

EU Quality Assurance

in Vocational Education & Training



Evaluation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)

Annex 2 Case studies

Caveat

These case studies are an Annex to the *Evaluation of the implementation of EQAVET* carried out by ICF GHK for the European Commission, DG Education and Culture.

The case studies present the views of country researchers not those of the countries covered. The reports are based on:

- Review of legislation and documents describing national quality assurance in VET; and
- Interviews with representatives of public authorities in charge of quality assurance as well as those of stakeholders.

The case studies were drafted in the period February – March 2013 and present the situation as of these dates.

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1 Case study: Finland¹

1.1 Introduction

The case of Finland illustrates good synergy between internal drivers for change in QA in VET and European policy developments.

Finland has been a member of the ENQA-VET network since 2003. As such, it has had the opportunity to participate in and influence European developments in quality assurance in VET for the last decade. At the same time, Finland has also maintained and enhanced focus on continued development of quality assurance systems and on self-assessment at providers' level – supported by voluntary mechanisms developed at system level and financial incentives.

1.2 Importance of quality assurance in policy and practice

All interviewed Finnish stakeholders have stated that QA in VET is a priority of education policy in Finland and also priority for a large part of providers. The only concern voiced in this respect was that with the pressure to cut spending, some of the quality assurance practices might eventually suffer. Two stakeholders have pointed out that with the publication of Quality Strategy for the period 2011-2020 – a key policy document to guide further development of quality assurance, the pressure to improve quality assurance has become even stronger.

The system-level incentives for quality in VET include support for regional and thematic networks of VET providers, as well as several voluntary mechanisms to encourage quality assurance and self-assessment at providers' level: peer reviews of VET providers, promoted and supported by the Finnish National Board of Education, and the Quality Awards.

Finnish National Board of Education has since 2011 been providing funding based on the state budget for the set-up of regional – or thematic - networks of VET providers.

The Quality Awards, a competition for VET providers, is run by the Ministry of Education and Culture with strong involvement of stakeholders, including employers', teachers', and students' organisations in the process of evaluation and selection of candidates for the award. Students have their own prize which they award according to the students' organisation's priorities in quality policy in VET.

Performance-based allocation of 3% of funding to VET providers is another incentive mechanism that currently operates in Finland. The allocation is based on performance index (which takes into account performance indicators of VET providers, quality of education, and local environment) is used to allocate "top up" performance-based financing to high performing providers, with the aim to encourage quality improvement. VET students' organisation and other stakeholders take part in the working group currently revising the indicators on which the allocation of "top up" funding should be based.

Peer reviews for IVET and CVET providers have been promoted as a tool to implement the Quality Management Recommendation (2008) for VET providers. The Recommendation reflects EQAVET principles and encourages self-evaluation.

At the same time, all stakeholders have noted that while many providers are active in voluntary improvement of quality assurance, others are not so active. They therefore have welcomed the requirement of the Quality Strategy that all VET providers should have an effective quality assurance and development system in place by 2015. Currently, all providers are required by law² to undertake self-evaluation of VET provision and its effectiveness, but the exact form of this is left to the providers. There will be more focus on evaluation of QA systems in place from now onwards.

¹ Author: Maria Golubeva (ICF GHK).

² Art. 24 630/1998

1.3 The drivers for change in quality assurance

The following factors have been named by Finnish stakeholders (representatives of VET associations, industry association and students' organisation) as important factors driving change in quality assurance in VET:

- The need to attract students to VET.
- The need to make sure that the same national qualifications can be achieved through different paths – workplace-based learning, school-based learning, and mixed. It is important to have quality assurance that provides for adequate quality in all circumstances.
- The need to reduce the percentage of dropouts and to make sure that as many people as possible reach the labour market.

As an important factor in its own right, the involvement of Finnish experts and policy makers in European developments on quality assurance was mentioned.

1.4 The interaction between EQAVET and the national context

All stakeholders interviewed in Finland were aware of EQAVET and two had taken part in workshops and EQAVET network events (one of them has been a Steering Committee member as representative of VET providers). They expressed doubts, however, that members of their associations have any first-hand knowledge of EQAVET or awareness of it. They do not see it as their direct responsibility to distribute information on EQAVET to their members, however, association of VET providers has used EQAVET principles when guiding providers on how to better implement QA practices. It has to be noted, however, that the majority of providers have QA and QM systems in place, and they have not started from scratch with EQAVET principles. Developments in EQAVET have also been discussed at the Steering Committee of national network of VET leaders.

The arena where EQAVET principles have really come into play and had significant impact is the VET quality policy at system level. The group that developed the Quality Strategy and the group that currently works on its implementation has taken EQAVET principles into consideration and has reflected on them and on the situation and needs of quality assurance in Finland. One of the interviewees has even stated that in her opinion, the Quality Strategy is mainly based on EQAVET elements and principles. Stakeholders agree that their own and their colleagues' involvement in EQAVET work at EU level has had a great impact on their inputs in the national Quality Strategy.

The crucial points of Quality Strategy are:

- The requirement for all VET providers to have an effective quality assurance and development system in place by 2015.
- The development of a set of criteria applicable to different kinds of VET provision to document effective quality systems (by March 2013). These criteria will be used for assessing QA systems of VET providers. The role of self-assessment is central to this system.

The Quality Strategy cannot be viewed as a separate development as, in the view of stakeholders, it continues the development of quality assurance in VET from the existing stage, based on voluntary involvement of providers, to a more comprehensive level.

1.5 Conclusions

The involvement of Finland in European developments in quality assurance and in EQAVET has had an effect in the sense of providing background and context to the inputs of national stakeholders in the processes of improving quality policies, as the case of VET Quality Strategy clearly demonstrates.

The development of internal and external evaluation, monitoring, and the use of indicators in Finland went apace with the development of advanced quality assurance systems in Europe, and the engagement with EU developments in quality assurance has been fruitful for both.

The culture of quality assurance that exists in Finland has allowed the permanent upgrading of indicators and evaluation principles that is in the spirit of EQAVET, with results of monitoring and evaluation constantly feeding the planning and improvement processes.

2 Case study: Germany³

2.1 Introduction

In Germany, the federal states (Länder) have the legislative competence for education policy. In principle, this applies also to VET, specifically to quality assurance mechanisms at vocational schools. Thus there is a high diversity of VET institutions, and also QA mechanisms between the Länder at initial VET providers and even more CVET providers. Furthermore, the German VET system is characterised by the dual system. This means a high involvement of a wide range of stakeholders from the public sphere, specifically employers' and employees' groups.

These two aspects imply strengths (eg, high stakeholder involvement) for VET and quality assurance in VET, but also challenges (eg, regional disparities). However, in general the German VET system has a good reputation. This is why several countries such as Spain, Greece and Italy have shown interest in cooperating with Germany on VET policy issues.

Nevertheless, there are also challenges in the system, e.g. the issue of dropout-rates and need for strategies to address a growing share of students with a migration background (diversity of students). As a reaction to these challenges, quality assurance in VET is high on the public agenda. This is visible for example from the strengthened emphasis on QA in the reform of the Vocational Education and Training Act (*Berufsbildungsgesetz*, BBiG in 2005), the Instructor Aptitude Ordinance (AEVO) and also the rules regarding the quality system certification of CVET providers in the context of active labour market policy (AZWV/AZAV).

2.2 Main drivers for reform of QA

The drivers for the high priority of QA in VET in Germany are manifold.

As a first reason, many stakeholders from various organisations state that there is a strong need to ensure a high quality VET system, since many potential applicants opt for an education path in higher education instead of vocational education. Thus both at the system level and at the individual firm level there are high incentives to assure and demonstrate a high quality of education and training: a well-established QA system helps to retain the attractiveness of the VET system in times of a lack of applicants in some industries.

This motivation to focus on QA is also enforced by debates about educational output quality itself. As noted above, the VET system in Germany is highly regarded for its quality. However, expert reviews such as the "Euler report" for the *Bund-Länder-Kommission für Bildungsplanung und Forschungsförderung (BLK)* stated challenges for VET in various areas. Thus, the aim of continuously raising output quality in VET itself is an important driver for a strengthened focus on quality assurance and a connected quality development process.

Apart from concerns about output quality, a major driver for the use of QA measures is the intention of policy makers to foster efficiency and effectiveness of VET. This is connected with the on-going austerity measures regarding public budgets: QA is seen as an instrument to ensure quality in situations of scarce budgets. Especially for CVET providers that are involved in training as one instrument of labour market policy, certification based on quality assurance is seen as crucial and the use of certification requirements was just recently (April 2012) extended with the reform of labour market instruments.

QA measures are also driven by trends towards a stronger reliance on competition between VET providers. Again, this is most relevant in the CVET sector, where competition is fostered in order to reach the above-mentioned aims of a higher efficiency. To ensure adequate (minimum) standards between competing providers of VET QA assurance becomes more important.

Apart from these trends, international comparative studies can also be seen as a driver or trigger for keeping a focus on quality assurance in IVET as well as in CVET. Studies such as the PISA study – although not focused on VET – have had large impact on the debate on quality in the

³ Author: Florian Berger (Technopolis).

German education system. There were also discussions about a “VET-PISA”. This shows how international studies keep the level of attention concerning quality assurance up.

As a last point, European initiatives like the EQF play an important role. In Annex III of the EQF recommendation from 2008, principles of quality assurance are stressed. In order to have a wide acceptance of the German referencing outcomes (e.g., VET-based qualifications on higher levels of the EQF), the need to put quality assurance high on the agenda is widely recognized.

2.3 The interaction between EQAVET and the national context

One driver mentioned above is the influence of international comparative studies and especially European initiatives in general. Since EQAVET can be seen as an example for a driver of this kind, the initiative enforced the debate on QA this way. Interaction between German experts and the EQAVET initiatives took place through the personal involvement of German stakeholders in the work on EQAVET and its preceding initiatives.

Comparing the influence of EQAVET and other socio-economic drivers mentioned above, it seems that the EQAVET initiative itself cannot be seen as main driver for QA developments in Germany. Drivers such as an intrinsically motivated need to ensure the attractiveness of VET in times of falling student numbers have a significantly higher influence on QA developments than the EQAVET initiative.

There are some indications that the influence of EQAVET on activities in Germany was somewhat stronger in the school-based part of the German dual VET system than in the firm-based part. Examples for this are several conferences organised on the issue of QA at VET schools, while events specifically addressing EQAVET and firm-based VET seem to be more rare. There are various reasons for this. One is that the indicators from the EQAVET recommendation are partly more relevant VET schools than firms. An example would be indicator 6 “Utilization of acquired skills at the workplace“. This is obviously a relevant indicator for a vocational school, but not necessarily for firm-based training where all acquired skills are *per definitionem* relevant at the workplace. A further reason for a higher relevance of EQAVET for school-based VET is that – although QA has also a long tradition in school systems – the concept of a quality assurance and improvement cycle is traditionally better known to firms than to stakeholders from VET schools. After all, the concept originated in the management literature and quality management systems for firms. Since firms often do not see an innovative added value of EQAVET to these concepts, the take-up could be weaker among trainers in firm-based VET than in schools.

Comparing the influence of EQAVET on QA with the influence of initiatives like the EQR, the debate in Germany among education policy makers was much more shaped by EQR than by EQAVET itself. While even EQF is not necessarily known to a wider public, EQAVET is even more a topic of interest to specialists only.

2.4 Outcomes of this interaction

There is no “hard” evidence for examples in the German quality assurance system of what has concretely changed as an effect of EQAVET. The question of what would have happened if EQAVET had not existed on the European level is thus challenging. Projects directly associated with EQAVET – such as the ENIQAB project – are of course a direct outcome of the existence of EQAVET. There are also concrete outputs from ENIQAB in the form of best practice documents and seminars. However, these projects seem to have a limited outreach and have not yet had an effect on quality assurance measures on a wider scale.

Apart from these potential direct project effects, there are however some indications that policy makers’ and stakeholders’ focus on quality assurance issues were supported by the existence of EQAVET. While the focus surely would have also been high without EQAVET, a number of national conferences were at least partly triggered by the debate on EQAVET. An example is a conference on QA organised by the state of Bavaria in the city of Wildbad Kreuth. The importance of information exchange on QA within Germany should not be underestimated, since the *Länder* have a high autonomy in education issues and quality assurance mechanisms thus also differ between *Länder*.

Another example of a potential effect of the debate on EQAVET is that the Sub-Committee on VET of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany have set QA as a policy priority. Again, in terms of complementarity of EQAVET, these activities would probably have happened if EQAVET had not existed, because VET is traditionally important for Germany and has a longer tradition than in other countries. However, EQAVET did have an effect in terms of raising (or keeping up) awareness.

2.5 Conclusions

The existence of EQAVET had an **effect** in the sense of **focusing the policy debate** on quality assurance issues in VET. However, concrete causal effects of EQAVET to the German quality assurance system in VET are hard to identify. The reason is that even before EQAVET, there were many activities on quality assurance going on in the traditionally well-positioned field of VET in Germany. EQAVET was thus only an additional initiative within an existing national effort to assure quality in VET.

Apart from the strong position of VET in Germany, the **uniqueness of Germany's Dual System** makes it difficult to compare and to learn from many countries. EQAVET could thus have particular advantages for countries in which firm-based VET traditionally plays a less important role in the education system. Specifically, stakeholders from employers' organizations were quite sceptical about the added value of EQAVET. It seems thus important to involve them even more strongly to make EQAVET an effective framework for VET systems like the German one.

3 Case study, Greece⁴

3.1 Introduction

While quality assurance policies have long been in place in Greece, until recently there has been no coherent national framework for quality assurance neither in IVET⁵ (IEK) nor in CVET. Quality assurance has been regulated by a plethora of legislative acts which, according to the interviewees, added to the complexity of the system. Numerous quality assurance requirements existed for licencing of providers. Quality assurance was rather fragmented with different rules for different segments of VET. There was no comprehensive indicator system that would enable measurement of the state of play and provision of feedback to promote improvement.

In July 2011 a National Framework for Quality Assurance in LLL, π^3 , started to be piloted and this testing is still going on. This national framework is not embedded in any legislation and for the moment, it is still in development and is not a mandatory requirement. This section discusses the situation regarding quality assurance in IVET and CVET as currently embedded in laws in vigour. The π^3 initiative is discussed in the remaining sections.

Over the past years, significant changes have taken place in terms of development of the quality assurance system, including:

- Development of the assessment and certification of Trainers, Structures and Systems;
- The development of occupational frameworks expressed in learning outcomes (CVET);
- Definition of the conditions in which the final assessment leading to qualifications takes place (this process is designated as certification of qualifications – it applies to IVET only).

The Lifelong Learning Act (2010) significantly altered the division of responsibilities in IVET and CVET. The Act merged IVET and CVET providers under the umbrella of lifelong learning. It decentralised the provision of VET to prefectures and shifted the monitoring responsibility of these structures to the Ministry of Education. The LLL Act specifically mentions the constitution of a system that will ensure overall quality of learning provided, and links the provision of state funding to the positive evaluation of the training providers. It hence creates a basis for performance-based management of VET providers. However, it does not provide a specific quality assurance system.

Another significant change took place in November 2012 when three organisations (the National Organisation for Qualification Certification, the National Centre for Vocational Guidance and the National Centre for the Certification of Continuous Vocational Training) were merged into one. The new organisation, the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications & Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP) ensures the quality of inputs into VET (providers, programmes, qualifications standards, trainers), guidance and counselling services and outputs/certification (recognising learning outcomes achieved through formal but also non-formal and informal learning). Therefore there is now a single agency in charge of several facets of quality assurance requirements in the country which is a step forward towards simplification.

The LLL Act constitutes the most significant change regarding IVET, placing it under the auspices of the General Secretariat of Lifelong Learning. At this stage quality assurance does not involve a systematic monitoring mechanism, nor are indicators collected. Inspection is limited to private providers and monitors their compliance with criteria, on which their certification is depending.

CVET, on the other hand, was especially fragmented in Greece and not all types of providers functioned under the auspices of one authority or were covered by the same legal framework. Subsequently, quality assurance provisions could not cover the whole spectrum of CVET. After 2008, and especially 2010, CVET providers were gradually moved under the responsibility of the same authority. This has paved the way for a more holistic approach to quality assurance. Over the past two years, CVET is under reform, given that its structures, the leading authorities and relative quality assurance systems are changing.

⁴ Author: Stelina Chatzichristou (ICF GHK).

⁵ In this context, IVET refers to post-secondary IVET providers, called IEK. Secondary IVET falls under the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, but are not included in the relevant legislative acts.

3.2 Main drivers for reform of QA

A National Framework for Quality Assurance in LLL, π^3 , has been developed by the Ministry of Education. It covers all Lifelong Learning providers, IVET and CVET included. The proposal for the establishment of π^3 was first presented in July 2011. Currently, π^3 is in its second pilot implementation phase. Although it has not been registered yet as a law, the development of π^3 is considered a significant step towards the inclusion of quality assurance systems across VET.

π^3 builds on the quality indicators, the criteria and the descriptors of the EQAVET Recommendation. It is expected to create a framework that can suit vocational training, as part of LLL, in Greece. It stands for quality in:⁶

- inputs, i.e. provision of education and training: providers, teachers & trainers, curricula, material;
- processes, i.e. teaching methods and practice;
- outcomes, i.e. learning outcomes: knowledge, skills and competences acquired through learning paths.

The reform was instigated by a range of drivers, both national and international:

3.2.1 National drivers:

The main legal framework of IVET was developed 20 years ago and there was a need to upgrade it and raise the quality of the system. The large number of legislative acts has added elements of quality assurance to the system, but has not updated the system.

Application for attendance at public IVET schools has declined, whereas private providers have become more popular. The operating way of public IVET, the lack of clear structures and systems of quality assurance were identified by the Ministry of Education as an issue to address.

There were pressures from the side of trainers in view of a system that would be encourage performance and results rather than time in service solely. The previous system suffered with deficiencies in the process of selection and the lack of evaluation of trainers.

Apprenticeships in IVET have been identified as an area that immediate improvement is needed, in terms of quality assurance.

The demographic profile of IVET trainees has changed. About five years ago, almost all students were secondary school graduates. Presently, many of the students of the IEK are simultaneously studying in, or have graduated from higher technical institutions. This change can be attributed to high youth unemployment. Given that the average age of the students has significantly risen, these students have greater demands for qualitative changes in their training. This demographic and cultural change urges for improved quality of training.

Given that developments were more advanced in higher education, the proposed national approach, π^3 , was greatly influenced by the quality assurance systems already in place in higher education.

The decentralisation of education system had been long identified as a need. The LLL Act introduced a strategic planning for the decentralisation of IVET and CVET provision. A complete quality assurance framework that would serve such a decentralised system could be assured through a new, holistic national approach. Moreover, updated quality assurance systems in place will be beneficial for ensuring access to finance for local education authorities aiming at co-funding from European funds for LLL programmes.

3.3 International drivers:

There was strong political will from the Minister of Education at the time when EQAVET Recommendation was published, to create a national model for quality assurance approach to keep up with the European developments

⁶ <http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/implementing-the-framework/greece.aspx>, cited on 11/12/12

Another driver was exposure to VET systems in other EU countries. Over the past years, many IVET schools participated in EU programmes (mainly Leonardo da Vinci). They were given the opportunity to observe good practices in other countries, discuss and exchange ideas and experiences with other IVET systems. This interaction created incentives, led to the informal adoption of some quality assurance elements and subsequently, pressures were developed towards the formal adoption of more effective QA processes.

The General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning (GGDVM) participates in various international fora and represents the country in projects and initiatives that relate to VET. Additionally, European strategies and communications are recognised as inspirational for a national quality assurance approach:

- The *Belém* Framework for Action, run by UNESCO, which underlines among others, the importance of quality in adult education;
- The PIAAC project by OECD, where the performance of education and training systems is one of the objectives;
- The EU2020 agenda;
- The Renewed Agenda for Adult Education;
- The Bruges Communiqué.

Interviewees regarded EQAVET as the most significant international influence in the development of a national approach of quality assurance.

3.4 The interaction between EQAVET and the national context

The adoption of EQAVET came timely in the case of Greece:

- The needs for reform of VET and in particular for the review of quality assurance were identified nationally;
- There were pressures from the side of different parties as shown above, in favour of reform; and
- There was political support for reforming quality assurance in VET as well as a favourable view of the European developments in this area among key policy makers.

Participation in the EQAVET network provided the opportunity to Greece to exchange experience and further learn from other Member States with similar or even completely different VET systems and with more advanced quality assurance systems.

In this context, the EQAVET framework was taken a starting point for future developments. The cycle, descriptors, indicators were taken as a blueprint and adjusted to the national situation.

The fact that the key people from the national administration in charge of quality assurance were involved in the European discussions on EQAVET was an important factor for the influence of EQAVET on Greek developments. These people had the role of change agents in the country feeding the experience acquired at European level into national texts.

3.5 Outcomes of this interaction

As a result, there are direct links and correspondence between π^3 and EQAVET as adopted in the Recommendation⁷:

- π^3 includes a quality cycle that was based on the four quality criteria suggested in Annex I of the EQAVET Recommendation. The π^3 quality cycle was also inspired by the assessment framework RADAR, on which EFQM is based,
- The difference between the quality cycle of π^3 and that of EQAVET regards the areas of “Assessment and Evaluation” which is split into two steps in π^3 : “Measurement” and “Evaluation”. According to π^3 framework, this distinction should underline the need for providers

⁷ According to “ π^3 , National Framework for Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning”, published by the Ministry of Education in July 2011, available at http://www.eoppep.gr/images/DIASFALISH_POIOTHTAS/plaisio.pdf

- to focus on evaluation and decision making based on measurable (qualitative and quantitative) data.
- π^3 incorporates the principles that EQAVET descriptors are based on but not the descriptors per se.
 - Indicators: All 10 indicators of the EQAVET Recommendation have been included in π^3 .
 - However, the EQAVET indicators were developed into 15 ones, so as π^3 addresses the country-specific framework of VET.
 - π^3 includes an indicator regarding provision of guidance, that is not covered by EQAVET. The guidance indicator was included to underline the importance for quality vocational guidance. Also, EOPPEP is the responsible organisation for vocational guidance in the country.

Inspired by EQAVET and explicitly linked to its framework, the national approach for quality assurance in Lifelong learning was developed by the Ministry of Education.

In order to design the proposed national approach, the Ministry of Education consulted IVET and CVET representatives, as well as social partners. That was the first time that such a consultation took place, given that the approach envisaged referred to the whole spectrum of Lifelong learning, and aimed at the design of a full cycle of quality assurance, in contrast to the fragmented approaches in place. The first pilot phase of π^3 was completed in December 2012, when the second pilot phase initiated. The second pilot phase includes IVET and CVET providers, as well as providers of adult education. It is expected to conclude in March 2013, having explored the attribution of a quality label to providers that will choose to comply with π^3 and the evaluators/inspectors of providers. The results of the pilot implementation will lead to an updated version of the national framework.

However, the adverse economic situation of the country creates uncertainties regarding future developments and the pace with which recent legislation on IVET and CVET will be implemented. Moreover, interviewees consider that π^3 should be ratified as a law, in order to assure its implementation from all providers and structures of IVET and CVET.

3.6 Conclusions

The most recent developments in quality assurance in Greece (π^3) are clearly directly inspired by EQAVET. This is recognised by the interviewees and apparent when comparing the two frameworks.

It seems that EQAVET had a very strong influence on the development of π^3 because:

- There was no comparable framework in place in the country at the time when EQAVET was already adopted;
- There was political willingness to reform quality assurance and willingness to learn from the European process;
- The right people were involved in the European process.

However, it has to be born in mind that the π^3 framework is still in development stage and the extent to which it will be implemented in practice depends very much on what measures will be taken next. In particular, on how providers will be supported and encouraged to use the framework.

It should also be noted that the π^3 framework will not replace the already existing quality assurance measures for providers, trainers, qualifications etc. , but will complement these.

4 Case Study: Italy⁸

4.1 Introduction

Quality assurance in Italy is still being developed and embedded in the VET system. A number of initiatives (both prescriptive ones and experimentations) were developed in the last years, all aiming at increasing the quality of both the offer and the performance of the VET system.

This was the case of the establishment of the National Evaluation System⁹ by the Ministry of Education, University and Research aiming at assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the national education and training system, with particular regard to the school system. The system was one of the results of the reform of the Italian education and training system, which embedded a number of quality assurance mechanisms (unfortunately not yet globally applied).

Another relevant quality assurance mechanism introduced in the Italian system was the accreditation system for VET providers¹⁰. Regions and Autonomous Provinces (delegated by the central administration for the management and implementation of vocational training) set standards relating to both services and expected for training agencies accessing public funding. The system was conceived as a quality assurance mechanism *ex ante* (minimal requirements are assessed beforehand), *in itinere* (requirements have to be maintained during the performance), and *ex post* (expected results have to be achieved and measured). In 2008, the accreditation system was further enhanced through an agreement between the State and the Regions, with the primary objective of promoting and valorising accreditation as a tool for quality assurance. The revised national accreditation system is now structured around five main criteria, which provide specific instructions to regional authorities for defining their respective regional accreditation systems. The five criteria relate to infrastructural and logistic resources, economic and financial reliability, managerial capacity and professional resources, efficiency and effectiveness, relationship/link with the regional territory.

The National Plan for Quality Assurance for VET, which involved all relevant stakeholders (Ministry of Education, University and Research, Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Regions and Autonomous Provinces, social partners, schools and VET providers) in the drafting phase, was already validated by the Ministries concerned and it is currently in its final validation phase (social partners). The National Plan follows the model proposed by the European recommendation, and implies a systemic approach to quality assurance with the role of the different actors, their interaction, and the monitoring, measurement, and evaluation measures described.

ISO certifications and the European Foundation Quality Management (EFQM) also represented an attempt to increase the quality of the VET provision, although it was demonstrated that these kind of measures play a major role in improving processes more than results, and were applied mainly on a voluntary basis.

Last, but not least, a number of initiatives for piloting quality assurance among VET providers were initiated in the country. Among them, the more relevant is the Peer Reviewing Project, promoted by the EQAVET NRP and funded through the ESF, and involving both schools and VET providers. This peer review method originated from two European projects funded within the framework of the Leonardo da Vinci Programme¹¹ and it aims at promoting continuous improvement of quality by enhancing transparency in the education/ training offer and the comparability among schools and among VET agencies. The peer learning process embedded in the method allowed the growth of a quality assurance culture among practitioners (although the number of VET actors involved remains restricted).

⁸ Author: Michaela Vecchia (external expert to ICF GHK).

⁹ Law decree nr. 286 of 19 November 2004, <http://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/deleghe/04286dl.htm>

¹⁰ Firstly established in 2001 by the ministerial decree nr. 166 (Ministry of Labour and Social Policies) and revised in 2008 [http://www.lavoro.gov.it/NR/rdonlyres/E2E76C8C-6FAA-4995-BEFF-FB9E3B0F7049/0/1Accordo accreditamento 20 marzo2008.pdf](http://www.lavoro.gov.it/NR/rdonlyres/E2E76C8C-6FAA-4995-BEFF-FB9E3B0F7049/0/1Accordo%20accreditamento%20marzo2008.pdf)

¹¹ 'Peer Review in Initial VET' and 'Peer Review Impact'

4.2 Main drivers for reform of QA

According to the interviewees, the three main drivers leading to the development/enhancement of quality assurance mechanisms in the Italian system were (and still are):

- Striving to make a shift from formal quality to a culture of quality meant as a powerful tool for improving what is done (results), a long-term focus of debate in Italy;
- The continuous reform of the Italian education and training system¹² which implied a number of normative prescriptions where quality assurance was one of the main elements: the revision of the regional accreditation system for VET agencies; the adoption (not yet completed) of the National Plan for Quality Assurance for VET, the piloting of experimentations in the field involving both schools and VET providers
- The need of increasing the overall performance of the VET system also in relation to the increasing unemployment rates registered in the country, and the need for making the education/vocational training system responsive to the needs of the labour market.

As for international drivers, all interviewees agreed on that the European Union's initiatives in this field (mainly the EQARF Recommendation) were, and still are, among the more relevant drivers for embedding quality assurance in the Italian system. In this field, for instance, the information/guidance provided by the EQAVET NRP played a major role in involving all main stakeholders in a continuous debate on the topic (although its activities in this sense became less regular in the last years) and in engaging schools and VET providers in embedding some quality assurance mechanisms in their practice (i.e. peer review project, guide for self-assessment of schools and VET providers).

4.3 The interaction between EQAVET and the national context

The interaction between EQAVET and the national context is visible mainly in two recent actions in the field of quality assurance.

At the prescriptive level, the National Plan for Quality Assurance for VET (not yet entered into force) follows the model proposed by the European recommendation, and for each of the four main components of the quality assurance and improvement cycle, actions already in place and to be undertaken for conforming to the European framework are specified:

4.3.1 Planning and implementation

Apart from the already existing practices for identifying the training needs and implementing consistent training actions at the system level (both nationally and regionally), additional actions aiming at reinforcing mechanisms and procedures for defining training needs, and links with the European objectives are listed. The definition and monitoring of objectives through the use of specific indicators, as well as the development of regulations and guidelines for the recognition, validation and certification of individual competences are mentioned as well. In relation to individual schools and VET providers, the planning mechanisms should be revised and implemented according to a precise list of procedures and actions.

4.3.2 Monitoring and evaluation

The National Plan distinguishes between those actions assigned to the Ministry of Education, University and Research, and those attributed to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and the Regions/Autonomous Provinces. A strategy for continuing, revising or enhancing those actions in order to increase quality assurance in both the education and training system is mentioned. It is important to note that some of the activities described in relation to the Ministry of Labour and the Regions already have a clear connection with those established by the EQAVET Recommendation.

¹² Among other measures, the so called *Comitati Tecnico Scientifici* (technical-scientific committees) were introduced coherently with the vocational/technical schools reform law of 2008. These committees, which has a proposal and consultative functions, actively involve social partners with the aim of reducing the mismatch between the education/training offer and the labour market needs, thus ensuring a more effective overall performance. In this context, quality assurance has been indicated as one of the components to be reinforced in the future

4.3.3 Review

Currently the follow up actions are attributed to the specific structures of the involved Ministries (Labour and Education), the Regions and Autonomous Provinces with an active involvement of the social partners. According to the Plan, a common/shared annual report on achieved results, strengths and weaknesses and improvement measures at the system level should be drafted.

From a practice point of view, the Peer Review Project, managed by the EQAVET NRP, is an example of how the EQAVET Recommendations have influenced the Italian system. Although still limited to a restricted number of VET providers, this project had begun an in depth discussion on quality assurance elements through a peer learning approach which made it possible to embed QA mechanisms in the day-to-day practice of the schools/ VET agencies involved. This was supported by a shared work with the education actors, and the development of a series of ad hoc tools to be applied by them in their practice. The project is still, currently, in its piloting phase (second round).

4.4 Outcomes of this interaction

According to all the interviewees, EQAVET had a great influence in quality assurance debate, policy and practice in Italy.

The EQAVET Recommendation helped the State to get committed, and to consider both the principles and indicators proposed as a sort of guidelines on elements which were rarely taken into consideration before (the essence of the concept of quality assurance and not only a formal execution). This gave the opportunity to a number of other actors (practitioners, social partners) to reflect on this issue.

The overall awareness that a quality system is needed for enhancing quality at the system level, and for increasing coherence between the training offer and the needs of the labour market (thus favouring a higher employability of those people who exit the education/training system) has increased.

However, if the EQAVET Recommendation has put the problem of quality on the table and the issue was treated/discussed at the national (institutional) level, what is still missing is the full involvement of the practitioners.

The Peer Review Project and the National Plan for Quality Assurance for VET (although not yet validated) represent the outcome of the influence that EQAVET had on the country system. An initiative such as the one of the peer review (although limited by its piloting character), in fact, contributed to interrupt the prejudice against evaluation and it diminished the shared perception of evaluation as a simple control/ judgement exercise on activities, demonstrating its potential and added value in terms of improvement of both performance and achieved results. When Italian VET providers started to engage with quality, certification (ISO) was the only way of tackling quality assurance issues, and the main difficulty was the identification of effective indicators. The indicators set within the Recommendation allowed organisations to review them, and make indicators more coherent with an outcome-based process.

However, the piloting experiences should have been scaled up and transferred to a larger number of actors, so that a systemic approach could have been created.

4.5 Conclusions

The situation regarding QA is still changing, and a comprehensive action for quality assurance is still under development. However, the two reference examples (National Plan for Quality Assurance for VET and the Peer Review Project) tell us a lot about the potential of EQAVET for impacting on the Italian system, as well as about the difficulties still encountered at the system level. The policy action in this field, according to stakeholders, is still not systematic and too fragmented, and there is still a limited understanding of the value of and need for a such a process among practitioners.

According to the interviewees, as far as the policy agenda is concerned the idea of quality assurance is still conceived mainly as a formal application of the concept.

In order to make the EQAVET impact on the Italian system more effective, the interviewees stressed the need for applying positive ideas/ successful experiences step by step and on a continuous basis (some discontinuity in policy and decision making were observed by all interviewed persons). This would increase transferability of good practice, hence widening the number of actors involved in the reforming process. For example, the process for developing the National Plan for Quality Assurance for VET was very long (discussions started in 2010), with a low implication of social partners in the last phase of the process. On the contrary, the Peer Review project was taken as a good example for applying EQAVET principles in the training practice, but the small number of actors involved has been pointed out as a disadvantage. The Italian education and training system still suffers from differences among different areas of the country, and the risk of involving the most proactive schools and VET agencies is the one of maintaining disparities in quality.

The main suggestions provided for overcoming the above-mentioned difficulties were the following:

- To implement a more comprehensive and coherent set of regulations/actions in the field of quality assurance;
- To reinforce the dialogue and common action between the central/institutional level (ministries, regions, NRP) and all the other stakeholders (social partners, school system, VET agencies, sector-based associations);
- To increase the use of quality assurance principles and tools in the field through an active involvement of representative of the school and VET system;
- To enhance transferability and mainstreaming of actions undertaken in the field of quality assurance (from piloting to current practice).

5 Case study: Romania¹³

5.1 Introduction

Like other Central and Eastern European countries, Romania has undergone fundamental structural and systemic changes of the education and training system. The main changes were focused on curriculum development and assessment, defining training standards, restructuring the educational pathways, planning methodologies, decentralisation and school-community partnership. The emphasis on quality assurance in TVET in Romania has been determined by a series of internal drivers such as wish for better education for all students, with focus on disadvantaged groups in terms of access and participation in education, but also by the European initiatives in the field. The years 2004-2006 have been extremely favourable for debates and implementation of EU programmes that initiated structured and explicit interest in quality assurance in VET in Romania at the national level. One of the main outcomes of the debates and programmes between 2004-2006 was the national framework for quality assurance in education and training (Law 87/2006 on Quality Assurance in Education).

According to the current legislation, the responsibility for quality assurance in IVET in Romania is shared between central, regional and local institutions with a strong focus on self-assessment of schools. In CVET quality assurance, legal framework provided is considered outdated and a new version is now under discussion. The need for changes is due to the institutional re-organisation at system level in CVET in Romania since 2011, but also due to the fact that quality assurance is now limited only to the accreditation of training providers. The quality assurance in CVET in Romania is rather decentralised, County Authorisation Commissions being in charge with assessing the training programmes. At the central level, starting with 2011, a new established institution - National Authority for Qualifications (under the co-ordination of Ministry of Education) took over a set of responsibilities regarding the quality of CVET as developing strategic CVET plans and programs of national interest and ensuring technical implementation, management and updating *National Register of Adult Training Providers* and *National Register of Assessors*.

5.2 Main drivers for reform of QA

Main drivers for quality assurance in VET in Romania were linked to the need to adjust the education system to the changing social and economic environment. The focus of quality assurance measures was therefore on specific categories of students and adults with lower chances of access and participation in education and labour market, such as students resident in disadvantaged areas, Roma children, children with special educational needs, adults with low level of educational qualifications. The disparities in quality between rural and urban areas, both in learning outcomes and school infrastructure, but also regional economic disparities, were also generally seen as in need of addressing by education policy in order to ensure a better quality of education. Low level of participation of adults to lifelong learning (one of the lowest in Europe) and issues of access for vulnerable groups were reasons for educational policies targeting the system of quality assurance. The adoption of specific legislation on quality assurance in 2005 / 2006 and the establishment of new institutions in charge of quality assurance, new methodologies and implementation required new approaches in this field.

At the same time, national development of quality assurance system was strongly influenced by European policies on education and training in the context of Romania joining the EU in 2007. Comparative data analyses on EU benchmarks and indicators fostered discussion on the situation of Romanian educational system, compared to those of other EU countries. The comparative perspective increased the awareness of policy makers of the need of an improved data collection system compatible with the European and international methodologies (Eurostat, OECD, IEA, UNESCO), with direct implication on quality assurance tools and methodologies both at the national and at the provider level.

¹³ Author: Magdalena Balica (external expert to ICF GHK).

Active participation of Romania at the European discussion on QA was also a very important driver for QA measures in the country. Starting with 2003, Romanian experts have participated in the Technical Working Group on QA in VET. This participation inspired a lot of new initiatives in QA in VET as such as new VET policy on quality assurance aimed to provide a National Quality Assurance Framework based on Common Quality Assurance Framework for VET in Europe.

EU financial support such as pre-accession multi-annual programs (PHARE Human Resources Development) and later on ESF was also an important driver for QA assurance implementation in Romania, a large amount of projects outcomes (methodologies, tools and reports) being currently used in the system. Moreover, Romania's participation in the Community programs such as Leonardo da Vinci, Socrates as well as other initiatives of co-operations initiated by the European Commission, substantially contributed in shaping the interest for QA in Romania. An important role in sharing information and experiences and increasing awareness on quality assurance was also played by the activities of Romanian National Observatory¹⁴ by regularly monitoring the progress of initial and continuing training system in Romania and also implementing different types of institution building activities with a large participation of stakeholders. Recent European initiative on National Qualification Framework and EUROPASS had also an impact on national level debates on quality assurance in the view of a more coherent and articulated approach at the national level.

5.3 The interaction between EQAVET and the national context

EQAVET has a direct influence more on the level of IVET and general education quality assurance systems and less influence on CVET. In IVET, all the principles and descriptors of EQAVET were harmonised and reviewed at the national quality assurance system level, while in CVET quality assurance guidelines are more likely to follow an ISO model.

The main contribution of the EQAVET framework to Romanian developments on quality assurance was the creation of opportunity for different relevant national stakeholders to engage in a discussion on quality assurance. It also created the awareness on the need for more systematic data collections system, which is seen at the moment as the weakest point which needs to be addressed for a more evidence informed policy.

The activation of *National Group for Quality Assurance* (GNAC) as EQAVET National Reference Point in Romania played also an important role in promoting the EQAVET principles and European experiences and good practices to a large number of stakeholders and also provided the opportunity to open the dialogue between the main responsible institutions on quality assurance in Romania. The activities of GNAC also increase the awareness of its members for the need for a more coherent vision and interlinks of different European instruments at the national level.

EQAVET facilitated also the learning process on policy and implementation of QA in Romania, providing opportunities to exchange practices and examples from other countries with a longer history in quality assurance. Many important projects implemented in Romania in the recent years in quality assurance were developed within European partnerships born in the EQAVET networks, meetings and informal events. The opportunity to apply for EU projects in order to develop and disseminate EQAVET products was extremely valuable in the Romanian context. Without this opportunity much less could be done in terms of capacity building of GNAC.

The activities that take place at European level regarding EQAVET are seen by the interviewed actors as a valuable source of information and expertise that offers guidance and feedback on the national developments.

5.4 Outcomes of this interaction

As direct results of EQAVET activities in Romania, the National Centre for Development of Technical and Vocational Training drafted recently a *Strategy for Implementing EQAVET in IVET quality assurance system, the major QA* – a major policy documents on QA in Romania. The strategy is based on a systematic analysis of the EQAVET recommendations on principles and

¹⁴ Romanian National Observatory was a program initiated and supported by the European Training Foundation between 1996-2005, as part of a EU network of observatories on education and training

indicators, identifying also the main strategic objectives for the next years. Based on national and European cooperation with regards to EQAVET, the QA indicators and methodologies have been revised, both in IVET but also in general education. The activity of GNAC as National Reference point for EQAVET was also revived by EQAVET debates at the European level, in spite of lack of financial support, GNAC succeeding to implement a certain number of relevant activities in the country.

Another major results are two large scale projects developed in the recent years with impact on EQAVET implementation at the national level. First project - *QUALVET@RO Promoting Quality! Capacity Development of NRP for EQAVET*, implemented by the Romanian Agency of Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education (201-2012), as member of GNAC, has the following main results: a communication strategy for GNAC in order to strengthen the cooperation between relevant institutions and social partners in the view of building a common culture of quality in Romania; developing GNAC website (www.gnac.ro). An important number of EQAVET documents were translated into Romanian (European and national policies on quality in education and training, best practices, specific tools etc.), information leaflets, newsletters and three booklets of best practices developed by EU partners were distributed to key stakeholders. In the framework of the project were also organised eight regional workshops and two conferences, which enabled debate on communication strategy and materials developed. Second large scale projects in regards to EQAVET is the ESF project: *Improving quality in IVET trough partnership networks, implemented*. In the framework of this project a methodology for implementing EQARF / EQAVET in IVET in Romania was developed and tested.

5.5 Conclusions

The interest for quality assurance in Romania is rather recent, with a relatively short history of legal and institutional framework in place. The absence of a legal framework for quality assurance in VET before 2006 made it easier subsequently to connect with European activities and enhanced the willingness to learn from EQARF and EQAVET experiences. Therefore, most of the strategic documents on QA in VET in Romania are reflecting in high degree the discussion at the European level. The same concerns EQAVET principles and indicators that were already included in the recent development of QA system in Romania.

Financial support trough European funds was a major opportunity for Romania to implement the EQAVET activities at the national level. A large number of projects outcomes such as methodologies, tools and reports are used currently in the system, in spite of a limited support from the national budget.

Despite its rapid implementation of EQAVET recommendations and tools, Romania is still facing the lack of a coherent vision on QA at the level of different systems (IVET, CVET and higher education), EQAVET being so far most influential in IVET system and general education and less in other education and training systems. A higher degree of cohesion among different approaches and tools at EU level in the future (EQF, EUROPASS etc.) might be eventually an opportunity for a more coherent vision at the national level too.

More steps should be taken also in order to close the gap between policy documents and methodologies at the national level and the current QA practices at the provider level. Future activities of EQAVET at the European level would be most valued as far as will encourage the sharing practices and experience among countries, not only at the policy level, but also at the provider level.

6 Case study, Slovakia¹⁵

6.1 Introduction

The main part of VET in Slovakia is school-based and is part of upper-secondary education. The VET at upper-secondary level is integrated into the system of school education. It is governed by the same legislation and the rules for quality assurance are common to VET and general education. There are also post-secondary VET programmes but these are not covered in this case study.

The current system of quality assurance in school education (including VET) comprises:

- External evaluation of schools by the school inspection; and
- External assessment of students' learning outcomes on completion of ISCED 1, 2 and 3.

The external assessment on completion of ISCED 3 also concerns certain VET qualifications (those that result in upper-secondary school leaving certification – Maturita – and give access to higher education).

The development of a system of external assessment of students, including standardised assessment components of the upper-secondary leaving certificate (Maturita) was a major development in the Slovak approach to quality assurance in the past decade. These assessments concern general education subjects such as mathematics, mother tongue (or language of instruction) and foreign language.

There are no requirements for internal quality assurance, though as described below several initiatives to support schools in doing internal quality assurance are going on.

VET in Slovakia faces a number of challenges:

- Low attractiveness of VET pathways as a high proportion of students opt for general education studies;
- The combination of demographics (less young people) and expanded capacity of general education schools meant that the quality of students who entered VET pathways in the past decade diminished, which also negatively affected outcomes;
- Continued existence of VET pathways which have poor results in terms of employability. On completion of a VET programme less than 7% of graduates find employment in their field of study, 14% in another field of study, 29% are unemployed and slightly more than 50% continue to higher education¹⁶.
- Expansion of VET programmes in the service sector which do not correspond to labour market needs at the expense of technical and science-based VET programmes.

This situation is partly a result of the liberalisation of education provision. This led to creation of new schools purely based on demand from the side of students and parents without taking into account the labour market needs.

As a result, despite the rather high unemployment, a number of businesses which employ technicians and people with VET qualifications with science profiles struggle to find qualified workforce.

6.2 Main drivers for reform of quality assurance in VET

The pressure to reform VET came from the side of employers who, in the period prior to the economic crisis, faced major problems with recruiting qualified labour – in particular in technical and science-related professions. Though this problem was somewhat diminished with the economic downturn, it remains an issue for certain sectors.

¹⁵ Author: Daniela Ulicna (ICF GHK).

¹⁶ Július Hron (15.06.2012) *Návrh transformácie odborného vzdelávania a prípravy* presentation on a conference entitled **Medzinárodná pracovná konferencia na tému transformácia odborného vzdelávania a prípravy** Calculations based on sourced of Ministry of education, Ministry of Labour and other.

Furthermore, beyond the mere availability of workforce there is also an issue of quality of outcomes. Over the past two decades VET programmes have become less and less attractive for students with good results. This, according to the interviewees, translated into an overall decline in the quality of graduates. The insufficient level of skills and competences among qualified graduates was another reason for labour market actors to push towards a reform.

These pressures resulted in the adoption of the 2009 legislation on VET and its further revision in 2012. The main objective of the measures introduced is to improve matching between VET provision and labour market needs. The 2009 law creates the systemic conditions for matching VET and labour market needs in particular through governance mechanisms and requirements to carry out anticipation and forecasting. The law does not refer to quality assurance as such. It defines the responsibilities of different bodies as part of governance, development and delivery of VET.

The 2012 revision of this law brought a number of changes of which the following are relevant for this case study:

- Publication of employment results from different VET programmes in each region. This should be publicly available for students and parents to make better informed choices;
- The competence of regions to define and impose the number of classes that will be opened in a specific field of study in a given year. This mechanism should regulate the provision of VET (in terms of numbers of places) based on labour market needs and not merely on demand from the side of students. The capacity of those programmes that demonstrate poor results in terms of employment will be reduced, while programmes with good outcomes will be prioritised. This concerns only those programmes that are publicly funded. The methodology that will underpin these decisions is currently in development.
- Introduction of entry requirements for general education programmes as well as for VET programmes leading to upper-secondary qualifications (Maturita) in terms of average grades (a ceiling is introduced and students with worse results than the ceiling should not be eligible). Reintroduction of entry examinations.

A further revision of this legislation is currently being discussed by the Government Council on Vocational Education and Training¹⁷. This is an advisory body that brings together representatives of the government, regions, employers and trade unions. One of the key changes being envisaged is the introduction of performance-based funding for VET institutions to replace the current per capita funding system. The current funding system encourages schools to orientate their efforts towards recruitment of new students independent of their chances to succeed on the labour market.

All these developments aim to improve the quality of outcomes of VET and to develop a VET system that is more responsive to labour market needs. According to the persons interviewed the demands for these reforms are based on the existing situation in terms of human resources in Slovakia.

Beyond these reforms that concern vocational education and training only, there are other developments in quality assurance in school education that also cover VET:

- The Slovak state school inspection has recently completed a project to support self-assessment of schools (see below).
- The National Institute for Certified Education Measurement¹⁸ which implements and analyses the external assessment of students on completion of ISCED 1, 2 and 3 is currently running project to develop a system of quality indicators based on these measurements.
- Certain regional centres for in-service training of teachers and school heads have developed programmes about quality management in a school for headmasters.

As noted above, the Slovak State Inspection has developed a model for self-assessment of schools that is applicable to general education schools as well as VET schools¹⁹. The model offers

¹⁷ <http://www.radavladyoyp.sk/>

¹⁸ http://www.nucem.sk/sk/projekt_esf/project/13

¹⁹ <http://www.ssiba.sk/Default.aspx?text=g&id=25&lang=sk>

a detailed explanation of the approach to self-assessment, suggested quality criteria and indicators as well as examples of questionnaires and methods to collect information in view of such self-assessment. The model is also informed by international experience based on study visits in United Kingdom and the Netherlands. The main international influences for this activity were the exchanges that take place in the framework of the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates²⁰.

There is currently no plan to make school self-assessment a requirement. Instead there is certain willingness to encourage schools to take up self-assessment on voluntary basis and for school councils to push heads of schools to carry out self-assessment. Local authorities have important competences in terms of governance of schools and monitoring their quality assurance. However interviewees expressed the opinion that local authorities are not using these competences. Currently, each school has to present an activity report to its school council. Councils could require schools to transform these activity reports into more complex documents based on true self-assessment efforts. One of the key difficulties in introducing self-assessment to schools is the lack of resources to carry out the necessary activities. Therefore, at this point in time, self-assessment remains scarce and very much depends on the willingness and management style of the head of school and motivation of staff.

6.3 The interaction between EQAVET and the national context

The interviews carried out for this case study show that though a number of activities are currently implemented in Slovakia in the field of quality assurance and quality monitoring, including in VET, these are not particularly influenced by EQAVET.

The only international inspiration cited by interviewees was that of the already mentioned Standing International Conference of Inspectorates.

The three stakeholder representatives interviewed were not aware of EQAVET, though the principles of VET reforms which they support are comparable to the philosophy of EQAVET:

- Quality assurance based on indicators and data, including on outcomes; and
- Matching labour market needs.

The representatives of public authorities interviewed confirmed that there was no clear influence of EQAVET in the past developments of quality assurance in school education. EQAVET is only beginning to be taken into account in the national discussions about VET and so far there is no clear plan as to what shape this would take, as confirmed by the interviewees representing public authorities.

6.4 Conclusions

In Slovakia VET is integrated into school education. This case study indicates that most influences for development of quality assurance in the past decade came from the general education field.

The discourse in VET so far has not been focused on quality assurance but rather on labour market responsiveness and matching. In the discourse of interviewees the two topics appear to be distinct – people tend to associate the term quality assurance with management at institutional level. They do not designate the system-level framework for matching training to labour market needs as quality assurance.

The theme of quality monitoring on the other hand is present in the discourse and documents.

This case study shows that there are multiple influences that affect development of quality assurance systems in VET in Europe, EQAVET being just one of them. The current developments in VET in Slovakia (use of labour market outcomes indicators or development of performance-based, thus outcome indicator based, funding) are compatible with the EQAVET idea of cycle and use of data but have been developed without the influence of EQAVET (even though they are just recent).

²⁰ <http://www.sici-inspectorates.eu/>

The developments in VET are quite strongly influenced by the already mentioned Council. While the documents of the Council discuss the development of qualifications framework and register, there is no evidence of discussion of EQAVET in these reports. The interviewed members of this Council were unaware of EQAVET indicating that the national communication and dissemination of EQAVET has so far failed to reach this key target group. However, given that the European agenda has recently been strengthened within the directorate in charge of VET in the Ministry of education, it is possible that this will change in the future.