

EQAVET PLA – The importance of digital competence of VET teachers

During the Peer Learning Activity of 22-23 November 2023, Ester Scholten from the Dutch program VET Digital (Dutch: *MBO Digitaal*), gave some insight in the importance of digital competence of VET teachers. She shared more about the sub-program Digital Competence (Dutch: *Digitaal Bekwaam*) and how their objectives relate to the EQAVET framework. She also explained why digital competence should be of the essence to all VET teachers and other professionals in VET.

Digital Competence

Digital Competence a national sub-program, which is part of the national program VET Digital. VET Digital is a platform of the VET council (subsidised by the Dutch ministry of education). It is the point of contact for vocational schools and other parties such as the ministry of education when it comes to digitalization and educational innovation. VET Digital represents the interests of VET institutions on a broad array of themes related to digitalization, such as data exchange and cyber security. Besides that it arranges knowledge development and exchange, vision and strategy development and it initiates sub-programs and -projects.

Digital Competence is one of those sub-programs. Within the Digital Competence VET program, we work in a multidisciplinary manner to raise the ICT skills of teaching staff to a higher level. Many schools in the Netherlands see the possibility of using digitalization as an innovative way to achieve far-reaching flexibility and modularization. These educational innovations require a lot from the designers and implementers of education, which in our country means: the teachers. In order for the changes mentioned to be successful, it is necessary to work proactively on the digital competence of teaching staff in VET. We work on this objective on the basis of six goals:

- Monitoring
- Developing policy
- Experimenting
- Professionalization
- Educating
- Connecting

Within these goals the program tries to raise awareness on the subject: what do we mean by digital competence? Why is this an important subject for all teachers and not just some of them? Within the program we focus on teacher education and training, as well as several co-creation networks in which VET schools can experiment and exchange on the subject.

Raising awareness also means talking to the teacher trainers colleges and VET institutions about what their responsibilities are when it comes to education and further training.

EQAVET Framework

The EQAVET Framework has an indicator which emphasizes on the investment in training of teachers and trainers. You could think this relates to quality assurance, but quality assurance always relates to the content of good education and every aspect of education.

The Dutch NCP has explained this in a good way in their objectives:

- VET should flexibly adjust to changes in the labour market – which means digital skills (amongst many other skills) should be incorporated in VET curricula.
- Teachers should work on their initial and continued professional development, in order to provide high quality education. Part of high quality education: technical and digital skills, e.g. teaching in a virtual environment, being able to work with digital learning resources which correspond with professional and digital didactics.

We should also keep in mind the ongoing changes in the labour market. What do VET students require when it comes to digital skills? And not only in their future profession, but also in daily society. Preparing students for these things requires higher digital or ICT skills from all teachers and trainers. So if all teachers and trainers should have a certain minimum level of digital competence, this means everyone within VET has a role to play in making sure they are educated and trained well in order to provide education that is actually of a higher quality than before. You can teach teachers, but if their environment is not well-equipped or if the vision of the school is not in line with their new-found knowledge, it will not be a sustainable investment.

Continuous Learning

In the Netherlands Digital Competence tries to work towards an approach of continuous learning, when it comes to digital competence.

Instead of focusing on tools, or instrumental skills (such as knowing how to use equipment, or an educational platforms for e-learning) in teacher training, we focus on a wider range of digital competence. In the Netherlands we have developed indicators for 'Learning and teaching with ICT for teachers in VET'. This is done together with the Dutch iXperium Centre of Expertise after elaborate research in VET.

Those indicators are:

- (as mentioned before) instrumental skills,
- informational skills
- media literacy
- train students to become ICT-literate
- pedagogical didactic use of ICT
- designing ICT-rich learning arrangements
- evaluating ICT-rich learning processes
- competencies for learning and innovating with ICT

The iXperium Centre of Expertise has developed a monitor, based on these indicators, which many Dutch VET institutions use within their schools. This gives them insight on the level of digital competence within their school. Based on the results, they can decide which indicators need more attention in, for example, training.

People tend to see teacher training (after their initial education) as a quick fix. During Covid we noticed this when we had to switch to online education. Teachers needed training on how to work with Microsoft Teams, Zoom or other online platforms. We do the same when a new digital system is implemented – we quickly provide a training, kind of based on the just-in-time principle. Instead of this, it would be better to focus on continuous learning. Doing that could also create more time and space for development of teachers' beliefs and values, instead of mainly trying to influence their behaviour. If teachers do not see the added value of digital skills in their job, e.g. how it could support them or make their lessons better, how do you expect their behaviour to change long term? This supports the idea of a more holistic approach towards teacher education and training – and maybe even a more important role towards teacher education and training within EQAVET objectives.

Questions regarding this subject? Contact the Dutch NRP EQAVET through info@ncpeqavet.nl



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