



Introduction

This report has been drafted by the EQAVET National Reference Point of Belgium (Fr) and describes the main quality assurance arrangements in vocational education and training.

SECTION A - DESCRIPTION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE ARRANGEMENTS

1. Initial VET (IVET)

Introduction

IVET is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education in the Walloon-Brussels Federation.

1.1 Quality assurance arrangements at system level in IVET

- National Framework for quality assurance in initial VET – who is in charge of what?
In Belgium (Fr), IVET includes mainly vocational education and training delivered at secondary level (lower and upper). IVET falls under the remit of the ministry in charge of education for the French-speaking community.

IVET includes full-time education, provided by vocational education institutions, and dual vocational education and training (based on practical training in the workplace) with training. Dual vocational education and training implies a partnership between a VET provider, a pupil and a company. Qualifications awarded through dual pathways represent about 10% of qualifications awarded at secondary level.

The constitutional principle of freedom of education in Belgium limits the role of the regional and Community authorities in education and training and prevents any restrictive measures to the organisation of schools. Schools have considerable autonomy in management and pedagogy and educational methods. In term of quality assurance, it means that networks of VET providers and VET providers themselves are responsible for ensuring the quality of their training offer. At Community level, regulatory mechanisms to ensure quality of education and training are provided in this school autonomy context. There is a quality assurance framework at system level: the inspection services have been responsible for quality assurance in IVET since 2007 (2007 Decree).

- Statutory stakeholder involvement in quality assurance in initial VET systems
Overall, the stakeholders involved in VET systems include:
 - The government of the French-speaking community
 - Networks of other controlling authorities
 - VET providers
 - Inspection and pedagogy councils
 - Representatives of employers and trade unions

As the main controlling authorities, the government of the French-speaking community and

networks of other controlling authorities are involved (policy design, implementation, monitoring) in initial VET systems. The government also provides funding to VET providers and coordinates inspection. In 2009 a Decree introduced regional VET committees. These committees may (voluntarily) be set up by VET providers to ensure dialogue with other VET providers, public authorities and networks of controlling authorities, with a view to rationalising the education and training provision in a given territory.

The 2012 Decree on validation of learning reinforces the role of these stakeholders in the definition and validation of learning units.

Regarding other stakeholder involvement in the activities of the inspection body, the 2007 decree foresees that the inspection and pedagogy councils in place at the level of each education and training provider network should cooperate. In practice, this translates into, for instance, the inspection reports being shared with the pedagogic councils of VET provider networks. Besides this formal requirement, activities of the inspectorate body and their results are usually presented to and discussed with VET authorities at regional or community level.

- Requirements for evaluation and review

There is no specific requirement for evaluation and review at system level, apart from those linked to the Inspection Service. Inspection is de facto mandatory for VET providers. For instance, in the case of subsidised VET providers, the decision to grant subsidies to a VET provider will be based on the outcomes of the inspection report about this VET provider.

- Identification of training needs

Le FOREM (regional public employment service) monitors the labour market under the 'Job Focus' exercise. The objective of Job Focus is to identify labour force shortage risks before they occur. Le FOREM's identification of training needs is used by the government in the framework of the work of the Education system steering committee. Regarding IVET, results from inspections are also taken into account to match education and training offer to skill needs.

- Who can deliver VET and under what conditions – accreditation or other requirements on VET providers

As introduced above, initial VET in French-speaking Belgium is delivered by schools that belong to different networks depending on their legal status 66:

- The network set up and administered by the French-speaking community of Belgium

- The network of subsidised VET providers (in general these are set up by municipalities and provinces)

- The network of subsidised VET providers that are not set up by public authorities but which have independent status. It contains a sub-network of VET schools set up by confessional bodies.

The Wallonia-Brussels Federation is the 'controlling authority' for the institutions that fall under its remit. In other cases, (subsidised VET providers), the controlling authorities are part of controlling authorities networks that represent them at government level.

According to the principle of freedom in education, it is possible to set up schools with very limited links to the public authorities. There is no accreditation process as such, but the conditions to obtain funding and to award recognised qualifications are much more restrictive. Schools that aim to benefit from funding (subsidies) from the community must comply with the provisions of laws, decrees, and regulations with regard to their structure (that should be approved by the Minister), the curriculum (teaching should be in line with applicable decrees, in particular, in the case of compulsory education, with respect to the core skills and final achievement targets), health and hygiene standards, etc. Schools must also comply with their obligation regarding inspection.

Certification – assessment and validation of learning (system level)

Assessments are required for each IVET provider, in compliance with the education and training regulation. However, due to the freedom of education principle, the type and frequency of these assessments in the schools that belong to their network are left up to the controlling authorities.

The 2012 Decree on validation of learning introduced the validation of learning units in VET. This

validation is to be piloted in a limited number of training fields, based on definitions elaborated by the government in consultation with VET stakeholders. Implementation will be carried out with the support of the inspectorate body.

- **Monitoring, inspection and use of indicators**
Monitoring is the responsibility of the Education System Steering Committee. This advisory body systematically collects data about pupil progression through the system, about the system's functioning and results, and making proposals. The work of the Steering Committee is prospective and aims to prepare informed decision at system level.

Regarding inspection, the review organised by the system may focus on a class, an institution or a group of institutions. The legal basis does not specify the requirements for control and review (e.g. launching mechanism, frequency, etc.). Heads of education and training institutions may proactively request a review of their staff.

- **How is the quality assurance implementation monitored?**
Reforms of quality assurance in initial VET since 2003 (beginning of EU cooperation)-2008 and since 2009 (adoption of EQAVET Recommendation). The following reforms concern IVET and CVET both at system and provider level:
 - Creation of the Inspectorate body with the 2007 Decree. The body was created to monitor and evaluate quality and performance of teachers, VET providers as well as the system as a whole
 - In 2009 a Decree introduced regional vocational education and training committees to rationalise the education and training provision in a given territory
 - In 2010 the government created a professions and qualifications department, which is in charge of developing job and training descriptions in terms of learning outcomes, applicable to the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (not implemented yet)). This Department is also in charge of assessing whether VET institutions comply with the job and training descriptions and reach these learning outcomes
 - In 2012, a Decree on validation of learning introduced the validation of learning units in VET.

1.2 Quality assurance arrangements at provider level in IVET

- **Planning at VET provider level (including identification of training needs)**
In line with the freedom in education principle VET providers are in charge of defining their strategy. School heads are responsible for planning (school plan) and monitoring (annual activity reports). The controlling authority also reports on the activities of VET providers in its network.
- **Requirements for monitoring and review (self-assessment)**
The role of inspection has been detailed above. The following sub-sections will focus on other requirements and practices at provider level and mention inspection when relevant at provider level.

Both reports are reviewed by the inspectorate body. The latter may formulate recommendations on the schools' or the network's activity reports. In this case, the network has to take action in relation to these recommendations (implementation at network level or VET provider level).
- **Certification, assessment and validation of learners**
Each school may choose the type and frequency of assessments in line with the remit of their controlling authorities. In full time education and training, certification is carried out by the class council at the end of each year. The class council examines whether pupils have successfully completed the year, i.e. met the required knowledge and competencies for each of the subjects concerned. For dual VET, certification is the responsibility of the class council of secondary dual vocational education and training. Dual education students must reach the same level of competence as full-time students.
- **Stakeholder involvement**
A school council is created at provider level by each provider. This council brings together the

head of the institution, delegates from the controlling authority, and representatives of staff, social, cultural and economic sectors, parents, and pupils. The school council is involved in planning (preparation of the school plan) and monitoring implementation of the school plan (annual activity reports).

2. Continuous VET (CVET)

Introduction

CVET in French-speaking Belgium includes CVET for adults and VET schemes specifically designed for job seekers, promoted by the public employment services (Le FOREM, Bruxelles Formation) and for workers, promoted by the VET providers focusing on specific sectors, such as management of SME training (IFAPME and CFPME).

In CVET, there is neither unified provision nor unified quality arrangements. The government of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation coordinates CVET in the Wallonia- Brussels Federation, within the boundaries of the freedom of education principle. It organises CVET for adults. Other CVET providers (institutions or groups of institutions) propose their own quality assurance systems, but none is predominant. The four above mentioned CVET providers (Le Forem, Bruxelles Formation, IFAPME, the CFPME) have chosen the ISO 9001 QA standard as a common QA framework. This choice is, for each, an internal decision.

2.1 Quality assurance arrangements at system level in CVET

- National Framework for quality assurance in CVET – who is in charge of what?
CVET for adults falls within the remit of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. The Higher Council organises CVET for adults in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation.

The government of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation is responsible for general policy on continuing education for adults, but regions are responsible for the provision of CVET. The main actors at regional level are:

- Le FOREM: VET agency and the public employment service for the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (except Brussels). Aims to support people to manage their career plans and enterprises to manage their human resources. Le FOREM plays the role of 'coordinator of the job market in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. Le FOREM coordinates its VET centres (owned centres and competences centres).
- Bruxelles Formation: VET agency and public employment service for the Wallonia Brussels Federation (Brussels only).

IFAPME and the SFPME are other important CVET actors. IFAPME provides training adapted to the specific requirements of the self-employed and SMEs. The SFPME is IFAPME's counterpart in the Brussels Region.

The majority (roughly 90%) of CVET is provided via a partnership between Le FOREM, Bruxelles Formation and IFAPME. Le FOREM is responsible for around 40,000 trainees per year, while the other partners are responsible for another 10,000 trainees.

- Statutory stakeholder involvement in quality assurance in CVET systems
Given the complexity of the institutional organisation of VET in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, public authorities have set up working groups and transversal committees to ensure information and coherence of the policies and actions of VET stakeholders.

In CVET for adults, stakeholders are represented in the Higher Council that brings together representatives of the networks of controlling authorities, of school management and teaching staff, of trainees, the ministry in charge of education in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, the Inspection Service and social partners.

Le FOREM and Bruxelles Formation are jointly managed by representatives of the workers and of the employers. Le FOREM also consults its committees in charge of employment and training at local level.

- Requirements for evaluation and review/Identification of training needs

Planning for CVET is the responsibility of both the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (ministry of education, for schools) and the regional government (for job seekers). The Higher Council has an advisory role in relation to the adequacy of CVET for adults as a response to socio-economic and cultural needs, as well as on matters to do with promoting, developing and improving this form of education.

Le FOREM, in its role of regional public employment service, monitors the labour market under the 'Job Focus' exercise'. 'Job Focus' aims to identify areas in which there is a mismatch between training and needs of the labour market, as well as to anticipate future skills needs. The body, as training provider, benefits from this training needs identification exercise.

- Who can deliver VET and under what conditions – accreditation or other requirements on CVET providers

The government of the French-speaking community is responsible for the accreditation of VET providers in general. For CVET for adults, there is no accreditation of providers, except for those providers granting certification linked to regulated professions.

Le FOREM, Bruxelles Formation, IFAPME and the SFPME have an agreement with the Wallonia Brussels Federation, under which they carry out their VET provision and coordination activities. Le FOREM and Bruxelles Formation act as public employment services; therefore there is no need for its VET providers to be accredited (including sub-contractors). IFAPME and the SFPME accredit their VET providers. Accreditation implies compliance with criteria related to security, equipment, staff, etc.

- Certification – assessment and validation of learning (system level)

For CVET for adults, the French-speaking Community (Walloon and Brussels Region grouped under the Wallonia-Brussels Federation) is responsible for the organisation of continuous assessment and examinations and award and statutory recognition of achievement certificates.

For CVET provided by Le FOREM, Bruxelles Formation, IFAPME and the SFPME, certification and assessment is the responsibility of the CVET providers. Regarding validation, a skills validation consortium has been established, which brings together representatives of the different types of CVET provision: CVET for adults (the ministry in charge of education), workers and job seekers (Le FOREM, Bruxelles Formation, IFAPME and the SFPME). The Skills Validation Consortium ensures validation of non-formal learning.

- Monitoring, inspection and use of indicators

Quality assurance in CVET for adults is the remit of the Inspection Service. The same system level requirements apply as for IVET providers. Under the agreements between the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and Le FOREM, Bruxelles Formation, IFAPME and the SFPME these VET providers have to report on a series of indicators – mainly output indicators - aiming to show that they are fulfilling their mission:

■ Le FOREM uses indicators which feed into a monitoring database. These indicators are related to training, integration of trainees, trainee satisfaction, human resource development inside Le FOREM (training dept.), as well as budgetary and financial aspects of the organisation. The monitoring database is updated on a monthly basis

■ Bruxelles Formation collects indicators at three levels: activity-level indicators; process level indicators and management-level indicators. The latter are dedicated to strategy and management of CVET in the Brussels area. Some of these indicators are in line with EQAVET indicators

■ IFAPME and the SFPME focus on the indicators agreed in their contract with the Wallonia Brussels Federation. IFAPME reports on these indicators (indicators dashboard) on a biannual basis.

- Requirements CVET providers have to comply with (if not described in 1st section)

However, Le FOREM, Bruxelles Formation, IFAPME require its service providers to provide

evidence of quality assurance measures:

- Le FOREM developed a quality assurance system based on ISO 9001 requirements and received ISO 9001 certification in 1997. The certification focuses on the training courses provided by Le FOREM, in particular the procedures (training guidelines, the monitoring of trainees, etc.) which apply when partner organisations or external trainers operate at Le FOREM
- Bruxelles Formation (as well as its counterpart in the Flemish Community) adopted the same standard. Bruxelles Formation also uses the EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) for self-assessment of its VET providers
- IFAPME has also obtained ISO 9001 certification. Most IFAPME training centres received the Qfor label in 2008 and IFAPME had the objective of having all its training centres have the label in 2010. The Qfor Method is a modular system of quality evaluation and certification of training institutes and consultancy firms, based on two kinds of quality control:
 - Client satisfaction: past experiences of clients, based on the assumption that if past clients were satisfied, there is a high probability that future clients will also be satisfied
 - Processes: conformity of the business processes and resources to specific quality criteria, which focus on the appropriateness of tools and methods for each situation, in order to ensure effectiveness.

2.2 Quality assurance arrangements at provider level in CVET

- Planning at CVET provider level (including identification of training needs)
See above
- Requirements for monitoring and review (self-assessment)
See above
- Certification, assessment and validation of learners
See above
- Stakeholder involvement
See above

SECTION B – INTERACTION BETWEEN NATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EQAVET

- National Reference Point – Introduction

There is no formal NRP in place in Belgium (Fr). The Wallonia-Brussels Federation has not formally appointed NRP, but Le FOREM and the French-speaking community have been informally asked to act as NRP in the meantime. The main obstacle to appointing a NRP is that there is no 'obvious' candidate for this position. To create a consensus, the NRP should represent all aspects of VET in the region (IVET, CVET, validation, etc.). This task could not be done by one actor only.

- National approach to enhance quality assurance

There is no common approach to quality assurance at regional level, but each of the main actors adopted measures to ensure quality in the VET area under their responsibility. There has been discussion about establishing a joint approach to quality assurance among VET actors in the region/community, which would be open to all VET providers in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. This would involve, for instance, the creation of a joint quality assurance agency, which would be in charge of quality assurance at all levels of education and training (including IVET and CVET). IVET and CVET actors agree that a common approach to quality is necessary to ensure mutual trust among VET actors. For the time being, most actors have developed their own quality approach and they are not ready to change (this is particularly true for IVET), even if it means having a common and trusted approach with other actors at regional or European level.

The education and training advisory body (CEF) has played an important role in triggering the discussion on quality assurance. In 2010, the advisory body published a background document about quality assurance in VET. It also organised events where the different quality approaches in place were presented to VET stakeholders.

The following barriers have been identified:

- There is ongoing VET reform in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and priority has been given to ECVET-related aspects of the reform. The implementation effort that is required from school staff is considered heavy, in terms of resources and time. It was decided to focus on this reform before launching quality-related reforms, especially as it would directly impact on the same target group
 - Some VET provider and their networks are reluctant to give up on their own quality approach for a (new) joint approach to quality assurance in VET.
- Influence of EQAVET on national developments of quality assurance
- Quality assurance in VET is considered high in the agenda, its European dimension under EQAVET to a lesser extent. VET actors understand that they need to work together on this issue, they are aware that the EU has supported an initiative in this direction and have been involved in activities aiming to see the extent to which quality approaches in VET are in line with EQAVET.

In terms of EQAVET's influence on the policy agenda in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, EQAVET has put quality assurance in VET higher on the agenda in the sense that it has triggered discussions and events at national and European level about this issue. However, the influence of EQAVET is limited, as this issue already existed and current discussions about a regional/community approach to quality assurance in VET have taken place independently of EQAVET.

Important steps (creation of the inspectorate body and the QAA) had taken place before the EQAVET Recommendation was launched. No link can be made with preparatory discussion or activities under EQAVET before the Recommendation.

In terms of activities, the education and training advisory body (CEF) has organised a series of activities related to quality assurance in VET, and has always included the European dimension (EQAVET) in the discussion and publications. In 2010 it assessed the extent to which the QA systems in place in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation would be able to feed into EQAVET indicators. In most cases, the results of this exercise show that data related to EQAVET indicators could be collected, but is not being collected for the time being (except some context indicators in the case of Bruxelles Formation or Le FOREM).

The report issued after this assessment shows an intention to make a link between the QA systems in place and EQAVET. This link may look artificial regarding some of the EQAVET indicators, (e.g. satisfaction rate of individuals and employers (indicator 6(b)) is based on growth in number of registrations and indirect positive feedback from employers). CEF has contributed to keeping EQAVET present on the political agenda, but there is no evidence that CEF's opinions have been taken into account at policy level (e.g. there is reference to EQAVET in CEF opinions, but no further reference to EQAVET in recent legislation).

