



EQAVET

European Quality Assurance
in Vocational Education and Training

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

POLICYBRIEF

This policy brief has been prepared in order to share the results of an EQAVET Peer Learning Activity on supporting training providers to identify areas and implement actions for improvement in line with EQAVET. The peer learning activity, organized within the EQAVET Network, provide a means of discussing, sharing and learning from each other on areas of strategic importance for the successful implementation of the Recommendation on establishing a European quality assurance reference framework for VET. The policy brief reflects the opinions of those who participated in the peer learning activity and does not constitute an official European Commission or EQAVET position.

Peer Learning
Activity on

Supporting training providers to identify areas and implement actions for improvement in line with EQAVET

Participating countries: AT, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, FI, HR, HU, IE, IT, LV, MT, NL, PT, RO, SI, SK, UK, FyROM

SUMMARY

This policy brief is based on the peer learning activity (PLA) organised by EQAVET in partnership with the Portuguese National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (ANQEP) in Lisbon, on 29 - 30 March 2017 as part of the ["EQAVET Strategic plan 2016-2017"](#). The PLA brought together representatives of VET providers, government and EU agencies (such as CEDEFOP and ETF) and those with a national or regional responsibility for VET policy from 21 countries. Some participants represented a Member State's Quality Assurance National Reference Point (NRP). The NRPs were established as part of the EQAVET Recommendation and have a central role in supporting the vocational education and training (VET) quality assurance arrangements in their system.

The PLA methodology used in EQAVET allows participants to share knowledge and experiences using examples of practice and/or policy implementation. This provides a starting point of reflection on how to address some of the shared challenges faced by education and training systems across the EU. This PLA focused on quality improvement at provider level using evaluation and review mechanisms and tools established at system and provider levels. The following comments are based on the participants' reflections which were informed by presentations from Portugal, Hungary, Italy and Finland.

This policy brief is not a verbatim report; instead it is an analysis of the issues that were felt to be important in an EQAVET context, given the key role of quality improvement, based on evaluation and review mechanisms, in the implementation of EU and national education and training policies and reforms. The PLA was informed by a background paper and an analysis of a questionnaire based on participants' experiences of using such mechanisms.

More information on this PLA is available on the EQAVET web-site [here](#).

POLICY CONTEXT

The **European Quality Assurance for VET Framework (EQAVET Framework)** was set out in the 2009 Recommendation from the European Parliament and Council¹. It builds on earlier work at European level, and seeks to enhance European cooperation in vocational education and training, by the development and use of a Common Quality Assurance Framework.

The **EQAVET Recommendation** invites Member States to promote and monitor continuous improvement in their VET systems, through the use of a quality assurance (QA) and improvement cycle based on planning, implementation, evaluation and review. EQAVET is a framework that allows individual Member States to develop quality assurance systems which meet their requirements. It provides a systematic approach to quality assurance and emphasises the importance of monitoring and improving quality by combining internal self-monitoring, external processes and qualitative analysis. It covers all aspects of VET (formal, informal and non-formal) in both the initial and continuing education sectors.

¹ Recommendation of the European Parliament and 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) - [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32009H0708\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32009H0708(01))

These directions were reinforced by recent EU official documents, such as the "[Riga Conclusions](#)", regarding European cooperation in vocational education and training 2015-2020" (June 2015) and the Communication "[A New Skills Agenda for Europe](#) - Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness" (June 2016).

EQAVET can be used to address challenges outlined in the Education and Training strategic framework 2020 and the lifelong learning (LLL) programme proposed by the European Commission (Erasmus +) which has streamlined the current EU programmes for education, training, youth and sport.

Peer Learning Activity OBJECTIVES

This EQAVET Peer Learning Activity (PLA) focussed on identifying best practice in quality improvement, based on evaluation and review mechanisms and tools, as defined at system and provider levels.

The aim of EQAVET PLAs is to create an opportunity for discussion, reflection, and the sharing of knowledge and experience among participants to feed into the work of the EQAVET Network. The discussions were informed by experiences presented by four Member States: Portugal, Hungary, Italy and Finland. Each country presented the mechanisms and tools developed at system level and described how VET providers use these mechanisms or others.

The PLA was organised in two thematic blocks, both of which discussed the issues and challenges of supporting training providers to identify areas and implement actions for improvement in line with EQAVET. The first thematic block focused on the Evaluation phase of the "Quality Cycle", the second on the Review phase (and on closing the Quality Cycle). Each presentation was followed by Q&A and each thematic block concluded with discussion and exchange of best practice.

The discussions at each thematic session were prompted by the following questions

For the **first thematic block**:

- Are evaluation procedures/mechanisms defined at all relevant levels?
- Are VET processes (qualifications and curriculum design, work-based learning arrangements, trainers' training, assessment and certification etc.) evaluated regularly?
- How do training providers use these mechanisms? Are they part of their self-evaluation processes?
- How are the outcomes of evaluation made publicly available?
- What mechanisms are in place to adjust the system on the basis of the outcomes of evaluation and to devise action plans for change?

For the **second thematic block**:

- Are procedures for feedback and review in place at provider level?
- Are the results/outcomes of the evaluation processes discussed with relevant stakeholders?
- How is feedback from learners and teachers/trainers on the teaching and learning processes gathered and used for improvement?
- How is the information on feedback made widely and publicly available?

CASE STUDIES

The case studies presented at the PLA highlighted that there can be different QA approaches to *supporting training providers to identify areas and implement actions for improvement in line with EQAVET*. All presentations are available [here](#).

CASE STUDIES from PORTUGAL

The first Portuguese presentation described the ongoing Project "Quality assurance on VET – Implementation of quality assurance systems aligned with the EQAVET framework", launched and coordinated by the National Agency for Qualification and VET (ANQEP). This project, supported by an ICT platform, involves:

- The definition of a national quality assurance approach using a set of EQAVET indicators to assess and monitor the improvement of initial VET supply.
- The promotion of the adoption by VET providers of the EQAVET quality assurance and improvement cycle, quality criteria and indicative descriptors.

ANQEP'S MISSION

A public body under the joint supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Solidarity, Employment and Social Security in coordination with the Ministry of Economy

- To coordinate the implementation of policies regarding the vocational education and training of young people and adults
- To ensure the development and management of the National System for the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC System)

- The assessment of VET providers' quality assurance systems in order to check their alignment with EQAVET. The assessment is carried out by quality experts appointed by higher education institutions.
- The award of a quality seal to VET providers whose systems are in compliance with EQAVET.

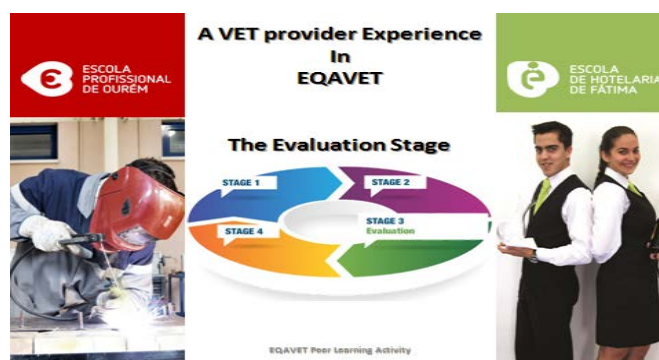


The second presentation concerned an intermediate level – a network of VET schools which evaluates results in line with EQAVET relating to:

- Self assessment on the basis of strategic documents.
- Action planning – activities to be implemented, but also the main indicators used.
- Implementing activities and verifying conformity with the EQAVET approach, by using internal mechanisms.
- Auditing and reporting – including corrective measures and/or new improvement actions

The third presentation described a quality improvement mechanism developed by a VET provider, following the four stages of the “quality cycle” during the self-evaluation process.

The VET provider representative described the instruments used during this process and the outcomes of the evaluation process. One important idea was that the perceived burden of bureaucracy associated with the QA systems and processes can be reduced by using ICT and online tools; and how the results of evaluation can be disseminated, in specific ways, to different stakeholders.



CASE STUDIES from HUNGARY

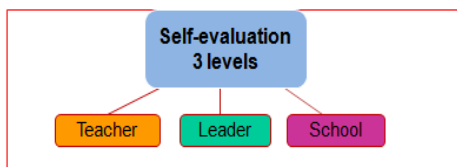
The Hungarian presentation described their approach to self-evaluation from the perspectives of system and provider.

In Hungary, the self-evaluation is regulated centrally at system level. This process is a comprehensive, systematic, regular exercise, based on national standards and complemented with external evaluation (based on the same standards).

There are (for both self-evaluation and external evaluation):

- Three targets of evaluation (“teacher”, “school leader” and “school”).
- Seven areas (Educational processes; Students’ personal and social development; Results achieved; Institutional knowledge sharing, Communication and professional relations; School partnerships, Networking; School resources and climate; Achievement of the objectives of the National Core Curriculum and those of the School Pedagogical Programme).
- Eight teacher competencies and five leadership competencies.

Features of self-evaluation



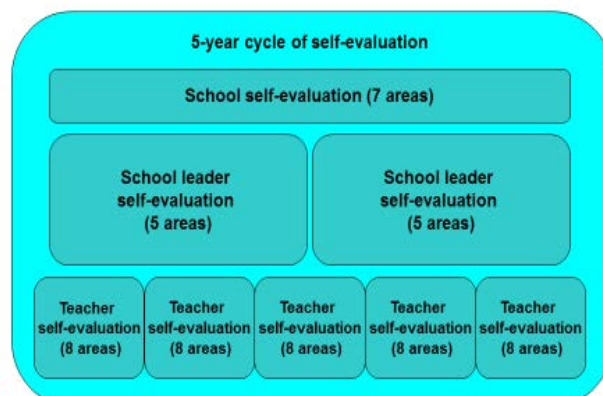
- General standards of self-evaluation are centrally defined, uniform, publicly accessible, and identical with those of external evaluation (inspection).
- Focus of self-evaluation: teaching and learning, quality (improvement) of pedagogical – professional work in schools.
- Basis of self-evaluation: specific quality requirements defined by the schools themselves along the general quality standards.
- Self-evaluation is carried out with the involvement of the school’s internal and external stakeholders; and benefits from previous self-evaluation practices as well as the knowledge, expertise and experience of the staff.

One critical aspect is that *professional support* for self-evaluation – including in the area of regulations, guidelines and textbooks, specific training, IT support and professional counselling – is offered to schools and staff involved in self-evaluation.

The schools apply and adapt the national framework, taking into account existing conditions. The self-evaluation process is carried out over a period of 5 years and the main stages are:

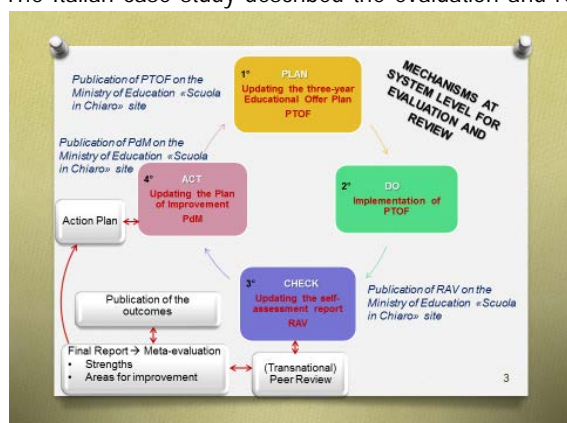
- Preparation: informing the teaching staff, creating the Self-evaluation Support Team (SST), training the school leaders and the members of the SST, defining the specific requirements and planning the self-evaluation.
- Implementation – at teacher, leader and school level – including data collection and support.

5-year cycle of school self-evaluation



CASE STUDIES from ITALY

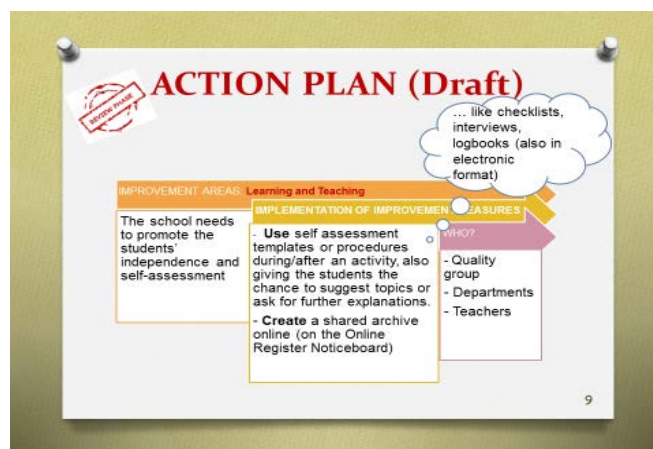
The Italian case study described the evaluation and review mechanisms at system level and, and the role that the Italian EQAVET National Reference Point plays in this process, by:



- Promoting and disseminating the best practices.
- Ensuring the link between national and European levels.
- Supporting the VET providers in implementing the National Plan for Quality Assurance.
- Promoting and organising peer-reviews for Italian VET schools. Peer review is an alternative to external evaluation, promoted by the [European Peer Review Network and Association](#), with a specific methodology (derived from two Leonardo da Vinci Projects)

The VET provider experience was related to the use of the peer review, to complement self-evaluation. The results of the peer review were disseminated to the teaching staff, discussed with other stakeholders and used to develop a comprehensive action plan for quality improvement. This action plan identifies the improvement areas, programmes and measures to be implemented for each area and who is responsible for each one of them and the resources allocated.

An important issue raised was the existence of a wide variety of improvement measures at VET provider level, for instance: improving teaching and learning, different projects (including some financed by from the Erasmus+ programme), online instruments and libraries, counselling services for students, additional training for staff etc.



CASE STUDIES from FINLAND

The first Finnish case study described the evaluation and, mainly, the review mechanism used at system level, in line with indicative descriptors of EQAVET, in order to face challenges, such as:

EQAVET NETWORK PAPER ON COMPLEMENTING EQAVET At system level

Procedures, mechanisms and instruments for undertaking reviews are defined and used to improve the quality of provision at all levels

- By 2015 the VET providers should have effective quality assurance and quality improvement system / operational system. (The Parliament)
- Evaluation of VET providers' quality managements systems in 2015
- Criteria for effective quality assurance and quality improvement system has been developed aligned with EQAVET with key stakeholders
- Performance-based financing system
- Quality Award for VET
- Monitoring of the results of skills demonstrations on sample basis
 - External evaluation of learning outcomes
- Monitoring of other topics

Systematics?
Time?
Early warning systems?
Skills?

16/04/2017 | Finnish National Agency for Education

- Going from a supply oriented approach to demand-driven VET.
- Collecting, at provider level, feedback from teachers, trainers and other relevant stakeholders.
- Introducing performance-based financing, with criteria related to student and employer satisfaction.
- Focusing on individual learning pathways.
- Publishing and disseminating key results.
- Quality networks for VET providers.
- Developing a quality culture by involving the teaching staff.

The second Finnish presentation was made by a VET provider who described some of the ways of implementing high quality in daily work: after analysing the results of self-evaluation and feedback from stakeholders at national and provider level, data is combined and plans and actions are developed. The targets for improvement may address, among others:

- On-the-job-learning and "skills demonstrations".
- Learning outcome follow-up and measurement
- Student Welfare services
- Quality management system – measuring outcomes, using Balanced Scorecards, increasing participation, optimising strategic planning processes etc.

Luovi Vocational College Providing VET – Supporting Individual



- Largest special needs VET provider in Finland
- Operates nation wide in over 20 locations
- Staff around 690
 - 82 % of staff work within teaching and student services
- About 1 500 students in initial VET (IVET)
- About 300 participants in continuing VET (CVET)
- Turnover 55,7 million euro (2016)
- Luovi is a part of Hengitysliitto (the Organization for Respiratory Health)



30.3.2017/Margit Huhtanen
Tähtien arviointi-osa

DISCUSSION & REFLECTIONS

All case studies highlighted that **all systems and providers are concerned with closing the quality cycle by introducing adequate evaluation and review mechanisms**. On the other hand, **these mechanisms are very diverse**.²

Despite this diversity, participants at the PLA agreed that it was important to share practices and learn from the experiences and challenges encountered by others. These related to:

- Best practice, as characterised by the decision to make the quality cycle the basis for quality improvement: the evaluation and review phases followed on from the planning and implementing stages, and were meant to initiate a new improvement cycle.
- Evaluation and review mechanisms and procedures should be consistent among different levels – system, provider and, when needed, other levels (between the system and the provider – e.g. region or sector – or within the provider - e.g. teams, departments, groups, trainers).
- Stakeholders should be involved in self-evaluation and external evaluation processes, using formal and informal mechanisms, in order to promote ownership of the evaluation outcomes, including review and improvement measures. The employers and the students are, usually, not sufficiently involved in the evaluation and review phases. Their involvement should be multi-purpose (e.g. for accountability and improvement) and multilevel (e.g. system and provider).
- One effective way of creating engagement and ownership is by establishing quality management taskforces, groups or teams.
- Collecting feedback from learners, teachers/trainers and companies is common practice. There are many ways of collecting feedback from these actors, such as: peer observation; inspection and external evaluation; internal evaluation, and surveys; benchmarking reports; sharing best practices at provider level (within departments or training programmes).

² The Background paper highlighted this idea, indicating different studies in this regard. View the background paper [here](#).

- One important challenge is to adapt the evaluation and review methods and tools to the needs and characteristics of each trainer provider. For instance, the evaluation of the learning processes and learning outcomes in small providers/companies may differ from those in larger providers/companies.
- The use of tools devised at central level, such as common platforms, data bases, electronic feedback systems and indicators, may increase the effectiveness of evaluation and review.
- Ensuring transparency of the evaluation results is a must and, therefore, publishing self-evaluation and external evaluation outcomes is common practice. But the amount of data published (e.g. full reports, a selection of outcomes, data samples, key indicators etc.) and the way evaluation outcomes are published (e.g. published for the general public on websites at system level, on the provider's website, sent only to selected key stakeholders etc.) differ from one system to another and even among providers. In this matter, an additional challenge is the protection of personal data.
- Usually there are not enough resources allocated to evaluation and review phases – both at system and provider levels. The system should provide centralised resources and support (e.g. training, information, counselling, guidelines etc.).
- Self-evaluation is common practice, but it has different forms depending whether it is used in centralised systems, where feedback, evaluation and review mechanisms are defined “top-down”, or in decentralised ones, where such mechanisms are defined “bottom-up”.
- Frequent self-assessment (to measure the “deviation” from plan) should be combined with periodical external evaluation (e.g. every two years) in order to influence curriculum and qualification development and to increase the relevance of VET programmes to the labour market.
- There is much best practice in self-evaluation, but countries usually have compulsory evaluation systems in place: compulsory self-evaluation frameworks or improvement plans; mandatory online collection of data etc. The existence of a Management Information System should be considered in this context. Self-evaluation is, usually, combined with external evaluation, made either by “third-part” institutions (Agencies, Inspectorates etc.) or by “peers” (“peer review”, for instance). Some systems and providers practice benchmarking – but not all do, for cultural reasons.
- The main outcomes of the review phase should be a basis for long-term improvement plans and actions and also for short-term “bottom up” improvements (“early success”). The latter has proven to be a powerful motivating factor for all stakeholders.
- One of the main challenges at provider level is following up the improvement process: checking if the improvement has occurred and how successful it was, and devising new action plans, if necessary.
- Evaluation and review processes should take into consideration and contextualise changes that may occur, such as: changes in stakeholders' expectations, general and VET policies and regulations, the evolution of the labour market etc.
- There are important features of these processes to be taken into consideration:
 - Ensuring support at top management level and a commitment to improvement;
 - Building sound evidence-based decision-making processes and ensuring data accuracy and sufficiency;
 - Creating support mechanisms (e.g. information and training systems);
 - Combining data from different sources and perspectives (e.g. teachers' and students' perceptions of a specific topic).

EMERGING POLICY ISSUES

The discussions at the PLA confirm that the approach and “philosophy” that EQAVET offers (as a framework) is useful, due to the diversity in VET provision in the EU countries. The PLA participants agreed that many VET providers already use evaluation and review mechanisms in line with EQAVET. On the other hand, these mechanisms are diverse and, in this regard, diversity is an asset and, therefore, identifying and sharing best practices is a strength of the EQAVET Network.

In order to ensure the effectiveness of the evaluation and review mechanisms and, therefore, of the overall quality improvement in VET, the VET providers need support:

1. At system level, by:
 - Relevant and flexible QA regulations;
 - Sharing and publishing data;
 - Creating platforms for learning and for exchanging best practices;
 - Allocating consistent resources for evaluation and for support (training, counselling, evaluation tools and guidelines etc.).
2. At EU level:
 - Policy support to increase cooperation and exchange of best practices among Member States, by developing, updating and agreeing on common quality assurance and quality improvement frameworks, such as the model offers by EQAVET.
 - Providing resources and financial support (for instance, by the Erasmus+ Programme) for cooperation and exchanges of best practices.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Cooperation and exchanging best practice, at VET system and at provider level, are key elements for quality improvement and for ensuring transparency, relevance and convergence of VET systems in EU. In this respect, closing the quality cycle with consistent evaluation and review mechanisms should be a feature of every EU VET policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS on the process of designing and updating the QA systems and procedures for the “Evaluation” and “Review” stages, in line with EQAVET:

- Ensuring consistency and coherence between evaluation and review mechanisms devised at different VET levels: system level, provider level and, when needed, other levels, too (e.g. sector, region, provider network, teams, groups, trainers etc.).
- Taking into consideration, when building evaluation and review mechanisms, the specificity and the quality culture embedded in the VET system. Quality improvement mechanisms are different in centralised system (defined as “top-down”) and in decentralised systems (defined as “bottom-up”).
- Relevant stakeholders should be involved in all phases of the quality improvement cycle, in order to build ownership and mutual trust. One effective way of ensuring this is to devise quality assurance / quality improvement teams or groups at all levels of VET systems.
- Evaluation mechanisms should be two-fold: self-evaluation mechanisms – the most important for improvement purposes – complemented with external evaluation/ inspection processes, designed mainly (but not exclusively) for accountability purposes.
- In order to continuously improve VET provision, the use of appropriate indicators is necessary (e.g. the indicators mentioned in Annex II of the EQAVET Recommendation). In this respect, the system level should offer access, for VET providers and other relevant stakeholders, to databases, collections of best practice, benchmarking tools and other types of support for evidence-based decision making.
- The support provided for VET providers at system level should include specific training, counselling, guidelines and information materials.
- The VET system and VET providers should allocate specific (earmarked) financial resources to the evaluation and review phases of the quality cycle.
- Special attention and support for evaluation, review and improvement of VET provision should be given to small and medium-size enterprises and VET providers.