

Biarritz, 26/11/2008; EU Sports Forum.

Implementation of the White Paper on Sport
"Professional Qualifications"
Herman Rutgers , EHFA

Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this important and unique gathering, at such a crucial time for the sport, active leisure and fitness sectors.

My name is Herman Rutgers and I represent EHFA, the European Health and Fitness Association, based in Brussels.

First, by way of introduction, some points about the European health and fitness industry.

In the world of health and fitness, Europe is the most significant market in the world.

Some 400,000 employees service 40 million consumers in almost 40,000 facilities.

In 2007, the total value of the sector was €20 billion, almost twice the value of professional football.

This is a unique sport sector in the sense that we don't have world championships, no gold medals, no champions league, but many athletes use our centres to get better in their sport or just come to our centres to stay healthy.

The H & F sector is can play an ever bigger role in reducing the disastrous effects of lifestyle diseases like obesity and overweight.

That is why EHFA stands behind the attempts of DG Education and Culture and DG Sanco to get "more people, more active, more often. "

In the context of the White Paper on Sports, EHFA applauds the initiative of the **European Physical Activity Guidelines** which our industry wholeheartedly supports.

However, I am here today to talk about professional qualifications...

EQF and ECVET have been recognized by EHFA as crucial for our sector since 2005, as in our business the human factor makes all the difference.

At the bedrock of this is the painstakingly crucial work that has been completed by EHFA, with the support of the European Commission, to develop a structure for education and learning that is aligned to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

Every employer has now been made aware that as their representative at the European level, EHFA believes that the quality of staff, their freedom to work anywhere in the European Union, and the recognition of their qualities and qualifications should be of utmost importance.

Two years ago, the EHFA members took the bold decision to take the progress made by specialists in the industry who had helped to develop a set of pan-European standards and bring it in front of every employer in the European fitness industry.

Without employer engagement, the progress made in education and training will not leave the strategists desk.

In July of this year, EHFA started the creation of a European Register of Exercise Professionals – the practical output of all of the work in this field to date.

The European Register of Exercise Professionals (EREPS) is an independent process for the registering of all instructors, trainers and teachers working across Europe in the exercise and fitness industry.

It is a pan-European system, based on independent national registers, culminating in a central European database. It has been designed, based on an existing register called REPS in the UK with 7 years of success and 27.000 or 70% of the workforce registered today.

Through its quality assurance process EREPS recognises that exercise professionals are qualified to do their job giving consumers, employers and partners in medical professions the necessary level of confidence in their professionalism and a structure for increased mobility of workers.

Registration means that an exercise professional has met prescribed minimum standards of good practice, including the adoption of a

Code of Ethical Practice and that they are committed to raising standards through a process of continuing professional development.

However, without employer support, this goes nowhere. Standards are only of value if they are relevant and implementable.

And we have made progress, I am happy to say;

Fitness First, the largest operator of fitness facilities in Europe, has pledged to ensure all their fitness staff are qualified to a level aligned to EQF so that their instructors can be recorded as a member of the European Register of Exercise Professionals.

In addition, we have expressions of interest from major operators in Scandinavia, Benelux, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Czech Republic and Poland.

This is in addition to the movement that is being seen at the national level through EHFA's national association members in Portugal, Netherlands and Belgium .

Hot off the press, I would now like to turn to an exciting project that this week has been agreed with the support of DG EAC.

In partnership with the DG EAC, EHFA has developed an innovative solution through ECVET that allows for learning across borders.

Bringing to the table the key operators of health clubs and leisure centres, this project sees the concept of ECVET tested at the frontline of operational practice with the leading organisations in the sector.

Fitness First, Health City, SATS, Holmes Place Iberia, Holmes Place Central Europe and Injoy together have a combined number of sites over 700, a workforce of roughly 9,000 who service around 2 million European consumers.

For the first time, the potential of ECVET will reach the grassroots of the fitness sector.

An international scholarship programme is being built which sees four EHFA Accredited VET providers working with 6 multinational organisations to build an international curriculum and examination strategy based on the outcomes of EHFA's previous ECVET related projects.

This will take the theory established in that project and expose it to the reality of practical implementation to test some critical

assumptions relating to the mobility, diversity and flexibility of the European health and fitness sector.

Real exercise professionals will be given the opportunity to study a part of their course in four different countries.

The candidates will be given an opportunity following each portion of the course to spend up to five days working with one of the multinational employers to gain practical work experience whilst learning.

The process will culminate in the award of the **Jean Monnet European Exercise Professional of the Year** Award which will be given to the best performing candidate as an incentive.

This is just an example of how the largest organisations in the sector are now engaging with the progress that is being made in the area of learning at the European level.

However, we are still at the very early stages and have some challenges ahead.

We recognise that the roll-out of the European Register of Exercise Professionals is likely to take seven years, but here are factors that could greatly contribute to this process moving quicker;

The most crucial factor being the role of national authorities.

There will be many people in this room with an interest in qualifications at the national level.

Urgent discussions are now needed to ensure that progress on the European level is recognised at the national level and measures are taken to address the compatibility of these systems.

EHFA extends an open offer to any national authority that would like to begin this dialogue, and this is the very reason why I am here, so please come and talk to me....

Thank You.

Herman Rutgers

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For more information;

www.ehfa.eu

www.ereps.eu