Introduction

1. The Peer Learning Activity (PLA) has been organised by the EQAVET Secretariat in collaboration with Skolverket¹ which hosts the Swedish National Reference Point for Quality Assurance in VET. The PLA takes place on the premises of a multinational company (SKF) which owns its own VET school². The PLA has been designed to enable participants to discuss how:
   - different approaches to self-assessment³ can be used to quality assure the work-based learning of upper secondary school students. These students are most likely to be taking an initial, full-time EQF Level 4 qualification;
   - the EQAVET Framework supports the quality assurance of work-based learning.

2. As with all PLAs, the priority is to find time for discussion, reflection and sharing knowledge and experiences. The approach is designed to be interactive and the event will provide an opportunity for a number of short presentations setting out examples of using self-assessment at the system level, and by VET providers from four countries. Participants are encouraged to reflect on the policy and practical implications for their own approach to self-assessment in order to support the quality assurance of work-based learning.

3. As with other PLAs organised by EQAVET there will be a site visit - this will be to SKF’s vocational school.

Context

4. The PLA supports the use of the EQAVET Recommendation⁴ which is designed to help Member States promote and monitor continuous improvement of their VET systems. The EQAVET Framework has been designed to support quality improvements in VET and increase transparency of, and consistency in VET policy developments in Member States. The Framework is based on a four-stage quality assurance cycle (planning, implementation, evaluation and review), ten indicators, and a series of indicative descriptors at the system and provider level.

5. With the context of the EQAVET Framework, the PLA focuses on how the output from self-

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¹ https://www.skolverket.se/andra-sprak-other-languages/english-engelska
² http://www.skftekniskagymnasium.se/
³ The EQAVET glossary (https://www.eqavet.eu/eu-quality-assurance/glossary/self-assessment) uses Eurostat's 2010 definition of self-assessment and defines it as a comprehensive, systematic and regular review of an organisation’s activities and results referenced against a model/framework, carried out by the organisation itself.
assessments can be used to support improvements in the quality of work-based learning in VET. The PLA will be relevant to all types of work-based learning, particularly those

6. Across Europe there are different approaches to self-assessment. This was highlighted in discussions in the EQAVET PLA in Budapest in May 2013. The policy brief from this PLA noted that the wide range of approaches to self-assessment responds to the traditional and cultural approaches inherent in VET provision. However, despite this variety, there are many common themes associated with self-assessment e.g.:

- a clear expectation that those VET providers in receipt of public funds should use some form of self-monitoring or self-improvement;
- responsibility for deciding how to organise self-assessment is assigned to individual VET providers;
- most Member States expect their EQAVET National Reference Point to be fully involved in supporting or promoting self-assessment;
- policy makers are confident that self-assessment takes place in organisations that provide continuing and/or initial VET;
- outcomes from self-assessment can be, and are being, used in a wide range of ways e.g. for accreditation, to inform discussions with inspectors, to support peer review, to publicise performance to parents and learners, and to inform a national or regional reporting process.

### EQAVET Network reflection on a self-assessment approach to work-based learning

7. The PLA in Budapest identified a major challenge in establishing a self-assessment approach for work-based learning. However, given the importance to VET of employers, employees and their representatives organisations, it is important that VET systems and providers ensure that self-assessment covers also work-based learning. This was noted by participants in the 2013 PLA: there is a need to 'create and/or strengthen a self-assessment culture in work-based learning’. Participants acknowledge that this is difficult but it could be done. The participants concluded that when work-based learning is closely aligned with or is part of school-based provision it can be easier to establish self-assessment. However, the difficulties are multiplied when work-based learning is company-based and there is little or no involvement of a school-based VET provider.

8. The need to ‘develop a culture of self-assessment’ is one of the six Building Blocks identified by the EQAVET Network on work-based learning. The Building Blocks can be used by work-based providers to develop their approach to quality assurance; and support improvements in quality for those organisations with more established quality assurance systems. The Building Blocks are designed to be used by all VET providers including those that offer apprenticeships, company-based training, continuing and initial VET.

9. Given these reflections, it seems timely for the EQAVET Network, through this PLA, to reflect and consider different approaches to self-assessment which are used in a work-based learning context.

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This PLA is also an opportunity to examine new developments and consider the extent to which there has been a change in practice.

**Current situation**

10. Across Europe there are systems where the approach to self-assessment in work-based provision is identical to the approach used in school-based provision. However, this is not always the case; some systems (e.g. Germany: as described in the December edition of the EQAVET newsletter⁸) choose to use a different approach to the quality assurance of school-based and company-based provision. This can lead to different expectations and approaches to self-assessment.

11. It is important to recognise that self-assessment is part of the quality assurance cycle. Self-assessment which does not lead to improvements has limited value. It has to be part of a quality improvement cycle for the full benefits to be realised. Cedefop’s 2009 report⁹ comments that ‘under no circumstances should self-assessment become an end in itself; this would just be a waste of time. Self-assessment becomes all the more powerful when results are transformed into a development plan. This plan should define the areas and problems that need to be changed, as well as the objectives, procedures, resources and those people personally responsible for the change process. The relationship between these two elements can be stated in the following terms: self-assessment is for measurement, the development plan is to improve quality.’ Getting the most from self-assessment implies that there will regular reviews of practice; the use of benchmarks or indicators to record and measure performance; and the use of indicative descriptors as the basis for describing effective practice.

12. There are many factors which influence the development and use of self-assessment systems in work-based learning. These include:
   - the burden that self-assessment places on individual employers. For small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) this can be a particularly difficult problem. In some systems there are intermediary organisations that help to support SMEs when they become involved in work-based training - and this support can include assistance with quality assurance;
   - the connections between school-based and work-based provision. In some systems, VET providers are dependent on employers offering work experience or an apprenticeship to a learner. This dependence can make it difficult for a VET provider to insist that every employer uses a formal self-assessment method (or the same method);
   - in many situations businesses use an industry-based quality assurance system such as EFQM or ISO (EQAVET has published guidance on how EQAVET aligns with these systems¹⁰) and these systems have different approaches to self-assessment;
   - in systems where individual VET providers (including school-based and work-based providers) collect different information and data on the quality and performance of their initial VET provision, it can be difficult to develop policies and reform at the system level. When there are unaligned data sets (e.g. when individual VET providers decide what data to collect and which indicators to use) it can be difficult to comment on the overall quality of provision and identify change which would be useful at the system level;
   - in systems where the quality of VET depends both on school-based and work-based provision, it is important to be clear who has responsibility for self-assessment e.g. where work-based learning or work experience is based on goodwill and local connections, it can be difficult for VET schools to challenge their work-based learning partners;
   - the level of unemployment in the economy also has an impact on the relationship between school-based and work-based providers - if the level of unemployment is low and businesses are finding it difficult to recruit suitable staff, they may be more responsive to requests for VET

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⁸ https://www.eqavet.eu/Top-Navigation/Newsletter
schools to use a particular quality assurance and self-assessment system. On the other hand, when it is hard for school-based VET providers to find suitable work-based training or work-experience for their learners, it is more difficult for VET schools to make quality assurance requests\textsuperscript{11}.

13. In 2015 Cedefop published its \textit{Handbook for VET providers}\textsuperscript{12}. It provides a significant amount of advice on self-assessment and quality assurance (see Annexe in page 5 for a summary of how self-assessment is part of the provider’s quality assurance system). The Handbook comments that self-assessment is a powerful tool for quality when: it is an inherent part of the quality approach within a VET institution and is carried out systematically and comprehensively. In most cases it is coordinated and implemented by the core quality team of a VET institution, assembling quality officers and experts under the responsibility of a quality manager, but it goes without saying that other staff members - preferably teachers and trainers - are invited to participate in this process. This accurately describes how trainers (including those who are based in companies) can, and should, contribute to the self-assessment of the VET institution while encouraging us to reflect on whether (and to what extent) a work-based learning context can be considered as a VET institution. As very few employers’ main activities are associated with vocational training, it may be unrealistic to imagine that they will use the same self-assessment processes.

14. In its Handbook, Cedefop also set out pre-conditions for successful self-assessment\textsuperscript{13}:
\begin{itemize}
  \item commitment, support and participation of the head of the institution;
  \item a core quality team to coordinate and integrate self-assessment activities;
  \item involvement of staff in the self-assessment exercise;
  \item openness towards data, facts and potential changes;
  \item open and honest debate addressing ‘intangible knowledge’;
  \item immediate decisions on improvements based on self-assessment results;
  \item agreement among staff on implementation of improvement actions.
\end{itemize}

15. The PLA discussions will provide an opportunity to discuss the extent to which these pre-conditions are applicable in the context of work-based learning.

\textbf{During the PLA}

16. On the first day of the PLA the focus will be at the system level and on the perspective of social partners Also, a site visit to the SKF vocational school will provide opportunities to meet learners and VET school staff. The site visit will inform the discussions in small groups. The focus of these discussions will be on how self-assessment can support the quality assurance of work-based learning e.g. what are the issues and problems that should be considered. The discussion will focus on the system level and consider:
\begin{itemize}
  \item the issues involved in collecting data from self-assessment;
  \item how to improve the quality of work-based learning by using data from self-assessment.
\end{itemize}

17. On the second day of the PLA the focus will be at the provider level. The discussions will consider the issues facing VET providers when using self-assessment to support the quality assurance of work-based learning. Participants will be invited to comment on:
\begin{itemize}
  \item the extent to which should self-assessment differ between work-based and school-based VET provision;
  \item the quality assurance issues that are particularly important for work-based providers.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{11} This refers to situations where the learner is based in a VET school and has to complete work experience or work-based training. This situation is unlikely to apply where the learner is based at work (in a company).


18. At the end of the PLA, a short policy brief (3-4 pages) will be produced and added to the EQAVET website. This will highlight the key issues and conclusions developed during the PLA.