



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

4th EQAVET Annual Forum

Date: 14-15 March 2013

Venue: Dublin, Ireland

Introduction

This EQAVET Annual Forum was the fourth 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 Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

Twenty six countries were represented at the Annual Forum. Apologies were received from EU Member States: Bulgaria, Greece, Poland and Spain; as well as from partner countries: Croatia, Liechtenstein, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Turkey. The Social Partners were represented by the European Trade Union confederation (ETUC), the European Centre of Employers and Enterprises (CEEP) and the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (UEAPME). Observers from Eurochambres, European Providers of Vocational Education and Training (EUproVET), the European Vocational Training Association (EVTA), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), Thematic Working Group on Quality in Adult Learning, Syndicat des Consultants Formateurs Indépendants and the EQAVET Projects Support and Coordination Unit 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 Ms Dana Carmen Bachmann, recently appointed Head of Unit Vocational Education and Training Policy; Leonardo da Vinci Programme, DG Education and Culture, and Ms Alison Crabb, deputy head of unit.

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

Day 1: Opening speeches and Introduction to the Annual Forum 2013

The Annual Forum was officially opened and welcomed by Dana Carmen Bachmann who thanked Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) for hosting the meeting. She also welcomed representatives of Member States, the Social Partners' representatives and the representatives of agencies representing VET providers and other observers.

She noted that quality assurance and VET are at the core of the new strategy proposed by the European Commission *Rethinking Education*, which encourages Member States to take action for education reform in order to make VET a more attractive and high-quality learning option, providing young people with the right skills to find a suitable job; and adults with an opportunity to update skills they will need throughout their working life.

The Chairperson noted the importance of this year's Annual Forum as the discussions taking place will support the reflection on the Commission report to the European Parliament of the EQAVET Recommendation this autumn, which will build on the results of the Secretariat survey and the outcomes of the external evaluation of EQAVET (undertaken by GHK).

She acknowledged that the Annual Forum this year was organised with the objective of reflecting on these key issues and thanked the Secretariat for facilitating this.

Padraig Walsh, Chief Executive of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), welcomed the Forum to Ireland. He referred to the importance of high quality education and training as the essential drivers of economic recovery, reflected in the recently published Commission Communication *Rethinking Education* which invites Member States to promote excellence in VET in cooperation with the Social Partners by developing quality assured VET systems with a strong work based learning component. These concerns are at the centre of the EQAVET work programme 2013-2015 which supports Member States to develop responses to the strategic objectives of the Bruges Communiqué and builds and monitors effective quality assurance approaches, deepening and strengthening the culture of quality assurance across the continuum of lifelong learning. He mentioned that the Annual Forum this year would allow a discussion on how EQAVET can continue its support to these processes. He noted the importance for Ireland to host the EQAVET Secretariat which has supported this complex process of European cooperation and he looked forward to continuing to contribute at this level.

The speech is available [here](#).

Commission Communication *Rethinking Education* and its importance for VET and EQAVET

Alison Crabb, European Commission, presented the Commission Communication *Rethinking Education - investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes*. She noted that the guiding

principle of this strategy is on increasing growth and employment in the EU and on how education and training systems can deliver the skills needed by the labour market. VET is a key element in the strategy. The strategy has three strands:

1. Skills for 21st century (basic and transversal – special focus on entrepreneurship; and VET with a focus on WBL and excellence)
2. Open and flexible learning (learning outcomes (LO), transparency and recognition of qualifications – EQF, ECVET);
3. Collaborative effort (maintain investments in E&T) in order to share the investment on education and training.

In addition, the strategy identifies six priorities which encourage Member States to take immediate action to ensure that young people develop the skills and competences needed by the labour market to achieve their targets for growth and jobs. One of the six priorities for Member States action is excellence in VET, which should focus on:

- High-quality dual VET systems – "European Alliance for Apprenticeships".
- Aligning VET with regional/local economic development.
- Permeability and development of higher VET to respond to emerging skills shortages.
- Strengthening partnerships and networks between companies and VET providers.

In the part of the strategy dedicated to VET, there are three focus areas:

1. Work-based learning (WBL). Alison Crabb presented a chart showing the proportion of VET students enrolled in combined work- and school-based VET, as a percentage of all students in upper secondary VET (2010) across the EU-27 countries. She noted that there is scope for sharing and transfer of experiences and knowledge between Member States in the different forms of WBL – i.e. apprenticeships/dual system; on the job training periods in companies (within school based system); and other forms of WBL within school based VET (workshops, labs, kitchens, practice firms, etc.). This is the goal of the upcoming European Alliance for Apprenticeships.
2. The strategy suggests some measures to encourage incentives to fund CVET, for individuals, such as earning accounts, vouchers, allowances, training loans, tax-based schemes, and for employers, such as compulsory schemes (levy based) and non-compulsory schemes (subsidies, tax incentives).
3. Excellence of VET. The strategy points out that VET needs to be more responsive to the labour market. More than that, VET should lead the labour market's evolution and growth. The strategy recognises that VET can support and drive innovation and change demand, facilitating economic restructuring including transition towards the green economy. The key features of VET excellence are explored: VET should be incorporated in economic strategies; VET providers should have institutional autonomy and cooperate closely with companies; VET systems should provide routes for progression and reward and mainstream excellence; companies should engage in CVET; VET teachers and trainers should have opportunities and incentives for continuous professional development in cooperation companies; European cooperation on VET standards should be enhanced, particularly on a sector basis.

It also contains a chapter on state of play of VET systems in Europe, utilising the Cedefop's Bruges Monitoring of the short term deliverables agreed in 2011 by Member States and Social Partners.

Members expressed their concern in relation to the concept of WBL used in the analysis of *the proportion of VET students enrolled in combined work- and school-based VET, as a percentage of all students in upper secondary VET (2010) across the EU-27 countries*. They pointed out that there is not sufficient clarity in the use of the concepts of school based learning and WBL. Alison Crabb acknowledged that WBL can take a range of forms but that attention is focusing on dual system-type approaches, since these seem to have the clearest results in helping individuals to make a smooth transition from education to employment. She noted that success factors of different VET systems can be analysed, adapted and transferred.

The presentation is available [here](#).

Key findings and trends emerging from the Secretariat survey, 2012

Sean Feerick, Director of the Secretariat, presented some of key findings of the completion of the Secretariat Survey 2012 – the results are presented in a report prepared by the Secretariat which was distributed among members and it is envisaged to be published in order to aid the discussion and reflection in relation to the on-going work of the network; and how the network can make a contribution in the implementation of the broader policy context at EU level (i.e. the Burges Communiqué, Rethinking Education strategy and ET2020).

He noted the importance of considering this work as an on-going exercise which will be reviewed or updated in a regular basis 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 has informed the monitoring process on the progress of the short terms deliverables of Burges Communiqué implementation by Cedefop and will inform the report of the EQAVET Recommendation to the EU Parliament in autumn 2013.

The presentation is available [here](#).

Update on the Commission report to the EU Parliament on the implementation of the Recommendation

Sophie Weisswange, representative of the European Commission and EQAVET Chair, noted that the Commission is due to submit a report to the European Parliament on the implementation of EQAVET, which will be based on the results of the EQAVET Secretariat survey and the external

evaluation of the Recommendation undertaken by GHK and commissioned by the Commission. This reporting is part of the formal reporting process foreseen in the Recommendation. The report may also include a proposal for the revision of the text of the Recommendation.

The Commission has also commissioned a study on mapping existing quality assurance management systems/tools and EQAVET, undertaken by GHK. The study aims firstly to map existing quality assurance measures in CVET at system and provider level and secondly to develop and analyse scenarios for the future development of EQAVET. The study will support the work of working group 2 and she noted that these scenarios also provide a basis for discussion at this Annual Forum.

She stressed that it is important that members understand the different aims of these two studies.

Astrid Henningsen (GHK) presented an overview of the methodology of the external evaluation of EQAVET. The results of the evaluation are based on 34 country reports (prepared through desk research and individual interviews) and 10 case studies. The key issues for the evaluation include:

- Ensuring the evaluation of EQAVET as a whole, not of national quality assurance approaches
- Collecting evidence on how EQAVET has influenced national developments
- Taking into account the period before the adoption of the EQAVET Recommendation
- Collecting evidence on the use and usefulness of EU level activities and how these support national developments.

A validation workshop for EQAVET Steering Committee members took place on 13 March 2013 from which comments and remarks will be taken into consideration in the final draft of the evaluation.

The presentation is available [here](#).

Annette Curth, (GHK), presented the study on mapping the quality assurance tools and EQAVET which proposes a number of scenarios for possible approaches for the on-going implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation. The scenarios have been assessed by several members of the Network through interviews. Interviewees stated that no one scenario would be sufficient for EQAVET implementation and that several scenarios should be combined.

The presentation is available [here](#).

Information Carousel session

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 three parallel working sessions at which three 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 provided the background information which ensured that the discussions at the Forum were well informed and that Network members had the opportunity to discuss the priorities for the work to be developed in 2013-2015. The themes were as follows:

1. Building an information/dissemination strategy at national level using the IT tool/training material
Presenters: [Horace Caruana](#), [Leena Koski](#), [Siegfried Willems](#). Click on the name to download the presentation.
2. Latest EU developments for EQF & ECVET and higher education.
Presenter: [Sophie Weisswange](#). Click [here](#) to download the presentation.
3. The work of CEDEFOP and ETF on quality assurance
Presenters: [Tina Bertzeletou](#), [Elizabeth Watters](#). Click on the name to download the presentation.

Messages from the discussions taking place in the Information Carousel were presented by rapporteurs (i.e. [Siegfried Willems](#), [Sophie Weisswange](#) and [Tina Bertzeletou](#)) in the day 2. Click on the name to download the presentation.

Brainstorming sessions

Participants were divided into four groups working in parallel, which reflected and discussed three topics relating to the implementation of the EQAVET work programme 2013-2015. For each group, a facilitator was allocated, who was supported by an expert. Facilitators encouraged and documented discussion. Each topic was introduced by a presentation, which illustrated how the topics were addressed and contextualised by members of the network. Participants 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 EQAVET work programme 2013-2015. The topics were:

- **The work of the working groups in 2013.** Participants were updated on the work to be undertaken by the working groups and on results envisaged within the context of the work programme 2013-2015. Presenters: *Katalin Molnár-Stadler*, *Dana Stroe*. Presentation is available [here](#).
- **EQAVET indicators and increasing EU cooperation.** Participants reflected on how countries are dealing with the implementation of the EQAVET indicators and increasing cooperation in using indicators as benchmark at European and national levels. Presenters: *Rhona Dempsey*, *Nick Gibson*. Presentation is available [here](#).
- **EQAVET in lifelong learning perspective – the importance of partnerships.** Participants discussed the importance of the role of social partners, VET associations and higher education associations in the work of EQAVET on promoting a culture of quality assurance. Presenters: [Thomas Gruber](#), [Serban Iosifescu](#), [Nele Muys](#), [Agnes Roman](#). Click on the name to download the presentation.

Messages and outcomes from the brainstorming sessions' 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 and next steps for the work of the network within the context of the work programme 2013-2015 and the challenges identified in *Rethinking Education* (see below for more information on messages and outcomes).

Day 2: Plenary session and Workshops: EQAVET and Rethinking Education

The Chair, Alison Crabb, acknowledged that the work of the network and the work programme 2013-2015 were fit for purpose and addressed the issues highlighted in the Commission strategy *Rethinking Education*. She noted that the tools and methods developed so far by the network were of high importance and relevance, and that the network should continue to build on this work, in particular in relation to supporting national reference points (NRPs).

Keith Brumfitt, EQAVET expert, introduced the subject of how to build on the results of the work in EQAVET in order to respond to the policy challenges presented in *Rethinking Education*. He noted that EQAVET could have a role in supporting Member States to address the strategic areas identified in *Rethinking Education*, i.e.:

- the use of WBL to help facilitate the transition from learning to work;
- the development of advanced vocational skills, tailored to regional needs;
- support for more mobile VET learners and a skilled labour force;
- the greater use of learning outcomes;
- the modernisation of assessment in order that it can be used for learners to have skills acquired outside school assessed, validated and recognised;
- closer coherence between the various European instruments to support transparency and mobility;
- greater use of Open Educational Resources to allow individuals to learn anywhere, at any time following flexible pathways

He proposed members to reflect in smaller groups on:

1. How to ensure that EQAVET supports the development of responses to the challenges facing VET.
2. Identify issues keeping in mind the scenarios presented in the mapping study and the results of the external evaluation in order to reflect on future work, including the review of the EQAVET Recommendation.

The presentation is available [here](#).

Discussion document is available [here](#).

Informal meeting of quality assurance reference points

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 between national reference points.

Reports of brainstorming sessions and workshops followed by panel discussion

The following key messages identified in the brainstorming sessions and workshops on day 1 and 2 were presented by facilitators (Darko Mali, Sven-Olof Lundin, Colette Harrison, Marge Kroonmäe):

There was a general consensus that the work of the network should undertake a strategic shift or move from developing instruments to exploring, using and understanding these instruments in their various policy contexts (legislative, socio-economical, historical, cultural, etc.) and specific implementation settings (such as WBL, the training of teachers and trainers, assessment, etc.). While it is important to develop instruments and guidelines, it is also necessary to examine and support Member States in applying those instruments and guidelines within their specific circumstances. This shift will entail a greater emphasis on developing and strengthening a culture of quality assurance rather than on the development of individual instruments and/or resources alone.

IN RELATION TO THE WORK OF WORKING GROUPS (BRAINSTORMING SESSION 1), the following are the messages reported from the groups

- **WG1 ON FACILITATING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A QA APPROACH FOR VET PROVIDERS IN LINE WITH EQAVET**
 1. While it is important that the group understands and takes into consideration the different forms or arrangements of VET existing in the different Member States, it should not become embroiled in discussions on concepts and terminology.
 2. There is a distinction between work based learning (WBL) and workplace learning; the latter is broader. The group should consider both. It should not concentrate entirely on the 'dual system' and apprenticeships.
 3. In this context, the WG should take into consideration including in the guidance (scope) the following:
 - Certification (assessment, validation and recognition of learning outcomes) and qualification processes
 - Accreditation of those providing learning
 - Curricula setting
 - Training of teachers/trainers/mentors/tutors
 - Guidelines on right balance between theory and practice

4. The guidance should highlight the benefits of WBL in relation to increasing employability as it develops the right basic skills, key competencies and soft skills.
 5. The group should create links with employers to gain better understanding of their needs and get relevant guidance /input from them.
 6. The group should use the external evaluation to identify the more effective forms of guidance.
 7. The guidance should include case studies but some members questioned the idea of including 'building blocks'.
- **WG2 ON SUPPORTING VET SYSTEMS TO ADDRESS THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE EQAVET FRAMEWORK AND EXISTING QM SYSTEMS/INSTRUMENTS**
 8. The group should develop a good understanding of national QA systems/approaches in order to address the interaction between EQAVET Framework and the national VET systems; as each system has in own peculiarities. Some members suggested that a further study to learn about the national systems in relation to EQAVET should be undertaken.
 9. The EQAVET indicators should be included in the mapping exercise, which should be offered as toolbox and for use on a voluntary basis.
 10. It is considered useful that the analysis includes guidance on consultation with stakeholders on different QA approaches.
 11. The analysis should consider the core elements of EQAVET Framework, which are: the cycle; indicators and the indicative descriptors.
 12. The analysis should encourage quality assurance not the acquisition of certificates.
 13. It is important that the analysis transmits the idea that there is not a particular model/approach/tool better at meeting the EQAVET Framework than others.

Discussion document is available [here](#).

ON THE TOPIC OF EQAVET INDICATORS AND INCREASING EU COOPERATION (BRAINSTORMING SESSION 2), the following messages were reported from the groups

1. While it is too early to consider revising the indicators, some members felt that there is a need to review indicators 6 and 9 as the Secretariat Survey shows that these indicators are not used by many systems.
2. Some members considered that there are various issues with the definition and clarity of some indicators that need to be addressed.
3. There is the concern that the value of soft skills/general education of learners (which increase their employability) is not currently reflected in the indicators.
4. A process of benchmarking could hinder the process of cooperation and developing a culture of QA at both system and provider level. Therefore it should be treated with care.
5. The benchmarking process should be focused on sharing of experiences, fostering a process of mutual learning rather than be conceived as a 'competition' process. In this regard, the data gathered should be published but not in the context of benchmarking.

6. This is so because the context (e.g. socio-economic, regional, type of VET, culture, etc.) is highly significant when using each indicator.
7. This idea is supported by the Recommendation which states that the indicators are a toolbox from which actors can select the ones that meet their needs.
8. NRPs could have a supporting role in this context.
9. The indicators were designed to measure progress towards the Lisbon objectives, but national systems may need to address different targets in different times (for instance, in time of crisis or related with different qualifications).
10. The data from indicators could increase trust, transferability and transparency – which is correlated with the implementation of EQF/NQFs.
11. In gaining transparency, the ‘client’ (the learner) can make a more informed decision about which product (VET provider) is more suitable for her/his needs.
12. However, it is important to keep in mind that indicators are used at national level and there is a concern that using them at EU level this could have a negative impact.
13. The process of increasing cooperation should focus on supporting services for companies willing to take apprentices.
14. The accountability culture is of crucial importance in relation to WBL/workplace learning; here the use of indicators can be useful.

Discussion document is available [here](#).

ON THE TOPIC OF EQAVET IN LIFELONG LEARNING PERSPECTIVE – THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTNERSHIPS (BRAINSTORMING SESSION 3), the following key messages were reported emerging from the groups

- All members agreed that working in partnership is of paramount importance for the development of a culture of QA; increasing trust and transparency.
- These partnerships should include the labour market representatives, VET providers and the higher education sector.
- The EU level is identified as a relevant stakeholder and should be included.
- These partners should have a real influence.
- This is of particular importance when involving social partners at both system and provider levels – their role should not be confined to a consultancy role, they should also be involved in the decision making process. The social partners should be involved in all phases of the “quality cycle”; and from the beginning of creating a program.
- The industry sectors should be key partners.
- In some systems, the dialogue and partnership methodology is a reality, however in other systems this is not the case; therefore it is important that the network provide guidelines and foster sharing of good practices of active partnerships (e.g. by organising peer learning activities or by preparing studies on the involvement of social partners in different stages of the QA process – the work of Cedefop can be utilised).
- Another way of supporting EQAVET members is by supporting the establishment of ‘promoters of partnerships’ and guidance that identifies the advantages /benefits of getting involved to social partners.

- As resources are limited, it is important that NRPs work in partnership; this will ensure that their work reaches a greater number of relevant actors.
- NRPs should demonstrate a desire to engage with employers and to encourage their involvement in WBL. This can help to close the gap existing sometimes between the qualification framework and the regulated professions.
- It is important that the needs of SMEs are addressed (they provide the greatest number of opportunities for employment in the EU); therefore they should be considered as important partners.
- It is important to show and demonstrate the added value of working in partnership.
- There is a need to keep in mind that a highly regulated/overly intrusive QA framework might prove a disincentive for companies that provide WBL.
- Member States should put in place structures of cooperation and legislative frameworks, for instance in the form of incentives.
- The cost and commitment needed to create active and sustainable partnerships are important factors that need to be taken into consideration.
- The cooperation with the higher education is important for the realisation of permeability – reciprocal recognition of qualifications. There is a need to create cooperation programmes between VET providers, universities and companies.
- When building partnerships with higher education there are important factors that can not be ignored:
 - VET and higher education have different models of governance. The involvement of the social partners can alleviate these differences; therefore initiatives should be put in place to involve them in the cooperation strategies.

Discussion document is available [here](#).

The following are the key messages reported from Workshop on HOW TO ENSURE THAT EQAVET SUPPORTS THE DEVELOPMENT OF RESPONSES TO THE CHALLENGES FACING VET?

Members considered that:

- The EQAVET network does not need to establish new priorities in order to address the priorities of the *Rethinking Education* Communication; rather it should take into consideration the latter in the already planned activities of the network;
- The network should identify and establish clusters of Member States; which could work on issues of shared interest and learn from each other enabling effective transfer of knowledge.
- The network needs to support the use and understanding of the EQAVET instruments as well as helping NRPs to use them in specific contexts (e.g. in work based learning, in assessment, in developing learning outcomes etc.) in order to strengthen the culture of quality as the specific national situation is critical to what can be achieved.
- So, the goal is to develop instruments at system level – common approaches; but the interventions should be tailored (as the systems are very different). “Think globally – act locally”. The role of NRPs in this context is of core relevance as they can find specific solutions to common problems.

- The network and NRPs both gain from a symbiotic relationship.
- Even though there is commitment of the policy makers in Member States to implement EQAVET at both system and provider levels continued efforts are necessary in order to strengthen the implementation of the Recommendation and meet the EQAVET–related strategic objectives of the Bruges Communiqué. The EQAVET Framework should underpin the quality management systems existing; and each part of the learning cycle should be quality assured (standards, curriculum, institutional capacity, qualifications).
- The needs of the learner should be at the centre of all actions.
- It is important that EQAVET is embedded in EQF and NQFs;
- WBL, assessment, learning outcomes (LO) are intrinsically interrelated, so they need to be addressed in tandem.
- WBL is a priority; there should be an integration of WBL into the school system. In this context it is of importance to consider the quality management issues: how to quality assure / manage WBL.
- The effective implementation of LO requires the consideration of quality management /QA issues; this dependent relationship should be made visible as “quality assured LOs” ensure transparency and transferability.
- There is a need to establish transnational agreements for the transferability of qualifications – designed on the basis of LO.
- It was agreed that the more the various EU instruments can be pulled together at national level, the greater the value. In this sense, efforts should be made to increase cooperation and communication between the Copenhagen and Bologna processes.

Discussion paper is available [here](#).

The following are the key messages reported from Workshop on REFLECTION ON FUTURE WORK, INCLUDING THE REVIEW OF THE EQAVET RECOMMENDATION, KEEPING IN MIND THE SCENARIOS PRESENTED IN THE MAPPING STUDY AND THE RESULTS OF THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION

- The scenarios address the EU level. The political process will decide and leverage the process of implementing QA approaches.
- The feedback on ESG for HE suggests taking on board the developments in the other EU tools (EQF, ECVET).
- The current work of the network, as provided for in the work programme 2013-2015 and in its objectives of responding to the policy context provided by the Bruges Communiqué and Rethinking Education, was considered to provide an appropriate basis for an incremental approach to embedding a culture of quality assurance of VET in line with the Recommendation. In the light of this, scenarios 1 and 9 were considered to be particularly helpful.
- Resistance to any scenario that implies ranking or labeling.
- The Network is not yet ready for Scenario 8.

Presentations showing the messages from discussions can be downloaded on the following links: [Group 1](#), [Group 2](#), [Group 3](#), [Group 4](#)

MESSAGES EMERGING FROM THE PANEL REFLECTION ON THE WORK OF EQAVET FOR 2013-2015 AND THE BROADER POLICY CONTEXT

Juergen Horschinegg, (AT), noted that the function of EQAVET is not that of a think-tank but rather it is to monitor developments in VET in the national contexts, develop content issues and provide a platform for sharing and exchanging knowledge. He acknowledged that EQAVET is on track but there was a need to constantly monitor in order to ensure that we were meeting the needs of the policy process and partners. In relation to WBL, he noted that the underlying aim of WBL is to reduce youth unemployment and permit the smooth transition between school and employment; while this is the common aim, each Member State has its own needs and forms of addressing this aim. The role of EQAVET in this context is to oversee the quality management of WBL.

In addition he noted that the role of NRPs is to tailor the instruments and guidelines produced at Network level; therefore NRPs are important actors to focus on. Members agreed on this. They pointed out that NRPs are very different in Member States; this needs to be acknowledged and be transmitted to policy makers in order to ensure support.

Tove Blytt Holmen, (ENQA), noted that there are similarities and differences between ESG and EQAVET (e.g. ministries and the European Commission are closely involved in VET and EQAVET respectively; this is not the case of higher education and ESG). She acknowledged that VET is very complex and that NRPs have a challenging work ahead. She pointed out the need to increase cooperation between VET and higher education, but she stressed the need to keep the socio-economic goals of VET and higher education distinguishable. She noted that the emphasis put by EQAVET and VET in the involvement of Social Partners is something from which ENQA and HE should learn from.

Agnes Roman, (ETUC), pointed out that there is a need to focus on developing a culture of QA rather than to developing instruments. The Network should encourage and create opportunities for exchange of knowledge and learn from each other. She emphasised that it is of paramount importance that NRPs engage with Social Partners and work collaboratively. She identified WBL and the quality of the teachers and trainers as the areas at which EQAVET can play a role in relation to the priorities described in the *Rethinking Education* Communication. She informed members that she is using the work developed by EQAVET (notably the training material) in the work of ETUC with teacher representatives.

Kirsti Kosonen, (EUproVET) noted that EQAVET is a useful and valuable framework, and that it is important that it is kept as a reference framework, which offers quality criteria and indicators from which VET providers can choose those more suitable for their concrete needs/requirements. She noted the importance of fostering the autonomy of VET providers in their decisions and actions, as they are closer to the learner and the needs of the context.

Closing remarks

The Chairperson, Alison Crabb, closed the meeting. She summarised the messages emerging from the discussions at the Annual Forum:

1. There is a general agreement and understanding that EQAVET, the network and its work programme 2013-2015 can support the priorities identified in *Rethinking Education*. In particular the work of the working groups in relation to WBL and CVET; the sectoral approach which addresses the importance of working in partnership with the labour market actors; and the reflection group which encourages synergies between the other validation/transparency tools (EQF and ECVET).
2. There seems to be a consensus that while the network should develop instruments and guidelines, there is now a need to focus on the use of these instruments in the different contexts (national, socio-economical etc.) in order to develop a genuine culture of QA. There is a need 'to use the instruments in a context, for a purpose'. There are two methods to address this: a) to work in partnership. NRPs can drive this process (e.g. by engaging with SMEs); and b) NRPs can work and share knowledge in relation to concrete issues and adapt the instruments in order to fit the different contexts.
3. EQAVET is on track. The European Commission will report on the Recommendation to the Parliament by mid-2013. The report will be published and follow-up actions will need to be discussed by Member States. The report will be based on the external evaluation (conducted by GHK), the Secretariat Survey and the work carried out by Cedefop on monitoring the short terms deliverables of the Bruges Communiqué. The discussions which have taken place at the Annual Forum will support also the process.

She 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. She thanked the Secretariat for its work.

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