

Examples of QA systems for VET in Europe

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Author(s) Alie Kamphuis
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CINOP B.V.
Postbus 1585
5200 BP 's-Hertogenbosch
Tel: 073-6800800
www.cinop.nl
info@cinop.nl

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Examples of QA systems for VET in Europe

The quality of upper secondary vocational education and training (VET) in Europe is assured in various different ways. Some of these ways correspond with existing national or international quality assurance systems; some schools have developed their own systems.

This outline sets out how the quality of VET is evaluated in different European countries and the role of the institutions in this respect. It also identifies the differences and similarities with the Dutch system. This is set out for the following countries: Norway, Sweden, Ireland, Slovenia, Scotland and Estonia. The information in this document was obtained through document analysis of internet sources and web pages. The information provided in this outline was checked with the NCPs concerned and adjusted as necessary in September 2019.

This outline was written by the National Coordination Point EQUAVET. NCP EQUAVET fulfils a role with a grant from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in strengthening quality assurance in the VET sector both in the Netherlands and Europe. The system implemented to evaluate the quality of education at institutional and system level is high up on the agenda of the European EQAVET network. In addition, NCP EQUAVET has developed various activities in the Netherlands in recent years themed around strengthening the quality culture and quality assurance.

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1 Norway

The Norwegian education system is regulated at national level by legislation. The Kunnskapsdepartementet (Ministry of Education and Research) is responsible for all levels of education. The national government is responsible for the defining policy on education and determines the broad outlines and frameworks for education. Municipal and local authorities ensure that the directives adopted by the government are followed and that results are achieved. Responsibility for developing curricula for upper secondary vocational education and higher education is largely delegated to the individual institutions.

Internal review

In Norway, the regulation of quality assessment in education seems to be mainly centralised. Internal review occurs in the form of quality assurance in the institutions and this QA is one of the subjects of the external review.

External review

Norway adjusted its quality assurance system in 2004. These adjustments were aimed at improving the dialogue and communication between the authorities and the social partners¹. The social partners have a say in advisory bodies, the advisory bodies collectively represent the decision-making system for upper secondary vocational education. Social partners include representatives from the business, industry and public sectors. This interplay between the social partners and the education sector enables ongoing dialogue about the consequences in the field of shifts in the technology and employment markets and what this means for education².

Advisory bodies³ at national and local levels in which social parties have or usually have a majority:

- The National Council for Vocational Education and Training (Samarbeidsrådet for yrkesopplæring (SRY)) advises at central/system level.
- Eight Vocational Training Councils (Faglige råd) advise on educational/training programmes for specific professions.
- Each County Vocational Training Board (Yrkesopplæringsnemnda) advises on quality, career guidance, regional development and provision in the county to meet the needs of the local employment market.
- There are Trade-specific Examination Boards (Prøvenemnder) in each county.
- Students who failed their final examination at provincial level can appeal to the National Appeals Boards (Klagenemnder).

Under the Education Act the county authority (fylkeskommunen) has the task of advising the County Vocational Training Board (Yrkesopplæringsnemnda) with regard to quality assurance for vocational training given primarily at school as well as vocational training given primarily in the workplace. The

¹ Eqavet, n.d.

² Haukås, Margareth; Skjervheim, Kjersti, 2018, p. 40-41

³ Haukås, Margareth; Skjervheim, Kjersti, 2018, p. 41

County Vocational Training Board has the right to be consulted, on the accreditation of internship companies, for example. The Board must also present quality development proposals, in which they focus on improving partnerships between schools and businesses and the development of skills and competences for lecturers and trainers⁴.

The government is responsible for inspection activities. The Ministry of Education and Science (Kunnskapsdepartementet) has delegated this inspection responsibility at a national level to the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (Utdanningsdirektoratet). The Directorate is responsible for developing and assisting with inspection visits, making a uniform national inspectorate possible and explaining the application of legislation and regulations.

The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (Nasjonalt organ for kvalitet i utdanningen (NOKUT)) is responsible for the recognition, accreditation and quality assurance in VET and higher education⁵.

All VET curricula (upper secondary vocational education and higher professional education) must be approved in advance by NOKUT. Higher education institutions are obliged to have their own QA system. That system is accredited by NOKUT every 6 years⁶.

In Norway, educational quality is safeguarded and monitored at four levels:

- 1 National level
- 2 Regional level
- 3 Institutional level
- 4 Student level⁷

The audits NOKUT conduct at the educational institutions focus on the school's internal QA system⁸. NOKUT conducts institutional audits, with the emphasis on the institutions' own QA systems and the information on the actual educational quality they offer.

Besides NOKUT, local government bodies also play an important role. Each county has a County Vocational Training Board.

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⁴ Haukås, Margareth; Skjervheim, Kjersti, 2018, p. 48

⁵ Haukås, Margareth; Skjervheim, Kjersti, 2018, p. 49

⁶ Haukås, Margareth; Skjervheim, Kjersti, 2018, p. 26-27

⁷ NOKUT, 2012, p. 25

⁸ Eurydice, 2017 & OECD, p. 12

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2 Ireland

After their compulsory general education, one in three pupils in Ireland enter 'senior cycle streams'. Those who completed the 'Leaving Certificate Vocational Program' (LCVP) can enrol with an Institute of Technology. These Institutes of Technology prepare students for certificates and degrees in year 2, 3 or 4.

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the independent state agency responsible for quality and accountability, to which schools are accountable for quality.

Internal review

Institutions are able to decide which indicators and benchmarks they consider relevant and appropriate to their own context and mission. Institutions are encouraged to derive these indicators from international sources.

QQI does provide some guiding questions:

- How has the institution implemented QA procedures and assessments?
- How effective are the institution's internal QA and assessment procedures?
- Do the QA procedures comply with the European standards and directives?
- Do the QA procedures comply with the QQI policy and the directives, or the equivalent thereof?
- Who takes responsibility for quality and quality assurance in the institution as a whole?
- How transparent and accessible is the reporting on quality and quality assurance?
- How is quality promoted and improved?
- Are any effective quality improvement and assurance innovations in place?
- Does the student experience correspond with the institution's own mission and strategy?
- Does quality and quality assurance performance correspond with the institution's own mission and strategy?
- How do quality and quality assurance performances compare with the benchmarks and quality indicators set by the institution?⁹

There are two quality frameworks, one for awarding bodies and one for voluntary providers (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2).

⁹ QQI, 2016, p. 5-6

Figure 2.1 Quality framework for awarding bodies

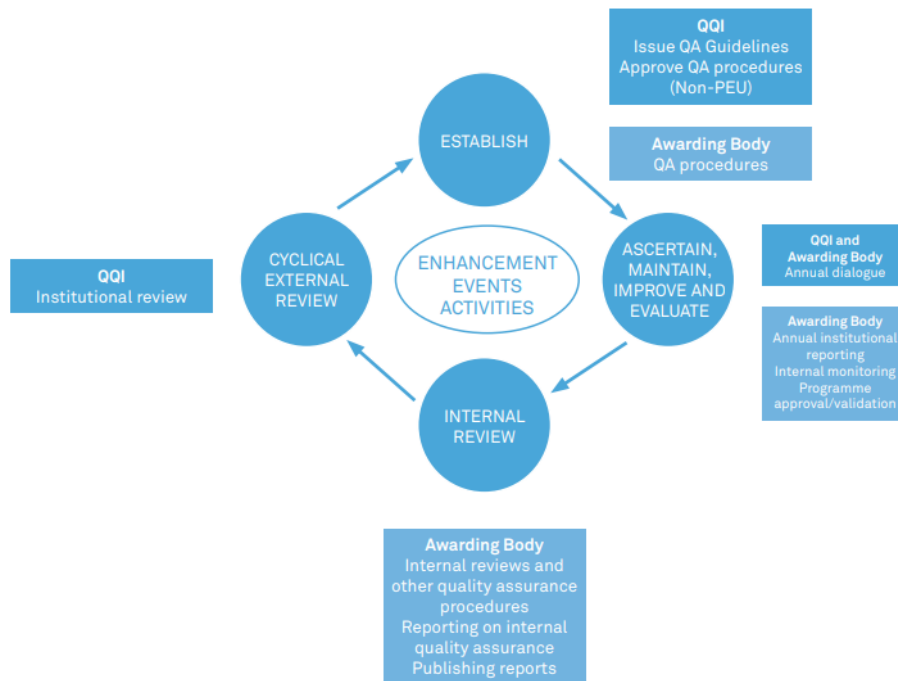
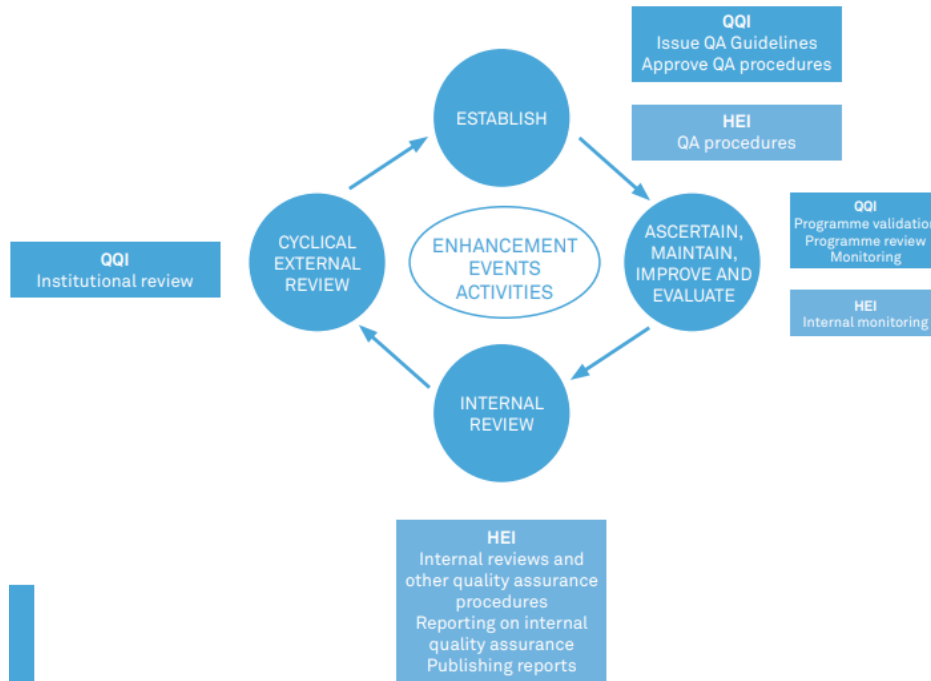


Figure 2.2 Quality framework for voluntary providers



Under the Education Act of 2012, which focuses on qualifications and quality assurance, QQI is obliged to draw up and publish guidelines for educational institutions to enable the institutions to safeguard the quality of the programmes and services they provide. Educational institutions are legally obliged to take the QQI guidelines into account when developing their own QA procedures.

The general approach to quality control in education and training consequently means that providers are responsible for the QA of their own programmes, with reference to the QQI guidelines and criteria. Considering the wide range of providers in Ireland, QQI has developed guidelines for a number of specific sectors, including further education and training (FET). In their guidelines for FET providers, QQI observes that they are modelled on the EQAVET Framework, the European initiative for QA in vocational education and training, designed to provide tools for quality management in vocational education and training. QQI actively contributes to the work of EQAVET at European level and these guidelines are intended to complement that.

In 2017 QQI also started developing detailed self-evaluations and the related standard criteria. At the time of writing this document, only a draft version of the document *'Terms of Reference for the Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in the Education & Training Boards'* was available. The information taken from it cannot, therefore, be regarded as final but one example of what it contains is that standard student evaluations must be conducted and incorporated into the self-evaluation reports. The internal reviews are public and available on the QQI website. Schools are obliged to publish their internal self-evaluations.

External review

In the document 'Policy for Cyclic reviews of Higher Education Institutions' QCI explains the QA system for institutions in higher education, including vocational education and training. Cyclic reviews are part of the wider quality frameworks for VET and higher education.

QCI conducts an independent external review which examines the internal QA review procedures the institution has implemented¹⁰. QCI conducts this external review in accordance with the following procedure:

- 1 Publication of 'Terms of Reference';
- 2 The institution delivers an internal self-review report;
- 3 The external review of the institution with visit by a team appointed by QCI¹¹;
- 4 Publication of a review report including findings and recommendations;
- 5 A follow-up procedure to explore actions taken.

The external review considers:

- The institution's mission and vision and the chosen quality indicators and benchmarks
- The European and national standards for quality and awards.
- QCI Q guidelines and other relevant QCI regulations¹².

Programme validation is an important QA process by which QCI approves new programmes offered by education and training providers. In this context, validation means that a programme complies with minimum standards regarding learning outcomes and NFQ levels. Programme validation can therefore assure providers and students that successful completion of a QCI-validated programme will lead to specific NFQ awards. Programme validation comprises two stages:

- 1 approval of the provider's ability to ensure the quality of its programmes;
- 2 validation by QCI of a specific programme(s). QCI does this by assigning independent expert(s) to compare suppliers' proposals with the requirements of the specific NFQ award(s). If the proposed programme does meet the QCI criteria it can be validated for up to five years.

If it does not meet the criteria then the programme may not be offered as proposed¹³.

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¹⁰ QCI, 2016, p.5

¹¹ The team is made up of external stakeholders and students and staff from similar institutions. The size of the team and duration of the visit depend on the size and complexity of the institution. QCI, 2016, p. 9)

¹² QCI, 2016, p. 5

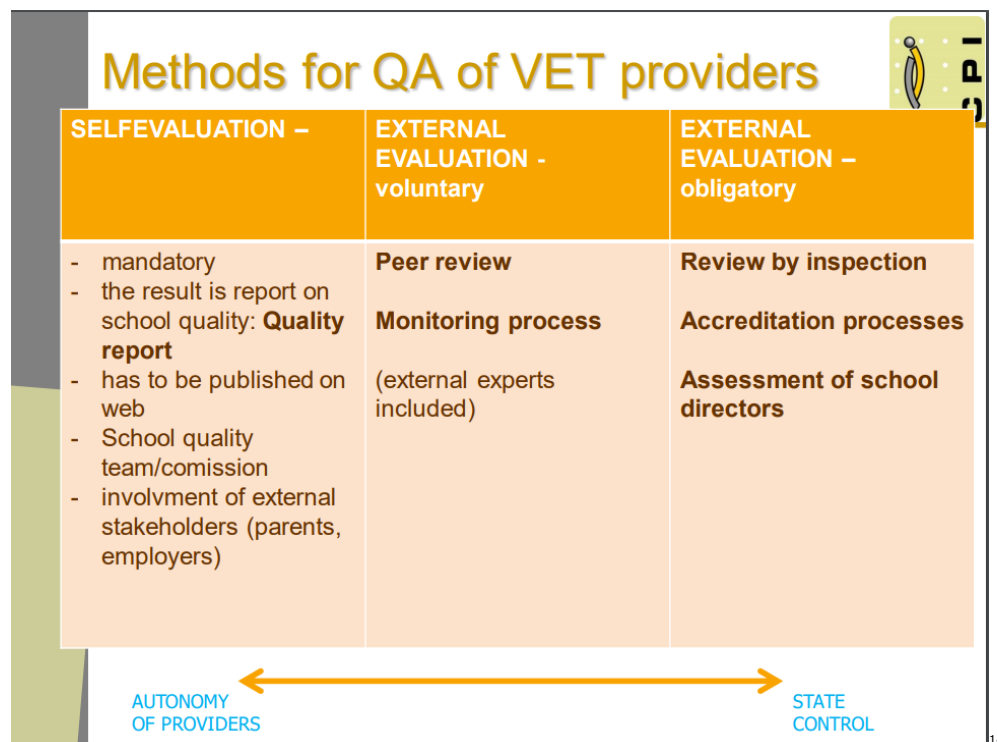
¹³ Burke N.; Condon, N.; Hogan A.; 2019, p. 49

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3 Slovenia

The Slovenian Vocational Act (2006) emphasises the importance of quality assurance and increases the autonomy and enhances the development role of initial vocational education and training. In Slovenia internal review and one of the two types of external review are obligatory. This is shown in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 Obligatory and voluntary methods of QA in Slovenia



Internal review

In their self-evaluation educational institutions must focus on eleven indicators set at a national level. These eleven indicators incorporate the ten EQAVET indicators. These indicators are discussed in the report written by the quality committee and ultimately published on the school's website¹⁵. The Education Act states that every educational institution must establish a quality committee comprising at least five members: lecturer, employer, student and parent representatives¹⁶. As well as publishing the quality committee report, schools in Slovenia are also obliged to set out their internal QA policy on their website. The school's board of governors is responsible for the policy. In practice, however, there is insufficient knowledge and/or support to actually achieve this.

¹⁴ Grašic, 2019

¹⁵ Grašic, 2019

¹⁶ Knavs, S; Šlander M, 2019, p. 27-28

This is currently being addressed at a national level in the form of a pilot set up in 2016. The pilot focuses on the development and implementation of a self-evaluation framework. Between 2016 and 2019 the pilot focused on developing self-evaluation indicators and during the period from January 2020 to August 2022 it will examine their implementation. The schools concerned receive appropriate support throughout the whole process.

External review

In 2017, the Ministry of Education presented a new national framework for quality assurance, which describes the educational levels from pre-school to secondary education (Ministry of Education, 2018c). This framework will be implemented over the coming years. Every school is required to have a quality committee, which should comprise five lecturers and two students.

The external review is intended solely to verify legislative compliance and not as an evaluation of teaching proficiency.

Since 2006 the quality assurance processes and quality development processes of VET institutions are periodically monitored by the *national education institutes and universities* (peer review). The monitor findings show that the quality assurance performance of VET institutions is continually improving. More than half of the VET institutions nevertheless seek professional assistance to define and implement their own quality assurance (QA) processes and quality development (QD) processes. This often concerns assistance with the development of a schedule, the choice of methodology and tool, and QA and QD reporting.

To support institutes in these matters, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport is working on a '*common national framework for QA in formal education*'. This framework will be implemented over the coming years and will apply for all educational institutions¹⁷. This framework is shown in Figure 3.2.

¹⁷ Grašić, 2019

Figure 3.2 National framework for QA in formal education in Slovenia



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4 Scotland

In the United Kingdom (UK) education is one of the areas devolved to the governments of England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. In Scotland, responsibility for VET lies with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. The Directorate for Learning and Justice oversees the policy on both school education and vocational education and training.

Internal review

Scotland has a leading role in the internal evaluation a key part of quality assurance. In Scotland, responsibility for the quality of education lies explicitly with the educational institution. The quality of the education is internally evaluated by inspection and review activities. A self-evaluation tool called 'How good is our school' has been designed for that purpose. The aim of the self-evaluation tool is to promote the culture of quality in Scottish education. The Scots have set an educational target of progressing from 'good' to 'overall great' over the coming years¹⁸. They believe they will be able to achieve that through close collaboration within schools, between schools and between schools and other local and national parties in 'national networks'¹⁹.

The tool consists of fifteen national quality indicators also used in external monitoring by Education Scotland²⁰. The indicators are classified in three categories: 1) leadership and management, 2) learning provisions 3) successes and achievements. These categories are shown in more detail in Figure 4.1²¹:

¹⁸ Education Scotland, 2016

¹⁹ Education Scotland, 2015

²⁰ Education Scotland, n.d.

²¹ Education Scotland, 2015

Figure 4.1 The quality indicators

What is our capacity for improvement?		
Leadership and management	Learning provision	Successes and achievements
How good is our leadership and approach to improvement?	How good is the quality of the care and education we offer?	How good are we at ensuring the best possible outcomes for all our learners?
1.1 Self-evaluation for self-improvement 1.2 Leadership of learning 1.3 Leadership of change 1.4 Leadership and management of staff 1.5 Management of resources to promote equity	2.1 Safeguarding and child protection 2.2 Curriculum 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment 2.4 Personalised support 2.5 Family learning 2.6 Transitions 2.7 Partnerships	3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion 3.2 Raising attainment and achievement 3.3 Increasing creativity and employability

The self-evaluation tool offers questions that could open discussions on a range of topics, thus assist enhancement in such areas as:

- Improving the learning outcomes of all learners.
- The impact of inequality in terms of well-being, learning and achievements.
- Consistently high learning experience.
- Incorporating increasing learning, life and work skills in the curriculum for 3 to 18-year-olds.
- Enhancing leadership at all levels of the school.
- Improving the quality and impact of lifelong learning.
- Broadening and deepening partnerships.
- Promoting sustainable learning.
- Tackling unnecessary bureaucracy²².

²² Education Scotland, 2015

The series of questions set out in the self-evaluation tool are to be answered by the school. During the external evaluation an assessor then questions the school about the answers given. The schools are free to define their self-evaluation as they choose.

Education Scotland describes its approach to effective self-evaluation and school improvement as 'an inwards, outwards and forwards approach'. It is an ongoing process of continuous reflection and evaluation of the work, on the basis of which improvement activities are then developed. To that end, schools and partners can answer the following questions:

- How do we do it?
- How do we know that?
- What will we do in future?

This approach is shown in figure 4.2²³

Figure 4.2 Ongoing process of self-evaluation and school improvement in Scotland



External review

In addition to this self-evaluation schools in Scotland are externally monitored by Education Scotland. The National Quality Framework was developed for that purpose. This Framework concerns the learning environment in schools and colleges. The frameworks for the various education sectors differ

²³ Education Scotland, 2015

slightly. While various organisations are assigned to conduct the external reviews, the process is organised at national level. In this system, the role of an inspector is to advise and to pass judgement.

Qualification courses must be accredited by a central authority: the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA Accreditation). That is the body responsible for accrediting educational awards to schools and colleges. The organisation may also grant accreditation powers to other awarding bodies²⁴.

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²⁴ EQAVET National Reference Point of Scotland, 2016

5 Estonia

Internal review

Estonian schools are legally obliged to continuously guarantee educational quality by internal assessment. The aim of this assessment is to promote a climate that supports the development of school and student alike and ensures they are consistent with each other²⁵. On the basis of the development plan, an implementation plan is written to help the school create the right climate.

The internal evaluation analyses the educational and administrative activities and evaluates the effectiveness of the education given and of the governing body. This analysis forms the basis for the development plan. In their internal review, educational organisations are advised to examine leadership and administration, staff management, the cooperation with interest groups, resource management, the education and schooling process in relation to the academic results, personnel and other interest groups, and statistics relating to the educational institution.

Educational institutions compose an internal evaluation report and/or development plan at least once every three years. There are no specific format requirements, schools are free to define the reports as they choose. The internal evaluation report sets out the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation, thus forming the basis for the development plan. Each educational institution submits its internal evaluation plan to an education information system. This enables the Ministry to monitor which institutions have submitted evaluation reports. The internal evaluations are publicly accessible. The school is nevertheless not obliged to publish the reports on the school website²⁶.

While there are no format criteria for the internal evaluation report, as mentioned above, it must meet the recently defined evaluation criteria. These specify the subjects the evaluation report must cover, such as student drop-out rates and staff policy.

External evaluation

In Estonia external evaluation focuses on schools' curriculum groups, which are awarded the 'right to offer VET programmes'. This right is awarded by the Ministry of Education and remains valid for three years. The award is based on documents submitted by the school, the results of an external assessment by an expert committee and additional evidence as necessary.

The curriculum group is also accredited. Accreditation includes the external evaluation of curriculum groups at schools, based on their internal evaluation reports and a review conducted by an external committee. The evaluation focuses on:

- Achievements
- Sustainability
- Leadership
- Cooperation with stakeholders

²⁵ Riigi Teataja, 2013

²⁶ Ministry of Education and Research, 2016, p. 9

- Resource management and human resource management

This accreditation is organised by the Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA). The Quality Evaluation Council, appointed by the Ministry of Education, is part of the EKKA. This council has 13 members who represent the various stakeholders. Depending on the council's proposal, the Ministry may either extend the accreditation for three or six years, or withdraw accreditation²⁷. EKKA does not conduct any external evaluations itself.

Following an amendment of the law in 2006, schools play a larger part in external reviews while the Ministry plays a smaller part²⁸. The Ministry is only responsible for policy, not for reviews. Agencies are assigned to conduct the external reviews. An external review, based on the internal assessment, is conducted once every six years. This evaluation focuses on: the achievements and sustainability of the programme and education, including curriculum development, learning and teaching, management and finance²⁹.

The assessment is conducted by an assessment council made up of:

- At least three experts "of broad groups of study of vocational education specified in the Vocational Education Standard, who shall be appointed by the body of chairmen of professional councils"
- At least six members representing employers/other stakeholders
- At least one member representing VET institutions
- At least one member representing students³⁰

The external review is conducted on the basis of the following steps:

- 1 analysis of statistic and financial reports, academic results and other data collected, including an analysis and verification of data in the Estonian Education information system;
- 2 review of the educational institution's documentation and an analysis of the content;
- 3 interviews with employees, members of the supervisory council, parents, students and the owner of the educational institution; in the case of a private or state institution, with the representative of the local government concerned;
- 4 assessment of the learning and growth environment of the educational institution, education and training activities, and analysis thereof³¹.

²⁷ Kaldma, K., Kiilo, T., Siilivask, R., 2019, p. 37

²⁸ Ministry of Education and Research, 2016, p.8

²⁹ Riigi Teataja, 2019, art. 14

³⁰ Riigi Teataja, 2019, art. 14

³¹ Ministry of Education and Research , 2016, p. 9-10

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6 Sweden

Internal review

All VET institutions are obliged by law to implement systematic quality assurance. There are no specific requirements for detailed guidelines as while the regulation is centralised, education is decentralised. It is common practice for schools to use average marks, attendance data, pass rates and placement rates as indicators in their analyses. Many educational institutions poll students, the related topics are teaching, facilities and well-being³².

External review

An external review takes place once every 3-5 years. This is organised at national level and involves a thematic evaluation. In Sweden, the method of external monitoring depends on the type of VET institution. This is shown in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1 Responsibility for goals, content, diplomas and quality assurance in VET in Sweden

Diploma/education	Responsible for goals and contents	Responsible for awarding diploma certificates	Responsible for quality assurance
Vocational diploma at upper secondary level	Government; The National Agency for Education	School's/education provider's headmaster/director	The governing body of the school provider; The Swedish Schools Inspectorate
Diploma in higher vocational education and Advanced diploma in higher vocational education	Education providers	Education providers	Education providers; Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education

Source: Skolverket

Upper secondary VET

Responsibility for the monitoring and quality audits of the vocational programmes in Swedish upper secondary schools lies with the Swedish school inspection (Skolinspektionen). Frequent monitoring is conducted on the basis of several assessment areas and points, whereas the audit focuses on one specific area³³.

³² Skolverket, ReferNet Sweden, 2019, p. 51

³³ Skolverket, ReferNet Sweden, 2019, p. 51

Higher VET

External monitoring of programmes in higher vocational education is conducted by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan) through inspections and quality audits. Programmes are assessed for compliance with current legislation and other provisions. The Inspection can monitor programmes in three different ways, meaning that introductory (for new programmes), regular and/or ad hoc inspections are possible. Ad hoc inspections are carried out if students have complained about the study programme or the education provider. The ad hoc inspection focuses solely on the student's complaint³⁴.

The vocational programmes in Swedish upper secondary schools provide a basis for a professional life and for further vocational education and training. The programme content is determined by the government. Combining different courses enables schools to prepare their students for the specific demands of the regional employment market. The National Education Agency cooperates with schools and stakeholders to guarantee that these courses and corresponding qualifications are aligned to the employment market. A national council, with representatives from the sector and social partners from the relevant occupational field, is therefore in place for every vocational training programme. Some such councils also include government representatives. One of the tasks of these councils is to advise and assist the National Education Agency in relation to the adjustment, development and modernisation of the range and content of vocational training. This helps to ensure that the education and training aligns with the skills required in the field. The councils do not have any decision-making powers; they have an advisory role and can propose revisions.

When a Swedish vocational qualification is designed or revised, the need for such is first extensively analysed. This analysis considers the relevance in practice. If this has been demonstrated, the National Education Agency will initiate an extensive evaluation process. Focus groups are organised via which lecturers and students are consulted. Interim versions are published on a website to enable lecturers and stakeholders to express their opinion. Proposals are laid down in writing and the National Agency assesses whether they comply with the relevant legislation³⁵.

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³⁴ Skolverket, ReferNet Sweden, 2019, p. 51

³⁵ Eqavet, n.d.

7 Initial conclusions

	Internal review	External review
<i>Norway</i>	Internal reviews are conducted using the educational institutions' own QA systems.	Inspection visits by the Directorate for Education and Training. The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) is responsible for the recognition, accreditation and quality assurance. Institutions are obliged to have their own NOKUT accredited QA system in place.
<i>Ireland</i>	The internal review forms the basis for the external review. Institutions are able to decide which indicators and benchmarks they consider relevant and appropriate to their own context and mission.	Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the independent state agency responsible for quality to which schools are accountable. QQI conducts an independent external review which examines the internal QA review procedures the institution has implemented. QQI provides some guiding questions.
<i>Slovenia</i>	The internal review is mandatory. The results of the internal review of the quality of the school are published in a Quality Report on the institution's website. Within the school is team or committee that works together to optimise the school quality, also involving stakeholders, parents and people from the labour market sector.	In Slovenia, external evaluation is conducted through of peer reviews by other institutions and by inspection visits.
<i>Scotland</i>	A self-evaluation tool: 'how good is our school' helps schools promote a quality culture. This centres around fifteen national quality indicators in three categories (leadership and management; learning provisions; and successes and achievements).	Education Scotland provides external supervision using the National Quality Framework. Qualifications are accredited by a central body, the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

	Internal review	External review
<i>Estonia</i>	Estonian schools are legally obliged to continuously guarantee educational quality through internal assessment. This assessment analyses the educational and administrative activities, and the effectiveness thereof.	Accreditation is awarded by schools' curriculum groups, which acquire the right to provide vocational education and training. To that end schools must submit documents and assign an expert committee to conduct an external assessment. External reviews are conducted once every six years and based on the internal assessment.
<i>Sweden</i>	All VET institutions are obliged by law to implement systematic quality assurance. There are no specific requirements for detailed guidelines. It is common practice for schools to use average marks, attendance data, pass rates and placement rates as indicators in their analyses. Many educational institutions poll students, the related topics are teaching, facilities and well-being.	The Swedish inspection carries out monitoring and quality audits. Frequent monitoring is conducted on the basis of several assessment areas, audits focus on specific areas.