

Introduction

1. The Peer Learning Activity (PLA) will enable participants to:
 - share information on how the indicators in the EQAVET Recommendation are used (or could be used) at the national and provider level in relation to approval, external evaluation or accreditation;
 - identify what lessons can be learnt from other countries' experiences.
2. The PLA has been organised by the EQAVET Secretariat in collaboration with the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research and the Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education. It will be hosted by the Tallinn School of Service.
3. As with all PLAs, the priority is to find time for discussion, reflection, and for sharing knowledge and experiences. The approach is different to the one used in a study visit - the participants will consider approaches used in a number of countries as well as the hosts' experiences. There will be a number of short presentations setting out examples of using indicators at the system level and by VET providers. These presentations will provide a stimulus for discussion, and participants will be encouraged to reflect on the policy and practical implications for their own approach to using indicators as part of an accreditation, approval or evaluation process.

Context

4. The PLA supports the use of the EQAVET Recommendation¹ which is designed to help Member States promote and monitor continuous improvement of their VET systems. The EQAVET Framework contributes to quality improvements in VET and increases transparency of, and consistency in, VET policy developments in Member States. The Framework, based on a four stage quality assurance cycle (planning, implementation, evaluation and review) includes ten indicators (see Annexe A) and indicative descriptors at the system and provider level.
5. The PLA focuses on the EQAVET indicators and how they (or other indicators) are used as part of the accreditation, approval or evaluation processes. While the initial decision to accredit a VET provider can include a consideration of how indicators are used (or will be used), there are many situations where indicators are not part of this process. In 2011 Cedefop² commented that 'as part of the criteria for accreditation, VET providers should build on the set of quality indicators included in the EQAVET Recommendation. This set of indicators provides a backbone that might be extended by additional indicators according to particular circumstances.'
6. We should also note that the 2016 EQAVET Secretariat survey³ comments that the vast majority of countries use standards as 'a condition of accreditation/approval' and these standards are required as

¹ The Recommendation is available on the EQAVET website at <http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/library/policy-documents/policy-documents-2009.aspx>

² Page 26, Assuring Quality in VET – the role of accrediting VET providers, Cedefop <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3061> [Accessed 17-7-17]

³ Page 79, the EQAVET survey, 2016 <http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/statistics.aspx> [Accessed 17-7-17]

part of the legislation in the initial and continuing VET sectors. However we do not know if these standards refer to the EQAVET (or other) indicators.

- The EQAVET Secretariat' survey in 2016 shows that extensive use is made of the EQAVET indicators in initial and continuing VET⁴.

Figure 5.2.1 – EQAVET Reference Framework Indicators in the IVET sector in 2016

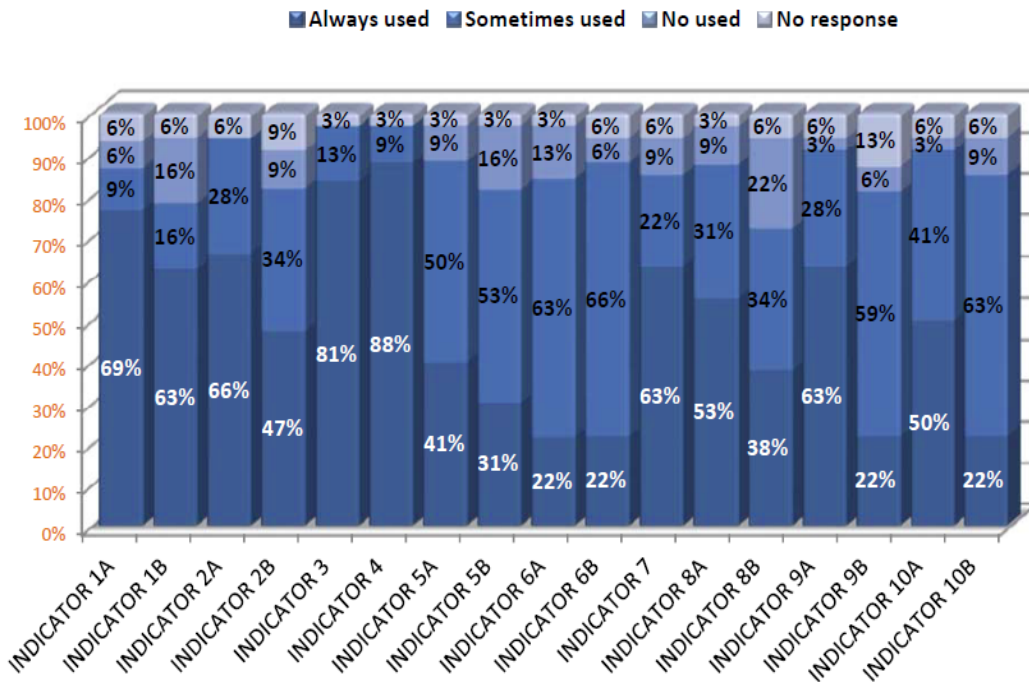
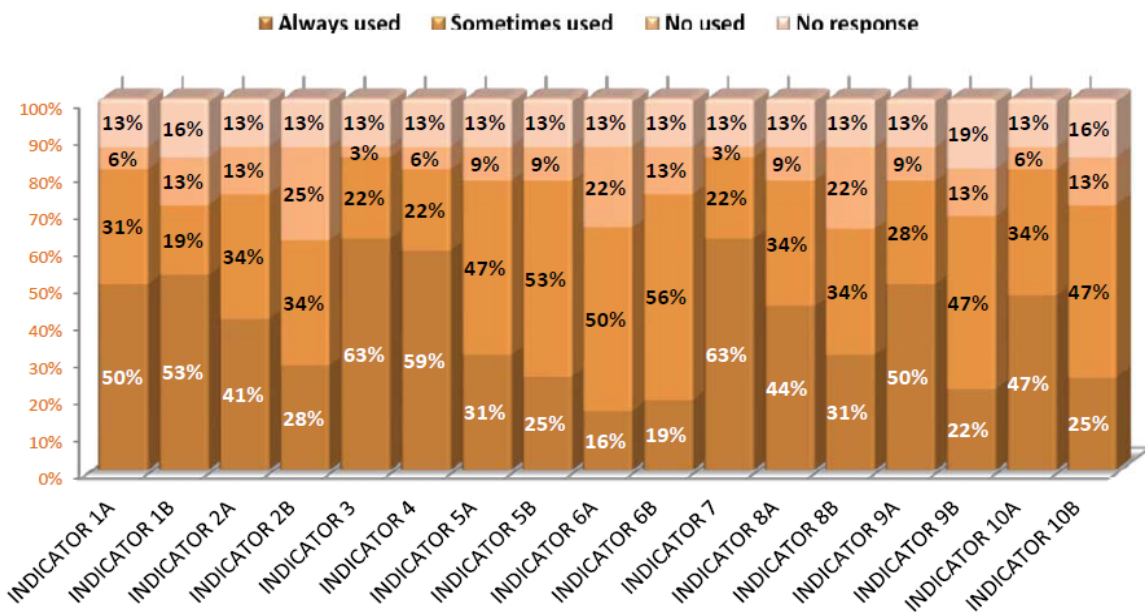


Table 5.2.2 – EQAVET Reference Framework Indicators in the CVET sector in 2016



⁴ Page 159 and 162, the EQAVET survey, 2016 <http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/statistics.aspx> [Accessed 17-7-17]

8. Irrespective of whether the EQAVET, or other, indicators are used in the accreditation, re-accreditation or approval decision, they are important in all internal or external evaluation processes at both the system and the provider level.

Accreditation

9. The accreditation of a VET provider⁵ is the quality assurance process through which status is granted to an education or training provider. This shows that the VET provider has been approved by the relevant legislative or professional authorities as having met predetermined standards. These 'predetermined standards' can include a wide range of measures such as indicators; criteria; principles; entry requirements; agreement of funding arrangements; monitoring and evaluation expectations; or an acceptance of inspection or external evaluation. Annexe B sets out the accreditation process as seen by Cedefop.
10. Accreditation always involves an external body which has been recognised to perform an external assessment and to award accreditation as a result of a positive evaluation. The external body designs the predetermined standards which have to be met by the VET provider during the accreditation process. This may include defined minimum requirements, grades or levels of excellence. A central aspect of most accreditation processes is the requirement to implement an internal quality assurance system at the provider level. This internal system should reflect the criteria and standards defined by the external accrediting body even though the VET provider's system is often designed to meet local needs.⁶
11. Cedefop also comments⁷ on how the process of VET accreditation can strengthen the focus on quality issues. This can be achieved through closer links between the VET sector and the labour market; improved involvement of stakeholders; increased regional cooperation and a stronger emphasis on measuring outputs and outcomes with the promotion of a relevant set of indicators.
12. It is worth noting that accreditation can be based on:
 - meeting a minimum set of standards; or
 - encouraging the development of a quality culture and one that provides incentives for high quality providers⁸.
13. Accreditation can be an administrative process which focuses on controlling VET providers and ensuring they are accountable within the overarching VET system. With this approach the main task of accreditation is to check that the minimum standards are being met in order to ensure poor quality provision is prevented from being established. This approach focuses on the quality of inputs; the appropriateness of the machinery and staffing arrangements; sound financial management; and the premises/infrastructure which is available for training. These accreditation criteria can be assessed by business or technical experts: training specialists are not required. An alternative approach to accreditation is to focus on those features which have a direct impact on the quality of the training process. In this second approach accreditation concentrates on the quality of the assessment of learning outcomes; the outputs from training and the internal processes which support the improvement in the quality of the provision. With this approach training specialists are required to be involved in the

⁵ <http://www.eqavet.eu/qc/gns/glossary/a/accreditation-education-training-provider.aspx> [Accessed 17-7-17]

SOURCE: Cedefop, 2008c, based on Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials, 2003.

⁶ Page 11 of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in VET, 2009, Cedefop <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4089> [Accessed 17-7-17]

⁷ Page 27, Assuring Quality in VET – the role of accrediting VET providers, Cedefop <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3061> [Accessed 17-7-17]

⁸ Pages 190-193, Assuring Quality in VET – the role of accrediting VET providers, Cedefop <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3061> [Accessed 17-7-17]

accreditation process. The EQAVET indicators can be used to support either (or a combination) of these approaches.

14. Most European countries have a system for the external recognition of VET provider and/or VET programmes. Accreditation is undertaken by ministries, semi-public agencies or private organisations which are mandated by the system to carry out this role. In many countries is a requirement for VET providers seeking to offer nationally-recognised qualifications or to receive public funding⁹. The process of external accreditation helps to improve the reputation of VET providers and make VET programmes more attractive.
15. In addition to national accreditation and approval schemes, there are sectoral based approaches to external accreditation or recognition. These approaches can be organised by professional associations of VET providers, associations, organisations or individual companies. These processes can lead to the award of an international qualification¹⁰, an external 'label', or recognition by the sector. There are also international accreditation processes (e.g. ISO – the international organisation for standardisation, EFQM – the European Foundation for Quality Management) which are sometimes recognised at the national level and seen as equivalent to the national system.
16. Many of the external bodies with responsibility for accreditation also provide support or training to VET providers seeking to be accredited. When these bodies have this dual responsibility, it is important to separate the support and evaluation activities to ensure each applicant is assessed fairly using the agreed criteria.
17. In addition to system-level approaches to accreditation, many countries have accreditation or approval processes for individual programmes/courses. This involves formal recognition that a vocational course conforms to the national principles and guidelines for accreditation and to a national qualifications framework. This means that:
 - its contents and standards are appropriate to the qualification;
 - it fulfils the purpose for which it was developed; and
 - it is based on national competency standards, where they exist.¹¹
18. Course approval or accreditation is unlikely to be the sole responsibility of an individual VET provider (this contrast with the higher education sector where institutional autonomy often includes responsibility for validating or approving new courses/programmes). However there are many different approaches which can be used by a VET provider to approve a programme e.g. establishing an independent committee to review a proposal; gaining approval from the sector; working with a partner VET provider in a peer-support process; relying on the views of an independent inspectorate; applying to a ministry's approval panel; working with a partner university to offer a franchised programme, working with a funding agency to offer a bespoke programme etc.

Using the EQAVET (or other) indicators

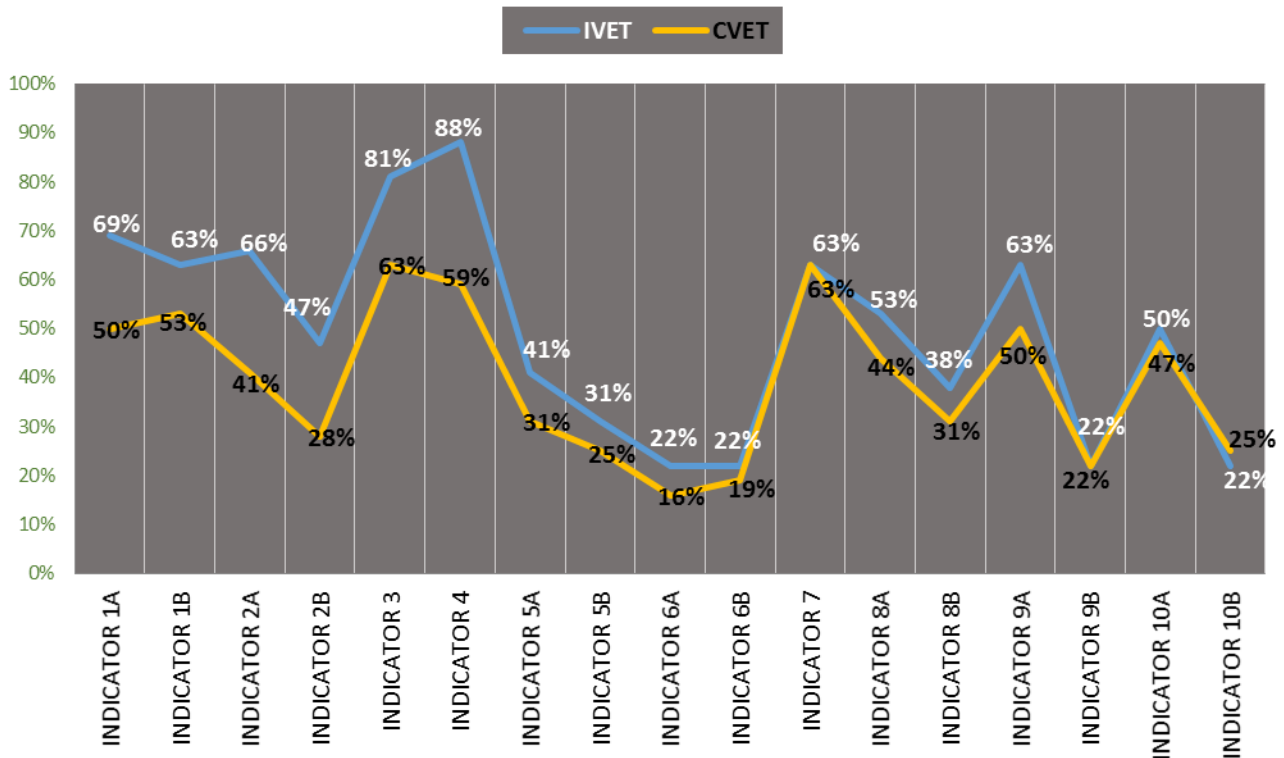
19. The indicators in the EQAVET Recommendation are part of a tool box which encourages Member States to select those which are the most useful in their context. The tables in paragraph 9 highlight that Member States have used the EQAVET indicator to different extents – they are not equally 'popular'. This is shown in the following figure (page 175 from the EQAVET Secretariat's report):

⁹ Page 78, VET providers' Handbook, Cedefop <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3068> [Accessed 17-7-17]

¹⁰ International qualifications are defined on page 13 of the revised EQF, 2017. Available from http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/library/policy-documents/policy-documents-2017_copy1.aspx [Accessed 17-7-17]

¹¹ <http://www.eqavet.eu/qc/gns/glossary/a/accreditation-vet-courses.aspx> [Accessed 17-7-17]

Overview of EQAVET indicators used at system level for the IVET and CVET sectors, 2016



20. The EQAVET Secretariat's report¹² notes that in initial VET those 'pure outcome' indicators (5A, 5B, 6A and 6B) are less likely to be used than those indicators which focus on inputs, processes, contexts or outputs. This situation is likely to be replicated when indicators are used for accreditation or approval – it is more difficult to use outcome indicators in this context. However for a re-accreditation process, these pure outcome indicators could take on a more significant role.

During the PLA

21. On the first day of the PLA there are two small group discussions. The focus will be on how indicators, based on EQAVET, are used as part of the accreditation, approval or evaluation process. In the first discussion in the morning, participants will be invited to discuss:

- what is the current practice in using indicators as part of the accreditation, approval or evaluation process;
- what are the problems of using indicators as part of the accreditation, approval or evaluation process.

22. In the second discussion in the afternoon of the first day, participants will be invited to discuss how the EQAVET indicators could be used as part of an accreditation, approval or evaluation process.

23. In the morning of the second day of the PLA there is a further opportunity for small group discussion. This will focus on the benefits of using indicators to underpin or support the accreditation, approval or evaluation process.

After the PLA

24. At the end of the PLA, a short policy brief (3-4 pages) will be produced and added to the EQAVET website. This will highlight the key issues and conclusions developed during the PLA.

¹² Page 159, the EQAVET survey, 2016 <http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/statistics.aspx> [Accessed 17-7-17]

Annexe A

EQAVET indicators

No 1 - Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers:

- (a) share of VET providers applying internal quality assurance systems defined by law/at own initiative
- (b) share of accredited VET providers

No 2 - Investment in training of teachers and trainers:

- (a) share of teachers and trainers participating in further training
- (b) amount of funds invested

No 3 - Participation rate in VET programmes:

Number of participants in VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria

No 4 - Completion rate in VET programmes:

Number of persons having successfully completed/abandoned VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria

No 5 - Placement rate in VET programmes:

- (a) destination of VET learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria (3)
- (b) share of employed learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria

No 6 - Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace:

- (a) information on occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training, according to type of training and individual criteria
- (b) satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences

No 7 - Unemployment rate (4) according to individual criteria

No 8 - Prevalence of vulnerable groups:

- (a) percentage of participants in VET classified as disadvantaged groups (in a defined region or catchment area) according to age and gender
- (b) success rate of disadvantaged groups according to age and gender

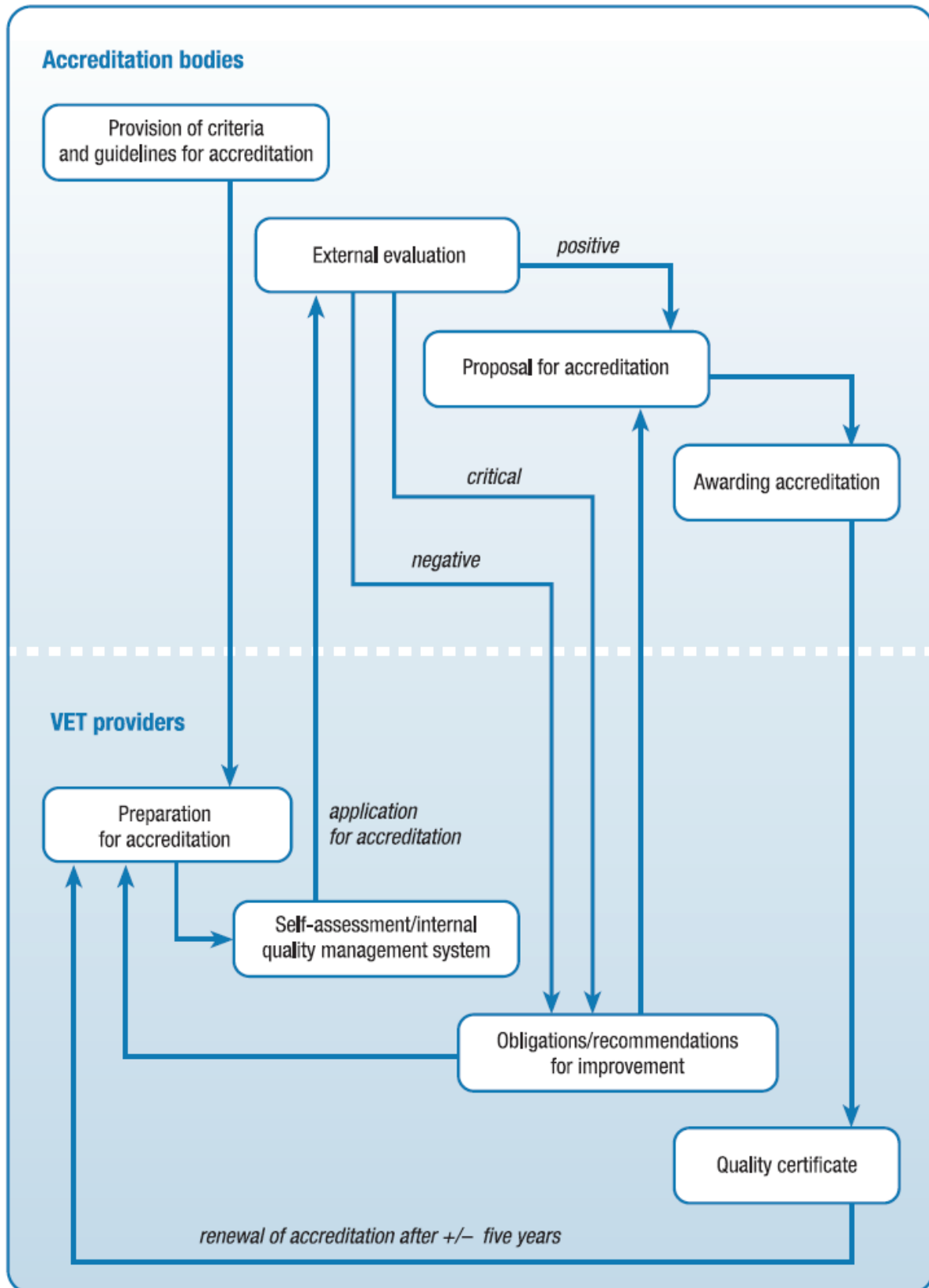
No 9 - Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market:

- (a) information on mechanisms set up to identify changing demands at different levels
- (b) evidence of their effectiveness

No 10 - Schemes used to promote better access to VET:

- (a) information on existing schemes at different levels
- (b) evidence of their effectiveness

The accreditation process (Cedefop, 2009)



Source: Erwin Seyfried.