



EQAVET Annual Network Meeting 2023

Stockholm, Sweden

Flash Report

The EQAVET Annual Network meetings bring together EU countries representatives in charge of quality assurance in VET, EQAVET National Reference Points (NRPs) representatives, as well as staff members of the European Commission, European Training Foundation (ETF), Cedefop, social partners and thematic experts/scientific advisors. The Annual Network meeting 2023 meeting was attended by 72 participants¹ from 29 (26 EU Member States and 3 non-EU countries) countries.

The EQAVET ANM 2023 took place in Stockholm, Sweden where the Network approached Quality Assurance (QA) in Vocational Education and Training (VET) from several angles and with a combination of interactive sessions, panel discussions and presentations. DG EMPL presented EU policy updates including key initiatives like the European Year of Skills and a EU initiatives in the field of Digital Skills. The host country Sweden provided an overview of their QA system for VET including a focus on gender disparities and QA in Higher VET. The Network also discussed how to communicate effectively about quality assurance in VET on national and EU level, and engaged in a panel discussion on QA aspects linked to digitalisation in VET and national efforts to enhance basic and advanced digital skills.

Several EQAVET NRPs had an active role in the ANM by facilitating interactive sessions, participating in panel discussions, and presenting highlights from their work in the past year.

Anna Westerholm, Director, Department for National Curricula, Sweden opened the ANM by stating that efforts to improve the quality of VET is a priority in Sweden, particularly in the context of a growing skills matching problem on the labour market.

EU Policy Update

Koen Bois d'Enghien and **Michael Horgan**, DG EMPL updated the EQAVET members on recent developments in the EU VET policy context and shared insights to the initiatives related to digital transition. The European Year of Skills is a clear signal that skills are a top EU priority with an imperative role in driving key policy agendas like the Green Deal and the digital transition. The provision of quality VET is a catalyst for skills generation and the [2020 Council Recommendation on VET](#) is an important step in this direction.

Many countries are facing skills shortages and there are several occupations where it is difficult to find qualified staff. At the same time, participation rate in adult learning is low. For example, 90% of the current jobs require digital skills but only 54% of the population have basic digital skills. The [EU Digital Decade](#) target aims to ensure that 80 % of the EU population have basic digital skills and to train an additional 20 million ICT specialists.

The [European Skills Agenda](#) is backed by many funding opportunities, interlinked policies, initiatives, and tools. Initiatives like [micro-credentials](#) aimed for upskilling/reskilling and lifelong learning and [Individual Learning Accounts](#) are key measures as part of the EU skills agenda.

¹ 72 Participants including 10 from the European Commission and the EQAVET Secretariat

[DigComp 2.2](#) and [SELFIE](#) are EU tools designed to identify digital competences against a framework and to self-assess individual competences. Two new proposals for Council Recommendations were adopted in April 2023, and five countries (AT, ES, FI, FR, RO) are currently piloting the [European Digital Skills Certificate \(EDSC\)](#).

EQAVET Members were asked to get involved in the European Year of Skills by contacting their national coordinator, use the social media hashtags and to promote relevant EU funding opportunities.

George Kostakis, Cedefop, presented Cedefop's work on monitoring and analysing national implementation plans (NIPs) in the framework of the VET Council Recommendation and Osnabruck Declaration. The presentation provided an overview of the priorities selected by countries, the quantitative targets they have set and how these can be monitored by Cedefop's VET policy dashboard. Cedefop's analysis also presented the most popular topics selected by countries in their national implementation plans to ensure quality in VET, followed up by a Q&A session.

Mounir Baati, ETF, explained that the European Training Foundation is the EU's agency supporting countries surrounding the European Union to reform their education, training and labour market systems. Its mission is to help transition and developing countries harness the potential of their human capital through the reform of education, training, and labour market systems, in the context of EU external relations policies.

The ETF activities are structured around 3 main services: knowledge hub, monitoring, and assessment as well as policy advice to its partner countries and EU services.

In the area of quality assurance, the ETF established in 2017 a forum on quality assurance in VET which is a transnational collaboration initiative between national institutions with VET quality assurance mandates in 22 ETF partner countries¹. The purpose of the Forum is to support its member countries to modernise and improve quality assurance in VET by providing the context and means for peer learning through transnational cooperation. One of the main working tools of the forum is peer visit which is a form of external feedback from peers, with the aim of supporting a Forum member acting as the host in its quality assurance development efforts. So far, the forum organised 4 peer visits and is planning a fifth one in the Autumn.

In addition to that, the ETF provides targeted support to its partner countries in modernising their QA system. i.e.: Georgia on the use of EQAVET indicators, Uzbekistan on "aligning" its QA system to the EQAVET framework and to Kazakhstan in reviewing its QA system.

Introducing the Swedish VET system and QA

Sweden has IVET programmes in upper secondary education, adult education, and programmes for people with special needs and HVE (CVET) programmes. Swedish VET is embedded in a decentralised system with both public and private actors. IVET programmes are advised by national programme councils in which industry representatives take part, and HVE programmes are governed by a managing board where industry representatives are in majority. All VET providers have systematic QA processes with a high level of autonomy and considerable efforts are going into creating a quality culture amongst the providers. HVE programmes are directly designed based on the needs of the labour market and over 90% of the HVE graduates get a relevant job after graduation. Few students apply to VET programmes and there is a considerable gender divide between different types of programmes (i.e., electricity and constructions have mainly male students and social care programmes have mainly female students).

Highlights from the work of the NRPs in the past year

Three EQAVET NRPs presented national initiatives that they have recently completed:

- **Italy - Laura Evangelista and Concetta Fonzo** presented a national experimentation of creating an integrated Peer Review at provider level for VET and General Education (GE). Italy analysed existing tools and created a joint methodology and integrated tool for joint Peer Reviews. The initiative took considerable time since it involved two different ministries (Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour) and the fact that GE is generally provided via public schools and VET provision often is private. In the pilot peers from eight GE schools, and seven VET schools received training on the methodology and participated in the Peer Reviews.
- **The Netherlands - Nina van Veldhuizen and Daisy Termorshuizen** shared lessons learnt from a trajectory for policy advisors of quality assurance working in Dutch VET. The trajectory focused on mutual learning between Dutch VET providers and policy makers related to developing needs, responsibilities of VET providers, useful interventions, and reflections on forward steps. The sessions are linked to a tool listing intervention actions and behaviours; highlighting roles and what can be done to reach improved quality.
- **Austria - Franz Gramlinger** focused on a recent Austrian reform that introduced an integrated QA mechanism for VET and GE. Austria has a history of two divided QA system, and it was therefore a challenge to build a QA mechanism that would benefit both sectors. The solution was to focus on learners and teachers, as well as sharing of existing strengths: while VET providers are experienced in data collection, GE schools are working more directly with data analysis.

Digitalisation of VET provision

Network members from Italy, Estonia and Montenegro participated in a panel discussion on how countries support the digitalisation of VET provision, and the development of digital skills among students. The members highlighted how their national VET providers responded to the rapid increase in online and blended learning over the past two years. Each presenter explained how a series of developments had become necessary because of government lockdowns associated with COVID-19 pandemic. Following the short presentations, other Network members raised questions, reflected on their own experiences of increasing the availability of digital learning, and made suggestions in relation to QA.

EQAVET Community development

The EQAVET Secretariat presented updates on the peer reviews and the communication activities within the network and the Members were able to discuss communication strategies in smaller groups. Like the previous ANM, a session was dedicated for beginners who had little experience in working with EQAVET.

The EQAVET Network Activities and the Annual Network Survey

The EQAVET Secretariat presented the results from the Annual Network Survey and highlighted a set of mutual learning activities and initiatives at national level. For example, Lithuania is in the process of translating the Peer Review manual into their language and Italy recently requested expert support for an upcoming event in Rome. In terms of remaining activities, one peer review remains (Portugal), and one more newsletter will be published in 2023. Two events will take place in autumn: a webinar and a Peer Learning Activity (PLA). During the ANM, the Network members were invited to suggest topics for the webinar and the PLA by writing them on post-it notes.

The EQAVET Network communication channels

An update of the [EQAVET webpages on europa.eu](https://www.europa.eu/eu-portal/en/eqavet-webpages-on-europa-eu) included a revision of the [EQAVET country factsheets](#), which will soon be promoted with a news article. EQAVET Members are encouraged to share case studies that can be published on the web page. The EQAVET community space is now including a lot of content and a private channel has been set up for the Steering Committee. The EQAVET Secretariat is preparing another newsletter for

September 2023 and regularly promotes the Network's activities via the social media channels of DG EMPL.

The EQAVET Peer Reviews

The Peer Reviews have proven to be an effective measure to focus on a particular topic while considering context-specific elements and thus, creating more transparency and mutual learning between the participating EQAVET Members. A feedback survey has shown high satisfaction rates (overall satisfaction with the method stands at 4.33 out of 5).

Next steps

The presentations from the meeting will be made available on the EQAVET Community Space TEAMS page.

A full summary report from the meeting will be circulated by mid-July 2023.