

# EQAVET Annual Network Meeting 2020

Virtual meeting, 14-15 December 2020)

## Flash Report

The EQAVET Annual Network meetings bring together Member States representatives in charge of quality assurance in VET, EQAVET National Reference Points (NRPs) representatives, as well as members of the European Commission, Education and Training Foundation (ETF), Cedefop, social partners and thematic experts/scientific advisors. The meeting was attended by 60 participants.

The thematic focus of the EQAVET ANM 2020 was related to the new [Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training \(VET\) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](#), which was adopted on 24 November 2020. During its 2020 Annual Meeting, the EQAVET Network discussed the implications of this new legal basis for VET on EQAVET and on the work of the EQAVET Network.

## The Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience

Chiara Riondino, Head of Unit E3 at DG EMPL, European Commission, underlined that this is the first ever Council Recommendation that focuses specifically on the VET sector which is a big step forward. The Recommendation is the result of a long joint preparation process that involved all VET stakeholders in Europe. It integrates the two 2009 Council Recommendations of ECVET and EQAVET, puts a strong emphasis on digital transitions and highlights the importance of flexible pathways in VET.

Jan Varchola and Koen Bois d'Enghien from DG EMPL Unit E3 further stressed the key ideas behind the VET Recommendation, which is based on four pillars:

1. **A joint vision for VET in Europe:** this is largely inspired by the opinion of the ACVT from 2019, which stipulated that inclusion and excellence should equally underpin VET systems in Europe. VET needs to respond to labour market needs, but also needs to equip a person with skills for life, so that they can take care of their personal needs and become an active citizen.
2. **A set of concrete principles to achieve inclusion and excellence, that should be followed on national level:** The focus here is on IVET as well as on CVET and on the increasing need for investing in upskilling and reskilling. There is also the idea to have a more proactive VET, co-creating the structural changes taking place in the economy, being a driver for innovation and growth.
3. **A set of support actions at European level.** There are several ideas about support actions that can be taken at the EU level, such as the Platforms of Centres of Vocational Excellence, the digitalisation of VET (including SELFIE tool), support to reform strengthened support to apprenticeships, European vocational core profiles (the idea is to see if there is a potential to look for commonalities on vocational qualifications across Member States) worldwide reference of VET learners, Peer reviews on quality assurance.
4. **Three quantitative objectives:**
  - a. the share of employed graduates from VET should be at least 82 %
  - b. 60 % of recent graduates from VET benefit from exposure to work-based learning during their vocational education and training
  - c. 8 % of learners in VET benefit from a learning mobility abroad

These are long-term strategic goals that underline the importance of effective quality assurance methods. In an Annex to the VET Recommendation, the updated EQAVET Framework is presented (including the EQAVET+ indicative descriptors).

DG EMPL further highlighted that the key goals of the VET Recommendation are complemented by another very recent strategic policy document: the Osnabrück Declaration from 30 November 2020 that aims at revitalising the Copenhagen process, and underlines the role of vocational education and training as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies.

## **Discussion topics for the EQAVET Network emerging from the VET Recommendation**

The EQAVET Network discussed two topics in more detail: digital VET delivery and flexible learning pathways.

### **Quality assurance of VET delivery**

The COVID-19 crisis entailed the sudden need to offer remote learning, blended learning and other digital solutions at an unexpected and unprecedented scale. VET providers, employers of apprentices, and other key agencies have made remarkable efforts to put emergency measures in place, thereby ensuring the continuity of learning. Finding themselves ‘thrown in the cold water’, they had to address the following needs:

- Adaptation of the curricula
- Development of basic pedagogical and didactical approaches to digital VET delivery
- Expansion of the methods of examining and assessing the course content
- Availability of hardware equipment and bandwidths to all students
- Financing issues

Yet the crisis also revealed the challenges ahead and showed that VET providers as well as learners are currently not yet sufficiently prepared for the digital transition, and there is little quality assurance in place. For instance, there is a need to

- Discuss the need for legal adaptations in national training regulations to accommodate distance learning
- Launch a discussion at VET provider/employer level to better define the quality of digital skills
- Differentiate and define the demand for digital skills in view of different types of qualifications
- Undertake research in dialogue with VET providers and the labour market, e.g. to discuss digitalisation in relation to technological developments like robotics and artificial intelligence
- Broaden the scope for digital assessment methods and quality assurance of the outcomes
- Secure funding for the required developments (e.g. through support from private companies).

### **Quality assurance of flexible learning pathways**

In the second workshop, EQAVET Network members discussed the different ways how VET training pathways are made more flexible and what this means for quality assurance.

A wide range of different actions are in the process of implementation which are increasing flexibility to individual learners and to employers. These included operational changes as well as system changes.

- Operational changes, for instance, can include

- Improving transitions so learning is recognised before courses are chosen and started
- Starting courses a different times throughout the year
- Providing blended and online alternatives
- Skills assessments
- Systemic changes were found to include
  - Unitisation and transfer/stacking of learning outcomes but more recently recognition of micro-credentials and partial qualifications
  - Personal budgets for adult learners replacing or augmenting provider budgets
  - Integration of different parts of adult learning (standard approaches) and guidance services
  - Recognition of work-based learning on the job as part of a unit or certification

Challenges for quality assurance can include:

- How are course quality standards maintained for different pathways? How can standards for class-based learning be applied for work based and online learning?
- How can the quality and assessment of learner capabilities be maintained through different approaches? How can employers be assured that certification by every pathway has the same value to them? How can providers in other areas/countries and in other education sectors (primarily higher education) be assured that certification by non-conventional pathways matches standards?
- How can stacking units and other unconventional ways of building up competencies towards a certification be as transparent as traditional ways?
- How can relevance be tested and outcomes measured through so many routes and short learning experiences by individuals?

The presentations from the meeting can be revisited on the [resource page](#) created for the meeting.

A full summary report from the meeting will be circulated in January 2021.