



Developing guidelines for supporting quality assurance in VET systems



European Network for Quality Assurance
in Vocational Education and Training

Background

Introducing quality assurance frameworks in VET has become a priority for Member States in recent years. Countries at the early stages of developing their quality assurance policies can learn from the experiences of others who have already implemented comparable quality frameworks.

This brochure presents an early analysis of quality assurance approaches in Member States which are compatible with the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQARF). The analysis identifies a series of common themes, called building blocks, which have been used to establish and strengthen system-wide quality assurance processes, in particular the approaches set out in the EQARF.

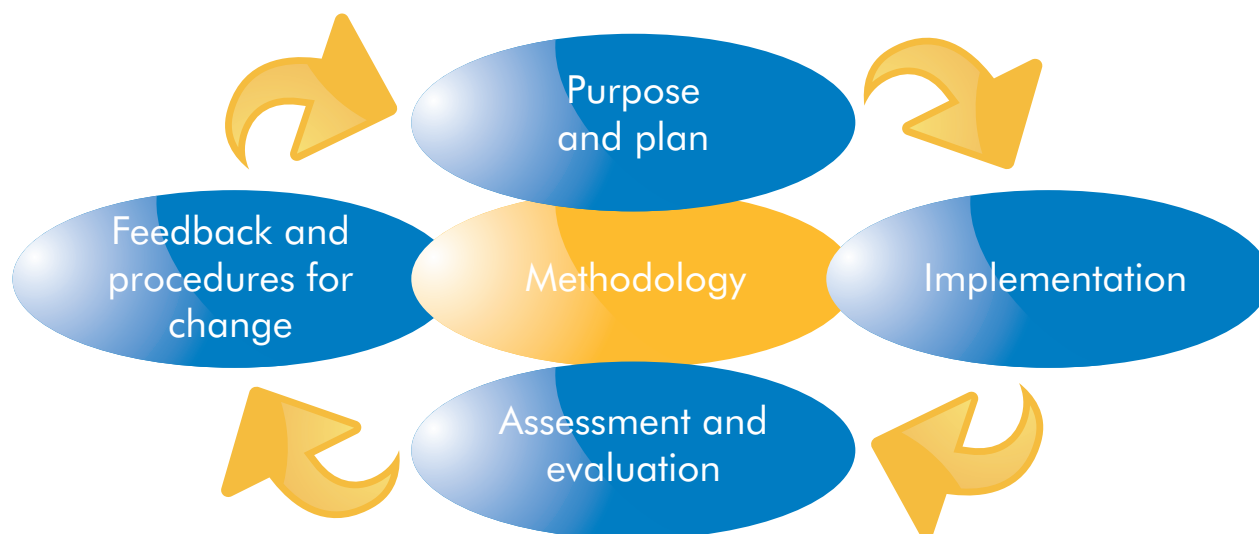
It is based on a series of examples provided by members of the ENQA-VET thematic group on developing guidelines for supporting quality in VET systems.

European context

The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF) provides a European-wide system to help Member States and stakeholders to document, develop, monitor, evaluate and improve the effectiveness of their vocational education and training (VET) provision and quality management practices. The EQARF will also complement work on the quality assurance aspects of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the European Credit System for VET (ECVET). It builds on earlier European level work on quality assurance systems (such as the Common Quality Assurance Framework - CQAF) in that it:

- includes the need for regular monitoring (involving internal and external evaluation mechanisms) and reporting on progress;
- uses common quality criteria and indicative descriptors to underpin the monitoring and reporting arrangements;
- stresses the importance of common indicators to support the evaluation, monitoring and quality assurance of VET systems and providers.

Figure 1: The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQARF).



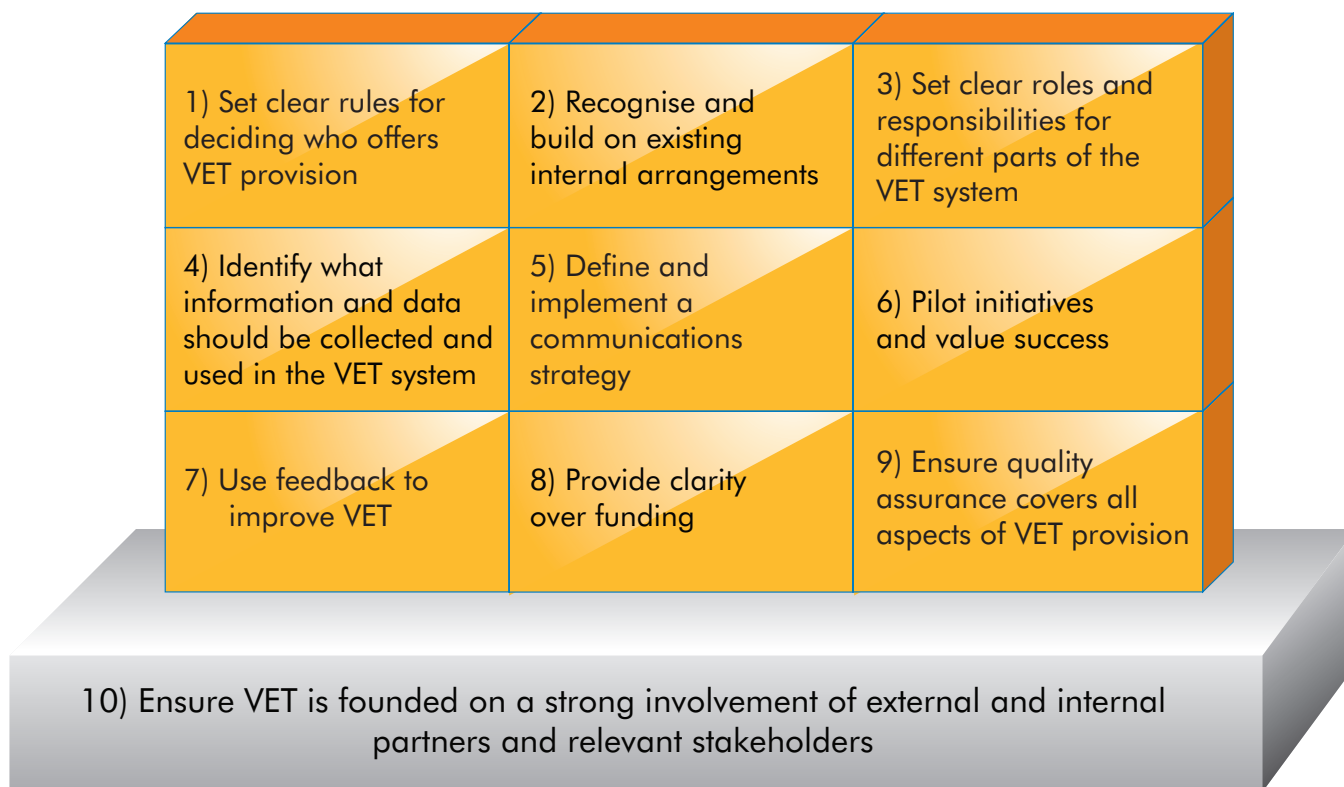
Building blocks

The EQARF is complex and its implementation will take time. The four stages of the quality assurance cycle are interrelated and need to be addressed holistically. Member States have made significant progress in developing and implementing quality assurance systems in VET through both incremental approaches as well as through system-wide reform. New approaches are being developed at both the provider and system level.

The early analysis of quality assurance approaches which match the EQARF has identified a number of interdependent building blocks. Each of these building blocks is based on an analysis of the early lessons and experiences of developing quality assurance systems in Member States. The ten building blocks support and complement each other and build on the EQARF descriptors and indicators as set out in the “Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training”.

A clear understanding of the needs of the labour market and a recognition that occupations have their own requirements and traditions underpin all the early lessons around implementing quality assurance systems in line with the EQARF. This understanding of the needs of the labour market can be enhanced through research, through monitoring and analysing the needs of industry, through liaison with training providers and through regular and systematic monitoring of quality.

Figure 2: The ten building blocks



Each building block refers to the quality assurance cycle, contains a “call to action” and sets out the activity that helps to develop a quality assurance system for VET in line with the EQARF recommendation.

The building blocks enable us to identify:

- the key issues and factors for success;
- Member States’ experiences to date;
- the issues that should be considered alongside the lessons learnt.

What the building blocks mean and their relationship to the four stages of the quality assurance cycle

What the building blocks mean		The four stages of the quality assurance cycle			
		Plan	Implement	Evaluate and assess	Review and revise
1. Set clear rules for deciding who offers VET provision	Member States manage the supply of high quality training by having clear systems to decide which organisations can offer courses and/or qualifications.	✓			
2. Recognise and build on existing internal arrangements	The EQARF Recommendation can be supported through the use of existing provider-based systems and VET quality assurance arrangements.		✓		
3. Set clear roles and responsibilities for different parts of the VET system	At both provider and system level (either nationally or regionally) it is important to be clear about what each organisation is expected to do.	✓			
4. Identify what information and data should be collected and used in the VET system	There is extensive data on vocational training: the challenge is to identify and use a relevant core set of data consistently – with a focus on providers, inspectors, evaluators and government using the same definitions of the indicators and measures.	✓		✓	✓
5. Define and implement a communications strategy	Whilst mainly relevant at the system level, there are clear needs for up-to-date, consistent and accurate information on the quality assurance process to be shared and understood.	✓	✓	✓	✓
6. Pilot initiatives and value success	Quality assurance can be achieved through recognising effective practice. Staged approaches which include pilot programmes, awards and funding can all play a part in recognising successful quality assurance systems.		✓	✓	✓

What the building blocks mean		The four stages of the quality assurance cycle			
		Plan	Implement	Evaluate and assess	Review and revise
7. Use feedback to improve VET	VET has to meet both employers' and learners' needs. Key to any quality assurance system is the way feedback is used to improve the national or regional system, and training providers systematically collect and use the experiences and feedback from learners and employers to modify and improve their provision.			✓	✓
8. Provide clarity over funding	Public and private sector funds are not limitless. The link between high quality provision and funding provides both an incentive as well as an accountability measure for quality assurance arrangements.	✓			
9. Ensure quality assurance covers all aspects of VET provision	Quality assurance covers both the content of training and the administrative and staff arrangements which support teaching and learning. The EQARF should be seen as all encompassing.	✓	✓	✓	✓
10. Ensure VET is founded on a strong involvement of external and internal partners and relevant stakeholders	VET is based on effective partnerships. These exist between government, social partners and national stakeholders; employers and training providers; and learners and society. They create the foundation stone of the VET system which gives it strength, relevance and acceptability.	✓	✓	✓	✓

Main messages

- The EQARF offers a comprehensive and coherent approach to quality assurance. All the pieces of the jigsaw need to be in place for a fully functioning system to operate. The whole system, each of the four stages of the EQARF cycle and the connections between them need to be considered.
- The planning and implementation stages of the EQARF cycle are more likely to be well developed at both provider and system level. The evaluation and assessment stage, the review and revise stage and the connections between each of the four stages in the cycle will need more attention.
- As Member States are in the early stages of developing quality assurance arrangements that align with the EQARF, there is much that can be achieved by building on existing systems and developing an incremental approach to implementation.
- Much has already been achieved by Member States in developing quality assurance systems for VET and these can support the EQARF. While each Member State's approach varies, there is a common focus i.e. the creation of an effective quality assurance system. The case studies (available at www.enqavet.eu) show a wide range of approaches to quality assurance, and each emphasises that it is the quality of the outcomes of VET (e.g. in terms of certificates and stakeholder satisfaction) that matters most in the design of any quality assurance system.
- The development and implementation of a comprehensive, coherent and systematic quality assurance system cannot be taken for granted. It has to be nurtured, supported and regularly reviewed.
- Effective quality assurance systems in VET are dependent on the strong involvement of internal and external partners and relevant stakeholders.

Further information

For more information on this topic please see the full report "Developing guidelines for supporting quality assurance in VET systems" available for download from the ENQA-VET website www.enqavet.eu



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