

EQAVET Peer Review on ‘the implementation of the new Accreditation Manual and Manual for VET providers in Malta’ - Flash Report

EQAVET Peer Review in Malta

This EQAVET Peer Review took place on 16th and 17th May 2023 in Malta. It was hosted by the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) which manages the work of the EQAVET National Reference Point in Malta. Seven EQAVET Network members from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Romania and Spain acted as peer reviewers.

The Peer Review focused on provision at EQF Level 5 and above. As such, the discussions included the use of the European Standards and Guidance (ESG) and the EQAVET framework. In order to offer academic or vocational training leading to an award or qualification on the Maltese Qualifications Framework, organisations need to apply to the MFHEA for a licence. For organisations which successfully complete the licensing process, there is a re-accreditation process every five years.

To support discussions on the licensing and re-accreditation processes, the peer reviewers considered two publications:

- the latest draft of the ‘*External Quality Assurance - accreditation manual*’ which is mandatory and based on the ESG;
- the ‘*Implementation of Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training institutions*’ which is voluntary and based on the EQAVET framework.

The two manuals

The draft *External Quality Assurance - accreditation manual*’ is aligned with the ESG. For each of the eleven Standards, the manual includes indicators which need to be met when providers apply for their initial licence, and for their subsequent re-accreditation. These Standards are divided into ‘minimal indicators’ for licensing, and ‘performance indicators’ for re-accreditation. In addition, for each ESG Standard this manual includes a list of evidence which the provider could produce, and additional indicators which need to be used when the provider offers any online or blended provision.

The manual for the ‘*Implementation of Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training institutions*’ explains the EQAVET framework. It is intended to assist providers in the design and implementation of their internal quality assurance processes.

The focus of the Peer Review

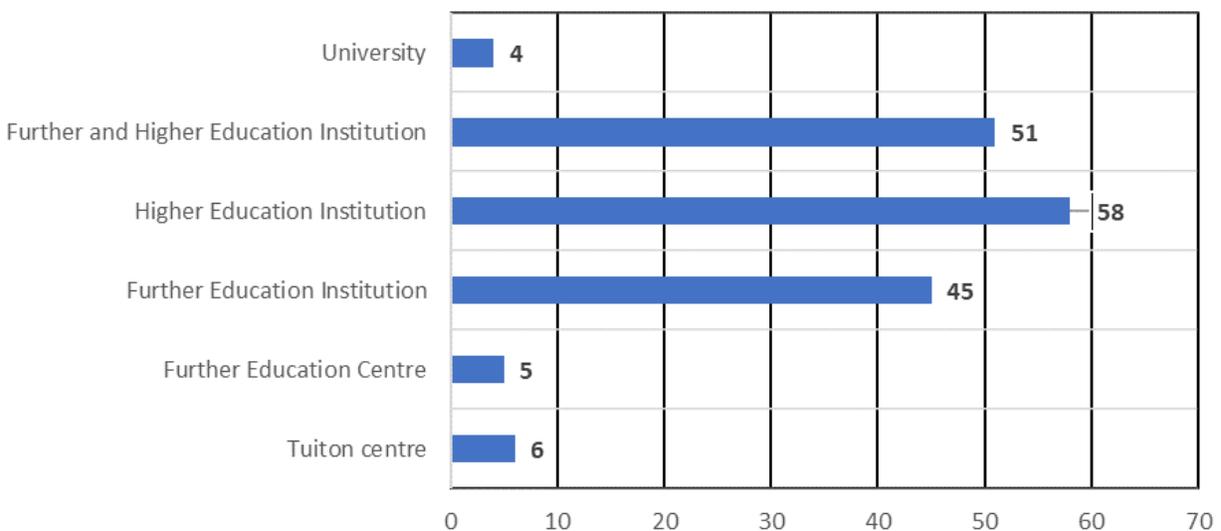
The Peer Review included presentations from the MFHEA and the two largest VET providers. The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology have the authority to accredit and approve their own programmes up to EQF level 7 while the Institute of Tourism Studies can do so up to EQF Level 5. The University of Malta have the authority to accredit up to EQF level 8. After each

presentation, the peer reviewers had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss how the two manuals were currently being used and how they could be used. These presentations emphasised that, once a provider is licensed, they are responsible for managing their internal quality assurance processes. External quality assurance is based on the re-accreditation process every five years. The presentations from the two providers highlighted how their internal quality assurance systems use the manual which explains the EQAVET framework. This manual, which is voluntary, is not used by every provider for the design and implementation of internal quality assurance.

In 2022, the Malta Qualifications Database contained 169 licensed providers (table 1). These organisations offer a wide range of awards and qualifications based on learning outcomes and ECTS¹ - many of these providers are very small and offer a limited number of programmes. The decision on whether to license a provider is taken by the MFHEA based on a report prepared by an MFHEA-appointed team of independent peer reviewers and experts.

Table 1

Total Number of Licensed Providers per License Category



Completing an application to gain a licence requires a considerable amount of work from potential providers. The process is thorough and complex: some applicants look for assistance and support from consultants and the MFHEA. For potential providers, their application has to be based on what they plan to do, as they are unlikely to have appointed teaching staff, recruited students or established the processes which are required for internal quality assurance. As such, the licensing

¹ The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is used in the European Higher Education Area to make studies and courses more transparent. It helps students to move between countries and have their academic qualifications and study periods abroad recognised. ECTS allows credits taken at one higher education institution to be counted towards a qualification studied for at another. ECTS credits represent learning based on defined learning outcomes and their associated workload. (<https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/inclusive-and-connected-higher-education/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system>).

arrangements consider what the applicant intends to do, rather than what they are doing or have already done. This is different to the re-accreditation process which is based on what has actually happened. The difference between what is planned and actual practice is one reason for including minimal and performance indicators in the *'External Quality Assurance - accreditation manual'*.

Alongside discussions on the licensing and re-accreditation processes, the peer reviewers considered the following more detailed questions:

1. To what extent is it possible to use the same accreditation system, accreditation processes and guidance materials for:
 - a. academic and vocational providers wishing to offer programmes at EQF Level 5 and above?
 - b. providers wishing to offer on-line programmes?
2. Is the plan to combine the ESG and the EQAVET framework likely to lead to improvements in the quality of VET provision?
3. To what extent would an external quality assurance process based on EQAVET and the ESG help to strengthen the quality of VET providers' provision?

Next steps

At the end of the meeting, the peer reviewers thanked the hosts and shared their initial feedback on the licensing and re-accreditation processes and the alignment between the two manuals for qualifications at EQF Level 5 and above. The full report of the discussions will be shared with the hosts. The feedback from the peer reviewers' report will help to inform the development of the final version of the *'External Quality Assurance - accreditation manual'*.

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 Maltese Peer Review was one of the twelve peer reviews taking place in 2023.