



EQAVET Annual Network Meeting 2024

13-14 June 2024, Brussels, Belgium

Flash Report

The EQAVET Annual Network meetings bring together EU country 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, and thematic experts. The Annual Network meeting 2024 was attended by 78 participants¹ from 33 countries (27 EU Member States and 6 non-EU countries).

The EQAVET ANM 2024 took place in Brussels, Belgium and brought together the National Reference Points (NRPs) for Quality Assurance (QA) in Vocational Education and Training (VET). During the meeting, DG EMPL presented EU policy updates, including lessons learnt from the European Year of Skills; and shared the outcomes of the evaluations of two key instruments related to EU Education and Training policy: the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), and Europass. The host country Belgium provided an overview of their efforts of making VET more attractive and labour-market relevant, to respond to emerging skills needs. The Network received an update on progress with an OECD study on Quality Assurance in Adult Education and Training; and discussed new developments related to QA in VET, including QA of microcredentials and in Higher VET, through a combination of interactive sessions, panel discussions and presentations.

VET and quality assurance in the host country Belgium

Damien Rebella, representing the Ministry of Education of the French-speaking community of Belgium, and **Andy Thoelen** from the Department of Education and Training at the Flemish Government, opened the ANM by stating that efforts to improve the quality of VET is a priority in Belgium, particularly in the context of a growing skills matching problem on the labour market.

Amandine Huntzinger and **Adeline Magnée** from the Ministry of Education further elaborated that in the French-speaking community, the labour market relevance of VET was strongly improved by strengthening the role of labour market stakeholders in VET governance. Eline De Ridder from the Flemish Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Grants (AVOHOKS) confirmed that the Dutch-speaking community faces similar challenges. **Annelien Deprez** and **Kevin Polley** from the Flemish Ministry of Education presented the efforts of the Flemish community to make VET more attractive, including through dedicated assessment centres that help secondary students identify interesting VET study pathways, and the use of innovative technology such as AI and XR in VET.

EU policy update and results of recent activities

Koen Bois d'Enghien, DG EMPL updated the EQAVET members on recent developments in the EU VET policy context and shared insights from the European Year of Skills, which has put skills high on the EU policy agenda and entailed more than 2000 events across Europe,

¹ 72 Participants including 14 from the European Commission and the EQAVET Secretariat

90 million video views on and 69 million reach on social media. National implementation was supported by National Coordinators of the Year that were appointed by 38 countries.

The main skills challenges and opportunities in the EU that emerged during the Year include 1) critical skills shortages for employers, 2) pressing skills and training gaps and 3) skills for new opportunities, such as the substantial job growth expected from the green and digital transitions. Due to these ongoing challenges, skills will remain centre stage at European, national, regional and local level, e.g. through the Pact for Skills and the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. Koen Bois d'Enghien closed by highlighting the 'Europe on the Move' initiative which puts enhanced effort into providing learning mobility opportunities for everyone including VET learners.

George Kostakis, Cedefop, presented an on-going initiative to monitoring national implementation plans (NIPs) in the framework of the VET Council Recommendation. The monitoring shows that the NIPs have a strong national character, based on strategies and frameworks set before the NIPs. Until 2022, planning and design of measures prevailed. Since 2023 there is a focus on implementation, with overall modest progress. Challenges and areas to work on across Europe were identified, which include the implementation of comprehensive CVET system, sustainability of WBL and apprenticeships, supporting competent teachers and trainers and green transition in VET. There is a broad variety of QA related measures mentioned in the NIPs, including further developing national QA systems (8 countries) and developing QA in CVET and adult learning (6 countries) to establishing self-assessment and graduate tracking mechanisms (3 countries each).

Mounir Baati, ETF, explained that the European Training Foundation has develop a diagnostic tool to support self-evaluating quality assurance processes and procedures across various areas of VET systems (policy & governance, qualifications and awards, VET provision, assessment, validation and certification, and data and knowledge creation) and identifying and planning quality enhancement actions linked to these areas. The tool is piloted in Serbia in June and Georgia in October 2024 and will be deployed in 2025 to all ETF partner countries. ETF will provide support to the implementation of the tool. Furthermore, there will be workshops to disseminate and discuss the findings of the diagnosis, and peer reviews among the ETF forum members.

Maya Ivanova, DG EMPL, presented the outcomes of the recent evaluation of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), which shows that the EQF approach achieves its main goals and is well equipped to support transparency, comparability and portability of qualifications within and between countries. While the EQF is comprehensive in its structure, in practice it still remains mainly a transparency tool for qualifications from the formal domain. Further support is therefore needed for the integration in NQFs of qualifications other than full formal education and training qualifications, including international qualifications, micro-credentials, qualifications outside the formal domain. Moreover, while the EQF is of high practical value for stakeholders working with qualifications, its relevance and further purpose is not sufficiently clear to the broader public.

Christine Voelkl, DG EMPL, shared conclusions and lessons learnt from the evaluation of the 2018 Europass Decision. The results show that users and stakeholders rate the platform high in terms usefulness, whereas their perceptions regarding accessibility draw a mixed picture: A good balance needs to be ensured between simplification and complexity of the platform to ensure user-friendliness and visibility of tools and services (e.g. separate entry points for users and stakeholder groups). Yet, interoperability and cooperation with other relevant EU initiatives and national portals could be improved to increase users' visibility to potential employers or their access to the relevant services (e.g. European Youth Portal, European Education Area Portal, Euraxxes, Digital Skills and Jobs Platform, Regulated Professions Database or national guidance services). The use of data analysis and Artificial

Intelligence in Europass could be further developed to provide users with customised recommendations. Further promotion of the uptake of Europass could allow it to become an EU standard for employment, education and training profiles.

In terms of further development of Europass (EU and Member States level), Member States are encouraged to develop databases and registers of qualifications and learning opportunities and to link them to Europass. The European Digital Credentials for Learning infrastructure and standards can support Member States in their own digital transformation of credentials. Moreover, the availability of information on career guidance, validation opportunities and recognition of qualifications on the Europass platform could be improved.

OECD Quality Matters: Strengthening quality Assurance in Adult Education and Training

Ricardo Espinoza, Project leader OECD Skills Strategy Projects summarised the outcomes of a mapping study related to QA in Adult Education and Training (AET). Quality Assurance has proven to be important to ensure AET programmes meet high standards and provide a positive learning experience, ensuring that learners gain relevant skills. Robust QA has important benefits, for instance it facilitates informed decisions in training and career choices and enhances public accountability and quality enhancement, and risks of low-quality Training that would lead to poor return on investment for both public and private funds are reduced.

Ricardo Espinoza then reflected on the observed mechanisms of Quality Assurance, which include setting quality criteria, utilising quality standards and assessment instruments for AET program evaluation, and evaluating educational institutions and programmes against benchmarks to identify best practices and areas for improvement. The observed challenges in Quality Assurance of Adult Education and Training include financial and human resource investment (essential yet substantial for implementing effective quality assurance measures), system resistance (inherent preferences for existing systems and apprehension towards new methodologies can hinder reform efforts) and AET Complexity (diverse learner demographics and educational settings add layers of complexity to standardising quality assurance processes).

Highlights from the work of the NRPs in the past year

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

Carmen Muşat, Romania, presented how the 2022 EQAVET peer review at system level informed the development of VET graduate tracking and forecasting skills and qualification needs in Romania. Graduate tracking data are regarded as an important QA component. Yet, there is an insufficient amount of data from the regional (county) level on the professional status of graduates, economic indicators and the labour market. This leads to insufficiently detailed information for a solid forecasting. Additional issues like limited computing capacity of the dedicated online platform, a lack of employer participation in the forecasting mechanism and a low response rate to surveys were the reasons why this peer review topic was chosen. Feedback from the peers helped the Romanian EQAVET NRP to better understand the challenges and obstacles and find solutions.

Laura Ferri Ramírez, Spain shared lessons learned from the work carried out within the 'Quality Assurance for CoVEs in Spain (QACS) project'. Goals of the project, which runs from 2023 to 2025, are to 1) promote the application of the EQAVET framework in the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) through the creation of stable coordination and communication tools and the implementation of training activities in the field of quality assurance; 2) provide an updated description of national quality assurance schemes based on the EQAVET Framework through a preliminary study to establish the starting point of appropriate quality standards and indicators for CoVE; 3) To propose initiatives to facilitate the implementation of

the EQAVET Framework at the level of vocational training providers; 4) Support self-assessment as a complementary and effective form of quality assurance to determine success and areas for improvement through the development of instruments and tools that enable centres of professional excellence to be quality certified in accordance with quality standards; and 5) Participate in quality assurance peer reviews at EU level to increase transparency and consistency, as well as cooperation and support from the peers defined in the project methodology. A training course was launched to introduce an EQAVET quality model for training providers in the Vocational Training System.

Vanya Tividosheva, Bulgaria, presented the 'Quality and modernization of VET Content' project. Based on a review of models for skills anticipation in different countries, Bulgaria has worked intensively on the design of methodology for identification of labour market skills needs. They have piloted the methodology through a survey among employers in three sectors (construction, ICT and transport). This led to a series of recommendations and guidelines for the utilisation of labour market information for the update of VET programmes. Recommendations for VET skills development highlighted the importance of providing a variety of learning experiences for students, including practical experience in a real work environment or through group projects, role plays and simulations that require flexibility and adaptability, teamwork, communication and problem solving. Training should be oriented towards the development of creativity and innovation, and should support the development of analytical, evaluative skills and abilities for information processing.

EQAVET work programme and communications strategy 2024-2026

The **EQAVET Secretariat** presented updates on the mutual learning activities of the EQAVET Network and highlighted the communication activities.

They reported that since the last EQAVET Annual Network Meeting in June 2023, two Peer Learning Activities (PLA) and a webinar took place. The EQAVET system level peer review cycle 2022-2023 was finalised, and the 2024-2026 cycle with 20 planned peer reviews was prepared: host NRPs planned topics and dates and the visiting peer countries were matched to attend five peer reviews each. Looking ahead, it was mentioned that the EQAVET Network will also have the opportunity to discuss topics of interest at the EQAVET ANM, in PLAs and webinars (one per year). Network members were invited to suggest topics for these mutual learning opportunities by writing them on post-it notes.

The EQAVET Secretariat also presented the EQAVET Network's communications strategy for the coming years (2024-2026). The main media outlets for the public are the [EQAVET webpages on europa.eu](#), which are constantly updated, and the [EQAVET Newsletter](#). The Network members were encouraged to use the EQAVET community space to promote their national activities. The EQAVET Secretariat also promotes the Network's activities via the social media channels of DG EMPL.

Next steps

The presentations and further documents from the meeting will be made available on the events' resource page and the EQAVET Community Space TEAMS page.

A full summary report from the meeting will be circulated by mid-July 2024.