

EQAVET Peer Review on ‘ANQEP as EQAVET NRP and its driving role in EQAVET implementation process’ – Flash Report

EQAVET Peer Review in Portugal

The 21st EQAVET Peer Review took place on 26-28 July in Porto, hosted by the Portuguese EQAVET NRP, the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (ANQEP). Six EQAVET Network members, from Bulgaria, Germany, Latvia, Luxembourg and Spain, acted as peers.

The Peer Review focused on the assessment criteria of the degree of alignment with the national EQAVET model and the follow-up methodology based on the assessment of the yearly progress reports and the role of the NRP. Representatives from private and public VET providers, a student, a graduate and a company representative, as well as external experts were invited to share their experience of the EQAVET alignment process so far with the peer reviewers. The feedback from the peers will be used to improve these criteria and processes.

The EQAVET National Model

Specific features and guidance material

The Portuguese host briefly presented the Portuguese VET system and introduced the national quality assurance model as well as the supporting documents. Through the issuance of Decree-Law No. 92/2014, it is the **responsibility of ANQEP, I.P.** to promote, follow up and support the **implementation of quality assurance systems and certify them as EQAVET systems**. A first version of the EQAVET national model was issued in 2018. It encompasses public and private VET providers of professional courses but its implementation is only mandatory for private VET schools. The EQAVET national model has three specific features¹:

- ❖ The awarding of an **EQAVET Seal** for three years (the first alignment process may result in a conditional seal for one year) to the VET school as a result of an assessment/verification process focusing on the EQAVET alignment achieved by the school;
- ❖ A **set of criteria that frame the different degrees of alignment with the EQAVET reference framework** and thus provide the reference point for the assessment/verification process (planning, implementation, assessment, review, institutional dialogue for the continuous improvement of the VET offer, application of the QA cycle and the improvement of the quality VET offer);
- ❖ **Protocols agreed between ANQEP and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for the recruitment and training of the external experts** who make up the **assessment/verification teams** responsible for the schools’ assessment/verification process (174 experts from 33 public and private HEIs, universities and polytechnics, with experience in quality assurance and training on the national EQAVET model provided by ANQEP as well as relevant professional experience and proven

¹ <http://www.qualidade.anqep.gov.pt/sobre.asp>

involvement in projects or activities with links to Level 4 initial VET). In each case, two experts are selected by the VET provider from a list made available by ANQEP.

The model is explained in several **guides**, all of which have been available on the [VET Quality Assurance website](#) since January 2019:

- ❖ Following the *Guia para o processo de alinhamento com o Quadro EQAVET* (**Guide for the EQAVET alignment process**), which includes the objectives, steps, instruments and procedures to be applied, VET providers create or adapt quality assurance systems aligned with the EQAVET framework;
- ❖ Using the *Guia para o processo de verificação de conformidade com o Quadro EQAVET* (**Guide to the process of assessment/verification of alignment with the EQAVET framework**), which includes the verification criteria and outlines the verification process, quality experts from HEI assess the systems put in place;
- ❖ A third guide – *Guia para a Utilização da Plataforma EQAVET - Operadores de EFP e Equipas de Verificação de Conformidade EQAVET* (**EQAVET ICT Platform Guide**) – contains instructions for VET schools and the quality experts on how to use the ICT platform.

The EQAVET Seal is awarded by ANQEP on the basis of the external experts' proposal resulting from the assessment of the **written evidence** made available by the VET school and **on-site interviews** (e.g., with representatives of the school's quality management, students and internal as well as external stakeholders) against the EQAVET alignment criteria. Based on the analysis of written evidence, the team of external experts identifies questions to be asked during the on-site visit (one day) or any additional document to be provided. The on-site visit is used to verify documented evidence, clarify open issues, identify areas for improvement and to make some forward-looking recommendations.

The whole process of alignment is registered in an **ICT platform**, which also facilitates communication between VET providers, external experts and ANQEP as the administrator of the model. As all VET providers have to register data on certain indicators related to the courses they offer, the platform has been designed to be able to produce information on a large scale.

The general alignment process with the national EQAVET model started in 2020. By the beginning of 2023, a significant number of existing private and public VET providers offering professional courses are registered in the EQAVET platform and awarded with the EQAVET Seal. So far, 459 EQAVET Seals have been awarded to VET schools offering professional courses (i.e. 70%): 282 to public schools (of 455 in total) and 177 to private schools (of 203 in total).

Specificities of the assessment criteria, indicators and process

Principles, criteria and indicators

The EQAVET alignment criteria are based on the following **principles**:

1. Strategic vision and transparency of processes and results;
2. Use of the quality cycle, quality criteria and indicative descriptors for VET provider level;
3. Engagement of relevant stakeholders in the quality cycle;
4. Continuous improvement using indicators, including the selected EQAVET indicators.

According to these principles, a set of **six EQAVET alignment criteria** (quality criteria) has been defined and each of these criteria includes the aspects (**focal points of observation**) to be considered by the experts responsible for the assessment/verification process, as well as the descriptions of the **EQAVET alignment levels** (Degree 1. Started alignment; Degree 2. Advanced alignment; Degree 3. Consolidated alignment). VET providers must show that they meet the EQAVET alignment requirements through reports and other **documented evidence**. This is then **assessed** by the experts through analysis of the evidence provided and on-site interviews to evaluate the performance of the VET providers against the six quality criteria.

The use of the following **EQAVET indicators** within the alignment process is **mandatory** (i.e. they are prioritised in the first implementation cycle):

Indicator 4

Completion rate in VET programmes: Number of persons having successfully completed/abandoned VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria

Indicator 5

Placement rate in VET programmes:

- a) Destination of VET learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria;
- b) Share of employed learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria (12-36 months after completion).

Indicator 6

Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace:

- a) Information on occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training, according to type of training and individual criteria;
- b) Satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences.

To be completed in the near future with the inclusion of the satisfaction rate of the students graduated and already placed in the labour market.

Conditions related to the first EQAVET alignment verification/assessment process

The outcome of this process is one of the following situations:

- 1) The awarding of the EQAVET Seal for a period of three years if the VET provider fully complies with the EQAVET requirements (in case four or more criteria are assessed with alignment degree 2 or 3);
- 2) The awarding of the EQAVET Seal with conditions for a period of one year to allow the VET provider to correct inconsistencies or gaps in its quality assurance system and fully meet the EQAVET requirements (in case three or more criteria are assessed with the alignment grade 1 – started alignment). The VET provider must reapply for a re-assessment procedure after this one-year period.

Conditions related to the subsequent assessment processes

The criteria and focus of the observation remain identical to those of the first assessment process, although more adequate management is desired to monitor a verification process of continuous improvement of VET providers' quality assurance systems in line with the EQAVET framework.

The outcome of the EQAVET Seal **Renewal Process** (after three years) is one of the following situations:

- 1) The renewal of the EQAVET Seal for a new period of three years (in case four or more criteria are assessed with alignment degree 2 or 3);
- 2) The suspension of the EQAVET Seal due to a negative decision after the renewal procedure (in case three or more criteria are assessed with the alignment grade 1 – insufficient alignment).

The outcome of the **EQAVET Seal Re-assessment Process** (after one year following the conditional issuing of the Seal) is one of the following situations:

- 1) Award of the EQAVET Seal for three years (in case four or more criteria are assessed with alignment degree 2 or 3);
- 2) Non-award of the EQAVET Seal due to an unfavourable decision after the re-assessment process (in case three or more criteria are assessed with the alignment grade 1 – insufficient alignment).

Currently, the follow-up procedure is based on the requirement for VET providers to submit a **Yearly Progress Report** after being awarded the EQAVET Seal, which means the submission of three annual progress reports in total. Each Yearly Progress Report must demonstrate progress in the development of the quality assurance system and compliance with the recommendations made by the external experts during the previous assessment process. In addition, VET providers must upload the maximum **updated data on EQAVET indicators** to the database system.

Objectives of the Peer Review

In 2023, VET providers that have been awarded the EQAVET Seal in 2020 will start the renewal process by the end of the 3-year validity period. ANQEP has introduced some changes in the operationalisation of the criteria and intends to implement it in a near future. The Peer Review meeting was considered an important opportunity to assess the follow-up procedure established, to improve the effective capacity to manage the overall EQAVET national system and to discuss the modifications of the criteria and focal points of observation. The guiding questions for this Peer Review therefore were:

- 1) Do the changes now introduced in the assessment criteria and focal points of observation help to improve the assessment process? Should they be reinforced?
- 2) How to improve the follow-up methodology based on the assessment of the Yearly Progress Report that VET providers are required to deliver between the awarding of the EQAVET Seal and its renewal (three years) as well as for the renewal process?

Peer discussion

The peers noted that the EQAVET alignment process, which takes into account the specific circumstances and contexts of the VET schools in a flexible way, is a helpful tool that supports the schools in the process of quality development and assurance. The peers and the host discussed, among other things, how to further develop the exchange between the external experts and the networking between the individual schools in order to strengthen the exchange of good practices and how to best use their experiences and feedback to further improve the process.

At the end of the meeting, the peer reviewers shared their initial feedback. A comprehensive feedback report will be drafted and shared with the Portuguese hosts. The feedback in the peer reviewers' report will help to improve the evaluation criteria as well as the follow-up procedure.

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 Portuguese Peer Review was the last out of twelve Peer Reviews that were scheduled to take place in 2023, following nine Peer Reviews in 2022.