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Editorial: António Silva Mendes, "Rethinking Education"; what does it mean for Quality Assurance?

The recent Commission Communication "A stronger European Industry for Growth and Economic recovery" highlights the need to strengthen the productive economy and sets the goal of increasing the industrial base from 16% to 20% by 2020. It is clear that VET is one of the main tools to provide skilled workers, if this goal is to be reached.

Indeed the Commission's policy paper "Rethinking Education", adopted in November 2012, explicitly mentions the development of high quality vocational skills as one important way to support the growth and recovery strategy Europe 2020. Effective VET systems, and in particular those that include a strong work-based learning component, appear to facilitate the transition of young people from education to work. Countries with strong, attractive VET systems, and especially those with well-established apprenticeship systems, tend to perform better in terms of youth employment.

The Commission staff working document on vocational skills which accompanies Rethinking Education identifies some elements for VET excellence. Among them, especially at system level, quality assurance frameworks are explicitly mentioned, together with the need for adequate evidence in view of improving

effectiveness and efficiency of systems, as well as greater permeability between VET and higher education. At firm level, the need for companies to become responsible for the provision of more apprenticeships and lifelong learning is underlined. At VET provider level, the importance of high quality teaching staff and efficient school leaders, as well as the importance of networking with the broader economic community at all levels, are mentioned as part of the path towards VET excellence.

Where this Communication and the accompanying staff working documents are innovative, compared to previous documents, is that they go beyond the sole school environment and broaden the perspectives for VET excellence by explicitly encompassing the world of work and its diverse stakeholders and clearly stating the importance of reinforcing this dimension for reaching excellence.



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What's new?

Cont. Editorial: António Silva Mendes, "Rethinking Education"; what does it mean for Quality Assurance?

Within the Europe 2020 strategy, two headline targets directly concern education: we want to achieve by 2020 a level of 40 % of higher education (and equivalent VET level) graduates. At the same time, we are committed to reducing the number of young people leaving school without an upper secondary level qualification from currently 14 % to a maximum of 10 %. Excellence and inclusion; when addressing the skills challenge, both ends of the education spectrum are vital. We need more highly qualified people, and we must achieve a lower level of school dropout. We cannot afford to waste any talents.

Quality assurance frameworks can have a determining role in achieving these challenges. More transparency is

needed between the various national quality assurance frameworks, as well as mutual recognition. For this the EQAVET framework can help by providing a common reference. Peer learning activities, but also in the future peer-reviews, a reflection about going beyond the toolkit approach as well as other actions can be implemented.

The EQAVET network constantly adapts its work priorities to evolving challenges. Having thoroughly analysed the Communication "Rethinking Education" from a quality assurance perspective, it has adapted its work programme accordingly. We are pleased to present you in this newsletter details of how the EQAVET network intends to respond to the new priorities. I wish you good reading.

How should EQAVET respond to "Rethinking Education"?

'Why do we need to RETHINK education?

Youth unemployment is approaching 23% across Europe and at the same time we have over 2 million unfilled job vacancies. The knowledge economy continues to increase demand for higher skills but more than 70 million Europeans have only low or no formal qualifications. In 2011, 13.5% of pupils in the EU left school after lower secondary education. In 9 Member States, more than half of the adult population has no or low computer skills!

This highlights a serious weakness in our education and training systems. Matters have been made worse as the economic downturn has led many Member States to cut funding for education and training. My message is clear: Europe will only resume growth by producing highly skilled workers who can contribute to innovation and entrepreneurship.

That is why education and training is high on the agenda for renewed growth in Europe'.

Androulla Vassiliou European Commission, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism, Sport, Media and Youth; Strasbourg, Tuesday 20 November 2012

Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes sets out the role of education and skills in boosting growth and competitiveness in Europe.

It identifies a number of strategic priorities which give particular attention to youth unemployment, and asks Member States to step up their efforts to:

develop world-class vocational education and training to raise the quality of vocational skills

promote work-based learning including quality traineeships, apprenticeships and dual learning models to help the transition from learning to work

promote partnerships between public and private institutions (to ensure appropriate curricula and skills provision)

promote mobility through the proposed *Erasmus for All* programme

Strategic Priorities

Rethinking Education acknowledges that much has been achieved and that some European countries already have world-class VET systems (Germany, Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands), with built-in mechanisms to adapt to current and future skills needs so that training is mainly demand-driven. They report fewer problems with skills mismatches and show better employment rates for young people, and in these countries VET education is characterised by dual systems which have a high proportion of work-based learning.

EQAVET contribution – promoting excellence in VET

A central theme in *Rethinking Education* is the need to develop world-class vocational education and training in order to raise the quality of vocational skills – this is part of the drive to create excellence. All of Europe’s VET systems are not world-class and *the performance and outcomes of vocational education and training systems vary significantly between Member States*¹. EQAVET, alongside the other European instruments, needs to be well placed to support progress in those areas where more could be done.

EQAVET can offer a unique perspective on *promoting excellence in VET*. *Rethinking Education* outlines a number of strategic areas where progress is needed:

The use of work-based learning to help facilitate the transition from learning to work
The development of advanced vocational skills, tailored to regional needs
Support for more mobile VET learners and a skilled labour force
Greater use of learning outcomes
The modernisation of assessment so that learners who have skills acquired outside school can have those skills assessed, validated and recognised
Closer coherence between the various European instruments to support transparency and mobility
Greater use of Open Educational Resources to allow individuals to learn anywhere, at any time, following flexible pathways

In each strategic area, EQAVET could have a role in supporting Member States in building a demand-driven VET. Using a quality assurance system that is compatible with the EQAVET Framework will strengthen:

1. the confidence of learners and employers, improve trust, promote transparency and lead to greater mobility
2. the quality assurance approaches associated with the development of learning outcomes
3. the assessment of learners’ achievement outside a school setting
4. the provision of open educational resources in a VET context
5. the provision of more work-based training, teacher/ trainer education and curriculum development

Strategic Areas

EQAVET contribution

EQAVET Network’s Work Programme 2013-2015

The EQAVET Network’s work programme 2013-2015 proposes a number of activities which directly address the strategic areas identified by the *Rethinking Education* strategy. This will support Member States in promoting and building excellent in VET.

Working Group 1 on *facilitating the development of a quality assurance approach for VET providers in line with EQAVET*. Within the context of quality assurance, the group will develop support for national reference points by preparing guidance which can be applied in different forms of workplace learning addressing *inter alia* issues such as resources, relevance, SME motivation, shared responsibilities etc.

Working Group 2 on *supporting VET systems to address the interrelation between the EQAVET Framework and existing quality management systems/instruments in order to guarantee quality, increased transparency, mobility and mutual trust*. The working group will examine how best to ensure the development of appropriate guidance material for use in national contexts.

VET-Higher Education activities organised in collaboration with CEDEFOP, with the objective of achieving a deeper mutual understanding of the quality assurance approaches used in both VET and HE. The aim is to promote greater permeability and transparency of qualifications so that learners are able to move more easily within and between systems.

Sectoral approach, seminars and workshops, which address sectors that are significant drivers of the European economy and focus on the issue of meeting future skill needs (both quantitatively and qualitatively). There will be a particular focus on work-based learning and continuing VET.

The European instruments *were not developed in isolation from each other; however, there is room for much closer coherence where the different tools and services – including transparency and recognition of qualifications, validation of non-formal and informal learning and lifelong guidance – are offered in a coordinated way*. EQAVET’s previous work programmes have included a **Reflection Group** on the synergies and complementarities between ECVET, EQF and EQAVET. This work continues in 2013 and includes greater collaboration with the higher education sector.

¹ Strasbourg, 20.11.2012 SWD(2012) 375 final.
http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/rethinking_en.htm

The model of Work-Based Learning in Austria and The Netherlands – challenges and factors for success



Article by **Juergen Horschinegg**, Head of Strategy, Development in VET, Research and Development and Quality in the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture; and **Thea van den Boom**, Senior Policy Advisor in the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.



WORK-BASED LEARNING IN AUSTRIA

Initial vocational education and training (IVET) is extremely important in Austria.

After completing their compulsory schooling period (9 school years), about 40 % of young people in Austria are trained in a legally recognised apprenticeship occupation, another 40 % opt for a VET school or college. So, about 80% of an age cohort (14 to 15 year old students) get in touch with work-based learning.



WBL in VET-schools:

- compulsory internships in most VET-school types
- duration of internships: 3 to 12 weeks (depends on school type)
- projects in cooperation with companies (e.g. Diplomarbeitenprojekte)
- laboratories and special facilities (e.g. kitchen and service areas) are in place

WBL in apprenticeship training:

- The apprentice is in a training relationship with his or her training company and a student at a part-time vocational school at the same time.
- The company-based part of dual vocational training makes up the major part (80%) of the apprenticeship period.

Success factors:

- Design curricula referring to labour market needs, invite stakeholders to design curricula
- Teachers in VET schools with practical experiences in their subjects
- Foster links between schools and companies
- The final apprenticeship exam is taken before professional experts.

Sources:

www.ibw.at/components/com_redshop/assets/document/product/1362394008_Apprenticeship2012.pdf

www.abc.berufsbildendeschulen.at/de/download.asp?id=26&theme=Information+der+Sektion+Berufsbildung%3A+Englisch+%282011%29

WORK-BASED LEARNING IN THE NETHERLANDS

VET in the Netherlands is the main supplier of employees to the labour market. The educational design of VET in general is built around the profession and the competences needed for specific professions. Competences consist of knowledge, skills and attitude. To ensure the right learning output, suitable for the labour market, the labour market and VET institutes together determine the output of the education, validated by the ministry of education. The educational design is based on this output and is fitted to regional labour market demands. The students can choose between two 'learning routes' in which students combine work and study: a school-based route (minimal 20% to maximum 60% in practice in a learning company) and a work-based route, (minimal 80% in practice in a learning company)². In both routes students gain the same diploma.

Work-based learning is an important aspect of the educational design. Work-based learning is learning that takes place in a learning environment that is a real work situation or that equals a real work situation. In both situations the student is confronted with problems that could appear in a real work situation. An important aspect of work-based learning is the integration of theory and practice. There are various forms of work-based learning.

One form is compulsory by law:

- Apprenticeship in an accredited enterprise/learning company: the students works under guidance as an employee in an accredited enterprise. The student's responsibilities will depend on the phase of his or her education. However his or her contribution to the business is real and appreciated by the company.

In order to stimulate work-based learning as much as possible, others kinds of work-based learning are carried out. These forms are complementary:

- Centres of practices located in the school

² In the year 2013/2014 the law for VET will change and the amount of the work-based part in the school-based route will be reduced to 40%.

- Assignments executed in school but designed by enterprises
- Creating your own business at school
- Activities, events and competitions organised by www.skillsnetherlands.nl in order to promote professionalism and craftsmanship.

Because of the recognised position of work-based learning in the education system, it is important to guarantee the quality of the work-based learning. The measurements taken to assure the quality, explained below, only apply to the compulsory part of work-based learning: the apprenticeship.

1. Work-based learning only takes place at accredited enterprises. Centres of expertise for Vocational Education & the Labour Market, organised by sector, are responsible for the acquisition, accreditation and support of the enterprises that provide work-based learning. See for more information the website www.s-bb.nl. It is the VET institute which is responsible for the final quality.
2. A work placement agreement clarifies the agreement and responsibilities between the institute and the learning company. This covers the context and content of the work-based learning program and the way the company and VET institute work together.
3. A work placement protocol clarifies the agreements and responsibilities between student, learning company and the VET institute. This protocol covers the preparation, execution, examination and evaluation of the student's learning.

4. In a national apprenticeship the quality of the apprenticeships is evaluated annually.
5. Employees of the enterprises that guide/teach the students are trained in their coaching and guiding skills to ensure that their guidance of high quality.
6. The inspectorate checks the quality as part of the education and examination program. Important quality indicators are transparency to the student, the matching between enterprise and student, the way of monitoring student results during and at the end of the learning programme and communication between enterprise and institute about the student and the learning programme. The quality standards for the work-based learning are the same as for the school-based learning.



EfVET in the context of the EC Communication “Rethinking Education: investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes”

An article by **Rasa Zygmantaitė**, EfVET Executive Secretary



Rasa Zygmantaitė

During the 21 years of its action EfVET (European Forum for Vocational and Technical Education and Training, www.efvet.org) has become a major organization, representing interests of VET providers across Europe. In order to collect the views of its members and further to pass the message on to European policy makers, EfVET constantly

conducts surveys through on-line consultations on the EfVET website and during annual conferences of the organization. Latest survey “Rethinking Education-VET Document” took place in April 2013. A statement based upon the responses to this consultation is being used as an underlying position of the members, while preparing for the period of 2014-2020 and representing the organization in debates and discussions with main political

stakeholders of the EU. It will also be circulated to the Member States’ national governments before the annual conference of EFVET which will take place in Athens in October 2013. The immediate priority for all Member States is to increase the quality of all VET courses, making them generally attractive and inclusive, with highly qualified teachers and trainers using innovative learning methods, in good facilities, with high labour market relevance. EfVET also adds the importance of developing vocationally-focused foreign language and intercultural awareness training, both, in VET institutions and in enterprises to increase intra-EU trade and global trade and facilitate the expansion of student, apprentice and employee mobility within and outside the EU.

EfVET members discussed the issue of quality during their two last conferences. The conference in Malta was particularly focused on one of the themes of *The Bruges Communiqué*

“Improving the quality and efficiency of VET and enhancing its attractiveness and relevance”. Here are some extracts of the recommendations of EfVET members on this issue, which is closely related to EQAVET, as a system across Europe to improve VET:

- There is an urgent need to discuss whether the present VET systems are appropriate to meet the requirements of future training needs, some of which have not yet been identified.
- It should be made easier for VET teachers and trainers to undertake continuing professional development (CPD) placements in companies in order to update teaching and learning methodologies and the skills and competences of VET professionals.
- A structure of peer evaluation of the quality of a VET institution's course provision should be universal and complement any existing or future national inspection

regime. The application of the EQAVET criteria would ensure consistency of performance.

- There remains too little collaboration and consultation between VET trainers and employers. VET professionals would thus become more aware of labour market needs and employers could advise on course revisions and developments. Companies should be encouraged to offer practical experience to all trainees by way of work placements.

The EfVET conference of 2013 will focus its activities and debates around the main topics of EC Communication of 2012 on Rethinking Education. VET practitioners from Europe and outside will try to elaborate their position on the most important issues of the Communication: how to create world-class educational and training systems and increase levels of work-based learning, how to ensure that VET systems have well-trained, motivated and entrepreneurial teachers.

The Swiss VET system – a good practice

An article by **Sophie Weisswange**, Principal Administrator – VET policy/Adult learning, European Commission - Directorate General for Education and Culture (EAC) in collaboration with **Heike Suter-Hoffmann**, Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research EAER in Switzerland.



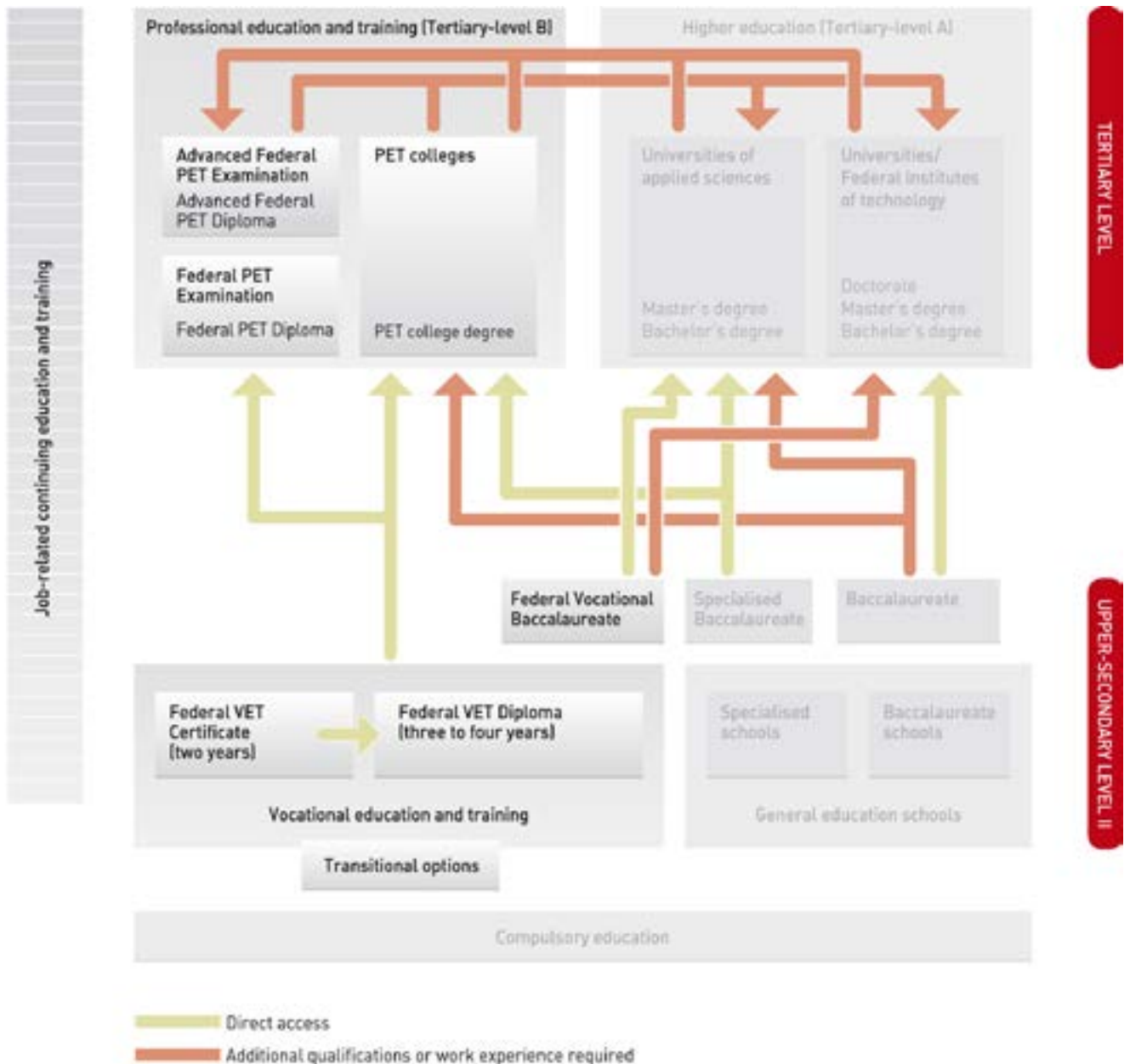
Sophie Weisswange

The Swiss vocational education and training and professional education and training (VET/PET) system pursues the goal of being both inclusive and attractive to high-flyers. With the lowest level of youth unemployment in Europe (3%) as well as one of the lowest levels of early school leavers (below 7%), the Swiss VET system seeks to train well-qualified young professionals for the labour market.

Focus has been on ensuring as much as possible that early school leavers (ELS) at upper-secondary level gain qualifications, developing an efficient training system for young people in order to ensure their absorption in the labour market and providing good career and study perspectives to the best performing VET/PET students, to ensure employability, inclusion, attractiveness and competitiveness. This is a challenge.

Attractiveness of VET/PET and VET/PET excellence

Switzerland ensures the attractiveness of its VET system by avoiding presenting VET/PET as a dead-end option or second choice option. Permeability has been ensured at each step of the educational pathway, be it the professional path or the academic path (see figure below). The shortest professional pathway, the “Federal VET certificate” (2 years), allows for training in the longer (standard) VET pathway called “Federal VET diploma” (3-4 years long) and after successful completion the learner may study for the “Federal Vocational Baccalaureate” (FVB), which gives access to tertiary level education, be it academic or PET (higher VET).



The reputation of PET colleges and examinations (Tertiary-level B) is equivalent to academic higher education institutions.

Switzerland is involved in all kinds of campaigns for rendering VET/PET attractive. It is committed to the World Skills process and the Swiss Skills are well established events that provide competitions in more than 60 professions.

ESL³ strategy – Guidance and counselling

Another success of the Swiss VET/PET system is to try to skill its youth in the most efficient way possible by taking concrete measures to avoid people entering the world of work after obligatory school (i.e. at 16 years) without skills.

An efficient and well resourced⁴ counselling and orientation service provides information sessions and/

3 Early school leavers according to Eurostat definition is the percentage of the population aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education (thus without upper secondary level diploma) and not in further education or training

4 For the canton of Bern (1million inhabitants: around 150 Guidance and counsellor officers)

or mentoring to young people during the two last years of obligatory school to help them identify their fields of interest, their talents and aspirations. It is supported by a well-documented website offering tests for young people and a vision of every profession regulated in Switzerland. For pupils with difficulties and those who have not yet chosen a career, bridge-year courses are offered. For particularly difficult cases a case management programme has been set up to offer close guidance and integration of individuals into the system. The goal is to reduce by 5% the number of individuals who have not gained an upper-secondary qualification. This counselling task is part of the competence of the cantons but the website is a federal one (www.orientation.ch)

A strong dual system that enables good transition from school to work

Two out of every three young people chose a VET/PET pathway after completing obligatory school. Though Switzerland has the lowest number of higher education graduates in Europe, it also has the lowest number of unemployed youth (3%). The dual system appears to be the key to this success.

The dual system is market driven. Young people in fact do not choose a school initially, their first step is to apply to a company, where they will be employed during their apprenticeship. The choice of school will result from the apprenticeship chosen.

The time spent in the company is greater than the time spent in school (3.5 days in the company and 1.5 days in school).

During the time spent in the company the apprentice is most of the time part of the production process, unlike in other countries, where an apprentice is trained in a company, but is not considered as part of the production process. In Switzerland, the apprentice does proper work for the company. This workplace training has been analysed by the researcher Professor Wolter as being one of the factors why the Swiss apprenticeship system is so beneficial⁵.

The apprentice signs a contract with the company and receives pay. Companies do not receive any financial incentives to take on apprentices, however, but good framework conditions are offered to make the organisation of an apprenticeship easier. The apprenticeship contract is a standard contract throughout the country and is very user friendly⁶. A website where all open apprenticeship positions are listed is available.



Most of the companies involved are SMEs. It can sometimes be difficult for them to provide training in all aspects needed for certain occupations. Thus inter-company courses have been created for specific professions where apprentices can learn the complementary skills needed to qualify in a profession (e.g. construction sector training centre). The school provides the training in the more theoretical skills and knowledge.

On average 30% of companies take apprentices and accreditation is required to do so. Notably, they need to have a trained VET/PET trainer. Training of VET/PET trainers is assured by the Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (SFIVET)⁷ and is regulated on the federal level.

An efficient and effective tripartite partnership

The authorities involved in the process are the Confederation, the cantons and the professional organisations.

Notably, the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, SECO, which is responsible for economic and labour market policy, is not involved in the VET/PET system as the acquisition of skills is considered an educational rather than an employment issue.

In particular it can be noted that the apprenticeship contracts are not under its supervision but are supervised by the VET offices of the cantons. The professional organisations are the main actors in the design of curricula for professions. They design curricula for a regulated profession (VET/PET ordinance) after having identified the need for a new curriculum in their sector.

It is to be noted that every profession is organised through a professional organisation. Not having an association renders it almost impossible for a profession to train appropriate skilled workers and then be competitive on the labour market.

The confederation takes the strategic decisions and guides the whole process of developing a curriculum for a profession. Finally it issues the VET ordinances.

The 26 cantonal authorities implement the measures necessary to start the training of apprentices in the regulated professions. They organise the counselling and guidance of young people, support the various parties in the apprenticeship system, organise the training at the VET schools, validate the apprenticeship contracts and give grants for inter-company courses.

The funding of the VET/PET system

Three quarters of public funding comes from the cantons (approx. 2.6 billion CHF), and the remaining quarter from the confederation (approx. 0.85 billion CHF).

Private financing supplies 60% of the overall costs. All of the private costs are supported by the companies (approx. 5 billion CHF), but they receive a return on investment (approx. 0.45 billion CHF), as the benefits of an apprenticeship outweigh the costs (productivity of apprenticeships is estimated at 5.8 billion CHF per year).

Training of VET/PET teachers and trainers

The VET/PET teachers are professionals that receive training at SFIVET. They can get a Federal Diploma as a VET teacher that will allow them to teach full time.

The VET/PET trainers in companies have to complete 40 hours of training at the SFIVET.

The VET/PET examiners are professionals from companies that are also trained as examiners at the SFIVET. Peer examination is a significant element of the Swiss apprenticeship system, according to Professor Wolter. It encourages enterprises to provide quality training as their apprentices will be evaluated by competitors.

5 "The effect of labour market regulations on training behaviour and quality: the German labor market reform as a natural experiment" Anika Jansen, Mirjam Strupler Leiser, Felix Wenzelmann and Stefan C. Wolter. Swiss leading House Working paper No.83, December 2012.

6 www.berufsbildung.ch/dyn/1411.aspx (not available in English)

7 www.ehb-schweiz.ch/en/Pages/default.aspx

Development of learning outcomes-based curricula for a profession

The request for a new curriculum in VET comes from professional organisations. An analysis of the profession is undertaken. On average between 30-40 occupational activities are identified and described. The description of the occupational activities are elaborated in workshops comprised of young professionals, who are fewer than 5 years in the job, as well as esteemed professionals/experts and representatives of the professional organisation involved. They identify the theoretical knowledge needed, the attitudes (social and personal competence) and the abilities (practical skills like the use and maintenance of tools/instruments). The activities are drafted following a learning outcomes approach. The activities identified are then clustered into fields and become the occupational profile.

The next step is to develop the lessons tables and design the qualification profiles (assessments to be undertaken). The VET ordinance is adopted at federal level, which ensures market mobility. A curriculum consists of 4 parts: occupational competencies, syllabus, industry courses, qualification procedure. The implementation phase then begins with the training of teachers, instructors, trainers and examiners.

Finally, the VET programme can begin and is evaluated after a certain period of time.

The development of a curriculum is a long process that takes 4-5 years on average. It needs to be reviewed about every 5 years in a shorter revision process. The monitoring of the system is done by a reform commission composed of representatives of the tripartite partnership.

Quality assurance in the Swiss VET/PET system

According to the 2002 Swiss Federal Act on Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPETA), article 8:

- 1) VET and PET providers shall be responsible for ensuring the constant improvement of quality.
- 2) The Confederation shall promote quality improvement, establish quality standards and monitor compliance."

The quality management of VET/PET in Switzerland is not centralised. The responsibility for quality management and quality development is linked to the roles and tasks of the various partners. The roles and tasks are established by law. The partners in VET/PET commonly define a need for action, but the action is initiated by the relevant parties.

On the **cantonal level** a specific authority is in charge of implementing and supervising quality management in VET schools and counselling services in accordance with quality standards set at federal level. They are also in charge of monitoring legal standards of apprenticeship contracts as well as the different actors.

The **professional organisations** focus on the quality management of in-company training as well as on the quality management of training in inter-company courses. Quality management tools for both cases have been

developed in collaboration with the cantons, the most well-known being QualiCarte and QualCIE (French term).

The function of QualiCarte is to evaluate the quality of in-company training. This tool has been elaborated jointly by the Swiss Conference of cantonal authorities responsible for VET⁸, the employers' association⁹ and the Swiss Union of Crafts and SMEs¹⁰.

QualCIE helps the providers of inter-company courses to measure and improve the quality of training provided, by evaluating the quality of inter-company courses. QualCIE was developed by the Swiss conference of cantonal offices responsible for VET/PET together with the employers' associations and professional organisations. The application of QualCIE is optional but recommended. QualCIE meets the above-mentioned quality requirements described in the VPETA.

The QualCIE may be supplemented by other indicators specific to a profession aided by the workplace organization. Another system of quality management can be applied instead of QualCIE.

QualCIE consists of a file containing the following elements:

- a manual that includes administrative information, describes the quality indicators, gives advice on practical application and information on legal provisions, terms and other information sources.
- a set of 5 cards to fill in, featuring the 15 quality indicators (A4, double-sided).

The **Confederation** is in charge of the establishment of quality standards by law. The Confederation ensures the monitoring and quality of the assessment, validation and recognition processes of the qualifications. The Confederation stimulates quality development by facilitating the exchange of information and experience.

The recently developed project "Living the Quality"¹¹ is one of the measures taken at Confederation level to stimulate quality development, but also to look at the impact that the VPETA of 2002 has had on the development of quality since its implementation.

Several actions have been taken in the context of "Living the Quality":

- Using the yearly conference with the partners in professional training to discuss important issues related to the VET/PET quality.
- Dissemination through a newsletter
- Launch of a website

The underlying idea of "Living the Quality" is to go beyond the monitoring of professional training by encouraging dialogue between the partners and the development of a culture of quality experienced on a daily basis.

8 www.sbbk.ch (not available in EN)

9 www.arbeitgeber.ch (not available in EN)

10 www.sgv-usam.ch (not available in EN)

11 www.sbf.admin.ch/berufsbildung/01511/01512/index.html?lang=fr (not available in EN)

Focus on: 4th EQAVET Annual Forum, Malahide, Ireland 2013

The fourth EQAVET Annual Forum took place in Ireland on 14-15 March 2013. It was hosted by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). Twenty-six countries were represented as were the social partners at EU level, namely ETUC, CEEP, UEAPME and Business Europe. Of particular interest was the participation of Eurochambres, European Providers of Vocational Education and Training (EUproVET), the European Forum of Education and Training (EFVET), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) and the Thematic Working Group on Quality in Adult Learning. The European Development Centre for Vocational Education and Training (Cedefop) and the European Training Foundation (ETF) were also represented.

The Annual Forum was chaired by the European Commission represented by Ms Dana Carmen Bachmann, recently appointed Head of Unit Vocational Education and Training Policy; Leonardo da Vinci Programme, DG Education and Culture, and Ms Alison Crabb, deputy head of unit. The Forum was opened by Pdraig Walsh, Chief Executive of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). All three emphasised the importance of the EQAVET Recommendation and quality assurance as a means of responding to the current socio-economic challenges underlined in the new strategy proposed by the European Commission *Rethinking Education*.



Opening the Annual Forum: Pdraig Walsh, Dana Bachmann, Alison Crabb, Sophie Weisswange and Sean Feerick (L-R)

The Annual Forum was an opportunity for the EQAVET Network to discuss the priorities to be considered by the Network when responding to the emerging policy needs at both EU and national levels.

EQAVET members agreed that the current work of the Network, as provided for in the work programme 2013-2015 and in its objectives of responding to the policy context provided by the Bruges Communiqué and *Rethinking Education*, provides an appropriate basis for an incremental approach to embedding a culture of quality assurance of VET in line with the Recommendation.

Also there was a general consensus that the work of the Network should undertake a strategic shift or move from developing instruments to exploring, using and understanding these instruments in their various policy

contexts (legislative, socio-economical, historical, cultural, etc.) and specific implementation settings (such as work-based learning, the training of teachers and trainers, assessment, etc.). They agreed that while it is important to develop instruments and guidelines, it is also necessary to examine and support Member States in applying those instruments and guidelines within their specific circumstances. This shift will entail a greater emphasis on developing and strengthening a culture of quality assurance.

This shift will contribute to advancing EQAVET-related strategic objectives and short-term deliverables of the Bruges Communiqué and address the priorities identified in *Rethinking Education*.



EQAVET Members during plenary session

These are the messages voiced at the Forum by members:

In relation to EQAVET indicators and increasing EU cooperation

While it is too early to consider revising the indicators, some members felt that there is a need to review indicators 6 and 9 as the Secretariat Survey shows that these indicators are not used by many systems.

There is a concern that the value of soft skills/ general education of learners (which increase their employability) is not currently reflected in the indicators.

Any process of benchmarking could hinder the process of cooperation and developing a culture of quality assurance at both system and provider level. Therefore it should be treated with care. Any type of benchmarking process should focus on the sharing of experiences, fostering a process of mutual learning rather than be conceived as a 'competition' process (this idea is supported by the Recommendation which states that the indicators are a toolbox). In this regard, the data gathered should be published but not in the context of benchmarking. This is so because the context (e.g. socio-economic, regional, type of VET, culture, etc.) is highly significant when using each indicator. National reference points could have a supporting role in this context.

The indicators were designed to measure progress towards the Lisbon objectives, but national systems may need to address different targets at different times (for instance, in time of crisis or in relation to different qualifications).

The data from indicators could increase trust, transferability and transparency – which is correlated with the implementation of EQF/NQFs. In gaining transparency, the 'client' (the learner) can make a more informed decision about which product (VET provider) is more suitable for her/his needs.

The accountability culture is of crucial importance in relation to work-based learning (WBL); here the use of indicators can be useful.

However, it is important to keep in mind that indicators are used at national level and there is a concern that using them at EU level could have a negative impact.

In relation to EQAVET from a lifelong learning perspective – the importance of partnerships

Working in partnership is of paramount importance for the development of a culture of quality assurance, and to increase trust and transparency. These partnerships should include the labour market representatives, VET providers, the higher education sector and EU level.

These partners should have a real influence – their role should not be confined to a consultancy role, they should be involved in the decision making process and in all phases of the "quality cycle".

In some systems, the dialogue and partnership methodology is a reality, however in other systems this is not the case; therefore it is important that the Network provide guidelines and foster sharing of good practice in active partnerships (e.g. by supporting the establishment of 'promoters of partnerships' and guidance that identifies to social partners the advantages/benefits of getting involved)

It is important that the needs of SMEs be addressed (they provide the greatest number of opportunities for employment in the EU); therefore they should be considered as important partners.

It is important to show and demonstrate the added value of working in partnership. However, there is also a need to take into consideration the cost and commitment needed to create active and sustainable partnerships.

There is a need to keep in mind that a highly regulated/overly intrusive quality assurance framework might prove a disincentive for companies that provide WBL.

Member States should put in place structures of cooperation and legislative frameworks, for instance in the form of incentives.

The cooperation with the higher education is important for the realisation of permeability – reciprocal recognition of qualifications. There is a need to create cooperation programmes between VET providers, universities and companies. VET and higher education have different models of governance. The involvement of the social partners can alleviate these differences; therefore initiatives should be put in place to involve them in the cooperation strategies.



EQAVET Members discussing at the working groups

In relation to ensuring that EQAVET supports the development of responses to the challenges facing VET

The EQAVET Network does not need to establish new priorities in order to address the priorities of the Rethinking Education Communication; rather it should take the latter into consideration in the already planned activities of the Network.

It should identify and establish clusters of Member States; which could work on issues of shared interest and learn from each other enabling effective transfer of knowledge.

It needs to support the use and understanding of the EQAVET instruments as well as helping national reference points to use them in specific contexts (e.g. in work-based learning, in assessment, in developing learning outcomes etc.) in order to strengthen the culture of quality as the specific national situation is critical to what can be achieved.

So, the goal is to develop instruments at system level – common approaches; but the interventions should be tailored (as the systems are very different). “Think globally – act locally”. The role of national reference points in this context is of core relevance.

Even though there is commitment of the policy makers in Member States to implement EQAVET at both system and provider levels, continued efforts are necessary in order to strengthen the implementation of the Recommendation and meet the EQAVET-related strategic objectives of the Bruges Communiqué.

The needs of the learner should be at the centre of all actions.

It is important that EQAVET is embedded in EQF and NQFs.

WBL, assessment, learning outcomes (LO) are intrinsically interrelated, so they need to be addressed in tandem.

WBL is a priority; there should be an integration of WBL into the school system. In this context it is of importance to consider the quality management issues.

It was agreed that the more the various EU instruments can be pulled together at national level, the greater the value. In this sense, efforts should be made to increase cooperation and communication between the Copenhagen and Bologna processes.

Discussions and presentations from the Annual Forum are available to view and download [here](#).

Click [here](#) to view the videos.

WHAT'S NEW?

The report on the results of the *European Conference on Quality in VET Practices* on the five selected EQAVET projects has been published by the Promotion and Knowledge Management Unit – MENON

The report is available at <http://eqavetprojects.eu/conference-main-page>

The five projects (coordinated by OeAD - Austria, CINOP -The Netherlands, NCFHE - Malta, BiBB - Germany and ARACIP –Romania) were run by the respective national reference points. The projects approached EQAVET from a wide perspective. They tested EQAVET as an instrument capable of promoting a shared culture of quality assurance.

The report outlines the lessons learnt from the development of national approaches to improve the quality assurance of VET systems by promoting and developing the use of EQAVET. The report presents an inventory of reports, manuals for quality assurance, curricula and a certification process for quality managers together with a communication strategy for involving stakeholders in quality assurance and guidelines from the five projects.



The QALL project has published “The QALL Potential”.

The project aims to improve the quality and efficiency of education and training by highlighting good practice and developing recommendations. The paper addresses very specifically the QALL contributions to EQAVET work on quality assurance in VET and it lists a number of products that were highly recommended by an international expert panel (cooperating very closely with the EQAVET network) for application within the EQAVET context.



This publication is available at [The QALL Potential](#)

If you are interested in other QALL publications please visit the [download area](#) on QALL website.

UEAPME has published its updated position on the implementation of the EU transparency tools EQAVET, EQF and ECVET.

UEAPME is the employers' organisation representing the interests of European crafts, trades and SMEs at EU level. UEAPME is a recognised European Social Partner and an important stakeholder and member of the EQAVET Network.

According to UEAPME the following issues related to EQAVET deserve particular attention:

- supporting implementation by facilitating cooperation between Member States, social partners and other relevant stakeholders at EU, national, regional and sectoral level in the whole process and notably through the national reference points;
- demonstrating higher employability and outcomes;
- encouraging peer learning and good practice dissemination;
- coordination with other instruments developed at European level, namely ECVET and EQF.

The paper highlights that from the perspective of employers and SMEs quality assurance management has to be adapted to the needs and reality of VET providers. It should be implemented in a user-friendly, simple and cost-effective way. Small VET providers and small enterprises have to feel that working with quality assurance is relevant for them. Intermediary bodies, such as Chambers of Skilled Crafts and Commerce play an important role in supporting SMEs with tailored implementation.

It also states that UEAPME considers EQAVET indicators number 5 and 6 as very useful, given the high level of unemployment and particularly of youth unemployment in Europe where a focus on employability and outcomes is essential.

Furthermore, the paper recommends greater coordination, synergy and consistency between EQAVET, ECVET and the EQF, in order to enhance permeability and flexibility between general education and VET at all levels, notably at tertiary level. Employers should have access to the relevant information in order to create confidence in the learning outcomes.

This position paper is available to download at www.ueapme.com/spip.php?rubrique26





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