

EQAVET NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2014

ISSUE 10



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Editorial: Koen Bois d'Enghien

Following the elections to the European Parliament in May this year, a new European Commission headed by Jean-Claude Juncker has been appointed.

The new Commission has an ambitious growth agenda and will also bring important changes regarding the management of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the Commission. The responsibility for VET (including EQAVET) and Adult Learning (AL) as well as the skills and qualification strategies (including EQF) will be transferred from the Commissioner in charge of Education, Culture, Youth and Citizenship to the Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility.

This reallocation is prompted by President Juncker's firm intention to redouble the Commission's efforts to combat unemployment. The change includes not only the transfer of the VET, AL and the skills and qualifications files, but also the management of Cedefop and the ETF. DG EMPL has extensive experience in managing agencies (Eurofound and OSHA), and will have four agencies under its direct supervision. The Erasmus+ programme (VET and AL) will continue to be managed by DG EAC, with policy input from DG EMPL.

The move should be transparent from the perspective of the Member

States (MS) and stakeholders. VET will continue to be strongly linked to the EU coordination process on Education and Training and at the same time will build on the synergies of policies managed by the DG for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility. It is important to highlight the very different structures of MS as regards VET responsibilities. In some cases VET is under the Ministry of Labour, in others, under Education, and under Economy in yet others. Therefore, it is obvious that there is no one single "best fit" solution for managing VET policy, either at national or at European level.

Because of the integrated nature of education and training activities, also reflected by the integrated nature of the Erasmus+ programme, the new Commission remains fully committed to the coherence of the overarching ET 2020 policy framework and the principle of lifelong learning underpinning it. As regards EQAVET and other transversal issues, such as the permeability between education sectors, EQF, ESCO and the analysis of future skill needs, these will continue to be addressed in a transparent way between the units in DG EMPL and DG EAC.

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What's new

Short announcement: A new policy officer responsible for Quality Assurance in VET

Koen Bois d'Enghien has been appointed policy officer for EQAVET in the European Commission where he replaces Sophie Weisswange who left DG EAC in May 2014. Before taking up this post, he worked as a policy officer in the European Employment Strategy unit as well as in the Labour Law unit of DG Employment and Social Affairs of the European Commission. Prior work experience also

includes research posts in Cedefop in the field of sectoral approaches to VET and at the research department of the public employment services in Belgium. Furthermore, he has extensive experience in the management and monitoring of EU grant programmes (Leonardo Da Vinci, ESF, ERDF, TEN-T and others). He holds a Master degree in Economics and one in Political Sciences.

Annual meeting of National Reference Points, October 8-9, 2014, Brussels: Issues discussed and highlighted

At their annual meeting (Brussels, October 2014) National Reference Points (NRPs), as the key actors in supporting the implementation of the national approach to quality assurance of VET, had an opportunity to provide updates on recent national policy developments in quality assurance for VET; and to discuss the support needed, and the relevance of the material developed in EQAVET. These were the key messages:

- In the majority of countries NRPs perform a broad range of activities.
- It would be preferable for NRPs to have a centralised, long-term and regular budget rather than temporary funding (e.g. funding from ESIF (European Structural and Investment Funds)) as that would make it possible to devise long-term plans and work programmes.
- Many NRPs have too little funding at present and the expectation is that funding will diminish further.
- It would be of key importance that a restricted EU call for proposals among NRPs be developed in order to share good practice, utilising the results of the Secretariat survey and of external evaluation.
- Increased cooperation is necessary between NRPs, for instance regarding how NRPs can support the work of national VET providers, particularly in relation to the use of the EQAVET Framework, and promoting and communicating this framework and the national framework.
- A strong desire to deepen this work in the future was expressed, through developing clusters of NRPs around some common interests and challenges.



NRPs at the meeting

- There are three main models used by countries to set up and fund NRPs. In most countries, the NRP is located within Ministry of Education with a shared budget. In many countries the NRP does not have a clear mandate. In AT and NL, the NRPs are outside the direct control of a Ministry, and enjoy a clear mandate and budget.



NRPs at the meeting

- The group recommended that EQAVET be extended to WBL (in this area, the EQAVET on-line tool on WBL needs to be implemented at provider level).

- There is a need to promote the cooperation with QA in both higher education (HE) and general education to boost leadership. QA systems can contribute to permeability between HE and VET. Of key importance is the need to involve key stakeholders; NRPs need support in order to develop a strategy addressing this issue.

The results of the EQAVET Secretariat survey 2013-2014 were presented. The report analysing the results can be found on the EQAVET website at: <http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/implementing-the-framework/progress-report.aspx>



Update on the EQAVET working groups by the EQAVET experts supporting the work

WORKING GROUP on EQAVET and THE QUALITY ASSURANCE APPROACH in ADULT LEARNING in THE CONTEXT of CONTINUING VET by Maria Emilia Galvão, EQAVET expert

EQAVET and quality assurance arrangements in adult learning

It has been fully recognised that Europe needs to tackle its unemployment crisis, create sustainable jobs and strengthen its economic growth. It has also been widely acknowledged that EU education and training systems are key actors “in the drive towards better jobs, stronger growth and competitiveness”¹ These priorities were taken into account by a) the Thematic Working Group on Quality in Adult Learning that undertook the discussion on how best to improve the quality of adult learning provision in 2011-2013, and b) the EQAVET Annual Forum (2014) that discussed the need to increase synergies between the EQAVET Framework and quality assurance arrangements in adult learning. In the wake of the EQAVET Annual Forum a working group was set up and mandated as follows:

1. To explore quality criteria/indicative descriptors in the context of adult learning in Continuing VET, including quality criteria (in relation to transparency and guidance for learners, client request management, social responsibility, infrastructure and equipment) and vocational competencies, soft skills and interpersonal competencies as required by the labour market and from an LLL perspective;
2. To investigate how indicators can be used in order to promote the quality assurance of CVET and contribute to the recognition of prior learning



Members of the working group at the 1st meeting, Sept. 9, 2014 Brussels



Members of the working group at the 1st meeting, Sept. 9, 2014 Brussels

In early September, the working group held its first meeting and agreed on a number of issues that will frame the work to be undertaken:

- Employability is the main guiding principle upon which the content of the guidance material is to be developed, including the way the working group approaches the issue of “soft skills” and the issue of individuals’ access to learning. The underlying assumption is that Adult Learning

¹ Council of the European Union (2014) *Conclusions on quality assurance supporting education and training* http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/142694.pdf

(AL) and Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) are instrumental in enhancing the employability of individuals, particularly the role that AL and CVET play in up-skilling and re-skilling the labour force in the current unemployment crisis in the EU.

- Typology of deliverables: the material to be developed should be generic so that it can be used and applied in various national contexts. It should address the macro (system), the meso (institution/provider) and the micro (learner) levels. The “package of materials” to be developed should provide tools/guidance/checklists for the various levels e.g.
 - a. for the learner, guidance should be learner-centric, i.e. it should enable individuals to make an informed decision about the quality of the learning programmes/ qualifications available to them,

- b. for labour market representatives, the material to be developed should address the quality assurance aspects of employers’ engagement, by focusing on lessons learned from concrete situations in national contexts, as represented by members of the working group; and on challenges, benefits and a legal framework that allows quality cooperation with employers, in particular with SMEs.

To sum up, the Working Group aims both to explore synergies and to strengthen the links between Adult Learning and Continuing VET and to continue to implement the EQAVET Framework. By May 2015, the Working Group will deliver a package of guidance materials targeted at the National Reference Points, individual providers of adult learning and CVET and other interested parties.

JOINT WORKING GROUP for EQAVET and ECVET by Keith Brumfitt, EQAVET expert



Members of the working group at the 1st meeting, Sept. 10, 2014 Paris

Over the last year the independent evaluations of EQAVET² and ECVET³, and the consultation on the European Area of Skills and Qualifications (EASQ)⁴, have outlined the value of finding new ways to support closer collaboration between the European instruments which support vocational education and training. One of the ways that EQAVET is responding is through the establishment of a joint working group with representatives from the ECVET Users’ Group.

Following an invitation to members of the EQAVET network and the ECVET Users’ Group, colleagues from social partners and 22 countries met for the first time in September 2014. The joint working group provides opportunities for members

of the two networks to communicate their developments, exchange knowledge, expertise and information and identify areas of shared interest where joint reflections can support the integrated implementation of the European instruments in a national or system-wide context. The aim is to strengthen cooperation, systematise the exchange of information and provide guidelines for Member States and advice to the European Commission. The group will meet four times during the year and present their work to the EQAVET Annual Forum in Latvia in June 2015 and to the ECVET Users’ Group meeting in summer 2015.



Members of the working group at the 1st meeting, Sept. 10, 2014 Paris

The group is investigating the following areas:

- a. how have ECVET and EQAVET teams collaborated at the national/system level (the activities undertaken, the barriers faced, the solutions found and the lessons learnt) and shared these experiences;
- b. what are the technical questions, based on national or system-level experiences, which need to be answered in order to find clear ways to collaborate;
- c. guidance on quality assurance which supports the design and recognition of learning outcomes and qualifications based on the ECVET principles;

2 Evaluation of implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) Final Report. June 2013, GHK. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/eqavet_en.pdf. (Accessed on 6/10/14)

3 Implementation of the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), Final report, 4 July 2014. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/evaluations/index_en.htm (Accessed on 6/10/14)

4 Stakeholder consultation on the European Area of Skills and Qualifications - Background document. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/consultations/documents/skills-back_en.pdf. (Accessed on 1/10/14)

- d. the production of a background paper to support the peer learning activity on 'how VET providers address the issue of quality assurance in assessment procedures for transnational mobility and learning progression'.

The group will use an incremental process to ensure the work builds on their previous decisions. However, as with all working groups, there will be time to take stock and reflect

on the direction the work is taking. This is an important part of the process as there may be new developments to consider e.g. in the European Area of Skills and Qualifications; emerging priorities or changes in directions arising from the appointment of the new Commissioner; or new ways of thinking arising from the transfer of VET from DG EAC (Education and Culture) to DG EMPL (Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility).

The EQAVET representatives of the EU social partner associations outline their priorities within the context of evolving EU policy

The role played by the social partners is key in helping deliver high quality VET which is responsive to learners, labour market and broader societal needs. The representatives of ETUC and UEAPME in the EQAVET network stress the importance of holistic approaches to quality assurance which also address issues such as teacher training and the key role of SMEs in supporting effective work-based learning.

Trade unions' concern about quality of VET by Agnes Roman, European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)



Agnes Roman

Commissioner Juncker's decision of 10 September, 2014, to transfer the units dealing with vocational education and training and skills from the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission to the Directorate-General for Employment met with a qualified approval from the social partners, who have gone on to raise certain concerns.

On the one hand, the shift is indeed an essential step toward the formation of closer links between vocational education and training (VET) and the employment of learners. It is hoped that it will help combat the exceptionally high youth unemployment rate in Europe.

On the other hand, the education trade unions and members of the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) – which represents 11 million teachers and education professionals in Europe under the affiliation of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) – have several concerns about the possible negative consequences of this transfer for the quality of VET.

In order to achieve attractive high quality VET in Europe, it is essential to motivate students and parents in general education to make IVET studies a first choice. It is also important to enable VET graduates to continue their studies in tertiary VET and in higher education. Therefore, VET must keep its significant link with general education and training besides improving relations with the labour market. The division of education and training between two directorate-generals will raise considerable issues about the quality of education and the competence and professional development of VET teachers and trainers.

The press release of the education trade unions, published on 11 September, 2014, stresses that it will not be possible to achieve the targets of the EU2020 Strategy, ET2020 Strategic Framework on education and training, and of the Bruges Communiqué, if one essential part of education and training is under different management.

EQAVET tools and indicators have been primarily developed for IVET and need to be further improved for work-based learning and CVET, which is a positive step towards improved provision in all VET sectors, and to contribute to greater employability of VET graduates in Europe. In light of the above-mentioned transfer of the VET unit to DG Employment, EQAVET has an essential role to play in preserving a holistic approach to quality VET with the involvement of the social partners.

The importance of SMEs for growth and jobs by Helen Hoffmann, European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (UEAPME)



Helen Hoffmann

• The EU is at crossroads with high expectations of the new Commission, while facing a review of the Europe 2020 Strategy. In order to bring about a post-crisis recovery, we need to tackle high unemployment and skills mismatch, and to foster job creation and growth and the right skills. Skills are decisive to the competitiveness of SMEs, for innovation and access to new markets, and it is SMEs that create 85% of new jobs.

- Key to these challenges is therefore to improve the labour market relevance and quality of VET, and overcome structural weaknesses of education and training systems and labour markets, as reflected in many country specific recommendations.
- EQAVET has supported change in quality assurance systems in many Member States. EQAVET is an important toolbox for applying quality assurance principles to VET, including work-based learning, CVT for adult learning and also at medium and higher skill levels. Generic skills, technical skills, digital skill, will all be required.
- However, QA necessitates a continuous and holistic approach in order to improve quality: for employers QA

should be adapted to the requirements of companies, but it is also required in VET schools. Member States need to improve the quality of VET: those introducing apprenticeships / WBL for the first time, those adapting VET systems or those with well-established systems. In fact, systems need to be continuously adapted to changing or growing sectors and labour markets.

- On governance: we need to strengthen cooperation and partnerships with labour market actors, social partners and VET providers to ensure the implementation of EQAVET. We must strengthen transparency of quality assurance processes for better ownership and mutual trust, taking into account the needs of small businesses.
- Furthermore, a focus on learning outcomes and “employability” indicators remains essential and data shows that there has not been enough progress. The quality assurance process should centre on the competences needed by the labour market. High-quality and work-based learning schemes are effective instruments to improve the transition from school to work.
- To conclude, more and better involvement of employer organisations should ensure a broader culture of quality assurance in VET. It is not an option but a necessity if we want to improve the competitiveness of our companies and the employability of workers.
- More information on UEAPME paper on [Crafts and SMEs 2020](#).

Key messages from the European Business Forum on VET – Brussels 23-24/09 by Giorgio Allulli, EQAVET expert



Giorgio Allulli

The mismatch between skills demand and supply is one of the main challenges faced by vocational education and training in Europe today. Even in countries with high rates of youth unemployment, companies find it difficult in an increasingly competitive environment to recruit employees with the right skills. On the other hand, even young people holding good qualifications find it difficult to get the work in their area of qualification.

To discuss these issues, the European Commission organised in September a new edition of the European Business Forum on Vocational Training. In this Forum, the emphasis is on spurring growth and competitiveness in Europe by developing

closer cooperation between VET providers and companies: it is necessary to build and constantly improve cooperation between education and training providers and businesses, so that young people will enter the labour market with the skills needed by employers. In particular, the Forum addressed the role of small and medium-sized companies.

The Forum gathered about 350 stakeholders representing governments, vocational education and training providers, employers and other European and national stakeholders and social partner organisations.

Three workshops were organised, focusing on:

- how to meet the skills needs in key economic sectors
- how to develop more entrepreneurial VET
- how to strengthen the provision of high quality apprenticeships.

Panel discussions demonstrated why schools and companies should work closer together and how that could be achieved

and why businesses should invest in the development of vocational and education training.

During the final plenary session the issue of high youth unemployment was raised: what can VET do in those countries where youth unemployment exceeds 50%? The answers revealed that youth unemployment is lower in those countries where VET is working well. But what are the characteristics of a functioning VET system?

- a. It should be largely based on work-based learning: work-based learning improves learning efficiency, because practical experience enhances learning and motivates learners.
- b. It should be based on a strong sectoral approach, involving stakeholders at sectoral level.
- c. It should set sound qualification standards which are acknowledged at national level, and determine what a carpenter, a plumber, an accountant, etc. should know and be able to do

- d. Standards should be set and continuously updated through permanent sectoral bodies by the main stakeholders (social partners, chambers, etc.), which know their needs better than anyone else.
- e. Standards achievement should be verified and certified by third parties, to make all VET customers (employers and learners) confident of sound learning outcomes.
- f. Standards should be carefully implemented by VET providers and companies, by:
 - g. planning relevant curricula
 - h. providing well-trained teachers and trainers
 - i. providing flexible teaching which differentiates among pupils
 - j. Continuous monitoring of the system and internal and external evaluation should be organised at provider and system level.

All these points can be expressed in two words, quality and quality assurance, because achieving quality is the way in which to meet the needs of learners, employers and society.

Events

An EQAVET Symposium on learning from sectoral approaches to quality assurance of VET, which focused on work-based learning partnerships and the role of quality assurance, took place in Brussels (The International Auditorium) on November 24-25, 2014.

This symposium provided an opportunity to deepen the dialogue between VET systems and labour market actors on the quality assurance aspects of:

- world-class vocational education and training, to raise the quality of vocational skills
- work-based learning, including the number and quality of traineeships, apprenticeships and dual learning models, to ease the transition from learning to work
- partnerships between public and private institutions (to ensure appropriate curricula and skills provision)



The results of the work undertaken in the **EQAVET Sectoral Seminars 2011-2013** provided a background for reflection by symposium participants on how a stronger culture of cooperation between labour market actors could improve responses to the challenges faced by VET systems. In addition, the symposium built on and explored the results of the European Commission **Sector Skills Alliances**

(SSAs) initiative launched in 2012 in order to address the current mismatch between the needs of the labour market

and the skills supplied by education and training systems in the EU.



Participants in the Symposium

The symposium was organised around three issues:

1. Forecasting the needs for skills
2. Work-based learning in a lifelong learning perspective
3. Teacher and trainer skills

The symposium was designed to bring together key multipliers among policymakers, EU social partners organisations and

national employers associations (chambers of commerce and craft, professional chambers, sectoral skills councils, etc).

Three case studies were presented (from the Netherlands, Italy and Norway) highlighting how one of the issues mentioned above has been addressed. The case studies were presented in two parts:

- a. A presentation which contextualised the case study and provided an overview of the framework, organisational arrangements, establishment of partnerships/dialogue etc. at national or regional level which facilitate good practice;

- b. A 'testimony' element, presented (in the form of an interview) by a key actor (a client/user i.e. an apprentice, a LLL learner, a teacher/trainer) who personalised the way in which the approach presented and described in point a) affected his/her work/practices/development.

The presentation of case studies was followed by discussion in workshops. All presentations can be found at www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/Symposium.aspx.

What's new?

A new brochure on quality assurance for work-based learning has been published.



The brochure provides concrete and practical guidance on quality assurance for work-based learning (WBL), in line with EQAVET. The guidance is based on the work developed by the EQAVET working group on work-based learning, established in 2013. The working group identified

a series of common themes, called building blocks, which have been used to establish and strengthen quality assurance processes in WBL, in line with EQAVET. The building blocks present an early analysis of approaches to quality assurance for WBL.

Full details of the guidance are contained in the [EQAVET online tool on WBL](#), which describes the activities that help VET institutions to develop and support a quality assurance approach for WBL in line with the EQAVET Framework, based on examples from European VET providers. The online tool can be found on the EQAVET homepage at www.eqavet.eu



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