



True stories:

Gaining skills, qualifications and
employment in Europe

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Kurz gesagt

Liebe Leserin, lieber Leser!

Das Europass-Magazin informiert Sie regelmäßig über europäische Richtlinien zu Kompetenzen, Qualifikationen und Beschäftigungspolitik sowie über die Umsetzung von Instrumenten und Mechanismen, unter denen das Portfolio von Europass eine bedeutende Rolle spielt. Politische Entscheidungsprozesse bis hin zur Umsetzung sind in unterschiedliche Kontexte eingebettet und umfassen eine breite Menge an Akteuren und Organisationen. Manchmal werden solche Prozesse aber auch zu komplex für Bürgerinnen und Bürger, sodass ihre Sinnhaftigkeit nicht mehr erkannt wird, ganz zu schweigen davon, dass der persönliche Nutzen für den eigenen Alltag klar ersichtlich wäre.

Deshalb dreht sich in diesem Europass-Magazin alles um das Thema „Mitten aus dem Leben: Wie man in Europa neue Kompetenzen, Qualifikationen und Arbeit erwirbt“. Unsere Idee war ganz einfach, „echte“ Menschen zu fragen, wo die Schwierigkeiten liegen und was zum Erfolg beiträgt, wenn es um Lernen und Arbeiten in Europa geht; echte Menschen mit all ihren unterschiedlichen Ausgangspunkten, Wünschen und Möglichkeiten.

In den Geschichten, die von Mitgliedern des Europass-Netzwerks gesammelt wurden, finden Sie eine finnische Sozialwissenschaftlerin, die sich eine spannende akademische Laufbahn in Oxford aufgebaut hat; zwei junge Deutsche, die das Beste aus ihrem Berufspraktikum im Ausland gemacht haben, und zwar in ganz verschiedenen Berufsspezialisierungen; einen Bericht aus einem weltweit tätigen Unternehmen, das aus einer persönlichen Perspektive heraus internationale Schulungsmöglichkeiten für seine Angestellten organisiert, und kleine Erzählungen, wie drei tschechische BürgerInnen mit unterschiedlichen Vorbedingungen und unterschiedlichen Zielen in anderen europäischen Ländern Arbeit gefunden haben.

Das Europass-Netzwerk wünscht Ihnen eine interessante Lektüre, friedvolle Feiertage und einen erfolgreichen Start ins Neue Jahr!

En bref

Chère lectrice, cher lecteur,

Depuis deux ans, le Magazine Europass vous tient informé sur la politique européenne en matière de compétences, de qualifications et d'emploi, ainsi que sur la mise en œuvre des outils qui y sont liés, parmi lesquels le portfolio Europass, élément clé du dispositif. La définition des objectifs politiques et leur mise en œuvre est un processus complexe associant une multitude d'acteurs et d'organisations, et les citoyens ne peuvent pas toujours mesurer l'utilité concrète de ces outils dans leur vie quotidienne.

Nous avons donc décidé de consacrer ce numéro du Magazine Europass au thème suivant : « L'accès aux compétences, aux qualifications et à l'emploi en Europe : Histoires vécues ». L'idée est d'expliquer ces mécanismes en termes simples, et d'identifier les défis et les succès qui jalonnent le parcours d'apprentissage et la carrière des citoyens dans l'Europe d'aujourd'hui, quelle que soit leur situation de départ, leurs aspirations et leurs moyens.

Les histoires qui suivent ont été recueillies par les membres du réseau Europass. Ils témoignent de parcours très différents : un chercheuse en sciences sociales finlandais qui a réussi une intéressante carrière universitaire à Oxford ; deux jeunes élèves allemands de l'enseignement professionnel qui ont su valoriser au maximum une expérience internationale, dans des domaines d'activité différents ; une société internationale qui a choisi la stratégie de la micro perspective pour proposer à son personnel des actions internationales de formation; enfin, trois citoyens tchèques aux parcours et ambitions différents en quête d'un emploi dans un autre pays européen.

Le réseau Europass vous souhaite bonne lecture et vous adresse ses meilleurs vœux pour l'année 2015.

True stories

Gaining Skills, Qualifications and Employment in Europe

Dear readers,

in over two years of its existence, the Europass Magazine has been bringing you information on the making of the European policies on skills, qualifications and employment, and on the implementation of the related tools and mechanisms among which the Europass portfolio has been playing an important role. Policy making and implementation is a multi-sided process with varying contexts and a wide range of individuals and organisations taking part. However, policy making can sometimes also become a little too complex for individual citizens to make sense of, let alone to clearly grasp the benefits it brings into a person's everyday life.

Therefore, we have decided to dedicate this edition of the Europass Magazine to a topic called „True stories: Gaining Skills, Qualifications and Employment in Europe.“ The idea is simply to reach out to real people and find out what are the actual challenges and successes of learning and working in contemporary Europe as encountered by individuals with various starting points, desires and possibilities.



Among the collection of stories presented on the following pages by the members of the Europass Network you will find a social scientist from Finland who has worked herself up to building an interesting academic career in Oxford; two young German vocational learners who have made the best of their international training experience, even though in very different areas of specialisation; an account of how a globally relevant company takes a micro perspective in organising international training opportunities for its employees; and the short stories of three Czech citizens of different backgrounds and ambitions finding work in other European countries.

The Europass Network wishes you an inspiring reading, a peaceful holiday time and a successful start into the new year 2015.

On behalf of the Europass Magazine Team
Lubomír Valenta, Editor



From Turku to Oxford

Maaria Tirri, Finland

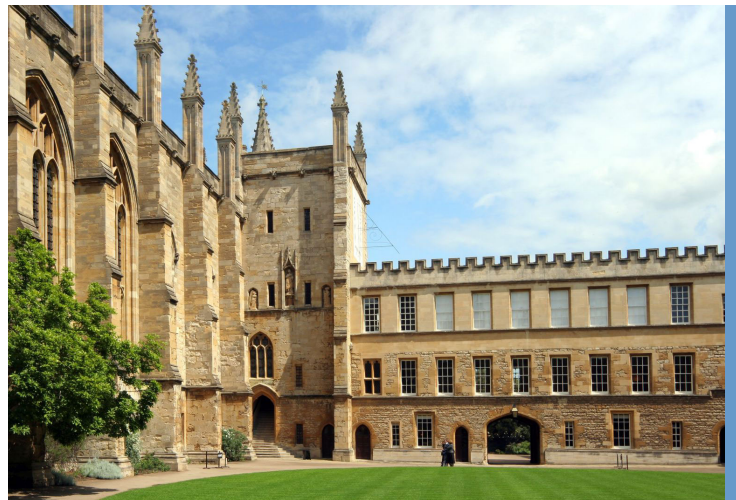
Katri Eeva is a young Finnish woman whose ambitions and studies have taken her to the United Kingdom. She is currently working on her PhD on EU higher education policy at the University of Oxford. She is also a Junior Dean at one of Oxford's 38 colleges. Katri shared with the Europass Magazine her story about the inspiring path to get there.

Qualifications and international experiences

Katri Eeva did her bachelor's (BA) and master's (MA) degrees in education science, specializing in higher education policy, at the University of Turku, Finland. Incorporating international elements to her studies was important for Katri from the very beginning. "I worked a summer in London after the first year of my BA and then the following year I participated in an Erasmus exchange to Ireland", she explains. Katri was also involved in the Erasmus Student Network at her university and tutored international students in her faculty.

At one time, Katri ended up in Brussels, the beating heart of the European Union. "As I was finishing my master's degree, I worked on an Erasmus traineeship in Brussels, at the Council of European Professional and Managerial Staff (EUROCADRES). Following this, I started working for FinUnions, the EU office of the Finnish trade union confederation. Simultaneously, I was working on my MA thesis and took my last exams at the Finnish Embassy in Brussels. I graduated in 2010, and immediately started working at the European Parliament, mostly in the Committee for Education and Culture. Striving for a deeper understanding of the research in this field, I decided to pursue a doctorate at Oxford," Katri explains. After three years in the European Parliament, Katri started her PhD in the autumn of 2013.

When asked why she chose her specific MA qualification, Katri gives a thoughtful answer. "A Finnish master's degree in social sciences provides a strong academic foundation with skills that are highly transferable to the world of work. It also provides a vast range of employment opportunities, as the degree is directly applicable to various fields," she replies.



"These seemed to be significant challenges at the time, and were often time-consuming and stressful. Nevertheless, those hurdles provided me with a greater confidence to pursue my goals and strengthened my belief in what I wanted to achieve"

Gaining new skills for employment

According to Katri, being able to manage a wide range of information and knowledge is her most valued skill regarding studies as well as employment. “I regard foreign language skills and competence in interacting with a wide range of people very valuable in today’s world of work. In addition, interpersonal communication, understanding different ways of tackling problems and the ability to work under pressure are significant factors for success in any career,” she says.

When asked what it actually takes to “gain new skills“ in contemporary society, Katri emphasizes the importance of lifelong learning. For her, it entails not only acquiring new skills and knowledge but also maintaining them and keeping them up to date. “Of course, professional knowledge and skills are vital, but I consider the knowledge and skills acquired through informal activities as equally important,” she adds.

But how does one really gain new skills? Katri highlights a variety of wide-ranging interests. “I not only read widely in my field of specialisation but also keep an open mind to learning from a broad range of other subjects. I seek out lectures in different fields and branches, as well as training opportunities, to hone my skills. Continuous learning can be exhausting and it is indeed sometimes difficult to maintain existing skills and abilities,” she explains.

According to Katri, her degree in education science has been relevant in the job search, even though sometimes it would be confusing for employers who think she is a teacher. When searching for employment, Katri found the Europass documents useful. She used the Europass CV when she applied for jobs in Brussels. “Some employers preferred Europass because it facilitated comparison between candidates. When applying to the University of Oxford, the Diploma Supplement was a very useful tool, too, to describe the knowledge and skills that I had acquired in my BA and MA studies,” she explains.

Inspiration for the Europass Magazine readers

One’s career path is seldom smooth and trouble-free. Katri speaks about various challenges along her way, for example the necessity to learn new languages and adapt communicational skills at the workplace. “These seemed to be significant challenges at the time, and were often time-consuming and stressful. Nevertheless, those hurdles provided me with a greater

confidence to pursue my goals and strengthened my belief in what I wanted to achieve,” she emphasizes.



To finish our interview, I asked Katri for a piece of advice. If the readers of the Europass Magazine were interested in a career path similar to hers, what would be the important things for them to do? Katri’s advice was quite simple. “Follow your true interests, be internationally minded, study languages and be open to new opportunities. Don’t be afraid of trying new things or taking risks – they often result in the greatest academic as well as employment-related opportunities where you least expected them. Linking with people who share your interest is priceless, too. Building strong networks is an asset in every field,” she explains.

The road may be a bit demanding and bumpy at times, but gaining skills, qualifications and employment in Europe is achievable. Or as Katri puts it, “there will certainly be challenges and obstacles along the way, but they can be overcome”.

More than a dolce vita

A hairdresser's apprentice went to Italy for learning and working

Isabel Götte, NEC Germany

Italy has a long tradition as a destination of educational journeys. Standing for cultural history, creativity and the art of living it attracts people from all over the world.

In 2013 Michelle Knipping made her personal educational trip to Italy. She was at that time a hairdresser in training and took the chance to go abroad for an internship in Florence. Having received a letter from the Chamber of Skilled Crafts

The warm welcome of the new schoolmates and colleagues in Florence helped her very much.

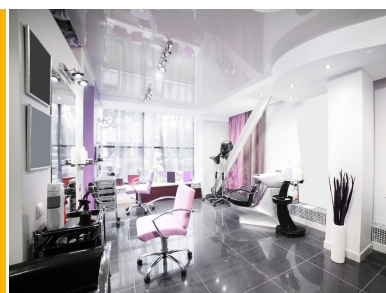
Braunschweig-Lüneburg-Stade that offered apprentices the possibility to take part in a mobility period of working and learning in Italy, she decided to apply for partaking. One year before, a colleague of Michelle's who was then also an apprentice went to Norway and returned with a lot of experience and new ideas. "She was a living example of the fact that going abroad for working helps you develop new skills", says Michelle.

"I too wanted to learn as much as possible during my apprenticeship – therefore a work placement abroad was a great opportunity for me!" Her motivation to move for learning was very high: "I would have gone anywhere!" confirms Michelle. "But Italy as a land of fashion and creativity was simply perfect."

So, in May 2013 she left with two other apprentices for Florence where they went for three weeks to the hairdresser's school "Scuola Parrucchieri Pino Capasso" and worked for an associated hairdresser's shop. "The day of our departure I was very nervous", admits Michelle for whom it was the first time she had to accustom herself to foreign study and work surroundings. But the warm welcome of the new schoolmates and colleagues in Florence helped her very much.



In addition, she not only had the possibility to get in contact with the Florentine people but also with young people from many different countries as she stayed in a hostel for three weeks. Looking back she is convinced that going to Florence was an inspiring new experience: "I gained a lot of personal skills and self-confidence and got to know a lot about other cultures. Apart from that I naturally learned new professional techniques. And of course, I learned Italian!"



The language was indeed one of the greatest challenges for Michelle: she had had just little knowledge of Italian before, and most of her new colleagues and fellow pupils had in turn only basic knowledge of English. But nevertheless she managed to communicate: "In Italy people speak gesticulating – that helped a lot!" What she enjoyed most was working at a hairdresser's shop where she was able to attend to clients independently.

Michelle is convinced that the skills she gained during her stay in Italy will turn out pretty important for her future work life. She finds her internship abroad a very instructive and fascinating way of acquiring new skills. Her learning outcomes are now documented in the Europass Mobility – the Europass document that stands amongst other things for the courage to learn and work in foreign countries. Michelle's time to apply for a job has not come yet because her current apprenticeship supervisor Gabriele Stammerjohann offered her further employment after the training. In her opinion, the Europass Mobility is able to document the learning outcomes in a more detailed way than a working certificate. Gaining experience and skills abroad is for Gabriele Stammerjohann an important part of apprenticeship: "As a hairdresser you need to develop professional skills and in addition to that it is important to work autonomously and to be communicative. Going abroad is therefore a perfect training for the job!" That is also the point of view of Michelle. She is happy to have faced the "adventure mobility" – and could even imagine doing it again!

Race for Europe

A global player in engineering offers mobility experience to trainees

Franziska Bopp, NEC Germany

The automotive sector is one of the most globalized industries in the world. Companies, their workers and the production of cars are distributed all over the world. Thus, these companies have always been pioneers in internationalization. Such attitude should be shared by their employees as well. Naturally, the best way to teach and foster intercultural awareness and understanding is to promote first-hand international experience. It is to this end that the German automobile company AUDI offers its trainees three-month stays in their partner companies abroad.

“Our international exchanges started 13 years ago, when for the first time trainees were sent abroad - at that time still without a certificate such as the Europass Mobility,” remembers Ute Miehling, responsible for international mobility in the team for commercial vocational education at AUDI in Ingolstadt. She has introduced the Europass Mobility as a standard means of documentation of learning outcomes acquired by their apprentices abroad. Over the last six years, Ms Miehling has issued more than 200 Europass Mobility documents. “The Europass Mobility allows for a very detailed description not only of the professional skills but also of the organizational, social, intercultural and language competences. Furthermore, it is accepted all over Europe”, she is convinced.

„From the first day I was part of the team even though conversations were sometimes difficult because of the language“

Trainees at AUDI are sent to Lamborghini, Bentley or Bugatti as well as to SEAT, VW Slovakia or AUDI Hungaria and AUDI Brussels. For the young trainees – often not older than 18 – this is an exciting, unique experience. Natalie Reichel and Jeremias Risch, both apprentices to become car mechatronics technicians, spent three months at AUDI Hungaria in autumn 2013. Both enjoyed their time in Hungary very much and would recommend this experience to their fellow trainees. “I was impressed of the friendliness and helpfulness of my colleagues in Hungary. From the first day I was part of the team even though conversations were sometimes difficult because of the language”, says Natalie. This warm welcome helped them very much in a situation when they had to arrange their daily life in a foreign country completely on their own. “To do your own cooking, washing and daily tasks far away from your family was a new experience for me”, Jeremy admits. “But I became more independent and self-confident in result”.

Natalie and Jeremias received their Europass Mobility certificates after their stay in Hungary. The document states their professional tasks and duties during their time at AUDI Hungaria but also gives an account of which social, organizational, language and other skills they have shown. Both are very happy to have these skills and competences documented through a Europe-wide recognised instrument. “The Europass Mobility is very important”, thinks Jeremy. “The document can help a lot when you apply for jobs after your traineeship.” And Natalie adds: “For my supervisors as well as for future employers it is important to have an official certification of my activities in Hungary. This experience became a part of my professional and personal biography. Now I have a reliable evidence of this fact.”

Ute Miehling is convinced that certifying skills and competences in the document is a valuable validation not only for the apprentices themselves but also for further assignments of the people within and outside the company. For the future she is planning to also use the Europass CV in the application procedure for mobility placements abroad. “The clear and structured layout of the Europass CV makes it easy to read and understand which skills an applicant has. Furthermore, I can quickly compare the candidates and take my decision on the basis of a sound interpretation of their CVs. This saves my time and helps in the decision-making process.”

Ms Miehling's supervisor, Marco Reich, Director of Commercial Vocational Education at AUDI AG Ingolstadt, fully supports her view, and adds: "AUDI is a big international company within the global Volkswagen Group. Working in an international environment is our daily routine. That's why we offer even our youngest employees – apprentices and students – the experience

of international working mobility." For Mr Reich, the advantages for the individual and the company outweigh by far the temporary absence of an apprentice. "Apart from a deepened professional expertise our trainees acquire social skills and build their own international networks. This helps later in their professional career. It's easier for them to understand and respect sensitivities and needs of foreign business partners."

For Nathalie Reichel the most difficult situation came when she had to leave Hungary. "The people, the work and the country had become very familiar to me so I felt like I had to leave a part of myself when I had to go back to Germany." This is probably the best result of mobility experiences in Europe: to feel a bit at home at places you have never been before.



One of the tasks of Jeremy Risch (second on the right) and Natalie Reichel (first on the right) in Hungary was to convert an AUDI A3 into a police car.



The Europass Viral Video Competition 2014 has its winners!

In the previous edition of the Europass Magazine, we informed you about the Europass Viral Video Competition for the year 2014. The results are here now, after 62 videos were submitted and over 4000 people participated in the public vote.

Watch the winning videos here:

1st prize: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9F9xqRPIpM>

2nd prize: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_hrOGYyWZs

3rd prize: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bto8_78rCR8

...and enjoy the great story of the making of the video that reached to the top this year:

The idea of the winning video was generated by second-year multimedia students at the Design Department of Kuressaare Regional Training Centre (Estonia) in a subject called Vocational Projects. When we heard from the Estonian National Europass Centre about the Europass Viral Video Competition we immediately thought of animation and humour. First, we read carefully the task of the competition, and then went on to background research on Europass to be sure that we know all about it. The next task was to get ready for a brainstorm: we tried to boil Europass down to its very essence and came up with the phrase „important paper“. We draw a mental map and put down all the main roles and our personal experiences with paper in our everyday lives. Then we circled the most emotional, most universal and funniest roles of paper on the mind map. Each student chose one scene and drew a storyboard for taking a photo to be later used in parallax animation. Most of the actors in the scenes are us ourselves. Finally we needed good music from Jamendo that would support the epic nature of looking back in one's life, also creating a funny dissonance with the not so deep but nonetheless important moments such as feeding an F grade paper to a pet, making a spitball or being saved by a toilet roll handed by a stranger. We were almost done, but how to get a video go viral? Well, a cute kitten will always do the job as countless photos and videos on the internet prove.

Merit Karise, co-ordinating teacher and supervisor, Estonia

Czech citizens finding work in their desired fields abroad

A survey among individual users of the Europass Certificate Supplement

Sylvie Boumová, NEC Czech Republic



The National Europass Center Czech Republic (NEC CZ) is run by the National Institute of Education. NEC CZ has been issuing the Europass Certificate Supplement (ECS) since 2007 in cooperation with upper-secondary vocational schools. Currently the ECS is provided for around 800 fields of study in Czech, English, German and French. In 2014, almost 65.000 graduates obtained their Certificate Supplements. The figure amounts for more than 50% of all secondary education graduates in the country this year. Those graduates who have not obtained their ECS after the completion of their study may submit an individual request to the NEC CZ. This service can be provided retroactively without a limit of the year of graduation.

Information received through the survey signals that the ECS is one of the most useful documents for citizens who wish to work or study across the European Union.

In order to obtain a valuable feedback on the usefulness of the ECS, NEC CZ launched a survey among individual applicants in August 2014. A questionnaire consisting of 5 questions was sent to 315 individuals, and 101 answers were received.

Among the feedback received through the questionnaire were, among others, the following statements:

„To me, the Certificate Supplement is like my leaving exam for foreign countries.“

„Great that the ECS is free of charge.“

„When I have presented my ECS at a job interview, the HR valued that I was well prepared.“

„A Labour Office in Germany automatically recognized my achieved qualification.“

„Europass set my level of education into the level of education of the given country.“

„Without my ECS I would not have had a chance to ask for a job corresponding to my qualification.“

Information received through the survey signals that the ECS is one of the most useful documents for citizens who wish to work or study across the European Union. It also allowed us to create a list of the most significant advantages of the ECS according to Czech citizens:

- available free of charge in 3 languages;
- recognized in all of Europe and even beyond;
- describes clearly the gained qualifications (and their EQF level);
- describes vocational competences related to the respective field of study.

The following suggestions for improvements were mentioned. The ECS should be:

- provided also for partial qualifications;
- better inter-connected with educational systems in the EU countries;
- available online for free download (this is already the case in many EU countries);
- better promoted among employers and HR specialists;
- translated into other languages, for example Spanish.

Three of the respondents of the survey shared their stories with us:

Martin Grülling, Ostrava

graduated in 1991 in General Economics, 50+ years old

I decided to look for employment in another country of the European Union, and I chose Great Britain. The fees of Employment Agencies seemed quite high so I took on searching for job opportunities directly at employers via email and telephone communication. It turned out that I needed a document that would serve as proof for recognition of my Czech education in other EU countries. I can say that the Europass Certificate Supplement I have presented helped me during the interview and was appreciated and fully satisfactory for the foreign employer.

The document helped me gain the job eventually. I learned in the process that language competence and a record of work experience is not quite sufficient: you need to have your formal qualification recognised as well. I am above fifty years old, and these days it is not too easy to get and keep a new job at my age, let alone in a foreign country. I consider it a success that I did.

Zdeněk Chytra, Berlin

finished apprenticeship in 2001 as a Waiter, 33 years old

Initially, I got registered in Germany as a job seeker with only basic level education. When I presented my Europass Certificate Supplement, however, the Employment Office automatically recognized my qualification which led to a much wider access to employment opportunities without the need to take additional courses.

This helped me a lot to succeed in the labour market. It took me 2 weeks to find a job in Germany.

I was looking for it directly when I was there, but I never tried to find one in Germany while being in the Czech Republic. First I was trying to find a job in gastronomy and then in IT. Now I work as an IT service technician.

Petr Tropschuh, Munich

graduated in 1997 in Car Bodywork - Engineering Production.



I have been living in Munich, Germany, since 2004. I gained my vocational certificate as a car bodyworker, which is a profession I very much like, in the Czech Republic. However, at one point I decided to try my luck and move to Germany.

Unfortunately, I could not find a job in my profession there, so I spent the first five years working in a restaurant. This was mainly due to the fact that my education was not recognized and I did not have the finances to study again in Germany. In 2006, I started working at the Munich airport which increased my interest in air transport industry. I wanted to become an aircraft mechanic and I put all my efforts into achieving this goal. I found the company Aero Bildungs on the internet, and they informed me about Europass. Consequently, I obtained my Europass Certificate Supplement

and thanks to it I could start a course for the desired profession, which was paid for by the Munich Labour Office. Now I work at the E.I.S. Aircraft Munich and I can say it is a great job. This could not have happened without my dedication, of course, but also the recognition of my qualification through Europass helped a good deal.



Education and Culture

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