

**EUROPEAN REGION OF THE
WORLD CONFEDERATION FOR
PHYSICAL THERAPY**



**Report of the
ER-WCPT
Workshop on a
Common Platform
for Physiotherapists**

**24 May 2006
Šibenik, Croatia**

European Region of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT)

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1. INTRODUCTION

The European Commission has approved a Directive to clarify and simplify the rules of Recognition of Professional Qualifications in order to facilitate free movement of qualified people among the Member States, particularly in the light of an enlarged European Union. The New Directive was approved on 7th September 2005 and officially published on 30th September 2005. After this publication of the Directive, the EU Member States will have two years to implement this Directive into their national law.

The Directive will replace fifteen existing Directives in the field of recognition of professional qualifications and constitutes the first comprehensive modernisation of the Community system since it was conceived forty years ago.

A number of changes are included compared with the existing rules, including greater liberalisation of the provision of services, more automatic recognition of qualifications and increased flexibility in the procedures for updating the Directive.

Following this aim of the new directive of providing a simpler and more transparent procedure for recognition of professional qualifications, it will be possible for professional organisations both at European and at national level to establish Common Platforms. The objective of a common platform is to avoid the compensation measures required by the different Member States if there are substantial differences of education and training. This will facilitate worker migration between the EU countries.

The European Region of the WCPT has followed the development of the new directive and submitted their comments to the European Union institutions. The Executive Committee of the ER-WCPT has established a Common Platform Task Force in order to explore the feasibility of developing a Common Platform for physiotherapists at European Level. This Task Force, composed by the Chairmen of the EU and Education Working Groups plus two members from each, held a meeting with the European Commission, on Friday 30th September 2005, to discuss the steps necessary to achieve it.

2. DEFINITION OF A COMMON PLATFORM

What is a Common Platform?

The concept of a Common Platform (C.P.) is defined in Article 15(1) as a collection of criteria on professional qualifications able to bridge the substantial differences between the training conditions in the different Member States. In compliance with the criteria of the platform, the professionals following this procedure would already have compensated for the differences in question in advance. It must be emphasised that the purpose of the platform cannot in any way be to force national authorities to modify nor to harmonise their national legislation. This is explicitly stated in Article 15(4) of the Directive. The purpose of the platform is to “predefine” the qualification criteria able to overcome the differences between the various national training courses so as to obviate the need for any compensatory measure. Professionals are free to follow the Common Platform procedure or the present system of title recognition, since both procedures will remain together.

The Common Platform has the aim of facilitating the migration of workers but it is not compulsory to present a Common Platform. It is optional since the actual procedure established by the Member States will remain even with a Common Platform. It will also be possible for the professionals to choose the actual criteria or the Common Platform procedure to recognize their titles.

The Common Platform objective is to avoid the compensation measures required by the different EU Member States to recognize titles. The actual procedure of title recognition is based on the obligation of the EU Member States to recognize titles from other EU Member States. As there are differences among the EU Member States titles based on professional experience required or years of education-training, compensation measures may be required. The Common Platform would avoid these measures because if you follow the C.P. no measures will be required by the Member States since the professionals would achieve them before through the Common Platform.

Steps to develop a Common Platform

1st Step – Inventory of the profession by the association in the 25 Member States

Inventory of national regulations: The association has to make an inventory of the regulated profession in the 25 Member States. This inventory has to take into consideration the fact that the Common Platform needs two majorities to be recognized by the EU institutions:

1. Majority: 2/3 of the Members States must be evaluated and
2. Majority: All the Members states where physiotherapy is regulated.

It means that we have to make an inventory of the physiotherapy situation in all the EU Members states where it is regulated and it must be regulated at least in 2/3 of the EU Member States (M.S.).

The inventory must cover:

1. The level of qualifications and its duration required/provided in the EU Member States.
2. What are the areas of activities of the profession and the content of the training in the E.U. Member States.
3. The definition of the profession in the E.U. M.S. Only if the definitions are the same could they receive the same treatment. There will not be problems if the definitions are similar.

After that we will have a first picture of the profession based on:

- Work experience
- Education-training + duration
- Areas of activity

This picture would tell us if it is possible to have a Common Platform or not and what kind of a Common Platform we have to create.

2nd Step – Establishing the Common Platform

The idea of the Common Platform is not a harmonisation; it is not to establish an average level, since the Member States want to keep their levels. The idea is to find the way for the professionals to take steps in advance to compensate for being in a E.U. M.S. with a lower level.

Some examples of criterias for a Common Platform were presented:

- It will be necessary to have a minimum level of the diploma, BAC+3. If not, it will not be possible to compensate differences such as to pass from 1 year study to 5 years.
- Minimum 1 year experience.
- Activities covered by the profession. The education-training must prepare to the maximum number of activities.

In any case it will depend on how the profession is regulated in the different countries and the Commission knows that it is impossible to find a perfect identity.

3rd Step – Presenting the Common Platform to the European Commission

Once the Common Platform is submitted to the EU Commission, there will be a consultation procedure submitted to the Member States that will appoint a group of experts to evaluate it. They will verify that the Common Platform improves the mobility of professionals. It is the Commission who must approve the Common Platform but it only will do that if the E.U. Member States agree by qualified majority (The approval procedure is in article 54 of the Directive).

In any case, the Commission will prepare a procedure to publish the Common Platform on internet to receive comments from other professionals maybe not represented by the association or national authorities. This procedure will take place before the presentation of the Common Platform for final approval.

Once approved, the Common Platform will become a “European legal body” and not a European association Common Platform.

3. Presentation of the Workshop

On Wednesday 24 May 2006, the Task Force on a Common Platform and the Education WG organised a Workshop on Common Platforms and Legislation-Regulation that was held for the Member Organisations of the European Region of WCPT and National Competent Authorities in Sibenik, Croatia.

56 delegates from 29 Member Organisations attended the Workshop, with the Vice President and the Secretary General of the WCPT, the President of the European Network of Physiotherapy in Higher Education (ENPHE), and representatives from national authorities of the following countries: Austria, Cyprus, Poland, Norway and Canada.

3.1 The purpose of the workshop was to:

1. Clarify understanding of the concept of a Common Platform
2. Review progress on data collection by ER-WCPT and MOs towards an inventory of national regulations, levels of training and professional activities for the establishment of a Common Platform (stage 1)
3. Clarify understanding of the Bologna Process (in outline) and its implications for the establishment of a Common Platform.
4. Explore key issues and challenges for stakeholders in moving towards the establishment of a Common Platform

3.2 The workshop sought to provide the following outcomes:

1. Knowledge of what a Common Platform is in all E.U. Countries
2. Identify key issues for further work
3. Review the draft timetable for the three stages to achieve a Common Platform
4. Facilitate the communication among MOs, national responsible authorities and Higher Education Institutions (HEI's).
5. Identify common points in the regulatory and education process

3.3 Programme of the Workshop

09.00 – 09.15 **Opening of the Workshop. Welcome Address**

Antonio Lopes – Chairman of the ER-WCPT

Gabriele Dorninger – Bundesministerium für Gesundheit und Frauen

09.15 – 10.45

Chairman: Anne Lexow / Co-chairman: Dagmar Pavlu

Common Platforms: *Sigrun Knútsdóttir – 1st ER-WCPT Vice-Chairman*

- The nature of Common Platforms,
 - Criteria for establishment
 - Stages of establishment
- Points for clarification

Focus on the Structure of Higher Education in Europe Bologna Process

Grahame Pope – Member of the Education Matters WG of the ER-WCPT

Points for clarification

Current situation of the European Region

Antonio Lopes, ER-WCPT Chairman

- Challenges, opportunities, next steps

Points for clarification

10.15 – 10.45 *Coffee break*

11.15 – 12.45 **Panel discussion**

Chairman: Nina Holten

Participants: Anne Lindrup, Advisor Health Educations National Board of Health Denmark / Rachel Tripp, Health Professions Council, UK / Antoon Ven, President of ENPHE / Antonio Lopes, Chairman of the ER-WCPT

- Legislation, regulation, common platform
- Substantial difference in education
- Uniformity of adaptation periods and aptitude tests
- Recognition of professional experience
- CPD-criteria

12.45 – 14.00 *Lunch*

14.00 – 16.00 **Group discussion** – Introduction: Liz Carrington – Member of the EU WG of the ER-WCPT

16.00 – 16.30 *Coffee break*

16.30 – 17.45 **Reports from the discussion groups – 3 key issues**

Chairman: Eckhardt Boehle

17.45 Closing

Note: All the presentations are listed in the annexes of this report and available for download on the ER-WCPT website www.physio-europe.org

4. SUMMARY FROM THE PANEL DISCUSSION

Panel participants:

- Chairman: Nina Holten, Education Working Group
- Anne Lindrup, Competent Authority, Denmark
- Rachel Tripp, Health Professional Council, UK
- Antoon Ven, ENPHE
- Antonio Lopes, Chairman of the ER-WCPT

The emphasis of the panel discussion was on the following topics:

- Legislation, regulation, common platform
- Substantial difference in education
- Uniformity of adaptation periods and aptitude tests
- Recognition of professional experience
- CPD-criteria

The participants from the Competent Authorities were asked the following questions:

1. How does your Competent Authority understand Regulation?
2. What Criteria are used for identifying substantial differences in education?
3. What will be the benefits of a Common Platform for waiving compensation measures?

Anne Lindrup, Competent Authority, Denmark:

She pointed out that there are differences in how the registration has been organised in different countries. The organisation and structure of the education and scope of practice is also different.

1.Regulation:

In Denmark there is regulation by law, one act for each profession.

In each act, the education minister co-operates with the health minister.

The education ministry makes the core curriculum, not on description of the practice.

Danish authorisation is lifelong, but not yet a requirement for re-registration.

Each applicant pays a fee for the application of authorisation.

2. Substantial differences: Knowledge of which is essential to ensure the duration and content of training.

Aims: The safety of the patient and to be able to deliver health services of high quality.

The professional must be able to:

- work independently,
- assess independently
- make functional diagnosis
- decide interventions
- evaluate
- have communication abilities with patients, relatives, colleagues and other staff members

Academic level is not the priority.

The Bologna process is an academic description

The EU Directive looks at professional qualifications, not academic description.

3. Benefits of a Common Platform:

Chiropractors and occupational therapists have an accreditation system that makes mutual recognition of professional qualifications easier.

Administration would be easier and fewer resources would be needed.

The C.PL would be a useful tool, but the description must be clear and transparent.

The information must be reliable.

Rachel Tripp, Health Professional Council (HPC), UK:

1. Regulation is important to:

- Setting standards
- Keep a register - record
- Approve courses
- Taking actions

Regulation can be in the form of:

- Self-regulation, professionally led
- Statutory regulation
- Independent body (HPC) – self financing

The regulation has the aim to protect the public.

The HPC deals with 13 professions.

In the Council there are members from the profession and from the public.

Setting standards:

Level of qualification for entry to the register (mainly universities)

Programme admission procedure

Programme management and resources

Curriculum

There are threshold standards for entry to the register.

This is shared and profession specific

Expectations of health professional, skills required for application of practice

Standard of conduct performance and ethics

Standard of Continuous Professional Development

All professionals need to show CPD that should be relevant of services and how they have developed it.

Keeping a register:

There are more than 4000 applications for migration to the HPC each month. In evaluating the applications, both academic and clinical level is evaluated.

Co-operation with other regulators is important

www.healthregulation.org

Approval of programmes:

The HPC visits educational institutions to assess courses.

Fitness to practice

The HPC takes action to protect the public.

When a complaint is received it is investigated and then interim orders are made.

2. Criteria (substantial differences)

Standard of proficiency

Minimum level for safe and effective practice

Competency focused

Learning outcomes

Main aim: → Protection of the public

3. Potential benefits of a Common Platform:

- Decreased bureaucracy
- Flexibility in delivering training
- Freedom of movement
- Public recognition
- Common understanding of professions => better healthcare provision
- Strengthen networks between competent authorities

Antoon Ven, ENPHE

The president of ENPHE was asked the following questions:

1. How does the work of ENPHE contribute to the convergence of basic education?
2. How could educational providers have a common documentation that will allow identification of substantial differences on education among EU countries?
3. How do educational providers, as curriculum developers, see the usefulness of a Common Platform?

1. ENPHE contribute to the convergence of basic education

In the Charter of ENPHE the aim is to bring together education institutions in Europe, promote convergence in physiotherapy education and stimulate the development of a European dimension in physiotherapy education curricula.

ENPHE is trying to establish a database to describe and categorise physiotherapy education. This task is difficult.

Increased co-operation with ER-WCPT is important.

ENPHE is going to develop an Erasmus thematic network

2. How could educational providers have a common documentation that will allow identification of substantial differences on education among EU countries?

It could be possible by establishing a database. There is a need to know what is behind the programmes.

Thematic network can be helpful.
Common language is important.
ENPHE would like to contribute to the Common Platform.

3. How do educational providers, as curriculum developers, see the usefulness of a Common Platform?

It is important to compare to international standards. Could be used as a reference tool towards international audit and accreditation
International recognition of qualification to improve mobility, staff, students and professionals

Antonio Lopes, ER-WCPT:

He reminded the participants of the steps of establishment that had been introduced earlier in the Workshop.

The inventory of information needs to cover facts and must be accurate and reliable.
Regulation: Source of information. The ER-WCPT is using the EU database of regulated professions.
Sources of information are: Member Organisations, schools, NARIC-centers, and EURODYCE.

Areas of activities. Sources of information can be: Legislation, regulatory bodies, competent authorities and Member Organisations. The Benchmark Statement on Physiotherapy education outcomes and the WCPT description on physiotherapy can also be used as a reference.
Content of training: Sources of information are schools, accreditation agencies, quality assurance agencies, national core curriculum frameworks, WCPT '07 draft guidelines on entry level.

The Directive looks at programme contents whereas the Bologna process emphasises the professional competencies. Both need to be taken into consideration.
This is both a challenge and an opportunity.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Nina Holten opened the discussion:
Patients have to rely on good education, quality of the profession and the quality of their services.
For the applicant it is important to know better in advance how and what is required. A Common platform will make that easier.

Common platforms will do the work instead of the Competent Authorities.

The fee for applications was questioned and pointed out that as an example in the UK the fee is 200 £ and this could be a very high cost for applicants from Eastern Europe.

It was argued that the Competent Authorities must charge for their services

It was pointed out that Common Platforms would give us opportunities to recognise differences.

It was questioned how we keep the Common Platform alive and responsive to political priorities and needs of the countries?

If we have a Common Platform for physiotherapists to waive compensations, would the ER-WCPT then be responsible to protect the public, if there was damage done?

Per Haugum, from the Competent Authority in Norway, pointed that we are all responsible for our own actions. The authorities would pay for damages in the same way as for national professionals.

There was also a question on how providers related to science and new knowledge could ensure evidence based practice within the Common Platform?

Antonio Lopes stressed that The ER-WCPT needs to discuss the issue of how to keep the Common Platform alive; this could be done, for example, by projects that involve people with different responsibilities.

Conclusions:

It was agreed that the first step is willingness, we want a transparent system which is the core but a system that still acknowledges differences.

It was also suggested that an informal start might be easier.

5. SUMMARY FROM THE DISCUSSION GROUPS

After the morning presentations and panel discussion, the delegates were invited to distribute themselves into discussion groups and the following questions were presented to be answered by them:

- Question 1: How will the establishment of a Common Platform be a benefit to the profession in your country?
- Question 2: What are the barriers to the establishment of a Common Platform in your country?
 - Legislative?
 - Educational?
 - Other?
- Question 3: What steps can the Member Organisations take at national level to promote the development of a Common Platform working with
 - The Competent Authority
 - Educational institutions

The main conclusions of the discussion groups were as follows

Question 1: How will the establishment of a Common Platform be a benefit to the profession in your country?

Benefits for the profession

- To identify differences in practice and education
- To have more transparency education and practice
- To create a common basis
- Aiming for standardized curricula
- Possibility to define / lift the standards of qualification / education
- To decide on the level and content of education (it could also be a barrier)
- To increase coherence in education programmes within the country
- To create an “European thought”
- To raise the profile as an autonomous profession in Europe and increase position of physiotherapy in each country
- To clarify the essential competences of a physiotherapist
- To provide a tool for the authorities and make their work easier
- To facilitate the migration internationally and inside/outside Europe and the recognition itself
- To learn from each other

Question 2: What are the barriers to the establishment of a Common Platform in your country?

- Legislative?
- Educational?
- Other?

Barriers

- Decisions are made elsewhere
- Slow decision-making / law-making
- Legislation is complicated
- Keep your autonomy
- Be careful of misuse
- Resistance from other professions
- Levels of education are different
- Scope of practice is different
- Cultural differences
- Lack of communication in general and specially between educational and professional systems

Question 3: What steps can the Member Organisations take at national level to promote the development of a Common Platform working with

- The Competent Authority
- Educational institutions

Steps to take

- Discuss this issues with competent authorities and educational institutes, for example inviting them to national and international conferences
- Open-minded towards authorities
- Start cooperation with all relevant partners and specially with the national co-ordinators (art 58)
- Use basic material data from inside / outside Europe
- Use the example from Canada (Regulators / Universities / Association / Accreditation)
- Promote the Common Platform
- Take the necessary time to develop each step
- Look in a global perspective