EQAVET Peer Review on *'External view on the new Quality Management System for Austrian Schools (QMS), its design, the implementation, and the transition from the previous QM system for VET schools (QIBB) to QMS'*- Flash Report

The Austrian Peer Review

The third EQAVET Peer Review in 2023 took place on 15-16-17 March in Vienna, hosted by the Austrian Reference Point for Quality Assurance in General and Vocational Education and Training. Eight EQAVET Network members from the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Italy and Norway, acted as peers. The Peer Review focused on the design and implementation of the new Austrian Quality Management System for Schools (QMS).

For the hosts, the Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD) | RQB and the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research of Austria, the aim of the peer review was to obtain external feedback on the strength and potentials for further improvement of the QMS. Specific focus was put on the benefits and challenges for VET schools related the transition process from the previous quality management system for VET schools (QIBB) to QMS, which is a joint system for general education and VET.

The peer feedback and the insights gathered during the peer review, will feed into adjustments of the design and implementation of the QMS, where needed, as well as considerations for future steps.

Transitioning to a single Quality Management System (QMS) for all types of schools

The Education Reform Act of 2017 adopted by the Austrian parliament resulted in a new school governance and management system where schools are no longer grouped by type but by education regions. The Act also meant that the two former quality management systems, the Quality initiative in VET (QIBB) and the School Quality in general education (SQA), were replaced by the current Austrian Quality Management System for Schools (QMS). The new system aims to at developing and implementing a common quality framework for all types of schools to better monitor the education system. The QMS has been implemented since 2021 across 5,927 Austrian schools, of which 696 are VET schools.

Building up on the learning from the two former systems, the Quality Management System for Schools (QMS) main objectives are:

- To systematically design and organise quality development and quality assurance at school level by providing schools with a common quality framework and the supporting tools for schools to implement agile quality management at all levels and to develop schools' projects (including both central reform and school-specific projects). To this end, the QMS centralised all the necessary tools on the dedicated platform qms.at (e.g., the school development plan, the QMS Manual, tools for internal school evaluation and feedback).
- To provide schools autonomy and flexibility to set their own goals and review them periodically with the respective school quality manager to pursue their own development plan.

- To generate evidence-based school management and decision making at all school levels (teams of teachers and individual teachers).
- To encourage the development of 'mission statements' at organisation and individual level, which may encourage the cultivation of a quality culture in schools.

What changed from QIBB to QMS?

QMS specifically addresses a few identified challenges of QIBB, including

- While QIBB was found to have difficulties moving from 'Check' to 'Act' (or 'Evaluation' to 'Review') in the quality cycle, QMS aims to promote the quality cycle as a working method that is used at each school and by all practitioners involved.
- While QIBB included specific task profiles for school heads and quality coordinators, QMS offer task profiles for a larger range of school staff, including teachers and teams of teachers, to ensure that quality management is understood as a task for the entire institution.
- QIBB missed an all-encompassing quality framework. For QMS, a quality framework was developed that is compulsory for all schools. Every other tool developed is linked to this quality framework.
- QMS strives to reach an integrated approach in education monitoring, so that a key set of figures is available that schools and the education authority can work with. However, this is still work in progress.
- QIBB did not include external evaluation, which is now an element in QMS.

Peer discussion

During the peer review, the peers discussed with representatives of the Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD) | RQB and the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research of Austria as well as with the Education Authority and the Heads of School of several VET schools, including the Hertha-Firnberg School of Business and Tourism, which hosted parts of the meeting. They also met with regional quality coordinators and trainers in university colleges for teacher education.

During the discussions, practitioners pointed out that for VET schools, the transition to QMS went overall smoothly. They appreciate the support structure of QMS and the tools and underlined that they perceive QMS as an evolution from QUIBB.

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 Austrian Peer Review was the 12th out of 21 peer reviews planned for 2022 and 2023. Nine further peer reviews are planned for 2023.