Editorial by Eckert Detlef

New Skills Agenda

The Commission has adopted on 10 June 2016 a new and comprehensive Skills Agenda for Europe. The aim is to ensure that people develop a broad set of skills from early on in life and to make the most of Europe’s human capital, which will ultimately boost employability, competitiveness and growth in Europe.

The new Skills Agenda for Europe launches a number of actions to ensure that the right training, the right skills and the right support is available to people in the European Union. It will aim at making better use of the skills that are available; equip people with the new skills that are needed - to help them find quality jobs and improve their life chances. The Commission invites Member States, social partners, the industry and other stakeholders to work together to:

- Improve the quality and relevance of skills formation
- Make skills more visible and comparable
- Improve skills intelligence and information for better career choices

Concretely, the new Skills Agenda proposes 10 actions to be taken forward over the next two years. You can find the full list of actions on the dedicated website1. One of these actions is the initiative about tertiary graduate tracking which I would like to single out here given its relevance for EQAVET.

The Commission will propose in 2017 an initiative on tertiary graduate tracking to improve information on how graduates progress on the labour market. Feedback from and about graduates and their jobs and careers is indeed highly valuable to universities and colleges and to governments. It shows what kinds of jobs graduates have, provides information on labour market trends, and gives feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of education programmes. This kind of information is collected in some, but not all, Member States, and in different ways. This initiative will step up EU cooperation, to provide better and more comparable information about the jobs graduates do, how easily they get into jobs, and how they are using their skills and knowledge.

When it comes to EQAVET, the new Skills Agenda mentions that the Commission will present proposals supporting VET modernisation, such as a possible revision of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). The Commission already started consultations with EQAVET stakeholders (e.g. during the EQAVET Annual Network meeting in June 2016 in Haarlem) to discuss possible proposals regarding next steps for EQAVET.

We are looking forward to your proposals to ensure that quality assurance in VET continues to be a key pillar to modernise VET as a pathway to excellence.

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The overview of the EQAVET Annual Network Meeting 2016

This EQAVET Annual Network Meeting took place in Haarlem, the Netherlands from 8-9 June 2016. The event was organised by the European Commission, the EQAVET Secretariat and the CINOP in the Netherlands.

Twenty-five EU countries were represented at the Annual Network Meeting. The Social Partners were represented by the European Trade Union confederation (ETUC) and the European Centre of Employers and Enterprises (CEEP). Observers from the European Credit system for VET (ECVET) network, European Providers of Vocational Education and Training (EUproVET), the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) were also present. CEDEFOP, the European Training Foundation (ETF) and the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) were also represented.

The Annual Network Meeting was chaired by Mr João Santos, Deputy Head of Unit Vocational Education and Training Policy; DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission.

The EQAVET Network paper containing the EQAVET+ descriptors was adopted and the impact of the new Skills Agenda for the work of EQAVET was discussed.

The second day provided an opportunity for NRPs to be updated on the work programmes submitted as part of the restricted call 2015 within the context of the Erasmus+ and to discuss how to best support new submissions by NRPs and cooperation.

Examples of practice from Member States were also presented notably: Work Based Learning (WBL) in the context of cooperation between the key stakeholders, outcomes based provision in VET and feedback loops and the review phase, demonstrated real-life approach to quality assurance in VET.

For more information on the agenda, presentations and discussions of the Annual Network Meeting 2016, please visit our website at: www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/Annual-Network-Meeting/annual-network-meeting-2016.aspx
Why networking matters? The views of EU VET Providers’ Associations in the context of QA

What are the advantages of involving VET providers in the development of the national QA approach in VET in line with EQAVET?

It’s hard to see that there is anything but advantages to involving VET providers in the development of QA at national level. Grass root level knowledge and experience is essential to confirm adequate and proper implementation of QA at VET provider level. Current status of QA varies a lot in MS, a one size fits all approach is not necessarily the best. VET providers and national VET associations are an already existing route to confirm correct measures in different MS.

In my opinion a common QA framework for VET providers could lead to a higher level of trust. For instance, the adoption of the European Credit Transfer System was fundamental to allowing mobility of students across Europe based on a framework that was widely accepted by stakeholders. That system created the basis for an assumed quality assurance requirement because it removed the lack of understanding between institutions. That is also applicable to workplace learning where diversity is high and there is a need for a common reference that will enable transparency and mutual trust among VET providers.

Personally and on behalf of EVBB, I am absolutely in favour bottom-up approaches, in particular in the case of Management Systems and the further implementation of operational tools for Quality management and better corporate governance. VET provider involvement is absolutely critical. It was stated in the Bruges Communiqué and reinforced in June 2015 in the Riga Declaration of Ministers in charge of Vocational Education and Training, supported by EVBB and all 4 European Vet Providers’ Associations: we reasserted the need for quality assurance mechanisms in VET, in line with EQAVET recommendations, with bottom-up approaches from grassroots level, e.g., involving and obtaining a “commitment” from VET providers.

As you know, EVTA participated in the Riga declaration, with our Platform VET4EU2, in June 2015 following on from the Bruges Communiqué. Christophe Donon, chairman of EVTA, is involved with VET networks, for the development of European QA, regarding EQAVET Reference. The advantages for VET providers are that they follow common lines of national organisation. For example, AFPA in France is founded on 7 QA criteria defined by our national law (2015, March 5). The national level is a good frame for VET providers, but European coordination is necessary.
What mechanisms can be put in place in order to actively involve VET providers in the implementation process of EQAVET?

Matti Isokallio; EUprovET

Mutual trust is key element for a common approach on a national level. Not only on the national or political level but also at practical grass root level and in many different ways VET providers must be involved. I would prefer the term cooperation to involvement.

Some examples: openness at national level, including VET providers in working groups at national level, with different measures taken nationally by VET providers included, common goals at national level, options on how to reach the goals have to be open enough at VET provider level, support for the networking of NRP and other national QA bodies and VET providers.

Alfredo Soeiro; EUCEN

One of the mechanisms is to require that VET providers adopt the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework or similar. Public online display of the results obtained by VET providers using the QA schemes should be mandatory. Anyone should be able to analyse the data and the fact sheets of each VET provider created by the application of the QA methods. Another mechanism is to associate quantitative indicators to EQAVET requirements. These indicators should be included in a database that could be used for comparison of results and for improvement of VET providers practice using, for instance, a PDCA approach.

Margarida Segard; EVBB

VET providers must have a greater knowledge of the advantages of EQAVET and in particular, the tools available to all. At this level, there are huge differences among member states. As you know, VET is a “child” of several “fathers and mothers” in each country: several Ministries are responsible for VET (education, employment, human resources, higher education, sectoral ministries) and also social partners, NGOs, etc. The EQAVET “message” , delivered by NRPs, has only reached a small number of VET providers, most of whom are public VET providers which focus on youngsters and IVET. IVET and CVET are delivered by thousands of VET providers that are not familiar with EQAVET tools. I think NRPs can play an important role in mainstreaming the Model and tools thought workshops, training the trainers/teachers/VET provider staff, with greater scope than in public schools. They are very important, but right now, the most vulnerable target groups are not included in these schools. EQAVET should cover them all!

Yves Grange; EVTA

The mechanisms for further increasing VET providers are to measure impacts of QA policies in each national approach, with an annual meeting and evaluation, e.g. during the next VET week in 2016 December, in Brussels.

The social utility of VET must be brought to the attention of VET providers in each European country, with an annual result on common indicators and guides for performances (EQAVET). QA work-based learning should be supported more in Europe (Riga Declaration).
How can EU VET providers’ associations support EQAVET National Reference Points?

Matti Isokallio; EUproVET

For networking, not only at national level but also at a European level, sharing good practice, European VET provider associations could become hubs in certain QA situations EU VET providers could support VET providers and NRP where national or European projects are planned.

Alfredo Soeiro; EUCEN

The VET providers’ associations could provide case studies and examples of practices that could support EQAVET NRPs in order to guide and support VET providers. Another possibility is that VET provider associations could be used as consultants for EQAVET NRPs to disseminate expertise when necessary. A third option for VET providers would be to train providers that need assistance in the application of EQAVET. A fourth approach could be the provision of concrete feedback about the use of EQAVET by the members of associations.

Margarida Segard; EVBB

It’s important that we work more together, namely in:

Dissemination: EU associations together cover more than 200,000 training centres in 28 EU countries, plus 16 in non-EU countries; most of them are private and some are national associations for VET, therefore I believe we have a larger variety of end users than some NRPs; I am sure we can complement NRPs and create more synergies involving VET providers at national level, including in “peer learning” activities, exchange good practice, improve some tools, adapt more to local/country and business needs. This is very important and we are available to cooperate. EVBB is also supporting some EU projects in line with EQAVET, for example EQVET-US for the sustainability of VET providers [http://eqvet-us.upm.ro/

Yves Grange; EVTA

Our EU VET associations, EVTA and EVBB, are involved mainly with employment, youth and adults, and enterprises, and could become more involved, as has happened with CEDEFOP, with EQAVET. Social utility could be a common point of survey with EQAVET National Reference Points. We believe that quality, especially in worked-based learning, is our principal means of persuading employees and employers to choose vocational training as a long-term investment for human resources and economical success. VET provider associations, with European agencies for education and training, should reinforce their relationships on QA.
Establishing effective communication channels - the communication strategy of ARQA-VET.

An article by Franz Gramlinger, ARQA-VET, Austria.

ARQA-VET, the Austrian Reference Point for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training, was established in 2007, so we have been working as a nodal point for Quality Assurance in VET for more than 8 years. The central concern of ARQA-VET is to support and promote quality assurance in VET and to cross-link the actors involved. We see ourselves as a service institution to serve the actors in vocational education and training in Austria as comprehensively as possible by means of providing services and know-how in the fields of quality assurance and quality development. VET providers are an important target group when it comes to the communication strategy of ARQA-VET. There are three well-established communication channels we regularly use: (1) digital channels with the ARQA-VET website, the newsletter and social media; (2) the annual Quality Network Conference for all stakeholders in VET; (3) information seminars and training courses offered to the main players in Austrian VET schools and colleges.

1. Electronic channels: www, newsletter, social media and direct mailings

Since the establishment of ARQA-VET, the website www.arqa-vet.at has been one of the cornerstones of the communication strategy. On the website a wide range of relevant information on quality in vocational education and training is available both in German and in English (partly). The content of the website is produced by ARQA-VET and the updating of the website is also performed by our staff.

The ARQA-VET website is organised under six different sub-themes: ARQA-VET, Quality, EQAVET, Information, Communication and Cooperation. There will be a relaunch of the homepage at the end of 2016/beginning of 2017; we are just beginning the preparatory work.

Other websites maintained by ARQA-VET are

- Peer Review in QIBB: www.peer-review-in-qibb.at
- Q-KULT – Qualitätskultur in berufsbildenden Schulen (a Leonardo-da-Vinci project) www.q-kult.eu
- The Good Practice in QIBB database: www.arqa-vet.at/qibb-good-practice-db
- The ARQA-VET Quality Network Conferences website: www.qualitaet-in-der-berufsbildung

2. The annual Quality Network Conference

The annual Quality Network Conference is the most important event to inform a wide range of our stakeholders about current issues of quality assurance in VET.

The ARQA-VET newsletter is released 7-8 times a year. It is one of the most important channels to inform stakeholders of our products and services and to raise issues of quality assurance in VET. Besides sharing information, we regularly inform about specialist literature, including recent studies and events in the area of quality assurance of VET. Approximately twice a year we interview persons of interest in our field (“Who has something to say”) and publish it in our newsletters. The videos of these interviews are available online, too. Together with keynotes and presentations from our conferences they can be found on the ARQA-VET YouTube channel at: www.youtube.com/arqavet.

And finally, ARQA-VET has a twitter account at twitter.com/arqavet which is mainly used to inform stakeholders about ARQA-VET activities and/or new contents on our websites.

Parallel to the three channels described above there is a communication strand we can use through the VET department of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and Women’s Affairs (BMBF). The VET department regularly sends information top down to the schools. Two to four times a year we use this channel to disseminate the most important information and announcements related to our work. We believe we reach the headmasters or the quality managers in the schools.

Franz Gramlinger; ARQ-AVET
Question: Where is the largest roundabout in Europe?

Answer: Coryton roundabout at junction 32 of the M4 motorway on the outskirts of Cardiff, at almost a mile in circumference, is reputed to be the biggest roundabout in Europe – unless you know better!

Apart from this trivia, which might be of some use in a future quiz, the significance for EQAVET is that just off the roundabout is the headquarters of CollegesWales/ColegauCymru, and the seat of the National Reference Point for Wales.

CollegesWales is the national organisation representing all 14 further education (FE) colleges and institutions in Wales with a mission to raise the profile of further education with key decision-makers to improve opportunities for learners in Wales. Although there is some IVET teaching in pre-16 compulsory education the majority of post-16 VET teaching is undertaken at FE institutions so CollegesWales has a central role to play in VET provision in Wales.

Since 2013 CollegesWales has acted as the National Reference Point in Wales for EQAVET, and the National Coordination Points for ECVET and EQF. In the UK it is the only organisation where all the European initiatives are under one roof and allows CollegesWales to communicate with its members, and other stakeholders, on all activities and key messages regarding European issues which affect and influence the VET sector.

An international dimension is important for the work of CollegesWales. An International Coordinator oversees a programme of bilateral student work experience in Europe using funds such as Erasmus+; hosting official delegations from other countries who want to learn about vocational training and education in Wales and scope potential future partnerships; and continued professional development (CPD) worldwide for teachers, trainers and senior leaders in the FE sector in Wales.

3. Information seminars and training courses

A training concept, developed by ARQA-VET and key stakeholders during the EQAVET project “VET-CERT” (2011 - 2013), has become a strong support for the Austrian VET Quality Initiative QIBB. (QIBB is the quality management system for some 700 VET schools and colleges.) Under the name QUALI-QIBB Qualification for and in QIBB, we offer two training courses in cooperation with the University College of Education of Upper Austria: a 12 ECTS course (2 terms) for quality managers in VET schools and colleges and a 6 ECTS training course (1 term) for headmasters, school inspectors and executive personnel of the school administration.

Both courses have become an important means of communication and information – in both directions: from ARQA-VET to the schools and the other way round. In October 2016 the fourth round of QUALI-QIBB training courses will start.

As a side effect of QUALI-QIBB, the team of ARQA-VET has been asked by various groups to give seminars on different topics – always related to quality management. We have run seminars from half a day to two days, with groups from 10 to 30 people, in the last two years.

And we always communicate what we are doing, what we are offering and what is the idea behind quality work and quality management.

Spreading the EQAVET message to VET providers – how the WALES NRP communicates with stakeholders.

An article by Philip Whitney, NRP, Wales.

Establishing effective communication channels - the communication strategy of ARQA-VET.
The strong links that have been built through these international connections are extremely useful in getting messages about European initiatives across to VET providers. By building on positive experiences from mobility projects, such as Erasmus+, we have sought to introduce European initiatives to VET providers as a set of tools which are inter-connected and share a common purpose in promoting mutual trust, mobility of workers and learners, and lifelong learning.

One result of this holistic approach to Europe has been the development of a website www.skillsforeurope.wales – designed to demystify the various initiatives, which is aimed at VET providers, careers advisors and others who would not necessarily access the usual reference sources. The website is currently being developed into a UK-wide resource with a common platform into which the four home nations can feed and link to other sites.

Standards at FE colleges in Wales continue to rise. Quality is measured at national level through independent inspection based on self-assessment and a Quality and Effectiveness Framework based on a number of core indicators. FE colleges also have to follow the quality assurance procedures of the awarding bodies they use to deliver qualifications, and internal QA systems are designed with the needs of vertical accountability in mind.

The use of key performance indicators is an integral element of the recording and reporting element of QA for all Welsh FE colleges and it is in this context that the EQAVET indicators are relevant. An early exercise in the work of the NRP was to map the EQAVET indicators against national KPIs, key reports and statistical releases. Many of the indicators, such as completion and attainment, are currently used to measure outcomes of FE colleges. Other more difficult indicators, including placement rate, are frequently mentioned in reports as important measures of quality and fitness for purpose. Work continues on improving the quality of the data used to inform VET provision and improvements to the system.

CollegesWales has commissioned initial research into skills and qualifications within SMEs in Wales focussing on the tourism, hospitality and retail sectors. Funding from the recent Restricted Call will allow us to expand our research and provide valuable data on utilisation of acquired skills in the workplace and future skills and qualifications requirements. It will also enable us to establish communication channels with more work based learning providers than we have engaged to date.

To this end, the recent announcement of joint working arrangements on public affairs with the National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW) is especially significant. NTfW is a membership organisation of over 100 organisations involved in the delivery of learning in the workplace. It represents the interests of training providers and learners and informs them about all aspects of the education and training agenda in Wales. The two organisations, CollegesWales and NTfW, have been working together on a number of joint projects over recent years, and this latest announcement consolidates and formalises the work being undertaken to communicate to post-16 VET providers as well as other stakeholders with a single voice.

Regular meetings with our European steering group provide the opportunity to inform all interested stakeholders about developments of the European tools. At UK level a well-established UK Coordination Group for VET Initiatives meets three times a year and brings together representatives from the home nations and other relevant organisations. There is close cooperation regarding representation on steering committees and working groups. As the UK is treated as a single member state, this cooperation is required when responding to invitations which only allow one delegate. We invariably sorted things out amicably and fairly with no outbreaks of civil war - yet!

2016 is an important year for further education and skills in Wales. It is a year where the future shape, funding and delivery of vocational as well as academic education for post 16 learners is firmly on the political agenda as Wales goes to the polls to elect a new National Assembly. By the time this newsletter is published the elections will have been held and we will start to see the direction that VET in Wales will take over the next 5 years.

CollegesWales has produced a manifesto document Skills for a Prosperous Nation which sets out how the next government and the sector can deliver the ambition of world-class post-16 education and skills for Wales.

It challenges a future government as well as learning providers to focus on four key priorities:

1. Driving productivity through raising employer-led supply of skills
2. Improving opportunities for 16 – 19 year old learners
3. Securing higher level vocational training and
4. Meeting the needs of learners in all their diversity.

CollegesWales and the NTfW jointly represented the post-16 VET sector at each of the five party political conferences in Wales to ensure that these issues are at the forefront of the minds of all candidates as they seek election. The political parties have begun to announce how their own manifestos will support education, training and skills. It is welcoming to see a focus on post-16 VET in all parties’ key pledges.

Almost overshadowing these national elections will be the referendum on June 23rd on whether the United Kingdom should remain a member of the European Union. CollegesWales and its member colleges receive European funding to deliver a range of education-related activity in Wales. For example, more than a third of the apprenticeship budget is funded through the ESF. There are also cross-border flows of learners and staff between Wales and Europe, funded mainly through European funding streams such as Erasmus+. Although the example of Erasmus+, and indeed the EQAVET network, suggest a place for non-member states within Europe, the potential effects on other funding streams have not yet been fully assessed.
Events


EQAVET, in partnership with the Polish National Reference Point (the National Centre for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education) and the Educational Research Institute in Warsaw, organised a peer learning activity (PLA) in Warsaw 14-15 April 2016. The PLA focused on identifying the quality assurance criteria for defining and describing learning outcomes, according to the approach set up in EQAVET and EQF.

Qualifications frameworks, based on learning outcomes (LO), are becoming reference points for the development and renewal of VET qualifications at national level.

Implementing the EQF is thought to ‘speed up’ change processes. The shift from defining qualifications based on inputs to LO has an impact on quality assurance policies and practices. This PLA provided the opportunity to discuss the quality assurance mechanisms that ensure the development of a LO-referenced VET system.

The discussion addressed:
- Quality assurance for defining qualifications and qualification standards based on the LO approach;
- Quality assurance for assessment and certification of LO;
- Ensuring quality, relevance, flexibility and transparency of LO-based VET qualifications (with a focus on guidance from EQAVET and EQF Annex III).

View the background paper, presentations at the PLA and the policy brief prepared as a result of the discussions that took place at the activity here.

All participants attending this PLA in Warsaw had a unique opportunity to avail of a guided tour of the Associated Schools of Gastronomy in Warsaw that provided catering and dinner during the above-mentioned event.

Enhancing synergies between the European tools – EQAVET at the ETF summit seminars


This seminar was organised by the European Training Foundation (ETF) in order to review recent activities aimed at the enhancement of VET quality assurance and take stock of new developments in SEMED countries. It provided an opportunity for information sharing and capacity building and examined how the work of EQAVET can be used in different national contexts; it included inputs from the EQAVET Secretariat and the Irish National Reference Point. The particular emphasis was on the examination of practices which focus on a strengthened systemic and systematic approach to provider external and internal evaluation.

“Photo de famille” during the ETF Good Practice Forum. 14 March 2016, Torino, Italy.
What’s New?

EQVET-US project

EVBB together with five partners from Portugal, Romania, Austria, Bulgaria and France are supporting an EQVET-US project, an Erasmus + project, aiming to improve implementation of sustainable quality assurance systems in VET in line with EQAVET.

WHY EQVET-US?

A conclusion of the EQAVET Secretariat report is that there seems to be room for improvement in supporting VET providers:

» Identify areas for improvement to quality assurance and implement quality assurance systems in line with the EQAVET recommendation;

WHAT NEEDS DOES EQVET-US ADDRESS?

» Guidelines for scalable Eco skills and sustainable training and evaluation in order to determine the return on investment in VET programs, an indicator for the program effectiveness.

BECAUSE:

» VET providers need to have an updated framework and practice set consisting of detailed documentation like: guides, self-diagnostic tools, good practices, strategies for implementation of sustainable quality assurance systems.

More about the project can be found on: eqvet-us.upm.ro/about-eqvet-us/

Modernising quality assurance – taking stock of progress and moving forward to make best use of European developments, Minsk 2-3 December 2015

The seminar organised by ETF focused on quality assurance in the contexts of VET and higher education, and in particular the rationale for the modernisation of quality assurance approaches in both sectors. A key objective was to reflect on progress in modernising quality assurance and review future plans to mainstream successes, address weaknesses and take account of changing needs within Belarus. During the event, Sean Feerick (EQAVET Secretariat Director) delivered a presentation which explored how EQAVET can support such processes.

International Teaching and Learning Conference, Cardiff, 29 February 2016

On 29 February 2016, at the first international conference in Wales for the whole education sector, leaders and expert practitioners from five countries, drawn from four continents, brought their innovations and good practice to Wales.

More information about this event can be found on collegeswales.ac.uk/en-GB/teaching_and_learning_conference-850.aspx

Sean Feerick, EQAVET Secretariat Director, delivering a presentation during the ETF seminar. 2-3 December 2015, Minsk, Belarus.

Iestyn Davies, Chief Executive of CollegesWales addressing the recent International Teaching and Learning Conference in Cardiff.
ETUC Quality Framework for Apprenticeship – A Trade Union Proposal

The report is available in six languages: English, German, Spanish, French, Italian and Polish. The trade union proposal on a quality framework is presented on page 45 (English version).

More about the ETUC Quality Framework for Apprenticeship – A Trade Union Proposal can be found on www.etuc.org/publications/european-quality-framework-apprenticeships#.V16i5P72ZMt

And finally…

The EQAVET website is now tablet friendly. The EQAVET website satisfaction survey, carried out by the EQAVET Secretariat in March 2015, has shown that the EQAVET website is perceived as an effective tool to for the dissemination of information and for providing support and guidance. However, the findings indicated that the Member States would like the EQAVET website to be tablet friendly. This has been now successfully addressed.