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> FETAC, East Point Plaza. East Point Business Park, Dublin 3, Ireland

T: 00-353-1865-9546 F: 00-353-1865-0067

Editorial:

Christina Linderholm, UEAPME (European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) and EQAVET **Steering Committee member**

"EQAVET network and its cooperation with social partners"

UEAPME, the European employers' association representing Craft and SMEs and a European social partner, has supported EQAVET to encourage quality assurance in VET from the outset.

We strongly share the view that quality assurance and transparency of VET systems and providers, as outlined in the EQAVET Recommendation, helps to increase both employability in VET and economic growth. Quality assurance is also the foundation for making VET learning pathways more attractive and flexible and for boosting VET mobility in Europe.

Support, cooperation and coordination are crucial issues in terms of implementing EQAVET effectively through the National Reference Points (NRPs). It requires the support and cooperation of social partners and other stakeholders in the whole process and at all levels: European, national, regional and sectoral. Setting up a continuous dialogue and exchange of information between stakeholders will facilitate a balanced implementation. Moreover, a coordinated implementation of EQAVET with the other European instruments - European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and European Credit System for VET (ECVET) - between and within Member States, will also increase synergies between the three instruments focusing on learning outcomes.

The Bruges Communiqué sets a target for Member States to establish Quality Assurance frameworks at national level for VET providers that also apply to associated workplace learning compatible with the EQAVET Recommendation by 2015. Again involving social partners early in EQAVET should lead to more cooperation between education and training and the world of work and thereby promote quality assurance and work-based learning.

From the perspective of employers and SMEs quality assurance management has to be adapted to the needs and reality of VET



providers and their specificities. Quality assurance should be implemented in a user-friendly, simple and cost-effective way. The diversity of training providers, notably smaller providers, needs to be considered. Furthermore, small enterprises should be recognised as important training providers when they are involved in alternating initial and continuous VET, including apprenticeships,





and quality assurance should be adapted to them. This in turn will help to achieve stronger ownership and more sustainable outcomes.

Standardisation has been an issue lately. According to UEAPME it should not be applied to VET. VET is too varied, branch dependent and strongly shaped by national culture and practice to be able to fit into a standardised system. Additionally, it bears a high risk of being overly bureaucratic, leading to the crowding out of training providers and limiting the participation of small businesses as trainers, which would be clearly counterproductive at a time when more efforts are required to support a higher integration of young people in the labour market.

The results of projects providing good practice on QALLL (Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning) are useful in helping National Reference Points implement EQAVET through the training providers. It should not stop there but also take into account the work of social partners in the process of mutual learning and exchange of good practices on a bipartite and/or tripartite basis. This will contribute to promoting a culture of quality assurance. Similarly, the EQAVET sectoral seminars, bringing together Member State representatives and social partners, provide a forum to investigate further the needs of different sectors and to feed the results into the continuing work.

As a next step, case studies on individual training providers will be identified and compiled, introducing good practice in quality assurance linked to indicative in descriptors and indicators the **EQAVET** Recommendation. UEAPME considers this is a good opportunity to highlight the key topic of employability. EQAVET indicators 5 and 6 focus on output and employability, i.e. placement in VET programmes and the utilisation of acquired skills in the workplace. Good practice in this area would give a higher visibility to the impact of VET on employability and contribute to a more evidencebased policy. It is also a very relevant input linked to developing a benchmark on employability for VET learners, something that is being currently proposed by the European Commission and debated among Member States.

UEAPME and its members are strongly involved in promoting mutual trust, transparency and quality in VET through EC- funded projects in the area of networks and partnerships. "SME Master Plus" (www.sme-master.eu) is a project aiming at implementing ECVET in the formal training programmes of a master craftsperson and setting up an international network of training providers of master crafts people. On the mobility of apprentices "Euroapprenticeship" (www.euroapprenticeship.eu) is seeking to create a sustainable European network of intermediary bodies to support the mobility of apprentices and young people in VET in Europe.

To conclude, UEAPME considers EQAVET a useful instrument to increase quality assurance and transparency of VET qualifications. However, strengthening a broader quality assurance culture and community adapted to national systems and training providers can only be achieved if social partners and other stakeholders are fully on board throughout the implementation process.

Christina Linderholm, UEAPME and EQAVET Steering Committee member



We asked EQAVET social partner representatives 3 important questions

Susanne Müller (DE)

BDA Confederation of German Employers' Associations – BUSINESSEUROPE Astrid Kristin Moen Sund (NO) Utdanningsforbundet **Morten Smistrup (DK)**

Danish Confederation of Trade Unions

What are the advantages of involving social partners in the QA management of VET provision?

Social partners are key players for a successful VET system. They represent the world of work and thus can help to develop VET programmes with regard to labour market needs. In the planning and evaluation phase the point of view of social partners should always be taken into consideration. Ideally they should also be involved in the implementation of VET-programmes.

The social partners play an important role in VET provision in Europe, even if the VET systems are different. It is important to see the development of VET in close connection to the demands of the labour market, and of course in relation to the demands of the individual student. Both are equally important. The advantages of involving social partners are, among others, the organisation's knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses in the VET system and the demands of the labour market.

The social partners have an important role to play in ensuring that QA management and VET provision are responsive to labour market needs and reflect its development in order to implement change; ensuring that qualified young people are flexible and mobile within and between companies; that citizens participate in further education and contribute actively to a broad range of societal processes. Social partners have a strong motivation in securing high quality in VET. They are well suited to taking on this role as in many EU countries they have a broad access to companies and know the labour market needs within the different sectors.

What mechanisms can be put in place in order to actively involve social partners in the implementation process of the EQAVET Framework?

Social partners should be consulted on different levels and at every single step of the implementation process. On the system level they can be partners of QA-networks or advisory bodies. As multipliers they can inform their members about the implementation process. Depending on the VET system on provider level they can act immediately as providers or they can support providers in planning, implementing and evaluating their programmes.

The social partners have contributed to developing the EQAVET Framework in Europe through participating in the work of the EQAVET network and its different activities, and in thematic working groups and peer learning at the European level. The next important phase is to develop *national solutions* for these issues. It would be important to continue to involve social partners in European conferences and other relevant activities.

What mechanisms will be suitable will depend very much on the extent to which the social partners already take part in discussions concerning VET. There are also structural issues related to whether the country has a school-based system or a dual-system. In dual systems social partners are strongly involved. In countries where these kinds of structures do not exist, the government, the employers and the employees might consider organising a national body for implementation and local reference committees which would cooperate with the VET institutions. I think it would be crucial to establish a dialogue between these bodies.

How can social partners support National Reference Points (NRPs)? **S**ocial partners can serve as multipliers and inform their members on the role and work of National Reference Points (NRPs). As key players in VET they can also help reference points develop implementation strategies. Therefore they need to be informed continuously on the work of the NRPs.

The success of the National Reference Points (NRPs) is relevant to the task. If European countries establish NRPs with clear support from governments, then the social partners will support the task.

Social partners can support the National Reference Points (NRPs) by creating awareness among employers and employees about the EQAVET framework and by stressing the importance of the QA system. They can also use their contacts and knowledge of the national labour market and of labour traditions to ensure that it is adapted/implemented with due regard to these conditions. In some countries the support of the labour market parties is crucial to the legitimacy of such initiatives. QA will be symbolic, merely, if the parties directly involved do not see its value and actively support its implementation.



Using the Quality Cycle IT tool in the national context - Its application in some EU Member States

In Germany (DE), Romania (RO) and UK (Wales) National Reference Points have been using the IT tool to support their implementation of national approaches to the EQAVET Recommendation.

We asked them about their experiences in this respect.

How has the IT tool been used and/or how have you incorporated the IT tool into your processes and implementation actions?

DE: Germany has established a culture of quality assurance (QA) over a long period of time. In 2005 the Vocational Education and Training Act was reformed. Since then the 'vocational and professional capacity to act' forms a basis for all acts and measures undertaken in IVET and CVET. The IT tool is mostly used at system level for reviewing the system of QA on all levels. IVET and CVET-competent ministries on national and federal state level as well as the competent bodies (e.g. chambers of industry and commerce as well as the chambers of skilled crafts) use the tool for orientation in the process of converging the German and European QA systems.



Where QA already exists in Germany, it is based on the Quality Cycle. But no single model is used in all 16 German states. Responsibility for school education is a state competence and their frameworks of vocational education are also coordinated by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder. Most states have established external and internal evaluation systems. The external evaluation system is handled usually by state institutes that evaluate the schools in fixed cycles (3 to 5 years). They supervise the qualification of teachers, the curriculum, the buildings (sometimes) and the learning process — in cooperation with partners in

IVET. Most schools organise internal evaluation by using the elements of the quality circle.

RO: Romania is currently setting up the Strategy for implementing the EQAVET Recommendation at national level.

The information provided by the IT tool on actions taken in different Member States in order to adapt and implement the quality criteria, indicative descriptors and quality indicators is extremely useful. A Study on how EQAVET is implemented in Member States was conducted under a ESF project

http://parteneriatpentrucalitate.tvet.ro/index.php/mai-mult/43-analiza-comparativa-privind-implementarea-eqarf-in-statele-membre.html)
 based on an analysis of examples of system developments provided by the IT tool, in order to provide a basis for national developments.

Furthermore, Romania is reinforcing evidence-based policymaking in education and training. This will require an in-depth assessment of our VET policy and system. As we begin the process of identifying the requirements for creating and using evidence throughout the policy cycle, the good practice examples provided by the IT tool are most welcome.



In which areas of the VET QA national strategy has the IT tool been most useful?

UK (Wales): Wales strives to keep abreast of developments in VET in Europe. It was one of the first countries to fully reference its national framework to the European Qualifications Framework and it has most of the elements in place to demonstrate compatibility with the EQAVET Quality Indicators. However initial discussions with key stakeholders about EQAVET identified a limited shared vision of how the various initiatives interrelated. I spent a little time explaining how I see EQAVET underpinning a series of European initiatives (such as EQF, ECVET) aimed at improving recognition for skills and competencies acquired by learners in different countries or learning environments. The IT tool enables me to use the mapping of the quality indicators against the planning cycle to provide a starting point for discussions about which indicators could be used to inform each stage.

Many of the stakeholders already have systems in place; the advantage of the IT tool is that it can quickly and



easily assist in the review and evaluation of their systems. Discussing the quality indicators in the context of the planning cycle, and linking it directly to the systems already in place, helps stakeholders to reflect in a more structured manner. I use the tool in a supportive approach to continuous improvement across a stakeholder's quality systems.



Feedback has been positive, confirming that the web tool provides a good visual representation of a very complex structure and that it is more valuable when its use can be facilitated. If it is to be used effectively as a development tool to work with stakeholders it is extremely important that the context of their quality systems be understood from the outset.

DE: The IT tool can help in every segment of education and will be able to build bridges of understanding and trust between them, enabling more permeability between the education sectors. As each sector works with a method of quality assurance on the basis of the Quality Cycle they will identify more and more problems in common, and they will try to find solutions for those. In the same way it will be possible to speak in future about quality assurance of vocational education and training, for example, without referring only to the German states.

RO: In Romania, a National QA Framework for TVET (NQAF) was developed and piloted between2003 – 2006 and was then fully implemented at national level starting in 2006. The National Quality Assurance Framework in TVET has been developed on the basis of the European Common Quality Assurance Framework in VET (CQAF), with which it is perfectly compatible in terms of principles, methodology and instruments. Currently our focus is on revising the NQAF in TVET in order to correlate it with the European Reference QA Framework for VET (EQAVET). In this respect, information offered by the IT tool is very useful.

Another area of our QA in TVET approach in which the IT tool provides meaningful examples of good practice is in monitoring the QA system. One of the aspects that need further improvement on our national QA system for TVET is data collection and analysis. The IT tool, in detailing solutions adopted in different Member States for the collection of data in systematic and predictable ways, leading to financial savings and providing greater clarity to stakeholders, is a crucial source of information.

In relation to the national implementation process, what have been the benefits of having access to the IT tool?

DE: In the history of the Federal Republic several discussions over quality and quality assurance have taken place. These were seldom national discussions but regional or sectoral in character. EQAVET and the IT tool offer us the opportunity to take a 'national approach' to the discussion of VET with all stakeholders. The IT tool has become a basis for communication and understanding across Germany. Systems which are still used in the federal states to assure the quality of the vocational schools and their teaching processes are compatible with the quality cycle of the EQAVET process. It also facilitates communication between all levels (local, regional, national) of the system. In this way the IT tool is a useful instrument for the German National Reference Point: it helps to embed a sense of ownership of the culture of quality assurance among the competent authorities and facilitates the collection, exchange and review of case studies about current quality assurance in Germany through appropriate stocktaking measures.

RO: The IT tool supported many aspects of the national implementation process, such as:

- the involvement of relevant stakeholders in the QA in TVET implementation process
- support of teachers and trainers in improving their QA practice
- monitoring satisfaction rates among students and teachers regarding the training programmes
- accountability of TVET training providers.

Furthermore, Romania is currently implementing a LdV project (Call EACEA 09/2010) which aims to:

- develop and pilot a communication strategy for the Romanian National Reference Point of EQAVET (GNAC In Romanian Language: "Grupul National pentru Asigurarea Calitatii", meaning the "National Group for Quality Assurance"), in order to implement the EQAVET Recommendation, the policies and the instruments elaborated within EQAVET
- raise the level of awareness of all stakeholders, by meetings, project website, database of relevant documents and materials published regarding the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation and the policies and instruments elaborated within EQAVET at national level.

During project implementation, many documents available on the IT tool will be translated and disseminated at national level.



Some messages from the Conference on the European Qualification Framework –a quality assurance perspective 25-26 May 2011. Budapest

Article by Serban Iosifescu, EQAVET Expert

Between 25 and 26 May 2011, the Hungarian EU Presidency, in close cooperation with the European Commission, organised a Conference on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The participants at this Conference were experts in the field of qualifications and policymakers from Member States, candidate countries, EEA countries and pre-accession countries, representatives of relevant international organisations and stakeholders active in the field — including a representative of the EQAVET network.

The primary aim of this Conference was to overview the implementation of the EQF Recommendation, to evaluate progress, to draw lessons from experiences and the process of referencing. The aim also was to identify challenges and to outline further tasks.

Three years after the adoption of the Recommendation on the establishment of the European Qualification and halfway to reporting on experiences to the European Framework (EQF) developments and Parliament and the Council in 2013, the Commission took stock of the progress made in the implementation of the EQF. The evaluation was based on the development and implementation of national qualifications frameworks, on the results of referencing national qualifications' levels to the EQF, on the work of the EQF Advisory Group and National Coordination Points and of other relevant stakeholders. Starting from the fact that the EQF was a key priority of the Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies, this conference intended to reveal the progress made at European level and also at national level in order to link national qualification frameworks (NQFs) to the EQF.

Five main topics were presented by the keynote speeches and discussed in five parallel workshops (for more detail see http://tempus.tpf.hu/eqf/):

1. Promoting confidence in the EQF – with two main sub-topics: a) confidence in and ownership of the national referencing process; b) confidence in the results of the referencing process abroad.

- 2. The impact of NQFs on the learning outcomes approach with sub-topics: teaching, training and facilitating learning; the role of quality assurance (QA) in implementing the learning outcomes based approach at provider level.
- 3. NFQs as policy instruments for Lifelong Learning with sub-topics: NQF as a tool in recognising prior learning; NQF as a tool in lifelong guidance.
- 4. NQFs as communication tools. How NQFs can promote dialogue and cooperation with subtopics: NQFs as a communication tool between stakeholders from different education and training subsectors; NQFs as a communication tool between stakeholders in the education and labour markets.
- 5. External dimensions of the European Qualifications Framework and the potential for policy co-operation with other regions with subtopics: the evolution of regional qualifications frameworks; how can regional qualifications frameworks support mobility between different regions of the world?



Poster used at the conference published by CEDEFOP

"Quality assurance"/"quality assured processes" was a recurrent topic of interest in all discussions at the Conference.

The following are some points of interests for future developments of the work of the EQAVET network and the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation:

It is necessary to pass from the political level (all the Member States have agreed to implement the EQF, ECVET and EQAVET) to the technical. It is important to build concrete mechanisms at Member State level in order to pass from "why" to "how", "what", "who", "when" and "where".



- QA systems will support the movement from one end of the qualification process (i.e. input) to the other (i.e. results), notwithstanding the extreme diversity of VET and school systems at both national and European levels. "Results orientation" will become the main thrust of all QA systems and QA of learning outcomes will be crucial. Even when there is no common European institutional solution to the implementation of EQF, ECVET and EQAVET (because of differences among EU education and training systems) there may be a conceptual solution i.e. focusing on learning outcomes.
- "Customer orientation" is another very important principle: VET provision must start from the expectations of employers, training providers and trainees. In this respect, QA mechanisms should support the definition of learning outcomes that are transparent and easily understood by all stakeholders. It should ensure that stakeholders obtain the results they expect. The approach of VET systems should also move from teachercentred to learner-centred.
- NQFs and the EQF should have a "bridging" role across sectors, levels and interests. In this respect, QA systems should have a facilitating role, ensuring transparency, flexibility, accountability and leading to mutual trust. Credibility is the most important issue for a QA system, particularly since NQFs aim to bring together institutions which have built a bond of trust with each other (across sectors, levels and types of education). There has been mention of a new concept, "trust-based networking", in the development of NQFs.
- It is necessary to close the loop of the dynamic process of continuous improvement (progress and continuous improvement based on the "Quality Cycle") in order to make VET more "fit for purpose". But the QA systems should go beyond the traditional PDCA cycle, using "feed-forward", as a complement to "feed-back".
- There is pressure to include general school outcomes in NQFs, including establishing a NQF/EQF level for the school leaving certificates in order to unify the QA systems for "academics" and VET. In this respect, QA for VET should be extended and reconciled with QA for general education. Consequently, the implementation of the NQF, EQF and learning outcomes approach could fail if it does not include the school curriculum and teacher training. In relation to the latter, teacher training should be focused on learning outcomes, so that teachers will be able to focus on the learning outcomes of their pupils/trainees.

The contextualisation of competencies may be a target for QA systems. Practising as a professional differs from the process of acquiring the professional competencies. In this respect, quality assured standards, assessment, validation and recognition are the most important topics.



Poster used at the conference published by CEDEFOP

Implication for EQAVET: focusing on the role of learning outcomes in designing qualifications and creating and implementing a qualification framework based on learning outcomes have a series of implications and consequences for educational provision and institutional practices, including the need for the development and establishment of quality assurance systems. Without QA systems, it will be very difficult to build mutual trust and common understanding and to ensure flexibility and mobility of qualifications at European level.



Results of the Eurobarometer survey on:

"Attitudes towards vocational education and training"

The European Commission has recently published the Eurobarometer survey on "Attitudes towards vocational education and training". The survey was conducted through face-to-face interviews with 26,840 EU citizens in all 27 Member States between 4 and 19 June 2011.

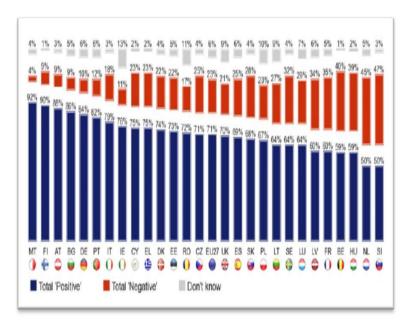
The findings of this report provide a useful guide that should inform the work of EQAVET as it seeks to modernise national VET systems. It provides excellent insight into learners' perspectives which will be useful for the future development of EQAVET.

These are some of the key findings:

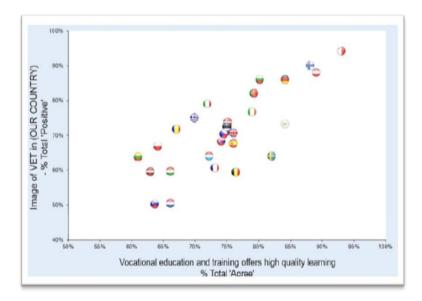
1. Positive image of vocational education and training linked to quality

Vocational education and training (VET) is generally well regarded by EU citizens, although this belief is stronger in some countries that in others.

'Do you think that VET has a positive or negative image in your country?'



There seems to be a direct link between the image of VET and the perceived quality of training (see figure below): 75% thought that VET offered high quality learning.



Other reasons for an overall positive image were highly competent teachers and trainers (76%), access to modern equipment (82%) and opportunities to move on to university studies (68%). However, one third of respondents say there is scope for improvement in transmitting transversal skills and competences, such as communication or teamwork (34%).

2. Strong employment prospects

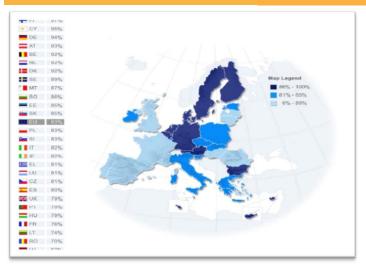
EU citizens agreed that VET provides the skills relevant to the labour market to meet employers' needs.

Most respondents (56%) also believe that young people with VET are more likely to find a job after their studies than those with general secondary or higher education qualifications.

3. Economic and social impact, challenges for entrepreneurship

A large majority stated that VET contributes positively to the economy.

'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement: VET contributes positively to the economy of your country (Total agree = 100%)?'



The majority (83%) also believe that it plays a role in reducing unemployment (76%) and that it contributes to the quality of services in their countries (80%). Around half of the respondents believe that VET does not stimulate the creation of small companies while 36% say it does.

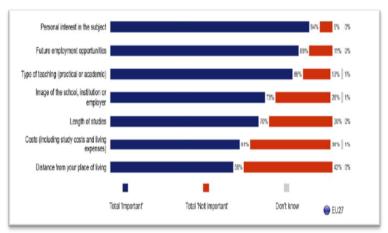
4. Need to improve mobility for training and work

On the question of whether VET allows students to do part of their training abroad, responses were mixed: 43% agree that VET in their country gives students and trainees this opportunity, while 35% do not.

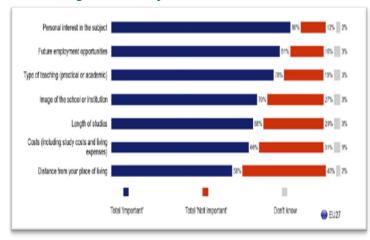
5. Need for improvements in guidance services

In spite of an overall positive image and perceived benefits of VET, 41% of respondents aged 15-24 would rather recommend general secondary or higher education as a preferable choice for young people, compared to 27% who would recommend VET.

'When you decided to follow a VET pathway, how important was each of the following factors for you?'



'When you decided to follow general secondary or higher education, how important was each of the following factors for you?'



The fact that students selecting VET take much the same factors into consideration as students selecting general secondary or higher education suggests that there is no great social divide separating those who choose the two different educational pathways. The struggle may instead be to reach those members of society who do not seriously consider taking either educational route. A fifth (21%) of all EU respondents currently believe that VET does not offer good career opportunities, and this is one of the key statistics that the EU initiative needs to improve by 2020, both through enhancements in the VET system and through the education of young people and of the adult workforce.

Fewer than half of all respondents aged 25-39 and 40-54 agree that young people receive enough career guidance. According to the survey, family is still the primary source of information for young people when making educational choices (47% of 15-24 year olds say they consulted their family).

Internet and online social networks are increasingly influential with 43% of 15-24 year old respondents saying they consulted these information channels. Schools also play an important role in guidance and provision of information.

For more information:

Full Eurobarometer report, summary and survey findings country by country:

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_special

Related documents:

Cedefop research paper on: "Vocational education and training is good for you. The social benefits of VET for individuals" available at: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications

ENQAVET thematic group report on: "Making initial vocational education and training more attractive for learners" available at: http://www.egayet.eu/gns/library/publications/2009.aspx





www.eqavet.eu/gns/library/policy-briefings

1 Policy brief presenting the key messages of interest to policymakers and practitioners 'On quality assurance in continuing vocational education and training in the Healthcare Sector'.



This policy brief is based on the discussions which took place at the 1st EQAVET Sectoral Seminar, Norway in May 2011. The seminar brought together National Reference Points for quality assurance, VET providers, practitioners, policymakers and industry representatives from 14 member countries.

website:

All the Sectoral Seminar material is available on the website at:

www.egavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/sectoral-seminars

2 Policy briefs

summarising the key issues arising from the ongoing work of the EQAVET Working Groups within Phase II of the EQAVET work programme 2010-2013.

The Working Groups are focusing their work on:

"Developing guidelines to support National Reference Points', and



 Developing a culture of using indicators to self-monitor the quality assurance processes in VET provision'.

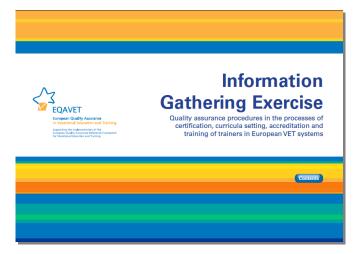
All the related material on Woking Groups is available on our website at:

www.egavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/working-groups

EQAVET Information Gathering Exercise, 2011.

The exercise is available at: www.eqavet.eu/gns/library/publications

The Information Gathering Exercise provides an overview or snapshot of the state of the European VET system in 2011.



It explores the quality assurance mechanisms that underlie some VET procedures among Member States, such as:

- The certification (assessment, validation and recognition) and qualifications processes in national VET systems;
- Curriculum setting and the implementation of programmes in national VET systems;
- The accreditation of VET providers;
- The training processes for trainers/teachers in national VET systems.

The information is presented in matrix format and in individual country cards:







The information provided was validated and reviewed by National Reference Points in February 2011.

QALLL project compendium

The thematic network QALLL (Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning with particular focus on vocational education and training and adult education) has published the project compendium of the first thirty projects that have been identified as good practice in the field of QA in VET and Adult Education.

The compendium presents the results of these projects and draw lessons and instances of good practice from these experiences. For more details on QALLL go to

http://www.qalll.net.





The EQAVET Promotion and Knowledge Management Unit, which coordinates the five EQAVET projects selected in the call for proposals "to support national projects for the development of a national approach to improve the quality assurance of VET systems by promoting and developing the use of the EQAVET reference framework (EACEA/09/2010)" has launched its website. The website contains information and material on the first seminar project which took place in Vienna on July 2011. The seminar's topic was: Standardisation & Contextualisation: Lessons Learned from 2003 to 2011.

Visit the site at: http://www.egavetprojects.eu/

