



Study on EU VET instruments (EQAVET and ECVET)

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Abstract

Council Recommendations on two instruments, the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) were adopted in 2009. This study examines the influence EQAVET and ECVET have had on VET policy developments at national and European level, as well as their relationship with other EU instruments, and considers if and how the instruments can build on what has been achieved so far and maximise their future impact.

Future arrangements for ECVET and EQAVET are proposed to address some of the barriers experienced to their implementation, weaknesses in their approach, and equip them to achieve renewed ambitions for VET policy in the EU as well as the outcomes they were originally expected to achieve. The study mentions the options which are assessed most positively: for ECVET to incorporate the ECVET principles within a wider VET strategy framework and to integrate the ECVET Memorandum of Understanding and Learning Agreement into Europass while making their use mandatory for Erasmus+ beneficiaries of VET mobility actions; for EQAVET to implement peer reviews of country developments which are also possibly embedded in a wider VET strategy framework.

Executive summary

Background

Council Recommendations on two instruments, the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) were adopted in 2009. EQAVET intends that countries define a strategy to improve the systems of Quality Assurance (QA) in VET, based on a quality cycle and the use of performance indicators and provider self-assessment. ECVET intends a modular approach in VET provision, with courses described using units of learning outcomes.

The ECVET Recommendation was developed to improve the recognition, accumulation and transfer of learning outcomes, supporting mobility and lifelong learning. This responded to the 2002 Copenhagen Declaration on the future priorities for enhancing European cooperation in VET, which stated a need for a system which supported *'the transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of competence and/or qualifications, between different countries and at different levels'*.

The EQAVET Recommendation was developed to improve the quality of VET. The importance of maintaining quality in VET was initially articulated in the 2000 Lisbon strategy. This stated that the transition to a knowledge-based economy requires modern and adaptable VET. The 2002 Copenhagen Declaration subsequently proposed EU cooperation in quality assurance in VET in order to support mutual trust and the recognition of qualifications.

Now after nearly 10 years of implementation, the European Commission commissioned this research to explore a) how the instruments have influenced national developments in quality assurance and qualification design building on previous evaluations, and b) potential options for the future direction of the two instruments, to build on what has already taken place, address any gaps or challenges with their implementation, and ensure the further development of the instruments continue to be aligned to current European VET policies.

This study

Context

Both the EQAVET and ECVET Recommendation were adopted in 2009; at a time when the EU had to navigate the turbulence caused by the economic crisis which started in late 2007. These developments affected not only the demand for skills and the funding

available to the VET system (although the effect had a time lag), but also companies' capacity to engage in workplace learning. While the European economy has since recovered, recent years have not been without challenge. Repercussions of austerity measures, large migrant flows and not least the ongoing digital transformation of jobs place new demands on education and training systems.

As 2020 approaches the Commission is carefully examining option for future developments supporting the EU VET policy. The 2015 Riga Conclusions reinforced the priority for flexible vocational pathways for skills development which ECVET supports. More recently, relevant policy actions have emphasised the quality and effectiveness of apprenticeship (EFQEA), promoting automatic mutual recognition of formal educational qualifications, the establishment of a European Education Area and the launch of ErasmusPro long-duration mobility and their expansion after 2020. With EQAVET, recent policy ambitions have opened up discussions on a possible revision of the underlying Recommendation, have put a greater emphasis on its application beyond school-based VET and have introduced a focus on establishing continuous information and feedback loops in VET linked to labour market intelligence.

Detailed aims of the study

The study aims to examine the influence EQAVET and ECVET have had on VET policy developments at national and European level, as well as their relationship with other EU instruments, and consider if and how the instruments can build on what has been achieved so far and maximise their future impact.

To do this, the study:

- Provides a comprehensive analytical summary of national VET developments related to quality assurance and flexible vocational pathways and assesses how EQAVET and ECVET have influenced these;
- Examines the relationships between EQAVET and ECVET with other EU instruments such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), EUROPASS and the Validation Recommendation;

Based on these analyses, developed and tested a set of scenarios on how the two instruments can develop in future and meet future challenges in VET.

Approach and method

The study drew on the following activities:

- **Key informant interviews** with staff in national ministries and authorities with responsibility for quality assurance and VET programme design. Interviews were conducted with 81 individuals from 26 countries. The interviews took place between March and August 2018.
- **Targeted consultation** with EQAVET National Reference Points and ECVET User Group Members. In total, 15 responses were received for the targeted consultation between April and August 2018.
- **Desk research** examined material published in the last 10 years on the implementation and impact of EQAVET and ECVET. In total, 130 documents were reviewed. The review documents were coded and analysed using NVIVO software for analysing mixed methods research. This took place between March and August 2018.
- **Thematic case studies** to explore particular aspects of the implementation of ECVET and EQAVET identified in the Interim report through further informant interviews and desk research. These took place between July and August 2018.
- **Two stakeholder events** to identify and then test scenarios for the future direction of the EQAVET and ECVET instruments. The first stakeholder event

took place in 4 May 2018 and the second event took place on 27 June 2018. Both events were attended by 10-15 stakeholders.

- **Two Delphi surveys** to test the potential scenarios in more depth. The first Delphi survey was issued in July 2018 and ran for over four weeks, receiving eight responses. The second survey ran in October 2018, after the final set of draft options were completed. The survey ran for two weeks and received six responses. Respondents were not attendees at the stakeholder events.

Consultations of the ECVET and EQAVET Network to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the potential scenarios. The EQAVET Network discussed the options at the EQAVET Annual Network meeting in Sofia in June 2018 while the ECVET Network analysed the options at the ECVET Annual Network meeting in Thessaloniki in October 2018.

Key findings: ECVET

Overview of relevant VET developments since 2009

Since 2009, in parallel with the generalised adoption of a learning outcomes-based approach, six more countries have introduced modules or units in IVET (bringing the total to 21) with four others having some qualifications or parts of qualifications modularised. Credit systems have been introduced in a further nine countries over the same period bringing the total to 17 though very few applying the concept of ECVET points.

Influence on national policies and systems

ECVET has widely contributed to the development of a better-quality mobility experience, through more effective agreement on, and documentation, of learning outcomes and their recognition being adopted within all Member States. In some countries this has created a shift where learning outcomes undertaken abroad can now contribute to a learner's VET qualification, while also ensuring the mobility experience is better structured, organised and quality assured. In a few countries it has contributed to developing more flexible vocational pathways both generally (AT, ML, FI) and for learners facing barriers to learning (IE, HU, PT). It is recognised that its contribution to increasing flexible learning pathways for upskilling and reskilling could be greater.

On the other hand, ECVET requires units to be assessed and certified separately for accumulation, a concept which some strongly believe incompatible with the key characteristics of their VET qualifications. It has also had less success with the use of its credit points to transfer assessed learning outcomes. Countries which employ national credit point systems for VET programmes or ECTS for mobility have not adopted ECVET points for mobility outcomes.

Enablers and barriers to implementation of the recommendation

The use of peer learning activities (PLAs) and other events (annual fora, Users' Group and network meetings) for mutual learning and exchange of experience are widely believed to have sustained implementation of ECVET principles, certainly in the countries which have adopted them fully since 2009. The User Group provided identifiable country leads for ECVET who could be an advocate to take forward the Recommendation in national authorities. This indicates the approach used by the Commission and Secretariat to identify needs and share information are largely effective.

It is commonly reported though that the User Group and other activities have not been so effective in engaging VET policy makers in national authorities. This is in part attributed to the User Group being made up of technical experts, which reflects how ECVET is implemented at a national level (in most cases it is led by dedicated teams specialising in mobility or in implementing EU projects).

Relationship with other instruments and policies

ECVET is recognised by VET stakeholders as playing a role in supporting other instruments and policies such as VNIL, EQF, and Europass. On a practical level, ECVET has supported the use of learning outcomes among Member States, which is an important requirement for referencing to the EQF, and of VNIL being defined in terms of units in Member States' recognition of NFIL policies - which is then used to provide access and/or exemption to VET programmes.

At national level, there are some indications that ECVET is not always being considered holistically with the other EU instruments. This is resulting in some inconsistencies/ confusion around the use of documentation for mobility for example (perceptions of overlap with Europass). This is perceived to arise from ECVET not having the same visibility as instruments, such as EQF and Europass, and when it is understood it is often considered as a tool for mobility, rather than for flexible VET learning and progression more broadly.

Key findings: EQAVET

Overview of relevant VET developments in QA since 2009

Nineteen countries have made major changes to their QA arrangements for IVET, including self-assessment requirements for providers since 2009, and the others have made some adjustments. Twenty countries have made some changes to their QA arrangements for CVET.

Indicative descriptors are also widely used, with over 87% of countries reported that their national QA system included EQAVET indicative descriptors (all EU-28 countries except BE-fr and UK (all parts) and 87% reported using EQAVET indicators (all EU-28 countries except Be-nl, BE-fr UK-NI, UK-SC and RO). However, the type and number of indicators and indicative descriptors used varies significantly by country. Some indicators such as 4 and 3 were used by nearly all countries whereas others such as 6A and 6B, 9B and 10B were used by less than seven Member States.

Influence on national policies and systems

EQAVET has spurred countries to review and refine their national QA systems. Twelve Member States have changed their QA policies specifically to implement the EQAVET recommendation, while in most other countries it has been used to review their systems against EU good practice in QA and to inform recent adjustments to their QA systems. Some countries (EE, PT, RO) have new QA legislation that refers specifically to EQAVET. As a consequence, all country representatives in the EQAVET Secretariat survey reported that their QA system utilised or is compatible with the EQAVET framework, with the exception of BE (fr).

A particular strength of the EQAVET Recommendation is that it has reportedly been useful in countries with more mature QA systems. Among countries that did not have formal QA processes in place, it was felt to play a key role in communicating the components that need to be in place for an effective system. In countries with more developed QA systems, it was felt to act as a reference point to improve their systems in line with best practice.

However, there is a perception that EQAVET did not contribute significantly to the improvement of transparency of QA arrangements between countries and did not foster mutual trust. Furthermore, there is also a perception that EQAVET is mostly applied in school-based IVET. Where it is used in CVET and WBL it only covers some providers. This was partly attributed to CVET operating in a less regulated environment to IVET and partly because CVET providers are generally smaller and therefore not having the capacity to implement QA processes. Most countries also reported challenges in implementing EQAVET in WBL particularly where it might dampen demand for apprentices.

There is generally considered among countries that there is room for improvement because:

- There is believed to be much variation in the quality of provider self-assessments. The requirement for providers to undertake self-assessments is optional in some countries. The extent to which this is done was reported to vary considerably and to be linked to the extent a provider attracted learners from other areas;
- There remains considerable diversity in the monitoring systems that countries employ to examine provider performance. Although most countries have a provider register, the monitoring can vary considerably in effect and intensity.
- Some indicators are not used extensively at a VET system or provider level because of resource and data limitations. This means that few countries use all 10 indicators and there is considerable diversity in the range of indicators that countries or providers use.
- The use of indicative descriptors is also mixed. Across all stages of the planning cycle it is only used by 50-70% of countries at a system level and less than half of providers use indicative descriptors in each of the planning stages. The indicators least used are in the review and evaluation stages of the quality circle, meaning that the EQAVET implementation seems to be underdeveloped in relation to the feed-back loop between education and labour market.
- In some cases, this is due to resource constraints or a lack of data making it difficult to use certain indicators, but a few countries also felt that some indicators, such as amount of funding invested in teacher training (2B) and unemployment rates, were not appropriate for their national VET system.

Enablers and barriers to implementation of the recommendation

The National Reference Point (NRP) network was felt to play a key role in developing a peer network across the EU on QA. This was regarded as a key achievement of EQAVET, as previously QA policy leads had no direct channels for discussion with their peers in other countries, which meant there was little shared understanding of different countries' QA systems. However, because the NRP has not represented the diversity of VET, there was a perception that this resulted in EQAVET implementation being more focused on IVET than CVET.

The Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) were also felt to provide considerable value in facilitating the sharing of effective practice. They helped address practical issues that countries faced in implementing the Recommendation and also provided an opportunity for dealing with any ambiguities. The PLAs and network were also felt to be well-supported by the secretariat, with high quality and relevant materials.

A key challenge that countries faced when implementing EQAVET was gaining political support for implementing EQAVET. This has been variable. While most countries reported that QA is perceived as a high political priority and in some this has led to a rapid response, this has not always translated into political commitment in others. It has also been a challenge in some countries to disseminate knowledge and understanding of QA and EQAVET in national authorities outside a team of experts.

As with ECVET, there are also challenges in disseminating materials for providers on effective practice in QA. Although some of the materials produced by the Secretariat have been helpful, in some cases language barriers have prevented them from being used effectively.

Relationship with other instruments and policies

EQAVET was generally felt to underpin all other instruments supporting VET as it aimed to improve the quality of learning, which improves learner outcomes and progression. As such it was felt to have relevance to the implementation of the EQF, Europass and ECVET as well as supporting wider national and European Commission

priorities for improving access to higher level skills and permeability between HE and VET.

There were also no significant reported overlaps or inconsistencies between EQAVET and other VET instruments. The EQAVET indicators and descriptors for self-assessment and monitoring were generally felt to complement other EU VET instruments which mainly focused on the design and recognition of learning.

There are some differences between the European Standards and Guidelines for QA in HE (ESG) and EQAVET. The ESG provides more specificity in some areas, particularly in areas such as external QA, the assessment of students and the quality of teachers, but has less emphasis on provider indicators for use for achievement and progression. This creates challenges for Higher VET institutions, which commonly adhere to ESG requirements and consequently are reluctant to introduce additional requirements for EQAVET.

At national level, in some countries EQAVET has not been introduced alongside reforms to particular VET sub-sectors, the introduction of NQFs, or as part of wider national reforms to improve the quality and delivery of VET. This indicates that at a national level it cannot yet be universally considered as a set of principles that underpin high-quality VET.

How might challenges and future needs be addressed

Any future arrangements for ECVET and EQAVET must attempt to confront the barriers experienced to their implementation, address any weaknesses in their approach which are reducing their impact, and equip them to better achieve their objectives in line with the EU VET policy.

Any future arrangements must also consider the feasibility of implementing changes within the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and the key agreements for VET and HE over the last ten years or so: Copenhagen Riga and Bologna.

What are the challenges?

It is evident that barriers could be inhibiting countries from implementing the current recommendations. For ECVET this includes the perception that it is a 'credit system' with stringent requirements on credit points that may not be compatible with some countries' national credit system. For EQAVET this includes the perception that some indicators are more difficult to implement than others. Both instruments are also used less frequently in WBL and CVET, partly due to the provider base for these education sectors being more fragmented, but for EQAVET there is also a perception the instrument is more suitable for IVET.

What are the strengths?

However, there are strengths to build on not least the fact that both instruments can build from a higher base of countries which have adopted the instruments and have established peer learning activities to enable practical implementation. In many countries considerable progress has been made in the implementation of credit systems, flexible learning pathways and QA systems since both instruments were introduced in 2009.

With no let-up in ambitions for achieving vocational flexible learning pathways for skills development and mutual trust in learning outcomes and formal qualifications between countries, the topics addressed by ECVET and EQAVET continue to be policy relevant.

What is the scope of options

The options set out potential approaches to increase the impact of the two instruments in raising the quality of QA in VET and supporting flexible learning and mobility. They include a status quo, options for decreasing the scope of the instruments as well as options to increase alignment with HE and other lifelong

learning instruments. It should also be noted that some of the options are not mutually exclusive and could be combined or pursued in parallel.

ECVET

The options for ECVET are summarised below:

- **Option 1 (Enhanced status quo)** - the concept and definition of ECVET points which would be revised. It would be repositioned as a set ECVET principles rather than emphasising the 'system' aspect.
- **Option 2 (Embedding the functions of ECVET into other existing EU instrument and programmes)** - the promotion of VET mobility and flexible learning pathways to continue, but developments on credits will be implemented as per the provisions in Annex V of the EQF recommendation while the ECVET Memorandum of Understanding and the Learning Agreement could be integrated into Europass and the VET mobility charter could make it compulsory for Erasmus + beneficiaries of mobility actions to follow aspects of ECVET
- **Option 3 (VET instruments become part of a broader European policy framework for VET)** – introduction of an overarching Recommendation that covers quality assurance, flexibility and recognition in VET. This would be governed by a single policy group. Sub-groups would be used to take forward priority actions for particular instruments and policy areas. A PLA programme will exist, which will be instigated by the single policy group.
- **Option 4 (VET and HE instruments are more aligned to each other, with an ambition of more convergence between HE and VET)** – introduction of a recommendation incorporating aspects of ECTS and ECVET (e.g. focus on learning outcomes, MoU, LA). Would also include a redefined concept of units of LO and credit points
- **Option 5 (European framework for transfer of learning achievements and flexible progression pathways)** – facilitating the transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed or validated LO between various contexts by proposing Member States recognise and document achievements and recognise them for access, admission and exemption. This would build on and expand the European Commission Recommendations for VNFIL and the Promoting automatic mutual recognition of HE and upper secondary education diplomas and outcomes of learning gained abroad. To aid trust the framework would also specify syntax and language for writing learning outcomes.

Assessment of options

The option that has the largest benefits is Option 5, followed by Option 4 and Option 3. However, both Option 5 and Option 4 have high implementation costs, and are less feasible compared to other options. Both also have potentially high unintended consequences - for Option 4 there is likely to be resistance to using the credit points used in ECTS and for Option 5 the more stretching requirements for implementing common descriptions of (units of) learning outcomes and transferring learning outcomes may deter some countries from implementing the instrument.

Consequently, **Option 3 is the most positively assessed option based on the stakeholder consultation.** It provides significant benefits in terms of increasing the synergy with other lifelong learning instruments, which in turn will encourage take up as it is seen to complement other EU priorities and instruments, as well as benefits from addressing obvious weaknesses with the instrument. The option will also provide some efficiency savings and will also be feasible to implement. However, as indicated in the Delphi survey, this will likely achieve a higher impact if **combined with Option 2.**

EQAVET

The EQAVET options are described below:

- **Option 1 (Enhanced status quo)** - Incorporating a set of core indicators utilised by all providers into a new EQAVET Recommendation, as well as the refinements introduced in EQAVET+.
- **Option 2 (Embedding the instrument into other existing EU policy instruments)** – implementing EQAVET alongside the implementation of the EQF, with the legal basis of the instrument being Annex IV of the EQF recommendation.
- **Option 3 (Instruments become part of a broader policy strategy framework for VET)** – introduction of an overarching Recommendation that covers quality assurance, flexibility and recognition in VET. This would be governed by a single policy group. Sub-groups would be used to take forward priority actions for particular instruments and policy areas. A PLA programme will exist, which will be instigated by the single policy group.
- **Option 4 (Strengthening the Recommendation by implementing peer reviews of Member States' quality assurance arrangements in VET at system level)** - the Recommendation would be revised to incorporate a core set of descriptors and indicators that can be used to carry out peer reviews. The governance structure would remain but include a remit to monitor the progress countries are making in developing their QA systems and to provide support.
- **Option 5 (Aligning HE and VET instruments, with an ambition of converging systems across HE and VET)** – the creation of an overarching Recommendation for quality in education which provides high-level principles for QA that both systems adhere to, and sets out tools to do this (ESG in HE and EQAVET for VET).
- **Option 6 (Introduction of a voluntary certification system for national QA systems)** - specifying explicit expectations for national quality systems and introduce a certification scheme where countries must ensure their VET QA systems achieve certain standards to be certified. These could be graded so they progress towards a standard.

Assessment of options

The options that would have the greatest benefits are Option 4 and Option 6. Both these options would work to raise standards in QA, with Option 4 promoting a peer review process that enables countries to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their QA systems, and Option 6 resulting in countries refining their QA systems to achieve certification. However, option 6 would incur high costs for countries as well as for the Commission to administer a certification process. Furthermore, some countries may also be resistant to sharing and participating in a certification process. As a consequence, there would be significant unintended consequences of some countries deciding not to implement the EQAVET recommendation. Country resistance also makes the option relatively unfeasible compared to the other options.

Consequently, **Option 4 is the most positively assessed option based on the stakeholder consultation.** It provides the greatest benefits in terms of increasing the quality of QA arrangements while also supporting peer learning and the maintenance of a team of experts that can stimulate developments in Member States. The costs of implementing the option are low and it is relatively feasible to implement. It was also the preferred option in the Delphi survey. By reinforcing EU cooperation in QA at EU level and enhancing mutual trust between Member States, this option fits also very well with the establishment of a European Education Area and the Council Recommendation on automatic recognition of diplomas and learning periods abroad.

This option could possibly also be combined with **option 3** and the peer reviews on quality assurance could be part of broader policy strategy framework for VET.

Conclusions

EQAVET

As a result of the options appraisal it is suggested to **implement a peer review of country developments (Option 4) possibly as part of a broader strategy framework for VET (option 3)** to take forward the implementation of EQAVET and fully achieve its intentions. In this option a group comprising Member States, supported by a Secretariat, will review by mutual agreement country QA systems to identify strengths and areas of improvement, based on the expectations in the EQAVET recommendation.

Alongside taking forward this option, there are elements from the other options which could also be applied to support the implementation of EQAVET. These are:

- Changing the technical specification of the recommendation to include the provisions in EQAVET+, strengthening the requirements for external reviews and changing the list of indicators to include some mandatory indicators and others than are optional.
- Exploring the feasibility of developing a joint QA mission statement for both HE and VET, which can be used to frame the overall Commission vision for QA.
- Conduct research on QA approaches and indicators that are proportional for smaller CVET providers.

ECVET

Following the options appraisal, it is **suggested to integrate ECVET in a wider policy strategy framework for VET (Option 3)** to reinvigorate the use of ECVET principles to support flexible learning pathways that enhance lifelong learning. This would include having an overarching governance group setting out an annual work programme alongside and complementary to other instruments.

Alongside this, there are additional elements which could also be applied to support the implementation of this option. These include:

- Remove or revise the concept and definition of ECVET points and reference to credit systems as part of the on-going promotion of ECVET
- Strengthening the use of ECVET in transnational mobility by making the use of MoU and LA a requirement for VET Mobility Charter holders and integrating them in Europass.
- Supporting a new generation of pilot projects to promote and demonstrate how ECVET principles can be used to address current issues related to flexible and individualised learning pathways.
- Take further the developments on credits as per the provisions in annex V of the EQF Recommendation.

1 Introduction and background

In the last 10 years, a range of policy instruments and tools in the field of Vocational Education and Training (VET) have been introduced. They are aimed at supporting recognition and mutual trust between education systems in Europe, facilitating lifelong learning and mobility, and improving the learning experience.

Council Recommendations on two of these instruments, the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) were adopted in 2009. EQAVET intends that countries define a strategy to improve the systems of Quality Assurance (QA) in VET, based on a quality cycle and the use of performance indicators and provider self-assessment. ECVET intends a modular approach to learning, with courses described using units of learning outcomes.

After nearly 10 years of implementation, the European Commission commissioned this research to explore a) how the instruments have influenced national developments in quality assurance and qualification design building on previous evaluations, and b) potential options for the future direction of the two instruments, to build on what has already taken place, address any gaps or challenges with their implementation, and ensure the instruments continue to be aligned to current European VET policies and instruments.

1.1 Overview of EU VET policy instruments

The ECVET Recommendation was developed to support the functioning of the European Union's internal market principle of the free movement of people. Its aim was to facilitate recognition, transfer and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes, supporting mobility and lifelong learning. This responded to the 2002 Copenhagen Declaration on the future priorities for enhancing European cooperation in VET, which stated a need for a system which supported 'the transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of competence and/or qualifications, between different countries and at different levels'.

The ECVET Recommendation proposes that Member States 'create the necessary conditions and adopt measures so that as from 2012 it is possible for ECVET to be gradually applied to VET qualifications at all levels'. It states that qualifications should be organised into units of learning outcomes which can be assessed and validated with a number of associated ECVET points. Qualifications composed of units would make it easier for individuals to transfer units across countries and to obtain credit for units through validation of non-formal learning. Pathways to vocational qualifications would thus become more flexible.

The EQAVET Recommendation emerged from developments to support improvement to the quality of VET. The importance of maintaining quality in VET was initially articulated in the 2000 Lisbon strategy. This stated that the transition to a knowledge-based economy with resultant rapid change to economies and society requires modern and adaptable VET. The 2002 Copenhagen Declaration subsequently proposed EU cooperation in quality assurance in VET in order to support mutual trust and the recognition of qualifications.

Following the Copenhagen Declaration, the Education Council agreed on cooperation to develop a shared framework for QA in VET. This was taken forward by a Technical Working Group (TWG) comprising European Free Trade Area/European Economic Area (EEA) countries, European Social Partners and the Commission. The TWG developed a Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF). The Education Council endorsed the framework and invited Member States and the European Commission to promote it.

The CQAF contained four elements:

- A model for reviewing VET systems, based on a planning, implementation, evaluation and review cycle;

- A methodology for assessing and reviewing VET systems, based on a mix of provider self-assessment and external evaluation;
- A monitoring system that could be used at a national or regional level, potentially combined with a voluntary peer review process;
- A set of reference indicators to support Member States to monitor and evaluate their own systems.

In 2009 the Council Recommendation on EQAVET built on and further developed the CQAF to establish a reference instrument to help Member States to promote and monitor continuous improvement of their VET. It recommends that by June 2011 countries devise an approach aimed at improving QA systems at national level and making best use of the framework.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The aim of the study is to examine the effect EQAVET and ECVET has had on policy developments at national and European level, as well as their relationship with other EU instruments such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), EUROPASS and the Validation Recommendation, and consider if and how the instruments can build on what has been achieved so far and maximise their future impact.

To do this, the study is expected to:

- Produce a comprehensive analytical summary of national VET developments related to quality assurance and flexible vocational pathways (i.e. action taken to pursue the objectives agreed in the framework of the Copenhagen Process, as defined in the 2010 Bruges Communiqué and the 2015 Riga conclusions), and how these developments have been influenced by EQAVET and ECVET;
- Based on this analysis, to develop and test a set of scenarios on how the two instruments can develop in future. This will be used to produce reflections on the future direction of the two instruments.

In the context of the proposed actions set out in the 2016 New Skills Agenda for Europe, there is also need for an analysis of how these tools have helped Member States to achieve the objectives agreed within the Copenhagen Process for enhanced cooperation in VET, and to evaluate their position in, and suitability for, the policy context of education and training today.

The study focuses on EU28 countries. It is recognised that other countries take part in the governance arrangements for ECVET and EQAVET as well as in Erasmus+ funded projects which work with these instruments. Where this information is available it is included in the study.

1.3 Policy context

1.3.1 What has shaped the development of ECVET and EQAVET

EQAVET and ECVET were introduced by respective European Recommendations in 2009, although their origins can be traced back to VET initiatives launched at the beginning of the 2000s. One important shared pillar between the two instruments in this context is the **2002 Copenhagen Declaration**¹ on enhanced European cooperation in VET. It set out actions aiming to increase voluntary cooperation in order to promote mutual trust, transparency and the recognition of competences and qualifications.

¹ Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, and the European Commission, convened in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002, on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training — 'The Copenhagen Declaration'
http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/copenhagen-declaration_en.pdf

The wider EU policy context has evolved in the years since the Copenhagen Declaration. Over the last decade, VET policy has been significantly shaped by the severe economic crisis in the late 2000s, a slow period of recovery, and rising pressures associated with demographic and technological change, which have posed new challenges to education and training systems.

In the **2010 Bruges Communiqué**², countries agreed to follow the Recommendation and test ECVET for mobility, and to implement the EQAVET Recommendation by making progress towards national quality assurance frameworks for VET.

In November 2011, the Council adopted conclusions on a **benchmark for learning mobility**. It stated that, by 2020, across the EU at least 6 % of 18-34 year olds with an initial VET (IVET) qualification should have had an IVET-related study or training period (including work placements) abroad lasting a minimum of two weeks, or less if documented by Europass.³

The Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the **validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNIL)** invites Member States to set up national arrangements for the validation (identification, documentation, assessment and certification) of non-formal and informal learning by 2018.⁴ Validation aims to make the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning visible, through its identification, documentation, assessment and certification, thereby also supporting mobility across sectors and countries. In 2015, Member States and social partners agreed, for the period 2015–2020, to focus on five medium-term deliverables for VET, building on those identified in the Bruges Communiqué in 2010. These are referred to as the **2015 Riga Conclusions**. For ECVET, the conclusions particularly emphasised the creation of flexible vocational pathways (the third medium-term deliverable includes a call for flexible pathways for skills development and qualifications). With regard to EQAVET, the conclusions also directly refer to quality assurance in VET, in particular the first deliverable (to promote work based learning (WBL) in all its forms by involving all relevant stakeholders) and the second deliverable (to further develop quality assurance mechanisms in VET in line with the EQAVET Recommendation and, as part of QA systems, establish continuous information and feedback loops in IVET and CVET systems based on learning outcomes).

1.3.2 Recent policy developments

The **2016 New Skills Agenda** not only launched the revision of the EQF Recommendation and the Europass Decision, which have since been adopted, but also brought forward a **possible revision of the EQAVET and ECVET Recommendations** as part of an action to support VET modernisation.⁵ The Council adopted the revised EQF and the related annexes in May 2017. The Commission's proposal to revise the Europass framework was adopted in April 2018.⁶

In March 2018, the Council adopted a recommendation setting a **European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships (EFQEA)**, based on a Commission proposal published in October 2017⁷. It identifies 14 key criteria that Member States and stakeholders should use to develop high-quality and effective

² Communiqué of the European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, the European Social Partners and the European Commission, meeting in Bruges on 7 December 2010 to review the strategic approach and priorities of the Copenhagen process for 2011-2020
http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/brugescom_en.pdf

³ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/126380.pdf; European Commission (2016). Education and Training Monitor 2016.
https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016_en.pdf

⁴ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)&from=EN)

⁵ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=15621&langId=en>

⁶ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-18-3201_en.htm

⁷ <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6779-2018-INIT/en/pdf>

apprenticeships, ensuring both the development of job-related skills and the personal development of apprentices. As such, the initiative has a focus on both the direct employability and wider competences of apprentices. Criterion 11 specifically refers to flexible pathways and mobility. It specifically refers to the EQF, while ECVET is not mentioned explicitly. Criterion 14, in turn, mentions EQAVET, by specifying that QA approaches should be in place in line with the framework.

In November 2017, the European Commission introduced its vision for a **European Education Area** by 2025, in which learning, studying and doing research would no longer be limited by any borders.⁸ In its Communication on Building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies, published in May 2018, the Commission set the promotion of cross-border mobility and cooperation in education and training as one of three key objectives of the European Education Area.⁹ In the context of this initiative, the European Commission, in May 2018, presented a **proposal for a Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition** of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas and the outcomes of learning periods abroad. This document was adopted on 26 November 2018.¹⁰

The objective is to ensure that every student, apprentice or pupil who completes a learning experience abroad, whether for a qualification or learning mobility, can have that experience automatically recognised for the purposes of further study. The proposal suggests that Member States will be invited to put in place the steps necessary to achieve, by 2025, automatic recognition of higher education and upper secondary qualifications, as well as recognition of the outcomes of learning periods, without making learners go through a separate recognition procedure. In this regard, the proposal explicitly refers to the use of a Learning Agreement and Transcript of Records.

The proposal furthermore suggests exploring synergies between EU transparency tools and, where appropriate, develop them further, with the objective of improving cooperation and mobility between education and training sectors. As such, it makes reference to the Diploma Supplement, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), ECVET, the EQF and Europass. The document also calls for action to foster transparency and build trust across secondary education and training systems by developing further quality assurance instruments in vocational education and training in line with the EQAVET.^{11 12}

With the current policy framework coming to a close by 2020, there is an ongoing debate on the future direction of post-2020 policy priorities. It is expected that a new EU VET policy agenda will be adopted in 2020. To support the formulation of the post-2020 VET policy, the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training (ACVT¹³) adopted an Opinion on the future of VET post-2020 (03 December 2018).¹⁴

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/education/initiatives/european-education-area_en

⁹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1530529323717&uri=CELEX:52018DC0268>

¹⁰ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210\(01\)&qid=1545235466093&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01)&qid=1545235466093&from=EN)

¹¹ European Commission (2018). Proposal for a Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas and the outcomes of learning periods abroad. COM(2018) 270 final. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0270&from=EN>

¹² https://ec.europa.eu/education/initiatives/european-education-area/automatic-mutual-recognition-of-diplomas_en

¹³ The Committee has the task of assisting the Commission in implementing a Community vocational training policy.

¹⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=9263&furtherNews=yes>

With the December 2016 launch of the 'Investing in Europe's Youth' initiative, the topic of learner mobility was given a central position on the VET policy agenda. As part of this initiative, the Commission also introduced the ErasmusPRO initiative: its key objective is to increase long-duration mobility (6 to 12 months) of VET learners/apprentices in work placements abroad. In 2017, the European Commission launched ErasmusPRO with the objective of opening up the possibility for 50,000 additional young people to spend at least three months of their training in another Member State in the period 2018-2020.

In December 2016, the Council adopted the Recommendation on 'Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults'.¹⁵ It aims to help adults acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and/or acquire a broader set of skills by progressing towards an upper secondary qualification (EQF level 3/4). To achieve this, the initiative proposes three key steps: skills assessment; tailored learning offer; validation and recognition.¹⁶

Earlier this year, the European Commission presented the Multiannual Financial Framework for the period from 2021 and 2027. The budget for Erasmus+ will be doubled to EUR 30 billion with the key targets for learner and staff mobility increased considerably from 650,000 to 2 million people. For VET, this would imply multiplying by six the number of staff with the opportunity to go abroad, i.e. from 50,000 to 300,000.¹⁷

As a consequence, for **ECVET**, recent policy ambitions have emphasised the promotion of flexible pathways and opened up discussions on a possible revision of the ECVET Recommendation. Three very recent policy proposals (EFQEA, the proposal for a Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition and the launch of ErasmusPRO long-duration mobility) could potentially provide new policy applications for ECVET.

With **EQAVET**, recent policy ambitions have opened up discussions on a possible revision of the underlying Recommendation, have put a greater emphasis on its application beyond school-based VET and have introduced a focus on establishing LO-based continuous information and feedback loops in VET linked to labour market intelligence and the enhancement of mutual trust between the Member States.

1.4 Previous research on EQAVET and ECVET

The study also aims to build on, rather than duplicate, the extensive research that has already taken place on the implementation of ECVET and EQAVET. Consequently, it aims to draw on previous research and evaluations of both instruments. Most notably, it aims to build on the findings from the 2014 evaluation of the *Implementation of the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET)* and the 2013 *Evaluation of implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)*. The key findings from these evaluations are presented in the report below.

¹⁵ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224(01)&from=EN)

¹⁶ Annex 8 includes a case study which further explores the linkage between ECVET and the Upskilling Pathways initiative.

¹⁷ Cf. information presented by DG EMPL at the ECVET Network Meeting in October 2018. <http://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/system/files/documents/3893/ecvet-network-meeting-erasmus-update-and-future-joao-santos.pdf>.

Key findings from the previous ECVET evaluation

- ECVET had limited progress at the national level during the evaluation period of 2009-2013.
- No evidence could be identified regarding the impact of ECVET on facilitating the transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes, supporting citizens move across and within countries and building their flexible learning pathway, including between VET and higher education; in particular, no demand for credit points could be identified.
- The most valuable elements of ECVET identified were the (units of) learning outcomes and the ECVET documents (Memoranda of Understanding and Learning Agreements). Their use strongly increased the quality of mobility and developed awareness and understanding of learning outcomes approach bring stronger.
- ECVET had a comparatively complex and unclear governance, communication and support structure, though each separate element worked well.

Key findings from the previous EQAVET evaluation

- EQAVET had supported two-thirds of countries to make changes to their QA systems. Moreover, the majority of countries had in place approaches for improving their QA systems.
- EQAVET products were viewed positively but were more effective when translated and adapted for the national context. The EQAVET governance structure was also considered effective.
- However, the evaluation found little evidence that EQAVET is contributing to making VET systems more transparent, and the quality cycle, criteria and descriptors did not lend itself for supporting this objective.
- The EQAVET cycle, is very general and is applicable to any educational process independent of its nature. However, the evaluation found that the framework is mainly used to inspire changes in QA of school-based VET.
- There is not systematic EU-level cooperation between EQAVET and European initiatives in quality assurance in other sectors of education. Moreover, the complementarity of EQAVET with other EU instruments needed to be articulated more clearly

1.5 Methodology

1.5.1 Conceptual approach

It is critical to understand what the two instruments are expected to achieve. The main purpose of ECVET is to facilitate transfer, recognition and accumulation of learning outcomes. It is a tool that aims to achieve this aim in all contexts: organised (and not-organised) transnational mobility of learners, transitions within formal learning for both inter- and intra-country movement from other areas of learning (including non-formal and informal learning to formal learning).

The main purposes of EQAVET are twofold:

- To strengthen the quality culture in VET organisations – both at provider and system level – and strengthen evidence-based practices in VET; and
- Through this, to improve the quality of VET. Though the EQAVET Recommendation does not define explicitly what quality in VET is, the descriptors and indicators do give some clarity about what good quality VET should be delivering.

This research has to explore the extent to which these outcomes are achieved, and what changes can be attributed to EQAVET and ECVET. For the latter it explores:

- The **types of influence**, such as providing the case for change/development, a template for implementation, guidance of examples of good practice, and learning for implementation; and
- The **scale of influence**, such as providing a sustained influence on country developments, providing periodic influence or an upfront incentive for implementation, providing some influence but focused on particular areas (mobility, schools-VET) or providing little or no influence.

It is recognised that even within countries there may be differing perceptions of the scale and type of influence of each instrument, which may be due to the responsibilities of different national authorities and the relevant perceptions of the individual. Consequently, the study aims to synthesise views from differing national stakeholders, and between ECVET/EQAVET specialists and non-specialists.

1.5.2 Overview of the methodology

The study was structured into four main research tasks, as shown below. The study commenced in January 2018 and ran until September 2018.

Figure 1. Overview of study methodology



The research stages are described below.

1.5.3 Inception stage

The following research tasks took place in the inception stage:

- An **inception meeting** which clarified the objectives of the study and explored any refinement of the study methodology;
- **Scoping interviews** with four national and international stakeholders with knowledge of and experience with the two instruments, the surrounding policy perspective, and a broad European perspective. These interviews were held with experts from the EQAVET secretariat, Cedefop, the Finnish National Agency for Education and an individual who was formerly a member of the European Forum of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (EfVET);

- The **development of a draft analytical framework** which set out the key research questions and the sources of evidence that would be used in the study. This is included in Annex 3;
- An **expert brainstorming workshop** which was used to test the analytical framework. The attendees included individuals who have supported the implementation of EQAVET or ECVET in Member States, experienced members of the national ECVET teams or the EQAVET network, representatives of some national agencies and independent experts. The list of persons invited was approved by the Commission.

An inception report was subsequently submitted on 3 February 2018. The report contained a final analytical framework, a refined methodology for the assignment, topic guides for the qualitative interviews and a questionnaire for the targeted consultation. As requested by the Commission, the inception report also contained a short study summary to be used to inform different types of stakeholder about the study methodology when collecting data, and a note to inform the ECVET and EQAVET governance bodies of the study.

1.5.4 Collection of evidence about VET development and the role of ECVET and EQAVET

A range of research tasks was conducted to collect examples of national developments in quality assurance and qualification design that were influenced by ECVET and EQAVET. This included:

- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)** with staff in national ministries and authorities with responsibility for quality assurance and VET programme design. These interviews were to be conducted with 'VET generalists', rather than individuals that specialise in implementing the ECVET and EQAVET tools. The interviews explored the developments that took place in VET qualifications and quality assurance since the introduction of the two recommendations, how these changes were influenced by ECVET and EQAVET, and their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the instruments' implementation. Interviews were conducted with 81 individuals from 26 countries. The interviews commenced in March and were completed in August 2018.
- **Targeted consultation with EQAVET National Reference Points and ECVET User Group Members.** This gathered feedback on the areas where ECVET and EQAVET have had the greatest impact, the implementation of the two instruments and perceptions of the EQAVET and ECVET technical specifications. In total, 15 responses were received for the targeted consultation, which ran from April to August 2018.
- **Desk research** examined material published in the last 10 years on the implementation and impact of EQAVET and ECVET. Both the ECVET and EQAVET Recommendations have undergone external evaluation. In total, 130 documents were reviewed, which included VET in Europe Country Reports, Cedefop's Inventory of the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (NFIL), EQAVET and ECVET newsletters, the results from the 2016 EQAVET Secretariat Survey, the 2013 Evaluation of EQAVET, and the 2014 ECVET evaluation. The review documents were coded and analysed using NVIVO software for analysing mixed methods research. The desk research commenced in March and was completed in August 2018.
- **Thematic case studies** to explore particular aspects of the implementation of ECVET and EQAVET identified in the Interim report. These took place between July and August 2018. They were:

EQAVET

- A case study examining the approaches adopted by countries that have QA agencies overseeing both HE and VET (Ireland, Malta, Estonia). Here we conducted interviews with QA agencies in these countries and desk research on the policies and systems they have in place.
- A case study of three countries where there is legislation requiring providers to implement EQAVET compatible QA systems (Portugal, Latvia and Romania). Here we conducted interviews with four providers to explore the steps they took to implement EQAVET principles, their use of indicators and any implementation challenges they encountered.

ECVET

- A case study on the future value of the current common ECVET templates (Learning Agreement, Memorandum of Understanding), i.e. whether efforts should be made to improve the common templates, and if yes, which aspects and linkages should be considered. This included interviews with coordinators of national ECVET experts in three countries (Belgium-fr, Norway, Romania).
- A case study on the role of ECVET in Upskilling Pathways. This case study compared and contrasted three countries (Finland, France, and Poland) that differ significantly in the extent that they have internalised ECVET principles at system level. This was based on a review of country literature.

ECVET and EQAVET

- A case study on approaches to employ EQAVET and ECVET in the context of work-based learning (WBL). This case study examined secondary research to identify examples of how three countries (Finland, Malta and Croatia) have used ECVET principles and EQAVET in the development of work-based learning.

Case studies are included in Annex 5-9.

1.5.5 Scenarios, options and related consultation

In parallel with the collection of examples of development, research was also undertaken to identify and test scenarios for the future direction of the two instruments. This research included:

- The **development of an initial 'long-list' of eight scenarios** that could be applied to EQAVET, ECVET or both. The initial set of scenarios was based on the emerging findings from the KII and targeted consultation, as well as a group discussion with the expert group engaged in the inception stage.
- A **first stakeholder event**, which took place in Brussels on 4 May 2018. The purpose of this was to test the emerging findings from the KII and targeted consultation, and explore the benefits, negative consequences and feasibility of the eight 'long-list' scenarios. The stakeholder workshop was attended by members of the EQAVET National Reference Point (NRP) group and ECVET User group, as well as representatives from the Commission. Following the first stakeholder event, a paper setting out the eight scenarios was submitted on 14 May 2018.
- A **second stakeholder event**, which took place in Brussels on 27 June 2018. The second workshop was used to refine the set of scenarios into options that can be tested in more depth. It included a discussion of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) for each scenario, and how and whether they could be implemented in practice. The second stakeholder event included the same invitees for the first workshop.

- A **Delphi survey** to test the potential scenarios in more depth. The first Delphi survey was issued in July 2018 and ran for over four weeks. The survey was sent to 28 individuals, which contained a mix of ECVET and EQAVET independent experts, EQF and validation experts, and experts from higher education or schools with certain affinities for ECVET or EQAVET. The first survey received eight responses. The second survey ran in October 2018, after the final set of draft options were completed. The survey ran for two weeks and received six responses.
- **Consultations** of the ECVET and EQAVET Network to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the potential scenarios. The EQAVET Network discussed the options at the EQAVET Annual Network meeting in Sofia in June 2018 while the ECVET Network analysed the options at the ECVET Annual Network meeting in Thessaloniki in October 2018.

1.6 Challenges encountered

Some challenges were encountered when conducting the research. These include:

- **A high volume of refusals for the KIIs.** This was attributed to a high proportion of the contacts provided who felt they were not acquainted with the VET instruments in sufficient depth to be able to comment on them. Many referred interviewers to members of the ECVET user group or EQAVET network who were not target interviewees. Poor knowledge of the instruments made it difficult to cover all the areas of questioning in all interviews.
- **Low response rate for the Delphi survey.** The Delphi survey response was low because of staff being on leave during the holidays. As a consequence, the deadline for the first survey was extended, so it ran for six rather than three weeks.

1.7 Structure of this report

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** provides background information on the characteristics of the ECVET and EQAVET instruments.
- **Chapter 3** describes the national developments that have taken place in VET qualification design and quality assurance in Member States since the introduction of the Recommendations.
- **Chapter 4** sets out how EQAVET and ECVET has influenced these national developments and country policies.
- **Chapter 5** presents the enablers and barriers related to the Recommendations and their implementation that have affected the influence of the tools.
- **Chapter 6** describes the relationship with, and influence of, the instruments on other relevant tools supporting VET policies.
- **Chapter 7** summarises our assessment of the instruments.
- **Chapter 8** sets out our appraisal of options for the future development of EQAVET and ECVET.
- **Chapter 9** presents the conclusions and recommendations from the study.

2 ECVET and EQAVET

This section provides a brief overview of the instruments, their activities/tools (including any changes since they were established), their expected fit with other tools, and their future plans.

2.1 ECVET

2.1.1 Aim of the recommendation

The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training, ECVET, is based on the 2009 ECVET Recommendation¹⁸ and is a technical framework to facilitate the transfer, recognition and (where appropriate) accumulation of individuals' learning outcomes with a view to achieving a qualification.

In essence, ECVET has two broad objectives:

- To help transfer and recognise learning that has taken place during a stay abroad (geographical mobility); and
- To support lifelong learning, by allowing people to transfer and accumulate learning outcomes achieved in different contexts and places to build up to, update or upgrade recognised qualifications.

In European higher education, the concept of credit transfer was introduced in the 1980s in the form of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). While ECVET is based on different concepts to ECTS, the ECVET Recommendation sets out a specific intention to **“facilitate the compatibility, comparability and complementarity of credit systems used in VET and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (‘ECTS’)”**. The 2004 Maastricht Communiqué had referred to “the development and implementation of a European credit transfer system for vocational education and training (ECVET) in order to allow learners to build upon the achievements resulting from their learning pathways when moving between vocational training systems. ECVET will be based on competences and learning outcomes, taking account of their definition at national or sectoral levels. It will take into account the experience of the ECTS in the field of higher education and the Europass framework.”¹⁹

As with other European instruments developed in this context (e.g. EQF, EQAVET), the introduction of ECVET is based on voluntary decisions by the Member States and on mutual exchange, monitoring and peer learning processes.

2.1.2 ECVET in practice

The ECVET tools and methodology are comprised of: the description of qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes with associated points; a transfer and accumulation process; and complementary documents such as Learning Agreements, Memoranda of Understanding, transcripts of records and ECVET users' guides.²⁰

The common principles concerning the design of qualifications and arrangements for credit transfer and accumulation are laid out in Annex 2 of the Recommendation:

- Qualifications are designed based on *learning outcomes*. Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do upon completion of a learning process, and are defined in terms of knowledge, skills

¹⁸ European Parliament; Council of the European Union (2009). Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET). Official Journal of the European Union, C 155, 8.7.2009.

¹⁹ Maastricht Communiqué on the future priorities of enhanced European cooperation in vocational training and education, 14 December 2004.

http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/communique_maastricht_priorities_vet.pdf

²⁰ Cf. European Parliament and Council of the EU, 2009

and competence. Through learning outcomes, it is possible to identify whether the learning in one context, system or country, is comparable to another one;

- Qualifications are structured in *units of learning outcomes* that can be assessed, validated and recognised separately;
- *Assessment* of units is documented and enables progressive accumulation and transfer, by constituting credits;
- *Credit*, i.e. a set of learning outcomes that have been assessed, can be validated and recognised in the context of other qualification systems;²¹
- *Partnerships* among competent bodies facilitate the recognition of credit as they develop trust in each other's qualifications and assessments.
- Qualifications and units are described using *ECVET points*. The points help to identify the size of a qualification and the relative weight of the units within the qualification. A total of 60 points is allocated to the learning outcomes expected to be achieved within a year of full-time VET. This quantitative reference to points only serves a descriptive function, while the learning outcomes structured in units form the core of transfer and accumulation.

There are three key ECVET documents.²² The *Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)* is a document which is signed by two or more collaborating institutions (e.g. for a mobility project, the sending organisation and the host partner organisation). It sets the framework for credit transfer. It formalises the ECVET partnership by stating the mutual acceptance of the status and procedures of the competent institutions involved. It also establishes partnership's procedures for cooperation.

The *Learning Agreement (LA)* is an individualised document which sets out the conditions for a specific mobility period. It specifies, for a particular learner, which learning outcomes and units should be achieved during mobility. The LA constitutes a commitment to the learner that his/her achievement, if in line with the agreement, will be recognised.

The *Personal Transcript* is a record of learning achievements. It contains information on learners' assessed learning outcomes, units and ECVET points awarded. It also specifies the identity of the learner and the competent institution(s) that assessed, validated and recognised learners' credit. Unlike the Memorandum of Understanding and the Learning Agreement, the Personal Transcript has not previously been presented in the form of a European tool or template. In practice, the *Europass Mobility*²³ serves as the most well-known and well used document for this purpose.

²¹ In ECVET, 'credit' stands for a set of learning outcomes that have been assessed; this differs from 'credit points' that are a 'numerical representation of the overall weight of learning outcomes in a qualification and of the relative weight of its units in relation to the qualification.' Cf. European Commission (2011): Get to know ECVET better. Questions and answers. Revised February 2011. http://www.ecvet-projects.eu/Documents/ecvet_questions%20and%20answers%202011.pdf

²² The ECVET community has developed templates for the MoU and the LA. There is no common template for the Personal Transcript.

www.ecvet-toolkit.eu/sites/default/files/Memorandum%20of%20Understanding%20-%20Template%20%28en%29_0.dotx

www.ecvet-toolkit.eu/sites/default/files/Learning%20Agreement%20-%20Template%20%28en%29_0.dotx

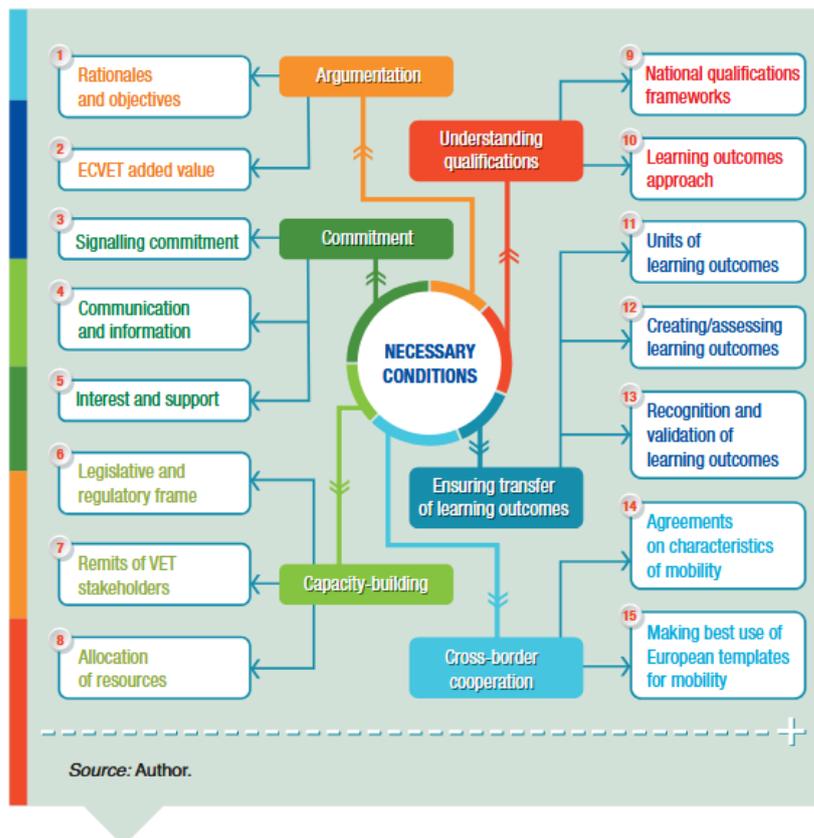
²³ Europass Mobility primarily serves as a document to record knowledge and skills acquired in another European country, e.g. through a work placement in a company; through an academic term as part of an exchange programme; or through a voluntary placement in an NGO. It is completed by the two partner organisations involved in the mobility project, the first in the country of origin and the second in the host countries. It can be obtained at National Europass Centres (cf. <https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/documents/european-skills-passport/europass-mobility>).

Also see case study in Annex 7 which further explores this topic.

2.1.3 Requirements

ECVET has been designed as a European credit transfer system that is flexible enough to accommodate the characteristic features of VET systems and reforms of those systems, as well as to accommodate existing credit systems and arrangements. The implementation of ECVET relies on certain features, or principles, of qualifications systems to create and ensure transparency and a common understanding of qualifications. In this regard, Cedefop (2012) identified fifteen conditions that can influence implementation of ECVET (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Necessary conditions for ECVET implementation



Source: Cedefop (2012): Necessary conditions for ECVET implementation. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

The development of national qualifications frameworks (NQF) and, crucially, of the learning outcomes approach are two key components which create the transparency and mutual trust needed for successful ECVET implementation. It goes without saying that the heterogeneity of VET systems across countries meant that individual countries were at quite different starting points in terms of the "ECVET readiness"²⁴ of their system characteristics at the point when the ECVET Recommendation was adopted.

While many projects and providers use Europass mobility as a Personal Transcript, it has also repeatedly been pointed out that ECVET and Europass were developed in a different context and there are problems of conceptual as well as digital connectivity between them. Cf. ECVET Secretariat (2017). Developing mobility support tools and services: ECVET Peer Learning Activity in Larnaca, Cyprus, 9-10 March 2017. Background paper 2: Existing Tools and Frameworks.

²⁴ ECVET readiness was taken to mean having units and learning outcomes, transfer and accumulation, and national lifelong learning frameworks based on credits and/or common methodological approaches using learning outcomes. Two 2007 studies (the ECVET Reflector and ECVET Connexion studies) indicated that no VET or qualifications systems were, at that time, in a position to implement ECVET fully. A high degree of ECVET readiness does not mean that a credit system is present in a country. Cf. Cedefop (2010). The

2.1.4 Governance

ECVET has a multi-layer governance structure designed to be able to respond to the key priority that has driven implementation since its inception, i.e. promoting European cooperation in VET. The governance structure, as set out in the 2009 ECVET Recommendation, was intended to create a supportive environment that would promote the implementation of the instruments at country level. It did so by making provisions for appropriate channels to cascade the instruments to the national level, and to establish forums for mutual (i.e. cross-country) exchange and feedback, as well as the development of partnerships. The governance structure was also set up with a view to ensuring sufficient flexibility to be compatible with the different structures of (vocational) education and training systems across countries.

In 2015, action was taken to simplify the ECVET governance and cooperation structure. A need for restructuring was emphasised in the 2014 external evaluation report, which reported that stakeholders perceived it as having a comparatively complex and unclear governance, communication and support structure. Stakeholders had found it difficult to identify where the decisions concerning ECVET were being taken and who was putting forward particular proposals. EU-level governance of ECVET is currently composed of the following layers:

- The *ECVET Users' Group*, which consists of Member State representatives in charge of VET, and operates as a policy group. Besides Member State representatives, it also includes representatives from EEA and candidate countries, employer organisations and social partners, national agencies for education and lifelong learning, and from the European Commission, Cedefop and ETF agencies.
- The *ECVET Network*, which consists of the Users' Group and the national implementation bodies. Its purpose is to strengthen the exchange of experience and cooperation between these bodies. The ECVET Network has a broader group of stakeholders than the Users' Group by adding coordinators of national ECVET experts²⁵.
- The *ECVET Community of Practice (CoP)*: The term Community of Practice (CoP) was introduced at the third ECVET Forum in 2012. The ECVET Community of Practice meets at the annual ECVET Forum. The 2018 ECVET Annual Forum, which was recently held in Sofia, Bulgaria (14-15 June) focused on the topic of using ECVET for long-duration mobility.
- The *ECVET Secretariat* was set up to assist the European Commission in supporting Member States in implementing the ECVET Recommendation. Its tasks include the coordination of the ECVET Network, meetings of the ECVET Network, the Users' Group and peer learning activities.

In addition, several non-permanent working groups have been set up in recent years with a mandate to explore and discuss in-depth topics of particular relevance (e.g. units of learning outcomes, principles for flexible pathways).

development of ECVET in Europe. Working Paper No 10. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/6110_en.pdf; Fietz, G.; Le Mouillour, I.; Reglin, T. (2007). ECVET Reflector: study on the implementation and development of an ECVET system for apprenticeship. Bonn: BIBB.

²⁵ The National Teams of ECVET Experts provide a pool of expertise to support the implementation of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). They promote the adoption, the application and the use of ECVET at national level and provide counselling to VET relevant competent bodies and institutions. The European Commission provides funding through Erasmus+. Cf. Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2019, http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus2/files/erasmus-plus-programme-guide-2019_en.pdf.

Cedefop has conducted monitoring of the ECVET implementation since 2010. Its most recent report, covering the period between mid-2013 and 2015, was published in June 2016.²⁶ Furthermore, as noted above, ECVET underwent external evaluation in 2014.²⁷

2.1.5 Expected alignment and linkages with other policy developments

By its very definition, ECVET is not a stand-alone element in European education and training. It is intended to be intrinsically linked to national education and training systems and to European tools for mobility and transparency, such as the EQF, EQAVET, Europass, and the Recommendation on the validation of NFIL.

ECVET shares close conceptual links to the **European Qualifications Framework**. They share common principles and concepts, with both ECVET and the EQF being: (a) focused on learning outcomes expressed in terms of knowledge, skills, and competence; (b) based on the concept of a qualification (as distinct from that of an education and training programme); (c) covering all learning contexts and lifelong learning; (d) geared towards enabling the mobility of people. The ECVET technical specifications also specifically refer to the use of EQF levels as a reference for deciding on comparability of qualifications and on the possibility for transfer credit. However, the transition from the existence of a qualifications framework and arrangements for credit transfer towards an open system allowing learners to follow flexible learning pathways involves more than the implementation of the framework and mechanisms for credit transfer.²⁸

In May 2017, the Council adopted the revised European Qualifications Framework and the related annexes²⁹. Annex V of the revised Recommendation refers to credit systems in relation to the EQF. It outlines **seven principles for credit systems that are related to NQF systems** referenced to the EQF. These principles emphasise that credit systems should support flexible learning pathways for the benefit of individual learners and support the transfer of learning outcomes and progression of learners across institutional and national borders. The principles also refer to seeking synergies with arrangements for validation of prior learning. The annex does not refer to the concept of units of learning outcome, but instead uses the term components of a qualification.

Existing credit systems in many countries operate within sub-sectors of education and training which limits their potential to support the transfer of learning outcomes and progression across sectors. ECVET and ECTS have been developed independently from each other, and as ECVET is not used as a credit point system, they are not applied in a coordinated way. Using the comprehensive and overarching nature of the EQF as a vehicle for these principles for credit systems (that are linked to NQFs) could contribute to improving the permeability of systems and reducing barriers to progression and mobility. Linkages between credit systems and validation arrangements are essential for this. The potential of this newly added Annex V however clearly lies in the future, since although there are quite a few credit systems

²⁶ Cedefop (2016). ECVET in Europe: monitoring report 2015. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 56. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/946187>

²⁷ European Commission (2014). Implementation of the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET). Final report. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/evaluations/docs/education/ecvet14_en.pdf

²⁸ European Commission (2006). Commission Staff Working Document. ECVET. A system for the transfer, accumulation and recognition of learning outcomes in Europe. SEC(2006) 1431. See also Cedefop (2010a). Linking credit systems and qualifications frameworks: an international comparative analysis. Luxembourg: Publications Office. (Research paper; 5). http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5505_en.pdf;

²⁹ Council recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the EQF for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the EQF for lifelong learning, <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/cee970-518f-11e7-a5ca-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

in operation in Member States, currently very few are linked to NQFs and therefore within the scope of the EQF Recommendation.³⁰

In common with ECVET, the validation principles as expressed in the **2012 Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning** build on the core principle of learning outcomes. Validation ensures that learning outcomes can be recognised either formally in the context of qualifications or socially in relation to occupational profiles on the labour market, wherein credit systems make it possible to transfer learning outcomes acquired in one context to another. ECVET relates to formally awarded qualifications, but it does take other learning contexts (non-formal and informal) into account as well. As such, ECVET can potentially provide a framework for combining 'credit' from validation of NFIL and 'credit' from formal learning.³¹

Validation mechanisms allow outcomes from non-formal or informal learning to be assessed and certified, and therefore be converted into an assessed and validated unit of learning outcome in the ECVET sense, allowing progress towards a full qualification. Whether countries can acknowledge and encourage this role for ECVET will depend on how far they have implemented the learning outcomes approach and on the validation mechanisms they have in place.³²

Finally, ECVET has linkages with the **Europass** framework. In the absence of a common European template for the personal transcript, Europass Mobility has been widely used to document the outcomes of mobility experiences, as pointed out above. The Commission's proposal to revise the Europass framework was adopted in April 2018. One of the cornerstones of the revised framework will be an online platform, managed by the European Commission, gathering European skills and qualification tools, including for "documenting the learning outcomes of qualifications".³³ Online tools related to the implementation of ECVET should therefore in future be hosted on the Europass platform.

2.2 EQAVET

2.2.1 Aim of the recommendation

The recommendation on the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQAVET) was adopted in 2009 with the objective of contributing: *'to quality improvement in VET and to increased transparency of, and consistency in, VET policy developments between Member States, thereby promoting mutual trust, mobility of workers and learners, and lifelong learning'*³⁴. It was developed to recognise that the shift to a knowledge based economy and the rapid evolution of jobs following technological advances required an adaptive and high-quality VET system³⁵.

To do this, the framework contains a set of descriptors and indicators which countries can use as a toolbox to improve their QA arrangements. It builds on and expands on the CQAF which was accepted by the Commission in 2004 and draws on EU good practice in QA.

³⁰ European Commission (2016). Commission Staff Working Document. Annex III. Revision of the European Qualifications Framework. SWD(2106) 195 final. Brussels, 10.06.2016. <https://tinyurl.com/y7aj5378>.

³¹ ECVET Secretariat (2018). Peer Learning Activity: ECVET and validation of non-formal and informal learning 17-18 May 2018, Roskilde, DK. Synthesis Report. June 2018. <http://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/system/files/documents/3862/pla-roskilde-synthesis-report.pdf>

³² Cedefop (2013). Opportunities and challenges for ECVET, the vocational credit transfer system. Briefing Note July 2013. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/9080_en.pdf

³³ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-18-3201_en.htm; <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018D0646&rid=1>

³⁴ Council Recommendation on the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET, 2009

³⁵ *ibid*

Importantly, the recommendation does not propose a particular QA system that countries should use. Instead, it sets out common principles - criteria, indicators and descriptors - that allow VET providers and national authorities to review their strengths and identify areas of improvement. Consequently, it is expected to build on rather than prescribe national QA systems.

2.2.2 EQAVET in practice

The EQAVET recommendation contains two technical elements:

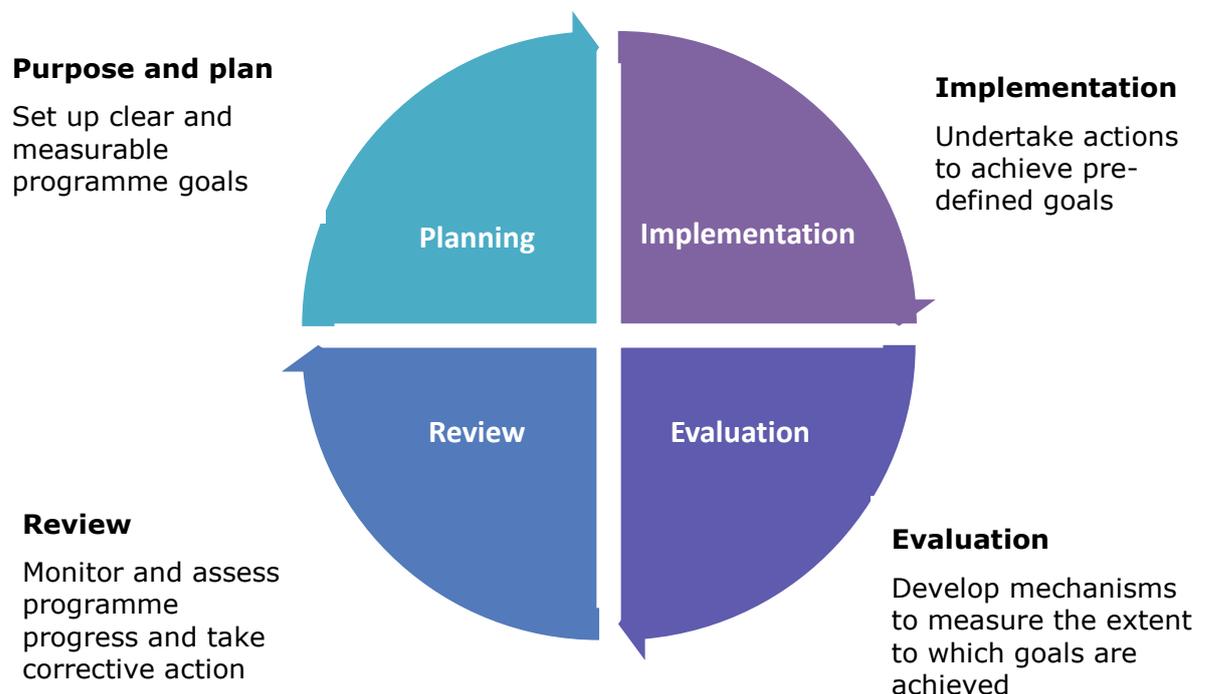
- The use of the quality cycle to underpin a self-assessment process among providers and make improvements of QA arrangements at VET system level; and
- A set of indicators and descriptors that can be used as a VET-system and provider level to monitor the effectiveness of provision.

These are described in turn below.

2.2.2.1 Quality cycle

The quality cycle should form the basis of provider- and system-level monitoring and evaluation of VET provision. It has four stages, as shown in in Figure 3 below and is based on common performance management cycles such as Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA). It describes the need to set goals and metrics to evidence of achievement, collect evidence to measure the extent to which these metrics are achieved, and then review this information to identify any actions that could improve performance. This then feeds back into the programme purpose and planning, and the cycle continues.

Figure 3. EQAVET Quality Cycle



Source: EQAVET website, accessed 2018

2.2.2.2 Descriptors and indicators

The EQAVET recommendation sets out provider-level and system-level indicative descriptors and quality criteria to demonstrate effective practice in all four stages of the quality cycle. The descriptors are intended to guide national authorities and

providers to implement the quality cycle and self-assessment process. The list of indicative descriptors by quality cycle stage is presented in Annex 2.

The EQAVET Recommendation also proposes a set a 10 common indicators and associated descriptors that could be used to monitor VET provision. these are described below. The indicators define elements related to the planning, delivery, development and outcomes of VET programmes.

Table 1. List of EQAVET indicators

No	Indicator title	Potential measures
1	<p><i>Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET provider. This includes:</i></p> <p><i>A: share of VET providers applying internal quality assurance systems; and</i></p> <p><i>B: Share of accredited VET providers</i></p>	<p><i>Percentage of VET providers showing evidence of applying the EQAVET principles within a defined quality</i></p> <p><i>Percentage of VET providers who are accredited</i></p>
2	<p><i>Investment in training of teachers and trainers. This includes:</i></p> <p><i>A: Share of teachers and trainers participating in further training</i></p> <p><i>B: Amount of funding invested</i></p>	<p><i>Percentage of teachers and trainers participating at accredited in-service training programmes</i></p> <p><i>Total amount of funds annually invested per teacher and trainer in teachers' continuous professional development</i></p>
3	<p><i>Participation rate in VET programmes</i></p>	<p><i>Percentage of annual cohort completing lower secondary school/compulsory education participating in IVET programmes at upper secondary level</i></p> <p><i>Percentage of active population (15-74 years old) entering continuing education and training (CVET) programmes</i></p>
4	<p><i>Completion rate in VET programmes</i></p>	<p><i>Percentage of learners that completed their programme (i.e. attaining a formal qualification)</i></p>
5	<p><i>Placement rate in VET programmes. This includes:</i></p> <p><i>A: Destination of VET learners at a fixed point after they complete their study</i></p> <p><i>B: share of employed learners at a fixed point after completing their study</i></p>	<p><i>Proportion of VET programme completers who are placed either in the labour market, further education or training (including university) or other destination within 12-36 months after the end of programme;</i></p> <p><i>Percentage of VET programme completers who are employed one year after the end of training.</i></p>
6	<p><i>Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace. This includes:</i></p> <p><i>A: information on the jobs obtained by individual's that completed particularly types or</i></p>	<p><i>Percentage of VET programme completers working in relevant occupations</i></p> <p><i>Percentage of employees who, within a period of 12-36 months after completion, find that their training is relevant for their current</i></p>

	<i>levels of VET programmes</i> <i>B: Satisfaction of employers with skills acquired</i>	<i>occupation</i> <i>Percentage of employers of a given sector who are satisfied to find VET programme completers with relevant qualifications and competences required for the work place;</i> <i>Percentage of employers of a given sector who are satisfied with programme completers</i>
7	<i>Unemployment rate</i>	<i>The number of people unemployed as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the total number of people employed plus unemployed</i>
8	<i>Prevalence of vulnerable group</i>	<i>Percentage of participants and of programme completers from disadvantaged groups</i> <i>Percentage of programme completers, compared to the number of those entering.</i>
9	<i>Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market. This includes:</i> <i>A: information on mechanisms set up to identify changing demands at different levels</i> <i>B: evidence of their effectiveness</i>	<i>Type of mechanisms used to update the VET offer to the future labour market needs</i> <i>Information on mechanisms used to provide stakeholders with the most recent information on the future needs of the labour market.</i>
10	<i>Schemes used to promote better access to VET. This includes:</i> <i>A: information on existing schemes at different levels</i> <i>B: Evidence of their effectiveness</i>	<i>Type of schemes used to improve access to VET</i> <i>Information demonstrating the capacity of the VET system to increase access to VET</i>

Source: EQAVET Recommendation, European Commission 2009; EQAVET website

2.2.3 Proposals to Member States

The Recommendation provides the following commitments for Member States³⁶:

- To use the quality criteria, indicative descriptors and reference indicators described in the recommendation to further improve and develop their VET systems, support lifelong learning strategies and the implementation of the EQF and the Quality Charter for Mobility
- To develop, by 18 June 2011, an approach for improving QA systems at national level, where appropriate, and making best use of the framework. This should involve social partners, regional and local authorities and all other relevant stakeholders
- To participate in the EQAVET network to support the further development of common principles, reference criteria and indicators, guidelines and tools for quality improvement in VET

³⁶ Council recommendation on EQAVET, 2009

- To establish a QA NRP for VET that is linked to the particular structures and requirements of the Member State. The NRPs are to bring together existing relevant bodies and partners to:
 - Inform national partners of the framework
 - Support the EQAVET work programme
 - Support self-evaluation as a complementary and effective means of QA
 - Disseminate information on EQAVET to national partners
- To undertake a review of the implementation process every four years

2.2.4 Governance

The EQAVET network is supporting the implementation of the recommendation by countries. To do this the network holds regular meetings and establishes a biennial work programme to guide developments. The network comprises representatives from all countries that signed up to deliver EQAVET (the EU 28 and Norway, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Turkey), as well as members of the European Commission, Education and Training Foundation, Cedefop, social partners and scientific advisors.

There is also an EQAVET secretariat which supports the implementation of the Work Programme. The secretariat provides:

- Expertise in QA to support the network;
- Coordination of the reporting activities laid down in the Recommendation;
- Support for the drafting of documents and resources on the implementation of EQAVET;
- Support and advice to EQAVET meetings;
- Communications and dissemination on the outcomes of the network.

Support is provided to countries through regular Peer Learning Activities, where countries discuss effective practice around priority areas identified by the network. Additionally, materials and resources are provided by the network and secretariat, including examples of good practice and guidance documents.

Specific issues are also explored through EQAVET network working groups. Working groups have been established for a range of topics, including exploring the alignment of EQAVET with the New Skills Agenda, how EQAVET can build on existing national QA systems, and QA in Adult Learning in the context of CVET.

There is also an annual EQAVET forum that has taken place during European Vocational Skills Week since 2016. The forum is used to discuss issues pertaining to QA in VET. It is attended by national policymakers, VET providers, VET practitioners and other key stakeholders. The 2018 forum was attended by 100 participants in 40 countries.

2.2.5 Expected alignment and linkages with other policy developments

EQAVET is expected to form the underpinning QA that supports all VET systems in Member States. Consequently, it is expected to be used for all families of qualifications that are referenced to the EQF, as well as to support mobility programmes. However, as it is only for formal qualifications it is not expected to support VNIL.

3 Overview of relevant national VET developments since 2009

This section seeks to set the scene for an assessment of the influence of the instruments on national and international policies and their implementation since the adoption of the ECVET and EQAVET Recommendations in 2009.

Describing relevant national VET developments that have taken place over a decade is not an easy feat, given the diversity of VET systems in Europe and the structural reforms that have taken place in some countries. A recent Cedefop report (2017) found that while the conception of VET has been stable *"the past two decades have witnessed remarkable diversification of VET in terms of providers, levels and target groups, increased horizontal and vertical permeability, renewed emphasis on work-based elements, coalescence of initial and continuing VET, and hybridisation of systems and programmes."*

The report then goes on to identify several trends in VET:

- Strengthening VET as work-based training;
- Expanding into other parts of the education and training system, in particular higher education;
- Diversifying as (part of) lifelong learning.³⁷

Both the EQAVET and ECVET Recommendation were adopted in 2009; at a time when the EU had to navigate the turbulence caused by the economic crisis which started in late 2007 and led to the Eurozone crisis which left several Member States unable to repay or refinance their government debt. These developments affected not only the demand for skills and the funding available to the VET system (although the effect had a time lag), but also companies' capacity to engage in workplace learning. While the European economy has since recovered, recent years have not been without challenge. Repercussions of austerity measures, large migrant flows and not least the ongoing digital transformation of jobs place new demands on education and training systems, and will affect the way in which national and EU policy contexts evolve.

3.1 Vocational learning/qualification systems

VET systems across the EU-28 have changed considerably during the last decade, with many systems undergoing profound and far-reaching reforms, in particular with regard to the introduction of learning outcomes based approaches, unitised or modularised structures and the development and implementation of credit systems.

Annex 4 contains a table of the 28 Member States against a set of indicators that are relevant in the context of ECVET implementation. It seeks to illustrate each country's **point of departure** which could be described as its level of 'ECVET readiness' and its current position which then could be described as its distance travelled.

3.1.1 Shift to learning outcomes based approaches

The focus on learning outcomes (rather than input-focused approaches) is the common denominator of the EQF, ECVET and validation of NFIL. The EQF process, launched with the adoption of the EQF Recommendation in 2008, and the ECVET Recommendation served as an important catalyst for a comprehensive shift towards learning outcomes based systems across the entire European Union.

Member States have thus made significant progress in recent years in pushing forward learning outcomes-based approaches – both at system and practical implementation level. Related policy initiatives can be identified in practically all Member States. While

³⁷ Cedefop (2017). The changing nature and role of vocational education and training in Europe. Volume 2: Results of a survey among European VET experts. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 64. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/548024>

learning outcomes-based approaches have been around for several decades in some countries, some VET systems have embraced them only rather recently. So, around the time when the ECVET Recommendation was adopted, national VET systems were at varying stages of implementing learning outcomes-based approaches.

Cedefop (2012³⁸) grouped them into two different categories. 'Early developers' were those countries where the introduction of learning outcomes in VET curricula occurred in the 1990s or earlier. 'Recent developers' were those countries where the introduction of learning outcomes into IVET had occurred since 2005 (at least with the introduction of legislation and a development process not necessarily the implementation of outcome-oriented curricula).³⁹ Table 6 below captures this categorisation as an indicator of a country's starting point in terms of outcome-based approaches at the time when the ECVET Recommendation was adopted. Among the EU-28, ten Member States had learning outcomes based VET systems by 2005, while the remainder have all become 'recent' adopters where relevant initiatives in VET were launched after 2005.

Table 2. Development of learning outcomes based approaches across the EU-28

Type	Member States
<i>Early developer</i>	Total number: 10 (+ BE-nl) (FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, NL, PL, SI, SE, UK)
<i>Recent developer</i>	Total number: 17 (+BE-fr) (AT, BG, HR, CY, CZ, DK, EE, DE, EL, IT, LV, LU, MT, PT, RO, SK, ES)

Source: Based on Cedefop (2012) and stakeholder interviews.

While the 2017 Cedefop study⁴⁰ points out that most countries have followed the trend towards describing VET qualifications and programmes in terms of learning outcomes, there was no single type of way in which learning outcomes are specified.

3.1.2 Unit-based and modular approaches

Modularisation and unitisation of VET programmes and qualifications are generally seen as approaches which increase flexibility, both in relation to the labour market (e.g. to create tailor-made training offers that directly respond to certain skills needs) and to the learners themselves, to provide them with the opportunity for more flexible learning pathways.

Findings from a 2015 Cedefop study confirm that modularisation and unitisation efforts are widespread in Europe and have been introduced gradually. It also shows that they have taken different forms⁴¹. Table 7 below shows that in 2009, 15 Member

³⁸ Cedefop (2012). Curriculum reform in Europe. The impact of learning outcomes. Research Paper No 29. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

³⁹ Based on Cedefop (2012). Curriculum reform in Europe. The impact of learning outcomes. Research Paper No 29. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

⁴⁰ Cedefop (2017). The changing nature and role of vocational education and training in Europe. Volume 2: Results of a survey among European VET experts. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 64. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/548024>

⁴¹ The 2015 Cedefop study provides a categorisation of countries in terms of their form of modularisation (focusing on IVET) based on five criteria: a clear start and end point for a module; an outcome-based system; individual certification of each module; no restrictions regarding participation or length of participation; no regulation governing which training providers are allowed to offer which kind of programme. Some countries have applied modularisation and unitisation to all aspects of IVET provision (examples include IVET in UK-EN, FI, UK-SC, and HU) while others continue with more holistic structures for programmes (e.g. in AT, DE, IT). Cf. Cedefop (2015). The role of modularisation and unitisation in vocational education and training. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop working paper; No 26. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/38475>

States already had modules or units in place in IVET, while the others did not make use of units or modules in IVET. By 2013, five of these other Member States were either gradually introducing units or modules or piloting them: Belgium (Fr), Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, and Malta. By 2018, 21 Member States have modular or unit-based structures in place in IVET, with another four Member States using modular or unitised structures for some qualifications, or parts of qualifications (DK, DE, IT, AT).

Table 3. Development of modularised or unitised systems for VET across the EU-28⁴²

Units/modules in place (IVET)....	Member States	Additional developments
<i>Before 2009</i>	<i>Total number: 15</i> <i>(EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, LU, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, UK)</i>	
<i>2018</i>	<i>Total number: 21</i> <i>(BG, BE, CZ, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, UK)</i>	<i>CY: plans to modularise all IVET and CVET curricula until 2020.</i> <i>AT, DE, DK, IT: modular/unitised structures used for some qualifications</i> <i>SK, EL: no current developments</i>

Source: Cedefop, stakeholder interviews.

Latvia is among the more recent cases of modularisation of VET programmes with development taking place after some sectoral research between 2013 and being close to finalisation by 2018. Piloting and implementation of modular vocational education programmes started in 2016. The shift to a modular system is ongoing, not all VET schools have introduced them yet.

In most countries that have units or modules, IVET tends to be mainly school-based. Several Member States not using modules or unit-based approaches have strong work-based apprenticeship strands (e.g. AT, DK, DE) which do not use units or modules although some of these have modules in some qualifications and possibilities for transferring learning outcomes from other learning contexts, including gaining credits for work experience⁴³. It is also the case that in many countries awarding a qualification based on a final exam, accumulation of units to gain accreditation is not possible⁴⁴ (e.g. AT, CY, DE, DK, EE, HU, IT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI)⁴⁵.

The introduction of modular and unitised structures in VET appears to be closely linked to the development of credit arrangements based on learning outcomes and of

⁴² 2015 data based on Cedefop (2016). ECVET in Europe: monitoring report 2015. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 56. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/946187>. 2013 data based on Cedefop (2014). Monitoring ECVET implementation strategies in Europe in 2013. Working Paper No. 22. 2018 based on findings from targeted consultation and stakeholder interviews.

⁴³ ECVET Secretariat (2016). Peer Learning Activity 'Units, partial qualifications and full qualifications'. 26-27 May 2016, Riga. Synthesis Report.

⁴⁴ Cedefop (2015). Stronger VET for better lives: Cedefop's monitoring report on vocational education and training policies 2010-14. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Cedefop Reference series, No 98

⁴⁵ Based on country fiches. In Romania, accumulation of units is conceptually possible, but the principle is not yet operationalised. Awarding of a qualification based on accumulation of units is however possible in e.g. ES, IE, FI, MT, UK-EWNI, UK-SC, LU, SE, LV [currently being introduced]).

arrangements for the validation and recognition of NFIL.⁴⁶ In countries with units or modules, VET tends to be flexible and transfer is generally possible. However, this does not necessarily guarantee that qualifications can be acquired by accumulating modules or units.

3.1.3 Credit systems in VET

A credit system is 'an instrument designed to enable an accumulation of learning outcomes gained in formal, non-formal and/or informal settings and to facilitate their transfer from one setting to another for validation and recognition. A credit system can be designed: by describing an education or training programme and attaching points (credits) to its components (modules, courses, placements, dissertation work, etc.); or by describing a qualification using learning outcomes units and attaching credit points to every unit'.⁴⁷

Credit systems are expected to facilitate access and transfer across different learning contexts and shorten the duration of training.⁴⁸ The number of Member States to have a credit system in place for VET (not necessarily based on ECVET) has doubled during the past five years, showing significant progress at national level (Table 8). Sixteen Member States currently have a credit system in place for VET (as of 2018), compared to 13 Member States in 2015, and eight Member States in 2013.

Between 2015 and 2018, four countries have developed credit systems as part of VET reforms: Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania and Portugal. In Bulgaria, a credit system and credit transfer have been created and will be implemented once all VET standards which will have the same structure are updated. Croatia has adopted an ECVET based credit system for VET with the new CROQF legislation. Credit points are not yet used in practice. Portugal has recently decided on the introduction of a national credit system for VET, which is inspired by ECVET (Order n. ° 47/2017 of February 1st). It is applicable to double certification qualifications integrated in the CNQ (levels 2, 4 and 5 of NQF/EQF).

Table 4. Development of credit systems for VET across the EU-28⁴⁹

Credit system in place for VET by....	Member States	Additional developments
2018	Total number: 17 (BG, BE, DK, EE, FI, FR, HR, IE, LT, LU, MT, PT, RO, SI, ES, SE, UK ⁵⁰)	Poland and Cyprus have ongoing developments; in Latvia, an introduction is currently being discussed.
2015 ⁵¹	Total number: 13 (BE ⁵² , DK, EE, FI, FR, HR, IE, LU, MT,	4 other Member States were developing a

⁴⁶ For more information, refer to Cedefop (2015). The role of modularisation and unitisation in vocational education and training. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop working paper; No 26. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/38475>

⁴⁷ Cedefop (2008). Terminology of European Education and Training Policy. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4064_en.pdf

⁴⁸ BIBB (2011). Credit-Systeme für das lebenslange Lernen (CS3L). Zwischenbericht. Written by C. Eberhardt, S. Annen, F. Kupfer and K. Schwichtenberg. https://www2.bibb.de/bibbtools/tools/dapro/data/documents/pdf/zw_15203.pdf

⁴⁹ 2015 data based on Cedefop (2016). ECVET in Europe: monitoring report 2015. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 56. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/946187>. 2013 data based on Cedefop (2014). Monitoring ECVET implementation strategies in Europe in 2013. Working Paper No. 22. 2018 based on findings from targeted consultation and stakeholder interviews.

⁵⁰ Belgium: BE(fr) only. Lithuania: being introduced. Bulgaria: in place but not yet active.

	RO, SI, ES, SE, UK)	credit system (BG, HR, CZ, CY), and 8 were testing elements with this purpose. ⁵³
2013	Total number: 8 (FI, IE, LU, RO, SI, ES, SE, UK)	

Source: Cedefop Monitoring ECVET implementation reports (2015, 2013) and stakeholder interviews.

In most countries with a credit system in place for VET, units of learning outcomes can be assessed, validated and recognised, as well as accumulated and transferred *within* the country; to do the same in the case of geographic mobility is possible in a smaller number of countries. Where credit systems are mainly operating within sub-sectors of the education and training system, often with no linkages to other contexts, this can hamper their role in supporting progress and permeability across levels and segments of the system.

3.1.4 Mechanisms for validation of non-formal and informal learning

According to the 2016 update of the European inventory on validation of NFIL 15 Member States had established national mechanisms to coordinate validation across education, the labour market and the third sector. These mechanisms included, but are not limited to, establishing a national institution coordinating good practice or producing national principles to promote consistency. In most cases the coordinating body is at ministerial level.⁵⁴

3.2 Quality assurance systems

3.2.1 Overall changes

There have been considerable changes to country QA systems since 2009 in both IVET and CVET. The 2014 evaluation of EQAVET found that by 2013, 15 countries (BE, BG, EE, ES, EL, FI, HU, EI, LV, LT, MT, NL, PL, SE) have made major changes to IVET and 12 (AT, CY, CZ, DE, DK, FR, IT, LU, PT, RO, SI, SK, UK) made some adjustments since the introduction of the EQAVET recommendation. Since then, a further four countries (IT, PT, SI and SK) have introduced new frameworks or legislation for QA in VET, while LV has introduced further revisions to their QA systems through a new Cabinet Regulation, including a requirement for providers to use EQAVET indicators and conduct graduate tracking.

Table 5 shows the changes between 2009 and 2018. The major changes included:

- Introduction of new elements of quality assurance. This includes establishing acts or framework related to QA, as well as the establishment of new agencies or inspectorates.
- Consolidation of the quality assurance framework (changes to performance measures, the frequency and structure of inspections, and changes to guidelines for self-assessment); or
- A new focus for quality assurance, such as strengthened focus on outcomes. This includes the use of new indicators for monitoring performance

⁵² BE(fr) only.

⁵³ Cedefop (2016). ECVET in Europe: monitoring report 2015. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 56. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/946187>. The figures in the report have been adapted to reflect EU Member States only.

⁵⁴ BE (fl and nl), DK, FR, EL, IE, IT, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SK, ES, SE. Cedefop; European Commission; ICF (2017). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning – 2016 update. Synthesis report. Luxembourg: Publications Office.

Minor adjustments included:

- Piloting of measures, such as new data collection approaches, and inspection and review processes;
- Developing methodologies for providers, such as providing guidelines for self-assessment, data collection methods and annual planning;
- Projects to support quality assurance (providing training, templates and factsheets);
- Adjusting existing frameworks (e.g. revisions of some indicators without changing radically the focus of the approach)⁵⁵.

Similar changes are reported in CVET. Eighteen countries underwent QA reforms and 4 made some adjustment by 2015, Since then, Hungary and Italy have also made changes. However, some countries report difficulties in obtaining data about QA in CVET, which means it is not clear how comprehensively these reforms were implemented.

Table 5. Character of changes introduced to quality assurance in IVET after adoption of EQAVET

Country	Change (IVET/CVET)	Country	Change (IVET/CVET)
AT	Adjustments/Major	LV	Major/Major
BE fr	Major/Unknown	LT	Major/Major
BE nl	Major/Major	MT	Major/Unknown
BG	Major/Major	NL	Major/Major
CY	Adjustments/Major	PL	Major/Unknown
CZ	Adjustments/ Adjustments	PT	Major/Unknown
DE	Adjustments/ Major (in one of the major QA schemes)	RO	Adjustments/ Major
DK	Adjustments/ unknown	SE	Major/ Major
EE	Major/Major	SI	Major/Adjustments
ES	Major/unknown	SK	Major/Major
EL	Major/Major	UK	Adjustments/Major
FI	Major/Unknown	FYROM	Major/Major
FR	Adjustments/Unknown	HR	Adjustments/Adjustments
HU	Major/major	IC	Adjustments/Major
IE	Major/Major	LI*	Unknown/unknown
IT	Major/Major	NO	Major/unknown
LU	Adjustments/Unknown	TK	Major/unknown

*VET provision in Liechtenstein is largely in line with Switzerland's

Source: ICF GHK (2013)

⁵⁵ ICF GHK (2013). Evaluation of the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET). Final Report. June 2013; p. 28

As shown in Table 6, implementation of new and improved QA systems has grown apace since 2013. In 2012 there were 9 countries in the planning stage for having a QA system in line with EQAVET requirements. By 2013, this went down to 4, and by 2018 all but one of these countries had QA systems in line with EQAVET.

Table 6. Devising the national approaches to QA in line with the EQAVET Framework

A national approach has been devised in line with the EQAVET Framework	No	Countries 2018	No	Countries 2016	No	Countries 2013
NO						
It is still in preparation (planned year of introduction)	-	-	-	-	2	CZ, SK
We need more time to devise (planned year of introduction)	1	BE(fr)	1	BE(fr)	2	BE(fr), PT
We do not need it	-	-	-	-	-	-
Totals	1	BE(fr)	1	BE(fr)	4	BE(fr), CZ, PT, SK
YES						
But the national approach has been devised independently of EQAVET but it is compatible with the EQAVET Framework	19	CZ, DE, DK, EE, HR, IE, ES, CY, LV, LT, LU, HU, NL, , SK, SE, UK(Eng, Wls, Nir, Sct)	20	CZ, DE, DK, EE, HR, IE, ES, CY, LV, LT, LU, HU, NL, SI, SK, SE, UK(Eng, Wls, Nir, Sct)	17	DE, DK, EE, HR, IE, ES, CY, LV, LT, LU, NL, SI, SE, UK(Eng, Wls, Nir, Sct)
But the national approach has been devised independently of EQAVET and does not share features with the EQAVET Framework	-	-	-	-	-	-
The national approach has been devised utilising the EQAVET Framework	12	BE(nl), BG, EL, FR, IT, MT, AT, PL, PT, RO, FI, SI	11	BE(nl), BG, EL, FR, IT, MT, AT, PL, PT, RO, FI	10	BE(nl), BG, EL, FR, IT, MT, AT, PL, RO, FI
Other approaches	-	-	-	-	1	HU

Source: EQAVET Secretariat Survey (2018), (2016), and (2013)

Table 7 shows that most of the VET systems have national approaches that cover both IVET and work-based learning as well as CVET. Very few countries (BG, LV, RO, LT and PL) apply QA solely to IVET or to CVET. However, in the qualitative interviews some national authorities reported that QA was not applied systematically across all CVET or WBL.

Table 7. VET sectors with QA arrangements that meet EQAVET requirements

VET sector with QA arrangements	No	Countries 2018
IVET only	5	BG, LV, LT, PL, RO
IVET & associated WBL	26	BE(nl), CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FR, HR, IE, IT, CY, LU, HU, MT, NL, AT, PT, FI, SE, SI, SK, UK(Eng, Wls, Nir, Sct)
CVET only	7	BG, CZ, EL, LV, LT, HU, RO
CVET & associated WBL	18	BE(nl), DE, DK, EE, ES, FR, IE, IT, CY, HR, MT, NL, FI, SE, UK(Eng, Wls, Nir, Sct)

Source: EQAVET Secretariat Survey (2018)

The EQAVET Secretariat survey in 2018 found that most countries implemented all of the key elements of EQAVET. In total:

- 90% of countries stated that their national QA system included the EQAVET quality cycle. This included all EU-28 countries with the exceptions of BE-fr, UK-WL, LU and SK;
- 87% of countries reported that their national QA system included EQAVET indicative descriptors. This included all EU-28 countries except BE-fr and UK (all parts);
- 87% of countries reported using EQAVET indicators (all EU-28 countries except Be-nl, BE-fr UK-NI, UK-SC and RO).

3.2.2 System-level changes

3.2.2.1 Use of indicative descriptors

The 2018 EQAVET survey found that half of country VET systems have indicative indicators across all four stages of the quality cycle (planning, implementation, evaluation and review). Currently 69% of countries (22) VET systems always use indicative descriptors in the planning phase, 66% (21) use indicative descriptors in the implementation phase, 56% (18) in the evaluation phase and 53% (17) in the review phase. This is a significant shift from 2013, when less than half of countries' VET systems employed indicative descriptors in each of the four quality cycle stages.

The survey also shows that over 40% of countries employ indicative descriptors in each of the four quality cycle stages. However, the number of countries always using the descriptors is lesser for CVET than for IVET. As shown in Table 8, in 2011 the use of indicative descriptors was largely the same in CVET and IVET, but since then its use has grown more substantially in IVET.

In all the four secretariat surveys, countries were more likely to use indicative descriptors in the planning and evaluation stage of IVET, rather than in the implementation and review stage. In CVET, there are similarly more countries that use EQAVET indicators in the implementation stage than in the review stage..

Table 8. Percentage values for all EQAVET indicative descriptors 'always used' at system level for IVET and CVET in 2011, 2012, 2013, 2016 and 2018

	Planning	Implementation	Evaluation	Review
IVET				
2018	66%	63%	56%	53%

2016	69%	66%	56%	53%
2013	47%	41%	47%	44%
2012	50%	41%	44%	41%
2011	50%	38%	38%	42%
CVET				
2018	56%	50%	44%	44%
2016	56%	50%	44%	44%
2013	47%	41%	47%	44%
2012	50%	41%	44%	42%
2011	50%	38%	38%	41%

Source: EQAVET Secretariat Survey (2018, 2016, 2013 and 2012)

3.2.2.2 Provider registrations and external audits

The 2018 EQAVET Secretariat survey found that 78% (25) of countries have in place registration systems for both IVET and CVET providers, with a further two countries (HU, CY) having a registration system only for CVET and one country (AT) having a registration system only for IVET. The only EU-28 countries without any registration system are BR-fr, IE, UK-SC and UK-WL.

The survey found that 94% of all countries, and all EU-28 countries, had systems in place for external audit. Of these countries, 24 (75%) has external audit arrangements for both IVET and CVET. A further seven countries (FR, LU, AT, PT, RO, SI, SK) had external audit systems only for IVET. BE-fr was the only country VET system with no external audit system in place.

3.2.3 Provider-level changes

3.2.3.1 Use of indicative descriptors

Table 9 shows that in 2018 VET providers most commonly use EQAVET indicative descriptors in the planning and evaluation phase and least commonly in the implementation and review phase. This has not changed materially since 2011 and is broadly in line with the use of indicative descriptors at a VET system-level. Indicative descriptors are more commonly used in IVET rather than CVET.

Table 9. Proportions of 'always used' for all EQAVET indicative descriptors at provider level for IVET and CVET for 2011, 2012, 2013, 2016 and 2018

	Planning	Implementation	Evaluation	Review
IVET				
2018	53%	47%	47%	47%
2016	50%	41%	47%	44%
2013	47%	41%	47%	44%
2012	50%	41%	44%	42%
2011	50%	38%	38%	41%
CVET				
2018	50%	34%	38%	41%
2016	41%	31%	34%	34%
2013	38%	31%	34%	31%

2012	38%	28%	31%	28%
2011	35%	23%	27%	27%

Source: EQAVET Secretariat Survey (2018, 2016, 2013 and 2012)

3.2.4 Use of indicators

Table 10 and Table 11 show the EQAVET indicators used in both CVET and IVET in 2016. It shows indicators with the highest proportions of 'always used' and 'not used' values.

Across both sectors the most commonly used indicator was *Completion rate in VET programmes* (Indicator 4). This was always used by 28 countries for IVET and 19 countries in CVET. The least commonly used indicators for both IVET and CVET were *Prevalence of vulnerable groups* (Indicator 8). However, there was some variation for IVET and CVET. In IVET *Relevance of QA systems for VET providers* (Indicator 1) and *Placement rate in VET programmes* (Indicator 5) also less commonly used, whereas for CVET *Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace* (Indicator 6) and *Investment in training of teachers and trainers* (Indicator 2) are used less frequently.

Table 10. EQAVET Indicators in the IVET sector in 2018

Most commonly used Indicators (no of countries)	Used by	Least used indicators (no of countries)	Used by
Indicator 4 (28)	BE(fr), BG, CZ, DK, DE, EE, IE, EL, ES, FR, IT, LV, LT, LU, HU, MT, NL, AT, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, FI, SE, UK(Eng, Wls, Nir)	Indicator 8A (8)	CZ, EE, IE, CY, LT, LV, MT, AT
Indicator 3 (26)	BE(fr), BG, CZ, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, FR, IT, LV, LT, LU, HU, MT, NL, AT, PL, RO, SI, SK, FI, SE, UK(Eng, Wls, Nir)	Indicator 1B (5)	DK, LT, LU, HU, SE
Indicator 1A (22)	BG, CZ, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, FR, LT, LV, MT, NL, AT, PL, RO, SI, SK, SE, UK(Eng,Wls, Nir, Sct)	Indicator 5B (5)	BE (fr), CZ, SK

Source: EQAVET Secretariat Survey (2018)

Table 11. EQAVET indicators in the CVET sector 2016

Most commonly used indicators (no of countries)	Used by	Least commonly used indicators (no of countries)	Used by
Indicator 3 (20)	BE(fr), BG, DK, CZ, ES, IE, EL, FR, IT, CY, LU, HU, MT, NL, SK, FI, SE, UK (Eng, Wls, Nir)	Indicator 8B (8)	HR, IE, CY, LT, LV, LU, MT, AT
Indicator 7 (20)	BG, CZ, DE, DK, ES, IE, FR, IT, LT, LU, HU, NL, AT, RO, FI, SE, UK(Eng, Wls, Nir, Sct)	Indicator 6A (7)	CY, LT, HU, AT, RO, SK, FI

Indicator 4 (19)	BG, DK, IE, EL, ES, FR, IT, Indicator 2B (7) CY, LV, HU, MT, NL, PL, SK, FI, SE, UK (Eng, Wls, Nir)	DK, FR, LT, LU, HU, AT, RO
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Source: EQAVET Secretariat Survey (2018)

4 Influence of instruments on national policies and systems

This chapter examines the extent to which EQAVET and ECVET have influenced national developments in quality assurance and qualification design. It draws on the findings from the interviews and literature review to examine the scale and type of influence the two instruments have had.

4.1 ECVET

This section analyses and summarises the impact of ECVET on national policies and systems, in particular on developments and progress made in relation to:

- Improving the transparency of qualifications and learning outcomes;
- Promoting lifelong learning and portability of learning outcomes;
- Facilitating the validation, recognition and transfer of learning outcomes;
- Promoting European mobility of learners;
- Promoting cooperation and trust.

ECVET shares these objectives at least partly with other EU-level instruments that have been developed as part of the Copenhagen Process, most notably the EQF, the principles for validation of NFIL and Europass. As a result, it is difficult to separate the effect of ECVET principles from the other tools. Indeed, the findings from qualitative and literature research suggest that ECVET-related developments are often part of broader reform processes which make it difficult to separate ECVET-related developments from others.

For some countries ECVET has had a limited impact on national systems because they either already had unit-based systems and well-established credit systems for VET in place (e.g. IE, SE, SI, UK) or they have systems that are not, or not easily compatible with ECVET principles (e.g. reported by respondents from AT, CY, DE, DK, NL, SK)⁵⁶.

The table below groups EU-28 Members States according to two dimensions: their degree of ECVET readiness of the system around the time when ECVET was adopted; and the impact of ECVET on national (I)VET systems since then. 'High impact' of ECVET on VET systems describes a situation where VET systems have undergone significant changes that are in line with ECVET principles, and where these changes are at least partially attributed to ECVET.

Table 12. Impact of ECVET on VET systems

Impact	ECVET readiness of the system	
	Low	High
Low	AT, BE-nl, CY, CZ, DE, EL, ES, DK, FR, HR, HU, IT, NL, SK	IE, LU, SE, SI, UK
High	BG, BE-fr, EE, LT, LV, MT, PL, PT, RO	FI

Source: Stakeholder interviews, targeted consultation, desk research.

Finland is the only country identified that is characterised by both a high degree of ECVET readiness from the outset, and high impact of ECVET implementation on the VET system. The Finnish VET system was already highly compatible with many ECVET

⁵⁶ Unless otherwise noted, most information reported refers to initial VET.

elements before ECVET emerged. Finland already had modular qualifications, credits, flexible learning pathways, recognition of prior learning, assessment of each unit documented, accumulation of learning outcomes and transfer of learning outcomes from one context to another. Still, ECVET has significantly contributed to the fine-tuning of the competence-based system, and the adoption of ECVET points.

Among the countries for which the impact of ECVET has been high, the following five countries can be highlighted as examples where significant reforms of the VET system are linked to ECVET: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Romania.

Almost half of the EU-28 Member States fall into the group of countries that had a low level of ECVET readiness of their (I)VET systems and a low impact of ECVET implementation on their VET systems. It should be noted that low impact on VET systems refers to system-level changes and does not mean that there has been a low level of ECVET-related activity in the respective countries.

In most of the countries within this group, ECVET has been attributed more as playing an important role in changing mind-sets and sparking discussions at national level with regard to introducing learning outcomes, the options for introducing unit-based systems and/or partial qualifications and to the quality of transnational mobility than in shaping their implementation (e.g. AT, CZ, DE, HU, IT, NL, SK).

4.1.1 Unit based and modular approaches using learning outcomes strategies/plans

It is evident that important areas of ECVET's influence at national level have been on increasing the introduction and implementation of learning outcomes approaches and the structuring of qualifications into units or groups of learning outcomes. In the 2014 ECVET evaluation (European Commission, 2014) ECVET's contribution to the implementation of a learning outcomes approach was identified as one of three main strands of benefit.

The concept and use of groups or units of learning outcomes have been central to **reforms of VET systems** in a variety of countries: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, Malta and Romania attributed a strong influence of ECVET on their substantive VET reforms. In Romania, ECVET, in conjunction with the EQF, has been the main pillar for the revision of qualifications in the technical VET system, for example.⁵⁷

Elsewhere too:

- **Estonia** implemented a learning outcomes-based approach with credit points brought into law in 2013. By the beginning of 2017, all curricula in VET were using LO and a credit points system and they were all set up in a module-based way. This is taking time to filter into providers as new curricula are introduced.
- In **Lithuania**, in 2012, a new guideline for developing modular programmes was issued; part of the methodology is based on ECVET technical components, e.g. units of learning outcomes. A module-based system for VET was introduced three years ago. Not yet all VET programmes are module-based, but most are. Old VET programmes, based on VET standards designed for a specific qualification, are gradually being replaced by newer, more flexible ones. By 2018, 76 modular VET programmes were registered.
- **Latvia** is among the more recent cases of countries that introduce a modularised structure to their VET system (developments started in 2011). The use of units of LO to design qualifications or programmes lies at the base of the current comprehensive VET curriculum reform. This reform was inspired by ECVET, although ECVET is not used in the respective legal documents. The approval and implementation of the new modular VET programmes is still ongoing. This is an

⁵⁷ Romania has also started preparatory work for revising VET qualifications in CVET.

ongoing process, and not all VET schools have introduced modules yet. In the **French-speaking community of Belgium**, a formal decision was taken in 2009 to implement ECVET in parallel with the NQF. Units of learning outcomes have been established in all VET (IVET and adult education) programmes. A credit system has been in use since 2011, which is considered as a direct impact of the ECVET Recommendation. It is however not considered widely used in practice.

•

In **Malta**, the ECVET system was introduced in conjunction with establishing an NQF, both designed to improve the structure and visibility of VET qualifications. In 2014, the manual for conversion of qualifications into the ECVET system was published, requiring qualifications to be structured into units of learning outcomes and accompanied by ECVET points. In other cases, though, similar developments to qualifications and learning have taken place but the influence of ECVET is identified as either 'one piece of the jigsaw' although a significant one in providing building blocks, or a trigger to raising awareness and fine-tuning their VET systems.

In Sweden for instance, where the VET system is considered to be very much in line with ECVET principles (use of a credit point system, transfer and accumulation process) but with qualifications structured according to a slightly different logic, interviewees would not say that implementing ECVET was their primary driving force..

Among some of the countries in which unitised/modular structures are not yet widely used in VET, ECVET has served as a trigger to discuss possible developments towards unit-based or modular approaches, and to launch initiatives (e.g. AT, DE, IT).

4.1.2 Credit points

The use of **credit points** has been a sensitive and much-discussed topic within ECVET implementation from the start. A few countries consider them incompatible with their VET systems and this has overshadowed considerations of credit transfer and accumulation.⁵⁸ Also while agreeing to use units of learning outcomes in the curricula, countries have often found it difficult to assign credit points to these learning outcomes. In some cases this is because credit points are seen as incompatible with national systems which give credits on the basis of notional learning time.⁵⁹

Of those countries that have set up credit systems for VET, some have also introduced credit points influenced by ECVET:

- **Finland** had a credit system for upper-secondary VET prior to ECVET. ECVET is however credited for having inspired the revision of the credit system from a workload-based approach to a more competence-based approach, with competence points now focusing more on the scope, complexity and significance of the learning instead of workload. Since the beginning of 2018, IVET and CVET have been under the same law. While CVET was already based on the competence-based approach, competence points have only recently been added to further and specialist vocational qualifications.
- **Estonia:** According to the recent VET institutions act, the volume of VET is expressed in Estonian VET credit points (EKAP), indicating the estimated volume of a learner's work necessary to achieve the learning outcomes described in the curriculum or module. A study year in VET is equivalent to 60 EKAP. EKAP is

⁵⁸ "In ECVET, the accumulation process concerns validation and recognition of assessed learning outcomes. In this process, ECVET points are not the core subject of accumulation. However, ECVET points contribute to the understanding of the transfer and accumulation process by providing information on the weight of achieved learning outcomes compared to the whole qualification." Isabelle Le Mouillour (Cedefop) and Michel Aribaud (European Commission) (2010). Using ECVET for recognising knowledge, skills and competence. ECVET Magazine No 1.

⁵⁹ Cf. Cedefop (2013).

based on the principles of ECVET. All VET school curricula had to be renewed by September 2017 ⁶⁰.

- **Malta** is implementing ECVET as a system. It is closely linked to ECTS (points are calculated the same way and thus are based on workload). Self-accrediting institutions are using ECVET points as part of their system. It is used by all VET providers from NQF level 1 to 4, required by law to get a VET provider's licence. ECVET points are used for level 1 to 4 of the NQF. Credit points refer to either ECVET or ECTS points. Higher VET programmes on level 5 and upwards use ECTS.

Ireland, Sweden, Slovenia and the UK use credit points in VET as well, they are however not considered compatible with ECVET. In Sweden, two different credit systems are used in VET: upper secondary credits and higher vocational education credits. Slovenia has had a credit system in place at upper-secondary level VET that uses the same credit point convention as HE.

In Croatia, the VET Act includes provisions for the use of credit points; they are however not yet used in practice. Also in Lithuania and Portugal, there are arrangements for the use of credit points; but further discussion on their implementation is still needed.

4.1.3 Flexible pathways and choices/progression/permeability

Respondents generally indicate that progress in terms of flexible pathways and permeability has been mixed. Although quite a few countries have taken increased efforts in this direction, success so far (e.g. actual improvement in permeability) has been relatively modest. Interviewees referred to difficulties in implementing the transfer of assessed learning outcomes to another context, not only, but in particular between VET and HE. The following three aspects play a role in this:

- Systems for recognition which focus on individual negotiations and need many 'approvers';
- The difficulty to compare learning outcomes (complexity);
- Different ways of calculating credit points across sectors (e.g. VET vs. HE).

ECVET has been credited by many respondents with raising awareness of and sparking discussions on the importance of creating more flexible learning pathways and improving permeability between the different parts of education and training systems (in particular, between VET and HE). Again, though developments of more flexible pathways have not been attributable to ECVET by respondents, they often acknowledge the significance that learning outcomes and the accumulation of credit play. Making VET pathways more flexible was one of the key objectives in the recent ECVET-inspired VET reforms in Estonia, Latvia and Finland.

Some examples where ECVET's (potential) influence has been acknowledged include:

- In **Austria**, pilot projects have been implemented to explore how ECVET can be used to improve permeability between VET and HE and make learning pathways more flexible (e.g. a project on improving permeability and credit transfer between VET colleges and universities of applied sciences, and a project on using ECVET in the area of healthcare qualifications).
- In **Malta**, ECVET has helped to improve options for permeability between VET and HE. Graduates of full VET programmes (120 ECVET credits) can progress to a level 6 programme at the University of Malta.

⁶⁰ Silla, E. & Aarna, O., 2014.

4.1.4 Transnational mobility, Erasmus+

Many respondents believed the most significant impact of ECVET in their country was in improving the quality of transnational VET mobility and improving the possibilities for recognition of learning outcomes achieved abroad. ECVET tools, most notably the MoU and the LA, are widely implemented at national level and considered useful and effective to enable this.

Respondents said that the most important ECVET elements in national VET systems were (a) **definition of learning outcomes** to be achieved during mobility period, **description of how to assess** and **validate** them in a LA and (b) exchanging **MoUs**. Cedefop's 2016 ECVET monitoring report (for 2015) also indicated widespread agreement that the MoU and LA templates increased the **quality of mobility** in terms of better understanding of competences gained and increased mutual trust. This is also supported by findings from the Erasmus+ mid-term evaluation. Data for the period 2014-2015 suggests that

- 88% of mobile learners had signed a LA before their mobility period;
- Over 80% of mobile learners in VET received some form of recognition of learning outcomes achieved; and
- In VET, the absence of a LA is associated with a high rate of non-recognition. More than 50 % of learners without a LA stated that they did not receive recognition. In contrast, 92 % of those VET learners with a LA received recognition of their mobility.⁶¹

This is confirmed by respondents in many countries. For example:

- In **Slovenia**, for instance, LA and MoU are used at school level for work placements and most VET schools have concluded MoUs with mobility partners in other countries, especially in Spain;
- In **Estonia**, many VET providers use ECVET tools for planning and implementing VET mobility periods and consider them useful to ensuring learners have a fulfilling experience;
- In **Italy**, the National Agency for VET Mobility (INAPP) adopted the ECVET principles and found that where MoU, LA and personal transcripts were used more widely the projects were rated higher by participants.

As depicted in Table 17 below, three countries are found to have no or very little reported activity implementing ECVET in transnational mobility (BE-nl, EL, LU). In eight countries, ECVET principles are used for transnational mobility only with little or no other application (DE, DK, HR, IE, SE, SI, SK, UK). These countries also did not report any plans to move towards ECVET implementation beyond transnational mobility. The third, and biggest group, consists of countries that have reported ECVET implementation activity both in the context of transnational mobility and lifelong learning. For many but not all countries in this group, the impact of ECVET on transnational mobility has been considered more significant than on lifelong learning in general.

⁶¹ European Commission (2017). Combined evaluation of Erasmus+ and predecessor programmes. Final report - main evaluation report (Volume 1). Report prepared by ICF. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. <https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf>

Table 13. Use of ECVET for transnational mobility across the EU-28

Group	Member States
<i>Countries with no or very little reported activities to implement ECVET in transnational mobility</i>	<i>BE-nl, LU, EL</i>
<i>Countries that explicitly focus implementing ECVET in transnational mobility only (with no or very little activity in the context of LLL)</i>	<i>DE, DK, HR, IE, SE, SI, SK, UK</i>
<i>Countries that report ECVET implementation activity both in the context of transnational mobility and LLL</i>	<i>BE-fr, BG, EE, ES, FI, FR, LT, LV, MT, PL, PT, RO mainly mobility but some other aspects as well: AT, CY (early stage), CZ, HU, IT, NL,</i>

Source: Stakeholder interviews, targeted consultation.

Several countries reported significant progress in ensuring the recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility, i.e. this has made it possible to recognise them as part of their respective IVET pathways (e.g. in, FR, IT, HR, LT, RO):

- In Italy, this coincided with the paradigmatic shift that happened with the law 107/2015 "La Buona Scuola" that imposed periods of work based learning for all Italian higher secondary schools (200 hours in three years for gymnasiums and 400 hours in three years for technical and professional schools)..The new regulation fully recognises periods of work based learning abroad.
- France introduced a mobility unit for its baccalauréat professionnel qualification (NQF/EQF level 4). Based on the work carried out within the ECVET pilot project MEN ECVET (2011-2013), the French Ministry for National Education has made regulatory provisions to recognise learning outcomes from the obligatory workplace training completed in a company, or a vocational school, located in a country outside France.⁶²

While respondents have not explicitly said that mobility has been strengthened by the tools through giving more assurance to participants and increasing demand, the examples illustrate how the ECVET mobility tools overcome a barrier.

4.2 EQAVET

This section examines the potential impact of EQAVET on national policies and systems. It explores five areas which EQAVET is expected to influence, which are:

- **Increasing the QA culture in national VET systems.** This includes changes to the extent to which QA is regarded as a priority, and the role of the EQAVET recommendation in mobilising country stakeholders to take action;
- **Informing the design of national authority arrangements for monitoring the performance of providers.** This includes the introduction of, or changes to, national quality assurance agencies, as well as other system-level changes to improve provider monitoring;

⁶² Cf. ECVET Magazine no. 28. http://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/system/files/magazines/en/ecvet_mag_28.pdf.

- **Improving system-level QA arrangements.** This includes the use of provider registration, the collection of new information on learner destinations and programme outcomes, and the collection of data from providers to monitor their performance;
- **Strengthening the self-assessment approach within VET providers.** This includes examining the extent to which there is increased use and implementation of provider self-assessment and use of the quality cycle;
- **Increasing provider use of indicators and descriptors to monitor performance.** This includes defining appropriate indicators for programme review, collecting relevant data and using the intelligence for internal planning.

The impact of EQAVET on each of these areas is presented in turn below.

4.2.1 Creating a QA culture in countries

In the qualitative interviews, most interviewees reported that the EQAVET recommendation has continued to raise the profile of QA, building on the CQAF, and mobilised national authority officials to respond. As one interviewee stated it '*started a conversation*' about QA in their organisation. Most interviewees felt this was a significant impact, as QA has not historically been an important policy priority in their country, and many reported undertaking activities to raise awareness of the Recommendation.

However, some countries also reported that wider socio-economic factors were also raising the importance of QA in VET. This included a decline in some countries (such as DE) of demand for VET compared to academic programmes, and a cognisance that technological advances were creating rapid changes in the skills required by new entrants to the economy. These developments were reported to have stimulated developments in QA before and after the introduction of the Recommendation.

Despite the general perception of an increased national focus on QA, some countries reported that it took significant time to implement changes. Some countries (IT, PT, HU had only *implemented* changes to their QA systems within the last two years, despite some countries making system changes over five years previously. This slow pace of change was attributed to:

- **The time taken to engage national stakeholders and ministers.** Some national stakeholders reported that introducing new policy around QA can take a considerable time, as it requires the mobilisation of a range of actors. This is particularly true when QA was not previously considered a policy priority for the country before the Recommendation.
- **Level of compatibility of the Recommendations with existing VET systems.** A few interviewees reported that their country had different approaches to QA, which means that implementing the EQAVET Recommendation required a significant culture shift, which takes time to effect. For example, a few national stakeholders reported that in their country VET schools' principals are expected to have sole responsibility for QA, which means there was resistance to introducing any standard indicators or external QA systems. Another country reported that in CVET, and particularly apprenticeships, QA was seen as the employers' responsibility, rather than the school, so it was difficult to engage schools in the reforms.

Where implementation has taken place relatively rapidly, it is largely as a result of countries being able to incorporate QA changes in wider reforms of VET. In Ireland, for example, reforms to QA were incorporated around wider structural changes that resulted in the establishment of regional commissioning boards for VET (Education and Training Boards) and the establishment of a single quality assurance agency for HE and VET (Quality and Qualifications Ireland).

4.2.2 Design of national authority arrangements for monitoring the performance of providers

As shown in Chapter 3, many countries (EE, RO, add]) have introduced new QA systems since the publication of the EQAVET Recommendation. Twelve countries, most notably Slovenia, Estonia, and Hungary, reported that the new systems were designed specifically to implement the EQAVET Recommendation. In these instances, all the systems embedded the Plan Do, Check Act (PDCL) framework which underpins the EQAVET quality cycle, and also required providers to establish appropriate indicators that reflect some of the 10 EQAVET indicators. In some countries, such as Romania, the reforms were initially based on the CQAF, and were later updated to reflect the requirements of the EQAVET Recommendation.

All of these countries generally reported that EQAVET supported these developments, as it provided a basis for their QA systems that was based on EU good practice. As one interviewee reported: *"The Recommendation made the last nine years a lot easier. We had a structure to follow"*.

In countries with well-established QA systems (UK, SE, NL, DE, FR), country interviewees reported that the EQAVET Recommendation did not primarily inform recent reforms they have made to their QA systems. Rather, these changes were developed as a result of wider national priorities to improve QA in particular sectors (in France this was on CVET, in SK it related to WBL reforms).

However, in some of these countries the interviewees reported that the EQAVET Recommendation was used as a reference to ensure that their new developments were in line with EU standards. Netherlands, Germany and the UK England and Wales have aligned their indicators to reflect the EQAVET indicators, although in Germany additional indicators were added that measure the quality of the teaching pedagogy⁶³.

Some countries have also developed their QA systems in ways which fall outside the scope of the EQAVET Recommendation but are based on EQAVET principles. These included:

- The Ireland funding agency for VET which introduced a range of performance measures that are used to negotiate targets for regional commissioning authorities. Most of these performance measures reflect EQAVET indicators, such as completion rates, placement rates and investment in staff development;
- In Spain, the Spanish Ministry of Education which has created a QA framework programme for VET which provides funding for regions to develop QA programmes. The actions undertaken by these programmes are required to relate to addressing EQAVET indicators;
- In Bulgaria, changes which were made to the data collection requirements of providers, to ensure they collect information to measure some indicators. Previously, the only data collected systematically from VET providers were student achievement of the upper secondary leaving examination, which were measured externally.

There are some examples however of countries making VET reforms, mostly outside of IVET, where EQAVET was not considered. This includes a reform of apprenticeships in Slovakia and reforms to CVET in France. Interviewees reported this as potentially an 'opportunity missed' because monitoring could identify whether the reforms were effective in achieving their policy aims.

⁶³ Cedefop 2010

4.2.3 Improving system-level QA arrangements

The literature review and qualitative interviews identified a range of changes that countries have made to system-level QA systems. A common change has been the introduction of a register of providers. The EQAVET survey of NRPs found that 23 of 28 countries in 2016 have these systems in place for IVET and CVET, and five have a register for one VET sector. In the qualitative interviews the study found that around half of these registers were introduced as a result of the EQAVET Recommendation.

The EQAVET secretariat survey shows that nearly all (94%, or 30) of the countries that have EQAVET NRPs reported they had provision in place for the external review of VET providers. In the qualitative interviews, some countries (UK, NL, DE, FR, SE, IE, BE) reported that these systems were in place before the introduction of the Recommendation. Others, such as Malta and Estonia, reported that they introduced a new certification system based on the EQAVET requirements. In Malta, all providers must be able to evidence their institutions' performance against the 10 EQAVET indicators in order to certify qualifications. Estonia introduced an accreditation system for VET curriculum groups. Providers are granted permission to deliver VET programmes in particular sectors for 3-6 years, after which their performance is reviewed before they can become accredited again. The accreditation is based on provider self-assessments, as well as other factors such as the importance of the programme, level of take-up and level of alternative provision available in the area. Other countries, such as UK and DE, reported undertaking national monitoring of QA through an external QA agency. These agencies were revised to incorporate EQAVET indicators to measure provider performance, as well as further indicators on the quality of the learning pedagogy.

Most countries have also introduced requirements for providers to undertake self-assessments. In the qualitative interviewees, most national authorities reported that there was an expectation that providers carry out self-assessments, and around half stated that this requirement was introduced in the last five years as a result of the EQAVET Recommendation. However, in most cases the requirements were only in place in schools based VET, and was not mandatory. Moreover, few countries reported introducing requirements for CVET or WBL providers to undertake self-assessment.

A few countries (PT, FR, BG, IT) have or are planning to introduce legislation requiring providers to undertake self-assessments. Reforms in Portugal in 2017 and France in 2014 required providers to demonstrate they have appropriate QA systems in place in order to receive public funding. In Portugal, providers are required to show they have a self-assessment approach in place and use appropriate indicators to measure performance to achieve a certified quality mark for their QA system. This quality mark is required for providers to access public funding. In France, legislation requires all VET schools to achieve an external accreditation by a QA body (e.g. ISO) or to self-certify their QA systems. The option to self-certify was removed in new 2018 legislation.

Bulgaria and Italy have introduced policies requiring providers to undertake self-assessments, as part of a wider QA framework. In Italy, EQAVET was included in the national plan for education and training that was published in 2017. This resulted in the publication in 2018 of a national policy for QA and a common QA framework. In Bulgaria, VET reforms in 2014 included a requirement for VET institutions to build an internal QA system, as well as the establishment of national indicators which were aligned to the EQAVET indicators. Spain has also introduced some EQAVET principles implicitly in legislation relating to the requirements of the NQF. A few countries, such as Germany, Netherlands, Ireland and the UK also include some elements of EQAVET in their QA systems⁶⁴, which are governed by national legislation.

⁶⁴ Cedefop 2010a

The use of indicators is also in most cases incorporated within QA legislation, but in most countries providers have flexibility to use the indicators they feel are more relevant. A few countries such as Malta and Portugal require this to be based on the EQAVET indicators, but in other countries providers could use other indicators that reflect their institution's aims. This was partly attributed to national authorities recognising that providers may not be able to collect the data necessary to measure some of the indicators and partly to national authorities not wishing to overburden providers with QA requirements immediately, as they felt this could give providers a negative perception of QA and EQAVET.

In most countries, providers are required to measure indicators for their own self-assessment. Few countries collect data on indicators for benchmarking. An exception is Scotland and England in the UK, where national agencies supply providers with data so they can compare the performance of their institution with their peers. In Scotland some benchmarked data is used to negotiate provider priorities for the upcoming year.

The qualitative interviews and literature review identified some resistance to the use of EQAVET indicators for benchmarking. In Germany, national and federal ministries and associations reported concerns that the data would increase the cost of training, while potentially interfering with providers' relationship with employers⁶⁵. In the qualitative interviews some stakeholder also reported there would be resistance to providers in any additional data collection requirements and perceived monitoring. Consequently, none of the interviewees reported concrete plans to do this in the future.

4.2.4 Strengthening the QA culture within VET providers

In the qualitative interviews and stakeholder engagement, most providers felt that recent changes in legislation and new requirements had raised the profile of QA among providers. As one stakeholder reported, it has resulted in the VET system "starting to look at itself". The most commonly reported impact was that these developments had increased dialogue in providers about quality. One interviewee reported that they had seen examples of providers introducing regular internal meetings to discuss QA issues, and another reported that there were examples of senior leaders forming peer groups to discuss QA arrangements.

However, within countries most interviewees believed the response from providers to the EQAVET Recommendation and associated national developments was likely to be mixed. Some providers that were interviewed in the case studies reported extensive use of self-assessment using indicators. National authorities felt take up was more common among providers that participated in EU projects, or provided mobility opportunities as they had a greater awareness of EU VET policies. Some national authorities reported that this was more commonly undertaken by prestigious VET providers, as they want to demonstrate their VET provision is of high quality and adheres to EU expectations.

In the case studies, providers that had recently introduced a self-assessment approach believed it brought significant benefits to their institution. This included:

- **Helping develop provider understanding of what should be the expectations of their VET programmes.** Here the process of identifying what were the most appropriate indicators and descriptors for their programmes helped them develop a shared understanding of the requirements and expectations of their programme, which then informed the development and revision of programmes;
- **Benchmarking performance.** This was mostly undertaken by providers comparing the performance of programmes against previous years in order to

⁶⁵ Cedefop 2010a

ensure that performance is in line with expectation. This allowed issues to be identified and then interrogated, with the programme revised accordingly;

- **Re-emphasising the importance of staff development, which had not previously been a priority for the organisation.** A few providers reported that as a consequence of the indicator on staff development they considered in more depth the strategies they had in place for Continual Professional Development of their workforce. A few reported that this resulted in the introduction of new training courses on topics such as computer-assisted learning and working with particular groups, which subsequently raised quality.

This indicates that where it is being used, it is bringing benefits to providers, and consequently most planned to continue to invest in developing their QA systems. Some for example reported to introduce new surveys to gather intelligence that can be used to evidence indicators. A few providers also reported that in future they plan to explore the feasibility of developing data sharing agreements with other local providers, so they can benchmark performance more effectively.

National authorities felt however that some institutions had not yet made significant changes to their QA culture. This in part was attributed to the flexibility afforded by country QA policies allowing providers to employ different approaches to implementing QA systems. It was also attributed to some providers not having the resources to develop the data collection and analysis systems required for a robust self-assessment process, or focusing on other national priorities.

Some national authorities reported that this was due to the providers having relatively little experience in conducting self-assessments. These national authorities reported that there are no clear national or EU mechanisms for creating a culture of quality among providers, or promoting good practice and results.

4.2.5 Provider use of indicators and descriptors

In the qualitative interviews, most national authorities reported that their national QA systems made extensive use of the EQAVET indicators. Indeed, the EQAVET secretariat survey found that some indicators, such as *Completion rate in VET programmes* (Indicator 4) and *Participation rate in VET programmes* (indicator 3) were used by nearly all countries. In some countries with well-established QA systems (DE, IE, SE, UK), national authorities reported that these indicators had historically been collected to measure performance. However, some countries, such as FR and EE, reported that the indicators were collected specifically in response to the EQAVET recommendation.

The interviews and secretariat survey do however show that some indicators are less commonly collected. This includes indicators such as learner placement rate and labour market relevance, where data collection was perceived to be costly as it could only be collected through research or surveys.

In other countries, the lack of availability of data was reported to inhibit the collection of indicators. In Bulgaria for example, the only data that providers have historically collected has been on attainment, and consequently there is a lack of data to explore learner characteristics. Other countries also reported that they did not have destination data or data on learner utilisation of skills in the workplace, as this required data to be collected from employers.

In the case studies, very few providers using macro-economic data, such as unemployment and participation rates, as indicators. This is because they believed these indicators could be affected by factors outside their control (such as labour market conditions, level of migration).

There were also very few providers that were reported to use indicators on investment in teacher training. Most providers did not collect this data and some also felt it was

difficult to monetise the cost of training investment as so much of it is done internally using existing staff.

4.3 Factors that influence impact

4.3.1 ECVET

Distance to travel & VET system characteristics in place: Based on their system characteristics and long-standing VET traditions, countries have different starting points as regards their initial level of 'ECVET readiness'. For a country with a unit-based VET system, a credit system in place and a long-standing tradition of using learning outcomes approaches, the step towards ECVET implementation will probably be a relatively modest one, achievable through some fine-tuning of the system. For a VET country that does not have any unit or module based approach in VET nor a credit system in place, implementation of ECVET will probably entail a profound reform of its VET system.

Correspondence with national priorities and political buy-in: Council Recommendations are 'soft law' and the EU policies they convey are not legally binding and there are no sanctions available for Member States that do not comply with or do not reach the commonly agreed objectives. The impact of any given initiative will thus largely depend on its perceived relevance at national level and on whether it responds to national policy priorities, and thus depend on the continued commitment to its implementation by the relevant government. This dependence on political will was in particular mentioned by interviewed stakeholders with regard to ECVET implementation.

Implementation of the principle of learning outcomes at various levels: The principle of learning outcomes forms the core of ECVET, i.e. for ECVET to work, learning outcomes must be implemented comprehensively and at all relevant levels: in particular, for the assessment, validation and recognition of learning outcomes. While most countries have made significant progress in describing their qualifications in terms of learning outcomes, stakeholder feedback has shown that most countries are still far away from having a fully learning outcomes-based system.

Relationship with other initiatives and distinctive value of ECVET: The relationship and linkages with other initiatives (in the case of ECVET most notably the EQF/NQF and the principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning) is an important factor that influences its impact. At the same time, impact also depends on the initiative's capability to retain its own unique selling proposition, its own distinctive value. One concern with ECVET is that it shares such significant overlap with the EQF/NQF, validation of non-formal and informal learning, or Europass that its own distinctive value is no longer self-evident.

Last but not least, the support provided for the implementation of the initiative is an essential factor – both in terms of financial support and in terms of broad stakeholder commitment: Full-blown implementation of ECVET requires commitment from a wide range of bodies and organisations operating in vocational education and training in all sectors. In some countries, this might be difficult to achieve, especially when they do not fully support the initiative.⁶⁶

In her analysis of the impact of the Copenhagen Process at national level, Ante (2016) concludes that *"firstly changes at member states level are either small-scale or no changes were enacted; secondly member states use the scope for action European VET policies provide to implement them in the way most in conformity with existent*

⁶⁶ In Germany, a controversial debate on the impact of the Copenhagen process took place. Especially, it was vividly discussed if European VET policies, and due its far-reaching nature in particular ECVET, would affect the occupation-based nature and holistic approach to occupations ('Berufsprinzip'). This debate went as far as some saying that EU VET policies would have the potential to put an end to dual VET systems such as the German one. Cf. Ante (2016)

institutions; and thirdly even in the case of ECVET in Germany, where European proceedings met ongoing reform discussions and the government and large firms tried to use EU policies as a window of opportunity for reform, national institutions have been largely resistant to change thus far. At the same time, states do influence European policy-making in order to bring European policies closer in line with their own institutions.”

4.3.2 EQAVET

There was a clear sense from the interviews that the level of maturity of QA systems can alter how countries use EQAVET. In the KII interviews, countries that had well-established QA systems before the programme were less likely to make any step-changes in their QA processes as a result of the EQAVET Recommendation. However, for most of these countries the EQAVET Recommendation has a value as a reference point for allowing them to compare the extent to which their systems were in line with EU standards, and to refine their systems based on good practice garnered from peer learning.

In countries that had less established QA systems prior to the launch of the Recommendation, the interviewees found that most made changes which were wholly or mostly based on the Recommendation. Some countries such as IT, HU, LV, RO and EE, strongly reflected EQAVET in their national legislation, while others reference indicators and the quality cycle that are in the EQAVET Recommendation

The diversity of the provider base was commonly reported as a factor that inhibited countries from implementing EQAVET QA principles, particularly in CVET. Some countries reported that providing systematic oversight of a landscape that could include over 3,000 providers was resource intensive. Moreover, most countries were also concerned that applying stringent internal and external QA systems to smaller providers may discourage some from providing VET. This could potentially have a significant impact on the delivery of apprenticeships and community-based learning.

A few countries also reported lack of Minister/senior official buy-in for improving QA systems. This was exacerbated in recent years by a rise in youth unemployment following the economic downturn, and a rise in immigration which has resulted in national governments identifying more immediate policy priorities. As a consequence, developments on QA have been delayed.

A few interviewees also reported that introducing the changes required a significant culture change among providers. These interviewees reported that in their country it is traditionally the Principal within a VET provider that is responsible for quality, and consequently there is significant provider resistance to initiatives that aim to provide external oversight of providers' QA arrangements or that specified which indicators providers would use.

5 Enablers of and barriers related to the Recommendation

This chapter examines the effectiveness of various components of the instruments in supporting their impact on national policies and systems. It specifically examines the wording and structure of the Recommendation, the technical features (such as use of learning outcomes, MoU and LA for ECVET; and the indicators, descriptors and quality cycle in EQAVET), the governance arrangements, the branding, dissemination and communication, and the use of peer learning and information sharing.

5.1 The Recommendation

5.1.1 ECVET

Stakeholders generally consider the Council Recommendation for the implementation of ECVET as a strength. Many stakeholders believed that ECVET needed to be firmly rooted in EU-level policy statement to ensure influence. They were generally familiar with the need for a Council Recommendation and most believed that the topics addressed by ECVET still remain relevant. A very small group of respondents challenged the need for a Council Recommendation related to the ECVET principles, arguing that it had been very relevant in 2009 but that with the ECVET principles (in particular referring to the description of qualifications in terms of learning outcomes) now being actively embedded at an operational level, there is now no need for a Recommendation and related governance arrangements.

However, respondents gave more mixed views as to whether the style of the document itself could be considered as an enabler or barrier. For some who perceive ECVET as setting out a complex and rigid system, the Recommendation is considered as being too specific/prescriptive, or having too complex wording of the concepts. This, for some, makes it impractical, and too difficult to implement and hard to grasp for stakeholders. For others, who were well aware that a Council Recommendation is currently the strongest available tool for education policy, it was felt that the Recommendation was 'not prescriptive enough in what countries must do to comply with the Recommendation' and would prefer stronger specifications to avoid a proliferation of approaches that would ultimately compromise the core objective of creating better transparency of qualifications. In between these views some stakeholders believed the Recommendation has just the right level of specificity that provided Member States with the flexibility to implement ECVET as they saw fit for their national context.

For many respondents the multi-purpose role of ECVET was seen as a barrier although to varying degrees. For some of these, mixing the credit transfer element with attempts to reform VET systems broadened the scope and created a stumbling block towards its implementation for several countries. For others, the main focus of ECVET is less clear, as it represents a mix between a 'back-office tool' (for VET curricular reform) and a 'front office tool' (for mobility and flexible pathways). Numerous interviewees lamented the fact that ECVET wants '*too many things at once (IVET, CVET, permeability, progression, ...)*', which makes a clear communication and implementation difficult: '*With its multiple objectives, the focus of ECVET somehow got lost.*' Some advocated that it would be clearer if some of the strands of ECVET were seen as a foundation which could be built on later to achieve other objectives.

Suggestions for improvement include making it more general in terms of requirements and more specific in terms of objectives. This might allow countries to focus more on key elements of the instrument, and those where there is a political will and hence opportunity to implement change. It was also suggested by a few respondents that the Commission should give time to streamline translations into other languages, as this has also created confusion in the past.

5.1.2 EQAVET

Nearly all the respondents reported that there was a need for the Commission to provide a Recommendation on QA. They believed that QA was integral to EU policies on supporting trust and recognition of VET. It was recognised that there had previously been a lack of transparency about Member States' QA systems and inconsistent practice that the Recommendation was addressing. The Recommendation was also required to raise the profile of QA to underpin improvements in VET, which was often reported as not being a significant priority in 2009.

Interviewees largely felt the Recommendation was an appropriate 'starting point' for driving developments in QA. The perceived flexibility in allowing providers and countries to use indicators and descriptors that best met their needs was felt to be valuable in enabling the Recommendation to be accessible to all countries, regardless of their starting point. A few interviewees also reported that it was positive that the Recommendation did not include an explicit requirement for benchmarking, as they believed this may have discouraged their national authority to implement the Recommendation if it were to provide negative perceptions of countries' VET system.

There are however some areas where respondents felt the Recommendation could have been improved. This included a lack of upfront explicit mention of WBL and CVET. Many recognised that this issue had largely been addressed through subsequent communication and publications issued by the European Commission and EQAVET Secretariat. However, it was felt to initially result in countries focusing more on school-based IVET.

A few interviews also reported that a lack of milestones with which to monitor progress also hindered implementation. Some national authorities felt that this made it more difficult to mobilise stakeholders as there were no explicit targets that needed to be achieved, which in turn slowed the pace of implementation and the country response.

Some stakeholders also felt that the complexity in the terminology in the Recommendation was also a barrier. They reported that it made it more difficult to explain to Ministers. A couple of interviews suggested the Recommendation could have been more impactful with the objective worded more like a mission statement.

5.2 Technical features

5.2.1 ECVET

5.2.1.1 The principle of learning outcomes and units of learning outcomes

The most commonly reported strength for ECVET was its focus on the learning outcomes orientation of all VET, as well as the structuring of qualifications into smaller components that are capable of individual assessment (units of learning outcomes). This was reported by a very wide range of respondents.

The presence of learning outcomes as a core principle of ECVET is considered as the key enabling factor for its implementation, identified as a key contributor to transparency and permeability, as well as for laying the foundations for the accumulation of learning, flexible learning pathways and validation and recognition.

There are however also some barriers in this regard. *"From a [...] system point of view, the principles of ECVET are good ones: recognising parts of learning, visibly and transparently, that can be accumulated and moved to another context. The idea is brilliant, but so difficult to implement."* Some interviewees raised concerns about the difficulties faced in introducing learning outcomes in an appropriate way, which faces a persistent lack of expertise in writing and applying Los and risks proving a very time-consuming and often bureaucratic process. Some respondents said that the knowledge of LO (and LO-based descriptions) at provider level is still quite basic in many areas and believed that there continues to be a need for training in writing and implementing learning outcomes. As a consequence, these respondents reported

learning outcomes across countries were often considered too varied to permit their full use by stakeholders for permeability and long-term mobility.

Terminology issues arise from the distinction between units and modules. In practice, however, countries do not always follow this distinction, and both terms are sometimes used interchangeably. For instance, in the Latvian case, the term 'modules' is used, but the term 'units' would also fit. In the UK, they refer to different concepts, i.e. one module (process level) contains various units (outcomes level). While the recommendations from a 2016 ECVET PLA on this topic called for a clearer differentiation between the two concepts, a few interviewees also suggested that a too strict differentiation between the two concepts should be avoided.⁶⁷ The outcomes of the 2017 ECVET Working Group on the possible revision of the ECVET Recommendation recommended the term 'groups' be used instead of 'units' of learning outcomes, to reflect a broader notion, while maintaining the differentiation from modules.

5.2.1.2 ECVET Templates

The tools that ECVET provides, in particular the LA and MoU, were considered as useful by most respondents. Some respondents identified some overlap between different templates and documents (e.g. Europass). Some also said that employers were difficult to convince of the added value of using the templates, as they can be put off by the amount of paperwork involved with their use.

National level interviewees generally showed a lot of support for a common approach at European level by having the ECVET mobility tools - as long as they are sufficiently flexible to allow for adaptation to national and/or local needs. Interviewees did however often indicate some room for improvement in terms of digitalisation, modernisation and accessibility of the common templates.

"While MoU and LA are really useful, they overlap with each other too much. I do see the point that the learners have to see the information within, but it would be nice to not have to fill in the same thing all over again. It is time-consuming, a digital solution would be great, maybe with the MoU as head document, and the ability to attach other [documents] easily. Then maybe it would also be easier to convince smaller partners to use it."

Interviewees also pointed out that some parts of the templates were redundant (pointing, for instance, to overlaps with Europass Mobility), and some room for improvement was identified about the following aspects: simplification of the templates; elimination of duplication; need for digital / online solutions.

5.2.1.3 ECVET points

Of all the technical features, the credit points received the most negative feedback, and are considered by many as the key barrier to ECVET implementation. This however does not mean that the concept of credit points is generally rejected – though it is by a few. Many felt that the focus on ECVET points came too soon in the process, creating confusion and deviation from the actual focus of the entire instrument.

⁶⁷ A unit of LO corresponds to a component of a qualification, consisting of a 'coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence' that can be assessed and validated, in accordance with the concept defined in the ECVET Recommendation.

Modules are commonly understood as components of education and training programmes which are identified in advance, intended for obtaining a specific qualification. The term 'module' thus refers to the process level while 'units' refers to the outcome level in terms of parts of qualifications that can be defined on the basis of knowledge, skills and competence.

A more in-depth discussion of the distinction between modules and units is provided in: ECVET Secretariat, 2016. Peer Learning Activity 'Units, partial qualifications and full qualifications' 26-27 May 2016, Riga. Synthesis Report.

They are widely perceived to be a major weakness of the instrument due to a lack of clarity about their calculation, and sometimes for it being perceived as an unnecessary parallel structure to ECTS, creating problems for permeability. Respondents also pointed out that this led to an exaggerated focus on credit points in discussions, ultimately somewhat inhibiting the entire implementation process.

"The credit points are a difficult issue. In our previous qualification design we had points based on time. Currently, however, we do not use points for our credits, because it was complicated and we could not use them."

A barrier is also seen to be the lack of a uniform system for the calculation of credit points. This represents a barrier to Europe-wide implementation for mobility-purposes and also a problem that has to be overcome for permeability within a country (e.g. between VET and GE or HE).

5.2.2 EQAVET

5.2.2.1 Indicators and descriptors

Most interviewees generally felt the indicators reflected a good range of measures that largely reflected *"what a good VET system should look like"*. The specificity of the indicators was also felt to be a strength, and it ensured there was a common understanding and definition of each indicator. As one interviewee stated: *"It provides a common rule-book"*

However, a few interviews felt for some indicators the resources and costs required to measure performance were high. Examples included:

- The indicator on utilisation of acquired skills in the Workplace (Indicator 6), which includes a measure on employer satisfaction with VET graduate skills. This was challenging for providers to collect as it required an initial collection of learner destinations (and the contact details of line managers) followed by a survey of employers. There was also concern it may provide an undue burden on employers.
- The indicator on investment in training of teachers and trainers (indicator 2). National QA agencies reported that this indicator was difficult to collect evidence for, particularly the measure on provider investment in training as an employer. It would require new data to be collected from all providers, and many providers did not collect evidence of expenditure on training, which includes a lot of in kind financial contributions as many deliver their own internal training.

Some interviewees felt that complexity of some indicators gave the aspiration that EQAVET was largely a tool where countries could 'pick and mix' what indicators they chose to use. While this was felt to have benefits because it meant there were few barriers for countries to implement EQAVET principles, some interviewees reported that it meant some national authorities or providers did not have the full benefits of using the indicators.

Some interviewees also reported that some indicators were more important than others, but this was not clearly articulated in the Recommendation. National authorities generally reported that the most important system-level indicators were relevance of QA systems for VET (indicator 1), participation rates (indicator 3), completion rates (indicator 4), and placement rate (indicator 5). For providers, the most important indicators were generally reported to be participation rates, completion rates, placement rates and for some programmes the prevalence of vulnerable groups (indicator 8). Some interviewees felt there should be more focus on encouraging all providers to collect information for these specific indicators.

A couple of interviewees also reported that they felt there should also be indicators that relate to the quality of teaching, and not just the outcomes achieved. This recognises that in some providers the outcomes and achievement may be lower

because they are working with more disadvantaged group of learners, or are in areas where there are fewer employment opportunities. Therefore, indicators on the quality of teaching were felt to provide a more rounded view of provider performance.

A few interviewees also believed that some indicators, such as placement rate and unemployment rate, are significantly influenced by macro-economic factors that are outside the control of the VET system. These interviewees felt they may not be an appropriate measure for benchmarking the performance of a national VET system.

5.2.2.2 System and provider requirements

Overall, most interviewees believed the requirements of the Recommendation on self-assessment and the use of the quality cycle were appropriate. The language and principles were felt to be simple enough to be relevant in all countries and providers, although some interviewees suggested they would benefit from more specific sub-indicators and descriptors related to apprenticeships, and potentially a 'light' approach for small CVET providers that do not have a large learner population.

There were some interviewees that also felt the Recommendation ought to explicitly require countries to have an audit body in place. Some felt this would have strengthened the Recommendation, as most felt an audit body was essential for conducting the external monitoring of provider performance. However, others felt this may have deterred countries from engaging in the Recommendation.

5.3 Governance

5.3.1 ECVET

Respondents generally appreciated the presence of ECVET governance arrangements and believed their existence essential for the implementation of ECVET. The governance structure is generally perceived as being inclusive. One of the strongest positive aspects was the orientation towards mutual learning, exchange of experience and good practices, especially through Peer Learning Activities (PLAs), but also through the Annual Fora and other events (also see sub-section 5.6 below).

Yet, stakeholders also reported barriers to more effective governance, and in particular mentioned the ECVET Users' Group in this regard. A few respondents felt that the Users' Group had become less influential in recent years and a few noticed a high level of fluctuation in membership between meetings and declining attendance in recent years. With more experienced members leaving the group, and new representatives joining, they have very different levels of knowledge and experience, which can prolong discussions or make them repetitive. There are concerns that discussions 'move in circles' rather than progress over time.

Many respondents pointed to the setup and work of the ECVET Secretariat as a key strength in terms of governance. Many of them pointed to the activities and services provided under the umbrella of the ECVET Secretariat as a key strength in governance. The Secretariat is commonly appreciated for the materials provided, events organised, its expertise, and the ECVET Mobility Toolkit⁶⁸. Interviewees also considered the setup of the Secretariat as a strength, e.g. that the body has been designed and functions as a support body rather than a monitoring body.

The following further barriers were identified in relation to EU-level governance:

- Many interviewees felt there was a lack of support or clear message on how to proceed with implementation, some said that the further development of ECVET at European level was 'on hold' which had led to a 'wait and see' position.

⁶⁸ Stakeholders often associate the ECVET Mobility Toolkit with the Secretariat. However, the ECVET Secretariat maintains the toolkit website but did not actually develop it. It was developed by the NetECVET project, a partnership of 14 National Agencies under coordination of the German BIBB.

- Some stakeholders still believe that there is too much complexity in the levels of governance. After the outcomes of the external ECVET evaluation had been published, governance structures were slightly streamlined, in an attempt to reduce complexity.
- A few stakeholders called for more dissemination activities in general, particularly more dialogue between the national and European level in the Users' Group and more dissemination of the work of the Users' group at the national level were called for.

The following barriers were identified at national level:

- The fragmentation of agencies at national level appears to be an obstacle in several countries; they create territories of influence that hamper and compromise coordination and communication between the different instruments. Stakeholder feedback implies that governance at national level appears more efficient when the different instruments (e.g. ECVET, Europass and EQAVET) are led by the same body.
- Difficulty of bringing national stakeholders together: Reaching out to stakeholders and getting them on board was seen as a challenge on the national level in several countries.
- Lack of political commitment from MS for implementation: Many interviewees reported a lack of political and financial support for the national implementation by their national governments, manifesting itself in the absence of a national coordination point, e.g. in Spain, or the reduction of funding for national ECVET experts.

5.3.2 EQAVET

Respondents generally reported a range of strengths with the current EQAVET governance structure. The NRPs were generally felt to provide a necessary point of contact in national authorities to drive forward national developments in QA, by playing the role as "*national advocates for EQAVET*". In the Netherlands for example, the NRP has established a national EQAVET advisory group, which consists of the Ministry, VET provider associations and learner representatives, to coordinate developments and share good practice.

The establishment of NRPs was also reported to have resulted in a 'community of practice' which allows countries to share best-practice. Most NRP members reported examples where they had contacted other NRPs to discuss their practice and how they overcome implementation challenges. Most of the NRPs we interviewed also stated that as a result of participating in the NRP network they gained a better understanding of other countries' QA systems, which they were able to share with other officials in their organisation.

Some interviewees did however report that the NRP network was too diverse, as it involved policy makers, funders, QA specialists and practitioners. As one interviewee said "*policy makers want to talk policy, funders want to talk about implications on funding, and QA specialists want to talk about practical implementation. It means the group is being used to mean all things to all men*". This broadens the scope of the meetings and means that some issues cannot be discussed in sufficient depth.

Some interviewees also reported that the composition of NRPs comprised mainly of representatives from the school sector. This meant there was less expertise on apprenticeships and CVET, which could potentially be resulting in EQAVET being less well-established in these sectors. A few interviewees also felt that the attendance at NRPs was variable, which meant some countries were more involved in decision-making than others.

In the qualitative interviews and targeted consultation there was also considerable positive feedback on the Secretariat. However, a couple of respondents reported that it was not always clear how the programme of activities undertaken by the Secretariat is informed by MS demands. One interviewee reported they believed the Secretariat could play a more enhanced role in providing contextual information on MS's implementation of the Recommendation and examples of good practice, which would be a useful resource for MS.

5.4 Promotion and branding

5.4.1 ECVET

According to respondents, awareness of ECVET as a brand among different groups of VET stakeholders is believed to be variable. This is however not necessarily perceived as an implementation barrier, as the term ECVET in whole or part only needs to be understood by some VET policy makers and practitioners. Interviewees in several countries said they adopted an approach where promotion of ECVET principles and tools to stakeholders (e.g. VET providers, employers) does not happen under an ECVET banner.

Most interviewees have said that the ECVET toolkit website is a valuable source of information with examples which help implementation, such as with using ECVET for cross-border VET mobility. Also the ECVET Secretariat website was frequently mentioned as a valuable source for learning more about ECVET.

Several interviewees also pointed to the ECVET pilot projects (and the way how they were communicated) as an indispensable means for promoting ECVET. The ECVET pilot projects were implemented between 2008 and 2014 (11 pilot projects funded for the period 2008-2012, and 8 pilot projects funded for the period 2011-2014), and accompanied by a dedicated website and a set of published material on the topic of ECVET implementation.

The following barriers in relation to promotion and branding of ECVET were identified.

- Connotations about its name: Many interviewees reported that the name ECVET led to an initial misconception, as it took a long time to communicate that ECVET is not just a credit points system, and that credit points are only an optional component. Thus, the communication about the steps of ECVET and the components of the system were initially misleading. Respondents often reported that policy makers were reluctant to introduce a credit system, as they did not feel there was value in the certification of partial achievement and it undermined full achievement of VET courses, and the negative perception has persisted.⁶⁹
- Confusion about its purpose, language and concepts: Within its broad scope and multiple objectives, some respondents felt that the essential core of ECVET somehow has got lost, or at least made it difficult for stakeholders to grasp the essence of the instrument. Furthermore, many of these felt that by referring to ECVET as a 'concept' rather than a 'tool', it would make it harder to communicate it to wider audiences. Many felt that they found it hard to reach and address their respective stakeholders (e.g. VET institutions or employers) at national level as a consequence.

⁶⁹ Recent communication on ECVET that focuses on the implementation 'ECVET principles and tools' (as recommended by the ECVET Working Group) was reported to have mostly overcome these issues among experts and those that work with the tools regularly. However, interviewees reported that within their national authorities there remain a few policy makers that still view ECVET as a credit system. In a way, ECVET has suffered because there is a fear, expressed by several countries from the outset, that ECVET would lead to the deconstruction of VET. This was particularly expressed by countries that follow a more holistic approach towards qualifications. While these fears have largely turned out to be unfounded, and this has also been confirmed by some interviewees, it has nevertheless weakened the image of ECVET.

- Confusion about its target group: many interviewees found it difficult to identify who they should communicate to about ECVET. Should 'everyone' know about ECVET or would it be enough to know about implementing its components relevant to them?

5.4.2 EQAVET

Most national respondents reported that knowledge of EQAVET was largely concentrated in particular specialists within government departments and agencies. This was consistent among countries that had developed new QA systems based on EQAVET, and those that already had established QA systems where EQAVET was mostly used as a reference point. This 'compartmentalisation' of EQAVET was however largely attributed to QA being implemented as a specialist area, rather than being directly related to the Commission's dissemination of the instrument.

Most interviewees also reported relatively little public awareness of EQAVET, particularly when compared to other EU VET policies. However, they felt this was unsurprising, as it reflected that the results of changes to QA were less visible when compared to, for example, the introduction of a new national qualification framework or the use of learning outcomes.

Most stakeholders, and members of the stakeholder group, did not believe there needed to be wider awareness of EQAVET. They reported that QA is often the 'hidden wiring' underpinning VET provision, and consequently when EQAVET principles have been incorporated in national QA systems and legislation, it is not necessary for providers to understand that these developments are due to EQAVET.

Some interviewees did however report that the lack of awareness of EQAVET meant the instrument is not achieving its potential in terms of supporting mutual trust. Here the delivery of qualifications by providers that have QA systems in line with EQAVET principles is not leading to employers recognising the qualifications as being delivered to a good standard.

5.5 Events and engagement including peer learning

5.5.1 ECVET

Peer learning activities and the ECVET Annual Forum were considered to be key enablers in implementing ECVET by most respondents, in particular for the opportunities for knowledge sharing, dialogue and networking they provide. One interviewee referred to this as investment in stakeholders' learning enabling people from different countries to exchange their experience on a particular topic, learn from each other, discuss open issues, and afterwards take this learning back to their national level. For Member States with less experience of ECVET, these events were said to be extremely helpful.

PLAs were mentioned as essential for implementing ECVET by a large number of stakeholders, who described them as 'beneficial', 'extremely helpful' and 'excellent opportunities for better use of ECVET'. Besides the exchange of experience, and the discussions in workshop format, it is also the possibility to establish new contacts to people working on the same topics that apparently make these events such a beneficial experience. Showcasing examples from other countries that demonstrate how changes can be made and what can actually be achieved using a certain model or approach can help others to collect fresh ideas for initiatives in their own country. Success stories from other countries may provide additional leverage in convincing the national level to take up a certain new approach.

Interviewees acknowledge that the success of a PLA in terms of reaching those who are implementing ECVET depends on participants' success in cascading information and outcomes at national level. Once perceived barrier in relation to the PLAs was that they are limited in number, so that they effectively only reach a few stakeholders.

5.5.2 EQAVET

Most interviewees felt the need for peer learning was essential for implementing the Recommendation. The general consensus was that it enables national authorities to unpick how the Recommendation could be implemented in practice, including:

- Dealing with any ambiguities in the requirement,
- Adapting the Recommendation to changing policy contexts; and
- Providing practical solutions for any implementation challenges that countries face.

The peer learning undertaken through the programme was generally felt to be effective in addressing these issues. Interviewees reported that most of the peer learning activities were relevant to their countries' needs, and most reported that the national officials that attended the events generally found them useful. The key element to the PLAs that interviewees found most useful were the practical workshops and discussions. Nearly all reported that it had also influenced their planning, although few were able to give tangible examples.

The only perceived barriers to the PLAs was that a few countries reported difficulties in identifying suitable attendees that had the appropriate English language skills. This meant they were not able to identify appropriate individuals for some PLAs.

A few interviewees did however posit that a potential limitation of the peer learning is that it is not effective in engaging providers. The provider base in most countries can contain over 1,000 providers, and consequently it would be unlikely that a PLA programme aimed at providers would engage a 'critical mass' to make tangible behaviour change in national VET systems. This is a particular issue for EQAVET where impact is dependent on providers as well as national VET systems making QA changes.

6 Relationship with other relevant instruments and policies

This chapter examines the extent to which ECVET and EQAVET are aligned and adding value to other VET and Lifelong Learning (LLL) tools and policies. The chapter draws on KIIs, the targeted consultation and a review of relevant international literature.

6.1 Overview

The Copenhagen Process has since 2002 served as a platform for voluntary cooperation and coordination between Member States in matters of VET. Under the Copenhagen Process, a set of European tools and principles have been established, including the ECVET, EQAVET, the EQF, Europass, principles for the validation of NFIL, as well as principles for lifelong guidance and counselling⁷⁰. These tools and principles have been designed and intended as an integrated framework with the shared overall aim of increasing the transparency of qualifications with the objectives of promoting mobility and making VET systems more flexible.

The focus on learning outcomes serves as an overarching principle of these tools. To support this more generally the Commission has developed **ESCO**, the multilingual classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations. It identifies and categorises skills/competences, qualifications and occupations (they form the three pillars around which ESCO is structured) relevant for the EU labour market and education and training, in a wide variety of different languages. ESCO offers a standardised terminology to make learning outcomes descriptions comparable across borders, through the process of 'annotating' learning outcome descriptions.⁷¹

Efforts to increase coordination and integration between the different instruments go back as long as the respective Recommendations themselves. In 2011, for instance, the Commission, together with the respective Secretariats responsible for EQAVET, EQF and ECVET organised a joint seminar on the topic of "Assuring the quality of VET qualifications – the contribution of the EU tools (EQAVET, EQF, ECVET) to the definition and re-definition of learning outcomes based standards". Conclusions suggested that more needed to be done to promote better integration of the EU tools in communications, their development and implementation at EU and national levels.⁷²

6.2 Alignment with EU VET policies

6.2.1 ECVET

Section 2.2.5 provides a first overview of ECVET's alignment and potential linkages with other European policies and instruments. In the qualitative interviews, many interviewees identified considerable synergy between the different instruments and tools, noting that there would still be room for improvement in better exploiting these synergies. While both national-level and EU-level stakeholders seemed generally satisfied with the conceptual links between the instruments and tools, many interviewees felt that they do not interact efficiently enough and that, in a way, the Commission has failed to make the most out of these tools and principles.

The vision of a better exploitation of potential synergies between ECVET and other European policies and instruments was emphasised by a large number of interviewees. Some felt that while the conceptual relationship between the different instruments, but in particular between ECVET, EQAVET and EQF (labelled 'the three pillars of the VET and lifelong learning policy' by one interviewee), has been very obvious and

⁷⁰ From this set of tools, certainly only ECVET and EQAVET, are pure' VET-related instruments.

⁷¹ European Commission (2017). ESCO Strategic framework. European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations. July 2017.

⁷² EQAVET Briefing Note summarising the key outcomes of the seminar. Improving coordination between EQAVET, ECVET and EQF was one of the priorities of the EQAVET Work Programme 2010-2012. <https://www.eqavet.eu/eqavet2017/media/Documents/Policy-Brief-on-the-EQAVET-EQF-ECVET-Joint-Seminar.pdf>

close-knit from the outside, the narrative about their linkages seems to have become lost, or at least significantly weakened, along their way. This is also reflected in the perception, raised by several interviewees, that work on these instruments was very much done in 'silos', i.e. without awareness of the activities that are ongoing with the other instruments.

Few interviewees however believed that merging any of the instruments would help in this regard, but they instead called for a better overall coordination of them. Their experience was that synergy will not come automatically, even if a conceptual framework provides for potential synergy between two given instruments, it has to be co-developed.

Many interviewees agree that ECVET has contributed to achieving the objectives agreed on within the Copenhagen Process, but they also point out that they consider it impossible to discern the ECVET contribution from the contribution that other instruments have made in this regard. For many interviewees, ECVET's contribution to improving VET mobility was apparent, whereas the objective of setting up a European credit system for VET could not be met. Overall, though, stakeholders interviewed attributed a larger share of the contribution towards reaching the Copenhagen objectives to the EQF and VNIL than to ECVET.

6.2.2 EQAVET

In the qualitative research and targeted consultation, most respondents felt the EQAVET Recommendation was largely in line with wider EU policy developments. The Recommendation has supported increased EU cooperation in VET, which reflects the objectives of the Copenhagen process. The implementation of QA mechanisms to improve quality were also felt to underpin recent EU Skills Agenda objectives of:

- Making VET a first choice for young people and adults;
- Supporting the development of high quality, flexible learning which supports the implementation of Upskilling Pathways for low-skilled adults.

Some interviewees also went further by suggesting that EQAVET is an 'enabling system' which underpins all EU VET policies as it aims to improve the quality of provision..

The only exception was that some interviewees felt the EQAVET Recommendation did not support the wider EU policies for promoting and encouraging the take up of apprenticeships. These interviewees believed that the Recommendation did not make specific reference to apprenticeships, and some indicators such as placement rates were not appropriate for apprenticeships while the Recommendations do not cover areas such as the co-design and delivery of learning with employers which is a key indicator of quality in apprenticeships.

These interviewees accepted however that recent actions have subsequently been undertaken to support QA in apprenticeship, most notably the 2014 EQAVET publication on Quality Assuring Work Based Learning and the elements elaborated in the framework of EQAVET+. However, they reported that within some national stakeholders there is a perception that EQAVET is mostly aimed at school-based VET.

The EQAVET+ exercise carried out in 2016 by the EQAVET Network also added new provisions regarding the LO approach and improved therefore the connection with other EU instruments (such as EQF),

A few stakeholders also reported that there was a lack of synergy between EQAVET and the EU approach to quality assurance in HE. In HE, QA standards are set in the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and implemented by a voluntary network of QA organisations in HE (ENQA) and through a self-regulation approach where HEIs sign up to a register of HEIs that adhere to high quality assurance standards (EQAR). This difference of approach was felt to increase the complexity of EU QA systems, which in turn makes

the systems more difficult to understand to employers and learners. However, some interviews acknowledged that the approach for QA in HE may not be easily applicable to VET as it has a wider range of providers and QA agencies which may make a voluntary network unfeasible.

6.3 Alignment with national VET policies

6.3.1 ECVET

Many national level respondents generally agreed that ECVET has aligned with their national priorities for qualification reform and development, in particular with regard to implementing learning outcomes approaches, unit-based approaches and the promotion of cross-border VET mobility.

Some countries, however, felt that the alignment with national VET policies has been weakened in recent years, with different, possibly more pressing, national policy priorities pushing ECVET implementation aside. Some interviewees took a more optimistic position pointing out that recent and ongoing demographic and technological changes (e.g. migration flows, rapid technological change) continued to push initiatives towards more flexible VET pathways into the policy spotlight (e.g. PT, SE).

6.3.2 EQAVET

National level respondents often reported that EQAVET has aligned with their national priorities for improving access to higher level skills (e.g. UK, FR) as well as helping improve the value and take up of VET (e.g. DE, PT). In this context the recommendation has fit with wider developments to improve the quality of VET to increase progression to higher VET and to use indicators that promote the quality of VET to learners.

The EQAVET indicators were also felt to be generally aligned with national objectives for VET. Some countries reported that the indicators on progression to employment and engagement of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in lifelong learning were also national priorities. Countries trying to improve the quality of VET felt this was aligned with EQAVET indicators on measuring graduate destinations and employer satisfaction with VET programmes.

However, some interviewees reported that during the economic downturn, a key priority for their country was to address youth unemployment and re-skilling individuals made redundant. As a consequence, funding was diverted to provide additional VET programmes and policy developments in areas, such as traineeships. In some cases interviewees reported that this resulted in QA being less of a priority in the Member State.

6.4 Alignment with other European instruments and policies

6.4.1 ECVET

6.4.1.1 European Qualification Framework

Quite a few interviewees reported that ECVET and EQF have reinforced each other, and that consistency between ECVET and EQF has been well-managed while NQFs were being developed. In Romania, for instance, the EQF/NQF in conjunction with ECVET have been considered as the main pillar of the reform of the Romanian TVET system. The interviews and desk research show, however, that so far few countries have explicitly linked their NQFs and credit systems for VET. Malta, the UK and Croatia belong to a small number of countries that have done so⁷³.

⁷³ To be confirmed for Slovenia.

6.4.1.2 Principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning

Interviewees believed that ECVET strongly supported the validation of NFIL. Yet, many respondents felt that these links were currently not strong enough in their countries. Countries however also reported examples of initiatives they have taken to further strengthen these links (e.g. NL, AT⁷⁴).

6.4.1.3 Europass Mobility

The 2017 PLA on 'Developing mobility support tools and services'⁷⁵ and the 2017 ECVET Working Group meeting on mobility tools concluded that Europass Mobility is widely used to document the outcomes of mobility experiences, and thus used instead of a Personal Transcript. There is no 'European' template for the Personal Transcript. Those who use Europass Mobility appreciate that Europass is a standardised instrument which is very well-known across Europe, and easy to use. Yet, as Europass does not belong to the 'family' of ECVET related documents, there is currently no coherent set of documents to support the entire mobility experience (before, during, and after mobility).⁷⁶ Besides, the current structure of the Europass Mobility document does not allow for a sufficiently detailed description of learning outcomes acquired during mobility, which means that its actual suitability as a Personal Transcript is limited.

6.4.1.4 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)

While ECVET uses learning outcomes as the basis for the award of credit, ECTS awards credit in higher education based on hours of study, the workload that students need to undertake in order to achieve the expected learning outcomes.⁷⁷ ECTS was originally set up in 1989 as a pilot scheme within the Erasmus programme to facilitate the recognition of study undertaken abroad. ECTS is used as a credit system throughout the European Higher Education Area (covering all countries participating in the Bologna Process), with most countries having adopted ECTS by law.

The literature and respondents have pointed out the difficulties of aligning the two which are commonly accepted. Some of these seem to relate to limited willingness of HEIs in some countries to start a discourse on this. While ECVET is based on learning outcomes, ECTS is still largely based on input criteria like course length and number of learning hours. Improved linkages between ECVET and ECTS could help improve permeability between vocational and higher education qualifications. The latest Bologna Process Report reports progress in this direction. In 2015 in Yerevan, ministers agreed that the common approach to ECTS is to allocate credits based on the learning outcomes achieved and the associated student workload. In the 2018 report, the majority of countries reported that this is the case. While this change represents a strong reference to learning outcomes, ECVET however remains based on the traditional concept of workload in terms of time.⁷⁸

During the past years, several projects funded by European programmes addressed the issue of compatibility between ECVET and ECTS and their use for promoting permeability between VET and HE. Findings from these pilot projects show that the

⁷⁴ Cf. article on an Austrian ECVET experts conference on use of ECVET principles for supporting the validation of NFIL. http://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/system/files/magazines/en/ecvet_magazine_27.pdf

⁷⁵ <http://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/system/files/documents/3717/synthesis-report-pla-cyprus.pdf>

⁷⁶ ECVET Secretariat (2017). Peer Learning Activity: 'Developing mobility support tools and services'. 9-10 March 2017, Cyprus. Synthesis Report. March 2017. <http://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/system/files/documents/3717/synthesis-report-pla-cyprus.pdf>

⁷⁷ <http://www.nationaal-kenniscentrum-ecv.nl/evc-professionals/images/kennisbank/internationaal/ECVET-EQAVET-EQF-background-paper.pdf>

⁷⁸ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018. The European Higher Education Area in 2018: Bologna Process Implementation Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

value of using ECVET credit points and ECVET credits as a basis for establishing equivalency between HE and VET is at best limited.

A learning outcomes based approach appears to be the strongest point of connection between ECTS and ECVET and might thus be the most promising basis for further exploring permeability between VET and HE. The DELAROSE project, for instance, concluded that 'ECTS and ECVET equivalency should focus on an outcomes-based approach rather than credit based, and should be a matter of individual learner mobility and inter-institutional collaborative agreements rather than national frameworks.'⁷⁹

6.4.1.5 ErasmusPRO and the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA)

The introduction of ErasmusPRO⁸⁰ for long-duration mobility will make the question of validation and recognition of learning outcomes from mobility periods even more relevant. In previous ECVET events (e.g. the 2017 PLA on 'Developing mobility support tools and services' and the 2017 Working Group meeting on mobility tools), ErasmusPRO was referred to as a 'game changer'. With short-term mobility projects, recognition may be seen as a useful add-on for learners. With long-duration mobility, however, failed validation and/or recognition of learning outcomes could be very detrimental. This would make mobility a lot less attractive for learners who might then face an unwanted extension of their training time. Therefore, promoting ECVET principles in the context of Erasmus PRO long-term mobility is an option to be considered. The European Commission has taken up this idea and dedicated this year's ECVET Annual Forum to the topic of 'Using ECVET for long-duration mobility'.

Forum conclusions attribute an important role to MoU and LA in the context of long-duration mobility in VET, in particular for the validation and recognition of learning outcomes achieved abroad. While these tools were considered generally fit for purpose for their use in long-duration mobility, a need for simplifying the templates and adapting them to the needs of those involved was identified. As ErasmusPRO targets apprentices, employers play a key role in the mobility process. The tools should be digitalised, and allow greater adaptation to the individual context.⁸¹

The use of ECVET principles could play a role in supporting the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships, which was adopted in March 2018. A few respondents noted that this could take place through LAs between VET schools and

⁷⁹ Some examples of projects include: BE-TWIN I & II: Building Bridges and Overcoming Differences; Cert-Ent: Applying ECVET and ECTS to certify entrepreneur competences in the construction sector; RELATE - Promoting the recognisability of learning outcomes from VET to HE. Tuning: Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Humanities & Arts (ECVETS and ECVET: Comparisons and Contrasts) etc.

Cf. Luomi-Messerer, K. (2016). Compatibility, comparability and coherence between the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the European Credit Transfer And Accumulation System (ECTS) - Discussion Paper. Unpublished;

Cf. Ryan, c.; Bergin, M.; Titze, S.; Ruf, W.; Kunz, S., Wells, JSG. (2018). ECVET and ECTS credit equivalency in higher education - A bridge too far? European Journal of education 2018;00:1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12297>

⁸⁰ The Erasmus+ Call for Proposals 2018 introduced the Erasmus PRO initiative. Its objective is to increase the number of longer-duration work placements abroad (three to 12 months). ErasmusPRO is not a new programme, but a specific new action within KA1 of Erasmus+. The target participants are VET learners, apprentices and recent VET graduates (less than 12 months after graduation).

⁸¹ ECVET Secretariat (2018). ECVET Magazine No. 32. September 2018. http://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/system/files/magazines/en/ecvet_mag_32.pdf

training companies that define quality criteria to make sure that learners, who go on a work placement, will have their achieved learning outcomes recognised.

6.4.2 EQAVET

6.4.2.1 European Qualification Framework

Nearly all interviewees believed that effective QA was central to employers having confidence that qualifications delivered in another country was delivered of appropriate quality to ensure learners achieved their intended objectives. This is largely reflected in the revised EQF Recommendation, which states *'trust in the quality and level of qualifications that are part of national qualifications frameworks or systems referenced to the EQF... is essential in order to support mobility of learners and workers within and across sectoral and geographical border. The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training build a basis for such common principles.*

The Recommendation also states that to be referenced to the EQF, an NQF should be quality assured so that it included *'regular review of existing external monitoring bodies or agencies, carrying out quality assurance'*. However, it does not specify the specific QA procedures that national authorities should implement.

While being complementary to the EQF Recommendation, most interviewees reported that national developments in EQAVET have largely taken place in isolation from EQF developments. This is largely attributed to EQF implementation focusing on qualification design whereas QA was perceived to focus on delivery. However, as a consequence this has meant that there has been relatively little interaction between the two instruments at a national level. A few interviewees felt this was an opportunity missed, as *'We should have confidence that providers delivering qualifications referenced to the EQF are doing so to a good quality'*.

6.4.2.2 Principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning

EQAVET was generally not expected to have a significant impact on VNIL, as EQAVET focuses on formal learning. Consequently, there was little alignment between VNIL and EQAVET developments in countries.

6.4.2.3 Mobility tools and projects (Europass and Erasmus+)

The VET Mobility Charter, which is a prerequisite for delivering Erasmus+ KA1 Mobility programmes, requires providers to demonstrate they can provide high quality mobility opportunities in the application form. However, this application form does not specifically reference the QA systems that providers should have in place, although the guidance note does reference the EQAVET Recommendation as a source of relevant information to inform the application.

A few national authorities reported however that some providers have implemented EQAVET in order to help them access Erasmus+ funding for mobility projects. Here the providers believed that the EQAVET Framework would demonstrate that provision was delivered to a good standard, and would also encourage international learners from studying at the institution.

6.4.2.4 European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA)

The EFQEA encompasses elements of EQAVET to ensure apprentices achieve a high-quality learning placement. The Framework sets out a series of requirements that demonstrates a good quality apprenticeship placement, including a requirement for QA and graduate tracking (criteria 14). The framework also explicitly states that this should be developed in coherence with EQAVET. Some EQAVET indicators in terms of social partner and employer engagement in programme design and learner destination are also incorporated in other framework criteria.

In the qualitative interviews, national authorities all felt there was no overlap between the framework and EQAVET as they both covered distinct areas. The framework covers the *quality* of provision, i.e. it sets out the minimum criteria that WBL providers should have in place to ensure a good quality apprenticeship. EQAVET described the QA systems providers should adopt to ensure they continually monitor and improve their provision.

6.4.2.5 European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

The ESG plays a similar role to EQAVET for HE. Both have similar stated objectives, with the ESG stating: *'The purposes of the standards and guidelines are: to improve the education available to students in higher education institutions in the EHEA; to assist higher education institutions in managing and enhancing their quality and, thereby, to help to justify their institutional autonomy; to form a background for quality assurance agencies in their work; and to make external quality assurance more transparent and simpler to understand for everybody involved'*

There are however significant differences between the ESG and EQAVET. The ESG provides more specificity in some areas, particularly in areas such as external QA, the assessment of students and the quality of teachers, but has less emphasis on provider indicators to use for achievement and progression. The ESG also contains some elements that are more relevant to HE, including standards for the quality of research output and autonomy.

In the case studies and qualitative interviews, national authorities believed there were inherent differences between HE and VET which means it would be difficult to have a set of indicators that could cover both. As indicated above, HE contains elements on research and autonomy which would not be relevant to most VET providers, and the diversity of VET means that indicators would generally need to be broader in order to encompass IVET, CVET and WBL.

However, what was reported to be important was that QA systems should both contain common principles. In countries such as Ireland which have one agency for both HE and VET, national authority staff reported that they employed separate assessment criteria for HE and VET, but where possible were developing and building on commonality to ensure a consistency of approach.

To support the ESG there is a national register of HE providers, EQAR, and a governance group consisting of national QA agencies (ENQA). In the stakeholder workshop and interviews, national authorities felt that a provider network for VET would be unfeasible because there are far more VET providers than HE providers. Moreover, the HE provider network is based on providers applying for the register to improve their reputation. VET providers are less likely to compete on reputation and consequently would have less motivation to sign up to such a register.

7 Assessment of each instrument

This chapter draws on chapters 3-6 to assess the effectiveness of the tools and areas of improvement. For both instruments it explores:

- The delivery and implementation of the instruments;
- What is working well and less well in enabling the instruments to achieve their intended objectives;
- The level of alignment of the tools with other VET instruments and policies.

7.1 ECVET

7.1.1 Delivery processes/implementation

7.1.1.1 What works well

A key reported strength of the delivery process was the use of PLAs and other events (Annual Fora, Users Group and Network Meetings) serving as fora for mutual learning and exchange of experience. This was felt to provide important benefits in terms of circulating knowledge about different models through peer learning, building country capacity through new ideas and the dissemination of good practice, and empowering individuals to drive forward developments in their country. Some interviewees even argued that this was critical to implementation, as it helps translate the Recommendation into practical actions. The use of PLAs also allows the Commission to guide country developments, and share information of approaches to align ECVET to new policy developments.

The topics covered through these events were generally felt to be appropriate and reflecting country needs. There was also generally positive feedback on the materials provided before and after the PLAs for countries. This indicates the approach used by the Commission and Secretariat to identify needs and share information is largely effective.

The User Group was also felt to be valuable in identifying country leads for ECVET. This was felt to create an accountable person to liaise with on progress, while also creating an ECVET 'advocate' to take forward the Recommendation in national authorities.

7.1.1.2 What works less well

The User Group is largely comprised of technical experts, which reflects how ECVET is implemented at a national level (in most cases it is led by dedicated teams specialising in mobility (e.g. NARIC centres) or in implementing EU projects). This appears to be resulting in knowledge of ECVET being largely compartmentalised in Member States and not part of mainstream VET policy formation. It is illustrated by the fact that in the KIIs, many of the contacted individuals in Government VET policy areas referred the interviewer to an ECVET lead as they felt they did not have sufficient knowledge to conduct the interview.

A limitation of this approach is that it does not necessarily elicit wider national stakeholder buy-in. In countries where implementation of ECVET is more advanced it is instructive that there is a wider community of practice taking forward implementation, with elements of the Recommendation incorporated within country policies and their wider approach to system design.

Some stakeholders also reported dwindling attendance and high turnover of experts in the User Group. This in part was attributed to a perception that the authority of the group has decreased in recent years but it may indicate less country engagement in ECVET.

Additionally, the peer learning activities are generally considered effective in engaging national authority staff, but there is little current engagement of providers. While

engaging a range of providers in European PLA activity would be unfeasible given the diversity and size of the VET providers base, some level of information sharing would help improve the implementation of ECVET principles and increase their impact.

7.1.2 Achievement of intended impacts

7.1.2.1 What works well

The research suggests ECVET has significantly contributed to helping to introduce and strengthening efforts towards the use of the learning outcomes approach and unit-based systems. A particularly strong influence of ECVET on national strategies and plans for VET qualifications could be identified for Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Romania.

ECVET has also contributed to the development of a better-quality mobility experience, through more effective documentation for learning during mobility, by using the common language for learning outcomes (KSC: knowledge, skills, and competence), and through its credit transfer process. This has increased the recognition of competences undertaken abroad in some countries (e.g. HR), whereas previously only time was recognised.

In a few countries it has also contributed towards supporting more flexible vocational pathways. Countries such as Malta, Estonia and Latvia have reported that this has supported permeability, while countries such as Finland, which already has a flexible VET system, reported that it helped improve the recognition of education and training taking place outside the formal system. Other countries (IE, HU, PT) also report it has supported learners from disadvantaged communities or with barriers to learning to accumulate learning outcomes achieved in formal or NFIL learning.

The widespread acceptance of ECVET as an important underpinning tool for international mobility has ensured that it is commonly used by a range of providers. This has motivated a wide range of providers to implement ECVET principles on mobility programmes. With the increase in Erasmus+ funding post-2020 it is likely that this this will continue in the next European Commission VET policy framework period.

7.1.2.2 What works less well

Some countries are resistant to introducing credit systems, as there is a perception this requires units to be assessed and certified separately for accumulation, a concept which some believe incompatible with their core system characteristics. Some countries traditionally place strong emphasis on achieving full qualifications, as they believe that quality in VET is best achieved through comprehensive ('full') qualifications that ensure the holder's full occupational proficiency⁸². Furthermore, it increases the volume of learner assessments. Some also argue that a unit has little value unless the learner achieves it within the context of a whole qualification. While ECVET does not currently position itself as a credit system but rather a set of principles⁸³, some countries are still under this impression and therefore are unwilling to use it outside the field of international mobility.

In other countries, there appears to be a lack of political will to drive forward developments in line with ECVET principles, beyond the use of learning outcomes. In some cases, this reflects a lack of learner and provider awareness of the instrument which means there is little demand for its benefits. However, some country stakeholders also reported that the ECVET processes for credit and unit based systems are considered overly burdensome, particularly when countries have well-established

⁸² This is sometimes also referred to as a 'holistic' approach towards qualifications.

⁸³ While the communication may have changed, the underlying ECVET Recommendation certainly has remained unchanged; it still refers to the establishment of a European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training.

standards for VET programmes and employ other credit systems (national systems or ECTS).

7.1.3 Alignment with other tools and instruments relevant to VET

7.1.3.1 What works well

There is explicit mention of ECVET in other relevant EU VET instrument Recommendations, such as the EQF. This demonstrates that it is recognised as playing a role in supporting other instruments and policies such as VNIL, EQF, and Europass. Most respondents understand that there is a clear logic which demonstrates its linkage to other instruments – it supports the flexibility of VET which ultimately supports engagement and achievement, and a more responsive VET system.

On a practical level, ECVET has also supported the use of learning outcomes among Member States, which is an important requirement for referencing to the EQF. There are also examples of VNIL being defined in terms of units, which is then used to provide access and/or exemption to other VET programmes.

There is also some cross-working between the EQAVET NRP network and ECVET User Group to share information. This helps develop a shared understanding of the two instruments.

7.1.3.2 What works less well

The implementation of ECVET at a national level is not always being considered holistically with the other EU VET instruments. This means that in some countries the link between the instruments is being lost. It is resulting in some inconsistencies/confusion around the use of documentation for mobility for example (perceptions of overlap with Europass).

The perception of ECVET as a standalone tool, rather than as a pillar for a wider ambition to create a stronger and more flexible VET, may also reduce countries' willingness to implement the instrument. ECVET does not have the same visibility as instruments such as EQF and Europass, and when it is understood it is generally considered as a tool for mobility, rather than for flexible VET learning and progression more broadly.

7.2 EQAVET

7.2.1 Delivery processes and implementation

7.2.1.1 What works well

For EQAVET the NRP network was felt to play a key role in developing a peer network across the EU on QA. This in itself was regarded as a key achievement of EQAVET, as previously many QA leads reported that they had no direct channels to communicate to their peers, which meant there was little shared understanding of different countries' QA systems. The value of this network has meant that some stakeholders felt it would be likely to continue outside EQAVET, if necessary.

The PLAs were also felt to provide considerable value in facilitating the sharing of effective practice. They helped address practical issues that countries faced in implementing the Recommendation and also provided an opportunity for dealing with any ambiguities. The PLAs and network were also felt to be well-supported by the Secretariat, with high quality and relevant materials.

7.2.1.2 What works less well

A key challenge that countries faced when implementing EQAVET was gaining political support for implementing EQAVET. Most countries reported that QA is perceived as a high political priority but some countries reported there is little knowledge and understanding of QA and EQAVET in national authorities outside a team of experts. Although the Recommendation helped to raise the profile for QA and in some countries resulted in a rapid response, in other countries there remained a lack of political

commitment which restricted the pace with which countries were able to implement changes to their QA processes.

As with ECVET, there are also challenges in disseminating materials for providers on effective practice in QA. Although some of the materials produced by the Secretariat have been helpful, in some cases language barriers and a lack of clarity about the requirements have prevented this from being used effectively.

It was also identified that the diversity of VET means that the NRP group did not systematically cover all VET sub-sectors. There was a perception that this resulted in EQAVET implementation being focused on some VET sectors rather more than others.

7.2.2 Achievement of intended impacts

7.2.2.1 What works well

The EQAVET Recommendation has been widely implemented, with most countries reporting that their QA system reflects the EQAVET Recommendation and that their providers 'always use' some EQAVET indicators, most notably indicators 3 and 4. This in part demonstrates that there is general support for the Recommendation. There is also evidence of EQAVET spurring countries to review and refine their national QA systems. Half of Member States have changed their QA policies following the introduction of EQAVET. Some countries such as Romania, Estonia and Portugal have new QA legislation that refers specifically to EQAVET.

A particular strength of the Recommendation is that it was reported to be useful to countries regardless of the maturity of their QA systems. Among countries that did not have formal QA processes in place, it was felt to play a key role in communicating the components that need to be in place for an effective system. Even in countries with established QA systems, it was felt to act as a reference point to ensure their systems comply with EU best practice.

7.2.2.2 What works less well

In many countries, the requirement for providers to undertake self-assessments is optional. Consequently, the extent to which this is done was reported to vary. Providers that give mobility opportunities or accept mobility learners, as well as those that promote the prestige of their institution, were reportedly more likely to implement EQAVET, as they felt it would provide confidence to learners and other providers that their provision is of high quality. However, no country has yet undertaken formal research to explore the extent to which EQAVET is used by providers.

There is also variation in the quality of provider self-assessments. Interviewees reported that this was largely because providers were at an early stage of implementing self-assessment, and consequently were still learning effective practice. In some countries, it was also reportedly due to the lack of availability of or high cost of collecting data for particular indicators or descriptors. For example, some indicators are not used extensively at a VET system or provider level because the collection of information was regarded as costly or because the country does not have sufficient data collection systems in place. This means that few countries use all 10 indicators and there is considerable diversity in the range of indicators that countries or providers use.

The use of indicative descriptors is also mixed. Across all stages of the planning cycle it is only used by 50-70% of countries at a system level and less than half of providers use indicative descriptors in each of the planning stages. The indicators least used are in the review and evaluation stages of the quality circle, meaning that EQAVET seems to be underdeveloped in relation to the feed-back loop between education and labour market.

There is considerable diversity in the monitoring systems that countries employ to examine provider performance. Although most countries have a provider register, the monitoring can range from light touch review of performance, using QA indicators to inform funding decisions, to conducting audits that decide whether providers are able to deliver and accredit VET programmes.

However, some stakeholders have the perception that EQAVET did not contribute significantly to the improvement of transparency of QA arrangements between countries and did not foster mutual trust. Furthermore, there is also a perception that EQAVET is mostly introduced in school-based IVET, and where it is used in CVET and WBL it only covers a few pockets of provision. This was attributed to CVET providers generally being small and therefore not having the capacity to implement QA processes. Most countries also reported challenges in implementing EQAVET in WBL as employers would be unwilling to implement the system and for some it would discourage them from taking on an apprentice.

7.2.3 Alignment with other tools and instruments relevant to VET

7.2.3.1 What works well

EQAVET was generally felt to underpin all other VET instruments as it aimed to improve the quality of learning, which improves learner outcomes and progression. As such, it was felt to have relevance to the implementation of the EQF/NQFs, international mobility, unitised delivery as well as supporting wider national and European Commission priorities for improving access to higher level skills and permeability between HE and VET.

There is also no significant reported overlap or inconsistencies between EQAVET and other VET instruments. The EQAVET principles of the use of indicators and descriptors for self-assessment and monitoring were generally felt to complement other EU VET instruments which mainly focused on the design and recognition of learning. This meant that there were no barriers to introducing EQAVET alongside other VET instruments.

7.2.3.2 What works less well

There are some discrepancies between the QA requirements for HE and those for VET. This particularly creates challenges for Higher VET institutions, which commonly adhere to ESG requirements and consequently are reluctant to introduce additional requirements for EQAVET. It can also create confusion as it points to a mixed message from the Commission on effective practice in QA.

In terms of national implementation, there also appears to be some disconnection between the implementation of EQAVET and the implementation of other instruments. In some countries, for example, EQAVET was not introduced alongside reforms to particular VET sub-sectors, the introduction of NQFs, or as part of wider national reforms to improve the quality and delivery of VET. This indicates that at a national level it cannot yet be universally considered as a set of principles that underpin high-quality VET.

8 How might the challenges and future needs be addressed?

This chapter examines the potential options that can be used to increase the impact of the two instruments and meet the future needs for VET systems. It draws on the findings from chapter 7, the Delphi survey, the two stakeholder workshops and an expert brainstorming meeting with selected EQAVET and ECVET experts, as well as feedback from an EQAVET Network meeting in June 2018 and an ECVET network meeting in October 2018.

8.1 Identifying potential scenarios

The first stakeholder workshop examined potential scenarios on how the two instruments could move forward for the post-2020 EU policy framework for education and training. This included identifying proposals that support both instruments towards achieving their objectives:

- **ECVET:** to facilitate the transfer, recognition and accumulation of learning outcomes of individuals on their way to achieving a qualification, to support lifelong learning, the mobility of learners and the flexibility of learning pathways to increase lifelong learning and improve the quality of mobility;
- **EQAVET:** To improve the QA systems that providers have in place, which ensures quality issues in VET can be identified quickly and addressed. The use of QA systems is also expected to improve the strategic planning and implementation of VET systems and programmes to better ensure they reflect national labour market, employer and learner needs. This in turn will increase mutual trust among EU VET systems.

Various dimensions were examined to considered how well the instruments can best achieve their objectives.

The first was to identify any weaknesses in their implementation that could be deflecting the two instruments from achieving their impacts. For both instruments this includes examining whether they are creating sufficient synergy with other EU lifelong learning instruments (including developments in HE) and stimulating country buy-in, particularly for ECVET. At the same time, there are also potential changes to the technical components that could improve impact.

The second was to address barriers that could be inhibiting countries from implementing the current recommendations. For ECVET this includes addressing the perception that it is a 'credit system' with stringent requirements on credit points that may not be compatible with some countries' national credit system or general system characteristics. For EQAVET this includes addressing the perception that some indicators are more difficult to implement than others. Both instruments are also used less frequently in WBL and CVET, partly due to the provider base for these education sectors being more fragmented, but for EQAVET there is also a perception the instrument is more suitable for IVET.

The third was exploring elements that would raise the ambitions of both tools in the context of the development of VET policy ambitions since 2009 and as they stand at present. This reflects that in many countries considerable progress has been made in the implementation of credit systems in VET, flexible learning pathways and QA systems since both instruments were introduced in 2009. Consequently, these instruments can now 'build from a higher base'. For EQAVET, this could include strengthening the requirements on external audits and indicators, the feedback loop and for ECVET it could include strengthening requirements on credit accumulation and learning outcomes.

However, the scenarios also had to consider the feasibility of implementing changes within the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Moreover, proposals that require changes to recommendations and proposals in the Bologna framework are likely to be more difficult to implement.

The scenarios also had to consider the option for decreasing the explicit focus on ECVET and EQAVET. This is based on the premise that some of the objectives of the two instruments could be achieved through other EU lifelong learning instruments, and that it is more beneficial to focus on other VET developments, particularly as some of the objectives of the instruments, such as learning outcomes in ECVET and the implementation of QA systems in EQAVET, have largely been implemented.

8.2 Overview of the eight scenarios

The eight initial scenarios for discussion were based on the considerations above. They included:

- A status quo scenario, where only minor changes would take place to the two instruments to address obvious weaknesses.
- Scenarios which aim to strengthen the implementation and ambition of the two instruments. This builds on the progress made by countries to implement the Recommendation and also addresses and weaknesses that may limit the reach and impact of the two tools.
- Scenarios which aim to refine or limit the scope of the two instruments to focus on areas where they are achieving most impact.
- An option to discontinue both instruments.

Following the stakeholder workshop, an initial 'long-list' of eight scenarios were developed (see Table 14 below). All the scenarios except Scenario 7 can be applied to each instrument (EQAVET or ECVET). The scenarios are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Table 14. Overview of eight initial scenarios

No	Scenarios	Implementation in the context of ECVET	Implementation in the context of EQAVET
1	Enhanced status quo, adjusting obvious shortcomings	Continue as standalone Recommendation. Change to remove reference to 'credit system' and credit points	Continue as standalone Recommendation. Strengthen reference to CVET and WBL. Prioritise some indicators as being essential
2	Limiting scope – only focus on some key aspects that work well	Focus on quality and recognition of transnational mobility. Make compulsory for VET mobility under Erasmus+	Focus on becoming a community of practice of national authorities
3	Implementation is limited to Erasmus+, ESF and EaSI programmes	Development of credit systems a priority for Erasmus+, ESF and EaSI funding; VET mobility charter requires ECVET tools.	QA development a funding priority for Erasmus+, ESF and EaSI funding; EQAVET compliance an ex-ante modality for ESF
4	Instruments become absorbed by another EU instrument	ECVET principles incorporated as requirements for VNIL, for referencing to NQFs/EQF; MoU and LA incorporated in Europass requirements	EQAVET principles incorporated as requirement for EQF referencing and mobility.
5	Instruments become part of a broader VET policy strategy	One holistic Recommendation incorporating EQAVET and ECVET. Single strategic governance with sub-groups established to take forward specific instruments with an annual work programme	
6	Discontinue of ECVET	Recall instrument without incorporation in other instruments.	

	and EQAVET	May similarly require a revision to other recommendations (such as EQF Recommendation) which refers to the EQAVET and ECVET Recommendation.	
7	implementing peer reviews of Member States' quality assurance arrangements in VET at system level	N/A	Strengthen expectations on countries in terms of implementing EQAVET. Establish an EU group of relevant stakeholders to review progress and support national QA developments
8	VET instruments are aligned to similar instruments in HE	Have principles on flexibility of learning and credit systems for lifelong learning in more general terms that do not refer to VET or HE, but qualifications referenced to the EQF via NQFs	Employ an overarching QA 'vision' covering both HE and VET, with more detailed requirements for each sector. Development networks to create peer networks between HE and VET QA agencies and national authorities, based on this common vision.

8.3 Feedback on the eight scenarios

Each of these scenarios was then tested in a second stakeholder workshop and the Delphi survey. The key findings from the discussion and feedback are described below.

- For both instruments, there was some support for an improved status quo. This was felt to provide benefits in continuing the 'brands' of the two instruments and demonstrate a continuity of policy by the European Commission. It also reflected that for EQAVET, in particular, it was felt to be important to maintain the community of practice that was established through the NRP network.
- There was also a desire to improve the integration of ECVET and EQAVET with other EU VET policies particularly more recent ambitions for improving skills. For ECVET, in particular, this was felt to potentially provide an opportunity to create more discourse on implementing flexible learning pathways and in engaging countries that are not currently implementing ECVET principles. However, it was felt that this needed to be balanced with the risk that there may be a lack of focus on the instruments if they were considered as part of other instruments or programmes.
- There was some support for aligning VET policies with HE, but concerns that the diversity and size of the VET sector means that some of the approaches employed in HE would not be appropriate, particularly around the engagement of providers. Some stakeholders were also concerned that the OMC approach for VET cooperation means that some of the approaches employed in HE (such as the establishment of bodies for monitoring progress) may be perceived as over-reach by the Commission in VET.
- For EQAVET, there was little appetite for using EQAVET indicators for benchmarking national VET systems. This was largely because some indicators were felt to be influenced by macro-economic factors that are outside the control of VET systems. Moreover, the diversity of VET means that many providers felt it was difficult to make direct comparisons between VET systems.
- There was little support for limiting the scope or discontinuing the work on the topics addressed by the instruments. For both EQAVET and ECVET, the progress made by most countries to implementing the Recommendation meant that most stakeholders felt this would be a backward step, and for ECVET, it was felt that the removal of the references to the 'units of learning outcomes' and credit

system for VET would sacrifice the mutual trust necessary for transnational mobility.

This meant that in relation to the scenarios developed, there was some support for an enhanced status quo (scenario 1) for both ECVET and EQAVET and some qualified support for aspects of scenario 4, scenario 5 and scenario 8, which integrate the instruments with other lifelong learning instruments. There was less support for scenarios 2 and 3, which limit the scope or discontinue the two instruments.

8.4 Options for assessment

Based on considering the feedback from the Commission, the stakeholder group and the Delphi survey, the eight scenarios were refined into six more detailed options for EQAVET and five for ECVET. These options combined elements of different scenarios taking account of views about their benefits/costs and their practicality. Additionally, a further option for both instruments was included which set out more ambitious proposals for increasing the impact of the two instruments. Although this option would be challenging to implement, there may be elements from the option that should be considered to inform the future direction of EQAVET and ECVET.

The options for each instrument are described below.

8.4.1 ECVET

For ECVET, the following five options were identified from the scenarios:

- Enhanced status quo;
- Embedding the functions of ECVET into other existing EU instrument and programmes;
- Incorporating the instrument into a broader European policy strategy for VET;
- Aligning HE and VET instruments, with an ambition of converging systems across HE and VET;
- European framework for transfer of learning achievements and flexible progression pathways.

A detailed description of these options is given in the tables below, alongside a high-level analysis of the option's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT).

8.4.1.1 ECVET Option 1: Enhanced status quo

The enhanced status quo option is described in depth in Table 15. In this option the Recommendation would be revised to incorporate changes to the technical components and significant changes to branding. The strategic focus and governance of the tool would not change and no changes would be made to other EU VET instruments or policies.

Table 15. Description of the enhanced status quo option

Component	Proposed changes
Changes to the strategic focus	No change
Changes to the technical components of the instrument	Adjustments would in particular refer to the concept and definition of ECVET points which would be revised. Principles and technical specifications would be revised along the lines of 'principles for flexible vocational learning pathways'.
Changes to the legal	The Recommendation would be revised considerably to address

Component	Proposed changes
basis of the tool	these shortcomings; the strategic objective of the document would remain, but the instrument would be changed from a system to a set of principles for flexible learning pathways. This would also result in changes to the technical specification, most notably the removal of the specification regarding credit points.
Changes to other EU policies or instruments	No change required.
Change in branding and marketing	Repositioning as a set of ECVET principles rather than emphasising the 'system' aspect. (ECVET as European Cooperation VET principles)
Governance arrangements	No change

A SWOT analysis of the option is summarised below:

Strengths:

- A key strength of this option is that it will provide stability to Member States. This allows countries to continue any work they have planned, as well as allowing them to refine and build on the changes they have already made.
- The continuity of governance arrangements will also maintain existing networks between Member States, and does not require countries to make changes to how ECVET-related structures and activities are organised
- The status quo will also continue the momentum generated by Erasmus+ in increasing provider understanding of ECVET principles, and in increasing their use.

Weaknesses:

- The changes proposed to the Recommendation will unlikely to do enough to encourage countries previously sceptical about the value of ECVET to start to use it. This is because among these countries there remains a negative perception of ECVET as a credit system, which will be difficult to change.
- It will potentially show a lack of ambition. When the instrument was established in 2009 few countries had unitised approaches and used learning outcomes. This landscape has now changed and consequently some countries policy makers will believe they do not need to undertake further developments on ECVET as they already comply with the requirements. This will slow developments as the research identified that ECVET is not yet achieving its full potential in supporting flexible learning and intra-country mobility.
- The option will not explicitly address the declining attendance of representatives of VET authorities. There is concern that this lack of engagement will inhibit the future implementation of ECVET principles.

Opportunities:

- The option will also demonstrate continuity in European Commission VET policy. This gives countries confidence that the Commission takes a long-term view in developing VET policy, which helps elicit a timely country response to new developments.

- The Recommendation will also help strengthen the ECVET 'brand', which will make it more recognisable among providers and third countries

Threats:

- It may be perceived to signal a lack of ambition of the tool, which may consequently slow the pace of developments.

8.4.1.2 ECVET Option 2: Embedding the functions of ECVET into other existing EU instruments and programmes

An option to embed ECVET into other EU instruments and programmes is described in depth in Table 16. It proposes to further promote the use of credits in the framework of Annex V of the EQF while ECVET tools such as the MoU and the LA could be mainstreamed and further developed in the framework of Erasmus Key action 1 on mobility and / or integrated into Europass . In addition, the objective of creating flexible learning pathways specifically in VET programmes and qualifications could be added as a specific quality descriptor of a revised EQAVET Framework in order to encompass wider measures than only those limited to the use of credits and the LO approach in qualifications.

Table 16. Description of the option for embedding ECVET in other instruments and programmes

Component	Proposed changes
Changes to the strategic focus	The promotion of VET mobility and flexible learning pathways would still remain strategic objectives within the EU VET policy framework.
Changes to the technical components of the instrument	The EQF Recommendation contains principles for credit systems related to national qualifications frameworks or systems referenced to the EQF. More work on credits (in VET and other sectors) could be carried out in Annex V of the EQF. The VET mobility charter could make it compulsory for Erasmus + beneficiaries of mobility actions to use aspects of ECVET (LA, MoU, transcript, assessment and recognition) which can be integrated into Europass
Changes to the legal basis of the tool	The ECVET Recommendation would be repealed.
Changes to other EU policies or instruments	No need to change the legal basis of the EQF Recommendation (Annex V would not be amended) but the EQAVET Recommendation would need to be changed in order to add a specific descriptor on flexible pathways in VET.
Change in branding and marketing	End of the ECVET brand
Governance arrangements	The ECVET governance would end and discussions flexible pathways in VET would take place in the framework of the abovementioned EU instruments.

The SWOT assessment of the option is presented below.

Strengths:

- The expectation is that developments related to flexible pathways in VET will take place alongside developments for the EQF, VET Quality Assurance, Erasmus+ mobility, and Europass. This ensures its implementation takes place in a way that maximises synergy and added value with these other instruments.
- It is also likely that there will be greater traction in countries to make VET more flexible if the objectives are addressed with other instruments that are widely used. This could support implementation in countries that have previously been resistant to implementing ECVET.
- The option will streamline the set of EU instruments and avoid duplications between ECVET, EQF and Europass. It will simplify the governance of the EU VET policy framework. This brings resource savings to countries and to the Commission.
- The approach will also strengthen the linkages between ECVET tools (in particular) and Erasmus+ funding and possibly integration into Europass 2. This will provide an incentive for providers to use MoU and LA for mobility.
- It will end of the confusion about ECVET as an EU credit system

Weaknesses:

- Lack of specific focus on ECVET and the removal of national leads for implementation may slow development in this area in case the other EU instruments would not address the topic of flexibility.
- Annex V refers to principles for credit systems related to national qualifications frameworks or systems referenced to the EQF which are in place only in very few countries. The implementation of such credit systems, if intended at all in a country, will likely take quite some time.

Opportunities:

- It will provide an opportunity to promote (the quality of) flexible pathways in other more widely used instruments
- The option will also reduce the number of EU instruments and free resources for more targeted mutual learning activities in the area of flexibility in VET
- It will increase trust and more transparency among the national VET systems through the connection with the EQF, EQAVET and Europass .
- Increased use of MoU and LAs in the context of increased budget for VET mobility in 2021-2027 will create an opportunity to integrate these tools into Europass.

Threats:

- Risk that flexible pathways are not considered as a priority for EQF and Erasmus+ implementation

ECVET Option 3: Instruments become part of a broader European policy framework for VET

Table 17 describes an option for embedding ECVET within a broader European policy framework for VET and LLL – there are margins for the definition of the scope and the related governance structure, which would be organised around a single policy group (either the ACVT or a new body). Sub-groups would be used to take forward priority actions for particular instruments and policy areas. A PLA programme would exist, which would be instigated by the single policy group and supported by a secretariat.

Table 17. Description of the option for embedding the instruments as part of a broader European policy framework for VET

Component	Proposed changes
Changes to the strategic focus	There would be an overarching Recommendation that covers quality assurance, flexible pathways (including mobility) and recognition in VET. It thus combines and merges policy areas previously covered by the ECVET, EQAVET and Quality Framework for Apprenticeship Recommendations, and possibly other areas.
Changes to the technical components of the instrument	<p>The key concepts of units of learning outcomes; transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes; partnerships; would be part of the main body of the Recommendation, in a revised form (e.g. concept of 'unit' might be revisited), possibly as principles for flexible learning pathways.</p> <p>The Recommendation would mention MoU and LA – or related instruments ensuring their functions supporting the quality of mobility – as an integral component.</p>
Changes to the legal basis of the tool	A new, overarching Council Recommendation for VET would be adopted, which would include reference to the topics addressed by the current VET instruments. This would supersede and repeal the other VET instrument Recommendations
Changes to other EU policies or instruments	The current ECVET Recommendation would be repealed, as would be the Council Recommendation for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships and EQAVET. However, the principles in these recommendations would be included in the new Recommendation. This would share and acknowledge strong links with EQF, VNIL and Europass (and also ECTS – though not a VET instrument). In particular, the work on a new Europass platform and the further development of LA and MoU should be linked.
Change in branding and marketing	ECVET brand would end. However, its principles would be promoted as part of a wider suite of VET instruments
Governance arrangements	There would be no separate governance and activities for each of these pillars. Instead, there would be an overarching governance, possibly through ACVT with single-purpose task and finish groups or permanent sub-groups. The main group which would decide on a multiannual programme of peer-learning and exchange activities, supported by a secretariat

The SWOT assessment of the option is described below.

Strengths:

- The option could create strong and deep links between VET instruments and policies. This improved synergy also ensures ECVET developments are considered alongside the wider ambitions of EU VET policies, rather than as a discrete activity.

- It will also create a more straightforward narrative of European instruments and their interlinkages. This will make it easier for national authorities to communicate EU VET policies and instruments to stakeholders, which should encourage greater buy-in
- It will streamline the governance of the instruments, which will reduce duplication and increase the attendance of national representatives at meetings.

Weaknesses:

- The option could result in a loss of expertise as the existing governance structure is discontinued. However, the experts currently involved in the ECVET implementation could continue to work as part of a sub group of the single policy group.
- There is a risk that ECVET will be considered less important than other EU policies or instruments, which means little specific resource is spent on it. This could slow the pace of ECVET-related developments

Opportunities:

- More coherence between the instruments could raise awareness and understanding of EU VET policies and instruments, particularly among national decision makers
- Could ensure that Commission support, in relation to funding and facilitating peer learning, better reflects needs and priorities

Threats:

- There may be a perception among providers and stakeholders that this is a discontinuity in EU policy. There may therefore be a need to re-explain the rationale behind changes and the advantages of moving to a new approach
- The broad remit of the governance group and a lack of focus on particular instruments may result in a loss of momentum or reduced interest for some instruments

ECVET Option 4: VET and HE instruments are more aligned to each other, with an ambition of more convergence between HE and VET

Table 18 presents a description of an option for aligning ECVET with ECTS, with the ambition of creating more convergence between HE and VET. In this option the ECVET Recommendation would be repealed and replaced by a new act. The new act would include elements of the ECTS requirements but also some ECVET components such as learning outcomes, MoU and LA. Consequently it would differ from the HE act

Table 18. Description for the option of aligning ECVET to HE instruments

Component	Proposed changes
Changes to the strategic focus	The focus on flexible learning pathways and mobility would remain, however in broader terms and not limited to VET only.
Changes to the technical components of the instrument	Would incorporate aspects taken from ECTS as well as from ECVET (e.g. focus on learning outcomes, MoU, LA). Would also include a redefined concept of units of LO and credit points. This would be applied to VET and HE.
Changes to the legal basis of the tool	The current ECVET Recommendation would be repealed. A new act would be created covering credit systems for HE and VET.

Component	Proposed changes
Changes to other EU policies or instruments	ECTS would not need to be modified (though the competent authorities might take the opportunity to do so).
Change in branding and marketing	The ECVET brand would cease.
Governance arrangements	Separate governance arrangements for implementation in place, including arrangements for peer learning and exchange of experiences.

The SWOT assessment of the option is shown below:

Strengths:

- The option will streamline and simplify credit systems in education, which will raise awareness of the credit principles in VET. It will particularly provide simplification for the area of higher VET, where some institutions are implementing ECTS and others are implementing ECVET (or other credit systems for VET).
- It will provide scope for better coordination and recognition of credits achieved in VET for learning in HE. This will support opportunities for greater permeability between VET and HE
- Having a broader definition of ECVET-related principles will also make it easier for countries to incorporate the system within their national credit systems. At present, the specificity of ECVET means it is difficult to integrate with other credit systems

Weaknesses:

- There is a risk that the lack of specificity of the tools creates divergence in countries approach to describing the qualifications. This could have particular implications on the quality and recognition of mobility.
- It will reinforce a credit point system in VET, despite there being country resistance to implement this. Maintaining this component consequently would likely not increase buy-in for the initiative, and some of the more prescriptive requirements for ECTS in terms of credit allocation may deter some countries from implementing the system

Opportunities:

- It will simplify the landscape. This could help stimulate national developments on credit systems and the potential use of credit points, including in countries which have been reluctant to introduce the ECVET system.
- The link to HE may also improve the perceived value of VET credits in HE, particularly if the changes increase their recognition for access, admission and exemption to HE.
- It will provide an opportunity for transferring effective practice in VET on using learning outcomes to HE.

Threats:

- There may be political resistance to management of VET instruments alongside HE systems. This may come from VET stakeholders (which believe the unique nature of VET requires a specific tool) as well as HE stakeholders, that may feel

that the changes may give the impression that credit in VET is equivalent to credit in HE. This may make it difficult to implement the changes

ECVET Option 5: European framework for transfer of learning achievements and flexible progression pathways

A new Recommendation on a 'European framework for transfer of learning achievements and flexible progression pathways' would be developed and adopted (shown in Table 19). Its key purpose would be: to facilitate transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed or validated LO between various contexts; and to support flexible individual learning pathways based on a unit-based approach and progression that support lifelong learning and mobility.

The option would build on the Validation recommendation but would focus on learning in all contexts and not just NFIL (learning that takes place within the education and training system or any other work context, or volunteer activities). It would also ensure the principles of the 2018 Council Recommendation on 'Promoting automatic mutual recognition of HE and upper secondary education diplomas and the outcomes of learning periods abroad' could be expanded to formal VET provision, while also supporting recognition of VET learning outcomes in HE and vice versa.

The recommendation will do this through:

- Proposing Member States recognise and document in a consistent manner the achievement of knowledge, skills and competencies that do not result in a formal qualification. It would cover both assessed and validated LOs and therefore would replace the VNIL recommendation.
- Proposing Member States ensure providers recognise these units of learning outcomes for access, admission and exemption to further learning programmes

The learning outcomes approach underpins mutual trust of learning undertaken in another context. Consequently, the recommendation also proposes consistent syntax and terminology for describing learning outcomes. The option also includes the re-framing of ECVET as an approach for designing modular, flexible learning programmes, rather than a credit 'system' (as per the proposals in Option 1). It would not prescribe credit points so countries could use ECTS and/or their national credit systems. Revised Europass documentation would be used for documentation, which are to be used in all education sectors.

Table 19. Description of the option for developing a European framework for transfer of learning achievements and flexible progression pathways

Component	Proposed changes
Changes to the strategic focus	<p>This option has a cross-sectoral perspective and covers learning outcomes from various contexts (GE, VET, HE; AE, formal, non-formal and informal learning) it covers the documentation of these learning outcomes and how they are used by providers to inform decisions on access, admission and exemption.</p> <p>The framework would not be hung up on any concept of qualification or programme and would be promoted across various contexts of learning. The framework promotes the use of clearly defined groups of learning outcomes that are capable of independent assessment and accumulation.</p> <p>Two strategic purposes: (1) To ensure countries use a universally understood/agreed way of documenting assessed learning achievements and equipping individuals with the right to request such documentation of learning achievements according to agreed principles. (2) Ensuring (better) ways to</p>

Component	Proposed changes
	<p>allow learners to make use of these documented learning achievements for progression and LLL.</p> <p>A) Member States agree to make sure that learners have, on request, the possibility to have their learning achievements assessed and documented in a universally understood and comparable way (i.e. according to the common principles described below).</p> <p>B) Member States take action to ensure that these documented and assessed learning outcomes are recognised by providers for access, admission and exemption to further progression. Member States take furthermore action to ensure that providers recognise learning outcomes achieved in another context, where they match, to a reasonable degree of the destination programme/qualification.</p>
<p>Changes to the technical components of the instrument</p>	<p>The learning outcomes approach would be at the core of this option. The key aim would be to develop a more uniform approach to LO that allows better comparison of LO achieved in various contexts.</p> <p>There are common principles for presenting learning outcomes-based qualifications and programmes, based on a standardised terminology (e.g. pre-defined action verbs), and a pre-defined structure or syntax, linked to ESCO terminology. There is a link to EQF descriptors. These qualifications and programme descriptions would be linked to Europass Certificate and Diploma Supplements.</p> <p>Europass documents will adopt the same principles, structure and syntax. Europass documents would be available to set up partnership agreements and LAs. Europass documents will also provide for the possibility of documenting an individual's learning achievements according to these principles.</p>
<p>Changes to the legal basis of the tool</p>	<p>The ECVET Recommendation would be repealed. A new Recommendation would be developed and adopted.</p>
<p>Changes to other EU policies or instruments</p>	<p>The VNIL recommendation would be repealed. Possibly changes to the ECTS framework.</p> <p>The framework would have close links and be compatible with the EQF. For documentation purposes, it would be closely linked to Europass developments.</p>
<p>Change in branding and marketing</p>	<p>End of the ECVET brand.</p> <p>Documentation would run under the Europass banner.</p>
<p>Governance arrangements</p>	<p>The Recommendation would provide for the set-up of a governance structure to implement the Recommendation. A technical expert working group would be entrusted with developing the common principles.</p> <p>A high-level implementation group would be set up at EU level to promote implementation, with balanced representation from stakeholders from various learning contexts including the labour</p>

Component	Proposed changes
	<p>market.</p> <p>The role of National Europass Centres would be extended to serve as central point of contact for individual learners, education providers and employers. Their role would include ensuring that the common principles are applied in a uniform way across their country.</p>

The SWOT assessment of the option is shown below:

Strengths:

- It will build on a cross-sectoral agreement for using a common template and guidelines for using learning outcomes to describe qualifications, programmes and document learning achievements, thereby promoting permeability and progression across the education and training system.
- The option will improve the quality and consistency with which VET providers use learning outcomes, by providing more detailed expectations of approaches to use
- It will also ensure alignment with Europass documents, thereby simplifying the landscape and reducing bureaucracy for providers and employers
- The option will place an increasing onus on countries to use principles within that support flexible learning, by recommending countries ensure VET systems ensure learning can have learning outcomes recognised when they do not complete a qualification.

Weaknesses:

- Prescriptive nature of the Recommendation may discourage some countries from implementing the principles for flexible learning, which are currently being taken forward by the ECVET Recommendation
- The changes will have a major resource implication on countries and providers, in terms of changing their approach for using learning outcomes and recognising prior learning

Opportunities:

- It will increase the flexible learning provision available to learners, while also improving the quality and consistency of learning outcomes, which are key European Commission priorities
- It will reduce barriers between different learning contexts (GE, VET, HE, AE) and promotes their integration.

Threats:

- There may be significant resistance from countries (and/or sectors) for the European Commission issuing the new recommendation, due to the work it would require from Member States.

EQAVET

Following the stakeholder workshop and first round of the Delphi survey, the eight potential scenarios for EQAVET have been refined into six options. These are:

- An enhanced status quo
- Implementing EQAVET through other VET instruments

- The instruments becoming part of a broader VET strategy
- Strengthening the Recommendation and implementing peer reviews of Member States' quality assurance arrangements in VET at system level
- Aligning the instruments to QA systems in HE
- Introduction of a voluntary certification system for national QA systems

These options are described in depth below.

EQAVET Option 1: Enhanced Status Quo

The first option of an enhanced status quo is described in Table 20 below. The Recommendation would be revised to include a set of core indicators that all providers would be expected to use and incorporating the EQAVET+ additions to the indicative descriptors. All other aspects of EQAVET would remain the same.

Table 20. Description for the option of enhanced status quo

Component	Proposed changes
Changes to the strategic focus	The instrument would continue to focus on improving the country and provider QA arrangements for VET
Changes to the technical components of the instrument	The 10 indicators would be re-framed around core indicators and a suite of wider potential indicators. The EQAVET+ revisions to the indicative descriptors would be included in the recommendation
Changes to the legal basis of the tool	The EQAVET Recommendation would be revised
Changes to other EU policies or instruments	None
Change in branding and marketing	No change.
Governance arrangements	No change

The SWOT assessment of the option is shown below:

Strengths:

- It will continue the EQAVET brand, which is becoming established in the VET landscape. This will maintain current awareness of the instrument and provides a base for raising awareness among providers
- It will maintain the community of learning generated through the NRP network and peer learning. This expertise can be used to continue national developments in EQAVET

Weaknesses:

- It will continue to result in variation in the indicators and systems that countries adopt in undertaking QA
- It could potentially be an 'opportunity missed' – the QA landscape in countries has evolved considerably since the Recommendation was introduced. The status

quo will take advantage of these developments by providing more stretching requirements that aim to further improve national QA systems

Opportunities:

- It will provide consistency and stability to countries. This will indicate to countries that EQAVET continues to be a priority for the Commission

Threats:

- The high volume of countries that believe they already comply with the Recommendation may mean some will decide they do not need to take further action on QA if the Recommendation is largely the same

EQAVET Option 2: Embedding the functions of EQAVET in other EU instruments

Table 21 presents an option for implementing EU VET policy on QA in other instruments. In this option the EQAVET recommendation would be repealed but the promotion of EQAVET and the development of national QA arrangements for VET would take place through Annex IV of the EQF recommendation, which refer to QA principles in NQFs and systems that are referenced to the EQF. The requirements for QA in mobility projects would also be strengthened to ensure they align with EQAVET requirements for external audit, a review cycle and the use of measures for performance monitoring.

Table 21. Description for the option of EQAVET implementation taking place through Annex IV of the EQF Recommendation

Component	Proposed changes
Changes to the strategic focus	The requirements for QA in VET would shift from specific tools to broader expectations on QA, as defined in Annex IV of the revised EQF recommendation.
Changes to the technical components of the instrument	The technical components would be adapted as per the proposals in option 1. However, Annex IV of the EQF recommendation contains less specificity than the EQAVET recommendation. It does not explicitly mention the quality cycle or indicators/indicative descriptors. The EQF recommendation does however contain an expectation that there is an external monitoring body/agency in place for QA and that there should be feedback mechanisms and procedures for continuous improvement
Changes to the legal basis of the tool	The EQAVET recommendation is repealed, with EQF Annex IV providing the legal basis for EU-level intervention on QA.
Changes to other EU policies or instruments	There may also be changes to the VET Mobility Charter to strengthen the QA requirements for mobility programmes. Moreover, given the absence of a specific instrument on QA it would be expected that QA is considered in more depth during the implementation of other EU initiatives, such as Europass and Upskilling Pathways.
Change in branding and marketing	The EQAVET brand would not continue

Component	Proposed changes
Governance arrangements	The Governance arrangements for implementing the EQF recommendation will also have responsibility for supporting EU-cooperation on QA. This could include the establishment of a specialist sub-group specialising in QA arrangements. The current EQAVET governance arrangements would not exist.

A high-level SWOT analysis of the option is presented below.

Strengths:

- The option will likely to increase awareness of the importance of QA in countries where there has previously been little political will to incorporate EQAVET principles. This is because it aligns QA developments with NQFs and EQF developments, which have a higher profile among most Member States.
- The option could result in EQAVET principles being applied more systematically to formal qualifications, if it is being promoted as an essential requirement for referencing systems or suites of qualifications to the EQF.
- The option will streamline the set of EU instruments and avoid duplications between the work undertaken by EQAVET and ESF. It will simplify the governance of the EU VET policy framework. This brings resource savings to countries and to the Commission.

Weaknesses:

- The link to EQF will mean that developments in QA will only focus on qualifications that lead to national recognised qualifications. This limits the scope of EU-cooperation in QA, which currently covers all formal and non-formal programmes delivered by VET providers.
- There will be less specificity in EQF Annex IV compared to the EQAVET recommendation. This may result in more divergence in QA systems by Member States.
- Lack of specific governance arrangements could slow the pace of developments in QA systems in Member States.

Opportunities:

- It will provide an opportunity to promote the importance of QA more widely with other instruments.
- The option will also reduce the number of EU instruments and free resources for more targeted mutual learning activities in the area of flexibility in VET.
- It will increase the connections between QA and other EU policy instruments and tools.

Threats:

- Risk that the option will result in greater divergence in national QA arrangements, which in turn will reduce mutual trust.
- May be a perception among stakeholder that this is a discontinuity of EU QA policy in VET. This could present a reputational issue for the Commission.

EQAVET Option 3: EQAVET becomes part of a broader VET policy strategy framework

Table 22 presents an option for incorporating EQAVET within a broader European policy strategy framework for VET. This option creates a single governance structure with work plans and sub-groups to implement particular instruments, supported by a PLA programme. The option is the same as ECVET Option 3.

Table 22. Description for the option of EQAVET becoming part of a broader VET policy framework

Component	Proposed changes
Changes to the strategic focus	There would be overarching Recommendation which combines and merges topics previously covered by the ECVET, EQAVET and Quality Framework for Apprenticeship Recommendations.
Changes to the technical components of the instrument	The technical components would change in line with the proposals for the enhanced status quo.
Changes to the legal basis of the tool	A new, overarching Council Recommendation for VET would be adopted, which would include reference to each of the VET instruments. This would supersede and repeal the EQAVET Recommendation.
Changes to other EU policies or instruments	The current EQAVET Recommendation would be repealed, as would be the Council Recommendation for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships and ECVET. However, the principles in these recommendations would be included in the new Recommendation. This would share and acknowledge strong links with EQF, VNIL and Europass.
Change in branding and marketing	The EQAVET brand will continue, but will be promoted as part of a wider VET suite of instruments
Governance arrangements	There is no separate governance and activities for each of these pillars. Instead, there is an overarching governance, possibly through ACVT with single-purpose task and finish groups or permanent sub-groups. The main group which decides on a multiannual programme of peer-learning and exchange activities, supported by a secretariat

A SWOT analysis of the option is presented below.

Strengths:

- There will be clearer and more widely understood links between VET instruments and policies. This will encourage more strategic development of the instruments to reflect wider EU VET priorities.
- It will make it easier for national authorities to communicate EU VET policies and instruments to decision makers, which should encourage greater buy-in
- It will streamline governance arrangements, which will reduce duplication and increase the attendance.

Weaknesses

- The option could result in a lack of specific focus on EQAVET, which could slow the pace of implementation

- The end of the NRP network may result in a lack of expertise. However, a network of national authorities on QA could exist as a sub-group reporting in to the overarching governance group.

Opportunities

- It could increase decision makers awareness and understanding of EQAVET and its linkages with other VET instruments and policies.
- It will ensure that Commission support is better targeted at overall VET sector needs and priorities.

Threats

- It may be perceived as a discontinuation of EU policy in QA. The Commission may therefore need to clearly articulate the rationale behind the decision to implement change.
- The broad remit of the governance group may result in a loss of momentum or reduced interest for some instruments.

EQAVET Option 4: Strengthen the Recommendation by implementing peer reviews of Member States' quality assurance arrangements in VET at system level

Table 23 describes an option for strengthening the Recommendation and implementing a peer review process at VET system level to monitor country developments and reinforce mutual trust among Member States.

Table 23. Description for the option strengthening the Recommendation and implementing a peer review process

Component	Proposed changes
Changes to the strategic focus	There will be a stronger focus on countries developing and continually improving their QA systems, in terms of systems and their use of indicators
Changes to the technical components of the instrument	Could include a core set of indicators (as proposed in option 1) that countries should have in place as well as national data to be collected.
Changes to the legal basis of the tool	The current EQAVET Recommendation would be revised in line with the proposals in Option 1
Changes to other EU policies or instruments	No change
Change in branding and marketing	No change
Governance arrangements	The existing governance could remain, but would include a remit to monitor the progress countries are making in developing their QA systems and to provide support. PLA activities would also continue.

A SWOT assessment of the option is described below.

Strengths:

- The option will provide stretch and challenge for countries that have already implemented the broad requirements of the Recommendation and wish to further develop their QA system.
- The option will also stimulate action in countries that already believe they comply with the current Recommendation.

Weaknesses

- The more stretching requirements may discourage some countries from engaging with EQAVET. One of the strengths of the current Recommendation was that any country could use elements of the framework to adapt their QA systems.

Opportunities

- It will present an opportunity to raise standards in QA, building on what has been achieved to date and the current support for EQAVET. It would also fit well in the context of the creation of a European Education Area and the Council Recommendation on automatic recognition of diplomas and learning periods abroad.

Threats

- May be some resistance to a step-change in the Recommendation, as this could have a significant resource implication on the country. This could affect country buy-in.

EQAVET Option 5: Aligning HE and VET instruments, with an ambition of converging systems across HE and VET

EQAVET option 5 is described in Table 24. It proposes to align the QA systems in VET with the system in HE. This includes creating an overarching Recommendation for quality in education which provides high-level principles for QA that both systems adhere to, and sets out tools to do this (ESG in HE and EQAVET for VET).

Table 24. Description for the option of aligning EQAVET to HE

Component	Proposed changes
Changes to the strategic focus	No change
Changes to the technical components of the instrument	The overarching QA Recommendation would include elements in the ESG that would be applicable to VET and potentially GE (e.g. expectations of student support and principles that should guide planning) and the approach for audit would also be strengthened. The indicators however would remain, as they need to be specific for VET. Quality standards for VET would also be included (similar to the approach in ESG).
Changes to the legal basis of the tool	An overarching Recommendation on QA would be produced and the existing EQAVET Recommendation would be repealed
Changes to other EU policies or instruments	[to be determined]
Change in branding and marketing	EQAVET brand would continue as a framework for QA in VET, but without a specific Council recommendation

Component	Proposed changes
Governance arrangements	The NRP group will remain. A feasibility study will be conducted to explore the possibility of supplementing this with a network of QA agencies in VET.

The SWOT analysis for this option is presented below.

Strengths:

- It will create an environment where there can be greater convergence between HE and VET QA systems. The overarching Recommendation sets out what should be achieved by any QA system, which means both HE and VET will follow similar principles.
- Depending on the results of a feasibility study, the option will also create a forum where QA agencies in VET can share effective practice and build a community of practice.
- The use of similar QA frameworks in HE and VET will increase trust that the systems are based on universal QA principles.

Weaknesses:

- There may be resistance to having an overarching framework, which may inhibit buy-in from countries.
- May be a perception among stakeholder that this is a discontinuity of EU QA policy in VET. This could present a reputational issue for the Commission.
- May result in a disconnect with EQAVET and new VET policies.

Opportunities:

- It will present an opportunity to simplify the landscape and create greater trust in the QA system employed in both sectors.

Threats:

- There may be political resistance to developing a new Recommendation covering both HE and VET, particularly among VET institutions if it is perceived that VET is adopting HE standards. They may also feel the Commission is over-reaching in applying additional QA requirements for VET providers.

EQAVET Option 6: Introduction of a voluntary certification system for national QA systems

The final EQAVET option is described in the table below. It proposes to take the current EQAVET framework further by specifying explicit expectations for national quality systems and introduce a certification scheme where countries must ensure their VET QA systems achieve certain standards to be certified. These could be graded so they progress towards a standard. The requirements would be developed in collaboration with country representatives and sector stakeholders. It would be supplemented with a country benchmarking of particular EQAVET indicators to improve transparency and to encourage countries to build on strengths and address weaknesses.

Table 25. Description for the option of aligning EQAVET to HE

Component	Proposed changes
Changes to the	Re-framed as a standard that country VET systems should

Component	Proposed changes
strategic focus	adhere to in order to ensure they have effective QA systems. Introduce national benchmarking so countries can identify strengths and weaknesses
Changes to the technical components of the instrument	More specificity in the expectations for external QA arrangements to be in place in countries (external from Government, periodicity of inspections), the publication and sharing of data from provider self-assessments, collection and analysis of provider performance data and its use for informing funding decisions
Changes to the legal basis of the tool	The current recommendation would be repealed and replaced
Changes to other EU policies or instruments	No change
Change in branding and marketing	No change
Governance arrangements	The NRP group will remain, possibly supplemented by a group of QA agencies in VET

The SWOT analysis for this option is presented below.

Strengths:

- It will create more explicit expectations of the QA arrangements that countries should have in place.
- The certification scheme and benchmarking of country performance against key EQAVET indicators will encourage countries to build on strengths and address weaknesses.

Weaknesses:

- Risk the benchmarking may be misleading, as it may not take into account the different labour market conditions, economic structure and diversity within VET.
- It will require significant resources for countries to implement the recommendation.

Opportunities:

- It will present an opportunity to ensure more formal QA systems are in place in Member States.
- It will encourage political buy-in to improve weaknesses highlighted in the benchmarking.

Threats:

- Likely to be significant political resistance to increasing more stringent QA requirements and country benchmarking, which may discourage countries from approving or implementing the recommendation.

8.5 Assessment of selected scenarios

The five ECVET and six EQAVET scenarios are assessed qualitatively below, against the following criteria:

- **Benefits**, in terms of supporting the implementation and impact of the two instruments and enabling them to contribute to achieving ambitions for VET at national and EU levels. The benefits are rated on a scale from -5 to 5, with zero being the status quo. To score 5 the option has major benefits, whereas to score -5 the option has major dis-benefits
- **Costs** of implementing the option on national authorities and the European Commission. Costs are from a scale of -5 to 5, with -5 being a significant cost, and 5 being a significant saving. Zero denotes the status quo. It includes both one-off costs and on-going costs, with the latter given a higher rating.
- **Unintended consequences** of the option. This refers to any wider behaviour change that could result from the options which could have a negative impact on the implementation and impact of the two instruments. Unintended consequences are scaled from -5 to 0, with -5 being a negative consequence and 0 denoting no negative consequences.
- **Feasibility of the option.** This relates to the ease in which the option can be implemented. Feasibility is scaled between 0 to 5, with 0 being difficult to implement and 5 being very easy to implement. The status quo is 5, as it is already in place and therefore requires no additional action.

Table 26. Appraisal of options

Option	Benefits	Costs	Unintended consequences	Feasibility	Description
ECVET Option 1: Enhanced status quo	1	0	0	5	<p>Benefits: The modifications to the Recommendation would improve perceptions of ECVET, as it would avoid the misconception that ECVET is a credit system.</p> <p>Costs: The cost for implementing this option is relatively small. For the European Commission, it will require the release of an updated Recommendation. Countries are unlikely to experience any additional costs.</p> <p>Unintended consequences: Some national stakeholders may feel the lack of changes suggests a lack of ambition, which may affect perceptions of the tool and country buy-in. The enhanced status quo is also unlikely to engage countries and providers that are not already supportive of ECVET.</p> <p>Feasibility: The option can be implemented relatively easily as it requires little change to the existing Recommendation.</p>
ECVET Option 2: Embedding the functions of ECVET into other existing EU instrument and programmes	2	1	-1	4	<p>Benefits: Linking ECVET to widely used instruments such as EQF, EQAVET and Europass should increase the implementation of ECVET principles/objectives. Linking to the VET mobility charter / Europass 2 will ensure it is used more consistently for cross-border learning.</p> <p>Costs: the cost to the Commission would mainly be in the revision of Recommendations and guidance to inform countries of the changes. The dissolution of the ECVET governance structure will free up resources.</p> <p>Unintended consequences: The discontinuation of the ECVET brand might be perceived as giving a lower priority for flexible pathways and mobility in VET.</p> <p>Feasibility: The changes are feasible as they require repeal of ECVET Recommendation and little change to the EQAVET Recommendation.</p>

Option	Benefits	Costs	Unintended consequences	Feasibility	Description
ECVET Option 3: Instruments become part of a broader European policy strategy framework for VET	3	1	1	4	<p>Benefits: Having an overarching VET Recommendation is likely to raise awareness of and interest in ECVET-related principles among national policy makers. Moreover, it would also result in closer alignment and complementarity with other instruments.</p> <p>Costs: May provide cost savings for the Commission as it will only need to support one group, although there will be some sub-groups and task-and-finish groups. The main costs incurred by the Commission will be in developing a new Recommendation. Countries are unlikely to incur any additional costs.</p> <p>Unintended consequences: A lack of focus on ECVET-related principles may result in less progress with the aims related to this the instrument, or it may 'fade away'. There is also a risk that the national stakeholders are unable to dedicate sufficient time to steer the combined VET agenda effectively, which may slow implementation of EU VET policies and instruments.</p> <p>Feasibility: The option is quite feasible as the 'umbrella' Recommendation would contain content of and reference to other VET Recommendations. It would however require considerable change to EU VET governance structures</p>
ECVET Option 4: Align to VET and HE instruments to each other	3	-4	-3	2	<p>Benefits: The option would improve opportunities for permeability between HE and VET and potentially raise the profile of VET learning. The option is also likely to engage some countries to implement ECVET principles that have previously been reluctant to do so, as they would see additional benefits for implementing a system in VET aligned to HE. However, it may similarly discourage some countries from participating as many have in the past reported that they do not wish to implement a credit point system in VET.</p> <p>Costs: The option would require the introduction of a VET credit point system in all national VET systems, requiring huge efforts by providers, national authorities and the Commission. There will also be costs associated with promoting opportunities for permeability to students</p>

Option	Benefits	Costs	Unintended consequences	Feasibility	Description
					<p>Unintended consequences: May lose interconnectivity with other EU lifelong learning instruments which could have a negative impact on the learner experience. Change in policy may create confusion among stakeholders and have a reputational impact on the European Commission.</p> <p>Feasibility: There may be some political resistance to having similar credits achieved in HE and VET. The option will require significant changes to legislation to convert references to unitised and flexible learning more generally.</p>
<p>ECVET Option 5: European framework for transfer of learning achievements and flexible progression pathways</p>	5	-5	-2	2	<p>Benefits: Will improve the quality of learning outcomes descriptions used by Member States, while also encouraging credit accumulation. This will be a considerable shift in the use of these two principles. The option will also improve the synergy between ECVET principles and the VNIL recommendation.</p> <p>Costs: The costs for countries to refine their approach to using units of learning outcomes will be high. There are also likely to be costs incurred by the Commission to create new templates/tools and disseminating good practice. VET providers will also incur considerable costs in changing the way they use learning outcomes descriptions and also in developing and using new processes and systems for documenting learning outcome achievements and using this documentation to support learner intra and inter country mobility.</p> <p>Unintended consequence: The main unintended consequence will be that the more stretching set of expectations placed on countries may lead to resistance from providers and other national stakeholders to implement the changes. It may particularly restrict their use in CVET and WBL, where providers are likely to have less capacity to implement the proposals.</p> <p>Feasibility: There may need to be changes to other EU instruments, such as VNIL and ECTS, to ensure they are compatible with the ECVET documentation. There also may be</p>

Option	Benefits	Costs	Unintended consequences	Feasibility	Description
EQAVET Option 1: Enhanced Status Quo	1	0	0	5	<p>some political resistance to introducing more stretching requirements.</p> <p>Benefits: Will maintain the brand and the community of practice established through EQAVET. Modifications to the Recommendation will also increase the focus on WBL and CVET, while shift in indicators should encourage more countries to collect comparable information on performance</p> <p>Costs: Would not incur any additional costs for countries or the Commission, aside from the development of a new Recommendation</p> <p>Unintended consequences: No unintended consequences as such, but may be an 'opportunity missed', as general support for EQAVET and the steps made by countries in implementation suggests countries are capable of achieving more stretching targets. Moreover, as most countries self-report they comply with the Recommendation, in future only a few may decide to continue EQAVET developments.</p> <p>Feasibility: The option is very feasible as it requires little change to the existing Recommendation.</p>
EQAVET Option 2: Embedding the functions of EQAVET into existing EU policy instruments	1	1	-3	4	<p>Benefits: Linking EQAVET to widely used instruments such as EQF and Europass should widen awareness of the importance of QA. Strengthening the QA requirements in the VET mobility charter will also encourage the use of QA systems in mobility programmes. Linking to EQF may also encourage the use of QA across formal national qualifications.</p> <p>Costs: the cost to the Commission for implementing the changes would be small, as it would mainly be in the revision of Recommendations and guidance to inform countries of the changes. The dissolution of the EQAVET governance structure will free up resources.</p> <p>Unintended consequences: There is a risk that the lack of specificity in EQF Annex IV, compared to a repealed EQAVET recommendation, would result in greater divergence in QA arrangements among Member States. This would reduce mutual trust. The lack of</p>

Option	Benefits	Costs	Unintended consequences	Feasibility	Description
					<p>strength in the recommendation may also result in a decline in the quality of QA arrangements in Member States</p> <p>Feasibility: The changes are feasible as they require the repealing of the EQAVET recommendation and few changes to other recommendations</p>
<p>EQAVET Option 3: Instruments become part of a broader strategic framework for VET</p>	2	1	-1	3	<p>Benefits: Will provide greater clarity on the link between different instruments and result to a more holistic approach to implementation, which should synergy and complementary with wider EU VET policy. Simplified governance may also result in there being greater awareness of policy makers of EQAVET.</p> <p>Costs: Streamlining of VET governance arrangements should provide a cost saving to Member States and the Commission.</p> <p>Unintended consequences: Lack of specific focus on EQAVET may result in less resources and time spent on EQAVET implementation.</p> <p>Feasibility: Relatively feasible as the umbrella Recommendation will largely incorporate elements of the EQAVET Recommendation. However, it would require significant changes to EU governance arrangements for VET instruments.</p>
<p>EQAVET Option 4: Strengthening the Recommendation by implementing peer reviews of Member States' quality assurance arrangements in VET at system level</p>	4	-1	-1	3	<p>Benefits: Provides stretch and challenge to countries that will enable them to improve their QA systems.</p> <p>Costs: Countries will have to take action to meet the new requirements, which will have a small resource implication as there would be for governance of the additional monitoring role.</p> <p>Unintended consequences: The more stretching requirement may discourage some countries from implementing EQAVET.</p> <p>Feasibility: The option only requires changes to the EQAVET Recommendation. However, opposition by some countries may make it more difficult to implement.</p>

Option	Benefits	Costs	Unintended consequences	Feasibility	Description
EQAVET Option 5: Aligning HE and VET instruments, with an ambition of converging systems across HE and VET	2	-1	-1	2	<p>Benefits: The option will improve the consistency of QA arrangements in HE and VET, while also ensuring that good and effective practice from the ESG can be incorporated in EQAVET</p> <p>Costs: The costs would not be substantial, as it would only require the development of a new overarching QA Recommendations and revisions to the EQAVET Recommendation. Depending on its feasibility, the development of a network of QA agencies in VET may however incur additional costs.</p> <p>Unintended consequences: May be resistance to implementing these changes, particularly if it is perceived that VET is applying HE processes and that the Commissioning is over-reaching. This could discourage buy-in</p> <p>Feasibility: The proposed option is feasible as it does not require new governance arrangements or significant changes to legislation. The key challenge may be to gain HE buy-in for the changes.</p>

Option	Benefits	Costs	Unintended consequences	Feasibility	Description
EQAVET Option 6: Introduction of a voluntary certification system for national QA systems	5	-4	-3	2	<p>Benefits: This option will raise standards in QA by introducing more challenging provisions and creating a certification system for countries that have high quality systems in place. The sharing of comparator data will allow countries to identify areas of improvement and sharing effective practice on their areas of strength. This in turn will increase mutual trust.</p> <p>Costs: Some countries will incur costs for changing QA arrangements to gain certification and to meet the more stretching standards. The Commission will also incur costs in maintaining the certification scheme and in collecting and sharing data from all Member States.</p> <p>Unintended consequences: The more stringent requirements may discourage some countries from implementing the recommendation. There is a risk that it may also discourage countries from implementing new QA arrangements in CVET and WBL, as these sectors have a more fragmented provider base which makes it more difficult to implement QA systems consistently.</p> <p>Feasibility: Some countries would be reluctant to have their VET performance data shared and to have a more prescriptive set of QA requirements included in a recommendation. This is likely to mean it will be difficult to have the recommendation approved.</p>

8.6 Delphi survey respondents' assessment

In the Delphi survey, participants were asked to discuss:

- The current effectiveness of EQAVET and ECVET in achieving their policy objectives
- The feasibility, costs and potential benefits for options for EU-level actions to increase the impact of EQAVET and ECVET
- What they felt was the preferred option.

The Delphi survey was undertaken in two stages. The first survey asked respondents about the strengths and weaknesses of the instruments, and the impact of a broader set of scenarios in increasing the impact of the tools. The second survey asked respondents to rate four ECVET options, five options for EQAVET and the potential feasibility of more ambitious changes to the two instruments.

8.6.1 Stakeholder feedback from questionnaire 1

Questionnaire 1 received responses from 10 individuals in eight countries (Austria, Denmark, Ireland, France, Latvia, Germany, Sweden and Slovakia). It included six individuals that were experts on ECVET and four individuals that were experts in EQAVET. Most responses were representatives of national government departments and agencies or external consultants specialising in the national implementation of EU lifelong learning instruments.

8.6.1.1 Impact on national policies and systems

Most countries believed that ECVET has some impact on national systems. In total:

- Six of the eight respondents agreed that ECVET has some impact on creating a better-quality mobility experience and the remaining two strongly agreed
- Four respondents agreed that it helped strengthen the learning outcomes based approach in the country and two strongly agreed (the remaining two noted no impact)
- Four respondents agreed it supported the development of more vocational pathways, and two strongly agreed (the remainder noted no impact)

There was however no consensus on the scale of impact of ECVET. Four respondents reported that it has influenced between a third and half of countries, whereas the remainder reported that it had only influenced a few countries.

At an international level, the most common impact of ECVET was in circulating knowledge of how the tools could be used effectively. All but one of the respondents agreed this was a benefit of the ECVET recommendation. Only a half of respondents agreed that ECVET have helped overcome country resistance to utilising unitised learning in VET, implementing credit systems or providing practical tools for countries to implement the system.

The two most common factors that inhibited the impact of ECVET was reported to be the perception of ECVET as a credit system and low awareness and understanding of ECVET among policy makers and practitioners. This largely reflects the findings from the key informant interviews.

For EQAVET, most respondents agreed that the instrument has some impact on their national QA system. However, the area where it impacted most varied by country:

- Three of the six respondents agreed that it resulting in the country introducing new indicators to their QA measures and one respondent strongly agreed
- Two of the six respondents reported that it helped strength QA measures and resulted in the country adopting requirements for institution self-assessment, while one respondent strongly agreed

- One respondent reported that it helped align national QA systems to a European reference framework, with the remainder believing it had no impact.
- The findings largely reflected that countries have implemented different elements of EQAVET, depending on their starting point. Countries that did not have a system for institution self-assessment reported this was a major impact, but other countries already had these systems in place.
- All but one of the respondents believed that the recommendation has some impact in between a third and a half of all countries, with two respondents reporting it had a significant impact. All but one of the respondents reported that this was due to the networking that takes place between countries and the information sharing through PLAs.

8.6.2 How to increase the impact of the two instruments

For ECVET, six of the eight respondents reported that the impact of the instrument could be increased by better highlighting the benefits of flexible learning that the tools would help achieve. Additionally, five of eight respondents also reported that the technical specification and use of credit points should not be promoted as part of the instruments but rather as tools that can be used to support implementation.

For EQAVET, most respondents (four of six) reported that the impact of the instrument could be increased by highlighting where QA could support national priorities and strengthen the exchanges about QA in the learning environment and teaching practice. Three respondents also reported that the exchange of QA models in WBL should also be strengthened.

8.6.3 Feedback on initial scenarios

For ECVET, the Delphi survey found:

- Five respondents reported there were benefits from including ECVET in a broader VET policy framework. The most commonly reported benefit of this approach was that it would strengthen the link between the other instruments and also raise awareness of the common concepts that link the instruments.
- Four of the six respondents also reported value in limiting the scope of the instrument as it would ensure the instrument focuses on mobility where it adds the most value. However, all but one respondent believed the lack of specific focus on the instrument could inhibit impact and 'be a step back'
- Two respondents also supported the proposal for aligning ECVET with HE instruments. The main reported benefit of this approach was that it would increase permeability between HE and VET. However, this overall this was perceived to be the option most difficult to implement as the systems in HE and VET differ drastically, and implementation would also require the support of HE stakeholders.
- None of the survey respondents expressed a preference for the enhanced status quo. Some respondents felt that it would signal a lack of ambition from the Commission. Others felt that that the instruments have largely served their purpose as a 'change agent' and the future impact of the instruments in their current form would be limited.
- For EQAVET, the Delphi found:
 - Two of the six respondents believed the status quo should continue. As one stated "*why change a winning formula?*". However, two respondents also reported that they would feel it would unlikely result in a significant increase in activity on EQAVET as most countries believe their VET systems are in line with the current recommendation

- Three of the respondents supported linking EQAVET to a wider European strategy framework. They believed that QA underpins all VET developments and this link should be more explicit. None of the survey respondents highlighted any negative impacts of this recommendation
- There was limited support for the other options. Only one respondent believed the focus on the instrument should be limited, and not believed it should be discontinued. There was also a general consensus that introducing an external body to peer review national QA arrangements would lead to resistance among Member States

8.6.4 Stakeholder feedback from questionnaire 2

Survey 2 received responses from six respondents from six countries (Austria, Ireland, France, Latvia, Luxembourg and Sweden). This included four of the countries that responded to the first survey.

8.6.4.1 Assessment of ECVET options

For ECVET, the option that was reported to have the highest impact was **Option 2** (embedding the functions of ECVET within other VET instruments. Three of the six respondents reported this would have a significant impact, as it would strengthen ECVET by making it mandatory in the VET mobility charter. However, four respondents also reported that it would be possible to implement Option 2 alongside Option 3 (wider VET strategy framework). The main benefits of the option was to improve the use of ECVET for mobility and to increase synergy with other VET instruments.

One respondent reported that their preferred option was to align HE and VET credit systems. They believed that as ECTS is well-established it should be rolled out to VET. This in turn was felt likely to increase permeability. However, four of the remaining six respondents believed that this would be unrealistic as it would require countries to make major changes to their system and would not be used by countries that already have well-established national credit systems for VET.

One interview also reported that the status quo would have the greatest impact when compared to the other options. This was because they believed having a specific recommendation and governance structure would increase country focus on implementing the recommendation.

In the survey the cost for options 1-3 were largely felt to be consistent. In all surveys they only varied by 1-2 on a five-point scale. However, the cost of option 4 was substantially higher as it was felt to require countries to make major changes to their VET systems and also require new tools to support its implementation in VET

- The Delphi survey also identified some scope to introduce more ambitious changes to the instrument. It found:
- Three of the six respondents reported that there was significant or major country willingness to introduce more explicit documentation on learners being able to use assessed learning outcomes and to align ECVET and Europass documentation. Two respondents also believed there was scope of providing more specificity of the format of learning outcomes.
- These respondents also believed the changes would have a significant or major impact on country VET systems (denoted as 4 or 5 on a five-point scale).
- However, a similar proportion of interviews reported that these changes would not be feasible (scoring 2 or lower on a five-point scale).

8.6.4.2 Assessment of EQAVET options

- For EQAVET, the option with that was perceived to have the highest benefit was Option 4 (introducing a peer-review process of QA at VET system level). Three of the four respondents reported that this would have the highest impact of all

the options excluding option 6. The cost of implementing the option was also felt to be relatively low (less than 2 on a five-point scale).

- One respondent also believed the status quo was the most beneficial option. They felt that it would create the most simplified landscape, which in turn would encourage take-up.
- There was also significant support for Option 3. This was also felt to have reasonable benefits and the cost of implementation and unintended were low (less than 2 on a five-point scale). It was also felt to have the greatest impact on encouraging networking, which in the first survey was identified as the most significant determinant that supported impact.
- The Delphi also found that two of the four respondents believed there was some national support (rated as 3 or above on a five-point scale) for providing data on some indicators to be shared with other countries for comparison purposes, and for more explicit external assessment requirements. However, other respondents reported low support for these measures. This reflects the findings from the stakeholder workshops, which suggested there were some countries that would support this proposal but others that would not. The survey also identified that there was little support for certification system for national VET systems, with no country rating this as higher than 2 on a five-point scale,

8.7 Overall assessment

A summary of the assessment of the five ECVET and six EQAVET options is presented below, which brings together the findings from the assessment and the Delphi survey.

8.7.1 ECVET options

As shown in 0, the option that has the largest benefits is Option 5, followed by Option 4 and Option 3. However, both Option 5 and Option 4 have high implementation costs, and are less feasible compared to other options. Both also have potentially high unintended consequences - for Option 4 there is likely to be resistance to using the credit points used in ECTS and for Option 5 the more stretching requirements for implementing common descriptions of (units of) learning outcomes and transferring learning outcomes may deter some countries from implementing the instrument.

Options 1 and 2 will also bring some benefits and have few unintended consequences, as they address some weaknesses that are inhibiting or discouraging countries from implementing elements of the recommendation. However, the benefits are low as the options are unlikely to engage countries that believe the costs of modular design and assessment do not outweigh the benefits. For Option 2, there is also a risk that the lack of specific focus on ECVET would inhibit implementation.

The table shows that **Option 3 is the most effective option**. It provides significant benefits in terms of increasing the synergy with other lifelong learning instruments, which in turn will encourage take up as it is seen to complement other EU priorities and instruments, as well as benefits from addressing obvious weaknesses with the instrument. The option will also provide some efficiency savings and will also be feasible to implement. However, as indicated in the Delphi survey, this will likely achieve a higher impact if **combined with Option 2**.

Table 27. Summary of ECVET option appraisal

Option	Benefits	Costs	Unintended consequences	Feasibility
ECVET Option 1: Enhanced status quo	1	0	0	5
ECVET Option 2: Embedding ECVET into other existing EU instrument and programmes	2	1	-1	4
ECVET Option 3: Instruments become part of a broader European policy strategy framework for VET	3	1	-1	4
ECVET Option 4: Align VET and HE instruments to each other	3	-4	-3	2
ECVET Option 5: European framework for transfer of learning achievements and flexible progression pathways	5	-5	-2	2

8.7.2 EQAVET

For EQAVET, Table 28 shows that the options that would have the greatest benefits are Option 4 and Option 6. Both these options would work to raise standards in QA, with Option 4 promoting a peer review process that enables countries to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their QA systems, and Option 6 resulting in countries refining their QA systems to achieve certification. However, both options would incur high costs for countries and Option 6 would also incur high costs for the Commission to administer a certification process.

For Option 6, some countries may also be resistant to sharing and participating in a certification process. As a consequence, there would be significant unintended consequences of some countries deciding not to implement the EQAVET recommendation. Country resistance also makes the option relatively unfeasible compared to the other options.

Option 3 and Option 5 also provide significant benefits, and both have few unintended consequences. Option 4 is however likely to be more difficult to implement, as it will require HE support for the changes and to consider aligning their QA arrangements to those in VET.

Option 1 and Option 2 are not expected to provide significant benefits. In Option 1, most countries already believe they are compliant with EQAVET and consequently there would be little stimulus to undertake further reforms. Option 2 would improve alignment with EQF implementation, but will also result in less specificity in EU-level cooperation in QA. This may increase awareness of the importance of QA, but could result in greater divergence of national QA systems which may ultimately reduce standards. However, both instruments would not incur any significant costs, with Option 2 potentially resulting in some cost savings. Both would also be feasible to implement.

The table shows that **Option 4 is the option which has been mostly positively assessed by the stakeholders**. It provides the greatest benefits in terms of increasing the quality of QA arrangements while also supporting peer learning and the maintenance of a team of experts that can stimulate developments in Member States. The costs of implementing the option are low and it is relatively feasible to implement.

It was also the preferred option in the Delphi survey. It also fits well in the context of the creation of a European Education Area and the Council Recommendation on automatic recognition of diplomas and learning periods abroad. This option 4 could also be organised as part of a broader strategy framework for VET (**option 3**) which would make it coherent with the most effective options for ECVET.

Table 28. Summary of EQAVET options appraisal

Option	Benefits	Costs	Unintended consequences	Feasibility
EQAVET Option 1: Enhanced Status Quo	1	0	0	5
EQAVET Option 2: Embedding the instrument into existing EU policy instruments	1	1	-3	4
EQAVET Option 3: Instruments become part of a broader policy strategy framework for VET	2	1	-1	4
EQAVET Option 4: Strengthening the Recommendation and implementing peer review of country developments	4	-1	-1	4
EQAVET Option 5: Aligning HE and VET instruments, with an ambition of converging systems across HE and VET	2	-1	-1	2
EQAVET Option 6: Introduction of a voluntary certification system for national QA systems	5	-4	-3	2

9 Conclusions

In this chapter the key findings of the study are brought together to address the aims of the study and provide some recommendations.

9.1 Influence of the two tools on national policies and systems

EQAVET has played an important role in raising the profile of QA in many countries, which has resulted in 19 countries making major changes to their QA arrangements for VET, including self-assessment requirements for providers, of which 11 designed new QA systems specifically based on the requirements of the recommendation. It has also been found to have supported at least three countries with more established systems to review their systems against EU good practice in QA and to make changes that reflect EQAVET principles.

Most Member States also use indicators at a system and provider level. However, the type and number of indicators and indicative descriptors used varies significantly by country. Some indicators such as 3 and 4 were used by nearly all countries, whereas others such as 6A and 6B, 9B and 10B were used by less than seven Member States. In some cases, this is due to resource constraints or a lack of data making it difficult to use certain indicators, but a few countries also felt that some indicators, such as the amount of funding invested in teacher training (2B) and unemployment rates, were not appropriate for their national VET system.

Indicative descriptors are also widely used, with over half of countries reporting that they are 'always used' at a system level across all stages of the quality cycle and just under half saying they are 'always used' at a provider level. However, the indicators are far more commonly used in the planning and implementation phase rather than the evaluation and review stage. This means that the lessons from monitoring may not be consistently applied to inform future programmes.

ECVET has had a particularly strong influence on national strategies and plans for VET qualifications in five countries. It has also contributed towards supporting more flexible vocational pathways and the accumulation of learning outcomes achieved in formal learning and NFIL in a few other countries. Even so, it is recognised that its contribution to increasing flexible learning pathways for upskilling and reskilling could be greater.

ECVET is also acknowledged to have enabled learning from trans-national mobility to be recognised for progression. It is widely used across all countries for VET mobility, with most countries reporting that their VET providers use the instrument to record, describe and plan learners' mobility experience. In some countries this has created a shift where learning outcomes undertaken abroad can now contribute to a learner's VET qualification, while also ensuring the mobility experience is better structured, organised and quality assured.

Compared to EQAVET, ECVET has received less universal support from countries. This stems principally from some countries continuing to perceive the instrument as a 'credit system', despite the efforts made by the Commission to describe it more broadly as a unitised approach to VET which supports flexible learning.

From the research including the discussions about the options for ECVET and EQAVET, there are some areas where more work needs to be done to ensure the recommendations achieve their objectives of influencing and improving countries VET systems.

For EQAVET this includes

- Ensuring QA systems are used more comprehensively in CVET and WBL at all levels. At present there is a perception that country implementation has primarily been in school-based learning, and when used in CVET and WBL its implementation is inconsistent. This is largely because there are particular

challenges to using EQAVET in these sectors. For CVET, provision is commonly delivered by professional bodies and smaller providers, which have less resources to implement comprehensive QA systems. For WBL, engaging and motivating employers to undertake QA was considered a challenge, with some national authorities fearing it would reduce demand to take on apprentices.

- Ensuring that the QA approaches that providers employ meet a consistent standard. Although widely implemented, most national authorities felt the way EQAVET was implemented by providers varies considerably. This in part reflects the relative newness of the requirements to providers in many countries and the variability of support. However, there is also evidence of providers making pragmatic decisions about the indicators they choose to use to minimise their workload/cost.
- For EQAVET, the flexibility afforded by the Recommendation has resulted in variation in country approaches. In particular, there are significant differences in the external monitoring of providers that is conducted, which can range from a light-touch approach to in-depth audits to determine funding allocation and permission to deliver VET. The lack of specificity on what indicators providers should use as a priority also enables providers to use a broad range of indicators, even among similar providers in a country.

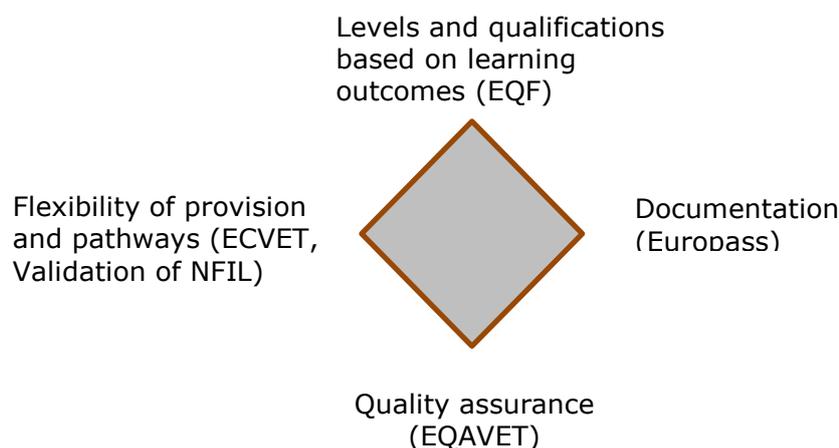
This is perhaps unsurprising and reflects that while the first step has been to gain country buy-in and support for the implementation of QA systems in all countries, the next step is to evolve and continually improve these QA systems.

For ECVET this includes:

- Ensuring better promotion and marketing of ECVET, and a consistent communication of its objectives and mission. The term ECVET has a negative connotation among several groups of stakeholders; this phenomenon dates back to the early days of ECVET. This will remain unless either its name is changed, or the acronym is heavily promoted with a new name (e.g. "European Cooperation in VET principles" or similar).
- Ensuring that ECVET tools (MoU, LA) are being further developed in line with changing requirements so that they can continue to be used effectively by national authorities, providers and learners (digital/interactive solutions).

9.2 Alignment to other VET policies

There are clear linkages between EQAVET and ECVET and the other EU tools related to VET and Lifelong Learning. Together they support mutual trust and recognition of learning through developing a consistent process for describing qualifications (using learning outcomes and levels), having documentation to make this visible (Europass) and enabling flexible VET pathways that support engagement and achievement (through ECVET and VNIL). All this is underpinned by the application of consistent, high-quality QA arrangements in Member States.



It is evident that the Commission has largely implemented these Recommendations holistically, with the revision to the EQF Recommendation including explicit reference to ECVET and EQAVET, and the 2008 Recommendation included reference to the CQAF. There was a general consensus among country stakeholders that understanding the QA arrangements in countries and having high standards in place was imperative for mutual trust and that the improvement in QA arrangements was helping to build trust.

However, this study has drawn out a few areas where there are opportunities for greater synergy which could be exploited. These are:

- At EU level, work on further integration between ECVET tools (MoU, LA), Europass tools (Europass Mobility, Certificate Supplement) and, for Erasmus-funded activities, the Erasmus+ Mobility Tool could be taken forward. The use of MoU and LA could be turned into a requirement for VET Mobility Charter holders.
- Some stakeholders have the perception that the instruments are being implemented as initiatives in their own right, rather than as a coherent set of pillars of a wider plan for supporting high-quality VET. There is some evidence in countries that the implementation of the various VET instruments has been compartmentalised which in some cases, has inhibited linkages at a national level; for example, of EQAVET not being considered alongside reforms to CVET or as a crucial component for ensuring the Quality and Effectiveness of Apprenticeships. By way of contrast though there was evidence in some countries that the linkages were being well made. In several countries, there were strong links between the implementation of ECVET to underpin the development of the NQF.

9.3 Enablers and barriers that support implementation

This can be considered in relation to the Commission and Member States.

From the **Commission's** work, a key activity that has supported the implementation of EQAVET and ECVET has been the communities of practice that have arisen from governance groups and PLAs. These communities of practice have ensured there is a more common understanding of the VET systems and QA requirements in Member States, while also facilitating peer learning and cooperation.

For both instruments, there is a general consensus among interviewees that peer learning was essential for implementation. Peer learning, and most notably the PLAs, were felt to play a key role in terms of identifying how to practically implement the recommendations, while also providing an opportunity for the Commission to clarify the connections between the instruments and new and emerging EU policies and priorities.

For EQAVET, the Commission's implementation of a Recommendation was also felt to be a key enabler in supporting some countries to implement QA. In many countries, QA was not a key priority, potentially because its benefits are less visible than other initiatives. The Recommendation was felt to play a key role in raising the profile of QA and mobilising stakeholders to implement change to QA systems, as well as providing a common language with which countries can discuss QA.

There was also widespread consensus that the high level of countries' buy-in to EQAVET was attributed to some extent to the 'toolbox' approach for implementation. Providers could use the indicators that had most value to their national situation. While this was potentially necessary to gain traction, it has however resulted in significant variations in practice which were not intended.

A barrier for EQAVET was a perception that the instrument is primarily for school-based VET. This was attributed to the NRP group generally containing national authorities in IVET, as well as the Recommendation itself making little specific reference to CVET and WBL and the indicators not specifically including measures for effective WBL (which could draw on the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships).

For ECVET, the provision of funding opportunities for ECVET implementation activities (most notably through the Lifelong Learning Programme and Erasmus+), especially in the early years of ECVET development and implementation (e.g. through the two 'generations' of ECVET pilot projects) was considered to have created a valuable knowledge base and experience of implementing ECVET principles, both in the context of transnational mobility and lifelong learning.

For ECVET, the Commission has striven to overcome some negative perceptions with positive results though there remain some countries who do not see the value of reform and do not support change. The biggest barrier which is well known to the Commission is the lack of support for credit points. This was not helped by the way in which ECVET was communicated in its early days and the use of the term 'credit system' in the recommendation.

From **Member States'** perspectives, the enablers/barriers tend to be around opportunities, fit to current VET systems, resources and support within the country, and perceptions of policy makers.

For EQAVET, gaining political support to implement changes to QA systems is a major barrier, as QA is generally considered less of a priority to countries than other more visible EU-level initiatives such as EQF and Europass. For the indicators the barriers tend to be around resources. Some countries' providers cannot collect information on, graduate destinations and employer satisfaction because of the costs of collecting the information.

For ECVET, there are similar challenges in gaining political support and resourcing changes. There are particular concerns in some countries about the implementation of unit-based or modular learning which can increase the number (and cost) of assessment. In quite a large number Member States ECVET champions struggled to find a suitable way to promote implementation of ECVET principles at national level and effectively link it to national policy priorities. In many Member States it has been far easier to find opportunities to implement ECVET for the recognition in transnational learner mobility than for developing flexible learning pathways. In some cases, the fragmentation of agencies at national level did not facilitate implementation because it did not exploit the synergy between ECVET and other EU policy initiatives (e.g. EQF, EQAVET, VNIL, Europass).

For both instruments there is also a challenge in engaging providers to practically use the instruments. This is particularly apparent among CVET and adult learning providers, where the diversity of the provider base (encompassing professional bodies, community learning providers, and private organisations) makes them difficult to engage and influence at a national level. As these providers are also typically smaller than IVET providers, some have limited capacity to make such substantial changes to the design and structure of their vocational qualifications and their QA system.

9.3.1 The option for EQAVET

As a result of the options appraisal it is **suggested to implement peer reviews of Member States' quality assurance arrangements in VET at system level (Option 4)** to take forward the implementation of EQAVET and fully achieve its intentions. In this option a group comprising Member States, supported by a Secretariat, will review by mutual agreement country QA systems to identify strengths and areas of improvement, based on the expectations in the EQAVET

recommendation. This option would achieve the highest benefits of the options considered. In particular it will:

- Provide stretch and challenge to encourage countries to improve and further develop their QA systems by learning from other Member States;
- Increase mutual trust by sharing information on their QA systems;
- Improve compliance with the EQAVET framework tools (indicators, indicative descriptors and the quality cycle), by enabling countries to identify how areas of improvement could be implemented;
- Help to take forward implementation of the indicative descriptors so that they are more comprehensively adopted and more often used in the planning and review stage.

Alongside taking forward this option, there are elements of the other options which could also be applied to support the implementation of EQAVET. These are:

- Having an overarching governance group that oversees EQAVET alongside other EU LLL instruments that apply to VET. This could be through ACVT or another group. The group would be responsible for setting annual work programmes for EQAVET and other instruments. The current NRP group could continue as a specialist subgroup of the main group tasked with implementing the annual work programme, with support from the secretariat. This ought to increase awareness and buy-in for EQAVET in Member States while also ensuring EU funding can be better aligned to European VET priorities and countries implement EU LLL policies in VET more holistically.
- Changing the technical specification of the recommendation to include the proposals in EQAVET+, strengthening the requirements for external reviews and changing the list of indicators to include some mandatory indicators and others that are optional. These changes will improve the consistency with which countries use EQAVET indicators at a system and provider level.
- Conducting research on QA approaches and indicators that are proportional for smaller CVET providers. This could include using a smaller set of indicators that are less resource intensive for CVET providers to collect.

9.3.2 The option for ECVET

Following the options appraisal, it is **suggested to integrate ECVET, alongside EQAVET, in a wider policy strategy framework for VET (Option 3)** to reinvigorate the use of ECVET principles to support flexible learning pathways that enhance lifelong learning. This would include having an overarching governance group setting out an annual work programme alongside and complementary to other instruments. The main benefit of this option is that it:

- Continues to promote the ECVET principles for flexible and responsive VET provision that underpin all developments in VET. This should help ensure more synergy between the implementation of the ECVET principles and the implementation of the EQF and validation of non-formal and informal learning, as well as ensuring that the ECVET principles are recognised for developing and documenting flexible learning that can support VET policies such as Upskilling Pathways, Erasmus+, ErasmusPro and Europass.
- Provides a forum to raise awareness of the benefits of the ECVET principles in supporting lifelong learning and mobility, as well as the role that the ECVET principles can play in supporting other EU policy developments such as Upskilling Pathways. This should encourage more countries to use ECVET principles, including those that have previously been resistant to implementing the recommendation.

Alongside this, there are additional elements which could also be applied to support the implementation of this option. These include:

- Remove or revise the concept and definition of ECVET points and reference to credit systems from the on-going definition of credit systems in VET. Principles could be revised along the lines of 'principles for flexible vocational learning pathways'. This will remove the perception that ECVET is a 'system' which must be fully implemented, and instead embolden countries to apply particular ECVET elements that they feel would add value to their qualifications. Moreover, it might also encourage countries that are resistant to implementing a credit system to apply some ECVET principles to their VET programmes.
- Strengthening the requirement of ECVET tools in transnational mobility by making the use of MoU and LA a requirement for VET Mobility Charter holders and making the tools digital and interactive. This will ensure that the tools are used by all learners undertaking mobility studies. The MoU and LA should be considered part of the Europass documentation, as it relates to mobility, rather than being ECVET tools.
- Supporting a new generation of pilot projects to promote and demonstrate how ECVET principles can be used to address current issues related to flexible and individualised learning pathways. These would be expected to change perceptions and unlock blockages in implementing ECVET principles, such as in validating learning outcomes in VET programmes without units/modules, and adapt credit achieved in VET so that it can be transferred to HE and vice versa.
- Taking further action to improve the consistency of how learning outcomes are described. Although learning outcomes are widely used, the terminology and language can be inconsistent which makes it difficult for units of learning outcomes to be transferred by the learner to another VET provider. This could include developing a framework using pre-defined action verbs and structure or syntax, linked to ESCO terminology.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Country factsheets

Austria

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

Since 2009, Austria has made some adjustments to its QA framework for school-based IVET, in order to reflect the EQAVET framework. The framework includes references to objectives, guiding principles, priorities and structures as part of a quality cycle, but now also includes indicators. CVET and WBL are seen as heterogeneous sector and as a result, there is no general framework for QA at a provider level.

System-level QA arrangements

The national framework for quality assurance in school-based VET in Austria is called QIBB (Qualitätsinitiative Berufsbildung). QIBB was launched in 2004 and therefore pre-dates the EQAVET recommendation⁸⁴. Nevertheless, it was developed from 2004 up to 2009 in-line with the recommendation. QIBB is the quality management system for some 700 schools, including the 150 VET part-time schools that are one part (about 20%) of the dual system/apprenticeship training. QIBB is based on self-evaluation – up to now there is no compulsory external evaluation. But the QIBB framework includes quality management instruments to ensure that the self-evaluation is completed in a systematic, transparent and target driven way⁸⁵.

For the company-based part of the apprenticeship training (which is about 80 % of the entire training), the Federal Ministry of Economy is responsible for QA.

“Lehrlingsstellen” (apprenticeship offices) evaluate the quality requirements, and provide ongoing QA for companies that would like to provide training to apprentices. The ibw institute is support structure for the apprenticeship-leave examination (LAP) by designing the exam questions and tasks. For CVET, there is a national QA scheme (Ö-Cert) that has an umbrella function for regional quality assurance schemes such as OÖ Qualitätssiegel (in the state of Upper Austria) or Cert-NÖ (in the state of Lower Austria)⁸⁶.

Provider-level QA arrangements

In school-based IVET, each school is expected to undertake a self-evaluation process, based on the quality cycle (plan-do-check-act)⁸⁷. This takes place annually and results in a quality report, which includes strategic and operational actions for quality improvement. The agreement on future objectives is completed in the form of a management and performance review between the two management levels, for example a regional school inspector and the headmaster of a school.

Self-evaluation in Austria is supported by an online platform which provides standardised evaluation tools such as questionnaires, survey grids and guidelines, therefore ensuring the approach used by schools is consistent and transparent.

In CVET and apprenticeship training, there are not any requirements for evaluation and review for non-state CVET providers. Although the Ö-Cert certification scheme

⁸⁴ <https://www.qibb.at/de/English>

⁸⁵ This includes Mission Statements; Quality Matrix which covers long/medium term objectives, measures, outcomes and indicators; Quality Focuses; Definition of Key Processes; Evaluation (individual feedback; system feedback; Evaluation platform and Peer Review in QIBB); Quality Reports at the school. Regional and Federal Level and Personal Development for VET Staff.

⁸⁷ <https://www.qibb.at/de/English>

does include some quality assurance elements, they do not correspond to the EQAVET descriptors.⁸⁸

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

Before 2013, ECVET implementation focused largely on EU/mobility projects. Legislation allows recognition of learning/work placement periods abroad. In 2014, a comprehensive national ECVET implementation strategy⁸⁹ was presented that aimed to employ the added value of ECVET also beyond mobility projects to foster permeability and transparency within the national qualifications system. The strategy was subdivided into partial strategies that focus on specific aspects of the E&T system⁹⁰.

Some initiatives have been started regarding the use of ECVET-principles for lifelong learning (e.g. in the context of recognition of prior learning from VET in HE or the validation of non-formal and informal learning in healthcare professions). Other goals include the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning and the use of ECVET as a 'currency' for CVET.

There are developments that point towards increased modularisation and reconciliation with the topic of validation (i.e. the recognition of non-formally or informally acquired learning outcomes for achieving a formal qualification).

Use of the learning outcomes approach

Significant progress has been made during the past several years in implementing the principle of learning outcomes in Austrian VET. New, learning-outcomes-based curricula for VET schools and colleges have been developed. Developments are also visible in the area of dual VET. These developments happened in connection with the 'BIST' initiative (development of educational standards) and other European initiatives, such as the EQF, ECVET and VNIL.⁹¹

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

First steps towards more flexible VET have been taken. In Austria, modularised structures can only be found currently in some segments of the formal education system, i.e. partially modularised apprenticeship training qualifications and the creation of modular vocational degrees. VET schools for people in employment have switched to a modular structure in 2011 already; also, add-on courses have a modular design.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

Austria currently does not have an explicit national credit transfer system in VET. However, there are credit arrangements in the form of regulations governing the crediting of learning outcomes if learners change between training institutions and/or training levels. Most of these regulations refer to the crediting of learning times and are based on a comparison of curricula or training plans.

⁸⁸ <https://www.eqavet.eu/Equavet2017/media/publications/Annex-1-country-reports-finalised.pdf?ext=.pdf>

⁸⁹

https://bildung.erasmusplus.at/fileadmin/Dokumente/bildung.erasmusplus.at/Policy_Support/ECVET_Expertinnen/2014-04-07_Strategiepapier_ECVET_in_AT.pdf

⁹⁰ As of October 2018, no information is available as to how the 2014 ECVET strategy will be followed up upon in the years to come.

⁹¹ Auzinger, Monika & Luomi-Messerer, Karin (2017): Lernergebnisorientierung in der österreichischen Berufsbildung - Status quo. 3s research laboratory (im Auftrag des Bundesministeriums für Bildung). http://3s.co.at/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/lo-orientierung_in_der_oesterr.bb_3s_2017.pdf

ECVET points have not been implemented/operationalised in Austria yet. This might change, though, as there are ongoing discussions about the feasibility of assigning ECVET points to the fourth and fifth grade of VET colleges. Depending on the outcome of this exercise, this could help in communicating the benefit of credit points, and how they could be used in the future.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

Increased promotion of quality assurance in VET learner mobilities can be directly traced back to ECVET developments. This applies to transnational mobilities as well as national compulsory internships: The Ministry of Education is currently developing tools to support the quality of compulsory work placements in upper-secondary school-based VET on the basis of ECVET tools.

Learning outcomes are the core elements but practitioners face challenges in formulating learning outcomes to be achieved and assessed during mobility abroad. Units of learning outcomes are rarely defined and ECVET points are not used at all, because they have currently no relevance in the Austrian VET system.

Learning Agreements are commonly used in ECVET-based mobility projects; the Memorandum of Understanding and the Personal Transcript are not widely used, and there is still a lack of clarity among users as to which documents are needed for which purpose.⁹²

Legislation allows recognition of learning/work placement periods abroad. However, there is no automatic validation and recognition of learning outcomes; reassessment at national level (double assessment) takes place, if required.

⁹² Based on outcomes from a project that aimed to collect experiences in which ECVET principles and tools are used to identify needs for improving the services provided by national ECVET experts.
http://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/system/files/magazines/en/ecvet_mag_30.pdf

Belgium (French speaking)

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

In BE-fr there is no common approach to QA at a regional level⁹³. The historical development of education in Belgium through the autonomy given to education providers means that providers themselves are responsible for maintaining quality. However, priority has been given to EQAVET principles in an ongoing reform of VET across Belgium Wallonia, although some, QA elements were delayed to ensure teaching staff were not overburdened with changes, and because VET providers do not want to stop using their own QA approaches.

System-level QA arrangements

System level QA arrangements exist. Since 2003, The Education System Steering Committee collects pupil data on progression, and makes proposals based on how the system is functioning and the results. There is also an inspectorate body to evaluate and QA the performance of teachers; VET providers and the whole system. The inspectorate review annual monitoring reports developed at the provider level, and regional reports developed by the regional authority, to produce recommendations.

There is no legal basis for external reviews of providers, but this may be requested by training providers – the inspections can take place at an institutional level, a class level, or on a cluster of institutions.

Provider-level QA arrangements

VET providers are responsible to undertake own self-assessment, including monitoring and planning at the provider level. This is used to produce annual activity reports cover monitoring and are then to be used by management staff to inform the school plan. VET providers are required to consider some national indicators, such as pass and failure rates; appeals against decisions taken by class councils and the results; the number/reasons for registration refusals and information about ongoing professional development for teaching staff. This matches some EQAVET indicators.

For CVET, due to a lack of unified quality arrangements, the main providers of CVET have developed their own requirements for training providers to provide QA evidence. This includes systems developed in line with ISO, the EFQM system and the Qfor label.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

In the French-speaking community, a formal decision was taken in 2009 to implement ECVET in parallel with the NQF.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The learning outcomes approach has been adopted from 2011 onwards, with the revision of training profiles, based on units and credit points, as a direct result of the ECVET recommendation.⁹⁴ However, discussions about the shift to learning outcomes had been going on before.

⁹³ <https://www.eqavet.eu/Equavet2017/media/publications/Annex-1-country-reports-finalised.pdf?ext=.pdf>

⁹⁴ ECVET in Europe Monitoring Report 2015

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

Units of learning outcomes have been established in all VET (IVET and adult education) programmes. Modularisation as a basic principle had been envisaged already before 2010, however.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

A credit system has been in use since 2011, as a result of the ECVET Recommendation. It is not widely used in practice.

Validation and recognitions systems are in place among a group of providers in the French-Speaking (Skills Validation Consortium) and Flemish-speaking communities, as a focus is put on internal recognition and accumulation of learning outcomes.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

Recognition takes place on the basis of comparing learning outcomes in training profiles, rather than credits. MoUs and Learning agreements are used in international mobility projects.

Belgium (Dutch speaking)

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

The Decree on Quality in Education of 8 May 2009 defines the overall system-level QA arrangements for VET and adult education⁹⁵, which reflect the EQAVET Framework. A new agency, AKOV, was established in 2009 to have responsibility for QA in Flanders. In 2011, the agency reorganised and changed its name into AHOVOKS (Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications & Study Grants). The EQAVET Framework has enabled Flanders to develop an integrated approach to QA covering both IVET and CVET. However, this has been difficult to integrate due to the various providers of IVET and CVET in Flanders⁹⁶, and this has also meant that changes have taken place at a slower pace⁹⁷.

System-level QA arrangements

External QA on IVET is completed by the Inspectorate, with each school inspected at least once every 6 years. The Flemish Government defines the Framework required for use during inspections. The Inspectorate has used the Context – Input – Process – Output model for use during inspections. The inspectorate publishes annual inspection reports which includes recommendations to Parliament.

A new Decree on External QA for IVET is approved by the Flemish parliament on 14 March 2018. The framework on which the external QA is built is based on 4 components: results and effects, stimulation of development, quality development and policy, all taking into account the context and input of the school.

CVET providers in Flanders are situated in different policy domains (mainly education and work). CVET providers are also subject to external monitoring. Adult Education Centres are inspected by the Inspectorate, Syntra Flanders is externally evaluated by IAVA and by the ESF-agency and VDAB have their own external mechanisms for auditing QA⁹⁸. Syntra Flanders evaluate regional Syntras every three years.

A new Decree on external QA for CVET is in formal procedure of approval in 2018. The aim of the new Decree is to build a system of QA for vocational education and training and validation of non-formal and informal learning which leads to qualification within the national qualifications framework (linked to EQF).

The new QA framework consists of 4 components for the external QA of training programs and the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The 4 components are: learning outcomes, curriculum design, guidance and evaluation.

Provider-level QA arrangements

Providers are required to undertake self-assessments and produce a self-evaluation report. This is used as the bases for the external reviews undertaken by the Inspectorate. CVET providers are expected to monitor their own quality, although they are able to choose how to do this. A number of the providers use the EFQM Framework, developed by Syntras, the Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service (VDAB).

In the new Decree on external QA for CVET each policy domain (mainly education and work) is responsible for the external QA on provider level. The quality requirements

⁹⁵ <https://www.eqavet.eu/Equavet2017/media/publications/Annex-1-country-reports-finalised.pdf?ext=.pdf>

⁹⁶ [https://www.eqavet.eu/Equavet2017/media/Documents/2-BE-\(FL\)_Final-EQAVET-country-information-update.pdf](https://www.eqavet.eu/Equavet2017/media/Documents/2-BE-(FL)_Final-EQAVET-country-information-update.pdf)

⁹⁷ <https://www.eqavet.eu/Equavet2017/media/publications/Annex-1-country-reports-finalised.pdf?ext=.pdf>

⁹⁸ <https://www.nvao.com/quality-assurance-systems/flanders>

and the recognition procedure will be stipulated in further regulation once the Decree is approved by the Flemish parliament.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

The Belgian Flemish-speaking community is closely following the European developments with regard to ECVET, but has not undertaken formal initiatives to implement the system. Priority was given to the NQF development.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The learning outcomes approach was been adopted, however, this is not attributed to the impact of ECVET, but rather to the EQF/NQF developments.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

Adult education is modularised and credit-based, but this is not attributed to ECVET.⁹⁹

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

Validation and recognitions systems are in place among a group of providers in the Flemish-speaking and French-Speaking (Skills Validation Consortium) communities. A credit-point system for IVET is not used.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

ECVET is not used for mobility purposes. However, recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility projects is facilitated through the use of the NQF and other measures.

⁹⁹ Refernet VET in Europe 2016

Bulgaria

Changes made to national QA arrangements

In Bulgaria, EQAVET impact at system level and at provider level has affected the legislative framework - in VET Act amendments from 2014 were included some specific texts setting out the obligations of VET institutions to build an internal quality assurance system. In compliance with the updated legislative framework, a subordinate legislation (Ordinance) was adopted regulating the quality assurance principles, the requirements for the institutions for improvement of the quality management processes, the indicators, the conditions and the order for measuring the achieved quality. This Ordinance has been repealed and a new regulation is in the process of being developed, covering not only VET institutions, but all institutions included in the School and Pre-school Education Act.

The Pre-school and School Education Act (in force since August 2016) establishes quality management processes, including for VET. Quality management is a continuous process of organisational development based on its analysis, planning, implementation and evaluation cycle. The evaluation is performed through biennial self-assessment and inspection.

System-level QA arrangements

In 2012, a national model for QA in VET was developed, which included the 10 EQAVET indicators and requires the use of the quality cycle. The indicators are used at a system-level for monitoring the quality for both IVET. In some cases, new data collection processes were used to gather evidence for the indicators. In CVET, the use of indicators is not mandatory, but providers are required to employ a QA system to obtain a licence to deliver CVET programmes.

Regional management units of the Ministry of Education and Science (territorial administrative units, situated in the 28 district centres) conduct inspections of schools, exploring the planning, organisational, coordination and control functions. The inspectorates also ensure that vocational providers are undertaking self-assessment and other QA activities.

In 2005, the Centre of Control and Assessment of Education and Quality in Bulgaria was developed with the aim of improving internal and external evaluation, and systems for quality control in some IVET providers. The Centre has developed a range of tools to enable 'school based' evaluation.

The National Inspectorate of Education (2018) is a new structure in Bulgaria. This Inspectorate does not exercise control over the activities of directors and teachers in schools and kindergartens but performs an inspection which is the process of preparing a comprehensive independent assessment of the quality of services provided by these institutions at some point of their activities, based on criteria and indicators, grouped into fields.

Provider-level QA arrangements

Head teachers of vocational training providers are required to complete self-assessments on EQAVET based indicators. A manual for self-assessment was established in compliance with the EQAVET cycle and given to providers. Furthermore, an online tool and templates to support self-assessment have been introduced. The tools include data collection and analysis of the results, descriptors and indicators and the proposed scores.

On the website of the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET) there are published guidelines for self-assessment of the quality of the training provided by the VET centres.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

State educational standards for VET – laid out in the VET Act 2016 – were developed according to the principles of the ECVET Recommendation, linking units of learning outcomes with credits in VET.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The learning outcomes approach has been adopted in school education and VET, both for young people and adults.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

The unit-based approach was introduced in Bulgaria upon amendment of the VET Act in 2016. It is used in the so-called State Educational Standards, which include assessment tools and assessment criteria.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

The formulation of 'units of learning outcomes' is now a prerequisite for implementing the procedure of validation and awarding of credits both in training (or validation) leading to the acquisition of a vocational qualification degree or professional qualification for a part of profession.

A credit system and credit transfer exist on paper, but are not used in practice until all VET standards will have the same structure, facilitating assessment of the correspondence between parts of different qualifications. VET standards created before 2014 are currently in the process of being updated.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

ECVET tools were introduced as standard tools for use in mobility projects. While the transcript of records was adopted in its original format, MoUs and LAs were adapted to the Bulgarian system.

Cyprus

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

In Cyprus, policies and procedures for QA are in place at individual educational levels, but there is no national approach. The QA policies in place were developed independently of the EQAVET framework although are aligned to the EQAVET quality cycle, indicative descriptors and indicators.

System-level QA arrangements

QA responsibility is shared between the Department of Secondary Technical and Vocational Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Human Resource Development Authority. QA in Cyprus has been considered important for some time; the EQAVET framework increased the importance of QA and helped facilitate self-assessment in VET and influenced HRDA's QA system. For CVET HRDA quality assured all elements of training provision and the EQAVET framework mainly influenced CVET.

The Inspectorate of the Department of Secondary Technical and Vocational Education conducted periodic external reviews of VET providers. It also collects information on the destination of VET graduates.

Provider-level QA arrangements

At the provider level there is no overarching QA framework that is linked to the EQAVET framework. The HRDA has developed a QA programme for CVET that includes self-assessment used by vocational providers. Stakeholders are involved in QA of CVET providers. For IVET, the Department of Secondary Technical and Vocational Education (STVE) has introduced processes to support provider self-assessments.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

Cyprus has referenced the CYQF to the EQF in 2017 and the Cyprus National Agency for the Erasmus+ Programme, along with the ECVET experts have since started to promote the implementation of ECVET on a policy level more concretely. Use of the learning outcomes approach.

ECVET supported reforming curricula towards a learning outcomes based approach. Until 2020 all IVET and CVET curricula should be learning outcomes based.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and / or partial qualifications

Cyprus is planning to modularise all IVET and CVET curricula until 2020, with ECVET playing a significant role in advancing these developments.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

An ECVET credit point system is being established in Cyprus in order to improve permeability and ease recognition of prior learning. This is the case only for the Secondary Technical and Vocational Education.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

In Cyprus, ECVET plays an increasing role in supporting the quality and recognition of international mobility.

Czech Republic

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

The Czech Republic has devised a national approach to QA independently of the EQAVET Framework, although it is aligned to the EQAVET quality cycle, indicative descriptors and indicators. QA is explicitly mentioned in the Long-term Development Plan for Education and Training 2015-2020. In IVET, the School Act (2004) includes both internal and external evaluation of schools. Internal evaluations are undertaken by schools and the independent Czech School Inspectorate is responsible for external evaluation. External evaluation can also be conducted by the school founder (most often the Regional Authority).

System-level QA arrangements

The national QA system makes provision for the external review of both IVET and CVET providers. The independent Czech School Inspectorate is responsible for external evaluation¹⁰⁰. Its evaluation criteria is based on 'The quality School' framework document (2015) which contains quality measures in the following six areas:

- Conception and framework of the **school**;
- Pedagogical **leadership in school**;
- Quality of the pedagogical staff;
- Educational process (learning and teaching, **educational programme**);
- Educational/learning outcomes and needs of pupils/students;
- Support provided to pupils/students (equal opportunities).

The model includes modifications for each type and level of school.

The inspectorate publishes yearly its evaluation criteria to educational institutions (Criteria for Evaluation of Conditions, Course and Results of Education). In addition the Inspectorate publishes summary comments on the state of the educational system in its annual report.

The national approach applies to IVET and associated work-based learning and CVET. Several EQAVET indicators are being used in the Czech Republic's IVET system and four are used in CVET.

Provider-level QA arrangements

The School Act requires IVET schools to carry out self-evaluation, but the form and criteria to use for self-evaluations are not prescribed in the legislation. The approach reflects the cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation and review. An amendment to the law states that the self-assessment report should form the basis for school's annual report, therefore linking the self-assessment to school governance and management. Evaluations by the school founder are undertaken in accordance with criteria published in advance. The requirement to carry out self-evaluations on an annual basis was removed from the amended legislation in 2011 to help reduce the administrative burden on schools. CVET providers are not required to have any specific quality assurance measures in place.

As part of the recruitment process for school principals, the principal has to draw up a long-term development plan for the institution which is approved by the School Council. Each school has to develop school level curricula in coherence with the National VET Curricula approved by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports for the respective field of study. The director of the school is responsible for the quality of the school curricula. The school curricula are approved by the School Council.

¹⁰⁰ https://www.eqavet.eu/eqavet2017/media/Documents/2-CZ_final_Template-for-updating-info-on-the-EQAVET-website.pdf

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

The Education Act introduced in 2004 a two-stage development of curricula. Curricular documents created on this basis are using learning outcomes approach. The use of units of learning outcomes is also wider thanks to the ECVET Recommendation. And ECVET is also successfully used in international mobility projects.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

All VET courses are described in learning outcomes. In May 2017, overall concept of the National Curricula revision was adopted. The revision at the upper secondary VET level focuses - among others things - on the transparency, permeability, flexibility, quality and interconnecting with National Register of Qualifications.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

The current European emphasis on supporting flexibility of VET pathways and programmes has been projected into the both conception and content of the system project Modernization of Vocational Education and Training (MOV).

Modularisation is a key element of the MOV project. The project team wants to incorporate the ECVET elements into the modules and offer schools different opportunities to respond more flexibly to the labour market needs. The project goal is to create a basis for the use of modules in teaching and training and to motivate schools to use them.

So called vocational qualifications in the National Register of Qualifications (NSK) are based on knowledge, skills and competences. Learning outcome units are not actually explicitly defined as learning outcome units, however, the individual competences, the vocational qualifications described by qualification and assessment standards consist of, can be understood so, as well as clusters of such individual competences.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

Vertical permeability is fostered by the availability of programmes where a VET graduate can obtain the matura certificate allowing to study in tertiary programmes upon passing an entry examination set by the institution.¹⁰¹

The system of recognition and validation of learning outcomes has been developed during the past years. According the Act on Verification and Recognition of Further Education Results any person who has gained certain skills and knowledge in some vocational field may after meeting the relevant requirements, acquire a nationally valid certificate of qualification that is recognised by employers. After collecting all necessary "partial" qualifications forming full qualification, learners can pass the final or "matura" exam and gain level of education allowing him progress for further studies.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

ECVET in the Czech Republic is mainly used for international mobility. There are also trends supporting the use of ECVET principles – especially defining the content of practical training provided in companies through expected learning outcomes and assessment of practical tasks. Implementing ECVET principals was piloted by the national system project POSPOLU (Fostering cooperation of school and companies) between 2012-2015.

¹⁰¹ VET in Europe 2016

Ireland

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

Ireland introduced major reforms to its QA arrangements from 2013, which resulted in the creation of a single organisation responsible for QA in HE and VET (Quality and Qualifications Ireland), as well as the establishment of regional commissioning boards for VET (16 Local Education and Training Boards which rationalised the 33 VECs). The QQI includes a QA framework which was developed independently of EQAVET but is compatible with it, as it includes provision for self-assessments, the quality cycle and the use of indicators.

System-level QA arrangements

At a system level QQI provides intelligence on the quality of provision to the Ireland funding council for VET (SOLAS) and the Department for Education. SOLAS was established in 2011 and introduced a range of performance measures that are used to negotiate targets for regional commissioning authorities. Most of these reflect EQAVET indicators, such as completion rates, placement rates and investment in staff development.

SOLAS has now established the programme and learner support system (PLSS) which will gather learner data from their first engagement with the FET sector¹⁰². Collection will include monitoring learners' destinations on leaving FET. Labour market outcomes (employment, unemployment or inactivity) which will be a key measure in evaluating training programmes designed for labour market entry. Data will be processed and analysed by the recently formed (in 2016) data analytics unit in SOLAS to show the type of FET (including VET) programmes which are best suited to different outcomes.

Provider-level QA arrangements

Within CVET, QA is conducted through provider accreditation and programme validation. Quality Assurance is a condition for accreditation and is becoming a condition for funding. VET providers who wish to offer QQI awards are required to agree their QA with QQI, as prescribed in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education And Training) Act 2012.

For IVET, school-based QA arrangements focus on schools' self-evaluation and external inspections. Self-assessments were formally introduced in 2012 as a collaborative, reflective process for internal school review and improvement¹⁰³. The 2016 quality assurance framework called 'Looking at Our School' for post-primary schools uses a six-step evaluation cycle (identify focus; gather evidence; evaluate and make judgements; write and share report and improvement plan; put improvement plan into action; monitor actions and evaluate impact)¹⁰⁴. The Department of Education and Skills introduced as evaluation initiative for post-primary schools called the 'Whole-School Evaluation-Management, Leadership and Learning' (WSE-MLL). This is a process of external evaluation of the work of post-primary schools carried out by the DES Inspectorate. There is an emphasis on school management, leadership and learning in post-primary schools.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/ireland_-_vet_policy_developments.pdf

¹⁰³ <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/School-Self-Evaluation-Guidelines-2016-2020-Post-Primary.pdf>

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/School-Self-Evaluation-Guidelines-2016-2020-Post-Primary.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Whole-School-Evaluation-Reports-List/>

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

In Ireland, ECVET did not have an impact on VET reform, as a credit based awards system was already in place for VET. ECVET has been used to promote and support international mobility. The ECVET toolkit and principles act as a guide for good practice VET mobility projects.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The use of learning outcomes was common practice already before the introduction of ECVET. ECVET is thus not seen to have had an influence on the use of learning outcomes.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

Ireland has had a modular and credit based VET system for many years, already before ECVET, thus ECVET is not considered to have had a substantial influence on national award systems.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

Ireland has an advanced accreditation system, which was not directly influenced by ECVET. Transfer and recognition of accumulated learning outcomes is possible within the current system.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

ECVET is used to promote the quality of international mobility projects. ECVET mobility tools are used at provider level, and they are encouraged when applying for Erasmus+ funding. Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility is done through the existing national systems, but ECVET also plays a role there.

Germany

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

Germany has a federal QA system, which were formed independently of EQAVET but are in line with the EQAVET framework across IVET, CVET and WBL. The broad QA principles are aligned with the EQAVET Quality cycle, indicative descriptors and indicators.

System-level QA arrangements

The Länder are responsible for school-based VET and are independent in their choice of QA frameworks so although quality assurance is high on the national VET policy agenda, no unilateral QA strategy in VET is in place nationally across Germany and no national institution for quality assurance in VET exists. Given the autonomy of the Länder, national policymakers primarily raise awareness and provide information on the advantages of QA in VET. For WBL, competent bodies such as the Chambers of Industry and Commerce monitor programmes.

Provider-level QA arrangements

The QA requirements of IVET providers are set out in a state's school law and generally monitored by the local school authorities. In a few Länder specialised agencies for quality development are in charge of supervising the vocational schools¹⁰⁶.

Vocational training boards exist in most of the Länder, which bring together relevant stakeholders such as chambers of industry and commerce as well as chambers of crafts and other competent boards. Local chambers are important stakeholders in initial VET, not only because they play an important role in developing, reviewing and updating the training regulations, but because they are also in charge of executing the final examinations. The chambers therefore assure quality management) in respect of final examinations at national level¹⁰⁷.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

National VET policy in Germany is developed independently from ECVET. ECVET is currently not discussed at system level. Modularisation as well as units of learning outcomes are still being heavily debated. Partial qualifications do exist in some places, and many programmes have become more modularised over time.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The learning outcomes approach was been widely adopted. This is partly attributed to the impact of ECVET.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

Modularisation of IVET qualifications is a heavily debated subject, as stakeholders see an endangerment of the 'completeness' of qualifications. IVET qualifications are developed around 'learning fields', which can be considered 'units of LO'. The individual assessment of these modules and units of LO is perceived too costly, especially for dual VET.

CVET is already more modularised.

¹⁰⁶ https://www.eqavet.eu/Equavet2017/media/Documents/2-DE_final_may-2016_updating-info-on-the-EQAVET-website.pdf

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Partial qualifications exist for a number of dual VET programmes, which are composed in a way that they are fully recognised for further learning at a later stage or directly afterwards.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

Germany has not developed a credit system. Credit points were tested in projects but not rolled out on a wider level.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

The focus of ECVET in Germany is on international mobility.¹⁰⁸

ECVET tools (MoUs and LAs) were promoted for use in Erasmus+ mobility projects. The ECVET coordination point was also integrated into the Erasmus+ national agency.

¹⁰⁸ [ECVET Network meeting and National ECVET Coordinators meeting summary - 2017](#)

Denmark

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

Denmark has a framework for QA for both IVET, and CVET and its associated WBL and which is aligned with the EQVET Framework. QA in the Danish education system was already high on the agenda prior to the introduction of EQAVET. Following the introduction of EQAVET, the Danish system for QA was revised to include the use of indicators in IVET, and the use of central inspection of providers¹⁰⁹.

System-level QA arrangements

Nationally, the National Agency for Quality and Supervision is responsible for quality and have been involved in the development of systems to evaluate IVET – the criteria of which are defined in the Danish Vocational Education and Training Act. The Agency also undertake regular inspection of VET providers – investigating and inspecting providers according to legal, financial and pedagogical indicators.

CVET in Denmark tends to be delivered by the same providers as IVET, so the QA approach is similar. The National Agency for Quality and Supervision monitors CVET providers, but does not require the same amount of indicators as IVET providers.

Provider-level QA arrangements

The National QA framework states that schools-based IVET providers must undertake self-assessments which review their delivery systems and learner outcomes. The framework also requires providers to evidence continued quality development, a follow up plan/annual action plan and to publish their results (EQAVET quality cycle). In company training is also subject to self –evaluation procedures implemented by Trade Committees.

CVET Providers are also required to have procedures in place for QA. In 2000, a national compulsory self-evaluation tool was developed, which measures satisfaction levels of the training provision (Vis Kvalitet). CVET providers are also required to undertake comparative evaluations of the programmes they provide, which can then be aggregated at a national level¹¹⁰.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

In Denmark, the most recent VET reform aimed at improving the attractiveness of VET. Discussions on learning outcome orientation and modularisation had already taken place before the ECVET Recommendation, in part inspired by the Dutch system.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The VET system is based on learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are used in curricula descriptions, but this development is not attributed to ECVET.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

The Danish VET system is based on modules and units of learning outcomes (e.g. basic vocational education EGU)¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.eqavet.eu/Equavet2017/media/publications/Annex-1-country-reports-finalised.pdf?ext=.pdf>

¹¹⁰ https://www.eqavet.eu/Equavet2017/media/Documents/2-DK_final_Template-for-updating-info-on-the-EQAVET-website.pdf

¹¹¹ Refernet Report VET in Europe 2016

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

Credits from IVET and CVET programmes can be transferred, but only in some cases accumulated¹¹². In 2007, a legal framework was implemented for the recognition of prior learning in the adult education and continuing training system. These changes are not directly attributed to ECVET.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

ECVET is used in international mobility projects. LAs and MoUs are in use.

¹¹² Refernet Report VET in Europe 2016 – EGU to other vocational programmes

Estonia

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

Estonia has a national approach to QA which including the quality cycle, indicative descriptors and indicators. This was initially developed in response to CQAF, but has recently been modified to include a registration system and indicators in response to the EQAVET recommendations.

System-level QA arrangements

In IVET Estonia system-level QA is divided into four elements including planning, implementation, evaluation and measurement and 'feed forward' and feedback (adjustments)¹¹³. This draws on the findings from self-assessments and analysis of provider data. In CVET, the destination indicators of graduates are important indicators in the measurement of quality in Estonia.

Regular external evaluation of VET providers takes place, as part of the licencing process. There is also some thematic and ad-hoc reviews that takes place.

Provider-level QA arrangements

Schools and private providers that deliver IVET are required to undertake a self-assessment on a three-year cycle. Legislation also requires providers to monitor the employment of students completing their VET for six months following completion. Estonia have developed formal tools for providers to undertake QA¹¹⁴.

In 2015, the Adult Education Act stipulated the requirement for an assessment of quality in adult education. The act stated that in-service training providers should establish the national QA system. For all other training providers, they should choose an appropriate system to enable them to monitor, and improve quality. Furthermore, the Adult Education Act states that quality assurance measures should be documented and published on the provider's website¹¹⁵.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

ECVET along with the EQF developments have had a strong impact on Estonian VET reform. In 2013 new legislation was passed, VET curricula were reviewed and set up in a learning outcome-oriented way. Entry requirements for different pathways are low or have been abolished in order to increase flexibility. Increased flexibility was one of the key objectives of the 2013 VET reform.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The use of learning outcomes was implemented in 2013, together with a credit point system, directly influenced by ECVET.

¹¹³ <https://www.eqavet.eu/What-We-Do/Implementing-the-Framework/Estonia?page=2>

¹¹⁴ <https://www.eqavet.eu/What-We-Do/Implementing-the-Framework/Estonia?page=2>

¹¹⁵ http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/estonia_-_vet_policy_developments.pdf

In 2015, the Adult Education Act stipulated the requirements for the quality of adult education. The act stated that in service training providers should establish a QA system. For all other training providers, they must choose an appropriate system to enable them to monitor, and improve quality

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

IVET and CVET Curricula were reviewed and set-up in a module-based way in 2007, also using learning outcomes. ECVET has played a big role in supporting this transition.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

An RPL strategy was introduced Estonia already in 2008. A credit point system based on ECVET principles for VET was introduced in 2013, and is attributed directly to ECVET¹¹⁶. One credit point corresponds to 26 hours spent by a student on studies upon the acquisition of skills and knowledge. A single study year in vocational training is equivalent to 60 credit points. It creates problems with permeability to general and higher education, as different credit point systems are in use there. Projects on increasing permeability between the sectors of education are currently being piloted.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

ECVET tools such as MoUs and LAs as well as ECVET credit points are widely in use in Estonian mobility projects, facilitating the recognition of learning outcomes achieved in national and international mobility.

¹¹⁶ The credit system is not linked to the EstQF. Credit points are connected with VET curricula. The common principle between VET curricula and professional standards are learning outcomes, i.e. both are based on learning outcomes, but credit points are connected only with VET curricula.

Greece

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

In Greece the national approach to QA has been developed using the EQAVET Framework¹¹⁷. In IVET¹¹⁸, Law 4142/2013 established an independent administrative authority called the Authority for Quality Assurance in Primary and Secondary (A.D.I.P.P.D.E.), responsible for quality assurance both in general and vocational education (HQF Levels 1, 2,3,4). It works closely with the Ministry of Education and is fully operational. In CVET, the main body responsible for quality assurance is the National Organization for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (E.O.P.P.E.P.). The QA approach is the same for IVET and CVET and is aligned with the EQAVET quality cycle, indicative descriptors and indicators. This approach remains in the piloting stage and full implementation in all regions is intended by 2020. It is also important to mention that the Ministry's effort to improve quality assurance includes a major restructuring that aims at redesigning vocational curricula, following the Learning Outcomes approach, as well as the creation of a new mechanism for better matching skills to labour market needs.

System-level QA arrangements

The current institutional framework foresees the meta-evaluation of the education system and high level educational staff in order to identify weaknesses and ways of responding. The Presidential Decree 152/2013 on teacher evaluation introduced a self-evaluation process where teachers and managers are required to use specific evaluation instruments, criteria and processes in IVET. This includes most EQAVET indicators. CVET providers must also comply with certain quality criteria, on which the provision of public funding depends. The Authority for Quality Assurance in Primary and Secondary Education conducts external reviews of IVET providers.

Primary responsibility for linking VET systems to labour market needs lies with the Lifelong Learning and Connection to Employment Council. It uses tools including international and national labour market surveys, and locally based skills' forecasting mechanisms such as tripartite committees consisting of state, employers and employee representatives¹¹⁹. Also, currently EOPPEP, in its capacity as the Hellenic Reference Point for the EQAVET Network, is collaborating with the National Institute for Labour and Human Resources (EIEAD), the responsible body for the skills forecasting mechanism, so as to conduct a study relating to the VET graduate tracking in Greece. This study by identifying the placement rate of VET graduates as well as the degree of satisfaction of employers and VET graduates (EQAVET indicators 5 and 6) aims at developing a model linking VET systems to labour market needs.

Provider-level QA arrangements

In IVET, under Law 3848/2010 providers are required to draw up an action plan complete a self-evaluation each year. The self-assessment should examine overall performance in achieving educational objectives, and the school's priorities for action and improvement for the following school year. In CVET, many providers use quality assurance systems on a voluntary basis, such as ISO and ECAF. Both IVET and CVET providers are required to assess and address labour market needs at regional and local level, as stated by Greek law.

¹¹⁷ ICF 2013 report

¹¹⁸ The IVET system in Greece is structured in two different levels (upper secondary and post-secondary level). Upper secondary (HQF Level 4) vocational education is offered by Vocational Education Schools (EPAL) and Post-secondary non-tertiary vocational education (HQF Level 5) is offered by the Vocational Training Institutes (IEK) and leads to the acquisition of a nationally recognized certificate (after a 2-year attendance)

¹¹⁹ https://www.eqavet.eu/Equavet2017/media/Documents/2-EL_-final_Template-for-updating-info-on-the-EQAVET-website.pdf

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

Although the implementation of ECVET was formally agreed upon in 2010, this has not happened in practice.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The learning outcomes approach is still not widely implemented in the Greek VET system.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

Modules as well as units of learning outcomes are not yet implemented in Greece.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

There is no credit system in the Greek VET system yet.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

The recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility is done through other means than ECVET.

Finland

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

Finland's QA approach has influenced the EQAVET Framework. The approach was fully implemented in 2009, and in 2017, the Finnish National Agency for Education updated their Peer Review criteria for VET to make the criteria uniform for all vocational training (CVET, IVET and WBL). This change replaced the separate criteria for IVET. The criteria were formulated in cooperation with VET providers¹²⁰.

System-level QA arrangements

VET policy is created at the national level. The QA strategy distinguishes between national steering by national policy, quality management systems of VET providers, and external evaluation of VET. Relevant stakeholders develop VET including QA through training committees (including social partners, teachers, students and labour market and VET experts). Stakeholders are also involved in Quality Awards for VET, development of the Quality strategy and preparation of QA criteria.

Since 2015, it has been compulsory by law for VET providers to self-evaluate the education and training they provide and to participate in external audits by an independent evaluation agency under the Ministry of Education and Culture¹²¹. The results are published but institutions are not ranked, as the focus of the audits are for self-development of providers. A set of criteria have been developed for the self-assessment of VET providers.

Provider-level QA arrangements

The national approach makes provision for external reviews of VET providers (IVET and CVET). The quality management system used by VET providers include processes and guidelines for planning, implementation, evaluation and review of learning pathways and study plans.¹²² However, providers are free to decide which QA systems or measures they use. As above, providers are involved in the development of VET including QA through training committees. Institutions are also encouraged to undergo peer review, preferably with peers with whom they are not in direct competition with¹²³. The peer review involves a peer visit, peer report and the formulation of targets and an action plan.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

In 2004, Finland launched the FINECVET national project to develop and test ECVET, which led to the conclusion that the Finnish VET system was already 'ECVET-friendly' from the outset, with most of the requirements regarding transfer, accumulation and recognition of learning outcomes already fulfilled at that time.

Despite the Finnish system being ECVET-compatible from the outset, the impact of ECVET at national level is considered to be very strong, in particular with regard to strengthening and finetuning the competence-based approach, the quality of VET mobility, and the credit system.

¹²⁰

https://www.oph.fi/english/curricula_and_qualifications/vocational_upper_secondary_education/quality_assurance_of_vet/peer_review_criteria

¹²¹ <https://www.eqavet.eu/what-we-do/implementing-the-framework/finland>

¹²² [https://www.eqavet.eu/EU-Quality-Assurance/Case-Studies/Individualised-flexible-learning-pathways-usin-\(1\)/Finland-1](https://www.eqavet.eu/EU-Quality-Assurance/Case-Studies/Individualised-flexible-learning-pathways-usin-(1)/Finland-1)

¹²³ <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED560077.pdf>

The VET reform launched in August 2015 had the dual objective of strengthening the learning outcomes-based approach and fully implementing ECVET. VET qualifications are modular and based on units of learning outcomes, and an ECVET compatible credit point system has been introduced (competence points) recently.

The most recent VET reform increased the emphasis on individual study paths.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The learning outcomes approach has been used for all VET qualifications since 2010. ECVET is considered a strengthening factor for the advancement of its implementation, even though learning outcome orientation had been in place already for many years before ECVET.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

VET provision has been organised in modules and units of learning outcomes already before ECVET. Qualifications can be obtained via different pathways, including school- or work-based learning.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

Finland has established a credit point system influenced by ECVET principles. The description of competence requirements as learning outcomes and use of unit of LOs form the basis for the accumulation, transfer and recognition of learning outcomes. The system also includes the use of competence points, which are compatible with ECVET. The competence points are additional information and are not transferred as such.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

ECVET has helped to improve the quality of the mobility experience. The use of ECVET principles for international mobility 'before, during and after' the period abroad is perceived to have helped structure the process better. MoU and LAs are frequently used, on a voluntary basis, and additional national templates also exist.

France

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

France has a long-established system for QA in VET, which applies to IVET, CVET and WBL. This was not informed by the EQAVET Recommendation, but are in line with EQAVET principles of the quality cycle and performance indicators.

System-level QA arrangements

Le Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de l'Enseignement Supérieur collects information about IVET and CVET to inform their future policy decisions. This includes measures such as IVET and CVET graduates' entry into the labour market and IVET progression in employment.

For CVET, regional councils have adopted quality charters. These are co-signed by vocational bodies or training organisations which enter into contractual agreements with the region. The documents aim to improve the provision of VET and enhance the quality of services offered by providers, including how trainees are treated during WBL alongside training methods, assessment.

Provider-level QA arrangements

Reforms in 2014 require providers to demonstrate that they have appropriate QA systems in place in order to receive public funding. Legislation requires all VET schools to achieve an external accreditation by a QA body (e.g. ISO). The ministry of Education has developed a label called Eduform responding to AFNOR requirements for quality of CVET: it is a quality guarantee can that apply to public and private providers preparing a vocational qualification of the ministry of Education. The option to self-certify QA arrangements was removed in new legislation in 2018.

For IVET, there are national and territorial inspection bodies who externally review IVET providers. There are also "continuing education" inspectors for courses which lead to National Education diplomas for CVET.

The ministry of Education also developed a self-assessment tool for VET schools, based on the EQAVET recommendation (and a European project).

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

In France, ECVET's biggest impact lies with transnational mobility rather than with lifelong learning. However, the current legislation and practice are supportive of the ECVET principles.

In 2014, the Ministry for National Education introduced a new 'mobility unit' for the baccalauréat professionnel, to facilitate the recognition of intercultural and vocational LO achieved during mobility abroad.¹²⁴

In May 2018 a reform was launched in order to better align vocational education and training with labour market needs¹²⁵. This is not directly attributed to ECVET, however.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

Qualifications had been described in terms of learning outcomes already prior to the ECVET Recommendation. The ECVET Recommendation and work on assessment during mobility helped improve quality in description of learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

¹²⁴ http://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/system/files/magazines/en/ecvet_mag_28.pdf

¹²⁵ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/france-new-vet-reform-launched>

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

France already had a unit-based system for VET before ECVET, thus ECVET is not perceived to have had an influence. ECVET developments did however lead to the introduction of a new mobility unit for the baccalauréat professionnel (see above).

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

Qualifications are described in groups of knowledge, skills and competences required ('blocs de compétences') to obtain the qualification.

Flexible career pathways with possible accumulation of learning outcomes and transfer to other pathways is possible in France. The national validation strategy was set up in 2002. These developments are not directly attributed to the ECVET Recommendation.

ECVET points are now used in some qualifications, based on the relative weight of a unit within a qualification.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

The main benefit of ECVET is seen in improving the quality of mobility experiences, including the recognition of learning outcomes: the regulation permits that units of learning outcomes acquired during mobility can be assessed and validated. This statutory possibility is nevertheless limited by the average duration of mobility periods, too short to cover enough LO of a unit. The introduction of an optional mobility unit for transversal competences acquired even during a short (2 or 3 weeks) mobility.

Spain

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

Regarding Vocational Education and Training in the Education System, The Spanish QA system was developed independently of EQAVET, although it shares its principles. Recent revisions have also strengthened its alignment to EQAVET, as it includes explicit reference to the EQAVET quality cycle, indicative descriptors and includes some indicators. Although the framework is not implemented, the quality assurance system is compatible with EQAVET. The national QA approach applies to IVET, CVET and WBL.

Article 22 of the Law 30/2015, of September 9, regulating the System of Vocational Training for Employment in the work sphere is dedicated to **QA**, establishing that Public Employment Services will ensure the quality of training in its different areas of competence.

System-level QA arrangements

Spain is using most but not all EQAVET Framework Indicators in both the IVET and CVET sectors¹²⁶. In IVET, the National Institute for Evaluation of Education is responsible for the actual monitoring of the performance of the educational system as a whole, taking into account the statistics on education and the annual report of the State Board of Education. Monitoring of VET schools are carried out by specialist civil servants of the Education Inspectorate, focusing on aspects such as teachers' performance, student to teacher ratio, teaching and sport facilities, the number of school units, as well as EQAVET indicators on student outcomes.

For CVET the National Public Employment Service develops an Annual Plan for the evaluation of the quality, impact, efficacy and efficiency of the CVET system. CVET providers are audited by the national authority

Furthermore, the Annual Plan for Employment Policies 2017 contains an specific indicator to measure quality improvements in vocational training for employment, in terms of improvement of labour integration rates and professional development of persons trained. In the same vein, the Spanish Strategy of Activation for Employment 2017-2020 includes the strategic objective C which measures the matching between training offer and labour market needs as one of the indicators that Law 30/2015 provides for quality measurement.

Provider-level QA arrangements

In IVET self-assessment is not mandatory. However, the Organic Act 2/2006 establishes that education authorities of the Autonomous Communities must help and encourage school self-assessment with the purpose of improving their practice. They also provide advice and analyse information from schools and VET centres in relation to the design, analysis and interpretation of results.

In CVET, one of the main QA instruments is a register maintained by the PES. Training organisations, both public and private, must be entered in the register enabled by the competent public administration if they want to provide any training specialities included in the Catalogue of Training Specialities. They must have staff resources and appropriate facilities to ensure enough technical solvency to provide quality training, both theoretical and practical.

Moreover, training organisations must be accredited if they want to provide training for employment aimed at obtaining a professional certificate, the official qualification

¹²⁶ Data suggests Spain is using indicators 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3, 4, 8A, 8B, 9A, 9B and 10A in IVET, and indicators 1A, 1B, 3, 4, 5A, 5B, 6A, 6B, 7, 8A, 8B, 9A, 9B, 10A, 10B in CVET.

issued by public labour authorities. Training organisations must fulfil all requirements specified in the regulation governing the respective professional certificates to get and maintain this accreditation.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

Spain have formally updated their VET system along the lines of ECVET principles. This process took place in parallel with referencing qualifications to the Spanish NQF. There is a legal basis for its implementation, but it has yet to come into force.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

VET qualifications have gradually been updated towards a learning outcomes-oriented approach. This process can be attributed to ECVET.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

Spanish VET qualifications have long been using modules, this is not attributed to ECVET. Allocating more recently developed 'ECVET points' to these modules still poses a challenge in practice and will gradually be done in the coming years.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

An ECVET-based credit system was developed and is currently being implemented, but its use is rather 'symbolic', assessment and accreditation of learning outcomes is not done automatically.

ECVET has fostered the recognition of professional qualifications acquired through professional experience.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

ECVET tools are very popular among many VET providers, even though their implementation is not mandatory. Regional implementation varies, however. By those who use ECVET, its value in improving the quality and recognition of mobility is widely appreciated and MoUs as well as LAs are in use.

Croatia

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

In Croatia, the development of the national approach to QA was developed independently of EQAVET but is compatible with the Framework. Overall, it incorporates the EQAVET quality cycle, the indicative descriptors, and some indicators. Since 2016, WBL has been included in the quality assurance of VET provision. Under plan is further development of national VET QA approach in line with the EQAVET.

System-level QA arrangements

Responsibility for QA a national level is shared between the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, Agency for VET and Adult Education (AVETAE), Education and teacher training agency (ETTA), and National Centre for external evaluation of education (NCEEE). The QA system of VET in Croatia has four levels:

- Curriculum network and the network of VET providers;
- Database for monitoring and system management;
- Evaluation system and evaluation data gathering; and
- Stimulating and correcting measures.

AVETAE have developed an online tool which provides support to VET providers in self-assessment procedures by ensuring the framework for entering necessary data, helps measuring the success of VET providers according to the quality criteria, provides information on areas of improvement and generates the report. Cumulative data on system level provides comparative information on quality assurance of VET providers and necessary data for analysis of QA segment and definition of national goals for selected priority areas. (e kvaliteta). The Agency for Adult Education is responsible for the establishment of a quality assurance system for CVET.¹²⁷ However, there is no formal requirement of the evaluation and review of adult education providers at a system level.

In IVET, the National Centre for the External Evaluation of Education (NCEEE) undertakes external evaluation of student outcomes and achievements. The self-assessment of VET institutions is managed by AVEATE and implemented by the VET institution Quality Commission.

Provider-level QA arrangements

The Vocational Education and Training Act states that IVET vocational training providers are obliged to undertake self-assessment once a year following the quality cycle (planning and programming of work; teaching and learning support; student achievements; material conditions and human potential; professional development; human relations; management and leadership; cooperation with other stakeholders). Following this process, a self-assessment report, and school improvement plan must be developed.

In CVET, self-assessment is done on a voluntary basis. The AVETAE recommend providers undertaken self-assessment once a year, and use the outputs (self-assessment report and improvement plan) to compare against the previous year's reports to examine what has worked well and what needs to be improved.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

In Croatia, ECVET does not focus on national VET policy, but on international mobility. National VET reforms were already agreed upon before the ECVET Recommendation

¹²⁷ <http://www.asoo.hr/default.aspx?id=100>

was adopted (learning outcomes and modularised curricula have already been implemented previously, in the VET Act of 2009, and national qualifications framework in 2013).

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The learning outcomes approach has been widely adopted, however, this is not attributed to the impact of ECVET, but was put in place earlier.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

Modules and units of learning outcomes have been introduced with the new NQF based qualifications, but independent of ECVET developments.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

Croatia has adopted an ECVET based credit system for VET with the new CROQF legislation.¹²⁸ The Vocational Education and Training Act and the Strategy for the Development of the System of Vocational Education and Training (2008-2013) set the foundation for the development of the ECVET credit system. The VET Act defines (Article 7) one ECVET credit as being equal to 25 teaching hours. However, credit points are not yet used in practice.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

ECVET in Croatia is increasingly used for supporting the quality and recognition of international mobility, MoUs and LAs are in use by participating organisations.

¹²⁸ Inventory Report on Validation of NFIL 2016

Hungary

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

Hungary has made major changes to quality assurance in the last two years, which was considerably influenced by the EQAVET Framework¹²⁹. This includes the introduction of a Common Quality Management Framework for VET (CQMF, ESZMK) which comprised of a process model for IVET and CVET, a system of surveying partners' needs and satisfaction, a common VET self-assessment model and a common set of VET quality indicators.

System-level QA arrangements

The Hungarian quality assurance system in education and training has been primarily self-assessment based, as stipulated by law. VET-specific self-assessment models have been developed against which providers have been evaluating all the areas of their activities and the results achieved. Several EQAVET indicators are being used in the monitoring of Hungary's IVET and CVET system.

The national QA system in Hungary also makes provision for the external review of both IVET and CVET providers. External evaluation and self-evaluation in the VET system are closely linked as the standards examine the same areas at all three levels of teacher, school leader and school in IVET. External evaluation of IVET schools is required every five years and is recommended once every two years for CVET providers.

Provider-level QA arrangements

IVET providers are required to carry out self-evaluation, including the self-assessment of teachers and the school leader, once every five years. They are expected to use the results of these assessments to develop action plans to ensure improvements are made. Providers are required to publicise external evaluations and measures they are taking in response to findings.

CVET providers are also required to carry out self-evaluations but can define the frequency of these and the execution and methods used, which are not regulated by legislation. Self-evaluations are recommended every two years.

The QA criteria related to IVET provider planning processes in Hungary defines how provider planning takes place, when, who is involved and which forums are used at the provider level. At CVET provider level the QA framework contains compulsory elements in relation to strategic and operative planning.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

In Hungary, there is no legal background and initiatives on ECVET implementation at national system level. However, ECVET-related activities are widespread at VET provider level with the coordination of the Tempus Public Foundation, National Agency for Erasmus+ by providing information to stakeholders; organise seminars and Peer Learning Activities, develop leaflets, brochures, guidebooks, and handbooks.

Thus, ECVET is used for geographical mobility (mainly under Erasmus+ Key Action 1) rather than for lifelong learning.

Categories of learning outcomes of HuQF (knowledge, skills, attitude, and autonomy-responsibility) introduced in 2015 are not explicitly used in VET documents. All qualifications have already been officially classified to the HuQF levels. But for the

¹²⁹ Latest ICF report

time being it has an administrative function and does not have a changing impact on the structure and content of education and training in Hungary.

Regarding VET: 800 NQR qualifications are based on learning outcomes, but their Professional and Exam Requirements are not based on categories of learning outcomes used in the HuQF. The expected outcomes are described in competencies (professional, methodological, social and personal competences). Modular approaches are in place, allowing learners to accumulate modules to achieve a given qualification. The module requirements consist of two main parts: task profile and competence profile.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The learning outcomes approach has formally been introduced in Hungary both for IVET and adult education, which to a great extent is attributed to ECVET and HuQF.

The concept of learning outcomes has not so far been used in the terminology of vocational training in Hungary; instead, they use the terminology of competences, competence-based curriculum. The national VET system in Hungary is considered outcome oriented however not LO-based, but competence-based instead. Expected outcome requirement/standards are described in professional, methodological, social and personal competences.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

ECVET has stimulated the introduction of modular and partial qualifications in Hungary. Since 2008, all programmes within VET have been modular. All the NVQR qualifications are built up from modules (at least 2 maximum 9 modules of different size). Modules do not have a HuQF level.

The modular VET system allows partial qualifications to be obtained at the vocational examination, which can later be supplemented by the missing modules to obtain a complete qualification either in school-based VET or in adult training. Partial qualifications cover a subset of the modules included in a full qualification. They prepare the holder for simpler occupations or for a narrower scope of tasks. Some partial qualifications are open for adults without completed primary school. However these qualifications (at HuQF level 2) have a low prestige in the labour market.

Vocational program requirements of adult education are based on learning outcomes (Regulation NGM 59/2013).

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

There is no credit system for IVET in Hungary.

Although there is the legal possibility for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes acquired in different non-formal and informal contexts, Hungary does not yet have a nationwide validation system based on uniform principles and procedures. The current validation practice is fragmented and essential elements (strategic goals, responsible government actor, funding, stakeholder participation, quality assurance, preparation for participants, etc.) are lacking.

Although the practice in this area is regulated by law, the details are not standardised, thus they are elaborated at institutional level only. This means that this process is performed through different methodologies, at varying levels and intensity at institutional level.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

The main impact of ECVET in Hungary is perceived to be in mobility, fostering quality and cooperation and improving the recognition of learning outcomes achieved abroad. The ECVET templates for MoUs and LAs are widespread.

Using ECVET principle increases the quality of mobility programmes (well-planned, structured and recognised mobility based on learning outcomes, common understanding, mutual trust, including learning agreement, memorandum of understanding). It is clearly visible that mobility applications and their implementation represent higher quality year by year.

The use of learning outcomes is widespread in mobility actions and it has several evidence-based advantages. Learning outcomes make planning and implementation processes of mobility more consistent. It also clarifies the related requirements of evaluation and assessment. It supports international cooperation since learning outcomes can be understood and interpreted in every country regardless of the differences in the respective educational systems. The learning outcomes approach also supports better understanding between the training institutes and the employers.

Recognition operates at an institutional level based on the agreement between partner institutions about learning outcomes and criteria and forms of assessment. Learners do not have to repeat at home what has already been achieved and assessed abroad because of ECVET and sending institution recognise learners' achievements based on the case-by-case decision of the head of the vocational training school.

Italy

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

EQAVET was included in the national plan for education and training that was published in 2017. This resulted in the publication in 2018 of a national policy for QA and a common QA framework¹³⁰ approved in State Regions Conference. The national QA approach is aligned in terms of the EQAVET quality cycle, indicative descriptors and indicators. The national approach is expected to be fully implemented by 2020, and applies to IVET and associated work-based learning.

System-level QA arrangements

IVET providers are required to prepare a self-assessment report consisting of five areas: context, output, processes, self-evaluation process and priorities identification. Each area is completed with data based on specific indicators (49 in total) and is supplemented by additional information requested of the schools. In regional systems, the accreditation system has been conceived as a quality assurance mechanism *ex ante*, but with minimal requirements agreed beforehand¹³¹.

External evaluation is implemented through audit visits made by inspectors from the Ministry of Education. In IVET, the service is performed by technical inspectors, operating at national, regional and provincial level. The inspection service produces an annual report on the state of the schools' activities and education and training provision.

Provider-level QA arrangements

In IVET, schools have to comply with the national requirements of the national evaluation system, which includes measuring performance against national indicators and undertaking self-assessments. In CVET, vocational training agencies, on a voluntary basis, undertake a quality certification processes and undertake self-assessment. Interprofessional Funds for continuing training are managed by Social partners and controlled by ANPAL (The National Agency for Active Labour Policies) that is responsible of the decisions about funding rules. In April 2018 Anpal has approved Guidelines for funding interprofessional funds ("Linee guida sulla gestione delle risorse finanziarie attribuite ai Fondi interprofessionali per la formazione continua") that defines also quality minimum standards.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

The key impact of ECVET in Italy was in the context of transnational mobility. Within the context of lifelong learning, ECVET had a smaller role to play. There has been no official adoption of ECVET as a framework of reference.

In Italy the years 2012-2014 have been marked by significant reforms, both of lifelong learning policies (e.g. the reform of centres for adult education) and systems and tools for transparency of qualifications (through the legislative decree 13/13 focused on drafting the framework for the validation and certification of competences acquired from experience).

Many ECVET principles have been implicitly adopted, however, especially with regard to the recognition and validation of LO acquired through non-formal or informal learning, however without explicit reference being made to ECVET. ECVET is also

¹³⁰ Latest ICF report.

¹³¹ https://www.eqavet.eu/Equavet2017/media/Documents/2-IT-final_template-for-updating-info-on-the-EQAVET-website.pdf

attributed a significant role in promoting the principle of structuring qualifications into units of LO.

There are discussions that ECVET tools and principles could be used by employment services in the context of recognition of prior learning for migrants. On the other hand, the discussion on the use of ECVET principles to promote progression between VET and higher education institution got stuck and is currently not a policy priority.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

In Italy, the shift to LOs has been widespread. Almost all VET qualifications have been described in terms of learning outcomes.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

Some but not all qualifications are grouped into coherent units of LO. However, they usually cannot be acquired separately.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

In Italy, there are only very few possibilities to validate a part of qualification as such and to accumulate different units of LO to reach a formal qualification. A summative final exam is the norm.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

ECVET has had a strong impact on improving the quality of international mobility of learners and on facilitating the recognition of LO achieved in transnational mobility in Italy: the use of MoU, LA and personal transcript is widespread. The National Agency (INAPP) promotes the use of ECVET principles and tools in the context of transnational mobility.

A paradigmatic shift took place with the law 107/2015 "La Buona Scuola" that imposed periods of work based learning for all Italian higher secondary schools (200 hours in three years for gymnasiums and 400 hours in three years for technical and professional schools). The new regulation fully recognises periods of work based learning abroad as an integral part of the curriculum. The concept of credit points, however, is totally absent from this debate.

A 2016 survey carried out by the Italian Erasmus+ National Agency among the beneficiaries of Erasmus+ projects funded in 2014 and 2015 revealed that the learning outcomes approach as a common denominator has in some cases led to the involvement of enterprises in the ex-ante definition of learning outcomes to be achieved during the mobility phase. This helps students to capitalise on mobility experiences, even short-term ones. Such efforts of direct involvement of enterprises in this process are still very limited, yet they represent an innovative and key element that, in the future, may facilitate the "reading" and understanding of learning outcomes acquired by students (Source: ECVET Magazine).

Lithuania

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

The Lithuania approach to QA are based on the VET quality assurance system concept (2008). The concept has defined the following VET quality assurance pillars: internal quality assessment, national regulation, support to providers, external quality assessment, encouraging development of quality, VET monitoring, licensing and supervision and national coordination¹³². It applies to IVET and CVET but not work-based learning.

The concept was not developed in response to the EQAVET framework. However, it is generally considered by stakeholders to be compatible to the EQAVET framework, as it incorporates the quality cycle, indicative descriptors and indicators.

System-level QA arrangements

The implementation of VET programmes is supervised by the relevant divisions of the Ministry of Education and Science. The national quality assurance system makes provision for external review of both IVET and CVET providers. The State Audit Office performs random checks of the management of education institutions, and external assessment of schools are carried out periodically¹³³.

The new Law on VET that came into force in January 2018 has redefined VET quality assurance arrangements in-line with EQAVET (self-assessment, internal quality management systems, regular external evaluation and (or) accreditation, monitoring of VET according to indicators). The Law foresees introduction of these arrangements from 2019.

Provider-level QA arrangements

VET providers are required to carry out self-assessments under the Law on Education and Law on VET. According to legal acts they must also have internal quality assurance systems and to foresee measures and means for assuring training quality. Until recently, before the beginning of a new school year each VET provider planned the number of VET students to be enrolled in State-funded VET programmes based on local labour market needs. The enrolment plan was then submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science for discussion and approval¹³⁴. The students' enrolment planning procedure is being changed with a move towards more systemic national level planning based on information from human resources monitoring system.

Social partners participate in shaping the content of new qualifications, qualification standards and VET programmes. They are also involved in organising training. They may participate in the management of VET institutions and become their shareholders. Currently, social partners, enterprises and municipal authorities participate directly in managing self-governing IVET providers, which comprise a quarter of all VET institutions, however, according to new edition of Law on VET, all VET institutions should gradually become public ones. Social partners may also participate in the management of CVET institutions and become their shareholders¹³⁵.

¹³² https://www.eqavet.eu/eqavet2017/media/Documents/2-LT_final_Template-for-updating-info-on-the-EQAVET-website.pdf

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

The role played by ECVET in the national system has been very direct. A measure for implementation of the ECVET Recommendation was included in the Action plan on VET development 2014-16 (2014). In 2012, new methodological guidelines for modular VET programmes were introduced. Part of the methodology used is based on ECVET, e.g. units of learning outcomes, credits points (approach)¹³⁶.

Measures to modularise VET were included in the 2007 development programme. The NQF, based on learning outcomes, was adopted in 2010. Legislation (2009, amended in 2015) set up a structure of occupational standards which are LO-based. The commitment for introducing a credit system has been formalised in the 'concept of modular VET' and the methodology for developing modular programmes, which describe how to define the volume of VET programmes in ECVET credit points.

A new VET law was introduced in February 2018, with implementation currently going on step by step. The VET reforms brings a lot of change to the Lithuanian VET system.

The Lithuanian VET system has thus undergone significant transformation in recent years. Key aspects included: modularised programmes; credit system; bringing VET closer to labour market needs, introduction of apprenticeships; role and remuneration of teachers.

So far, main reform developments have taken place in IVET. As a next step, these should now be extended to CVET, which is still more subject rather than outcome-based, but gradually moving towards a modularised system.

Upcoming policy priorities furthermore include the preparation of new acts on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The transition towards a learning outcomes based systems has been ongoing since 2010.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

A module-based system for VET was introduced three years ago. Not yet all VET programmes are module-based, but most are. Old VET programmes, based on VET standards designed for a specific qualification, are gradually being replaced by newer, more flexible ones. By 2018, 76 modular VET programmes were registered.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

There is a credit system in place for VET. There are arrangements for the use of credit points; but further discussion on their implementation is still needed.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

ECVET is considered to have played an important role in promoting the quality of transnational mobility. ECVET is increasingly used for VET mobility (predominantly in IVET); agreeing on the LO to be achieved ahead of the mobility taking place has made it easier to recognise learning outcomes achieved abroad. The existing legal basis allows recognition of LO achieved in cross-border mobility as part of a VET pathway.

ECVET is also felt to have contributed to the volume of VET mobility taking place.

¹³⁶ Cf. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/lithuania-modernising-vet-shifting-modular-programmes-0>

Luxembourg

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

The QA system in Luxembourg is based on the VET law of 19 December 2008 which includes the requirement for quality criteria of planning, implementation, evaluation and review (based on CQAF). Since then there have been some adjustments to its quality assurance framework in VET. The modifications were not as a direct response to the EQAVET recommendation, but it was reportedly taken into account to inform the changes¹³⁷.

The national QA system is used in IVET and associated work-based learning. CVET providers are mostly privately managed, so the government reportedly it does not have much leverage to influence them¹³⁸.

System-level QA arrangements

The Ministry of Education, Children and Youth has overall responsibility for monitoring the take up of publicly funded VET using the national database of students and teachers. The National School Quality Development Agency monitors and evaluates teaching standards, training requirements and student outcomes according to the quality cycle.

Provider-level QA arrangements

An evaluation and support system has been developed by the Educational and Technological Research and Innovation Coordination Service, requiring IVET providers to perform self-assessment based on school development plans. Each school has to write an institution-specific report to support school development and education quality which is assessed by the national School Quality Development Agency.

Following the adoption of the 2008 VET reform, stakeholders have been more centrally involved in VET decisions. When developing the 2008 reform, both technical secondary schools and social partners were involved in the working groups on curriculum development and took part in the implementation. In order to ensure the quality of working groups, training on curriculum development was provided to stakeholders¹³⁹.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

ECVET does not play an important role in policy debate. It is however considered as having somewhat played the role of a catalyst for the formulation of learning outcomes and modularisation developments in general terms, and in raising awareness of the importance of transparency and comparability of VET qualifications.

The ECVET system in Luxembourg is considered ECVET-compatible (in being based on learning outcomes, units of LO and a credit system in place) but reported to have been developed independently of ECVET.

Profound reform developments have taken place in the VET system since 2008 when a major VET reform was introduced, and then implemented from 2010 onwards. The current focus still lies in implementing the new system. LU aims for a full transition to a competence-based and modular system of teaching and assessment.

As for future plans for VET in general, the focus will be on the implementation of the White Paper on Lifelong Learning, and on promoting permeability (e.g. for the

¹³⁷ https://www.eqavet.eu/Equavet2017/media/Documents/2-LU_final_Template-for-updating-info-on-the-EQAVET-website.pdf

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

apprenticeship qualification). There are discussions ongoing on the introduction of credit points, with no decision taken yet.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The VET system has been based on learning outcomes (since major VET reform introduced in 2008); all curricula have been described in terms of LO.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

The VET system has been modularised since the 2008 VET reform (which has been implemented from 2010 onwards). Adjustments to the modularised systems are still ongoing. Luxembourg does not use the concept of partial qualifications; certification is only available for entire qualifications, not single modules.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

There is a credit system in place for VET, without the use of credit points.

Each VET module can be assessed and validated separately, and accumulated. Learners can leave their programme and later return and take up from where they left (if less than 5 years ago).

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

ECVET principles do not play a role in international mobility. Transnational mobility in VET is possible and practiced, with LO achieved abroad being recognised, however with other tools and methods than ECVET.

ECVET principles and tools are being promoted at secondary VET level, but with relatively little take-up and demand reported.

Latvia

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

Regulation adopted in 2016 states the procedures for accreditation and evaluation of professional activities of heads of education institutions. The Regulation includes EQAVET indicators and VET providers have to describe and supplement their self-evaluation report with information regarding relevant indicators. The national approach applies to IVET and CVET but not work-based learning.

System-level QA arrangements

The QA system in Latvia contains a set of quality criteria that are applicable for all VET providers. They are used to provide a uniform methodology for conducting self-assessments. A few EQAVET indicators are being used in Latvia's IVET system and in CVET. The key measures relate to the curriculum, teaching and learning, learner achievement, support for learners, ethos, resources, and organization of work, management and quality assurance.

The national QA system makes provision for the external review of both IVET and CVET providers. The external evaluation of education institutions and their programmes normally takes place every six years¹⁴⁰. The State Education Quality Service organises quality assessment or accreditation of education institutions. Accreditation of education institutions and programmes is based upon a report provided by an external expert commission. Due to the unified system for accreditation of general and vocational education institutions and programmes, the procedures and requirements, as well as the accreditation periods, are almost identical for IVET and CVET.

Provider-level QA arrangements

Latvian VET providers are required to undertake self-assessment each year and to publish updated self-assessment report till September 1 in their own or the founder (normally a regional or local authority) website. VET providers can use any self-assessment method, but the structure of the self-assessment report is determined by the Regulation.

The methodology for accreditation was updated in accordance with the Regulation and adopted by the State Education Quality Service in 2017. The changes were designed to help evaluators match the defined parameters with agreed standards. The State Education Quality Service has responsibility for the accreditation process.

Research on labour market demand and planning of vocational education development is responsibility of the state and municipalities. Employers are also involved in this process through tripartite dialogue and Sectoral Expert Councils.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

Latvia has experienced significant reforms to its VET system in recent years; the VET curriculum reform bears strong links with the underlying principles of ECVET.

The Education Development Guidelines 2014-2020 adopted in 2013 foresee the use of the EU Structural Funds for the development of modular education programmes that seek to increase the attractiveness, flexibility and labour market relevance (and actual participation) of VET by 2020. The sectoral research preceding the development of modular programmes was started in 2011. The actual work on the development of

¹⁴⁰ https://www.eqavet.eu/Equavet2017/media/Documents/2-LV_final_-Latvia_info-on-the-EQAVET-website-2.pdf

modular VET programmes began early in 2013 and is now, by 2018, close to completion.

ECVET as a set of principles has been on the agenda of the involved stakeholders for almost a decade - in the context of the reform of VET curriculum, re-evaluating the mode of delivery of VET content and ensuring flexibility in the study process, both, nationally and trans-nationally.

The impact regarding the lifelong learning context can be seen in relation to the planning and acquisition of EU funds in the planning period 2007 - 2013 and 2014 - 2020. The reform of the development and implementation of VET content with the support of the European Social Fund has been planned and implemented taking into consideration the approaches underlying the ECVET concept. As a result of this, major changes have been implemented by introducing learning outcomes based approach and modularisation of VET programs allowing for flexibility in various contexts. It has contributed also to the possibility of permeability at national and transnational contexts.

ECVET if translated as a set of principles has had a major influence in relation to the VET content reform, although many important developments are often 'not recognised' by stakeholders as being pertinent to ECVET and its content and scope, as ECVET seems to be understood in a more limited sense (if understood at all, e.g. by employers).

In a nutshell, in Latvia, ECVET principles' approach has had a strong influence for making VET pathways more flexible in initial VET; for strengthening the use of LO for qualification design and assessment; quite strong influence for improving the quality of international mobility of learners, and facilitating recognition of LO for transnational mobility of learners.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

Each modular VET programme is described in terms of its objectives, knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired, procedures for the assessment of learning outcomes and further education opportunities.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

Latvia is among the more recent cases of countries that introduce a modularised structure to their VET system (developments started in 2011). The use of units of LO to design qualifications or programmes lies at the base of the current comprehensive VET curriculum reform. This reform was inspired by ECVET, although ECVET is not used in the respective legal documents. The approval and implementation of the new modular VET programmes is still ongoing. This is an ongoing process, and not all VET schools have introduced modules yet.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

Credit points are not being used. The process through which organisations agree on how units will be transferred and accumulated is still under discussion at system level.

Learners will be able to use the modules to build up their qualifications; adults will be able to obtain a qualification by building on what they have achieved so far. Furthermore, partial recognition of qualifications will be made possible. The respective amendments to the law have been introduced, with some more legislation still being prepared. This process is ongoing.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

In relation to transnational mobilities, the system operates well from case to case (partnership to partnership), but there is still some way towards being well developed at system level.

ECVET is felt to have contributed to the quality of VET mobility, and has been used as a recognition instrument for learning outcomes achieved during VET mobility. The use of ECVET is voluntary, but an increasing number of institutions show their interest.

Malta

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

Malta has devised a national approach utilising the EQAVET Framework. The law on vocational and education training (2012) stated the importance of quality assurance at the national and provider level. The National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education was then launched in July 2015 and was built upon the European Standards and Guideline (ESG) and enriched by principles of EQAVET. The law does not oblige providers to comply to EQAVET but indicators are included in the National Standards¹⁴¹. The law also includes requirements on EQAVET quality cycle and indicative descriptors and covers both IVET and CVET.

System-level QA arrangements

The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, within the Ministry for Education and Employment, leads, coordinates and monitors the provision of IVET and CVET. This performance monitoring includes analysis of EQAVET indicators, although not all 10 indicators are used and the indicators differ for IVET and CVET. Both do however have common principles on evaluation and review.

Malta's national QA system includes an external review of both IVET and CVET providers. In accordance with the Legal Notice 296 of 2012, the National Commission for Further and Higher Education acts as the national quality assurance agency in charge of carrying out periodic external quality assurance audits¹⁴² of VET institutions as well as other further and higher education institutions.

Provider-level QA arrangements

The National Commission for Further and Higher Education encourages IVET and CVET providers to evaluate the outcomes of training provided. This can be carried out during or after the training. Processes for continual improvement, including actions to remedy issues identified in the process of evaluation, is also strongly advised for all VET Internal QA systems.

Legislation is in place which requires all IVET institutions to consult with external and internal stakeholders are consulted on provision, including teachers, management, employers, students, trade unions, and sectoral representatives. Institutions in particular must ensure cooperation at local level with labour market actors¹⁴³.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

Malta can be considered one of the early adopters of ECVET. ECVET has been introduced as a system in Malta (in conjunction with the EQF/MQF), with the effect on the system being considered very strong.

VET subjects were mainstreamed as part of the national curriculum framework and in line with Malta's education strategy after successful pilots in 2011, which included training to prepare teachers. In 2013, Malta published its manual for conversion of qualifications into the ECVET system. This manual was updated and published again in 2017.

Current issues for further development are how to accredit WBL components, and a further development of the use of ECVET points (especially in the context of

¹⁴¹ https://www.eqavet.eu/eqavet2017/media/Documents/2-MT_final_-Template-for-updated-info-on-the-EQAVET-website.pdf

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

apprenticeships). A Work Based Learning Act was recently approved by Parliament. It regulates work-based learning in all its forms.

In the context of validation of non-formal and informal learning, the NCFHE made sure to align VNIL elements with the ECVET Recommendation. Validation of non-formal and informal learning in Malta is regulated by Subsidiary Legislation 327.432, Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning, regulations of September 2012. Under the remit of this legislation, and as per Article 6(1) of SL327.433, the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) has been entrusted with VNIL in Malta.

Since then, the NCFHE has already published 27 National Occupational Standards. These standards are pegged to the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) and are therefore compiled using the learning outcomes approach, which is achieved by stipulating and outlining related knowledge, skills and competences. Additional effort is now needed to introduce ECVET points in VNIL. This will be piloted in particular sectors.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The VET system is based on learning outcomes.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

All Maltese awards (short courses) and qualifications are based on the notion of learning outcomes. Groups of learning outcomes, expressed in terms of units, form the basis of all Maltese VET programmes. This is also a requirement for the accreditation of such programmes as per National Quality Assurance standards, which are applicable to both public and private institutions.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

Malta has a credit system in place for VET, including the use of ECVET points (for qualifications up to EQF/MQF level 4).

ECVET points are quantified in the same way as ECTS points. ECVET points are used for qualifications at EQF levels 1 to 4, whereas ECTS is used for qualifications beyond EQF/MQF level 4, i.e. higher VET qualifications currently use ECTS points. One credit point is defined as being equivalent to a workload of 25 hours of total learning.

A learner may transfer relevant units acquired in one context to another, which allows him or her to move seamlessly within the education and training system, facilitating educational choices and pathways. The introduction of the ECVET system has thus improved permeability between VET and HE. The Maltese ECVET system is linked to the Qualifications Framework.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

VET institutions use MoU and LA in the context of transnational VET mobility. Due to the small size of the country, Malta tries to actively promote transnational mobility for their VET learners.

The Netherlands

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

In Netherlands the national approach to QA was developed independently of EQAVET and is compatible with the EQAVET framework. EQAVET has contributed to increasing the emphasis on a culture of quality. The national QA approach is aligned in terms of the EQAVET quality cycle, indicative descriptors and indicators.

System-level QA arrangements

All EQAVET Framework Indicators are being used in the Netherlands' VET system (2 indicators are partially used). The VET law mandates VET providers to set up a quality assurance system. They are relatively free to design and implement their own system, but they have to meet nationally set quality standards and ensure regular quality assessments that include the arrangements in place for teacher training¹⁴⁴.

External reviews of public and private VET providers are conducted by the Inspectorate of Education. Since August 2017, the inspectorate has increased the use of information about the quality that is given by the provider and then triangulates this information with the views of teachers, students and companies¹⁴⁵.

Provider-level QA arrangements

VET providers regularly assess the progress and achievement of the goals set for education programmes and use this to identify areas of improvement (the evaluation and review stage of the EQAVET quality cycle). Providers are also required to have authorities and responsibilities for QA clearly defined, sufficiently communicated and embedded in the organisation. Special focus is on independent assessment of the quality and the involvement of stakeholders.

In terms of planning, VET providers have to formulate sufficient specific and measurable goals for education in a structured manner, based on the institution's mission and strategic policy. Sufficient continuity in teaching and management staff is important. VET providers are obliged to maintain a sufficiently functioning dialogue regarding quality with internal stakeholders and persons responsible as well as with external stakeholders. This dialogue comprises accountability regarding the quality provided and its improvement¹⁴⁶.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

The impact of ECVET at system level is considered modest, both in the context of mobility and in lifelong learning. Stakeholders at national level consider the Dutch VET as too inflexible for full ECVET implementation. Unfamiliarity with practical possibilities of ECVET, both related to mobility and lifelong learning, may have also played a role. There is no official document related to an implementation of ECVET.

ECVET is however credited with sparking discussions on how to make VET pathways more flexible, and that it has helped placing the topic of LLL more firmly on the agenda. A series of pilot projects were run to explore the implementation of ECVET principles for these purposes.

¹⁴⁴ https://www.eqavet.eu/Equavet2017/media/Documents/2-NL_final_Template-for-updating-info-on-the-EQAVET-website.pdf

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

Current policy objectives communicated from the ministerial level refer to a focus international mobility and promotion of lifelong learning, making learning pathways more flexible.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The qualification structure has been competence-based for many years. This is not understood as a direct impact of ECVET.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

The Dutch VET system does not have a structure based on stand-alone, certified modules or units that together form a full qualification. The qualification system has however recently been revised. The introduction of optional modules is intended to ensure labour market relevance of curricula. VET schools have a great deal of autonomy and may decide how they structure programmes, i.e. they may use extra, optional units but are not obliged to. There are pilot initiatives being currently implemented that explore the possibility of issuing certificates for parts of a qualification that function as a stand-alone unit.

Furthermore, modules have recently been introduced in adult VET. This is considered to be at least indirectly influenced by ECVET developments.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

There is no credit system in place for VET. Possibilities for credit transfer are largely at the discretion of education and training providers.

Currently, efforts are being made to gain familiarity with the benefits from using the ECVET principles in recognition of prior learning (without focus on ECVET credit points).

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

ECVET has positively contributed to the quality of international mobility. The tools provided by ECVET for this purpose are perceived as very helpful and are increasingly used for mobility purposes. However, with the share of VET learners going abroad still being very limited, the overall impact of ECVET has not been very large.

Poland

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

Poland produced guidelines on assuring the quality of vocational education (as well as general education) in regulation of the Minister of National Education of 7th October 2009 on pedagogical supervision (OJ of 9th October 2009). It utilises the EQAVET Framework, including reference to the EQAVET quality cycle, indicative descriptors and indicators. It applies only to IVET.

System-level QA arrangements

Quality standards are developed for the whole country by the Minister of National Education and are used to measure the quality of school work, although these are not necessarily based on EQAVET indicators. Pedagogical supervision and monitoring is also performed by education superintendents, who observe, report and give advice on how to improve the education process in both IVET and CVET. Very important quality mechanism relies on the system of external examination in the formal IVET and CVET. All VET learners participate in the standardised VET examination which allows to compare results from different schools. These data might be used by the decision makers at the local and national level.

Poland's national QA system makes provision for the external review of both IVET and CVET providers. This focuses on the evaluation and review stage of the quality cycle. The external reviews specifically measure some EQAVET indicators on achieved by learners and the centre's functioning in the local environment. However, it also measures non-EQAVET indicators, such as the processes of the centre and its management¹⁴⁷.

By the Act on the Integrated Qualifications System QA has been introduced to all the partial VET qualifications awarded outside formal VET which are included in Integrated Qualifications Registry (market qualifications). The awarding institutions are obliged to have internal quality assurance system of validation process and are evaluated periodically by external QA bodies.

Provider-level QA arrangements

In IVET, providers are required to conduct internal evaluation and use results to improve the future delivery of the programme (the evaluation and review stage of the quality cycle). Internal evaluation is the responsibility of the school head, and is performed in collaboration with teachers and managers once a year. The internal evaluation helps in gathering information on the centre's performance, the quality of its work and the effectiveness of its actions. The results are presented to the teachers' council.

Provider internal evaluation utilises some EQAVET indicators on outcomes, as well as indicators on teaching and learner care. This is used to diagnose quality deficits and plan further developments aiming at improving quality¹⁴⁸.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

In Poland, three reforms since 2009 have gradually introduced learning outcomes and units in VET. An integrated qualification system (IQS) was introduced, bringing together formal qualifications, regulated 'market' qualifications and 'non-formal' (not regulated) qualifications. Standards governing those institutions responsible for

¹⁴⁷ <https://www.eqavet.eu/what-we-do/implementing-the-framework/poland>

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

validation and articulation of market qualifications were introduced, and links to the Polish Qualification Framework and qualification register were established.

The key elements of the reform introduced in 2012/13 were a unitised LO based curriculum, new format of external assessment, and new procedures for validation non-formal and informal learning. They are considered in line with ECVET principles.

The Act on the Integrated Qualifications System that establishes the Polish Qualifications Framework and the integrated qualifications registry came into force in 2016. Its main aim is to support lifelong learning.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

A significant shift to learning outcomes based approaches has taken place since 2009. Each qualification includes specific sets of learning outcomes defined in the core curriculum for vocational education. ECVET has significantly supported this shift to learning outcomes.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

Learning outcomes are grouped in units, which typically contain from several to over a dozen learning outcomes and reflect specific professional tasks. Both full and partial qualifications in the formal VET in Poland consist of a number of units of learning outcomes, which are in line with the principles of ECVET. Units were introduced to increase the flexibility of learning, ensure the transparency of qualifications, and to facilitate accumulation and transfer of learning achievements. Each unit includes the description of learning outcomes and there are works to define assessment criteria to learning outcomes in the VET core curricula.

All partial VET qualifications awarded outside formal VET which are included in Integrated Qualifications Registry (market qualifications) consist of a number of units of learning outcomes which are described by assessment criteria as well. Units can be assessed separately.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

A system for credit transfer and credit accumulation, in line with ECVET principles, was developed as part of the PQF, but is currently not operational. It is not possible in Poland to accumulate single units of learning outcomes towards achieving vocational certificate. However, partial qualifications (vocational certificates) can be accumulated towards achieving full qualifications (vocational diploma). Poland does not use credit points in VET.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

Cross-country geographic mobility for IVET is not a national priority but there is growing interest among stakeholders in using ECVET as a tool to support it. Transfer of learning outcomes and periods of employment abroad are recognised on a case by case basis. Learning and working experience gained abroad can be recognised in the validation of non-formal and informal learning procedure in order to achieve VET certificate (partial qualification).

Portugal

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

Portugal has new QA legislation that refers specially to EQAVET and was devised utilising the EQAVET Framework. The approach was developed in 2017 and was rolled out in early 2018. Its QA framework requires all providers to become certified in order to receive public funding to deliver VET. The regulations cover all VET providers in Portugal, including providers of IVET, CVET, Adult Learning, WBL and non-formal learning. The national approach is aligned to the EQAVET quality cycle, indicative descriptors and indicators.

System-level QA arrangements

The Certification system for training providers is regulated by Portaria (Ordinance) n^o 851/2010 that was amended by Portaria (Ordinance) n^o 208/2013. The General Directorate for Employment and Industrial Relations (DGERT) of the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, has the responsibility for quality certification of training providers. Certification can be granted to any legally established public or private entity which meets requirements regarding its structure and training practices.¹⁴⁹

The Directorate-General for Employment and Industrial Relations undertake regular audits of VET providers to verify their compliance with quality standards, including self-assessment and using performance indicators. This audit is a precondition for maintaining accreditation¹⁵⁰. The quality standards include results analysis and continuous improvement measures, as well as post-training follow-up and an annual evaluation of results¹⁵¹. A few EQAVET indicators are being used in Portugal's IVET system-level management, but none in CVET.

Provider-level QA arrangements

Providers are required to use an established QA framework, which can be EQAVET but could also include other QA measures such as ISO. In implementing the QA framework, providers are required to have audits and undertake evaluations of performance¹⁵².

Further reforms in 2017 stipulated that only Portuguese providers who can demonstrate they have appropriate QA systems in place will receive a certified quality mark for their QA system and therefore public funding. These systems include a self-assessment approach and the use appropriate indicators to measure performance. In Portugal, the indicators providers use must be based on the EQAVET indicators¹⁵³.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

The new government has recently made the introduction of a VET credit system, inspired by ECVET, a priority.

Fulfilling the ex-ante conditionality 10.4. of the Portugal 2020 Partnership Agreement and the National Reform Programme (PNR), ANQEP carried out a set of activities to implement a National Credit System applicable to dual certification qualifications

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/portugal-certification-training-providers>

¹⁵⁰ http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/portugal_-_vet_policy_developments.pdf

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² 01 – Good Practices @Catalogue on EQF-ECVET-EQAVET. ATTRACT-VET Project Consortium. May 2016, p. 58

¹⁵³ Latest ICF report.

integrated in the National Catalogue of Qualifications (CNQ), incorporating ECVET principles. One of the ECVET principles that has been developed relates to learning outcomes, namely in developing qualifications standards and curriculum development.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The shift to a learning outcomes based systems is progressing, with many qualifications already described in terms of learning outcomes. This is accompanied by specific training for teachers and trainers to implement the new approach. ANQEP has been carrying out training sessions for the different providers of the education and training system on the operationalisation of the qualifications based on learning outcomes. These sessions allows teachers and trainers to understand the concepts and innovative principles of curricular design methodology by competences, to identify and apply the principles of competence-based training/learning outcomes, to plan curricular units organised in learning outcomes and to describe and apply the main assessment techniques and tools for the training based on learning outcomes.

Following training sessions, a methodological meeting/workshop will take place in November 2018 to share and reflect upon the implementation of qualifications based on learning outcomes, which allows having inputs to re-design the national methodology and to identify the best practices.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

The VET system is modularised and VET qualifications include units of learning outcomes.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

Portugal has recently decided on the introduction of a national credit system for VET, which is inspired by ECVET (Order n. º 47/2017 of February 1st).

It is applicable to double certification qualifications integrated in the CNQ (levels 2, 4 and 5 of NQF/EQF).

Nowadays, all double qualifications included in the CNQ have credit points associated. In 2019, it is expected to increasingly promote flexible pathways in adult learning provision and guidance by using the Qualifica Passport (instrument for recording the individual learning pathways) for mobility purposes (e.g., transferring credit points within the same qualification, between qualifications of the same NQF level and between qualifications of different NQF level), at national and European levels. Moreover, it is also planned to allow, under certain conditions, for the allocation of credit points to certified training not included in the CNQ.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

ECVET tools are being used in the context of international VET mobility at provider level, mostly in the context of Erasmus+ mobility, and not very widely implemented.

Romania

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

The Romania national framework for QA was first established by Law 87 in 2006 and was based on the CQAF. Since 2009, Romania has made adjustments to the framework to ensure it refers specifically to EQAVET, including reference to the EQAVET quality cycle and indicative descriptors. EQAVET has reportedly had a direct influence on IVET than CVET¹⁵⁴, and it does not apply to WBL.

System-level QA arrangements

At a system-level, a range of stakeholders are involved in monitoring QA in VET. In IVET, the Ministry of Education is responsible for ensuring quality at system level, drafting the general policies and monitoring the overall processes and results. The National Centre for Development of Technical and Vocational Education holds responsibility for developing specific methodologies on quality assurance in vocational and technical education. The County School Inspectorates are responsible for external monitoring visits and validation of the self-evaluation reports drafted by IVET providers.

In CVET, the National Qualifications Authority participates in developing the methodology for implementing the principles of quality assurance in vocational training of adults, and monitors the activity of authorised training providers to ensure quality. There is no system for external review in CVET.

Provider-level QA arrangements

All IVET providers are obliged by law to evaluate the quality of their provision annually, against a pre-defined list of national indicators and quality assurance principles (based on EQAVET). This is to be used to develop an improvement plan in order to address all the weak points identified. In each school, a Quality Assurance Commission is appointed to supervise all quality assurance processes and activities. At present, CVET providers are not required to have specific quality assurance measures in place¹⁵⁵.

Each IVET provider has to prepare a School Development Plan periodically, based to the profile of the institution and the local or regional socio-economic context. IVET provider decision-making structures include social partners and local administration representatives. No specific mechanisms for identifying training needs are in place for CVET¹⁵⁶.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

ECVET, in conjunction with EQF, has been the main pillar for the revision of VET qualifications.

The NQF was adopted in 2013. The credit system for IVET, which is compatible with ECVET, and the transfer of learning outcomes are not fully operational until the NQF is completely developed.

A methodology for the transfer and recognition of the learning outcomes achieved during on-the-job training in IVET is available. The national law of education sets

¹⁵⁴ https://www.eqavet.eu/Eqavet2017/media/Documents/2-RO_final_Template-for-updating-info-on-the-EQAVET-website.pdf

¹⁵⁵ https://www.eqavet.eu/Eqavet2017/media/Documents/2-RO_final_Template-for-updating-info-on-the-EQAVET-website.pdf

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

general rules relating to the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and the concrete methodology has been recently revised.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

Qualifications are defined in terms of LO for the entire TVET system. All training standards (levels 3-5) have been revised following the ECVET structure. A training standard is a document which describes the learning outcomes that participants in a technological programme or in a 'school- and work-based VET' programme should acquire and be able to demonstrate. The training standard is based on the relevant occupational standards in force and is the regulating document with the most important role in designing VET curricula. It also stands as general basis for the assessment of learning outcomes and the award of a qualification certificate.

Revisions have also kicked off for CVET, but this is still work in progress.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

VET qualifications are structured in terms of units of LOs (previously, units of competences had been used).

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

Romania has a credit system in place for VET. Accumulation of units is possible by design, but this principle has not yet been operationalised. It is currently not possible to obtain a partial qualification in Romania.

Credit points are considered a difficult issue. In the previous qualifications design, credit points were based on time. This turned out to be too complicated and not fit for use in the end. With the revised qualifications in place since 2016, there is currently a credit system without credit points.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

ECVET has significantly contributed to the quality of VET mobility, and to creating the possibility for learning outcomes achieved during transnational mobility to be recognised. LA and MoU are widely used, and ECVET is considered highly useful for creating a structure and mechanism for implementation of international mobility in VET. Transnational mobility mainly takes place within the framework of Erasmus+.

Sweden

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

Sweden introduced reforms to its QA systems in 2011 which were developed independently of EQAVET but shares many of the same principles in terms of the quality cycle, indicative descriptors and indicators. Indicative descriptors and indicators are frequently used by VET providers, but not mandatory requirement. National authorities also produce statistics to measure some indicators.

System-level QA arrangements

In IVET, the Swedish National Agency for Education has developed a web-based programme for principals and their staff to use in their work with quality assurance. This includes an online QA platform, BRUK, which uses seven EQAVET indicators and is an aid for schools to follow an annual cycle for systematically monitoring quality. The School Inspectorate carries out regular inspections of IVET schools¹⁵⁷. In CVET, the Agency for Higher Vocational Education has a responsibility to monitor those educational programmes which have been given government grants to arrange vocational education. It audits a chosen number of providers each year.

Provider-level QA arrangements

In IVET, regulations in the Education Act details how annual systematic quality work in upper secondary school and local adult education must be carried out. For adult education the principals/municipalities need to prepare a needs analysis of the local labour market to be entitled to specified government grants. In CVET, a detailed educational plan of each intended programme must be prepared and approved by the Agency for Higher Vocational Education¹⁵⁸.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

The system is considered as ECVET-compatible but ECVET is only implemented for transnational mobility, and on a voluntary basis.

ECVET does not really play a role in the context of lifelong learning, although the Swedish system in fact is very much in line with ECVET principles (based on LO, credit system in place, possibility of accumulation of modules, focus on flexible pathways). Also, ECVET is not specifically mentioned with regard to these topics.

Proposal for a national validation strategy in 2017, but not yet fully implemented. Validation is based on ECVET principles, like units of learning outcomes that are assessed separately (Sweden uses the term 'modules'). In many cases, credit points are used. The validation strategy proposal does not explicitly mention ECVET.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The Swedish VET-system is based on learning outcomes.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

Units as such do not exist, but qualifications (formal learning programmes) are subdivided into modules. To obtain an upper secondary diploma you have to accumulate 2 500 credit points (this is not the same as ECVET points). Most modules/course are 100 credits.

¹⁵⁷ <https://www.eqavet.eu/what-we-do/implementing-the-framework/sweden>

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Recent initiatives include the development of 'vocational packages' for adults (2017), which can be interpreted (but are not formally considered as) partial qualifications that consist of a smaller number of modules. These vocational packages can also be used in the so called introductory programmes in upper secondary school. Their aim is to develop smaller components of VET qualifications that can be recognised. They are not directly related to ECVET but are in line with the objective of creating more flexible pathways.¹⁵⁹

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

VET in Sweden has its own module-based credit system in IVET, which enables students to accumulate learning outcomes in accordance with a nationally established programme structure. A points system is in use. In fact, two different credit systems are used in VET: upper secondary credits and higher vocational education credits.

As in ECVET, the upper secondary credits are a numerical representation of the overall weight of learning outcomes in a qualification and of the relative weight of units in relation to the qualification and are not defined by time. However, no conversion system to ECVET points has been implemented.

CVET qualifications are provided in formal and non-formal education systems which differ significantly and ECVET components (units of LO, assessment and validation of LO and transcript of record) can be found within some formal provision.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

Supporting the quality of mobility (in particular through the use of MoU, LA) is reported to be the most significant impact of ECVET in Sweden, with ECVET tools being increasingly used. However, since many transnational mobility periods are relatively short and do not cover entire modules, it is typically the home institution that takes on the assessment of the learners upon their return.

¹⁵⁹ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/sweden-partial-ivet-qualifications-adults>

Slovenia

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

New quality assurance arrangements have recently been introduced in Slovenia. The Institute for Vocational Education and Training and the Institute for Adult Education, supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, have devised a national approach to QA based on the EQAVET Framework.

The new system embeds the 'Plan, Do, Check, Act' framework which underpins the EQAVET quality cycle and requires providers to establish appropriate indicators that reflect some of the ten EQAVET indicators¹⁶⁰. The framework has been partially implemented in Slovenia and is expected to be fully implemented by 2020. Data from the 2018 EQAVET survey suggests this new national approach applies to IVET and WBL but not CVET.

System-level QA arrangements

Quality indicators for the national VET system were initially introduced with the Vocational and Technical Education Act (OG. RS, no.79/2006). Slovenia currently has an established methodology for collecting data on quality indicators and has created a system of annual quality reporting¹⁶¹.

The Evaluation Council directs the system-level review and evaluation of VET programmes and curricula. External provider reviews are undertaken by the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training and other public professional institutions such as the National School for Leadership in Education, the National Education Institute, the Educational Research Institute and the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education.

Provider-level QA arrangements

The Vocational Education Act requires IVET providers to establish a quality committee, consisting of representatives of professional school employees, employers, students and parents. Annual self-evaluations are compulsory for IVET providers, as stated by The Organisation and Financing of Education Act. All adult education organisations that offer continuing vocational education also have to carry out self-evaluation. Guidance and recommendations to help VET providers evaluate their own performance have been prepared by the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for VET.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

In Slovenia, ECVET is not considered to have had a big impact on achieving the objectives of the Copenhagen Process. In addition, from a system perspective, ECVET is no longer considered a priority. The Slovenian qualifications framework is believed to play a much bigger role as a transparency instrument.

The idea of ECVET implementation beyond transnational learner mobility was discarded at policy level, as it was felt that a reform of the entire VET system would have been necessary in order to fully implement ECVET. There was no support for this. The Slovenian VET system is, however, considered to be in line with ECVET principles.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The VET system is based on learning outcomes. ECVET and EQF have been a valuable source of inspiration here, although Slovenia does not use the same concept of LOs.

¹⁶⁰ Latest ICF report.

¹⁶¹ https://www.eqavet.eu/Equavet2017/media/Documents/2-SI_-final_Template-for-updating-info-on-the-EQAVET-website.pdf

First developments towards an outcome-oriented approach in VET started in 1996, with a more profound reform taking place 2004-2010, when all IVET programmes were modularised.

Very recently, VET programmes have been revised by describing the practical training taking place through work placements (24 weeks per VET programme) or in the new apprenticeship path in terms of LOs, as well.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

Slovenia has a modularised VET system. By choosing different elective modules, students can be specialised on different occupational standards on which the vocational qualifications are based. The modules are competence-based and include vocational theory and practical training.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

Slovenia has had a credit system in place on the level of upper-secondary level VET since the reform implemented between 2006 and 2008. VET and HE use the same credit point convention.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

Supporting the quality of mobility (in particular through the use of MoU, LA at provider level; agreement on the LO to be achieved and how they will be assessed), in particular of work placements, is reported to be the most significant impact of ECVET in Slovenia.

ECVET has also significantly contributed to the possibilities of recognition of LO achieved during mobility stays abroad.

There is a high level of interest from VET providers in transnational learner mobility, with more applications for VET mobility than funding available. ECVET tools and methodology are much appreciated in this context. They are however typically not promoted under the ECVET banner.

Slovak Republic

EQAVET

Changes made to national QA arrangements

Slovakia has devised a national approach to QA independently of the EQAVET framework, although it is aligned to the EQAVET indicative descriptors and indicators but not the quality cycle. A section on monitoring and measurement of the quality of education and training is included in The School Act (245/2008 of Coll. as amended), with further specificities for VET outlined in The Act on vocational education and training (61/2015 of Coll.). The national approach applies to IVET and associated work-based learning but not CVET.

System-level QA arrangements

The indicators used in IVET in Slovakia cover the areas of school management, conditions for education and training and teaching processes and outcomes. Several EQAVET indicators are being used in Slovakia's IVET system and in CVET.

The national QA system makes provision for the external review of IVET providers but not CVET providers. The school inspectorate monitors the quality of education and training based on the results of school inspection visits using a set of defined indicators.

The Inspectorate prepares an annual report on the state and level of education and training, summarising the results of the inspections in the year under review, and presents the data against some of the indicators. There is a separate section on upper-secondary schools but not on VET as such. The report presents some of the data distinguishing general education subjects and vocational subjects. While there is no formal review process in CVET, the Act on lifelong learning requires institutions to provide data on a range of aspects of their VET programmes such as participation and competition rates¹⁶².

Provider-level QA arrangements

QA at provider level in Slovakia is based on the requirement for headteachers to issue a strategy for school development and to present its evaluation to the school council. Formal self-assessment at school level is not required in Slovakia.

The accreditation of the programme is used to encourage QA in CVET providers. The Act on lifelong learning, which regulates the accreditation process, defines a number of programme design and delivery characteristics that providers have to comply with. These characteristics include the definition of the programme target group, entry conditions, education methods and the scope of the programme in terms of hours of training.

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

ECVET has not led to any major changes at system level in Slovakia. Still, a strong impact is visible at VET schools level. ECVET plays a role in 80 % of Erasmus+ VET mobilities. ECVET principles and tools (including Memorandum of Understanding and Learning Agreement) are widely used and the focus on learning outcomes is contributing to improvement of both VET mobilities and the learning culture of schools.

Introducing a 'philosophy of learning outcomes' is heavily supported by seminars for Erasmus+ projects applicants organised by the National Agency. Developing units of learning outcomes is therefore predominantly linked to ECVET.

¹⁶² https://www.eqavet.eu/Equavet2017/media/Documents/2-SK_final_Template-for-updating-info-on-the-EQAVET-website-1.pdf

At system level, impact of ECVET is limited, as the Slovak VET is still insufficiently modularised and 'smaller' labour market driven qualifications of fourth sub-framework of the Slovak Qualification Framework system are still insufficiently developed. In the future policy discussion, ECVET might be possibly considered better suitable for CVET rather than IVET (apart from its use for transnational mobility).

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The VET curricula reform (2008) introduced competence-based curricula and corresponding standards. The key achievement of ECVET in Slovakia is its contribution to a shift towards a philosophy of learning outcomes. Input-based curricula for dual VET introduced in 2015 on request of employers were abolished by the 2018 amendment of Act on VET. Thus all VET programmes are based on the same pattern now: State educational programmes (national curricula containing educational standards) are used as a mandatory basis for autonomous elaboration of school education programmes by schools with employers' side having the opportunity to comment (explicitly stipulated by the law) before issuing the programme.

Many VET programmes in Slovakia are however still based on subjects (as a mandatory organisational instrument). Thus, the implementation of a learning outcomes-based approach in the daily life of schools heavily depends on the individual school culture, and can be considered to be generally at an early stage.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

There are no unit-based or modular structures in place in VET in national curricula. Schools are however autonomous in finalising curricula, and some already work with modules and units of LO inspired by ECVET. Modularisation and development of "smaller" demand-driven occupational qualifications (envisaged by the aforementioned fourth sub-framework of the Slovak Qualification Framework) is supported by experts, i.a. "Learning Slovakia" strategy paper¹⁶³ commissioned by the Ministry of Education and issued in 2017. Nevertheless, progress is relatively slow as it is considered to be not sufficiently supported by national authorities.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

There is no credit system in place for VET. The notion of credit is not used in the context of VET.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

ECVET activity in Slovakia focuses on the improvement of the quality of mobility of VET students. Introducing the description of learning outcomes to be achieved during VET mobility is considered as a key achievement of ECVET in this regard.

¹⁶³ Ministry of Education expert group (2017). *Učiace sa Slovensko (Learning Slovakia)*. Bratislava: Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport (part 3-04 National Qualifications System in particular), available in Slovak at http://www.minedu.sk/data/files/7532_uciace-sa-slovensko2017.pdf,

United Kingdom (EWNI)

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

ECVET is not explicitly linked to any UK policies and has not had a significant impact on national VET policy and approaches. This is because learning outcomes, unit based qualifications and credit systems were already well-established in the UK before the recommendation.

The UK is using ECVET to promote transnational mobility, to ensure a quality experience for the learner/worker and recognition/validation of their learning. UK [ECVET Experts](#) are promoting and encouraging organisations involved in mobility to use ECVET in geographical mobility, linking ECVET to Erasmus+.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

Learning outcomes were used many years before ECVET was introduced. UK actors have however become more aware of LOs during the last years.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

The UK VET qualifications system has been unit-based for many years. Credit-based units of learning outcomes have been strongly embedded into the VET system.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

The UK launched its own credit systems prior to the ECVET Recommendation, so would not implement ECVET as that would mean having two credit systems. Credit-based units of learning outcomes are already developed and strongly embedded in the VET system. There are clear procedures for accumulation, recognition and transfer of units of learning outcomes. Units in VET programmes may be assessed independently within qualifications, and linked to credits.

The UK credit systems are not compatible with the concept of ECVET credit points. It was not possible to create a link between ECVET and the UK credit systems.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

The main achievement of ECVET is to get UK colleges and international sending institutions to think more clearly on what learners do on their placements. It also created a dialogue on what should be achieved and recognised on placements. This is largely when ECVET is used for mobility. The introduction of LAs and MoUs, including the process for assessment, transfer and accumulation of LOs/ units has contributed greatly to an increase in trust and quality assurance between institutions and in some cases, competent institutions in different Member States. Within the UK, this is a major influence on the improved quality of mobilities.

The decision to introduce ECVET principles and instruments such as LAs and MoUs built on good practice already displayed in VET mobilities but with a greater focus on the specific VET learning the participant was involved in during their mobility.

United Kingdom-SC

ECVET

National VET policy and approaches in line with ECVET Recommendation

The main impact of ECVET has been to support mobility.

A unit-based structure of qualifications, including the use of credit points, has been well-established for many years. The Scottish credit and qualifications framework (SCQF) was adopted in 2001. It is based on learning outcomes and comprises 12 levels. It has supported credit transfer and accumulation, recognition of prior learning and other aims of ECVET implementation, including recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

ECVET thus had no impact on VET policies in other areas than mobilities.

Use of the learning outcomes approach

The SCQF describes levels, qualifications and units in terms of learning outcomes.

Organisation of VET provision in modules and VET qualifications in units of learning outcomes and/or partial qualifications

Scotland has been using individual units of learning since the 1980s. They are still the core of SCQF credits. Each unit has separate assessment criteria based on its expected learning outcomes. Units are also assigned an SCQF level, based on its learning outcomes.

Systems for transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes

The SCQF credit system (<http://scqf.org.uk/the-framework/scqf-credit-points/>) is explicitly linked to the national qualifications framework SCQF. Explicit links to arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning are also in place. One SCQF credit point equates to a notional 10 hours of learning (based on the time judged to be required for an 'average' learner to achieve the learning outcomes). The credit points are the building blocks for credit transfer.

The SCQF credit system is not compatible with the concept of ECVET credit points.

Recognition of learning outcomes achieved in international mobility

ECVET has had a very positive influence on Erasmus+ VET mobilities, leading to improved quality mobility experiences.

The introduction of LAs and MoUs, including the process for assessment, transfer and accumulation of LOs/ units has contributed greatly to an increase in trust and quality assurance between institutions and in some cases, competent institutions in different Member States. Within the UK, this is a major influence on the improved quality of mobilities.

Prior to the ECVET Recommendation, mobilities tended to focus on the social and personal development aspects. The decision to introduce ECVET principles and instruments such as LAs and MoUs built on good practice already displayed in VET mobilities but with a greater focus on the specific VET learning the participant was involved in during their mobility.

Annex 2: EQAVET indicative descriptors

Planning

Quality criteria: 'Planning reflects a strategic vision shared by the relevant stakeholders and includes explicit goals/objectives, actions and indicators'

Table 29. Provider and system indicative descriptors for the planning stage

System-level indicators	Provider-level indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goals/objectives of VET are described for the medium and long terms, and linked to European goals The relevant stakeholders participate in setting VET goals and objectives at the different levels Targets are established and monitored through specific indicators (success criteria) Mechanisms and procedures have been established to identify training needs An information policy has been devised to ensure optimum disclosure of quality results/outcomes subject to national/regional data protection requirements Standards and guidelines for recognition, validation and certification of competences of individuals have been defined 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> European, national and regional VET policy goals/objectives are reflected in the local targets set by the VET providers Explicit goals/objectives and targets are set and monitored Ongoing consultation with relevant stakeholders takes place to identify specific local/ individual needs Responsibilities in quality management and development have been explicitly allocated There is an early involvement of staff in planning, including with regard to quality development Providers plan cooperative initiatives with other VET providers <i>The relevant stakeholders participate in the process of analysing local needs VET providers have an explicit and transparent quality assurance system in place</i>

Source: EQAVET Recommendation

Implementation

Quality criteria: 'Implementation plans are devised in consultation with stakeholders and include explicit principles'

Table 30. Provider and system indicative descriptors for the implementation stage

System-level indicators	Provider-level indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation plans are established in cooperation with social partners, VET providers and other relevant stakeholders at different levels Implementation plans include consideration of the resources required, the capacity of the users and the tools and guidelines needed for support Guidelines and standards have been devised for implementation at different levels Implementation plans include specific 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources are appropriately internally aligned/assigned with a view to achieving the targets set in the implementation plans Relevant and inclusive partnerships are explicitly supported to implement the actions planned The strategic plan for staff competence development specifies the need for training for teachers and trainers Staff undertake regular training and

<p>support towards the training of teachers and trainers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VET providers' responsibilities in the implementation process are explicitly described and made transparent • <i>A national and/or regional quality assurance framework has been devised and includes guidelines and quality standards at VET-provider level to promote continuous improvement and self-regulation</i> 	<p>develop cooperation with relevant external stakeholders to support capacity building and quality improvement, and to enhance performance</p>
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Source: EQAVET Recommendation

Evaluation

Quality criteria: 'Evaluation of outcomes and processes is regularly carried out and supported by measurement;

Table 31. Provider and system indicative descriptors for the evaluation stage

System-level indicators	Provider-level indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A methodology for evaluation has been devised, covering internal and external evaluation • Stakeholder involvement in the monitoring and evaluation process is agreed and clearly described • The national/regional standards and processes for improving and assuring quality are relevant and proportionate to the needs of the sector • Systems are subject to self-evaluation, internal and external review, as appropriate • Early warning systems are implemented • Performance indicators are applied • Relevant, regular and coherent data collection takes place, in order to measure success and identify areas for improvement • Appropriate data collection methodologies have been devised, e.g. questionnaires and indicators/metrics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-assessment/self-evaluation is periodically carried out under national and regional regulations/ frameworks or at the initiative of VET providers • Evaluation and review covers processes and results/outcomes of education including the assessment of learner satisfaction as well as staff performance and satisfaction • Evaluation and review includes adequate and effective mechanisms to involve internal and external stakeholders • Early warning systems are implemented

Source: EQAVET Recommendation

Review

Table 32. Provider and system indicative descriptors for the review stage

System-level indicators	Provider-level indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures, mechanisms and instruments for undertaking reviews are defined at all levels • Processes are regularly reviewed and action plans for change devised. Systems are adjusted accordingly • Information on the outcomes of evaluation is made publicly available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners' feedback is gathered on their individual learning experience and on the learning and teaching environment. Together with teachers' feedback this is used to inform further actions • Information on the outcomes of the review is widely and publicly available • Procedures on feedback and review are part of a strategic learning process in the organisation • Results/outcomes of the evaluation process are discussed with relevant stakeholders and appropriate action plans are put in place

Source: EQAVET Recommendation

Annex 3: Research questions and sub-questions

Main research question	Sub-questions	Indicators, types of evidence expected	
		Secondary sources	Primary sources
What has been achieved so far with regard to ECVET and EQAVET policy objectives?	<i>ECVET</i>		
	<p>How has ECVET supported national policies for mobility, including:</p> <p>The organisation of the mobility experience</p> <p>The quality of the mobility experience</p> <p>The monitoring of mobility learners' progress</p> <p>The integration in the home programme of the learning outcomes of the mobility experiences</p> <p>How has the use of ECVET MoU and LA been incorporated in national mobility systems? What has been its impact?</p>	Evidence from Erasmus + programme (existing surveys of VET learners)	<p>Sentiment of interviewees and experts providing inputs via targeted consultation</p> <p>Examples of developments identified through the above</p>
	How has ECVET increased the recognition and use of (units of) learning outcomes in national VET systems?	Evidence from Cedefop research on unitisation and modularisation in VET	Idem
	How have learning outcome introduced through ECVET affected national systems for recognising formal learning in other contexts		

Main research question	Sub-questions	Indicators, types of evidence expected	
		Secondary sources	Primary sources
	How has ECVET affected national systems for recognising non-formal and informal learning? What impact has this had?	Evidence from the inventory on validation of NFIL	N/A (not needed the secondary evidence is strong enough)
	How has individualisation of training pathways in VET improved?	Individualisation as a pedagogical approach – i.e. adapting the training programme to learners' needs Individualisation by offering learners choices and options within programmes Evidence from Cedefop research on unitisation and modularisation in VET	Sentiment of interviewees and experts providing inputs via targeted consultation Examples of developments identified through the above
	How has it influenced national credit systems for VET?	Existence of credit systems in VET as identified by existing Cedefop studies: - ECVET monitoring - Monitoring of the Copenhagen process	Interviewees and expert views on how ECVET informed the introduction of national credit systems Examples of alignment of national systems with ECVET
	<i>Context specifically relevant for ECVET</i>		
	How has it strengthened use of learning outcomes in national systems	Cedefop reports on use of learning outcomes	Expert interviews of attribution of ECVET in supporting MS use of learning outcomes
	<i>EQAVET</i>		
	How, if at all, has EQAVET supported countries to strengthen systematic internal	Use of internal evaluations and recent changes to these policies Sources include:	Examples of EQAVET influence will be collected but the desk research evidence is already strong

Main research question	Sub-questions	Indicators, types of evidence expected	
		Secondary sources	Primary sources
	quality assurance processes at provider level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EQAVET evaluation - Refernet reports have a section on quality assurance - EQAVET survey 	
	How, if at all, has it supported countries to strengthen feedback loops between VET policy and provider level on the one hand and the labour market on the other hand	Idem	Idem Opinion about the extent to which the national measures have been strengthened (as opposed to remaining the same)
	How has it supported countries to strengthen quality assurance at system level	Idem	Idem
	To what extent has it led to countries' quality assurance procedures pay attention to all or most of the issues underpinned by EQAVET indicators	EQAVET survey contains data for all of the indicators and descriptors	Idem
What are the features of ECVET and EQAVET that have worked well so far and which ones are lagging behind and why?	<i>Both instruments</i>		
	Clarity of the request made on Member States in the ECVET/ EQAVET Recommendation. To what extent is the text of the Recommendation (core text) supportive of stimulating changes/ new developments at national level?	N/A	Targeted consultation – views of the ECVET Users' Group/ EQAVET network Level of awareness of the 'mandate' among the broader group of interviewees. + Sentiment about the clarity of this mandate among those who were aware.
	To what extent is the governance of the instruments supportive of stimulating	ECVET and EQAVET evaluations Description of	

Main research question	Sub-questions	Indicators, types of evidence expected	
		Secondary sources	Primary sources
	changes/ new developments at national level?	governance arrangements and their evolutions Analysis of participation in governance	
	To what extent are EU support actions appropriate? ECVET: - national teams of experts - Erasmus + projects and link with the VET mobility charter - peer learning and other events organised at EU level EQAVET: - Erasmus + projects and link with the VET mobility charter - peer learning and other events organised at EU level	Who is reached by these activities – analysis of data on participation How strong are the links between the programme and these policy initiatives – analysis of programme documentation	Targeted consultation – views of the ECVET Users’ Group/ EQAVET network
	Alignment of ECVET/ EQAVET objectives with the national priority agendas		Stakeholders’ perception of the alignment during interviews
	What is the level of awareness about these initiatives among stakeholders? What is being done to strengthen	Proxy indicators: Rapid search on social media for reference to the two abbreviations as well as terms related to the two instruments (such as credit systems, transferring credit, credit exemption, VET quality assurance)	Level of awareness of the stakeholders interviewed Their sentiment about who is aware of the initiatives

Main research question	Sub-questions	Indicators, types of evidence expected	
		Secondary sources	Primary sources
	awareness?	<p>Google analytics data on unique visitors to the secretariats' websites</p> <p>Google trends about frequency of search for the terms ECVET and EQAVET, credit systems, transferring credit, credit exemption, VET quality assurance</p>	
	Interaction with other instruments:		
	What is the theoretical alignment between the instruments?	Analysis of complementarities based on a logical analysis of these initiatives	Stakeholder feedback on where alignment would have been desirable
	Are there concrete examples of synergies?	Review of documents searching for cross-references	Examples of coordination identified
	<p><i>Specific to ECVET – technical specifications:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - units of learning outcomes - credit points - documentation (MoU, LA) - processes of assessment, transfer, recognition and accumulation 		
	Which of the technical specifications are most used in practice and why?	Units: based on above analysis of desk research on use of units/modules	Examples of influence identified through interviews and the extent to which these relate more or less to some of the technical specifications
	What is their relevance in the context of ("have they had	Review of objections to the use of units	
		Credit points: idem	

Main research question	Sub-questions	Indicators, types of evidence expected	
		Secondary sources	Primary sources
	contributed to") national policy developments?	Documentation: analysis of Erasmus + data Processes: there is data about relevant processes in the context of the validation inventory but not in general terms	
	For those that are least used, why is this the case? What was the initial intention for these elements and how has it failed?	Logical analysis of the initial purpose	Explanations about why some of these technical specifications are more or less useful
	Specific to EQAVET technical components: - the quality cycle - what descriptors and indicators are used and areas they cover - how these descriptors and indicators are measured		
	Which of the technical specifications are most used in practice and why?	EQAVET secretariat surveys	Examples of influence identified through interviews and the extent to which these relate more or less to some of the technical specifications The extent to which these features existed in the national systems before the EQAVET Recommendation
	EQAVET: For those that are least used, why is this the case? What was the initial intention for these elements and	Logical analysis of the initial purpose	Explanations about why some of these technical specifications are more or less useful

Main research question	Sub-questions	Indicators, types of evidence expected	
		Secondary sources	Primary sources
	<p>how has it failed?</p> <p>EQAVET: Is there a clear justification why some descriptors/indicators are not used? For elements that are not used, why? What was the initial intention of these elements and how as it failed?</p>		
		Analysis	Primary source
What is needed to support countries to tackle the (remaining) objectives/priorities in the upcoming years?	What instrument objectives have had a significant impact in supporting countries to adopt in their national policies? Do these require further action at EU level?	Analysis on the 1 st two research questions about national policy developments going in the sense of the EU policy objectives.	Analysis of potential further added value from EU actions in these areas based: Delphi survey Targeted consultation Stakeholder workshops
	Are there instrument objectives that are not being supported through national policy developments driven by the instruments? Do these still require EU level action?	idem	Idem
	To what extent do the objectives of the instruments that have not been fully met remain highly relevant for the EU policy agenda? Are there new policy objectives that should be reflected in VET policy initiatives?	Review of policy priorities relevant to VET Review of Cedefop study on the future role of VET	Idem
	What are the technical specifications,	Analysis on the 1 st two research questions about progress made	Idem

Main research question	Sub-questions	Indicators, types of evidence expected	
		Secondary sources	Primary sources
	governing arrangements and support actions that are supporting progress? why?	against objectives.	
	What are the technical specifications, governing arrangements and support actions that are hindering progress? why?	Analysis on the 1 st two research questions about progress made against objectives.	Idem

Annex 4: Distance travelled in relation to Credit Systems

Country	Units/modules in in place before 2009 (IVET) ¹⁶⁴	Credit systems in 2011 (starting point proxy) ¹⁶⁵	Credit systems in 2018 (IVET) ¹⁶⁶	Shift to outcome orientation ¹⁶⁷	National mechanism to coordinate validation ¹⁶⁸	IVET students ¹⁶⁹ as % of all upper sec. students	IVET work-based students ¹⁷⁰ as % of all upper secondary IVET	Stage of NQF development ¹⁷¹
Austria	No	No credit system	Credits used in some qualifications	Recent developer	None	69.5	46.8	Operational
Belgium – fr	No (but units being introduced)	Credit system in adult education for social	Credit system in place	Recent developer	National level	59.6	5.8	Formally adopted

¹⁶⁴ Cedefop (2014). Monitoring ECVET implementation strategies in Europe in 2013. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

¹⁶⁵ Proxy for the starting point in terms of credit system developments. This column is based on data reported for Cedefop (2011), which provided an overview of existing credit systems by country in the education and training sector besides ECTS. www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/6114_en.pdf

¹⁶⁶ Updated information based on Cedefop (2016). ECVET in Europe: monitoring report 2015. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 56. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/946187>. This report distinguishes between three broad categories of countries: (a) Countries with a credit system in IVET that allows accumulating and/or transferring learning outcomes of individuals (b) Countries where credits are used in some qualifications (c) Countries with no credit system. It should be noted, though, that this distinction provides a simplified picture of national developments for the sake of providing an illustrating overview. Within each category, different characteristics can be observed. Furthermore, this categorisation refers to IVET only. The study refers to 2015; data has been updated based on findings from the interviews and targeted consultation to reflect credit system developments since then.

¹⁶⁷ Early developers: countries where the introduction of outcomes orientation is dated in the 1990s or earlier. Recent adopters: are considered those countries where the introduction of learning outcomes into IVET is dated since 2005 (note that this means the introduction of legislation, i.e. the initial stage of the development process rather than the actual implementation of outcome-oriented curricula). Based on Cedefop (2012). Curriculum reform in Europe. The impact of learning outcomes. Research Paper No 29. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

¹⁶⁸ Based on Cedefop; European Commission; ICF (2017). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning – 2016 update. Synthesis report. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Distinguishes three groups of countries: (a) Mechanisms to coordinate validation at national level in place; (b) Mechanisms to coordinate validation in conjunction with regional/sectoral arrangements; (c) No coordinating mechanisms at national level.

¹⁶⁹ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/statistics-and-indicators/statistics-and-graphs/01-how-many-students>

¹⁷⁰ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/statistics-and-indicators/statistics-and-graphs/02-how-many-students>

¹⁷¹ Cedefop (2018). Overview of National Qualifications Framework Developments in Europe 2017. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/8608_en.pdf

Country	Units/modules in in place before 2009 (IVET) ¹⁶⁴	Credit systems in 2011 (starting point proxy) ¹⁶⁵	Credit systems in 2018 (IVET) ¹⁶⁶	Shift to outcome orientation ¹⁶⁷	National mechanism to coordinate validation ¹⁶⁸	IVET students ¹⁶⁹ as % of all upper sec. students	IVET work-based students ¹⁷⁰ as % of all upper secondary IVET	Stage of NQF development ¹⁷¹
		advancement						
Belgium – nl	No	No credit system	No credit system	Early developer	National level	59.6	5.8	Operational
Bulgaria	No (modules/units being piloted)	No information	Credit system in place (not yet active)	Recent developer	None	52.6	0.0	Formally adopted
Croatia	Yes	No information	Credit system in place	Recent developer	None	70.4	0.0	(Early) operational stage
Cyprus	No	No information	No credit system (credit system being developed)	Recent developer	None	15.6	0.0	(Early) operational stage
Czech Republic	No	No information	Credits used in some qualifications (credit system being developed) ¹⁷²	Recent developer	None	73.2	8.8	The national register of vocational qualifications (NSK) is operational
Denmark	No	Credit system in general upper secondary since 2005 reform	Credit system in place	Recent developer	National in conjunction with regional/secto	42.5	99.7	Operational

¹⁷² To be confirmed.

Country	Units/modules in in place before 2009 (IVET) ¹⁶⁴	Credit systems in 2011 (starting point proxy) ¹⁶⁵	Credit systems in 2018 (IVET) ¹⁶⁶	Shift to outcome orientation ¹⁶⁷	National mechanism to coordinate validation ¹⁶⁸	IVET students ¹⁶⁹ as % of all upper sec. students	IVET work-based students ¹⁷⁰ as % of all upper secondary IVET	Stage of NQF development ¹⁷¹
Estonia	Yes	Legislative proposal for Estonian credit system (tbc)	Credit system in place	Recent developer	None	35.7	1.4	Operational
Finland	Yes (credit system + points)	Credit system in upper secondary VET	Credit system in place	Early developer	None	71.3	13.6	Operational
France	Yes	No credit system	Credit system in place	Early developer	National level	41.5	24.7	Operational
Germany	No	No credit system	No credit system	Recent developer	None	46.8	86.0	Operational
Greece	No	No credit system	No credit system	Recent developer	National level	29.9	n.d.	(Early) operational stage
Hungary	Yes	No credit system	No credit system	Early developer	None	32.2	100.0	(Early) operational stage
Ireland	Yes (credit system + points)	Credit system in place ¹⁷³	Credit system in place	Early developer	National level	0.0	n.d.	Operational
Italy	No	No credit system	Credits used in	Recent developer	National level	55.8	0.0	Formally

¹⁷³ The credit for further education and training turned into a credit framework in 2008. The national approach to credit is part of the Irish qualifications framework.

Country	Units/modules in place before 2009 (IVET) ¹⁶⁴	Credit systems in 2011 (starting point proxy) ¹⁶⁵	Credit systems in 2018 (IVET) ¹⁶⁶	Shift to outcome orientation ¹⁶⁷	National mechanism to coordinate validation ¹⁶⁸	IVET students as % of all upper sec. students ¹⁶⁹	IVET work-based students as % of all upper secondary IVET ¹⁷⁰	Stage of NQF development ¹⁷¹
			some qualifications					adopted
Latvia	No (modules/units being piloted)	No credit system	No credit system (discussions ongoing)	Recent developer	National level	39.8	100.0	Operational
Lithuania	No (modules/units being piloted)	No information	Credit system being introduced	Early developer	None	26.8	0.0	Operational
Luxembourg	Yes (credit system, no points)	No credit system	Credit system in place	Recent developer	None	61.4	22.1	Operational
Malta	No (units being introduced)	No credit system	Credit system in place	Recent developer	National level	12.7	0.0	Operational
Netherlands	Yes	No credit system	No credit system	Early developer	National level	68.5	21.3	Operational
Poland	Yes	No credit system	No credit system (development ongoing)	Early developer	National level	50.5	15.7	(Early) operational stage
Portugal	Yes	No credit system	Credit system recently introduced	Recent developer	National level	44.9	0.0	Operational
Romania	Yes (credit system + points)	The January 2011 law foresees a credit system based on ECVET	Credit system in place	Recent developer	National level	56.3	2.8	(Early) operational stage

Country	Units/modules in in place before 2009 (IVET) ¹⁶⁴	Credit systems in 2011 (starting point proxy) ¹⁶⁵	Credit systems in 2018 (IVET) ¹⁶⁶	Shift to outcome orientation ¹⁶⁷	National mechanism to coordinate validation ¹⁶⁸	IVET students as % of all upper sec. students ¹⁶⁹	IVET work-based students ¹⁷⁰ as % of all upper secondary IVET	Stage of NQF development ¹⁷¹
Slovakia	No	Accumulation system	No credit system	Recent developer	National level	69.0	9.1	(Early) operational stage
Slovenia	Yes (credit system + points)	Credit system is operating since 2006 (points, transfer).	Credit system in place	Early developer	None	67.5	0.0	Operational
Spain	Yes	No credit system	Credit system in place	Recent developer	National in conjunction with regional/sectoral	35.2	1.2	Advanced development stage
Sweden	Yes (credit system + points)	Two credit systems in VET run in parallel: one regarding upper secondary credits and one regarding higher vocational education credits	Credit system in place	Early developer	National level	38.2	3.6	Operational
United Kingdom	Yes (credit system + points)	Qualifications and credit framework	Credit system in place	Early developer	None	40.1	54.1	Operational

Country	Units/modules in in place before 2009 (IVET) ¹⁶⁴	Credit systems in 2011 (starting point proxy) ¹⁶⁵	Credit systems in 2018 (IVET) ¹⁶⁶	Shift to outcome orientation ¹⁶⁷	National mechanism to coordinate validation ¹⁶⁸	IVET students ¹⁶⁹ as % of all upper sec. students	IVET work-based students ¹⁷⁰ as % of all upper secondary IVET	Stage of NQF development ¹⁷¹
		(EWNI); Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales; SCQF (Scotland)						

Annex 5: Case study on the use of EQAVET indicators by VET providers

Introduction

The case study looks at how EQAVET indicators are being used in a selection of countries (Latvia, Portugal and UK (England)). It aims to draw out similarities and differences in the approaches adopted in different countries, as well as any operational challenges that have influenced their use in certain national contexts. The countries were selected to show differences between countries with QA systems developed specifically in response to EQAVET (Latvia, Portugal) and those, that have established QA systems which have not needed to be changed significantly to comply with the EQAVET recommendation (UK). It specifically presents:

- Background and context to the EQAVET indicators
- How EQAVET is implemented in selected countries
- How providers in the three countries are implementing EQAVET indicators
- Barriers and challenges encountered by providers, and how they were overcome
- The benefits that providers experienced from using EQAVET indicators

Current EQAVET indicators

Using indicators is a key element of building a culture of quality assurance. The EQAVET Recommendation formulates a set of 10 indicators (some broken down into sub-indicators) which provide a basis for assessing quality. The indicators were developed by gathering good practices and methods across Member States.

The purpose of the indicators is to implement a coherent and consistent way of measurement across the EU¹⁷⁴. This in turn was expected to support countries and providers to monitor the quality of their provision and then take steps to build on strengths and address weaknesses. The use of consistent indicators across countries was also expected to improve transparency in quality assurance and promote communication and the exchange of good practice¹⁷⁵.

It should be noted that the EQAVET indicators are largely perceived as a 'toolbox' from which providers can choose indicators and descriptors according to their specific needs. However, the indicators themselves were largely developed to be applicable to most VET provision and for IVET, CVET and WBL¹⁷⁶.

The EQAVET Recommendation also stated that, when collecting data, providers and countries should:

- Consider whether the exercise is intended to call for quantitative information, qualitative information or both;
- And, more importantly, ask yourself if it allows you to "collect once, use many times"¹⁷⁷.

¹⁷⁴ The EQAVET website, section "Indicators", available at <https://www.eqavet.eu/EU-Quality-Assurance/For-VET-System/Building-your-System/Review/Indicators>

¹⁷⁵ Study on the set of indicators proposed in the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET, European Network for Quality Assurance in VET .2009

¹⁷⁶ European Parliament; Council of the European Union (2009b). Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training, 2009/C 155/01

¹⁷⁷ The EQAVET website, "How data is collected", available at <https://www.eqavet.eu/EU-Quality-Assurance/For-VET-Providers/Monitoring-your-System/Evaluation/How-Data-is-Collected>

Implementation of EQAVET in selected countries

This section gives an overview about legislation governing QA arrangements in the selected countries and the expectations placed on VET providers.

Latvia

In Latvia the national QA system was largely based on the EQAVET recommendation. Reforms in 2010 resulted in the creation of a State Education Quality Service, which monitors the quality of VET provision. As a result of Cabinet of Minister regulation No 852 (2010) "*Procedure of accrediting general and vocational education programmes, education establishments and examination centres*" accreditation procedures and quality assurance requirements were introduced¹⁷⁸. This includes a requirement for VET providers to undertake self-assessments at the end of each year.

The State Education Quality Service has responsibility for the accreditation process and monitoring provider self-assessments. Additionally, the organisation convenes an 'expert commission'¹⁷⁹ to review provider self-assessments and then conduct an external assessment. All IVET and CVET providers must submit self-assessments to become accredited providers. However, it is not undertaken for WBL.

The Latvia QA system contains a set of quality criteria that are applicable for all VET providers. They are used to provide a uniform methodology for conducting self-assessments and are based on the EQAVET indicators. The key measures are:

- curriculum
- teaching and learning
- attainment, results
- support for pupils/students
- environment
- resources
- management, leadership and quality assurance

The quality criteria form the basis of provider self-assessment and system-level monitoring of the national VET system.

Portugal

Portugal has used the EQAVET framework to devise its national approach to quality assurance. This approach was developed in 2017 and was rolled out in early 2018. It requires all providers to become certified in order to receive public funding to deliver VET. To gain accreditation, Ordinance No. 208 (2013) states that providers must meet quality criteria related to:

- The internal structure and organisation of human and material resources;
- The systems in place for development and evaluation of training programmes/courses, which include results analysis and continuous improvement measures;
- The production of an impact evaluation and post-training follow-up of learners, published annually¹⁸⁰.

The regulation requires providers to use an established QA framework, such as EQAVET or ISO. In implementing the QA framework, providers are required to 'carry

¹⁷⁸ Andra Šenberga. Quality of VET and WBL. Applying EQAVET for WBL. Riga, 7 September, 2015.

Andra Šenberga. Quality of VET and WBL. Applying EQAVET for WBL. Riga, 7 September, 2015

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 9

out maintenance audits' and 'performance evaluation based on indicators'¹⁸¹. Providers are recommended to use EQAVET indicators but not mandated to do so.

The regulations cover all VET providers in Portugal, including providers of IVET, CVET, Adult Learning, WBL and non-formal learning. The certification process only commenced in 2017/18 and to date only 50 providers have achieved accreditation. However, it is expected that 1,000 schools will be certified by 2018/2019.

The Directorate General for Employment and Labour Relations (DGERT) is responsible for implementing EQAVET in Portugal. The organisation had been the EQAVET NRP since 2009. The body is responsible for issuing the certification for providers.

UK-England

In the UK-England the system for QA was well-established before the introduction of EQAVET. It is refined each year. Recent modifications to the framework have not been due to EQAVET. However, the general approach to QA in UK-England (the use of indicators and the quality cycle) was largely in line with EQAVET principles.

In the UK-England, all providers that receive public funding to deliver post-16 learning must undertake a self-assessment and be externally reviewed against a pre-defined list of indicators. The specification of the indicators and the inspections are undertaken by Ofsted, which is an independent organisation funded by the Department for Education.

The results of the external provider inspections and the inspection reports are published on the Ofsted website. Ofsted also summarises trends from its assessments in annual reports which are used to inform Government policy. Inspection grades are also used to inform the funding providers receive, with those with the lowest grade (Grade 4) required to improve standards or face having funding withdrawn.

Indicators used in selected countries

This section provides an overview about what indicators are employed by the selected countries and outlines the methods of data collection.

Latvia

The Latvia regulations for QA require all indicators to be used systematically by VET providers. However, two indicators were merged with other indicators. These were:

- Indicator 2 (investment in training for teachers and trainers), which was merged with indicator 3.
- Indicator 7 (unemployment rate), which was merged with indicator 8.

Indicator 2 was not used because data collection for the indicator was perceived to be too challenging. This was because in most providers the investment in teaching contained both formal learning and informal support such as lesson observations, mentoring and coaching, which providers did not generally document. One interviewee also felt that an indicator on teacher investment was difficult to interpret, as some providers may be required to invest more in teacher training as they need to make improvements, whereas providers that are performing well may need to invest less.

Indicator 7 was not used because it was felt that the unemployment rate was outside the influence of VET, and therefore is not an appropriate measure of quality. Interviewees felt that the unemployment rate depends on the wider economic conditions, such as the level of economic growth in the country and in a VET providers' local area, as well as other factors that affect the labour market, such as migration and changes in types of employment need in a local area.

¹⁸¹ 01 – Good Practices @Catalogue on EQF-ECVET-EQAVET. ATTRACT-VET Project Consortium. May 2016, p. 58

The providers that were interviewed reported collecting information on the other indicators. Some were collected before Latvia introduced the new QA legislation, because they felt it was important for measuring the quality of their provision. These were:

- Indicator 3 (participation rate in VET programmes)
- Indicator 4 (completion rate in VET programmes)
- Indicator 9 (mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market)
- Indicator 10 (schemes used to promote better access to VET)

To collect information on other indicators, providers reported that they had to introduce new data collection measures. This included:

- Conducting a survey of learners that had recently completed their studies (for indicator 5 - placement rate of VET graduates). One provider used online surveys that took place 6 months and 12 months after graduation. Another provider used more informal methods with the tutors contacting former learners.
- Consulting directly with employers (for indicator 6 - utilisation of skills in the workplace). This was primarily done through meeting local employers to discuss the effectiveness of their recent graduates and their future skills requirements. They also get data about national employers from the statistics agency.
- Adapting data collection requirements. One provider reported collecting new information on the characteristics of learners (including ethnicity, sex) so they could subsequently examine the take up of courses by vulnerable groups. Another provider also reported asking guidance counsellors to provide some information on learner characteristics

In the interviews, providers did not believe that collecting this information was overly burdensome. This was in part because it was felt to build on existing work that their tutors undertook to keep in contact with recent graduates and communicate with local employers. Consequently, it was not felt to be a major step-change.

Portugal

In Portugal, there are three indicators that are mandatory for all IVET providers to collect. These were:

- **Indicator 4** – Completion rate in VET programmes. This is largely required to support providers to assess the quality of their programmes.
- **Indicator 5** – the sub-indicator related to destination of VET programme completers within 12-36 months after the end of the programme.
- **Indicator 6** – Information about the utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace. This is collected from providers' ongoing communication with local employers.

In the qualitative interviews, some providers used other EQAVET indicators, although this varied depending on the type of VET provider and their priorities. One community learning centre for example used indicator 3 (participation rates), indicator 10 (schemes used to promote better access to VET) and indicator 8 (prevalence of vulnerable groups). These indicators were felt to reflect the organisation's mission statement to widen access to learning, particularly for disadvantaged young people and adults.

Some providers also used indicators over and above what was specified in the EQAVET recommendation. One provider for example used learner attendance as a performance indicator, as they found that courses with attendance of less than 95% had lower pass rates. Another provider measured parent engagement (attendance at school meetings,

and the level of parent communication) as higher parent involvement also resulted in higher achievements.

Providers that recently started using EQAVET indicators reported the main challenge was in collecting data for indicator 5 and 6. To do this, one of the providers:

- Developed a system for engaging with former learners through social media. They reported that most courses had a Facebook group for learners, which the tutors used to gather destination data;
- Ran a survey of local employers that they understood have taken on VET graduates. In the first year they ran the survey the response rate was relatively low at 59%. However, since then they explained upfront to employers why the training was valuable and as a result they found the response rate in the second year increased to 88%.

The other indicators could largely be developed through the providers' internal management systems (number of enrolments, completion rates, schemes that the provider has in place).

United Kingdom – England

In England, providers are required to conduct self-assessments against a set of inspection criteria, as specified in the Common Inspection Framework. This includes a grading of each criteria from a scale of 1 (outstanding) to 4 (inadequate). The provider self-assessments are then externally reviewed by Ofsted and supplemented by additional primary research, such as lesson observations and a review of provider documentation. Ofsted then produces a final assessment grade and inspection report which is published on its website.

The Common Inspection Framework contains four overall indicators with further sub-indicators. These do not directly reference EQAVET indicators but include some elements of the indicators. These are:

- **Effectiveness of leadership and management, which includes elements of:** Indicator 1 with sub-measure 'evaluate the quality of the provision and outcomes through robust self-assessment'; indicator 2 with sub-measure 'improve staff practice and teaching, learning and assessment through ... appropriate professional development'; and indicator 6 with sub-measure 'provide learning programmes or a curriculum that have suitable breadth, depth and relevance so that they meet ... the needs and interests of children, learners and employers, nationally and in the local community
- **Personal development, behaviour and welfare** (includes indicator 6 with sub-indicator 'learners are well-prepared for the next stage of their education, employment, self-employment or training')
- **Outcomes of children and learning** (which includes indicator 4, as articulated in sub-measures for learners achieving relevant qualifications and progress well from different starting points)
- **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment** (which includes some elements of indicator 8, through the sub-measure 'assessment information is used to plan appropriate teaching and learning strategies, including to identify children and learners who are falling behind in their learning or who need additional support, enabling children and learners to make good progress and achieve well').

Some indicators such as indicator 10 (schemes used to promote VET) and indicator 7 (unemployment rate) are not explicitly included in the inspection criteria. There is also no explicit requirement for providers to collect information on learner destinations (indicator 6), despite the framework having a sub-measure which states learners should acquire the skills necessary to progress to further learning or employment.

The framework also includes indicators that are not included in EQAVET, which mostly relate to the quality of teaching. These are:

- Teachers having high expectations for learners;
- Teachers providing appropriate feedback to learners to help them improve;
- The promotion of equality and diversity;
- Engagement with parents, carers and employers;
- The use of effective assessment approaches.

The measures are used to ensure that learning is delivered to a sufficient standard so that learners achieve at least the progress expected of them.

All providers are mandated to collect information that measure all these indicators. However, in practice the level of information that providers are expected to collect depends on their size. Large organisations such as further education colleges are expected to collect a high level of evidence. Smaller community learning and private providers are not required to collect as much information as it is recognised that some do not have the capacity to do so.

Benefits of using EQAVET indicators

All of the providers that were interviewed believed it was valuable to collect EQAVET indicators. Providers felt it was particularly valuable for active labour market and community learning programmes, as it provides measures for understanding whether provision is effective in engaging learners and helping them relate to and work with employers. However, providers generally agreed that some indicators, such as success rates, learner destinations and the extent to which VET programmes meet employer needs, were valuable for all VET programmes.

Providers reported that the main impact of using indicators is that it allows planning for the next year to take place in a more structured way. One provider reported that they used the intelligence gained from measuring indicators to undertake a SWOT analysis of all their programmes, to identify their priorities for next year. Another reported that they used the indicators to set targets for particular learning programmes and courses, which they reviewed at the end of the year to identify what improvements needed to be made to particular programmes.

Countries have however tailored the indicators to reflect their national circumstances. In some cases, this has involved removing indicators that were not felt to be relevant (such as the unemployment rate). In other cases, it has involved adding indicators on learner satisfaction, learner attendance, involvement of parents in learning and in the quality of teaching).

Two providers also reported that the indicators provided a valuable tool for promoting the good work that they are doing. These providers used data on the number of learners that progressed to employment as part of their promotion of their institution. One community learning provider also reported that the data helped them attract funding.

Some providers have also used the indicators to set long-term goals. This includes setting targets such as 'improving progression rates by five percentage points to 2023, and in improving the results from employer surveys. Here EQAVET indicators were felt to create a framework which allows providers to take a more strategic view of what direction of travel the institution should take.

In Portugal and Latvia interviewees did however believe that only a few VET schools are aware of the benefits of EQAVET indicators. This is partly because of a lack of knowledge of EQAVET and partly because some believe that indicators are not relevant to the work they do. As a consequence, the take up and use of EQAVET

indicators was generally low, with some providers adopting a 'wait and see' approach to implementation.

In Latvia and Portugal, a further perceived limitation with the current use of EQAVET is that there is no national information that allows the providers to benchmark their performance against other similar providers. A provider in Portugal circumvented this issue by developing bi-lateral data sharing agreements with another local provider to compare results. In Latvia, the performance of individual courses are generally compared against each other or the institution average to determine whether they are good, bad or average.

Barriers to using EQAVET indicators

Across all countries, most of the barriers that providers experience in using EQAVET indicators relate to collecting relevant data. Providers acknowledged that many providers believed there were high costs for collecting data for some indicators, particularly learner destination data and information on employer perceptions of VET graduates. In some providers, there is a perception that the benefits of these indicators do not outweigh the costs.

In Latvia, there was also an unwillingness to collect some additional data from learners following the introduction of the recent General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

A few providers also reported that a key challenge was in convincing teachers of the value of collecting indicator information. This is because most believed their provision was delivered to a good standard and therefore the indicators were not necessary.

Conclusions

The case study research shows that where providers have utilised indicators, it was generally found to have brought benefits in enabling them to assess the effectiveness of their programmes and to benchmark their performance against their peers, in order to identify their strengths and areas of improvement. In some countries this has motivated providers to be early adopters of EQAVET indicators, even when national legislation does not mandate them to do so. In some countries providers believed the impact could be improved if there was data that allows them to benchmark their performance against other providers.

There was a perception that some indicators are more relevant to some providers than others. The suite of indicators was found to be most relevant to community learning providers and programmes that support employability, where it was considered essential to measure whether the programmes are engaging a diverse range of learners and supporting them to gain employment.

The case study research found that there were some indicators that providers already collected as part of their data collection system and therefore did not require significant extra work. This included indicators on completion, participation and the characteristics of VET learners. There were few barriers to providers using these indicators.

All the providers that were interviewed did however have to introduce new processes to collect data on learner destinations and utilisation of skills in the workplace. Both were generally undertaken through surveys, although for learner data an effective route for collecting information was also reported to be through social media groups. Some providers however did not believe these were overly burdensome as they should build on existing communication between the tutors and recent graduates and local employers. The only indicator that providers found it difficult to measure was the investment in teacher training.

While the indicators were generally considered effective, some providers and countries have had to adapt them to ensure they best meet their needs. This includes removing

some indicators that are not felt to be relevant (such as unemployment rate) or were too difficult to measure objectively (investment in training). A few also added indicators on the quality of teaching, attendance and parental involvement in learning as these were considered important components of high quality VET but not captured in the existing indicators.

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Annex 6: Case study on the potential for synergy between HE and VET QA systems

Introduction

This case study examines the scope for aligning EU quality assurance instruments for VET (EQAVET) and HE (the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)). It does this through examining the existing synergy between the two instruments and exploring the approach adopted by two countries (Malta and Ireland) that have a QA authority that covers HE and VET.

It is structured as follows:

- Section 1 sets out the technical requirements for HE and VET QA instruments;
- Section 2 compares the similarities and differences between the two instruments;
- Section 3 sets out the approaches that countries have adopted when they have QA authorities that cover HE and VET;
- Section 4 explores the level of demand and benefits of aligning HE and VET QA arrangements.

The study draws on desk research of the EU QA instruments and national QA approaches in Malta and Ireland, as well as interviews with national authorities in Ireland and Malta and representatives of the European QA Register for Higher Education (EQAR) and European Association for QA in HE (ENQA).

Technical requirements of EQAVET and ESG

The EQAVET instrument is based on setting expectations for VET providers and national authorities to collect and use performance data to inform VET provision. The key elements of the recommendation are:

- The use of 10 indicators, which include metrics for measuring activities that support high quality VET (investment in teacher training, use of QA, schemes to promote VET) and output measures (utilisation of VET skills in the workplace, take-up and destinations);
- Employing a quality cycle using indicators and indicative descriptors to provide performance information to inform delivery. This is based on four stages – planning, implementation, evaluation and review;
- An expectation that there will be internal (self-assessment) and external assessment of VET, at a provider, system and qualification level;
- An expectation that internal assessments are publicly available.

The ESG contains measures that relate to internal QA, external QA and standards for external QA agencies. The ESG also states that external QA agencies should be reviewed every five years, and establish a register of approved QA agencies and a European consultative forum for QA in HE (ENQA).

The specific requirements that countries are expected to adhere to are:

Internal QA

- HE institutions should have policies and procedures related to QA;
- There should be approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards;
- Students should be assessed using published criteria;
- Institutions should have ways of ensuring staff teaching students are suitably qualified and competent to do so;

- Institutions should have resources to support students which are appropriate for each programme offered;
- Institutions should have effective management systems to collect, analyse and use relevant information, such as student progression and success rates, employability of graduates, student satisfaction with the programme, effectiveness of teachers and profile of the student population.

External QA

- External QA authorities should review the quality of HE institutions' internal QA systems;
- Countries should employ clear and transparent external QA processes where the aims and objectives are determined in advance;
- Formal decisions made through external QA should be based on explicit QA procedures and applied consistently;
- Reports should be published which present findings and recommendations clearly;
- Recommendations from external QA which result in actions or an action plan should have a pre-defined follow up procedure to ensure they are being applied;
- External QA should take place periodically, with the length of cycle and review procedures defined and published in advance;
- QA agencies should periodically produce system-wide summary reports presenting their general findings from their reviews.

External QA agencies

- QA agencies should apply national external QA procedures that meet the criteria described above;
- QA agencies should be recognised as competent public authorities responsible for QA with an established legal basis;
- External QA activities should be undertaken on a regular basis;
- QA agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial;
- QA agencies should have clear and explicit goals and mission statement
- QA agencies should be independent to the extent to which they autonomous responsibility for their operations and the conclusions and recommendations they make
- The processes procedures and criteria adopted by QA agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. This should include a self-assessment or equivalent process, external reviews conducted by a group of externals and possibly student members through site visits, with the publication of reports and follow up procedures

The ESG also includes expectations of the quality of HE provision. This includes expectations on student assessment (being fit for purpose, whether diagnostic, formative or summative, use learning outcomes approach, be subject to external verification checks) and the availability of learning resources (such as computing facilities and libraries), and other support mechanisms that are readily accessible to students, designed with their needs in mind and responsive to feedback from those who use the services.

Similarities and differences between ESG and EQAVET

There are significant similarities between the EQAVET and ESG instruments. This includes:

- An expectation of internal and external assessment of providers;

- The use of indicators for monitoring performance. There are also some similarities in the indicators, with the ESG expectations broadly matching EQAVET indicators 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6);
- An expectation that assessment results are publicly available, although the ESG refers to external assessments and EQAVET suggests this should be done for internal self-assessments.

There are however significant differences between the two instruments. In particular, the ESG does not make specific reference to the need to collect and use data on indicators 7-10 (unemployment rate, prevalence of vulnerable groups, mechanisms for meeting labour market needs, and schemes that promote better access). In the qualitative interviews it was agreed that although these indicators are generally considered more relevant for VET, in some countries they also match national priorities for HE. The use of schemes to promote access and prevalence of vulnerable groups for example meet priorities in some countries to improve social mobility and equality and access to HE.

EQAVET also contains relatively little specificity on the nature of external reviews, with the recommendation only stating that it covers processes and results/outcomes of education, and involvement internal or external stakeholders. In contrast, ESG requires the external body to be independent, to publish its results from inspections and to produce and publish clear assessment criteria.

ESG is also monitored by ENQA, which is a group comprising national QA agencies. In contrast, EQAVET is managed by the European Commission with support from a secretariat. There is also a register in place for HE providers and QA agencies that adhere to ESG requirements (EQAR), whereas a similar system does not exist for EQAVET.

In the qualitative interviews, some interviews reported that it may be challenging to implement external reviews across the whole of the provider base, as the sector is diverse. However, a few countries such as Austria, UK and Ireland do have national QA agencies that meet the ESG requirements for independence and transparently.

Perhaps the most striking difference is that unlike the ESG, the EQAVET framework does not include any quality measures. Although EQAVET contains indicators, there is no specific reference to what would be expected in a high-quality VET programme. Across EU VET policy, the only area where quality is specified is in the recommendation for quality and effective apprenticeships.

In the qualitative interviews, it was recognised that EQAVET is a QA instrument, rather than one which covers quality. However, it was noted that they are often related – QA indicators should relate to measures of a high-quality learning programme. For example, if there is an expectation that high quality WBL requires programmes to be designed in collaboration with employers, then this should be measured to identify the extent to which it takes place.

Moreover, some interviews also believed that the lack of specification on what constitutes high quality VET may be an 'opportunity missed'. They believed that clear expectations at an EU level on what should be expected from a VET programme will help countries identify and address areas of improvement. However, they recognised that this would be complex to reflect the diversity of VET programmes, which comprise employability programmes, apprenticeships, schools based VET and higher VET.

Approaches adopted by countries that have national authorities responsible for QA in both HE and VET

In Ireland the introduction of one organisation responsible for Quality Assurance in HE and VET (Quality and Qualifications Ireland – QQI) was established relatively recently in 2013, following wider reforms to simplify the education landscape. In Malta, the Legal Notice 296 of 2012 created a National Commission for Further and Higher

Education which acts as the external verifier for VET providers and carries out quality assurance audits. The Commission was established in 2015.

In Ireland it was challenging to ensure there was support for the new body, as among the sector there was concern that it would not capture the nuances of the two sectors. This in part reflected that QA in Ireland was previously undertaken by two specialist organisations. In Malta, there was less opposition to having one body to monitor QA in HE and VET, as it was not replacing existing infrastructure. Moreover, as a small country, providers recognised that there are some efficiencies in having one body responsible for both education sectors.

In both countries it is recognised that there are specific aspects of HE and VET that need to be assessed differently, in terms of:

- Qualification awards (HE providers make levelling and content decisions whereas VET programmes are primarily based on national standards);
- Quality of research, which is an explicit requirement for HE but not generally undertaken by VET providers;
- Governance (HE providers are generally independent and therefore have to ensure good governance. VET providers are part of local education and training boards in Ireland and under the control of the Ministry of Education in Malta;
- Adherence to different European and national legislative of policy requirements (HE for example must adhere to Bologna requirements, including the use of ECTS. VET providers should use ECVET).

Ireland has two separate processes for QA in HE and for VET. This included separate external inspection cycles, and the use of different assessment criteria to assess provider performance. However, to ensure conformity both are governed by a core set of expectations of what denotes good quality in education, which both HE and VET providers must adhere to. In the interviews it was felt that this 'common core' could grow in future to increase synergy between HE and VET QA systems.

In contrast, Malta employs a single QA approach for HE and VET. This uses a broader set of QA arrangements that institutions must adhere to, which apply to both education sectors. These are:

1. **Policy for QA** (systems in place to monitor quality and use the information to inform programme design and delivery);
2. **Institution financial probity** (measures in place to measure institution finances);
3. **Design and approval of programmes** (for self-accrediting entities to develop programme defining workload in terms of ECTS/ECVET, use learning outcomes and support learner progression);
4. **Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment** (teaching comprising a mix of pedagogies and with consistent, fair and high quality assessment methods);
5. **Student admission, progression, recognition and certification** (consistent and transparent admission and induction procedures, and effective documentation of the learning outcomes learners acquired);
6. **Teaching staff** (effective systems for recruitment, conditions of employment and professional development to ensure the competence of teaching staff);
7. **Learning resources and student support** (appropriate facilities based on the type of course. To include physical or virtual libraries, learning equipment, study facilities and IT infrastructure);
8. **Information management** (collection of data on the profile of the student population, course participation, retention and success rates, and student satisfaction);

9. **Publication of information** (requirement for the publishing of accurate course information and information on selection criteria, learning outcomes, EQF/MQF level, credits and pass rates);
10. **Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programme** (use of the quality cycle);
11. **Cyclical external QA**, which is conducted every five years.

The criteria contain a mix of EQAVET and ESG measures. Criteria 1, 5, 8, 10 and 11 are based specifically on EQAVET requirements. Criteria 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 11 are based on meeting ESG requirements. The QA approach also includes a measure on student-centred learning (criteria 4) which is felt to underpin all learning.

The QA criteria do not make reference to some factors that are particular for VET or HE. For example, the criteria do not include measures for the quality of research, or the link to labour market needs. The QA criteria also do not explicitly cover all EQAVET indicators.

Benefits of increasing synergy between QA in HE and VET

In the qualitative interviews, there were a range of reported benefits for increasing the synergy between HE and VET QA systems. These were:

- Ensuring a more consistent application of standards for linking qualifications to NQFs and the use of ECTS/ECVET. Having one organisation responsible for monitoring qualification design improves the consistency with which learning outcomes are used and how credit points are calculated.
- Improving provider trust in what constitutes effective QA practice. Interviewees felt that the general principles of QA should be consistent across all forms of education, such as the use of external assessment, indicators of quality and the use of the quality cycle. Having different approaches for this in HE, VET and General Education can lead to diversity in how these principles are interpreted. Providers may not trust national QA systems if they are seen to be at a lower standard to those employed in other sectors.
- Creating a single point of contact for QA issues. This helps simplify the education landscape in countries and means that the public have a greater understanding of how quality is maintained in education.

Interviewees did however report some risks to increasing the alignment of HE and VET QA systems. Central to this was that the QA systems may subsequently lose some of the granularity that make them effective for particular education sectors. An example is that it may not give sufficient focus to the need for VET to meet labour market needs, and for HE providers to create high quality research.

Another challenge is in creating a system fit for both VET and HE. Interviewees reported that in many countries QA procedures in HE are well-established, whereas in VET they are only recently being implemented. As a consequence, it may be difficult to create a single set of requirements that capture these different 'starting points'.

A few interviewees also mentioned that there would need to be some consideration to whether QA requirements for HE would be appropriate for some smaller VET providers, such as adult learning centres of WBL providers. These smaller providers may not have the organisational capacity to implement the QA requirements expected for larger providers. Equally, QA agencies may not have the resources to inspect all these providers within a cycle.

Finally, it was felt that it would be difficult to create synergy in the governance arrangements for EQAVET and ESG at an EU level. This is because the governance of ESF by ENQA was only felt to be possible due to countries committing to implement the Bologna process. It was felt that for EQAVET, countries would be less willing to

have a similar statutory group which peer-reviews country compliance with ESG and therefore their suitability for inclusion in a register.

Conclusions

The case study found that there are significant similarities between the QA arrangements specified in ESG and EQAVET. This includes a common requirement for using the quality cycle and external assessments, as well as having indicators that relate to providers having internal QA systems, investing in staff development, increasing participation, achievement, progression and the extent to which their programme matches labour market needs.

However, there are also significant areas where there could be closer alignment. This includes the use of potential indicators in HE that measure the proportion of vulnerable groups, and schemes that improve access to HE. For EQAVET, there are opportunities for strengthening the requirements on external accreditation and expectations on the resources that are available to learners.

There was significant support from stakeholders to increase the synergy of the various QA systems that apply for education. The main benefit of this was that it would improve provider trust in QA if they understood there were common systems that applied across all education sectors. However, it was also felt to support consistency in how providers implement policies that apply across the lifelong learning sector (such as NQFs, EQFs and credit systems).

Two of the countries that have QA systems for HE and VET have illustrated different models for how this could be done. Ireland employs two separate processes for QA in HE and VET which are governed by a general set of principles for effective QA. Here it is expected that alignment will grow over time as the two QA processes converge. In contrast, Malta employs a single set of QA criteria which uses broad terms to describe QA requirements for HE and VET. Here it is expected that providers and inspectors tailor the requirements to ensure they are relevant to HE or VET.

It was recognised that any convergence in HE and VET QA systems do not lead to a dilution in the quality expectations of each sector. This includes ensuring that HE providers remain committed to raising standards in research and VET provision is suitably geared towards meeting labour market needs and providing accessible provision for individuals furthest from the labour market.

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Annex 7: Case study on the future of ECVET templates

Introduction

This case study focuses on the future value of the common ECVET templates 'Learning Agreement' and 'Memorandum of Understanding' in cross-border learning mobility. It seeks to elaborate on the questions whether action should be taken to improve them, and if so, which aspects and what changes could be considered. After a short overview of the current templates and previous research on the topic, new evidence gathered through in-depth interviews with four stakeholders at national level (including three national ECVET experts) provides suggestions for the direction of future development of these templates.

The current European templates¹⁸²

ECVET Template: Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is an agreement between competent institutions which seeks to establish mutual trust and sets the framework for credit transfer. It formalises the ECVET partnership by stating the mutual acceptance of the status and procedures of the competent institutions involved. It also establishes a partnerships' procedure for cooperation. By signing it, partner institutions confirm they have discussed and agreed on procedures for assessment, documentation, validation and recognition.

For MoUs established within a broader context (such as agreements set up by sector-based organisations, chambers, regional or national authorities) a list of organisations (VET providers, companies, etc.) who operate in the framework of the MoU can be added. This list can consist of their names or it can refer to the type of VET providers. The list can be included as an annex.¹⁸³

According to the interviewees, the MoU template is used widely and includes all necessary information.

ECVET Template: Learning Agreement (LA)

A Learning Agreement (LA) is concluded by the two competent institutions involved in the training and validation process and the learner, in the framework of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The LA defines the conditions for the mobility of each individual learner. If the conditions for mobility are the same for a group of learners, it is possible to use the same text for all of them. However, each learner should receive and sign an LA that concerns him/her individually.

According to a survey launched in 2017 in preparation of a peer learning activity (PLA) in Cyprus¹⁸⁴, the common template for an LA is fairly-well known and used in mobility activities: 40% of the respondents confirmed that they use it and cited benefits such as a quality-assured approach to delivering mobility, allowing mobility goals to be clearly presented and supporting less experienced ECVET users.

Interviewees reported on their use in several countries. In Hungary, institutions involved in European mobility projects use both the LA and MoU Templates, as well as the Europass. They are found to be efficient, and working well. Both the MoU and the LA are regarded as 'basic elements of mobility, international cooperation and mutual trust'. As partner institutions make decisions about expected learning outcomes of mobility, they describe them in the MoU and LA, and based on these documents everybody knows their commitment and requirements MoUs are important for validation and recognition of learning outcomes achieved abroad, because if the

¹⁸² <http://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/de/ecvet-european-templates>

¹⁸³ ECVET MoU Template

¹⁸⁴ Survey participation was open only to those invited to participate in the PLA with 15 full and 2 partial responses ultimately received (partial responses centred on the use of the Europass Mobility Document only)

proposed assessment process is not accepted by a partner organization this could lead to non-validation of LOs at the end.¹⁸⁵

In Finland, the same benefits are recognised but interviewees felt it would help if the templates were 'digitalised'.¹⁸⁶ This may explain why the LA template is not always used in many countries. In the survey for the Cyprus PLA, 53% of the respondents confirmed the use of different models or templates, citing the following advantages:

- Ease-of-use;
- Ease-of-access (online templates); and the
- Ability to incorporate specific assessment tools or practices and/or quality assurance commitments relevant in their own countries and contexts.

This was confirmed by the case study interviewees. For example, in Finland, even though there is no alternative 'national' template, some providers also develop their own templates, especially to add elements of assessment.¹⁸⁷ In Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway there is also more focus on assessment of LO in the LA.¹⁸⁸

Personal Transcript

Currently, there is no common ECVET template for a personal transcript. However, previous research shows that the **Europass Mobility Document** is often used for this purpose despite certain shortcomings in conceptual and digital connectivity. Case study interviews and the Cyprus survey confirm this. It is regularly used or promoted by 88% of respondents. The benefits cited were: standardisation; familiarity (the document is well-known across Europe among learners as well as institutions); and ease-of-use.

One challenge of the current version of Europass Mobility is that sometimes it is only signed but not filled in, as the language used is sometimes 'completely out of their [employers'] world'. This is particularly so for questions in part 5A which might be better understood as a 'work certificate' to describe the tasks and how the tasks were done, and how they succeeded.

The current version of Europass is perceived to use too difficult language, except for the Europass CV, which is generally referred to as the 'best' Europass document, because it uses a language that employers understand. It is in use a lot.¹⁸⁹

While alternative models of 'Personal Transcripts' exist across Europe, they are notably fewer, around a quarter (24% of respondents referred to an alternative model developed by their own institution/network or at system-level in the 2017 survey).

The following table summarises benefits and constraints of the different tools:

¹⁸⁵ Interview HU

¹⁸⁶ Interview FI2

¹⁸⁷ Interview FI1+2

¹⁸⁸ Interview FI2, NO

¹⁸⁹ Interview FI1

Benefits	Constraints
Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)	
⊕ Important in the context of quality assurance	⊖ Need for competent authorities to sign
⊕ Ensures a well-documented process	⊖ Not required and not commonly used in Erasmus+
⊕ Helps to clarify roles	
⊕ Helps to formalise commitment	
Learning Agreement (LA)	
⊕ Constitutes a multi-party commitment (learner, sending and hosting organisation)	⊖ Limited learner involvement observed
⊕ Can be individualised for each learner/mobility case	⊖ Great variety in practice of completion (guidelines needed)
⊕ Supports tracking and follow-up	⊖ Need to be realistic in terms of what LOs are actually possible to achieve at the placement (need to adapt LO targets)
⊕ Creates transparency and learner reassurance	⊖ Can be time consuming to fill in; needs simplification
⊕ Can include aspects of workplace security/insurance, hence protects all parties	⊖ Assessment and documentation not always obvious or specified in the LA
Personal Transcript (PT)	
⊕ Can record achieved LOs and more	⊖ Lack of connectivity with other tools (no data transfer possible)
⊕ Has an empowering character as it shows the learner what s/he has achieved in view of their employability	⊖ Needs to be simpler (open text boxes may be a deterrent)
⊕ There is increasing awareness that Europass Mobility can be utilised as PT, as no ECVET template has been developed	⊖ No single identity: many varieties of a PT are currently in use

Source: ECVET Magazine no.28, June 2017, p. 6

Possible adaptations and improvements of the current templates

While all experts agree that actions be taken at European level, they address the importance of keeping in mind the different stakeholders and their needs (such as different employers and different sectors).¹⁹⁰

Respondents in the 2017 survey as well as experts interviewed in 2018 talked of the importance of putting in place an integrated system that is sufficiently flexible to meet the demands of different national and institutional users.

The distinction between the LA Template and the Personal Transcript is not always clear, with 'assessment' tools and practices notably referenced under each of these two headings. Therefore, alternative models for both templates are described here.

According to stakeholders, the current templates have established a good minimum standard, and now the biggest improvement would be to get them to complement each other.

Digitalisation

According to all interviewees, the templates should be in digital format. There absolutely is a need for user-friendly digital versions of the templates.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Interview F11

They need a seamless link from the MoUs so that they can export data straight into the LA and so on, as well as the addition of the assessment and evaluation. They need to be available and completed online. This could operate under the Europass banner but also needs to be linked to the Erasmus+ mobility tool, so that it can use the data of the sending and receiving partners, students, and the LA to save time and effort.¹⁹²

Suggestions also included adaptations regarding more modern forms of 'evidence', such as videos or clips, presenting their learning achievements quickly, or the possibility to link to portfolios, e.g. for qualifications in the culture sector. The templates should encourage VET students to get involved in the digital world to show their achievements. It was mentioned that this will be more important for some sectors than for others, such as the construction sector. Thus, flexibility has to be ensured so that the tool can be used by different types of students and employers, not to be too academic. According to interviewees, most employers and learners would appreciate using digital documents.¹⁹³

In the 2017 survey, all respondents were in favour of having a **single online platform** that is able to facilitate access to the required data, by different actors, during the core stages of mobility: planning, delivery, assessment and documentation.

Add-Ons

In terms of the possible benefits of having integrated tools and services, interviewees pointed out advantages of having **one template that allows for individual adaptations** or 'add-ons', rather than having many similar templates which create unnecessary paperwork for all parties involved. 'In any process where you have data today, everyone tries to feed in the data only once and then use it for all kinds of documents, so that should be aimed for.'¹⁹⁴

Case study interviewees (Finland and Norway) proposed development of an assessment element in the templates. Others also mentioned the need for a better link between LO in the current LAs, to ensure assessment of all learning outcomes, and possibly having actual assessment with a grade or verbal assessment of how and how far the student has actually achieved the LO – more of an evaluation than a statement of facts.¹⁹⁵

The case of Norway: Add-on Assessment form

Norway uses an additional 'Assessment form'¹⁹⁶ as an add-on to the Learning Agreement. The National ECVET Experts have created a template for this which is a 'living document'. It is designed so that it takes the LA and adds a validation part, stating to what degree participants have managed to achieve the anticipated learning outcomes set in the LA, for various forms of learning.

It is a digital document in English (Word format). The institution finds it on the Norwegian webpage from where it can be downloaded, experts have a look at it once a year and take in feedback from users. Students have access to the template online, so they see the structure of the document. According to Norwegian law the learners are supposed to be part of setting the learning outcomes to be achieved, so the LA is individual for each learner, they can choose what they want to learn abroad, the LA is

¹⁹¹ Interview HU, NO

¹⁹² Interview FI2

¹⁹³ Interview FI1, Spain

¹⁹⁴ Interview FI2

¹⁹⁵ Interview FI2

¹⁹⁶ The template can be found in the Annex

supposed to be made in agreement between sending institution, receiving institution and learner.

Norwegian institutions are using the templates to varying degrees, they issue them themselves, are not obliged to use them but their use is actively promoted. It is an add-on to the LA, an assessment to what degree they have learned, compared to what was set up in the learning agreement. Its filled in by receiving institutions and signed by receiving institution and participants. There is room for the learner to have a say when completing the form.

In some fields, the implementation of the templates is challenging, because depending on the country of the work placement or the individual company the learner is placed in, it is hard to set the learning outcomes that can be achieved in advance, much of it, e.g. in the building industry, is set up only upon arrival – thus the LA can only be filled in very shortly before the work starts. In other sectors, e.g. nursing, participants know a long time in advance which tasks they will be working on. These differences in practical work create a challenge, not because of the document but because of the nature of a certain occupational activity, thus an LA has to have the possibility to be changed upon arrival, or to add or subtract learning outcomes to be achieved.

Synergies – Better Use of Europass Mobility Document

The Working Group 'Developing Mobility Support Tools and Services' suggested in December 2017 that a European Personal Transcript template should be drafted, for which existing examples included in the ECVET Mobility Toolkit¹⁹⁷ or the Europass Mobility Document could be used.

An initiative on a European level with better connected documents is expected to help keep processes simple, according to interviewed stakeholders, allowing for synergies between the Europass and ECVET templates, where a Europass Mobility document could function as a personal transcript to document the ECVET process after the mobility for the validation and recognition of learning outcomes achieved. Integrating documentation of assessment was also seen as crucial by interviewed stakeholders and the 2017 Working Group.¹⁹⁸

Alternatively, the working group suggested a link between an 'LA+ app' and the MoU or other funding tools, in order to establish a transcript that documents what the learner has achieved. The Europass documents were also suggested to be further developed for ECVET purposes, making use of its good reputation and other advantages such as the possibility of describing soft skills without necessarily grading them. As the revised Europass decision was passed only recently¹⁹⁹, stakeholders were still unsure about its explicit implications and opportunities: while there is mention of a plan for a European-wide platform through which all individuals can access a range of services including an e-portfolio, there is no specific mention of ECVET tools and templates.

The case of Finland: adjusting existing templates to local needs

Quite a big change in Finland is that VET has gone through a comprehensive reform and with the reform there have been some nationally required agreements put into legislation. This includes a document called 'Training agreement for learning at companies'. It resembles the ECVET LA, but has a few additional requirements, thus many institutions have tried to combine the two, to fulfil both ECVET and national requirements of the new legislation. VET providers are not required to use ECVET standards to receive EU funding, but they are required to have some form of

¹⁹⁷ <http://www.ecvet-toolkit.eu/tools-examples-more/ecvet-toolkit-tools>

¹⁹⁸ Interview NO, F12

¹⁹⁹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32018D0646&from=en>

agreement. Some institutions have established 'low-key' agreements like letters of intent. The Learning Agreement is required for Erasmus+, thus Finland has been stricter about following ECVET guidelines there.

Regarding the Europass, the Erasmus+ agency recommends the use of the Europass Mobility document, though not compulsory. However, it is decreasing in importance, as the national reforms bring national templates for training and apprenticeships, and the Europass does not fulfil these national criteria. Other templates such as the MoU or letters of intent have more flexibility and are thus still very popular.

In general, ECVET tools are used by most institutions, both for EU-funded and nationally funded activities and mobilities, as they are perceived useful. Here, the MoU is usually and LAs are used for each learner. Most LAs are adapted locally to the institution's needs.

Most institutions have implemented them as digital agreements. They have not just made them available online, but also drawn them up digitally, so that they form part of their student management database, from where it can be used and filled in. They often also have databases of the MoUs and sending institutions, and can combine the two databases. Finnish institutions usually draw up their MoUs on paper but then feed the information into their databases.

A crucial part of mobility projects in Finland is the evaluation or assessment of learning outcomes. As tools for assessment have been missing from the existing ECVET templates, Finnish institutions have developed their own assessment tools, which are usually included as annexes to the LAs, in order to inform learners as well as the receiving partner institutions beforehand about the assessment procedures and criteria. However, there is no common model and there are wide variations across institutions. The Europass Mobility document has also been in use for this purpose, but does not fulfil the exact purpose of assessment, as the document focuses more on details such as duration and less on actual assessment of learning outcomes achieved.

For the future, a definite need for common European action is felt to be minimum standards, the way ECVET sets a common minimum, but with the scope to make additions at national level, e.g. the MoU template which provides a minimum standard, but allows partners to agree on more information which could be easily added. The same goes for the current LA, which sets a good common standard. Both could be developed into a **Mobility Management System**, where this could all be in a **digital format**, providing a basic standard in the system with the possibility to add to it.²⁰⁰

Revising the Personal Transcript

To better align the Personal Transcript with the needs of the labour market, the Working Group on Developing Mobility Support Tools and Services suggested that the Personal Transcript should be renamed the 'Learning and Skills Transcript', use a more understandable language and be task- rather than LO-based. One of the interviewees suggested that for this purpose it would also be helpful to more simply describe the transcript as a 'work certificate' for work-based learning.,

The case of Finland: specific wording creates challenges

Interviewed stakeholders refer to the problem of a lack of clarity regarding the understanding of the term 'Personal Transcripts', as to what they are, how official they are, who could issue them.

In Finland, a personal transcript can only be handed out for a full unit, or all the units of a qualification, not for a part of a unit. A mobility period seldom covers exactly one unit that a learner would be able to fulfil; more commonly they would be completing a few parts of several different units, thus the institution or company would not be

²⁰⁰ Interview FI2

allowed to issue a Personal Transcript to a student doing a mobility period in Finland. Companies would rather fill in an assessment form and assess how a student has fulfilled certain LO, than issue an official Personal Transcript.

However, the sending institution needs some form of data and documents as evidence of the learning outcomes achieved abroad, so they can assess that data and approve the LO as part of the student's studies, including credits, but they do not need a personal transcript for it, this would be too formal.²⁰¹

Summary and Conclusions

There is common agreement confirming the usefulness and importance of European templates and the need for common action at European level, as this assures common minimum standards and provides synergies between ECVET and Europass. Regarding their further development, opinions vary but also overlap:

- Leaving them as they are, but making them all available digitally as e-templates with automatic population of data where this is shared between documents OR integrating them into one document;
- Adding specific content, into the existing templates: the possibility for adding assessment and the possibility to make individual changes/additions to the templates.

As the Europass has high recognition value and a high reputation, most experts agree that especially the Europass Mobility Document could be combined with the existing ECVET templates.

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Interviewees

- Tore Kjaergaard (NO) - Senior Advisor SIU, Norwegian ECVET Expert, Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education, tore.kjaergaard@siu.no
- Mika Saarinen (FI) - Counsellor of Education, Head of Section Internationalisation Services, Finnish National Agency for Education EDUFI, Mika.saarinen@oph.fi
- Eva Farkas (HU), Hungarian ECVET Expert, Szeged University, Faculty of Education and Teacher Training Hungary, farkaseva9@gmail.com
- Kirsi Lounela (FI), Manager of International Affairs, Finnish ECVET Expert, SEDU Education, kirsi.lounela@sedu.fi

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²⁰¹ Interview FI2

Norwegian ECVET Assessment Form



‘Project name’

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Learner: _____

Study/program area: _____

Receiving organisation: _____

Mentor _____

Placement period: _____ - _____

Achievements related to goals from the Learning Agreement	Not satisfactory (fail)	Sufficient. (low)	Satisfactory (average)	Very satisfactory	Not applicable

<i>Informal learning outcomes (not subject to formal assessment)</i>	Please give a textual opinion of the trainee.
Language and communication skills	
General cultural understanding	
Responsibility/independency	
Punctuality and accuracy	
Integration in the company	
Participation, interest and initiative	
Overall assessment and personal comments - if wanted	

Signatures

Date/Place: _____

Date/Place:

Mentor _____

Learner _____ -

Annex 8: Case study on the role of ECVET in upskilling pathways

Introduction

The 'Upskilling Pathways' initiative is a key priority for the European Commission, mentioned in the recent State of the Union address and the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The Council adopted this Recommendation in December 2016²⁰², so marking the commitment of Member States to this initiative. The Upskilling Pathways (UP) Recommendation aims to bring low-skilled adults back to education and training by setting out a coherent 'pathway' to a higher level of skills. To design such pathways, three strongly interlinked steps are suggested:

- **Step 1: Skills Assessment**, to identify existing skills as well as skills needs.
- **Step 2: Tailored training offer**, to provide literacy, numeracy or digital skills and/or progression to a qualification at EQF level 3 or 4. .
- **Step 3: Validation and Recognition** of the skills acquired through the personalised upskilling pathway, ideally leading to an EQF level 4 qualification, and of prior knowledge, skills and competences, including learning at work - ideally leading to certification towards a qualification.

ECVET's expectation that qualifications are designed in terms of units of learning outcomes and that units can be accumulated and transferred can contribute to the delivery of flexible, tailored training that supports the implementation of the UP initiative. For example, learners that are targeted through UP (low skilled adults) are often the main beneficiaries of a unit-based system, as it offers flexible learning and a broad variety of opportunities to achieve partial or full qualifications which have relevance in the labour market.²⁰³

In the context of the UP initiative, ECVET implementation might be analysed from the three interconnected perspectives (see Figure below):

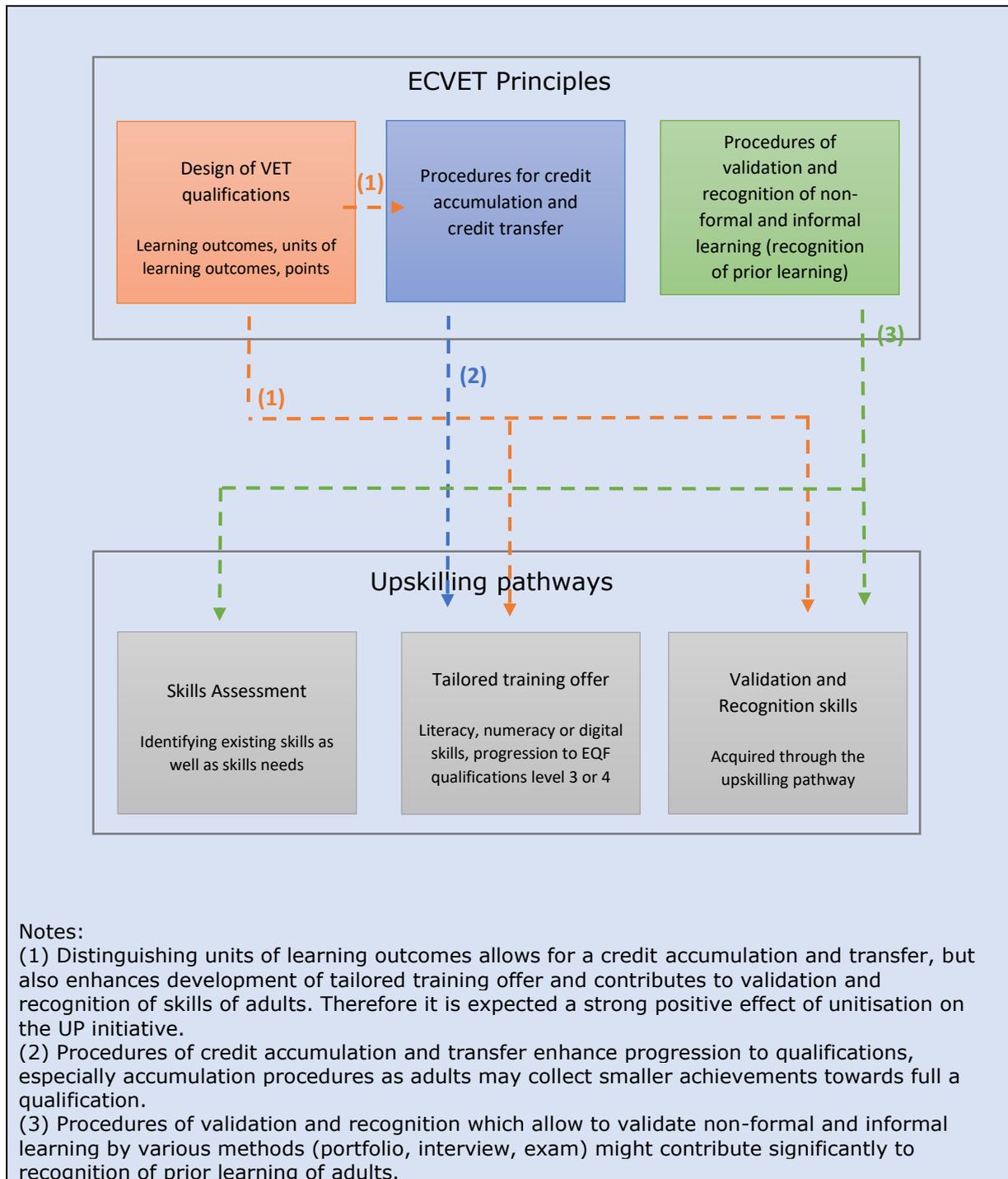
- The architecture of VET qualifications – qualifications requirements are expressed as learning outcomes, and learning outcomes are grouped into units:
- Validation of informal and non-formal learning (recognition of prior learning):
- Procedures for credit accumulation and transfer.

This case study compares and contrasts three countries (Finland, France, and Poland) that differ in the extent that they have internalised ECVET principles at system level. While the use of ECVET principles is not necessarily a pre-condition for creating and offering tailored and flexible learning offers (i.e. they can also be found in countries that do not have a unit-based system or a credit system for VET), this case study explores whether the more systematic implementation of ECVET principles has provided added value for countries in this regard.

²⁰² Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults (http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:JOC_2016_484_R_0001)

²⁰³ While 'holistic' systems also include opportunities for the transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes; many countries have implemented VET reforms to move towards stronger modularisation of their VET system. Cf Cedefop 'Monitoring of the implementation of ECVET', 2016

Figure 1. Linking ECVET principles with the Upskilling pathways initiative



Implementation of ECVET principles in the selected countries

The implementation of learning outcomes approaches and the ECVET principles in Finland, France and Poland are considered to be important policy initiatives aimed at supporting lifelong learning and are treated as tools to match qualifications and education systems to the needs of the economy and society.

Finland and France have a long history of participation in and promotion of adult education and training. The French classification of training levels was introduced in 1969 and the National Register of Vocational Qualifications (French NQF) was introduced in 2002. The first steps towards modularisation of VET qualifications were taken in the late 1970s with the introduction of capitalisable units (Cedefop 2015). In Finland significant reforms related to a learning outcomes approach were introduced in 1990 when the former syllabuses, study units and subjects were replaced by vocational study modules and competence-based objectives and assessment criteria that are based on the operating principles of working life. At the same time, a competence-based qualification system was introduced in adult education Koukku, Paronen (2016).

. Both Finland and France benefit from a strong involvement of social partners in VET at the level of governance and funding but also by active involvement in the design of qualifications and by taking part in assessing VET learners within IVET and CVET. Formal VET, especially for adults, is complemented by a well-developed counselling system and a system of recognition of competences. In both countries and especially in Finland VET qualifications have high social prestige, VET teachers are highly qualified and a career as a VET teacher is generally considered to be attractive.

In Poland vocational education regressed with the transition from a centrally planned to a market economy after 1989. Only since the late 2000s has it regained a significant position among national policies. Restoring the importance of VET has become a national priority, reflected in national and regional strategic documents and actions. One of the most important reform measures is the implementation of a learning outcomes based curriculum and assessment framework to better adapt the VET to the labour market and societal needs. An important element of the reform was the implementation of the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS) and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in 2015. The IQS is open to different types of qualification, including qualifications being awarded outside formal education.

As a consequence, although at different times and with different processes, Finland, France and Poland have implemented most of the key ECVET principles in their qualifications systems, namely: learning outcomes based qualifications which are divided into units, possibilities of credit accumulation and transfer, and procedures for recognition of prior learning. Finland additionally introduced competence points in its formal VET education system which uses the methodology proposed in the ECVET Recommendation. In all there have been close synergies with the development of their NQFs.

In France and in Poland implementation of ECVET principles is carried out within the frame of modernisation and integration of qualifications systems and the development of qualification registries and qualification frameworks. Modularisation is seen as a supportive initiative allowing for greater flexibility in achieving qualifications within the national qualifications system. Finland, however refers to implementation of the ECVET Recommendation explicitly with ECVET used in the national legislation and policy documents addressed to wide groups of VET stakeholders. Implementation of ECVET principles preceded implementation of the NQF. In the implementation of ECVET principles in Finland, learning achievements gained by IVET learners abroad were recognised. In France and Poland this has not yet happened.

In all three countries implementation of ECVET was preceded by pilot projects: FINECVET (Finland), MEN-ECVET (France) NQF projects (Poland) and others. Valuable insight was also provided by involvement in the EU funded projects (LdV and later

Erasmus+, Horizon 2020) by stakeholders (not only national agencies, but also VET schools, employers' organisations, universities and research institutes) in these countries.

Some differences between the case study countries qualification systems

With respect to implementation of ECVET in the context of Upskilling Pathways, there are two significant differences between the three countries which should be drawn out.

The **first difference** refers to the scope of the national qualifications system in their NQF. In France and in Poland NQF based qualifications systems embrace not only formal education qualifications but also qualifications awarded outside it (e.g. qualifications awarded by ministries, employer organisations or branches, and private training organisations). Therefore the NQF and ECVET principles are enforced by law more broadly, not only within the formal IVET and CVET system. For example, one of the ECVET principles regarding recognition of prior learning is imposed by law on all qualifications included in the National Register of Vocational Qualifications (French NQF).

In Finland, NQF and ECVET principles are imposed by law in the formal education system, which meets the needs of most adult learners. The opening up of NQF to the non-formal sector will be addressed in a second stage of the implementation of the NQF. The second phase is also expected to address partial qualifications (competence-modules), which play an important part in Finnish lifelong learning; many relate to access to regulated or specialised professions.

The second **systemic difference** regards the way formal VET qualifications are awarded. In Finland and France qualifications and assessment standards are developed at national level but the VET providers organise assessment on their own, following the national standards. In Poland IVET and CVET qualifications are only awarded after taking an exam which is conducted by the Central Examination Board and eight regional examination boards. Each person wanting to acquire a qualification takes exactly the same assessment at the same time in the two or three exam sessions. This system was introduced in Poland as a way of introducing the same standards of VET and quality across the country. However, it does mean that more flexible solutions to acquiring qualifications have to be designed differently than in Finland and France, and that modularisation of qualifications leading to more assessment leads to higher costs at the system level.

The use of units of learning outcomes (or groups of learning outcomes/components of qualifications)

In all three countries, formal IVET and CVET qualifications are learning outcomes based and consist of units of learning outcomes. In principle, in all three countries VET qualifications in the formal education system are structured similarly and consist of "professional units" linked to performing occupational tasks, and "general" units linked to key competences such as team work, social competences, learning to learn, cultural awareness, and others. However, it is only in Finland that all formal VET qualifications units can be separately assessed, validated and certified and accumulated towards full qualifications. In Poland and in France this is not always possible because combinations of units are generally assessed together.

In Finland, within the IVET system, units are classed as obligatory units, optional units and free choice units which allow for greater flexibility of learning pathways and the ability to gain general education qualifications as well as a vocational qualification. For IVET learners in Finland, it is possible to choose units from other vocational qualifications or obtain polytechnic degrees.

In France, within the IVET system, learners are not free to combine different units or adjust their sequential arrangement (Cedefop 2015). For adults participating in training it is possible to validate single units of learning outcomes but parts of qualifications would not generally be recognised in the labour market. The main aim

for learners is to work towards a full state-recognised award. Only specific parts of the BTS diplomas (just one of a range of IVET qualifications available in France) are fully modularised (Pilz 2018).

In Poland, VET qualifications (diplomas) are divided into partial qualifications (certificates). In order to achieve a diploma, a learner needs to accumulate one to three certificates (depending on the respective qualification). Each partial qualification is separately assessed and validated. In the Polish system adults might apply to validate units of learning outcomes distinguished in each partial qualification but they cannot accumulate them to achieve a qualification until they have achieved a partial qualification through the state examination.

In Finland, points are attached to each unit of learning outcomes. VET qualifications have a total of 180 competence points, corresponding to three years of full-time study. The competence points allocated to the units of learning outcomes are determined on the basis of the scope, complexity and significance of the related learning outcomes similarly as proposed in the ECVET Recommendation (2009).

In Poland and in France no points are used in the formal VET system. However, in Poland for qualifications awarded outside the formal education system which are included in the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS) qualifications registry, it is obligatory by law to design qualifications with distinguishable units of learning outcomes. Within the unit of learning, each learning outcome requires assessment criteria to be designed. Each unit must also be referenced to the NQF level and workload should be indicated (in notional hours) but credit points are not used. The IQS has been implemented only in 2016 and the process of including qualifications awarded outside formal education have recently started (around 100 qualifications submitted by the end of 2018).

The opportunities to have learning outcomes validated, irrespective of how and where they had been acquired

In all three countries, procedures for validation of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL) are implemented and steered by legislation and policies. This means that adults might ask to have their competences validated by competent bodies to acquire a qualification from the formal VET sector irrespectively of how they were acquired.

VET national core curricula and assessment requirements are the same for young learners and adults which means that when adults go successfully through assessment and validation they receive the same qualification as IVET learners.

In Finland (within competence-based qualifications), there are no barriers for the validation process, meaning that anyone can apply, whereas in France and in Poland there is one year and two years respectively of work or training required in a given profession.

In France, all the qualifications that are included in the French Register can be accessed via lifelong learning and validation of work experience (VAE- validation des acquis de l'expérience). VAE procedures are mandatory for qualifications to be included in the RNCP. In the Polish NQF based qualifications system, awarding bodies are encouraged to implement validation of NFIL but it is not obligatory. As a consequence, validation of NFIL is only obligatory in Poland in the formal education system as it is in Finland.

In Finland and in France, the validation process consists of four phases of validation that correspond to those listed in the Council Recommendation on the validation of NFIL (identification, documentation, assessment and certification) whereas in Poland it is narrowed to two stages of assessment and certification.

Assessment methods are broader in Finland and France than in Poland. Portfolio and interview in front of an expert jury (competent assessors) usually takes place leading to awarding partial or full qualification. If the collected evidence (in the form of

documentation) is not sufficient only then is an exam organised usually at the workplace.

In Poland the only assessment method used in the validation of NFIL is an exam consisting of two parts (written and practical). As a result, a partial qualification might be acquired which might be further accumulated towards achieving a full qualification (VET diploma).

In all three countries, the State contributes to validation of NFIL procedures. It is free of charge in France and costs adults in Finland (58 EUR) and in Poland (40 EUR).

The competence based qualifications system is very popular among the adult population in Finland - there are about 100,000 learners involved in the CBQ system yearly. In France the number of VAE applications collected by different Ministries is around 60,000 – 65,000 applications per year, while about 30,000 full qualifications per year are awarded. In Poland the number is smaller - around 23,000 but this is a relatively new system (in 2013) and many adults may not be aware of this option. One of the barriers to this is believed to be a general lack of knowledge about it among learners' counsellors in the local employment offices.

The opportunities to accumulate assessed groups of learning outcomes towards a qualification and the opportunities to transfer groups of learning outcomes validated in one context to other contexts

In all three countries it is possible to accumulate credits (achieved units of learning outcomes) within the formal education system and transfer them within it. In France and Finland these are based on units; in Poland these are based on partial qualifications (vocational certificates) which can be accumulated towards achieving full qualifications (vocational diploma) – which are made up of several units²⁰⁴.

Dividing qualifications into units or groups of units is especially beneficial in the CVET sector where adults can validate learning outcomes and accumulate them towards achieving a qualification (Stanwick 2009, Pilz et al. 2018).

In the three countries transfer of credit between different qualifications awarded by different awarding bodies from outside formal VET system is possible. However, transfer is only based on agreements between awarding bodies – it is not enforced by law.

Implementation of ECVET principles in FR, FI, PL – summary

The table below summarises the scope of ECVET implementation in the three studied countries.

	Finland		France		Poland	
	Formal VET and CVET	Non-formal education (but included in the NQF based qualifications system)	Formal VET and CVET	Non-formal education (but included in the NQF based qualifications system)	Formal VET and CVET	Non-formal education (but included in the NQF based qualifications system)
(1) Learning outcomes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
(2) Units of learning	Yes	-	Yes	Not	Yes	Obligatory

²⁰⁴ For example diploma of technician electrician (full qualifications) consists of three partial qualifications which are separately assessed. Some partial qualifications are common to different full qualifications.

outcomes				obligatory		
(3) Points	Yes	-	No	No	No	No, although workload measured in notional hours
(4) Existence of RPL procedures	Yes	-	Yes (1 year of experience or training required)	Yes (1 year of experience or training required)	Yes (2 years of experience or training required)	Not obligatory
(5) RPL methods extending examination methods	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	No. Exam is the only assessment method as the	Yes
(6) Credit accumulation	Yes	-	Yes	Yes Achieved units are valid for 5 years	Yes	Yes
(7) Credit transfer	Yes	-	Yes	Not obligatory	Yes	Not obligatory

ECVET principles and Upskilling Pathways

As illustrated above in all three analysed countries, ECVET principles have been to a large extent implemented and are treated as important policy initiatives to support adult learning. In the context of the Upskilling Pathways initiative the analysed country cases draw attention to the following aspects of ECVET implementation:

- Focus on learning outcomes,
- Architecture of formal VET qualifications,
- Variety of assessment methods in the VNIL procedures,
- Supporting credit accumulation and transfer,
- Scope of ECVET implementation,
- Quality of ECVET implementation.

1. Focus on learning outcomes

In the three studied countries the focus on learning outcomes enables prior learning gained outside the formal education system or gained from other formal learning to be taken into account when starting a new programme of learning or seeking an accreditation.

2. Architecture of formal VET qualifications: distinguishing units of learning outcomes

The units of learning outcomes distinguished in all formal VET qualifications provide a base for education and training providers to develop short tailored study programmes better adjusted to adult learners needs and their life situations.

Dividing qualifications into units supports the recognition of prior learning and previous formal learning as adult learners can gradually validate parts of a new programme of learning and then accumulate them to achieve full qualifications. This makes lifelong learning much more accessible to adult learners.

3. Variety of assessment methods in the VNIL procedures

More diversified methods of assessment are much more likely to be adjusted to the needs of adult learners. One of the significant strengths of the VNIL system in Finland and France is that different assessment methods are used, among others: interviews, portfolio, skills demonstration.

4. Supporting credit accumulation and transfer by decentralised assessment

Decentralised assessment in which diverse methods are used in Finland and France allows learners to validate smaller units of learning outcomes which might be further accumulated towards a full qualification. In Poland central assessment and examination as the only assessment method limits the possibilities of credit accumulation and transfer even though qualifications consist of units of learning outcomes.

5. Scope of ECVET implementation

Because adult learners might wish to study programmes offered outside the formal education system, it is important that such qualifications are included in the national qualifications system and designed according to the ECVET principles.

6. Quality of ECVET implementation

Dividing qualifications into units and adjusting assessment criteria, validation methods and procedures cannot be done quickly or without organisational, financial and human capital resources. In France, Finland and Poland, the process took some years and depended on the institutions governing the process of ECVET implementation to have a sufficient level of skills and to develop appropriate methodologies.

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Annex 9: Case study on ECVET and EQAVET in WBL

Introduction

Work-based learning (WBL) is found to be one of the most effective training forms when it comes to delivering the skills and competences which are needed quickly in the labour market. While classroom-based teaching is prominent in equipping learners with more general technical and soft skills, it is practical on-the-job training which can provide specific work-related skills in the shortest possible period of time in addition to up- or re-skilling workers through WBL programmes as a matter of course. The increasing importance of WBL raises issues about the quality assurance of this type of learning and how well integrated it is with other learning for individuals' for the learning outcomes to be recognised for progression.

In this sense, both ECVET and EQAVET have features that can help VET systems achieve the above-mentioned goals for WBL. ECVET creates the potential to recognise, accumulate and transfer work-related skills and knowledge acquired in different learning environments including the workplace, that may then contribute to building up recognised vocational qualifications. ECVET's ultimate goal is to increase transparency of qualifications, support mobility and provide learners with a systematic and transparent way to present, document and validate their knowledge, skills and competences.

In turn, EQAVET can provide a systematic approach to quality assurance. EQAVET can provide clear criteria for a system, which can include WBL, or a provider, which can include a workplace or business, which relate to a common understanding about quality assurance. These criteria synthesise what a system/provider should be doing to manage quality according to the following principles: existence of an explicit and transparent mechanism(s) with clearly defined processes and responsibilities; evidence-based on information about context, inputs and performance; providing external and internal review; and covering the whole of VET systems as well as different levels of decision making at system and provider level.

This case study looks into the progress made in Finland and Malta to implement ECVET and EQAVET principles in work-based learning. It further discusses the elements of the national VET systems which are compatible with the two European instruments.

Finland

ECVET

Qualification design (learning outcomes, credit points etc)

The Finnish VET system provides curricula for all national qualifications which include free choice and optional units. Every student in either an initial or continuing VET programme whether school or work based follows an individual study plan which is linked to the official state-recognised qualifications. The qualification requirements are based on learning outcomes.

Free choice units, the opportunity to select the most appropriate optional units, and the revised structure of common units enhance the flexibility of qualifications and enable individuals in the workplace to develop their work competences according to their own needs. The system is based on an electronic data-base with all the available qualifications and modules (units). This has been available since 2015 for CVET qualifications.

Accumulation of learning outcomes

The design of qualifications provides upper secondary students with considerable flexibility in IVET for both school-based and work-based learning. They can complete vocational upper secondary qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications through apprenticeship training. Apprenticeship training can also be provided in cases where a qualification is not being sought.

Apprenticeship training is integrated with the student's personal study plan, which is based on either the curriculum approved by the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) or the competence-based qualification being taken by the student. Having unit-based learning outcomes for all VET consideration of the student's prior learning and the opportunities and requirements of the workplace can be taken account of in developing the student's personal plan. The personal study plan is jointly drafted by the student, employer and VET provider.²⁰⁵

Validation of prior learning at work

Students' learning and competence are always assessed in terms of the vocational skills requirements and assessment criteria determined within the relevant National Core Curriculum. In apprenticeship training, student assessments are used to provide information on the candidate's competence as well as to ensure that the vocational skill requirements of a qualification are met. The candidate's competence is measured diversely and with adequate frequency by comparing it with the level of competence specified in the qualification requirements. The student's learning is assessed by providing him or her with oral or written feedback. Assessment of competence forms the basis for awarding grades for all qualification units on students' certificates, using the following three-step grading scale: Satisfactory 1, Good 2, and Excellent 3.

The organiser of the competence-based qualification assembles the tripartite group of assessors which submits a recognition proposal of prior learning to the Qualification Committee. Such a proposal has to be made immediately after an application for a competence-based qualification and the related preparatory training have been submitted, since recognition of previously demonstrated skills influences the completion of a qualification. In addition to the proposal by the tripartite group of assessors, copies of the following optional documents are required for recognition of prior learning: 1) qualification certificate signed by the Qualification Committee or certificate for completing one or more modules of a qualification, 2) qualification certificate for vocational upper secondary education or certificate of resignation or 3) valid certificates for special qualifications included in the qualification to be completed (for instance, standard proficiency testing for welders, a hygiene proficiency certificate, hot work permit and drivers' examinations).

Recognition of prior learning must account of the fact that no general time limit can be set for previously acquired and demonstrated skills and knowledge, but their status can be verified by, say, requesting an account of the candidate's work history prior to making a final decision. If necessary, the candidate must prove the correspondence of his or her competencies to the vocational skills requirements for the qualification in question. The Qualification Committee will recognise previously acquired and reliably demonstrated competencies by qualification module, as proposed by the tripartite group of assessors.

EQAVET

Standards/requirements for WBL providers

As part of the Finnish education strategy plan 2011-2015 every VET provider had to have an operational quality assurance and quality development system in place by 2015. In addition, the national arrangements which support individual choice and flexible programmes include criteria for quality assurance and quality development systems for WBL providers.

The employer must be able to offer appropriate and sufficiently diverse training, and to appoint a qualified or sufficiently experienced person as a tutor to the apprentice. Moreover, apprentices must be paid according to the relevant collective labour agreement in force in the industry concerned.

²⁰⁵ Kumpulainen, Timo. Key figures on apprenticeship training in Finland. Finnish National Board of Education, 2016.

At the workplace, the student is assigned a workplace instructor, who is responsible for organising the guidance and training at the workplace, thus allowing the student to gain the vocational skills requirements specific to the needs of the workplace and in accordance with the qualification criteria. An apprenticeship training workplace must have personnel with the necessary professional skills, educational background and work experience who can be assigned to the student as instructors. The workplace must also have sufficient production and service operations and the necessary equipment on hand.

The suitability of the work assignments is assessed based on the qualification criteria as well as the vocational skills requirements and competence targets. Studies provided at the workplace in connection with the practical work assignments are complemented by theoretical studies. When the student has acquired the required level of competence, his or her competence is assessed in a competence test or vocational skills demonstration at the workplace.²⁰⁶

Systems to review quality of training and assessment

Quality assurance mechanisms in Finland are well developed and relatively extensive. The corner stone of the quality assurance are the national qualification requirements. These requirements are developed in cooperation with experts from working life and education. Qualification requirements determine the learning outcomes along with the assessment criteria.²⁰⁷

The Qualification Committees (QCs) have an important role in quality assurance. QC monitor and supervise validation procedures and support training providers and organisers in their work. The QCs perform external audits on training providers and organisers with the aim of improving and supporting validation procedures and co-operation with employers. The training providers and organisers are obliged to have a contract for arranging competence tests. The providers are also required to compile a detailed plan to arrange competence tests. The contract and the plan must be approved by the QC in charge of the qualification in question. Each qualification requires a separate plan.²⁰⁸

At least one of the assessors needs to be a certified assessor. The assessors undergo a training programme worth 25 Finnish credits. The employer-based assessors have to take the same training. The providers may also organise additional e.g. sectoral training for assessors.²⁰⁹

Internal/external review

WBL providers are expected to have an approach to self-assessment. Each education provider appoints a tripartite body for the purposes of implementing and monitoring skill demonstrations. Vocational skill demonstrations aim to ensure the quality of education and training in co-operation with working life and feedback received from them is used as a basis for developing instruction. National learning outcomes are also evaluated on the basis of the demonstration of skills.

The quality assurance criteria reflect the EQAVET descriptors and indicators. The criteria were used by VET providers since 2014. By 2015 every VET provider had to complete their self-assessment using these criteria. About 15 percent of VET providers were selected for a site visit to validate the results of these self-assessments and

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Karttunen, A. 2012. Quality in Validation in the Nordic Countries. Finnish Report.

²⁰⁸ Competence-based qualification guide. Finnish National Board of Education, 2013.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

provide insights on the understanding of how to quality assure the individualised learning pathways.²¹⁰

Stakeholder inputs to QA/feedback mechanisms

Qualification Committees supervise compliance with the contracts for arranging competence-based qualifications and, if necessary, monitor the arrangement of competence tests and the assessment of competence test performances. At the beginning of its term of office, each Qualification Committee must plan how it will manage supervision and monitoring in practice.

Social partners take part in the National Education and Training Committees (*koulutustoimikunta*) that operate under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture for the planning and development of vocational education (including qualification structure). Social partners take part in Qualification Committees (*tutkintotoimikunta*) that are tripartite committees set up by the Finnish National Board of Education to oversee the organisation and supervision of competence-based tests. Each education provider appoints a tripartite body for the purposes of implementing and monitoring skill demonstrations.

Malta

ECVET

Qualification design (learning outcomes, credit points etc)

In the context of apprenticeship programmes, in Malta the colleges are in charge of learning outcomes for off-the-job training in the apprenticeship programme which is accredited by the college itself. The content and volume of these learning outcomes are the same as for school-based programmes leading to the same qualifications. With the support of the Trade Testing Boards (TTBs), the Employment and Training Corporation is in charge of defining the learning outcomes for the on-the-job part of the apprenticeship. This part of the programme is not accredited neither by the college or by the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE), which has accreditation functions.²¹¹

Through the procedure envisaged for defining learning outcomes that may be achieved on-the-job, MCAST intends to avoid downscaling general learning content and not to focus the course content on companies' immediate needs (i.e. MCAST intends to keep the balance between sector and company-specific training needs). Therefore, this procedure foresees defining a large number of sector-specific learning outcomes to be accredited as work-based learning. Also, it is necessary to agree with each employer a subset of learning outcomes from the sector specific ones. For both apprenticeship and school-based programmes with a work-based component, MCAST and the company identify the learning outcomes to be achieved by the learner at the company from sector-specific accredited work-based learning.²¹²

Accumulation of learning outcomes

Since an apprenticeship programme is made of accredited and non-accredited parts, apprentices receive two certificates: the journeyman's certificate and the MCAST award. The journeyman's certificate is the apprenticeship certificate issued by the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) following the final assessment carried out by the TTBs. It certifies all learning outcomes achieved both in company and college. The journeyman certificate cannot be used for progression to other levels, as it also certifies the non-accredited part of the apprenticeship programme.

²¹⁰ Using ECVET and EQAVET principles: some early experiences at national level. Joint working group for EQAVET and ECVET, 2015.

²¹¹ Cedefop. Apprenticeship review: Malta. In pursuit of quality and relevance: revitalising apprenticeship. Luxembourg, 2015.

²¹² Ibid.

As a result, apprentices undertaking workplace training stay longer in education and training as compared to those who only learn in school-based programmes leading to the same qualification. Such practice results in one extra training for apprentices to get the college certificate as compared to their peers in school-based VET programmes.²¹³

Validation of prior learning

As foreseen in the Maltese law, persons who have undertaken non-formal or informal learning for at least three years in a specific economic sector may have their prior non-formal or informal learning experience validated. National validation arrangements mainly relate to the introduction of the Sector Skills Units and the development of occupational standards.

More specifically, Malta introduces a Skill Card which helps workers record their skills and fill any gaps. To validate the non-formal and informal learning workers have acquired during work and other experiences, trade testing was introduced. Trade testing is used to validate the knowledge, skills and competences of those who may not have the required qualifications.

EQAVET

Standards/requirements for WBL providers

In terms of quality assurance of curricula for WBL, in general Malta is short of such provisions which significantly impacts the quality of learning part happening at a workplace. The ETC in consultation with TTBs and the MCAST, provides a handbook for each call aimed at companies providing apprenticeship placements. The handbook explains the basics of apprenticeship, also explains companies' obligations in terms of training. Although the handbook gives a general indication of the learning outcomes the apprentices need to achieve on the job, they are not well defined.

As companies are not involved or consulted in defining the handbook content, they do not have clear understanding of what is expected from them in terms of learning outcomes. Given that there is no distinct or coherent curriculum for apprenticeship programmes, which largely follows the curriculum for the school-based programmes, the timetable (balance between on-the-job and off-the-job training), targets for learning to achieve and for assessment are unclear both to apprentices and companies.²¹⁴

In response to the above-mentioned obstacles, MCAST initiated the formalisation of the apprenticeships by signing a memorandum of understanding with companies. MCAST also considers introducing the obligation for companies to appoint in-company tutors meeting certain requirements, such as level 4 qualification, work experience and journeyman qualification.²¹⁵

Systems to review quality of training and assessment

In 2014, the NCFHE has launched the National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education. The main aim of the initiative was to foster a national culture of quality in further and higher education provision. Also, Malta issued the Manual of Procedures for External Quality Assurance, which set out the procedures for the implementation of external quality audits. However, external audits were still in piloting stage in 2015 when three such audits were conducted.

The NCFHE accredits programmes of studies and institutions based on level of descriptors, quality assurance mechanisms and clear pathways for further training and

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

education. Occupational standards also determine the accreditation of specific programmes of studies.

It is foreseen that quality assurance across sectors will be underpinned by the development and implementation of occupational standards. Once established, the Sector Skills Units will work with stakeholders (national organisation, sector bodies, business representatives, etc.) to develop the standards.²¹⁶

Internal/external review

As foreseen by the Maltese Employment and Training Services Act, the ETC manages the relationship with the apprenticeship companies, and mediates the relationship between the company and the apprentice, including monitoring apprentices' performance, and their experience at the workplace. However, the ETC supervisors carrying out the monitoring at the workplace are not adequately trained in the field in which the apprentices receive training, so they are not fully capable of determining if the apprentice is progressing in learning.²¹⁷ Also, the monitoring is considered as effective from an administrative point of view, although it is not efficient enough in tackling cases where not offered a sufficient level of training during on-the-job training.

TTBs develop a logbook (a tool for monitoring apprentice performance in the company and for final assessment) for each apprenticeship call, which is designed for apprentices' self-assessment during the placement in the company. The logbook needs to be verified by the employer and checked by the TTBs. However, employers do not use the logbook consistently as a formative assessment and monitoring tool. In response, TTBs has recently introduced apprentice induction on how to use the tool.²¹⁸

As for accreditation and mentoring, companies do not receive formal accreditation and do not have a formal obligation to assign a qualified staff member (tutor) to mentor apprentices. In practice, however, companies usually assign a person to follow apprentices. Incapacity to nominate mentors is among the reasons why companies, especially SMEs, withdrew from apprenticeship.

Stakeholder inputs to QA/feedback mechanisms

In Malta, neither MCAST nor Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS) is involved, as per the legal framework, in monitoring apprentices at the workplace, cooperation between the teachers in VET colleges and the trainers at the workplace is not common. Both providers and hosting companies confirm that there is a lack of communication between them during the period of apprenticeship. Apprentices also believe that teachers who do not have experience in industry are less helpful and supportive.

It is foreseen that teachers' links with the industry will be improved through their new monitoring responsibilities. The accredited learning outcomes, identified by MCAST and the training company for the on-the-job training, will be a basis for the logbook which will be kept and filled in online. The logbook will facilitate the progress monitoring for MCAST and the company, as well as support the self- assessment effort for the apprentices²¹⁹.

²¹⁶ Murphy, I. 2016 update to the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. Country report - Malta. Cedefop, 2017.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

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