



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, provides 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

Using the EQAVET indicators to accredit VET providers

Participating countries: BG, CY, CZ, EE, FI, HR, IT, LV, MT, NL, PT, SK, SI, UK (Wales) and a colleague from the European Training Foundation (ETF).

SUMMARY

This policy note is based on the peer learning activity (PLA) held in Tallinn on 13-14 September 2017. The PLA was part of the EQAVET 2016-17 work programme¹ and was organised by the EQAVET Secretariat in collaboration with the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research and the Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education. It was hosted by the Tallinn School of Service.

The PLA brought together colleagues from VET providers and those with a national or regional responsibility for VET policy from 15 countries. Many participants represented a Member State's Quality Assurance National Reference Point (NRP) - these were established as part of the EQAVET Recommendation and have a central role in supporting the VET quality assurance arrangements in their system.

The PLA methodology used by EQAVET provides opportunities for participants to share their knowledge and experiences by using examples of practice and policy implementation. This provides a starting point to reflect on the shared challenges faced by education and training systems across the EU. This PLA looked at how the EQAVET indicators are used (or could be used) at the national and provider level in relation to course approval, external or internal evaluation, and institutional or programme accreditation. The following comments are based on participants' reflections which were informed by presentations from Estonia, Latvia and Slovenia.

This policy brief is not a verbatim report: instead it is an analysis of the quality assurance issues which were considered important in an EQAVET context. It is intended to inform those who are thinking about how to use quality assurance as part of an approval, evaluation or accreditation process. The PLA was informed by a background paper and the analysis of participants' experiences of using quality assurance as part of the approval, evaluation or accreditation process.

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

POLICY CONTEXT

The **EQAVET Recommendation** invites Member States to select those indicators which are most appropriate for their needs.

The Recommendation does not describe the range of ways in which the indicators can be used.

As well as **using the EQAVET (and other) indicators** to measure or monitor the quality of VET provision, indicators are used to support the accreditation of VET providers; the approval of programmes, curriculum areas or courses offered by individual VET providers; and the internal and/or external evaluation processes used by VET providers. While every EQAVET indicator² can be used to monitor the quality of existing provision, not all indicators provide a measure of the quality of future provision. When indicators are used to predict the quality of potential provision (i.e. in an approval or accreditation process) the focus is often on the quality of inputs and processes rather than outputs and outcomes.

Although the PLA focused on one particular way to use indicators, we should note that the 2016 EQAVET Secretariat survey showed that extensive use was being made of the EQAVET indicators in initial and continuing VET³.

¹ <http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/overview.aspx>

² The EQAVET indicators measure the quality of inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes.

³ Page 159 and 162, the EQAVET survey, 2016 <http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/statistics.aspx> [Accessed 17-7-17]



Figure 5.2.1 – EQAVET Reference Framework Indicators in the IVET sector in 2016

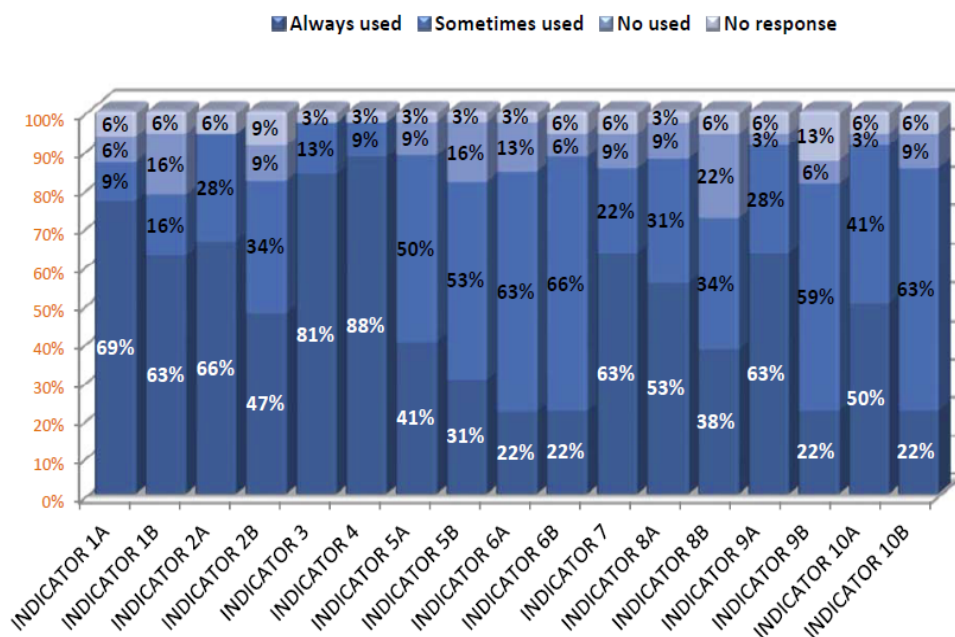
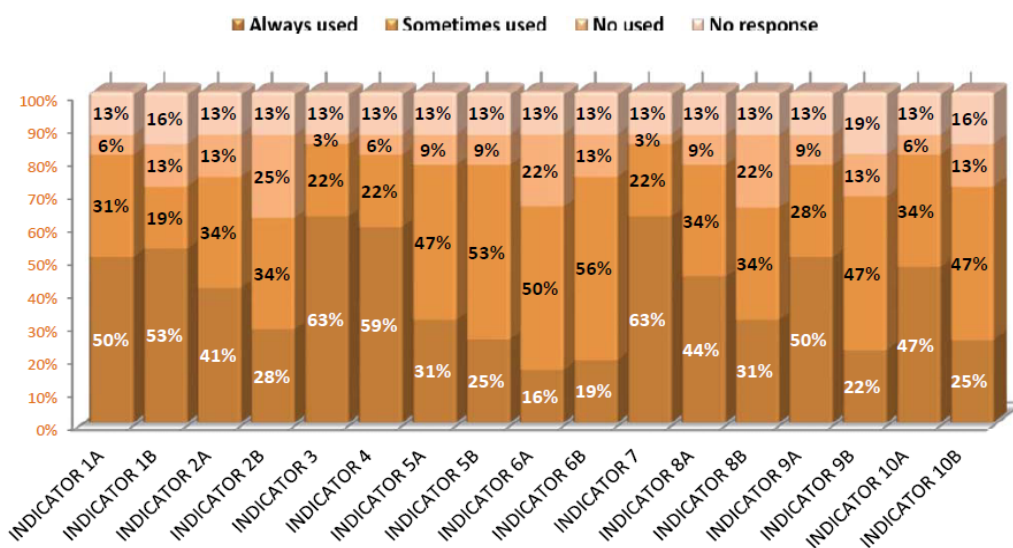


Table 5.2.2 – EQAVET Reference Framework Indicators in the CVET sector in 2016



The accreditation of a VET provider⁴ is the quality assurance process through which status is granted to an education or training provider. This shows that the VET provider has been approved by the relevant legislative or professional authority as having met predetermined standards. These 'predetermined standards' can include a wide range of measures such as indicators; criteria; principles; entry requirements; agreement of funding arrangements; monitoring and evaluation expectations; or an acceptance of inspection or external evaluation.

Accreditation always involves an external body which has been recognised to perform an external assessment and to award accreditation as a result of a positive evaluation. The external body usually designs the predetermined standards which have to be met by the VET provider during the accreditation process. This may include defined minimum requirements, grades or levels of excellence. A central aspect of most accreditation processes is the requirement to implement an internal quality assurance system at the provider

⁴ <http://www.eqavet.eu/qc/gns/glossary/a/accreditation-education-training-provider.aspx> [Accessed 17-7-17] SOURCE: Cedefop, 2008c, based on Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials, 2003.

level. This internal system should reflect the criteria and standards defined by the external accrediting body even though the VET provider's system is often designed to meet local needs.⁵

Accreditation can be an administrative process which focuses on controlling VET providers and ensuring they are accountable within the overarching VET system. With this approach the main task of accreditation is to check that the minimum standards are being met in order to ensure poor quality provision is prevented from being established. This approach focuses on the quality of inputs; the appropriateness of the machinery and staffing arrangements; sound financial management; and the premises/infrastructure which is available for training. These accreditation criteria can be assessed by business or technical experts; training specialists are not required. An alternative approach to accreditation is to focus on those features which have a direct impact on the quality of the training process. In this second approach accreditation concentrates on the quality of the assessment of learning outcomes; the likely outputs from training and the internal processes which support the improvement in the quality of the provision. With this approach training specialists are required to be involved in the accreditation process. The EQAVET indicators can be used to support either (or a combination) of these approaches.

Peer Learning Activity OBJECTIVES

This EQAVET Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was designed to enable participants to:

- Share information on how the indicators in the EQAVET Recommendation are used (or could be used) at the national and provider level in relation to approval, external evaluation or accreditation;
- Identify what lessons can be learnt from other countries' experiences.

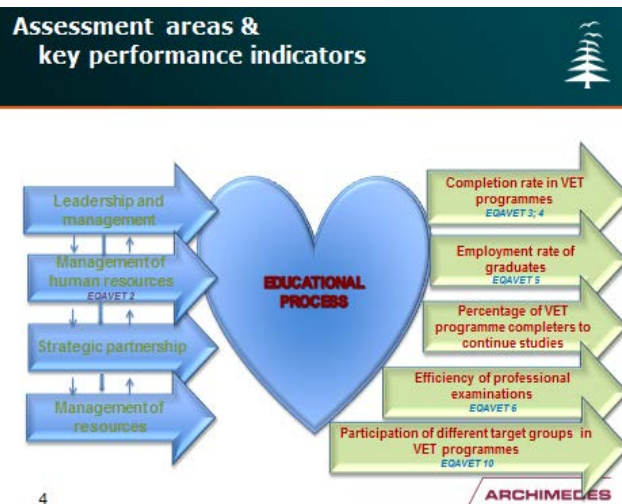
CASE STUDIES

The PLA was informed by a series of case studies. These considered the ways in which the key performance indicators and EQAVET indicators are used at the system and provider level to approve courses; evaluate provision; or accredit programmes or institutions. More information on each case study is available on the EQAVET website [here](#).

At the system level, the case studies covered:

The ESTONIAN VET System

The Estonian hosts described how VET schools are given the right to offer training for three years. This occurs when a new school is established or when an existing school offers courses in a new curriculum area. The decision is made by the Ministry of Education and Research on the basis of advice from an independent committee of experts. Once a curriculum area or school is accredited, the quality of the provision is reviewed on an on-going basis by **which reports to the assessment council**. After the accreditation decision has been made, the assessment council makes one of the following proposals to the Ministry of Education and Research (extend the right to provide instruction in a curriculum area by three or six years; or refuse to extend the right to provide instruction.) This review process is based on five assessment areas and five key performance indicators, four of which are based on the EQAVET indicators. Some of these indicators (the five key performance indicators set out below) are used to measure the performance of each VET provider and some are used to collect data (the assessment areas set out figure on the right).



THE LATVIAN VET SYSTEM

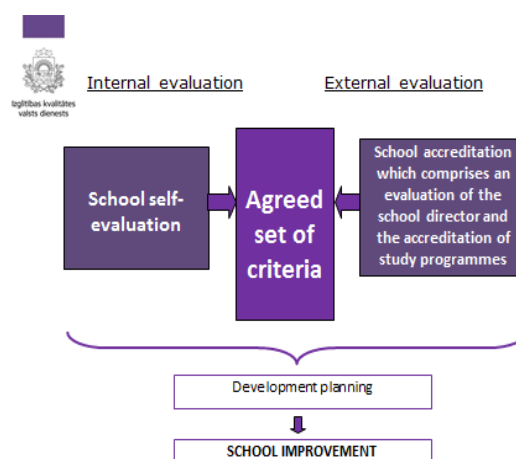
Latvian VET schools are required to complete an annual internal self-evaluation on the basis of 19 criteria divided into seven quality areas.

These criteria are used by the external evaluators or accreditation experts who review the performance of each school every six years.

⁵ Page 11 of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in VET, 2009, Cedefop <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4089> [Accessed 17-7-17]

The external evaluation and accreditation experts' report is used by the State Education Quality Service to decide whether to re-accredit a VET provider. In Latvia accreditation relates to the right of an institution to award a diploma which is recognised in the national qualifications system. The internal and external evaluation processes use an agreed set of criteria and these inform the VET school's development plans and school improvement.

The EQAVET indicators are fully integrated into the seven quality areas which are used in the agreed criteria which inform the internal and external review processes. Since 2013 the accreditation experts have been trained by the State Education Quality Service – this training covers theoretical and practical knowledge about the external evaluation and accreditation processes.



THE SLOVENIAN VET SYSTEM

In Slovenia every VET school is required to use 11 indicators (ten of these are the EQAVET indicators) for self-evaluation. The same 11 indicators are used in peer reviews and external evaluations. Information from these internal and external evaluations are used to prepare a national quality report on the VET system. This report is published and presented to the Council of experts in the Ministry for Education, Science and Sport. The most recent report highlighted there was more work to be done to improve the quality of self-evaluation and there was a need to strengthen the links between the data that has been collected by VET schools and their development plans. From 2016-2018 the National Institute for Vocational Education and Training will develop a methodology for self-evaluation and a structure for the self-evaluation reports which are published by VET schools. The EQAVET indicators are not used by inspectors; in the accreditation process or in the review of headteachers' performance.

At the VET provider level, the case studies looked at:

THE KURESSAARE REGIONAL TRAINING CENTRE, ESTONIA

Kuressaare Ametikool (the regional training centre on the island of Saaremaa) has worked with the boat building and small craft sector to support innovation and improve the quality of initial training. Using the EFQM excellence model⁶, the centre has increasingly focused on adult learners returning to formal education. Taking account of changes in the small craft and boat building industry, the training centre redesigned the curriculum and developed a new procedure for recognising employers as work-based training centres for learners. The quality and quantity of training has increased (as measured by the national and school's key performance indicators which are based on EQAVET) and employers have supported the centre in developing a new curriculum which combines the skills of constructing traditional wooden boats with the use of more technologically advanced construction materials and techniques.

THE TALLINN POLYTECHNIC SCHOOL, ESTONIA

Changes in national legislation created the need for more electricians to be qualified to work outdoors on large-scale distribution networks. The Tallinn Polytechnic School has worked with the largest Estonian network of companies (Estonian Association of Electrical Enterprises) to understand what in-company training is needed to respond to this legislative change. There was agreement that the existing Level 4 qualification for electricians needed to be updated (an example of using EQAVET indicator 9 - *mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market*) and training needed to be work-based (an example of using EQAVET indicator 6 - *utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace*). The first two cohorts of learners began training in 2016 and graduated in 2017, the second two cohorts began in 2017. By working closely with employers, particularly the largest electricity distributor in Estonia - OÜ Elektrilevi, the Tallinn Polytechnic School has been able to gain the confidence and trust of the sector and train electricians who are able to meet the new legislative expectations.

THE LIEPAJA'S VOCATIONAL SCHOOL, LATVIA

This case study looked at three examples of how the EQAVET indicators have been used to support improvements in the quality of provision and respond quickly to the needs of the labour market. Within a system set by the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia, the Liepaja Vocational School has used the EQAVET indicators to monitor the demands of employers and strengthen the employment opportunities for local people e.g. in the:

⁶ <http://www.efqm.org/the-efqm-excellence-model>

- **logistics** sector the school worked with international companies to support the development of the city as a regional transport hub. This involved meeting the needs of individual companies and ensuring students spend two days each week working and training in a company;
- **metal working** sector the school provided in-service training using modern technology to more than 60 members of staff;
- **welding** sector the school worked with a Danish company to develop and accredit a training programme for local people wishing to re-enter the labour market.

Each programme supports the work of the local authority and is part of the local strategy to encourage investment and job creation in Liepaja.

THE BIOTECHNICAL EDUCATIONAL CENTRE LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA

The centre is a public institution with more than 3,500 students. It offers education and research in secondary, short-term tertiary and adult education related to biotechnical area (veterinary, food technology, nutrition, environment, biotechnology etc.), hospitality and tourism. It uses the EQAVET indicators as the basis for its quality insurance system which is set out below:

One example of how the EQAVET indicators are being used relates to indicator number 8 - prevalence of vulnerable groups. With more than 13.5% of learners having special needs, the Centre:

- prepares an individualised programme (IP) for each learner;
- requires the class teacher to ensure the IP is prepared in cooperation with parents and students, counselling staff and the Centre's IP coordinator;
- ensures an expert checks each IP;
- evaluates (in accordance with the law) every two years the effectiveness of the IP. This involves liaison with parents and students.



DISCUSSION & REFLECTIONS

The case studies illustrate that **individual VET providers are using the EQAVET indicators** – however this was not a universal experience. For many Member States the EQAVET indicators operate ‘behind the scene’ and influence the development of the national or regional system⁷.

This ensures that it is easier to **make decisions on which indicators to use in order to meet system priorities**. As some EQAVET indicators focus on outputs (e.g. indicators 5, 6 and 8) they can be particularly difficult to use as part of an accreditation, evaluation or approval process. This reflects a question which ran throughout the PLA - is there a correct balance between the outcome and process measures of quality? For some participants there was an overemphasis on outcomes and insufficient attention was given to the quality of the VET providers’ processes (e.g. the effectiveness of teaching and learning, and learners’ experiences during their training).

The EQAVET indicators are equally useful for accreditation, evaluation or approval at the VET provider level. However some EQAVET indicators are designed to operate at the system level (e.g. number 9 - *mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market* and number 10 - *schemes used to promote better access to VET*) and consequently it is more appropriate to collect data at this level. This matters because there are different aims behind accreditation, evaluation and approval e.g. accreditation and approval are often the basis for authorising a VET provider to award a diploma or offer a programme or area of study; the aim of evaluation at the system level could be to provide feedback, assign a grade or ranking to an individual VET provider, or inform policy decisions. Given the different aims of these processes, it is likely that different EQAVET indicators will be important.

The EQAVET indicators help to establish long term trends, both at the system and provider level. However the accreditation/approval process is often based on a ‘moment in time’ and this means there may be a need for other criteria to be included in the process.

There was a detailed discussion on many aspects of **how to collect and use data as part of an accreditation, approval or evaluation process**. Participants noted that:

⁷ In some systems the EQAVET indicators are used at the national level even though the VET providers do not recognise the indicators are based on the EQAVET Recommendation.

- sometimes the data that is used for accreditation/approval is based on historical information rather than considering what a VET provider will do in the future;
- too often data appears to be collected because 'it is a good idea' rather than because it will be used to make decisions, change practice or report on effectiveness. Participants argued that it can be better to collect less data; be clearer about how data will be used; and ensure that it is only data that is needed that is collected. Without a clear reason and purpose for collecting data (which should be agreed before the data is collected) there can be resistance to providing information and a perception that quality assurance is a bureaucratic process. And in an environment where teachers and trainers are asked to take on an increasingly wide range of tasks and responsibilities, it is important to be clear about why all the data that is collected is needed, and how it will be used;
- there was agreement that there can be an over-reliance on quantitative data and this creates self-evaluation reports which fail to give a full picture of the quality of provision. There was a recognition that more qualitative information (e.g. the learners' experiences; the quality of the teaching and learning processes) was needed to inform the quality reports from VET providers and at the system level;
- to be effective, there is a need to collect and analyse relevant, useful and accurate data (e.g. EQAVET indicator number 2 - *investment in training of teachers and trainers* did not provide useful information for providers. What matters is how the teachers and trainers use their training and the impact this has on learners' outcomes);
- collecting data is time-consuming, expensive and not as reliable as some people want. Too often the response rates to questionnaires are low and this makes the data less reliable and difficult to analyse;
- while some measures have been taken to track learners' progress much more could be done to ensure the long-term nature of the impact that VET has on individuals' careers and progress at work;
- indicators (especially when used for accreditation/approval) should measure what is important rather than the data that is easy to collect.

There was agreement on [the importance of indicators \(whether they were the EQAVET or other indicators\)](#) because all VET providers wanted to know how well they were doing; how they could be assured about how well they are doing; and what they should do next. Without indicators they were not able to answer these questions and this made it more difficult to manage and lead their VET schools. The EQAVET indicators (when they are used) provide a solution for VET providers and, as long as they are used in an holistic way, give VET managers and leaders a good understanding of the quality of their provision. The VET providers' use of a set of indicators also increases the confidence of inspectors, external evaluators, awarding bodies and accreditation committees.

EMERGING POLICY ISSUES

There was agreement that the [EQAVET indicators can be used to support accreditation, evaluation or approval processes](#). However the PLA participants stressed the importance of having one set of expectations i.e. it is unhelpful when VET providers use EQAVET indicators and a second set of nationally agreed indicators. This problem can be avoided when the EQAVET indicators are part of, or aligned with the national approach.

As accreditation or approval is based on an holistic judgement of a VET provider's potential to offer training and qualifications, the [indicators need to reflect this holistic approach](#). This has a number of implications in an EQAVET context:

- the **balance between process and outcome quality**. Without a sufficient focus on the quality of the processes used by the VET provider (e.g. the effectiveness of teaching and learning) an accreditation process can undervalue the learners' experiences;
- the **balance between indicators which are historic and those which predict the future quality of provision**;
- the **importance of collecting a sufficient amount of data** (especially from employers) to give accrediting/approving authorities confidence that a comprehensive picture of the quality of provision is being considered;
- understanding the **longer term progress that learners make following the completion of a programme**. Asking a small sample of learners whether they are employed in a relevant area generates some information but this is incomparable to the information that can be collected using longer term tracking systems;
- it is important to **distinguish between data which is 'nice to know' and data which can be used to improve the quality of VET provision**.