

Central Asia Education Platform NEWSLETTER

Newsletter #15 March 2019

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Editorial

Dear colleagues,

As you know, the second phase of the CAEP project is coming to an end this month. In February we met some of our key stakeholders in Brussels for the closing Regional Conference, "Strengthening education reforms and employability in Central Asia and the EU – The European Education Initiative (EEI) and the Central Asia Education Platform (CAEP) 2012-2019", where we looked back at the achievements of the last seven years and looked forward to potential future cooperation.

We are delighted to say that we anticipate a continuation of CAEP in mid-2020, the format and content of which will be decided following a review of stakeholder needs. The new project will be based on the revised EU-Central Asia strategy to be adopted later this year.

As stated by EU High Representative Federica Mogherini during the 14th EU-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting in November, "Central Asia is looking for more engagement with the European Union (...) and the EU is also interested in increasing this partnership. It is in our interest that Central Asia develops as a more resilient and more closely interconnected economic and political space, and this is something we are actively supporting".

Key concepts in the new strategy are *connectivity*, 'the physical and non-physical infrastructure through which goods, services, ideas and



people can flow unhindered' and *resilience* - both of which tie in with a continued focus on investing in youth and education in the region. The European Union is currently the number one donor in Central Asia, with the total envelope for EU assistance rising to €1 billion for 2014-2020.

In this newsletter, you can find out more from the Regional Conference, including an overview of the achievements of CAEP II, a summary of the evaluation report and details of the next steps towards planning the third phase of the project.

Although there will be no CAEP activities over the coming year, the website will be accessible until at least the end of 2019, and is a valuable source of information on education reform and cooperation in the region. As well as background papers on CAEP priorities, you will also find new 'Central Asia HE and VET Briefs' covering current education policy in the Central Asia coun-

tries, and a database of 185 donor projects. Links to all of these are on page 6.

We would like to wholeheartedly thank all our stakeholders for their commitment and contribution over the last seven years and we hope to be working with you closely again in the future.

Christian Wagner
CAEP Team Leader

Also in this issue:

Full report from the
Regional Conference in
Brussels



Final CAEP webinars and
Financing Review Report

Conclusion of Erasmus+
NURSLING project



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Future continuation of CAEP discussed at Regional Conference in Brussels



The purpose of the final Regional Conference was to review the outcomes of CAEP II and discuss future perspectives for cooperation in Higher Education (HE) and Vocational Education & Training (VET) between the European Union, Member States and Central Asian countries.

Attending the event in Brussels were representatives from the Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO), Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC), the European External Action Service (EEAS), the CAEP Team, project partners Erasmus+ and the European Training Foundation (ETF), and delegates from the five Central Asian Ministries of Education and the EU Member States Latvia, Finland and Romania.

The event was opened by Mr. Daniel Weiss, Head of Sector Central Asia DG DEVCO. After welcoming the participants he went on to announce that a continuation of the CAEP project into a "Phase III" is anticipated for mid-2020, and that although the exact format was still to be decided, the project would be based on the new EU-CA strategy to be adopted later this year.

He revealed that ETF would be entrusted to visit each Central Asia country to discuss their needs and ideas for future implementation of the project, and also emphasised the importance of EU Member

State involvement. Following two rounds of consultations this year, a proposal will be put to EU Member States at the start of 2020 for agreement.

Mr. Boris Iarochvitch, Head of Division for Central Asia at EEAS explained that at the heart of the new EU-CA Strategy was the concept of 'resilience' and that the priority areas for cooperation would include promoting human rights and strengthening the rule of law, the environment, climate, water, security and investing in youth and education.



Alongside this strategy, bilateral agreements are being made with each country, with agreements with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan already finalised or under negotiation. Together with the continuation of Erasmus+ in Central Asia and EU support for research and applied sciences, a clear focus can be seen on strengthening and supporting exchange and cooperation at all levels within the region.



Mr. Gianpaolo Suriano of DG EAC and Mr. Cesare Onestini, Director of the European Training Foundation (ETF), then respectively looked at the impact that Erasmus+ and ETF with the Torino Process have had on education reform and policy dialogue in HE and VET within the region, and how their objectives align with those of CAEP.

Overview of CAEP II outcomes and achievements



At the Regional Conference, Mr. Christian Wagner, CAEP Team Leader, presented an overview of the outcomes of the CAEP project from 2012-2019.

An important part of EU support to education in the region, along with Erasmus+ and CAREN, the project has changed considerably since its inception in 2012, with a more visible approach achieved through the strengthened commitment of the Central Asia countries and more active member state involvement.

The achievements of CAEP II (2015-2019) can be divided into three areas:

1. Improved Policy Dialogue

Two Ministerial Meetings (Riga 2015 and Astana 2017) resulted in a Joint Communique and Roadmap of activities and subsequently the Astana Declaration. Dialogue fora and meetings have promoted regular exchange on the modernisation of education systems in Central Asia and facilitated regional cooperation. Cooperation has also been established with other donors such as the World Bank and UNESCO.

2. Sector modernisation

CAEP activities in conjunction with other EU programmes, such as Erasmus+ and ETF, have contributed to:

- The launch of a joint cross sub-sector discussion of VET and HE on an integrative qualification system
- Raising awareness on policy learning and development in the



area of evidence based policy making

- Identifying potential for bilateral cooperation between EU member states and CA as well as among CA countries
- Promoting the benefits of Bologna principles and the learning outcomes approach when establishing National Qualification Frameworks (NQF)
- Recommendations for strengthening quality assurance and accreditation (QAA)
- The active involvement of the business community
- New and strengthened contacts between EU and CA institutions.

3. Improved knowledge and mutual understanding

The active involvement of lead EU Member States Poland and Latvia, and subsequently also Romania, has seen experience and best practice shared, both at policy and institutional level. The use of peer learning methodology and working groups has favoured people-to-people exchange and enhanced mutual understanding in the modernisation process in the education sectors of both regions.

Including the extension from 2018-2019, CAEP II has implemented the following activities to address challenges in HE and VET:

- 9 National Meetings
- 7 Regional Meetings
- 5 Peer Learning Meetings
- 5 Working Group Meetings
- 7 Webinars
- 5 Senior Officials' Meetings (SOM)
- 2 Ministerial Meetings (MIN)

A total of 8 background and review reports have been produced by CAEP experts on topics such as National Qualification Frameworks, Capacity Building and Mobility programmes, Social Inclusion and Gender Equality and the Financing of Education Systems.

Finally, in terms of communication and mapping, a database has been produced with a total of 185 donor

projects in the region, a bilingual website has been updated with news and events, and 15 editions of the CAEP newsletter have been produced.

Central Asia countries share recent developments in education reform



During the conference, representatives of the five Central Asia Ministries of Education were invited to share recent developments in education reform in their countries, looking specifically at how the priority areas identified in the Astana Declaration in 2017 are being approached.

Mr. Amantay Nurmagambetov from the Bologna Process and Academic Mobility Center, presented how Kazakhstan has been developing its External Quality Assurance (EQA) mechanisms and a National system of Qualifications (NSQ) to meet labour market needs, and gave an update on the implementation of the autonomy of Kazakh HEIs.



Mr. Rahmatulo Mirboboev, First Deputy Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Tajikistan reported on innovations in Tajik VET policy and the development of quality assurance mechanisms in their 'Higher Education

Development Project'.

NQF and QAA were also priorities highlighted in the presentation by Ms. Larisa Marchenko representing Kyrgyzstan. She explained how the country's National Development Strategy 2018 – 2040 aimed at having three Kyrgyz universities listed in the top 200 world rankings by 2040. With a third of the country's population being from ethnic minorities, inclusivity is also seen as a key area for future education reform.

Mr. Abbas Khodjaev from the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan looked at how involvement with CAEP has supported the first steps in the development of Uzbekistan's national qualifications framework, as well as recent activities to actively involve employers in adapting their education system to better reflect labour market needs.

Finally, Mr. Ezizmuhammet Mammedov gave an overview of recent investments in the education system in Turkmenistan and the development of quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms.

Success factors of CAEP II and recommendations



It was agreed by all participants that the active involvement of EU member states has been key in the success of CAEP II. The contributions that the lead MS Latvia and Poland have made in sharing their experience and best practice, along with the more recent involvement of Romania, has led to greatly improved dialogue and mutual learning.



Ms. *Maija Zvirbule* from the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) of Latvia, confirmed that the Central Asia region is high on Latvia's foreign priority list, and that as well as being involved in projects such as CAEP and Erasmus+, the MoES has also concluded bilateral agreements with all CA countries.

They support the continuation of CAEP and recommended expanding it to include not only a wider circle of Central Asian stakeholders but also an increased number of EU member states.



Ms. *Ana-Maria Anghelescu* from the Ministry of National Education in Romania, also underlined the importance of continued contact between EU Members States and the Central Asia region and stated that CAEP had provided a strong framework for dialogue and sharing of expertise at regional level. The Ministry is supportive of any continuation of the project and hopes to continue its involvement.

Following the Member State presentations, Mr. *Claudio Dondi*, CAEP Expert and Ms. *Christine Hemschemeier*, ETF, looked at how the use of Peer Learning and Evidence Based Policy Making have fostered mutual exchange and strengthened regional cooperation within the CAEP Framework.

In the concluding discussions, it was concurred by all that the CAEP project had been successful in reaching its objectives and establishing a regional platform for supporting policy dialogue and education reform in Central Asia.

Some suggestions for future implementation included expanding the

range of stakeholders, focusing on more concrete topics, continuing the use of webinars as a supplement to face-to-face meetings, and looking in more detail at the area of regional qualification recognition.

All the presentations from the Regional Conference can be found on the CAEP website:

www.caep-project.org/events-details/event/regional-conference-strengthening-education-reforms-and-employability-in-central-asia-and-the-eu/

CAEP II Evaluation Report highlights relevance and impact of project

As part of the 4th Steering Committee meeting on the day following the conference, the external evaluation team consisting of Mr. Stephen Webber and Mr. Bertil Oskarsson presented an overview of the CAEP II evaluation.

The evaluators found clear evidence that CAEP II has contributed to national education reform, and the improvement of international and regional cooperation. An important factor has been the demand driven nature of CAEP; the team and participants established stakeholder needs and these have been reflected in the flexible and evolving format. Success factors highlighted were:

- The sustained commitment and contribution of Central Asian and European stakeholders,
- Synergies with ETF, DG EAC and EACEA
- The performance of the CAEP Team

The evaluators found it striking that not a single respondent did not want to see a continuation of the project, although there were clear viewpoints about future content and format. There was a strong desire to maintain the momentum, but to move from 'theory to prac-

tics' and work towards more concrete deliverables, concentrating on work plans with specific outputs to support implementation such as toolkits and published guidelines.

Recommendations were summarised as follows:

- To continue CAEP to a third phase, maintaining the format of regional and national activities
- To maintain the dual focus on VET and HE as well as the main thematic areas
- To maintain the core elements of forums, studies and communication/mapping
- To expand the participant base and also build on existing partnerships

To sum up, Mr. Webber and Mr. Oskarsson thanked the stakeholders for their contribution to the evaluation. They see the CAEP project as having a key role in engaging with decision makers in the education sector, and an important link in the overall engagement between the EU and the region.

Final CAEP webinars focus on Innovation and Financing

Three webinars have been held within the framework of CAEP II since the start of 2019. The first two focused on 'Teaching and Learning Innovation' – firstly in HE and secondly in VET - and the final webinar looked at the 'Effective Financing of Education Systems and Institutions'.

It was agreed by participants at the final Regional Conference that webinars have been an effective supplement to core activities during CAEP II and a successful means of engaging a wider range of stakeholders, although they cannot replicate the benefits of face-to-face meetings.

The first webinar on Innovation in



HE gave an overview of current trends in teaching and learning methodology including the use of technology, and how innovation can be planned and implemented successfully both at policy and institutional level. Case studies were presented by delegates from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as well as EU member states Hungary and the UK.

The second event specifically addressed innovation in VET and the adoption of a Learning Outcomes approach in job-oriented education and training.

Best practice examples included developments in e-learning and distance learning in Europe, as well as the development of a Work-Based Learning (WBL) approach in Latvia, and Central Asia case studies were presented on the development of educational clusters in Astana and competency-based training in Tajikistan.

Webinars offer the opportunity for delegates to pose questions and prompt discussion during the session itself, and can help identify shared priorities for further debate and cooperation. The key topics that emerged from the VET webinar included getting the right balance between theory and practice, how best to cooperate with employers during placements, assessing work-based learning and competency-based training and new approaches to e-learning.

The final webinar at the start of February aimed at improving policy makers' awareness of the various means and approaches to financing state and private education institutions in both HE and VET, as well as fostering cooperation.

Ms. Marie Dorléans from the European Training Foundation (ETF) considered the challenges faced by both Europe and Central Asia in financing VET systems, and how the ETF Financing Prism can be used to facilitate dialogue

between public and private stakeholders when designing and implementing financing policy.



Following an overview of current financing models in Europe, delegates from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan shared the main reforms and developments in their countries.

Presentations from all three webinars can be found on the CAEP website:

www.caep-project.org/event/events-2019/

Review Report on Financing of Education Systems and Institutions



In preparation for the financing webinar, a team of CAEP experts produced a review report on the 'Effective Financing of Education Systems and Institutions in HE and VET in the EU and Central Asia'.

The aim of this report was to provide a review of the current

situation in the field along with good practice for policies, methods and instruments supporting efficient and effective financing mechanisms in the EU and in Central Asia. This background paper provided a basis for discussions during the webinar itself as well as for further debate among policy makers and education practitioners.

The report firstly gives an overview of the approaches and models of financing HE and VET in Europe, and looks at current trends, such as the increase of private funding in HE, the expansion of work-based learning in VET and the introduction of performance indicators for state funding in both sectors.

The focus then turns to Central Asia, with an overview of financing methods in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Following this, case studies from both CA countries and EU member states are presented.

In conclusion, common challenges are identified, such as the growth in the student population, and recommendations are given for stakeholders and decision makers to address these challenges.

The report can be found on the CAEP website along with a number of other review reports and background papers on topics such as National Qualifications Frameworks, Capacity Building, Employability, Social Inclusion and Gender Equality in Education:

www.caep-project.org/studies-and-reports/



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NURSLING project to present proposed Uzbekistan NQF at Final Conference



Following an agreed extension, the Erasmus+ NURSLING Project: "National Qualifications Framework: Guidelines for the Development and Recognition of Qualifications" will conclude with a Final Conference in Tashkent on April 1-5, 2019.

The aim of the project, funded through Erasmus+ and launched in 2015 by a consortium of institutions from Uzbekistan and the EU, has been to develop a national qualification framework for Uzbekistan (NQF RUz).

It is foreseen that the development and implementation of the NQF will allow for:

- The evaluation of a specialist by his/her qualifications, learning outcomes and gained competence
- A significant expansion of employment opportunities in foreign countries and organisations

- The ranking of educational institutions by the level of demand

Following analysis of the existing education system, structure and documentation, 8 levels (+2 sublevels) of qualifications were identified, making up the draft NQF RUz, which was then comparatively assessed against the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Dublin descriptors for graduates of Bachelor and Master programmes were also developed, which will be an integral part of the sectoral qualification frameworks.

A pilot model of credit system (similar to ECTS) was introduced to the Tashkent University of Information Technologies in the academic year 2018-2019 on an experimental basis.

The proposed model of the NQF will now be presented for discussion at the final Conference of the NURSLING Project in April, as the first stage of the 10-step NQF formation process.

A full report on the outcomes and challenges of the project, as well as the proposed NQF, comparison with the EQF and the Dublin Descriptors can be found on the CAEP website:

<https://www.caep-project.org/nursling-project-to-present-proposed-uzbekistan-nqf-at-final-conference/>

Useful links

The current CAEP website will be accessible until at least the end of 2019, and possibly beyond, and is a valuable source of information on education reform and cooperation in Central Asia, including:

- Details of all [past CAEP events](#), including downloadable materials
- [CAEP Studies and Reports](#) on topics such as National Qualifications Frameworks, Capacity Building, Employability, Gender Equality, Social Inclusion and Financing
- [Central Asia HE and VET Briefs](#) reviewing current education policies in the Central Asia countries and covering all CAEP thematic priorities
- A [database](#) of over 185 donor funded projects in the region

Find out more at:
www.caep-project.org

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