



# Report

## Annual Network Meeting 2018

**Date: 20-21 June 2018**

**Venue: Sofia, Bulgaria**

### Introduction

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This EQAVET Annual Network Meeting was organised by the European Commission and EQAVET Secretariat and hosted by the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria. The EQAVET Annual Network Meeting is the decision-making body of the Network which meets once a year. The meeting provides the strategic direction for the work of the EQAVET Network and responds to the ongoing policy needs concerning the quality assurance of VET. It provides the opportunity for discussion, allowing for different perspectives while striving for common solutions which benefit all Network members.

Twenty-five EU countries were represented at the Annual Network Meeting. Apologies were received from Denmark, Lithuania, Luxemburg and Slovakia. The Social Partners were represented by the European Trade Union confederation (ETUC) and UEAPME. The European Training Foundation (ETF) and the European Development Centre for Vocational Education and Training (CEDEFOP) were also represented.

The Annual Network Meeting was chaired by Joao Santos and Jan Varchola, Unit Vocational Training, Apprenticeships and Adult Learning - DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission.

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

### Opening speeches and Introduction to the Annual Network Meeting 2018

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The meeting was officially opened and participants were welcomed by Maria Todorova, Director VET Directorate, Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria. She noted that the meeting was organised under the Bulgarian Presidency which has provided an opportunity for enhancing reflection at national level on key areas of VET, inter alia, the future and modernisation of VET, measures to track VET graduates, pedagogical approach and teachers and trainers. All of these areas address key elements outlined in the New Skills Agenda. The work of the EQAVET Network and the discussion taking place at the meeting support the reflection on how to improve the use of the EU instruments and cooperation in the field of VET.

Joao Santos welcomed participants to the meeting and thanked the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria for hosting the meeting. He provided an update on the European VET policy and programmes; and on the EU framework budget for 2021-2027.

He presented the proposal to support the establishment of Platforms of Vocational Excellence to develop the concept of "Vocational excellence", which has been called for since 2004. The proposal aims is to support the establishment of a framework for transnational "Platforms of Vocational Excellence" by connecting existing training providers, and their networks, chambers,

etc. Each platform will share a common interest in a specific economic sector or thematic societal challenge. They would link with European Universities Networks. The primary aim is to foster excellence so that VET providers play a pro-active leadership role in regional development and smart specialisation strategies. The partnerships could include the development of joint VET curricula, anticipating future skill needs, strategies for mobility of learners, teachers, trainers or VET leaders; sharing of innovative teaching and training methods, and resources and equipment. Promoting excellence in VET increases its attractiveness.

He also presented the programme and events to be organised as part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Vocational Skills Week taking place under the Austrian Presidency. The EQAVET Forum will be part of this and will be in Vienna 6-7 November 2018. He noted that the Vocational Skills Week will include 'excellence awards' and he presented the categories under which an award may be made.

The presentation is available [here](#).

### Quality assurance in the EU policy context – update on EU policy developments with relevance to EQAVET

Jan Varchola and Koen Bois d'Enghien from the European Commission provided an overview of EU related policy developments.

Jan presented the context and aims of the European Education Area; and the proposal for a Recommendation on the automatic recognition of diplomas and learning periods abroad. The proposal suggests a step-by-step approach to support Member States in ensuring there is automatic recognition of:

- higher education qualifications gained in one Member State and used for the purpose of further studies;
- upper secondary qualifications giving access to higher education;
- the outcomes from a learning period abroad in secondary and higher education.

The initiative will foster transparency and build trust by the further development of QA instruments in VET in line with EQAVET.

Jan also mentioned the provisional plans for the review of Education and Training 2020. There will be inputs from different stakeholders including the preparation of an Opinion by the Advisory Committee on VET (ACVT) on a "Shared Vision of future-fit VET systems 2030".

The presentation is available [here](#).

Koen presented the key elements of the Council Recommendation on tracking graduates. This includes the state of play of the EU pilot survey of tertiary education graduates and the findings of the mapping study on VET graduate tracking measures. He noted that the Recommendation aims to improve information on the labour market outcomes of education and training; and the challenges or success factors of graduates' employability in particular regions and sectors. As part of this proposal, the Commission invites Member States to create or develop by 2020 their graduate tracking systems based on data from relevant administrative databases as well as (longitudinal) graduate surveys. As part of this Council Recommendation, a new Network of experts dealing with producing graduate tracking data will be established. The Network will meet

for the first time in September 2018. He also presented the key findings of the mapping study which was finalized in March 2018.

The presentation is available [here](#).

### **Update on relevant work in QA of VET from ETF and CEDEFOP**

Elizabeth Watters, European Training Foundation (ETF), provided an overview of the on-going work that ETF is developing in relation to enhancing quality assurance of VET in partner countries (South Eastern Europe and Turkey and Southern & Eastern Mediterranean). She explained that ETF is working with these countries in order to build a multi-national scientific community involving national ministries and institutions responsible for VET quality assurance. The aims are to improve quality assurance through international peer learning; and implement jointly agreed strategies and work plans. These have been inspired by the ongoing work of the EQAVET Network and the EQAVET Framework. Currently the partner countries are working with the EQAVET indicators. She presented the events which have been organised with partner countries to promote quality assurance in VET; and appreciated the support provided by the EQAVET Secretariat and other Network members for these events.

The presentation is available [here](#).

Tina Bertzeletou from the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) presented CEDEFOP's current research projects on: 'The changing nature and role of VET in Europe'. She presented the indicative trends for the future, i.e.: more modularisation, transversal skills, fewer VET qualifications, further expansion to higher VET, further blurring of the frontiers between (IVET and CVET general education and VET). She pointed out that these trends suggest some conclusions and issues for debate, inter alia, there is a need to attribute to VET its real value for society and the economy. The VET sector has more than 10 million EU-students attending programmes at EQF levels 3 and 4, and the scale of this involvement is often underestimated. The research has identified the need for qualifications to span several subsectors and involve institutions and providers which are currently operating individually.

The presentation is available [here](#).

### **Reports from the EQAVET Secretariat on the work of the Network and from the EQAVET working group on the strategic role of QA in VET within the EU policy context**

Sean Feerick, Director of the Secretariat, presented progress in implementing the EQAVET Network's Strategic Plan 2017-2018. The Strategic Plan was designed to support Member States in developing their strategies for the implementation of the Recommendation by focusing on deepening the culture of QA, the transversal role of EQAVET in the EU E&T policies and the dissemination of good practices and increasing cooperation. He noted that this work builds on accumulated experience; on the work on complementing EQAVET undertaken in 2017 and 2018 and this enables the Network to contribute to the developing policy context. He presented the on-going activities of the Network organised by the Secretariat. These include:

- peer learning activities in 2017-2019 on key topics:

- QA procedures for WBL at the provider level in line with EQAVET focusing on developing national guidelines for self-assessment (Sweden, Spring 2019);
  - Involving teachers and trainers in the QA processes (Prague, Oct 2018);
  - Higher VET and the role of QA (Larnaca, March 2018);
  - Using the EQAVET indicators to accredit VET providers (Tallinn, Sept 2017);
  - Supporting training providers to identify and implement actions for improvement in line with EQAVET (Lisbon, March 2017);
- EQAVET Forums as part of EU Vocational Skills Week. These provide an opportunity to disseminate the experience of the EQAVET Network; and share practical approaches and experience of working with EQAVET. The Forum in 2018 will be organised as part of the Austrian Presidency and will focus on the concept of learner's voice by providing first-hand examples of learner engagement with their training;
  - The Secretariat Survey in 2018 which includes a supplement on EQAVET+ and provides an opportunity for updating the information provided in 2016. It is envisaged that the results will be published in autumn 2018. The survey is an important source of information as it provides an overview of progress; identifies areas for attention and policy priorities, and provides information for use in the Commission report to the European Parliament on the implementation of the Recommendation.
  - EQAVET working group 2017-2018 on 'The role of QA in the EU policy context'. This reflected strategically on how to strengthen EQAVET's contribution to the QA of VET across the ET2020 process and its successors; and on the future of EQAVET. The group met on three occasions: Nov 2017, Feb and April 2018 in the Hague. 17 Member States, CEDEFOP, ETF, EU social partners and the European Commission were members of the group.

Sean explained that the Secretariat is participating in NRP events organised as part of the ERASMUS+ funding; and is supporting their work through the on-line portal. The Secretariat has also participated in ETF events and initiatives; and in the DGVT meeting / peer review in Sofia in April 2018.

He noted that the work of the working group will be the central part of discussions during the Annual Network Meeting. This will enable the Network to reach agreement on this important input for the on-going EU reflection on VET policy.

The presentation is available [here](#)

### **Working Group 2017 – 2018 on the role of QA in the EU policy context**

The chair of the working group, Thea Van den Boom, presented the main outputs from the group. Matters for clarification were addressed by Keith Brumfitt – the supporting expert of the working group. Thea noted that the mandate of the group was agreed at the 2017 Annual Network Meeting; and asked the group to consider and identify priorities for the quality assurance of VET; take account of European initiatives and developments in Member States; and prepare early ideas on any revised EQAVET Recommendation. The group aimed to ensure that the EQAVET Network contributes to the developing policy context and any associated future changes in governance, methodology and focus. The group focused on strengthening the quality assurance of VET in the European context by:

- proposing a set of principles for VET (covering all types of VET, all areas of the education and training processes, the provider and the system level, the synergies with recent and

forthcoming European developments affecting VET and setting out a clear view on strategic issues affecting the implementation, evaluation and effectiveness of any quality assurance approach);

- considering 10 strategic issues 1. whether to focus on the whole Recommendation or the QA framework in the Recommendation's annexes; 2. how to cover all areas of VET; 3. the indicators; 4. the indicative descriptors; 5. reporting and/or monitoring; 6. connectedness; 7. sustainability; 8. dissemination; 9. placing employers and learners at the centre of VET; 10. the question of level – system and provider.

The group's reflections were explained in the paper received in advance of the meeting, and were based on the group's expertise in using the EQAVET Recommendation and understanding of the main issues arising from implementation. Thea noted that this working group had an advisory rather than a decision-making role.

Thea and Keith asked the Network to agree on this approach and on the issues identified in the paper presented to the Annual Network Meeting. Time was given to the Network to discuss these issues during the meeting. The Network was asked to reflect on whether the strategic areas should be considered as part of a review of the European approach to the quality assurance of VET? and if they were accurately described in the paper produced by the working group?

The presentation is available [here](#)

### **The Interim findings of the study on VET policy instruments. Update on the implementation of the EQAVET work programme 2016**

Monika Auzinger from Research + Consulting 3s, Unternehmensberatung GmbH, presented the interim findings of the study carried out on behalf of the European Commission on the implementation of the EU transparency tools of the Copenhagen process, i.e. EQAVET and ECVET. The study, together with the work of the EQAVET working group and the Secretariat survey will inform the Commission's reflection on the future developments in the area of VET and EU cooperation.

Monika explained the context, the research methodology which was being used, the consultation process followed in the study and the progress that had been made. She presented the emerging findings and outlined eight potential scenarios for the future of the instruments. These have been identified from the early research - Monika asked participants to reflect on which of these scenarios describe better the needs of countries.

The presentation is available [here](#)

The paper from the working group and the interim results of the ICF/3s study were discussed in workshops where participants agreed the following:

- The priorities and the areas identified in the paper are correct and properly described. However, some groups noted that there was a need to include a short contextual introduction to clarify the status and the scope of these priorities and areas. Also, some groups mentioned the need to simplify the paper and refer to the policy objectives, i.e. accountability, mobility, employability; the voluntary nature of EU guidance on VET,

subsidiarity, and the importance of ensuring Member States were able to take ownership of, and lead the developments

- The Network noted the need to emphasise the importance of developing a culture of continuous improvements toward excellence in VET.
- A need to refer to teaching and learning, the lifelong learning perspective, teachers and trainers and social inclusion.
- In relation to the strategic issues, the Network agreed that these were appropriately described. However, some participants noted there is a need to ensure the involvement of the Network in EU developments and initiatives which are relevant to the quality and QA of VET.
- Also, the Network noted the need to acknowledge the diversity of systems,

The scenarios presented in the ICF/3s study were also discussed in the workshops. Participants noted:

- There is a need to develop scenarios for EQAVET which are separate to those for ECVET as the 'future' for ECVET and EQAVET are not and should not be the same.
- The policy developments and needs are different for these two instruments and cannot be compared.
- Not all scenarios describe and address the current needs of Member States; some overlap or some are not mutually excluded. The Network agreed that a combination of features from several scenarios may be a better option.
- There were also other scenarios that should be considered.

### Next Steps

The paper will be amended based on the results of the discussion. The amended version will be sent to all members of the Network for approval before is published on the website. Similarly, the feedback on the scenarios will be used in preparing the next draft of the study findings.

### Appointment of the new EQAVET Steering Committee for 2018-2020

Seven nominations with letters of support were received by the deadline of 15 June 2018. The nomination received were: Franz Gramlinger (Austria), Nino Buic (Croatia), Ismene Tramontano (Italy), Katalin Molnar-Stadler (Hungary), Inita Juhneva (Latvia), Thea van den Boom (The Netherlands), and Dana Stroie (Romania). The Secretariat proposed to accept all seven candidates because although the number of nominations exceeded the number of places available for elected members, some of the nominations were from countries which will hold the Council Presidency over the coming two years. The Network agreed with this proposal and welcomed the members of newly appointed steering committee.

Therefore, the composition of the steering committee for 2018-2020 will be as follows: elected members: Franz Gramlinger, Nino Buic, Ismene Tramontano, Katalin Molnar-Stadler, Inita Juhneva, Thea van den Boom and Dana Stroie; Presidency Trio: BG, AT, RO – from July 2018 – December 2018. AT, RO, FI – from January 2019 – June 2019; RO, FI, HR – from July 2019 – December 2019; FI, HR, DE – from January 2020 – June 2020; Social Partners: ETUC, UEAPME; Scientific Advisors: CEDEFOP, ETF; EU VET provider associations representative: EUproVET; Chair: European Commission

The 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the new steering committee will take place on October 16, 2018 in Brussels.

## National Reference Points work programme supported by Erasmus+

### Update on the Erasmus+ call for Proposals 2017- 2018

Laura Paoletti (EACEA) presented work related to the NRPs' work programmes supported under the restricted call ERASMUS+ programme 2017-2018, within the key activity 3 - Support for policy reform. This grant supports NRPs to further develop QA mechanisms in line with the EQAVET Recommendation and/or establish continuous information and feedback loops in IVET and CVET systems based on learning outcomes (Riga Priority). The current allocation is €2 million, there was a requirement for 15% co-funding and the maximum grant per project was €150 000. 19 NRPs received a grant.

Most of the proposals focused on strengthening mutual cooperation among NRPs and deepening the culture of QA of VET. The projects include activities that address key issues for Member States.

The presentation is available [here](#).

### Presentation on the key messages from the study on 'Strengthening the Role of EQAVET National Reference Points – Insights from the study of their work programmes under the Erasmus+ programme 2016-2017' - Giorgio Allulli, EQAVET Expert

Giorgio Allulli presented the key findings of the study undertaken by the Secretariat on the NRPs' work programmes under the ERASMUS+ grant in 2016. The study sought to record the NRPs' insights arising from their organisation and management of a project. Giorgio highlighted the added value of the NRPs' work, and the lessons that had been learnt. The study, together with a policy note on the main findings, is available on the EQAVET website at: [www.eqavet.eu/Materials-Resources/Publications](http://www.eqavet.eu/Materials-Resources/Publications)

These insights provide a good understanding of what is happening at the national level. These insights will be used to inform the work of the Network and support the development of any subsequent calls to the NRPs under the Erasmus+ programme.

The presentation is available [here](#).

### Discussion in plenary on how the NRP projects can contribute to the work of the EQAVET Network after presentations of the projects from:

#### NRP in Sweden – Svante Sandell, Swedish National Agency for Education

Svante presented the work of the NRP's current project. He noted that the aim is to bring key stakeholders closer, particularly social partners in order to develop an approach where they can have an active, and not just consultative, role in the quality assurance process. The challenge was to balance the provision of transversal skills while responding to particular needs of industry. The project is reflecting on how indicators can be used to monitor the effectiveness of quality assurance approaches, in particular the provision of feedback from various stakeholders at the system level. The NRP staff have visited other NRPs and have carried out a survey on quality assurance mechanisms in other European countries to learn from them.

The presentation is available [here](#).

### **NRP in Bulgaria – Radostinka Vasileva and Vanya Tividosheva, Ministry of Education and Science**

Radostinka presented the objectives of their ERASMUS+ project i.e. EQAVET: ‘Vision for Revision’ (VIREO). The project aims to review the existing skills forecasting mechanisms, analyse available data and identify leading indicators for VET performance. This will help the NRP support VET schools, policy makers and relevant stakeholders. This project is supporting reform to strengthen the identification of future labour market needs. Vanya mentioned the fruitful study visit to Finland hosted by the Finnish National Agency for Education and Culture (EDUFI) - the EQAVET NRP in Finland. The visit was organised around the following topics: VET reform in Finland, labour market relevance of VET provision, feedback loops, and VET graduates tracking system.

The presentation is available [here](#).

### **NRP in Croatia – Nino Buić, National Agency for VET and Adult Education**

Nino presented the main objectives of their project which focuses on reviewing the self-assessment approach in Croatian VET schools, strengthening capacities of the NRP and establishing links with other NRPs. He mentioned the organisation of EU PLAs and study visits to The Netherlands and Austria. A major output of the project is the organisation and development of transnational peer reviews in partnership with Slovenia, Austria and Finland. Nino also mentioned that 19 workshops for VET providers, headmasters, teachers and quality committee members, led by the National Agency’s sector advisors and members of the NRP, have been organised as part of the project. The NRP is also piloting the introduction of a VET graduate tracking system.

The presentation is available [here](#).

Juergen Horschinegg from the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research in Austria presented the priorities and events for VET of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The future of VET is a key focus of the Presidency in order to respond to rapid technological developments, globalisation and global value chains, demographic ageing and migration. All of which calls for structural change in EU VET. The renewal of the strategic framework for European policy cooperation in VET, the ET 2020 follow-up, the Recommendation on Mutual Recognition, and the Recommendation on Language Learning will also be discussed. Juergen explained that the EU Vocational Skills Week and the EQAVET Forum will be organised in Austria under the Presidency.

The presentation is available [here](#).

## **Closing remarks**

The Chairperson, Jan Varchola, closed the meeting. He acknowledged that the work on QA developed by the EQAVET Network is of key importance, very relevant and provides an important



input for the current reflection of the European Commission in relation to the future plans for the work on EU policy for VET.

He thanked the hosts, Network members, the experts, the representatives of the social partners and other observers and groups for their attendance, active cooperation and commitment to the Network. He also thanked the Secretariat for its work.

Sean Feerick thanked the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria for supporting the organisation of the meeting; and participants for their input and commitment in the discussions. He thanked the chairs and rapporteurs of the workshop for their help and cooperation. He noted that the Secretariat will amend the paper of the working group based on participants' input and circulate to the Network for agreement before final publication.

All the presentations at the Annual Forum are on the EQAVET [website](#).