



EQAVET

European Quality Assurance
in Vocational Education and Training

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

POLICY BRIEF

This series of policy briefs is designed to share the results of the EQAVET sectoral seminars with a wider audience of VET providers, policymakers and other stakeholders. The present policy brief has been prepared by the EQAVET Secretariat on the basis of the discussions at the seminars and the material provided by its expert supporting the development of the sectoral seminar approach. It reflects the opinions of the sectoral seminar participants and does not constitute an official European Commission or EQAVET position.

On quality assurance in initial & continuing vocational education and training

**EQAVET
Sectoral
Seminar**

The tourism and catering sector

Participating countries: BE, BG, EE, FI, DE, GR, HU, IE, LT, MT, SE, SI, UK

SUMMARY

This policy note is based on the EQAVET sectoral seminar on the quality assurance of education and training in the tourism and catering sector. The seminar was hosted by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB, section "Quality Assurance and Development/Instruction Personnel/Distance Learning/DEQA-VET"), and took place at **WIHOGA** School of Management for the hospitality sector in Dortmund, 8-9 December 2011. WIHOGA is considered one of the most innovative hospitality management schools in Germany¹. The seminar brought together quality assurance national reference points, VET providers, practitioners, policymakers and industry representatives from 13 member countries (all the material is available on the website www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/sectoral-seminars.aspx).

CONTEXT and INTRODUCTION

EQAVET sectoral seminars and the development of a culture of quality assurance in the EU

EQAVET sectoral seminars are an important tool for promoting and consolidating a culture of quality assurance in vocational education and training (VET) among key stakeholders. They support exchange of experience, expertise, cross fertilisation of ideas and mutual learning between countries, involving quality assurance national reference points, VET providers, industry representatives, policymakers and social partners. These sectoral seminars play an important role in deepening knowledge of the European quality assurance reference framework (EQAVET Framework) and in promoting a culture of quality assurance in VET.

Objectives - The sectoral seminars aim to: **1.** Improve and develop quality assurance in EU VET systems, with a focus on continuing VET; **2.** Reflect on how quality assurance in VET is addressed and managed in a particular industry sector; **3.** Generalise the outcomes of the discussions during the seminar in order to generate policy useful recommendations; and **4.** Identify messages in relation to the use and implementation of the EQAVET Framework.

The first round of EQAVET sectoral seminars focuses on industry sectors which are essential in meeting EU socioeconomic requirements such as healthcare, tourism and construction. This second sectoral seminar addresses the tourism and catering sector, a sector which is of particular interest as it has a long tradition of developing quality assurance in the provision of its services. It also makes a significant contribution to both gross national income and employment in Member States. In addition, qualifications in the tourism sector very often serve other industry sectors.

The TOURISM and CATERING SECTOR in EU

An overview

The Lisbon Treaty acknowledges the importance of tourism and outlines a specific competence for the European Union in this field: "the Union shall complement the action of the Member States in the tourism sector, in particular by promoting the competitiveness of Union undertakings in that sector"². The Treaty provides a new legal basis to the aim of ensuring that the EU continues to be a first class tourist destination, which requires high quality education and training in the sector. The EQAVET Framework can support Member States in achieving the Treaty's goals in this regard by providing authorities and providers with common tools for the management of quality in vocational education and training (VET)³.

¹ <http://www.wihoga.de/>

² For more information on the Lisbon Treaty visit: http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/glance/better_life/index_en.htm

³ For more information on the EQAVET Framework visit our website at: www.eqavet.eu

According to the [European Commission Enterprise and Industry Directorate General](#): *the tourism and catering sector in Europe includes the provision of a wide variety of products and destinations. It involves many different stakeholders, both public and private, with areas of competence. The regulation and training of these competences are very much decentralised, often at regional or even at local levels.* The sector is characterised by:

- Employing about 5% (up to 12 %) of the total workforce;
- Generating more than 5% (up to 10 %) of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the EU;
- Including about 1,8 million enterprises (95% with fewer than 10 people employed);
- Involving mainly (73,9 %) visitors from Europe;
- Dynamic markets as a result of demographic change, fluctuating economic conditions and highly seasonal patterns;
- Exposure to the current financial crisis;
- The need for innovation to develop new concepts and services reflecting new interests and activities, as a supplement to more traditional trends;
- Offering low pay and placing high demands on staff flexibility and mobility;
- High staff turnover and a high share of informal employment arrangements;
- Suffering from persistent skill shortages, including a high percentage of qualified personnel who leave the sector.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION and TRAINING and QUALITY ASSURANCE

Improving human resources for the tourism and catering sector through better quality assurance of VET

Quality Assurance (QA) in the education and training of tourism and catering personnel plays a crucial role in the process of ensuring the provision of quality tourism and catering services. The primary aim of QA is to stimulate VET systems, enterprises and providers to work together to improve education and training programmes, and to secure a match between the supply of skills and competences and the demand for them in the sector.

The sector covers a wide range of types of VET provision as there are many different occupations within the sector. This diversity is reflected in the definition of the sector by the NACE classification: the sector includes domestic, inbound, outbound, national and internal tourism together with tourist accommodation establishments, non-rented accommodation, same-day visits, gastronomy, events, restaurants, and catering.

Despite this diversity, the sector requires a workforce that is very flexible in order to respond to seasonal demands, new technologies and customer expectations; and that can develop desirable professional attitudes and cooperation skills. These competences are best acquired by qualified tourism and catering workers who continually upgrade their professional skills (continuing vocational education) and/or who are trained under realistic and practical working conditions (work-based learning).

Quality Assurance in VET plays an important role in ensuring the right conditions within which these competences can be developed, which strengthen the quality of services provided and raise the skills and competence levels in the sector.

The consequences for the sector of improving personnel skills are: a) increased competitiveness and b) enhanced cross border mobility of workers.

The importance of work-based learning in the tourism and catering sector and QA

Practical training gives students an understanding of the tourism and catering sector and its needs, and enables them to develop the necessary skills, competences and attitudes. This is crucially important for ensuring high quality in the provision of services in the sector as knowledgeable and motivated personnel is a main quality indicator determining demand.

On the other hand, quality assured work-based learning - which brings together the industry and education institutions - is the most efficient way of providing an up-to-date education, as students gain direct experience of the daily changes in demand, new technologies and customer expectations.

Challenges for work-based learning

a) The role of enterprises in the delivery of training

Work-based learning requires support from enterprises which are willing to take the responsibility for educating the next generation of tourism and catering employees. This is a major challenge as:

1. the availability of training places within enterprises is limited, particularly in the current economic situation;
2. the perception by enterprises of the cost and benefits involved in recruiting apprentices and in receiving learners for short periods is very often negative;
3. the provision of motivated and/or qualified trainers/mentors in the workplace requires additional investment by enterprises with uncertain returns.

These challenges are more evident in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which represent approximately 95% of all enterprises in the sector in the EU.

Germany has institutionalised the dual system in order to overcome these difficulties. In this system employers finance⁴ and retain full responsibility for the regulation and management (including QA) of the apprenticeship system, resisting State interference in these matters.

Some EU governments have introduced policies aimed at increasing profitability for enterprises which support trainees through the provision of financial incentives (e.g. tax reductions) and upgrading their prestige by involving them in the preparation of the vocational diplomas within the sector. In other countries social partners structure and manage mutual funds provided by enterprises and required by the State, in order to bear the cost of training in the sector.

b) Avoiding dropouts

One main problem for work-based learning in the sector is the high number of dropouts. A large percentage of students experience what has been termed as “practice shock”: they are often surprised by the absence of the type of glamour which has been projected by popular worldwide TV programmes featuring star chefs.

To avoid this shock, it is important that placements in enterprises are well planned and trainers/mentors are well prepared and motivated.

KEY FACTORS for developing QUALITY ASSURANCE of VET in the TOURISM and CATERING SECTOR

The discussions during this sectoral seminar enabled participants to identify a number of core areas which are important in ensuring the provision of an efficient quality assurance process in the delivery of practical training. The core areas identified include:

1. ***The need for permanent dialogue between stakeholders and schools***, which ensures the provision of education and training tailored to the market and to local needs; able to develop up-to-date competences, skills and attitudes.
2. ***Provision of trainers and mentors from the industry***: the standard of trainers/mentors in the enterprises determines?/make a difference to the students’ perception of the quality of the education. The trainers need to develop professional and personal skills. Additionally, they should have a close relationship with the schools they serve as well as internally with the management of the enterprise, so that they have an up-to-date knowledge of both worlds.
3. ***State-of-the-Art Equipment for Training***: the equipment in schools and enterprises influences the quality of the education and training provided. Many schools ensure upgraded equipment through close cooperation with a number of suppliers of equipment and/or with leading enterprises in the tourism and catering sector. These suppliers may provide equipment to training institutions for marketing reasons: they advertise the equipment to the next generation of employees. Therefore, training institutions need to invest greater efforts in building links with providers of equipment in order to increase the possibilities for securing sponsorships and keeping abreast with developments in technology.
4. ***Quality assurance, assessment and certification***: the assessment and certification process of tourism and catering qualifications should be at the interface between the educational system and the labour market taking into account their specificities. In other words, it is crucially important that both dimensions and actors (the economic and educational) are involved in the process of assessment and certification⁵. However, it is difficult often for employers to value the certification process in the sector as occupations are accessible to people with a variety of (or none) qualifications (which has important implications for the issue of career possibilities in the sector). In many cases employers in the sector are reluctant to provide training leading to a formal qualification as:
 - they may invest in the training of their own staff who could be later recruited by another enterprise (or worse, by a competitor), thus losing their investment;
 - they fear that employees may claim a pay rise, supported by or based on their formal qualification;
 - some employers may believe that to certify their workers is unnecessary and costly⁶.

Because of these factors it is important that the State education and training system plays a role, as certification often guarantees the quality of training and regulates access to further education/training, which in turn increases the overall quality and competitiveness of the sector. However, one should not underestimate the importance of labour market recognition for the certification process, i.e. it should be taken into account by employers. Very often this is only possible if the assessment and certification process engages with and involves employers. This is particularly true in SMEs.

On the other hand, some hotel chains have created their own VET programmes and diplomas for staff. This academisation process may lead to confusion amongst key stakeholders and have consequences for the conventional way of understanding VET.

⁴ Employers bear approximately 84% of the total cost of the apprenticeship system (where salaries of apprentices and trainers are the major cost). The rest of the cost (16%) is covered by the Länder (Regions). More information on the issue: <http://datenreport.bibb.de/html/3700.htm>, 2007.

⁵ In the German system, trainees who have completed their training period receive certificates from school, the enterprise and the Chambers. The latter is the most important one as it has a high social value and high degree of portability within the labour market (because of its relevance to enterprise needs). However, in this context participants noted that the role of teachers in schools needs to be more clearly recognised and their professional status acknowledged.

⁶ According to the finding of the CEDEFOP study on [Mobility in the European Tourism Sector: The Role of Transparency and Recognition of Vocational Qualifications](#), it is estimated 12% of the EU’s tourism labour force consists of foreign workers. Because of the tendency to recruit staff at lower levels, many migrants are recruited on the basis of personal qualities and experience rather than formal qualifications. Few policies on transparency and recognition of qualifications exist; and pressure to develop European standards for tourism qualifications is relatively low.

**POLICY
RECOMMENDATIONS
OR
KEY MESSAGES for
POLICYMAKERS
and VET
PROVIDERS****Recommendation at system and/or European level:**

In relation to the **development of the right skills and competences for learners**, it is important to:

- Secure work experience which covers all aspects of the sector involving the acquisition not only of practical know-how but also the right attitudes;
- Develop national standards and/or a common QA reference framework for VET in the sector which can ensure national consistency without undermining the importance of the role played by local or regional authorities in the decision-making process. There is a need to introduce some degree of flexibility as regional/local authorities are nearer to the enterprises, the labour market and the people they serve. They are in a better position to adapt the VET systems to the local economic and environmental demands of the tourism and catering market.
- Ensure that teaching and coaching focuses on the acquisition of competences and not only on how to pass the exam;

In relation to **making VET in the sector more attractive**, it is important to consider the following aspects:

- Establishing arrangements which encourage enterprises to understand and value the importance of employing people with the right qualifications and training for their business. This positive image of qualified personnel in enterprises will impact positively on trainees and trainers/mentors.
- Putting in place up-to-date guidance and counselling services for learners, which would present to them the wide range of career possibilities within the tourism and catering sector.
- Communicating the positive aspects of working in the industry by building on the economic and public interests in the sector.
- Ensuring regulated quality assurance procedures are put in place for training in enterprises; these should bring together the VET system (schools, staff and students) and enterprises, and foster transparency and continuous dialogue.
- Developing local/regional, national and/or international competitions in order to motivate students, schools and enterprises to present and document their skills and competences. These initiatives are an incentive to improve quality and to increase recognition for those who reach high levels of quality service; and
- The need to establish a structure for the recognition of skills and competences together with a number of clearly defined career paths within the sector. This calls for further work in the development of occupational standards within the sector.

Recommendation at school, SME and/or industry level:

In relation of **reducing dropout rates**, a number of activities need to be considered:

- Ensuring that student expectations are as realistic as possible. This can be achieved by establishing guidance services, by offering students the possibility to train in an enterprise very early in their career and by disseminating realistic informational material presenting the main strengths and weaknesses of working within tourism and catering.
- Reducing the 'practice shock' experienced by many students during training and/or in the workplace.

In relation to **work-based learning and training** and to **secure work placements within enterprises** in the sector, it is important to:

- Ensure that enterprises are able and willing to provide training placements. Germany conceives training as a long-term investment for the industry as a whole, which ensures a positive attitude towards training by enterprises. Also, the fact that even small enterprises are strongly organised contributes to promoting a positive perception of training.
- Develop a 'training culture' (in particular in SMEs), which implies a change of attitudes. In some cases, enterprises may be persuaded of the value of training if they are supported through financial incentives, close engagement of social partners and/or by involving them in the development of vocational diplomas.
- Foster local cooperation between firms or the creation of networks of interaction between SMEs in the sector in order to develop a strategy which would reduce the cost of training –including mentors – and the negative perception of the value of pursuing formal employee qualifications. Local governments should contribute to the formation of these networks by facilitating the establishment of systematic mechanisms to allow stakeholders to share the cost and benefits of the training of future personnel. The key is to foster a perception of increasing the overall competitiveness and quality of the industry within the region, in order to attract visitors.
- The social partners, the Chambers and the schools can support SMEs by reducing the administrative burdens and any unnecessary bureaucracy involved in these processes.
- Develop agreed definitions for the roles of trainers, teachers and mentors and ensure that trainers have the required professional and personal skills, competences and attitude to work effectively with students.

Schools should have policies on **staff development and review** which include the following aspects:

- Teachers should have regular links with practical work in the sector (e.g. by working for a period in an enterprise).
- Teachers need to build up a personal network of contacts with enterprises with the support of the school.
- There is a need to increase the role of students in the process of ensuring the quality of provision of their own education and training. This requires clear structures through which students can influence the different processes in place.