

# Report

## EQAVET 1st Annual Forum

**Date: 29-30 April, 2010**

**Venue: Consejo Escolar del Estado, San Bernardo, 49, Madrid**

### Introduction

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This EQAVET Annual Forum was the first to take place within the new phase of the work at European level regarding quality assurance in Vocational Education and Training (VET) since the adoption of the Recommendation on the establishment of the quality assurance reference framework for VET and the subsequent establishment of the Secretariat to support its implementation.

The Annual Forum was hosted by the Ministry of Education, Madrid, Spain.

Twenty-seven countries were represented at the Annual Forum. Apologies were received from EU Member States France, Slovenia, Slovakia and UK as well as from partner countries Liechtenstein, Iceland and the “Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”. The Social Partners were represented by the European Trade Union confederation (ETUC), the European Centre of Employers and Enterprises providing Public services (CEEP), the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (UEAPME) and Business Europe. Observers from Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning (QALLL) project, European Association of Institutes for Vocational training (EVBB) and the Confederation Empresarial de la Provincia de Alicante (COEPA<sup>1</sup>) were also present. The European Development Centre for Vocational Education and Training (Cedefop) and the European Training Foundation (ETF) were also represented.

The Annual Forum was chaired by the European Commission represented by Mr. João Delgado.

A full Attendance List can be found on the [website](#).

### Official Opening

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The Annual Forum was officially opened by Mr. Antonio Gil González, Head of Unit, Subdirectorate of Guidance and VET, Ministry of Education, who welcomed the Annual Forum to Madrid. He noted the increasing awareness within the Spanish context of the need to implement quality procedures in the different processes for the management of VET. He also noted the close relationship between these processes and the EU work on quality assurance, particularly those in the areas of policy developments aligned to the requirements of the European Reference

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<sup>1</sup> COEPA is an international organisation located in Alicante, Spain, which represents investors and entrepreneurs.

Framework for quality assurance in VET. He congratulated EQAVET on its continued work in this field and cited its potential to enhance European cooperation. He thanked the representatives of Member States, partner countries, Commission and the Secretariat for their presence in Madrid.

The Annual Forum (AF) was welcomed by João Delgado, Chairperson of the EQAVET Network, who thanked the Spanish Authorities for hosting the meeting. He also welcomed representatives of Member States, the Social Partners' representatives and the representatives of ETF, Cedefop, the QALLL project and the other observers.

The Chairperson noted the significant progress and development made in the field of quality assurance in VET at European level. He enumerated the significant milestones in the work of quality assurance and European cooperation over the years. He noted that the new phase, with the adoption of the Recommendation, represented a crucial milestone in this ongoing work. He noted the valuable work of ENQAVET and all players involved in driving the development and implementation process. He noted the importance of the outcomes, activities and reports produced within the work programme of the past phase; acknowledging them as valuable resources useful in the implementation of the Reference Framework in the national contexts.

He stressed the importance of improving the quality of European VET systems in order to develop a competent and relevant labour force.

The Chairperson presented the agenda, noting that it would be adjusted as necessary in order to respond to needs over the duration of the meeting. The agenda was adopted by the Annual Forum.

## EU Policy context: key note addresses from representatives of the European Commission followed by discussion

The Chairperson, João Delgado, presented the economic and political context and an update on European VET policy in which the Recommendation is framed. He pointed out the challenges which VET and the work in quality assurance face in helping to provide the future skills needed in an increasingly ageing population, characterised by rapid technology change and low-carbon economies.

He contextualised the Recommendation by presenting the policy initiatives since the Copenhagen process began in 2002 and the new impetus for VET to 2020, notably the Bruges review (5.12.2010) and the new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training - ET 2020.

He also presented the key elements concerning the implementation of the Recommendation and the role of EQAVET in supporting the process: i.e. timeline, main stakeholders involved, the

outcomes expected from each and the governance structure ensuring cooperation and the effective implementation.

Sophie Weisswange, DG Education and Culture, European Commission, presented the role of the EQAVET Network and the Commission within the Lifelong Learning (LLL) programme and the implementation of the Recommendation. She explained the Quality Assurance in LLL project funded by the Commission which will focus on Leonardo da Vinci (LdV) projects with a quality assurance dimension funded in the period 2005-2009; and the importance of cooperating with QALLL. She provided an update on the call for proposals within the LdV projects focused on quality assurance for VET (a meeting with interested participants will be held in the morning, day 2 of the Annual Forum). She also updated participants on the latest European policy developments as part of the Copenhagen process. She announced the key dates for VET in the coming months are as follows:

- \_ Spanish Presidency Conference in Zaragoza, 5.05.2010
- \_ Fifth review of the Copenhagen Process: Bruges Communiqué, 5.12.2010
- \_ Belgium Presidency Conference in Bruges, 6.12.2010

Anita Kremo, DG Education and Culture, European Commission, presented the ongoing work of the EQF Advisory Group, which supports the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and manages the coordination of Member States initiatives in relation to national qualification frameworks based on the learning outcomes approach, aligned to the EQF. She pointed out that quality assurance is the key underpinning principle that ensures the effective implementation of the EQF. Consequently, she acknowledged the need to cooperate with EQAVET. In order to enhance this cooperation, she announced that all 32 countries participating in "Education and Training 2020" have nominated their EQF National Coordination Points. The national coordination points coordinate the referencing process, and they should be linked closely to the work of the national quality assurance reference point (particularly to report upon criteria number 5 and 6). She also announced that 3 countries (Ireland, Malta and the UK) have referenced already their National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) to the EQF. By the end of 2010, 9 countries will have referenced their NQFs to the EQF (including the three that have done it so far). Therefore, 26 countries will have referenced their NQFs to the EQF by the end of 2011. She also noted the benefits of the learning outcomes approach and the clear shift towards this approach in Member States which will facilitate the implementation of NQFs aligned to EQF.

Erik Hess, DG Education and Culture, European Commission, presented the state of play of the ECVET network (European Credit system for VET) by describing its governance structure, its roadmap, priorities and communication strategy, which will support the gradual implementation of the credit system for VET. The network has established its Secretariat and it will hold its first annual forum and launch its webpage in June 2010. He noted the important role to be played by national agencies in the implementation process. They will provide pilot projects to test the tool. He announced a call for proposals under the Lifelong Learning Programme to support national projects to test and develop the credit system for VET. He emphasised the importance of developing a close relationship between ECVET, EQF and EQAVET networks.

Presentations are available on the [website](#).

## Network work programme followed by discussion

Sean Feerick, Director of the Secretariat, presented the work programme designed to support Member States in developing their strategies for the implementation of the Reference Framework and enhancing cooperation in the field of quality assurance.

He welcomed new members (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Latvia, Poland and Turkey) into the work on quality assurance for VET at European level.

He noted the three main challenges of the new phase for the EQAVET Network:

1. ensure that new Member States are fully and speedily briefed and integrated into the work of the Network
2. capitalise and build on the achievements and work of the past, particularly in the context of ENQAVET, in order to identify key priorities
3. enhance the cooperation philosophy in order to create a platform of cooperation in quality assurance in VET, integrating the processes developed by ECVET and EQF projects

He noted that the work programme responds to these challenges and focuses on the implementation of the Recommendation and promoting a culture of quality assurance across Member States.

He presented the work programme working methodology which ensures the:

- a) engagement of relevant stakeholders – in particular policy makers and VET providers;
- b) ownership of the process by Member States and all those involved;
- c) added value outcomes/content is tailored to the needs and national characteristics of members;
- d) effective dissemination of information and policy practices – centrally of the web;
- e) availability of expert advice;
- f) efficient implementation of the Recommendation.

The work programme follows an incremental and collaborative bottom-up approach in which national reference points are the nodal point. The objectives of the work programme are to establish a community of practice in quality assurance in which EQAVET becomes an international reference and a leader in relation to quality assurance in VET. It is also concerned with the need to work complementarily with ECVET and EQF.

The activities of the work programme are designed to maximise participation in an inclusive approach and promote cooperation between Member States and all relevant stakeholders.

This presentation is available on the [website](#)

Representatives of Member States reminded the Forum that there is a need to ensure that the duplication of efforts is avoided and that the work programme and the reporting phase described in the Recommendation build on what has been produced or used within the ET 2020 review process.

The Commission and the Director assured participants that future work will be built on common understanding and what is already available at European level. The Network will continue to capitalise and rely on the work of Cedefop as the main source of information and research in order to advance the work of quality assurance within and across Europe.

They recognised the need to define the reporting criteria in an easy and user-friendly manner. The Network, according to the requirements of the Recommendation, is responsible for the delivery of this task. They recognised that the reporting phase should be conceived as a means of increasing motivation and furthering the quality assurance culture rather than as a uniform instrument for control. The working groups envisaged in the working programme will address the issues, particularly in relation to developing the framework, criteria and/or template for the reporting phase of the Reference Framework implementation.

## Presentation of QALLL project

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Carin Daniel Ramirez-Schiller, Head of Transversal Programmes, Euroguidance and Europass, in the Austrian Lifelong Learning Programme Office presented the Quality assurance in Lifelong Learning (QALLL) project, the European thematic networking with a focus on VET and adult education. She stressed that the QALLL project's objective is to highlight good practice and to move forward recommendations in order to support cooperation in the field of quality assurance in VET. The project will identify both immediate priorities for the Lifelong Learning Programme as well as long-term challenges for the next generation of the programme.

She observed the need to support and complement the work of EQAVET; therefore a close relationship between the two should be promoted. She updated the Forum with the project agenda and its expected outcomes.

This presentation is available on the [website](#).

## Steering Committee

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The Steering Committee for the Network was designated for a 2 year period up to the end of 2011. Seven expressions of interest to participate in the Steering Committee were received: G. Allulli (IT), J. Horschinegg (AT), L. Koski (FN), K. Molnar-Stadler (HU), J. Pohanková (CZ), D. Stroie (RO), T. Van den Boom (NL). In order to build on the high level of interest and motivation from the Member States, the Commission proposed to work with all those who had expressed their interest in joining the steering committee in order to ensure the development of a strong collaborative approach to supporting the work of EQAVET. This approach met with the approval of the Forum.

The Steering Committee will have its first meeting on 1 June 2010 in Brussels.

## Workshops

The Annual Forum was divided into 4 representative workshops. Chairpersons and Rapporteurs were allocated. The rationale behind the formation of the workshops was to provide Member States with an opportunity for a discussion on the working groups to be established within the context of the EQAVET work programme. A background paper was prepared and circulated to all participants by the Secretariat to guide and facilitate discussion. Chairs received a briefing paper to enable them ensure that there was full participation and contribution among members of each workshop.

The Rapporteur for each workshop presented the summary of their discussions.

The following outcomes were clear from the discussions at the workshops:

### **Strategic issues to be considered in the mandate for the Work programme working groups:**

- The national implementation phase is the focus. There is a need to identify the best way to move from the development to the implementation phase, building on the results of the past which have been achieved within the context of the ENQAVET work programme.
- Quality assurance reference points are central. They need to be supported in order to develop an action plan for the national implementation processes, in which the different roles/responsibilities, their relation with ECVET and EQF initiatives and the funding streams should be identified. They will also play a crucial role for the reporting/review of the implementation process.
- A clear focus on supporting and serving the needs of VET providers in their efforts to improve the quality of their provision is necessary.
- An effective communication strategy which will engage, increase awareness and, highlight the benefits of the implementation process, in order to motivate relevant stakeholders is important.
- Care is necessary in order to avoid duplication of efforts by building on the knowledge already accrued; and generating a common understanding/language of issues and priorities.
- There is a need for a user-friendly approach, involving and supporting relevant stakeholders. The web should be seen as the central channel for the dissemination of information within the work of the working groups, enhancing contribution and communication in an inclusive and incremental manner to ensure stakeholder involvement – including all members, members of other relevant networks, providers, learners, employers, sectoral representatives etc.

### **Challenges for the Work programme working groups:**

- Member States are in different stages of the implementation process. It is important that the solutions reached respond to the different needs of Member States. Clustering of countries could be considered to address this issue.
- The diversity of socio-political and economic national context should be reflected in the working group's discussion and outcomes.

- Identify the communication channels necessary to effectively disseminate results to the target audience groups.
- The integration of new members is crucial.
- The right profile/expertise of participants in the working group is of essential importance.
- Engagement with relevant stakeholders at both national and European level is necessary in order to enhance a quality assurance and cooperative culture in VET.
- Synergies, complementarity, integration and connectivity with QALLL, LdV future projects and EQF-ECVET should be ensured in the work of the working groups

### **Proposals/recommendations for the Work programme working groups:**

#### Working group on guidelines:

- Importance of testing and piloting (in this respect, monitor and use the LdV projects is important)
- Use the results of the ENQA-VET Thematic Group on ‘Developing guidelines for supporting QA in VET systems’
- Develop a culture of self-assessment by using peer review/peer learning activities as appropriate

#### Working group on indicators:

- Begin by targeting and focusing on a few chosen indicators
- Foster opportunities for enabling synergies and cooperation with other groups and utilise their experience and expertise – notably the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmark
- Indicators should be seen as useful means for improving and fostering a culture of continuous improvements rather than as means for comparisons between Member States VET systems

The mandate of the Network’s working groups will be based on these suggestions.

The reports from workshops are available on the [website](#).

## **Communication Strategy**

The Secretariat (S. Feerick) presented the Network dissemination/communication strategy which will be reviewed on an annual basis. It identifies the target audiences and their particular informational needs. The strategy establishes the most appropriate communication channels or the products which will best capture and deliver the information, messages and added value knowledge emerging from the work of the Network as a community of practice. The dummy version of the website was also presented and very favourably received.

By identifying the target audiences, the products that best match their needs and the mechanisms to provide feedback, the Network will effectively deliver the findings, added value knowledge and/or messages.

This presentation is available on the [website](#).

## Closing remarks

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The Chairperson closed the meeting and thanked the hosts, the experts, the members of the Social Partners and advisory groups – ETF and Cedefop; and all members for their attendance, active cooperation and commitment to the Network. He thanked the Secretariat for its work.

Note: All presentations made at the Annual Forum have been uploaded on the [website](#).