



**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 series of policy briefs is designed to share the results of the EQAVET sectoral seminars with a wider audience of VET providers, policymakers and other stakeholders. The present policy brief has been prepared by the EQAVET Secretariat on the basis of the discussions at the seminars and the material provided by its expert supporting the development of the sectoral seminar approach. It reflects the opinions of the sectoral seminar participants and does not constitute an official European Commission or EQAVET position.

## On quality assurance in continuing vocational education and training

**EQAVET**  
Sectoral Seminar

# The healthcare sector

Participating countries: BE, BG, CZ, DE, ES, FL, IE, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, NO, UK

### SUMMARY

This policy note is based on the EQAVET sectoral seminar on the quality assurance of education and training in the healthcare sector, hosted by the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, Stavanger, May 23-24, 2011. The seminar brought together quality assurance national reference points, VET providers, practitioners, policymakers and industry representatives from 14 member countries (all the material is available on the website at [www.eqavet.sectoralseminars.eu](http://www.eqavet.sectoralseminars.eu)).

### CONTEXT and INTRODUCTION

#### EQAVET sectoral seminars and the development of a culture of quality assurance in the EU

EQAVET sectoral seminars are an important tool for promoting and consolidating a culture of quality assurance in vocational education and training (VET) among key stakeholders. They support exchange of experience, expertise, cross fertilisation of ideas and mutual learning between countries, involving quality assurance national reference points, VET providers, industry representatives, policymakers and social partners. The sectoral seminars play an

important role in deepening knowledge of the European quality assurance reference framework (EQAVET Framework) and promoting a culture of quality assurance in VET.

**Objectives** - The sectoral seminars aim to: **1.** Improve and develop quality assurance in EU VET systems, with a focus on continuing VET; **2.** Reflect on how quality assurance in VET is addressed and managed in an industry sector; **3.** Generalise the outcomes of the discussions during the seminar in order to generate considerations that are accessible, transferable, suitable and relevant for any policy context; **4.** Extract messages in relation to the use and implementation of the EQAVET Framework.

The first round of EQAVET sectoral seminars will focus on industry sectors which are essential in meeting EU socioeconomic requirements such as healthcare, tourism and construction. The first sectoral seminar focusing on healthcare is of particular interest because it is a sector in which a) global competition for skills and resources and b) public accountability of quality services have become increasingly important.

### THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR in EU CHALLENGES for VET

**The healthcare sector in Europe** is complex due to the significant differences in existing subsectors. As defined by the NACE classification, the sector includes human health activities (hospital, medical and dental practice), residential care (residential nursing, residential care for mental retardation, elderly and disabled, etc.) and social work activities. In Europe the sector can be characterised by<sup>1</sup>:

- A growing demand for services in ageing societies
- Skills shortages and difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff
- Increasing migration within the EU, especially cross-border flows of staff (which may help destination countries but undermine the supply of the labour force in countries of origin)
- Accounting for the employment of around 10% of the total workforce across Europe
- Spending around 9% of GDP in Europe. It is expected to raise further revenue
- Featuring a growing private sector
- A political demand for accountability on how care services are delivered and for structural and organisational reforms and changes

#### Improving human resources for the healthcare sector through better quality assurance of VET

Quality Assurance (QA) in the education and training of medical and health personnel is an important means of ensuring quality healthcare. Its primary aim is to stimulate VET systems and providers to identify their own needs and those of the communities they serve, to ensure value for money, to assess their strengths and weaknesses, and to consider their potential for reorientation to existing and emerging health imperatives in



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European societies.

VET in the healthcare sector covers a wide range of types of education and training. There are also extensive differences among models of training provision among EU countries. Regardless of these training differences, there are some shared characteristics: qualified healthcare workers need **a)** long and specialised training; **b)** to develop desirable professional attitudes and clinical skills; and **c)** opportunities for practical problem-based learning. Effective quality assurance processes are very important in the delivery of work-based and continuing VET (CVET) and in the arrangements for interaction between systems and institutions/actors involved in the delivery of learning and training.

In this context, EU governments, training providers, social partners and professional bodies need to make decisions that ensure a balance between:

- quantity and quality
- theory and practice
- medical staff and non-medical staff
- work-based training and school-based education
- the supply of qualifications and the demand for competences
- domestic workforce and migration
- recruitment and replacement demand
- hospital-based care and community-based care

### **The importance of work-based learning and continuing vocational education and training (CVET) in the healthcare sector and QA**

Upskilling healthcare workers and the development of appropriate learning and clinical skills in future practitioners are crucial ingredients for solving some of the challenges faced by the sector.

CVET and work-based learning are some of the mechanisms most suited to closing this skill gap. They are of major importance in the healthcare sector because:

- the scope of knowledge relating to healthcare is growing rapidly and many aspects of practice are changing fast. This requires healthcare workers to undertake ongoing further education and training.
- healthcare training must include a significant period of time in clinical settings in order to ensure that:
  - the emphasis in healthcare education is on practical skills and critical judgement based on evidence and experience rather than being exclusively reliant on the acquisition of a compendium of current knowledge
  - there is ample opportunity to nurture and encourage the development of appropriate attitudes and professional conduct, which requires sufficient time to be devoted to personal contact with and care of patients.

Institutions, providers and governments should encourage healthcare workers and trainees to participate in this type of training through self-directed learning and further development of their knowledge and skills throughout their professional careers by fostering lifelong learning skills. In this context, learners should have the opportunity to practise safely, ethically and effectively under supervision while undergoing training and further vocational education in clinical settings.

Because of their importance in the sector, work-based learning and CVET need to be framed and defined in the overall decision and implementation plans of healthcare institutions, schools, communities and local and national authorities after consultation with major stakeholders. Cooperative and formalised arrangements must be put in place between these actors who should develop and share the QA procedures in the area of human resource development as one of the priorities for improving and delivering quality healthcare services.

### **The EU FRAMEWORK for QUALITY ASSURANCE in VET - Addressing challenges**

The **European framework for quality assurance in VET** (EQAVET Framework) provides a general quality assurance instrument for initial and continuing VET and work-based learning that is used at EU level on a voluntary basis. EQAVET includes a set of quality descriptors and indicators for the four stages of its quality cycle (planning, implementation, evaluation and review) to support documentation, development, monitoring and evaluation in order to improve the effectiveness of VET provision and quality management practices.

Irrespective of the state of development or tradition of the national VET system, the EQAVET model provides a reference framework for establishing a QA system which has operationally defined criteria that serve as performance descriptors and indicators for self-measuring QA. It recognises that approaches to VET need to be compatible with the national/regional system, the needs of the industry and the community, which vary from region to region and country to country. The framework acknowledges that diversity among VET systems and providers is

desirable. The EQAVET Framework defines the prerequisites for basic QA in VET in broad terms.

The EQAVET Framework can promote transparency and mutual trust removing many barriers to the mutual recognition of healthcare competences/qualifications between education and training sectors, systems and countries. These barriers include difference in healthcare needs and systems, as well as workforce and immigration considerations. In these terms, the EQAVET Framework contributes to the development of a genuine borderless lifelong learning area and promotes a culture of quality improvement at all levels.

The ultimate goal is to encourage national governments, VET providers and, in this instance, healthcare institutions, to adopt a quality assurance process for initial and continuing VET that promotes continuous improvement and public confidence that the quality of provision and standards of healthcare personnel are being safeguarded and enhanced, regardless of where the learning process takes place.

For more information on the Framework visit the EQAVET quality cycle online tool [here](#).

## KEY FACTORS impacting on the development of a CULTURE of QUALITY ASSURANCE of VET in the HEALTHCARE SECTOR

The discussions during this sectoral seminar enabled participants to identify a number of core areas which are important in ensuring the provision of an efficient quality assurance process in the delivery of practical training:

1. Partnership arrangements and cooperative relationships between the healthcare schools and the institutions where the training takes place are important. Very often these arrangements are informal and based on personal contacts. It is essential that formalised arrangements be established and reviewed on an ongoing basis. A formal mechanism for high-level consultation between the school and the healthcare affiliated institutions should ensure appropriate channels of communication and liaison on matters of mutual interest, particularly those relating to teaching and its objectives.
2. These formalised arrangements should encourage reciprocal systems in which: a) the academic staff of the school are able to maintain their clinical skills by having appropriate access to further training and research within the healthcare institutions; and b) healthcare workers who act as trainers are informed about their

teaching obligations. This type of relationship should be integrated into the service and administrative activities of the healthcare institutions and schools.

3. Healthcare schools need a supportive relationship with the relevant government department. These departments should engage in these formalised arrangements so that the industry can respond appropriately to the healthcare needs of the community, thereby raising the standards of healthcare education and training provision.
4. Schools, institutions and government should develop a communication strategy orientated to increasing the social and public status of training, learners and trainers in the sector. Motivation among these actors will ensure the quality, quantity and desirable professional attitudes of healthcare workers.

### Identifying success factors in VET QA systems in the healthcare sector

The QA process for work-based learning and CVET in the healthcare sector should:

- Include all relevant stakeholders and should be conducted in a consultative and consensus-building fashion.
- Be open to external public scrutiny, fostering accountability and transparency.
- Encourage innovation and re-orientation in order to keep pace with changing healthcare needs in EU societies.
- Monitor progress on an ongoing cycle of review, focusing on the achievement of planned and self-specified objectives.
- Encourage a variety of teaching and learning methods which are both learner centred and focused on the training of trainers.
- Ensure that learners/trainees assessment processes are appropriate for the teaching and learning methods.
- Ensure adequate resources to deliver the curriculum, which should be concerned with achieving the desired outcomes rather than with detailed specifications of learning content.
- Develop a comprehensive and updated career guidance service.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS or KEY MESSAGES for POLICYMAKERS and VET PROVIDERS

The opportunity for exchange of experience and analysis of examples of best practice examined during this sectoral seminar enabled participants to identify a number of recommendations relating to the QA of CVET in the healthcare sector.

In relation to **Workplace training**, it is important to consider:

- Establishing accreditation procedures for workplaces within the sector
- Developing regulations and structures for training provision in cooperation with the industry
- Developing agreed definitions for the roles of trainers, teachers and mentors
- Developing comprehensive curricula in consensus with the schools and institutions where the training takes place
- Establishing mechanisms that allow the evaluation, review and change of the curriculum by the schools in consultation with the healthcare institutions

**The training of trainers** within healthcare institutions is a core topic which calls for:

- Developing training paths that fit specific groups of trainers
- Developing standards for trainers (knowledge, attitudes,...) within the sector
- Launching motivational initiatives which encourage more healthcare workers to **1.** become trainers; **2.** engage in further training; **3.** invest in their professional development

Schools should have policies on staff development and review. This development should be formative and based on clinical competences. Healthcare institutions should provide opportunities for the mentoring of learners.

In relation to **Documentation of the performance of practical/clinical procedures and skills**, there is a need to develop:

- Common structures across systems, actors and activities
- Standards with respect to measurements of competences and the indicators used in the documentation process
- Documentation systems:
  - a) in which all actors involved are clear about their responsibilities and expectations with respect to quality assurance procedures
  - b) that ensure the ownership of the documentation process by those involved
  - c) that integrate the contributions of learners and empower them in the process
- Data management procedures that minimise bureaucratic burdens and administer the information obtained in an ethical manner

For **Managing labour market needs and skills supply** there is a need to:

- Set up coherent plans that engage and involve all levels in the provision of training
- Engage in constant dialogue with the industry so that relevant and practical education and training provision is achieved
- Develop follow-up activities focused on learner needs (mandatory tests, extra lessons, summer school, career services, placements ...)
- Support communication and collaboration between the learner, family and school
- Carry out recruitment campaigns in order to ensure greater recruitment
- Organise local skills competitions to motivate learners and promote excellence

## End notes

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<sup>1</sup> For more information visit:

- [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Upload/Projects\\_Networks/Skillsnet/Flashes/SkillsnetSF\\_Healthcare.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Upload/Projects_Networks/Skillsnet/Flashes/SkillsnetSF_Healthcare.pdf)