

EQAVET Peer Review on ‘Quality Assurance in CVET: The examples of distance learning, nationally valid further training regulations and quality requirements in the case of state funding’ in Germany - Flash Report

EQAVET Peer Review in Germany

The 6th EQAVET Peer Review took place on 14-15 November 2022 in Bonn, hosted by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB). Five EQAVET Network members from Austria, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary and Lithuania acted as peers. The Peer Review focused on the different instruments at federal government’s level to ensure quality assurance in CVET in Germany. The hosts invited the peers to reflect and provide food for thought that could help them finetune the existing national quality assurance measures.

CVET Quality Assurance in Germany

The German formal continuing vocational education and training (CVET) is regulated at federal level¹ by the Vocational Training Act (BBiG) and the Crafts Code (HwO). In addition, long-established quality assurance standards and procedures regulate continuing education and training at national level:

1. The Distance Learning Protection Act (FernUSG)
2. Further training regulations according to BBiG and HwO
3. The Accreditation and Approval Ordinance for Employment Promotion (AZAV)
4. The Upgrading Training Assistance Act (AFBG).

All these measures play a decisive role alongside the BBiG in quality assuring CVET. The recent challenges faced by the German authorities in relation to the rapid transformation of the labour market due to digitalisation, demographic changes and decarbonation objectives have brought CVET and its quality assurance structure at the core of the policy debates.

The peer review focused on exploring how the available instruments fit the purpose of quality assurance in CVET themselves and how they can serve as a response to address the three major challenges (digitalization, demographic changes and green transition) To kick off the discussions, a panel discussion involving relevant experts and stakeholders in the field with the aim to contextualise quality assurance in CVET in Germany.

The Distance Learning Protection Act (FernUSG)

Distance learning is a regulated form of the delivery of continuing education in Germany. Distance learning offers are available for formal and non-formal education and training. It has rapidly changed in recent years due to the emergence of green and digital skills. It was outlined that the number of approval procedures for distance learning has increased significantly in the last couple of years.

The main purpose of the Distance Learning Protection Act (FernUSG) is to quality assure all continuing training courses organised in a distanced way. It ensures that the quality assurance

¹ There are 16 federal states (“Länder”) in Germany.

and development of distance learning courses comply with the requirements of the German authority for distance learning (ZFU), which is ultimately responsible for new distance learning courses approvals. Furthermore, the Act provides consumer protection through vocational learning courses with a recognised quality standard through a nationwide approval.

Furthermore, the close cooperation between the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BiBB) and ZFU, regulated by the “Guidelines for Assessment of Vocational Distance Learning Courses” was highlighted. These guidelines also set the criteria for the courses’ approval procedure in the case of offers aiming to prepare for further training regulated exams based on BBiG and HwO, bringing also transparency for providers.

The peer review explored further the advantages of quality assurance as consumer protection via the FernUSG and what further developments could be taken forward to overcome the current challenges (digitalisation, skills shortages...).

Regulated further vocational training

With regard to CVET, building on the highly regulated IVET system, legally regulated further vocational training falls under the BBiG (Vocational Training Act) and HwO (Crafts Regulation). The notion “further” vocational training refers to a close link to further training regulations which are linked to the IVET-trained occupations. The latest BBiG amendment introduced new standardised qualification designations for the further training levels. There are new designations for all three levels which have been introduced as equivalent to the already existing specialisations in formal CVET:

- First level of further vocational training: **certified occupational specialist** includes qualifications such as certified service technicians, and certified technical adviser at level 5 of the Germany qualification framework². Further training regulations on the first level are the only formal degrees at the German qualification framework level 5.
- Second level of further vocational training: **Bachelor Professional**, which can be used alongside the longstanding and well-known “Meister” (for crafts and technical occupations). Other qualifications at level two are for example certified senior clerk, operative professional or industrial master craftsman/ craftswoman. They correspond to level 6 of the German qualification framework.³
- Third level of further vocational training: **Master Professional** are formal further training qualifications. For example, technical business administrator, vocational educator and strategic professional. (German qualification framework level 7).⁴

Quality assurance of CVET via quality requirements and state funding

Within the German context, state-subsidized continuing education must meet certain quality assurance requirements, usually provided through accreditation and certification processes. There are two different funding streams, one to support training through Public Employment Service to unemployed and specific groups of employed at risk of becoming unemployed, and another funding stream that provide financial support for those enrolling in formal upgrading CVET. Training providers, their methods and contents, need to be accredited by expert bodies which must be accredited by the German Accreditation Body (DAkkS). In this context, the

² This is not equivalent to the European Qualification Framework.

³ Note that university-level Bachelors are also classified under at level 6 of the German Qualification frameworks

⁴ Note that university-level Master degree are also classified under level 7 of the German qualification framework.

Accreditation and Approval Regulation for the Promotion of Employment (AZAV) and the Upgrading Training Assistance Act (AFBG) are the two available quality assurance mechanisms related to the two funding streams.

Peer Discussions

The German hosts presented the quality assurance instruments in CVET and lifelong learning currently in place with the aim to get feedback from the peers on the areas of reflections and improvement in relation to the examples presented and their interlinkage. The peers agreed that the three instruments presented seem to work well and provide a robust basis to develop a more coherent system for quality assurance, covering a broader range of continuing learning and lifelong learning offers and to increase transparency. The peers also suggested to develop a nationwide system for validation of non-formal and informal learning as well as for recognition of prior learning. Peers also outlined the huge amount of educational data available in the German system which could be useful for based evidence decision making and to steer the training offer to the needs of the labour market.

In relation to the challenge of keeping up with the number of IVET and CVET end users, peers also suggested to invest in increasing awareness of the system by for instance developing a communication strategy to make the population aware of the CVET offer to prepare for the green and digital transition.

The hosts and the peers also exchanged on the difficulties encountered to find balance between the richness offered by a federal system and the challenge to steer all federal regulations. Linked to this, it was also mentioned that, given the huge number of actors, measures and available programmes in CVET may be difficult to navigate for the end user. Another issue discussed concerned costs and limited possibilities for small providers to get certified.

At the end of the meeting, the peer reviewers shared their initial feedback on the three sub-topics associated with the quality assurance in CVET. A comprehensive feedback report will be drafted and shared with the German hosts. The feedback in the peer reviewers' report will help to inform the national stakeholders on further improvements.

The EQAVET Peer Review initiative 2022 - 2023

The [2020 Council Recommendation on VET](#) called upon the EQAVET Network to develop a specific methodology for EQAVET peer reviews, with the objective to support the improvement and transparency of quality assurance arrangements at system level in the Member States. Over the course of 2021, with the support of DG EMPL and the EQAVET Secretariat, the EQAVET Network agreed on a joint methodology and prepared a Peer Review Manual.

The Quality Assurance National Reference Points (EQAVET NRPs) from 21 Member States have agreed to take part in the first phase of the EQAVET Network's peer review initiative. The Latvian Peer Review was the third out of ten Peer Reviews that are scheduled to take place in 2022. Eleven further peer reviews are planned to take place in 2023.