



## ELF: E-Learning Courses and Register for Fitness Professionals

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### Abstract

*The paper presents the main results and methodology of eLF e-learning courses (n. 511669-2010-LLP-KA3-KA3MP), co-financed by the European Union by the EACEA, as part of the LLP-Lifelong Learning research program. The eLF e-learning program aims to train professionals that will meet the European training standards in the fields of group exercise, to include cardiorespiratory, muscle conditioning and aquafitness as well as individual fitness instruction with weights, resistance machines and cardiofitness equipment at EQF level 3 and Personal Training at EQF level 4.*

*The courses are multilingual, very structured and use complex didactical materials.*

*The project involves over 25 European countries. The value added of the eLF e-learning is that all participants who successfully complete the course will be admitted to the ELF NATIONAL REGISTER valid in all the project partner countries. The register will certify the qualification both to potential clients and companies that want to hire instructors and will allow the instructor to have access to job offers from other European countries that recognize the registers. This register put in practice European Union guidelines concerning certification of competences, transparency, favouring mobility of Fitness instructors across Europe.*

*FIAF, Federazione Italiana Aerobica e Fitness, coordinates the development of the technical Fitness Programs of the eLF Project. The courses have been recognized and accredited by the European Health and Fitness Association - EHFA.*

*University "Sapienza" of Rome, Department of Computer and System Sciences is the coordinator; Caspur is the technological partner; Ceres takes care of evaluation, dissemination and exploitation aspects. This paper is the result of project outcomes produced by the partnership.*

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*For more details see [www.elearningfitness.eu](http://www.elearningfitness.eu).*

### 1. eLF objectives

The first objective of the eLF project is the development of an eLearning platform and content, which is based on the European occupational standards for fitness instructing and personal training occupations at EQF levels 3 and 4.

The second objective of the project is the development of a pilot national register platform for fitness professionals within the partner countries that do not have a national one. At the end of the testing the successful participants will be listed on the pilot register platform and the register template will also have been translated into the same languages. This will enable interaction and communication, which will enhance mobility of fitness professional across Europe.

A major impact of the project will be a more professional level of fitness instructor and personal trainer, who meet European occupational standards for fitness instructing and personal trainer occupations, which are referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). This will enhance consistency of vocational education and training, will promote the mobility of exercise professionals throughout Europe, which will ultimately safeguard consumers with a final impact on over 40 million Europeans through health enhancing physical activity.

Before creating the e-learning, eLF partners carried out a research phase to analyse and compare all information available on current eLearning platforms for fitness related occupations and registers of exercise professionals in the partner countries. The results of the research[1] have been used to define the contents to be developed in accordance with the learning outcomes identified by the European Standard of occupation and to choose the most effective and user friendly methodologies, didactical materials and technological tools.

Moreover, a research study on existing registers of professionals[2] has been conducted by the UK Register of Exercise Professionals (UKREPs) exploiting its experience as the official UK register for over 11 years. The development of a pilot eLF standardised national register platform is based on the UKREPs, but also takes into consideration the European Register of Exercise Professionals (EREPs)



and in accordance with ICREPS (International Council of Registers of Exercise Professionals) and other national registers of exercise professionals where they exist, such as Fitness Australia, New Zealand REPs, REPs South Africa. The UK Register (around 30000 members) is estimated to have over two thirds of the industry as members. It is a voluntary register, which means that it is not regulated by government but by the industry itself. There are currently 24000 members on the Australian register, 3000 on the New Zealand register and each of these registers are voluntary and exist due to industry needs rather than Government intervention. These significant voluntary numbers demonstrate that there was a need within the industry to improve professionalism and raise standards. The research highlighted two important aspects to setting up a register:

- A database is required to record the details of the registrants and to provide information to the public and employers of their registration status and abilities;
- Systems and processes must be established to ensure that those accepted onto the register have the knowledge, competence and skills to do the job.

## 2. ELF outputs

The eLearning Fitness Project (eLF) has developed a European training system for e-learning in fitness and covers a network of 19 core partners (18 EU Member States plus Norway) and 86 associated partners in 26 countries (17 EU Member States plus Albania, Croatia, Russia, Serbia, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, USA and New Zealand). The development process for the e-learning contents was primarily accomplished by the involved training providers and based on the EQF standards for Level 3 (Fitness, Aqua Fitness and Group Fitness Instructor) and EQF Level 4 (Personal Trainer) established by EHFA. All courses have a preparatory module devoted to core knowledge that contains the theoretical items that guarantee the European minimum standard learning outcomes.

These courses are intended to train professionals that will meet the European training standards in the fields of group exercise, to include cardiorespiratory, muscle conditioning and aquafitness as well as individual fitness instruction with weights, resistance machines and cardiofitness equipment at EQF Level 3 and Personal Training at EQF Level 4.

The courses are loaded on a moodle platform and the didactical materials include videos and pictures that show the exercises as well as the demonstration of their correct execution.

At this stage approximately 400 candidates in all the partner countries are registered to participate in the pilot testing of the project.

Participants will follow an assessment process that includes: distance evaluation using tests and questionnaires for theoretical knowledge, face to face evaluations organized in each partner country, for the teaching skills and practical application of the knowledge, in the four different professional profiles.

Participants that successfully complete the courses will be registered in the eLF National Registers of fitness professionals.

Moreover, the EHFA Standards Council has evaluated the structure, contents and aimed learning outcomes of the courses for Fitness Instructor (EQF-level 3), Group Fitness Instructor (EQF-level 3) AquaFitness Instructor (EQF-level 3) and Personal Trainer (EQF-level 4). Against the background of the facts that the relevant eLF courses are based on EHFA standards, that they have been developed by an inter-institutional cooperation and the involvement of EHFA accredited training providers, EHFA Standards Council has decided to give its formal approval. Thus, all graduates of the mentioned eLF courses are formally entitled to be registered onto the European Register of Exercise Professionals (EREPS) after registration in their respective pilot National Register of Fitness Instructors, as this is one requirement of the eLF project.

The EHFA Standards Council emphasizes that because of the inter-institutional approach of the eLF project its graduates have a one off and exceptional status within the European educational network for health and fitness. Finally, all parties look forward to a successful collaboration.

## 3. The unique nature of Aerobics and Fitness in Italy[3]

There are no laws governing the Italian Fitness sector (often relegated to the status of "amateur sports" or described as a services industry), with the ambiguity concerning the status of the whole sector being rife.

There is only one law providing for the obligation to have a fitness centre director with a diploma in Motor Science. For the rest, in the Italian market, fitness instructors often have limited past experience as practitioners and a simple certificate of attendance of a short course where they have supposedly learned the exercises and how to use fitness machines. In fact, countless schools and fitness centres



organize short courses that are not recognized at national level. There is one example of organization that provides courses that are recognized at national level by a large number of fitness centres: the Italian Federation of Aerobics and Fitness (FIAF) with its School (SIAF – recognized by the Italian Ministry of Education). FIAF-SIAF provides 2 different levels of courses: the base module (study of the human body and theory regarding training principles and methodology) and the advanced courses, which include different professional modules. The base module is compulsory for people who do not have a degree in Motor Science. The FIAF-SIAF certified title is valid for 2 years, after which the trainees have to attend continuing education and further developmental courses.

In order to provide a basic skills set to future Fitness instructors and an equally basic service level to the schools which are dedicated to instructor training, a series of initiatives at local, national and European level have been rolled out by various organizations. FIAF has taken part in several European projects devoted to providing these standards. eLF is the exploitation of the results from one of these projects. Here, it is interesting to mention the process of the creation of the Italian Register of Professionals in Motor Activities and Fitness, promoted by FIAF. In July 2006, at CNEL (National Council of Economics and Labour constituted by the Ministry of Labour and the Unions) a Technical Institutional Table was established with representatives of the Ministries of Labour, Economic Development, Education, the Conference of Regions, CNEL, ISFOL (the Italian Institute for Workers' Training), "Tecnostruttura" of Regions. The intention of FIAF is to establish an official Register to classify all Fitness instructors with a recognized qualification, ensure adequate insurance against professional hazards and foster adherence to ethical behaviour. The Technical Table evaluates the option of entrusting the Chambers of Commerce, through the Coordination of Unioncamere, with keeping and maintaining the Register. A further step to recognize the Fitness professionals was created by ISFOL, thanks to FIAF's collaboration, in 2007, when the profession of "Maestro" of Fitness was included in the publication "Handbook for professionals of personal services".

#### **4. Conclusion**

Co-financed by the European Union, as part of the LLP-Lifelong Learning research program, the e-Learning Fitness Project offers the opportunity to participate in a series of free distance learning courses, to become:

- A Group Exercise instructor (Aerobics and Muscle Conditioning), EQF level 3;
- An AquaFitness instructor, EQF level 3;
- A Fitness instructor (weight room and cardio machines) EQF level 3;
- A Personal trainer, EQF level 4, after having successfully participated in the fitness instructor course (EQF level 3).

At this stage, eLF provides added value inside this dialogue among stakeholders and institutions that take care of health and safety of fitness consumers. eLF registers may become as the UK REPs a register of professionals recognized by the fitness industry. eLF partners involve many fitness providers with chains of fitness centres around the world.

Moreover, a European coordination of all National Registers would generate the opportunity to have a Pan European Register of Exercise Professionals.

#### **References**

- [1] Jenny Patrickson (CYQ), "Analysis of the State of the Art and Synthesis of e-learning courses", E-learning Fitness (eLF) Project Study Report D2.4, London, October 2011
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- [3] Ceres, Italian Report of the Leonardo Partnership Project n. LLP-LdV-PA-09-IT-0245 "Developing the professional skills of the future sports instructors in accordance with the EQF"