

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 the Role of Social partners in Quality Procedures in Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Countries taking part: AT, CY, CZ, DE, DK, FI, IR, IT, LT, LU, MT, NO, PL, SE, SI

SUMMARY

This policy note is based on the PLA held in Berlin in October 2008, which was attended by representatives from trade unions and employers organisations from 15 countries (full PLA report can be found at www.enqavet.eu).

*The objective of the PLA was to explore the **role/involvement of social partners in assuring and improving the quality of VET systems.***

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. Life long learning supports creativity and innovation and enables full economic and social participation

PLA OBJECTIVE

Rationale for PLA on the role of social partners in Quality Assurance (QA) procedures in VET

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 the Lisbon's objectives and VET context, the social partners play an important role as they have a long tradition in contributing to developing training at different levels.

The social partners objective is to meet the needs of the future with a skilled work force; i.e., they link education and training with labour market needs.

Cooperation between VET institutions and social partners is crucial in order to achieve the skill needs of a knowledge driven economy.



Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) provide an opportunity for policymakers and practitioners from one organisation or 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 and effectiveness/ relevance of VET.**

The PLA on the role of social partners in Quality Assurance (QA) procedures for VET is expected to impact in two ways:



It will develop common quality structures and promote the inclusion of social partners in decision making process for quality in VET, which will enhance mutual trust and possibilities for a more united European labour market

It will upgrade VET leading to better practical value of the training results better employability of the skilled workforce increase the competitiveness of enterprises via innovation and knowledge which promotes growth and greater social cohesion

EMERGING POLICY ISSUES

from the PLA on the role of social partners in QA procedures in VET

- **The social partner organisations have a major role to play in VET** and it should be a basic principle in assuring the quality of VET.
- **Cooperation and exchanges of experience with national Chambers** can replace the lack of quality assurance procedures in small and medium size enterprises (SME).
- **Decentralisation** of responsibilities and empowerment of social partners in every stage in the development of QA procedures for VET is important.
- **Trainers and teachers need constant upskilling to ensure that they understand** the needs of the workplace (i.e. practical company-based training).

Some obstacles:

- 1) social partners' **lack of information** in the procedures for quality assurance in VET.
- 2) **lack of inclusion** of social partners in the procedures for quality assurance in VET.
- 3) **lack of appropriate structures** and processes which ensure the maximum social partners' involvement.
- 4) **lack of awareness of EQARF** among social partner organisations.

<p>POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS At European level</p> <p>At National level</p> <p>At Enterprise level</p> <p>At VET-college level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to develop common European references in order to increase transparency and consistency in national policies initiatives in VET; however, • Ensure balance between the establishment and use of European tools and frameworks in QA and national/sectoral peculiarities. • Implement a more systematic measurement of outputs and outcomes as part of the EQARF quality circle (i.e. in terms of employability of graduates). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modernisation of training regulations according to (changing) companies' needs. • Same standards in all regions of the country and an overall framework for VET systems. • Motivate and attract more SMEs to participation in VET. • Social partners must be consulted in the decision making process of QA in VET. • Increase awareness of EQARF in all bodies and organisations which are relevant to VET. • Inclusion of representatives of employers and trade unions in the quality assurance national reference points (QANRPs). • Establishment of national registers of training providers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality assurance should be assured in work based learning and not just in VET school and training centres. • Upgrade the training of the trainers in a work based setting. • Need for a coherent lifelong learning approach. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality assurance should be guaranteed in both initial VET and continuous VET. • Need to ensure a more demand driven education in order to achieve employability of graduates. • Social partners' involvement in setting up vocational and pedagogical standards for instructors' training.
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<p>Trade Unions vs Employers recommendations</p>	<p>Trade Unions (main focus: societal implications)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training to support personal development and career path: evolution of workers inside/outside company. • Protection against precariousness: access to education. • Key aspects: worker's needs and training regulations. • Cost training responsibility: employers and/ or public authorities. • Training must guarantee and facilitate transferability of competences (i.e. not only adapted to job). 	<p>Employers (main focus: effectiveness of VET)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of individual competences in line with company performance and competitiveness. • Need to make initial education closer to company needs. • Training programmes adapted to market needs. • More responsibility of workers to progress in their training-process. • Informal training within company should be recognised and focused mostly on the job and comply with company needs.
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<p>ANALYSIS: reporting according to CQAF</p> <p>Purpose and Plan</p>	<p><i>The PLA on quality assurance procedures for the role of Social Partners in quality assurance procedures in VET provides an interesting example in the use the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) as the instrument to exchange experiences and capture best practices. The following emerged:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In all Member countries, social partners are involved in the planning process. • Social partners' participation ranges from: involvement on political strategies for VET, to setting up new curricula, to drafting the content of VET courses, to developing standards.
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Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the delivery of apprenticeship training, social partner organisations in particular employers, fulfil their stronger role concerning the provision of quality in VET. In school based VET systems, social partners in cooperation with VET schools, regional enterprises and professional bodies, take part in the implementation process. Social partners are often involved in the organisation of work placement for VET-students. Social partners are often involved in the practical training of teacher within enterprises.
Assessment and Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very often, social partner organisations (Chambers) are co-organisers of examinations. In some cases, social partners supervise craft examinations or control counselors. Rarely are social partners involved in the governing boards of awarding bodies.
Feedback and Procedures for Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being responsible for the introduction of new curricula and the changing of outdated educational content, social partners are strongly involved in review procedures. Sometimes, social partners are involved in consultation processes at different levels (at regional, VET-school and/or enterprise level).
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The resources for participation in quality procedures come mostly from public bodies, national ministries, public employment services, regional governments or awarding bodies. In some countries, European Structural Funds are the most important resource. Very often, resources are too tight to fulfill QA requirements for VET. To avoid bureaucracy, in some contexts the administration of new funding schemes is done by the Chambers.

CHALLENGES for QA procedures for WBL	Five major challenges were identified by participants:
Structural Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of common structures, like national and/or European qualification frameworks. Balance between economic targets and social inclusion. Guarantee transparency within the existing complexity of VET provision. Support EQARF to become the reference for developing QA on all levels of lifelong learning. Company based practical training for VET teachers.
Curricula Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How to involve social partners in the processes of making future curricula or adapting existing ones.
Challenges in relation to Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How to assure that employees and employers participate in QA processes. How to implement any internal quality management approach including EQARF in small companies for apprenticeship training in the workplace. Development of quality indicators which can measure both placement rate and prevalence of vulnerable groups.
Measurement Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of systematic outputs and outcomes measurements as part of the QA.
Current demographic and economic Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member States face a change in developing lifelong learning strategies which cater for growing numbers of immigrants. High drop-out is a common challenge, particularly when developing policies to cater for the needs of "at risk" groups.