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## Editorial by Sean Feerick

This issue of the EQAVET Newsletter provides an opportunity to highlight some of the work undertaken by the national reference points in the context of the funding provided by ERASMUS+ since 2016. With the adoption of the EQAVET Recommendation in 2009 the quality assurance national reference points have been seen as essential players in the effective implementation of the European quality assurance framework in their national contexts. However, the reality across the member states has varied widely. In some cases, national reference points have received clear mandates from their national authorities and have been appropriately resourced. In other cases, EQAVET responsibilities were added to already crowded work programmes of agencies and/or ministries. However, the possibility of EU-level support through ERASMUS+ has, for the first time, provided an opportunity to put in place work programmes which enable national reference points to support and strengthen the development of a culture of quality assurance in their national contexts.

Effective policy implementation is dependent on a clear legislative basis, well developed partnerships with key stakeholders and the availability of resources to develop work programmes that target those responsible for providing high quality, "fit for purpose" training opportunities for learners. In the examples provided in this edition we see how national reference points have developed their strategies for supporting teachers and trainers in order to assure the quality of work-based learning and apprenticeships. We also see a number of projects where reflective practitioner strategies have been

developed in order to improve the quality of VET for all learners and trainees. The projects provide many examples of how ERASMUS+ has enabled national reference points to create a space for reflection and a basis for developing their strategic approach to deepening the culture of quality assurance at national level.

The key themes which emerge in the national examples include the importance of effective partnerships in developing a context for policy development and implementation, the centrality of teachers and trainers in ensuring high quality learning and the importance of the networking role of the national reference points nationally and at European level.

The ongoing work of sharing experience and reflection on what works (or does not) in developing quality assurance approaches at national level also creates a context where countries share information, examine the use of the EQAVET indicative descriptors and indicators and work towards creating a European space and shared language for speaking about the quality assurance of VET.

As the EQAVET Network reflects on how to ensure that the quality assurance of VET continues to contribute to the attainment of the EQAVET-related objectives of the Riga Communiqué and the ambitious objectives for VET established in the New Skills Agenda, it is obvious that a strong network of national reference points which brings together the key priorities at national and European level will be an important means of delivering high quality VET over the coming years.

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# The involvement of teachers and trainers in quality management systems. Reflections from ARQA-VET, Austria

Within the EQAVET Call 2016-2017, ARQA-VET, the Austrian Reference Point within the EQAVET Network, focused thematically on the involvement of teachers and trainers in quality management systems (QMS). We are convinced that teacher and trainer involvement is crucial for successful implementation of quality management. Without teacher participation, quality management cannot fulfill its purpose of being a driver of provider development and improvement. Furthermore, ARQA-VET fostered recognition of its work by launching a new website and new dissemination material during the project.

The Austrian project was built on three main activities:

- 1) Joint activity of Austrian National Reference Point and Finnish National Reference Point "Exchange and Development Group with four other countries: Germany, The Netherlands, Romania and Scotland/UK to involve teachers and trainers in QMS and quality assurance (QA) procedures" with two meetings, one in Austria, one in Finland.
- 2) Teacher and trainer training concept, Introduction in quality management.
- 3) Strengthening communication and dissemination of the Austrian National Reference Point



ARQA-VET meeting with colleagues from Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Romania and Scotland/UK in Vienna in October 2016

On the basis of expert inputs, good practice examples from different VET providers and the results of group discussions, participants in the Joint Activity agreed a set of recommendations regarding teacher and trainer involvement in quality management at system level, at organisational level and at individual (teacher and trainer) level.

For the training concept we focused on the following question: what do we expect of teachers and trainers when it comes to quality management? They should partake in evaluation and feedback procedures, they should contribute to school development for example in school projects, and they should cooperate with their colleagues to develop teaching and learning so that the provider as an organisation can move forward.

Teaching and learning are at the heart of provider quality. Ultimately, it is students who must benefit from QM. Evidence shows that teachers and trainers who have a self-reflective attitude and practice feedback have higher achieving students than those who do not. Nonetheless, it cannot be presumed that teachers and trainers have all the competences they need in order to do that. We discovered that quality management competences are rarely found in first level teacher training in Austria. Further professionalisation is needed.

In the next working period of 2017-2019 we will focus on the topic "feedback for teachers and trainers". As we learned from our first project, the attitude of teachers and trainers towards their students and towards their own professional development is crucial for schools QMS. Feedback in this context is a powerful instrument and is not used sufficiently. Our planned activities for the next period are as follows:

- 1) Developing an online resource for VET teachers and trainers to support individual (personal) feedback;
- 2) Developing a 'Train the Trainer' concept with focus on implementation of individual (personal) feedback at VET provider level;
- 3) Piloting the 'Train the Trainer' concept;
- 4) Organising a joint activity/ transnational Peer Review with Finland, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria;
- 5) Participation in the National Reference Point's Peer Learning Activities and exchange of expertise with other National Reference Points;
- 6) Organising a thematic conference with follow-up events 2017-2018.

The events and activities will serve also for dissemination and exploitation of the products and lessons learnt.

6. See 2016 Report on Vocational Education and Training, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Berlin, p.7; See Data Report for the 2016 Report on Vocational Education and Training, Information and Analyses regarding the Development of Vocational Education and Training, Bonn.  
7. 2016 Report on Vocational Education and Training, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Berlin, p.12,

# Working together to strengthen the quality culture in the Netherlands

An article by Alie Kamphuis and Marloes van Bussel, CINOP, the Netherlands



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The National Reference Point EQAVET (NRP EQAVET) in the Netherlands is the link between European policy developments, national policies and national practice. The National Reference Point is stimulating the work on quality in vocational education based on the EQAVET framework. Our priorities are working on quality in teaching teams and promoting a quality culture.

An important task is to bring together, inform and activate the various stakeholders and actors.

The National Reference Point connects initiatives so that they can strengthen each other. In addition, the National Reference Point facilitates dialogue and the development of knowledge.

The dialogue at its core is always about how the quality assurance at system, institutional and educational level (= mean) can best contribute to achieving quality at the level of teacher and student,

in the primary educational process (= aim). An example of how the National Reference Point supports this is as an associate partner in the Erasmus+ project QUAL4T and QUAL4T2. This project supports teaching teams in VET schools in their use of quality assistance mechanisms like the 'Plan Do Check Act' cycle.

Strengthening the quality culture in VET has, for some years, been a priority for the Dutch National Reference Point. With funding from the European Commission,

the National Reference Point has been able to expand its activities on this topic. In order to further clarify the topic, the National Reference Point organised an expert meeting with experts in education and quality culture from all levels of the educational system, including a student, teacher, director, representative of the Inspectorate and representative of the Ministry. They addressed the question of what it means to strengthen the quality culture in VET and what interventions are needed to do so. This work has enabled the National Reference Point to develop the concept further. Some conclusions were that the work on quality culture should focus on teachers and teaching teams, that it is crucial to connect a strengthening quality culture to improvement in education and that management has an important facilitating role. Quality culture is not easy to change. By focusing on education, on what binds a team together and on how the team works together, we hope to change the quality culture. The desired result is a change in behaviour. Based on the insights from the expert meeting, the National Reference Point has developed a guide for teaching teams. To develop our ideas, we used insights from the Erasmus Q-cult project, carried out by the Austrian National Reference Point.

At present, the National Reference Point is conducting pilot projects to test the guide and improve the guidelines. It will be ready by autumn for teaching teams to use. To encourage widespread use, the National Reference Point will provide workshops throughout the country, aimed at teachers, managers and quality staff. We will also organise a EQAVET Peer Learning Activity on the 3rd and 4th of October 2017 to share our insights regarding strengthening a quality culture and to develop our ideas with other Member States. We will link the topic to the role of collecting and using student feedback.

## Enhancing quality culture in education institutions in Latvia

From 2016 to 2017, the State Education Quality Service, as the national reference point of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework in vocational education and training (EQAVET) in Latvia, implemented the Erasmus+ programme Action Grant 2016 – Support to the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training National Reference Points (EQAVET NRP), which aimed at introducing EQAVET indicators and basic principles into Latvian vocational education. A number of representatives were invited to participate in the implementation of the project – representatives of vocational education institutions and sectoral expert councils, social partners and other stakeholders.

The main emphasis of the introduction of EQAVET indicators to Latvia centred on the quality culture in education institutions, as well as the introduction of EQAVET indicators.

Within the project a number of questionnaires were developed for target groups such as learners, employers, representatives of industry, supervisors of internship and graduates. The questionnaires are used for data acquisition, compilation and analysis of EQAVET indicators. The main goal of questionnaires is to obtain a more complete picture of the quality of vocational educational programmes and of what improvements may be necessary. The questionnaires have been trialled in several vocational education institutions. After the trial, the heads of vocational education institutions shared their thoughts on the results and challenges they faced.

The development and trial of the questionnaires has also led to feedback between the employers and graduates on identifying the requirements of labour market.

During the project, the importance of the quality culture in the promotion of quality in vocational education institutions was repeatedly highlighted. Vocational

education institutions shared their experience and good practice regarding the promotion of quality culture.

The project also raised the issue of employment trends in Latvia and their correlation with vocational education institutions.

The project resulted in a booklet and recommendations for the introduction of EQAVET indicators to the target

audience of representatives of vocational education institutions, social partners and other stakeholders.

During the next project work will continue on the development of a quality culture concept in education by acting in two directions: 1) quality assurance in work-based learning; 2) collection, compilation and analysis of data on EQAVET indicators 5 and 6.

## Investigating quality assurance of the certification of non-formal, apprenticeship/work-based learning in Greece – development of instructions and guidelines for presenting learning outcome-based assessment and certification criteria

This project has been under way since summer 2016, undertaken by EOPPEP, the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance in Greece. The project objective was to further explore quality assurance (QA) arrangements associated with the certification of apprenticeship/work-based learning (WBL), with a view to establishing principles and guidelines that will be of use to policy-makers and practitioners in developing or enhancing quality assurance measures and policies.

The project began with an inception seminar attended by representatives of a wide range of relevant stakeholders including the Ministry of Education, social partners and the quality assurance bodies responsible for certification in all sectors of education and training in Greece. A follow-up survey and meetings with key experts resulted in a thorough analysis of the areas of certification associated with non-formal WBL in Greece, and of the modes of assessment in these areas. This analysis contributed to a further study exploring practice in the above-mentioned area in Europe generally, with particular focus on case studies of five countries. The study is an important outcome of the project activity and its conclusions will be available on the EOPPEP website ([www.eoppep.gr](http://www.eoppep.gr)).

Key findings show that the rapid pace of change in the world of work and the need for training to adjust to the changing context is a challenge for VET in Europe. However, the study identifies relatively few situations in which work-based learning achievement is directly assessed in the workplace: more often it is assessed separately through external examinations and/or laboratory-based simulation assignments or not included at all in the overall assessment for certification.

The focus of quality assurance arrangements is still mainly on the quality of inputs and learning programme provision. There are only a few discernible guidelines for the quality assurance of VET certification and even fewer for the assessment and certification of work-based learning.

The starting point for a quality-assured certification process of work-based learning is to define the expected learning outcomes (LOs) and then identify suitable assessment methods and tools to measure their achievement. QA arrangements can then be designed to underpin the validity of the assessment. However, practitioners need to develop expertise in describing learning outcomes for assessment and certification purposes and to this end they should be supported.

The study concludes by setting out principles and recommendations to guide the design of assessment and certification processes that can be quality assured.

Building on the findings and recommendations from the study and with the contribution of VET practitioners, the project had also included the formulation of instructions and guidelines for developing assessment standards and criteria, defined in terms of learning outcomes. This activity was followed by an implementation phase, contextualised in the tourism sector, in the apprenticeship/work-based learning part leading to a Vocational Qualification of I.E.K., (EQF level 5) awarded by EOPPEP. This activity is of particular importance to Greece since apprenticeship schemes based on the dual system have been recently restructured and reintroduced into the VET system of the country.

# Strengthening the mechanisms of quality assurance of VET in Croatia

The Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education has, as part of its regular activities, and supported through the Erasmus+ project European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training: National Reference Point (EQAVET NRP), held four regional teacher-training events for VET teachers and school directors whose schools are currently undergoing self-assessment processes, with the purpose of supporting VET schools and quality committees in the implementation of the self-assessment process.

The teacher-training events were held during March 2017 in the cities of Rijeka (13th March), Zagreb (17th March), Osijek (24th March) and Split (27th March). They were intended for members of quality committees, for the purpose of supporting VET schools in the process of quality assurance and when undertaking self-assessment. The teacher-training events involved principals of VET schools, members of school quality committees, as well as coordinators for quality and self-assessment. There were around a hundred participants from around sixty VET schools. This marked the beginning of a new cycle of professional development and continuous support for VET schools conducting self-assessment. Through these activities the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education contributes to strengthening the capacities of VET schools to implement self-assessment and further the process of quality assurance in the VET system. The introduction of quality assurance of VET in the Republic of Croatia has gained ground by adopting

to improve the system of quality assurance of VET at the national level through teacher-training events organised for VET schools. The project was designed to strengthen mechanisms of quality assurance of VET and self-assessment during implementation of the programme of the EQAVET Network. The project defined two priorities; one connected with strengthening cooperation between National Reference Points and the other with deepening the culture of quality assurance in VET, and the Agency has directed its energies to designing activities in order to strengthen capacities and support the implementation of the self-assessment process in VET schools, as well as evaluating results already achieved in the implementation of the process, in order to define areas which still need work, in order to improve the existing model of quality assurance and self-assessment.

Therefore, as part of teacher-training events and self-assessment workshops, VET schools were presented with topics connected with establishing a culture of quality in the VET system. The participants were introduced to the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET Framework), the EQAVET Recommendation, EQAVET criteria and quality indicators, as well as recommended activities which should be undertaken by providers of VET when establishing quality assurance.

Participants in the teacher-training events were also given the results of an analysis of the Croatian model of quality assurance and self-assessment, which was undertaken by VET schools as part of the project. In this part of the workshop participants shared their experience of the implementation of self-assessment and using the Self-Assessment Handbook and the e-Kvaliteta online tool. An important part was a comparison of individual experiences in the implementation of the self-assessment process in VET schools; with notable experiences presented by participants from the Vrapce Nursing School, Požega Craft School and Rijeka Medical School. The workshops were judged to be very successful by the participants, especially the presentation of examples of good practice and the exchanging of experiences. The teacher-training events were also opportunities to discuss the advantages and recommendations to improve the national framework of quality assurance and self-assessment as tools for quality assurance within the Croatian VET system, as well as the role of the Agency in providing support to schools in the implementation of this process.



the VET System Development Strategy 2008-2013 and the Vocational Education and Training Act. This has enabled the implementation of a system of quality assurance through the process of self-assessment since 2012 in VET schools. One of the goals of the new Strategy of Education, Science and Technology and the VET System Development Programme, which was implemented based on the Strategy, is the establishment of a coherent system of quality assurance of VET, and the Agency has a role in this.

The Agency represents Croatia in the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training Network (EQAVET Network) and is also the Croatian National Reference Point for quality assurance in VET (QAVET.HR). As National Reference Point the Agency is actively involved in the work of the Network and has applied for and been granted funds for the Erasmus+ project European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training: National Reference Point (EQAVET NRP), whose main purpose is

# EQAVET Study Visit in Bonn: Reflections from DEQA-VET, Germany

An article by Helena Sabbagh and Hendrik Biebeler, DEQA-VET, Germany



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At the end of January 2017, the German National Reference Point for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (DEQA-VET) invited participants to a three-day visit with a round table discussion in Bonn at the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training. Representatives of ten European reference points accepted this invitation. The title of the event was 'European Understanding of Quality Assurance in Work-Based Learning'. The aim of the programme was to achieve a greater degree of mutual understanding and transparency regarding exchange on the approaches to work-based learning in the participating Member States.



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On the first day, Helena Sabbagh, Head of DEQA-VET, explained the quality assurance of vocational training in enterprises in the German system and presented examples of quality assurance mechanisms on the basis of the training regulations. Building on this, the approaches of all vocational training systems represented were discussed. This was done on the basis of the following criteria: monitoring of training, decision-making competence for the content of the training and involvement of stakeholders in the field of vocational training. It emerged that there are gaps in the monitoring of training and that it focuses more on vocational schools than on training in enterprises. A culture of quality in enterprises is therefore of particular importance. The extent to which vocational schools or enterprises providing training define the content of training differs between the Member States, as does the scope of cross-company and company-specific content. This is also linked to the question of the speed at which the content of training is adapted. Stakeholders can have stable exchange relationships with each other or only cooperate as required. In addition, the learners' perspective must be taken into account.

On the second day, the participants initially visited the company GKN Sinter Metals. The training manager, Frank Prokop, explained that the company's trainees work in a training workshop in the first year and that part of the training is oriented towards very specific applications in the company. This explains the company's interest in having its own trainees and its high investment in training. Apart from the transfer of the required technical knowledge, learning "soft skills" presented a challenge. In addition to the vocational training, the company pursues an approach that combines the training with a university degree. This presentation was followed by a factory tour,

which provided insights into the production process in particular. The participants were able to speak to both workers and trainees.

The programme also included a visit to the professional training centre Bildungszentrum Butzweilerhof. The Centre Director, Richard Draga, and the Head of the Department for Training at the Cologne Chamber of Crafts, Arik Werle, introduced the work of the training centre. There, trainees in several trades receive training on subjects that cannot be offered by small craft enterprises. This enables these enterprises to offer training despite their sometimes limited range of activity. However, the trainees only spend a small section of their training period in the Centre. For participants, this was also appealing because they could look at workshops for several professions in one go – carpenters, bricklayers, hairdressers, opticians etc. And they were able to conduct conversations with the learners at all points.



On the third day of the visit, four vocational education and training representatives held a discussion amongst themselves and with the participants on the quality of vocational education and training in Germany: Barbara Fabian of the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Joachim Lapp of the Coordinating Association of German Industry for Vocational Education, Mario Patuzzi of the German Trade Union Confederation and Barbara Hemkes of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training. They emphasised the following specifics of the German vocational education and training system: the legal bases, especially in the form of nationally applicable training regulations, which were also the subject of the first day of the visit, the tripartite system with representatives of employers, trade unions and government, in which decisions are taken on consensus; the importance of training contracts according to prescribed models; the responsibility of trainers in the enterprises and the Chambers; the integration of trainees into their respective workforce. Major current challenges are the shrinking demand for apprenticeships among young people, the changes brought about by digitisation, the integration of refugees and the drop-out rate in training, which is perceived as being too high. The discussion with the participants covered the limits and possibilities of integrating aspects of work-related learning in mainly school-based vocational training systems – with the conclusion that they can only be applied in part and with adjustments.

## Events

### Peer Learning Activity: 'Supporting training providers to identify areas and implement actions for improvement in line with EQAVET', 29-30 March 2017, Portugal

The EQAVET Secretariat, in partnership with the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (ANQEP) in Portugal, organised a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) for participants interested in discussing the different ways to support training providers to identify areas for improvement and to implement QA approaches in line with the EQAVET.

The discussion focused on the review phase of the quality cycle and the role of feedback loops in order to improve provision in general and the following topics in particular:

- Effective practice in supporting VET trainers to implement review processes in order to improve provision.

- The QA mechanisms to be used by various stakeholders to provide feedback on VET policies and programmes. Using stakeholder's feedback to improve VET programmes (at provider level) and VET policies (at system level).
- The use of data in order to inform revision and improvement (at system and provider levels).

View the background paper, presentations at the PLA and the policy brief prepared as a result of the discussions that took place at the activity [here](#)

### EQAVET Annual Network Meeting 2017

The Annual Network Meeting of the European Quality Assurance in VET (EQAVET) Network was organised jointly by the European Commission, the EQAVET Secretariat and NCFHE in Malta on 8-9 June 2017. It was chaired by Carlo Scatoli, Unit Vocational Training, Apprenticeships and Adult Learning - DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission.

The Annual Network Meeting 2017 had three major priorities namely:

- Approval of the work of the working group on "Developing Guidelines for the work of Complementing EQAVET and the results of the Secretariat survey 2016"
- Reflection on the preparation of the network work programme 2018-2019
- Reflection on the results of work undertaken by the ET 2020 working groups and the Commission study on mapping EU systems to track VET graduates and their relevance for EQAVET

The Annual Network Meeting 2017 provided an opportunity for the National Reference Points to be updated on the EQAVET work programme 2016-2017 and on the other work related to EQAVET. Presentation of national examples of the work programme within the context of Erasmus+ provided a useful platform for discussions.

For more information on the agenda and discussions of the EQAVET Annual Network Meeting 2017, please visit our website at: [www.eqavet.eu](http://www.eqavet.eu)



EQAVET Annual Network Meeting, 8-9 June 2017, Malta

## What's New?



DISCOVER  
YOUR TALENT

European Vocational Skills Week  
2016

The European Commission is organising the [2nd European Vocational Skills Week](#) from 20 to 24 November 2017, in order to showcase the numerous opportunities that Vocational Education and Training (VET) can provide for young people and adults to “discover their talents” and develop specific skills and knowledge for the jobs of today and tomorrow. Amongst many activities to showcase excellence in VET will be the EQAVET Forum which will take place in Lille on 21 November.

## EQAVET+ Indicative Descriptors



Since the introduction of the EQAVET Recommendation there has been an increasing emphasis on the importance of work-based learning; learning outcomes; pedagogy which focuses on meeting the needs of individual learners; and the opportunity for learners to demonstrate their achievement through a wider range of learning contexts including the recognition of achievement through non-formal and informal learning.

Between 2015 and 2017, the EQAVET Network reflected on the need to be more explicit about the importance of these aspects of training/learning; and suggested an EQAVET+ approach that complements the EQAVET Recommendation and helps Member States to further strengthen their quality assurance approaches in line with EQAVET.

Click [here](#) to view the latest EQAVET+ brochure.



# EQAVET

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