



Report

Annual Network Meeting 2017

Date: 8-9 June 2017

Venue: St Julian's, Malta

Introduction

This EQAVET Annual Network Meeting was hosted by the National Commission for Further and Higher Education of Malta (the EQAVET national reference point). The EQAVET Annual Network Meeting is the decision-making body of the Network which meets once a year. The meeting provides the strategic direction for the work of the EQAVET Network and responds to the needs of Member States in relation to the implementation of QA policies for VET and the EQAVET Recommendation. It provides the opportunity for discussion, allowing for different perspectives while striving for common solutions which benefit all Network members.

Twenty six EU countries were represented at the Annual Network Meeting. Apologies were received from Lithuania and Poland. The partner countries: Norway, Switzerland, FYROM and Kosovo participated. The Social Partners were represented by the European Trade Union confederation (ETUC). Observers from the European Credit system for VET (ECVET) network, and the European Providers of Vocational Education and Training (EUproVET) were present. The European Training Foundation (ETF) and the European Development Centre for Vocational Education and Training (CEDEFOP) were also represented.

The Annual Network Meeting was chaired by Mr Carlo Scatoli, Unit Vocational Training, Apprenticeships and Adult Learning - DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission.

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

Opening speeches and Introduction to the Annual Network Meeting 2017

The meeting was officially opened and participants were welcomed by Carlo Scatoli who thanked the National Commission for Further and Higher Education of Malta for hosting the meeting. He also welcomed representatives of Member States, the Social Partners' and colleagues from agencies representing VET providers and other observers.

He underlined that the meeting was taking place at an important moment as it provided an opportunity for the Network to reflect on the priorities of the European [New Skills Agenda](#) from an EQAVET perspective.

He noted that the New Skills Agenda focuses on making VET more attractive and relevant to the labour market. These two priorities should be considered in any policy developments related to VET. From this perspective, he also noted that 2018/2019 was a transition period in which the Commission is reflecting on how best to move forward the New Skills Agenda in coordination with the EU VET policy and the cooperation in education policy, as the Copenhagen process and the Strategic Framework Education & Training 2020 only set the agenda until 2020. He mentioned that a revision of these processes is likely to take place in 2019. This could lead, in the VET area,

to a broad policy recommendation which revises the EU transparency tools, including EQAVET. He noted that it was unclear whether there will be a separate legal basis for EQAVET beyond 2020, or whether a more general legal basis will be launched that covers VET policy initiatives including EQAVET, ECVET etc. To inform this decision making process, the Commission is planning the launch of an evaluation (planned for August 2017) in order to assess the impact of EQAVET. A preliminary exchange of ideas on the forthcoming education and training policy context and programme will take place at a meeting of the High Level Group for Education and Training in Tallinn, Estonia, on 15 June 2017.

Christina Scholz, Research and Policy Manager, National Commission for Further and Higher Education of Malta, welcomed participants to Malta. Her presentation outlined the focus of education and training (general, vocational and higher; and the transition paths) in the national context and how the EQAVET Framework had stimulated and provided a basis for monitoring the improvements of VET in Malta. She observed that the Maltese QA system is in line with the EQAVET Framework and its indicators; and that the national priorities in VET are aligned with the EQAVET work programme and supported by the work of the NRP.

Quality assurance in VET in the EU policy context

Carlo Scatoli and Koen Bois d'Enghien from the European Commission provided an overview of EU related policy developments. They mentioned the recent revision of the EQF Recommendation which was adopted on 22 May 2017. This focuses on increasing the understanding and comparability of qualifications and making better use of all available skills in the European labour market. Carlo presented the new elements in the EQF, including the idea (mentioned in the recitals rather than in the legal provisions) of exploring the need for an EU register, outside the field of higher education, for bodies monitoring quality assurance systems for qualifications.

Koen presented the Commission's proposal for a Council Recommendation on graduate tracking to improve information on the labour market outcomes of education and training; and the challenges or success factors of graduates' employability in particular regions and sectors. As part of this proposal, the Commission will invite Member States to set up by 2020 a graduate tracking system which includes data from relevant administrative databases as well as the development of longitudinal graduate surveys; and to set up a Network of experts dealing with producing graduate tracking data. Currently, a mapping exercise is being carried out in order to have a clearer view about what is happening in the Member States and to facilitate cooperation.

The presentation is available [here](#).

Participants questioned the value of developing a EU register for QA agencies in VET, and mentioned that it is a complex issue that should be considered by the Network. The reflection should include members' feedback which could feed into any revision of EQAVET, explore the added value, conditions, possibilities and challenges of developing a EU register for QA agencies in VET. The complexity of VET arises from a considerable degree of devolved legal responsibility for quality assurance; currently there is insufficient clarity on whether or not the register is thought to be for agencies responsible for QA of qualifications or agencies responsible for QA of provision. Participants also mentioned that in this context, there is a need to reflect on the relationship between the NRPs and the QA agencies.

In relation to the proposal for setting up a graduate tracking system and a Network, participants agreed that duplication of efforts should be avoided and the work of the EQAVET Network should feed into and be part of the process; and that a tracking system should be seen as a tool to improve QA and not as a goal in itself. The process of collecting information on outcomes of VET is part of the EQAVET Framework and should be part of a broader approach to supporting continuous improvement.

Update on the implementation of the EQAVET work programme 2016

Sean Feerick, Director of the Secretariat, presented progress in implementing the EQAVET Network's Strategic Plan 2016-2017. The Strategic Plan was designed to support Member States in developing their strategies for the implementation of the Recommendation by focusing on deepening the culture of QA, the transversal role of EQAVET in the EU E&T policies and the dissemination of good practices and increasing cooperation.

He noted that the underlining principles for actions by the Secretariat in 2017 were: communication and dissemination; increasing transparency of information; and the role of QA in the broader policy context. These principles have informed the methodologies and activities developed within the Strategic Plan 2016-2017, with a focus on:

1. Working group on Complementing EQAVET that ensured relevance to the needs of the EU policy context and Member States and consolidated the work developed over recent years by adding areas that address important policy priorities;
2. Peer learning activities on topics identified by NRPs in 2016-2017:
 - Indicator number 5 'Placement rates' Cardiff September 2016
 - 'Procedures for supporting training providers to identify areas for improvements to QA and to implement QA systems in line with the EQAVET' Portugal March 2017
 - 'Using the EQAVET indicators to accredit VET providers' Estonia 13-14 September 2017

He also emphasised the importance of the work of NRPs developed within the restricted call of ERASMUS+. He noted that a key priority for the work of the Secretariat was to ensure a two-way process by which the NRPs work programme feeds into the work of the Network as well as being informed by the work achieved at Network level.

He pointed out the main dissemination elements for 2017: policy briefs as a result of the PLAs; the EQAVET+ indicative descriptors: the Network paper on complementing EQAVET, the new area on the website and brochure; Newsletters; and the results of the Secretariat survey 2016. He also mentioned upcoming events: the launch of call for nominations for PLAs on 'Using the EQAVET indicators to accredit VET providers' Estonia 13-14 September; and the EQAVET Forum 21 November in France linked to the EU's Vocational Skills Week. He commented on the importance of the input at the Annual Network Meeting for preparing the work of the Network.

The presentation is available [here](#)

Working Group 2017 - on *Developing Guidelines for the work of Complementing EQAVET*

The supporting expert of the working group, Keith Brumfitt, presented the main outputs of the group. The working group was established in 2016 to produce materials to support the use of the

EQAVET+ indicative descriptors identified by the EQAVET Network in 2015-2016; and illustrate how these could be implemented and used. The group met on four occasions and developed 29 case studies which are based on practice in 16 Member States. These case studies look at practice at the provider and the system level. They cover all the EQAVET+ indicative descriptors, are linked to the EQAVET indicators; and focus on supporting NRPs, Member States and other users of EQAVET. Each case study has a short summary which is followed by the full text and users of the EQAVET website can search the case studies on the basis of a set of 'key words'. The work is accessible from the EQAVET homepage on the website.

The presentation is available [here](#)

Results of the Secretariat Survey 2016

Aranca Oviedo, policy officer EQAVET Secretariat, presented the results of the Secretariat survey 2016. The report includes information on all EU28 countries and some EFTA and Candidate countries. She explained that by 2016 all countries had established a comprehensive QA approach compatible with EQAVET at the system and provider level (with the exception of BE); and on average in more than 25% of countries EQAVET has served as the model for developing the QA approach. In the majority of countries, the national approach covered work based learning (WBL). Systems are collecting information relating to the destination of VET graduates, and this information is being used to monitor the quality of VET provision. However, less use is made of this information to modify and/or improve VET provision. As in previous years, the results of the survey show that the approach to QA is solid and systematic (and has included the involvement of relevant stakeholders) in the planning and implementation phases of the QA cycle; but that this is not the case for the evaluation and review phases. In relation to the use of indicators: the 'pure' outcome indicators (i.e. indicator 5A, 5B, 6A and 6B) and the indicators which provide qualitative data (i.e. indicators 6, 9 and 10) are less used by Member States. The report can be found on the EQAVET website [here](#).

The presentation is available [here](#)

National Reference Points work programme supported by Erasmus+

Michele Grombeer (EACEA) presented the draft compendium on the NRPs' work programmes supported under the restricted call ERASMUS+ programme 2017-2018, within the key activity 3 - Support for policy reform. The objective of the grant is to support NRPs to further develop QA mechanisms in line with the EQAVET Recommendation and/or establishing continuous information and feedback loops in IVET and CVET systems based on learning outcomes (Riga Priority). The allocation is €2 million. There was a requirement for 15% co-funding of the total budget amount for each country's national sources; and the maximum grant per project was €150 000. 19 NRPs received a grant and she presented the timeline for each project's implementation.

Most of the applicants focused on strengthening mutual cooperation among NRPs and deepening the culture of QA of VET. The projects involve organising activities that address the following issues:

- closing the gap between VET and labour market needs and establishing more effective mechanism for identifying and addressing skills mismatch
- disseminating QA principles

- strengthening feedback loops, graduate tracking and peer review
- developing work based learning
- improving QA by using self-assessment of VET providers and external monitoring
- implementing EQAVET+

The presentation is available [here](#).

Presentation of national examples followed by a plenary discussion on matters arising

Catherine Beauvois from the NRP in France outlined the role of CNEFOP (Conseil National de l'Emploi, de la Formation et de l'Orientation Professionnelle) in coordinating the national strategy relating to guidance, vocational training, apprenticeship, employment, and remaining in employment. She presented CNEFOP's objectives for 2017-2018; and explained that as part of their ERASMUS+ project, CNEFOP will organise a peer learning activity on EQAVET and develop a dedicated "quality" section on the CNEFOP website. She also mentioned that new reforms are taking place which are likely to introduce a new labelling requirement for training providers. This reform aims to increase transparency by increasing the available information on VET providers, the quality of their programmes and outcomes.

Radostinka Vasileva from the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science (the NRP) presented the objectives and planned outputs of their ERASMUS+ project i.e. EQAVET: 'Vision for Revision' (VIREO). The project aims at reviewing the existing skills forecasting mechanisms, analysing data available and identifying leading indicators for VET performance; in order to support VET schools, policy makers and relevant stakeholders. This project will support reform which will strengthen the identification of future labour market needs. She mentioned that cooperation with other NRPs is a key priority and the NRP will organise a PLA in autumn 2017.

Workshop on Work Programme 2018-2019

Sean Feerick presented the draft work programme for 2018-2019. This has taken account of the new EU policy context provided by the EU New Skills Agenda; and the final year of implementing the Strategic plan 2016-2017, including the outcomes of the working group on 'Complementing EQAVET'. The draft was prepared using the findings from the NRP questionnaire on topics for PLAs after 2017, the results of Secretariat survey 2016, reflections on the results of the NRP projects funded by the ERASMUS+ grant 2015-2016, ad hoc meetings with EQAVET's experts and the Commission on 28 February 2017 and the Steering Committee meeting on 28 March 2017.

Participants were asked to reflect on whether or not the proposed work programme responded effectively to the policy challenges described in the New Skills Agenda and other EU policy processes; and to future developments such as the possible revision of the EQAVET Recommendation.

Following discussions in workshops, the participants agreed that:

- The current draft of the work programme does not provide sufficient strategic direction as it is mainly operational.

- It is important that the work programme facilitates strategic discussions relating to relevant EU initiatives as this will increase cooperation/synergies and ensure the expertise of NRPs is taking into account.
- The work programme should enable reflection on strategic developments beyond 2020 and the role EQAVET should play, considering the potential revision of EQAVET in 2019.
- The work programme should propose activities that enable Network members to reflect on the role of the NRPs in relation to national and European developments e.g. EFA, EQF, tracking systems, the register, etc.
- The activities should invite those working on other EU tools and initiatives to be involved; and vice versa.
- The work programme should be based on increasing synergies between existing European initiatives rather than adopting new ones.
- A working group should be established to look at emerging policy developments to reflect strategically on how, from 2020, the QA of VET could be strengthened at a European level.
- Peer review at EU level should be considered as a working methodology in order to support improvements, transparency and cooperation.
- The methodology for PLAs is an appropriate way to strengthen peer learning. The key element of PLAs is the opportunity for sharing and exchanging practices/insights. The focus of each PLA on the review phase was agreed. PLAs should involve practitioners/stakeholders and their interests and perspectives need to be heard in the discussions. The five topics proposed for PLA were seen as relevant, although one group considered as not relevant the topic on higher level apprenticeships and higher VET. Other possible PLA topics mentioned during the discussions were: Making VET more attractive/a first choice; and the involvement of teachers, trainers, learners, QA teams and employers in the QA processes.

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

Elizabeth Watters, European Training Foundation (ETF), provided an overview of the on-going work that ETF is developing in relation to enhancing quality assurance of VET in partner countries. She referred to the *ETF Torino process* which monitors VET QA and identifies needs in each partner country; and the *ETF Forum for QA in VET*, which aims to internationalise QA processes in VET, strengthen networks and deepen knowledge. She pointed out that EQAVET is playing a catalyst role for increasing cooperation in partner countries despite the wide diversity of QA approaches and policy development. She noted the importance and value of the work developed by EQAVET which is easily accessible from the website. She presented the events which have been organised with partner countries to promote quality assurance in VET; and appreciated the support provided by the EQAVET Secretariat and other Network members in these events.

The presentation is available [here](#).

Tina Bertzeletou from the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) presented recent publications produced by CEDEFOP i.e. 'Changing nature and role of VET', 'Learning outcomes bridging education and training and the labour market', 'Application of learning outcomes approaches in Europe' and 'Globalisation of VET'. These are all are

available on the CEDEFOP website. She referred to the on-going work to monitor the implementation and impact of Qualifications Frameworks. In addition, CEDEFOP is working with learning providers through the platform for European Associations of VET Providers (established in 2015 in order to work on strategic issues and inform the Commission) and the community of VET practitioners (established in 2017 which looks at practical guidance for practitioners, identifies good practices and makes use of European activities and results). Both of these networks collaborate and develop actions plans facilitated by CEDEFOP.

The presentation is available [here](#).

Information session and workshop on ensuring continued relevance of EQAVET in the broader policy context of ET2020 and the NSA

Information session on other work relevant to EQAVET

Presentation of the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFA)

Carlo Scatoli and Koen Bois d'Enghien from the European Commission presented this initiative to support the advancement of the quality, supply, attractiveness and inclusiveness of apprenticeships. The EFA sets out key elements for the design and delivery of apprenticeships at all levels; the responsibilities, rights and obligations of each party and which should be enforceable within the flexible arrangements which apply to very different Member State systems. It is envisaged that the EFA will be adopted as a Council Recommendation in September 2017.

The presentation is available [here](#).

ET2020 Working Group on quality assurance on teachers and trainers in work-based learning

Paul Vroonhof, from the consultancy Panteia, presented the study on '*Mapping of models and practices in relation to teachers and trainers in WBL/apprenticeships*'. The findings of the study will feed into the work of the ET 2020 Working Group on teachers and trainers. Some of these findings refer to the need to focus on the professionalisation of teachers and trainers, cooperation for ensuring quality of teachers and trainers, and the governance issues relating to teachers and trainers in WBL. He noted that the work in EQAVET, particularly the Building Blocks for WBL, are highly relevant for work in this area.

The presentation is available [here](#).

Interim findings of study commissioned by the Commission on mapping EU systems on tracking VET graduates

Patricia Vale from the ICF consultancy presented a study on mapping EU systems on tracking VET graduates. She explained that the study is based on 81 measures from 24 countries. The measures cover lower and upper secondary VET and post-secondary non-tertiary. 37 are VET specific measures that focus on the tracking of VET graduates exclusively and 47 are wider measures that track graduates from different parts of the education system (e.g. all upper secondary graduates) or wider groups of people (e.g. age cohort). Most countries opt to use quantitative surveys. The study will consider whether there is a need to develop a new EU VET

graduate tracking measure; streamline an existing survey; or provide support for the creation or development of measures at national, regional or provider level.

The presentation is available [here](#).

Workshop

Participants were asked to consider these issues as part of their reflections on how the EQAVET Network could identify future directions for its work to strengthen the quality assurance of VET at both system and provider levels.

From the discussion in workshops, the following considerations emerged:

In relation to the **European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships**

- While the focus on apprenticeship is the correct one, there is no need for this framework or recommendation – quality assurance is already covered by the EQAVET Recommendation EQAVET is useful in all forms of VET and covers all VET related initiatives, including apprenticeship.
- This relates to the need of limiting reporting and avoiding duplication and overlaps.
- However, there was agreement that more work should be done in EQAVET namely the development of ‘guiding principles’ to support the QA of the apprenticeship framework. This should take account of the work that has already been developed, particularly in relation to EQAVET+ and the building blocks for WBL. This work should build on the work of the EFA relating to the criteria for quality and effective apprenticeships and criteria for framework conditions.
- Participants were concerned about the lack of cooperation and coordination with EQAVET. There is a need for better communication and a greater role for the EQAVET Network.

In relation to the **quality assurance role of teachers and trainers in work-based learning**

- EQAVET can and should support reflection on this issue (by working with the materials which have already been e.g. relating to increasing the understanding of WBL, disseminating good practice, EQAVET +, etc.).
- EQAVET could be invited to provide examples of practice relating to co-operation between teacher and trainers, governance or support (particularly pedagogical support for trainers). These examples could help to support the ET2020 working group. .
- Cooperation between teacher and trainers on quality assurance is a priority – a team effort is needed to provide mutual support for the benefit of learners.
- The professional development needs of teachers and trainers should be identified at the “team level” (within the VET provider and the company). This is likely to include the need to provide guidance for trainers as assessors.
- These reflections within the EQAVET Network should consider the diversity in approaches and the needs of those working at the national, regional, provider, company level; and the differing needs of large companies and SMEs.
- The use of ICT and e-learning; and the role/contribution of compensation in facilitating and incentivising the work of teachers and trainers. And further work is needed to ensure there

is commitment from these actors - particularly when the increased emphasis on WBL/apprenticeships could imply that teachers will lose teaching time; and trainers are still expected to fulfil their role as workers.

In relation to the initiative on the **EU on tracking VET graduates**

- Participants welcomed the idea of focusing on improving data on VET, as data is an important and needed element for improving the quality assurance of provision.
- However data is difficult and expensive to obtain. For this reason, data must be used effectively; and a cost-benefit analysis should be completed.
- Data must be disseminated as soon as possible to both systems and providers; and data must be “customer oriented”.
- The following elements are of particular relevance at provider level in relation to tracking graduates:
 - Participants agreed that it is a tool to improve the quality of feedback; but tracking systems are not a goal by themselves; i.e. they should be part of a broader process in which data on tracking graduates feeds into other information and QA procedures; as reflected in the EQAVET Framework. This helps to ensure that the data is properly interpreted within the socio-economic circumstances of systems and providers.
 - Based on the result of the Secretariat Survey, we know that countries collect and evaluate information on the destination of VET graduates but the data is not always used to improve provision. Therefore, any system on tracking graduates should be aware of this risk and streamline or work with existing systems rather than develop or set up new initiatives.
 - Any system for tracking graduates should build on and provide examples of good practices at system and provider levels. It should not encourage benchmarking.
 - Countries’ limited resources (time, personnel, financial) and data protection requirements should be considered when discussing the setting up of a VET graduate system.
 - Some participants argued that EQAVET indicators 5 and 6 address the issue and there is no need for creating another layer. Resources should be used to support the implementation of EQAVET indicators 5 and 6.

Reports of the discussion at the workshop are available in the [EQAVET online restricted Members’ Area](#)

The Commission (Carlo Scatoli) clarified that the European Framework on Quality and Effective Apprenticeships should not be understood as a quality assurance framework. It rather was an instrument to support national action to establish, reform or improve apprenticeship systems, including 14 criteria to guide such action. One criterion was about quality assurance and EQAVET clearly had a role in addressing it.

Closing remarks

The Chairperson, Carlo Scatoli, closed the meeting. He acknowledged that the work on QA developed by the EQAVET Network is of key importance, very relevant and responds to the

priorities of the New Skills Agenda. He noted that discussion on the possibility of revising EQAVET should not interrupt the implementation of the work of the EQAVET Network and work programme for 2018-2019.

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

Sean Feerick thanked the National Commission for Further and Higher Education of Malta for supporting the organisation of the meeting; and participants for their input and commitment in the discussions. He thanked the chairs and rapporteurs of the workshop for their help and cooperation. He noted that the Secretariat will prepare a new work programme for 2018-2019 based on the discussions in the meeting; and mentioned the need to think strategically to support the EU policy needs and on-going reflections on the implementation of the New Skills Agenda while building on the work and long tradition of EU cooperation in the QA of VET.

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