

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 (QA) procedures for Student Assessment

Countries taking part: AT, CY, CZ, EE, FI, IE, IT, LU, NL, RO, UK

SUMMARY

This policy note is based on the PLA held in Helsinki in November 2008 -and brings together the contributions made by participants from 11 European countries reflecting on quality assurance procedures for the assessment of student's knowledge, skills and competences at European, national and regional level (full PLA report is available on the Network's website at www.engavet.eu).

POLICY CONTEXT

In Lisbon 2001, ministers in charge of education and training in the EU agreed to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" by 2010. Education and training are crucial to economic and social change. The flexibility and security needed to achieve more and better jobs depend on ensuring that all citizens acquire key competences and update their skills throughout their lives. Lifelong learning supports creativity and innovation and enables full economic and social participation

PLA OBJECTIVE

Rationale for PLA on Quality Assurance procedures for student assessment

Vocational Education and Training (VET) plays a key role in this process as a result of its direct link to employment and social cohesion

Within VET, **student assessment is** a key issue as the assessment of student' learning outcomes conditions the quality, equity and efficiency of VET.

The main functions of assessment are:

- Evaluate the level of specific knowledge, skills and competencies, related to a norm or criterion (i.e. standard), for a specific individual or target group and for different purposes (e.g. passing to another level of education, selection, employment, promotion etc.).
- Provide feed-back on progress and thus, motivate learners and increase learning.
- Evaluate the learning process itself (judging the level of adequacy of the learning situations).
- Evaluate the curricular aims and objectives in relation to beneficiaries' needs and policy goals.



Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) provide an opportunity for policymakers and practitioners from one country to learn from the experiences of their counterparts elsewhere in Europe through direct contact and practical cooperation. The objective is to share best practice and engage in a process of reflection on the implications for policy making.

This sharing of experiences with other systems is of particular importance in **delivering quality assurance in VET.**

The PLA on Quality Assurance (QA) procedures for student assessment impacts in two ways:



It promotes shared assessment mechanisms and ensures better knowledge of the level of performance and recognition of competences among Member States which increase transparency and trust, facilitating labour mobility

It fosters new forms of procedures to motivate learners by offering positive and constructive (feedback) on their progress which offers a solid base for lifelong and life-wide learning perspective.

EMERGING POLICY ISSUES

from the PLA on Quality Assurance procedures for Student Assessment

- **Trust, decentralisation and empowerment of all actors** (teachers/trainers, schools/enterprises, pupils/apprentices, social partners/employers).
- Involvement of **VET providers** in student assessment.
- **Upskilling of trainers and teachers** in order to satisfy the **learner's** and **labour market needs.**
- **European peer reviews and/or external evaluation** can solve the problem of the lack of common European procedures and bodies for awards.

Some obstacles:

- 1) lack of **employer's involvement** in student assessment;
- 2) **limited, non empirical based or lack of systematic methodologies** for student assessment **reviews/feed back** procedures;
- 3) **lack of agreed outputs and outcomes** - i.e., lack of indicators;
- 4) lack of available information for **disadvantaged groups**;
- 5) lack of provision for **student involvement in assessment.**

<p>POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS At European level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to set up common principles which can support the establishment of the school-enterprise relationship in student assessment. • Need to further develop the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). • Common concepts, standards and procedures for awards covering awarding bodies, awarding procedures and student's evaluation/monitoring. • Strengthening the convergence of VET policies concerning student assessment. • Need for structures to help motivate and involve employers in student assessment. • Rethink public funding for VET within a common European coherence framework. • Ensure common mechanisms to match student assessment results with labour market needs.
<p>At National level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop National Qualifications Frameworks, national standards covering all sector and levels. • Need for unified national procedures for student assessment common to IVET and CVET. • Trust, accountability and empowerment of VET providers in student assessment processes. • Assessment methodologies should balance national steering and local initiatives. • Further development of systems and procedures for evaluation and recognition of prior learning. • Reinforce the principle of evidence based assessment and evidence based decision making.
<p>At Enterprise level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance between work based assessment and school based assessment (theory vs practice). • Update the training and role of assessors according to specific sectoral and labour needs.
<p>At VET-college level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student self-evaluation should have more consistent function in the overall assessment mechanism. • Assessment should be embedded into the "normal" organisational life of VET provision. • Assessment procedures should lead to further learning or be seen as a learning experience for both assessor and assessed. • Competence tests independent of how the vocational skills have been acquired. • Accelerate people's transition to further and higher education.
<p>ANALYSIS: reporting according to CQAF</p> <p>Purpose and Plan</p>	<p><i>The PLA on quality assurance procedures for student assessment provides an interesting example in the use the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF) as the instrument to exchange experiences and capture best practices. The following emerged:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often national procedures for student assessment are different for IVET and CVET. • There are different definitions of "competences" among Member States. • Generally, there are national procedures for student assessment but the degree of generalisation differs among Member Countries.
<p>Implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When procedures for student assessment in IVET and CVET differ, CVET tends to be less "centrally" controlled. • There are different ways of regulating the relationship between schools and enterprises in student assessment among Member States. • In most countries, there are both work-based assessment and school assessment. • Many Member States do not have specific regulations in relation to training and qualification of assessors (standards included).

Assessment and Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanisms for evaluating and monitoring student assessment are organised very differently (e.g. supervision, inspection by regional/national authorities, external appointed observed/experts as member of external committees, statistical surveys at national/regional level, feedback from students). • Very often, assessment mechanisms are more concerned with monitoring than with evaluating.
Feedback and Procedures for Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally, regulation institutions and providers share the responsibility for communication and for distributing information among relevant stockholders. • There are limited, non empirical based or non systematic methodologies for student assessment reviews/feedback procedures.
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanisms for matching student assessment results with the labour market vary among Member States (e.g. use of national indicators, research studies, regulating institutions involving social partners, market lead strategies and policies).

CHALLENGES for QA procedures in student assessment	Participants identified five major challenges faced by QA procedures for student assessment:
Structural Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconciliation of IVET and CVET assessment frameworks. • Balance common framework/standards/tools and cultural/national/sectoral difference and needs. • Feedback and review procedures to inform the decision making process (i.e. evidence based decision making).
Curricula Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find the appropriate balance between theory and practice for each sector, level and qualification. • Find the appropriate balance between work-based assessment and school based assessment for each sector, level and qualification. • Stakeholders' involvement and commitment in any change and/or reform undertaken.
Challenges in relation to Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality is a matter of values/culture rather than a technical one. • Make VET more attractive.
Measurement Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective, transparent and shared assessment mechanisms in order to develop a European dimension of VET and common instruments for quality in VET. • Integrate and evaluate competences acquired in different context.
Current demographic & economic Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scarcity of resources to implement the approaches required. • Increasing mobility of students, workers and qualification holders.