and intended outcomes for learning during mobility and for their automatic recognition. Learning agreements may potentially support each of the five principles outlined in this framework proposal. A model step-by-step procedure for automatic recognition foreseeing the use of a learning agreement is included in Annex 1.
- Set out a proposal for exchange pupil status (see principle 3).

This framework proposal is based on an analysis of country reports setting out current policies and practices for recognition in the Member States, developed by the country experts involved in the network, and complementary research conducted by the study Consortium. The principles were agreed by the network, and respond to gaps identified in the Member States Analysis, and longer-term goals for automatic mutual recognition.

## **Key principles for automatic mutual recognition**

### **Key principles proposed by the network are:**

- Principle 1: Promote trust and transparency across education systems
- Principle 2: Value diversity of education cultures and contexts
- Principle 3: Ensure that pupils are fully supported in their sending and host schools during mobility and throughout reintegration and recognition processes upon return
- Principle 4: Promote flexibility in summative assessment of learning outcomes of study periods abroad
- Principle 5: Support development of national frameworks, along with guidelines, tools and training to support consistent and fair recognition processes.

To a certain extent, progress toward automatic mutual recognition and support for long-term individual pupil mobility are intertwined. The principles underpinning automatic

recognition, described in greater detail below, are thus complemented by a discussion of actions that may support and strengthen individual pupil mobility across EU Member States, including the need to promote the benefits of mobility and encourage broader participation, and to strengthen the evidence base.

## **Principle 1: Promote trust and transparency across education systems**

This first principle addresses the need for trust in school quality assurance systems across countries. Trust in this context refers to the degree to which individuals have confidence in institutions and believe them to be “trustworthy”. Within the European Education Area, quality assurance systems based on shared values for school education can reinforce trust in the academic standards and support pupils’ development and well-being in different school systems.

Trust tends to develop over time when two parties have a shared and transparent value framework and act in a competent, benevolent, honest and just manner<sup>5</sup>. Cultures of quality enhancement are essential to building trust and transparency within and among Member States<sup>6</sup>. The aim is not to homogenise approaches to school evaluation and improvement, which are grounded in each country’s particular education culture and context, but rather to support openness and exchange among countries.

The concrete, step-by-step measures to promote trust and transparency across Member States’ education systems are:

- Study the feasibility of a European framework for school system quality assurance. The proposed framework, might first set out a shared vision, aims and objectives for school education, building on the 2018 Key Competences Framework which emphasises the importance of learner well-being, values, inclusion, and active citizenship as well as knowledge and skills. Internationalisation of schools may be highlighted as an important way to support these aims. To reinforce trust, it might also include agreed-upon standards for high-quality school provision. This would support countries in reviewing and strengthening their quality assurance systems (including pupil assessment, school evaluation, teacher and school leader evaluation and stakeholder engagement)<sup>7</sup>. The European Commission could support this work through assisting a task force comprised of quality assurance experts from the

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<sup>5</sup> Gillespie, N. (2015). Survey measures of trust in organizational contexts: an overview, pp. 225-240. In: F. Lyon, G. Möllering, and M. Saunders (Eds). *Handbook of Research methods on Trust*. Cheltenham/Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT, *Accompanying the document* Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (COM(2020) 625 final).

<sup>7</sup> Maxwell, B. and Staring, F. (2018). *Better learning for Europe’s young people: developing coherent quality assurance strategies for school education*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.



different European countries as well as representatives of European stakeholder groups in the pupil mobility sectors<sup>8</sup>.

- Designation of national- and European-level organisations (respectively, by national ministries of education and the European Commission) which may host observatories on pupil mobility, with the remit to gather data, exchange information and good practices, promote analysis and research, and support peer learning among countries.

Annual data collected might include mobility destinations (country and region), pupil backgrounds, host and sending schools, duration of mobilities. These data are needed to support evidence-based policymaking and to establish a baseline to measure progress and support research related to: access to mobility opportunities within Erasmus+; trends in automatic recognition of learning outcomes; destination countries for study abroad, and so on.

Trends in mobility and recognition may also be communicated in the form of a scoreboard. While modelled on the iVET mobility scoreboard<sup>9</sup>, in line with the aims of the 2018 European recommendation, the school mobility scoreboard would focus primarily on policies to support recognition processes. The scoreboard may provide detailed descriptions of countries' recognition policies, structures and mechanisms; visual data highlighting percentages of pupils whose study abroad learning outcomes are recognised; mapping of policy developments and their implementation in the Member States.

The European-level observatory would facilitate cooperation among national observatories as well as among ministries of education, Erasmus+ national agencies for the promotion of intercultural learning and mobility and support the development and publication of joint research projects and an annual report on pupil mobility in Europe.

The national-level observatories would have the remit to collect annual data on pupil mobility and mobility providers. In addition, they would support networking among national organisations involved in pupil mobility (including ministries of education, universities, mobility providers, and associations for school leaders, teachers, pupils and parents) as a way to support knowledge sharing and cooperation, and build greater trust and transparency. In cooperation with the national stakeholders' group, the national observatory might also collect good practice exemplars, including for learning agreements,

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<sup>8</sup> Mobility and recognition stakeholders include, among others: representatives of public and private mobility provision (e.g. Erasmus+ National agencies, the European networks of non-profit pupil exchange organisations EFIL and EEE-YFU), the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU), the European Parents Association (EPA), the Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE), European School Heads Association (ESHA).

<sup>9</sup> Mobility Scoreboard <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/mobility-scoreboard>.

as well as support country-level research and evaluation on trends in individual pupil mobility and recognition practices.

Both national and European observatories could share good practices on how to support pupils during mobility and in recognition processes. Principles set out in the 2006 European Quality Charter for Mobility<sup>10</sup> and in the development of learning agreements (principle 5) should underpin approaches.

The European-level observatory functions might be located in an existing organisation, such as Eurydice. At national levels, for those countries that do not already have an institution hosting an observatory (e.g., Italy), this role might be taken on by the Erasmus+ national agency, national ministry of education, the national ENIC-NARIC centres<sup>11</sup>, and/or a non-profit pupil exchange organisations.

## **Principle 2: Value diversity of education cultures and contexts**

The EEA recognises the richness of diverse education systems across Europe, which are grounded in unique education cultures and contexts. These reflect national values and beliefs on the aims and objectives of schooling, expressed through priorities set out in curricula, approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. Learning in a very different education culture and context is core to the value of study abroad and a key motivation for pupils. At the same time, it should be noted that education systems across Europe share common values and objectives for learning, including transversal competences such as intercultural sensitivity, personal and social development, active citizenship, and so on.

An extended intercultural experience is a potentially transformative experience for the pupil. The pupil is fully immersed in another cultural context (including a different school culture)<sup>12</sup> and is challenged intellectually and emotionally. Pupils who are following the curriculum of the host school and who are fully immersed in the study abroad experience may develop new understandings and broaden their social identity, values and relationships as a result of spending an extended period in a different cultural reality.

The 2018 Recommendation on automatic recognition balances the diversity of education systems and their common values, noting that the outcomes of learning periods abroad should be recognised so long as they are “broadly in line” with the requirements of the

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<sup>10</sup> Principles for Quality in Learning Mobility in the Youth Field, <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/principles-learning-mobility>.

<sup>11</sup> The European Network of Information Centres (ENIC) on mobility and recognition, were set up by the Council of Europe and UNESCO, which works cooperates n with the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC), a network put in place by the European Union, brings together the national centres tasked with recognising academic qualifications at national level.

<sup>12</sup> Ruffino, Intercultural education and pupil exchanges in Intercultural competence for all Preparation for living in a heterogeneous world, Pestalozzi series No.2, Council of Europe Publishing, 2012.

home school. Study abroad also offers unique opportunities for pupils to demonstrate competences within the context of another culture.

Sending schools may design learning agreements in cooperation with the host school to establish the intended learning outcomes, including key competences which are considered to be broadly in line with the national curriculum in the country of origin, and which will be recognised on successful completion of study abroad. Schools are not required to match learning outcomes in their different curricula, but rather to identify opportunities for pupils to develop competences in the host school's context which fulfil basic learning aims of the sending school. Well-designed agreements balance the benefits of intercultural learning, personal development and academic competences. They also help to ensure that pupils will not be required to repeat the school year or to take extensive examinations beyond core content of curricula upon return to the home school, which frees the pupil to benefit from the exchange.

While national curricula vary across Europe, the 2018 European Key Competence framework (updating the 2006 framework) provides a common reference point. Within national and school curricula, aims for pupils' competence development are set out as intended learning outcomes<sup>13</sup>. Schools that develop learning agreements can more easily identify commonalities in intended learning outcomes within their respective curricula, and whether learning outcomes are "broadly in line" with the home system curriculum.

The learning outcomes approach also encompasses the concept of competences – defined as the 'ability to apply knowledge, skills and attitudes adequately in a defined context (education, work, personal or professional development)'<sup>14</sup>. In other words, the individual demonstrates achieved learning outcomes through the application of knowledge, skills and attitudes<sup>15</sup> in a specific context. The learning outcomes approach provides a way for transversal competences such as intercultural, personal and social or citizenship competences to be both visible and valued.

### **Principle 3: Ensure that pupils are fully supported in their sending and host schools during mobility and throughout reintegration and recognition processes upon return**

Support for pupils to succeed in their studies abroad and in the recognition process itself may involve several elements. First, pupils need to be fully supported by their host schools during mobility. As a practical matter, pupils need to be registered in host schools which provide them with the documentation required in their home country for recognition processes. A contact teacher who will support the pupil should be

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Cedefop (2014). Terminology of European education and training policy: a selection of 130 key terms. Second edition. Luxembourg: Publications Office. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4117>, pp. 164-165.

<sup>15</sup> Principles for Quality in Learning Mobility in the Youth Field, <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/principles-learning-mobility>.

designated. Full integration in the host school – immersion in a new language, a new culture, and a new school environment – along with the support of a contact teacher, as recommended in the 2006 Quality Charter on Mobility<sup>16</sup>, may also ensure that the pupil fully benefits from learning opportunities during the mobility, and fulfils the necessary steps for the recognition process. Full integration in the host school is also vital to ensure that the pupil has formal status, with rights and responsibilities for learning and assessment adapted to their specific study objectives and set out in a learning agreement.

A second element is the need for the sending school to be involved before, during and after mobility, to ensure that the learning of the pupil will be recognised. A contact teacher in the sending school should be identified and should help the pupil to prepare their learning agreement and other details of study abroad, communicate with the contact teacher in the host school, and shepherd the pupil through recognition and reintegration upon return.

The engagement of the sending and host school should be guaranteed regardless of the type of mobility programme pupils are enrolled in, namely whether it is a school-to-school partnership or a programme organised by private non-profit or for-profit organisation. Teachers and other staff in both the sending and host schools will also need to be included in decisions on how to support exchange pupils and how they may best accommodate exchange pupils' learning and assessment needs. They may require training on the use of the learning agreement. It is important to ensure that teachers are appropriately included in decisions and recognised for their work, and that they are provided with the time and other resources needed as they take on new roles.

National/regional authorities may further facilitate mobility through the creation of a specific status for pupils on mobility, to be applied, as appropriate in both the sending and host schools. This would help to ensure consistent funding and support for schools, particularly in those systems where funding is based on the number of pupils who are enrolled and physically present in the school. In host schools, financial and staff resources are necessary to ensure that they are able to support pupils during the exchange. In sending schools, resources are needed to support recognition processes. Pupils may also be reintegrated with their class following the mobility, as their status at the school is maintained. A specific status for pupils on mobility would have the further advantage of supporting monitoring, allowing national systems to track pupil mobility at the central level (with schools being required to report pupils with this status), thereby strengthening collection of data on pupil mobility.

A European-level task force should be created to gather input from representatives of education ministries on the definition of the terms for any new proposed exchange pupil status, and how this might be addressed through national frameworks and legislation and administered across the Member States. Representatives from the network of experts and national observatories could also be included in the task force, to ensure alignment with policies to support recognition.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

In the sending school, the new exchange pupil status would:

- Guarantee that the pupil is enrolled in the same school upon return from study abroad.
- Ensure that the sending school designates a contact teacher who will support the exchange pupil during the study abroad period and who will communicate with the designated contact teacher in the host school.
- Ensure that the sending school is committed to recognising the learning of the pupil upon their return, and provide support for reintegration.
- Ensure that state funding in the sending country is provided to the sending school to support the preparation for mobility, communication with the host school, and reintegration and recognition of learning outcomes upon return.

In the host school, the new exchange pupil status would:

- Guarantee that the exchange pupils are officially enrolled while attending school in the host country, and that the type of enrolment allows for the learning programme to be adapted to their needs, and re-define pupil's rights and responsibilities accordingly.
- Ensure that a designated contact teacher communicates regularly with the designated contact teacher in the sending school.
- Ensure that the host school is committed to assessing the pupil's learning, with assessment methods adapted to the specific needs of the pupil (e.g. whether examination performance may be affected while they are still learning the language of the country, etc.).
- Ensure that funding is provided to the host school to support the hosted pupil, on the same basis as for other regularly enrolled pupils (this is applicable to the countries where funding for schools is calculated per-capita for each pupil enrolled)

Each school year, both sending and host schools would report the number of exchange pupils registered (sending school exchange pupil status and host school exchange pupil status) to the School Inspectorate/Ministry of Education for monitoring purposes

## **Principle 4: Promote flexibility in summative assessments of learning outcomes of study periods abroad**

Current approaches to summative assessment may pose challenges to recognition of the learning outcomes of study abroad. During study abroad, pupils with lower-level language competences, particularly in the early stages of their exchange, may struggle to perform well on tests given in the courses they are following. Yet evidence of pupil learning and progress during study abroad is vital for recognition upon return to the home school.

Pupils returning from study abroad also face a number of challenges in terms of reintegration:

- Pupils are frequently required to take examinations in every subject they have missed in their home school during their study year abroad<sup>17</sup>. While it is important to identify major gaps in learning and to ensure that pupils are prepared for their school leaving and university admission examinations, extensive testing in every subject missed creates a major burden for the pupil as well as the school and undermines the spirit of automatic recognition.
- The timing of examinations during the school year and at its end, may also inhibit mobility between three months and a full school year. While some countries allow pupils to take examinations under supervised conditions at a later date, others do not.
- Pupils, particularly during the final two years of secondary school, need to fulfil requirements for graduation and university admissions examinations.
- Assessments typically do not capture the value-added of study abroad, including the transversal competences developed or the non-formal and informal learning that occurs as learners adapt to a new environment. University admissions may not consider the value of study abroad in preparing pupils to succeed in higher education based on the results of standardised assessments.

Greater flexibility in summative assessment approaches would allow exchange pupils to demonstrate learning acquired during mobility and following their return to the home school. For example, alternative assessment formats such as multi-media learning portfolios or other projects allow the pupil to demonstrate learning during study abroad. Assessments of transversal competences developed during study abroad, such as intercultural competence, are also important for valuing learning in the host school. Attention to transversal competences, including those developed in non-formal and informal contexts, may further reinforce opportunities for pupil enrichment in the context of study abroad.

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<sup>17</sup> E. Briga, 'Recognition of school study periods abroad in Europe: An overview and policy recommendations. European Federation for Intercultural Learning', EFIL, Brussels, 2018.

Alternatives to numeric grades may also be considered. For example, teachers in the host schools may choose to provide descriptive assessments of achieved learning outcomes in lieu of numeric grades.

In the pupil's home school, well-developed projects and thesis papers may potentially count toward requirements for promotion to the next school year as well as graduation requirements. As noted, several countries discourage study abroad during the final one to two years of upper secondary school as pupils need to prepare for high-stakes graduation and university entrance examinations. Greater flexibility in assessments for school leaving and university admissions may provide a way for pupils to demonstrate learning outcomes achieved during mobility, including transversal competences that are important for success at the university level.

It should be noted that recognition of learning outcomes does not preclude assessment of pupils on their return to their home school. Indeed, it is important for schools to identify gaps that pupils may need to fulfil graduation requirements, and to allow pupils sufficient time to catch up with core content. However, situations in which pupils are required to sit all examinations missed should be avoided. Flexibility in regard to timing of examinations for pupils returning from mobility is also important, as some pupils may be required to repeat the school year in their home country if they miss examinations

Acceptance of alternative assessment methods to either replace or complement the traditional end- of-year assessments would require the buy-in of stakeholders and guidelines for assessors to ensure that all pupils meet standards for learning. Pilot programmes may be developed to ensure the quality of innovative, alternative approaches. In addition, dialogue between ministry representatives at the school education and higher education levels, as well as representatives working in higher education admissions will be important for raising awareness on the value of pupil mobility in preparing pupils for higher education.

### **Principle 5: Support development of national frameworks, guidelines, tools and training to support consistent and fair recognition processes**

National frameworks, along with guidelines, tools and training are needed to put the first four principles into practice. Currently, few Member States have a well-established recognition system<sup>18</sup>. National frameworks, modelled on this European-level framework, could set out clear principles and recommendations on recognition processes as well as for the status of exchange pupils (supported by legislation where necessary) (principle 3). A national framework may also help to provide more visibility to pupil mobility within the European Education Area.

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<sup>18</sup> Briga, E. and Looney, J. (2021). Member States Analysis: Expert Network on Recognition of outcomes of learning periods abroad in general secondary education, forthcoming.



Clear guidelines, tools and training would support communication between the sending and host schools and the exchange pupil<sup>19</sup>. In particular, learning outcomes-based learning agreements can support greater transparency of expectations for learning and assessment, and ensure that all pupils are able to have their learning recognised. Shifts in policies and guidelines regarding who can take part in long-term individual mobility and achieve recognition may also be needed: it is not only for high-performing pupils. Having passing grades in the school year before the exchange might be a reasonable criterion for providing pupils this opportunity. All pupils could benefit from study abroad as a transformative experience.

In particular, well-designed learning agreements can ensure that roles and responsibilities across sending and host schools and for the pupil are clear. Learning agreements may identify the learning outcomes that the sending school considers as broadly in line with their national curricula, as this is the core requirement for automatic recognition as set in the Council recommendation. Schools are encouraged to involve the exchange pupil in the identification of the learning outcomes they consider to be the most relevant, taking into account that only some learning outcomes are important and realistic within the context of study abroad. Since transversal competences, in particular intercultural competence, social and personal competence, citizenship competence are developed in individual pupil mobility, these may be at the centre of the learning agreement.

A learning agreement template should be accompanied by guidelines setting out processes for developing the agreement and along with the intended learning outcomes. In addition, processes for communication between the sending and host schools, for documentation of learning and on return to the home school, for automatic recognition and requirements to catch up on missed content, should be clear to all. The learning agreement should only be considered as valid when the pupil, sending and host schools have agreed to and signed the document. Learning agreements for mobilities of three months or less should be kept simple in terms of assessment during and after the mobility, and the definition of intended learning outcomes. The latter should be proportionate to the length of the experience and focus on intercultural and other transversal competences, keeping in mind that knowledge related to specific subjects might be difficult to gain for the pupils due to the language barrier and the difficulty of reaching high proficiency in the host country language during a short mobility.

Teachers and school leaders should also have access to appropriate training on the development of learning agreements and the type of support pupils may need. They should also be allocated the time needed to develop learning agreements and to follow up with teachers in the host school and with pupils.

Member States need to use their respective guidelines, subscribe to them, support each other in working towards agreements and align their systems to any agreed upon quality criteria. Given the voluntary nature of European frameworks and tools, implementation

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<sup>19</sup> A model step-by-step procedure for automatic recognition is provided in Annex 1. A Training Model for education professionals on Assessment of Transversal Competences developed in long-term individual pupil mobility is one of the outputs of the Expert Network.



will need to be enhanced through peer learning between countries, combined with stakeholder engagement.

## **Strengthening individual pupil mobility**

Beyond these principles, policies to strengthen individual pupil mobility will also be important. These include outreach and communication on the benefits of mobility to encourage wider participation, and investments in research and monitoring to improve the evidence base.

### **Communicate the benefits of mobility**

Individual pupil mobility within the EU is a small percentage compared to the overall phenomenon, which sees North America as the main destination. The main destinations in the EU are countries where the language spoken is popular (France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Spain). Incentives are needed to promote further intra-EU mobility and diversity among the host countries in the EU. Automatic recognition of the broad learning outcomes of the study period abroad as part of the secondary school path, can be a key incentive for intra-EU mobility.

Efforts to promote the benefits of mobility within the EU – including its recognition – among general secondary education institutions and pupils and their families may support broader take-up. This may lead to a virtuous cycle, with a critical mass of pupils participating in study abroad leading to readiness for automatic mutual recognition and effective recognition processes leading to readiness of more pupils to participate in mobility.

Outreach and communication campaigns targeted at pupils, parents and schools may highlight the benefits of mobility, and also support them to navigate mobility and recognition processes. In the near future, communications should also recognise and address any post-pandemic context. While schools and pupils may be particularly focused on making up for content missed during remote and blended learning, benefits of mobility, such as the importance of international cooperation and intercultural competence during times of crisis, the importance of resilience, critical thinking well-being and other personal competences that are developed through mobility, may be emphasised.

School-level internationalisation and opportunities for teachers to participate in Erasmus+ mobility may also influence both teachers' and pupils' interest in learning abroad. Schools hosting pupils from abroad may also encourage their own pupils to participate in mobility experiences.

### **Improve the evidence base**

Observatories at both European and country levels should be supported to gather data systematically. National observatories may serve as clearinghouses for information on

pupil mobility and provide up-to-date information on recognition rules, procedures and practices at national levels. The extent to which countries are able to fulfil the 2025 goal for progress toward automatic mutual recognition can may also be monitored.

A European observatory may have the remit to collect data from national level observatories and provide support research on policies and practices to support mobility and to evaluate their effectiveness.

## Conclusion and next steps

The EEA provides high visibility to mobility programmes as a key tool for strengthening competences crucial for active participation in society and the labour market and promote European identity.

Progress toward automatic mutual recognition of the learning outcomes of study abroad will require international cooperation over time to build trust and to support peer learning and exchanges. Sufficient resources and a clear timeline will also be needed. As set out in the 2018 Council, Union level, a process for European cooperation and exchange of practices at upper secondary level should be launched with Member States “...to foster transparency and build mutual trust in education systems across the Union”<sup>20</sup>.

A step-by-step approach will be necessary to make progress toward automatic recognition by 2025.

In 2022, recommended steps are to:

- Promote the outcomes of the Preparatory Action and specifically the Proposal for a European framework on automatic recognition within the European Commission initiative of the “learning mobility framework” (with the process for the latter to be launched in 2022) which is part of the European Education Area<sup>21</sup> (to be implemented by the EC and stakeholder groups<sup>22</sup>).

In particular, the main objectives to be included in the learning mobility framework are:

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<sup>20</sup> Council Recommendation (2018/C 444/01) of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions “on achieving the European Education Area by 2025”, 30.09.2020, COM(2020) 625 final.

<sup>22</sup> Individual pupil mobility and recognition stakeholders include, among others: representatives of public and private mobility provision (e.g. Erasmus+ National agencies, the European networks of non-profit pupil exchange organisations EFIL and EEE-YFU), the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU), the European Parents Association (EPA), the Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE), European School Heads Association (ESHA).

- monitoring of individual pupil mobility at national level, based on an EU-level agreed set of data to be collected, to ensure comparability, developed in cooperation with a network of European-level stakeholders
  - the establishment of national frameworks on automatic recognition, in cooperation with a national stakeholders' network on individual pupil mobility
  - the creation of the exchange pupil status in Member States, defining rights of pupils and obligations for sending and host schools, in cooperation with an expert group at EU level
  - ensuring adequate resources and support and training for teachers promoting and supporting individual pupil mobility and automatic recognition
- Keep connections among the Expert Network to promote and pilot the outcomes of the Preparatory Action through Erasmus+ funded projects and other/own initiatives (stakeholder groups)
  - Encourage Erasmus+ national agencies to pilot the use of learning agreements based on the above-mentioned principles, and the Training Model for education professionals on Assessment of Transversal Competences developed in long-term individual pupil mobility (EC)
  - Launch a broader information and awareness campaign on pupil mobility and recognition (EC and stakeholder groups)
  - Launch a task force to explore the feasibility of a European framework for school system quality assurance (EC)

In 2023, recommended steps are to:

- Establish a European network of experts and stakeholders on recognition of outcomes of learning periods abroad in general secondary education. The network would include an influential stakeholder on this topic per Member state and European-level stakeholders. Building on the work of the network established in 2020-21 (EC), in 2023-25, the network objectives would be to:
  - Support the adoption and implementation of the EU learning mobility framework.
  - Create awareness among ministries of education, schools and pupil mobility providers on the need for national and European-level data on individual pupil mobility, and initiate discussions on what needs to be monitored.
  - Promote the creation of national stakeholder groups to advocate for and engage with the implementation of this Proposal for European framework at national level, and provide input as ministries begin the process of developing national frameworks aligned with the European framework.
  - Initiate projects to pilot the Training model at national level in selected countries, with the support of Erasmus+ funding (EC and Expert Network).
  - Promote the piloting of the use of learning agreements based on the above-mentioned principles, accompanying guidelines and training in selected countries to determine if these can be used in mobility

programmes operated by any provider (Erasmus+ national agencies and other pupil mobility providers, such as non-profit organisations).

- Begin collection of exemplars of learning agreements to share in a common European repository.

In 2024, following adoption of the EU learning mobility framework, recommended steps are to:

- Establish a European-level task force to define common data for monitoring individual pupil mobility at national level, which are also to be aggregated at the European level (EC).
- Designate the ministry department or external organisations charged with gathering monitoring data (national ministries).
- Identify an appropriate organisation to host a European-level observatory (EC). The designated agency works with the Expert Network, to agree on key data on pupil mobility to be monitored at national levels, and to agree on guidelines to ensure data gathered by the national observatories are valid and reliable.
- Gather baseline data monitoring pupil mobility and recognition processes in each Member State through the designated organisation.
- Collect best practices in cooperation with the national stakeholder networks, based on the repository built by the European and national networks in 2022-2023.
- Establish a European-level task force on the creation of an “exchange pupil status” (EC).
- Design and pilot national frameworks on automatic recognition, aligned with this proposed European framework, and incorporating the results of the task force recommendations on monitoring individual pupil mobility and on the “exchange pupil status”

In 2025, recommended steps are to:

- Adopt national frameworks on automatic recognition, which were piloted in 2024 (selected Member States).
- The European Commission or its designated agency begins work on a first European-level report with baseline data on pupil mobility and recognition processes in each Member State (EC European-level observatory).
- Adopt the exchange pupil status with rights and duties across the EU.

## Annexes:

1. Model step-by-step procedure for automatic recognition

## Annex 1 – Model step-by-step procedure for automatic recognition

Outlined below are the steps for automatic recognition of outcomes of a pupil's learning period in chronological order, beginning with pupil enrolment in a long-term individual pupil mobility programme.

### 1. Enrolment in an individual mobility programme

- Through the sending school, as part of a school-to-school partnership mobility programme: the teacher appointed to manage the pupil's learning period abroad initiates discussions with the pupil on the aims and content of the Learning Agreement.
- With a private, non-profit or for-profit organisation: the pupil informs the school principal of their intention to enroll in an individual pupil mobility programme with a pupil exchange organisation, and to discuss the content of the Learning Agreement.

### 2. Drafting of the Learning Agreement (LA)

#### 2.1. The Learning Agreement includes:

- The name of the designated contact teachers in the sending and host schools who will be responsible for keeping in touch with the pupil during the learning period abroad.
- The broad learning outcomes that the pupil needs to achieve while abroad for the learning period abroad to be recognised, taking into account what is realistic within the context of a learning period abroad. These include the transversal competences that will be developed during the programme, in particular intercultural competence. The sending school takes the lead in defining these broad learning outcomes with the exchange pupil, which – if necessary- can be adapted by the host school together with the pupil and the sending school.
- The essential mandatory elements of the sending school curriculum which are not addressed in the broad learning outcomes formulated (e.g. learning outcomes related to specialisation subjects or subjects that are tested for the end-of-school examination) and which are essential for progressing to the next grade in the sending school upon return. Pupils will need to make up for these following their return to the sending school, in cases where they were not addressed in the host school
- Tailored assessment in the sending and host school.
- Planning for reintegration in the sending school (e.g. what support the pupil will receive in order to catch up on the essential mandatory elements, and how they will their mobility experience with their peers).
- How the compulsory exams for the end-of-school examination will be organised upon return (if applicable)
- The documents needed from the host school to support the recognition of outcomes of the learning period abroad.

- The Learning Agreement may differ based on the type of individual pupil mobility programme provider:
  - a) School-to-school partnership
    - Agreement between sending and host school, pupil and family before departure.
  - b) Private, non-profit or for-profit organisation
    - Agreement between the sending school, pupil and family. The mobility provider commits to establishing contact with the host school and sending school preferably before departure or at the latest at the start of the pupil's learning period abroad.

### 3. Enrolment in the sending school

The pupil remains enrolled in the sending school with the status of 'pupil on a learning period abroad'

### 4. Enrolment in the host school

On arrival in the host country, the pupil is enrolled in the host school, is assigned a contact teacher who serves as a tutor and develops a personalised learning and assessment plan based on the Learning Agreement with the pupil. It is the responsibility of the exchange pupil to be in touch with the contact teachers appointed by the sending and host school, and encourage communication between them.

### 5. Tailored assessment in the host school

The hosted pupil is assessed at regular intervals as defined in the Learning Agreement, and supported throughout the learning period abroad.

### 6. Report on learning outcomes achieved

At the end of the mobility, the host school provides the hosted pupil with the documentation needed for recognition of the outcomes of the learning period abroad. This should always be provided by the host school, even in the absence of a Learning Agreement with the sending school.

### 7. Return to the home country

Pupils submit the documentation provided by the host school to the authorities in charge of recognition, namely the sending school in most cases. Recognition is granted following the principle that the pupil's achieved learning outcomes are 'broadly in line' with the ones set for pupils attending school in the sending country. No extensive examinations upon return are required.

## Differences in length of mobility

### Periods abroad shorter than a full school year

- For study periods abroad that last between 2 and 6 months, the pupil is re-integrated in the school and takes the exams at the end of the school year with their peers.
- For periods abroad shorter than a full school year and completed after the school year in the home country, a specific procedure needs to be defined in most countries. This is typically the case of the spring semester abroad.
- Periods abroad lasting longer than 6 months and finishing before the end of the school year in the home country are not usually offered, and therefore in most countries no specific procedure has been defined.

### A full school year

- For a full school year abroad, following a successful recognition process, the pupil is admitted to the next grade and supported in catching up with the essential subject-related contents missed while abroad. In countries where recognition is the responsibility of the sending school, an exceptional class council may be convened before the start of the school year to finalise the recognition procedure and admit the pupil to the following school year.

### **Finding information about the EU**

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