



INTRODUCTION

As part of the European Vocational Skills Week, the EQAVET Forum took place on 6-7 November 2018 in Vienna, Austria. It was attended by more than 100 participants from 25 EU countries. In addition, countries participating in ETF's Quality Forum (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Former Yugoslav Rep. of Macedonia, Israel, Jordan, Kosovo, Lebanon, Montenegro, Palestine, Serbia, Tunisia, Turkey) attended for the first time.

The two-day programme was designed to explore the learner's voice in developing and enhancing quality and excellence in VET. Day 1 commenced with parallel sessions on EQAVET for Beginners and Improvers and a workshop for EQAVET national reference points.

The Forum was officially opened by Koen Bois d'Enghien, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. The opening was followed by words of welcome and introductory remarks from Ferdinand Hoppe, Deputy Headmaster, Tourism School Wassermannngasse, where the Forum was held, and Sean Feerick, Director of the EQAVET Secretariat. Sean handed over to the two masters of ceremony (Barbara Kelly and Kim Faurschou) who moderated and facilitated discussion over the course of the two-day event. Copies of all presentations and material are available on the EQAVET website at www.eqavet.eu/What-We-Do/EQAVET-Forum/EQAVET-Forum-2018

The Forum was organised into four thematic sessions which included short country presentations from Austria, Finland, Romania, United Kingdom (Wales) and the Netherlands and a presentation on the Erasmus+ Traktion project. Each presentation was followed by a panel discussion with VET learners, former graduates, social partner policy makers and other invited guests (such as OBESSU, the EU VET student union). Time for discussion and questions from the audience to panelists was built into the programme. Kim and Barbara (using Slido – an online interactive tool) encouraged audience reflection and insights. In addition, the graphic artist Eva Rudofsky illustrated the key emerging issues raised by participants in their discussions. See attached.

The four themes were:

Day 1	Day 2
1. VET a first choice, learner-centered provision	3. Designing and delivering WBL, engagement with learners
2. Engagement with student groups and the use of role models	4. Tracking VET graduates, the benefits and challenges of developing a common approach to tracking VET graduates

KEY MESSAGE EMERGING FROM THE REFLECTIONS

VET a first choice, learner-centered provision

The EQAVET NRPs from Austria (Franz Gramlinger, ARQA-VET) and Finland (Leena Koski, National Agency for Education) presented on ways in which the learner's voice is heard in approaches to their respective quality assurance systems. Austrian learners Florian Heimilcher, Tourism School Wassermannngasse, Jenifer Bayer and Emma Heidenreich from Vocational School, Mollardgasse, Berufsschule für Elektrotechnik und Mechatronik, outlined the reasons why they selected their study programmes and who influenced their decisions, including parents and mentors. Tiina Immonen, Principal of Mercuria Business College in Finland outlined the school principal's perspective. Tiina highlighted that the College's main objective is to teach people rather than subjects. Bicca Olia representing OBESSU outlined the learner perspective, highlighting the contribution learners make to the development and enhancement of programmes and to the modernisation of practice within the workplace.

Engagement with student groups and the use of role models

Serban Iosifescu made a presentation on behalf of the EQAVET NRP in Romania outlining how role models are a useful way of highlighting opportunities in VET. Serban's presentation included a video made by learners Alinna-Mihaela Predeteanu and Ruxandra Stanescu from Kretzulescu Superior Commercial School in Bucharest, Romania, who were invited to participate in this panel. Alinna and Ruxandra wanted to show in their video that VET is key to producing the skills required in the labour market in Romania, and that role models demonstrate this, testifying to the positive status and importance of VET. They highlighted the need to increase information to learners on the benefits of VET, and role models are a good means of doing this. They outlined their respective experiences and discussed the characteristics of role models and other people who inspired them in their choice of programmes and careers. Both learners, based on their training and experiences, highlighted their ambitious and well considered future career plans. Oprea Mihai, Entrepreneur and former VET student from Romania, outlined his vocational experience and career journey to date highlighting the important part that VET played in making him the businessman and person he is today. Giuseppe Lipari from OBESSU outlined the benefits and challenges of involving learners in designing and delivering WBL. He referenced the importance of learner rights across the EU, bearing in mind that there are many different systems and approaches.

Designing and delivering work-based learning (WBL), engagement with learners

Phil Whitney, EQAVET NRP in UK (Wales), made a presentation outlining the Welsh approach to WBL. He was followed by his colleague Michelle Simmonds, Essential Skills Wales Coordinator, WBL Department, Coleg y Cymoedd, who discussed the benefits and challenges of learners being engaged in designing and delivering WBL in Wales. Learners Jordan Lawrence and Jacob Morrissey, both studying engineering at Coleg y Cymoedd, shared their experiences and views. In particular, they highlighted the value of their WBL experience in terms of the learner's role in enhancing the programme and the impact on their respective employments of applying newly acquired knowledge and skills. They said their employers recognise and acknowledge the advanced skills they are learning and the new ideas they are bringing to their respective companies. The Social Partners represented by Agnes Roman (ETUC) and Sabine Trischer-Archan (UEAPME) agreed that the learner's voice is central to the design and delivery of work-based learning programmes.

Tracking VET graduates – the benefits and challenges of developing a common approach to tracking VET graduates

The final session began with a presentation from the EQAVET NRP in the Netherlands, Alie Kamphuis, who described the value of tracking students to better inform public policy and provider decision-making.

This was followed by a presentation from Ivan Diego and Mar Romero, Traction Project coordinators, Valnalon, Spain, who presented an overview of the project – its aims and objectives, and the complexity of tracking learners across borders.

The partners of the project, Elnaz Kashefkapdel, Education and Employers (UK), outlined the benefits and challenges of developing common approaches to tracking VET graduates, and Tim van der Ploeg, Policy Advisor service Unit Education and Quality Control, Alfa College, the Netherlands discussed his positive experience of using the outcomes of the tracking process. Finally, Koen Bois d'Enghien, European Commission, DG EMPL, presented the European Commission perspective, outlining what the EU is doing to support the further development of VET graduate tracking in Member States including via EQAVET and funding initiatives.

CONCLUSIONS

Following presentations and discussions, Barbara and Kim sought the views of the audience for the final conclusions by seeking feedback from each table at which participants were grouped.

These are some of the feedback and conclusions:

- The learner's voice is a key tool in quality assurance and development of VET and is used for continuous improvement
- Practice varies across Member States – in some cases the learner's voice is only considered on an ad-hoc basis or is not always included in improvement measures. In other cases, the learner's voice is considered systematically and structures are in place
- The positive benefits and outcomes of VET should be communicated and highlighted to all stakeholders, including welfare officers, family, etc. The use of role models or skills competitions can support these actions, together with the establishment of career guidance that can draw on positive experiences
- Countries including ETF-funded countries are at different stages of development. However, all countries, including those with effective VET systems, are in a continuous cycle of reform as VET needs to be continually evolving to meet changing demands. System changes include: moving from a supply to a demand system; revising legislation to support policy development; introduction of national/regional/local learner satisfaction surveys, new funding/investment initiatives; initiatives to track learners to help measure success; enhancing and promoting better WBL approaches; enhanced data collection to support better evidence-based policy making.
- The learners and graduates who presented at the meeting did so with powerful voices and are clearly making an impact in their school and work places. They demonstrated high levels of engagement and confidence and were seen by providers and policy makers present as strong role models for VET.
- The learning outcomes approach helps facilitate engagement and discussion between providers, employers and learners as it provides a common language and frame.

- It takes a symphony of voices to create high quality engagement and enhancement within VET systems. The voice of the learner is a key contributor. Future events may showcase the voices of others e.g. employers, teachers etc. and the collaboration between them.
- Telling stories is a great way of demonstrating impact within and across systems.

The key recommendation from the Forum was that the learner's voice is valuable and central to assuring and developing quality and excellence in VET. It is not just a consultative element in the search for improvement, but a deliberative one. It is in the interest of providers and national and regional authorities to ensure that relevant arrangements are put in place to ensure that the learner's voice is heard and heeded.

Closing

Finally, Sean Feerick closed the Forum by thanking everyone who attended and contributed. He specifically thanked the management and staff of Tourism School Wassermannngasse for their excellent hospitality. He wished all well and a safe journey home. He noted that the next EQAVET Forum will take place next autumn during the Finnish EU Presidency.