

POLICY BRIEF

This note summarises the results of a Peer Learning Activity, which has been prepared by an independent expert. The report is based on a peer learning activity where policymakers and practitioners from a number of countries exchanged ideas and experiences on an issue of shared policy interest. This report reflects the opinions of the participants and does not constitute an official European Commission or ENQA-VET position.

**Peer
Learning
Activity**

On Quality Assurance procedures on Accreditation

Countries taking part: AU, CZ, CY, DE, EE, FI, IT, LU, NL, MT, NO, RO, PT, SI, UK

SUMMARY

This policy note is based on the peer learning activity (PLA) held in Rome in April 2009. It brings together the contributions made by 15 European countries reflecting on accreditation as an instrument to assure quality on VET providing institutions (full PLA report is available on the Network's website at www.engavet.eu).

<p>INSTRUMENT</p>	<p>ENQA-VET's peer learning activities are an important tool in promoting quality assurance (QA) in Vocational Education and Training (VET), supporting mutual learning between Member States and play an important role in the implementation of the ENQA-VET work programme.</p> <p><i>Peer learning is a policy learning strategy that includes knowledge sharing and utilises local experience on a relevant policy topic.</i></p> <p>PLAs must be viewed in the context of the Open Method of Coordination which is based on promoting mutual trust by disseminating best practices, respecting subsidiarity in the education field and achieving greater convergence among Member States towards European goals.</p>
<p>PLA OBJECTIVE</p>	<p>WHY A PLA ON QA PROCEDURES FOR ACCREDITATION OF VET PROVIDERS?</p> <p>This peer learning activity aimed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promote cooperation in quality assurance (QA) procedures for accreditation of VET institutions; • build on common methodological approaches which improve and contribute to a shared understanding of QA procedures for accreditation processes fostering mutual recognition of VET provision; and • disseminate best practice on the management of change and improvement in accreditation procedures for VET.
<p>DEFINITION</p> <p>EMERGING POLICY ISSUES</p>	<p>Accreditation of VET providers is a "monitoring measure, which is close to control, used in many Member States to harmonise and legitimate a wide variety of VET providers. This means compelling VET providers to meet a set of fixed minimum standards" (European Commission, 2005).</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation can be used as an instrument to assure the quality of VET provision, however; • Accreditation for VET providers does not alone assure quality. • Internal quality management (e.g. self-evaluation) must also be put in place. <hr/> <p>Common issues related to introducing an accreditation system for VET providers:</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation, as an external monitoring measure which conforms to requirements specified in a set of standards, is perceived by VET providers as a matter of accountability rather than of continuous improvement. • Accreditation is seen as a control-bureaucratic measurement linked to financial incentives. • Unmotivated providers need to be persuaded of the internal added-value of the accreditation process.

<p>POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS at European Level</p>	<p>How to enhance the quality assurance aspect of accreditation?</p> <hr/> <p>An accreditation system of VET providers should:</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become an instrument to assure confidence of the quality of VET in Europe • Increase transparency of VET provision among Member States • Aim to build mutual recognition of VET provision fostering learners/labour mobility and comparability of qualifications • Have a shared understanding of accreditation procedures without implying a unified European accreditation system.
<p>At National Level</p>	<p>The accreditation system for VET provision should:</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be centrally controlled or consist of a unique system with a robust legal base • Integrate regional/local needs • Recognise and build on existing internal processes • Ensure close cooperation with VET providers and other relevant stakeholders (such as social partners) • Allow improvement beyond the accountability factor of the accreditation system • Be compatible and reflect European frameworks and tools (i.e. EQARF, EQF, ECVET) • Be simple and non-bureaucratic • Be monitored and reviewed continually • Be well funded • Possess quality experts as auditors responsible for the accreditation process • Focus on organisational quality as much as on content and training process needs
<p>At Providers Level</p>	<p>VET providers should be involved in the accreditation process, in order to:</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build motivation and commitment within the accreditation process • Reduce the perception that the accreditation system is about external control • Incentivise them to take greater ownership for their own quality control and quality development as a result of the accreditation process • Ensure the internal added value of the accreditation system • Have a shared understanding and values of the accreditation procedures • Focus on non-financial consequences for those who do not meet the standards • Include their particular needs in the accreditation system • Be accountable as much as be encouraged towards gradual improvement/s of the system
<p>ANALYSIS: reporting according to EQARF</p> <p>Purpose and Plan</p>	<p><i>The PLA on quality assurance procedures for accreditation provides an interesting example of the use of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF) as the instrument to exchange experiences and capture best practices. In countries where an accreditation system is in place, the following emerges:</i></p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In most countries, the accreditation system is aimed at both accountability and improvement of the VET system • Generally, the accreditation system is mandatory

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The accreditation body is governmental or semi-governmental (at both national and regional level) • Countries do not always consider the accreditation process as a way toward mutual recognition of VET providers at national level
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally, the object of the accreditation system is the VET providing institution/ programme (only in UK the object is the qualification and the awarding bodies) • Social Partners are not involved in the accreditation process • There is a lack of students' participation in the accreditation process • All countries have similar methodological procedures put in place, which include self evaluation, site visits and document analysis (audits, stakeholders surveys and product inspection are rarely among the method used)
Assessment and Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspectorates, where they exist, are rarely involved in the assessment of the accreditation system • In all Member States, the evaluation of the system is weak, not existing at all or conducted internally (only UK applies external audits by ISO –ISO9000) • The use of performance indicators is in general limited and varies among the actors involved in the accreditation process
Feedback and Procedures for Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In general, there are no feedback procedures put in place • The results of the accreditation system's evaluation are not translated into a determined action plan • There is a lack of appropriate structures and processes to ensure the inclusion of input from the social partners'
CHALLENGES for QA procedures on Accreditation	<p>Participants have identified the following challenges faced by QA procedures for accreditation of VET providers</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find the mechanisms to motivate providers to engage in the accreditation process • Introduce QA improvements within an established system • Design of an efficient model for accreditation whereby QA improvements are guaranteed without increasing bureaucracy and managerial cost • Create linkages between the accreditation system and a lifelong learning approach of VET provision • Reach general acceptance of the system by all stakeholders, fostering transparency • Develop links between accreditation of programme/institution and learning outcomes