



**EQAVET**

European Quality Assurance  
in Vocational Education and Training

Supporting the implementation of the  
European Quality Assurance Reference Framework  
for Vocational Education and Training

# Report

## EQAVET 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Forum

**Date: 29-30 March 2012**

**Venue: Konventum, Lo-skolens konferencecenter, Helsingør, Denmark**

### Introduction

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This EQAVET Annual Forum was the third 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 Danish Confederation of Trade Unions.

Twenty-four countries were represented at the Annual Forum. Apologies were received from EU Member States Bulgaria, Ireland, Lithuania, Slovakia and Spain; as well as from partner countries Liechtenstein, Iceland, the “Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Turkey. The Social Partners were represented by the European Trade Union confederation (ETUC), the European Centre of Employers and Enterprises (CEEP), the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (UEAPME) and Business Europe. Observers from Eurochambres, European Providers of Vocational Education and Training (EUproVET) and European Forum of Education and Training (EFVET), the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) and the MENON network 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, Head of unit Vocational Education and Training Policy; Leonardo da Vinci Programme, DG Education and Culture, European Commission

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

## Opening speeches and Introduction to the Annual Forum 2012

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The Annual Forum was officially opened and welcomed by João Delgado, who thanked the Danish Authorities and Danish Confederation of Trade Unions for hosting the meeting. He also welcomed representatives of Member States, the Social Partners' representatives and the representatives of NGOs (particularly those representing VET providers) and the other observers. He acknowledged the significance of the active involvement of social partners (in particular the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions) in this 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Forum of the EQAVET network.

The Chairperson noted the significant progress and development in the field of quality assurance in VET at European level. He pointed out the relevance of VET and quality assurance within the work of European cooperation over the years, being a priority in the EU agenda. He acknowledged the cornerstone role of quality assurance in strengthening lifelong learning in the EU and in modernising education and training systems, offering quality learning and mobility opportunities for EU citizens. He acknowledged the importance of viewing the work developed by the EQAVET network within the broader policy context of: the Education and Training initiative (ET 2020), the new EU programme for Education and Training ('Erasmus for All', an integrated programme for education, training and youth, which focuses on developing skills and mobility) and the Bruges Communiqué, which represents a step forward in the implementation process in relation to the EQAVET Recommendation.

Concerning the work developed within the network, he stressed the importance of ensuring an effective communication that can disseminate the results so far achieved to national and EU stakeholders in order to increase the awareness of quality assurance. He also noted the importance of increasing the visibility of national reference points and cooperation and synergies with other instruments developed at EU level, namely higher education, ECVET and EQF. He acknowledged the fact that countries are at different stages of development, and/or that they are using different quality management systems (e.g. ISO, EFQM).

He referred to the election of the Steering Committee which would take place on day 2. He announced that 5 candidates had notified their interest within the deadline: Mr Jürgen Horschinegg, Ms Leena Koski, Mr Wolfgang Kreher, Ms Katalin Molnarné Stadler, and Ms Dana Stroie. He thanked them for their interest and motivation.

He also referred to the reporting process. In particular, the launch of an external evaluation in the coming months which will bring an external input to this process, helping the Network to answer important questions such as: 'is the Network going in the right direction; is the Recommendation the most effective and sustainable way of developing and further improving the quality assurance of EU VET systems?'. Sophie Weisswange presented some of the aspects of this external evaluation on day 2 (see below, page 5).

The speech is available [here](#).

Erik Nexelmann (on behalf of Per Hansen, Director General, National Agency for Quality and Supervision in Denmark) welcomed the Annual Forum to Helsingør and thanked the European Commission and the EQAVET Secretariat for their decision to hold the Forum in Denmark. He noted the importance of VET in the Danish education and training context and the new

developments to be introduced which address the need to facilitate and stimulate the transition from VET to higher education. Also, he explained the Danish approach to quality assurance in VET (which follows the quality assurance cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation and review) and the important role played by social partners, which ensures the relevance and quality of VET programmes in the labour market. He pointed out that Denmark is focusing on three issues in relation to quality assurance for VET: 1. reducing the drop-out rate; 2. increasing the employment rate; 3. facilitation of the transition to higher education.

The speech is available [here](#).

Morten Smistrup (on behalf of Ejner K. Holst, Secretary, Danish Confederation of Trade Unions) welcomed the Annual Forum to Denmark and to Konventum, the Danish school of the Trade Unions. He noted the close cooperation between social partners and the Danish authorities in relation to VET policy in Denmark. He pointed out the importance of VET for Danish trade unions as it is an essential element for maintaining jobs and the welfare system in the EU, which faces global competition. He explained that the main VET quality indicator for trade unions in Denmark is the employment rate, which emphasises the crucial role to be played by social partners and the dual system. He acknowledged the important work developed by EQAVET towards raising the quality of VET in the EU.

The speech is available [here](#).

## Secretariat report and presentation of key findings and trends emerging from the survey undertaken in 2011

Sean Feerick, Director of the Secretariat, presented the progress made on the implementation of EQAVET 2010-2012 work programme since the Annual Forum in 2011 held in Budapest. The work programme is designed to support Member States in developing their strategies for the implementation of the Recommendation and enhancing cooperation in the field of quality assurance, focusing on:

1. Supporting implementation and national reference points. Several actions have been taken in order to provide national reference points with the effective tools to fulfil their role as specified by the Recommendation, creating a dynamic platform where national reference points interact and communicate. These actions and their respective deliverables were: working groups on guidelines and indicators and the further development of the IT tool; four policy briefs; the launch in early 2011 of a dedicated NRP virtual forum; the completion of the survey and Secretariat progress report. In addition two Information Seminars for national reference points will be organised in 2012.
2. An increased cooperation with VET providers, which was a first step toward addressing the short term deliverable of the Bruges Communiqué in relation to establishing a common quality assurance framework for VET providers. The actions and deliverables taken within this area were: the further development of the IT tool by EQAVET working groups which involved the VET providers at European level, supporting the work of national reference points in this area; and initial steps towards an incremental approach for the involvement of EU VET provider associations in the various activities of the network.

3. Structured involvement of social partners, focusing on the relevance and attractiveness of VET, the diverse needs of the industry sectors, the role of social partners, continuing VET and work based learning. The activities and deliverables developed within this focus were: three Sectoral Seminars which focus on the healthcare, tourism & catering and the construction sectors and three policy briefs based on the results of the seminars. These seminars, together with a closer cooperation between the network and EU social partner associations, have provided an opportunity for enhancing the involvement of the social partners and industry representatives in the work of the network.
4. Building synergies with EQF and ECVET in a LLL perspective. This complex theme has been developed through the creation of a reflection group, which met 5 times between 2011 and 2012, and which supported the organisation of a Joint Seminar, organised with the objective of increasing synergies and cooperation between the three EU initiatives. As a result, a report and policy brief have been published. The EQAVET Secretariat also commissioned an 'Information Gathering Exercise' which has been an important step towards sharing information and increasing cooperation.

These actions and deliverables have contributed to the formation of a well functioning community of practice, which involves Member States, national reference points, policy makers, social partners and other EU initiatives (namely EQF and ECVET). He noted that the focus now has shifted from the development of content-process to the implementation-process, which needs to strengthen communication and target practitioners, VET providers and other relevant stakeholders in order to support the implementation of the Recommendation in the national contexts.

He presented some of key findings of the completion of the Survey, which was conducted by the Secretariat in 2011, based on a template developed by the working groups and other key actors of the network (i.e. Steering Committee and ad-hoc experts). These findings are presented in a report (which was provided to participants of the Annual Forum) which supports the on-going work of the network. He noted the importance of considering this work as an on-going exercise which will be reviewed or updated by national reference points in summer 2012 in order to gain a more comprehensive picture in relation to the progress made by Member States concerning the implementation of the Recommendation and its role of catalysing VET systems reform in EU countries. The information gathered provides a solid, evidence based and structured support for the development of the work by the network. This information, updated in summer 2012, will inform the monitoring process on the progress of the Bruges Communiqué implementation by Cedefop.

The presentation is available [here](#).

## Agora thinking session

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The session was organised with the objective of maximising participation, interaction and communication between the members and participants of the Annual Forum. The session was designed in the form of four parallel working sessions at which four relevant thematic themes were introduced by speakers. Each session was 30 minutes long allowing maximum time for discussion and exchange of views.

The themes chosen for the workshops provided the background information which ensured that the discussion at the café-tables—where network members had the opportunity to discuss the priorities for the work to be developed in 2013-2015—was well informed. The themes were as follows:

1. The IT tool, how to communicate and maximise its use?  
Presenters: *Keith Brumfitt, Maria Emilia Galvão*. Click [here](#) to download the presentation.
2. The LLL perspective, increasing cooperation with higher education and EQF & ECVET.  
Presenters: *Sophie Weisswange, Maria Kristin Gylfadottir*. Click [here](#) to download the presentation.
3. Supporting a community of practice, the work on quality assurance by CEDEFOP and ETF.  
Presenters: *Tina Bertzeletou, Margareta Nikolovska*. Click [here](#) to download the presentation.
4. Fostering a partnership culture with the industry sectors and social partners.  
Presenters: *Kim Faurschou, Susanne Mueller*. Click [here](#) to download the presentation.

## Café-tables for thematic workshops

Maintaining the same division of participants as for the ‘Agora thinking session’, four groups worked in parallel, which were structured as ‘paired café-tables’. Two moderators were allocated to each group. The aim of the café tables was to enable participants to:

- identify priorities and thematic areas for the work to be developed by the EQAVET Network 2013-2015.
- identify activities and actions to address priorities/thematic areas.

The rationale behind the discussion on the identification of priorities/thematic areas and activities/actions was to support the network to develop a work programme for 2013-2015. Participants at the café tables received in advance a background document, which highlighted the importance of contextualising the priorities and actions for 2013-2015 within the evolving EU policy context; and building on the current EQAVET work programme 2010-2012. It also proposed a series of focal points or thematic areas for the work to be undertaken by the Network based on discussions which took place at the end of 2012 with the EQAVET Steering Committee and the EQAVET ad hoc experts -who have been involved in the activities of the EQAVET work programme 2010-2012.

The background paper, together with the information provided at the ‘Agora thinking session’ established a structured and well informed discussion at café tables, ensuring that the work programme to be developed will respond to national needs and the evolving EU policy context, supporting Member States and National reference points to implement and use the EQAVET Reference Framework in their national contexts.

Messages and outcomes as a result of the café tables’ discussions fed into the panel discussion on day 2, which provided an opportunity to identify the emerging trends and messages coming from EQAVET members in relation to the priorities/thematic areas and activities/actions. The outcomes of discussions will form the basis for the actions and activities of the network and its work programme 2013-2015 (see below for more information on messages and outcomes).

## Steering Committee

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The Steering Committee for the Network was designated for a 2 year period up to the end of 2013. Five expressions of interest to participate in the Steering Committee were received, within the deadlines: Mr Jürgen Horschinegg (AT), Ms Leena Koski (FI), Mr Wolfgang Kreher (DE), Ms Katalin Molnare Stadler (HU), and Ms Dana Stroeie RO). 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 new Steering Committee will have its first meeting on 3 May 2012 in Brussels.

## Informal meeting of quality assurance reference points

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An informal meeting of the quality assurance national reference points took place on Friday morning before the plenary session. It provided an opportunity for the networking and interaction national reference points.

The Secretariat presented the progress made in relation to the organisation of the Information Seminars to be held in 2012, which are designed to support exchange of good practices and experiences between national reference points and national relevant stakeholders while explaining the best ways of maximising the benefits of using the IT tool in a concrete and practical manner.

## Reporting on the EQAVET Recommendation, 2013

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Sophie Weisswange, European Commission, presented the steps to be undertaken in relation to the EQAVET reporting process, which is specified within the text of the Recommendation.

She noted the implications of the reporting process for Member States and the European Commission and its scope. She indicated that this process will involve: 1. a report of progress in the Member States, which will be based on the information provided already for the completion of the Secretariat Survey, thus avoiding duplication of efforts; 2. an external evaluation, which will be launched by the Commission in Spring 2012; 3. the Commission will draft a report based on the information categorised under points 1 and 2 above, which will form part of the report to the European Parliament and Council, 2013.

The presentation is available [here](#).

Some network members commented on the need to clearly identify the target group of the external evaluation, its scope and focal point/s.

## Reports of the café tables and strategic discussion followed by panel discussion

The following outcomes were identified following the discussions at the café tables:

### VISION AND FOCUS FOR THE WORK OF THE NETWORK TO 2015:

The focus of the Network for 2013-2015 should be to support the use and implementation of the Recommendation in the national contexts. This is premised on the following understanding of the context in which the work should be implemented:

1. The importance of national reference points as they are recognised by the Recommendation as the main actors in the process of its implementation; as such they are the actors who are able to adapt and/or develop an approach to the Recommendation which is fit for purpose and tailored to the national needs and requirements, promoting the development of a culture of quality improvement
2. The new impetus provided by the Bruges Communiqué, in particular in relation to the strategic objective number 2: *establishing at national level a common QA framework for VET providers compatible with the EQAVET framework which also applies to workplace learning by 2015*, which requires a systematic and permanent interaction between national reference points and VET providers in the national context; and the its short term deliverable of: *taking adequate measures to implement the EQAVET Recommendation and making progress towards national QA frameworks for VET by 2014*. Within this area, the follow-up of the reporting process of the implementation of the Recommendation will play an important role in the actions to be undertaken in future years.
3. The need to support the EU agenda in relation to 'making LLL and mobility a reality', which calls for a strong role for QA in the area of increasing learning mobility in its various forms, i.e. transversal mobility (facilitating access to higher education) and transnational mobility which is facilitated by the *transparency* tools developed within the Copenhagen process. All of which improve the image of VET, making it more attractive.
4. Within points 1, 2 and 3 above a systematic, structured and permanent dialogue with social partners is required as social partners a) are an important contribution to a better responsiveness of VET systems, b) have a closer relationship with the industry sectors and their diverse needs; c) are crucial actors in the delivery of continuing vocational education (CVET) and workplace learning.

The network should deliver and create an environment in which Member States and national reference points feel committed but also supported to ensure that the Recommendation is implemented in a way which embeds a culture of quality assurance throughout and within Member States, in order to develop and improve QA in VET, contributing to the EU broader agenda.

Therefore encouraging, stimulating and supporting the national implementation processes should be the focal-point within the work of the network in 2013-2015 which two distinguishable levels of action:

- Priorities focused on actions at national level: addressing points 1 and 2 above.

- Priorities oriented by the EU agenda: addressing point 3 above.
- Point 4 above should be reflected when both levels of actions are considered as the social partners are essential interlocutors at national and European level.

## **PRIORITIES AND THEMATIC AREAS FOR THE WORK TO BE DEVELOPED BY THE EQAVET NETWORK 2013-2015.**

### TO SUPPORT ACTIONS AT NATIONAL LEVEL

1. There is a need to further strengthen the national reference points in order to support their role at the interface between policy development and implementation in their national contexts. There is a need to develop a strategy aiming at enhancing the commitment of national reference points. They need further empowerment in order to increase their usefulness and visibility within the national contexts. At EU level, national reference points need to be stimulated and supported by creating a sustainable platform where they are able to interact, communicate and learn from each other by exchanging experiences and good practices. EQAVET should ensure a strategy to enable national reference points to accomplish their role as specified in the Recommendation.
2. There is a need to increase the involvement of VET providers in the work in order to ensure a more effective national implementation of the EQAVET Framework and to achieve the strategic objectives and short term deliverables set out in the Bruges Communiqué regarding European quality assurance in VET. National reference points play an important role in driving this process as the diversity of VET provisions and providers in their national contexts is only manageable from an insider perspective. National reference points should be seen as nodal points in the implementation process. The tools created by the network at EU level perspective need to be customised and contextualised by the national reference points. Therefore, while national reference points have a crucial role to play in the effective implementation of the Recommendation, the voice of VET providers should come through the processes to be developed by the network. In this regard, EU VET provider associations should be involved. VET providers should be provided with motives and incentives for using the EQAVET QA model. In this context, VET providers should be encouraged to exchange experiences between each other at both national and EU levels.
3. An enhanced engagement of social partners is important. The network needs to support and offer guidance in relation to defining how best to support a structured approach to cooperation and involvement of social partners in the national contexts. This will help national authorities and reference points to fulfil their role as specified by the Recommendation as a concrete step to support a responsive and effective implementation of the Recommendation in Member States. The cooperation with social partners will support the network in meeting the QA demands of CVET, workplace learning, the recognition of prior learning, the quality and availability of training placements in SMEs and the quality of teachers and trainers (i.e. up to date in accordance with market requirements). Hence, the network should ensure a more active and structured involvement of social partners in its work.



TO SUPPORT ACTIONS AT EU LEVEL CONTRIBUTING TO THE OVERALL EU GOAL OF ‘MAKING LLL AND MOBILITY A REALITY’

1. There is a need to consider the importance of facilitating the access to higher education (HE) by supporting mobility which increases the attractiveness of VET and contributes to the LLL perspective. This type of mobility requires a closer cooperation with the HE sector; and with EQF and ECVET as there is a common aim of increasing permeability and flexibility of learning pathways while ensuring quality and fostering trust and transparency, centred on learners’ needs.
2. Therefore, there is a need to enhance cooperation with the other EU initiatives and projects addressing quality assurance of VET issues -notably EQF, ECVET and the LLL projects addressing QA of VET issues. The priority is to create synergies and increased coordination in the implementation of these instruments. In this context, the network should explore the most efficient ways of ensuring effective cooperation between the different national actors or agencies responsible for the implementation of the various tools/initiatives, in order to meet the demands of the EU process in relation to QA, building on the strategy put in place by the Secretariat in 2010-2011.
3. These priorities should not distract attention from the fact that the network is designed as a networking process and/or collaborative entity working towards the development of a sustainable culture or community of practice of QA in and within Member States.

**IDENTIFY ACTIVITIES AND ACTIONS TO ADDRESS PRIORITIES/THEMATIC AREAS**

TO SUPPORT ACTIONS AT NATIONAL LEVEL

- Peer learning activities are considered as an important platform to support national reference points as they provide an opportunity to interact, communicate and learn from each other by exchanging experiences and good practices. The peer learning activities should meet the following conditions: 1) be organised following a menu or customised approach; 2) be informed by the outcomes of the EQAVET Secretariat survey in order to identify the concrete topics or issues to be addressed (e.g. in relation to the use and implementation of the EQAVET indicative descriptors and indicators; and/or areas where low rates occur –e.g. involvement of learners/students, in the QA management processes, etc); 3) while clustering national reference points under common themes, issues, traditions, characteristics, etc. is recommended, there is also a need of interaction where all national reference points are represented, facilitating networking; 4) it is important to ensure the follow-up of each peer learning activity , stimulating development in the national context.
- Customised/tailored expert advice should be offered, fostering a ‘professionalism’ of practitioners aimed at supporting a culture of QA or community of practice at national level. In this regard a group of experts should be established.
- A technical group should be established in order to explore the coexistence of EQAVET with other quality assurance management systems/instruments, in particular in the context of CVET. The possibilities, benefits, downsides, challenges and feasibility of developing a certification system for VET providers (implied in the concept of developing an EQAVET label) should be explored. Within this context the scope and

role of national authorities, national reference points and the network; and the question of resources available and sustainability need to be considered. In this regard, it would be important to analyse and gain from the experiences of the HE sector.

- A working group should be established where the needs of national reference points in relation to their interaction with VET providers at national level is addressed (including maximising the use and communication of the IT tool and its self-evaluation properties); moving forwards the short term deliverable of the Bruges Communiqué on *establishing at national level a common QA framework for VET compatible with the EQAVET framework which also applies to workplace learning by 2015*. In this context, it is important to demonstrate the added value or the benefits of EQAVET quality cycle model.
- National reference points need further support, both technical and financial to fulfil their role. It is important to consider the difficulties of attaining adequate and consistent funding within the national contexts and at EU level. This is particularly clear in relation to the possibilities of adapting/translating the material developed within the IT tool. Some funding might be available within the new EU programme 'Erasmus for All' but solutions at national level should also be fostered
- The network should find the right structures to involve EU VET providers associations in the network's decision making process.
- The network has taken a first step to address the needs of industry sectors, where the role of social partners is emphasised and prioritised. The Sectoral Seminars which involve industry representatives (employer associations, national sectoral councils/chambers, etc.) and national reference points are seen as an important means of enhancing the engagement with the social partners. The work in this area should continue building on the results achieved by the Sectoral Seminars (2011-2012). The industry sector approach should become essential part of the network. The activities in this area should provide an opportunity to explore the quality assurance and development processes in CVET and workplace learning; and discuss the issues of the quality of teachers and trainers and how to ensure the right level of training placements in SMEs and apprenticeship, presenting cases of good practices in relation to strategies put in place by countries of 'sound' alliances between schools and companies.

#### TO SUPPORT ACTIONS AT EU LEVEL CONTRIBUTING TO THE OVERALL EU GOAL OF 'MAKING LLL AND MOBILITY A REALITY'

- The activities to be developed at this level should be organised around the common goal of increasing trust and transparency, thereby increasing learning mobility at EU and national levels.
- In order to reflect on the conditions to facilitate access to HE (i.e. transversal mobility), the Network should organise an event (e.g. a conference or seminar) at which key actors from the two sectors –VET and HE- come together to share views, ideas and common projects, in relation to QA, with clear follow-ups.
- The network should put in place the adequate structures to ensure sustainable and structured cooperation with HE.

- The need to address quality learning mobility calls for a structured coordination, cooperation and synergy with ECVET and EQF at EU and national levels. The work of the Reflection Group should continue and the events organised under its aid (such as the Joint Seminar) should be fostered. The cooperation with EQF and ECVET should focus on common areas of interest (e.g. level 5 on the EQF) and learning outcomes (noticing that QA is contemplated on the totality of the learning process).
- Opportunities for dialogue and exchanges of expertise and experience should be provided between the different national actors involved in the various initiatives. Peer learning activities are seen as a good method to achieve results in this area.
- Guidelines should be offered to national reference points to establish a cooperative approach with EQF and ECVET at national levels.
- Social partners should be involved, in particular when considering market relevance in the process of the design of programmes, qualifications and QA.

Based on these reflections, the network will prepare a work programme for 2013-2015. A first draft will be distributed among members seeking feedback and agreement by May 2012 with a view of finalising it at the end of autumn, approved by Steering Committee.

## Closing remarks

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The Chairperson, Sophie Weisswange, closed the meeting and thanked the hosts, network members, the experts, the members of the social partners and other observers and groups for their attendance, active cooperation and commitment to the network. She thanked the Secretariat for its work.

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