

EQAVET Peer Review on Vocational education and training pathways for persons in employment: quality assurance of the work-based learning component - Flash Report

The Belgian-nl Peer Review

The sixth EQAVET Peer Review in 2023 took place on 30-31st of March in Brussels, hosted by the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training – Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Grants (AHOVOKS). Eight EQAVET Network members from the Netherlands, Belgium-fr, Malta, Spain and Luxembourg acted as peers. The Peer Review focused on quality assurance of Work-Based Learning components embedded within Flemish Vocational Education and Training (VET) programmes.

For the hosts and participating Flemish stakeholders (Flemish Social Inspectorate, Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), Flemish Education Inspectorate) the aim of the peer review was to obtain external feedback on the Flemish quality assurance system overall and specifically related to work-based learning.

More specifically, the Flemish hosts hoped to gain an outsider perspective on their quality assurance approach to Work-Based Learning, including the opportunities and challenges of its multi-stakeholder system and how to create linkages between internal and external quality assurance. The Flemish administration intends to consider the result of the Peer Review after the upcoming election in 2024, when formulating policy proposals for the new government.

The landscape of Quality Assurance on Work-Based Learning within VET in Flanders

Since 1989, education falls under the responsibility of the three Belgian language communities (the Dutch, the French and the German-speaking community). In Flanders the provision of VET is primarily under the responsibility of schools and the objectives are stipulated by the Ministry of Education and Training. There is no common quality assurance framework – several quality assurance instruments exist in parallel and are legislatively defined in Parliamentary Acts. Different stakeholders are involved, depending on the type of VET programme.

The host presented their approach to quality assurance in Dual Learning in IVET and CVET, Professionally Oriented Programmes within Adult Education, Professionally Qualifying Training Programmes and Validation Pathways and Associate Degrees. A presentation comparing the Flemish system to the EQAVET Quality Assurance Cycle was also shared with peers.

One of the focus areas of the Peer Review was the Dual Learning Programme, gradually developed and introduced since 2016, which combines work-based learning and classroom attendance and is available at IVET and CVET levels. The programme foresees a shared responsibility of the learning quality and well-being of students for schools and companies providing the work-based learning. Every student has a mentor at the workplace and is in some cases financially compensated for the hours spent at the company. The responsibility for quality assuring the two 'learning venues' is shared between the Education Inspectorate and the Labour Inspectorate. The collaboration started on an informal basis but is now underpinned by legislation.

Some VET programmes are placed outside of the formal education system. Professionally Qualification Pathways (PQPs) can be acquired via training programmes or validation of existing competences. A Parliamentary Act defines the quality assurance arrangements for providers of non-formal learning, where the external control covers both the certification of providers and the quality control of teaching and learning according to a common framework.

The landscape of VET is constantly evolving in Flanders, and increased focus has been placed on providing learning opportunities for work-ready or already working groups. The Peer Review showcased how various Flemish stakeholders involved in quality assurance are in regular dialogue and collaboration is becoming increasingly regulated.

Balancing contextual relevance with common approaches and enhancing the focus on evaluation and review

The Flemish VET quality assurance is adapted to each specific programme and level of education and training, consequently ensuring a high level of contextual relevance, which results in a high level of trust between VET providers and the regional authorities conducting the quality assurance. The Flemish system also has a long history of involving social partners and many informal collaborations are taking place. However, the diversity of QA approaches also means that quality assurance is carried out by many stakeholders, using different methodologies and terminologies.

The Flemish hosts presented a self-assessment of their quality assurance approaches based on the EQAVET Quality Assurance Cycle (Planning, Implementation, Evaluation and Review). The self-assessment showed that the planning and implementation of VET is fully compliant with the EQAVET descriptors, yet in the stages of evaluation and review compliance could be enhanced. An example of this was the link between internal and external quality assurance, where a balance between the need for regular quality control and the need of managing the workload of VET providers and inspectors needs to be assured.

Peer discussion

Focus of the discussions between the peers, the hosts and the participating Flemish stakeholders were the strengths and weaknesses of the Flemish system in comparison to a more centralised approach with a common framework through a SWOT-analysis. Another topic of discussion were linkages between internal and external quality assurance.

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 Belgian-nl Peer Review was the sixth out of twelve Peer Reviews that are scheduled to take place in 2023, following nine Peer Reviews in 2022.