Report
Annual Network Meeting 2019

Date: 13-14 J
Venue: Bucharest, Romania

Introduction

This EQAVET Annual Network Meeting was organised by the European Commission and EQAVET Secretariat and hosted by the Ministry of National Education and the National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development in Romania. The meeting provides the strategic direction for the work of the EQAVET Network and responds to the ongoing policy needs concerning the quality assurance of VET. It provides the opportunity for discussion, allowing for different perspectives while striving for common solutions which benefit all Network members.

Twenty-two EU countries were represented at the Annual Network Meeting. Apologies were received from Denmark, France, Greece, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland and the UK. The Social Partners were represented by the European Trade Union confederation (ETUC) and UEAPME. The European Training Foundation (ETF) and the European Network for VET providers (EUproVET) were also represented. Apologies were also received from Cedefop.

The Annual Network Meeting was chaired by Joao Santos, Unit Vocational Training, Apprenticeships and Adult Learning - DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission.

A full list of participants can be found on the EQAVET website.

Opening speeches and Introduction to the Annual Network Meeting 2019

The meeting was officially opened by Joao Santos who welcomed participants to the meeting and thanked the Ministry of National Education and National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development for hosting the meeting. He noted this was an important meeting at a time when new policies were being developed such as the European Education Area, the reflection on VET post-2020 and the ongoing discussions in the ACVT group on the future of the EU tools for VET. He explained that the EU discussions on EQAVET will become clearer after these reflections and that the expertise of the EQAVET Network would be welcomed and helpful in these discussions.

He mentioned the EU initiative on "Platforms of vocational excellence" which has the primary aim of fostering excellence so that VET providers can play a pro-active leadership role in regional development and smart specialisation strategies. He also mentioned the ongoing preparation of the 4th EU Vocational Skills week which is taking place under the Finnish presidency in October 2019; and builds on the success of previous EU Vocational Weeks. The EQAVET Forum will be part of this and will take place in Helsinki on 16 October 2019.

Participants were welcomed by Ionel Florian Lixandru, Romanian Secretary of State for Pre-university education and Dalia-Maria Mircea-Daramus, Director of the National Centre for TVET Development.

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They noted that the meeting was organised under the Romanian Presidency which has provided an opportunity for enhancing reflection at the national level in key areas of VET, inter alia, making VET more attractive and relevant to learners and the labour market. Mr Lixandru mentioned the recent development of a new national framework for VET which focuses on lifelong learning, vulnerable groups and sees VET as a tool for providing young people with opportunities for learning and contributing to society and the labour market. Self-assessment is also a key focus of the framework.

Ms Mircea-Daramus noted the EQAVET Network and the Romanian national reference point are supporting the work at national level. EQAVET was a helpful element in the development of national initiatives which focuses on raising the status and attractiveness of VET and developing a culture of quality assurance.

Quality assurance in the EU policy context – update on EU policy developments with relevance to EQAVET

Koen Bois d'Enghien from the European Commission presented the EU policy developments related to quality assurance in VET. He focused on the conclusions of the external study on the VET tools (ECVET and EQAVET) which was published in in 2019 and the outcome of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT) meetings on the future of the EU VET instruments. He also provided an update on state of play of the Education and Training post 2020 preparations.

He noted that the recommendations on *tracking graduates* and on the *automatic recognition of higher education and upper secondary qualifications* stress the need to further develop quality assurance with a view to fostering transparency and building trust in each other's secondary education and training systems; and to facilitate mobility and recognition of the outcomes of learning periods abroad.

He provided an update on the conclusions from the ad hoc group formed within the ACVT group. This group reflected on
a) the possibility of streamlining existing VET instruments taking into consideration the work on the EQF and Europass Advisory Groups;
b) whether the objectives of EQAVET and ECVET were still valid in the context of the overarching VET policy vision defined in the ACVT Opinion paper and the European Education Area.
The group also reflected on how best to pursue these objectives and possible modifications of the two tools in relation to content, legislative implications, governance structure and funding.

He also provided an update on Education and Training (ET) post 2020 and the preparation of EU related activities, including the 2nd European Education Summit on 26 September 2019 in Brussels. He mentioned that the new Commission will consider the possibility to launch a proposal on education and training post 2020 which might bring together the conversations on the European Education Area and the follow up of the ET cooperation framework. The existing plans for the European Education Area up to 2025 and a combination of shorter-term priorities and an overarching vision will be considered.

The presentation is available [here](#).

Report from the EQAVET Secretariat on the work of the Network

Sean Feerick, Director of the Secretariat, presented progress in implementing the EQAVET Network's Strategic Plan 2017-2019. The Strategic Plan was designed to support Member States in developing their strategies for the implementation of the Recommendation by focusing on deepening the culture of

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quality assurance, the transversal role of EQAVET in the EU VET policies and the dissemination of good practices and increasing cooperation. He noted that this work builds on accumulated experience over ten years of cooperation. He referred to the importance of the meeting as it is taking place at a time when EU reflection on future policy priorities is continuing and that there is a need to find appropriate ways of dealing with quality assurance in VET in order to build on achievements of the last ten years.

He presented the activities of the Network organised by the Secretariat in 2018 and 2019. These include two peer learning activities (PLAs) in 2019 :

1. 'Self-assessment for work-based learning', Göteborg, Sweden 27–28 March 2019;
2. 'The role of QA in making VET more attractive', Berlin, Germany 28-29 November 2019

He mentioned the 2018 EQAVET Forum which was part of the EU Vocational Skills Week. The Forum provides an opportunity to disseminate the experience of the EQAVET Network and share practical approaches and experience of working with EQAVET. The Forum in 2018 was organised as part of the Austrian Presidency and focused on the concept of learners' voice by providing first-hand examples of learner engagement with their training. The EQAVET Forum in 2019 will take place in Helsinki on 16 October 2019 as part of the Finnish presidency . It is a one-day event focused on adult learning and continuing VET. The 2019 Forum will be hosted by the Finnish NRP at the Amiedu Centre.

The results of a short questionnaire completed by NRPs undertaken by the Secretariat in March 2019 has identified topics for 2020 PLAs. This process has been a regular exercise since 2013. This NRP input has ensured that the PLAs are relevant, respond the needs of Member States, promote capacity building and deepen a community of practice for quality assurance in VET. This questionnaire supplements the Secretariat Survey which identified areas where further work is needed. The survey in 2018 identified two areas:

1 the evaluation and review phases on the QA cycle;
2 the EQAVET+ indicative descriptors.

29 NRPs responded to the short questionnaire representing 24 Member States. The analysis of the responses outlined the preference of NRPs as:

- Area 1: How the procedures, mechanisms and instruments which support the review phase are used to improve the quality of provision at all levels
- Area 2: Providers' partnerships arrangements between teachers and trainers; and how these partnerships are supported to improve the quality of VET provision

Arancha Oviedo presented the main findings of the EQAVET Secretariat Survey 2018 and highlighted:
- that national/system level quality assurance approaches are aligned with EQAVET and increasingly the framework is being used;
- quality assurance is seen as instrumental for different aspects of VET including work based learning, continuing VET, addressing learners' needs, and defining and assessing learning outcomes;
- there is a greater focus on the labour market relevance of VET and the involvement of labour market actors in the development of quality assurance measures and approaches;
- progress in implementing EQAVET continues;
- there is a need for robust and effective feedback mechanisms to support quality assurance and the automatic mutual recognition Recommendation. This will have a significant impact on EQAVET's work;
- there continues to be a need for a greater focus on the evaluation and review stages of the quality assurance cycle, and the indicators which provide information on outcomes.

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A pre-final draft of the survey results was distributed to Member States in February 2019 and this led to seven responses. These comments have been included in the final version will be published on the website in June. The report will be published together with the brochure distributed at the Annual Network Meeting: https://www.eqavet.eu/What-We-Do/Statistics

The presentation is available here.

Giorgio Allulli presented the key findings of the study undertaken by the Secretariat on Peer Review and the NRPs' experiences from Erasmus+ projects in 2016-2018. The study focuses on finding insights on how peer review can be applied to institutions or systems (national/regional policies); and how the NRPs from IT, AT, FI, HR, SI and SK organised peer review for VET providers as part of their projects. The main findings or lessons learned of the study suggests that peer review is an appropriate methodology for improving school quality assurance, and it can be embedded in school management systems; and that peer review offers important opportunities for transnational collaboration when the initiative is built on cooperation between NRPs and/or when peers come from different countries.

The presentation is available here.

Presentation on ISO 21001 - Management systems for educational organisations

Sandra Feliciano, Research Associate – Knowledge Innovation Centre, presented ISO 21001. She provided an overview of international standardisation and ISO noting that before ISO 21001, the main ISO management system standard applicable to education was ISO 9001; but it did not fully meet the needs of education institutions. As a result, ISO 21001 was developed to serve as an "umbrella" standard for more specific service standards, including education. Sandra noted that ISO 21001 was based on the plan-do-check-act approach and sets out activities which transform inputs into outputs. It also includes for the first time "sector specific" an independent ISO management system standard aligned with ISO 9001. Sandra noted that ISO 21001 is based on a holistic approach in which the concept of 'customers' has been widened to encompass the learner (students, pupils, apprentices) and other beneficiaries (government, labour market, parents and guardians).

She also noted that ISO 21001 can refer to EQAVET as the requirements of the former were compared to the EQAVET Indicative Descriptors (at the VET-provider level). The matrix contains some minor errors which will be corrected.

The presentation is available here

EQAVET members welcomed the presentation and noted that the network had completed in the past work to show how EQAVET aligned with ISO 9001.

DISCUSSION GROUPS – the Network's reflection on how EQAVET could be further developed to support future European cooperation in the quality assurance of VET

Participants were asked to reflect and discuss on how the work on quality assurance in VET at EU level could evolve to meet the challenges of moving to a new phase of European cooperation in the quality assurance of VET and how the text of the EQAVET Recommendation might be revised.

Following discussions in workshops, participants commented that:

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In relation to the quality assurance cycle:
- all participants agreed that the central idea of the quality assurance cycle should be maintained in any revised framework.
- the gap between 'monitoring' and 'review' remains. So the quality assurance cycle is not working properly and needs to be stronger in order to address this issue.
- the quality assurance cycle needs to focus more on the teaching and learning processes, i.e. on the pedagogy, assessment, learners and their outcomes etc.
- this new focus would help to build trust and transparency.

In relation to the idea of a set of core group of indicators and indicative descriptors:
- All participants agreed that idea of 'core', if considered in any revised framework, should not lead to the idea of 'obligatory' elements or imply a process by which comparability/benchmarking between systems becomes central to EU cooperation in the quality assurance of VET.
- The key issue is to increase trust, understanding and cooperation between EU VET systems.
- While the idea of 'core' could work, participants agree that this is only possible if there is a new 'focus'.

The idea of 'core' in relation to the EQAVET indicators and indicative descriptors
- Not all participants believed this was a good idea. They argued that the current 10 indicators are already 'core' as they were selected from some 200 indicators during negotiations on the adoption of the Recommendation in 2009. This selection took time and it is result of a long EU cooperation process.
- Others believed that EU policy priorities have changed and some indicators in the Recommendation are more relevant than others. These could be considered as 'core' as they respond to these priorities.
- Some participants pointed out that the current EQAVET Recommendation already leads to the idea of 'core' as it describes indicators as related to context, process, input, outcome, output.
- Some participants noted that the EQAVET Recommendation contains some indicative descriptors and indicators which are more focused on the 'core' business of teaching and learning, and these could be considered as 'core'.
- Participants agreed that as indicators do not help to build mutual trust there is a need to be clear about the purpose of core indicators (e.g. some of the existing indicators do not refer to quality, they measure the success of the economy).

In relation to the idea of reporting on the EQAVET indicators and indicative descriptors in order to improve transparency of QA arrangements
- There were mixed views on collecting data which enables individual Member States to see how well they are doing; as this does not necessarily help to build trust and transparency.
- Participants did not support the idea of developing reporting processes that lead to setting European targets, rankings or benchmarks.
- Participants commented that more qualitative reporting to learn from good practices is more useful than quantitative indications which might lead to benchmarking rather than transparency.
- They also commented that peer review as a process for enhancing cooperation and opportunities for learning from each other could work as a 'soft' process for increasing transparency.
- There was an agreement that any reporting process should not lead to a procees of certifing quality assurance systems .

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- Some participants suggested that a common EU process that establishes the value of 'internal assessment' could be useful.

In relation to any indicator being deleted, modified or added; and if the idea of a core group is helpful, which indicators should be included in this group
- Many participants agree that Indicator 7 could be deleted.
- They also commented that those indicators that strengthen the aspects of the 'quality of the teaching workforce' and of 'teaching/learning and assessment process' should be highlighted; and that indicator 2 does not provide accurate information in this regard.
- Which indicators that could be added: there were discussions on feedback mechanisms; strengthening self-assessment and certification processes; learners' view/satisfaction during their VET programme; tracking graduates; guidance through the "whole lifespan" (rather than indicator 10); percentage of training which is company or work-based; individualisation/flexibility of learning process.
- On the idea of core group: participants agreed that these indicators should be on the core business of VET, i.e. teaching/learning, assessment and guidance.
- A group of core indicators could help to close the gap between 'monitoring' and 'review' and support improvements in quality.
- Some participants suggested that there could be two 'clusters' of indicators: one on quantitative and comparable measures, and one which is a much broader indication of quality.
- Also, participants commented that the language should be revised in order to avoid negative phrases.

In relation to indicative descriptors including EQAVET+
- Participants agreed that the EQAVET indicative descriptors are necessary and that the EQAVET+ indicative descriptors have improved the EQAVET process - they are helpful and should be maintained.
- Some participants suggested there should be an elaboration of quality criteria rather than the current indicative descriptors. The indicative descriptors could form a 'supplement' or 'guidelines document' that supported the revised text of the Recommendation but they are not part of it. This text could include quality criteria and the revised indicators. Each criterion would be linked to the revised indicators with references to internal and external quality assurance.
- Some participants suggested adding the following indicative descriptors: something on the quality assurance of the assessment and certification process; recognition related to mobility based on quality assurance linked to the new policy priorities: e.g. the Recommendation on automatic mutual recognition (at system level); integration with lifelong learning policies; focus on learners; and on the quality of apprenticeships.

Update on relevant work in QA of VET from ETF

Mournir Baati, Specialist in VET Policies and Systems - Operations Department, European Training Foundation (ETF), provided an overview of the ETF forum on QA which was established in November 2017 as a transnational collaboration initiative between national institutions with VET and/or VET quality assurance mandates in ETF's partner countries (16 from SEMED and SEET). The Forum aims to support member countries to modernise and improve quality assurance in VET by providing the context and means for peer learning through multinational co-operation. He noted that the ETF forum is inspired by the EQAVET Network which serves as an instrument to guide the work of the ETF Forum. The Forum provides members an opportunity to meet and learn with / from experts/national stakeholders from EU Member States and EU institutions; deepen their understanding of EU policy in the field of VET quality

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assurance, the EQAVET Network and the NRPs and engage in debate on learner involvement in VET quality assurance. Events, organised as part of the forum, include peer visits based on a "Peer Visit Guidance and Training Manual - Working Paper" developed by ARQA-VET in collaboration with the ETF quality assurance team. The Manual provides guidance for the implementation of Peer Visits as well as a 'toolbox' of instruments. The Certification Process of the Pedagogical Training of VET Trainers was the policy area at the centre of a recent Peer Visit.

Mournir commented that the study visits are an important tool for enhancing cooperation among ETF members and increasing transparency.

The presentation is available here.

Presentation of Erasmus+ project: 'EQAVET in practice'

Ali Rashidi – coordinator of the Erasmus+ project and Director at the department for international cooperation at Folkuniversitetet Uppsala, Sweden presented the project. He noted that the project is based on work which has been developed since 2009. The project has developed a tool for VET providers to use in a transnational context to report on the use of existing criteria, descriptors and indicators at provider level; to develop a web-based interactive guidelines for interpretating the EQAVET criteria, descriptors and indicators according to the national VET context; and provide a way to update the existing tools, methodologies and quality assurance procedures according to the above guidelines. The results and implementation process of the project can be found at: www.qspirit.eu/en/project-en

The presentation is available here.

National Reference Points work programme supported by Erasmus+

Update on the Erasmus+ call for Proposals 2017- 2019
Michele Grombeer (EACEA) presented work relating to the NRPs' work programmes supported under the restricted call ERASMUS+ programme 2017-2019, within the key activity 3 - Support for policy reform. This grant supports NRPs to further develop QA mechanisms in line with the EQAVET Recommendation and/or establish continuous information and feedback loops in initial and continuing VET systems based on learning outcomes (this is a Riga priority). The current allocation is €2.5 million. There was a requirement for 15% co-funding and the maximum grant per project was €150 000. 19 NRPs received a grant.

Most of the proposals focused on strengthening mutual cooperation among NRPs and deepening the culture of quality assurance of VET. The projects include activities that address key issues for Member States.

The presentation is available here.

Update on the National Reference Points' work programmes supported by ERASMUS+
NRP in Romania – Carmen Muşat, **National Centre for TVET Development in Romania**
Carmen presented the work of the NRP. She noted that the aim of the current project is to increase the attractiveness of VET by furthering the development of the EQAVET Framework at the system level ; strengthening cooperation with other NRPs and supporting the development of the quality culture at all levels. The main outcomes of the project have been the research into the quality of initial VET provision in Romania at the system level; the development of an electronic feedback collection platform; and a

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collaboration process which has established a network of four NRPs from Romania, Italy, Finland and Greece. As a result of which a study visit in Romania onthe quality assurance of work based learning was organised and a report prepared. Also, a guide to good practice or success stories has been published and three national information seminars have been organised. Information can be found at: www.gnac.ro

The presentation is available here.

***NRP in Slovakia – Lubica Gállová*, Head of Department for the National Qualifications Framework, State Vocational Education Institute (ŠIOV)**
Lubica presented the objective of their ERASMUS+ project which is to develop sustainable quality assurance tools; implement a culture of quality in Slovakia; and facilitate and strengthen involvement of stakeholders in quality assurance in VET and adult learning. The project has four specific goals:
1. Introduce Peer Review in Slovakia and create tools for its implementation,
2. Support public debate on quality assurance and a culture of quality,
3. Involve stakeholders in networking on quality with partners in EU countries, facilitate exchange of ideas and good practice,
4. Strengthen the capacities of the NRP, its cooperation with other NRPs and organisations.
The envisaged outcomes of the project are:
- the introduction of Peer Review and a plan for its implementation
- study visits by Slovak stakeholders on look at quality in EU member states is implemented
- participation of NRP in the EQAVET events
- web-site on quality in education.

The presentation is available here.

NRP in The Netherlands – Alie Kamphuis, CINOP
Alie presented the main objectives of their project which focuses on furthering the development of quality assurance mechanisms in VET in line with EQAVET with a special focus on enhancing the culture of quality assurance in VET. She mentioned there are four parts in the project:
1. enhancing the quality assurance culture in close cooperation with stakeholders
2. connecting EU and Dutch developments and learning from each other
3. communication and information for stakeholders
4. monitoring, accounting and measuring satisfaction and impact
For each part of the project, activities have been organised. Of particular importance has been the study visits with the NRPs in Romanian and Sweden; the expert meeting on enhancing quality assurance culture for Dutch representatives of stakeholders (learning from other sectors and each other) and the investigation into the impact of the work of Dutch NRP.

The presentation is available here.

Closing remarks

The Chairperson, Joao Santos, closed the meeting. He acknowledged that the work on quality assurance developed by the EQAVET Network is of key importance, very relevant and provides an important input for the current reflection of the European Commission in relation to the future plans for the work on EU policy for VET.

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He invited participants to send by 31 July 2019 any general or detailed comments on the text of the EQAVET Recommendation and EQAVET+ to further inform Commission reflections on the future development of the EQAVET Recommendation.

He thanked the hosts, Network members, the experts, the representatives of the social partners and other observers and groups for their attendance, active cooperation and commitment to the Network. He also thanked the Secretariat for its work.

Sean Feerick thanked the Romanian colleagues form the National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development for supporting the organisation of the meeting; and participants for their input and commitment to the discussions. He thanked the chairs and rapporteurs of the workshop for their help and cooperation.

All the presentations from the Annual Forum are on the EQAVET website.

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