EQAVET PLA: 'Quality assuring the digital tools and delivery in VET' (22-23 November 2023)

The PLA was implemented in a virtual format, using the MS Teams platform.

Around 40 participants attended the EQAVET PLA, representing more than 20 EU and Non-EU countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Serbia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Portugal,

The majority of PLA participants work at a Ministry/national authority related to VET, but there was also a high share of participants from VET providers, research institutions and Ministries/national authorities related to higher education. Most of the participants had visited an EQAVET PLA in the past, but 44 % of the participants indicated that they attended an EQAVET PLA for the first time.[1]

Flash Report

The first day of the EQAVET PLA focused on getting an insight into different system-level initiatives related to quality assurance (QA) of digital tools and delivery. On the second day, participants were introduced to provider-level examples. On both days, group discussions were held.

Koen Bois d'Enghien, DG EMPL, European Commission opened the EQAVET PLA with an insight regarding on-going discussions related to the QA of digital tools and delivery in VET at EU-level. In the framework of the European year of Skills, the European Council adopted two recommendations on digital education and skills in the same week as the PLA. At the national level, many Member States have adopted system-level strategies related to digital education with a strong focus on teachers and trainers' digital competences and literacy.

The EQAVET reference framework is designed to fit different contexts and different types of learnings. How can EQAVET help to address the specific QA needs that arise from digital tools and delivery of VET at both system-level and provider-level? What other EU tools can assist with the quality control of digital education? **Anette Curth from the EQAVET Secretariat** set the scene for the EQAVET PLA by addressing these questions in a thematic presentation.

EQAVET offers a selection of descriptors and indicators in the format of a reference framework and can be used as a toolbox by both system-level stakeholders and providers. Well-functioning QA is crucial for understanding the inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes of VET. Indeed, QA helps to anticipate needs for new digital environments, responses to new digital jobs and competences demands – and what this means for learners, identifying needs for new learning outcomes and new types of teaching techniques. The relevant areas for discussion include (but are not limited to):

- The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and what it implies for QA;
- Quality assuring digital competences and skills of both teachers and learners;
- Ensuring equal access to digital learning opportunities.

---

[1] Self-assessment through sli.do poll on Day 1

Several EU tools and initiatives were designed as useful contributions to quality assuring digital tools and delivery in VET, such as the Digital Education Action Plan, the Digital Compass and the EU Skills Agenda. Policies such as the Council Recommendation on VET, Osnabruck Declaration and Council Recommendation on micro credentials and Individual Learning Accounts (ILA) are at the basis of the strategic direction for digital education, which is the basis for developing QA. In addition, Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) have the task to further the use of AI in VET and to promote lifelong learning, and a European Digital Skills Certificate is now being piloted in five countries.

Participants were asked to share their thoughts on what impact digital tools and delivery have on VET. This was transferred into a word cloud (see below). 'Innovation' proves to be the word that was mentioned most often, along with mentioning of teachers' competences, changing mindsets and QA challenges.

Figure 1: Sli.do results to the question: please share what impact does digital tools and delivery have on VET'. Result presented in word cloud format.

System level initiatives

Rita Kask, Ministry of Education and Research presented how digital tools and delivery in VET are being quality assured in Estonia. Estonia is focusing on continuous development of digital skills and competences, including digital solutions. The Estonian Education Strategy for 2021-2035 outlines three main objectives:

- Seamless learning paths (e.g., flexible pathways, lifelong learning)
- Competent teachers (e.g., digital skills)
- Meeting societal needs (e.g., responding to the labour market).

QA measures are in place to quality control the use of digital tools and delivery, for example, assessing the professional development of teachers (e.g., how does it take place, what support is provided and self-reflections). Estonia has also developed a quality label for e-courses.

Martin Ulovec, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports shared the Czech priorities for digital education including VET. The country has already announced major changes to the education system, including the introduction of computational thinking in the curriculum and digital skills applied transversally. Efforts have been made to support schools in all recent developments via the Recovery and Resilience Fund (RRF) in which quality assurance of

digital tools is embedded. Teachers are also support to their professional development focused on digital skills and effective use of digital tools.

A new strategic framework for digital education was introduced (2023-2027) and priorities are linked to digital skills and lifelong learning, responding to the labour market in the context of digitalisation, prevent the digital divide and strengthen coordination between key stakeholders including public, private, and not-for-profit actors.

Ester Scholten from the Dutch CINOP/MBO Digitaal showcased how the Netherlands approaches digital competences of VET teachers. Many Dutch VET schools see the possibilities of using digital education as an innovative approach to offer flexible learning, but for it to be successful, teachers' needs to be equipped with the necessary competences. Teacher training colleagues and VET institutions are targeted with awareness raising campaigns.

Ester referred to the EQAVET indicator 2 'investment in training of teachers and trainers' and stated that in the Dutch context, the aim is to ensure that VET should flexibly adjust to changes in the labour market which means digital skills need to be incorporated in VET curricular consequently, meaning that teachers should work on their initial and continued professional development to provide high quality education. Teachers' professional development needs to be approached as a continuous process; and they should not only be able to effectively use digital tools but also inform students about potential risks with digital tools, social platforms etc.

Provider level initiatives

Luka Orehar, Biotechnical Centre Naklo presented the Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) AgriNext project, an 'agricultural and rural excellence incubator and platform for exchange of competences', which is funded by Erasmus+. AgriNext is in the process of developing a digital learning environment responding to skills demand in the field of agriculture. In autumn 2023, the curriculum (including online and blended learning) was piloted. The CoVE has a particular focus on digital and green skills and applies several steps to quality assure the program including its use of digital tools:

- Needs assessment (define learning objectives and outcomes to be achieved in using digital tools)
- Regular evaluation (establish a systematic evaluation process)
- Alignment with curriculum (regular review and update of digital content)
- Accessibility and inclusivity (assess accessibility for all learners)
- Data security and privacy (implement secure measures for data protection)

Guido Helmerhorst, Warp VR and lead developer for POVE Water Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) showcased POVE Water's plans for using Virtual Reality (VR) to deliver situational learning in VET courses. Guido presented how VR can solve challenges linked to in-person training, such as ensuring the same learning experience for all learners and providing real-life scenarios (for example, training on how to act during an emergency).

An example VR course was showcased to the participants as well as examples of how stakeholders use VR to train students and/or employers. Guido stated that with VR often leads to an increase in engagement, students remember learning outcomes better and the time spent is shorter in comparison to other forms of training such as on the job training. The application of VR in VET can be quality assured via the EQAVET reference framework, such as participation rate in VET programmes (indicator 3) and schemes used to promote better access to VET and to provide guidance to (potential) VET learners (indicator 10).

Discussions and conclusions

Participants discussed the information provided in the presentations, in view of a) the needs for quality assurance emerge from digital tools, and b) the implications on the EQAVET reference framework and various QA measures. During the first day, three participants shared reflections:

■ **Laura Ferri Ramirez, Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, Spain** gave an insight on how stakeholders are consulted/involved in the quality assurance of digital tools from the context of Spain.
■ **Eimear Joyce, City of Dublin Education Training Board (ETB), Ireland** reflected on quality assurance of 'e-portfolio' as an example of a digital tool from the context of Ireland.
■ **Tomi Ahokas, Finnish National Agency for Education** summarised the approach to quality assurance of digital learning environments in the context of Finland.

At the end of the event, participants were asked to share their observations and reflections related to QA of digital tools and delivery in VET and several interesting points were raised, including that digital tools can bring important added value for learners but cannot replace in-person teaching and learning. Digital tools have a lot of potential to improve learning in VET, for instance, digital capture and reporting can be more efficient and beneficial to all. Consequently, digital tools can improve the quality of VET, but it requires highly trained teachers and trainers, and quality assurance to ensure effectiveness and efficiency.

In conclusion, digitalisation is here to stay and brings about a diversification of learning. A few guiding questions should be considered when planning the using digital tools and delivery in VET, including

■ What challenges are we addressing with digital learning – what problem(s) do we solve?
■ What do we want to achieve (do we have clear and measurable targets)?
■ Do we have a clear and common understanding of key concepts and definitions (e.g digital competences)?
■ How can we ensure teachers involvement in deciding what digital tools to use?
■ How can we create networks of collaborations between VET stakeholders (providers, policy makers, etc.)?
■ How can we ensure digitalisation is a team effort, involving not only teachers but potentially identify new job profiles at VET institutions (for example, pedagogical ICT coordinators)?
■ How can we create independency from the EdTech sector and develop transparent assessment (for example, the Quality label on e-courses in Estonia).

Further information

A more detailed synthesis report from the meeting will follow in a few weeks' time.

In case of questions, please contact the EQAVET Secretariat
EQAVET.mutual.learning@icf.com