

This report presents the results of a Peer Learning Activity, which has been prepared by the independent expert named on the cover. The report is based on a peer learning activity where policymakers and practitioners from a number of countries exchanged ideas and experiences on an issue of shared policy interest. This report reflects the opinions of the participants and does not constitute an official European Commission or ENQA-VET position.

REPORT OF THE PEER LEARNING ACTIVITY

European Social Partners on quality development in further education in VET with consideration to the economic crisis

'It is never too late to learn'

ENQA-VET Peer Learning Activity
BERLIN 28th - 30th May 2009
Hosted by the DGB / DGA

**Peter Noordhoek, ENQA-VET Expert
December 2009**

I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

It is never too late to learn

- We need an action plan under the title 'It is never too late to learn'. In it, the different countries will be challenged to give a higher priority to further education in VET. The crisis hurts, but many of the elements that will get us out of the crisis are already there. Further education in VET is continuous education: C-VET. Applying the principles as formulated under the EQARF-approach will get us out of the crisis sooner.

More involvement of social partners

- We recommend more involvement of social partners on the quality of C-VET, not only because they have a clear responsibility in this, but also because of the urgency of the present economic crisis. Only with enough involvement of social partners can the goals of implementation be reached.

Social partners and EQARF

- More involvement of social partners In the next phase can mean:
 - a more permanent presence in EQARF
 - more involvement in the activities of EQARF: for example in the form of a yearly meeting
- There should be enough resources for the participation of social partners in EQARF. Short and intensive communication of the framework is necessary.
- On the national level social partners should be active in the national reference points (QNRPS).
- On the national level social partners should be more aware of quality issues in further education of VET and the principles of EQARF. There is an active role to play for social partner in the regional bodies in member states where they and the government meet.

Measures

- We recommend more guidance and counselling services, and not just in the context of training needs. In view of the crisis it is vital to get the right persons in the right place. The governance of guidance and counselling becomes more important.
- A better focus on those crafts and studies that provide good jobs in the future labour market is logical. Best practices in this can and should be exchanged.
- The need for better quality development and assurance is most apparent with SME's. That is where the first priority should lie.

Quality Assurance

- Quality assurance of C-VET activities should be strengthened under the umbrella of EQARF. Where appropriate the efforts will be strengthened by a legal basis.
- This means more attention to:
 - measurable standards & Monitoring. The 10 indicators are the relevant indicators but not all of them are easily measured or monitored. Social partners rightly stress the need for workable standards, relevant to business
 - forms of quality assurance adapted to the need of further education with a focus on SME's
- Quality assurance under EQARF provides extra strength to what is often already there. However, awareness of best practices in quality assurance is still limited. Where the crisis hurts, and where there is a lack of perspective because of conflicting priorities, that is where there is most to be gained by getting to know examples from other member states.

II Introduction

This is a report of the peer learning activity (PLA) as held in Berlin from the 28th to the 30th of October 2009. It was co-hosted by the Confederation of German Employers' Associations, the Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände (BDA), represented by Ms. Susanne Müller, and by the Confederation of German Employee's Associations, the Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB), represented by Mr. Hermann Nehls. The PLA took place in the headquarters of both hosts, with site visits on the second day. 20 participants from 14 countries took part. Of these, the majority were either linked to, or part of, an employer organisation.

During the meeting the chair was held by Mr. Nehls and Ms. Müller. Added expertise was provided by Mr. Peter Noordhoek, of Northedge, the Netherlands, and of Ms. Tina Bertzeletou of Cedefop.

The PLA focussed on two specific items within the context of social partners working together on the subject of quality development in VET: further education and the reaction of social partners to the economic crisis.

Further education: the PLA aimed itself at further education in VET. Not the initial education in VET, but the continuous education in vocational education and training.

Economic crisis: this PLA took place during the worst economic crisis in living memory. What is the role of social partners when it comes to VET? Again and again we came back to this context of crisis when discussing measures.

Both elements of further education and crisis were addressed during the PLA, both at the national and European level. The PLA itself was a follow-up to a highly successful PLA of social partners in 2008 (for the report: see the website of ENQA-VET). From that PLA it was clear that representatives from both employers and employees were committed to the goals of life long learning as addressed in the context of ENQA-VET. This PLA of 2009 put the spotlight more on further education than on initial education, but the bottom line would remain the same and the commitment to the implementation of EQARF as strong.

The mix of participants and the policy content of the PLA ensured a lively program. In this report the program will not be followed to the letter. The highlights of the PLA will certainly be represented, but the main aim is to build up to the conclusions of the PLA. In the process it is hoped that something of the energy in the process will come across. The following elements will certainly be represented:

- The pre-PLA questionnaire and its subsequent exchange of views and experiences
- The main presentations as done by the representatives from Germany during the site visits
- An impression of the discussion at the end of the PLA and the conclusions that were reached.

III BERLIN FINDINGS

3.1 Goals and expectations

Goals, questions and basics

The focus of this peer learning activity was on quality assurance and quality development in further education in VET in the context of EQARF. The participants discussed the role of the social partners in the field of further education within the “European VET package”.

The ENQA-VET overall aim is to:

- enable participating member states to foster added value in promoting quality assurance within VET in Europe;
- position itself as a key player in the area of quality assurance;
- and promote the development of synergies.

As the PLA between social partners of 2008 stated clearly: social partners are and should be an inherent part of this process. But how should this be done? As Mr. Nehls put it in his opening presentation: it raises questions like: how can we make CQAF/EQARF the reference point for developing quality on all levels of life long learning? What is necessary to implement national quality assurance systems? How can we guarantee transparency within the existing complexity of VET provision? And finally: how can we assure the full participation of employers and employees within the quality related processes? All these questions had a place during the discussions, but this was clear from the beginning that:

- social partners welcome all developments and policies to improve quality and quality assurance in VET.
- social partners want to strengthen and to improve the effectiveness of the education and training systems through the implementation of EQF and EQARF.
- the process of implementing EQF and EQARF must not be used to undermine existing QA practices.
- social partners must be included and be given the opportunity to participate in the implementation and further development process of EQARF on all levels.

Mr. Herman Nehls said that there is much common ground between social partners. However, social partners do have different starting points from which to enter each discussion. Those should be taken into consideration when drawing conclusions.

Expectations

The expectations of the participants reflected the goals of the PLA. From the pre-PLA questionnaire it was clear that the exchange of ideas and best practices were common goals, each participant hoping to find inspiration for the challenges in their own country. One question stood out: what can be done to meet the future demand for qualified labour during the crisis? Though this was a very well informed group, just like in other PLA's participants hoped to learn more about the elements of CQAF / EQARF and said that there is still a lot to do before the member states are familiar with the aim and elements of EQARF.

3.2 Crisis and measures

Crisis and VET

The crisis is here. The first speaker, Mr. Dierk Hierschel of DGB, gave the participants the numbers. On many indicators the trend is downward, with risks of global imbalances, deflation and other dangers. Large scale government interventions do have effect, but for how long? All in all a brutal readjustment, requiring drastic measures. For Germany this should mean in his opinion:

- 1) no dismissals (part of a declaration by leading companies)
- 2) an extension of Short time work (benefits are paid for 18 months)

3) qualification instead of dismissal

Mr. Hierschel noted that so far the number of people unemployed in Germany are not as bad as compared with other crisis in the past. This could be due to the measures that so far have been taken, but it could also be because of demographic effects or some delay factor.

Ms. Tine Bertzeletou of Cedefop told the participants that overall in Europe there is a clear rise in unemployment. The mid 2009-Eurostat shows that 9,2% of the labour force or 14,570 millions in Eurozone or 20,825 millions are now laid off. It is still too early to see clear immediate effects on VET and education, but it is clearly having an impact. We see an increase in short time work-fixed term contracts and a decrease in apprenticeships due to firms closing down and shortages of in-firm training places.

It is clear that VET policies should be central in overcoming the effects of the crisis. The European Economic Recovery Programme of December 2008 states that priority should be given to structural reform measures. This could lead to more public investment in VET and as much work based training as possible (CVT and adult training at the workplace). The response to the crisis takes many forms in the different member states. For instance; wider partnerships between State and social partners and firms contributing at a higher level than their legal obligation (FR). We also see measures being announced for apprenticeships – including at higher level and measures for specific target groups (young, older, vulnerable, migrants). Apart from extended educational leave, there are also more fundamental attempts at reforms to respond to the new situation (DE, FR, MT). In some member states there is specific attention to quality and effectiveness of training (AT), to attractiveness and quality of VET (MT, SI) and to the implementation of EQF and recognition of informal and non-formal learning (SI, CZ). Improving skills is recognised everywhere as a clear factor towards recovery.

In general the EU seems on track to raise its qualifications profile, with more Europeans acquiring high and medium-level qualifications and with fewer low-qualified Europeans. The younger cohorts appear to be the best qualified ever. In general women are better qualified than men. Still there are 78 million low-skilled people in Europe. Until recently there were still 4 million vacancies unfulfilled, an indication of the mismatch between supply and demand. Ms. Bertzeletou, who presented these findings, said that in response to the crisis more effort should be put into VET. She also stated that the potential for entrepreneurship needs to be better exploited regarding the gender gap and to turn more migrants into entrepreneurs. It would be logical to go toward a broader concept of employment. Enterprises – especially SMEs - gain in importance both as job and learning providers.

Crisis and involvement of social partners

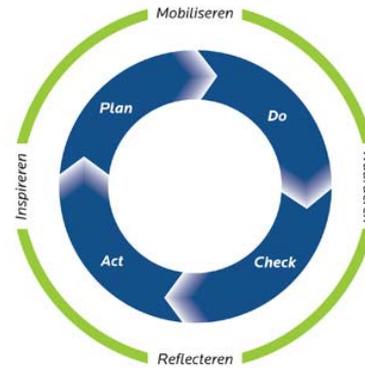
During the PLA the question was not if social partners should be involved in measures to counter the crisis, but how should they be involved. As became clear from the questionnaire and the discussion in the afternoon, social partners are involved in setting the levels of quality through many institutions and bodies: many councils, Chambers of Commerce, Chamber of Labour, Chambre de Salaries, Human Resource Development Authority, Accreditation Council, National Councils of Experts, Craft organisations and other forms of organisation. In most countries there seems to be continuous consultation before and during programme implementation through these organisations, with sometimes separate councils for VET. Nevertheless, though there is no lack of tables around which to sit, in a number of member states, there are serious tensions and internal conflicts when it comes to the best policies concerning VET. This is most of all the case in the Latin and East European countries. It is there that the participants are most hopeful that EQARF and the National reference Points will provide an added incentive to work out the differences.

Measures: quality development and quality assurance

The principles of quality development and quality assurance were presented by the expert and discussed by the participants. Added to these were the comments of the participants from the questionnaire that was sent in advance of the PLA.

The expert, Peter Noordhoek, explained the background of the EQARF in terms of quality development. EQARF is modelled on the so-called P-D-C-A cycle: first you plan, then you check whether the result is what you expected and then you act or adapt to improve performance. The 10 indicators of EQARF can each be connected to the different stages of the cycle.

Quality experts have recently done a review of the whole P-D-C-A approach. Not because the P-D-C-A itself does not make sense, but because of the observation that in practice not enough is being done with the C and A, and because overall the approach is often too rational. The outcome of this review is the so-called *inspiration cycle*, in which the P-D-C-A ('what should be done?') is interwoven with the a cycle of Inspire-Mobilise-Value-Review ('why should we do this?'). This addition could be valuable too EQARF as well, without changing it.



Participants were on the whole quite well acquainted with EQARF and the requirements of quality development and quality assurance.

The level on which quality development and assurance actually takes form is different from member to member. It more or less reflects the ease or difficulties social partners have to get involved in the issue of quality in VET. In many countries there are examples of progress.

The EQARF principles are brought into the system, (some of the) indicators are implemented. The very fact that there are indicators now, helps. Systems of quality assurance in the form of accreditation take shape. In general the participants are:

In all countries involved in the planning process

Their activities range from political strategies for VET, to setting up new curricula, drafting the content of VET courses and developing standards. Social partners can also be involved in the accreditation of training programmes.

More needs to be done. Frameworks are still being built or communicated, but most of it in primary education. Much needs to be done when it comes to craft education. Good examples, but also pressure from outside would help to bring this along. It is not easy to keep the attention on quality. As one participant said: 'I have hopes, but no expectations'. Other participants could report progress, but the idea that still much needs to be done is shared by others. Later on in the programme, participants would also express this idea about the coming period when EQARF needs to be implemented. Is the European Union committed enough?

Use of indicators

Attention was paid to the indicators and their implementation. A distinction must be made between the relevance of an indicator and the ease with which it can be measured. As not all indicators will get equal attention, this is relevant for social partners as well. Will there be enough focus on those indicators relevant to the partners? These are the ten 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 labour market
10. Schemes used to promote better access to VET

From those, indicator 9 was thought to be the most relevant, but also the one participants thought was the hardest to measure.

Other very relevant indicators were 4, 5 and 6. 4 and 5 were thought to be relatively good to measure. However, indicator 6 was also thought to be hard to measure.

The other indicators were thought to be less relevant.

This means that there is a gap for two very important indicators for social partners between relevance and measurability. Attention should be paid to that when implementing EQARF.

The expert had put the same question to the participants of the PLA in Malta in May 2009, with more representatives from government participants participating. Here the indicators 5, 6 and 9 were thought to be the most important. There too it was found to be important to make a distinction between indicators that take an employers perspective and the others.

National Reference Points

Among the participating social partners many are closely involved in the NRP's. Much information still needs to be given. For that reason lectures are being held and other activities deployed. In some countries there is a transfer of responsibility from ministry to National Examinations and Qualifications Centre, functioning as an NRP.

3.3 Lessons from Berlin, lessons in Berlin

Case studies

The second day of the PLA the participants made site visits to two places of interest for further education. Half of the group paid a visit to the the Centre of training and Technology of the Berlin Chamber of Small Business and Skilled Crafts ('Bildungszentrum des Handwerks'),. The centre plays an important role when it comes to C-VET in Berlin. The other half of the group went to the Berlin affiliate of OTIS company (elevators). After this there was a round table discussion on the way to proceed with further education in Germany and in the other participating countries. Specific attention was paid to the position of SME's.

The visit to the Bildungszentrum provided a good illustration of involvement of social partners in training. The craft centre provides trainings in more than a hundred crafts. Germany has a 'dual system', in which the trainee spends as much as 80% of his or her time in the company and the rest at the craft centre. At the end of the training the participants have the 'master' degree and they can become self-employed. In terms of quality assurance the craft centre uses an internal system based on ISO 9000 as the minimum standard, in combination with the accreditation process as prescribed by law.

An interesting part of our visit was the presentation of a project through which a focus was placed on three crafts that get extra support. Participants learn to adjust their knowledge to new technical developments, thereby improving their chances on the labor market. 26 of the 54 craft centers take part in this 'AAP-programme', each giving focusing on three crafts. Only a part of this is funded by public money. The involvement of social partners is high.

Though OTIS is part of global company, it works like an SME in Berlin. With the representatives from OTIS there was a good discussion on the qualifications and the requirements of a SME company in Germany. It was clear that the company has a very active training policy. OTIS provides a big incentive to the training of employees by facilitating three hours of training each week and providing funding for it. Trainings are aimed

at strengthening social competences and participation. One of the highlights for those who participated in this visit was the discussion about how to get the least skilled – most of them women – involved in training. Even though the facilities are there, they are not used enough by this group. The highly skilled – most of them men and engineers – do not need much incentive to use the training scheme. How to reach the least skilled also?

Round table discussion

After the site visits there was a round table discussion with Mr Wiegand, Handwerkskammer Berlin and Mr Fichtner, employee vice president.

Much attention was given to the way the Handwerkskammer was organised. In the tripartite board there is a representation of employers and employees and there is a delegation from the trainers. Discussion arose about the representation of the trainers on the board of the Handwerkskammer. It was clear that social partners had a big say in the development of training for crafts. Questions were asked like: where does the money come from. Are employers willing to pay a levy for their own training? How do SME's take part? Larger companies usually know their training needs, smaller not always. From the discussion it became clear that much depends on the level of engagement of social partners. In the case of Berlin the AAP-programme is an example of social partners and training institute getting together to create a new perspective for professions. Because of the crisis there is a reduction of budget, but so far this was solved by non-essential cutbacks and not by lowering the goals for training. The fact that the crafts represented in the Handwerkskammer are on the whole less dependent on exports and more on government jobs helps. Nevertheless it is clear that investment in further training remains a top priority to get out of the crisis.

SME's

Over 99% of all enterprises in Europe are SME's. In a presentation by Tina Bertzeletou of a Cedefop study on Qualification needs in European Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SME's)¹ she got these messages across:

- small firms lack orientation and strategic thinking in matters of HRD. They seem to be captive to outdated culture and old structures. They are however 'quick' in boasting of 'modern thinking'!
- isolated "good practices" do exist, like 'oases' that few know about. However, there are no channels for dissemination and creating demonstration effects.
- there are training providers take advantage of small firms' immaturity and ignorance.
- networking is very undeveloped. There is a lack of catalysts and facilitators.
- SME's often face a hostile bureaucracy, suspicious of private initiatives and slow in accepting small firms' legitimate requests for support. Sectoral Associations are not always ready to undertake a role.

In the ensuing discussion the participants told about their own challenges in the training for SME's. How to reach them? How to tell the owner of an SME that it is important to send his employees on training, even though that means that his or her business is undermanned? Only through collective effort of social partners can these business be reached. This can mean at the national level:

- the need to modernize training regulations according to the changing need of companies
- the setting of standards for trainings, also at the regional level
- timely consultation of social partners in the decision making process of quality assurance in VET

The role of the Chambers is very important in this. The motto should be: in stead of firing, training!

¹ European SMEs: HRD in the food, retail and tourism sectors: the case of some old and new Member States. Cedefop, 2009.

3.4 Coming to conclusions

During the PLA there was a continuous exchange of views. This reached a peak at the end of the programme, also because of the use of a 'carousel' method in which the participants exchanged views around four central themes of the visit. These themes were:

- Quality development in C-VET
- Quality assurance in C-VET
- Implementing EQARF
- Involvement of social partners

These are the main recommendations:

Quality development in C-VET

- define labour market needs, with consideration for the effects of the economic crisis
- seek active consultation between training providers and companies
- where necessary, update curricula
- encourage the accreditation of training centres
- provide incentives to enterprises for quality development within the context of EQARF

Quality assurance in C-VET

- make good use of the EQARF indicators
- self-evaluations of training needs and capabilities are important, and have extra value when subjected to external evaluation
- more attention should be paid to the issue of efficiency. Clear targets and deadlines should be set and maintained. We need simple and shorter solutions
- use feedback of trainees

Implementing EQARF

- there is need for a user friendly introduction of EQARF to all parties involved
- we need a commitment to achieve the goals of EQARF at the national level, including a commitment to review the effects of C-VET in light of the indicators
- prioritise the indicators that are most relevant to social partners
- there is a need for incentives for the implementation of EQARF, with funding both at the European and national level
- mutual learning remains very important, including the exchange of best practices across borders. We should keep on using existing structures for this

Involvement of social partners

- where relevant there should be a legal base for the involvement of social partners in C-VET too, leading to tripartite involvement
- the involvement of social partners should be both on the European and national level
- this means dissemination of knowledge of EQARF to many partners, making use of the National Reference points
- annual meetings of social partners on the issues should be held
- this also means paying more attention to mobility of labour in EU and in the member states. This to increase further efficiency in the labour market. Exchange of best practices helps with this

Discussing these common findings, the participants together came up with a number of key recommendation, as can be found in the executive summary at the beginning of this report.

IV. Conclusion and expected impact of the PLA

Both from the short evaluation at the end of the programme and from the post PLA questionnaire it was clear that the organisers had been able to organise a good PLA.

One participant drew this conclusion, to which all participants seemed to concur: it was clear from the programme that quality development in further education in VET is something that concerns everyone: social partners, businesses, the Government, VET providers and other relevant authorities involved in VET. The elements of EQARF should be made known to all the above mentioned key players and incentives should be given to them in order to adopt this framework according to local needs, using the National Reference Points as focal point. The key recommendations reflect these points.

Criticism concerning the PLA itself was mainly directed at the fact that there were not enough representatives from the unions, in contrast to the PLA of 2008. The programme was interesting and varied enough for the participants.

Transfer of knowledge about EQARF remains vital. Though some said in the pre PLA questionnaire that they were familiar with EQARF, in the post PLA questionnaire they said that more information about the content of EQARF would have been welcome. One participant wrote: 'it is a good idea to support more short and intensive educational programs'.

This report is probably one of the last to be written under the present activity programme of ENQA-VET. It is clear from the reactions of the participants that they value the peer learning activities. It is not clear whether there will be room for peer learning activities in the next phase. We hope there will be, as the added value was clear to this group of social partners.

ANNEX I PROGRAMME

| Day 1: 28 October | | |
|---|---|---|
| Venue | Time | Activity |
| BDA, Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände Haus der Deutschen Wirtschaft, Breite Straße 29, 10178 Berlin | 11.00 – 11.45 | Welcome Speeches - expectations - outcomes Hermann Nehls (DGB/ETUC) Susanne Müller (BDA/Business Europe) |
| | 11.45 – 13.00 | Crisis and Measures The development of labour markets and the need for quality measures in further education in VET Dierk Hierschel, DGB Tina Bertzeletou, Cedefop |
| | 13.00 – 14.00 | Discussion Lunch |
| | 14.00 – 17.00 | Quality Development and Quality Assurance in further education in VET in the context of EQARF - elements of EQARF: state of the art - relevance to participants - feedback questionnaires Peter Noordhoek (Expert) |
| | 17:00 – 18.00 | Discussion/Reflection |
| Day 2: 29 October | | |
| Venue: Bildungszentrum des Handwerks <u>and</u> <u>OTIS compagne (SME)</u> | 08.30 9.00 – 11.30 11.30. – 12.00 12.00 – 12.30 12.30 – 13.30 13.30– 15.15 | Travel to site of case-study 1) Case-study center for CVET on SME 2) OTIS compagne: Qualifications and the requirements of SME companies Return to Handwerkskammer Berlin Reflections Lunch Role and position of the organisations that work on behalf of social partners to improve further education in VET (SME) Round table discussion with Mr Wiegand, Handwerkskammer Berlin Mr Fichtner, employee vice president |

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|---|---------------|--|
| | 15.15 - 15.30 | Coffee break |
| | 15.30 – 16.30 | Qualification needs in European SMEs Tina Bertzeletou, Cedefop |
| | 16.30- 18.00 | Using the EQARF approach to strengthen the quality of further education in VET - Interactive discussion |
| | 19.00 | Collecting highlights |
| Day 3: 30 October | | |
| Venue: DGB Deutscher Gewrkschaftsbund, Henriette Herz Platz, 10178 Berlin | 09.00 – 10.30 | Attacking the Crisis Lessons learned from day 1 and 2 - Plenary discussion |
| | 10.30 – 10.45 | Coffee Break |
| | 10.45 – 12.30 | Conclusions: formulating recommendations for the report: - effective roles for social partner involvement - implementing EQARF - tackling the crisis |
| | 12.30 – 13.00 | Evaluation and goodbyes |

ANNEX II LIST OF PARTICIPANTS (THIS IS NOT THE LATEST VERSION!)

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