

## **EQAVET peer review on ‘Regional governance of VET in Slovakia and quality assurance - Flash Report**

### **EQAVET Peer Review in Slovakia**

The first EQAVET system level peer review of the 2024-26 cycle took place on 23-24 May 2024 in Bratislava, hosted by the State Vocational Education Institute (SIOV) which acts as the Slovakian National Reference Point (NRP). Eight EQAVET Network members from Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Italy and Romania acted as peers. The peer review focused on the regional governance of vocational education and training (VET) in Slovakia and quality assurance (QA). The feedback from peers, based on their knowledge and experience of VET governance and QA measures in their countries, will help to assess the effectiveness of the QA measures in place in Slovakia and reflect on common elements to strengthen and develop.

### **Regional VET governance in Slovakia and the self-governing regions**

#### **The role of SIOV and its activities to enhance QA in VET in the self-governing regions**

To kick-off the meeting, SIOV presented the role and responsibilities of SIOV via the self-governing regions regarding VET governance and QA. Regional governance holds an important place in the education system in Slovakia and the self-governing regions are independent. SIOV, as a national level organisation, is in charge of issuing the educational standards for the state curricula, and has a policy advisory role, yet it does not have a legal mandate to intervene in regional education and training policies or impose any QA measures on the regions.

As regards QA in VET, SIOV informs regions about the EQAVET framework, and establishes tools to improve QA and build awareness about the importance of VET and increase its attractivity. SIOV introduced the ‘Month of Quality in VET’ with a ‘National Award for Quality in VET’ granted to a school every year. SIOV also offers other opportunities to get involved in mutual learning activities in international environment and organise study visits in the EU.

SIOV presented their new ESF+ project to introduce quality management in VET and adult learning at all levels of the education system. The project aims to increase the quality of regional governance, to strengthen QA tools and methods available (peer reviews, graduate tracking and school surveys on graduates’ career pathways) and to develop capacity building. The EQAVET peer review was the opportunity to reflect on quality assurance in the self-governing regions, map existing measures and the different existing perspectives of QA in VET and understand how the priorities of the regions reflect their actions.

#### **Regional VET governance features**

At system level, the **Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport** is in charge of funding VET, defining the fields of education, the content of VET and relating methodologies, defining standards for material and technical equipment of VET schools and listing fields of study and apprenticeship with insufficient numbers of graduates for the needs of the labour market.

At regional level:

- **Regional School Administration Offices** are the second-level state administration in school matters. They compile statistics, information and provide methodological and advisory support to school founders of their region.
- **Self-governing regions** are responsible for their social, economic and cultural development programme, the regional strategy for education and training in secondary schools and regional development plans and programmes. They fulfil many roles, including the establishment and dissolution of schools, appointment of directors, support to schools and directors, provision of equipment and financial resources as well as discuss the educational processes with school principals.
- **Advisory bodies** support regional decision for VET: the regional VET councils ensure that VET is aligned with the development of the labour market; territorial school boards represent schools' interests; and committee for schools are an advisory board for the elected members of the regional government.

SIOV reflected on the strengths and challenges of the current VET governance system, in view of collaboration and quality assurance.

#### Strengths:

- There are strong links between the education sector and labour market, labour market stakeholders are visible and present in many parts of the system, at regional and national levels.
- Good practices exist and can be used as examples and further developed by regions.
- There is a good cooperation and mutual interest between VET actors which can enable further development.

#### Challenges

- There is an extensive network of schools in Slovakia.
- The per capita financing is not very motivating for schools to engage in QA.
- Regions have limited funds for education, especially post-covid.
- The introduction of new study fields is slow and reflects a lack of flexibility of the system.
- Numerous projects are being carried out, leading to overlap or mismatch between some activities. There is a need for better information coordination.
- School ranking performed by non-education actors<sup>1</sup> is quite controversial as criteria might not lead to the best comparability.
- There is a lack of skill and labour market intelligence to anticipate the future needs, for instance in the automobile industry which is undergoing consequent changes.
- Legislation does not provide a clear framework to support regions and schools with QA.

### Quality assurance in five self-governing regions

Five out of eight Slovakian self-governing regions participated in the peer review and presented their QA measures and tools for VET: Bratislava, Trenčín, Žilina, Prešov and Košice regions. The regions face various challenges: VET attractiveness; connection between VET and labour market needs; innovation and modernisation of the schools and their infrastructures; rationalisation of the system which is currently fragmented with a high number of small schools; a lack of human resources; the decreased number of students in VET and

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. offered by INEKO Institute <https://skoly.ineko.sk/rebrickly/?ts=SO%C5%A0>

brain drain. Some regions also need to adapt their education offer to include marginalised communities.

The regions presented their tools and measures to implement QA in VET. The regional strategies for education and training in secondary schools are the main documents on which regions base their QA activities. Current QA tools and measures vary between the region and include school reports on education activities; school visits; staff evaluation; school self-evaluation; quality management tools such as the common assessment framework (CAF); peer reviews; quality evaluators; and graduate tracking. For instance, Zilina business academy developed a graduate tracking system to improve the relevance of its study programmes, increase the attractiveness of VET, encourage innovation in the school curricula and provide better career guidance to students. Some regions also use EU funds, such as Erasmus+.

## Peer Discussions

The peers discussed the effectiveness of the QA measures in place in Slovakia and reflected on elements to strengthen and develop QA in VET, at regional level and, possibly, beyond.

At the end of the meeting, the peer reviewers shared their initial feedback. Peers found that there is a variety of QA measures in place in the regions and a high awareness of regional challenges. While the regional approach ensures tailored responses to local challenges, a certain level of fragmentation cannot be avoided. Moreover, several measures appear to be rather project based and not systematised. Coherence between QA measures could be improved across the regions. Peers reflected on the benefits of a common QA reference framework, and a joint system to collect, use, share and monitor data, to increase coherence and allow for labour market forecasting.

Regarding common features and elements of QA to strengthen or develop, peers stressed the importance to develop more VET specific QA measures. Peer reviews and quality coordinators are good practices which could be mainstreamed. Peers stressed the importance to strengthen cooperation processes and involve all stakeholders to increase coherence in the QA measures. Regional VET councils could play a role in the implementation of QA measures.

## Next steps

A comprehensive feedback report will be drafted and shared with the Slovakian hosts. The feedback in the peer reviewers' report will help the Slovakian NRP to identify how to develop and strengthen QA measures for VET.

### The EQAVET system level peer review initiative

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. A first cycle took place in 2022-2023 with Quality Assurance National Reference Points (EQAVET NRPs) from 21 Member States taking part in the EQAVET Network's peer review initiative. A second cycle is planned for 2024-26 with 20 participating NRPs. The Slovakian peer review was the first out of five peer reviews that are scheduled to take place in 2024. Ten further peer reviews are planned to take place in 2025 and five in 2026.