

EQAVET PLA: ‘Quality Assurance in Continuing Vocational Education and Training’ (27-28 April 2021)

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

61 participants¹ attended, representing the following 30 countries²: Armenia (AM), Belgium (BE), Croatia (HR), Cyprus (CY), Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Egypt (EG), Finland (FI), France (FR), Germany (DE), Greece (EL), Hungary (HU), Ireland (IE), Italy (IT), Latvia (LV), Malta (MT), Montenegro (ME), Morocco (MA), Netherlands (NL), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Republic of Moldova (MD), Romania (RO), Slovakia (SK), Slovenia (SI), Spain (ES), Switzerland (CH), Tunisia (TN), Turkey (TR), United Kingdom (UK)

Flash Report

Quality assurance (QA) policies and mechanisms are essential for Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET), to provide desirable and useful outcomes for learners, employers and the overall society. The [Council Recommendation](#) of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, underlines that all sectors of VET and all forms of VET learning must be underpinned by a culture of quality assurance.

The [Study on EU VET instruments](#) (EQAVET and ECVET), published in 2019, showed that EQAVET has stimulated many reforms in national quality assurance systems. Yet it was mostly applied in school-based initial vocational education and training, and to a much lesser extent in CVET and adult learning. In most EU-countries, there is no overarching system-level quality assurance framework for CVET. This can be partly attributed to CVET operating in a less regulated environment than VET, and in a more fragmented landscape. In most – but not all – EU Member States, publicly funded CVET is not delivered by the same providers as publicly funded IVET, and quality assurance requirements for publicly funded CVET differ from those in publicly funded IVET. For instance, the number of private providers is much higher in CVET. Consequently – as shown by the EQAVET Secretariat survey 2018 – across Europe, the use of EQAVET indicative descriptors and indicators in CVET is very different from IVET.

This EQAVET PLA was therefore designed to discuss and share experiences on how Member States can improve quality assurance in the CVET sector, and what role EQAVET can play. The objective of the PLA was to discuss and share experiences related to three topics:

- National approaches to quality assurance in CVET at system and provider level and how they can enhance learners’ and employers’ trust and boost effectiveness.
- The role of international/company labels (ISO, EFQM and sector-specific labels) and opportunities to utilise the strengths/mitigate the weaknesses of those systems and labels.
- Quality Assurance of Individual Learning Accounts and related initiatives to create training entitlement and boost participation in CVET and adult learning for all.

The PLA was divided in three parts, with each part addressing one of the above-mentioned topics.

¹ Including three representatives of the European Commission and two thematic experts.

² 21 EU Member States, and 9 Non-EU countries

Part 1: National approaches to quality assurance in CVET

During the first part of the meeting, three countries presented their national approach to QA in CVET.

- **Ireland:** IE is one of the countries where publicly funded CVET is delivered by the same providers as publicly funded IVET, and quality assurance requirements for publicly funded CVET are identical to those on publicly funded IVET. There are standards for education and training at all levels that are related to the National Qualifications Framework, and regulations for the recognition of qualifications. Quality Assurance is implemented through partnerships and stakeholders working together, Strategic Performance Agreements between the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and SOLAS, the CVET funding & policy agency. Moreover, it is underpinned by the Quality Assurance guidelines developed by QQI. QQI also approves providers' quality assurance procedures and monitors and reviews providers (through annual dialogues and statutory reviews).
- **Portugal:** QA mechanisms in VET is mostly overseen by DGERT, a governmental department, and exist against three main dimensions:
 1. **Providers:** Certification and or authorization of providers in Portugal includes:
 - i. General quality certification, by DGERT (Ministry of Labour), sectorial certification, by different authorities related to the access and exercise of professional activities (different Ministries)
 - ii. Public schools - authorization to develop adult education and training, by Ministry of Education)
 - iii. Qualifica Centres - authorization to develop adult education and training and competences validation process, by ANQEP (Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour).
 - iv. Monitoring of vocational training centres of IEFP - the public employment and vocational training service (Ministry of Labour)
 2. **Qualifications** Definition of qualifications and education and training courses in a national Catalogue, organized by learning outcomes, monitored by ANQEP
 3. **Training of professionals** Definition of pedagogical skills and training for trainers – certificate of pedagogical competences by IEFP – and skills development for teachers, by the Ministry of Education
- **Czech Republic:** In the Czech Republic, the wide variety of continuing CVET programmes provided outside the formal system is not regulated; but a system of validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (VNFIL) has been gradually developing since 2007, when the Act on validation and recognition of prior learning came into force, which is very relevant as in CVET there are no centrally set standards, except for the qualification and assessment standards of 1380 professional qualifications listed in the National Register of Qualifications. Standards set are to be respected by the authorised persons. There are regular on-the spot controls by the authorising body. Individual resort ministries (such as Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour Affairs, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health etc.) are responsible for accreditation of some CVET programmes (e.g. for specific or regulated professions or re-training programmes).

Part 2: International or company quality labels and instruments: convergence or conflict?

International or company quality labels and instruments like ISO and EFQM offer certifications which can be used to assess the 'management quality' of CVET organisations. Such labels are also helpful to enable an organisation to examine and improve how they create value for stakeholders. Both ISO and EFQM have been recently updated to ensure relevance for educational stakeholders. ISO 21001 and 2990 standards are specifically targeting educational

organisations, by broadening the focus and including indicators for the quality of the training and the learning outcomes.

ISO and EFQM encompass all four stages of the EQAVET quality cycle and can be used to help achieve EQAVET principles in an organisation. ISO 21001 was formally mapped against EQAVET to ensure ensuring harmonisation.

Part 3: Quality Assurance of Individual Learning Accounts

During the third part of the PLA, the participants discussed Quality Assurance of Individual Learning Accounts (ILA) and related initiatives. ILA are taken to be a model for financing learning for adults and training entitlements. ILA are an instrument for shifting initiative, choice and responsibility for lifelong learning to the learners themselves, as they are free to select the right offer to further their career. ILA are also used to reach out to people less active in lifelong learning. Obviously, in such a learner-centred setting, clear and transparent quality assurance is key for learners to be able to identify quality offers. ILA also need to go together with individual guidance and support.

Two countries presented their national approaches to ILA and the related QA arrangements:

- **France** has introduced Personal Learning Accounts (Compte Personnel de Formation-CPF) in 2015 and has since made significant efforts to boost its use across different levels of education. The Minister of Labour announced on 05 March 2018 the reform of vocational training desired by the Government. This entails an individual learning account for every French citizen that can be mobilised throughout their professional life. QA arrangements include system and provider level activities:
 - **System level:** National Certifications Framework, Unique National Quality Assurance Reference Framework (QUALIOPI), Social dialogue and regular evaluations at national and regional levels
 - **Provider level:** Unique National Quality Assurance Reference Framework (QUALIOPI) by means of regular assessments by certifying bodies, promoting continuous improvement and self-regulation
- **The Netherlands** have the STAP scheme in place, a subsidy for training or a recognised procedure for the recognition of prior learning (RPL). The training/RPL activity must be registered in the STAP training register. One of the following five conditions are needed to fulfil for registration:
 - The training provider is recognised by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science;
 - The trainer has the NRTO quality mark;
 - The training provider offers training that leads to a qualification that is classified in the national Dutch qualifications framework NLQF;
 - The training provider is recognised by a sector or branch organisation;
 - The RPL-provider is recognised by the National Knowledge Centre RPL.

Key discussion points

The PLA participants discussed that

- QA in CVET needs to be viewed from different angles, including
 - the ‘consumer protection’ point of view (ensure consumers have high quality learning offers available and know how to recognise them)
 - the provider perspective (ensure public as well as private providers comply with QA standards, regulations and guidelines)
 - the output (how to make sure the necessary skills are available on the labour market to satisfy regional skills demands).

- System level QA tends to focus on accreditation of providers and QA of output/outcomes, for instance, by relating 'quality' to compliance with national qualification frameworks/training regulations. Performance is often measured by data on labour market progression of graduates. In many countries at system level there are efforts to develop a QA system for IVET and CVET based on EQAVET, and EQAVET indicators/descriptors are used.
- Some countries (FI, RO) request that QA measures are in place as a pre-condition for funding (labels or other). There are a few examples of countries (RO) that recognise quality labels as proof of compliance with (a part of) national regulations. In most countries, the two strands exist in parallel. However, providers that are ISO or EFQM certified are known for having an established 'quality culture'. Therefore, national inspectorates and/or accreditation offices tend to spend less time quality assuring those providers and tend to validate certified procedures informally. Another observation is that ISO/EFQM certified providers tend to react quickly and smoothly to (new) quality requirements from the national (system) level, due to their 'quality culture'.
- The QA of ILA is very complex and in the interest of learners, QA needs to be based on ongoing dialogue between stakeholders. While there can be sometimes one lead institution implementing the ILA, the examples from FR and NL show that there is a high number of stakeholders involved in the implementation.
- It is neither possible nor desirable to have a one-fits-all QA 'system' in CVET, yet all parties involved (learners in CVET, CVET providers, governments, QA bodies, sectoral organisations etc.) benefit from a system that builds on a set of common standards or quality indicators to apply.