Creating a quality culture in VET - Trends and developments in quality assurance for VET providers

An EQAVET webinar (26 October 2023)

The EQAVET webinar was part of the EU's official programme of the 2023 edition of the European Vocational Skills Week (VET Skills week), which was embedded in the European Year of Skills (EYS) that takes place from 9 May 2023 until 8 May 2024.

Several events at EU level underlined that vocational education and training (VET) is key to Europe's efforts to respond to economic, climate and social challenges of today and of the future; and highlighted the opportunities VET offers to people of all ages to develop and improve skills for their careers and personal development.

The webinar was attended by **around 130 participants**, representing ministries or national authorities for VET and Higher Education, VET providers and their associations, research institutions, trade unions and employers.

Flash Report

EQAVET, the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET, has been evolving since 2009 to underpin quality improvement in VET. The 2020 Council Recommendation on VET calls for the EQAVET National Reference Points (NRPs) (among other activities) *'to support self-evaluation as a complementary and effective means of quality assurance to allow the measurement of success and the identification of areas for improvement, including with respect to digital readiness of VET systems and institutions.'*[1]'

During the webinar, it was underlined that VET providers are key actors in the field of Quality Assurance (QA) in VET and creating a quality culture in schools is one of the most important goals in that policy area. The 2022 EQAVET survey showed that

- Accreditation of VET providers is common, and most countries do this for both IVET and CVET providers.
- 16 of the EU27 countries have an external review/inspection system in place.
- Most countries have national QA standards for VET providers. In most cases providers are required to adhere to them as a condition of accreditation/approval or as part of legislation. In around half of countries it is a condition for funding.

Obviously, QA tools developed for VET providers are influenced by how the VET system is organised (e.g., centralised versus decentralised, work-based, or school-based, through apprenticeships etc.) and thus, a tool from one country might not necessarily have the same impact in another country. The types of QA frameworks and tools can also depend on the level of autonomy for VET providers that exists in the VET system.

Discussions in the EQAVET Network have shown that centralised Quality Assurance Systems and frameworks introduced by the system level need to allow for a certain level of flexibility, so that VET providers can apply the tools and indicators as needed, given the specific situation of their institution and the local labour market. Some countries have a longstanding experience

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[1] Page C417 | 8, paragraph 21

with self-assessment. Most of them use a broad national framework where it is up to individual VET providers to decide what indicators they consider appropriate to their context, and where they can identify areas of strengths as well as weaknesses to address.

A growing number of countries are in the process of developing and piloting self-assessment on the VET provider level, as this allows VET providers to embrace quality assurance as an empowering instrument and a chance for continuous improvement. Three of them presented recent policy reforms in that area.

Latvia: A Framework for Education Quality Assessment and Assurance

The State Education Quality Service in Latvia is currently in the process of implementing a Framework for Education Quality Assessment and Assurance. Reforms introduced in 2021 entailed a paradigm shift regarding the understanding of 'quality' among VET providers, establishing the understanding that quality is more than compliance with legal regulations. The new Latvian Quality Framework introduces joint quality standards and an approach to quality assurance that is based on data driven planning, execution, monitoring and improvement, using EQAVET indicators. The framework also re-defines the links of internal and external evaluation: the external inspection will work with the same quality standards; hence the results will be an additional source of data and information for VET providers to use in the review phase.

First experiences show that, for VET providers to fully embrace the transition to 'learning organisations', school leadership and management need to invest more time into strategic planning, boosting their capacity to analyse data and information to draw conclusions regarding strengths and potentials for future improvements.

Hungary: A Quality Management System for formal VET institutions

In 2021, the Hungarian National Reference Point has launched an EQAVET-based quality management system (QMS) for formal VET institutions. The QMS is underpinned by a legal regulation and foresees comprehensive institutional self-evaluation against a set of 21 VET-specific EQAVET-based self-evaluation criteria. The self-evaluation is carried out every two years and is a tool for continuous quality improvement, with the ultimate aim to develop and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the VET provision and the institution's operations, including the professional-pedagogical work.

The self-evaluation is managed and coordinated by a school-internal Quality Management Team, in collaboration with internal and external stakeholders (including school management, teachers, trainers, and other staff; students/graduates/; parents; dual training providers; and employers).

Greece: A Quality Assurance methodology for IVET Study Programmes

The Greek National Reference Point has developed a QA methodology for IVET Study Programmes together with an Implementation Manual and is currently in the process of evaluating the outcomes from a piloting exercise with two public IVET institutions. The methodology is based on a set of clear quality criteria and standards and stipulates a process that links change and improvement based on self-assessment with external assessment, reflection, and review.

A 360-degree evaluation of the piloting showed that the QA methodology was positively received. Through the combination of self-evaluation and external evaluation, VET providers were able to identify a few areas for improvement that had previously gone unnoticed.

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Based on the information gathered in the webinar, the participants raised several learning points related to QA at VET provider level, for example:

- It seems beneficial to have a joint QA framework for everyone;
- QA should be an on-going progress and linked to continuous improvement;
- QA should be tailored to national VET systems;
- QA should include outcome-based indicators that focus on labour market demands.

In the conclusions, an EQAVET Secretariat expert stated that the three country examples showcased the flexibility of the EQAVET reference framework as countries apply different approaches and indicators to align with their national contexts. It was also possible to see alignment between self-assessments and external assessments and how some systems favour qualitative data and others prefer quantitative data. The EQAVET reference framework allows for different types of data collection and analysis.

Further information

On the EQAVET webpage you will find further information on the EQAVET Networks activities, including country factsheets and case studies on national QA arrangements, and information about the EQAVET National Reference Points.

A detailed synthesis report summarising the inputs and discussions of the webinar will follow in a few weeks' time.