



Introduction

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

SECTION A - DESCRIPTION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE ARRANGEMENTS

1. Initial VET (IVET)

Introduction

In Estonia, both initial and continuing vocational education curricula are offered in VET Institutions. Initial vocational education (IVET) is offered at second, third, fourth and fifth Levels of Estonian Qualification Framework (that corresponds with the European Qualification Framework (EQF)). At each level, students acquire learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and attitudes) in accordance with qualifications at the appropriate EQF Level. The VET quality assurance is a working system, in continuous development. Analogous to developments in other EU Member States Estonia has also developed a system of indicators for self-assessment to facilitate assessment of the VET performance at provider level (provided with the Vocational Institutions Act). As such, the national approach of quality assurance in VET can be considered as a common quality assurance framework for VET providers.

1.1 Quality assurance arrangements at system level in IVET

- National Framework for quality assurance in initial VET – who is in charge of what? The Ministry of Education and Research (MoER) coordinates and leads the development of VET policy and its implementation through municipalities and other line ministries. The MoER and the Estonian Higher and Vocational Education Quality Agency (EKKA) are responsible for the accreditation of curriculum groups in VET institutions.
- Statutory stakeholder involvement in quality assurance in initial VET systems The various institutions responsible for VET (quality) include the MoER, other Ministries, social partners, associations of municipalities, cities and VET providers that participate in working groups responsible for devising VET development plans (a process led by the MoER).
- Requirements for evaluation and review

The Lifelong Learning Strategy is a document that guides the most important developments in the area of education. Strategical aims and action plans of VET are set and results are reported and analysed yearly under this strategy.

- Identification of training needs

1. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications is responsible for researching the skills and human resources needed on the labour market. The annual forecasts produced by the Ministry for each sector are one of the components considered by the MoER in determining the number and type of state funded study places in VET.

2. The coordination system of the surveillance and forecasting of the labour market and the development of skills (the OSKA system) was created in 2014. In the near future, the OSKA system should create a regular cooperation platform in order to plan the structure, volume and content of educational services between employers and parties offering educational services. It also combines and analyses information about trends on the labour market and in the economy, as well as forecasts of labour needs, ensures relevant regular outreach activities and will support the education system in planning training places in order to take into account professional and occupational needs in a better way.

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

The MoER and the Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency (EKKA) are responsible for the accreditation of curriculum groups in VET institutions. According to this new system, the accredited schools will have the right to deliver their programmes and qualification certificates for six years. If the accreditation is conditional the period will be reduced to 3 years, with the requirement to undergo another assessment in the end of this period. The education and training in curriculum group will be terminated once the accreditation is refused.

With the introduction of the new system – accreditation of curriculum groups – funding will only be allocated to accredited providers. The accreditation gives the right to provide VET and it is also a pre-condition to have the status of a VET school.

- Certification – assessment and validation of learning (system level)/monitoring, inspection and use of indicators

Certification: According to the new Vocational Education Institutions Act (since September 2013) both initial and continuing vocational education curricula are used in formal VET. Initial vocational education is provided at second, third, fourth and fifth EQF Levels. At each level, students acquire learning outcomes (knowledge, skill and competence) in accordance with qualifications at the appropriate EQF Level. There is no minimum education requirement for access to programmes at EQF Level 2 and Level 3. Curricula are designed for direct access to elementary labour market occupations. Continuing vocational education is provided at fourth and fifth Levels. To graduate from a VET institution one has to achieve learning outcomes of a particular speciality and to pass a professional examination, administered by a VET school or by the occupational qualifications awarding body. In cases where it's not possible to have qualification examination, it's possible to make school exam. The forms of graduation certificates and their supplements are determined by specific government regulation.

Monitoring: After 2003 the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) was adopted by the MoER for the mapping of quality assurance at the system level. The use of indicators proposed by the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQARF) recommendation in Estonia is presented here.

According to the 2009-2013 Development plan, the entry of VET graduates into the labour market and the proportion of graduates who continue their studies are important indicators of VET quality in Estonia. Since 2007, this data is collected by MoER from VET institutions.

Data necessary for the management of the Estonian VET system is collected via the Estonian Education Database (EHIS). In addition to regular surveys on the development of VET system, the EHIS is used to provide data to the policy makers.

According to the 2012 EQAVET Secretariat survey all indicative descriptors for IVET system are used in Estonia, except for quality standards at the VET provider level (only guidelines at this level are provided).

Regular work on creating quality assurance system in IVET was started in 2004. A system of quality assurance was developed that includes the following set of obligatory indicators for self-assessment:

1. Graduates who pass qualification exam on relevant profession (by curriculum groups)
 2. Share of drop-outs
 3. Continuing education path of graduates on next educational level in next school year
 4. Graduates' employment six months after graduation (by curriculum groups)
 5. Fulfilment of qualification requirements of teaching staff
 6. Further occupational training of teaching staff
 7. Age structure of teachers and other pedagogy
 8. Personnel flow (left and recruited)
 9. Ratio of students and teaching staff
 10. No of students per personal computer in their use
 11. Students dormitory/hostel (No. of places in hostel, No. of applicants)
 12. Fulfilment of state commissioned study places (by curricula groups)
- This set of Performance Indicators was changed lately by 02.05.2016 amendments in the regulation. More attention is paid to learning and pedagogical process, also pupils are more involved into assessment process.

The new set of performance indicators for VET institutions are:

1. Final exams results of basic school graduates who entered upper secondary VET
2. Pupils contentment with upper secondary VET studies
3. Frequency of using digital solutions in VET studies
4. Share of graduates who pass qualification exam on relevant profession
5. Share of drop-outs
6. Share of upper-secondary graduates at the nominal time
7. Graduates' employment 12 months after graduation
8. Share of graduates work based learning form of studies

- How is the quality assurance implementation monitored?

Schools in Estonia play an important role in quality assurance. They are required to undertake a self-assessment every three years. School performance data according to these indicators is publicly accessible on ehis.ee.

1.2 Quality assurance arrangements at provider level in IVET

- Planning at VET provider level (including identification of training needs)
Through their participation in councils of VET providers (at least 50% of council members need to be social partners' representatives) social partners are involved in the management of VET institutions.
VET institutions also co-operate with enterprises in providing company-based training and mandatory practicing in work environment as a compulsory part of every curriculum.
- Requirements for monitoring and review (self-assessment)
Internal evaluation shall be conducted in schools. Internal evaluation is a continuous process, the purpose of which is to ensure conditions promoting the development of students and the consistent development of a school. Based on the purpose of internal evaluation, the internal evaluation of a school shall analyse the teaching and education, the management and evaluate the performance thereof. The internal evaluation shall form the basis for preparing the development plan of a school.
A school shall prepare an internal evaluation report at least once during the period of the school's development programme.
Based on the internal evaluation, the school shall prepare the curriculum group report in order to extend the right to provide instruction. The new state recognition system foresees an external assessment (accreditation) of study process.
According to the new Vocational Education Institutions Act that came into force on 1 January 2013 the accredited schools have the right to deliver their programmes and qualification certificates for six years. If the accreditation is conditional, the period will be reduced to 1-3 years, with the requirement to undergo another assessment in the end of this period. The training in curriculum group will be terminated if the accreditation is refused.
The major change compared to the previous procedure for education licences lies in the fact that, according to the new procedure, there will be no need to reapply for an education licence for each curriculum after its nominal period of study is over; but the right to conduct studies will have to be extended after an established period of time.
- Certification, assessment and validation of learners
Vocational training studies shall be deemed to be completed after the learning outcomes corresponding to the qualification or partial profession described in the curriculum have been achieved and a Leaving Certificate shall be issued to the graduate. Vocational Education Standard sets that achievement of learning outcomes is assessed on qualifications exam since 1st of September 2016. If it's not possible, it can be replaced with school exam. Amendments to VET Standard to prolong transition period for one year are expected in 2016. The school shall enter the data of the issued Leaving Certificates and awarded qualifications to the EHIS.
- Stakeholder involvement
At provider level social partners participate in School Boards.
On the local level good cooperation between providers and enterprises exists in some sectors. Representatives of employers are assigned by a relevant professional council to be members of the assessment commissions in accreditation process in their corresponding sectors.

2. Continuous VET (CVET)

Introduction

In Estonia, both initial and continuing vocational education curricula are offered in VET. Initial vocational education (IVET) is offered at second, third, fourth and fifth Levels of Estonian Qualification Framework (that corresponds with the EQF). At each level, students acquire learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and attitudes) in accordance with qualifications at the appropriate EQF Level.

CVET in Estonia is a synonym for adult education governed by the Adult Education Act (1993, amendments 2013). Adult education is divided into formal education and continuing education. Both, adults who have and have not previously studied a profession are considered as pursuing adult education. Adult education includes distance learning, evening courses, part-time study or as an external student participating in in-work or non-formal training. The state supported non-formal adult education mostly relates to the training of the unemployed, in-work training of the people at the risk of unemployment as well as training of education institutions' staff. The non-formal CVET is the responsibility of training institutions and other providers.

2.1 Quality assurance arrangements at system level in CVET

- National Framework for quality assurance in CVET – who is in charge of what?

The strategic planning for 2014-2020 is based on Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy, there are yearly updated action plans and reports about adult education. Responsibility about strategic planning lies on Ministry of Education and Research, Adult Education Department. The functions of the Ministry of Education and Research in the area of adult education are the planning and implementation of the principles and objectives of the national education policy, development of the judicial area necessary for the implementation of the education policy and to ensure the purposefulness and continuity of implementation of the education policy. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Research shall ensure the analysis and evaluation of the training needs for the effective implementation of the education policy.

The Adult Education Council is an advisory body comprised of the representatives of the relevant ministries, continuing education institutions, formal education institutions, representative organisations of employers and employees and other persons and authorities engaged in the area of adult education. The Adult Education Council shall be formed and the rules of procedure thereof shall be approved with a directive of the minister responsible for the area. The Adult Education Council shall:

- 1) advise the Ministry of Education and Research and other parties in matters relating to the strategic planning, financing and organisation of the area of adult education;
- 2) participate in the preparation of development plans relating to the area and in monitoring the implementation thereof;
- 3) give expert evaluations and mediate the opinions of the organisations represented in the Adult Education Council concerning the area.

Concrete CVET activities are funded by various Ministries (the MoER, Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications) according to the needs identified in their respective sectors. For example, the training for the unemployed and other vulnerable groups is commissioned by employment offices and funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs. CVET is delivered by general

secondary schools for adults, vocational education institutions and institutions of higher education and a large number of private adult training providers.

Since 2007 the MoER funds short term training for working adults, delivered by existing VET schools and professional higher education institutions having VET programmes. The training is co-funded by the ESF and delivered through the work-related training and development activities for adult projects. Since 2010 the project also targets the unemployed. Organisation of studies in continuing education and bases for ensuring quality of activities of continuing education institutions:

(1) The manager of a continuing education institution shall establish the bases for the organisation of studies in continuing education and the bases for ensuring the quality of the activities of the continuing education institution.

(2) The bases for the organisation of studies in continuing education shall provide for the requirements and procedure for the admission of learners to and the exclusion from continuing education and the conditions and procedure for the payment of tuition for continuing education, release from the payment and the reimbursement thereof and other important conditions for the organisation of studies.

(3) The bases for ensuring the quality of the activities of a continuing education institution shall at least provide for the conditions and procedure for ensuring the quality of the continuing education curricula, adult educators and study environment and the procedure for gathering feedback on the continuing education.

- Statutory stakeholder involvement in quality assurance in CVET systems Strategic goals of Estonian Adult Education are developed by the MoER and approved by the Adult Education Council, which is composed of representatives of various ministries, social partners and provider and representatives of adult learners.

In case of formal CVET, social partners also contribute to developing professional standards for each profession through the national level Professional Councils.

- Requirements for evaluation and review

Private training providers need to acquire licences issued by the MoES, in line with the provisions of the Private School Act. Licences are valid for three to five years.

- Identification of training needs

Adult education courses are planned by a task force, consisting of various stakeholders, meeting twice per year. These stakeholders identify priorities in training needs in line with the labour market demand. In the near future, the OSKA system should create a regular cooperation platform in order to plan the structure, volume and content of educational services between employers and parties offering educational services. It also combines and analyses information on trends on the labour market and in the economy, as well as forecasts of labour needs, ensures relevant regular outreach activities and supports the education system in planning training places in order to take into account professional and occupational needs in a better way.

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

In order to operate as the manager of a continuing education institution, the continuing education provider shall submit a notice of economic activities if

pursuant to the law he or she is not required to apply for an activity licence for the provision of continuing education.

In addition to the provisions of the General Part of the Economic Activities Code Act, the notice of economic activities for the provision of continuing education shall include the list of continuing education curricula groups in which continuing education is provided. CVET curricula are developed by schools, in line with the applicable legislation of the founding body.

Training at company level is not a legal requirement in Estonia, but the Adult Education Act encourages the state, local authorities and employers to coordinate and organise adult education.

- Certification – assessment and validation of learning (system level)
The minister responsible for the area shall establish, by a regulation, the continuing education standard in which the requirements for the continuing education curricula, for the documents certifying the passing of and participation in continuing education and the list of continuing education curricula groups shall be provided for.
- Monitoring, inspection and use of indicators
There is planned to start gather information about provided study possibilities.
- Requirements CVET providers have to comply with (if not described in 1st section)
The manager of a continuing education institution who only provides continuing education may not in any manner refer to the possibility of providing formal education in the name of the continuing education institution.
Only a continuing education institution which has a permanent place of business and which provides continuing education on a continuous basis in at least three continuing education curricula groups may use the word „rahvaülikool” [folk university] in its name. The manager of a continuing education institution shall be required to maintain a website in order to disclose the information concerning continuing education. CVET curricula are developed by schools, in line with the applicable legislation of the founding body.
Training at company level is not a legal requirement in Estonia, but the Adult Education Act encourages the state, local authorities and employers to coordinate and organise adult education.

2.2 Quality assurance arrangements at provider level in CVET

- Planning at CVET provider level (including identification of training needs) Planning of the state commissioned adult education is the responsibility of the MoER and other ministries in their respective areas. Planning the rest of the non-formal adult education is the responsibilities of those who commission it (e.g. municipalities, enterprises) and the beneficiaries.
- Requirements for monitoring and review (self-assessment)
CVET curricula are developed by schools, in line with the applicable legislation of the founding body. Training at company level is not a legal requirement in Estonia, but the Adult Education Act encourages the State, local authorities and employers to coordinate and organise adult education. Private training providers need to acquire licences issued by the MoER, in line with the provisions of the Private School Act. Licences are valid for three to five years.
Currently public providers as well as private providers are required to undertake a self-assessment every three years. VET Institutions can offer courses for adults in curriculum groups where they have right to conduct studies and also courses

related to key competences. School indicates these fields where they provide courses for adults in the EHIS online database.

- Certification, assessment and validation of learners
In formal CVET certification procedures, assessment and validation are the same as in IVET. In case of adult courses the minister responsible for the area shall establish, by a regulation, the continuing education standard in which the requirements for the continuing education curricula, for the documents certifying the passing of and participation in continuing education and the list of continuing education curricula groups shall be provided for.
- Stakeholder involvement
At provider level social partners participate in VET Schools Boards. On the local level cooperation between providers and enterprises exists in some sectors.

SECTION B - INTERACTION BETWEEN NATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EQAVET

- National Reference Point – Introduction

Formally an EQAVET NRP has not been established in Estonia. The functions related to quality assurance are the responsibility of the MoER. The Estonian Higher and Vocational Education Quality Agency (EKKA) was also engaged in development and implementation of state recognition system and EQAVET cooperation. EKKA is in charge of organising accreditation process of study programme groups in VET. MoER in cooperation with the EKKA can cover all the functions traditionally allocated to a NRP. The MoER has participated in EQAVET related EU developments since 2005 and the EKKA – since 2009.

- National approach to enhance quality assurance
While the work on quality assurance in VET started already in 1990s, a systematic work of the MoER on this topic started in 2005 in the context of the first VET Development Plan. The aim of this process was to build a new system for quality assurance in VET.
System of external evaluation (giving schools a right to conduct studies in curriculum groups) was piloted 2011-2013 and respectively regulated by VET Institutions Law 2013.
The MoER is currently responsible for quality assurance developments at national and provider level, international cooperation including at European level. This work is supported by the State and ESF funding (in the area of VET only ESF funding). More specifically the MoER is responsible for systematic development for quality assurance systems at all levels as well as for the amendments of legislation and the state recognition system, implemented since 2013.
- Influence of EQAVET on national developments of quality assurance
Just like EQAVET's QA cycle according to the Concept of the State Recognition in Vocational Education and Training; the Estonian model for quality assurance in VET is divided into four parts: planning, implementation, evaluation / making an assessment (measuring), feed forward and feedback (adjustments). The quality assurance model for Estonian vocational education and training system (based on the Common Quality Assurance Framework – predecessor of EQAVET) The

MoER has participated in EQAVET related EU developments since 2005 and the EKKA – since 2009.

The initiatives to improve the quality assurance procedures in VET started before the country joined the ENQA-VET network and before the ENQA-VET Recommendation was issued. However, the national approach is very much in line with the EQAVET approach. The Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF model) developed by the technical group before the creation of the ENQA-VET network was used in Estonia to describe the quality assurance system in VET. The quality assurance developments and the understanding of importance quality assurance in VET were already there before the Recommendation and there was no need to change the approach. It was however underlined that the participation in European network is important from the point of view of dissemination and learning of good practices and cooperation in working groups. There are no major contradictions between the Estonian approach and the approach proposed by the EQAVET Recommendation. The main idea of EQAVET is to provide a holistic approach to quality assurance, based on common principles shared by the involved countries. How particular models or indicators are used on the national level is contextual. It also has to remain contextual in the future – as countries have different VET and quality assurance systems.

Quality assurance in VET is one of the top priorities of the Action Plan for the Estonian Vocational Education and Training System 2016-2019 in context of Estonian Life Long Learning Strategy 2020. The EQAVET network has been engaged in the pooling of experience concerning quality assurance in VET, harmonising concepts between Member States and further developing the CQAF model. As such, EQAVET is not been the impetus to quality assurance activities in Estonia but has been used as a support to these.

Aside the MoER and the EKKA, a number of other institutions and private companies are involved in the quality assurance in Estonia. Employer representatives at the qualifications authority are nominated by the Occupational councils. Foundation Innove has different tasks in relation to VET development, VET content and teacher training. As the EKKA only has six employees, it often relies on contributions of experts from different institutions in the VET system. Estonia has two councils – one for HE and one for VET, each with 15 members. Qualification authorities, trade unions take part in quality assurance.

Stakeholders are generally interested in cooperation in the EQAVET framework. They are participating at sectoral seminars, conferences, etc. The stakeholders were also informed then the EQAVET case studies were prepared for the EQAVET portal.

There have been no specific events organised to disseminate information on EQAVET in Estonia. The information is shared with the key stakeholders on seminars, conferences and on day-to-day work relationship basis and in relation to their specific roles in quality assurance. When the MoER organises a new accreditation year, it organises training seminars and information days for providers. These events are used to explain the accreditation process and evaluation criteria. Furthermore, training is offered to employers' representatives who will work as evaluation experts, explaining why particular criteria are important.

