EQAVET Newsletter

EQAVET
European Quality Assurance
in Vocational Education and Training

Supporting the implementation of the
European Quality Assurance Reference Framework
for Vocational Education and Training

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The Issue

FETAC, East Point Plaza,
East Point Business Park,
Dublin 3, Ireland
www.eqavet.eu

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

Editorial:

*João Delgado, European Commission Head of Unit;
Vocational Training, Leonardo da Vinci*

The current crisis has had the effect of a wake-up call. We can no longer simply do business as usual.

This has been recognised at many levels and in many fields, not least education and training. In particular, vocational education and training (VET) in Europe needs to be modernised to make it more attractive and improve its quality, in order to provide young people with adequate skills and enable them to find jobs, and also to offer adults adequate training in order to help them to switch jobs.

If VET systems are successfully modernised so that they provide high-quality training reflecting the needs of companies and equipping individuals with skills that are needed on the labour market, employers will find it easier to recruit employees and governments will see mismatches on the labour market declining.

European countries have quite different systems of vocational education and training; and thus different weaknesses and strengths. However, they are facing similar challenges. Cooperation among countries at European level can be effective in facing these challenges together and in creating and implementing special tools to improve the way in which skills, competences and knowledge are transferred and recognised between countries, sectors and jobs.

A strategic decision was taken in June 2002 to apply the open method of coordination to European cooperation in education and training. This has generated unprecedented progress in terms of more intense cooperation and agreement on common principles in the field of VET. Numerous tools and services have since been introduced.
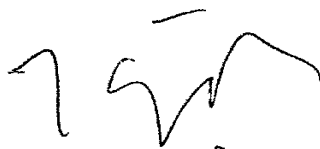
The adoption of the Recommendation on the establishment of a European quality assurance refe-

João Delgado, *European Commission
Head of Unit, Vocational Training; Leonardo
da Vinci*

Education and Culture DG

rence framework in June 2009 represents of one these achievements. As a result, two main objectives, the development and improvement of VET systems and the promotion of a quality improvement culture to enhance VET systems by making best use of the framework, have now been legally acknowledged by the countries of the European Union and the European Economic Area.

The Recommendation proposes a series of new initiatives to implement and develop these objectives:

- Creation of national reference points;
- Increased networking at European level, in particular with the creation of a network for European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training — the EQAVET network;
- Reporting tools;
- Dissemination, promotion and communication activities.

This newsletter represents one of the initiatives proposed for this new phase of collaboration. I hope that it will provide useful information for all stakeholders involved in VET quality management.

João Delgado
European Commission Head of Unit for VET Policy

European Vocational Education and Training, *a policy overview*

Event	Policy consequence
Rome 1957	The Advisory Committee for Vocational Education (ACVT) was established, in which the social partners obtain a special role.
Maastricht 1993	The principle of subsidiarity was applied to European VET. Each Member State is responsible for the organisation and content of its own VET. To turn policy into action, funds become available through the Leonardo da Vinci I (1995-1999) and II (2000-2006) programmes for VET.
Bologna 1999	29 countries (47 today) committed to base their higher education on the bachelor's-master's system, transparency and the start of introducing a system of quality assurance.
Lisbon 2000	Member States expressed their ambition to make the Europe Union (EU) the most dynamic and competitive region in the world, requiring a well educated and highly versatile labour force. To reach the goal, the open method of coordination was applied.✱
Education and Training 2010 Work Programme	Education and Training is key to the EU's overarching programme focusing on growth, jobs and social inclusion. EU political cooperation is a must. The strategic framework for EU cooperation in education and training was adopted by the Council in 2001.
Copenhagen 2002	Directore-General in charge of VET in the EU started a bottom-up process to improve the performance, quality and attractiveness of European VET in order to achieve the Lisbon objectives. The process acts at four levels: 1. Emphasise the importance of VET to political decision makers; 2. Develop common EU tools and principles aimed at enhancing transparency and quality; 3. Support EU cooperation and mutual learning; 4. Bring stakeholders on board.
Maastricht 2004	Consolidation of the Copenhagen process: focus on the development of EQF and ECVET and the improvement of statistical information in order to enable evaluation of progress in making VET efficient, effective and attractive.
Helsinki 2006	Development and implementation of common tools for VET. Policy focus on improving the attractiveness and quality of VET.
Bordeaux 2008	Implementing the tools and schemes for promoting cooperation in the field of VET at national and EU level. Focus on improving links between VET and the labour market The Commission adopted a proposal for a Recommendation on a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework in April 2008.
Education and Training 2020 Follow–up Work Programme	The follow-up of the *Education and Training 2010* work programme was adopted by the Council in May 2009. Lifelong learning (LLL) has become the fundamental principle underpinning the entire framework. Strategic objectives up to 2020 were established: 1. Making LLL and mobility a reality; 2. Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; 3. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship; 4. Enhancing innovation and creativity at all levels of education and training.
Bruges 2010	The aim will be to evaluate the implementation of the Copenhagen process and reflect on its strategic direction beyond 2010. Focus will be on mobility of learners and workers.

✱ The open method of coordination consists of four elements: 1. to formulate guidelines for medium and long-term objectives; 2. to fix qualitative and quantitative indicators and benchmark topics; 3. to translate common guidelines into national policy objective; 4. to assess activities periodically as a mutual learning process

VET Communication: A new impetus for European cooperation on Vocational Education and Training

European Commission's contribution to the debate on the future of European VET policy; an input to the review of the Copenhagen process

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions

The European Commission wishes to contribute actively to the review of the Copenhagen process and to present its vision for an innovative and efficient VET policy. For this reason the Commission adopted a communication on 9 June 2010. This communication has been transmitted to all European institutions, stakeholders and is available to EU citizens on the European Commission [website](#). In this initiative, the Commission provides a contribution to the debate on future cooperation in VET in the light of the upcoming review of the Copenhagen process. The initiative builds upon the Europe 2020 Strategy and is linked to the objectives of the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training – ET2020, as well as to the New Skills for New Jobs initiative.

Content, *modernization of VET*

This Communication constitutes the contribution of the Commission to the agenda for the modernisation of VET in Europe. It builds on and contributes to the Europe 2020 Strategy and the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training up to 2020 through:

1. **VET playing a key role in lifelong learning and mobility** with a focus on flexible access to training and qualifications as well as on a strategic approach to mobility in VET.

2. **Increasing attractiveness and excellence of VET through quality and efficiency** by implementing quality assurance in VET, responding to the evolving roles of teachers and trainers, striving for professional excellence combined with well developed key competences and ensuring labour market relevance through partnership.

3. **Contributing to equity and active citizenship through inclusive initial and continuing VET for** for different groups at a disadvantage such as early school leavers, low-skilled, unemployed people with migrant backgrounds and the disabled.

4. **Developing creativity and innovation in VET,** focusing on active learning and promotion of entrepreneurship.

The quality of human capital is crucial for Europe's success

The quality of human capital is crucial for Europe's success. The Europe 2020 Strategy puts a strong emphasis on education and training to promote "smart, green and inclusive growth". This Communication responds to the call for the Europe 2020 Strategy to reinforce the attractiveness of vocational education and training (VET) and maps out its potential with respect to the Flagship Initiatives: "An Agenda for new skills for jobs" and "Youth on the Move". The Copenhagen process launched in 2002 has supported the Member States in modernising VET systems. It has boosted the development of the learning outcomes approach and the lifelong learning perspective; and has supported the development of common reference tools. The European Ministers in charge of VET, European Social Partners and the European Commission will review the priorities under the Copenhagen process in December 2010. It will comprise the definition of priorities for the coming 10 years, with shorter term objectives to be regularly reviewed by the stakeholders.

> *Increase VET quality and efficiency by implementing quality assurance, responding to the evolving roles of teachers and trainers, striving for professional excellence combined with well developed key competences and ensuring labour market relevance through partnerships.*

Jan Varchola
Education and Culture, European Commission,
VET communication

EQAVET- supporting quality assurance of VET

An article by Sean Feerick, EQAVET Secretariat Director

New beginnings

With the launch of EQAVET in early 2010, European work in the quality assurance of VET has entered a new and exciting phase. Building on the tradition of cooperation between countries which has been a feature of the work since 2005, EQAVET now includes all 27 EU Member States, as well as the EEA and the candidate countries eligible to participate in the Lifelong Learning Programme. There is also a strong representation of the social partners at European level and other non governmental organisations active in the field of VET.

Using the Reference Framework

The work undertaken in this new phase is structured around supporting the effective use of the quality assurance Reference Framework in order to support development of a culture of quality VET in Europe and assist countries as they develop their approaches to ensuring the effective use of the Reference Framework and the implementation of the Recommendation in their national contexts.

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Underpinning principles

The first annual forum held on 29-30 April in Madrid agreed a strong work programme to take the work into 2011 and beyond. The work programme is articulated around three important principles which are to:

1.	Ensure the full integration of new members into the work on quality assurance of VET at European level
2.	Build on the significant work already undertaken in the context of ENQA-VET and ensure that the process of European cooperation moves forward
3.	Ensure that the work undertaken in EQAVET supports the quality assurance dimension of both ECVET and EQF

Building a community of practice

The major objective in the coming months and years will be to establish a dynamic community of practice which will bring together the key players in the quality assurance of VET. This community of practice will provide a platform for learning and sharing, where the specific concerns of national and/or regional contexts are understood and where the European dimension is seen as providing a catalyst to support policy development and implementation. This work will have a practical focus concentrating on developing guidelines and tools to support countries as they use the Reference Framework to improve the quality of their VET and reflect on how the indicators may be used as an effective toolbox to support this process.

National reference points

While the added-value of European cooperation will be very important in ensuring the success of this work, effective use of the Reference Framework and implementation of the Recommendation can only happen at national level. Therefore the quality assurance national reference points, which all countries have been asked to establish, will play a key role in ensuring the engagement of providers and other key stakeholders in the process of embedding the Reference Framework in national VET systems.

Effective communication and dissemination

Effective communication of what is happening will be a major indicator of success in this work. A re-vamped website, which over time will become a collaborative platform which is user-friendly and accessible, is a key priority and will ensure that learners, providers, social partners, employers, policymakers and citizens in general know about the importance of high quality VET in helping to create a competitive, forward-looking and satisfying labour market in Europe.

This online newsletter, available in English, French and German, with a summary in 18 languages will be an invaluable tool in informing key stakeholders and all those who are interested in the issue of quality assurance of VET about the key issues and important milestones over the coming years.

The EQAVET first annual forum took place on 29-30 April in Madrid. The EQAVET forum agreed a strong work programme to take the work of quality assurance in VET and the implementation of the Reference Framework into 2011 and beyond

Did you know that...?

That in every single EU country, unemployment rates systematically vary with qualification levels. The employment rate for those with high skill levels across the EU as a whole is approximately 85%, for medium skill levels 70%, and for low skill levels 50%

New skills for new jobs: Action Now, A report by the Expert Group on New Skills for New Jobs prepared for the European Commission, 2010; page 4

That nearly one third of the EU population aged 25-64 - around 77 million people- have no, or low, formal qualifications and only one quarter have high level qualifications

New skills for new jobs: Action Now, A report by the Expert Group on New Skills for New Jobs prepared for the European Commission, 2010; page 4

That there are 5 causes for skill shortages: **1.** underinvestment in training; **2.** information gaps or inadequately structured education provision; **3.** institutional factors, such as centralised wage bargaining systems; **4.** education supply failing to keep pace with technical progress; **5.** the country economy's position in the business cycle

The skill matching challenge. Analysing skill mismatch and policy implication. CEDEFOP, 2010; page 32

That one of the current problems in analysing skills mismatch in the EU is the absence of appropriate data collection and techniques that will assist skills forecasting

The skill matching challenge. Analysing skill mismatch and policy implication. CEDEFOP, 2010; page 65

That much forecasting skills requirements into the future, locally and by occupational sectors, tends to be unreliable as a means of VET planning provision, as VET graduates need a good mix of occupational specific skills and more generic transferable skills

Learning for jobs, OECD Policy Review of VET; OECD, 2009; page 43

That many EU countries face a shortage of vocational teachers and trainers in VET institutions, or expect to face such a shortage soon –in some EU countries more than half of vocational teachers and trainers in upper-secondary VET schools are over 50

Learning for jobs, OECD Policy Review of VET; OECD, 2009; page 48

The Reference Framework
A tool to support quality assurance of VET in Member States
An article by Keith Brumfitt, EQAVET expert

The Reference Framework - an introduction
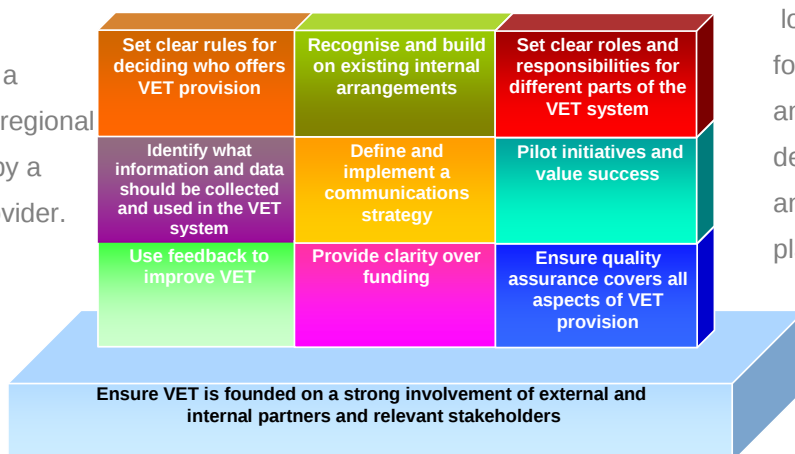
In April 2009, the European Parliament and Council accepted the recommendation to create the European Quality Assurance Framework for Vocational Education and Training. This recommendation included an invitation to Member States to devise, within 24 months, an approach aimed at improving the quality assurance of their VET systems at national level by making best use of the Framework.

In line with earlier European-wide quality assurance systems (e.g. the Common Quality Assurance Framework) this new Framework focuses on the following four stages of the quality assurance cycle: planning; implementing; assessing and evaluating; reviewing and revising. The four stages of the Framework can be applied at a system wide level or within an individual training provider's operations.

Guidelines for implementation

Over the past two years, work by representatives from Member States and European partner organisations has produced guidance on how the Framework is being used to support quality assurance. This guidance identifies a series of interdependent "building blocks" which need to be in place to ensure the Framework can be operated effectively throughout a national or regional system or by a training provider.

The building blocks illustrate how a quality assurance system can be created. Each building block contains a "call to action" and invites system leaders and managers in training providers to consider whether they have put in place the necessary arrangements to support quality assurance. The building blocks, set out below, support and complement each other. They emphasise the importance of effective partnerships between government, social partners and national stakeholders; employers and training providers and learners and society.

Lesson learned

Early work on implementing the Framework has highlighted the need to look at all four stages of the quality assurance cycle. For some organisations, it has been easiest to look first at the planning stage; others have found it easiest to look at the evaluating and reviewing stage. Whichever stage is the starting point, it is important that all stages are considered together e.g. during the planning stage it is necessary to consider how changes can be implemented, how success will be measured and how things can be revised in the light of the successes. As part of this work, the use of a series of standard indicators is helping system leaders and training providers to measure their achievements and identify what more can be done to develop further their quality assurance processes.

The building blocks are linked to each of the four stages of the quality assurance cycle and provide a focus for looking at specific issues e.g. building block one focuses on the supply of high quality training and considers whether systems are in place to decide which organisations can offer courses and qualifications. If there are no systems in place, it would be difficult to ensure high quality

Set clear rules for deciding who offers VET provision	Recognise and build on existing internal arrangements	Set clear roles and responsibilities for different parts of the VET system
Identify what information and data should be collected and used in the VET system	Define and implement a communications strategy	Pilot initiatives and value success
Use feedback to improve VET	Provide clarity over funding	Ensure quality assurance covers all aspects of VET provision

Ensure VET is founded on a strong involvement of external and internal partners and relevant stakeholders

Visit the building blocks - guidelines at:

www.eqavet.eu

	Plan	Implement	Evaluate and assess	Review and revise
Set clear rules for deciding who offers VET provision	√			
Recognise and build on existing internal arrangements		√		
Set clear roles and responsibilities for different parts of the VET system	√			
Identify what information and data should be collected and used in the VET system	√		√	√
Define and implement a communications strategy	√	√	√	√
Pilot initiatives and value success		√	√	√
Use feedback to improve VET			√	√
Provide clarity over funding	√			
Ensure quality assurance covers all aspects of VET provision	√	√	√	√
Ensure VET is founded on a strong involvement of external and internal partners and relevant stakeholders	√	√	√	√

provision was universally available. Similarly, for a training provider, the absence of a system to decide what courses to offer would lead to uncoordinated training and risks to the quality of provision.

Working towards developing a culture of quality assurance in VET

Although these are early days in the implementation of the Framework, there are already many examples of Member States developing their existing systems to create stronger quality assurance processes. The many examples on the **EQAVET website** illustrate how the building blocks are being used to develop the culture of quality assurance at both the national level and within training providers. For many Member States the development of the Framework has started with training providers undertaking pilot initiatives (building block 6).

For other Member States a more holistic approach covering all four stages of the quality assurance cycle has been adopted. Whichever approach is selected, Member States are working to ensure all the building blocks and the four stages of the quality assurance cycle are covered.

Over the next two years, a working group of the EQAVET network will build on this early work and provide more examples and assistance to help Member States and training providers support their quality assurance systems. More information will be available on the EQAVET website and in subsequent EQAVET newsletters.

Implementing the Reference Framework

Are indicators to be used to assure, to control or to improve quality?

An article by Maria Emilia Galvão, EQAVET expert

Introduction

What I say ought to be taken as "propositions", "game openings" where those who may be interested are invited to join in; they are not meant as dogmatic assertions that have to be taken or left en bloc.

Foucault (1991)

Current policy activity related to "outcomes-based" performance indicators in Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Europe, and elsewhere, is linked to both growing demands for accountability and effectiveness at system and providers' level and for quality as transformation in so far as learners themselves are concerned. Hence, there is an increased emphasis by countries on assuring quality and making VET more attractive to potential learners. It is within this context that the present article tries to highlight a couple of issues

> *We will focus on the question of the meaning of quality in VET and whether indicators are to be used to assure, to implement or to control quality. To that end we*
>
> *a) revisit the issue of meaning(s) of quality in VET and*
> *b) expand on such concepts as Quality Assurance (QA), Quality Improvement (QI) and Quality Control (QC)*

which are likely to emerge when implementing the [European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training](#) (Reference Framework), particularly the set of ten selected quality indicators (Annex II). We will therefore focus on the question of the meaning of quality in VET and whether indicators are to be used to assure, to implement or to control quality. To that end we will a) revisit the issue of meaning(s) of quality in VET and b) expand on such concepts as *Quality Assurance* (QA), *Quality Improvement* (QI) and *Quality Control* (QC).

Revisiting the meaning(s) of "quality" in VET

The meaning of quality in education in general, and particularly in VET, seems to be largely taken for granted, i.e., we all know what quality is and how we can achieve it. The heart of the matter, though, is that quality can be viewed from many angles and there are many different stakeholders who wish to have a say in deciding what quality in VET is. Moreover, there are different types of VET across Europe and their purposes vary accordingly, which emphasises the need for stakeholders to clarify the quality concept, to look at the criteria that different interest groups use in assessing quality and to arrive at a shared definition of what quality is. The bottom line is that, on the one hand, it is necessary to arrive at a practical solution and agree on a definition before embarking on any implementation journey of the Reference Framework and, on the other hand, in order to sustain quality improvement, it is crucial that a "culture of quality" is put in place. Harvey and Green (1993, p.16), citing Crosby, say that "*A culture of quality is one in which everybody in the organization, not just the quality controllers, is responsible for quality*", that is to say, for quality to be effective it needs to be grounded in both the minds and actions of all stakeholders: government agencies, social partners, VET providers, staff and learners alike.

Implementing the Reference Framework, therefore, relates mainly to the difficulties of embedding its evidence-based quality loop across VET systems and providers' organisations.

This feedback loop, which is based on data (indicators) to be collected, analysed, disseminated and used, is expected to lead to the modification of ideas and activities and to active sharing and dissemination of good practice.

Implementing the Reference Framework: are indicators to be used to assure, to improve or to control quality?

During the last decades, education systems throughout the world have been exposed to considerable reform and change. Paraphrasing Rowe (2006), we could argue that the global economic, technological and social changes under way, requiring responses from an increasingly skilled workforce, make high quality VET an imperative. In the European Union, and in line with the objectives of the Lisbon Council of 2000, the Copenhagen process has created the policy context to make quality a policy priority for VET.

Our interest here is to clarify to what purpose the Reference Framework indicators may be used, which means that we need first to elaborate on the concepts of *Quality Assurance* (QA), *Quality Improvement* (QI) and *Quality Control* (QC).We have reviewed some of the existing definitions, e.g. those offered by the [American Society for Quality](#) (ASQ). According to the ASQ both QA and QC are interchangeably used to refer to ways of ensuring the quality of a service or product, even if they have different meanings: *Quality Assurance* is defined as "*The planned and systematic activities implemented in a quality system so that quality requirements for a product or service will be fulfilled*" and *Quality Control* is defined as "*The observation techniques and activities used to fulfil requirements for quality*". As for *Quality Improvement* [Blom and Meyers](#) (2003, p.11*)* argue it "*is focussed on increasing the organisation's effectiveness in achieving customer satisfaction by working towards the improvement of those areas and processes which have been identified as needing to be improved*".

Given that the Reference Framework is to be implemented on a voluntary basis at Member State level, each country will make a particular choice of the available set of ten indicators. This choice will undoubtedly be framed by the approach (quality assurance, quality improvement or quality control) that best fits its own context or Member States may even decide for different approaches to different areas. At European level, on the other hand, a quality assurance approach seems to respond to the need to promote a) a common understanding and learning of quality issues in Europe; b) consistency between the quality initiatives at regional and/or national level and across Europe; c) the exchange of information and practices; and d) consensus building among stakeholders.

Concluding comment

Vocational Education and Training is a sector with many stakeholders who perceive quality and quality issues differently as a result of different concerns at different levels. One of the concerns often voiced is that the Reference Framework indicators may be transformed into a control mechanism at European level. How should we then analyse and report indicator data? A key feature of this exercise is that indicators' information allows systems and providers to 1) formulate strategic policy priorities, 2) specify achievable objectives, 3) implement them, and 4) evaluate the extent to which those objectives have been achieved. The debate on what really matters, namely, the provision of quality VET, has long begun and is expected to continue for a long time among the interested parties.

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1) formulate strategic policy priorities
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3) implement them, and
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What's New

News from the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLLP) to support quality assurance in vocational education and training

Valorising and exploiting the results of the Leonardo da Vinci projects in the field of quality assurance under the LLLP (thematic networking QALLL)

The aim of this project, funded by the LLLP, is to highlight good practice and to put forward recommendations in order to promote cooperation in the field of quality assurance in VET and adult education.

Seventeen national agencies are participating in the current project. The duration of the project is from December 2009 to December 2012 and it is coordinated by the Austrian national agency for international mobility and cooperation in education, science and research OEAD-QALLL.

A contact seminar took place in Finland on 8-10 June 2010 organised by CIMO in co-operation with the Nordic, Baltic and Irish national agencies. The theme is: "Tools for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training". For more information visit www.qalll.eu

New call for proposals to promote and develop the use of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework under the Lifelong Learning Programme

A new call for proposals to award grants to bodies responsible for the implementation of a national strategy for improving quality-assurance in VET systems and for promoting and developing the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET was launched in April 2010. The aim of the new proposals is to support these bodies in their task and in promoting the development of a quality culture among stakeholders in the field of VET.

The deadline for submissions is 16 July 2010. For more information, please visit: call for proposal EACEA/09/10

New call for tender in the field of quality assurance for VET. Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) issued an open call for tenders to the "Promotion and development of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework in Vocational Education and Training"

This invitation to tender is an integral part of the implementation and development of the European quality assurance framework for VET and the action being taken in this regard. Its objective is to set up a service contract with an organisation or grouping which will have the following tasks:

- accompany and support each of the projects,
- implement the initiatives required in order that the organisations selected cooperate and work together to consolidate the results of their projects,
- organise and ensure that information, achievements and results for each project are gathered, circulated and made available to all projects, the Agency, the European network for quality assurance (EQAVET), and the Commission,
- produce a consolidated final report on the running, research and results of the projects,
- participate in devising tools and guidelines for quality assurance at the different stages of VET (certification, curricula, devising qualifications, etc.).

Deadline for submission of the tenders: 27 September 2010. For more information visit:

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about/call_tenders/2010/call_tenders_01_2010_en.php

Learn more about implementing quality assurance in Member States VET systems – The new EQAVET website provides continuous updated information on Member States VET systems

EQAVET launched a new website in May 2010, which

builds on the priorities identified by Member States and includes information gathered since 2005. The new website provides a descriptive analysis of quality assurance procedures, quality indicators and policies in European vocational and training systems.

EQAVET home webpage, available at www.eqavet.eu

The new web also provides guidelines for implementing the Reference Framework, which are based on a description and analysis of how some Member States have introduced quality assurance processes which reflect the approaches set out in the Reference Framework.

You will find the text of the Recommendation establishing a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training in the Official Journal of the European Union under the following link:

http://eur-lex.europa.eu

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