



Quality assurance

in VET and Higher Education
for improving their permeability

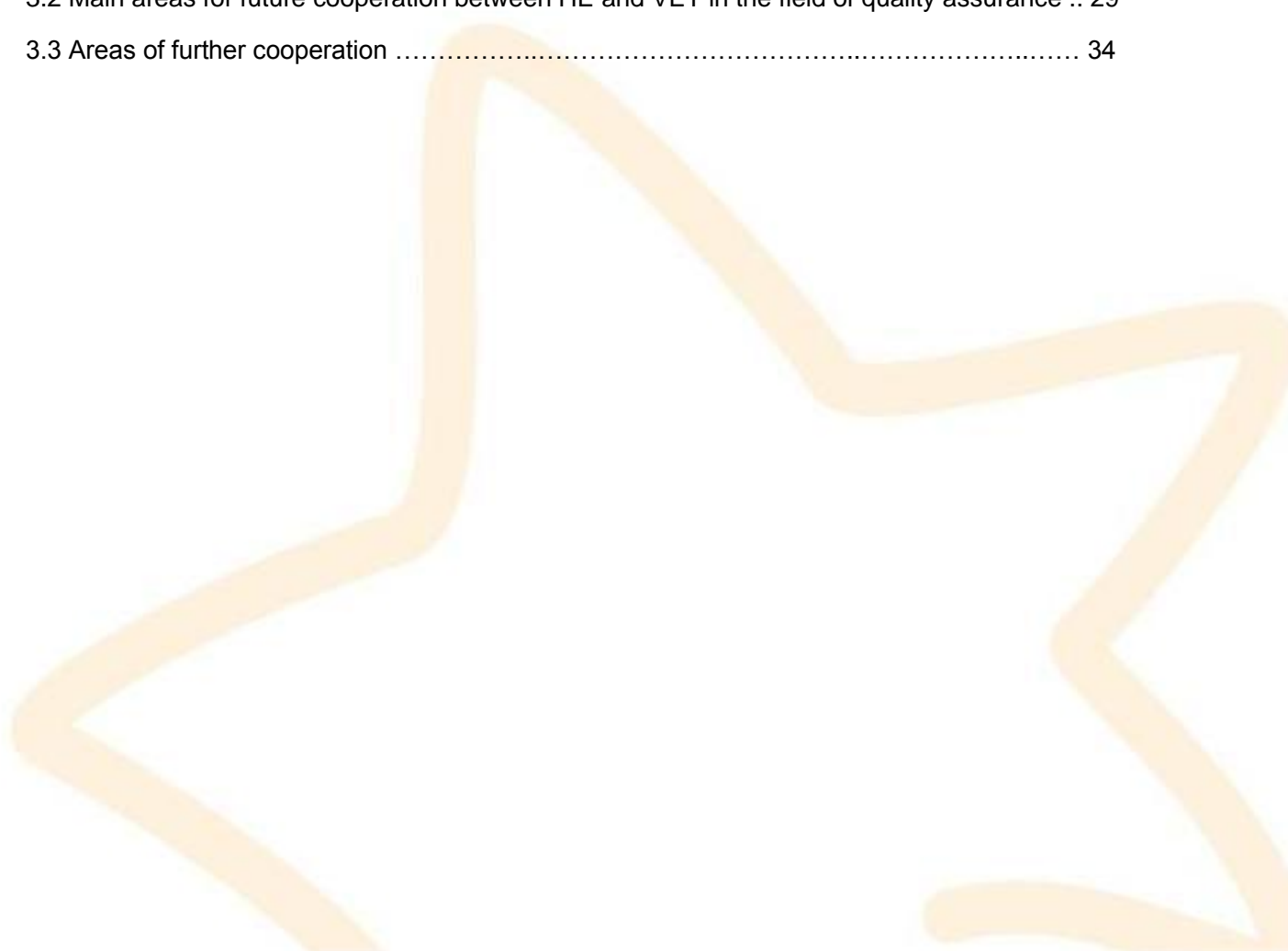
Report of the Joint Expert Seminar on Quality Assurance in vocational education and training (VET) and higher Education (HE) for improving their permeability

22-23 OCTOBER 2013

Brussels

Table of contents

Executive Summary	2
1. Context	6
1.1 The European context of quality assurance in HE and VET	6
1.2 The specific context of the joint expert seminar	7
2. Seminar Content	10
2.1 General overview of the areas of shared interest	11
2.2 Short overview of the topics for workshops	13
3. Conclusions & Recommendations	22
3.1 Conclusions in relation to the topics of the workshops.....	22
3.2 Main areas for future cooperation between HE and VET in the field of quality assurance ..	29
3.3 Areas of further cooperation	34



Executive Summary

Education and training are a key part of the Europe 2020 strategy for responding to the major social and financial challenges faced by EU member states. The needs of individuals as they build their learning and career pathways need to be the drivers by which policymakers identify strategies for responding to the challenges identified in Europe 2020. Effective quality assurance is a key part of ensuring that both higher education (HE) and vocational education and training (VET) respond to the needs of the labour market, society and individual citizens.

This is the context within which the joint expert seminar on quality assurance and improving the permeability between VET and higher education was organised by CEDEFOP and the EQAVET Secretariat, in the premises generously offered by the European Economic and Social Committee. The joint expert seminar addressed three important topics in order to advance the thinking on the issue of permeability between VET and HE:

- 1. quality assurance issues related to work-based learning;**
- 2. quality assurance of new forms and contexts of learning;**
- 3. quality assurance and accreditation.**

The key note addresses emphasised the central role of education in developing responses to the economic crisis and for closing the gap between the qualifications and skills needed and those available, notably through effective quality assurance approaches which increase mobility and permeability between the two “spheres of learning” (VET and HE) and facilitate transitions among sub-systems and between education and the “world of work”.

Discussion on the three topics highlighted a number of recurring themes which are crucial to the creation of a learner-centred European space for Lifelong Learning, in particular: the centrality of teaching and learning in approaches to quality assurance, customisation and individualisation of learning, professionalism of teachers and

trainers, assessment of learning outcomes and certification, support and assistance for learners and teachers, communication with stakeholders and their participation in decision-making processes, accountability and quality improvement and the international dimension of learning.

The conclusions of the three workshops are a summary of the main issues and concerns raised during the workshops, by the presentations and subsequent discussions.

Key messages from the workshops:

- Effective approaches to quality assurance can support and lead to **high-quality work-based learning**, which lies at the heart of current European policies. Thus, the policies and practices, designed from a “win-win” perspective for all partners involved, should aim at better integration of work-based learning into study programmes, improved systems for assessment during period of work-based learning, more transparent processes for monitoring and review, better training and support for teachers, mentors, trainers, tutors etc.
- **Quality assurance of new forms and contexts of teaching and learning** should take into account: the rapidly developing technological environment, new roles for teachers and students and enhanced communication and interaction between them, specific accreditation and quality assurance mechanisms and the “digital divide” (typically, socially excluded groups have less digital experience than well-educated students).
- **Accreditation, as a quality assurance mechanism**, needs to address several challenges, such as: the principle of real empowerment of students; promoting the institution’s staff as authentic players for quality assurance; the relationship between quality assurance and excellence, accountability and improvement, and internal and external evaluation; the need to improve

governance by sharing responsibilities for accreditation at national and EU levels.

Main areas for future cooperation:

The discussions between experts, the reaction in plenary sessions and the contributions of the key stakeholders contributed to agreement on a list of areas for increased cooperation in future between VET and HE in the future. These are:

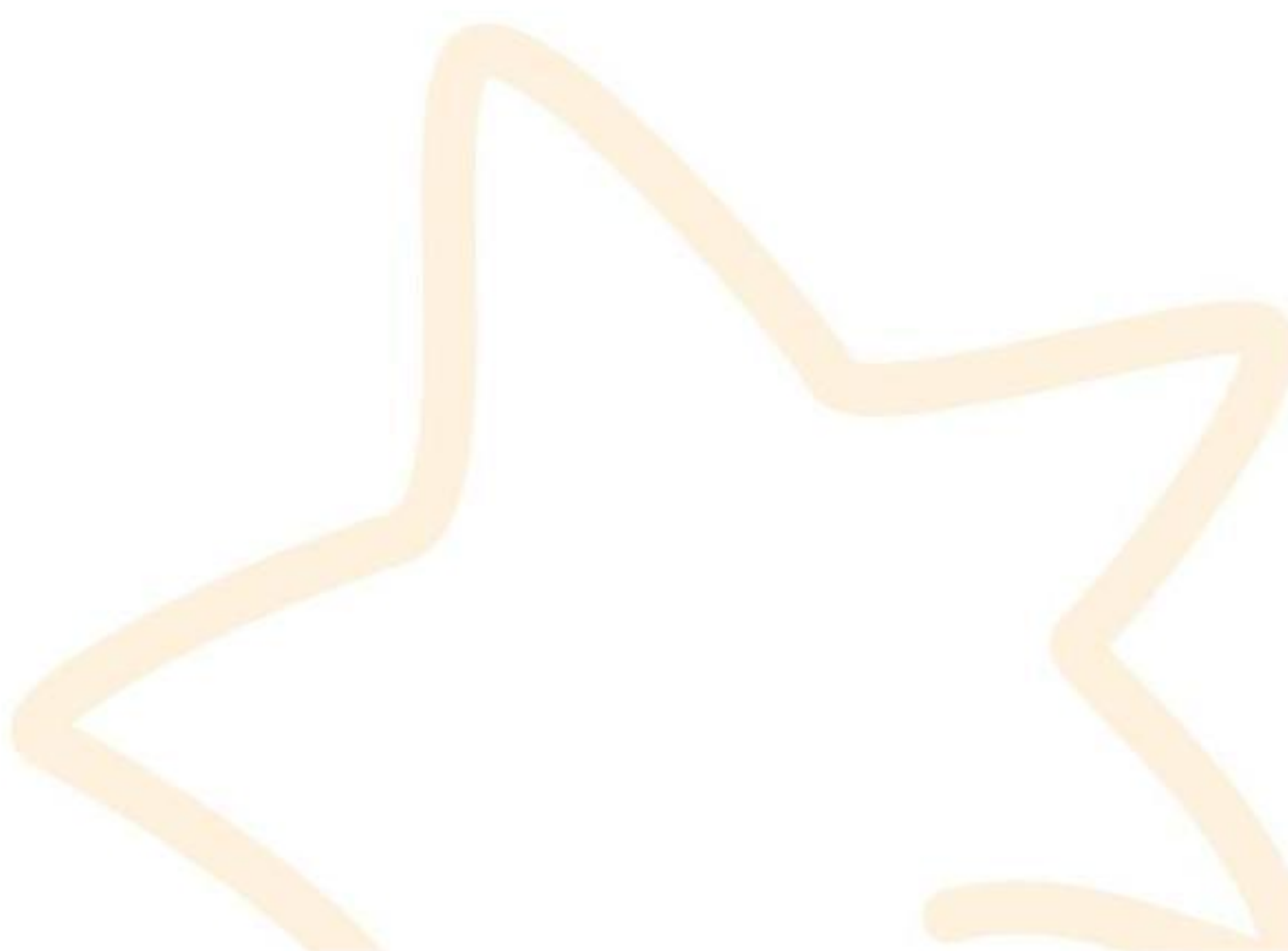
- How can accreditation help institutions to develop excellence?
- How can students/learners be empowered and given a greater voice?
- How can teachers' qualifications be strengthened so that they can develop and deliver high-quality ICT-based teaching and learning?
- How can appropriate support be provided for students in ICT-based teaching and learning?
- How to promote better access for at-risk groups to ICT-based learning?
- How can we create common quality assurance indicators for the two education sub-sectors, and address new areas like appropriate teacher skills to develop and to deliver ICT-based teaching and learning, or work-based learning and assessment, in VET and HE?
- Can we develop quality assurance processes for programmes/degrees offered jointly by VET and HE institutions?
- Can HE and VET collaborate on the creation of projects and pilot initiatives which strengthen mutual trust in quality assurance processes?

In responding to the discussion and the priorities for future work, the European Commission stressed that

Quality assurance approaches should focus on:

- Learner and learning outcomes.

- Cooperation with all stakeholders in order to improve the quality of VET and HE.
- Continuous improvement as the fundamental principle of all quality assurance systems.
- Strengthening teacher (further) education, considering teachers as learners as well, and in all learning contexts (formal, non-formal, informal).
- The integration of different components of education – sub-systems and contexts – must be seen from the lifelong learning perspective, as an important part of developing a European area for skills and qualifications.
- Improved governance which meets the needs of the labour market, in both sub-sectors.
- Increasing permeability between the sub-sectors.



1. Context

The Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (EUROPE 2020)¹ focuses on five ambitious goals: increasing employment, reducing poverty, promoting innovation, reducing the number of early school-leavers and increasing the number of people who obtain third level education and bringing about a low carbon economy, all of which feature education as a major factor. There are still gaps in the different education sectors and discontinuity in transition phases (e.g. from VET to HE, from education to labour market and vice versa). These barriers hinder mobility and exacerbate the existing economic problems, particularly youth unemployment. In this context, there is a need to increase coherence, continuity and consistency between the sub-sectors. Both HE and VET are called upon to contribute to growth and jobs and to cooperate with business.

1.1. The European context of quality assurance in HE and VET

The “Bologna Process”, the overarching strategy for reforming HE in Europe, features quality assurance as one of its three fundamental mechanisms; together with the introduction of the three-cycle system (bachelor/master/doctorate) and the recognition of qualifications and periods of study. In order to achieve this strategy, several institutions (the E4 Group²), were asked to develop further quality assurance of HE.

The Copenhagen Process on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training, launched in 2002, as the European strategy to improve the overall performance, quality and attractiveness of VET in Europe, focuses on quality

¹ Communication from the Commission. EUROPE 2020 A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth Brussels, 3.3.2010 COM(2010) 2020

² [ENQA, EUA, ESU and EURASHE](#)

assurance. The EQAVET Network, and the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (June 2009) on the Establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (the EQAVET Recommendation)³ are the key instruments in this context.

Quality assurance is among the top priorities of both the Bologna and Copenhagen Processes, which has been supported by jointly developed common tools designed to enhance mobility of learners in order to foster a high quality area of European education and training. This is the main policy goal of the Communication “Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes”⁴, which stated that a European Area for Skills and Qualifications is needed in order to respond to the current economic climate, in which cooperation between HE and VET is paramount.

1.2. The specific context of the joint expert seminar

Effective quality assurance is a key part of addressing these challenges, a favoured “vantage point”, in order to identify how these common challenges can most appropriately be addressed. The most recent developments at EU policy level confirm both the HE and the VET approach to quality assurance. Both quality assurance initiatives have, obviously, values, principles and goals in common, even if instruments and focus are not always identical. **In this context, learning from each other is a must.**

³ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0001:0010:EN:PDF>

⁴ The Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes. Strasbourg, 20.11.2012, COM(2012) 669 final http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/rethinking/com669_en.pdf

The present joint expert seminar, co-organised by CEDEFOP⁵ and the EQAVET Secretariat⁶, in the premises generously offered by the European Economic and Social Committee⁷, should be seen as a brainstorming event where participants engaged in discussions in order to identify future areas for enhanced cooperation and joint work, aiming at reinforcing trust between HE and VET.

The seminar focused on three key areas:

1. **quality assurance issues related to work-based learning;**
2. **quality assurance of new forms and contexts of learning;**
3. **quality assurance and accreditation.**

These areas are of significant interest as they represent new challenges for both VET and HE.

All these issues were covered by background documents, prepared by the EQAVET Network and CEDEFOP⁸, by introductory notes and speeches⁹ and in 14 presentations made in three parallel workshops¹⁰.

The main features of the current context were highlighted in the introductory speeches – made by Mr Gonçalo Lobo Xavier, European Economic and Social Committee, Mr Xavier Prats Monné, Deputy Director General, DG EAC, and Mr James J Calleja, Director, CEDEFOP. All three noted that:

- Education is a privileged way of overcoming the economic crisis (“the future of our wellbeing”) by building the European Area for Skills and Qualifications.

⁵ For more information on the seminar see <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/events/21340.aspx>

⁶ For more information on the seminar see http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/vet_higher_education_seminar.aspx.

⁷ For more information on the European Economic and Social Committee, see <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/>

⁸ See the “Background Document” at http://www.eqavet.eu/Libraries/Framework_brochures/VET-HE_seminar_-_Background_document_-_final.sflb.ashx or http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/VET-HE_seminar_-_Background_document_-_final.pdf, and the Introductory Notes for the three workshops, at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/events/21340.aspx>

⁹ See the “Agenda” of the seminar at [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/Agenda_16_10_2013\(1\).pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/Agenda_16_10_2013(1).pdf) and http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/vet_higher_education_seminar.aspx

¹⁰ See the content of the 14 presentations at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/events/21340.aspx> or http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/vet_higher_education_seminar.aspx

- There is a need to close the gap between the need for qualifications and skills (in different subsectors) and the existing provision. In this respect, the quality assurance mechanisms play a significant role and, within these mechanisms, the focus on learner and on learning outcomes.
- The new “Erasmus+” Programme provides a better correlation between “policy options” and “spending options”, quality assurance being one of the priorities for funding.
- A worryingly large part of the EU population lacks the basic skills needed in adult (including professional) life – as highlighted by the OECD Skills Outlook 2013 (October 2013¹¹).
- There is a need to increase synergies between the EU transparency and recognition instruments (EQF, ECVET, ECTS, EQAVET); and cooperation with all stakeholders, particularly the social partners.
- The existence of differences between the quality and quality assurance mechanisms of different levels and forms of education (including between HE and VET) and among EU Member States.
- Mobility and permeability between VET and HE are key areas for discussion, in an effort to ease and make more transparent the transitions between educational sub-sectors and between education and work. It is important to avoid “dead ends”.
- There is a need to improve the use of ICT at all levels of education and training; and to take into account the impact on education and training of globalisation, of mass on-line open content (MOOC), and of “big data” analysis.
- Continuous training and skills improvement (particularly in ICT-based teaching and learning) for teachers and trainers is needed.
- The on-going evaluation of EQAVET and ESG for HE is an opportunity for improving quality assurance mechanisms for VET and HE.

¹¹ [http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/Skills%20volume%201%20\(eng\)--full%20v8--eBook%20\(01%2010%202013\).pdf](http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/Skills%20volume%201%20(eng)--full%20v8--eBook%20(01%2010%202013).pdf)

2. Seminar Content

Mr Simon Field (OECD) and Prof Germain Dondelinger (Ministry for Higher Education and Research, Luxemburg) pointed out relevant issues common to the three focus areas of the seminar (quality of work-based learning, quality of the new forms of learning and accreditation as a quality assurance mechanism):

- It is not always clear what competencies are built into a HE or VET programme.
- The transition between the educational sub-sectors is not always transparent and involves considerable costs for the beneficiary (evident or hidden).
- The tension between general and local needs for skills may be reflected in specific components of the education or training programme (for instance, by a “local-based curriculum”), leading to a better match between the skills available and the skills required.
- Sometimes, the difference between HE and VET is artificial: e.g., in the health care sector, nurses perform the same tasks but they might have been prepared differently in VET and HE.
- The “double” aim of quality assurance mechanisms: ensuring that the service is “fit for purpose”, but also that “the purpose is fit for needs”.
- Quality is expensive. On average, the cost of implementing quality assurance mechanisms is between 7 and 8 per cent of the total cost of a provider. Also there are supplementary costs at system level (monitoring, review and/or accreditation).
- Quality assurance should be the basis for the structural reform of VET and HE systems (e.g. in HE, this is the role of the EQF and the “Dublin Descriptors”).
- There are some shortcomings in quality assurance at HE level. For instance: the international university rankings do not include specific indicators on research and innovation (something that the recent EU multi-ranking system addresses); another example: the existing quality assurance mechanisms for

HE should respond to the specificities of MOOCs. In order to bridge the gap between the two worlds – “education” and “work”, there is a need for “promoters of mutual trust”, among relevant stakeholders – mainly among employers, learners and experts.

- A common set of indicators – quantitative and qualitative – may be useful to measure outcomes and impact.

2.1. General overview of the areas of shared interest

The topics proposed for discussion at workshops were:

1. QUALITY-ASSURED WORK-BASED LEARNING AND WORK-BASED

ASSESSMENT. This topic deals with ensuring quality, by blending “work” and “learning”, in order to meet the needs and requirements of specific qualifications and professions. This theme has always been difficult to define¹²: a lot of different terms are used to describe it (e.g. “apprenticeship”, “internship”, “work placement”, “workplace learning”, “practice-based learning”, “work-integrated learning” etc.). This topic is the subject of extended literature, policies and initiatives in both subsystems, because it leads to a better match between the education and training provision and the needs of the labour market.

2. QUALITY ASSURANCE OF NEW FORMS AND CONTEXTS OF LEARNING.

This second issue highlights the learning opportunities offered by the escalating progress in technology, and its possibilities for “atypical” contexts of learning. When speaking about “new forms and contexts of learning” several dimensions related to quality and quality assurance should be considered. The focus of this seminar was on ensuring the quality of new

¹² See, for instance, W. Norton Grubb (2006). Vocational Education and Training: Issues for a Thematic Review. Paris: OECD

distance and technological learning, with their concepts of “e-learning”, “blended learning”, “adaptive learning”, “synchronous / asynchronous online learning” etc., and specific ways of networking.

3. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION. The third topic, accreditation, is to be considered as a contributor to promoting trust within and between the different education sectors. Nowadays, there is a great variety of education and training on offer across Europe (and the world). This means that mechanisms, external to the educational institutions, for building sustainable dialogue and trust between different actors and sectors, and for achieving a level of compatibility, are essential. These mechanisms are intended to guarantee that the institutions are “competent to carry out specific tasks”¹³ and that they do so “in accordance with the objectives, criteria and standards of the (national/sector) policy frameworks for quality”¹⁴. These mechanisms are designed to respond to the needs of the learner, who should be the ultimate beneficiary of all education and training.

The three topics are interrelated. For instance, work-based learning is being reshaped by the new technologies (“distance learning” / “e-learning” in its multiple forms) and by the new forms and contexts of learning, such as “learning islands”, “learning partnerships and platforms” and “networks of practice”¹⁵. Moreover, ICT skills are now embedded in work-based learning, and “informal learning” tends to be covered by specific recognition and validation mechanisms within work-based learning. Another example is the challenges raised by the accreditation of web-

¹³ Assuring quality in vocational education and training. The role of accrediting VET providers. CEDEFOP (2011). Luxembourg: CEDEFOP/Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/19074.aspx>

¹⁴ Accreditation and quality assurance in vocational education and training Selected European approaches. CEDEFOP (2009). Luxembourg: CEDEFOP/Office for Official Publications of the European Communities (<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/5007.aspx>)

¹⁵ See, for instance, Modernising vocational education and training Fourth report on vocational training research in Europe: background report Volume 2 (2009). <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/14723.aspx> Luxembourg: CEDEFOP/Office for Official Publications of the European Communities

based or blended learning programmes and, also, of different forms of work-based learning. The correlation between the three topics was emphasised in presentations and in the three parallel workshop discussions.

2.2. Short overview of the topics for workshops

Topic 1: QUALITY-ASSURED WORK-BASED LEARNING (WBL) AND WORK-BASED ASSESSMENT

Among the main aspects of this topic discussed were:

- **The communication between providers and employers.** How to improve communication within the educational system (among sub-systems) and with external stakeholders (such as employers) in order to close the gap between the changes in the economy and in technology and the response from the education sector in terms of training standards and curricula.
- **Analysis of the needs of employers and learners.** How to improve the tools and mechanisms for analysing individual and social needs in WBL?
- **Curriculum design.** How to optimise the curriculum design mechanisms and the relationship between classroom-based and WBL?
- **Curriculum delivery.** How to improve curriculum delivery by involving and motivating employers to offer opportunities for WBL?
- **Teacher / trainer professionalism.** How to tackle the dual professional profile of VET and HE teachers and trainers; what are the best ways of keeping staff up to date in both areas?
- **The assessment.** How to assess and integrate (via recognition, validation and certification) the competencies (or parts of competencies) acquired via WBL (generic and specific)?
- **The review mechanisms.** What kind of updating would ensure the continuous improvement of WBL design, delivery and assessment?

Four case studies were presented at the workshop¹⁶ for topic 1:

1. Quality assurance of WBL with a focus on cooperative studies (presenter Ms Ewa Traenkner, Department of Cooperative Studies, BSEL-Berlin). This case highlighted the need for and benefits of a systematic relationship between company, student and university; a systemic approach to input – process – output – outcome of the provision; and closed cooperation among stakeholders.

2. VET and the labour market: the Dutch approach (presenter: Ms Monique Jordense, The Centre of Expertise on VET and the Labour Market (COLO) – KCH) focused on the importance of communicating with stakeholders, including COLO, which is the association of 17 National Centres of Expertise which are sectoral organisations that represent over 40 branches of secondary VET. This case highlighted the importance of accrediting work placements in companies.

3. Preparing the way for greater involvement of firms (presenter Mr Alain Tambour, Ministry of Education, Academie de Caen, Training Advisor – GRETA network, Caen) focused on communication between providers, employers and the labour market in general. This involvement has to precede the actual provision of training; it should be a “joint training” (“*co-formation*”); where regional or local networks of providers are part of the process (acronym: GRETA).

4. VET and industry working together: a quality assurance approach in Malta (presenter Ing. Vincent Maione, QA Director, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology - MCAST). This case described a quality assurance system which focuses mainly on input (learning objectives) and outcomes (learning outcomes) and on generating trust by using accredited work-based learning programmes.

¹⁶ All presentations may be downloaded from http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/vet_higher_education_seminar.aspx or <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/events/21340.aspx>

- In general, work and learning tend to blend, covering both aspects of WBL: learning tends to be increasingly work-based but work has become increasingly learning-based. Therefore, lifelong learning is becoming a key element.
- All stakeholders are looking for ways to increase the relevance of learning in order to support work and for work to be informed by learning. This will be possible if there is closed and structured communication between the main stakeholders (including employers and experts), so that stakeholder needs can be analysed for the purpose of designing and delivering curriculum (role of teacher/trainer) and for the recognition/validation and certification of learning outcomes.

Topic 2: QUALITY ASSURANCE OF NEW FORMS AND CONTEXTS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Among the main aspects of this topic discussed were:

- **The systematic character of quality assurance.** What specific characteristics would ensure the quality assurance of new forms of teaching and learning? What would an appropriate systematic approach to external accreditation and internal quality assurance of ICT-based learning look like?
- **Common criteria, methods and guidelines and different criteria, methods and guidelines.** What are the appropriate principles and criteria, methods and guidelines for quality assurance of this type of learning, which could apply to both VET and HE? What are the differences between VET and HE in assuring the quality of new forms of teaching and learning?
- **Customisation and individualisation of learning.** How to consider the different needs of individual learners in the new forms of teaching and learning? How to bridge the gap between pre-produced/homogenised e-learning content and the demands of different groups of learners for customisation and individualisation?
- **Support and further training for teachers.** What kind of support and continuous further training will teachers and trainers need in order to be able to design, develop

and deploy high quality courses and learning activities within these new forms of learning?

- **Support and assistance for students.** What kinds of empowerment and support structures will different learners need in order to cope with the specific requirements of these new forms and contexts of learning at both VET and HE level?
- **Assessing learning outcomes.** Learning outcomes play a key role in orientating training and education in VET and HE. How to protect this role and achieve the quality standards when using the new forms of teaching and learning? How to assess the competences acquired via the new forms of learning and how to ensure their validity and consistency within specific qualifications?
- **Teaching and learning processes as a nexus of quality assurance systems.** What about the potential shift of focus in quality in training and education towards a new paradigm: Will teaching and learning processes become the centre of interest? What could be the elements of a suitable theoretical framework for quality and quality assurance in VET and HE?
- **Assessment and evaluation of quality.** Assessment and evaluation of quality objectives and learning achievements is essential for assuring and improving quality in training and education. How to improve communication and interaction and how to organise feedback processes between all stakeholders involved in developing, customising, deploying, adopting and learning in these new forms of teaching and learning?

Five case studies were presented at this workshop for topic 2, featuring forms of web-based and media-driven teaching and learning and new learning contexts such as learning islands, learning partnerships or communities of practice, which are increasingly affecting and changing traditional learning processes, both in VET and in HE¹⁷:

¹⁷ All presentations may be downloaded from http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/vet_higher_education_seminar.aspx or <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/events/21340.aspx>

1. New TEL settings – new prospects for teaching in VET and HE (presenter Adj. Prof Raija Hamalainen, Jyväskylä University). The focus of this presentation was on assessment and evaluation of quality and on support and assistance for learners and teachers, within technologically enhanced learning (TEL), emphasising new roles for teachers and new ways of organising the learning content.

2. The Gothenburg University and its “Framework for promoting and assuring quality in virtual institutions” (presenter Dr Davoud Masoumi, University of Gothenburg) underlined the need to focus the quality mechanisms on learning (not on teaching), in a systematic and “cultural” interactive approach, conceiving assessment as the “engine which drives the student’s learning”.

3. The Network of VET schools in mobile learning (presenter Mr. Christian Schrack, Austrian Federal Ministry for Education) focused on assessment and evaluation of quality – its infrastructure and results – in a nationally integrated approach. The case noted some shortcomings and challenges of using ICT in learning (e.g. the increased complexity of planning and timetable and additional costs).

4. Quality assurance of e-learning degrees (presenter Dr. Esther Huertas, AQU Catalunya) focused on the importance of a systematic approach and on issues related to assessment and evaluation of quality of programmes and institutions, and accreditation, raising issues such as plagiarism or the impossibility of obtaining all (or most) of the learning outcomes, exclusively by e-learning / distance learning.

5. Social challenges in distance and e-learning (presenter Dr. Andras Szucs, Secretary General, EDEN European Distance and E-Learning Network) presented a systemic approach to the topic, including principles and criteria (but also myths), methods and guidelines, assessment and evaluation of quality, in relation to social change, equity and other socio-economic challenges.

These presentations were followed by discussion. Among the issues which emerged from discussion at this workshop:

- Teachers and trainers in VET and HE need further training and increased support (mainly from the public sector) in order to face the challenges of the new forms of learning. The new roles of teachers implied by technology should be taken into consideration in relation to remuneration, e.g. there should be a differentiation in payment between face-to-face and online classes. Moreover, the ICT enhanced learning does not diminish the importance of the quality of teachers and trainers; on the contrary, it reinforces their importance: their pedagogical skills must be developed further and adapted to new environments.
- The ICT environment for learning is expensive, usually, and public support is needed, especially for “traditional” universities. In this context, the responsibility for the quality of the new tools for learning (for instance, for MOOCs) is not clearly established.
- The new emerging roles and “transversal” competencies for students implied by the use of ICT (e.g. more self-guided and self-regulated learning, more cooperation and collaborative learning, critical and reflective thinking, etc.) increase the need for student support structures. In this context, the specific skills for technologically enhanced learning (TEL) may be seen from two perspectives: skills needed **for** TEL and skills developed **by** TEL.

Topic 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION

Among the main aspects of this topic discussed were:

- **Focus: improvement versus accountability.** Accreditation in both VET and HE has an accountability function, but it is also meant to improve the quality of

education/training provision. These two roles are not necessarily convergent; in reality they are often opposed. What is the focus of accreditation in HE and/or VET? Is it possible to describe future tendencies in this field?

- **The bureaucratic burden of accreditation.** Both HE and VET institutions complain against the bureaucratic burden of the accreditation process. How could it be reduced? How could procedures be mainstreamed and simplified?
- **Involving stakeholders.** What is the role and weight of participatory approaches like the involvement of students, employers and other stakeholders in the accreditation process and in the delivery of education/training? And in the definition of criteria for accreditation?
- **Correlating internal quality assurance with accreditation.** How to promote mutually beneficial relationships between internal quality assurance and accreditation of education institutions?
- **Accreditation and registration.** How could/should VET quality assurance agencies be registered in an approach inspired by EQAR?
- **Accreditation and internationalisation.** How can international cooperation/internationalisation improve quality within an education/training institution and under which conditions?

Five case studies were presented at this workshop for topic 3:

1. Going for excellence in VET (presenter Mr Kalle Toom, Head of VET, Ministry of Education and Research, Estonia) focused on the importance of ensuring accountability and improvement, by involving stakeholders. Accreditation tailored to the profile of each VET-provider takes into account the geographical/social context of each individual provider. This is possible if the internal quality assurance processes are correlated to the accreditation process. The purpose of accreditation is excellence; and it should ensure the right balance between standardisation of procedures and individualisation of evaluation processes according to the needs and circumstances of VET providers.

2. The EQAR mission and experience with automatic recognition and foreign auditing (presenter Prof Eric Froment, Chair of EQAR Registration Committee) addressed important and topical issues for HE, such as: the accreditation and registration of the quality accreditation agencies; the automatic recognition of their accreditation decisions concerning joint programmes and degrees with other universities.

3. The EQUASS Quality Label (presenter Mr Guus van Beek, Executive Manager) focused on a coherent and complex system of international accreditation (in the social services sector), that is self-generated by the sector through the involvement of all stakeholders. “Positive labelling”, enhances accountability to the benefit of the supply of social services and promotes their real “empowerment”.

4. Institutional accreditation in HE: a means to increase internal responsibility for quality (presenter Prof Philipp Pohlenz, Managing Director, University of Potsdam) presented what he called a ‘system accreditation’, based on a structured approach in which solid internal quality assurance mechanisms and accreditation are closely correlated.

5. Stakeholders’ cooperation on accreditation for a quality culture in VET and HE (presenter Dr Pascale de Rozario, Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, Paris) focused on the importance of accreditation (including “multi-accreditation” and accreditation of “learning facilitators”) as a driver for accountability and for managing diversity, by integrating different quality assurance mechanisms from a lifelong and a life-wide learning perspective.

These presentations were followed by discussion. These are some of the issues which emerged from discussion at this workshop:

- There are internal factors – such as values, attitudes, “mind sets” – in relation to quality assurance – that need to be taken into consideration as they influence learning and continuous improvement, the teacher-student relationship, and the accountability of institutions in relation to their ‘clients’.
- From the learner’s perspective, quality assurance and accreditation should focus on the learning processes and should enhance and make obvious the benefits for the learner.
- Accreditation means, generally, adaptation of the provider to a system. However sometimes, the procedures and aims of the system are not relevant to the needs of providers and their clients.
- There is an increasing demand and need for companies to act as education providers. In this context, the accreditation process needs to be extended to cover them as ‘non-traditional providers, responding to their specific needs.

3. Conclusions & Recommendations

The second day of this seminar¹⁸ was dedicated to conclusions and recommendations. These were reached in consensus by participants inspired by the presentations and discussions taking place at the three workshops and at the panel session (the panel encompassed main actors for quality in VET and HE –see below for further information on the panel).

The seminar was closed by Mr Antonio Silva Mendes, director of education and vocational training, DG EAC, who referred to the overarching European policy in education and training, its achievements, and to the need for continuing the work in this important area.

3.1. Conclusions in relation to the topics of the workshops

The appointed rapporteur of each workshop reported in plenary the key issues which emerged from the workshop discussions. These discussions are summarised below:

On QUALITY-ASSURED WORK-BASED LEARNING (WBL) AND WORK-BASED ASSESSMENT (rapporteur: Ms Katalin Molnár-Stadler)¹⁹

¹⁸ See the “Agenda” of the seminar at [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/Agenda_16_10_2013\(1\).pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/Agenda_16_10_2013(1).pdf) and http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/vet_higher_education_seminar.aspx

¹⁹ See http://www.eqavet.eu/Libraries/Framework_brochures/Workshop_1-Conclusions.sflb.ashx and [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/Conclusions_Workshop_1_KMS_02\(1\).pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/Conclusions_Workshop_1_KMS_02(1).pdf)

High-quality work-based learning lies at the heart of current European policies, it is becoming increasingly important and features common goals for HE and VET, such as: increasing employability (mainly for young people); a better match between training supply and labour market demand; improving labour market relevance of skills and qualifications; facilitating smooth transition from education/training to work.

In order to promote quality assurance in WBL, there is a need to:

- **Design an approach which can benefit all partners involved (a “win-win” perspective)** within a structured regulatory framework (which needs to include work placement protocol, learning agreements, student contracts) that define the roles, tasks, rights and obligations of each party involved (company, learner, provider, centre of expertise etc.).
- **Improve the integration of work-based learning into study programmes** (both for VET and HE), with some focal points such as: well-defined learning objectives, joint ownership of programs, clearly defined learning outcomes, practical work identified for each learning outcome, joint training plan for theoretical and practical training, discussion on the organisation, content and structure of the course of study.
- **Assess and record student achievement in work-based learning by involving all stakeholders** to: agree assessment methods between employers and VET or HE provider; identify and appoint assessors from the employer’s side, have assessment tasks verified by the VET or HE provider; create combined examination boards etc.
- **Consider the “human factor”** by clearly defining the profile (qualification, skills etc.) and the tasks of the mentor, trainer, tutor, work-placement trainer etc.
- **Enhance evaluation, monitoring and improvement of work-based learning** by: setting up systematic feedback/review, including satisfaction

surveys for all relevant stakeholders; and using the results, in a systematic way, to improve actions.

- **Devise complementary external quality assurance / evaluation measures**, for instance: examination of the ability of the company, Quality Charter for accreditation of companies, accredited work-based learning, and inspection of employers by VET or HE providers, networking.
- **Involve social partners** in order to ensure that work-based learning remains responsive to labour market needs; identify future skills requirements; and review the training or occupational standards.

How can VET and HE cooperate in order to promote quality assurance in work-based learning? - Targets for further cooperation:

1. Quality assurance of work-based learning is a possible area of cooperation.
2. Developing a common quality language on quality assurance, in general, and on quality assurance of work-based learning, in particular.
3. Sharing responsibility for quality assurance in work-based learning by involving companies.
4. Shifting the focus from process- to output-based quality assurance systems.
5. Elaborating and/or developing common indicators.
6. Focusing on collaboration at level 5 and 6 of EQF and on joint degrees / joint diplomas.

Issues for consideration:

- **The technological background** of the new forms and contexts of learning has some **specific traits**, such as growing complexity (different technological solutions but also new learning settings for education and training); fast development (new possibilities and options, but rarely fully exploited); increased accessibility (manageable and affordable); networked solutions. These need to be supported by an existing national strategy (to develop, monitor and improve the new forms of learning).
- **There are new roles for teachers and students.** These require continuous skills improvement: for teachers (producing flexible / adapted learning scenarios; becoming facilitators of learning processes; empowering students to produce knowledge; integrating and building on students' prior learning and experience) and for students (more self-guided, self-regulated learning; social networking and collaborative learning; co-produced knowledge; more critical and reflective thinking; reflection on own learning habits).
- **The communication and interaction between teachers and learners (and amongst learners) should be strengthened** by: using multiple communication channels; knowing each other (lecturers and students); ensuring constant constructive feedback from teachers to students; fostering collaboration, group socialisation and private interaction amongst students; encouraging spontaneous online (informal & non-formal) learning; and in distance learning, shaping the identity of being a student.
- **E-learning programs have specific accreditation and quality assurance mechanisms.** For instance, for accreditation, the technological infrastructure, the student support system and way in which the assessment is organised need to be considered. In this context, the quality assurance mechanisms

²⁰ See http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/Workshop_2-Conclusions.pdf and http://www.egavet.eu/Libraries/Framework_brochures/Workshop_2-Conclusions.sflb.ashx

should include the adequacy of the learning scenarios, the teaching and learning methods, the adequacy of tasks and activities.

- **Tackling the ‘digital divide’:** implementing e-learning can deepen the digital gap as vulnerable groups tend to be less digitally literate than well-educated students. So, there is a need to increase access to technology, provide adequate student support systems, and customised learning scenarios. In this respect, sharing good practice is crucial.

How VET and HE can cooperate in order to promote quality assurance in the new forms of learning and teaching? - In order to increase cooperation, there is need to:

- 1.** Develop and promote quality criteria for the design and the delivery of new forms of learning.
- 2.** Work on common quality criteria in order to develop the necessary (ICT) skills for teachers; and develop mechanisms in order to utilise private and public funds for this purpose. Develop quality criteria for appropriate student support.
- 3.** Include in the accreditation guidelines quality criteria for new forms of learning.
- 4.** Promote better access to e-learning for groups at risk.

On QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION (rapporteur: Ms Tina Bertzeletou)

Approaches to accreditation in VET and HE that can provide illustrations of good practice at national, European and sectoral levels:

- **The Estonian accreditation model in initial VET and at national level** (based on EFQM), encourages VET institutions to strive for excellence, by

focusing on continuous improvement. The approach includes mandatory self-assessment and positive external assessment by assessors by which VET providers obtain the right to deliver training. The assessment grids do not define pre-determined levels of quality, rather each institution is considered unique; its state and progress are assessed in relation to its past performance (the assessment being contextual). Although this approach encourages further progress in quality, it is time consuming and assessors need to have a thorough knowledge of each provider and be able to establish a relationship with them.

- **In the University of Potsdam** accreditation is used to enhance the internal responsibility for quality, by so-called “System accreditation”. This system works in tandem with all structures and processes related to teaching and learning, which are assessed internally on the basis of the ESG and relevant German criteria/guidelines. The “System accreditation” certifies that the quality assurance system supports the achievement of the qualification objectives of the study programmes and is reviewed periodically. The “System” improves, as well, the design of the study programmes and enhances the ownership of quality (by the staff).
- **The EQUASS international accreditation model** certifies the quality of social services providers (for persons with disabilities) and the continuous improvement of their services, by awarding the EQUASS quality label. The approach is multi-stakeholder (incl. service-users and funders), non-prescriptive, compatible with EQF and EQAVET. The EQUASS certification model endorses the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and other human rights conventions. Providers have to implement the EQUASS Charter of Rights, with specific indicators, and empower the service users by affording them active participation at all levels of the organisation.
- **From the EQAR perspective**, the Accreditation Agencies are key actors in assuring quality in HE. At EU level, these Agencies are registered in EQAR.

The EQAR goal is to enhance international trust and recognition of the registered agencies and of their results within EHEA. This implies that governments should open their HE systems to the evaluation of HE institutions and programmes by foreign agencies. Despite the progress made since 2008, the automatic recognition, by the Member States, of foreign agencies, registered in EQAR, lags behind, even in the case of joint programmes. The reasons for this situation are: the diversity of approaches, varying national cultures and traditions, the unwillingness to lose a certain control at national level and the financial impact of assessment decisions.

How can VET and HE cooperate to promote quality assurance of accreditation? - Targets for further cooperation:

- 1.** In order to enhance a quality culture in VET and HE institutions beyond accreditation, there is a need to involve stakeholders.
- 2.** The accreditation process should focus on the learning impact of accreditation on society, the economy, the environment and individuals, from the “vantage point” offered by the lifelong learning perspective.
- 3.** Further work is needed to define commonalities and differences among various accreditation approaches prior to considering the feasibility of setting up an overarching voluntary framework from a lifelong learning perspective.
- 4.** Innovative approaches to accreditation with the double function of accountability and quality improvement should be further investigated and promoted.
- 5.** A platform for a systematic exchange of experiences between HE and VET could be set up to facilitate mutual understanding and cross-fertilisation in the field of quality assurance and accreditation²¹.

²¹ In this context some participants in this workshop thought that it could be useful to establish a EU Observatory on quality assurance from the perspective of LLL, which could reflect on the core concepts, define the “learning facilitators”, produce documents and useful information and benchmark the quality assurance approaches, in particular those empowering students and teachers.

3.2. Main areas for future cooperation between HE and VET in the field of quality assurance

The discussions following the presentations of workshop conclusions above were moderated by Mr. Keith Brumfitt, EQAVET expert, who summarised the areas of further cooperation and the suggestions for joint activities. The suggestions are in conformity with the EU related processes and with the principle of subsidiarity whereby Member States are responsible for VET and HE.

Priorities for increasing cooperation between VET and HE in quality assurance²² - KEY QUESTIONS:

- **How can accreditation help institutions to develop excellence?**
- **How can students/learners be empowered and given a greater voice?**
- **How can we create, in work-based learning:**
 - A more consistent understanding of learning outcomes?
 - Clarity regarding who is responsible for quality assurance and how to agree on a common language?
 - Common indicators for the two education sub-sectors?
- **Can we develop quality assurance processes for programmes/degrees offered jointly by VET and HE institutions?**
- Can HE and VET collaborate more on Level 5 and 6 of EQF?
- Would the establishment of an accreditation observatory help?
- Can HE and VET collaborate on quality assurance processes for internships and/or apprenticeships?
- Can HE and VET collaborate on developing quality assurance processes for further training of personnel/staff?
- **Can HE and VET collaborate on developing quality assurance criteria for work-based assessment?**

²² See [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/Where_can_VET_and_HE_work_together_on\(1\).pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/Where_can_VET_and_HE_work_together_on(1).pdf) and http://www.eqavet.eu/Libraries/Framework_brochures/KB_Where_can_VET_and_HE_work_together_on_1.sflb.ashx. The priorities in bold were proposed as the main ones.

- Can HE and VET collaborate on the development of strategies and quality criteria for the quality assurance of e-learning?
- **Can HE and VET collaborate on the creation of projects and pilot initiatives which strengthen mutual trust in quality assurance processes?**
- Can HE and VET collaborate on the development of new approaches to encourage access to e-learning for vulnerable learners?

Participants suggested some ACTIONS in order to address the above identified priorities. There is a need to:

- A.** “Focus on achievable results” and to “simplify things”; take stock of the existing best practices, keep in mind policy priorities and use the available resources – such as the new “Erasmus+” programme.
- B.** Exploit and continue the momentum created by this joint expert Seminar;
- C.** Improve the transitions between sub-sectors by using quality assurance specific mechanisms – for instance, by empowering learners with soft and professional skills, by innovating in pedagogy in order to face new challenges such as the generalised use of new technologies etc.;
- D.** Develop, beyond accreditation, quality monitoring systems with common guidelines and indicators, without forgetting the specific role and characteristics of HE and VET.

The PANEL DISCUSSION, which involved policy makers and stakeholders, helped to refine the areas for future cooperation.

Mr Jean Buffenoir, representative of EVTA²³, highlighted the need to reconsider and innovate in the field of pedagogy, by bringing together knowledge and skills that are divided nowadays among different institutions and HE and VET and by sharing good practices. The quality assurance systems can play a significant role in this respect.

Mr. Sean Feerick, representative of the EQAVET Network²⁴, underlined the request to move outside the comfort areas (and from the sectoral view), to innovate and to focus, using the opportunities offered by the Erasmus+ programme, on common pilot projects for empowering learners and teachers / trainers, from a lifelong learning perspective. The “continuum of learning” has to be the common objective of all quality assurance systems, and the EQAVET Work Programme has already addressed some of these issues.

Prof Manuel Pereira dos Santos, the representative of ETUCE²⁵, noted that education is a fundamental human right and a “public good”, subject to public accountability. In this respect, the teacher and the quality of teaching are extremely important, both for VET and HE. Thus, the research on teaching and reporting on it must be shared, and teachers and students must be involved in devising quality assurance mechanisms.

Ms Nevena Vuksanovic, the representative of ESU²⁶, asked for the unification of the qualification frameworks in order to ensure permeability and to ease transitions between VET and HE. The VET and HE quality assurance systems should “speak the same language”, even if they speak “different dialects” (starting with the specificities of VET and HE). Moreover, the quality systems should enhance student-centred learning, take into account the student support services and involve (and train) all stakeholders.

²³ The European Vocational Training Association – see <http://www.evta.eu/>

²⁴ The European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training – see <http://www.eqavet.eu>

²⁵ The European Trade Union Committee for Education - see http://etuce.homestead.com/ETUCE_en.html

²⁶ The European Students' Union - see <http://www.esu-online.org>

Mr Daniele Di Mitri, representative of OBESSU²⁷, highlighted the fact that VET should not be seen as a “dead end” and must focus not only on the short term skills needed for a job, but also on key competencies – such as citizenship. In order to be student-centred, the evaluation of the quality of learning programmes should be qualitative and not only quantitative, contextual and not only general, work-based and not only school-based. For the same reason, investment in education should not cover only infrastructures or curricula, but also teacher “welfare”.

Ms Sophie Weisswange, the representative of the European Commission²⁸, referred to the increasingly blurred boundaries between “work” and “learning”, as an important cross-sector and cross-country challenge for education, at all levels. For this reason, the existing policies at EU level focus on mobility (of learners, teachers, workers), transparency, mutual trust and on dialogue with all relevant stakeholders. The projects subsidised at EU level may bring added value in this respect, and may be seen as “quick wins”.

Prof Radu Damian, the representative of ENQA²⁹, noted the existing differences: different stakeholders have different needs regarding HE and VET, different levels of preparedness for work-based learning and, even within a sub-system such as HE, the technical qualifications are more likely to be linked to VET, while other qualifications provide transversal competencies. So, any cooperation agreement must take into account these differences and focus on improvements of shared interests, with topics such as: teacher training, work-based assessment, learner empowerment, learning outcomes, research and innovation, a (few) common indicators – in the wider context of a “collaborative competition”. Quality assurance is the prerequisite factor.

²⁷ The Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions - see <http://www.obessu.org/>

²⁸ DG Education and Culture - see http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/

²⁹ The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - see <http://www.enqa.eu/>

In his **CONCLUDING REMARKS**, Mr Antonio Silva Mendes, director of education and vocational training, DG EAC, pointed out the main areas for enhanced future cooperation on quality assurance between VET and HE. He emphasised that more cooperation is needed between VET and HE – and the evaluations on EQAVET and ESG under preparation should inform this action.

- The DG EAC will bring the issues raised by this seminar into discussion at national level, and seek the opinion of the Member States on the topics.
- The learner must be the main objective especially now that we have been made aware of the high human and financial costs of youth unemployment at EU level. All stakeholders and all sectors of education must cooperate in order to offer the necessary skills, reduce the dropout rate and increase access to HE. In this respect, the quality assurance systems and joint initiatives may bring added value.
- The OECD Skills Outlook 2013 indicates a high percentage of EU population with low skill levels, and a correlation between low skills level and unemployment.
- Continuous improvement should be seen as the fundamental principle of all quality assurance systems. While procedures are important, the results (such as mobility, responding effectively to labour market needs) are the key factor.
- Cooperation, involvement and partnership with all stakeholders, in particular with employers, are paramount, keeping in mind the central role of the learner.
- A focal point is cooperation in teacher education, considering teachers as learners in all learning contexts (formal, non-formal, informal learning). Only in this way will teachers be able to empower learners for today and tomorrow – anticipating future needs for competencies and qualifications.

- The integration of different components of education – sub-sectors but also contexts – should be seen from the lifelong learning perspective. Thus, common definitions and joint projects should be developed.
- The decision to develop a European area for skills and qualifications (EASQ) will foster common approaches to quality assurance in all education sub-sectors.
- In this respect, improved governance better correlated with the labour market throughout the whole education spectrum might be needed.
- Permeability among sub-sectors is very important (which increases VET attractiveness). Moreover, a new paradigm is needed: VET and HE not only empower people to find jobs, but also create jobs and initiate businesses.
- The interest, at EU level, in work-based learning is demonstrated by the recent initiative on European Alliance for Apprenticeship.

3.3. Areas of further cooperation

This joint expert seminar provided a good opportunity for colleagues from VET and HE to share ideas and learn from each other. The hope is that the seminar will be a positive first (and not final!) step in building mutual learning and trust. Other issues were raised, correlated with the three main topics of the three workshops discussed in this expert seminar that deserve further exploration, debate and collaboration³⁰:

- 1. Recognition, validation and certification of informal / non-formal learning** and, related to this, the need to develop **quality assured connection bridges** between education and training sectors, on one hand,

³⁰ Some of them are mentioned, as recommendations, in the OECD Adult Skills Survey 2013 – see [http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/Skills%20volume%201%20\(eng\)--full%20v8--eBook%20\(01%2010%202013\).pdf](http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/Skills%20volume%201%20(eng)--full%20v8--eBook%20(01%2010%202013).pdf)

and between the “world of education” and “the world of work”, on the other. This means removing the artificial and unnecessary barriers between general education and VET, between VET and HE, between education and the labour market etc.

- 2. Self-evaluation, peer evaluation and external evaluation**, widely used in VET and HE as part of the approach to quality assurance.
- 3. Combining and integrating peer learning / peer tutoring and coaching with work-based learning and traditional study programmes.** Fewer induction and professional development programmes are using the classical “training” mechanisms.
- 4. Embedding career guidance in VET and HE in an integrated way.** Supporting professional development and even “transition” phases with professional advice is becoming common practice in VET and HE but it is sometimes designed in different ways. A combination of easily searchable, up-to-date online information and personal guidance and counselling services is needed.
- 5. Tackling functions of HE** (e.g. the “third mission”) **and VET** (e.g. developing key competencies) **in a coordinated way.** For instance, the recent OECD Adult Skills Survey has demonstrated that in some Member States adults educated in VET programmes have better developed competencies for adult life than those with a HE qualification.
- 6. Creating “Work-based learning triangles” (universities, VET providers and companies)**, by integrating different levels of qualifications through common standards and ensuring professional development and a smooth transition between work, HE and VET.
- 7. Tackling “hard to reach / hard to motivate” groups and individuals** and recognising that individuals with poor skills are unlikely to engage in education on their own initiative and tend to receive less employer-sponsored training. In this respect, opportunities and incentives to continue the development of proficiency, both outside work and in the workplace, should be offered.

8. Creating more effective links between learning and work by allowing people to develop hard skills on modern equipment and soft skills through real-world experience. This is possible if employers are engaged in education and training and SMEs are assisted in order to provide training. This would ensure the relevance of learning, which would increase employability; workers learn to adapt learning to their lives. Learning content and delivery (part-time, flexible hours, convenient location including distance learning and open education resources) needs to be flexible.

At EU and national level, there is a need to define priorities for common action. For instance:

- 1.** smaller working groups can be established, with representatives from VET and HE could in order to prepare common projects.
- 2.** representatives of general education (primary and secondary levels) should also be invited.
- 3.** Other modalities of cooperation could also be envisaged. A reflection on new governance for a better collaboration could also take place.

Cooperation between HE and VET should be seen as a long-term objective and as an on-going engagement for continuous improvement, keeping in mind the crucial role played by quality assurance.

