

EQAVET Bulgaria Peer Review on 'Ensuring Labour Market Relevance of VET in Bulgaria' - Flash Report

EQAVET Peer Review in Bulgaria

The eleventh EQAVET Peer Review was hosted by the Bulgarian Ministry for Education and Science, VET Department). EQAVET Network members from Belgium-nl, Czech Republic, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, and Slovakia participated as peers. The Peer Review focused on discussing strategic priorities of ongoing reforms in Bulgaria, the role of social partners in VET, and how the process of developing and reviewing VET curricula can be structured in a way to act flexibly and meet labour market needs.

The feedback from peers, based on their knowledge of strategies for in their countries, will feed into the further development of tools and strategies, including Sector Skills Councils.

Modernising VET in Bulgaria

In recent years, the Bulgarian government has committed structural changes of the VET system, with a focus on updating VET programmes in a way that reflects structural changes to labour market needs and changing professional standards. In line with the green and digital transition, many industries in Bulgaria need to adjust to new regulations and workers need to be retrained on new job profiles.

The Peer Review focused on how to elaborate mechanism and criteria to identify needs in the labour market and develop responsive VET provisions, specifically by assessing how to:

- Identify mechanisms and criteria for training needs in the labour market, at several levels of governance
- Identify skills assessments, anticipation tools, and methods for data collection to develop effective VET programmes
- Fruitfully engage social partners in the development of curricula and qualification design
- Gather data and evidence on the effectiveness of the measures (in line with EQAVET Indicator 9).

The Bulgarian Ministry for Education and Science elaborated on strategic priorities and ongoing reforms of VET governance. The Strategical Framework for Development of Education, Training and Learning 2021-2030 includes the following key actions:

- Introduction of a skills anticipation mechanism;
- Development and implementation of a new List of Professions in VET;
- Introduction of a mechanism for flexible adaptation of the List of Professions and an open format of the vocational qualification standards;
- Development and implementation of sectoral skills strategies and sectoral qualification frameworks;
- Development and operation of Sector Skills Councils;
- Updating VET curricula and programmes to reflect the structural changes in occupations;
- Provision of accessible and quality career guidance services;
- Introduction and implementation of VET graduate tracking.

Representatives of Bulgarian social partner organisations presented the role of social partners in VET. It was underlined that there is a noticeable trend in Bulgaria to strengthen the role of

the social partners in the design and implementation of VET policies (IVET, CVET and Active Labour Market Policies). The social partners welcome this trend and are ready to contribute. For instance, they currently engage in a project to elaborate 450 job profiles and curricula for specific digital skills, using the European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp2.1). The project also works to develop ninety sectoral qualification frameworks to identify general and specific digital competencies.

The third input detailed the Bulgarian efforts to develop a graduate tracking mechanism. A pilot initiative in three Bulgarian regions created and tested a pilot model for graduate tracking, collecting data related to VET students that graduated in 2018, combining data from administrative registries of Ministry of Education and Science and National Social Security Institute. This includes administrative data and a survey.

Another important initiative in the context of the peer review topic is the development a comprehensive sector-specific skills framework based on up-to-date information obtained directly from employers/sectoral experts in three key sectors in Bulgaria (Construction, transport, and IT). This is expected to help with the development and update of a dynamic list of job-specific skills, organised, classified and linked together into logical structures and a practical taxonomy directly relevant to VET. The taxonomy is based on principles from the Occupational Information Network O*NET, the European Classification of Skills, Competencies, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO), and others.

Peer discussions

The peers agreed that the current plans, strategies and pilots form a strong basis for further work. The discussions then focused on barriers to implementation and suggested:

- Investing in dialogue with employers to develop a transparent and institutionalised mechanism/methodology to identify training and learning needs
- Placing strategic focus on the development of the Sector Skills Council and establishing strong connections with schools/centres from the beginning
- Strengthening the connecting between the evaluation and planning phase
- Developing elements of a bottom-up approach where VET providers proactively engage in dialogue and propose changes.

A comprehensive feedback report will be drafted and shared with the Bulgarian hosts. The feedback in the peer reviewers' report will help to inform the national stakeholders on how to improve the relevance of VET relevance to Labour Market needs.

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 EQAVET Network's peer review initiative. The Bulgarian Peer Review was the second of twelve Peer Reviews that are scheduled to take place in 2023, following nine EQAVET peer reviews that took place in 2022.