

Creating a quality culture in VET - Trends and developments in quality assurance for VET providers

An EQAVET webinar (26 October 2023)

The EQAVET webinar was part of the EU's official programme of the 2023 edition of the [European Vocational Skills Week](#) (VET Skills week), which was embedded in the European Year of Skills (EYS) that takes place from 9 May 2023 until 8 May 2024.

Several events at EU level underlined that vocational education and training (VET) is key to Europe's efforts to respond to economic, climate and social challenges of today and of the future; and highlighted the opportunities VET offers to people of all ages to develop and improve skills for their careers and personal development.

The webinar was attended by **around 130 participants**, representing ministries or national authorities for VET and Higher Education, VET providers and their associations, research institutions, trade unions and employers.

Access the recording of this webinar [here](#)

Summary Report

Setting the scene of the webinar topic

Koen Bois d'Enghien (DG EMPL) opened the webinar with welcoming remarks and by highlighting how the European EQAVET reference framework has supported QA arrangements in the Member States and the EEA countries in vocational education and training at both system and provider level. He thanked the EQAVET Network members for their active engagement. Koen underlined that the EQAVET webinar is connected to the [European Vocational Skills Week](#) and the European Year of Skills. He reminded the participants about a conference called '[Making skills count](#)' which was held in June 2023 and informed the participants that there will be a closing event for the Year of Skills in April 2023.

EQAVET, the [European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET](#), is in place since 2009 to underpin quality improvement in VET. The 2020 Council Recommendation on VET calls for the EQAVET National Reference Points (NRPs) (among other activities) *'to support self-evaluation as a complementary and effective means of quality assurance to allow the measurement of success and the identification of areas for improvement, including with respect to digital readiness of VET systems and institutions.'*¹

During the webinar, it was underlined that VET providers are key actors in the field of Quality Assurance (QA) in VET and creating a quality culture in schools is one of the most important goals in that policy area. The 2022 EQAVET survey showed that

- Accreditation of VET providers is common, and most countries do this for both IVET and CVET providers.
- 16 of the EU27 countries have an external review/inspection system in place.

¹ Page C417 | 8, paragraph 21

- Most countries have national QA standards for VET providers. In most cases providers are required to adhere to them as a condition of accreditation/approval or as part of legislation. In around half of countries it is a condition for funding.

Obviously, QA tools developed for VET providers are influenced by how a national VET system is organised (e.g., centralised versus decentralised, work-based, or school-based, through apprenticeships etc.) and thus, a tool from one country might not necessarily have the same impact in another country. The types of QA frameworks and tools can also depend on the level of autonomy for VET providers that exists in the VET system.

Discussions in the EQAVET Network have shown that centralised Quality Assurance Systems and frameworks introduced by the system level need to allow for a certain level of flexibility, so that VET providers can apply the tools and indicators as needed, given the specific situation of their institution and the local labour market. Some countries have a longstanding experience with self-assessment. Most of them use a broad national framework where it is up to individual VET providers to decide what indicators they consider appropriate to their context, and where they can identify areas of strengths as well as weaknesses to address.

A growing number of countries are in the process of developing and piloting self-assessment on the VET provider level, as this allows VET providers to embrace quality assurance as an empowering instrument and a chance for continuous improvement. Three of them presented recent policy reforms in that area.

Views on quality culture in VET

At the start of the webinar, participants were asked to respond to a Sli.do question, by using one or two words to explain what 'creating a quality culture in VET schools' mean to them.

As shown in the figure below, common words (the larger the word, the more frequent was it used) were cooperation, support, activity participation and accountability. Amongst many other words, using indicators, self-assessment, performance data and continuous improvement were mentioned. The responses linked well with the current discussions in the EQAVET Network; **VET providers becoming institutions that strive for continuous improvement based on measurable performance data.**



Figure 1: word cloud results of Sli.do question: 'In one or two words, what does 'creating a quality culture in VET schools' mean to you?

Understanding EQAVET and VET providers' QA

Keith Brumfitt, thematic expert from the EQAVET Secretariat provided an overview to EQAVET and QA at VET provider level. The EQAVET reference framework is flexible and can be used at regional and national VET systems to meet the different needs across countries. The framework is voluntary to use and use subsidiarity as main principle.

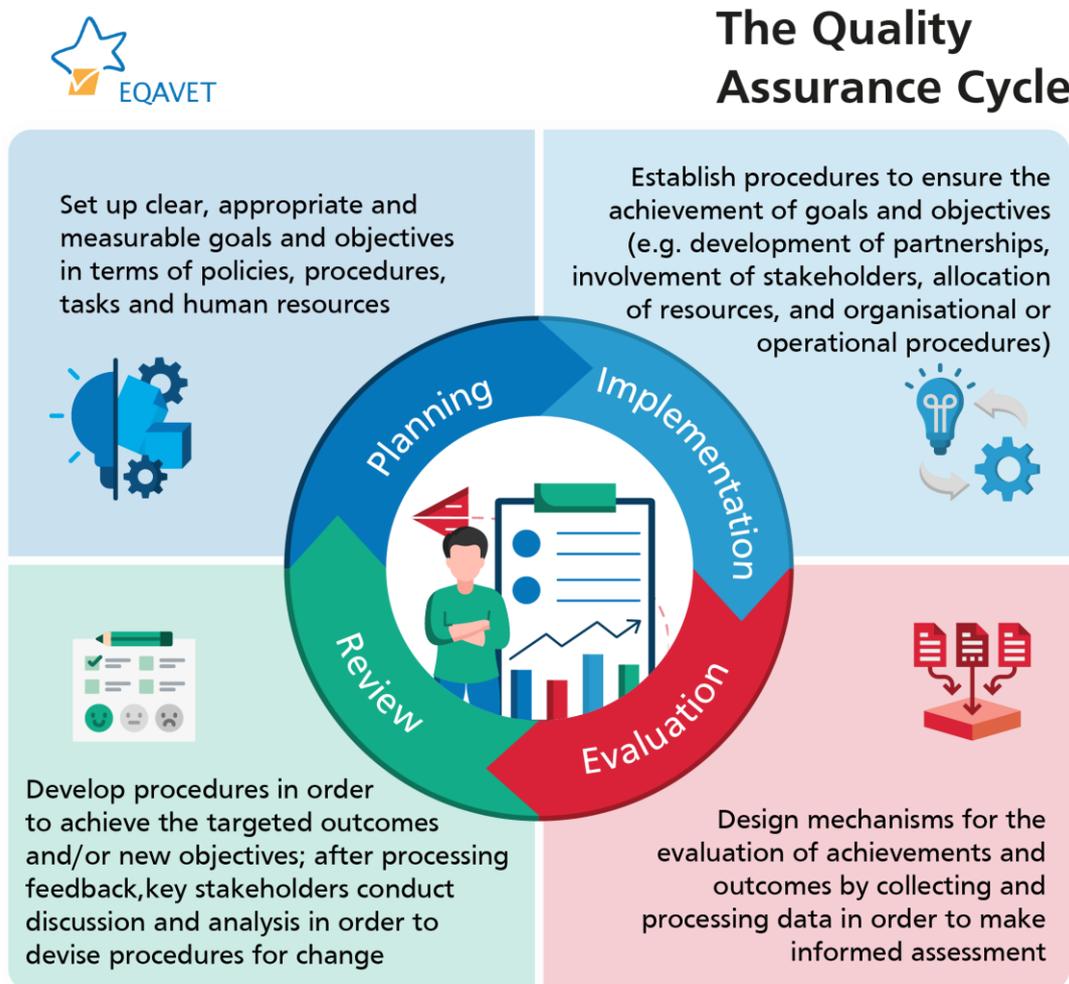


Figure 2: The EQAVET quality assurance cycle²

Keith highlighted three central aspects of the EQAVET reference framework:

- Covers QA at both system and provider level;
- There are 10 indicators based on inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes, all voluntary to use and based on inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes; thus, underpinning the measures of quality;
- Descriptors enables individual providers and policy makers to ask themselves questions about if they can see high quality.
- The cycle includes four parts: planning, implementation, evaluation and review - and the cycle can start at any point, for example, if there are existing arrangement, the QA process starts at the end: the evaluation process.

The EQAVET framework is flexible, allowing Member States to design their own QA approaches for IVET and CVET. Thus, EQAVET is a framework to guide practice, it is not a

² [EQAVET quality assurance cycle - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/euro-iss/quality-assurance-cycle)

quality assurance system. In some countries, the QA system is designed at national level and applicable at provider level and in other countries, individual VET providers design their own QA approaches – and in some countries – a combination of both approaches are used. There are some key factors influencing what type of QA system a country applies, including:

- The level of autonomy of the providers
- The extent of work-based learning versus at school learning
- The role of employers, e.g., in the dual system or in apprenticeships
- If CVET and IVET learners are awarded the same qualifications
- The application of external quality assurance
- The level of transparency and accountability (e.g., in some countries, the assessments are published and linked to funding).

It is important to highlight that the quality assurance approaches used by VET providers change with time and some of the current trends showcase an increase importance of self-assessments leading to annual action plans and reports on progress. The use of data in decision making processes is also becoming more frequent, more stakeholders are involved in QA processes, increased use of digital tools and delivery as well as linking VET funding to learning outcomes.

There are some challenges linked to QA at provider level, for example:

- The transition to green and digital economy has an impact on work-based learning and some providers struggle to adapt in a rapid manner
- The creation of new IT-based solutions to learning; digital and blended learning can make it difficult for providers to carry out QA
- as online learning becomes more important for the acquisition of knowledge, more ‘school-based’ time can be used to strengthen team working, personal responsibility and other soft skills
- The rapidly changing economic development makes it difficult to create a quality culture.

In conclusion, the EQAVET framework is popular amongst VET providers as it helps them to define expectations and it is an easy framework to use. QA can be applied in all aspects of VET. At the same time, many policy makers are searching for more consistency in how VET providers carry out QA.

Ali Zaidi, thematic expert from the EQAVET Secretariat provided a brief overview of surveys conducted amongst the EQAVET National Reference Points (NRPs) in 2022. More specifically, the EQAVET Secretariat organise regular surveys for the Network, which showcase that the EQAVET QA cycle is popular and used widely across Network Members, including the usage of all indicators at system level and most indicators at provider level.

The EQAVET NRP survey takes place every two years to examine new developments in QA across the countries as well as creating an understanding of their system-level and provider-level approaches. The survey was sent to 37 countries resulting in 34 replies (including all Member States, most candidate and potential candidate countries).

The key findings show that

- Most countries are working to set up national approaches to quality assurance, by 2022 13 countries had fully implemented approaches and five countries had partially implemented approaches
- The national QA systems are mainly based on the EQAVET principles
- 11 countries have common approaches for VET provider level and six countries have partially implemented systems. All countries’ provider level QA covers IVET and 22 countries also cover CVET

- Accreditation of providers to deliver VET is rather common (e.g., 27 countries apply this for both IVET and CVET)
- Around half of the countries have systems in place for external reviews
- Most (e.g., 20 countries) have national QA standards for VET providers, often linked to accreditation/approval as a part of the legislation but in half of the cases, also used as a condition for funding.

Overall, the use of system-level and provider-level QA systems is continuing to grow in both the EU27 and beyond – often reflecting recent EU policy instruments (EQAVET, graduate tracking, Learning Outcomes). Systems are reaching a level of maturity which means the growth is not now as fast as before. Priority instead shifts to refining and expanding existing systems. The use of EQAVET continues to be used more widely for IVET than CVET. However, the gap appears to be decreasing.

The presentations generated a lot of interest amongst the participants. For example, one participant asked why outcome indicators are being used less frequently and the answer was that it is often linked to the state of the economy. More specifically, when the economy is doing well, learners are often able to obtain a well-paid job quickly after graduation. Therefore, the success of an outcome indicator is more a measure of the economy than the quality of the provided education. The application of outcome indicators during a bad economy period often makes it look like the provider is not doing a good job, whereas this might not be the case. It is therefore important to understand how the data from outcome indicators should be used – if the result showcase that a particular sector or VET programme is not doing well, a policy maker need to do something about it – but this can be very difficult as the purpose is not always aligned with the national priorities. However, outcome indicators are good to use for a micro-credential or shorter CVET programme.

Latvia: A Framework for Education Quality Assessment and Assurance

Agija Reča-Danga, Latvian EQAVET NRP presented their framework for education quality assessment and assurance. The State Education Quality Service in Latvia is currently in the process of implementing a Framework for Education Quality Assessment and Assurance. Reforms introduced in 2021 entailed a paradigm shift regarding the understanding of 'quality' among VET providers, establishing the understanding that quality is more than compliance with legal regulations.

The new Latvian Quality Framework introduces joint quality standards and an approach to quality assurance that is based on data driven planning, execution, monitoring and improvement, using EQAVET indicators. The framework also re-defines the links of internal and external evaluation: the external inspection will work with the same quality standards; hence the results will be an additional source of data and information for VET providers to use in the review phase.

Framework for Education Quality Assessment and Assurance, internal and external school evaluation

Education quality is a process, curriculum, environment and leadership which ensures inclusive education for all and opportunity to achieve high quality results in accordance with the goals set by the society and defined by the state

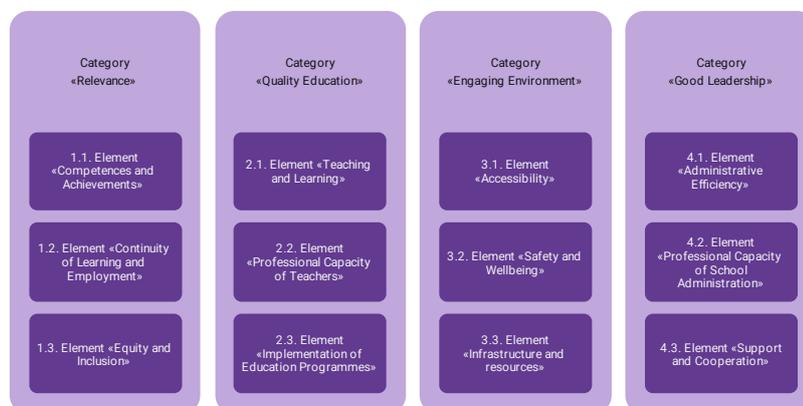


Figure 3: Screenshot from Latvian NRPS presentation during the EQAVET webinar, 26 October 2023

First experiences show that, for VET providers to fully embrace the transition to 'learning organisations', school leadership and management need to invest more time into strategic planning, boosting their capacity to analyse data and information to draw conclusions regarding strengths and potentials for future improvements.

Agija was asked two questions after her presentation.

- The first one was related to the use of indicators where Agija explained that Latvia are not using two EQAVET indicators, namely indicator 1³ (which refers to a QA system which is already in place in Latvia) and indicator 7⁴ (which focusses on the unemployment rate, as this information is already collected by another Ministry).
- Upon a second question, Agija explained how the indicators 5 and 6⁵ are used to showcase the link between high quality and the labour market and stated that if these indicators showcase high results, it often implies that the provided education is of high quality and matches the needs of the labour market.

Hungary: A Quality Management System for formal VET institutions

Katalin Molnárné Stadler, Hungarian EQAVET NRP continued the EQAVET webinar by presenting the Hungarian Quality Management System (QMS) for formal VET institutions. In 2021, the Hungarian National Reference Point has launched an EQAVET-based quality management system (QMS) for formal VET institutions. The QMS is underpinned by a legal regulation and foresees comprehensive institutional self-evaluation against a set of 21 VET-specific EQAVET-based self-evaluation criteria. The self-evaluation is carried out every two years and is a tool for continuous quality improvement, with the ultimate aim to develop and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the VET provision and the institution's operations, including the professional-pedagogical work.

³ EQAVET Indicator 1: Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers (see [EQAVET webpages](#))

⁴ EQAVET Indicator 7: Unemployment rate in the country (ibid)

⁵ EQAVET Indicator 5: Placement rate of graduates from VET programmes, EQAVET Indicator 6: Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace (ibid)

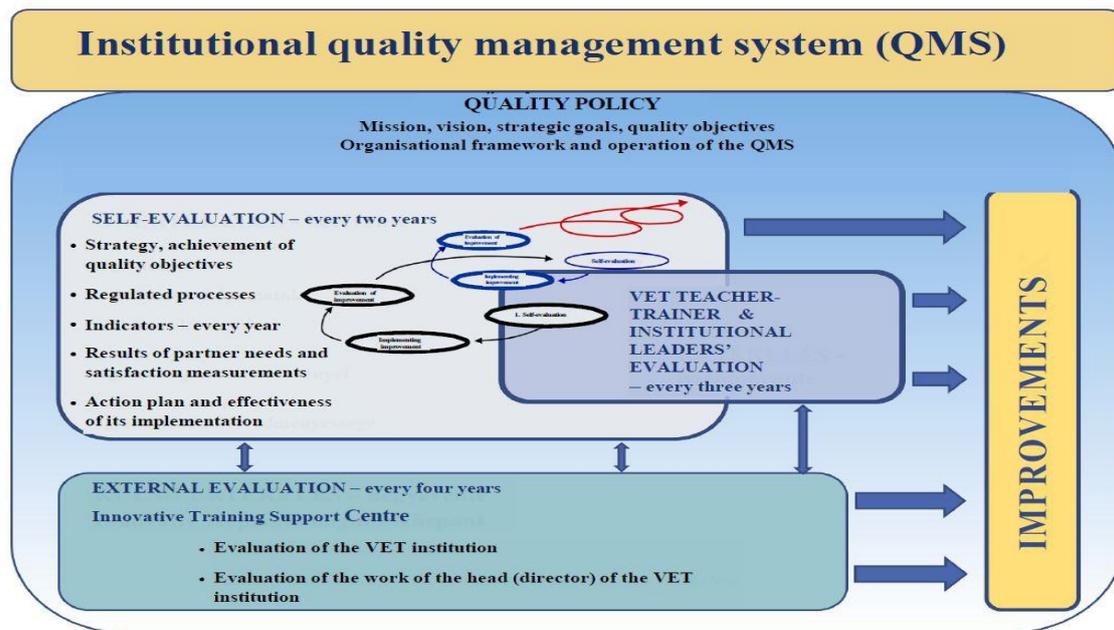


Figure 4: Screenshot of Hungarian NRP presentation during the EQAVET webinar, 26 October 2023

The self-evaluation is managed and coordinated by a school-internal Quality Management Team, in collaboration with internal and external stakeholders (including school management, teachers, trainers, and other staff; students/graduates/; parents; dual training providers; and employers).

Following Katalin's presentation, she answered three questions:

- The first question was related to what the institutions evaluate and Katalin replied that the institutions' evaluations cover all areas and results achieved through the activities. In the process, all aspects are taken into consideration. Institutions assess and evaluate the strategic objectives, the VET indicators in line with policy priorities. They also evaluate the needs of the relevant partners as well as analysing and developing action plans to ensure the improvements are made.
- The second question was related to the existence of external QA. Katalin explained that external QA is designed in the system, but the guidelines are still to be developed and will be based on the EQAVET framework and the existing self-assessments. The external evaluators will look at the same aspects as the VET providers did for the self-assessments.
- The last question was related to the how the quality management is organised within the VET institutions and Katalin replied that QA teams are established in each VET institution, and it is up to each institution to regulate how they will work and depending on the size of the institution, a team can consist of three to seven staff members.

Greece: A Quality Assurance methodology for IVET Study Programmes

Antonios Glaros, Greek EQAVET NRP presented the Greek QA methodology for IVET study programmes. The Greek National Reference Point has developed a QA methodology for IVET Study Programmes together with an Implementation Manual and is currently in the process of evaluating the outcomes from a piloting exercise with two public IVET institutions. The methodology is based on a set of clear quality criteria and standards and stipulates a process that links change and improvement based on self-assessment with external assessment, reflection, and review.

A 360-degree evaluation of the piloting showed that the QA methodology was positively received. Through the combination of self-evaluation and external evaluation, VET providers were able to identify a few areas for improvement that had previously gone unnoticed.



Quality Assurance Methodology Basic Stages



Figure 5: Screenshot of Greek NRP presentation during the EQAVET webinar, 26 October 2023

Following the presentation, Antonios was asked to elaborate on three questions:

- The first question was related to how the self-assessments are carried out (e.g., online or on-site). The self-assessments are carried out on-site and the results are not publicly available. The idea of the assessments is to bring support and help to improve for the VET providers.
- In terms of frequency, Antonios explained that the self-assessments are carried out annually and the external evaluation are taking place every three years.
- For the future, the Greek NRP will draw on the peer feedback from a recent EQAVET Peer Review (May 2023) and revise the methodology after the pilot phase. The idea is to carry out additional pilots and to establish a legislative framework.

Webinar learnings and participant reflections

At the end of the webinar, participants were asked to answer a second Sli.do question, to share their key learning points on the topic of the webinar – trends and developments in quality assurance at VET provider level.

Several participants underlined that QA is an on-going process contributing to continuous improvement. The importance of flexibility and a joint framework were raised, as well as the importance of using QA to motivate VET providers and help with their progress. The participants also highlighted that QA at provider level can vary depending on their level of autonomy and that mentioned that there should be a mutual understanding of the non-formal and formal training needs amongst the Ministry and the labour market.

The question was raised how companies can and should use the EQAVET Framework, when they are partners in providing vocational education and training, for instance in apprenticeships (dual systems).

Please share your key learning points on quality assurance at VET provider level!

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(1/2)

- Quality and timely vocational education
- Flexibility
- Mutual understanding under the Ministry and the labour needs even for non formal or informal training
- United systems to improve
- A lot of useful information provided today, important for everyone
- Qualitt and assurance
- NQF design level high quality
- Continously improving
- Seeing the systematic approaches to cycles of SE incorporating indicators
- Motivating. Helping progress
- Its a framework not a system
- Comprehensive qa model sa and ee
- that results of the evaluation is used to improve the training
- nothing on the companies as cooperators of VET provision, in dual and non-dual systems?
- Reassurance
- On going process

slido

Figure 6: Screenshot of Sli.ido poll launched during the EQAVET webinar, 26 October 2023

To conclude, **Keith Brumfitt, thematic expert from the EQAVET Secretariat** stated that the three country examples showcased the flexibility of the EQAVET reference framework as countries apply different approaches and indicators to align with their national contexts. It was also possible to see alignment between self-assessments and external assessments and how some systems favour qualitative data and others prefer quantitative data. The EQAVET reference framework is flexible enough to accommodate different learning environments and allows for different types of data collection and analysis.

Further information

Please visit the [EQAVET webpage](#) for further information on the EQAVET Network and its activities, including country factsheets and case studies on national QA arrangements, and information about the EQAVET National Reference Points.