

Eight EQAVET peer review on ‘the national model of quality assurance in initial VET in Croatia’ - Flash Report

The peer review

The eight EQAVET peer review took place from 1-2 December 2022 in Zagreb. It was hosted by the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (AVETAE) which manages the work of the EQAVET National Reference Point in Croatia. EQAVET Network members from Finland, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia and Spain acted as peer reviewers.

The peer review focused on self-assessment. The 2009 legal framework established the self-assessment process in Croatia’s initial vocational education and training (VET) system. Self-assessment is part of the VET quality assurance system which aligns with the EQAVET recommendation. All initial VET institutions are encouraged to develop and use an internal quality assurance system based on the EQAVET quality assurance cycle (planning, implementation, evaluation and review).

The self-assessment process

Self-assessment for VET providers in Croatia is based on a standardised national approach described in Croatia’s *Self-assessment manual (2010) and Self-assessment methodology (2020)*. There is a legal obligation for every VET provider to use the national on-line system (e-Quality tool) in the process of self-assessment and reporting. Each VET institution has a Quality Committee and a Self-assessment team, which have a self-assessment coordinator and a quality coordinator.¹ Together they are responsible for organising and monitoring the quality assurance process. AVETAE provides support to approximately 300 VET institutions to develop and implement their self-assessment processes. In this peer review the Croatian authorities invited feedback on the quality assurance of the self-assessment process and tools, in view of:

- improving the self-assessment model;
- strengthening the capacity of institutions to implement their self-assessment process;
- providing external support for institutions’ self-assessment;
- increasing cooperation between institutions;
- connecting the improved self-assessment process with an improved process for the external evaluation of VET institutions.

The focus of the peer review

The peer review focused on a series of quality assurance questions. On Day one, it was discussed

- whether the present quality assurance system used by VET providers (primarily based on the process of self-assessment) could be regarded as sufficient, and

¹ According to the Law on VET (2009) schools are obliged to nominate the Quality Committee, with the Amendments to the Law on VET (2022) schools are obliged to name both the Quality Committee and the Self-assessment team.

- what type of external support to the VET providers could improve the implementation of the self-assessment process.

On Day two, it was considered:

- if and how the involvement of internal and external stakeholders in the self-assessment process could be strengthened, and how their contributions to the quality assurance system, institution management and development could be improved; and
- if the contributions of stakeholders to national policy are sufficiently well defined in relation to the self-assessment of VET providers.

During the peer review, the Croatian authorities and four Croatian VET providers highlighted how VET schools take responsibility for managing quality assurance within a framework which has been designed by the national agency. However, not all VET schools are using the e-Quality tool to record their self-assessment process, and this makes it more difficult to gain a full understanding of how the national system is being implemented. The national agency provides feedback on the information provided by VET schools in the e-Quality tool. This feedback focuses on the processes and reporting used by the VET schools and does not provide an external view on the quality of provision.

The presentations outlined how the VET schools use the national system to assess their performance in six areas. Using more than 200 criteria, the VET schools assign themselves a 'grade' for each area. The e-Quality tool shows how an individual VET school's grades compare to the national average in each of the six performance areas. These grades are determined by the VET schools rather than by an external evaluation process. A pilot project to develop an external evaluation process is currently being implemented in adult education institutions ². Following ten years of using self-assessment based on six areas of performance, the internal evaluation of the system has highlighted that it was time for a review based on the lessons that had been learnt. The peer reviewers contributed to the evaluation of the self-assessment system by providing an external perspective on its achievements and areas for development.

Completing the annual self-assessment process requires a lot of work from schools and from staff in the national agency which provides frequent advice to individual schools. With regular changes to the quality assurance staff in the VET schools, the agency continually provides training and support for the VET sector. Staff in the agency demonstrate a significant commitment to helping schools to implement self-assessment and use the e-Quality tool.

The peer reviewers noted that:

- a great deal has been achieved already, e.g. creating a Quality Committee and a self-assessment team in every school is a significant achievement and provides a great basis for further development;

² Vocational schools in Croatia primarily offer IVET for students aged 15-18 years. Vocational schools can offer vocational education for adults (CVET) which means that they must follow the Law on education, the Law on VET and the Law on adult education which states that the institution providing education for adults has to participate in the procedure of external evaluation which is now piloted in adult education institutions. In IVET a form of external evaluation is being piloted through EQAVET NRP HR activity: National Peer Reviews.

- the e-Quality system has the potential to supply relevant and accurate information on the VET schools' quality assurance processes;
- complementing the internal self-assessment process with external evaluation would enhance the effectiveness of the system.

Next steps

At the end of the meeting, the peer reviewers thanked the hosts and shared their initial feedback on the Croatian Quality assurance model based on the self-assessment process. A full report will be drafted and shared with the hosts. The feedback from the peer reviewers' report will help to inform the development of an action plan to strengthen the self-assessment process.

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 from 21 Member States agreed to take part in the first phase of the EQAVET Network's peer review initiative. The Croatian Peer Review was one of nine peer reviews scheduled for 2022. Twelve more peer reviews are planned for 2023.