



The EQAVET Network's view on quality assurance in VET – based on the reflections of the 2017-18 working group

INTRODUCTION

1. During EQAVET's 2017 annual network meeting in Malta there was agreement to establish a working group to look at emerging VET policy developments and reflect strategically on how, from 2020, the quality assurance of VET could be strengthened at a European level. This would support policymakers engaged in EU level discussions relating to quality assurance. The EQAVET network agreed that this work *should enable reflection on strategic developments beyond 2020 and the role EQAVET should play, considering the potential revision of EQAVET in 2019*. This group's reflections are part of the [work programme for the EQAVET network](#).
2. The working group's mandate invited the group to:
 - consider and identify priorities for the quality assurance of VET within the context of the New Skills Agenda for Europe;
 - take account of European initiatives (e.g. the Quality and Effectiveness Framework for Apprenticeships, the revised EQF) and developments in Member States e.g. higher level apprenticeships;
 - prepare early ideas on any revised EQAVET Recommendation;
 - provide the expertise to ensure that EQAVET contributes to the developing policy context and any associated future changes in governance, methodology and focus.
3. The working group met in the Netherlands on three occasions between November 2017 and April 2018. The group included representatives from the European social partners and the European agencies; and Member State experts with extensive experience of implementing the Recommendation. The composition of the group provided an opportunity for an evidence-based discussion which could support any revision. The group also considered national and emerging European trends in VET particularly those identified in research from Member States, European and international institutions, and Cedefop¹.
4. Within the context of a wide range of VET systems across Europe, the working group discussed ten strategic issues (set out in paragraphs 18 – 49). These form the basis for this report which was discussed and agreed at EQAVET's 2018 annual network meeting in Bulgaria.

¹ Looking Back to Look Ahead, Cedefop, 2017, <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/9123>

BACKGROUND

5. Since the publication of the 2009 EQAVET Recommendation, VET has continued to change. Cedefop's September 2017 publication² on current trends in VET and their December 2017 publication³ on the changing nature of VET identified the following:
 - a greater focus on practical knowledge;
 - diversification of VET provision;
 - easier access to higher education;
 - new VET pathways for adults;
 - small improvements in the parity of esteem between vocational and academic pathways;
 - the growing importance of learning outcomes.

6. The Cedefop research highlighted two emerging (but different) trends in Europe:
 - a strengthening of VET as a work-based training opportunity (e.g. in AT, DE and DK) with expansion into higher education;
 - a diversification of VET in order to provide more lifelong learning opportunities (e.g. FR and FI).

These trends are not mutually exclusive, and Cedefop notes it is possible for countries to be moving simultaneously in both directions.

7. Cedefop's conclusions include the following observations which can inform the development of European level cooperation in VET:
 - while traditional VET at upper secondary level is under pressure in some European countries, the overall role of VET in the education and training system is strong;
 - the traditional distinctions between the sub-sections of education (general, VET and higher education), and initial and continuing VET are not always appropriate;
 - policy cooperation to promote vocationally-oriented learning requires a focus on education and training systems, and cooperation measures which ensure dialogue with society and the labour market;
 - the expansion and diversification of VET is a response to the challenges posed by technology, the labour market and society in general;
 - the trend towards a more diverse and less 'clear-cut' VET system can make it more difficult for groups at risk to benefit;
 - the increased attention being paid to lifelong learning will require policies which support and allow for progression between different types and levels of education and training.

8. The Directors-General group for VET (DGVT) discussed emerging trends during their October 2017 meeting in Tallinn. The group considered:
 - the future place of VET in the education and training system;
 - how to make VET future proof;
 - how young people and adult learners can be supported to develop skills which support long-term employability to empower them to cope with the increasing pace of technological developments;
 - how EU policies can help to facilitate the modernisation of VET.

² <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/9123>

³ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/changing-nature-and-role-vocational-education-and-training-vet-europe/publications>

9. DGVT concluded that they did not expect major disruptions to the education and training sector, and VET would continue to provide an important role in equipping learners with the skills needed by the labour market and society. They also noted the increasingly blurred boundaries between VET and higher education with a greater emphasis on work-based learning. They agreed there was a need to maintain a balance between a stable VET system and the need for VET to be flexible and respond to emerging skills needs. There was agreement that work-based learning is increasingly important for all systems including those with a more traditional school-based approach and those with extensive experience of apprenticeship training.

SUMMARY OF THE WORKING GROUP'S DISCUSSION

10. There was agreement that 'the working group should develop a proposal for change'⁴.
11. The working group focused on strengthening the quality assurance of VET within the European context rather than limiting the discussion to the reform of the EQAVET Recommendation. This focus included reflections on the two annexes of the Recommendation, the further development of the EQAVET+ documentation, and the quality assurance arrangements in other European instruments. Within this context the working group agreed it would be helpful if any revision to the European approach focused on the quality assurance cycle (set out in the EQAVET Recommendation) and included:
- a set of common quality assurance principles for VET;
 - all types of VET e.g. school and provider based, work-based, apprenticeships, non-formal and informal, e-based, blended, initial and continuing;
 - all areas of VET i.e. each step in the education and training process should be covered by a quality assurance process. This would include the design, validation and recognition of qualifications; curriculum development; learning approaches; assessment and certification;
 - a clear view on strategic issues which affect the implementation, sustainability, evaluation and effectiveness of any quality assurance approach;
 - provider and system level issues;
 - synergies with recent and forthcoming developments in European instruments which affect VET.

EU PRINCIPLES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE OF VET

12. Assuming one purpose or expected outcome for any review of the VET instruments is to support excellence in VET and strengthen the culture of continuous quality improvement from a European perspective, it is important to bear in mind the objectives of the EQAVET Recommendation i.e. to support and supplement Member States' actions by facilitating further action between them to increase transparency of VET, employability and social inclusion; and to promote mobility and lifelong learning. These objectives are particularly important as they reflect the principle of subsidiarity, support the voluntary nature of the Recommendation, and acknowledge that European level actions focus on supporting Member States.
13. As part of its discussion, the working group considered principles which support the quality assurance of VET which has a social and economic role within the context of lifelong learning. The group noted that the principles in the EQAVET Recommendation

⁴ Minutes from the second meeting of the working group

are implicit rather than explicit. This differs from other European instruments where there is often a definitive list of principles e.g. the quality assurance of qualifications in the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning⁵, the Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning - NFIL⁶, the 2015 revision of European Standards and Guidelines⁷, and the EU's working group on schools⁸.

14. Based on the working group's reflections on other European instruments, the group confirmed the importance of making explicit connections to the quality assurance principles of the EQF and the value of the following:

- the systematic use of the quality assurance cycle;
- the voluntary use or guiding role of an agreed set of indicators and indicative descriptors;
- quality assurance should apply to:
 - ✓ all forms of initial and continuing VET i.e. full-time, part-time, distance learning, digital learning, school and work based;
 - ✓ all areas of VET including inputs, structures, processes, outputs and outcomes at the system and provider level (as set out in paragraphs 15 - 17);
 - ✓ all qualification levels of VET;
 - ✓ provider and system-level quality assurance processes;
- a strong voice for stakeholders including those representing the labour market, the teaching and training professions, and wider society;
- (based on a principle in the ESG) VET providers, in line with systems designed by national or regional authorities, are responsible for the quality of their provision and its assurance;
- (based on a quality assurance principle for school education) VET providers, in line with systems designed by national or regional authorities, will want to take considered risks in order to innovate and develop;
- ensure the prominence of the voice and views of learners as they have much to contribute to:
 - ✓ quality assurance systems and processes;
 - ✓ the quality assurance and improvement of teaching and learning;
- quality assurance approaches should be as simple as possible and respond to regional/national/European developments.

AREAS TO BE COVERED

15. The working group emphasised the need for all areas of VET to be quality assured. This includes inputs, structures, processes and outputs/outcomes at the VET system and provider level.

⁵ See Annexe iv of the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the EQF (2017/c 189/03) <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ceed970-518f-11e7-a5ca-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

⁶ See the Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/C 398/01) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29>

⁷ See page 8 of the 2015 revision of European Standards and Guidelines <http://www.ehea.info/cid105593/esg.html>

⁸ See Quality assurance for school development, 2018 EU working group on schools https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/expert-groups/schools_en

16. Within the first area (VET inputs, structures and processes) quality assurance should, as a minimum, cover:

- the design, validation and recognition of qualifications;
- the development and content of the curriculum including the links to learning outcomes;
- the initial and on-going training for teachers and trainers;
- learning/teaching/coaching and other forms of pedagogy including learner centred approaches;
- the assessment and certification processes;
- the development and maintenance of VET providers' quality culture;
- the management of the human resources needed for VET provision;
- the governance, leadership and management of VET provision;
- how VET providers respond to the needs of individual learners, the labour market and society's expectations;
- the provision of careers guidance and counselling and how information about these mechanisms and approaches are made available to individuals (taken from the European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning⁹).

17. Within the second area (VET outputs/outcomes) quality assurance should, as a minimum, cover:

- assessment decisions;
- the award of certificates/qualifications;
- the mutual recognition of qualifications;
- the communication of learners' results;
- the monitoring of learners' progression to employment and/or further learning;
- the tracking of learners' progress over time (to align with the Council's 2017 Recommendation on tracking graduates);
- the extent to which the skills acquired by learners meet the needs of the work environment.

STRATEGIC ISSUES

18. The working group's discussion identified ten strategic issues to consider in any review of the European approach to the quality assurance of VET. These were:

- i. whether to focus on the whole of the Recommendation or the quality assurance framework as set out in the annexes to the Recommendation;
- ii. the coverage of all areas of VET and the need to ensure close connections with the indicators and indicative descriptors;
- iii. the indicators – including a discussion on whether to reduce their number and/or introduce a model based on 'core plus options';
- iv. the indicative descriptors – including a discussion on whether to increase or reduce their number and ensure they are aligned with the indicators, evolving EU policy on VET, and all areas of VET;
- v. reporting and/or monitoring the use of the quality assurance framework. This covered tracking, benchmarking, peer review and reporting;
- vi. connectedness – links to the HE/school/NFIL instruments and the forthcoming Recommendation on the mutual recognition of qualifications;

⁹ The appendix (page 10) to the ELGPN's (formerly European lifelong guidance policy network) guidance on the Quality assurance and Effectiveness Framework also includes information on quality assuring the effectiveness of careers education, information, guidance and counselling. <http://www.elgpn.eu/publications>

- vii. sustainability and how to ensure any new policy instrument can be supported and its key features sustained over a number of years;
- viii. dissemination and how to ensure the users of any new policy instrument become aware of the changes, and understand the implied and explicit messages associated with these changes;
- ix. the value of placing employers (who also have a training role) and learners at the centre of the quality assurance process;
- x. whether to focus quality assurance at the system, provider or both levels. The discussion also considered how to ensure any proposal at the system level can be implemented or connected to the provider level.

Issue i - the Recommendation or the framework

19. The EQAVET Recommendation describes a framework rather than prescribing a quality assurance system. This framework is based on the four stage cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation and review which is central to many quality assurance systems. The Recommendation aims to help Member States to promote and monitor continuous improvement of their VET systems based on common European references, to increase transparency and consistency in VET policy developments which helps to promote mutual trust, mobility of workers and learners, and lifelong learning. The Recommendation includes a set of indicators, indicative descriptors and quality criteria (annexes I and II of the Recommendation).

20. In addition to the quality assurance framework, the Recommendation invites Member States to:

- use and further develop the framework, quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators;
- devise (involving the social partners, regional and local authorities and other relevant stakeholders) an approach aimed at improving quality assurance systems at the national and provider levels;
- participate in the EQAVET network;
- establish a Quality Assurance National Reference Point (NRP);
- undertake a review of the implementation of the framework every four years.

21. The working group considered the features of the Recommendation (set out in paragraph 20) as outside their strategic reflections. These features (e.g. participation in the EQAVET network, the creation of an NRP) are operational activities and the group thought that questions of governance need to be considered once the EU VET policy or a set of potential scenarios was agreed.

Issue ii - all relevant areas of VET

22. The EQAVET Recommendation and framework can be used for all areas of VET (e.g. as described in paragraphs 15-17 in this paper). The Recommendation enables individual Member States to use the quality assurance cycle in different ways to cover different aspects of VET. The working group discussed the value of being more explicit about what would be 'in scope' in any review of the European approach to quality assurance in VET. The group agreed the value of a European approach which included each 'step' or 'stage' of the education and training process.

Issue iii - the indicators

23. The ‘toolbox’ nature of the quality assurance framework enables individual Member States to select indicators which most meet their needs. The Recommendation notes that the indicative descriptors and indicators are provided as guidance and may be selected and applied by users of the framework in accordance with all or part of their requirements and existing settings.
24. The work of the EQAVET Secretariat and the reflections in the network illustrate that it is not always easy to use some indicators e.g.:
- indicators 5¹⁰ and 6¹¹ are much less likely to be used, particularly for continuing VET;
 - some indicators are more likely to be influenced by external factors e.g. indicator 7 (the unemployment rate) is a measure of the context of VET and may be more affected by the state of the national economy than the quality of VET provision;
 - some appear to be proxy indicators e.g. indicator 2 (investment in the training of teachers and trainers) could be seen as a way to measure the quality of VET pedagogy.
25. In this context, the group discussed whether a revision of the European approach to the quality assurance of VET provided an opportunity to focus on a smaller group of indicators (either a sub-set of the existing indicators or new indicators which Member States have found particularly useful in measuring the quality of provision and which are linked to VET policy objectives agreed at the European level). The development of a smaller group of indicators could offer an opportunity to identify the most important and relevant measures of quality in the post 2020 environment.
26. As set in paragraph 24 the limited use of some indicators, particularly in relation to continuing VET (as shown by the EQAVET Secretariat survey) could imply that they:
- are not valued so highly by Member States;
 - are difficult to use;
 - do not show the data which the Member State wishes to present;
 - are not particularly relevant for some forms of VET (e.g. work-based programmes, on-line or e-based programmes, continuing VET, apprenticeships etc.);
 - are too heavily influenced by external factors unconnected to quality assurance;
 - are not chosen because the toolbox nature of the Recommendation can be seen as encouraging Member States to make a selection.
27. The working group discussed the idea of core and optional indicators. There was uncertainty about how to identify a core group of indicators – for some the focus would be quantitative; for others the focus would be more qualitative or descriptive. In addition, for some colleagues a core group of indicators should focus on measuring the outcomes from VET: for others the core would cover the effectiveness of the quality assurance processes and the creation of a culture of quality assurance. If a ‘core’ group of indicators is developed it will be important to establish:
- a robust process (which takes account of the views of experts and those with experience of implementing the current indicators) for deciding what to include;
 - agreement on whether the core indicators should be used to monitor progress;
 - whether to use the toolbox approach for those indicators which are not part of the core.

¹⁰ Indicator 5 - Placement rate in VET programmes

¹¹ Indicator 6 - Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace

28. The Recommendation includes indicators which cover context, inputs, outcomes, processes, and outputs. The indicators also include quantitative and qualitative information and data. It is difficult to see how a smaller number of indicators would be able to cover all aspects of the VET context, inputs, outcomes, processes, and outputs.
29. The working group discussed whether the indicators should include an increased emphasis on the perceptions of employers¹² and learners, and whether any review should strengthen this aspect of measuring the quality of VET provision.
30. The working group noted that a great deal of progress had been made in strengthening mutual understanding of how the indicators can be used to support quality assurance¹³. Any change (e.g. the development of a core group of indicators or a reduction in the number of indicators) would have an impact on Member States' quality assurance systems – this is confirmed by the Secretariat surveys which show how existing systems are aligned with the quality framework in the Recommendation.
31. If there are changes to the indicators, Member States may want to use the opportunity to make adjustments at the VET provider level.

Issue iv - the indicative descriptors

32. The indicative descriptors (at the VET system and provider level) were designed to support Member States when they introduced the quality assurance framework – they help those using the quality assurance framework to measure how much progress has been made.
33. In 2016 the EQAVET network established a working group to respond to the findings of the external evaluation and the network's increasing recognition that the framework should reflect recent policy developments. This included reflection on the quality assurance of:
 - apprenticeship/work-based learning provision and in-company training (as part of continuing VET and/or lifelong learning);
 - the processes of defining, describing and assessing learning outcomes;
 - qualification design, assessment and certification;
 - the pedagogical elements related to learning outcomes;
 - teachers and trainers;
 - procedures used in the validation of non-formal and informal learning in line with EQF/NQFs;
 - planning and improving the review phase of the quality assurance cycle.
34. This led to the development of the EQAVET+ network document¹⁴, supporting guidance and case studies. These materials have been agreed by the EQAVET network and are available on the EQAVET website. The development of these materials was based on:
 - an increase in the number of indicative descriptors;
 - additionality and nothing was removed or changed in the Recommendation.

¹² Employers are both trainers and recruiters of learners.

¹³ The EQAVET website contains many publications which help to illustrate and inform the indicators.

¹⁴ See <https://www.eqavet.eu/EU-Quality-Assurance/For-VET-System/Eqavetplus>

35. The working group discussed the emerging trends in VET (as set out in paragraphs 5 - 8) and considered whether EQAVET+ had provided sufficient opportunity to change the indicative descriptors. As the EQAVET+ work was completed within the last year, and there appears to be no emerging new trends it was unclear whether further change to the indicative descriptors was required. However, the group noted that adjustment (which could include reducing or increasing the number of indicative descriptors) would be required if there are changes to EU policy priorities, the EQAVET indicators, the reporting process, the alignment with other European instruments etc.
36. The working group also considered the connections between the indicators and the indicative descriptors. These connections are not always obvious and there are times when there is limited alignment between the indicators and the indicative descriptors e.g. the first indicative descriptor (goals/objectives are described for the medium and long term, and are linked to European goals) does not have an obvious connection to any indicator. In addition VET graduate tracking which is an EU policy priority is not explicitly included in the indicative descriptors.

Issue v - reporting/monitoring

37. As set out in paragraph 20 the implementation of the Recommendation is reviewed every four years. This is based on data collected through the EQAVET Secretariat's survey, the independent external evaluation¹⁵, informal feedback from the DGVT and ACVT discussions, and Cedefop's reporting on the Bruges/Riga processes. The working group noted that these processes did not look at the quality of VET provision in each Member State as measured by the indicators in the quality assurance framework.
38. The working group discussed the potential advantage of a more formal approach to monitoring and reporting on the data produced by the indicators. They considered the ways in which information/data could be produced (e.g. through peer review processes; data collection activities; self-evaluation etc.) and how the information/data could be used (e.g. for comparative processes; to review progress over time; to support a benchmarking process etc.). There was also a discussion on the disadvantages of any monitoring or reporting process.
39. The group recognised that the toolbox nature of the Recommendation is both a strength and a potential weakness – it has encouraged and facilitated all Member States to design a quality assurance approach which aligns with the framework but it has made reporting on progress less reliable. Providing similar information on individual Member States' quality assurance systems and the outcomes from these systems could strengthen mutual trust, support the implementation of the forthcoming Recommendation on mutual recognition of qualifications, and promote mobility. However monitoring and reporting arrangements are not as effective¹⁶ when the framework is based on a toolbox model and Member States select and use different indicators for all or some aspects of VET provision.
40. The working group discussed the ways in which information could be produced and used. In this context there was agreement on the value of a greater use of peer review processes and mutual learning. As the indicators (as set out in paragraphs 23-31) do not

¹⁵ <https://www.eqavet.eu/Materials-Resources/Publications/2013>

¹⁶ This is not a comment on the effectiveness of the quality assurance arrangements. It is a comment on the effectiveness of the European monitoring and reporting processes.

provide the full picture of the quality of VET, there was less support for using data to make comparisons between Member States' systems.

Issue vi - connectedness

41. The Recommendation was designed to take account of the common principles for quality assurance in the EQF and support its implementation, particularly the quality of the certification of learning outcomes. It was also designed to support the implementation of the ECVET Recommendation and the Common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning (paragraph 14 of the EQAVET Recommendation). The working group:
- was supportive of the intention for EQAVET to be connected to the European instruments set out in paragraph 13;
 - noted that some Member States had introduced actions to align the operation of different European instruments;
 - noted that some national agencies had responsibility for more than one European instrument.
42. The working group discussed the quality assurance systems and processes set out in other European instruments and agreed the value of more explicit connections to the EQF, the ESG, the validation of non-formal and informal learning and the quality assurance principles for school education. This reflects the increasingly blurred boundaries between school education and VET; and VET and higher education which have been recognised in Cedefop's research¹⁷. Over recent years higher education institutions have become major providers of VET and this has led to an academic drift in VET. In addition, Cedefop notes that the traditional distinction between education and training sub-sectors (general, vocation and higher education) as well as initial and continuing VET is not always practical when it comes to identifying and responding to new challenges.
43. For some learners transition between school and VET; and between VET and higher education is potentially difficult as each part of the education and training system has different expectations about how learning is organised and managed. The working group believes that a greater focus on the quality assurance of these transitions and more synergy and alignment between European instruments in paragraph 13 can lead to improvements.
44. The working group recognised there is uncertainty about how to achieve greater alignment between the European instruments. The group noted that:
- the task could be too difficult;
 - there could be barriers and resistance to change;
 - progress could be slow;
 - it is easier to gain agreement in principle than in practice.

Issue vii - sustainability

45. Since the publication of the Recommendation (and the work of EQAVET and its predecessor ENQAVET) a great deal of progress has been made in establishing and maintaining a European network of experts with an interest in, and commitment to,

¹⁷ Looking Back to Look Ahead, Cedefop, 2017, <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/9123>

collaboration. This network, supported by a Secretariat, has strengthened mutual trust; enabled the development of effective practice and provided opportunities for shared learning. This has supported the culture of quality improvement and, over the last ten years the network has produced guidance and advice; illustrated practice through case studies and worked on new areas of mutual interest. The network has sustained an interest in quality assurance and has continued to promote the EQAVET quality assurance framework and Recommendation. The work of the network has been supplemented by activities organised by the NRPs (partly through funding from the Erasmus+ programme¹⁸).

46. When revising the European approach to the quality assurance of VET the working group emphasised the importance of:

- building on what has already been achieved;
- considering sustainability – through the work of a Secretariat or other arrangement which supports implementation.

Policy development without due consideration for how the policy can be supported and implemented; and how the voice of stakeholders (particularly teachers and trainers) can be part of the quality assurance process run the risk of being ineffective.

Issue viii - dissemination

47. Member States have established NRPs to disseminate and support the adoption of the Recommendation. In addition the work¹⁹ of the EQAVET Secretariat (which focuses on supporting the NRPs) has enhanced the dissemination activities undertaken at a national/regional level. This is reflected in the Secretariat's mission to develop, disseminate and promote best European practice in the field of quality assurance at system and provider level by supporting the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation and fostering sustainable and inclusive activities. Any review of the European approach to the quality assurance of VET will need to consider how the proposals can be developed, disseminated and build on what has already been produced.

Issue ix – the role of employers and learners

48. The Recommendation emphasises the importance of involving all relevant stakeholders in the quality assurance process. This approach was confirmed and strengthened through the EQAVET network's development of EQAVET +. The working group believes it is timely (and there is an opportunity) to enhance this approach by being more explicit about the role that learners can and do play in the quality assurance processes. As well as being stakeholders, learners and the labour market are the main 'customers' for VET. They have a direct and personal interest in the quality of VET provision and this role should be increasingly recognised in any revision of the European approach to the quality assurance of VET.

Issue x - quality assurance – the level question

49. The EQAVET Recommendation was designed to apply at the system, provider and qualification-awarding level (see paragraph 11 of the Recommendation). Most of the network's activities have focused on the system or provider level: the work of individual

¹⁸ An analysis of the results from the 2106 funding is available at <https://www.eqavet.eu/Materials-Resources/Publications>

¹⁹ See <https://www.eqavet.eu/>

NRPs has included the qualification-awarding level. The working group discussed whether these three levels were still appropriate. There was agreement that both the VET system and provider level should be included; and there should be clear connections between the two i.e. indicators and indicative descriptors which are designed at the system level should reflect the work completed by individual VET providers. There was less discussion on how the quality assurance arrangements should apply at the qualification-awarding level.

FINAL COMMENTS

50. The group agreed that any review of the quality assurance of VET at a European level would benefit from a stronger emphasis on:

- promoting a culture of continuous improvement;
- explaining the context and rationale for change;
- the involvement of stakeholders;
- visibility and sustainability (i.e. there is a need to ensure continuation of the work on quality assurance and build on the Network's achievements);
- the needs of the labour market and the learners.

51. In addition it would be helpful if any review considered ways to:

- achieve excellence in VET and elaborate the role that quality assurance and quality management plays in achieving this;
- strengthen the mutual complementarity of European instruments/initiatives and education sectors;
- reflect the perspective and needs of VET systems and providers;
- align the indicative descriptors with the indicators and European VET policy priorities;
- instigate more regular, non-bureaucratic and manageable reviews of the European approach to quality assurance to order to respond to changing socioeconomic circumstances and changes in pedagogy and technology.