

# Report

## EQAVET 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Forum

**Date: 31 March - 1 April, 2011**

**Venue: Danubius Thermal & Conference Hotel Helia, Budapest, Hungary**

### Introduction

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This EQAVET Annual Forum was the second to take place within the new phase of the work at European level regarding quality assurance in Vocational Education and Training (VET) since the adoption of the Recommendation on the establishment of the quality assurance reference framework for VET and the subsequent establishment of the Secretariat to support its implementation.

The Annual Forum was hosted by NIVE, the National Institute of Vocational and Adult Education, Hungary.

Twenty-five countries were represented at the Annual Forum. Apologies were received from EU Member States Bulgaria, Denmark, Poland; as well as from partner countries Croatia, Liechtenstein, Iceland, the “Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Turkey. The Social Partners were represented by the European Trade Union confederation (ETUC), the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (UEAPME) and Business Europe. Observers from Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning (QALLL) project, Eurochambres, European Providers of Vocational Education and Training (EUproVET), the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU), the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) and MENON network were also present. The European Training Foundation (ETF) was also represented. Apologies were received by the European Development Centre for Vocational Education and Training (Cedefop).

The Annual Forum was chaired by the European Commission represented by Mr Risto Raivio.

A full list of participants can be found on the [website](#).

### Official Opening

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The Annual Forum was officially opened by Dr Sándor Czomba, Minister of State for Employment Policy in Hungary who welcomed the Annual Forum to Budapest. He noted the crucial role to be played by quality education and training in the present economic climate in Europe. The

Recommendation on the establishment of a European quality assurance reference framework for VET provides Member States with the appropriate instrument to respond to the current challenges by increasing EU cooperation in education and training and the quality and competences of human capital in the EU. This will allow EU to compete globally.

He acknowledged the important work developed in the Hungarian context, which has been one of the first to harmonise its VET system to the EU common quality assurance principles.

He congratulated EQAVET on its continued work in this field and cited its potential to enhance European cooperation. He thanked the representatives of Member States, partner countries, social partners, Commission and the Secretariat for their presence in Budapest.

The Annual Forum (AF) was welcomed by Risto Raivio, who thanked the Hungarian Authorities and NIVE for hosting the meeting. He also welcomed representatives of Member States, the Social Partners' representatives and the representatives of NGOs (particularly those representing VET providers and learners), the QALLL project and the other observers.

The Chairperson noted the significant progress and development in the field of quality assurance in VET at European level. He pointed out the relevance of VET and quality assurance within the work of European cooperation over the years, being a priority in the EU agenda. He acknowledged the cornerstone role of quality assurance in strengthening lifelong learning in the EU. He stressed the importance of effective communication with national and EU stakeholders in order to increase the awareness of quality assurance as the tool to increase EU competitiveness and equity. He also noted the importance of increasing cooperation and synergies with other instruments developed at EU level, namely ECVET and EQF.

He referred to the significant work undertaken since the last AF and the very concrete and practical work developed by the EQAVET network, which will support Member States and other relevant stakeholders to improve their VET systems in line with the Recommendation. He acknowledged the importance of the outcomes and activities produced since January 2010 within the EQAVET work programme as valuable resources useful to guide countries in preparing and implementing their national approaches.

## EU Policy context: key note addresses from representatives of the European Commission and relevant EU stakeholders

The representative of the DG Education and Culture, European Commission, Sophie Weisswange, presented the policy context and an update on European VET policy in which the EQAVET work and Recommendation is framed.

She presented the policy initiatives undertaken at EU level with implications for the work of EQAVET network, primarily the Education and Training 2020 initiative (ET 2020) and its Flagships, as well as the Bruges Communiqué -adopted in Dec. 2010. These initiatives sketch a vision for EU VET to 2020 as an attractive, accessible, flexible, inclusive option for learners with

an increasing role to play in facilitating mobility, equity, active citizenship and internalisation of the EU societal-economy.

She noted the role of the EQAVET network and the Commission within these initiatives and the Lifelong Learning (LLL) programme. She explained the particular importance attached to quality assurance of VET as a crucial element to ensure cooperation and mutual trust between systems in order to promote mobility, transparency and permeability of qualifications.

She enumerated the various projects of the LLL programme with a quality assurance dimension, which are funded by the Commission through Leonardo da Vinci (LdV) programme. In this context, she mentioned the importance of cooperating with QALLL; and provided an update on the five EQAVET projects (from Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Malta and Romania) to support national reference points which will be coordinated by the MENON network (a meeting with the interested parties will be held in the morning, day 2 of the Annual Forum).

Christina Linderholm (UEAPME), representing the EU social partners, provided an overview of the role to be played by social partners in the effective implementation of the Recommendation. She noted that social partners need to be involved at every stage of the implementation process at sectoral, local, regional, national and EU levels. She stressed the importance for EQAVET of building an active and structured cooperation with the social partners, in particular in the work of national reference points and EQAVET-EQF-ECVET cooperation. She outlined the policy priorities in relation to VET for the social partners at EU level which coincide with the objectives of ET2020 and the Bruges Communiqué.

Manfred Polzin, Senior Policy Advisor of EUproVET, presented the role and the priorities of, and opportunities for cooperation with VET providers associations at EU level. EUproVET, together with other EU VET providers associations (EfVET, EVTA and EVBB), is keen to contribute to the ET2020 objectives by actively participating in the various EU networks and initiatives in the field. He noted the significance of the Joint VET providers Declaration to the Bruges Conference in Dec. 2010, which launched an enhanced process for cooperation with VET providers associations at EU level. He acknowledged the importance of cooperation with EQAVET as quality assurance in VET is crucially important in achieving VET providers' priorities, namely in relation to: 1) increasing attractiveness and quality of VET; 2) the successful implementation of the LLL programme; 3) ensuring the quality of teachers/trainers; 4) building integrated and accredited mobility pathways; 5) fostering mutual trust; 6) creating an Open EU Area for VET; and 7) integrating coherently the work developed by EQF, ECVET, Europass.

Barbara Hoeller, QALLL project coordinator, presented the policy priorities for the Quality assurance in Lifelong Learning (QALLL) project, the European thematic networking with a focus on VET and adult education. She stressed that the QALLL project's objective is to highlight good practices and to move forward recommendations in order to support cooperation in the field of quality assurance in VET. The project will identify both immediate priorities for the LLL Programme as well as long-term challenges for the next generation of the programme. The objective is to: facilitate networking and mainstreaming of results; foster discussion; and dissemination and share of information in quality assurance issues in the context of VET and adult education. QALLL has collected, assessed and mapped the LLL projects with a VET and adult education quality assurance dimension (42 projects out of 80). She observed the need to

support and complement the work of EQAVET; therefore a close relationship between the two should be promoted.

Claudio Dondi, of MENON network, presented the MENON Network to the Annual Forum. MENON has been selected by the Commission to provide support to the five EQAVET LdV projects with the objective of sharing and disseminating best practices. There will be five thematic seminars and a final conference in 2012. A meeting with the interested parties was scheduled for the morning, day 2 of the Annual Forum.

## Implementation of the EQAVET Network work programme followed by discussion

Sean Feerick, Director of the Secretariat, presented the progress made on the implementation of EQAVET 2010-2012 work programme since last update in April 2010. The work programme is designed to support Member States in developing their strategies for the implementation of the Recommendation and enhancing cooperation in the field of quality assurance, focusing on:

1. National reference points. Several actions have been taken in order to provide national reference points with the effective tools to fulfil their role as specified by the Recommendation, creating a dynamic platform where national reference points interact and communicate.
2. A sustainable communication strategy to disseminate results and reach relevant stakeholders in order to support the development of a culture of quality assurance across Member States.
3. Developing appropriate resources to support the Member States in developing their national approaches to the use of the Reference Framework and, at a more general level, strengthening the culture of quality assurance and development.

These actions have contributed to the formation of a well functioning community of practice, which involves Member States, national reference points, policy makers, social partners and other EU initiatives (namely EQF and ECVET). He noted that the focus now has shifted from the development of content-process to the implementation-process, which needs to target VET providers and other relevant stakeholders if this process is to support the implementation of the Recommendation in the national contexts.

He recognised the need to capitalise and build on the achievements and work so far accomplished. The next stage of the work to be undertaken in the working groups would be very important in supporting this shift to responding to Member States needs in relation to the use of the Reference Framework. The workshops to be held in the afternoon would play an important role in helping to make the shift to the next phase of the work programme namely the new focus on implementation.

Key aspects of the work programme which had been developed in 2010-2011 were: 1) the working groups on guidelines and indicators; 2) the Information Gathering Exercise; 3) the Reflection Group to establish a structured cooperation with ECVET and EQF;; and 4) the Sectoral

Seminars, which are designed to strengthen cooperation with social partners (the 1<sup>st</sup> seminar to be held on 23/24 May 2011 in Norway on the Healthcare sector –invitations have been sent to Member States).

The EQAVET expert responsible for the completion of the Information Gathering Exercise, Serban Iosifescu, presented the outcomes of this project, which aims to provide a snapshot of the quality assurance processes underpinning a number of key areas of crucial importance for VET (certification and qualification processes, curricula setting, accreditation of VET providers and training of trainers/teachers). This exercise is designed to provide a basis for taking forward the work of closer collaboration with the quality assurance aspects of the work in EQF and ECVET. He presented the rationale, main topics and the methodology of the exercise and informed on the emerging trends and his recommendations.

The results of the two working groups on guidelines and indicators were presented by the key experts Keith Brumfitt and Maria Emilia Galvão and the representative of the Secretariat Arancha Oviedo. The objective of the working groups was to develop instruments and tools to support Member States in setting up their national implementation approaches for the implementation of the Recommendation. Within the remits of their mandates, the working groups have developed an on-line software tool which integrates the work achieved by the both working groups (which have been working between June 2010 and February 2011). It complements the work developed by ENQAVET. The on-line tool, or *EQAVET Quality Cycle*, was presented by the experts supporting the work of the working groups to the Annual Forum.

The on-line tool is available at [www.eqavet.eu](http://www.eqavet.eu)

Based on these achievements, the Secretariat director listed the next steps to be undertaken within the EQAVET work programme: a Secretariat survey will be conducted in order to inform the network on the developing of national approaches in the Member States and to assist in identifying how to best support the implementation process at European level; the continuation of the work of the working groups with a new focus on the use and implementation of the Reference Framework.

A more detailed discussion on the guidance for Member States, reporting and monitoring and the priorities for the next stage of the EQAVET work programme would take place in the workshops to be held in the afternoon.

Representatives of Member States congratulated the working groups and the Secretariat for their work resulting in the production of the *EQAVET Quality Cycle* on-line tool, which offers a user-friendly and interactive support and guidance to national reference points and other relevant stakeholders to improve and implement their national quality assurance systems in line with the Recommendation.

They recognised that in order to maximise the benefits and use of the on-line tool, there is a need to keep it up-to-date and to consider how to most appropriately ensure its use and adaptation in differing national contexts. They also suggested that members of the earlier ENQA-VET thematic groups which developed the content of the building blocks and the operational

definitions of the indicators used in the *EQAVET Quality Cycle* on-line tool should be mentioned in the 'About us' section of tool.

## Informal meeting of quality assurance reference points

An informal meeting of the quality assurance national reference points took place on Friday morning before the plenary session. MENON network presented its role as coordinator for the five Leonardo projects, which have been selected following the specific call for proposal concerning development and promotion of EQAVET. The projects are:

- Qualification as a way to quality, OeAD, Austria;
- Supporting the implementation of EQAVET in NL, CINOP, The Netherlands;
- Quality Assurance Tool for VET institutions, Malta Qualification Council;
- Capacity Building for the Romanian NRP: Promoting Quality, ARACIP, Romania;
- Europeanisation of the national model for quality development in VET, BIBB, Germany.

A focus of the discussion at this meeting was the modalities of coordination and dissemination to the other national reference points. MENON informed that participation of up to 20 participants from other institutions other than from these LdV projects in five seminars -which are envisaged in the MENON project work programme- were possible. Other national reference points were welcome to participate if interested.

The coordinator of projects will also organise a conference in 2012 where 150 participants are foreseen. While no reimbursement is foreseen for participation in the seminars, reimbursements of travel, accommodation and subsistence costs should be provided for 60 out of 150 participants at the conference.

The Chair, Sophie Weisswange, presented the next national reference points meeting, which will take place in Brussels on 24-25 November 2011. Some agenda points were suggested: e.g. presentation of the Secretariat's survey results on the national approaches to the EQAVET Recommendation, the updated matrix and the follow-up of the five LdV Projects. Some national reference points, participating in this meeting, suggested that more workshops during this meeting are advisable to allow exchange of information and good practices.

Then free time was left to national reference points to meet on a bilateral basis

## Supporting cooperation and synergies between EQAVET, EQF and ECET

The objective of this session was to present the scope of the work undertaken by the network in the coming years and enable EQAVET members to have a comprehensive view regarding the importance of the EQAVET Framework in the context of EQF and ECET.

Anita Kremo, DG Education and Culture, European Commission, presented the state of play of the implementation of the EQF, in particular referencing national qualifications levels to the EQF.

She informed that all 32 countries participating in ET 2020 have nominated their EQF National Coordination Points. Four countries (Ireland, France, Malta and the UK) have referenced already their National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) to the EQF. By the end of 2011, further 17 countries will have referenced their NQFs to the EQF. She indicated that the transparency and quality of the referencing process and of presentation of results are key to the success of the EQF. In order to fulfil these goals, she pointed out the importance of criteria 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 of the 10 criteria for referencing NQFs to the EQF agreed by the EQF Advisory Group. She noticed the underpinning role of quality assurance in the shift process to a learning outcomes approach in national qualifications systems, in particular quality assurance in defining learning outcomes for standards, qualifications and assessment criteria; and the certification process. These are important elements in the implementation of NQFs and the EQF. She presented the conclusions of the peer learning activity (PLA) organised by the Learning Outcomes Group on the role of quality assurance in defining and assessing LO, held in Helsinki in Nov. 2010. She suggested organising a peer learning on how the learning outcomes approach is used in VET - for qualifications and units - and how this is or should more effectively be underpinned by quality assurance. Such could involve national experts involved in NQF development, VET qualification development, the implementation of ECVET and EQAVET at national level. She also proposed to continue the work in relation to Information Gathering Exercise, by extending the information gathering on quality assurance procedures related to setting standards. The EQF NCPs should also be informed about the country cards on the quality assurance of the certification process.

Erik Hess, DG Education and Culture, European Commission, presented the state of play of the ECVET network (European Credit system for VET). He outlined the milestones, roadmap, objectives and priorities of the ECVET network and the credit system initiative. He also announced the different projects and calls for proposals under the LLL Programme to support national projects to test and develop the credit system for VET. He noted the important role to be played by national agencies in the implementation process. They will provide pilot projects to test the tool. He emphasised the importance of developing a close relationship between ECVET, EQF and EQAVET networks. He characterised ECVET as the tool which materialises the learning outcomes (LO) approach by enabling the transfer, the recognition and the accumulation of LO, facilitating mobility. Quality assurance underpins these processes, so he pointed out the need for closely cooperation between ECVET and EQAVET at both national and EU levels.

Elizabeth Watters, the expert supporting the work of the Reflection Group, introduced the background paper for the 3<sup>rd</sup> session of the workshops, which outlines the challenges and opportunities for cooperation between EQAVET, ECVET and EQF within the national contexts.

## Workshops and Panel discussions

Participants in the Annual Forum were divided into 4 groups which worked in parallel in 3 different sessions (twice in day 1 and once in day 2 of the Annual Forum). Chairpersons and experts were allocated to each workshop.

The rationale behind the formation of the workshops was to provide Member States with an opportunity for a discussion:

1. on the working groups and the IT on-line tool and how they will help them in the work of developing and implementing their national approaches;
2. on EQAVET network's future work to 2011;
3. on opportunities for synergies at national level between EQAVET, EQF and ECVET concerning quality assurance and VET LO; and the implications for the work of the network.

Each session was supported by a background paper circulated to all participants by the Secretariat to guide and facilitate discussion. Messages and outcomes as a result of the workshops' discussions fed into the panel discussions on day 2, which provided an opportunity to identify the emerging trends and messages coming from EQAVET members in relation to topics of each workshop. The outcomes of discussions will form the basis for the actions and activities of the network for 2011.

The following outcomes were clear from the discussions at the workshops:

#### **VISION AND FOCUS FOR THE WORK OF THE NETWORK TO 2012:**

The focus of the network for 2011-2012 should be to support the use and implementation of the Recommendation in the national contexts. The network should deliver and create an environment in which Member States and national reference points feel that they are supported to ensure that the Recommendation is implemented in a way which embeds a culture of quality assurance throughout and within Member States.

Therefore supporting the national implementation processes should be the focal-point within the work of the network in 2011-2012.

#### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES TO ADDRESS THE IMPLEMENTATION:**

1. There is a need to further strengthen the national reference points in order to support their role at the interface between policy development and implementation in their national contexts. They need further support to increase their usefulness and visibility within the national contexts. At EU level, national reference points need to be supported by creating a sustainable platform where they are able to interact, communicate and learn from each other by exchanging experiences and good practices. EQAVET should ensure a strategy to enable national reference points to accomplish their role as specified in the Recommendation.
2. There is a need to increase the involvement of VET providers in our work in order to ensure a more effective national use of the EQAVET Framework. National reference points need to drive the process as the diversity of VET provisions and providers in their national contexts

is only manageable from an insider perspective. National reference points should act as nodal points of the implementation actions/process. The tools created by the network formed from the EU level perspective need to be customised and contextualised by the national reference points which are the channel or bridge that adapt the EU perspective level to national realities, priorities, necessities and traditions. Therefore, national reference points have a crucial role to play in the effective implementation of the Recommendation.

3. An enhanced engagement of social partners is very important. The network needs to support and offer guidance in relation to defining how best to support a structured approach to cooperation and involvement of social partners in the national contexts. This will help national reference points to fulfil their role as specified by the Recommendation as a concrete step to support a responsive and effective implementation of the Recommendation in Member States.
4. There is a need to enhance cooperation with the other EU initiatives and projects addressing quality assurance of VET issues -notably EQF, ECVET and the LLL projects. The priority is to create synergies and coordination in the implementation of these instruments. In this context, the network will explore the most efficient ways of ensuring effective cooperation between the different national actors or agencies responsible for the implementation of the various tools/initiatives.

#### **ACTIONS/MEASURES TO BE UNDERTAKEN IN ORDER TO ADDRESS THE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

##### **Actions to address strategic objective 1: *supporting implementation and national reference points***

- Working group 1 on developing guidelines to support national implementation approaches to the Recommendation involving national reference points should continue. In addition to existing members new national reference points and other relevant stakeholders will be invited to participate in meetings.
- Working Group 2 on monitoring and self-assessment using indicators. Existing members of working group 2 and new members as appropriate will build on the results of working group 2, while respecting the 'toolbox' nature of the indicators and the voluntary nature (as inspiration to national reforms and actions) of the Recommendation.
- National reference points need further support, both technical and financial support to fulfil their role. It is important to consider the difficulties of attaining adequate and consistent funding within the national contexts and at EU level.
- Prioritise a clustering approach grouping national reference points under common themes, issues, traditions, characteristics, etc.
- Create opportunities and activities for the sharing and exchanging of information and good practices (e.g. peer learning and/or peer reviews activities).
- Customised/tailored (virtual) expert advice should be offered.

- The reporting process needs to be seen as a process owned by national reference points within the national contexts. It should support and inform the implementation process rather than be perceived as a monitoring process.

The IT on-line tool should be further developed. It has been identified as the instrument that can address and contain the content to be developed within the actions mentioned above.

**Actions to address strategic objective 2: *added-value cooperation with VET providers***

- The so called ‘cascading approach’ is seen as an appropriate approach to encourage the effective support of providers at national level. This approach identifies national reference points as the nodal point from which the information is ‘translated’ and adapted to very diversified national VET systems and providers.
- The involvement of EU VET providers associations is very important for the work of the network and they should be involved in the different actions and activities of the network.

The IT on-line tool should be further developed in order to be useful to VET providers, in particular in relation to offer good practices and case studies at VET provider level.

**Actions to address strategic objective 3: *structured involvement of social partners***

- The Sectoral Seminars which involve industry representatives (employer associations, national sectoral councils/chambers, etc.) and national reference points are seen as an important means of enhancing the engagement with the social partners.
- The Sectoral Seminars should provide an opportunity to explore the quality assurance and development process in continuing vocational education and training (CVET).
- Work based learning should also be considered in this context.

**Actions to address strategic objective 4: *building synergies with EQF and ECVET; and LLL Programme***

- These instruments are a catalyst of reform and change in Member States. As such, they support the focus on national implementation processes.
- The work of the Reflection Group should continue.
- Opportunities for dialogue and exchanges of expertise and experiences should be provided between the different national actors involved in the various initiatives.
- Guidelines should be offered to national reference points to establish a cooperative approach with EQF and ECVET at national levels.
- The LLL projects should inform the development of content in relation to strategic objectives 1, 2 and 3, avoiding duplication of effort and information.
- An approach devised – where national reference points, industry representatives and LdV projects interact – should be fostered.

## Closing remarks

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The Chairperson closed the meeting and thanked the hosts, network members, the experts, the members of the social partners and other observers and groups for their attendance, active cooperation and commitment to the network. He thanked the Secretariat for its work.

Note: All presentations made at the Annual Forum have been uploaded on the [website](#).