



Introduction

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

SECTION A - DESCRIPTION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Part 1 – Description of quality assurance arrangements and of recent developments

The main developments related to quality assurance requirements and measures at system or provider level since 2009:

- A unified system for quality assurance in general and vocational education was introduced in 2009 (the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 852 of September 2010).
- ESF project (2010-2013)¹ reviewed vocational education and continuing education programmes based on modules approach. Twelve sectoral expert councils (hereinafter – SECs) have been created in the framework of this project and their increased role.
- In April 2015, the Latvian Parliament (Saeima) adopted amendments to the Vocational Education Law, to ensure a better fit between vocational education and training (hereinafter – VET) and labour market needs at sectoral, institutional and programme levels. The amendments introduce the establishment of SECs to promote employer involvement in developing VET at sectoral level. These tripartite councils are composed of State and local government representatives, employers' organisations and trade unions. Twelve SECs were already established in 2011 under the ESF project 'Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing VET efficiency and quality (2010-15)'. They have proved successful in practice, but lacked a legislative and regulative framework.

Main role of sectoral expert councils:

- to participate in developing sectoral qualification structures;
- to propose required professions and appropriate specialisations in sectors;
- to enrol students in VET programmes in particular sectors;
- to participate in the development of content for VET programmes;
- to verify skills for which occupational standards must be designed;
- to develop professional qualification examinations;
- to review occupational standards and professional qualification requirements;
- to participate in the accreditation of VET institutions and programmes;
- to co-ordinate and promote cooperation between VET institutions and

¹ ESF project *Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education* (further information in Latvian only)

social partners.

Further, amendments to the law introduced the establishment of collegial advisory bodies at each VET institution, so-called convents. Convents will promote VET development in line with labour market needs at institutional level. They will be composed of heads of VET institutions, representatives of local government and supervising ministry, and employers. Convents will make proposals regarding development strategy of VET institutions, and cooperate with local enterprises to ensure student training placements and work-based learning opportunities.

Amendments to the law also define the term 'work-based learning' as one attainment form of VET and therewith link VET closer to the work environment. Students acquire theoretical aspects at VET institutions, but practical aspects necessary for performing professional activities are acquired at enterprises. Work-based learning has been carried out for the past two years in pilot projects and was well received by students and employers.

Amendments to the Vocational Education Law which came into force in May 2015.

- Regulation for validation of professional competences acquired outside formal education system on basic and secondary education levels came into force in February 2011 (it covers the Latvian vocational qualifications Levels 1-3, currently corresponding to the EQF Levels 2-4).
- Referencing of the five Latvian vocational qualifications levels to the EQF is formalised in the Vocational Education Law.

Quality assurance arrangements at system level in initial VET National Framework for initial VET

The organisations involved in the delivery of VET in Latvia and their competences are established by the Vocational Education Law (1999) as well as the Education Law (1999) and the Law on Institutions of Higher Education (1995), which, *inter alia*, provides the legal basis for the operation of colleges. In addition, the Law on Crafts (1993) specifies how crafts education is organised, establishes craftsman qualification levels as well as procedures for developing crafts, traineeship and qualification programmes.

The Vocational Education Law covers both IVET and CVET. This Law regulates the delivery of vocational initial education, vocational secondary education and also touches upon the first level higher vocational education as well as the corresponding qualifications.

The vocational education system is managed by the following centralised state institutions:

- The Cabinet of Ministers determines the national policy and strategy direction in vocational education, funds vocational education providers as well as setting procedures for issuing state recognised qualifications and the recognition of foreign qualifications.
- The Ministry of Education and Science (hereinafter –MoES) develops regulation for VET, makes proposals about the allocation of funds from the state budget (other Ministries finance VET institutions under their supervision), supervises VET providers and participates in tripartite consultations with social partners concerning the development of vocational education.
- The National Centre for Education (Valsts izglītības satura centrs), an institution under the supervision of the MoES, ensures:
 - The development of education content for vocational basic education, vocational education, vocational secondary, continuing vocational education, professional improvement and professionally orientated education in compliance with state standards;
 - The development and implementation of uniform content in vocational education state examinations;

- The coordination of the development of study aids complying with vocational education standards; and
 - The coordination and delivery of professional competence training and professional improvement for teachers.
- The State Education Quality Service (Izglītības kvalitātes valsts dienests) has the following functions:
- The maintenance of registers of licensed education programmes, accredited education institutions and programmes;
 - The licensing of education programmes (except non-formal, leisure and higher education);
 - The organisation of quality assessment of education establishments (except pre-school, HEIs and colleges) and education programmes (except pre-school, professional improvement, professionally orientated education, non-formal and professional higher education), as well as the accreditation process at examination centres;
 - The monitoring of the implementation of accreditation recommendations by VET providers;
 - The coordination of the validation of professional competences obtained outside formal education system by delegating this task to education institutions or examination centres.
 - The coordination of the work of the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) in Latvia and implementing EQAVET indicators to support the evaluation and quality assurance of VET.

According to the Education Law local governments in Latvia has the right, in coordination with the relevant sectoral ministry and the MoES, to establish, reorganise and dissolve professional educational institutions. They are also responsible for the professional guidance of children and youth as well as the professional development of teachers.

In line with the Vocational Education Law, initial VET is currently organised in five levels of vocational qualifications in Latvia. The vocational education corresponding to levels 1-3 (currently EQF Levels 2-4) is delivered by vocational education institutions (vocational basic schools, vocational secondary schools, vocational schools vocational gymnasiums). Some colleges also offer vocational education programmes at these levels. Specialised secondary education institutions (polytechnics or colleges) offer qualifications at Latvian vocational qualifications Level 4 (EQF Level 5) and professional higher education institutions at Level 5 (currently EQF Levels 6 and 7).

A large majority of the vocational education establishments in 2016 are state owned (24 state schools, 8 state colleges, six schools of local governments and four private schools). The number of VET schools was considerably reduced due to the optimisation of the school network in mid-90s.

Statutory stakeholder involvement in initial VET systems

The rights and involvement of social partners in the development of VET are stipulated by the Vocational Education Law (Section 12). According to the law the social partners must be consulted in the development of regulation, policy and planning in the field of VET as well as in the development of profession standards, education programmes, final qualification exams and traineeship conditions.

The social dialogue takes place in the National Tripartite Sub-Council for Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment, technically supported by the MoES, the relevant regional sub-councils and SECs. The decisions taken in the Sub-Council take into consideration recommendations of the SEC.

The SECs were set up relatively recently in the framework of the ESF co-funded project (started in 2010)¹. The SECs consist of social partners, various line ministries and the State Employment Agency (SEA). The Councils meet at least once each two months. Currently there are 12 SECs, including 83 organisations representing employers, 35 institutions representing employees, 14 professional organisations and 10 independent experts – in addition to the various line ministries and the SEA².

¹ The method for involvement of social partners in raising the quality of vocational education was developed during another ESF project implemented during the period 2005-2007.

² http://www.lbas.lv/projects/sectoral_qualifications_systems_and_the_establishment_of_

Amendments to the Vocational Education Law that have been adopted by the Saeima in April 2015 set out, *inter alia*, the regulation for SECs and created a framework for the Convention of vocational education institutions.

All twelve SECs consist of employers, employees and relevant governmental institution representatives. SEC deals with the most important questions about the content of initial vocational education, enrolment of students in VET programmes, main sectoral professions and related professions and specialisations, vocational qualification examination requirements. It is a way of informing the industry, of addressing those who need recognition of skills and competencies gained outside formal education etc. with industry connected education issues. To form consolidated views on the education content needed, the work of SECs is based on three sides – workers, employers and government representation.

The concept of the Convent of VET institutions was developed to bring employers closer to VET institutions. The Convent is a collegiate advisory body which aims to promote the development of VET institutions in accordance with labour market requirements.

The Convent shall be composed of heads of educational institutions, the representative of the Ministry, which is subordinate to the vocational education institution and the relevant authorities, as well as employers and their associations. The composition of the Convent may include the planning region representative. The Convent is chaired by the employer or the relevant local government representative.

The Convent is entitled to:

- 1) submit proposals for development strategy and planning documents for VET institutions;
- 2) participate in the selection and evaluation process of the VET institutions teaching/administration staff;
- 3) submit proposals for VET programme development before a license is sought;
- 4) promote cooperation between VET institutions and regional businesses for expansion of work-based learning.

Planning at VET system level

In line with Section 15 of the Education Law, the MoES develops policy planning document and drafts legislation in the field of education. Furthermore, as already mentioned, the Vocational Education Law stipulates that the social partners have the right to participate in the drawing up of conceptual issues and to draft regulatory enactments in the field of VET, create and implement vocational education strategy and policy, plan the State remit and the direction of development of the sector as well as to perform market intelligence and planning of the direction of development of VET in co-operation with State and local government institutions (Section 12). More general and specific objectives in relation to the development and quality of vocational education are stipulated in a number of national level policy documents.

An important innovation is the creation of the Vocational Education Competence Centres (hereinafter –VECCs). Since 2010, large vocational schools with more than 500 students have been gradually transformed into VECCs. These will act as regional hubs for developing closer relationships with employers, provide high-quality vocational education for students (youth and adults), and developing pedagogical support for other vocational schools, and, potentially, accreditation powers, including the recognition of prior learning for adults. Schools have to meet specific requirements to obtain VECCs status. These include the number of education programmes implemented, number of students, student academic success, career management and co-operation with employers. VECCs have to perform the functions of a regional or sectoral methodological centre, offer continuing education and teacher education, and assess professional competences acquired outside the formal education system. Once VECC status is achieved, schools get a 10% additional payment for personnel. By August 2015 a total of 14 vocational schools and one tertiary education institution had received VECC status.

In the recent past – in 2013 – WBL (Work based learning) was mainly a theoretical concept in Latvia. The MoES made an informed decision to take the so-called ‘bottom-up’ approach, calling on VET institutions and businesses to pilot the implementation of WBL on a voluntary basis.

As a result of the work that has been done in close co-operation with social partners and industry representatives, the number of schools that applied to take part in the WBL pilot project in 2014/15 school year was approximately 3-4 times higher than in the pilot starting year, and the number of participating enterprises increased six-fold compared to 2013/14.

In the 2014/15 academic year, about 15-20 VET institutions were involved in WBL in cooperation with around 200 entrepreneurs offering around 40 different programmes involving about 500 learners.

Moreover, WBL as a form of vocational education programme has been included in legal acts, and work has started at a governmental level to develop an incentive system for entrepreneurs WBL i. s also one of the ways to implement short cycle VET programs (1 and 1.5 years in duration) *inter alia* for NEETs.

Amendments to the Law on Vocational Education were developed and came into force on 15 May 2015. The amendments stipulate WBL as a form in the implementation of a VET programme and determine the competence of the Cabinet of Ministers for WBL implementation regulation.

The detailed regulations are in development, involving all relevant stakeholders. The draft regulation on WBL implementation on the systemic level was submitted to the public for comment at the beginning of 2016. Discussions regarding possible financial incentives to support work-based learning are ongoing though it has been stressed that any financial payments by the employer should be undertaken in the framework of employment protection legislation and be in line with minimum wage provisions. A lower minimum wage for those in work-based learning is being elaborated as one of the options for supporting quality work-based learning. The support for VET reforms (including WBL expansion) is envisaged in the EU funds programming period 2014–2020. The indicative planned financing is 21.9 million euro. In the frame of SO 8.5.1. it is hoped to involve 3150 student directly in WBL and 25 671 student in practical training at the enterprise. VET programmes at basic and secondary level are licensed, and vocational education institutions registered and accredited in accordance with the procedures specified by the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No.852¹.

The education institutions that offer basic and secondary level educational programmes are accredited for six years. The accreditation is a service offered for a fee, determined by the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations², and delivered by the State Education Quality Service (hereinafter – the SEQs).

Identification of training needs

Currently, training needs are assessed through cooperation with SECs, which, *inter alia*, inform the government of sectoral training needs and review plans for intake numbers into government-funded vocational education programmes. With regard to planning, SECs review the content of vocational education in the light of labour market requirements, the quality of VET, the number of specialists who need to be admitted to vocational education institutions in all core professions, sub-professions and related professions as well as the number of traineeship places in each sector and the number of individuals who require validation of qualifications obtained outside formal education.

According to the Vocational Education Law, Section 8(6), it is the competence of MoES to organise vocational career counselling and to conduct research into the labour market and into labour

¹ Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 852 of 14.09.2010. Procedure for accreditation of education and training programs, educational institutions and examination centres

² Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 851 of 14.09.2010 Regulations on State Education Quality Service fees

demand. In this process the MoES cooperates with the social partners and also takes into consideration labour market forecasts of the Ministry of Economics.

Who can deliver VET and under what conditions?

According to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No.852 only accredited education institutions are entitled to deliver licensed general and secondary vocational education programmes (currently EQF Levels 2-4) and to issue a State-recognised document certifying vocational education or a vocational qualification. The education institutions that offer basic and secondary level educational programmes are accredited for six years, while programmes are accredited for six years, or two years in the case of education institutions that only offer professional development programmes, professionally oriented education and vocational further education programmes).

In the accreditation process programmes are evaluated in terms of their conformity to state education standards, occupational standards and the occupational register as well as in terms of implementation and allocation of resources to ensure that they deliver the necessary knowledge, skills and competences. Education establishments and programmes are assessed on the basis of an integrated list of criteria, including education content, teaching and learning, student achievement, support for students, school climate, school resources and organisation, management and quality assurance.

Certification – assessment and validation of learning (system level)

Currently the Vocational Education Law, Section 5, stipulates that there are five levels of vocational qualifications in the education system of Latvia (EQF Level 2-7). This Law regulates implementation of vocational initial education, vocational secondary education and first level higher vocational education and the award of corresponding vocational qualifications. According to the Law, the following State recognised vocational education documents are issued to students who have completed an accredited vocational education programme and passed the vocational qualification final examination(-s):

- A certificate of vocational initial education (apliecība par profesionālo pamatzglītību) issued by schools that implement vocational initial education programmes and corresponding to Latvian vocational qualifications Level 1 – EQF Level 2);
- A certificate of basic (lower secondary) vocational education (atestāts par arodizglītību) issued by trade schools (arodskola) and corresponding to the Latvian vocational qualifications Level 2 – EQF Level 3);
- A diploma of vocational secondary education (diploms par profesionālo vidējo izglītību) issued by vocational secondary schools or technical schools (tehnikums) and corresponding to the Latvian vocational qualifications Level 3 – EQF Level 4); and
- A diploma of first level higher vocational education (diploms par pirmā līmeņa profesionālo augstāko izglītību) issued by education institutions that deliver college education programmes, corresponding to Latvian vocational qualifications Level 4 – EQF Level 5).

Students who have completed only a part of an accredited education programme and have not passed the qualification examinations receive a document acknowledging the acquisition of part of the relevant vocational education programme from the educational institution, in accordance with the procedures specified by the Cabinet of Ministers.

Monitoring and use of indicators

The State Education Quality Service (SEQS) organises quality assessment of education institutions (except pre-school, HEIs and colleges) and education programmes (except pre-school, professional development programmes, professionally orientated education, non-formal and professional higher education) and monitors the implementation of accreditation recommendations.

As mentioned before the same set of criteria (included in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 852) are used to assess general and vocational education programmes at basic and secondary education stages. These regulations establish a uniform accreditation procedure and a common set of quality assessment requirements in general and vocational education (for education programmes at EQF Levels 1-4). The unified system was introduced with the aim of providing a better overview

of education quality in the country and fighting the fragmentation of VET across regions in terms of access, contemporary requirements and quality.

The standardised education quality assessment system ensures that a uniform quality assessment methodology is used across seven operational fields, which are, in turn, based on 19 criteria across four levels (insufficient, sufficient, good and very good):

1. Education content.
2. Teaching and learning:
 - 2.1. The quality of teaching;
 - 2.2. The quality of learning;
 - 2.3. Evaluation and assessment as part of the study process.
3. Student achievement (the level is not graded; instead it is described):
 - 3.1. Student performance in daily work;
 - 3.2. Student performance in tests and exams.
4. Support for pupils:
 - 4.1. Psychological support, socio-pedagogical support, ensuring the safety and security of learners (security and workplace safety);
 - 4.2. Support for developing personality and character;
 - 4.3. Support for career education;
 - 4.4. Support for differentiated individualised learning;
 - 4.5. Support for learners with special needs;
 - 4.6. Cooperation with the learner's family.
5. School climate:
 - 5.1. Psychological and social environment/atmosphere;
 - 5.2. Physical environment.
6. School resources:
 - 6.1. Equipment and material resources;
 - 6.2. Human resources.
7. Organisation, management and quality assurance:
 - 7.1. Self-assessment of the institution's work and development planning;
 - 7.2. The work of the administration, and personnel management;
 - 7.3. Cooperation with other institutions.

Internal and external assessments are performed during the accreditation process. The internal assessment is performed by the education establishment, which is preparing its self-assessment report. The self-assessment report is a mandatory precondition for the accreditation of institutions and programmes. It is the basis for initiating the accreditation procedure in an institution. Accreditation of education establishments and programmes is further based upon the report provided by an external expert commission and its recommendations to the accreditation commission on granting or denying accreditation.

The expert commission consists of representatives from various institutions. It is organised by the State Education Quality Service (SEQS) and is independent of particular education establishments. Representatives of MoES, the National Centre for Education or the SEQS, education specialists of local governments, representatives of other institutions, including representatives of other ministries, local governments, non-governmental organisations, employers, craftsmen and trade unions as well as representatives from education establishments (except from the one undergoing accreditation) can be included in the expert commission. The vocational education accreditation expert commissions always include the representatives of the respective supervising institution, as well as sectoral associations and employer representatives delegated by the Latvian Chamber of Crafts, ensuring their regular and mandatory participation.

The criteria provided in Regulations No. 852 relate to the assessment of VET institutions and programmes, rather than the VET system as a whole. As such, they relate indirectly to the EQAVET quality indicators (as outlined in the table below). It can therefore be concluded that while the

EQAVET quality indicators may correspond to some areas of quality assessment in Latvia, they are not directly used to assess and monitor VET quality in the country¹.

EQAVET indicators	Latvian quality assessment criteria (as in Regulations No. 852, Section 19) closest to the EQAVET indicators
Indicator No 1: VET providers quality assurance systems	According to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations only accredited education institutions are entitled to deliver licensed vocational education programmes and to issue a State-recognised document certifying vocational education or a vocational qualification.
Indicator No 2: Investment in teacher and trainer training resources	The necessary education and professional qualifications for teachers and their professional competence development procedures are established in Regulation No.662 of 28 October 2014 by the Cabinet of Ministers. It states that the teacher is responsible for the development of his professional competence, carried out within three years, over not less than 36 hours, and planned in co-operation with the heads of the educational institution(s) in which the teacher is carrying out his/her teaching activities.
Indicator No 3: Participation rate in VET programmes	In accordance with Section 2 of Article 12 of the Vocational Education Law, the Sectoral Expert Council proposes the number of students in VET institutions required by the sector. Indicators on participation of students in vocational education and training programmes and participation rate are calculated. Indicators are collected at national level. Each initial VET provider reports on the planned and real situation to the Ministry of Education and Science.
Indicator No 4: Completion rate of VET programmes	Data is collected about students who successfully complete or who abandon vocational education and training programmes. Results of the qualification examinations are collected by the National Centre for Education. Each initial VET provider reports about the situation to the Ministry of Education and Science. Results of qualification examinations are included in institutional self-assessment reports.
Indicator No 5: Placement rate in VET programmes	VET providers monitor first destinations of graduates. National placement rate data is available. Further occupation description of learners after completion of the VET programme is included in institutional self-assessment reports.
Indicator No 6: Utilisation of acquired skills in the workplace	VET providers monitor first destinations of graduates and employer satisfaction. To get feedback loops the State Education Quality Service designs a survey focused on information obtained from individuals after completing training and a satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with the skills and competences that have been acquired during training. In accordance with Article 17. ¹ of the Vocational Education Law, the aim of the Convent is to promote the

¹ http://www.eqavet.eu/Libraries/EQARF_Indicators/EQARF_Indicators_Latvia.

	development of vocational education institutions according to the needs of labour market.
Indicator No 7: Unemployment rate	Data is collected at national level. The State Employment Agency of Latvia (NVA) is under the supervision of the Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia, and is responsible for implementing government policy in the area of reducing unemployment and providing support for unemployed and persons seeking employment. The NVA provides services, consultancy and assistance to persons in the area of reducing unemployment and the provision of support for unemployed and persons seeking employment, and also to national and local authorities and non-governmental organisations.
Indicator No 8: Prevalence of vulnerable groups	In the accreditation process differentiation of the teaching process is evaluated according to the needs of each individual and support to disadvantaged groups. Results are included in institutional self-assessment reports and external evaluation reports.
Indicator No 9: Mechanisms to identify training needs	To get feedback loops the State Education Quality Service designs a survey a survey focused on information on mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market by determining the training needs in the labour market and evaluating the teaching, learning and training process in VET. In accordance with Article 17. ¹ of the Vocational Education Law, the aim of the convention is to promote the development of vocational education institutions according to the needs of labour market.
Indicator No 10: Schemes to promote access to VET	Different activities and public venues are used to promote the VET system. Various learning opportunities are offered in Latvia. People have an opportunity to engage in educational activities which correspond to their interests and needs, and are organised in a non-formal way parallel to formal education that implies the structured and systematic acquisition of educational outcomes, which are approved by state recognised educational or professional qualification certificates. The professional competency acquired in non-formal education is formed by knowledge, skills and abilities gained through personal life and job experience. The evaluation of professional competencies of an applicant mastered in the process of the non-formal education is based on a test of the corresponding professional standard at the professional qualification examination.

Reforms of quality assurance in initial VET since 2009 (adoption of EQAVET Recommendation)

In 2009 the National Centre for Education and the State Education Quality Service (SEQS) were established under the supervision of the MoES. In 2010 the SEQS joined the working group of EQAVET, with the aim of ensuring the improvement of the vocational education quality assessment system.

Before 2010 two national education quality assessment systems existed in Latvia – one for general and one for vocational education. To improve the State’s ability to provide an accessible and quality education system as well as to reduce the threat of fragmentation in terms of education content and quality across regions, a uniform approach to quality assurance was developed for both general and vocational education. These changes were enacted by the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 852 (2010) for general and secondary vocation education programmes.

Quality assurance arrangements at provider level in initial VET. Requirements VET providers have to comply with

Initial VET is provided on basic, lower and upper secondary levels in Latvia and the quality is mostly ensured through the accreditation process.

The accreditation of VET institutions and programmes on the basic and secondary levels is undertaken based on the procedure and criteria specified in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 852. The procedure includes both internal and external assessment.

The external evaluation of educational institutions and education programmes is carried out by an Accreditation Experts’ Commission. Commissions may include: one representative of the MoES or the National Centre for Education or the SEQS; representatives of education institutions, (but not from the school being evaluated); and education specialists nominated by the municipalities. A Commission usually has three or four members including a head of commission and experts who must hold a teaching qualification or a relevant degree and have at least one year of teaching experience or experience in school management. They must also undertake a specialist training course in evaluation organised by the SEQS. The SEQS contracts the experts to carry out quality evaluation and to produce an evaluation report on each school.

The evaluation framework is defined in the Cabinet Ministers’ Regulation No. 852 of September 14, 2010 ‘Procedures for the Accreditation of General and Vocational Education Programmes, Education Institutions and Examination Centres’.¹ The Regulation defines a set of parameters to be used by evaluators to evaluate schools.

In addition, a methodological tool was developed by the State Education Quality Service in 2011. The ‘Quality Evaluation Methodology of Education Institutions, Examination Centres and Education Programmes’² is designed to help evaluators match the defined parameters with agreed standards. The main areas addressed by this framework are:

1. education content;
2. teaching and learning;
3. student achievement;
4. support for students;
5. school climate;
6. school resources; and
7. organisation, management and quality assurance

for which there are 19 evaluation parameters. The 19 evaluation parameters are evaluated according to four evaluation levels: level I – unsatisfactory, level II – satisfactory, level III – good, level IV – very good. A descriptive evaluation is provided for three of these parameters.

The external evaluation of schools and their programmes normally takes place every six years. However, whereas schools are accredited for a period of six years, education programmes are accredited for a period of either two or six years. For instance, in 2014, 89% of education programmes were accredited for six years and 11% of education programmes for two years.

There are three stages in the school evaluation process:

- A preparation stage, prior to visiting the school, when evaluators analyse the self-assessment report prepared by the school. At this stage the head of the evaluation Commission contacts the school to coordinate the visit.

¹ <http://m.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=217947>

² http://ikvd.gov.lv/assets/files/faili/24.05.2011.laksejie_noteikumi_Nr.5.pdf

- The next stage is the school visit that lasts two to three days. At the school, the committee of experts evaluates the institution and its education programmes according to the seven areas defined in the Regulation.
- The last stage includes the preparation of the evaluation report. The report is sent to the school head for information.

The internal assessment is undertaken by the education establishment through a self-assessment report, which is mandatory in order to initiate the accreditation procedure. The self-assessment report is then reviewed and evaluated by independent external expert commission, organised by the SEQS and consisting of representatives of the SEQS, the MoES, the National Centre for Education, education experts from local governments and other education establishments as well as the relevant sectoral authorities and organisations.

The accreditation experts also typically visit the education institution under review for three days on average, assessing its operations according to the criteria predefined in the Regulations. An accreditation commission, involving social partners, then examines the report of the expert commission and submits a proposal to the SEQS regarding the accreditation or grounds for its denial.

As a follow-up, education institutions are required to submit an annual report to the SEQS on their progress in implementing the recommendations issued as a result of the evaluation. Education institutions are then expected to submit a progress report every year until all recommendations are implemented. The efficiency with which this is carried out is also taken into account during the next accreditation.

The Accreditation Experts' Commission submits the evaluation report and proposals (recommendations) for the improvement of the school to the SEQS. Based on the proposals of the commission, the SEQS decides whether to accredit the education institution for a six-year period or to refuse accreditation. It also decides whether to accredit its education programme for six or for two years, or to refuse accreditation. Experts' commissions may refuse to accredit education programmes for the six-year period if some aspects are not rated high quality. A decision to refuse may be taken if any of the following criteria is evaluated as "insufficient": (1) education content – education programmes provided; (2) teaching quality; (3) equipment and other material resources; (4) human resources, or if more than one third of 19 criteria are evaluated as "insufficient".

In some cases, the SEQS demands a prompt response from the education institution to the experts' recommendations, but normally the education institution has to respond before December 1st. Refusal of accreditation is an indicator of low quality provision either of the education programme or the work of the school in general. In such cases, the founder of the school takes appropriate steps to improve education provision or school management. The education institutions may apply for a re-evaluation no earlier than after three months after the accreditation refusal. The most serious consequence for an education institution which has been refused accreditation of its education programme is the loss of the right to issue the state-recognised certificate on completion of vocational education.

Planning at VET provider level

The content of vocational education on basic and secondary education levels is established by the State vocational education standards (i.e. the vocational education standard, the vocational secondary education standard and the first level higher vocational education standard) and profession standards (knowledge, skills and competences for each profession), which are mandatory for the education institutions that draw up and implement vocational education programmes. As indicated, research into labour market and planning of vocational education development is the responsibility of state and municipalities. Employers are also involved in this process through tripartite dialogue SECs and Convents.

Requirements for monitoring and review (self-assessment)

As outlined above, the general and vocational education institutions and programmes are required to produce self-assessment reports in which their performance is assessed based on a range of

criteria. The SEQS undertakes the assessment of the self-assessment reports and the monitoring of the implementation of the Accreditation Commission recommendations¹. In each self-assessment report, the institution under review needs to outline how it has implemented the recommendations of the previous assessment as well as indicate pathways for future development based on the conclusions of the self-assessment report.

The current regulation in force (Cabinet of Ministers' Regulation no. 852) states that internal evaluation should be carried out at least once every six years. However, during the external evaluation process, experts check whether internal evaluation is carried out systematically every year and whether it focuses on priority areas. Experts also evaluate whether student achievement is evaluated annually by schools. The main purposes of internal evaluation are to improve the quality of VET providers and how they function, and to produce a report to feed into external school evaluation. The structure of the internal evaluation report is defined by the above-mentioned Regulation. It consists of:

1. the school's general profile;
2. the school's main targets (education priorities of previous years and outputs/outcomes);
3. progress on the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations;
4. school performance against the quality indicators of all 7 evaluation areas;
5. other achievements (significant/specific to the school); and
6. a development plan (based on the findings of the internal evaluation).

Internal evaluation should include an analysis of student achievement in national tests and qualification examinations.

The Cabinet Ministers' Regulation stipulates that all stakeholders should take part in internal evaluation. During the external evaluation process, the external experts consider the involvement of all stakeholders as part of their evaluation criteria.

School staff use internal evaluation findings in order to plan future developments. Priorities for teaching and learning are also determined as a result of the findings. The results of internal evaluation must be published on the school's website.

VET providers become more aware of the value of internal evaluation as a support for their day-to-day work and quality evaluation. The measure is intended to embed a culture of internal evaluation in Latvian schools.

Stakeholder involvement

Social partners play a significant role in the work of VET schools and colleges as they are involved in the development of their curricula. They provide, *inter alia*, information about new technologies, equipment, materials, etc. to ensure the curricula correspond to the requirements of the labour market.

In April 2015, the Latvian Parliament (Saeima) adopted amendments to the Vocational Education Law, to ensure a better fit between VET and labour market needs at sectoral, institutional and programme levels. The amendments introduced the establishment of SECs to promote employer involvement in developing VET at sectoral level. These tripartite councils are composed of State and local government representatives, employers' organisations and trade unions. Twelve SECs were already established in 2011 under the ESF project 'Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing VET efficiency and quality (2010-15)'. They have proved successful in practice, but lacked a legal and regulative framework.

Main role of SECs (Vocational Education Law Section 12):

- to participate in developing sectoral qualification structures;
- to propose required professions and appropriate specialisations in sectors;
- to enrol students in VET programmes in particular sectors;

¹ Section 4.17 of the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 225 of 23.04.2013 *State Education Quality Service Regulations*

- to participate in the development of content for VET programmes;
- to verify skills for which occupational standards must be designed;
- to develop professional qualification examinations;
- to review occupational standards and professional qualifications' requirements;
- to participate in the accreditation of VET institutions and programmes;
- to coordinate and promote cooperation between VET institutions and social partners.

Social partners are also involved in the process of developing the content of qualification examinations, in evaluating examination performance, in the process of organising work-based training and in the organisation of vocational skills competitions on national and international levels. Cooperation partners of VET schools (representatives of employers from the relevant economic sectors and local authorities) are also involved in the delivery of the external evaluation.

The SECs also play a significant role as they unite representatives from professional associations and sectoral crafts unions in a common effort to determine the requirements of the labour market and to introduce them into vocational education. Companies are also involved in the definition and validation of professional skills through the SECs.

The main tasks of SECs are to ensure that providers of vocational education in a particular sector are supplied with the latest information on the field, know the demands for vocational qualifications and learning outcomes. SECs also promote collaboration between enterprises and vocational education institutions in the organisation of qualification practices, in particular, by delegating experts for developing vocational qualification exam content and procedure.

The SECs also organise research and assessment of competences and skills necessary for their sectors, develop sectoral qualification structures corresponding to the NQF/EQF, provide recommendations about basic professions and the specialisations necessary for the sector as well as organise the development and update of sectoral occupational standards.

Outputs from quality assurance at provider level

The education establishments providing general and secondary vocational education publish their self-assessment reports – and the SEQS its the accreditation experts' reports – on their websites. School staff use internal evaluation findings in order to plan future developments. Priorities for teaching and learning are also determined as a result of the findings. The results of internal evaluation must be published on the school's website. VET providers become more aware of the value of internal evaluation as a support for their day-to-day work and quality evaluation. The measure is intended to embed a culture of internal evaluation in Latvian schools.

The vocational education accreditation expert commissions always includes the representatives of the respective supervising institution, as well as sectoral associations and employer representatives delegated by the Latvian Chamber of Crafts, ensuring their regular and mandatory participation. It fosters the VET providers' performance closer to the labour market needs.

Quality assurance arrangements at system level in continuous VET National Framework for CVET

The same legislation in Latvia governs the implementation of CVET and IVET. The Education Law defines the objectives of adult education and defines the right to learn throughout life (Lifelong learning- LLL).

CVET is provided by a number of organisations, including ministries, employer associations, trade unions, continuous education departments and distance learning centres at universities, regional training centres, centres of adult education, and private providers. It is the responsibility of enterprises to ensure learning opportunities for their employees.

As for IVET, cooperation with social partners on CVET takes place in the National Tripartite Sub-Council for Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment and the regional subcouncils.

Local governments, in line with the law On Local Governments¹ (Section 15(4)), are obliged to support the education of their residents. In the mid-90s the local governments established a network of adult education centres.

CVET is also provided by ESF-supported SEA projects, overseen by the Ministry of Welfare, and a number of private education centres located across the whole country that provide both continuing vocational education and non-formal education programmes. The private providers also cooperate with SEA in providing training to unemployed people in the regions.

Formal learning in CVET

The Vocational Education Law (Section 26) lists three types of formal CVET – vocational further education programmes (profesionālās tālākizglītības), professional development programmes (profesionālās pilnveides) and professionally oriented (profesionālās ievirzes) educational programmes. The Law defines:

- Vocational further education as a special kind of vocational education which provides an opportunity for adults with previous education and professional experience to acquire a specific level vocational qualification.
- Professional development training as a special kind of vocational education which provides an opportunity for persons, irrespective of their age and previous education or vocational qualification, to acquire systematic vocational knowledge and skills corresponding to the requirements of the labour market.
- Vocational further education includes enterprise staff training, training of unemployed people, education provided by adult education centres, evening schools and supported by local governments. The vocational further education programme corresponds to basic, secondary and higher education stages, and must include at least 30% of the mandatory vocational content specified by the State education standard.

The duration of acquisition and the content of professional development training and professionally oriented education are determined by the relevant education programme. Professionally oriented education is not defined by law, but includes programmes offered by music, arts and sports schools that children and youth can follow in addition to the general or secondary education.

Statutory stakeholder involvement in CVET systems

As mentioned above in April 2015, the Latvian Parliament (Saeima) adopted amendments to the Vocational Education Law, to ensure a better fit between VET and labour market needs at sectoral, institutional and programme levels. The amendments introduced the establishment of SECs to promote employer involvement in developing VET at sectoral level. These tripartite councils are composed of State and local government representatives, employers' organisations and trade unions. Twelve SECs were already established in 2011 under the ESF project 'Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing VET efficiency and quality (2010-15)'. They have proved successful in practice, but lacked a legal and regulative framework.

Requirements for evaluation and review

Due to the unified system and regulation (the Cabinet of Ministers regulations of accreditation for vocational programmes and institutions), the procedures and requirements as well as the accreditation periods are almost identical for IVET and CVET.

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

In line with the Vocational Education Law (Section 30) vocational education programmes, professional development training and professionally oriented education programmes, must be accredited. According to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 852 (Section 20) the quality of vocational further education and professional development training programmes and institutions is

¹ On Local Governments of 09.06.1994 <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=57255>

assessed according to the same criteria as for general and initial vocational education, excluding such criteria as support in developing personality, support in carrier education, support in teaching differentiation and cooperation with the family of trainee.

Certification – assessment and validation of learning (system level)

A vocational qualification certificate is issued to a student who has passed the vocational qualification examination after completing an accredited further vocational education programme, a part of an accredited programme or has acquired the relevant vocational education programme in the form of self-education. A certificate regarding the acquisition of professional development training is issued to a student who has acquired a professional development training programme. And a certificate regarding the acquisition of a professionally oriented education is issued to a student who has acquired a professionally oriented training programme.

In 2011 the Cabinet of Ministers issued Regulations No. 146¹ establishing a formal process for the validation of professional competences obtained outside formal education for Latvian vocational qualification Levels 1-3 (currently EQF Levels 2-4). The validation of professional competences is undertaken based on the requirements of the relevant occupation standard. Professional competences gained outside the formal education system can be validated by education institutions – a right that is delegated to these institutions by the SEQS. The SEQS also keeps a list of the institutions that may undertake the validation.

In the beginning of 2012 the Cabinet of Ministers also issued the Regulations No. 36⁴⁰⁵ setting the procedures for the assessment and recognition of learning outcomes of previous education or professional experience in higher education (including colleges). Both academic and vocational learning can be evaluated and validated by higher education institutions.

A fee is charged for the validation of professional experience (the consultation process is free up to the exams) and, if the person passes the examination, s/he receives a corresponding level professional qualification document.

Monitoring, inspection and use of indicators

The monitoring and criteria for self-assessment are the same for institutions offering IVET and CVET programmes, as long as these form a part of the formal education system.

Reforms of quality assurance in CVET since 2009 (adoption of EQAVET Recommendation)

On 1 July 2010, the Amendments to the Vocational Education Law came into force establishing the rights of a person to obtain a knowledge and skills assessment with the aim of obtaining a vocational qualification document. The Law defines the term “professional competence”, which includes the totality of knowledge, skills and responsibility for performing professional activities in a concrete working situation. The Law stipulates that the responsible body for the process is the MoES, and delegates to the government the power to adopt the procedure for assessing the knowledge and skills obtained outside formal education.

On 22 February 2011, CoM Regulations No.146 “Procedure by which professional competence obtained outside formal education system is assessed” was approved. The Regulations stipulate the procedure by which professional competence (except regulated professions) that corresponds to the Latvian professional qualification Level 1-3 (the EQF Level 2-4) obtained outside formal education is assessed. The institutions assessing professional competence may be accredited education establishments, which have been assigned by the SEQS.

Part 2 – Interaction between national quality assurance and EQAVET

¹ Republic of Latvia, Cabinet Regulation No.146, adopted 22 February 2011, *Procedure for the Validation of the Professional Competence Acquired Outside Formal Education System* (in Latvian and English)

Basic information

According to the Republic of Latvia Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No.225 of 23.04.2013. *Regulations of the State Education Quality Service*, the State Education Quality Service (SEQS) has been assigned coordination of the work of the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) in Latvia and implementing EQAVET indicators to support the evaluation and quality assurance of vocational education and training.

Latvia has a national approach to enhancing quality assurance in VET, which overlaps partially with the EQAVET Recommendation, but is fully aligned with the EQAVET indicators:

1. Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers;
2. Investment in training of teachers and trainers;
3. Participation rate in VET programmes;
4. Completion rate in VET programmes;
5. Placement rate in VET programmes;
6. Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace;
7. Unemployment rate;
8. Prevalence of vulnerable groups;
9. Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market;
10. Schemes used to promote better access to VET are enshrined in a draft Cabinet Ministers'

Regulation "Procedures for the Accreditation of General and Vocational Education Programmes, Education Institutions and Examination Centres".

This is intended to allow a comprehensive analysis of VET quality to be carried out in every education institution at national level. The quality indicators will allow all stakeholders in education to create a shared and better understanding of what high-quality education is. The indicators will be monitored and analysed in order to improve the quality of the education system.

SECTION B – INTERACTION BETWEEN NATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EQAVET

National Reference Point – Introduction

Acting as the National Reference Point for EQAVET, the State Education Quality Service (SEQS) coordinates implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework in VET, and the introduction of the common quality assurance indicators in VET at a national level since 2013.

At the first stage of the work discussions were held on the EQAVET Reference Framework and implementation of common vocational education quality assessment indicators with all stakeholders. The SECs representing the following branches:

1. Food processing and agriculture,
2. Timber industry (forestry, wood processing),
3. Chemical industry and related branches (pharmaceutics, biotechnology, environment),
4. Manufacturing of electronic and optical equipment, ICT,
5. Metalworking, machine building, mechanical engineering,
6. Transport and logistics,
7. Tourism and beauty industry,
8. Printing and publishing industry, paper and products production, computer design,
9. Building and construction industry,
10. Power industry,
11. Textile industry, leather and leather products producing,

12. Entrepreneurship, finances, accountancy, administration (wholesale and retail trade, commerce)
were briefed on alignment of the EQAVET criteria with national quality assurance system.

Discussions were held, with the participation of representatives of the Employers' Confederation of Latvia, the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia, the Ministry of Education and Science, the State Employment Agency and the Associations of the State Revenue Service and of the Vocational Education, the heads of the Accreditation Commissions on Vocational Education and the heads of the VET institutions.

At the second stage EQAVET indicators were implemented in the draft of the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers.

The SEQS representative participated in the working group on EQAVET and the quality assurance approach in adult learning in the context of Continuing VET.

In 2015 the SEQS representative participated in the EQAVET Steering Committee meetings.

The sixth EQAVET Annual Forum took place in Latvia on 17-18 June 2015. It was organised by the European Commission, the EQAVET Secretariat and the State Education Quality Service (SEQS), Latvia.

National approach to enhance quality assurance

As outlined above, quality assurance and monitoring are currently undertaken predominantly through the accreditation and licensing of education programmes and institutions – based on criteria specified in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No.852.

The current national approach to quality assessment provided by the Regulations No.852 is similar to the EQAVET Recommendation as it provides an integrated system for quality assessment in vocational education. As described above, the current approach foresees that the accreditation of education institutions and programmes will be based on their assessment in seven areas, based on an integrated list of criteria for both general and vocational education. Individual criteria may be used across all assessment areas and in separate areas several criteria for assessment are provided by the Regulations. According to the stakeholders interviewed, national assessment criteria and EQAVET indicators already overlap in a few broad areas. However, the current Latvian system is more oriented towards evaluating the provider's education and management *processes*, while EQAVET is more learning outcomes based (e.g. employment and placement rates) and output oriented (share of providers with quality systems, share of trained teachers, number of participants in VET programmes).

In 2013 the SEQS became the responsible institution for the implementation of an underactivity "European Quality Assurance Reference Framework in Vocational Education and Training implementation in vocational education in Latvia" under the European Social Fund project administered by State Education Development Agency in the programme „Human resources and employment” appendix 1.2.1.1.1. underactivity „Development of a sectoral qualifications system and improvement of the efficiency and quality of vocational education and training”.

During a project that aimed to develop new practices in self-assessment in order to support coherence, mutual trust and understanding by encouraging them to deepen their internal evaluation at the review phase, the SEQS has designed and published guidelines about deepening the culture of quality assurance and self-assessment for VET providers. The EQAVET indicators are included in the above-mentioned guidelines. To achieve the deliverables and modernise VET it is crucial to strengthen partnerships with social partners and other relevant stakeholders, further develop quality assurance mechanisms in VET in line with the EQAVET Recommendation and, as part of quality assurance system in Latvia, deepen the quality culture as a factor for the impact of quality assurance of VET through self-assessment, learning outcomes on achieved knowledge, skills and competences, data collection and analysis.

Influence of EQAVET on national developments of quality assurance

Overall, interviewees underlined the positive impact of the EQAVET Recommendation in drawing the national stakeholder attention to developing quality assurance in VET specifically. It was pointed out that the unified system of quality assessment in licensing and accreditation of education establishments and programmes is more oriented towards general education. Currently, basic education provision is assessed according to criteria which are similar to the criteria for vocational further education for adults.

Thanks to the Bruges Communiqué and EQAVET, stakeholders now are rethinking the unified approach – a methodology that gained consensus before – and considering that VET may have to strive towards different outcomes (not those of general education) and hence will need a different quality assurance approach.

Following the sixth EQAVET Annual Forum, which agreed priorities to be developed in 2016, and the Riga Conclusions, which present the role of VET in the context of the growth and jobs agenda and the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), the SEQs has set medium-term deliverables to reinforce the quality for VET in Latvia.

To achieve the deliverables and modernise VET it is crucial to strengthen partnerships with social partners and other relevant stakeholders, further develop quality assurance mechanisms in VET in line with the EQAVET Recommendation and, as part of quality assurance system in Latvia, deepen the quality culture as a factor for the impact of quality assurance of VET through self-assessment, learning outcomes on achieved knowledge, skills and competences, data collection and analysis. As mentioned already, the EQAVET system together with the EQF are also more geared towards the assessment of learning outcomes (rather than the learning process) and the results of learning – the ability of an individual to find a job after education, to integrate in work environment, take up further education and entrepreneurship opportunities. Hence, EQAVET has prompted a rethinking of the quality assurance in VET from the learning outcomes perspective.

Synergies with other EU level instruments

As many of the European instruments have close connections, as each contributes to the quality of VET, it is crucial to strengthen cooperation with EQF (NQF) and ECVET. The collaboration on quality assurance will support the design and recognition of learning outcomes and qualifications based on the EQF (NQF) levels and ECVET principles.

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