**STUDY OF THE WORK PROGRAMMES OF THE
EQAVET NATIONAL REFERENCE POINTS**
*within the framework of the funding provided
under the Erasmus+ programme
in the period 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017*

EQAVET Secretariat - Giorgio Allulli, October 2017

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Foreword

This study reports on the main results achieved by the 19 National Reference Points participating in the Erasmus+ KA3 call for proposals in 2016 – *Support to the activities of the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) National Reference Points (NRPs)*. The information is based on the projects' final activity reports, articles on EQAVET newsletter, direct contacts with the projects and additional information provided on request.

The structure of the study is as follows:

- A brief summary of the outcomes of each project and description of the relevant NRP.
- A cross-sectional presentation of the projects' outcomes, classified according to the main categories of activities/methodologies developed.
- A second cross-sectional presentation of the projects' outcomes, classified according to the main topics addressed.

Using this structure will involve some repetition, since the same activity is reported at times under different themes. However, this approach allows us to highlight the richness of the activities of each project and the contributions they made to the implementation of the various aspects of the EQAVET Recommendation, and in particular the three priorities set out in the EQAVET Network strategic programme 2016/2017 and in the Erasmus+ Call for Proposals, i.e.:

- *Complementing the current EQAVET Framework in order to ensure continued relevance to the needs of the policy context by developing an EQAVET+ Framework.*
- *Strengthening mutual cooperation among NRPs in order to address implementation – NRPs and the work with VET providers.*
- *Deepening the culture of quality assurance of VET – the importance of feedback loops and the review phase of the quality cycle.*

A chapter is dedicated to highlighting actions specifically for CVET, given the need for greater effort to implement EQAVET in this field.

In the final part, after reporting the main challenges faced by the projects, the monitoring and evaluation methods and the impact produced, we analyse the strengths and critical aspects of the activity financed by the Erasmus+ Grant and provide some suggestions at national and European level on how to further implement the strategic role of EQAVET national reference points (NRPs).

1. Main outcomes of the study and key messages

The funding to NRPs from the Erasmus+ programme has encouraged the implementation of multiple activities focused on QA in VET in countries participating in the call.

Activities developed by NRPs

- The most recurrent activities are those connected with *communication and information*: almost all the projects implemented or revised the national website and produced information and promotional material. Furthermore, eight NRPs have organised national/international conferences, seven have set up national networks, and/or issued newsletters, and six have organised training for trainers.
- Many NRPs developed *studies and analyses* on the VET system, which included the preparation of reports, surveys and studies (eight NRPs), some of which include the collection of good practice (three NRPs). Moreover, many NRPs (12) organised seminars, round tables, expert meetings, focus groups. These studies and analysis have led to the *development of materials useful for the implementation of the* EQAVET *Recommendation.* On foot of these, 12 NRPs developed policy recommendations and briefings, manuals and guidelines for providers and practitioners; and 9 NRPs conducted pilot activities, questionnaires, developed new instruments and other tools.
- Almost all NRPs used the grant to reinforce *links and cooperation with other NRPs*.

Topics addressed by NRPs

- The issue most frequently addressed by the NRPs was the *implementation of the EQAVET Framework*, in particular working on self-evaluation (seven NRPs); evaluation and review phases (seven NRPs); quality management and implementation of the EQAVET+ Framework (six NRPs); the development of the national approach to QA in VET (six NRPs); indicators and data collection (four NRPs); and external QA procedures (three NRPs).
- *Quality assurance of work-based learning* was addressed by seven NRPs.
- Other important issues were those connected to the *Integration of European tools* as EQF, ECVET, etc. (seven NRPs).
- Some projects focused on *supporting the VET* system, by developing actions that improve visibility and awareness of VET and QA (two NRPs); or implementing Peer Review (two NRPs). One project focused on using EQAVET in order to increasing transparency of QA in VET.

From the documentation produced by the projects, it was concluded that the Erasmus+ grant:

- Consolidated the role and the image of the NRPs in the national context.

- Promoted dialogue and cooperation among a number of stakeholders at national level.
- Facilitated convergence between EQAVET and other European tools.
- Promoted the creation of international networks on the theme of QA in VET.

On the other hand, it should be noted that:

- Participation in the call was incomplete as not all Member States participated.
- Actions taken in relation to the implementation of EQAVET did not always exhibit clear connections with the policymaking process in their countries.
- Most projects focused on IVET and did not look at the needs and requirements of the CVET sector.

However the overall analysis confirms the value of this initiative: it encouraged and facilitated activities that move forward the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation; produced new knowledge and insights; and promoted dissemination and networking.

The added value of the work completed and the results achieved by the NRPs, supported by the work of the EQAVET Network[1], can be summarised under five key issues or strategic criteria:

1. *Strategic approach:* performing the task assigned to the NRPs requires careful planning. It is necessary to keep in mind the goals to be achieved, the timespan, the resources available, constraints, possible partners, and implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation.
2. *Integration:* NRPs should be embedded within national and local policymaking processes, so that dissemination of the EQAVET Recommendation becomes an integral part of national education and training policy.
3. *Involvement*: it is advisable to involve the various stakeholders (social partners, associations of VET providers, etc.) when developing actions and materials. This enhances their awareness and ensures the suitability of the activities to the final users.
4. *Differentiation*: to increase the effectiveness of NRP materials and proposals, it is necessary to contextualise or calibrate the various activities and initiatives to meet the needs of different target groups, adopting appropriate language for each.
5. *Networking:* this is necessary at national level to set up local and national allies (they may be stakeholders, experts, associations of VET providers or companies). These relationships ensure that the task of disseminating contents and methodologies is shared. At

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[1] The 2018/19 EQAVET work programme suggests actions classified into three main headings
- Reflect strategically on the key role of QA in VET in the EU policy context
- Support the work of NRPs in order to design QA systems, services and processes for VET in key areas
- Support the development of a culture of continuous QA improvement by addressing the needs of countries

transnational level, networking between NRPs facilitates mutual learning, sharing of experience, practices, tips or transfer of actions; which in many cases serves as a source which leads to new actions at national level, or detecting risks to be avoided.

These five issues **should be taken into account at national level in the implementation of the tasks assigned to the NRPs in the EQAVET Recommendation.**

However, it is worth noting that NRPs need to be aware that raising awareness of VET and developing a QA culture at different levels is a long-term ambition which will provide long-term returns. *It is a slow process rather than an epiphany.*

At European level, these findings demonstrated that it seems advisable to continue financing the activity of NRPs through the Erasmus+ programme, since NRPs represent a strategic instrument for the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation in each Member State. We also need to support focused actions for work-based learning and CVET, given their policy priority.

There is also a need to stimulate the participation of all NRPs, particularly those who have not yet taken part in the Erasmus+ calls. The work of the EQAVET Network could support those countries that have not participated by providing individualised support on request, which could include supporting the completion of forms/requirements and/or the elicitation of themes/topics or activities. It is important that the experience and lessons learnt from those NRPs that have already participated are shared with those which have not yet.

However, the individualised support provided by the Erasmus+ programme to NRPs is not intended to replace the activities undertaken by the EQAVET Network. This work, in parallel, supports activities to promote NRP networking at national and international level; providing that they focus on actual impact and improve participation by targeted representatives who have a multiplier role and who should have an input into the content of these activities.

2. The context: Who are the National Quality Assurance National Reference Points (NRPs)?

The EQAVET Recommendation[2] invites the Member States to establish, if not already established, a Quality Assurance National Reference Point for VET (NRP) that is linked to the structures and requirements of each Member State and that, in accordance with national practice, brings together existing relevant bodies and involves social partners and stakeholders at national and regional levels, in order to ensure follow-up work on initiatives.

According to the Recommendation, NRPs should:

- Keep a wide range of stakeholders informed about the activities of the framework network,

- Provide active support for the implementation of the work programme of the framework network,

- Take concrete initiatives to promote further development of the framework in the national context,

- Support self-evaluation as a complementary and effective means of quality assurance which allows us to measure success and identify areas for improvement in the implementation of the work programme of the framework network,

- Ensure that information is disseminated to stakeholders effectively.

Some NRPs have been established and began their work before the final approval of the EQAVET Recommendation: in 2006 four NRPs were established (ES, IT, HU, RO); however, the majority of NRPs were established after the adoption of the Recommendation in 2009.

In 2013, ICF-GHK was commissioned to carry out on behalf of the European Commission an evaluation of the implementation of EQAVET[3]. In 2016 the EQAVET Secretariat launched a new survey on the implementation of EQAVET[4]. Both reports include a section describing the profile and activity of NRPs.

2.1 The profile of National Reference Points

Thirty-one VET systems, i.e. almost all countries (only Estonia has not officially appointed a NRP, although the national agency for VET and AL is functioning as such) established a NRP in the

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[2] EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND COUNCIL, RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (2009/C 155/01)

[3] ICF GHK in cooperation with Technopolis, *Evaluation of implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)*, Final report, 2013

[4] EQAVET Secretariat, *Supporting the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework. Results of EQAVET Secretariat Survey 2016/7*

national context[5]. Many of them are placed within a ministry, others are situated in external bodies having a specific responsibility for quality assurance (see table 1):

- 60% of VET systems established the NRP inside an agency funded by the relevant ministry, which is usually the Ministry of Education, except in the cases of:
    o Hungary, where the NRP is hosted by an Agency funded by the National Ministry of Economy (which is in charge of VET)
    o Italy, where the NRP is hosted by an Agency funded by the Ministry of Labour (ISFOL, now INAPP)
    o Germany, where the NRP is hosted by an independent organisation (BIBB).

- Ten systems (33% of countries) have established their NRP within their relevant ministry (usually the Ministry of Education); this happens more frequently in smaller countries.
- Three countries (NL, HR, IE) have established an agency independent of their relevant ministries.

Table 1 - Organisational arrangements used by national VET systems in the EU-28 to establish the National Reference Point

DESIGNATION of NATIONAL REFERENCE POINTS	Response count	Response percentages	Countries
It is part of the Ministry/ies	10	33%	BG, DK, EL, ES, CY, LU, PT, UK(Eng, Wls, Nir)
It is an agency funded by the Ministry/ies	18	60%	BE(nl), CZ, DK, DE, FR, IE, IT, LT, LV, HU, MT, NL, AT, PL, SI, SK, FI, SE
It is an agency independent of the Ministry/ies	3	10%	NL, HR, IE
It is a private organisation	1	3%	NL
Others	2	7%	RO, UK(Sct)

Source: EQAVET Secretariat, *Supporting the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework. Results of EQAVET Secretariat Survey 2016 – 2017.*

Usually the public agencies which host NRPs are those institutions responsible for VET development in general – i.e. they are not working on quality assurance and/or inspection only.

This means that NRPs are deeply embedded in their host organisation and do not have a separate budget from their host organisation and personnel works part-time only on EQAVET purposes (usually one or two persons). In many instances they must also perform other duties connected to the mission of the host organisation. The NRPs whose status is clear and whose main role is to

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[5] The two countries that reported that they have not established a National Reference Point, acknowledged that this issue is being addressed by the competent authority and/or that progress is being made in this respect (EQAVET Secretariat, cit.)

perform the tasks connected with the implementation of EQAVET at national level, are located in NL, AT, DE, IT and CZ [6].

2.2 The activities of NRPs

The results of the EQAVET Secretariat suggest that almost all NRPs are performing information functions. The large majority of them are also undertaking the other functions and activities specified in the EQAVET Recommendation (table 2):

- Providing active support for the implementation of the work programme of the EQAVET network (90%);
- Taking concrete initiatives to promote further development of the EQAVET Framework in the national context (87%);
- Supporting training providers to identify areas for improvement to quality assurance and implement quality assurance systems in line with the EQAVET Recommendation (87%);
- Supporting training providers to introduce or develop self-evaluation systems (68%).

Typical activities managed by the NRPs include:

- Developing Web pages about EQAVET on the host's website
- Performing presentations at events
- Organising national meetings for stakeholders.

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[6] ICF GHK in cooperation with Technopolis, cit.

Table 2 - Responsibilities of National Reference Points as set out by the EQAVET Recommendation

RESPONSIBILITIES of NRPs under the EQAVET RECOMMENDATION	Response count	Response percentages	Countries
Keeping stakeholders informed about the activities of the EQAVET network	28	90%	BE(nl), BG, CZ, DK, DE, EE, HR, IE, EL, ES, IT, CY, LT, LV, LU, HU, MT, NL, AT, PT, RO, SI, FI, SE, UK(Eng, Wls, Nir, Sct)
Providing active support for the implementation of the work programme of the EQAVET network	28	90%	BE(nl), BG, CZ, DK, DE, EE, ES, FR, HR, IE, EL, IT, CY, LT, LV, LU, HU, MT, NL, AT, PT, RO, SI, FI, UK(Eng, Wls, Nir, Sct)
Taking concrete initiatives to promote further development of the EQAVET Framework in the national context	27	87%	BE(nl), BG, CZ, DE, EE, ES, IE, EL, ES, FR, HR, IT, CY, LT, LV, LU, HU, MT, NL, AT, PL, RO, SI, FI, UK(Eng, Wls, Nir)
Ensuring that information is disseminated to stakeholders effectively	28	90%	BE(nl), BG, CZ, DK, DE, EE, ES FR, HR, IE, EL, IT, CY, LT, LV, LU, HU, MT, NL, AT, PT, RO, SK, FI, UK(Eng, Wls, Nir, Sct)
Supporting training providers to identify areas for improvement to QA and implement QA systems in line with the EQAVET Recommendation	27	87%	BE(nl), BG, CZ, DK, DE, EE, ES, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LV, HU, MT, NL, AT, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, FI, SE, UK(Eng, Wls, Nir)
Supporting training providers to introduce or develop self-evaluation systems	21	68%	BG, CZ, DK, DE, EE, ES, FR, HR, IE, IT, LV, LT, MT, AT, SI, FI, SE, UK(Eng, Wls, Nir, Sct)
AVERAGE number and percentage of activities undertaken by NRPs as set up by the EQAVET Recommendation	27	87%	–
Undertaking other activities	14	45%	BG, EL, ES, FR, HR, IE, IT, LU, HU, NL, AT, SI, FI, UK(Wls)

Source: EQAVET Secretariat, *Supporting the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework. Results of EQAVET Secretariat Survey 2016 – 2017.*

The EQAVET Secretariat notes that although these results are very positive, there seems to be room for improvement: NRPs need to carry out further work in order to support their own VET providers in the following fields:

- Identify areas for improvement to quality assurance and implement quality assurance systems in line with the EQAVET Recommendation;
- Introduce or develop self-evaluation systems.

The ICF GHK study also suggests that NRPs are not always supporting providers to introduce or develop self-evaluation systems.

In relation to the areas of the national education and training systems in which the NRPs operate, the EQAVET Secretariat survey indicates that:

- all are operating in initial VET (IVET); a large part (90%) also operates in the continuing VET sector (CVET); and 71% in adult education (figure 1).
- Only 58% of National Reference Points supported, within the national context, non-formal learning and 48% supported the informal education and training sector. According to EQAVET secretariat "this requires attention, particularly in light of the strategic objectives set by the Bruges Communiqué, which advises countries to *start to develop, no later than 2015,*

national procedures for the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, supported as appropriate by national qualifications framework".

In this regard, the Report of the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council states that "*The quality operational measures within the EQAVET network have focused on institutional, school-based provision (most of initial VET and part of continuing VET), with less visible impact on work-based learning and non-formal provision (which makes up most of continuing VET but could also play a key part in Initial VET in dual systems)*[7].

Figure 1. – Areas of VET supported by National Reference Points regarding the implementation of the EQAVET Framework
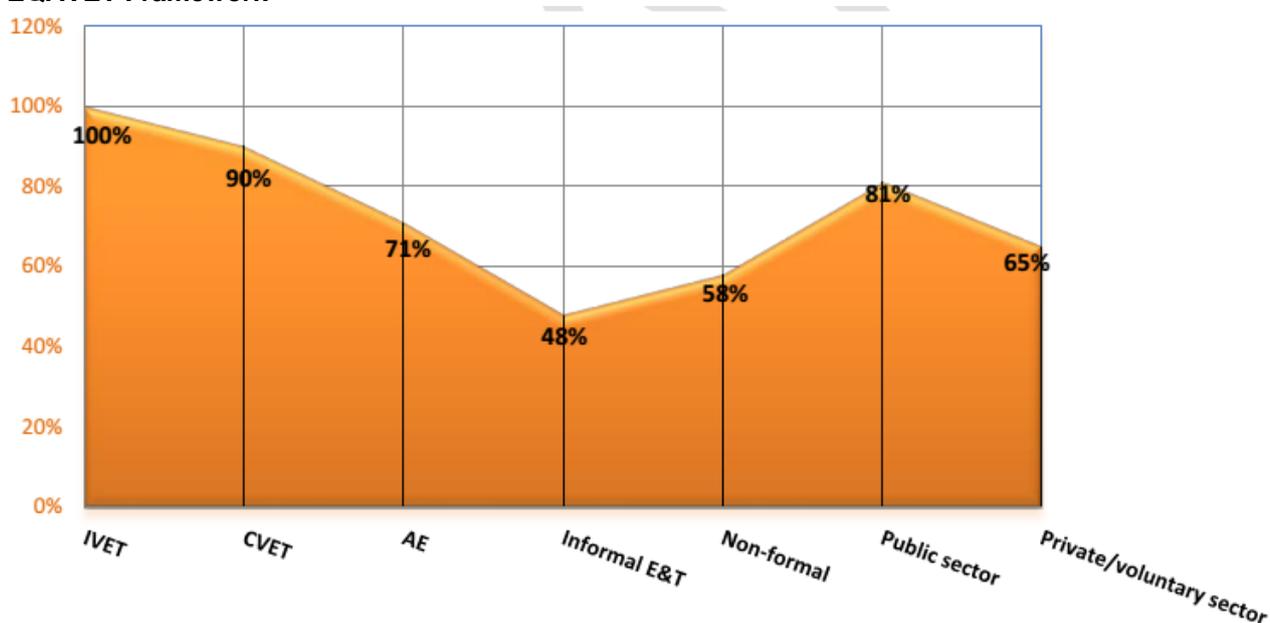
Source: EQAVET Secretariat, *Supporting the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework. Results of EQAVET Secretariat Survey 2016 – 2017.*

Figure 2 below shows the role of NRPs in relation to the broader European policy initiatives to support the lifelong learning strategy. The EQAVET Secretariat noted that:

- The large majority of National Reference Points (71%) made a contribution to the development and implementation of the quality assurance aspects of the European Qualification Framework (EQF).

- A slightly lower percentage (68%) provides support in relation to quality assurance issues relating to the European Credit system for VET (ECVET).

- Only 39% of NRPs provide support in relation to "The Common EU Principles for Identification and Validation of non formal/informal learning", despite its importance within the EU broader strategy of growth and jobs for all.

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[7] European Commission, *Report to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training*, Brussels, 28.1.2014, COM(2014) 30 final

- Finally only 23% provide support in relation to the implementation of the "European Charter for Mobility". This is significant, since it is mentioned by the EQAVET Recommendation as an initiative in which quality assurance will play a crucial role.

Figure 2 - Scope of National Reference Points

Source: EQAVET Secretariat, *Supporting the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework. Results of EQAVET Secretariat Survey 2016– 2017*

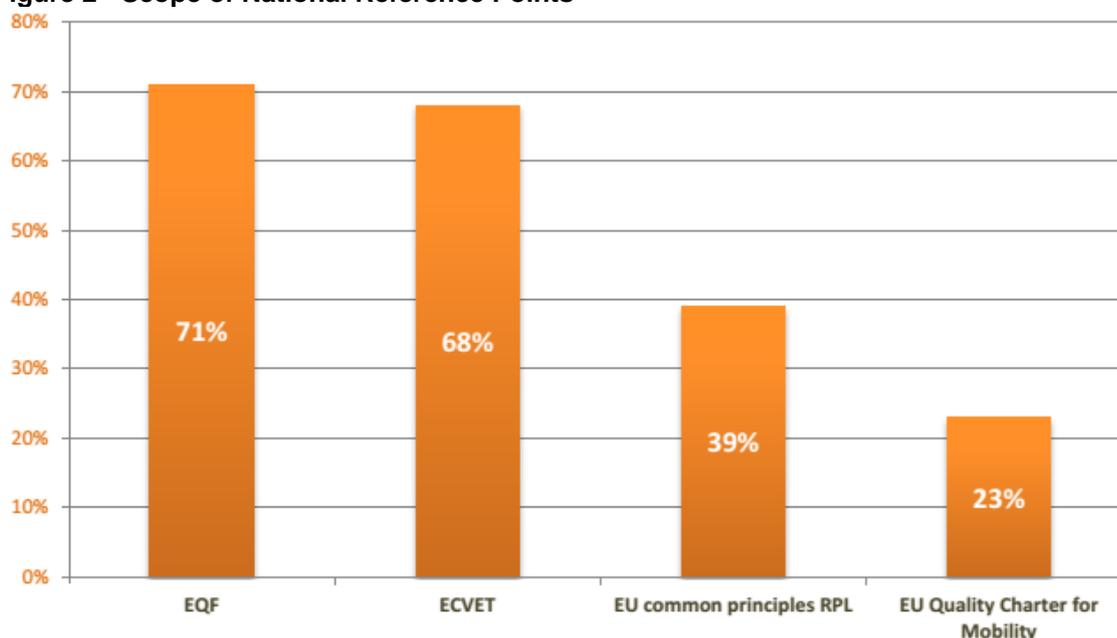In addition, ICF GHK noted that "*the review of the working of the NRPs, the work and the activities implemented suggests that there is a link between the existence of an NRP and active engagement in the implementation of EQAVET. The existence of an NRP appears to be a helpful step towards the engagement in the implementation of EQAVET, but not necessarily a sufficient step to ensure active engagement*".

3. The Erasmus+ call: the participating National Reference Points and main activities

In order to facilitate the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation in the Member States, the European Commission provided funding for NRPs in 2016 to support the development of the activities identified in the European Recommendation. Therefore in 2016 the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), under Key Action 3 of the Erasmus+ Programme (Support for Policy Reform), launched a restricted call for proposals from bodies designated by their national authorities to act as EQAVET NRPs, to support the implementation of the tasks assigned to them under the EQAVET Recommendation.

The three priorities identified in the EQAVET Network Strategic Plan 2016-2017 were the selection criteria for the call:

1. *Complementing the current EQAVET Framework in order to ensure continued relevance to the needs of the policy context by developing an EQAVET+ Framework.*
   Proposed activities and outcomes of this priority area are:
   - Production/formulation of new descriptors ensuring the inclusion of the above dimensions in the Recommendation and creating an EQAVET+ Framework.
   - Increasing the relevance and usability of the EQAVET Framework.

2. *Strengthening mutual cooperation among NRPs in order to address implementation – NRPs and the work with VET providers.*
   The lines of action that this direction proposes are as follows:
   - Contribute to strengthening NRPs and ensuring they are supported to fulfil their role.
   - Enhance cooperative work between NRPs and stakeholders, including social partners and those providing VET.
   - Provide NRPs with an appropriate environment where they can cooperate and learn from each other's experiences and expertise.
   - Supporting systems (in particular NRPs) to engage appropriately with VET providers whether within initial VET (IVET), continuing VET (CVET) and/or work-based learning (WBL).

3) *Deepening the culture of quality assurance of VET – the importance of feedback loops and the review phase of the quality cycle.*
   The lines of action suggested by this objective are as follows:
   - Completing the quality cycle, with a focus on the review phase.

- Working with EQAVET Indicators: in particular those indicators with a labour market relevance (notably indicator 6 and 9), building on the work completed so far by the Network in this area.

- Implementing a systematic, structured and permanent dialogue with the world of work and the social partners to support the Network to meet the QA demands of CVET, work-place learning, the recognition of prior learning, the quality and availability of training placements in SMEs and the quality of teachers and trainers in VET

- Increasing coordination with other sub-sectors of education and training, in particular with general and higher education, focusing on facilitating flexible learning pathways.

Under this restricted call, all 19 applicants received the grant. Most of them planned to implement all three priorities of the EQAVET Strategic Plan 2016-2017[8].

The next chapter provides information about the NRPs participating in the call and the main results of the projects developed[9].

See annex 1 for further information on each project.

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[8] European Commission: Erasmus+ KA3 — *Support to the activities of the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) National Reference Points (NRP)*. Compendium 2016

[9] The information provided on the projects is taken from the Projects' final activity reports, articles on Eqavet newsletter, direct contacts with the projects.

The information provided on the NRPs is taken from: ICF GHK in cooperation with Technopolis, *Evaluation of implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)*, Country reports, 2013 and from the Projects' final activity reports.

4. The methodologies adopted

This chapter considers the activities and the methodologies adopted by the NRPs to develop their project. As shown by table 3 the activities carried out by NRPS are numerous and differentiated.

Table 3 Activities carried out by National Reference Points

ACTIVITY	NRP	NO. OF PROJECTS
Communication and dissemination		
Implementation of the website, Internet platform	RO, IE, CZ, AT, DE, IT, TR, HU, CY, UK(NI), HR, LT, MT, FI, NL, EL, LV, SI	18
Information and promotional material, leaflets, other materials	RO, AT, NL, CZ, EL, IT, IE, DE, FI, LV, TR, HU, SI, HR, CY, UK(NI), MT	17
National/International conference	LT, DE, IT, EL, TR, SI, CY, RO	8
Implementation of national networks	MT, CZ, EL, IT, TR, IE, HU	7
Newsletter	AT, RO, NL, SI, CZ, IE, DE	7
Teachers, trainers and VET providers training on QA	AT, MT, HU, IE, UK (NI), HR	6
Study and analysis		
Seminars, round tables, expert meetings, working groups, workshops,	AT, UK (NI), IE, EL, LT, HU, NL, SI, FI, LV, CZ, TR	12
Reports, surveys, studies	EL, NL, DE, IE, TR, FI, CZ, HR, UK(WALES)	8
Inventories of good practices	RO, SI, HR	3
Development of materials		
Policy recommendations and briefings, guidelines for providers and practitioners, manuals	RO, LV, NL, EL, SI, MT, TR, IE, HU, FI, HR, AT	12
Pilot activities, new instruments, questionnaires and other tools	AT, LT, CZ, EL, LV, HU, FI, NL, CY	9
Links and Cooperation with other NRPs		
Links and Cooperation with other NRPs, study visits	AT, CZ, DE, NL, LT, IE, SI, EL, IT, FI, HR, RO, TR, LV, HU, CY, UK (Wales)	17

Source: Information taken from Erasmus+ KA3 — Support to the activities of the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) National Reference Points (NRP). Compendium 2016.

The most recurrent activities carried out by NRPs are those connected with *communication and information*: they were mentioned 63 times by the NRPs[10]. This is one of the tasks assigned to NRPs by the EQAVET Recommendation, which noted that NRPs should:

- *keep a wide range of stakeholders informed about the activities of the framework network,*
- *ensure that information is disseminated to stakeholders effectively*

This means that activity on communication and information has a central focus in NRPs' mission. In detail:

- 18 NRPs developed a dedicated website, which could be a powerful instrument to make information available to all interested parties.

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[10] The number of activities is higher than the number of the projects because each NRP performed several activities.

- 17 NRPs used the grant to develop (inter alia) information and promotional material, such as leaflets, or other materials to disseminate EQAVET to national stakeholders

The other communication and information activities reported by the projects are:
- organisation of national/international conferences (mentioned by eight NRPs)
- establishment of national networks (mentioned by seven NRPs)
- newsletters, issued by seven NRPs
- training of trainers (reported by six NRPs).

Another category of activity is the one that includes *studies and analyses of the VET system*, particularly in relation to how QA in training activities is introduced. This category of activities has been reported 23 times, and includes the following actions:
- Seminars, round tables, expert meetings, focus groups, which were mentioned by 12 NRPs
- Reports, surveys, studies on the VET system (skills and competences needed, etc.), mentioned by eight NRPs
- Inventories of good practices, mentioned by three NRPs

In many instances, studies and analysis led to the development of materials useful for *the implementation of the work programme of the EQAVET Network* (one of the task of the NRPs as specified in the EQAVET Recommendation). Twenty-one NRPs mentioned the development of material useful for this task. In detail:
- 12 NRPs developed policy recommendations and briefings, manuals and guidelines for national providers and practitioners
- Nine NRPs organised pilot activities, questionnaires, new instruments and other tools.

Almost all NRPs used the grant to reinforce *links and cooperation with other NRPs* (second priority included in the EQAVET Strategic Plan 2016-2017). Most of them organised study visits in their country or participated in peer learning activity (PLA) or study visits organised by NRPs from other countries.

Examples are given below of actions arising from each of the activities developed by NRPs. It is important to emphasise that this is not an exhaustive list of all activities carried out but just some representative examples of the work of NRPs.

Some activities are context dependent; these are described in boxes.

4.1 Communication and dissemination

4.1.1 The communication strategy

One of the major challenges of promoting the EQAVET Recommendation is to disseminate the principles and methodologies developed by the Network and supported by the EQAVET Recommendation. An analysis at national level reveals a considerable amount of materials, manuals, brochures but it is difficult to assess if these reach the end users, i.e. the VET providers and the other stakeholders. There would appear to be a strong need for a communication strategy that identifies the most appropriate means of communicating content; what needs to be transmitted and to whom.

The Communication Strategy of the **Greek** NRP has three specific objectives:

1. Build awareness of the activities and achievements of the project among target audiences
2. Ensure public access to the project materials, documents and other relevant information
3. Improve knowledge of quality assurance mechanisms for certification of work-based learning and the development of assessment standards and criteria defined in terms of learning outcome among target groups,

For IQAVET (the **Irish** NRP project) visibility and awareness of its activity was a key concern, in order to build awareness of EQAVET. EQAVET was formally embedded in policy architecture and tools, but was not used as a routine reference tool in practice. An important principle in the *communications strategy* was to ensure that the VET sector took ownership of the project and IQAVET.

The Irish NRP communications strategy

The seminars organised by IQAVET centred on three distinct phases of the project: preparation, collaborative learning and conclusion/dissemination.

A. Preparation
- Initial discussions with the sector to formulate the grant proposal gave rise to the communication strategy, and a steering group was convened to lead the project and to help build ownership of the IQAVET network. The steering group comprised VET providers and a representative of the Further Education Support Service
- Networks and groups already in existence were harnessed to build awareness of EQAVET and the project underway. In particular, the Quality Assurance strategy group, facilitated through ETBI (Education and Training Boards Ireland), comprised of directors of further education and training at the ETBs, were instrumental in helping to promote their project and embed the culture of Quality Assurance throughout the organisation.

B. Collaborative learning
- The IQAVET steering group was an important conduit for communications as they are working "on the ground regionally". They acted as champions for their project and encouraged and cultivated support both through the identification of possible case studies for presentation by their colleagues at respective seminars.
- The quality assurance strategy group referred to above was used to effectively promote and support the network and to identify good practice for showcasing at a national level.
- The emphasis on case studies from the sector itself led to rich collaborative learning. As the project continued, individual practitioners became increasingly interested in presenting their case studies to a national audience and in demonstrating innovation and changes in practice based on their particular context.

C. Conclusion/dissemination
- The QQI website was used as a significant resource throughout the project to build awareness of the IQAVET network as the Irish NRP for EQAVET. As seminars took place, the NRP pages on the QQI website acted as a resource for sharing presentations, case studies and tools developed by the sector through this project.
- A report compiled by QQI which captured all discussions, key learning, case studies and tools developed through three seminars based on the key themes agreed, was published in hard and soft copy to aid dissemination.

After attending the national seminars, the participants acted as ambassadors in their respective organisations and this in turn has laid down strong foundations for a very positive community of practice approach. Through case studies and the collaborative and inclusive discussion, the sector has realised, at least in part, the potential of EQAVET to guide, support and solidify their approach to quality assurance.

The strategy of the **Czech NRP** corresponds to the overall NUV (the National Institute for Education) strategy and also *defines different forms of communication pathways towards individual groups.* Target groups were identified both at system and provider levels:

- System level: Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Ministry of Industry and Trade, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Czech School Inspectorate and the Department for Analyses and Statistics of the National Institute for Education.

- Provider level: Unions and associations of secondary and tertiary professional schools directors, teachers, employers.

- Another target group between the system and provider levels is represented by individual regions of the Czech Republic and their Regional Authorities and also the National Institute for Education.

For the above mentioned target groups, a flyer, presentation, roll-up, video and a website (www.eqavet.cz) were created.

The **Austrian** NRP combined possibilities of digital media, print media and the organisation of events, i.e., ARQA-VET Newsletter, OeAD News, WebPages, mailing lists as well as EQAVET internet forum.

The staff who attended the training courses organised by the NRP in **Northern Ireland** were called to act as champions for the utilisation of the portal in their school. The portal was developed recognising that this will become a critical mechanism for sharing resources as part of the new qualifications.

4.1.2 Tools of communication and dissemination

Almost all the NRPs developed a *website*, to publish news, communicate events and make materials available.

The NRP in Ireland used the QQI website as a significant resource throughout the project in order to build awareness of the IQAVET network as the Irish NRP and to share presentations, case studies and tools developed by the sector through this project.

The **Cypriot** NRP has developed an internet-based platform which is used to foster communication between graduates and employers and is helping to extract information about the needs of the labour market. The aims of the platform are:

- Aiding communication between graduates and employers.

- Tracing the needs of the job market.

- Downloading statistical information.

The **Czech** NRP developed the website: www.eqavet.cz, in order to reach and involve representatives of the national network, experts, policymakers and secondary VET schools. The website features links to other European transparency and mobility tools, and promotional materials developed as part of the project (video and flyer).

The **Austrian** NRP renewed the ARQA-VET website in order to improve communication and presentations by NRP to national and international stakeholders.

The NRP in **Northern Ireland** recognised that a unique/centralised portal was required – currently each of the further education colleges had its own resource of curriculum materials and support information. The Department funded the development of a portal that could be accessed by all six further education colleges. This portal would help lecturers and teaching staff in each of the colleges to ensure that their knowledge and teaching skills are up to date and relevant at all times.

The **Turkish** NRP added self-evaluation questions to the on-line portal utilising the Ministry of Education website, and all vocational schools and centres were enrolled in the system.

The other communication and information activities developed by NRPs are:

- *Information and promotional material* like leaflets, or other materials to disseminate EQAVET principles and methodology, implemented by 17 NRPs.

- *Establishment of national networks* (reported by seven NRPs). In many instances, NRPs found it difficult to disseminate activities, given the large group of stakeholders and the limited resources available. In order to overcome this, some NRPS established national networks of stakeholders, such as experts, VET providers, etc. The **Dutch** NRP set up an advisory group which includes representatives of stakeholders who are informed and encouraged to disseminate information to their corresponding network. These representatives identified specific activities and sent the appropriate information and invitations to the appropriate people. The **Italian** NRP established a Board which includes the main institutions (Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education, Regions, Social partners and associations of VET providers). The **Hungarian** NRP set up and operated a National EQAVET expert network, which has initiated and maintained professional dialogue and served as a consultant group**.** The expert network functions as a multiplier network and applied the principle of continuous quality improvement in line with EQAVET principles.

- *Organisation of national/international conferences* (carried out by seven NRPs).

- *Newsletters* (reported by seven NRPs).

- *Training of trainers* (reported by six NRPs). The **Austrian** NRP designed a concept of training aimed at involving teachers in quality management systems and QA procedures (see point 5.1.3 for further information)**.** The **Croatian** NRP organised a workshop for senior expert advisers of AVITAE (the Croatian Agency for VET) to support the agency in the improvement of existing QA processes and adviser competencies for the monitoring and improvement of self-assessment at AVITAE and VET school level, and to prepare workshops on self-assessment for Croatian VET schools. Following this, four regional workshops were organised, with over 90 participants from VET schools. The aim was to further improve VET school self-assessment, inform schools about EQAVET, demonstrate how qualitative analysis improves self-assessment and its implementation, and support

schools in the QA and self-assessment process, discuss the existing model and improvement recommendations. **Malta** organised three seminars for VET providers and a 3-day training seminar for peers and students who act as reviewers to undertake QA audits.

In relation to the issue of _Training of trainers_, the projects analysed above suggest that it is crucial that training consist not only of a series of presentations but also that there be active participation and involvement of the target group, leading to the development of materials. When the target group is teachers, they should not just simply listen, but interact and produce documents. The learning process should be as active as possible:

- The **Irish** NRP organised three training seminars. Each seminar included a mix of VET and higher education and sectoral or international experts providing key insights to help stimulate discussion amongst participants. Daily interaction amongst participants and the opportunity to showcase existing practice was an integral part of each seminar. In addition each seminar involved an in-depth discussion on the topic in question and concluded with the development of a tool addressing that topic, extending the model developed by EQAVET for use by practitioners to help build capacity throughout the sector on a national level.

- The NRP in **Northern Ireland** delivered a programme of quality assurance training events to support the development of a professional learning community portal. The training workshops provided the colleges with an opportunity to meet and share their knowledge and to understand how collaboration can work in theory and in practice. Throughout the training events delegates were asked to get feedback on their materials from their colleagues and to discuss and review in their project teams before uploading onto the portal. By the final training event, each project had trialled the portal and uploaded their materials.

- The **Latvian** NRP focused two seminars on policy recommendations on VET QA development in order to ensure a common understanding of the EQAVET indicators among stakeholders. This facilitated the design of the Policy Recommendations "_Working for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training_". Moreover three seminars for VET providers were organised in order to discuss and develop new practices in self-assessment in order to support coherence, mutual trust and understanding.

4.2 Studies and analyses

4.2.1 Seminars, round tables, expert meetings, focus groups

These actions have been reported by 12 NRPs. Most of these activities were aimed at involving stakeholders (VET providers, experts, social partners, etc.) in the preparation of documents and materials. The decision to involve stakeholders appears to be an effective way of tailoring the contents of the materials and increasing common understanding of the system among local training providers.

Several activities were reported by the Dutch NRP.

Activities organised and realised by the Dutch NRP:

- A three-day expert meeting with different stakeholders on enhancing quality culture in the Netherlands.
- Three workshops for VET providers to disseminate the results of the expert meeting.
- Four round tables for representatives of governing bodies of VET providers on the issue of enhancing quality culture.
- An orienting study on QA progress for a group of VET providers.
- Two workshops of the national conference on QA in October 2016 on enhancing quality culture.

The **Greek** NRP organised consultation activities with stakeholders in order to develop a common understanding of certification regulations and requirements, such as learning outcomes, descriptions and assessment criteria. Particular attention was paid to the participation of labour market representatives, given their important role in certification and relevant QA processes; a working group/committee of representatives of employers and employees organisations, educationalists and professionals from relevant fields was established.

Finland established groups of experts to update the QA criteria of the national approach.

Finland: establishing groups of experts to update the QA criteria

In **Finland** at the beginning of 2017 small working groups of experts (coming from FNBE, Ministry of Education and Culture and Finnish Education Evaluation Centre) started to update the criteria of the system, supporting quality management and continuous improvement of quality at VET provider level in line with:

- self-assessment and evaluation results,
- the national priority areas of the Vet reform
- and the EQAVET+ framework.

The proposal was reviewed by a larger group of stakeholders during a workshop in March and the participants were asked to send comments and concrete proposals for change in electronic form during the full updating process. The workshop participants came from all over Finland, to provide feedback from different regions and different kind of VET providers and to promote the dissemination of the updated criteria.

Based on the results of the workshop and comments received, the updated version was finalised. Despite the delay in legislation the updated criteria are now available on the web page of EDUFI (the Finnish agency for education) for the self-assessment of VET providers.

4.2.2 Reports, surveys, studies on the VET system (on skills and competences needed, etc.)

This kind of activity has been carried out by eight NRPs.

The **Greek** NRP promoted a study, based on literature review and comparative analysis, which explored practice in the assessment and certification of non-formal work-based learning in Europe,

with particular focus on case studies from five countries (Germany, Spain, Finland, the Netherlands and Greece). Assessment methodologies used in many countries were listed and analysed in terms of their suitability for the assessment of learning outcomes achieved in the workplace.

The **German** NRP carried out a study which shows how QA and development of work-based learning in the German VET system works. The NRP in **Wales** has commissioned a research project on Retail, Tourism and Hospitality sector.

4.2.3 Inventories of good practices

Good practices in VET have been collected and reported by the **Romanian** NRP, to promote visibility and raise awareness of labour market opportunities offered by VET. SIQA-VET, the **Slovenian** NRP, prepared **two** cases of good practice on the use of all four phases of the quality cycle, with a focus on closing the cycle and further improvement. The **Croatian** NRP presented in the regional workshops on VET schools examples of good practice in self-assessment, identified during an analysis of self-assessment processes.

4.3 The Development of Materials

4.3.1 Policy recommendations and briefings, guidelines for providers and practitioners, manuals.

Twelve NRPs produced policy recommendations and briefings, guidelines for providers and practitioners, manuals. The **Slovenian** NRP prepared a manual/guidelines for VET providers based on the EQAVET Recommendation. **Greece** developed a handbook for practitioners which sets out the principles that should govern the design of quality-assured assessment and certification processes and guidelines for such processes in the context of work-based learning. **Finland** developed guidelines on the criteria supporting quality management and continuous improvement of quality for self-assessment at provider level. **Latvia** drafted the Policy Recommendations "*Working for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training*". **Turkey** prepared a quality manual for workplace learning in line with EQAVET framework. The meetings and workshops organised by the **Dutch** NRP resulted in a publication with tools for the staff of VET providers. **Malta** developed a guidance booklet called *Step by step guide to internal quality assurance* and an external quality assurance manual of procedures titled: *External Quality Assurance: Provider audit manual of procedures.*

In some instance, the manuals and briefings are based on the translation into national languages of the material produced by the EQAVET Network (developed by the working groups, PLAs and other activities) and published in English on the EQAVET website.

4.3.2 Pilot activities, new instruments, questionnaires and other tools

Nine NRPs developed *pilot activities, new instruments, questionnaires and other tools*.

Hungary is introducing labelling, i.e. assessing VET providers and awarding an EQAVET label to those which reach certain standards of quality assurance in line with the EQAVET Recommendation.

Hungary: assigning a label to VET providers

The aims of labelling are:
- Guaranteeing professional feedback for the training providers and supporting them in continuous professional development
- Offering support for local, regional and national authorities in adult education and learning for the development processes in quality assurance

The process for EQAVET labelling at national level was elaborated by the EQAVET labelling subgroup of the EQAVET national experts network.
The methodology was piloted with the help of a training provider from the fitness sector, as the European accreditation process of this sector requested that the training provider applying for the accreditation be formally recognised at national level by each member state's authorities through the EQAVET process. The company agreed with the main goals of the project. They found the survey thoroughly detailed.
As the result of the subgroup's efforts, two documents were produced:
- The first one, the system of awarding of EQAVET Label, contains detailed suggestions on the functions and operation of the system. It introduces the objectives, the scope of application, the term, the basic principles and the process of the system, complaint management, organisational demands, self-assessment requirements and information on using the label and necessary resources.
- The process of awarding the EQAVET label is described in detail, together with regulations for the application and awarding procedures. It defines the objective of the procedure, the activities before site inspections, a detailed description of site inspection, the decision about awarding the label and scheduling the procedure and complaint management.

The **Italian** NRP supported VET providers in implementing Peer Review.

The **Lithuanian** NRP prepared questionnaires for the evaluation of:
- Employer satisfaction with VET graduate qualification, knowledge, skills and competence.
- Graduate satisfaction with acquired qualification, knowledge, skills and competence.
- Learner satisfaction with individual learning experience and the learning and teaching environment.
- Teacher satisfaction with training environment and work conditions.

Questionnaires were also developed by the **Latvian** NRP for the collection of data on EQAVET indicators among VET providers on satisfaction rates of individuals and employers with knowledge, skills and competences, and the collection of information on training needs in the labour market (see below for more details). The questionnaires allowed for observation and collection of data on different aspects of the educational process and on satisfaction levels with the education and training sector.

The **Czech** NRP developed an online tool differentiated for three types of targets users groups:
- VET schools (usually a coordinator of cooperation),

- Companies
- Associations/Unions/State institutions

Analysis of the project seems to suggest that this tool may also form part of the relationship between VET schools and the companies and facilitate, monitor or methodically support the process. The transparency, quality and user-friendliness of the online tool have been tested by representatives of three user groups. This tool is useful for the regular monitoring of cooperation between a school and a company in the long term, both for self-evaluation and for external monitoring by the regional body or the Czech school Inspectorate.

Part of the online tool is a questionnaire with a set of the criteria to fulfil in the period before the training starts (planning), during the daily training (implementation) and after the training (evaluation). It also includes the review part of the quality cycle (the measures to be taken).

4.4 Links with other NRPs

The selection criteria (the second thematic area of the EQAVET strategic plan) was *Strengthening mutual cooperation of NRPs in order to address the implementation of a QA approach in line with EQAVET*. Some NRPs organised particularly complex and significant activities within this area. At the end of January 2017, the **German** NRP (DEQA-VET) organised a three-day visit, which included a round-table discussion at the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training, attended by other ten NRPs. The aim of the programme was to achieve a greater degree of mutual understanding and transparency in exchanges on approaches to work-based learning in the participating Member States.

The study visit organised by DEQA-VET (Germany):

The Study Visit was attended by representatives from 11 countries (CZ, DE, EL, FI, HR, HU, IT, NL, RO, SI and UK – Wales). Prior to attending the Study Visit, representatives from each country completed a questionnaire about their national system.

The study visit provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on the commonalities and differences in the national systems for quality assuring work-based learning. It included:
- a series of discussions on the quality assurance of work-based learning on day one; the approaches of all vocational training systems represented were discussed. This was done on the basis of the following criteria: monitoring of training, decision making competence for the content of the training and involvement of stakeholders in the field of vocational training. It emerged that there are gaps in the monitoring of training and that it focuses more on vocational schools than on training in enterprises. A culture of quality in enterprises is therefore of particular importance.
- Field trips to observe training organised by companies for apprentices in the dual system on day two; the programme also included a visit to a professional training centre. There, trainees in several trades receive training on subjects that cannot be offered by small craft enterprises. This enables these enterprises to offer training despite their limited range of activity.

- A round-table discussion for a more detailed analysis of the German model for quality assurance on day three: four VET representatives held a discussion amongst themselves and with the participants on the quality of VET in Germany. They emphasised the following specifics of the German VET system:
  - the legal bases, especially in the form of nationally applicable training regulations,
  - the tripartite system with representatives of employers, trade unions and government, in which decisions are taken on consensus;
  - the importance of training contracts according to prescribed models;
  - the responsibility of trainers in the enterprises and the Chambers;
  - the integration of trainees into their respective workforces.

Major current challenges are the shrinking demand for apprenticeships among young people, the changes brought about by digitisation, the integration of refugees and the drop-out rate in training, which is perceived as being too high.

Romania organised in October 2016 a Peer learning activity on promoting visibility and raising awareness of VET. The main aspects addressed at the PLA were relevant to both systems and providers. The PLA was attended by representatives of eight countries (12 participants representing Austria, Croatia, Finland, Greece, Italy, Latvia, and Slovenia; and 16 Romanian participants); they were invited to present their own initiatives in order to exchange experiences and identify the possibility of increasing the visibility and attractiveness of vocational training. **Austrian** and **Finnish** NRPs implemented a joint activity focussing on "Teacher and trainer involvement in Quality Management Systems and Quality Assurance Procedures". This activity included two meetings attended by NRPs and VET provider representatives from AT, FI, DE, NL, RO, UK/Scotland (teachers and trainers, management staff, school quality managers).

Austria and **Finland: joint activity on "Teacher and trainer involvement in Quality Management Systems"**

The first meeting took place in Vienna/Austria in October 2016 with 14 participants and the first phase focused on the theme "Good practice in NRPs". Presentations were made by participating NRPs, followed by more detailed processing in small groups. The resulting suggestions for good practices were collected and documented in a photo protocol. A second presentation introduced the topic and focused also on the role of NRPs in supporting and encouraging VET providers to involve teaching staff in QM. A presentation from ARQA-VET and expert input on the topic "How to involve VET teachers and trainers in QA work: at provider level?" was included.
The second meeting took place in Finland in February 2017 with 16 participants. After a sum-up of the most important findings of the first meeting the second meeting focused on concrete examples of good practice in the field of teacher and trainer involvement at provider level. Three Finnish VET providers presented their approaches. After the presentations the participants continued to work in small groups, tackling the theme of teacher involvement in QM from different perspectives.
On the basis of expert inputs, good practice examples from different VET providers and results of diverse small group work, the participants in the EDG (European Development Group) developed recommendations on the topic "teacher involvement in quality management" for different levels: system level, provider level and individual (teacher/trainer) level.

The NRPs from **Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia** organised a first meeting in September 2016 to bring together 15 persons working in the national authorities and dealing with VET quality issues. Participants at the meeting discussed and shared their experiences and good and innovative VET quality assurance practices, including

- Latest developments, trends and plans,
- Remaining challenges in VET quality assurance,
- EQAVET implementation at national level, including EQAVET indicators 6 and 9
- Implementation of VET quality assessment activities.

Croatia organised a PLA attended by 30 participants (system and provider level) from 9 countries (Estonia, Finland; Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Croatia) on the QA of work-based learning and self-assessment.

The EQAVET Secretariat participated in many of these activities.

5. The topics addressed

Table 4 below presents the topics addressed by the NRPs. These topics were the selecting criteria /priorities identified in the EQAVET Network Strategic Plan 2016- 2017[11]:

1. Complementing the current EQAVET Framework in order to ensure continued relevance to the needs of the policy context by developing an EQAVET+ Framework
2. Strengthening mutual cooperation among NRPs in order to address implementation – NRPs and the work with VET providers
3. Deepening the culture of quality assurance of VET – the importance of feedback loops and the review phase of the quality cycle.

Table 4 Topics addressed by the Projects

Topic	Priority	NRP	No of projects
Implementing EQAVET framework and Quality cycle			
Self-evaluation, internal QA	3	FI, IE, CZ, LV, MT, SI, HR	7
Evaluation and review phases of the QA cycle, continuous improvement	3	LT, IE, FI, MT HU, HR, IT	7
Quality management, quality culture, Implementation of quality framework, adapt the EQAVET+ Framework	2	AT, FI, NL, SI, UK(NI), MT	6
National approach, national framework for quality assurance	2	IT, LV, CY, HU, SI, MT	6
Indicators and data collection	3	LV, IE, HU, SI	4
External quality assurance, auditing, evaluation	3	MT, CZ, TR	3
QA of Work-based Learning			
QA of WBL	1	CZ, DE, HR, SI, TR, EL, FI, UK(Wls)	8
Cooperation between school and companies		CZ	1
Integrating European tools			
Integration other European tools (EQF, ECVET, Euroguidance, Europass, Eures, Eurodesk)	1	EL, CZ, HU, IT	4
Skills and qualifications, revision of qualifications and assessment standards, recognition of LO based on the EQF and ECVET	1	CZ, EL, FI, UK(Wls)	4
Supporting VET			
Visibility and awareness of VET and QA, make VET more attractive	2	RO, IE	2
Peer Review	2	IT, UK(NI)	2
Transparency of QA in VET	2	DE	1

Source: Final Projects' Reports

In some cases, activities are analysed under multiple topics as the same activity (for instance teachers training) could apply to more than one topic.

The issue most frequently addressed by the NRPs concerned the *implementation of the EQAVET Framework and the quality cycle*, which is priority three of the EQAVET Strategic plan 2016-2017.

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[11] EQAVET Network, *Deepening EQAVET work, Strategic plan 2016-2017*

This is the central purpose of the EQAVET Recommendation and most NRPs have found it worthwhile to focus on this objective and to set up activities to achieve it.

Within this specific priority, the issues addressed by the projects were:

- Self-evaluation, internal QA (reported by seven projects)
- Evaluation and review phases of the QA cycle (seven NRPs),
- Quality management, quality culture, implementation of the national quality framework, adapt EQAVET+ for the national approach (six NRPs)
- National approach/framework for quality assurance in line with EQAVET (six NRPs)
- Indicators and data collection (four NRPs).
- External quality assurance, auditing, evaluation (three NRPs).

Some NRPs (eight) worked on *QA of work-based learning*, which is one of the main priorities of the New Skills Agenda and the EQAVET Network.

Other important issue was the *Integration of the European tools*, i.e.:

- Convergence with other European tools (Euroguidance, EQF, Europass, Eures, Eurodesk), integration with EQF and ECVET (addressed by four NRPs).
- Revision of qualification and assessment standards of vocational qualifications and the recognition of learning outcomes and qualifications based on the EQF and ECVET (four NRPs).

This is an issue that has been identified by the first priority area of the EQAVET Network Strategic plan 2016-2017 and the Report of the European Commission on the implementation of EQAVET Recommendation, which says: "*More explicit attention to the quality assurance of qualification design and award, liasing to the EQF, ECVET and the EUROPASS Certificate Supplement, might allow EQAVET to better address non-formal and work-based VET*"[12].

Within the topic *Supporting VET*, the activities aimed at promoting the image of VET in the national context included:

- Visibility and awareness of VET and QA (addressed by two NRPs)
- Peer Review (two NRPs)
- Transparency of QA in VET (one NRP)

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[12] European Commission, *Report to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training*, Brussels, 28.1.2014, COM(2014) 30 final

The sections below presents the activities developed by NRPs under the various topics. This is not an exhaustive list of all activities but some representative examples of the work of NRPs.

5.1 Implementing the EQAVET Framework and quality cycle

5.1.1 Development of self-evaluation and internal QA processes

Seven projects focussed on the development of self-evaluation and internal QA processes. Many European countries have developed a national evaluation system which is mainly based on self-assessment among VET providers. Some NRPs used the European funds to support this process. This is in tune with the EQAVET Recommendation which assigns NRPs the task of s*upporting self-evaluation as a complementary and effective means of quality assurance.*

The manual developed by the **Slovenian** NRP for VET providers according to the EQAVET Recommendation aims to complement current efforts at national level, since Slovenia began with the preparation of a national framework for quality assurance in all areas and levels of education, from kindergarten to high school. This project emphasised the specifics of QA in VET, especially with regard to the QA of WBL.

The three seminars organised by the **Irish** NRP addressed the following topics:

- What data and evidence can be used for self-evaluation
- Self-evaluation
- VET governance.

The final report detailed the rich discussions and outputs of each of the three seminars above.

The **Maltese** NRP organised seminars for VET providers with the aim of enhancing the importance of internal QA and to increase the number of policy documents among VET providers related to this topic. The seminars addressed the challenges of developing:

- Self-evaluation processes,
- Internal procedures and criteria as part of an overall culture of reflection, analysis and action throughout provision and within the review phase of the quality cycle.

5.1.2 Improving the implementation of the phases of feedback and review.

In recent times the need to focus, through self-assessment, on the feedback and review phases, has become evident. It is acknowledged that data collection, produced from evaluation processes, is not always followed by revision and improvement of practice. For this reason, within the EQAVET Network, growing attention has been paid to these phases of the quality cycle, organising PLAs and other activities.

The focus of seven NRPs' projects was in line with these reflections.

The **NRP in Finland** updated the national criteria for self-assessment which support quality management and continuous improvement of quality at VET provider level in line with the national evaluation results, the national priority areas of VET reform and the EQAVET+ framework (see also section 2). Guidelines for using these criteria in self-assessment were also developed. This update of the national criteria for self-assessment focused on the final phases of the quality cycle: i.e. criteria for evaluation and review phases.

The **Italian** NRP focussed on improving the quality of training provision by enabling VET providers to focus on the quality tools of the review phase after conducting a peer review. The analysis of the impact of peer reviews was conducted on two VET providers which carried out a peer review two years before the analysis, in order to understand the real improvement/impact produced by this methodology and to stress the importance of the review phase.

The **Croatian** NRP activity focussed on the evaluation and review phases of the QA cycle in the national context, and its alignment with the EQAVET framework. First an analysis of the Croatian model of quality assurance was carried out and a report developed with recommendations for further work. Another analysis and report were carried out on the self-assessment of VET schools with recommendations for improvement of current practice. In order to disseminate results and strengthen the capacities of all parties involved in the self-assessment process, a workshop for senior expert advisors of the agency and four workshops for school directors and members of the quality committees were organised.

The **Lithuanian** NRP prepared concrete instruments for the evaluation of employers, graduates, learners and teacher satisfaction. The results of the project are available on line and may be used on a voluntary basis by VET providers when assessing and reviewing their performance. They will feed into the internal quality assurance mechanisms, since all IVET providers and main CVET providers have these mechanisms in place and are obliged to perform a self-analysis of the quality of their services.

5.1.3 Quality management, quality culture, implementing the whole quality framework, adapting the EQAVET+ Framework

Six projects focussed on issues of quality management, quality culture, implementing a comprehensive quality framework, adapting the EQAVET+ framework.

After the joint activity with the Finnish NRP, the **Austrian** NRP, developed a workshop design for teachers in order to provide an introduction to quality management, and initial training was developed in this regard.

The Austrian workshop design for teachers on quality management

The concept was developed in close cooperation with three Austrian teacher training providers, with one German teacher training provider and with several national and international experts. Representatives of Austrian VET schools were also part of the developing group. The final concept was prepared by ARQA-VET and approved by the participants of the working group. The following aspects are included in this workshop:

- Duration of the training (ECTS)
- Definition of target groups
- Pedagogical concept
- Competences and to be acquired and contents to be transferred
- Methodology
- Materials (presentations, guidelines, worksheets, instructions for exercises)
- Competences and qualification of trainers

The objective of the **Dutch** NRP was to stimulate different stakeholders to reflect on what is a quality culture and how to enhance it. This was done by organising a number of meetings and workshops with different target groups, which resulted in a publication with tools for the staff of VET providers, two reports that were placed on the Dutch EQAVET-website for further dissemination, a report on progress on QA in a group of VET providers and needs for further support, and finally two articles that were placed on the Dutch EQAVET website for further dissemination.

5.1.4 Implementation (or review) of the national approach/framework for QA

Six projects focused on this objective.

The **Italian** NRP carried out a first revision of the national plan for QA in VET. The Italian context has changed since 2012, when the first national plan for QA was approved by the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Education, and the Regions; it was necessary to revise and update the first national plan.

Italy: the National Plan for QA in VET

Through cooperation and coordination with the main institutions (Ministry of Labour, and then Ministry of Education, ANPAL (the national Italian agency for the development of active labour policies), Regions and Social Partners) a new Plan was drafted.
The Plan covers the following areas:

- Upper secondary education (attended by pupils from 14 to 19 years) managed by the Ministry of Education, and in particular technical and vocational education.
- Three-year VET courses (attended by pupils from 14-17 years) and four-year VET courses (14-18), managed by the regional governments.
- Post-qualification and post secondary level courses.
- Apprenticeships

For each of the phases of the QA cycle of the EQAVET Recommendation (Planning, Implementation, Evaluation and Review), the Plan specifies the goals to be achieved and the initiatives to be taken by the various institutional bodies (Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education, and Regions). It sets the goals and a timeline for implementation. The Board of the NRP, charged with addressing and validating its activities and results, has coordinated and promoted this process.

The **Hungarian** project set an EQAVET+ subgroup of the EQAVET expert network which agreed to revise and improve the national implementation process of the EQAVET Framework which was introduced in 2011. This subgroup also decided to prepare the definition of the indicative descriptors and indicators at system and provider levels; and for IVET and CVET separately. They also formulated recommendations for policymakers and VET providers for implementing and applying the EQAVET descriptors and indicators. As a result, a national approach to QA in VET in line with EQAVET was formulated. The results of this work are presented in a document, which includes recommendations for stakeholders and policy decision-makers.

One of the main priorities of the **Latvian** project was the implementation of the EQAVET Framework (criteria, descriptors and indicators) identifying elements in QA of VET which were not addressed by the national approach. This work resulted in the preparation of the document "Policy Recommendations - *Working for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training*". It should be noted that these recommendations are the result of discussions and proposals emerging from the seminars organised by the project team from the State Education Quality Service, with the participation of experts in the VET field, social partners and other relevant stakeholders. The main aim of the Policy Recommendations is to ensure a common approach to quality assurance development in VET**.**

The **Cyprus** NRP is working towards the design of a Cypriot national approach on QA in VET. The Ministry of Education and Culture organised an information seminar on "European Cooperation on Quality Assurance in VET - EQAVET", inviting other NRPs to present their QA approach in line with EQAVET. The **Slovenian** Ministry of Education decided to connect different public institutes to

prepare the national framework for QA in all areas and levels of education. The focus of the first phase has been the work of NRP for VET providers.

The seminars organised by the **Maltese** NRP added value to national practice by strengthening the importance of internal QA within the national approach to QA. The seminars raised awareness among educational institutions of the importance of having a formalised internal quality assurance document. The project was used by the National Council for Further and Higher Education (the authority responsible for managing the NRP) to disseminate and raise awareness of the 11 standards outlined in the national QA framework for further and higher education.

5.1.5 Indicators for quality assurance

The **Latvian** project developed procedures for data collection, with a focus on EQAVET indicators 6 and 9.

Latvia: the implementation of indicators 6 and 9

In this project, the main emphasis was on finding mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market and evaluating the quality of VET:

- by developing questionnaires for the collection of data on EQAVET indicators on satisfaction rates among individuals and employers with acquired knowledge, skills and competences;
- collecting information on training needs in the labour market.

After discussions on the dissemination of questionnaires and content, six questionnaires were developed. The development of questionnaires offered the possibility for VET providers to observe and collect data on different aspects of educational process and on satisfaction levels with education quality, thus deepening understanding of education quality indicators and ways to ensure quality in education. At the same time the questionnaire for employers obtained clearer information on training needs and the needs of the labour market for the future. As a result it motivated VET providers to continue to use the questionnaires in the future.

The Education quality indicators have been included in the regulation made by the Cabinet of Ministers. The regulation includes 8 out of 10 EQAVET indicators (excluding EQAVET indicators 1 and 7) and requires VET providers to use education quality indicators and include their data in a self-evaluation report.

The **Hungarian** NRP defined descriptors and indicators at system and provider levels; and pertaining to IVET and CVET. It formulated suggestion for policymakers and VET providers for implementing and applying them.

One of the seminars organised by the **Irish** NRP focused on the utilisation of data for QA. The seminar took into consideration the six Building Blocks developed by the EQAVET Network. These blocks complement the EQAVET indicative descriptors and indicators. The case studies clearly demonstrate that activities relating to Building Block 05 (Use data and feedback to improve VET) support VET providers in their efforts to improve provision in line with EQAVET.

5.1.6 External evaluation

Fewer projects worked on this topic. The NRP in **Malta** organised a 3-day training seminar for peers and students reviewers in order to undertake QA audits. The **Czech** NRP developed a tool useful for regular and sustainable monitoring of the cooperation between a school and a company, which may be used both for self-evaluation and for external monitoring by the regional body or the Czech school Inspectorate. The NRP in **Turkey** developed an internal/external evaluation manual to monitor and evaluate work-based learning.

5.2 Quality assurance of work-based learning

The **German** NRP organised a three-day study visit in order to compare national VET systems, with a focus on QA of work-based learning (for further details about the organisation of the study visit, seesection 4). The aim was strengthen mutual understanding among NRPs, to identify strengths and weaknesses in all VET systems, including the German system.

The **Czech** NRP developed a new methodological material for organising a practical training of students in a company (for the study programme Car mechanic, EQF 3).

**Czech NRP- developing methodological material
for organising a practical training of students in a company**

The material uses the relevant vocational qualifications of the national register of qualifications (NSK) that summarises requirements and recommendations for the organisation of practical training in companies. The learning outcomes approach has also been used and units of learning outcomes (inspired by ECVET) have been created. This new material was reviewed by an independent expert.
Both methodological materials for Cook/Waiter and Car mechanic together with units of learning outcomes (describing practical tasks for the assessment of skills and competences achieved during the training) developed by schools from various regions were tested from September 2016 until end of January 2017. The aim was to find out whether the methodology and other tools (units of learning outcomes and day schedules) can be used to support the quality of practical education provided by companies.
Each school prepared a report based on the testing phase in February 2017. The NRP prepared one summing-up report in March 2017, reflecting the results of the feedback received and summarising positive and negative comments on the methodology, including the possibility of implementing a national standard for the quality assurance of practical training. The comments will be used during the revision of national VET curricula, which is currently in process.

The **Greek** NRP carried out a study which explored practice in the assessment and certification of non-formal work-based learning in Europe.

**The Greek study on
assessment and certification of non-formal work-based learning in Europe**

The study identified relatively few situations in which work-based learning is directly assessed in the workplace: more often it is assessed separately through external examinations and/or laboratory-based simulation assignments or not included at all in the overall assessment for certification. The focus of QA arrangements is still mainly on the quality of inputs and learning programme provision. There are only a few discernible guidelines for the QA of VET certification and even fewer for the assessment and certification of work-based learning.

The starting point for a quality-assured certification process of work-based learning is to define the expected learning outcomes and then identify suitable assessment methods and tools to measure their achievement. QA arrangements can then be designed to underpin the validity of the assessment. However, practitioners need to develop expertise in describing learning outcomes for assessment and certification purposes and to this end they should be supported.

The study concludes by setting out principles to guide the design of assessment and certification processes and procedures that can be quality assured and also proposes draft recommendations on how to guarantee the quality of certification of learning acquired within work-based schemes.

The research project carried out by the NRP in Wales on the Retail, Tourism and Hospitality sector (RTH) contained (inter alia) the following policy recommendations:

Policy recommendations on Work-based learning

- As apprenticeship combines offsite training with onsite real world experience, something which was considered desirable by many interviewees, greater focus is needed on the role apprenticeships can play in improving alignment between FE and RTH businesses.
- For education and training providers, evaluation and review of training provision should pay particular attention to the needs of SME stakeholders and seek to incorporate these into revised, or enhanced course, provision.
- More work is needed to network multiple small firms together to make it easier for them to offer joint apprenticeships with combined experience across different businesses. Small firms should be encouraged and supported to do this and apprenticeships should be designed to make this a simple option.
- Greater use of work experience and work placements is needed in vocational training courses of all types to ensure that people have a better understanding of what jobs actually involve and to ensure employer and future employee expectations match.

The NRP in **Turkey** prepared a quality manual for workplace learning in line with the EQAVET Framework.

Turkey - the quality manual for workplace learning

This manual focus on the following issues :
- Internal and external evaluation of workplace learning
- Assessment criteria and marking
- Feedback to students
- Cooperation between VET providers and social partners
- Recording and retaining assessment records.

The internal/external evaluation manual provides the opportunity to monitor and evaluate the planning, preparation, training, assessment and support phases and occupational health and safety processes in workplace learning. The guide is used to monitor the quality of vocational

training provided by senior managers in charge of vocational training in enterprises, school management and independent quality experts from company and school.

The basic criteria adopted for the monitoring and evaluation process:

- The staff (teachers, workplace trainers, managers, etc.) involved in the vocational training programme in enterprises should be qualified.
- Close cooperation between the business and the school is an important requirement to meet the needs of both students and companies.
- The workplace environment should provide opportunities to students to apply their basic vocational skills. If the company is not adequate, the student must be able to access another company to complete the workplace learning programme.
- Companies should ensure a healthy and safe work environment for the students.
- Basic workplace learning tools, materials and resources should be provided to the students. These resources, provided by companies and schools, should be sufficient to provide the students with basic vocational skills, and for the number of students.
- The precision and accuracy of measurement and evaluation methods and techniques that are used by both teachers and workplace trainers should be high.

The combination of vocational training environment, equipment and materials used, teaching materials and resources, quality standards for curricula for workplace learning, establishes an effective quality management system.

The manual prepared by the **Slovenian** NRP for VET providers focuses on QA in VET in general and on QA of work-based learning in particular, providing practical guidelines on QA of work-based learning in all phases of the quality cycle (plan-do-check-act) .

The **Croatian** NRP organised a peer learning activity which focused on work-based learning.

Conclusions of the peer learning activity organised by the Croatian NRP

- Quality assurance of work-based learning needs to involve employers and cannot be left to VET providers
- VET providers staff need to see the benefits of self-assessment
- The development of on-line instruments for quality assurance and self assessment will continue.
- There is a need to continue to support employer involvement in work-based learning.
- An unanswered question was: is self-assessment an additional responsibility for VET staff or part of daily duties?
- It is worth including VET providers in peer learning activity as it helps to show that it is both a national and European trend.

5.3 Integrating European tools

Other very important issues addressed by NRP projects were:

- *Convergence with other European tools* (Euroguidance, EQF, Europass, Eures, Eurodesk, ECVET (addressed by four NRPs).

- *The revision of qualifications and assessment standards of vocational qualifications* as well as the recognition of learning outcomes and qualifications based on the EQF and ECVET (addressed by four NRPs),

The need to integrate the principles underlying EQAVET, EQF and ECVET is a policy priority emphasised during recent revision of the EQF Recommendation.

5.3.1 Convergence with other European tools

It should be noted that some NRPs (e.g. **Greece**, **Italy**, **Netherlands**) are located within institutions that are also responsible for the implementation of other European tools. This facilitates integration. The **Hungarian** NRP participated in a steering group meeting on EU mobility, involving representatives of Eures, Europass, Euroguidance, and Eurodesk. The Hungarian NRP promoted ongoing work on the project, highlighting the adaptation of the EQAVET+ Framework.

5.3.2 Quality assurance of qualifications

The **Finnish** NRP organised two sessions on the topic "Quality assurance of qualification design, assessment and certification in Finland" together with the Ministry of Education and Culture, to support the objectives of VET reform. 19 VET providers and various other organisations participated. A short report was prepared following discussions on enhancing QA of qualification design, assessment and certification at provider level in Finland. The report includes proposals for the dissemination of key messages.

The **Czech** NRP focused on the use of the quality cycle in the development of vocational qualifications within the National Register of Qualifications (NSK). NSK is a key instrument in the national lifelong learning strategy (further information on section 6).

The **Greek** NRP carried out a pilot implementation phase on the appropriate use of learning outcomes-based assessment based on information provided by the NRP study on the assessment and certification of non-formal work-based learning in Europe (see section .2).

Greece: The implementation of the outcomes-based assessment approach

In order to ensure the appropriate definition and use of the proposed learning outcomes-based assessment standards and criteria, the Greek NRP carried out a pilot implementation phase of the course leading to a Vocational Education Institute (IEK) qualification, awarded by EOPPEP: "Diploma of Vocational Specialty in Hospitality Management"- (EQF Level 5).
Building on the findings and recommendations of the study and on recommendations made in seminars with practitioners undertaken in the pilot implementation of the study, a handbook for practitioners was produced, setting out principles to govern the design of quality assured assessment and certification processes and guidelines for these processes in work-based learning. Finally, a process model describes six development steps appropriate for use in situations where new or improved assessment and certification arrangements are required.

5.4 Supporting VET

The **Romanian** NRP focused on *improving the visibility and awareness of VET and QA*, and prepared a compendium of good practice on promoting visibility and raising awareness of VET, including a collection of examples of good practice such as:

- campaigns to raise public awareness on VET benefits,
- platforms to promote VET,
- career guidance and curricular elements to support education and training,
- orientation for gymnasium students,
- company initiatives aiming to promote and support VET development/students, promotion of VET graduates,
- success stories.

This compendium is now available (www.gnac.ro) and was disseminated at national level. A peer learning activity on the topic was also organised. The result was a policy briefing on promoting visibility and raising awareness of VET.

In addition, a national information session on the topic was organised, with the participation of relevant stakeholders at both system and provider levels. The event had a double purpose: awareness raising and dissemination/exploitation of results.

The **Italian** NRP supported VET providers in implementing peer review, as a proven methodology for improving VET provision.

6. IVET and CVET

The external evaluation of the implementation of EQAVET, carried out by the European Commission in 2013, noted that CVET was not adequately included. This could be due to the fact that the IVET responsibilities tend to be at central level, while CVET is often managed autonomously by providers in the non-formal system. CVET providers are very differentiated and the formulation of a common approach that meets their needs is challenging. Even stakeholders are not identical: for instance, in many countries the Ministry of Labour and/or the Ministry of Economy are involved and not just the Ministry of Education. Social partners and companies tend to be more involved in CVET than in IVET.

Only four projects organised specific activities or actions addressing CVET. Ten projects focused on initial training only (or worked with IVET providers); and ten projects developed actions which covered both IVET and CVET without distinction[13].

Four projects included specific actions for CVET:

The Czech Register of Qualifications (NSK)

One of the activities of **Czech** NRP is connected to CVET. The outcome of the activity was the revision of qualification and assessment standards of vocational qualifications developed within the National Register of Qualifications (NSK). NSK was set up in 2005 as a key instrument in the national lifelong learning strategy, aiming at making lifelong learning accessible and the education and training system more permeable. The revision of the already existing qualifications standards in order to keep them updated was a priority for 2016 (in comparison to the development of new standards which was the priority in previous years).

The objectives and results of this activity have been successfully implemented: at the end of 2016 a set of qualification standards was revised in compliance with the agreed mechanism for QA . Part of the information system (that enables the insertion and adaptation of qualifications) that the creators of NSK work with, now features a new method of quality assurance in all qualification standards revised in 2016. This innovation is a file which records a brief description of reasons and the character of revisions implemented. It offers significant potential for further improvement through "turning round a circle" of the cycle of quality assurance in 2017. A short analysis has been composed in Czech with an English summary containing the methodology for the identification as well as the description of reasons leading to the revision of CVET qualification standards and factors.

The **Hungarian** NRP prepared descriptors and indicators at system and provider levels for the IVET and CVET sectors separately. They also formulated suggested ways in which policymakers and VET providers implement and apply descriptors and indicators

The **Italian** NRP, developing the new national plan for QA in VET, has included a section on CVET.

The **UK-Wales** project examined skill levels of employees and employer perceptions of training and skills acquisition, but the scope of the research focussed more on continuing, rather than initial,

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[13] The total exceeds the number of projects (19) because some NRPs mentioned explicitly both areas

education and training. The project was research based but it is expected to have an impact on how training providers respond to employers needs in the future.

Many other projects, while not addressing CVET, have consequences for this sector. For instance, training activities were addressed at or open to both IVET and CVET providers. However, it has been reported that participation among the latter group was low.

The **Greek**, **Northern Ireland, Finish, Slovenian and Cyprus** projects fall into this category.

In **Finland** one law and one regulation for all VET was recently established, which means there will be only one system. That has meant that many project's activities were targeted at both IVET and CVET (official qualifications). Representatives from both types of VET have been invited to workshops and the criteria for QA cover all activities, including CVET (e.g. further education and training, special qualifications for adults). The material produced is targeted at both sectors.

The manual developed by the **Slovenian** NRP was focused on implementing the EQAVET framework (indicators) among VET providers in both I-VET and C-VET. The manual was presented at the national conference on quality in VET, where participants included C-VET providers.

All the activities devised by the **Cyprus** NRP were clearly addressed at both IVET and CVET providers.

Many other NRPs did not mention the two working areas in their project, but, on request, specified that their activities were addressed at both sectors.

Table 5 Working Area of NRPs

NRP	IVET (activities specifically addressed)	CVET (activities specifically addressed)	BOTH SYSTEMS (activities addressed at or which affect both systems, without differentiation)
RO	X		
HR	X		
AT	X		
TR	X		
DE	X		
CZ	X	X	
IT	X	X	
HU	X	X	
UK (Wales)	X	X	
EL			X
IE			X
FI			X
SI			X
NL			X
LT			X
UK (NI)			X
LV			X
MT			X
CY			X

7. Challenges

The NRPs faced a number of challenges when developing their project. The challenge most frequently mentioned was the implementation of EQAVET in a holistic manner, i.e. implementing all its components. For this reason, EQAVET users are only partially implementing EQAVET. The material and tools developed by the Network are not always helpful as they reflect this complexity, rather than focusing on concrete issues faced by practitioners daily. Difficulties have also been mentioned in the adaptation of indicators at national level and the convergence of the various EU instruments:

Challenges regarding the implementation of the EQAVET model

- *Difficulties in explaining and understanding the whole EQAVET issue for the majority of target groups, as it is academic and complex on first view.* (**CZ**)
- *A feeling amongst participants at the outset of the project that the EQAVET website and the tools contained therein were relatively inaccessible or intimidating and overly complex for routine use.* (**IE**)
- *Combining the national quality indicators with EQAVET indicators, which required explanation by the national council of experts.* (**SI**)
- *The need to promote general understanding and recognition amongst VET providers that quality assurance is provider owned.* (**IE**)
- *One of the main challenges was to get educational institutions to start writing their internal quality assurance policy document.* (**MT**)
- *Reach a common understanding of quality culture and how a quality culture can be enhanced in order to attain a higher level of quality of VET provision* (**NL**)
- *Informal feedback and experience, which indicate that the results of assessment and evaluation in the majority of cases are not followed up.* (**HU**)
- *Convergence with other European tools, namely EUROGUIDANCE, EQF, EUROPASS, EURES, EURODESK and further implementation of quality assurance methodology, models and tools, including the spread of quality assurance culture through documents' production and dissemination closer to end users: VET providers, teachers, trainers and companies, national and regional institutions.* (**IT**)

Among the challenges faced by NRPs is the identification and involvement of the wide range of stakeholders:

Challenges regarding the involvement of stakeholders

- *Dialogue among national stakeholders involved in QA and cooperation with social partners on continuing training for the Revision of the National Plan for Quality of Education and Training* (**IT**).
- *The difficulty of engaging with stakeholders, who were not really interested in being involved or supporting this initiative.* (**CY**)
- *Stakeholders were sent the same people as participants. So findings and results of activities do not differ between projects.* (**TR**)
- *Insufficient involvement in mutual cooperation between industry representatives* (**LV**)
- *A lack of interest among schools in using selected self-evaluation instruments for VET schools that were developed in a previous project* (**CZ**)

Visibility of projects was another challenge: *The project still lacks visibility on a larger scale, namely, among the general public and is not well known to the mass media, which is crucial to building local capacity .*(**HR**)

Alignment with the pace of progress in national reforms was another issue:
- *Changes at institutional level due to the ongoing reform of labour market policies (***EL***)*
- *Delay with VET reforms* (**FI**)

Organisational issues have been identified also:
- *To plan activities on dates that are suitable for the potential participants.* (**NL**)
- *Bureaucratic administrative problems when national regulations were to be changed. Changes in the legal framework of contractual procedures for public organisations.* (**EL**)
- *Time management and effective coordination of all foreseen project activities within the NRP network.* (**AT**)

8. Monitoring and evaluating the project and its impact

Most NRPs have been monitoring their activities by setting up a detailed project plan that included a timetable with defined activities and deadlines, whose execution and compliance has been controlled.

For some projects, an external committee was put in place in order to monitor the evolution of the project. Other NRPs (e.g. **Slovenia**) discussed the process and the results of their activity in working groups for QA in education at national level.

Twelve NRPs, which organised conferences, seminars or training activities, evaluated the outcomes by means of satisfaction questionnaires completed by participants.

Some projects requested the evaluation of their materials before distributing them: *The main guarantee for the quality of the results was the trial phase based on which the results were improved. The evaluation tools were piloted and discussed with the main target group of the project (VET providers) and after that amended in accordance to comments received (***Lithuania).** Other NRPs established a Project Evaluation Board or asked colleagues not involved in the project to evaluate. Many NRPs checked the progress of the website visits on a regular basis by using monthly web statistics.

In relation to the *impact* of the projects, many NRPs have provided data on:

- Material distributed (manuals, guidelines, flyers, etc.)
- People involved in the activities: number of participants in conferences, seminars, training activities, number of internet accesses.

Other 'impacts' of the work of the NRPs can be extracted from the following:
- The NRP in **Slovenia** reported the inclusion of EQAVET indicators in the national quality framework.
- According to the **Hungarian** NRP**,** the EQAVET labelling concept and methodology provides an opportunity to recognise officially the EQAVET Framework.
- One of the outcomes of the **Austrian** NRP project is the new design of QUALI-QIBB, the Austrian national QA model for VET providers.
- The feedback received by the **Northern Ireland** NRP suggests that staff who attended the training courses will act as champions for the utilisation of the portal in each of their colleges and this will become a critical mechanism for sharing resources as part of the new qualifications.

Summing up

Given the restricted time in the call for the development and implementation of projects, it is difficult to detect real and observable impacts and changes in behaviour among the final beneficiaries of the projects: i.e. VET providers, companies, teachers.

Many projects reported an increase of awareness or knowledge of EQAVET among providers and stakeholders. However quantitative information to support this indication is not available. It is even more difficult to detect a change in the efficiency and effectiveness of the teaching and learning processes in VET as a result of the actions undertaken by the projects.

It is advisable that this information be requested in future calls. A good example of this is illustrated by the **Romanian** NRP, which focused its activity on increasing public awareness of opportunities offered by VET, and found that the number of pupils enrolling in VET had increased substantially since the activity was initiated.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

The proposal contained in the EQAVET Recommendation to establish an NRP in each participating country represented a strategic innovation. The objective was to ensure the promotion and implementation of EQAVET according to national practices and legislation; and to disseminate content and objectives, by involving national stakeholders.

Based on the information now available on the implementation of EQAVET[14], we have learned that limitation of resources curtailed the actions and possibilities of the NRPs.

Therefore, the decision of the European Commission to provide financial support to the NRPs, through the Erasmus+ programme, is appropriate.

The table below provides a synthesis of the main strengthens and weaknesses of the 2016 call and the projects carried out by the NRPs:

Strengths	Weaknesses
• The Erasmus+ grant supported the activity of the NRPs, and ensured the promotion and implementation of activities and preparation of materials. Most of the actions developed by the NRPs are significant and relevant for implementing the EQAVET Recommendation in the national context. • The activities carried out have consolidated the role and the image of the NRPs in the national context. • The actions undertaken have promoted dialogue and cooperation among a number of stakeholders involved at national level. • These facilitated steps towards greater convergence with other European tools, i.e. Euroguidance, EQF, Europass, Eures, Eurodesk. • The projects have facilitated national and international cooperation on the theme of QA.	• The participation in the call was incomplete; not all EU Member States participated. • The CVET sector was not always addressed • The evaluation of outcomes and impact was mainly restricted to the reporting of activities undertaken, material produced or gathering the satisfaction levels of people involved in the activities. Many projects reported an increase of awareness or knowledge of EQAVET by VET providers and stakeholders. However, quantitative information on which to base this outcome is very limited • The links between the actions undertaken on EQAVET and the policymaking processes are not always evident.

Despite weaknesses, the overall analysis indicates that the Erasmus+ grant is of great value and NRPs benefited from it by implementing activities that increased the knowledge, the dissemination and the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation.

Lessons Learned

Five words summarise the lessons learned from the implementation of the NRPs projects:

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1.   *Strategic approach,*

2.   *Integration,*

3.   *Involvement,*

4.   *Differentiation,*

5.   *Networking.*

1) Strategic approach

Performing the task assigned to the NRPs requires careful planning, keeping in mind the goals to be achieved, the timespan, the resources available, the existing constraints, the possible alliances, and the operating modes of the implementation. It is not a fast and easy process; it was well expressed by one NRP: *It is a slow process rather than an epiphany.*

The implementation of activities must be constantly monitored in order to assess results and impact. This facilitates appropriate corrections. It is not sufficient to gather feedback from those participating in training activities or other activities; a method of obtaining information on the impact of the dissemination of material and the training of trainers is also required.

One way to do this is by contacting participants six months after the end of activity to know:

- Whether the principles and the methodologies presented during the activity have been further discussed or disseminated or even implemented in the local context (if not: why, what difficulties have been encountered, what could be done to resolve them, etc.).
- What could be done to make future information and training more effective?
- Etc.

The impact on the system should also be assessed.

In other words: are NRPs practicing what they preach (are they closing the quality cycle, evaluating and reviewing for continuous improvement)?

The strategic planning should be twofold:

- Top-down planning, i.e. addressed at national/regional stakeholders (policymakers, social partners, etc.) in order to build a common understanding of and engagement in the policymaking process and actions relevant to VET providers/companies,
- Bottom-up planning, i.e. addressed at practitioners, in order to elicit innovative methodologies and approaches at system level, based on real/concrete practice.

As for areas which will need additional coverage in future: *work-based learning* and *CVET.*

2) *Integration* within national policymaking

Even when NRPs have excellent resources available, the tasks to be undertaken are challenging, particularly in larger countries. Communicating and disseminating requires much energy and work that cannot be achieved alone. For this reason, NRPs should be embedded in the national and local policymaking process. This facilitates the dissemination of the EQAVET Recommendation by integrating it into the national education and training policy. One way of achieving this objective could be by establishing, as part of the NRP governance, procedures that set up a board or steering committee which encompasses policymakers and the other stakeholders. This type of group could work on developing a plan for the implementation of the European Recommendation at system level or at VET provider/company level. The group could reflect on implementing initiatives and materials linked to the innovation of national education policies.

3) *Involvement* of stakeholders -VET providers, companies.

It emerged from an analysis of activities developed by the projects that the NRPs produced a considerable amount of materials, manuals, guidelines, etc., for various target groups. In order to ensure the effectiveness of these materials, namely that they addressed the needs of the final users, it is advisable to involve the various stakeholders (social partners, associations of VET providers, etc.) when developing them.

Many projects made significant efforts to involve in their initiatives the final users during the preparation of tools. This achieves two goals:

- The materials and tools produced are more appropriate to the needs of final users.
- There is an increase in ownership, which promotes the use and dissemination of the new principles and tools.

This approach should also be kept in mind when organising teacher training activities, peer learning activities or other. There is a need to:

- involve in the activity, as much as possible, associations of VET providers or representatives of other stakeholders who could act as multipliers. This ensures greater impact.
- involve the learners in the production of materials because, as some projects demonstrate, the learning process should be as active as possible.

4) *Differentiation* of approaches depending on different target groups.

Different actors in the system (policymakers, social partners, VET providers, teachers, companies) have different points of view, different needs and use different languages. In order to increase the effectiveness of NRP materials and proposals, they must be tailored to the specific needs of different target groups – e.g. the challenges faced by a company when organising work-based learning are different from those faced by a school.

5) Networking at local, national, European level.

The task facing NRPs is demanding; pooling efforts can help. It is necessary to find local and national allies (they may be stakeholders, experts, associations of VET providers or companies) in order to share the task of disseminating content and methodologies. Several projects have established national networks through which the task of disseminating the products of their activities has been facilitated. In fact, the network represents a multiplier of the principles and actions carried out by the NRP.

It is also very useful to strengthen international cooperation with other NRPs. This facilitates the transfer of best practice, knowledge or tips that can be sources of inspirations for developing new actions at national level, or detecting risks to avoid (for instance, the PLA organised by the NRP in Romania served as a source for new ideas to be implemented in Latvia which also learned what activities are viable). As one NRP suggested, the objectives of cooperating with other NRPs are:

- Sharing experiences with other NRPs on good and less well-evaluated practice regarding the work of NRPs
- Sharing experiences and ideas for involving teachers in QA with other NRPs
- Working with other NRPs on publications that includes lessons learned that individual NRPs can use in their work.
- Disseminating the results among relevant stakeholders.

Finally, at European level, given the good results achieved by the Erasmus+ grant, it seems advisable to continue financing the activity of NRPs. NRPs represent a strategic instrument to implement the EQAVET Recommendation at national level. If new grants become available, the need to support actions that more clearly address work-based learning and CVET, given their policy importance, should be considered.

Another area for consideration is the need to stimulate the participation of all NRPs, particularly those who have not yet taken part in the Erasmus+ calls. The EQAVET Network could support those countries that have not participated by providing individualised support by request, which could include the completion of forms/requirements and/or the reflection of themes/topics or activities. It is important that the experience and lessons learnt from those NRPs that have already participated are shared with those which have not.

It is important to note that the individualised support provided by the Erasmus+ programme to NRPs should not replace the activities undertaken by the EQAVET Network.

Activities which promote NRP networking at national and international level (such as peer learning activities, peer reviews etc) should also be supported, focusing on the actual impact of these activities. The profile of those participating in the activities is important, given their expertise and potential for multiplying dissemination.

ANNEX 1 – BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

CNDIPT - National Centre for Development of Technical and Vocational Education (RO)

Main activities and outcomes of the project

The project developed activities aiming at promoting VET visibility and raising awareness of the importance of QA in order to make VET more attractive and pathways to transition easier. The results/products are the following:

- A policy briefing of the peer learning activity (PLA) on promoting visibility and raising awareness of VET, comprising key messages for system and provider developments

- A compendium of good practices on promoting visibility and raising awareness of VET

- An updated website of the Romanian QANRP

- A national information session for awareness raising and dissemination/exploitation of results;

- Promotional materials that will disseminate the project aims, objective, scope and main results

- 3 newsletters

The Romanian Reference Point

The EQAVET National Reference Point in Romania is the GNAC (National Group for Quality Assurance). The GNAC was established in 2006 based on an association agreement signed by the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, National Centre for Development of Technical and Vocational Education Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education, National Council for Vocational Training of Adults, and the National Centre to Train Pre-University Education Staff. Each partner institution delegates a representative as a board member of GNAC. According to the legislation, The National Group for Quality Assurance in Education and Training is an advisory inter-institution coordinating body, without legal personality, operating at national level in the field of quality assurance in vocational training.

The main responsibilities of GNAC are the following:

- Facilitates inter-institutional coordination of an integrated approach to vocational training system.
- Drafts proposals and recommendations on quality assurance in vocational training;
- Informs relevant stakeholders on EQAVET network activity.
- Provides national support for implementing the work programme of EQAVET Network.
- Supports the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation in the national context.
- Increases awareness among stakeholders of the benefits of using the principles, criteria and indicators proposed by EQAVET.
- Strengthens cooperation (through peer learning, peer review and benchmarking) between training at European and national levels.

Depending on the topic debated, GNAC meetings can be attended by invited representatives of sectoral committees, the Economic and Social Council, vocational training suppliers, etc.

OeAD- Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research (AT)

Main activities and outcomes of the project

The Austrian project focused on three main activities:

1) Joint activity of Austrian NRP and Finnish NRP "Exchange and Development Group (EDG) with four other countries: DE, NL, RO, Scotland/UK to involve teachers in quality management systems (QMS) and quality assurance (QA) procedures."

2) Strengthening communication and dissemination of the Austrian NRP.

3) Teacher training concept: Introduction to quality management for teachers.

The Austrian and the Finnish National Reference Points for QA in VET (ARQA-VET and EDUFI) implemented a joint activity focussing on "Teacher and trainer involvement in Quality Management Systems and Quality Assurance Procedures". On the basis of expert inputs, good practice examples from different VET providers and the results of diverse small group work, the participants in the European Development Group developed recommendations on teacher involvement in quality management at different levels: system level, provider level and individual (teacher/trainer) level.

Under activity 2, the project relaunched external communication and presentation of the NRP (ARQA-VET) to national and international stakeholders by renewing the ARQA-VET website, publishing three new flyers and/or booklets and developing some promotional materials for the purpose of disseminating the work of the Austrian EQA VET NRP effectively.

A third part of the project activities involved a workshop designed for teachers to give them an introduction to quality management in their initial training. The concept was developed by ARQA-VET in close cooperation with three Austrian teacher training providers, one German teacher training provider and several national and international experts. Representatives of Austrian VET schools were part of the developing group.

The Austrian National Reference Point

ARQA-VET, the Austrian Reference Point for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training, was established on 1 October 2007, within the OeAD-GmbH, the Austrian Agency for International Co-operation in Education and Research. The central concern of ARQA-VET is to develop, support and promote a culture of quality in Austrian VET and to cross-link the actors involved.

The Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research has five main areas of activity:

- Informing national stakeholders about the activities of the European network and vice versa
- Active support for the implementation of the work programme of ENQA-VET
- Development of specific measures to support QA and quality development in VET
- Awareness-raising amongst stakeholders of the advantages of the principles, methods and tools of QA
- Operational support to the Ministry for the implementation of QIBB (Quality Initiative Vocational Education) and the national and European activities. This part of the work ARQAVET the most important and time-intensive at present.

There are five members of staff – four full-time and one part-time.

State Education Quality Service (LV)

Main activities and outcomes of the project

The project increased awareness of indicators of education quality for State and self-governing institutions, VET providers and employers' associations:

- During the project, policy recommendations regarding VET quality assurance development at national level were set up by the State Education Quality Service and other relevant stakeholders in order to ensure a common approach to quality assurance in VET.

- Mechanisms for collecting education quality indicators data were developed and improved through the project seminars. Questionnaires and surveys on indicators 6 and 9 were produced. The survey also focused on mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market by determining training needs and evaluating quality of VET.

- Participation in other NRPs` events about introduction of EQAVET indicators 6 and 9 and peer learning activities promoted an exchange of experience about education quality assurance in member states.

The Latvian National Reference Point

The State Education Quality Service is the National Reference Point of EQAVET in Latvia; acting as the National Reference Point for EQAVET, the State Education Quality Service coordinates the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework in Vocational Education and Training (VET), and the introduction of common quality assurance indicators in VET at national level since 2013.

From 2014 to 2015 discussions on the EQAVET Reference Framework and implementation of common vocational education quality assessment indicators were held with all stakeholders. The Sectoral Expert Councils were briefed on alignment of EQAVET criteria with the national quality assurance system. Education quality indicators were implemented in December 2016 by a new regulation on procedures for accreditation of education institutions, examination centres and other institutions.

Department for the Economy (UK-NI)

Main activities and outcomes of the project

The purpose of the FE Quality Action Plan is to provide support to the six NI FE colleges to implement and develop their quality improvement practices into the activities of VET teachers and trainers through a collaborative approach to curriculum development and the sharing of good practice. A collaborative portal of educational resources and support of technology enhanced learning has been developed by the further education sector and the portal will ensure that new curriculum materials are accessible centrally to ensure consistency of approach that will support professional development to deliver new systems of learning and provide support to specific course programmes and qualifications.

The aim of this project required the participants representing the six Further Education Colleges to:

- Work collaboratively to pilot the application and use of portal.
- Ensure that quality assurance processes through version management are fully embedded into the pilot.
- Incorporate relevant monitoring and quality control processes aligned with the EQAVET framework.
- Understand the importance of peer review and evaluation.

Four training events were held across Northern Ireland in various college locations to facilitate the development of peer review and self-reflective skills and relevant attitudes.

The UK-NI National Reference Point

The NRP for the UK was established in 2009 for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Scotland later became involved in 2010. The arrangement in the UK is that England holds the UK NRP seat but Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland act as NRPs in their respective Devolved Administrations (DAs).

In Northern Ireland, the Department for the Economy is the National Reference Point, and the work relating to the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation has been taken forward by its Further Education Policy branch.

The approach to date has been similar to the other parts of the UK, comparing the existing systems to EQAVET indicators and promoting engagement with the activities of the network. A project group was established to undertake this mapping exercise, which included providers, inspectors and colleagues associated with quality improvement across government. The NI quality assurance system, including provider level, is largely compatible with the EQAVET approach: in particular, a cyclical PDCA approach is taken to quality assurance at both system and provider levels, and the systematic use of data in measuring performance and progress reflects the use of most of the recommended indicators. As the NRP, the Department has also been active in EQAVET working groups and hosted a peer learning event on the use of acquired skills in the workplace.

CINOP Foundation- Center for Innovation in Training (NL)

Main activities and outcomes of the project

The Dutch EQAVET NRP has selected some specific activities from the Dutch working plan to be implemented through this project. The Dutch NRP focused on the second and third priority of the call: strengthening mutual cooperation among NRPs in order to address implementation and deepen the culture of quality assurance of VET.

The main activities managed by the Dutch EQAVET NRP focused on:

- Enhancing quality culture: deepening the dialogue between different stakeholders on what quality culture is and how to enhance it. Round tables were organised, as well as a three day expert meeting and different workshops to disseminate the main findings of the expert meeting. It is planned to publish the results as guidelines for VET providers.

- Orienting studies on the progress of quality assurance of VET providers and on enhancing quality culture in adult education using the European tool from 2015.

- Quality assurance of workplace learning (in cooperation with the German NRP).

- Exchange and Development Group (EDG) (in cooperation with 6 NRP's with the main challenge of improving impact).

- Thematic seminar on stimulating Erasmus+ projects on quality assurance.

The Dutch National Reference Point

The *Dutch* NRP is hosted by CINOP, the Center for Innovation in Training. CINOP acts furthermore as:
- The National Agency LLP for European programme management
- The NCP for ECVET,
- EQF/NLQF
- The Euroguidance centre.

The NRP is financed by the Dutch ministry of education and works on the basis of an annual working programme developed in partnership with it. The NRP advisory group is made up of relevant stakeholders.
The mandate of the NRP consists of the following tasks:
- To stimulate the implementation of the EQAVET Framework at the national and the provider level;
- Involving stakeholders including social partners.
- Dissemination of information from European developments, working groups etc..
- Participation in surveys, research, working groups and peer learning activities at national and European level.
- Preparation of the Dutch representation in formal networks

BIBB - Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (DE)
Main activities and outcomes of the Project:

DEQA-VET has completed a study which shows how quality assurance and development of work-based learning in the German VET system works. The study results on quality assurance in the dual system in Germany will be published in an easily-understood and attractive format.

In addition, a three-day study visit in Germany was conducted in January 2017 with 19 participants from 11 countries (including Germany). The study visit included an introduction to the German dual system, group discussions, a company visit and a visit of an intercompany training centre, and a round table discussion-conference with social partners. The concept of the meeting was developed with the following objectives:

- To increase the transfer potential of the study results at national and European level and to support the EQAVET work program.

- Exchange between the Reference Points about organising the quality assurance of vocational education with a focus on dual forms in other member states

- The support of critical dispute in various quality assurance systems in Europe and their method of presentation

- The comparison of various national ways of quality assurance in work-based learning in order to prepare common quality criteria which could be useful for VET.

The German National Reference Point

The NRP in Germany, DEQA-VET, is hosted at the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB). Three to four persons work in this unit during the contractual period.

The host organisation, BIBB, is an institution mandated by the federal government in regard to policy, research and practice in the field of VET. It is subject to the legal supervision of the BMBF and receives funding from the federal government budget. BIBB aims at developing new solutions for both initial and continuous VET.

EOPPEP - National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EL).

Main activities and outcomes of the project

Following recent developments in VET (i.e. the introduction of the Hellenic Qualifications Framework (HQF) into the Greek education matters as well as the upgrading of the apprenticeship system as part of the Ministry of Education), and efforts to establish a quality framework for VET, the 2016 priorities of the Greek EQAVET NRP are as follows:

1. Further assisting the on-going implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (HQF) by strengthening the use of learning outcomes in order to broaden the trust and confidence in VET qualifications in Greece. The Greek NRP explored ways to ensure greater transparency and comparability between the different quality management systems used in VET and in particular in the certification of qualifications at both European and national level.

2. Completing the learning outcomes identification methodology with a robust and quality assured certification of work-based learning, as the increasing shift to learning outcomes is having a major impact on the above mentioned certification process and on the relevant quality assurance arrangements. This was a major task requiring the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, most importantly the social partners.

3. Inviting national authorities to communicate more effectively the use of the European Quality Assurance Network (EQAVET) promoting quality, to all educational and training bodies and in particular to those involved in the provision of non-formal VET.

4. Developing synergies and links with other EU networks and tools facilitating mobility and transparency of skills and qualifications in European countries, such as EQF-NCP, Europass and Euroguidance in order to reach and inform specific and wider target groups.

The Greek National Reference Point

The NRP has been in place since the country's involvement in the network, in 2010. EOPPEP (National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance) is the NRP and represents Greece in EQAVET. EOPPEP operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs, Culture & Sports and is responsible for a wide range of activities which create and maintain a holistic and quality assured policy framework for the development of lifelong learning and certification of qualifications in Greece. More specifically EOPPEP aims at quality assurance through :

- The accreditation of VET providers according to predefined guidelines and criteria
- The development of occupational standards and the recognition of learning outcomes
- The certification of knowledge, skills and competencies of the graduates of Institutes of Vocational Training (IEK) – EQF Level 5 (Post – secondary VET)
- The certification of trainers for adults.

EOPPEP. is also responsible for the development of the Hellenic Qualifications Framework and its referencing to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

EOPPEP's "Communication and Development" Directorate and specifically the "Quality Assurance Department" is also responsible for operating the National Reference Point (NRP) for Quality Assurance. In relation to this the Quality Assurance Department is closely cooperating with the Ministry of Education to develop and/or promote quality assurance strategies and systems in the field of non-formal education and informal learning, taking into account the common principles, indicators and criteria of the European reference framework for quality in VET.

The NRP aims at fulfilling the predictions of the Recommendation. More specifically, its objectives are to:

- Complete the development of European quality assurance framework.
- Set up and implement the award of European label to providers/organisations that comply with the framework.
- Launch an on-line tool that will create EQAVET indicators: providers will be able to supply the tool with relevant data.

KPMPC - Centre for Qualifications and VET Development (LT)
Main activities and outcomes of the project

The project has focused on implementing two priorities of the call:

- Strengthening mutual cooperation among NRPs in order to address implementation – NRPs and the work with VET providers;

- Deepening the culture of quality assurance of VET – the importance of feedback loops and the review phase of the quality cycle.

The Lithuanian NRP has prepared concrete instruments for the evaluation of:

- Employer satisfaction with VET graduates' qualification, knowledge, skills and competence;

- Graduate satisfaction with acquired qualification, knowledge, skills and competence;

- Learner satisfaction with individual learning experiences and the learning and teaching environment;

- Teacher satisfaction with training environment and work conditions.

When developing these tools, Lithuanian NRP sought to improve the VET quality culture by strengthening the review phase of the quality cycle at VET provider level.

The project has also organised:

- Focus groups with various stakeholders

- A national final conference.

- The participation of NRP staff in events organised by other NRPs

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T*he Lithuanian National Reference Point*

The Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre (KPMPC) operates as the National Reference Point (NRP) in Lithuania. The Centre, which is under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science, is a state budget institution the core activities of which comprise: managing the Lithuanian qualification system, improving VET quality, developing an adult education system, and implementing VET and adult education participants' qualification development initiatives. KPMPC cooperates with social partners, monitors and provides information on VET and EU tools implementation, works to implement the Lithuanian qualifications framework.

The Centre has been involved in EQAVET-related activities since 2007. The Lithuanian NRP informs the stakeholders about the activities of the EQAVET network, implements the EQAVET network's work programme, promotes EQAVET on the national level, disseminates information to stakeholders, supports training providers in improving their quality assurance systems and introducing self-evaluation systems in line with the EQAVET Recommendation.

NSZFH - National Office for Vocational Training and Adult Education (HU)

Main activities and outcomes of the project

The Hungarian NRP's project targeted all the three specific objectives of the Call.

It has:

- Adapted the EQAVET+ Framework and the related guidelines developed at European level for the national context both at VET system (policy) and VET provider levels. Definitions of descriptors and indicators were prepared for IVET and CVET separately.

- Implemented activities to strengthen cooperation with other NRPs and learn from their good practices and share experiences.

- Set up and operated a National EQAVET Expert Network, which has initiated and maintained professional dialogue and served as a consultant group. The expert group developed a procedure for EQAVET labelling to promote excellence in VET.

- Developed professional materials and guidelines.

- Updated the national website with up to date materials.

- Adapted the EQAVET on-line tool and made it available in Hungarian for VET and AL providers.

- Taken part in national and international activities addressed at VET quality assurance in a wider European context.

- Developed a further training for EQAVET users on systematic feedback and continuous quality improvement. The training was piloted in the form of a practice oriented session

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The Hungarian National Reference Point

The QA NRP has been operating under the international relations and national reference points unit in NSZFH since 2010 by the assignment of the ministry of national economy, which is responsible for VET and adult learning policy in Hungary. The national office of VET and adult learning (NSZFH) is a government agency established by the ministry for national economy. The Hungarian NRP fulfils several tasks that are suggested by the EQAVET Recommendation, including:

- Representation of Hungary in EQAVET and related tasks;
- Contact with those involved in (and influenced by) quality assurance and quality development;
- Collection, structuring and dissemination of information concerning quality assurance and quality development;
- Regular information provision to national stakeholders about the activities of the European Network and developments with regard to EQAVET;
- Regular information provision to European Commission and members of the European Network about national developments;
- Coordination of the national and European action plans through the involvement of the relevant stakeholders;
- Coordination of various activities with regard to the QA and quality development of VET, with special focus on the national developments concerning EQAVET;
- Cooperation and contact with the NRPs of other Member States;

- Contact with other professional organisations and working groups (such as EUROPASS, EQF, ECVET and the European Higher Education Quality Assurance Network).

Finnish Board of Education (FI)

Main activities and outcomes of the project

The project aimed to support the EU policy goals of QA in VET, VET reform in Finland and the improvement of activities based on national external evaluation of QA systems of VET providers. The challenges are connected with quality culture, review phase and increase of work-based learning.

The main results are:

- The criteria for self-assessment of the system supporting quality management and continuous improvement of quality at VET provider level have been updated and guidelines provided in Finnish;

- Report on QA of the design, assessment, and certification of qualifications in VET;

- Guide "The QKULT" tool to analyse the organisational culture in schools in Finnish and Swedish, with brochure and Video.

- Complementing EQAVET and the material developed in EQAVET Network. Most relevant material has been translated into Finnish and a proposal made on how to integrate the results with the review phase in Finnish VET.

- Report on a joint activity with Austrian QANRP on how to involve teachers/trainers in quality management systems and quality assurance procedures.

- Policy briefing prepared by all participants of the PLA (organised by Romanian QANRP) on promoting visibility and raising awareness of VET. The summary report in Finnish presents good practices and suggestions how to further promote the activities targeted to visibility and awareness of VET at VET provider level.

- Presentations on QA in Finnish VET

- Increase the awareness of the review phase in EQAVET to promote continuous development culture by looking at the results of WG

- Lesson learnt for the further development of Peer review criteria

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The Finnish National Reference Point

The National Reference Point is hosted by the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE, which recently merged with the Agency for mobility and became the Finnish national agency for education-EDUFI).

Every year the Ministry of Education makes a contract with EDUFI including also the key policy guidelines for EQAVET,

In relation to EQAVET the NRP role is to disseminate and promote the approach defined by the EQAVET Recommendation – and does so though its varied activities including:

- Its sub-site on QM on web page of FNBE
- The Quality Award for VET
- Trainings for VET providers and yearly the quality seminar for VET
- The national network meetings it organises for VET providers.

The NRP has a subsite "Support for quality assurance" on the website of EDUFI in Finnish.

ASOO - Agency for Vocational Education and Adult Education (HR)

Main activities and outcomes

The project is aimed at ensuring valued support for the implementation of the work programme of the EQAVET network in Croatia and NRPs.

The project defined two priorities: one connected with strengthening cooperation between NRPs, and the other with deepening the culture of quality assurance in VET.

The NRP organised a two-day peer learning event in Croatia for 9 countries on QA of WBL and self-assessment of VET schools. A report and recommendations have been issued.

An analysis of Croatian VET schools self-assessment reports was carried out matching them with EQAVET quality cycle; the focus was on the evaluation and review phases of the QA cycle in the national context with special emphasis on quality areas, quality criteria, tools which schools use in the SA process. Recommendations for improvement of self-assessment of VET schools in light of EQAVET have been prepared.

A training of trainers event was organised (a workshop for senior expert advisors of the agency), and four regional workshops for VET schools afterwards, for the purpose of dissemination of results and strengthening the capacities of all the parties involved in self-assessment process. Participants were presented with the results of the analysis of the Croatian model of quality assurance and the process of self-assessment. The participants in the teacher-training event presented their experiences of the implementation of self-assessment using the Self-Assessment Handbook and the e-Kvaliteta online tool. An especially important segment was the comparison of individual experiences of the implementation of the self-assessment process in VET schools.

Participants in all workshops received promotional materials, posters and brochures developed through the project. A wide range of stakeholders were informed about the activities of the EQAVET network and the project, and the focus was on the effective dissemination of the information to stakeholders. A new website, qavet.hr, has been created.

The Croatian National Reference Point

The NRP in Croatia is based at the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (AVETAE), because AVETAE is responsible for VET development at national level and professional and pedagogic supervision of VET schools.

Within AVETAE, the NRP, under the name QAVET.HR, was set up in 2014, consisting mainly of staff from the Department of International Cooperation and Projects.

For the purpose of the project and future work the NRP obtained additional staff from the Department for Development and QA of VET. In total, the NRP has 8 members.

QQI - Quality and Qualifications Ireland (IE)

Main activities and outcomes of the project

The main focus of the project was on priority 3 in the context of recent significant structural changes for Education and Training Boards (ETBs). The approach taken was a holistic one with both public and private actors in VET invited to participate and contribute.

A steering group was established to lead to the project and to build ownership of IQAVET, the National Reference Point for EQAVET in Ireland.

Three strong themes emerged in discussions on priority 3 which led to three national seminars addressing the following topics:

- What data what evidence
- Sel-evaluation
- Governance

A dissemination seminar was held in early March 2017 to launch the IQAVET report, which details the rich discussions and outputs of each of the three seminars referred to above.

The QQI website supports the report by providing access to all the presentations made and resources shared during the seminars and providing a useful platform through which the work of IQAVET can be disseminated and promoted more widely.

Dissemination outputs have included:

- Four e-zines, regular reports and updates published on the QQI website, news items also published on EQAVET website and at EQAVET events,
- Articles for print media,
- Presentations within national networks/fora/working groups
- Progress updates to other NRPs within the EQAVET network

The Irish National Reference Point

The National Reference Point for Ireland (IQAVET) was previously located in FETAC and was transferred subsequently to the newly formed Qualifications and Quality Assurance Authority of Ireland (QQI).
The main role of the NRP is the dissemination of information at national level and to ensure that key players are involved in meeting quality standards aligned to EQAVET.

Slovenian Institute for Vocational education and training (SI)

Main activities and outcomes of the project

Slovenian NRP has focused on two priorities:

- Deepening the culture of quality assurance of VET – the importance of feedback loops and the review phase of the quality cycle and

- Strengthening mutual cooperation among NRPs in order to address implementation – NRPs and the work with VET providers.

The two objectives have been reached by:

- Preparing a manual/guidelines for Slovene VET providers according to EQAVET recommendations. The manual focuses on QA in VET in general and additionally on QA of work-based learning. In the process of preparation, the manual has been tested in two seminars for VET providers. Two exercises concerning QA of WBL and including all phases of quality cycle (plan-do-check-act) have been developed in practice and included in the manual.

- Cooperation with 3 PLAs, organised by German NRP, Croatian NRP and Romanian NRP. The results and insights of PLAs were used as one source for the preparation of the manual.

The Slovenian National Reference Point

The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training is the central institution responsible for VET in Slovenia. Since 2008, the Institute for VET has been the national reference point of EQAVET (SIQA-VET).
The Institute for VET has a dual role.

- On one hand, it performs a so-called "softer form" of external evaluation of quality in VET on the basis of seven quality indicators, as set down by the Council of Experts for VET in 2007, and 10 indicators and their criteria, which were set in 2008 by the European Quality Assurance in VET (EQAVET).

- On the other hand, the Institute offers support to VET providers in quality assurance in the form of various initiatives such as:
  - training of the school quality commissions to implement the process of self-evaluation and improvements based on the findings of self-evaluation;
  - support for provider networks for the exchange of good practice;
  - contributing to evaluate the current situation and to define development guidelines for quality assurance (national conferences, preparing national strategy documents, etc.);
  - participation in national and international development projects in this field
  - training and expansion of the network of quality peers;
  - preparation of publications with guidelines and examples of good practices for providers and other stakeholders;
  - participation on EQAVET peer learning activities.

National Institute for Education (CZ)

Main activities and outcomes of the project

The overall aim of the Czech NRP project was to:

- Raise awareness on the importance of quality assurance
- Support the implementation of its principles at different levels both in IVET and CVET in coherence with the EQAVET Recommendation.

NRP activities focused on self-evaluation, monitoring the quality of practical training through an online tool, development of a methodology for the assessment of practical skills for vocational school programmes (corresponding to EQF 3 level), feedback loops on the revision of qualification and assessment standards in the National Register of Qualifications.

There was a targeted PR supporting the promotion and visibility of EQAVET for various target groups at system level (policymakers from sectoral ministries, the Czech School Inspectorate, etc.) and provider level (regional authorities, schools, employers, etc.). The results of the activities implemented were disseminated to a wide range of stakeholders; also a Czech version of a video (What is EQAVET?) and a new website www.eqavet.cz were created.

It was also supported synergy among other European tools and European networks, namely EQF National Coordination Point and National Coordination Centre for ECVET. Networking with other EQAVET NRPs (the Netherlands and Germany) was an important part of the NRP work programme.

The Czech National Reference Point

The National Reference Point is led by the National Institute for Education; NÚV concerns itself with both general and vocational education, including art and language education, and also with counselling and career guidance. NÚV closely cooperates with the Czech School Inspectorate, which is the key body dealing with the external monitoring of quality in all types and levels of education (with exception of universities), and other external experts active in VET.

The NRP has re-established the previous National Network on Quality Assurance in VET (established in 2007) and revised its membership basis. The network will in the future ensure the effective dissemination of information to relevant stakeholders in both the educational sector and the labour market in all regions of the Czech Republic.

The mandate to NRP covers the following activities:

- Integration of selected EQAVET indicators into the Czech methodology for evaluation of VET under the responsibility of school inspection;
- Coordination of the Czech national network on quality assurance and the transformation of this network by engaging a broader range of bodies;
- Organisation of meetings of this network;
- Active participation in European activities related to EQAVET;
- Cooperation with those in charge of EQF and ECVET; and
- Dissemination and translation of EQAVET network materials via a website

The National Reference Point has a coordinator and four other employees from the Department for International Cooperation working on part-time basis.

ISFOL[15] – Institute for the development of workers vocational education and training (IT)

Main activities and outcomes of the project

The Italian NRP has focused its activities on the update of the national approach to quality in VET, approved by relevant ministries and regions in 2012.

The other main activities include:

- Participation in the working group on "Complementing EQAVET- Developing guidance for EQAVET+" to contribute at European level to improving the adaptability of the EQAVET Framework and to make it more responsive to the Italian context and needs and to include the results in the national plan for quality in VET.

- Cooperation with other NRPs in order to learn from each other's experiences and expertise in particular by participating in study visits and PLAs

- Cooperative work with stakeholders in particular VET providers both from the education system managed by Ministry of Education and vocational training centres managed by regions and Ministry of Labour to support the implementation of methodologies and tools for quality assurance coherent with EQAVET framework.

- The implementation of Peer Review as a tool to combine self-assessment and review for the real improvement of training offer.

- Strengthen the use of methodologies (as Peer Review) and tools for quality assurance and its development

- Increasing awareness of the benefits of quality assurance development and methodologies

- Coordinating the overall activities concerning participation in the EQAVET network.

The Italian National Reference Point

Italy has a National Reference Point in place since 2006. The NRP is hosted by ISFOL, now INAPP (Istituto Nazionale per l'Analisi delle Politiche Pubbliche). INAPP is a national research institute supervised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies,

The NRP is ruled by a Board that establishes and plans its activities at national level, as well as the dissemination of achieved results; it promotes the link with both national and European initiatives in the field of quality assurance. The members of the Board, which is coordinated by ISFOL-INAPP, are the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Ministry of Education, University and Research, the Regions, the social partners, the training providers, and the school institutions. NRP functioning and activities are funded through the European Social Fund.

The Reference Point supports the implementation of the European Recommendation on Quality Assurance of Vocational Education and Training and the national process to implement the national approach to quality assurance, disseminating technical and scientific knowledge, practices and tools to improve continuous development and quality assurance. It also supports VET providers in implementing self-assessment and Peer Review.

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[15] Now INAPP

MoNE - Directorate General for VET (TR)

Main activities and outcomes of the project

The specific objectives of the project were:

- Promote awareness of the quality of work place learning (WPL) among the sectors, social partners and society.
- Develop a systematic approach to quality monitoring and evaluating workplace learning with the participations of employers, professional associations, and related social partners.
- Develop an extensive consultation modal mechanism among employers, professional associations, social partners and VET institutions.

The main outputs are:

- A national quality evaluation and monitoring system for workplace learning has been developed in line with the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework.
- The existing structure of workplace learning has been analysed to provide active cooperation between the labour market and vocational education institutions
- The awareness raising activity regarding quality of workplace learning among social partners and society has been conducted. A quality manual for workplace learning in line with EQAVET framework was prepared, which addresses the following key points:
  - Internal and external evaluation of workplace learning
  - Assessment criteria and marking
  - Feedback to students
  - Cooperation between VET providers and social partners
- Recording and retaining assessment records.
- A five-day study visit to Germany was conducted to examine the practices of workplace learning

The Turkish National Reference Point

The National Reference Point has been established in the Directorate General for Technical and Vocational Education and Training in the Ministry of Education. The executive unit is the Quality Development Department and its staff.

The tasks of the executive unit are as follows:

- Carry out the accreditation activities of schools and institutions
- Support the self-evaluation processes in schools and to guide schools
- Verify the evidence documents on-site and, when necessary, advise schools accordingly, according to the monitoring and evaluation results obtained in accordance with the quality management standards at certain time intervals
- Determine the procedures and the principles for the development of the quality of vocational and technical secondary education
- Determine the training needs of teachers, administrators and other service personnel and carry out the relevant in-service training
- Gather good examples about quality applications in vocational and technical secondary education to open up and spread sharing
- Prepare annual reports on quality practices of schools and share them with the public
- Manage the business and operations related to the National reference point.

National Commission for Further and Higher Education (MT)

Main activities and outcomes of the project

The purpose of the project was to complement the current EQAVET Framework in order to ensure continued relevance to the needs of the policy context by developing an EQAVET+ Framework and deepening the culture of QA in VET, given the importance of feedback loops and the

review phase of the quality cycle.

Three seminars for VET providers in Malta were organised with the aim of enhancing the importance of internal quality assurance and to increase the number of internal quality assurance policy documents among VET providers. The seminars addressed the challenges of developing: self-evaluation processes, internal procedures and criteria as part of an overall culture of reflection, analysis and action throughout provision and within the review phase of the quality cycle. It was acknowledged that feedback and review are integral parts of a robust internal quality assurance structure within educational institutions, inclusive of VET providers. In fact, all providers acknowledge that feedback and reviews should be formalised within their quality assurance mechanisms.

In addition, the seminars added value to national practice by strengthening the importance of internal quality assurance within the National Quality Assurance Framework. The seminars have raised awareness among educational institutions of the importance of having a formalised internal quality assurance document. Furthermore, these seminars also helped raise the overall quality and status of VET in the context of the Copenhagen process and directly addressed the second priority area, i.e. to further develop quality assurance mechanisms in VET in line with the European quality assurance in VET Recommendation, and as part of quality assurance systems, establish continuous information and feedback loops in initial VET and continuing VET systems based on learning outcomes.

During the project, a three-day seminar was organised, to train peer and students reviewers to undertake quality assurance audits. This is in line with the EQAVET Recommendation to deepen the culture of quality assurance among educational institutions.

The Maltese National Reference Point

The National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) is responsible for managing the NRP. NCFHE acts as a broker between local government and relevant higher education institutions. NCFHE also oversees the implementation of the National qualification Framework, Quality assurance and qualification recognition.

Colleges Wales (UK)

Main activities and outcomes of the project

Colleges - Wales has commissioned a research project with the University of South Wales Business School (USW) to work in the area of Skills and Training which has been planned in three phases:

- Phase 1 (out of the project grant) includes desk research/literature review and the use of an online survey with the SMEs identified in the opening paragraph of the review.

- Phase 2 of the project aims to develop the findings of Phase 1 through a mixture of interviews, focus groups and dissemination events.

- Phase 3 of the project (to be finished) is the dissemination of the survey results, a final report of Phases 1 and 2 as well as recommendations for policy in Wales related to skills and qualifications.

The project further develops quality assurance mechanisms in VET in line with EQAVET recommendations and, as part of quality assurance systems, establishes information and feedback loops in I-VET and C-VET

The UK-Wales National Reference Point

The NRP for the UK was established in 2009 for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Scotland later became involved in 2010.
The arrangement in the UK is that England holds the UK NRP seat but Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland act as NRPs in their respective Devolved Administrations (DAs).
For the Welsh Government, the NRP representative is the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

Ministry of Education and Culture (CY)

Main activities and outcomes of the project

Aim of the project:

- Promoting the EQAVET Recommendation in Cyprus and a national approach in the quality assurance of VET;
- Encourage VET providers to develop and maintain internal quality assurance systems.

Activities:

- IVET-CVET International Experts Workshop (with speakers from EQAVET to present best practice on the quality assurance of VET to the Ministry of Education and Culture, the HRDA and key stakeholders);
- Study Visit of an HRDA officer to IQAVET Ireland, a National Reference Point with an advanced national approach to the quality assurance of CVET, based on the EQAVET Recommendation;
- Dissemination of the information to all stakeholders (IVET and CVET providers, schools, social partners and other stakeholders) via the design and maintenance of a Website on the:
  - Work of EQAVET
  - Quality assurance of IVET and CVET in Cyprus
  - Best practices
  - Events and other VET information.

On the basis of the above-mentioned activities, further development of the framework in the national context have been promoted. One of the NRP's main priority areas is the promotion of the quality dimension of training and development through multiple actions for the support of training infrastructure in Cyprus.

The Cyprus National Reference Point

The Department of Secondary Technical and Vocational Education, based in the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC), serves as the NRP in Cyprus and supervises and monitors providers and coordinates all relevant actions.

ANNEX 2- THE GRANT[16]

The projects financed

NRP	WEB site
CNDIPT - Centrul Național de Dezvoltare a Învățământului Profesional și Tehnic (RO)	www.gnac.ro
OeAD - (Österreichische Austauschdienst) Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung (AT)	http://www.oead.at http://www.arqa-vet.at/home/
State Service of Education Quality (LV)	www.ikvd.gov.lv
Department for the Economy (UK-NI)	https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/
Stichting CINOP - Centrum voor Innovatie van Opleidingen (NL)	http://www.eqavet.nl/
BIBB - Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (DE)	http://www.bibb.de https://www.deqa-vet.de/en/
National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications & Vocational Guidance (EL).	http://www.eoppep.gr
KPMPC - Kvalifikacijų ir Profesinio Mokymo Plėtros Centras (LT)	http://www.kpmpc.lt/kpmpc/
NSZFH - Nemzeti Szakképzési és Felnőttképzési Hivatal (HU)	https://www.nive.hu
Opetushallitus (FI)	http://www.oph.fi
ASOO - Agencija za strukovno obrazovanje i obrazovanje odraslih (HR)	http://www.asoo.hr/
Qualifications and Quality Assurance Authority of Ireland (IE)	http://www.qqi.ie
Center Republike Slovenije za poklicno izobraževanje javni zavod (SI)	http://www.cpi.si
Národní ústav pro vzdělávání, školské poradenské zařízení a zařízení pro další vzdělávání pedagogických pracovníků (CZ)	http://www.nuv.cz www.eqavet.cz
Istituto per le Sviluppo della Formazione Professionale dei Lavoratori (IT)	http://www.isfol.it
MEB - Meslekî ve Teknik Eğitim Genel Müdürlüğü - MoNE - Directorate General for VET (TR)	http://mtegm.meb.gov.tr/
National Commission for Further and Higher Education (MT)	www.ncfhe.org.mt
Colleges Wales - Colegau Cymru Limited (UK)	www.collegeswales.ac.uk
Ministry of Education and Culture (CY)	http://www.moec.gov.cy/en

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[16] Information taken from "Erasmus+ KA3 — Support to the activities of the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) National Reference Points (NRP). Compendium 2016.