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PROMOTING QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

THE ETF APPROACH

ETF WORKING PAPER

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Contents

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European Training Foundation's (ETF) approach to promoting systemic and systematic quality assurance in vocational education and training (VET) is set out in this working paper. Quality assurance in VET is summarised by the ETF as the measures established to verify that processes and procedures are in place, which aim to ensure the quality and quality improvement of VET. The ETF uses the following definition of VET: *'*education and training which aim to equip people with knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences required in particular occupations or more broadly on the labour market'[1].

The intention of this working paper is to serve as a resource for ETF staff and its function is to support a common ETF approach to promoting quality assurance in VET in partner countries. The paper will be made available to a wider audience with an interest in quality assurance in VET.

ETF partner countries have signalled the need for more effective quality assurance measures to help improve the quality and relevance of VET outcomes. They aim to strengthen quality assurance policies and measures that support the development of good VET governance and management, good qualifications systems, good qualifications and good learning environments facilitated by good teachers and trainers. The main purpose of this working paper is to guide ETF staff to support partner countries in their endeavours to develop further their approach to quality assurance in VET.

The paper has five chapters. The **background to present-day quality assurance** is presented in **Chapter 1**. The term quality assurance is relatively new in education and training, even though quality assurance concepts and measures have been intrinsic to the sectors for a long time. Approaches to quality assurance in education and training sub-sectors differ, both within and across countries. Education and training systems evolve and if quality assurance is to be 'fit for purpose', it must evolve too. Changing societies and economies, support for lifelong learning and the internationalisation of education and training are important drivers of quality assurance reform.

Concepts important to the understanding of the ETF approach to quality assurance in VET are reviewed in **Chapter 2**. Fundamental questions are considered, such as:

1. What is the meaning and the purpose of VET quality assurance?
2. What factors have a bearing on VET quality assurance?
3. What are the core elements of quality assurance in VET?
4. Who or what are the drivers of VET quality assurance renewal or reform?

VET system typologies are reviewed and the need for compatible quality assurance addressed.

The ETF makes best use of **European policies and instruments** to underpin its advisory and capacity-building services in partner countries. In **Chapter 3**, the evolution of European policies for quality assurance is summarised. There are different approaches for education and training sub-sectors at both national and European levels, even though they share universal quality assurance

[1] Cedefop Glossary 2011. (The main VET sub-sectors can be termed 'pre-initial VET' (usually below ISCED level 3), 'initial VET' (usually ISCED levels 3 or 4), 'continuing VET' (usually ISCED 4 or 5) that tend to be part of the formal education system and 'continuing vocational training' (CVT) that tends to be associated with the up-skilling and re-skilling of workers and job-seekers.)

philosophies, objectives, principles and criteria. The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET is presented in some detail, as is the work of the EQAVET network.

The *status quo* of **quality assurance policy and practice in ETF partner countries** and reform needs and challenges, as presented in the Torino Process reports, are discussed in **Chapter 4**. In summary, the traditional model of quality assurance in VET prevails, with emphasis on central control and measures that primarily relate to input standards. There is however, widespread conviction that VET quality assurance reform is a mandatory requisite for VET reform in general. However, countries, for the most part, are only at the stage of experimentation when it comes to quality assurance reform. Through sponsored initiatives, various countries are exposed to different models of quality assurance, which, on the one hand, enhance knowledge and know-how whilst, on the other hand, can create too much choice, divide opinion and make coherent policy making difficult. A key objective of the ETF approach is to support countries to make best use of relevant good practice, and to reference their approach with European frameworks, if so desired.

Chapter 5 presents the **ETF approach** to promoting quality assurance in VET development, based on the conceptual framework set out in the preceding chapters. The ETF approach prioritises the continuous improvement of core, quality assurance measures for VET related to context and input, process, output and outcome standards. It takes account of emerging needs related to changing economies and labour markets and the increasing need to support lifelong learning, and the internationalisation of VET that may require a renewed quality assurance approach. The ETF approach is to support countries to develop/improve their own unique quality assurance approach, in accordance with the development of their VET systems and derived from their own existing policies and practices. Chapter 5 includes **10 key factors**, which form the basis of the ETF approach to promoting quality assurance in VET reform, summed up by the keywords **Vision, Strategy, Leadership, Partnership, Learn, Plan, Trial, Improvement, Visibility** and **Mindset**.

1. TRENDS AND THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

To improve economic productivity and competitiveness, particularly in the context of globalisation, national governments need to ensure effective VET provision. In order to prepare sufficient numbers of workers with the relevant knowledge and know-how needed in the present and the near future, VET policy-making must be informed by robust economic intelligence whilst VET systems and provision must be governed and managed, staffed and resourced to attain good VET, characterised by relevance, equity and efficiency. Good VET responds to the skills needed in national economies and to ensure that qualifications have currency in labour markets. VET systems[2] must maintain ever-closer relationships with the world of work. Effective quality assurance policy helps to support the development and maintenance of good VET systems. Technological advancement and the spread of the market economy, both affecting social structures and relations, are forcing changes in education and training, which require new forms of governance, including for quality assurance. Quality assurance in VET has its origins and traditions, which continue to exist to varying degrees, and modernisation plans must take them into account.

1.1 Trends/changes

Changes in economy and society

Technological advancement

Technological advancement has speeded up the pace of change in economies and labour markets, marked by a marginalised / industrialised agricultural sector, a declining industrial manufacturing sector and a growing service sector (Bell, 1974). The most recent technological advancement is digitalisation, i.e: information and communication technologies spreading into all spheres of life giving rise to the **information society**. Information, knowledge, and creativity are the new raw materials of such a society (Webster, 2002). Digitalisation affects the world of work, demanding more and better qualified workers keeping pace with rapid change. It also affects learning, giving access to knowledge without classrooms and teachers, even in the form of full courses that are now available online. These trends require high quality VET and robust quality assurance of provision; governments might use digital technologies to support both. Different regions/countries are at different stages of development and affected in different ways by technological advancement. In any case, technological advancement causes demands for (re-)skilling the workforce accordingly.

Spread of the market economy – Globalisation – Internationalisation

Boosted by advancements in communication and transport technologies, economies are becoming more and more globalised. **Globalisation** generates migration of jobs and migration of workforces. There is competition for 'advantage of location' – via prices or quality. In both cases, this is about submission to economic demands and a better performance in order to meet them. Global markets are driving borderless mobility and exchangeability of workers and their qualifications. Globalisation of the economy reduces the power and influence of the State. 'Markets' are putting governments under pressure to accommodate their demands: low tax, slim State, liberalisation – unless these conditions are met, their investment in the respective State is reduced.

[2] VET systems in the strict sense comprise all formal VET; in the context of a lifelong learning strategy, VET also comprises arrangements of non-formal and informal learning with a vocational orientation.

As economies become increasingly globalised, VET policies must be internationalised accordingly. VET policy has to ensure the quality and relevance of the outputs and outcomes of VET *vis-à-vis* global labour market needs. Progressively more countries are interested in internationalising their skills base as well as raising the value of national qualifications on the international labour market. **Internationalisation** can be an integral part of national policy with national strategies for (1) introducing transnational contents in qualifications/curricula, including languages, cross-cultural competences, internet competence, international norms/standards, etc.; (2) fostering international experience through training/work placements abroad; and (3) internationalising the 'form' of qualifications through transnational development of joint qualifications, mutual recognition of 'foreign' qualifications and credit transfer. Supra-nationally directed internationalisation ranges from international classifications (e.g. ISCED), through benchmarking/reporting e.g. in OECD-led surveys, to major interventions such as EU policies, instruments, programmes that link and harmonise national systems for the sake of free movement. Internationalising quality assurance is part of VET internationalisation.

Equity and social inclusion

Both, technological advancement and the (global) spread of the market economy are driving social change: they generate inequalities and exclusion; at the same time, they require more 'equality' and inclusion. Equality becomes an economic issue. Those who are not adequately skilled, are in danger of being excluded as they cannot participate in society and the labour market in an optimum way. In Western, Middle and Eastern Europe, where the 'ageing' of society is an issue, there is a need to up-skill the existing workforce and to tap new resources for the labour force: women, migrants, low-skilled and people with disabilities. In other countries, it is the growing young population, and the upsurge of youth unemployment, which raises the issue of improving equality and inclusion.

Over the past 20 years, digitalisation and globalisation, exacerbating exclusion but requiring an upskilled, flexible and mobile workforce, have increased in importance as drivers of VET policy reform, leading to both, unlimited (lifelong) learning needs and expanded VET provision.

Changes in education and training systems[3]

Lifelong learning

Education and training systems develop to meet the needs for knowledge and 'know-how' emerging from changes in economies and societies, since these changes are ever more frequent and unpredictable; the current trend is that systems aim to support lifelong learning. A key feature of such systems is the blurring of the traditional distinctions between sub-sectors of education and training requiring more 'joined-up' education and training policies, strategies, governance and provision and more coherent qualifications systems. Coherence and complementarity between quality assurance policies and measures across education and training sectors is a trust-building requisite for systems supportive of lifelong learning. By briefly examining two developments related to lifelong learning, the **expansion of the VET sector** with the opening up of provision to the private sector and non-traditional providers and the introduction of national **frameworks for all** education and training **qualifications** underpinned by the so called 'learning outcomes approach', the respective needs for VET quality assurance reform become evident.

[3] These include changes to curricula (e.g. learning outcomes orientation, modularisation/unitisation) and the teaching/learning process (e.g. learner-centred, new forms of assessment, digital and open-access) aimed at new target groups (e.g. early school leavers, unemployed university graduates), by non-traditional (i.e. for a specific country) providers (e.g. community-based consortia, public employment services, private enterprises) and new qualification types and levels (e.g. wider range of levels and smaller or supplemental awards).

The opening up of VET provision

There is an ever-growing market for training with more and more non-public sector providers (national and international) of all sizes offering services, particularly in the continuing VET sub-sector aimed at companies and employees but also increasingly in the initial VET sub-sector, including 'second-chance' VET provision. Whilst providers may be in receipt of some public funding, many are 'for profit' enterprises or they have access to external sources of funding (e.g. Donors), which gives them varying degrees of independence. Training services can be a highly competitive and often lucrative business and being able to signal the validity, reliability, trustworthiness and cost-benefit of offers is vital. Unless the State provides the means to enable these providers to demonstrate that their services are quality assured, they tend to make use of, often diverse, quality assurance sources and suppliers in order to become licenced or accredited in a recognised scheme to gain public trust. This solution can be both costly and confusing. On the other hand, it is in the best interest of citizens that these providers and their services are quality assured and the onus for consumer protection rests with public authorities.

In this new scenario the governance arrangements, processes, instruments and rewards/sanctions that characterise traditional approaches to quality assurance are difficult to apply. To meet new needs in the most coherent and cost-effective way, it is advisable for national authorities to engage in consultation with non-public sector providers when planning to improve the national approach to quality assurance in VET.

National qualifications frameworks

To support lifelong learning, by increasing access to learning opportunities through more flexible provision and opening up horizontal and vertical progression pathways requires qualifications' systems reform. Features of reform include modularisation, awarding credits for qualification units, minor awards (leading to a full qualification), accreditation of prior learning, flexible delivery (including open and distance learning) and qualifications' frameworks. The shift to describing qualifications in terms of learning outcomes, with less emphasis on the duration or location of learning, greatly facilitates these reforms. For the wider spectrum of providers, a national framework for qualifications is a reference structure for their VET offer and for the State to assure their quality. There is a growing trend to align reformed national qualifications' systems with a reformed, unified but more pervasive quality assurance approach and measures, often in the context of developing a national framework for qualifications, underpinned by the 'learning outcomes approach'.

KEY MESSAGE

Why is there a need for modernising quality assurance in VET?

Technological advancement and the global spread of the market economy, requiring an upskilled, flexible and mobile workforce, leading to both lifelong learning needs and expanded VET provision, require VET reform, including new forms of governance.

With the opening up of provision to non-traditional (private) providers and the introduction of national frameworks for qualifications underpinned by the 'learning outcomes approach', the respective needs for VET quality assurance reform become evident.

1.2 Origins/traditions/contexts – quality assurance in education and training

Traditional quality assurance in education and training

From the beginnings of tutoring in ancient civilisations, teachers/researchers and their academic/ scientific **communities** or 'masters' and their communities of practice were relied upon to assure the quality of learning outcomes. This kind of quality assurance is still alive and relevant even though embedded into systemic approaches. With the development of education and training systems and, later on, the 'massification' of education, and public investment in education and training for societal, rather than exclusively individual advancement, the need to assure quality extended beyond teachers/researchers and masters and their communities. Quality assurance mechanisms were introduced by the **State at system level** to safeguard education and training quality with a focus on governance, financing, management and efficiency as well as education and training contexts, inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes.

The approach to quality assurance in the public system of general education[4] is similar in all countries that have in common, *inter alia*: policies for universal access, types of governance, sources of funding, types of provider institutions, teacher qualification requirements, curricula/contents focussed on basic skills and key competence development, methods of assessing learning outcomes and making awards. The approach tends to be centrally controlled, or centrally steered in systems characterised by de-concentration or delegation, usually by the Ministry of Education, which sets the norms.

Regulated **school inspection** has been commonplace since the introduction of compulsory schooling. To a significant extent quality assurance measures were built into organised learning and are manifest in common practices such as setting and achieving standards for: qualifications, qualifications of teachers and other education and training staff, curricula and syllabi, textbooks/materials, inspection of teaching/learning, learning assessment through external examination and certification. Measures to assure the quality of educational institutional management including the effective/efficient use of funding and other resources are (still) commonplace.

The **traditional** and relatively consistent quality assurance approach in **general education** is arguably both the most transparent and the most resistant to change although the trend to increase school autonomy is increasingly aligned with **new quality assurance** measures such as all-school planning/reporting, self-evaluation and benchmarking.

At university level there is another tradition. Until the 19th century, the medieval model of the university as an institution for the education of the elite, under the patronage of the church or the sovereign, funded by them or through private benefaction, but with autonomous jurisdiction, remained in place. The political significance of the research function, the proliferation of universities, the commodification and the burgeoning of State aid led to a shift from a flat model of collegial governance to a complex form of professional administration and bureaucratisation that facilitated State steerage at the same time as safeguarding State investment.

Accreditation became one of the measures to support this governance shift (Clark, 2006). Independent accreditation agencies for the validation of education quality were first established in the USA over 100 years ago. Over 50 years ago, accreditation agencies were set up in Ireland and the UK. Almost 30 years would pass before the exponential growth of such agencies throughout Europe (see Chapter 3) and internationally; mostly set up by, or at the behest of, governments, unlike the USA prototypes even though this model was otherwise adopted. The primary driver of accreditation was

[4] For the purpose of this paper the formal system of general education is considered to comprise (usually compulsory) provision for pupils aged 6 to 16 commonly known as primary and lower secondary schooling.

economic, as higher education became increasingly seen as a major contributor to national wealth and development.

The degree to which tertiary institutions are autonomous differs. In a large number of countries, the State exerts direct control over certain types, if not all, tertiary institutions and in many others controls them through indirect steering mechanisms including for financing and quality assurance. **Accreditation and audit** are two of the most common forms of quality assurance utilised by governments to: safeguard the standards of qualifications; ensure financing efficiency and accountability; strengthen institutional internal management; measure and raise institutional performance; empower users/stakeholders; be freed-up from micro-managing; maintain access to managed data sources necessary for planning and to oversee international interaction.

Modern quality assurance – origins in industry and business

We can identify three phases in which distinct forms of quality assurance in industry and business arose. The first at the time of the guilds (starting in the Middle Ages), when quality was secured by peers, i.e. the masters of a certain trade organised in local associations. The second at the beginning of large-scale mass production (around 1900), when standardisation, standard setting and quality control became part of a top-down 'scientific management'. The third following the rise of the 'Japanese model' of production (post WWII), where continuous improvement of processes and products became an issue for every single employee. All three forms can be found today to various degrees in different economies.

'Modern' quality assurance refers to standards for processes and products. The first national standards organisations were founded at the turn of the 20th century. They played an important role in both the establishment of the International Standardisation Organisation (ISO 1946)[5] and the European Committee for Standardisation (CEN 1961). Three quality assurance instruments related to industrial standards are worth briefly mentioning here: TQM, ISO, EFQM.

Total Quality Management (TQM)

TQM philosophy, dating back to the 1930s, aims to foster a culture of quality in an organisation involving all employees committed to achieving and maintaining high quality standards. This philosophy requires wise leadership and an enabling organisational structure and culture. W.E. Deming, a founder of the TQM model, conceptualised the quality cycle plan/do/check/review, and collaborated on the development of a statistical approach to support TQM (Martínez-Lorente et al., 1998, pp. 378–386).

International Standardisation Organisation (ISO)[6]

The ISO published the first management quality standard (ISO 9000) in 1987[7]. ISO models and standards with relevance for training are numerous and address a wide range of needs such as basic requirements for non-formal education and training service providers (ISO 29990[8]) and a harmonised quality model for IT – learning, education and training – quality management, assurance and metrics

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[5] ISO evolved from the International Federation of the National Standardizing Associations (1926), established in New York / administered from Switzerland and the United Nations Standards Coordinating Committee (1944), established in London.

[6] A standard is a document that provides requirements, specifications, guidelines or characteristics that can be used consistently to ensure that materials, products, processes, services are fit for purpose. ISO defined.

[7] www.iso.org/iso/home/standards/management-standards/iso_9000.htm The ISO 9000 family addresses various aspects of quality management. Standards in the ISO 9000 family include ISO 9000:2005 – covers the basic concepts and language; ISO 9001:2008 – sets out the requirements of a quality management system; ISO 9004:2009 – how to make a QMS more efficient, effective; ISO 19011:2011 – guidance on internal and external audits of QMS; ISO 9001:2015–updated version (draft).

[8] www.iso.org/iso/home/news_index/news_archive/news.htm?refid=Ref1384

(ISO/IEC 19796[9]). ISO does not certify itself, numerous certification bodies make audits and issue ISO compliance certificates; these certification bodies are authorised by accreditation bodies, which tend to have mutual agreements with each other to support international recognition of certificates: ISO standards exist for both types of bodies, which charge fees for services. Certificates must be renewed at regular intervals, usually every three years[10]. As certification of compliance with standards increased in importance, as a proxy for quality and a requisite for competitiveness, quality assurance processes were progressively integrated with company management. These processes address standards related to competence as well as methods, materials, equipment and the environment, thus covering the area of in-company training and other forms of staff development.

European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM)

The EFQM was established in 1988 and is based in Brussels. EFQM was founded by the CEOs of important European businesses who developed a quality management tool based on best international experience. The EFQM Excellence Model is TQM inspired and based on eight core concepts: achieving balanced results, adding value for customers, leading with vision, inspiration and integrity, managing by processes, succeeding through people, nurturing creativity and innovation, building partnerships and taking responsibility for a sustainable future[11]. The model has been adapted for tertiary institutes. Alongside generic measures for assuring quality, approaches and mechanisms have developed that are considered synonymously with the term *quality assurance in education and training.* These have emerged in the context of the increasingly internationalised tertiary education sector and in enterprises that provide and/or cooperate in the provision of education and training.

Modern quality assurance in education and training as a governance issue

Quality management[12] is the result of making systematic use of policies, methods and instruments in a coordinated way to direct people and institutions towards the attainment of pre-defined quality objectives, which, in turn, depends on people, individually and collectively, performing their work tasks in a quality orientated way. Good quality management is inextricably linked to good governance.

The education and training system is part of the public sector and subject to the prevailing form of public sector governance. Liberalisation/globalisation of the economy comes in tandem with the demand for a 'slimmer' and more efficient state regime (deregulation). From the 1980s, government policy in many lead economies, albeit at different times, speeds and degrees of intensity, moved towards a market-orientated management of the public sector with cost-efficiency as the main driver. In a way, quality assurance through accreditation and audit of autonomous universities can be seen as a forerunner for a paradigm shift concerning the entire education and training system. **New Public Management** (NPM) (Hood, 1991, pp. 3–19) characterised by disaggregation and 'incentivization', increased competition between different public agencies and between them and private ones, promoted 'contracting out' and placed emphasis on outcomes. **Management by objectives** expressed with indicators, the monitoring and evaluation of related performance formed the core of evidence-based policy. It also gave rise to quality assurance mechanisms and instruments. Whilst NPM continues to be dominant, for well over a decade a reversal trend[13] is evident in some 'leading'

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[9] ISO/IEC 19796-1:2005 Information technology-Learning, education and training-Quality management, assurance and metrics: A framework to describe, compare, analyse, and implement QM and QA approaches.

[10] Between 2003 and 2009 ISO 9001 certification doubled, with steady increases since. www.iso.org/iso/home/standards/certification/iso-survey.htm?certificate=ISO%209001&countrycode=AF

[11] www.efqm.org/

[12] The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) defines quality management as including 'all the activities that organizations use to direct, control and coordinate quality. These activities include formulating a quality policy and setting quality objectives. They also include quality planning, quality control, quality assurance and quality improvement'. www.praxiom.com/iso-definition.htm#Quality%20management

[13] 'This ebbing chiefly reflects the accumulation of adverse indirect effects on citizens' capacities for solving social problems because NPM has radically increased institutional and policy complexity.' (Dunleavy et al., 2005)

economies with the principles of re-integration, needs-based holism and digitisation taking precedence over disaggregation, competition and 'incentivisation'. Digitisation enables the reintegration of affairs into governmental control and facilitates more agile, holistic/joined up government. The quality assurance of system governance and management demands under the so-called **'digital-era governance'** tend to focus more on data collection and usage. NPM is still the context for the EU quality assurance discourse.

Arguably, globalisation and digitalisation that propelled NPM have had the greatest impact on the higher education sector that is increasingly internationalised. This paradigm shift has resulted in the need for quality assurance approaches that can cross borders. In Europe, the 'Bologna Process' offers a solution (see Chapter 3).

KEY MESSAGE

What are the roots of today's quality assurance in education and training?

Since the beginnings of compulsory schooling the State introduced school inspection to safeguard the quality of education. In higher education, the proliferation of universities and the burgeoning of State aid caused a shift in university governance from a collegial to a State steering mode via accreditation and audit (starting in US 1900).

Modern quality assurance in education and training has its origins in industry: ISO, TQM, EFQM provided the instruments. Neo-liberalism provided the political context for New Public Management (NPM): Management by objectives combined with indicators, the evaluation of related performance and subsequent action (evidence-based policy). NPM provides the context for the European quality assurance in education and training discourse.

2. QUALITY ASSURANCE CONCEPTS – UNDERSTANDING THE ETF APPROACH

2.1 The meaning of VET quality and VET quality assurance

To understand VET quality assurance it is important to consider what we mean by 'quality'. A common understanding of quality is 'being of value' and this makes quality relative: of what value; value for whom and value for what? There is no global, absolute, objective measure for quality rather it is something agreed upon by communities. Within the education system the meaning of VET quality can be quite different from that within the employment system. VET might be of the highest quality at a certain moment in time but a sudden change in labour market needs can render its outputs, at least temporarily, worthless as regards employability.

The aim of quality assurance in VET is to support processes and procedures that ensure good VET. '**Good VET**' has five key features:

- responds to labour market, societal and individual needs;
- leads to nationally, or even internationally, recognised qualifications or credentials;
- provides access to decent jobs and sustainable employment;
- is attractive, inclusive and accessible, i.e. all citizens have access to VET;
- fosters capabilities that enable progression to further learning.

Policies for good VET systems are supported by: effective leadership and a vision of quality VET; evidence-based planning; adequate resources; interconnected strategies; multi-level governance and multi-stakeholder engagement; competent personnel and responsible institutions.

VET quality assurance may be understood as the composite measures established to verify that processes and procedures are in place, which, when effective, ensure the quality and quality improvement of VET. The measures often have a regulatory or legislative underpinning and status. The measures relate to quality standards with underlying principles, criteria and indicators. A quality assurance measure does not control or assure quality *per se*: rather, it assures that a given procedure is being followed and that it meets certain requirements. The procedure, if it is a good one, will increase the probability that there is a quality result. If there is a feedback loop, any defects will be reported and fixed, thus increasing quality. There is a caveat, quality assured procedures can be implemented but the 'product' can be low quality; thus every care must be taken that measures are based on a vision for 'good VET' and that they are appropriate, understood, accepted and effective.

The overall **purpose** of VET quality assurance is to support the attainment and maintenance of VET quality standards. With regard to quality standards[14], VET policy making needs to take account of the value judgements of different 'communities' of persons who influence, steer, interface with, provide and benefit from VET. The **key objectives** of quality assurance in VET are to support the provision of high quality VET and the attainment of relevant qualifications, to control adherence to national

[14] Quality standards are 'technical specifications, which are measurable and have been drawn up by consensus and approved by an organisation recognised at regional, national or international levels. The purpose of quality standards is optimisation of input and/or output of learning' Cedefop, 2003. *Source:* Cedefop (2011) Glossary

standards that safeguard the reliability of VET qualifications, to control the effective and efficient usage of funding and to support a quality culture for continuous quality improvement.

In addition to the pursuit of good VET, the **functions** of VET quality assurance include, – with particular relevance for public authorities:

- to enhance the attractiveness of VET (ENQA-VET, 2009) by making evident the appeal of VET contents and didactics for learners;
- to reinforce confidence and trust in VET qualifications by demonstrating that they meet national standards and match labour market demand;
- to support strategic planning for skills development, appropriate for well-functioning and balanced economies by making clear the relationship between labour market intelligence and education and training planning, including for VET;
- to raise awareness of the national skills base, with emphasis on the availability of vocational/occupational competences, especially for the purposes of new business generation and international direct investment;
- to minimise the risk of the misuse of public funds;

and, with particular relevance for companies and the private sector:

- to signal expertise and the trustworthiness of services and products;
- to maintain and develop high levels of workforce productivity and competitiveness;
- to demonstrate the 'return on investment' in VET.

In all quality processes, **standards** are of central importance. Achieving consistent application of standards relies on one hand, on regulation and binding guidelines (who must do what, with whom, how and when) and on the other, trust in the competence and experience of the actors involved and their autonomy. The degree of regulation and autonomy varies from system to system and in relation to processes of qualifications (development, delivery, certification,). Coherent VET quality assurance mechanisms extend from individual-level (self-assessment) through the organisational-level (internal assessment and its objective/external verification) to societal level (evaluation of institutions, programmes, reforms).

KEY MESSAGE

What is quality assurance in VET aiming for?

VET quality assurance may be understood as the measures established to verify that processes and procedures are in place, which, when effective, ensure the quality and quality improvement of VET. The measures relate to quality standards with underlying principles, criteria and indicators.

The aim of quality assurance in VET is to ensure good VET: responding to labour market, societal and individual needs, leading to recognised qualifications; providing access to decent jobs and sustainable employment, being attractive, inclusive and accessible, fostering capabilities that enable progression to further learning.

2.2 Types of VET systems and sub-systems and their impact on quality assurance

VET systems are defined and organised according to different social, economic and political traditions. These influence their purpose, functions, status and scope. VET systems and sub-systems vary in relation to the:

- degree of interplay between society and the economy;
- role of VET in educational planning; the main aim of the VET system/sub-systems (employment, social inclusion, further learning);
- main source of funds (public: national/regional or international from public taxation; private: individual, business/industry, philanthropic/charity);
- main form of governance;
- main target groups;
- main form of organisation and provider type;
- available resources; and the
- management and development of learning inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes.

VET can be part of the formal education system or to a greater or lesser extent the responsibility of the labour market agencies and enterprises. Accordingly, national approaches to VET quality assurance have their own distinctive features. However, VET systems can be classified in terms of typologies, as can quality assurance approaches. Furthermore, quality assurance principles, criteria and measures, commonly shared across different education and training sectors, can be identified and classified.

Research on VET reveals a complex range of **typologies**. These are 'ideal types', which are to be used as heuristic/analytical tools. Systems match more or less an 'ideal type' and sub-systems within a given system may match different 'ideal types' in different ways. These typologies are grounded in socio-economic and political organisation, structures and strategies and differ according to trajectories of industrialisation, educational values, the degree of centralisation in governance, the division of responsibilities for VET between the State and the market, corporate governance and responsibilities, industrial relations and collective bargaining and welfare state policies. Greinert, Winterton, Busemeyer and Trampusch, for example, identified such typologies.

Greinert refers to three overriding types of VET in Europe, each with a long tradition: the liberal market economy type (e.g. England), in which VET is driven by market forces and where workplace demands are the governing principle; the state-regulated bureaucratic type (e.g. France) with an academic approach to VET where education and science are the governing principles; and the dual-corporatist type (e.g. Germany), in which VET is determined by the vocational principle (Greinert and Hanf, 2004). Similarily, **Winterton** (2007) refers to types of VET systems differentiated by the mode of regulation – state or market and the location of learning – school or workplace. **Busemeyer and Trampusch** (2012) explain disparities across VET skills systems in terms of variations of the capitalist approach based on the degree of public commitment to VET versus company involvement and related state run, liberal, segmentalist and collective solutions.

Typologies can serve as useful starting points to classify systems and identify comparative features. Types may be associated with different countries or groupings of countries where a certain type is dominant in the dominant VET sub-sector, for example initial VET; however, other typologies may be associated with other VET sub-sectors in the same country. VET quality assurance approaches that

are 'fit for purpose'[15] are responsive to the differences in the dominant typologies, which often results in variations in, *inter alia*: the locus of governance and policy-making, the combination and nature of stakeholder involvement and the choice of processes.

Typologies can also be applied to the various areas of quality assurance. For instance, in the area of **assessment and certification** three models were identified, which can be related to the above mentioned VET typologies, namely: prescriptive, cooperative and self-regulated (Cf. Cedefop, 2010, p. 162).

- **The prescriptive model:** Assessment methods are centralised. The methods are designed and specified by one awarding body. This body is responsible for making the assessment, quality assurance, validation and awarding a certificate. The provider is little more than a conduit between the learner and the awarding body in the assessment and certification. This model is more common in state regulated and school based types of VET systems.
- **The cooperative model:** Awarding bodies retain the responsibility of designing assessment criteria and broad methodological boundaries, while decisions concerning the form and content of the assessments are left to providers. Providers may also be responsible for marking or grading the examinations, but this responsibility is closely supervised by the awarding body. This model is more common in dual-corporatist, state regulated and workplace located types of VET systems.
- **The self-regulated model:** In this model, the VET provider designs and undertakes assessment validation, and is the awarder of the qualification certificates. The provider takes on the responsibility of quality assuring all aspects of the certification process itself, without deferring to any higher government ministry or agency. This model is more common in market led and workplace located types of VET systems.

Analogous variations of quality assurance related to system typology have been identified by Cedefop research in the area of qualifications standards as regards feedback mechanisms between VET and the labour market: liberal, statist, participatory and coordinated[16], each dependent on how the VET governance structures are rooted in social, political and economic environments.

KEY MESSAGE

Different VET systems require specific quality assurance approaches

When making plans to renew or reform VET quality assurance, it is crucial that the type and underpinning philosophy of the VET system and its governance model are considered, as well as VET purpose, functions, scope, and institutional context and target groups.

The heterogeneity of VET militates against a one-size-fits-all approach to measures for quality assurance and this needs to be taken into account when considering the transferability/adaptability of externally developed models that evolved in different contexts.

[15] *Fitness for purpose* (Ball 1985; Harvey and Green 1993) provides an 'organising principle' for the approaches.

[16] 'Liberal', characterised by a low degree of coordination, where feedback between VET providers and the labour market is mainly regulated through the market (e.g. England). 'Statist', characterised by strong state regulation of education and weak links between education and labour market in terms of formal communication (e.g. Sweden). 'Participatory', which allows for the participation of social partners in the processes, but mainly in a consultative role (e.g. France). 'Coordinated', where social partners are the drivers of renewal processes and play an active role in its implementation (e.g. Germany) Cedefop (2013).

2.3 Core elements of a modern VET quality assurance system

The interlinked and interdependent elements of a quality assurance system[17] for VET explored in this section are quality assurance principles, areas, criteria, measures and indicators.

Principles

Principles for VET quality assurance can be clustered under the headings: leadership, stakeholder engagement and coordination; relevance, effectiveness and efficiency; clarity and coherence.

Leadership, stakeholder engagement and coordination

Decision-makers for VET ensure that quality assurance is enshrined in policy. The governance of quality assurance in VET is in the hands of reputable leaders and is expert, strategic, fair and fitting. Decision-making processes are inclusive. There is responsible delegation of authority/responsibility and accountability. The coordination role is unambiguous. Stakeholders engage appropriately and collaboratively in the development, management, implementation and review of quality assurance in the five areas : policy and governance; qualifications standards; provision; assessment, validation and certification, and data and knowledge creation, within VET, and between VET and other education and training sub-systems. There is a quality culture of ownership, participation and responsiveness.

Relevance, effectiveness and efficiency

Quality assurance in VET meets the needs of the labour market and society/individuals and supports VET system management. Quality assurance is integral to VET, rather than an add-on, evidence-based and fit for the context, aims for the continuous improvement of VET and is 'do-able' with a robust strategy and realistic objectives. Quality assurance is based on quality standards and measures are in keeping with the scope of the VET sector/sub-sector, cost-effective and nurture responsibility and accountability. Quality assurance is systemic, comprehensive covering all phases of the quality cycle (plan, do, check, review) and addresses context, inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes and systematic with a balanced bottom-up and top-down approach. Evaluation of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency is based on comprehensive external-internal review mechanisms. VET quality assurance policy has an international dimension.

Clarity and coherence

Policy for quality assurance in VET is clear and coherent, understood by all and sustainable. Stakeholders agree on definitions for quality assurance concepts. The quality assurance system/framework and methodology are well defined and consistent and apply to the system and provision and the interrelationship between them. Roles and responsibilities related to governance and management are unequivocal. Rules and guidelines for the implementation of quality assurance measures are explicit. The purpose of processes, procedures and support tools is clear to stakeholders. Quality assurance policy across VET sub-sectors and other education and training sub-systems is coherent and consistent and supports system-wide analysis.

[17] The relevance of this set of elements was agreed by ETF experts at a workshop to plan this paper in 2014.

Key areas

A holistic quality assurance system addresses five key areas and their interconnectedness.

Policy and governance	Supporting policy development from planning through to review and including financing and data management.
Qualifications standards	Supporting the setting and attainment of standards for VET qualifications and for the qualifications of VET personnel.
Provision	Supporting learning provision quality regarding curricula/contents, didactics-learning processes, learning contexts, information and guidance services, resources and the fitness of the physical environment.
Assessment, validation and certification	Supporting the integrity and reliability of learning outputs.
Data and knowledge creation	Supporting the identification, collection, analysis and usage of quantitative and qualitative demand/supply information.

Criteria

The criteria are the conditions that need to be met for effective quality assurance in VET. They embrace the over-arching principles and apply to the core areas. Criteria relate to the mindsets and actions of decision makers and other stakeholders and the ownership and do-ability of policies and measures. Criteria tend to be numerous and applicable at system and provider levels.

Areas	Main criteria for effective and efficient quality assurance
Policy and governance	■ Concentrated on the economy/labour market and society and needs and expectations are researched and addressed in a balanced way. ■ Focused on employers and learners who are actively engaged. ■ Directed effectively, upholding values that inspire trust, committed to a strategy that can best achieve goals, giving judicial freedom to people to act responsibly and allocating resources wisely and fairly. ■ Engaged, responsible, collaborative, influential, proactive stakeholders. ■ Legislated for, or regulated quality standards and monitoring system.
Qualifications' standards	■ Developed by the state and social partners (by/under the aegis of). ■ Based on research/ reliable and robust evidence. ■ Monitored and reviewed regularly. ■ Used to underpin verified programmes, curricula and contents.
Provision	■ Managed expertly. ■ Staffed appropriately. ■ Resourced suitably. ■ Connected fittingly to the labour market and local community. ■ Reviewed regularly ensuring adherence to regulations and standards as assessed through external/internal evaluation (see pp. 14−15). ■ Published results of evaluations and recommendations addressed.
Assessment, validation, certification	■ Based on standards. ■ Managed and executed by appropriate stakeholders. ■ Supported by appropriate/objective and reliable mechanisms. ■ Recognised by employers.
Data and knowledge creation	■ Established indicators for relevant data collection. ■ Operationalised, well-functioning data management system. ■ Evaluated data, controlled for accuracy, reliability, up-to-datedness. ■ Analysed data and feedback mechanisms employed for VET reform.

Measures

Quality assurance in VET combines measures that aim to ensure quality standards (see definition in Footnote 14) are met. These measures relate to the control and steering of the VET system, ensuring compliance with centrally devised policies and strategies for qualifications and provision and for cost effectiveness and accountability and generating knowledge sources. Furthermore, measures aim to foster a quality culture in the myriad of VET scientific communities and communities of practice. In the following section, various quality assurance measures are listed in relation to the afore-mentioned foci for quality assurance in VET: policy and governance, qualification standards, provision, assessment, validation and certification and data and knowledge creation.

Policy and governance

Quality assurance measures related to VET policy and governance may be regulated through legislation or national-level plans / binding agreements and mandatory regulations/requirements. Quality assurance measures aim to verify adherence to national/regional regulations. These regulations include the need to meet national and/or international standards (e.g. ISO) or standards agreed by international representative bodies for qualifications related to professions/occupations and/or sectors.

Quality assurance measures can take the form of e.g. periodic and regular monitoring and review of VET policy and its implementation at system/sub-system levels including arrangements for VET provider institution licensing/ registration/ accreditation, programme validation and award conferrals. Quality assurance measures can be external e.g. international peer reviews of VET policy, including for quality assurance, and/or the VET system, including the implementation of quality assurance policy. Quality assurance measures related to policy and governance are the responsibility of the state that may delegate authority to a quality assurance responsible body.

Qualification standards

The main purpose of quality assurance at VET system level is to set and maintain standards. In order to maintain VET qualifications' standards, measures must be in place to verify that skills needs are reliably identified and that qualifications standards are responsive to skills needs, developed jointly by education and labour market stakeholders, comprise occupational, educational and assessment standards and are systematically reviewed and revised.

Quality assurance measures aim to verify that qualifications' standards underlie programmes/courses, underpin curricula/contents and that attainment is supported by suitable didactics and learning contexts and is reliably assessed and certificated. Depending on the system, responsibility for quality assurance related to qualifications standards may lie with the state, a state delegated body responsible for quality assurance (and/or the qualifications' system) or a recognised professional body e.g. sector skills council and providers.

Indicators and data

Quality assurance measures are needed to verify that indicators for demand/supply data collection are relevant, robust and reliable and have been constructed to monitor the objectives set for quality VET. Measures are also needed to verify that the procedures for data collection are systematic, reliable and occur with optimum frequency and that data are analysed reliably and analyses results are published and/or 'fed-back' into the VET system for improvement purposes. Quality assurance measures related to information systems tend to be under state responsibility.

Indicators are used to measure the quality of VET. VET indicators not only need to be 'good' indicators, defined with a specific use in mind, they must also be understood, collectable and analysable. VET indicators are meant to facilitate the measurement of performance against a standard; they are a tool for the comparison of performance, as regards different pathways and providers, and the follow up of changes in indicator values over time. Indicators relate to the quality criteria and standards that apply to the core areas e.g. the percentage of accredited providers.

Indicators can be classified according to the 'message' they convey and the purposes they serve. Indicators that are a sub-set of statistics are numerical and quantifiable, however, there are difficulties in identifying 'good' quantitative indicators related to VET quality assurance and qualitative information may have to serve as an indicator even though qualitative indicators include an element of judgement and are consequently subjective.

A quality indicator can be thought of as a quantitative 'representation' that helps to assess a quality characteristic, such as VET outputs (e.g. qualifications), or the achievement of a quality objective. A quality indicator is only one of many 'representations' of quality characteristics, quality norms or criteria can be represented as quality indicators and quality objectives can be expressed in accordance with the values of quality indicators. Performance or quality indicators are developed to improve transparency, encourage competition and improve quality.

Indicators are constructed to enable the collection of data that help to measure outcomes over time related to objectives for quality VET. For example, an objective might be *to enhance the capabilities of*

VET teachers and trainers and the indicator might be *the share of VET teachers and trainers participating in formal continuing professional development courses annually*. Key attributes of an indicator are validity and reliability. Both the processes/procedures for establishing objectives for improving VET quality and the processes/procedures to develop indicators to monitor the attainment of those objectives must be quality assured to produce valid and reliable indicators. Thereafter, quality assurance measures are required to verify the reliability of data collection analyses and usage.

Personnel qualification standards

Quality assurance measures are needed to verify that qualifications' standards for VET personnel (learning facilitators: teachers, skills instructors, on-the-job trainers and school/training centre principals/directors/managers and guidance specialists) are expertly developed and up-to-date and that the qualifications of recruited VET personnel meet the expected standards. Quality assurance measures are needed to verify that procedures are in place to monitor the development and renewal of standards underpinning the qualifications of VET personnel. Measures are also needed to verify that the knowledge, skills and competences of VET teachers/trainers/instructors and their managers are kept up-to-date. Quality assurance measures related to staff *qualifications' standards* are usually the responsibility of the state that may delegate authority to a quality assurance body, or a teachers' management body that has this function amongst others.

Provider quality assurance measures – external and internal evaluation

Quality assurance measures aim to guide, monitor and measure the quality of teaching and learning processes and their outcomes. In order to maintain qualifications' standards, system-level quality standards for provider institutions are needed. System-level, quality assurance measures to verify adherence to VET provision standards can vary across VET system typologies. The most common measure is the traditional State and/or competent body (external) evaluation of provider institutions. Increasingly, institutions are obliged, or choose to, self-evaluate; this practice is exemplary and most effective when conducted as a complementary measure to external evaluation. If evaluation is exclusively external, the components of the checklist for self-assessment need to be addressed.

Common forms of provider institution external evaluation

External evaluation of provider institutions by the state or an intermediate statutory authority or by an independent competent body (professional/sectoral or in relation to internationally recognised standards e.g. ISO) that comprises one or more of the following measures:

- inspection, e.g. Schools Inspectorate, with a focus on teaching, learning and assessment;
- audits e.g. with a focus on management, budgets, facilities;
- site visits by public/private reviewers to agree action on self-assessment reports;
- peer review against a set of key issues using a defined methodology;
- external review of references from key stakeholders – e.g. employer-, learner-surveys;
- external evaluation by means of an Information Management System (IMS) and the analysis of data supplied related to indicators e.g. participation, completion, success, placement rates;
- external evaluation of quality assurance measures for programme development/delivery and external examinations.

Standards set for the external evaluation of provider institutions inform their internal self-evaluation standards and their quality assurance processes and procedures. Standards and measures can be prescribed by public authorities or organisations/sectoral bodies, or be self-developed and regulated or combine these. When self-developed and regulated the involvement of impartial, external stakeholders (e.g. social partners) is a quality assurance criterion.

Checklist for provider institution internal evaluation

Management and organisation

- Quality management (including evaluation)
- Strategy planning (including school plans)
- Finance and administration
- Data systems and data management (including capacity building)
- Learner engagement (in decision making)
- Institutions' ethos and access/inclusion policies
- Social environment, participation and interaction
- Health and safety
- External relations (e.g. community, enterprises, other providers) and engagement
- Internationalisation policy/practice

Infrastructure

- Buildings – related to safety, access and ecology considerations etc.
- Facilities – related to 'fitness for purpose' (e.g. libraries, refectories, sports grounds)
- Equipment – related to suitability for occupational skills development (e.g. IT, machinery, appliances)

Personnel

- Manager/principal competence (development)
- Staff recruitment policy and practice
- Teacher/trainer competence and performance
- Staff development
- Working conditions of staff

Programmes

- Curricula
- Teaching materials/resources (textbooks, software etc.)
- Didactics
- Contexts (including work-based learning)
- Learning outcomes
- Learner guidance
- Learner assessment
- Learning results
- Learner destination

2.4 Fostering a quality culture

Quality culture refers to an organisational culture that intends to enhance quality permanently and is characterised by two distinct elements: on the one hand, a cultural/psychological element of shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality and, on the other hand, a structural/managerial element with defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordinating individual efforts. (European University Association, 2010)

As this definition indicates, organisational cultures are characterised by habits formed through the management and usage of, in this case, quality assurance instruments or procedures, which can be objectively observed and measured and by the collective of personal beliefs, values and expectations regarding quality. Following from this, numerous institutions implementing the same quality assurance tools or procedures may share some aspects of a quality culture but the probability of sharing the same sets of values, beliefs and expectations is less likely.

A shared quality culture is based on communication, participation and trust. The description and assessment of quality culture can be considered at three levels: normative, strategic, operative. The first level is the starting point for the other two and on this level are the non-formal, psychological-cultural components of a quality culture, personal beliefs, values and expectations towards quality. The quality culture becomes visible on the strategic level in decision making and planning processes. At the operative level, quality culture is apparent in the usage of the tools and measures focusing on quality improvement[18].

KEY MESSAGE

What are the key areas/issues addressed by quality assurance in VET?

Principles for quality assurance in VET can be clustered under the headings: leadership; stakeholder engagement and coordination; relevance, effectiveness and efficiency; clarity and coherence.

The five interconnected key areas of quality assurance are policy and governance; qualifications standards; provision; assessment, validation, certification; data and knowledge creation.

For these areas, criteria for effective and efficient quality assurance need to be defined and measures that ensure the criteria are met need to be established. The aim of these measures is to foster a quality culture in the institutions/organisations of the VET system.

[18] Based on the 'Development and Testing of an Instrument for the Description and Assessment of Quality Cultures at Higher Education Institutions', see www.psychologie.uni-heidelberg.de/ae/abo/forschung_qualitaetskultur_en.html and the author's own views.

3. EUROPEAN POLICIES AND ACTIONS UNDERPINNING THE ETF APPROACH

3.1 European policy and actions on quality assurance in VET[19]

Quality improvement has been central to EU VET policy since the adoption of the 'general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy' (Council Decision of 2 April 1963). Without using the term 'quality' the principles implicitly define 'good' vocational training. Moreover, the 'principles' include quantitative and qualitative forecasts; comparison of provision and requirements; information and guidance; training for teachers and instructors (trainers); standardised descriptions of basic qualifications on various levels. These still valid 'principles', have been shared for over 50 years.

General principles for a common vocational training policy (1963) – Definition of 'good VET'

Good vocational training guarantees adequate training for all; it supplies the labour force required; it encourages the harmonious development of the personality and meets the requirements arising from technical, economic and social developments.

It enables every person to reach the highest possible level of training, whilst encouraging intellectual advancement, civic education and physical development.

It avoids any harmful interruption either between completion of general education and commencement of vocational training or during the latter.

It promotes basic and advanced vocational training and, where appropriate, retraining, suitable for the various stages of working life.

It offers to every person, according to his/her inclinations and capabilities, working knowledge and experience, and by means of permanent facilities for vocational advancement, the opportunity to gain promotion or to receive instruction for a new and higher level of activity.

It meets both the needs of the economy and the interests of the trainees.

Council Decision 63/266/EEC

Quality assurance, i.e. detailed administrative and procedural measures to safeguard quality, only surfaced as an EU-level policy area about 20 years ago. In 1994 the 'Council Resolution (94/C 374/01) concerning the quality and attractiveness of vocational training' was adopted. This was followed by the 'Council Conclusions of 1995 (95/C207/03) concerning the importance and implications of the quality of vocational training', which invited Member States to improve the quality of VET and develop, with the Social Partners, exchanges of information and experiences to promote methods and tools for the evaluation of quality.

Following a positive response from the tripartite EU Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (2001) to the Commission's proposal, the **European Forum on the Quality of Vocational Training** was established. The work of the Forum was subsumed into the mandate for the Commission coordinated **Technical Working Group for Quality in VET (TWG-Q)** established as part of the **Copenhagen Process** (2002), which had VET quality assurance as a priority action line with two goals.

[19] The OECD executes a QA function internationally conducting quality reviews, measuring the competences of individuals (e.g. PISA, PIAAC) or comparing the effectiveness of systems in a wider sense.

1. **Giving attention to the learning needs of teachers and trainers within all forms of VET**.

2. Promoting cooperation in quality assurance with particular focus on exchange of existing models and methods, as well as agreeing common criteria and principles for quality in VET.

The TWG-Q identified from within the EU a common core of criteria and a set of indicators for quality development at EU level based on policy and practice in the EU. This led to the drawing up of a proposal in 2003 for a **Common Quality Assurance Framework** (**CQAF**) (Faurschou, 2003), applicable at both the VET system- and provider-levels, as referenced in the Council Conclusions 2004.

The CQAF comprised four interrelated elements: a model, a methodology, a monitoring system, and a measurement tool and could serve a range of purposes: as a checklist, as an instrument, as a reference or even a normative framework. The CQAF was based on the **Deming quality cycle (plan, do, check, review)** and quality criteria and indicative descriptors were elaborated for each of the phases. The TWG-Q proposed an accompanying limited set of 10 indicators (Seyfried, 2003). In 2005, EU Member States established the **European Network for Quality Assurance in VET (ENQA-VET)**, supported by EU financial resources that funded, *inter alia* the work of the Secretariat set up in Dublin. Member States agreed to appoint **National Quality Assurance Reference Points** (**NRPs**) to promote and strengthen EU level cooperation. The ENQA-VET continued to refine the CQAF, by developing supporting materials and instruments, and promote it, bearing in mind that the new Member States had not been party to its development.

In 2009, the European Council and the European Parliament passed the Recommendation establishing a **European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET** (**EQARF**), based on the CQAF, and the NRPs, and raising the status of the network, newly named **EQAVET**. Thus, the EQARF is a reference framework comprising principles, criteria and a set of quality indicators, commonly implemented by the EU Member States, many of which contributed to its development.

The EQARF encourages an iterative learning process ideally suited to reinforcing a quality culture. The Recommendation encourages Member States to align their VET quality assurance approach with the EQARF for transparency and trust-building purposes. The **10 EQARF indicators** (see Annex 1) serve as a useful tool for indicator development and international comparison purposes. They have to be adapted to nationally determined objectives in a manner that ensures ease of understanding, collection, storage, analysis and usage to guarantee their relevance, validity and reliability. The indicators are related to context, input, process, output and outcome.

The EQAVET network, including its network of NRPs, supports the operationalisation and implementation of EU policy on quality assurance in VET, comprising the EQARF. User-friendly instruments and guidance are accessible on the EQAVET website (see Bibliography). Research undertaken by EQAVET[20] indicates that in the EU the common actions for the effective implementation of a VET quality assurance strategy are as follows:

- Key institutions (notably the relevant ministries) drive the development process.
- The main stakeholders are engaged and assume ownership as relevant and appropriate.
- A negotiated and agreed strategy and/or policy document on QA in VET is published.
- National-level quality standards for VET providers are established.
- Measures to evaluate and review are in place and results are made public.

[20] The 2013 EQAVET progress report

In 2014, the Commission's report to the European Council and the European Parliament on the implementation of the goals of the Recommendation was published[21] giving direction for new developments in the EQAVET work programme.

Despite the significant diversity and complexity of VET quality assurance processes and frameworks across the EU, stakeholders increasingly share a collective meaning of 'quality' and use a common language to describe and compare their quality assurance measures and demonstrate improvements. Enhanced transparency facilitates deeper trust in the quality of VET systems, provision, qualifications and skills. An important outcome of EU cooperation has been the need to 'unpack' VET quality assurance to make multiple measures/mechanisms visible; many of which can be so deeply embedded in practice that they are taken for granted. This unpacking exercise is crucial for understanding the pervasiveness of quality assurance in VET, identifying weak links, raising standards, and facilitating exchange of good practice and benchmarking.

3.2 Quality assurance in higher education

The **European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education** (ENQA) was established in 2000 as a policy forum. In their 2001 biennial meeting in Prague (Bologna process), European Ministers called for closer cooperation and greater degrees of mutual trust between recognition and quality assurance networks. They encouraged all the partners to collaborate on the establishment of a **common framework of reference for quality** and to disseminate related good practices. In 2002, the Joint Quality Initiative produced the 'Dublin Descriptors', which were proposed as generic descriptors for all Bachelor and Master degrees, in relation to the qualification. By 2003 all Bologna signatory countries had established, or were in the process of establishing, agencies responsible for external quality control in some form or another and the majority of higher education institutes were undergoing external quality assurance procedures.

Whilst acknowledging the value of quality assurance agencies for external review and public accountability, the EUA Quality Culture Project stressed the primary importance of developing the internal quality culture of universities. The latter requires organisational development, the nurturing of communities through participation, effective communication channels, and support frameworks for quality review and evaluation processes and standards[22].

The Berlin Communiqué (2003) gave the mandate to ENQA[23]to develop **European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance** in the EHEA (ESG). The ESG were adopted in Bergen in 2005 and their revision in 2015 in Yerevan. In 2007, European ministers for higher education gave a mandate for the establishment of a **European Quality Assurance Register** (EQAR) operational since 2008[24].

The internationalisation of quality assurance extends beyond networks of European quality assurance agencies; the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) was set up over 20 years ago and at least one multi-national network exists in each continent. Belonging to an international network facilitates peer learning and peer review for development and

[21] http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/eqavet_en.pdf

[22] Transnational European Evaluation Project (TEEP) methodology for the use of common criteria and QA at European level. QA agencies oversee the development of the transnational external evaluation method for various disciplines. The evaluation method combines self-evaluation reports on the educational context, learning outcomes and QA mechanisms, site visits and the publication of reports.

[23] ENQA, the European Students Union (ESU), European University Association (EUA) and European University Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) are collectively known as the E4 Group.

[24] EQAR information on quality assurance agencies in Europe (in August 2014 32 QAAs in 16 countries) that comply with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance adopted by the European ministers in Bergen 2005. It is web-based and freely accessible.

evaluation/benchmarking purposes; this two-way exposure can help to increase quality and international standing and competitiveness in what has become an important business sector.

3.3 Bridging the gap between quality assurance in higher education and in VET

The European policies aim to enhance quality assurance in both the higher education and VET sectors. Given the increased blurring of traditional boundaries between VET and higher education, the philosophy, goals and mechanisms of the Bologna Process have a direct, or indirect, impact on VET in participating countries with varying effect. However, certain factors can separate sectors and create tensions, which militate against a common approach. Compared with the higher education sector, the VET sector is far more complex as regards organisation, governance and management, funding and diverse target groups. Endeavours by all stakeholders are required to achieve harmony between quality assurance policies in the two sectors.

The development of a national framework for all qualifications provides a useful context for strengthening cross sector collaboration and building trust in the quality assurance measures underpinning qualifications (Deane and Watters, 2004). Relating qualifications levels to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is an important driver of quality assurance reform. Whilst countries can relate their qualifications levels to the EQF with or without formally establishing a national qualifications framework the quality assurance criteria are prescribed (see Annex 2). These criteria can serve as a framework for cross sector cooperation.

KEY MESSAGE

What European policies, processes and instruments for quality assurance in VET are there?

Quality in VET was first addressed in the EU with a Council Decision in 1963 laying down general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy. Quality assurance, i.e. detailed administrative and procedural measures to safeguard quality, surfaced as an EU-level policy area with the Council Conclusions of 1995, which invited Member States to improve the quality of VET and develop, with the Social Partners, exchanges of information and experiences to promote methods and tools for the evaluation of quality.

In 2009, the European Council and the European Parliament passed the Recommendation establishing a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQARF), based on the EU Common Quality Assurance Framework, and the National Reference Points, and raising the status of the ENQA-VET network, newly named EQAVET. The EQARF is a reference framework comprising principles, criteria and a set of quality indicators, implemented by the EU Member States, many of which contributed to its development.

Blurred boundaries between VET and higher education exposes VET to European policy for quality assurance in higher education and the EQF is helping to increase transparency and trust in quality assurance policies across sectors.

4. VET QUALITY ASSURANCE IN ETF PARTNER COUNTRIES

Quality assurance reform in many partner countries is often, at least in part, financed, designed, planned and implemented through pilot action by external actors, including donor organisations. Pilot action, whilst introducing useful models for VET reform, providing valuable learning opportunities and enhancing capabilities, can also result in 'opportunity costs' i.e. unexpected, incomplete or negative outcomes. One example of an unexpected outcome is when the quality assurance approach, intrinsic to a given model VET policy in country A (e.g. apprenticeship) does not 'travel' with the model when it is adapted for application in country B and the traditional quality assurance approach is not suited to the new model. Such piloted 'reforms' may fail to bring about any sustainable, systemic change[25].

4.1 Quality assurance in VET in partner countries – snapshots[26]

Whilst it is difficult to generalise[27], it appears that the most dominant quality assurance approach, at VET system level, across partner countries, is the traditional centralised and prescriptive one (see Section 1.2). This approach is aligned with the prevalent, centralised and prescriptive model for VET governance, VET qualifications (standards, curricula, assessment / examination and certification), VET teachers' qualifications and recruitment and VET provision and funding. Within this context, quality assurance measures relate to provider compliance with centrally prescribed rules and regulations and centrally organised inspection and audit. When VET is under the aegis of two, or more, government departments there are sometimes parallel centralised and prescriptive models for quality assurance in operation that may be similar or may differ. The dominant quality assurance approach is applied in a system perspective across the provider institutions, which tend to be VET public schools or VET private schools supported by public funds.

In partner countries public authorities are mostly motivated to implement quality assurance in order to minimise the risk of misuse of public funding, the main focus is on inputs and ensuring that there is sustainable financing. Safeguarding control of the qualification system and the qualifications awarded is another motivation. However, the approach tends to be of limited efficacy in relation to the labour market relevance of VET programmes and the currency of qualifications and often fails to support VET quality improvement or meet the expectations of learners, employers and funding bodies. Whilst the relevance of standards or the efficacy of their application and their evaluation may be under question, certain QA measures, processes and procedures that aim to ensure relevance for changing needs, remain essentially valid, albeit in need of modernisation.

Much of VET reform in partner countries is aimed at addressing the fundamental issue of the labour market relevance of programmes and qualifications. Such reforms aim to, *inter alia*:

- intensify the active engagement of economic and civil society actors in VET;
- embed multi-actor, multi-level governance;

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[25] For further reflection on the concept of policy learning versus policy borrowing, consult Raffe (2011).

[26] The ETF Torino Process reports are the main source of information for this chapter. In parallel with the writing of this paper a mapping of quality assurance in VET in selected partner countries was undertaken with information sourced from these reports.

[27] Information sources, on which the analyses in this chapter are based, are quite limited. Primary, and more in-depth secondary research are required for more robust findings. The objective is to use available information to build a picture of VET quality assurance, which can be used in discussions with partner countries for validation, supplementation and identifying activities.

- strengthen processes to ensure relevant qualifications standards;
- augment the capabilities of VET managers, teachers and trainers;
- increase provider autonomy and accountability;
- build work-based training into programmes with the need for closer school-enterprise linkages;
- open pathways between initial and continuing VET and VET and higher education.

Each reform presents a challenge to the adequacy of the traditional approach to quality assurance.

Quality assurance features in many ETF partner countries – A snapshot

- Governance of initial VET tends to be centralised and quality assurance traditionally controlled by government authorities/agencies.
- Collecting and analysing data on labour market skills demand (LMIS) continues to be a major challenge as research capacity tends to be weak and data management tools tend to be lacking; this also applies to the supply side and management information systems (MIS). Feedback mechanisms tend to be weak.
- Quality assurance measures related to the qualifications cycle need to be more coherent and comprehensive.
- Standards for VET principals, teachers and trainers qualifications are under review and opportunities for CPD are increasing.
- Licensing and accreditation of mainly private VET providers is common.
- School inspection is the most common form of external quality assurance of institutions with an increasing interest in audits.
- Pilot projects (including Donor funded / supported) have for long supported quality assurance initiatives at VET school level. Efforts are being made to mainstream good practice and increase coherence between quality assurance at system and provider levels.
- Quality assurance in continuing vocational training (CVT) is under-developed.

Quality assurance trends in many ETF partner countries – A snapshot

- A good deal of new legislation. Shortfall in implementation (and evaluation) of legislation.
- Greater efforts to involve employers and enhance social dialogue (still challenging).
- Increased focus on cost-effectiveness and accountability.
- External examinations maintained / introduced as a quality assurance measure.
- EU Frameworks for quality assurance e.g. EQARF used for models.
- Expansion of agencies that have VET quality assurance in their remit.
- Growing focus on the accreditation of institutions and programmes.

Quality assurance reform drivers in many ETF partner countries – A snapshot

- Expansion of private sector VET providers creating new quality assurance needs.
- Creation of national qualifications' frameworks and related qualifications' reforms and referencing requirements.
- Changing quality assurance needs related to better integration of work-based learning in VET (still challenging).
- Availability of EU funds to support quality assurance reform in line with EU VET policy.

Quality assurance in VET practice in selected ETF partner countries – Samples (2014)
In **Albania**, a 2014 baseline survey of providers provides data on VET quality against 10 assessment benchmarks. The Institute for Educational Development is working on competence-based standards for teacher education.
In **Algeria**, the National Assembly has a specialised Commission to evaluate the VET system. Some research institutes and universities contribute to evaluations. The national inspectorate has quality assurance functions. A quality framework for private VET provision has been developed. New training establishments are set up on the basis of local needs analyses. Many training institutions have framework agreements with public and private employers.
In **Armenia**, Sector Skills Councils have been established by law, with social partner participation, as consultative bodies to the Ministry of Education and Science and to cooperate on the development of competence-based standards.
In **Azerbaijan**, the Ministry of Education is responsible for the quality assurance of VET providers. The quality of education is also controlled by the Regulation on Accreditation of Educational Institutions. The Ministry establishes a commission of experts to implement the accreditation of the education institution. It supervises public training provided by institutions with some autonomy.
In **Belarus**, the quality management system based on the ISO-9001 standards, introduced into VET institutions in Belarus in 2012 – 2013, aims at insuring optimisation of the system for quality management and the development of organisational and pedagogical conditions, methods, principles and technological management techniques, specific to a market economy.
In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, education inspectors supervise the work of VET providers. Areas / issues reviewed by inspectors include: appointment of school boards and school directors; school premises, permits and licenses; student records and disciplinary measures.
In **Egypt**, the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE) was established in 2007. The NAQAAE framework covers a wide range of areas, sets performance standards and indicators and includes identifying standards for reformed curricula and qualifications. To support compliance with the NAQAAE quality standards framework, the Ministry of Education established the Quality Assurance Division and Quality Assurance Units at both the governorate and local level.
In **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** the VET Centre's responsibilities include: accrediting staff training services; proposing measures to improve the quality of teaching; instructing / mentoring teachers and assessing them. Teachers are obliged to assemble a portfolio to collect evidence of their work and achievements; it is used as part of the teacher evaluation process, overseen by the State Education Inspectorate.
In **Georgia**, since 2010, the Sector Committees established under the National Professional Agency have operated under the supervision of the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement. The objective of the Sector Committees is to support the development of occupational standards and the catalogue of qualifications.
In **Israel**, the definition of the curriculum and the setting and control of national examinations are held under ministry control, these being measures intended to guarantee a measure of quality and equity across the diverse range of schools and populations. Each area has a subject committee, including industry representation. The work of the Inspectorate is maintained at ministerial level. In other respects, responsibility for quality assurance is shared between the Ministries, education networks and local authorities.

In **Jordan**, accreditation and quality systems are managed by the Higher Education Accreditation Commission for technical education and the Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA), for vocational education in schools. Working to the tripartite ETVET Council, CAQA's role is to license and accredit TVET institutions; and provide licenses to practice. CAQA is supervising the development of occupational standards.

The Independent **Kazakhstan** Quality Assurance Agency for Education (IQAA) was established in 2008 as a non-governmental and non-profit organisation for the independent external quality assurance of higher education institutions. IQAA also offers accreditation services to VET institutions, in mid-2015 12 VET colleges are cited as having acquired accreditation.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in **Kosovo**[28] published Criteria and Procedures for Quality Assurance of Educational Institutions and Vocational Training – Internal Processes in 2014. The National Qualifications Authority initiated quality assurance measures in VET including, developing criteria for provider accreditation.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, formal quality assurance for VET schools is exercised according to State standards, and comprises two different steps: licensing and attestation. Licensing permits the exercise of education and training activities, while attestation considers the compliance of programmes with approved state standards. Only licensed schools may deliver State-recognised diplomas.

In **Lebanon**, the inspectorate, within the Directorate General of Vocational and Technical Education (DGVTE) has a broad role, including guiding teachers and monitoring their performance. The large numbers of private training providers have management and funding independence, but need DGVTE accreditation to operate and must use national programmes, enter students in the national examinations, and get DGVTE endorsement for the appointment of a principal.

In **Libya**, the Directorate of Training Quality Assurance (DTQA) uses expert committees, which include employers, to identify the skills needs associated with private providers' programmes. The Quality Assurance and VET Providers Approval Centre and the DTQA are intended to quality assure the relevance of VET programmes. The National Board for Technical and Vocational Education's Evaluation and Assessment Office supervises final examinations for intermediate technical diplomas and approves intermediate technical education certificates and its quality units are responsible for determining if a student fulfils graduation requirements.

In **Moldova**, the Ministry of Education has developed the NQF in collaboration with relevant ministries, Sectoral Committees, VET institutions, enterprises, social partners. From 2015, responsibility for determining curriculum content, and pedagogics, lies with the National Agency for VET Quality Assurance in mandatory consultation with stakeholders.

In **Montenegro**, the policy framework for VET quality improvement comprises external and internal evaluation. Since 2006, external evaluation is carried out every four years. Since 2010, internal evaluation is mandatory for all VET institutions. The VET Centre has prepared a methodology for internal evaluation and analyses school plans for quality improvement.

[28] This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

In **Morocco**, measures to verify that procedures are in place to monitor qualifications' standards include the regulatory framework for the development of the NQF; and regulations/guidelines for the development of the Répertoires Emplois Métiers (REM) and Référentiels Emplois Compétences (REC) and the competence-based approach; the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training tracking studies; Ministry accreditation of public and private providers; the National Charter for Education and Training requirements for regular evaluation of providers; the use of the ISO 9001 standard and the four-year evaluation of the VET system.

In **Palestine**[29], the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (AQAC) was established to license higher education providers including community colleges and to approve new programmes and qualifications using quality criteria. The TVET strategy places strong emphasis on the importance of quality assurance. The Centres of Competence are piloting ISO 29990.

In **Russia**, the Ministry sets Federal State Education Standards through the relevant councils that consult with employers, academics and NGOs. At regional level, regional ministries/departments are responsible, some cooperate with large enterprises. The regions provide the bulk of funding for VET providers, according to regulations and provider performance.

In **Serbia**, a national quality assurance framework covers the VET school system and prescribes two processes: self-assessment and external assessment. The Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development conduct the external assessment under standardised procedures and tools and include the monitoring of teaching performance. Standards, based on EQARF, have been proposed for VET schools and Adult Education providers.

In **Tajikistan** the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment (MLME) develops professional qualification standards for VET and, together with its agencies and VET schools, is responsible for observance of the standards. The MLME's VET Methodological, Monitoring and Evaluation Centre monitors and assesses compliance with the qualification standards and quality standards for learning outcomes, maintains the curriculum and is responsible for teaching methodologies.

In **Tunisia**, quality assurance is central to initiatives taken through the MANFORME programme (1996 onwards) that created sustained VET reforms (demand-led, competence-based, reformed curricula, more institutional autonomy, emphasis on quality assurance), with a commitment to social partner engagement. Quality assurance standards conform to ISO standards. The National Standards for the Quality of Vocational Training developed as national benchmarks for the quality of vocational training centres are in 8th edition.

In **Turkey**, there is a well-developed LMIS (Labour Force Survey, employers' survey, vacancy monitor, administrative data on jobseekers, unemployment insurance beneficiaries etc.). E-school is a computerised web-based MIS that tracks students on an individual basis and the E-graduate project monitors the transition from VET to work. Situation Assessment Studies that track student achievement at / in various grades and subjects are used to compare regions, schools and programmes to inform policy development.

In **Turkmenistan**, each employer independently defines the requirements for upgrading professional qualifications and retraining staff, which is carried out according to procedures stipulated by the labour contract or collective agreement. The training can be provided in education institutions, in the workplace, or by distance learning. Of the total of registered education institutions, 30.3% are engaged in adult education.

[29] This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual position of the EU Member States on this issue.

In **Ukraine**, an attestation system is used to evaluate teachers' level of compliance with job requirements, governed by the Model Regulations on Teachers Attestation. A Commission evaluates educators' performance by attending their lessons, assessing their students, studying what innovative technologies they use and what teaching materials, manuals, or textbooks they have created.

In **Uzbekistan**, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population (MLSPP), through the Centre for Secondary Specialized Vocational Education, prepares/agrees annual plans matching vocational school graduates with estimates of employment needs/vacancies. This is supported by a Presidential Decree that enables local government to set local employment quotas in cooperation with schools, the MLSPP and employers.

KEY MESSAGE

What is the status quo of VET quality assurance in partner countries?

The most dominant quality assurance approach, at VET system level, across partner countries, is the centralised and prescriptive one with emphasis on inspection.

Quality assurance reform tends to focus on implementing formal procedures for licensing or accrediting (mostly private) VET providers, which can include pilot action to test external monitoring and evaluation measures. There is a danger of a widening gap between quality assurance measures for public funded providers and those for private providers with implications for standards and progression.

There is a good deal of pilot action to modernise VET quality assurance but it appears difficult for ad hoc, small-scale pilot projects to impact at policy level in centralised systems.

4.2 Partner countries – modernising quality assurance

In the following sections, experimentation with quality assurance reform in partner countries, usually in the context of a pilot project and either as a 'stand-alone' initiative or inter-linked with other reforms, such as frameworks for qualifications, is reviewed. The review focuses on initiatives identified across a significant number of partner countries, by no means all of them. Such pilot actions include experimentation with e.g. adapting quality assurance measures from other countries for the national context, implementing ISO standards and applying the EFQM Excellence Model. Currently, much pilot action is focussed on referencing with European frameworks such as the Bologna Process European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance and the Copenhagen Process European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (see Chapter 3).

Aligning with/referencing to European frameworks

The Bologna Process, with its comprehensive and transparent model linking qualifications and quality assurance, serves as an innovation laboratory for participating countries. At present almost half of ETF partner countries[30] participate in the Bologna Process and many others are reforming their higher education systems in line with Bologna reforms, for example Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries. Comparable approaches to quality assurance is a requisite for achieving Bologna goals.

In the 'Bologna approach' to quality assurance, higher education institutions have primary responsibility for quality assurance and have adopted 'European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for quality assurance' to underpin reforms. Both internal self-assessment and external evaluation of

[30] Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine.

programmes and institutions are key features of the approach and quality assurance agencies have been established, in most participating countries (and in many others in the process of aligning their systems with Bologna). The attraction of the 'Bologna approach' to quality assurance for partner countries is the 'ready-made model' that can be replicated, there are sources of external funding to support replication as well as consultants and European intermediary agencies willing to advise. Additionally, there is the incentive that compliance facilitates integration in the 'European area of Higher Education'. However, the impact of quality assurance developments on quality improvement is difficult to discern[31].

Now that many partner countries have already, or are in the process of, establishing quality assurance systems for higher education, aligned with the Bologna framework, there is a tendency to consider the application of the same model to VET. Whilst this might be a viable option and could help to bridge the two sectors and enhance mutual trust, appropriateness very much depends on the VET system-type and matters related to VET functions, governance, financing, provider institution autonomy, number and size. Applying the 'Bologna' quality assurance model, developed for the archetype, self-administered, university sector, in an often centrally controlled, large, heterogeneous VET sector comprising many diverse provider types including private enterprises and very diverse pathways, could be costly, unwieldy and potentially ineffective.

The transparency tools developed in the context of the Copenhagen Process, especially EQF, ECVET and EQARF, are favoured by external advisers operating in partner countries for their 'neutrality', tangibility and because they aim to support the Europeanisation of VET. Thus, a number of partner countries, particularly EU candidate countries, are influenced by EQARF in the context of quality assurance reform policy and many partner countries in other regions experiment with the alignment of their VET quality assurance approach with EQARF, often in parallel with ESG alignment testing.

EU candidate countries, participating in the Copenhagen Process, seek to meet the strategic objectives and deliver on the 'deliverables' set out most recently in the Bruges Communiqué (2010) and the Riga Conclusions (2015)[32]. One of five medium-term deliverables (2015–20) focuses on VET quality assurance, including the further development of approaches that are in line with the Recommendation establishing the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQARF). EU candidate countries have undertaken to give priority to this deliverable and monitor and report on their progress[33].

EU policies and instruments overtly inspire VET reform policy in partner countries, however there has been slow progress in implementing requisite reform and thus little evidence of the effectiveness of instruments such as EQARF. Countries tend to have weak institutional cultures of policy monitoring and reporting on achievements and due to data lacunae, evidence based policy-making practices present a major challenge. For many partner countries, alignment with the EQARF, in particular applying EQARF indicators, would require a transformational reform of systemic quality assurance policies and practices.

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[31] 'Ensuring and improving quality of higher education and establishing quality assurance systems remains a high priority for many countries. While it is a moot question whether quality in higher education has improved during the lifespan of the Bologna Process, there is no doubt whatsoever that quality assurance has seen dramatic developments.' (UNESCO, 2013, p. 42)

[32] Riga Conclusions (2015) on a new set of medium-term deliverables in the field of VET for the period 2015−2020, as a result of the review of short-term deliverables defined in the 2010 Bruges Communiqué http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-conclusions_en.pdf

[33] Candidate countries progress towards this goal (2010–15) was generally modest (Cedefop, 2015a).

Modernising quality assurance in VET – from piloting to policy development

In this section, pilot initiatives, aimed at VET quality assurance reform, undertaken in a significant number of partner countries, are synthesised under the headings: policy and governance, VET qualifications, teachers and trainers and their qualifications, provision and data. Their effectiveness, in terms of their potential for contributing to coherent, comprehensive and 'doable' policy, is considered.

Policy and governance

In an attempt to shift from centrally controlled, rigid and often uniform VET systems to ones that are more mixed, flexible, autonomous and accountable, a good deal of pilot action comprises the setting up of multi-actor and/or multi-level management committees or councils / observatories or focus groups that *inter alia* address quality assurance in VET. The latter may be given the task to monitor and validate research/studies that review VET policy, often comparative with international policy, or to analyse external legislation as models to inform national legislation. As previously mentioned, many partner countries have set up quality assurance agencies, in the first instance for the external evaluation of higher education institutions (HEIs) but also for private VET providers. Extending their role to publicly funded VET providers is also under consideration.

On the positive side, these initiatives break new ground, for example by including economy stakeholders in the VET policy arena, testing new forms of partnership and cooperative activities and introducing new policy approaches and models. On the other hand, there is evidence of policy borrowing, rather than learning, with external legislation copying. The tendency is to concentrate on the preparation of legislation/policy plans rather than on the policy cycle that includes preparation for implementation, evaluation and review. Committees tend to be set up for steering pilot projects rather than for steering national policy and there is tokenism susceptibility regarding social partner engagement, in particular unions, although there is some evidence their usefulness is gaining recognition. Additionally, quality assurance agencies tend to be government controlled.

VET qualifications

The primary function of quality assurance in VET is to verify that appropriate processes and procedures are in place to guarantee the relevance of VET learning outcomes and qualifications. The majority of partner countries are confronted with the decreasing labour market significance of their VET qualifications.

Across partner countries, there are myriad initiatives focussing on the revision of, and/or creation of new, occupational standards in accordance with international classifications, including: the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), the European Classification of Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) and the Arab Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO). Related initiatives include the piloting of Sector Skills Councils with a quality assurance function, testing quality assurance measures related to sector based occupational standards development and the linking of occupational and education/training and assessment standards; sometimes in the context of planning qualifications frameworks. The trend to design frameworks, for qualifications based on the 'learning outcomes approach', which aim to align/reference with supra-national qualifications' frameworks, e.g. EQF or the qualifications framework of the European Area for Higher Education (QF-EHEA), places the spotlight on qualifications standards.

On the positive side, partner countries are taking action to engage economy actors, in setting standards that are intended to inform VET programme design, and increasing awareness of how to enhance the labour market relevance of VET provision and qualifications. In some cases, pilots engage business and industry sectors and/or VET providers in processes for developing standards, thereby enhancing sector and local capacities. Moreover, through alignment experimentation with

international classifications, partner countries have an additional means to compare the quality of their programmes/qualifications and make them more transparent for stakeholders. Frameworks that aim to increase the transparency of qualifications for mobility purposes are being developed.

On the other hand, Sector Skills Councils and similar entities set up in the context of pilot projects to develop/renew standards are often not sustainable after piloting ends. There is not always sufficient evidence of the relevance of external classifications for a specific national context. There is a tendency to detach occupational from education/training and assessment standards; this can result in their separated, rather than integrated, usage in the context of a qualification standard. Piloting at local or sector levels can appear to be less costly and easier to organise but can result in duplication of development costs, exacerbate the potential for fragmented and poorly articulated VET programmes and militate against national qualifications' standards important, inter alia, for geographical mobility. The depth and breadth of expertise required for implementation or application (e.g. basing curricula on standards) is often under-estimated. Copying the design of the EQF for legislative purposes as the blueprint for the NQF often means that the vital phase of foresight, research, national awareness-raising and extensive consultation prior to the development of the design is truncated, with major implications for the implementation process.

Qualifications of managers, teachers and trainers

The responsibilities and capacities of VET teachers, instructors and trainers are broadening and the need to update knowledge, skills and competences very regularly is essential. As well as the need to keep up with technological advancement, including the use of ICTs, adapt to new methodologies and enhance mentoring, counselling and assessing competences, they must also contribute to school-enterprise/community cooperation and quality assurance developments.

As a rule, in many partner countries, teachers in VET schools tend to have similar qualifications as those held by teachers in general education. VET teachers may also have occupational/professional qualifications related to the technical subjects that they teach and sometimes schools employ skills instructors for these purposes. Skills instructors in VET training centres tend to have occupational or professional qualifications and have acquired pedagogical competences formally or non-formally. Trainers in enterprises who are skilled workers, including those who mentor apprentices or students undertaking work-based elements of VET programmes, rarely have formal teaching qualifications. VET teacher recruitment is usually under central control, as is teacher inspection. VET teachers are frequently challenged by poor working conditions, low pay and inferior status.

There is limited information in available reports regarding the upkeep of national qualifications' standards for VET teachers, instructors and trainers and their managers, in relation to pre-service education or continuous professional development (CPD). There is experimentation with models or measures for the professional development of teachers and trainers that focuses on fostering a quality culture and supporting training practitioners through networks or online resources. Research and trialling help to raise awareness amongst the teaching body of their collective needs and increase a sense of collegiality but fundamental matters of policy, governance and financing, as regards VET teachers, their qualifications and professional development, status and pay need to be addressed in order to bring about qualitative and sustainable improvement.

Quality assurance and the nurturing of a teaching/training-staff quality culture in VET provider institutions is the responsibility of the manager/principal[34]. Managers/principals lead the development, implementation and review of internal quality assurance measures at institutional level and ensure

[34] The manager/principal is responsible for supporting and strengthening a wider institutional quality culture with measures for the engagement and competence development in quality improvement of all internal and external stakeholders, from learners and auxiliary staff to parents and board members.

their inter-connectedness with external quality assurance measures. There is limited information in available reports regarding the knowledge, know-how and competences, related to quality assurance in VET, of managers/principals or of their development in this field.

VET provision

In centralized systems, the State sets and enforces standards across providers, at least those in receipt of public funds. Such systems, which are common in partner countries, have well established measures, processes and procedures related to standards setting and enforcement. Regulations including those related to teacher recruitment, curricula, textbooks etc. and ensuring that they are adhered to through, inter alia, inspection, audits, external examinations, contribute to maintaining national standards.

A core and common challenge for partner countries is to ensure that private providers, operating with private funding including student fees, employer funds and levies, donor funding etc., comply with national standards, e.g., in relation to nationally recognised qualifications and/or consumer protection. Pilot action tends to focus on the latter rather than quality assurance reform in core, public-funded provision. In this case, the influence of the Bologna Process comes to the fore.

In partner countries, quality assurance reform tends to focus on implementing formal procedures for licensing or accrediting (mostly private) VET providers, which can include pilot action to test external monitoring and evaluation measures. There is some 'spill over' into the public system with an increase in piloting school development processes and management competence building, to include quality assurance matters, such as, implementing institutional self-assessment processes. Other pilot actions include addressing quality assurance developments related to curriculum design and the competence-based approach, work-based learning and learner guidance and assessment.

Whilst acknowledging the value of pilot actions, often insufficient attention is given to their coherence with existing systemic measures or their mainstreaming potential and, at worst, these actions can exacerbate fragmentation of the system. Accreditation agencies and processes, set up in the context of a pilot project may not be sustainable after the piloting ends. Procedures for accrediting providers tend to be focused on inputs and are less concerned with monitoring and evaluating provider performance in a long-term perspective due to the short-term strategies of pilots. There is a danger of a widening gap between quality assurance measures for public funded providers and those for private providers with implications for standards and progression. It is difficult for *ad hoc*, small-scale pilots to impact at policy level in centralised systems.

Data

Data generation and utilisation is a key quality assurance measure. There is widespread recognition across partner countries that current approaches and methods for collecting, analysing and using demand/supply information to support VET quality improvement are deficient. In many partner countries, initiatives are / have been piloted with the aim of setting up integrated Labour Market Information (LMI) systems, testing LMI systems and testing methodologies for skills identification, matching and anticipation. On the supply side, for the most part, only basic data are systematically collected and only a few countries have developed / piloted an integrated education information management system. Testing processes and/or instruments for longitudinal / tracer studies is at an early stage in only a few countries. Research capabilities in VET are weak in many countries, Partner countries are however, increasingly engaging in comparative research supported by international organisations.

On the positive side, partner countries are gaining access to models and materials and building capacities to manage information more effectively. However, imported systems, methods, instruments are often not sustainable after piloting. The depth and breadth of expertise required for data collection,

analyses, usage and update tends to be vastly under-estimated. Quality assurance indicators for VET often do not exist or are not used for data collection.

KEY MESSAGE

What are the successes and challenges of VET quality assurance reform in partner countries?

Policy challenges, in pursuit of good VET, are commonly faced and strategy planning for reforms in quality assurance are underway.

No 'one-size-fits-all' solution for quality assurance reform can be applied successfully across all partner countries.

European frameworks for quality assurance play an important role in piloting for reform.

Good examples of policy and practice for the reform of quality assurance in VET exist in all partner countries. At the same time, countries face similar obstacles to progress, such as developing competences, mainstreaming successful innovative measures and ensuring effective monitoring and evaluation.

There are good foundations for enhanced cooperation across partner countries with the aims of mutual trust and development.

5. THE ETF POSITION ON QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VET

The ETF position on quality assurance offers an approach that is generic and non-prescriptive and set in a loose framework of common principles, criteria and methods that can serve as a reference to support reform debates. The **information and analyses in the previous four chapters underpin the ETF position** summarised in this chapter under the following headings: principles, approach and actions.

5.1 ETF principles

The ETF aims to guide quality assurance reform in VET policies

The ETF defines quality assurance as the composite measures established to verify that processes and procedures are in place, which, when effective, ensure the quality and quality improvement of VET. ETF aims to guide quality assurance in VET policies and approaches so that they:

- are fit for purpose and context with emphasis on relevance and cost-effectiveness;
- acknowledge that quality assurance is a dependent variable (on context and other VET policy themes);
- address VET inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes;
- apply the quality cycle: plan, implement, monitor and evaluate, review and renew;
- make visible strengths, weaknesses and improvement successes;
- promote quality improvement through a pervasive quality culture;
- take into account internationally accepted quality assurance concepts and European policies and models.

The common needs of partner countries steer the ETF position on quality assurance. The ETF mission and mandate guides its approach to promoting its position. Over the past decade, the ETF has supported a range of projects that address quality assurance in VET. The ETF supports quality assurance in VET development through the Torino Process and related actions.

The ETF promotes quality assurance that aims to ensure good VET

The ETF promotes quality assurance policy and approaches that aim to ensure VET:

- responds to labour market needs;
- leads to nationally, or even internationally, recognised qualifications or credentials;
- provides access to decent jobs and sustainable employment;
- is inclusive and accessible, i.e. all citizens have access to VET, which fosters capabilities that enable progression to further learning.

Key objectives are to control adherence to national standards that safeguard the reliability of VET qualifications, to control the effective and efficient usage of public funding and to support continuous quality improvement. Achieving consistent application of standards relies on regulation and binding guidelines and trust in the competence and experience of the actors involved and their autonomy.

The ETF promotes quality assurance that is systemic

The ETF addresses quality assurance in the first instance at VET system level. To ensure system-wide application, ETF advocates that quality assurance policy is enshrined in VET legislation / binding regulation.

The ETF promotes quality assurance in VET policy that is comprehensive. As set out in Chapter 2, the ETF is concerned with the key and interdependent **areas** of: policy and governance; qualifications standards, including those of teachers and trainers; provision; assessment, validation and certification, and demand/supply data and its effective usage.

The ETF proposes **principles** for quality assurance summed up under the headings of leadership, stakeholder engagement and coordination, relevance, effectiveness and efficiency and clarity and coherence. ETF advocates the **criteria** for quality assurance that need to be met in relation to the key areas. The ETF suggests measures that help to ensure quality standards are met (see Section 2.3).

The ETF promotes the use of **indicators** to facilitate the measurement and comparison of performance (see Section 2.3).

The ETF supports the nurturing of a **culture of quality** ensuring that quality assurance leads to quality improvement (see Section 2.4).

VET quality assurance mechanisms extend from individual-level (self-assessment) through the organizational-level (internal assessment and external verification) to societal level (evaluation of institutions, programmes, reforms). ETF supports quality assurance policies characterised by:

- effective leadership and a vision of quality VET;
- evidence-based planning; interconnected strategies;
- multi-level governance and multi-stakeholder engagement;
- competent personnel and responsible institutions and
- adequate resources.

The ETF believes that international benchmarking can help to set goals for higher levels of quality.

The ETF approach comprises core, universally recognised quality assurance features that include the application of the quality cycle, mutually supportive external - internal provision evaluation and competence development at all levels.

The ETF takes a systematic approach to quality assurance

The ETF takes a systematic approach to quality assurance. ETF considers that **a quality assurance system** comprises a policy and approach and a framework and methodology.

- A quality assurance **policy**, generally enshrined in legislation or binding rules/regulations, provides the rudiments including aims, **approach** (describing the way of dealing with quality assurance), governance and management and accountability arrangements.
- A quality assurance **framework** that gives an orientation, rather than acting as a strait jacket, and provides structure and direction on a preferred way of dealing with quality assurance. A flexible framework enables customization or adaptation to changing conditions and leaves room for different practices and tools to be included.

- A quality assurance **methodology** establishes the processes and procedures to be followed, and instruments to be used, in order to produce results. The use of indicators helps to validate results and determine how to make improvements. A methodology is a well thought out, definite and repeatable approach.

In summary, processes and procedures can be developed in the context of a methodology, which can be applied in accordance with a framework that is consistent with the chosen approach set out in VET quality assurance policy.

The ETF supports quality assurance that has a European/international perspective

The ETF bases its quality assurance approach on European/international research, policy and practice, both at supra-national and national levels. In keeping with its mandate, the ETF makes best use of European policies and instruments to underpin its advisory and capacity building services in partner countries.

EU VET quality assurance policy currently focused on the implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF), and European Higher Education quality assurance policy and practice, largely developed and sustained in the context of the Bologna Process inspire the ETF approach. ETF adopts the methodology for quality development based on the ubiquitous Deming quality cycle intrinsic to the EQARF[35] and promotes the guidance and tools, related to the EQARF 'toolbox' of indicators, principles, criteria and indicative descriptors, developed by the EQAVET network[36]. The ETF contributes to EQARF/EQAVET developments through representation on the EU level Steering Committee.

Given the prominence of bi-lateral cooperation between individual EU Member States and partner countries, the ETF takes account of quality assurance approaches in the former by keeping abreast of developments. ETF references its activities in the field of quality assurance to international organisations operating in the VET sector.

KEY MESSAGE

What is the scope of the ETF approach to VET quality assurance?

The ETF aims to guide quality assurance policies and practices towards the goal of improving VET. The ETF advocates a systemic and systematic approach to VET quality assurance that comprises policy, a framework and a quality cycle methodology comprising actions and indicators and aims for quality culture development. The approach, based on key principles focuses on:

- governance,
- qualification standards, including those of teachers and trainers,
- provision,
- assessment and certification,
- demand/supply data and knowledge creation.

The ETF approach to quality assurance has a European/international perspective and makes best use of the EQARF and the EQAVET network.

[35] The EQARF does not prescribe a particular quality assurance system or approach, but provides common principles, quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators that may help in assessing and improving existing systems and provision of VET.

[36] The EQAVET network www.eqavet.eu/gns/home.aspx

5.2 The ETF approach – promoting quality assurance in VET

The ETF approach to promoting quality assurance in VET is guided by its corporate mission and mandate and steered by the common needs of partner countries. ETF policies and practices strive to support the continual improvement of VET system quality in its partner countries. The Torino Process facilitates the monitoring of VET quality in terms of the efficiency of VET systems and arrangements[37].

In addition to the overall approach to VET quality development that permeates its work, the ETF supports specific initiatives to enhance VET quality assurance at policy/systemic and provider levels in partner countries. ETF supports partner countries to reflect on and prepare for a shift towards strengthened multi-actor and multi-level VET governance and contingent quality management matters.

The ETF supports policy-makers to improve the governance of VET quality assurance by facilitating their engagement in processes for self-assessment and cross-country benchmarking and for reform identification and planning. ETF supports stakeholders from partner countries to analyse the relevance and applicability of European policy for national quality assurance development in VET and customises instruments, as appropriate, to meet their needs.

Three core principles underpin the ETF approach when promoting quality assurance in VET, they are as follows:

1. Comply with needs as determined by national level VET policy- and decision-makers

Decision-making related to quality assurance policy for VET systems is entirely a matter for national level policy makers and other relevant national stakeholders. Effective quality assurance policy needs a clear vision shared by the main national stakeholders, good governance and strong, strategic leadership to develop and guide necessary reform. National needs steer the ETF actions on VET quality assurance and national stakeholders are in the driver's seat.

2. Focus on the formal VET system but aim to be relevant for all VET

The ETF focuses primarily on public-funded VET provision within the formal education and training system leading to nationally recognised VET qualifications. The rationale for this is the view that an effective quality assurance approach at the core of the VET system provides a framework, which, when underpinned by clear principles, criteria and indicators and accompanied by 'doable' processes and procedures, may be adapted for application in other VET arrangements. Within this context, the ETF is concerned with VET quality at system and provider levels, with the quality of qualifications and provision and with the quality of governance and management. Procedures and processes should apply equally to different parts of the system, including state/market, initial/continuing provision.

3. Build on existing VET quality assurance policy and measures in partner countries

The ETF position is based on the assumption that quality assurance measures exist in all formal VET systems. Governments, which devolve any degree of responsibility for learning to institutions that are publicly funded, establish mechanisms of 'checks and balances' that serve as quality assurance measures, addressing such matters as: qualifications requirements for personnel; inspection of teaching and learning; standards for qualifications, curriculum and examination of learning outcomes; data collection and budgetary audits. Thus, the point of departure for the ETF position is the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of existing measures and what improvements should and could be made. The secondary consideration is to identify and address the need for innovation in VET

[37] 'Arrangement' refers to VET provision outside a country's formal system that might include: in-company training of workers, 'active labour market' VET measures for the unemployed, non-formal and informal vocationally orientated education, e.g. community-based VET and VET for individuals with 'special' needs.

quality assurance. The emphasis is on a step-by-step renewal of approaches and measures for improvement rather than radical transformation.

KEY MESSAGE

How is the ETF supporting quality assurance developments in partner countries?

ETF mission and mandate guide its approach to promoting its position on VET quality assurance. The common needs of partner countries steer the ETF position on quality assurance. The ETF supports reform needs, as determined by national level VET decision-makers.

The ETF focuses its support for quality assurance development on the formal VET system but aims to be relevant for all VET.

The ETF approach is evolutionary rather than revolutionary and builds on existing VET quality assurance policy and measures in partner countries.

The ETF creates cooperation contexts for inductive learning, the sharing of experience / expertise and joint ventures for the development of VET quality assurance.

5.3 ETF actions – supporting the reform of quality assurance in VET systems

The ETF supports partner countries to develop their own visions for VET quality assurance, in accordance with the development of their VET systems and derived from their own existing policies and practices. In the first instance, quality assurance in VET is a governance matter. The Torino Process is the ideal context for action supporting policy and governance related reforms in the field of quality assurance in VET. Actions to support systemic reform include awareness raising, information dissemination, policy advice, external policy learning activities, competence development measures and pilot projects. The ETF also sponsors pilot projects to support competence development at provider level. Within this context, the ETF provides guidance to support partner countries in relation to:

Launching a national debate on quality assurance in VET on the following issues:

- Who/what is driving the need for quality assurance reform in VET?
- What quality assurance reforms are priorities for VET effectiveness/efficiency?
- How to approach VET quality assurance reform in a policy perspective and ensure quality assurance is embedded holistically in the system at all phases of the policy cycle?
- Which stakeholders need to be engaged in VET quality assurance with what roles and responsibilities and how, including how to address coordination challenges?
- How to achieve correlation between quality assurance on system and provider levels and a balance between flexibility and complexity?
- How to foster a quality culture that goes beyond quality control?
- What demand/supply data are needed for evidence-based policy and how to get, analyse and use them to inform policy/provision development?

Reviewing the current VET quality assurance system in terms of its relevance and effectiveness, by:

- Mapping[38] the quality assurance in VET system: the current policy and approach, framework and methodology, taking account of: governance and management; evidence: statistics and research; VET qualifications standards; teacher/trainer qualifications standards; teacher/trainer development; provision standards and the European/international dimension.
- Evaluating the quality assurance in VET system by means of: research, studies, surveys and peer reviews[39].

Analysing the need for reform in terms of deficits and in response to current needs and challenges by:

- Organising consultations with key stakeholders to gauge the effectiveness/inadequacies of the current quality assurance system and gaining support for agreed reform needs.
- Setting up multi-actor expert groups to review current QA approaches and measures in relation to new needs as a consequence of other VET reforms planned (e.g. for: qualifications and qualifications systems' reform; curriculum, programme, assessment reform; VET reform related to the learning outcomes-based approach; VET programme reform e.g. integrating work-based learning etc.) and to make recommendations for reform.

Assessing and making good use of relevant models, such as the EQARF, to inform the quality assurance in VET reform process by:

- Appraising other quality assurance in VET systems by means of: research, studies, surveys, study visits, peer learning activities and peer reviews.
- Applying the outcomes of policy learning to the process of adapting external models for the national context or adapting the national system for closer alignment with suitable external models.
- Testing all components of the quality assurance in VET system undergoing reform, for suitability, applicability and efficacy taking account of competence development and systemic implementation support needs and cost implications.

Supporting the process for VET quality assurance reform, with emphasis on the measures to verify that:

- The reform strategy is based on reliable knowledge sources and implementable.
- Governance arrangements are suitable.
- Relevant stakeholders are engaged appropriately.
- The *modus operandi* for dialogue and cooperation is conducive.
- Capacities for the operationalization of the strategy throughout the policy cycle are available.

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[38] The ETF has developed an interactive template for mapping VET quality assurance.

[39] ETF processes and instruments include the Torino Process reviews, reporting, evaluation processes; networking, capacity-building activities; peer learning, peer review activities; dedicated projects and their outcomes: studies, publications; access to EU expertise, knowledge to support PC self-assessment and actions that support comparative analyses.

- The monitoring and evaluation of progress is formative and supports the development of a quality culture.
- Review is regular and thorough and results in revision, as necessary.

TEN KEY FACTORS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VET REFORM

Vision: Examine the drivers of quality assurance reform in relation to the present context and determine what reform is desirable and achievable in the short- medium- long- term. Consider quality assurance as the means to manage the assessment and improvement of VET system quality systematically. Set goals for holistic reform, bearing in mind that quality assurance is a matter of good governance, effective policy, a pervasive quality culture and having in place, a supportive framework, a workable methodology and efficient measurement tools.

Leadership: Drive the development process for VET system quality assurance through policy, with state led/steered/delegated authorities taking the lead.

Partnership: Engage aptly stakeholders from the worlds of work, civil society, other education sectors, information and guidance services and research, as partners in VET quality assurance development, at the different levels and with an appropriate balance between regulation and autonomy.

Learn: Be open to European/international cooperation to gain exposure to new and successful practice that can help to speed up planning for VET quality assurance reform.

Plan: Thoroughly evaluate the current quality assurance in VET policy, approach and system. Plan to maintain/further develop what works well and discard what does not. Research and gather ideas on how the quality assurance in VET policy, approach and system might be improved – consult/discuss widely new ideas, retain ideas that are most likely to work - discard those ideas that are unlikely to work in the present circumstances.

Strategy: Make quality assurance explicit in VET policy design and address both system and provision in a complementary way. Base VET quality assurance policy on reliable evidence, with regard to judgements on the performance of VET in relation to its purpose and functions. Apply the revolving quality cycle to policy design: strategic planning of quality assurance measures, for all inter-dependent parts of the VET system/provision to include their implementation, continuous monitoring and evaluation with a view to revision as necessary.

Trial: Test quality assurance policy and system reforms extensively and rigorously in strategic and coherent pilot actions and mainstream what proves to work well.

Improvement: Plan for effective feedback mechanisms to ensure that quality assurance policy and system reforms implemented are effective, or to flag aspects that need further review and revision.

Visibility: Make public quality assurance policy, measures and evaluation results for transparency and accountability purposes.

Mindset: Nurture VET quality cultures and develop capabilities for quality assurance at all levels (policy, system, provision). Teachers/trainers and their managers require special attention.

CONCLUSIONS

ETF partner countries share the universal challenges brought about by technological advancement and the global spread of the market economy, requiring an upskilled, flexible and mobile workforce, leading to both, lifelong learning needs and expanded VET provision, which require new forms of quality assurance for VET systems. The introduction of national frameworks for qualifications underpinned by the 'learning outcomes approach' is also a key driver of VET quality assurance reform.

VET quality assurance may be understood as the composite measures established to verify that processes and procedures are in place, which, when effective, ensure the quality and quality improvement of VET. The measures relate to quality standards with underlying principles, criteria and indicators. The principles are: leadership; stakeholder engagement and coordination; relevance, effectiveness and efficiency; clarity and coherence. The key areas for quality assurance are policy and governance; qualifications standards, including for teachers and trainers; provision; assessment, validation, certification; data and knowledge creation. For these areas, criteria for effective quality assurance need to be defined and measures that ensure the criteria are met need to be established.

Quality assurance in VET models range from traditional school/college inspection and/or accreditation and audit processes and procedures to quality assurance models with origins in industry and for which, for example, ISO, TQM, EFQM provide the instruments. Modern quality assurance in VET is based on the plan, do, check, review quality cycle that nurtures quality cultures in institutions and quality development. The transparency and comprehensibility of quality assurance in VET, across sectors, regions, countries and continents, is increasing in importance and supported by frameworks that include the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF).

The most dominant quality assurance approach, at VET system level, across ETF partner countries, is the traditional, centralised and prescriptive one with an emphasis on inspection. Quality assurance reform tends to be driven by pilot actions often focussed on implementing formal procedures for licensing or accrediting (mostly private) VET providers. Whilst there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution for quality assurance reform that can be applied successfully across all partner countries in response to their respective reform needs, policy challenges, in pursuit of good VET, are commonly faced and strategy planning for related reforms in quality assurance are underway.

The ETF promotes systemic quality assurance reform that aims to improve VET. The conceptual framework underpinning the ETF approach has a European/international perspective, is based on principles, focuses on the afore-mentioned five areas, comprises sample measures and indicators and aims to support the development of a quality culture. The ETF also promotes a systematic approach.

The ETF approach is to support partner countries to build on existing VET quality assurance policy and measures with the aim of improving them. Although evolutionary rather than revolutionary, the ETF approach is to raise awareness of the need for more radical quality assurance reform in response to wider VET reform and to help expose partner countries to good practice and guidance to inform their developments.

The ETF approach comprises actions that include: stimulating debate on quality assurance in VET; reviewing the current VET quality assurance system in terms of its relevance and effectiveness; analysing the need for reform in terms of deficits and in response to current needs and challenges; assessing and making good use of relevant models, such as the EQARF and supporting the process for VET quality assurance reform.

ANNEXES

Annex 1. The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework – Indicators

Indicator	Type	Purpose of the policy
Overarching indicators for quality assurance		
1. Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers: (a) share of VET providers applying internal quality assurance systems defined by law/at own initiative; (b) share of accredited VET providers.	Context/ Input indicator	Promote a quality improvement culture at VET-provider level. Increase the transparency of quality of training. Improve mutual trust on training provision.
2. Investment in training of teachers and trainers: (a) share of teachers and trainers participating in further training; (b) amount of funds invested.	Input/ Process indicator	Promote ownership of teachers and trainers in the process of quality development in VET. Improve the responsiveness of VET to changing demands of labour market. Increase individual learning capacity building. Improve learners' achievement.
Indicators supporting quality objectives for VET policies		
3. Participation rate in VET programmes: Number of participants in VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria.	Input/ Process/ Output indicator	Obtain basic information at VET-system and VET-provider levels on the attractiveness of VET. Target support to increase access to VET, including for disadvantaged groups.
4. Completion rate in VET programmes: Number of persons having successfully completed/abandoned VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria.	Process/ Output/ Outcome indicator	Obtain basic information on educational achievements and the quality of training processes. Calculate dropout rates compared to participation rate. Support successful completion as one of the main objectives for quality in VET. Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups.
5. Placement rate in VET programmes: (a) destination of VET learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria; (b) share of employed learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria.	Outcome indicator	Support employability. Improve responsiveness of VET to the changing demands in the labour market. Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups.

6. Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace: (a) information on occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training, according to type of training and individual criteria; (b) satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills/ competences.	Outcome indicator (mix of qualitative and quantitative data)	Increase employability. Improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market. Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups.
Context information		
7. Unemployment rate according to individual criteria	Context indicator	Background information for policy decision making at VET-system level.
8. Prevalence of vulnerable groups: (a) percentage of participants in VET classified as disadvantaged groups (in a defined region or catchment area) according to age and gender; (b) success rate of disadvantaged groups according to age and gender.	Context indicator	Background information for policy decision making at VET-system level. Support access to VET for disadvantaged groups. Support adapted training provision for disadvantaged groups.
9. Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market: (a) information on mechanisms set up to identify changing demands at different levels; (b) evidence of their effectiveness.	Context/ Input indicator (qualitative data)	Improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market. Support employability.
10. Schemes used to promote better access to VET: (a) information on existing schemes at different levels; (b) evidence of their effectiveness.	Process indicator (qualitative data)	Promote access to VET, including for disadvantaged groups. Support adapted training provision.

Annex 2. Common principles for quality assurance in higher education and VET in the EQF context

Recommendation (2008/C 111/01) – European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (Annex III)

When implementing the EQF, quality assurance, which is necessary to ensure accountability and the improvement of higher education and VET, should be carried out in accordance with the following principles:

1. Quality assurance policies and procedures should underpin all levels of the EQF.
2. Quality assurance should be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions.
3. Quality assurance should include regular evaluation of institutions, their programmes or their quality assurance systems by external monitoring bodies or agencies.
4. External monitoring bodies or agencies carrying out quality assurance should be subject to regular review.
5. Quality assurance should include context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes.
6. Quality assurance systems should include the following elements:
    - clear and measurable objectives and standards, guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement;
    - appropriate resources;
    - consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review;
    - feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement;
    - widely accessible evaluation results.
7. Quality assurance initiatives at international, national and regional level should be coordinated in order to ensure overview, coherence, synergy and system-wide analysis.
8. Quality assurance should be a cooperative process across education and training levels and systems, involving all relevant stakeholders, within Member States and across the Community.
9. Quality assurance orientations at Community level may provide reference points for evaluations and peer learning.

GLOSSARY

These definitions have been extracted from different sources, including ETF sources; Cedefop (2011) Glossary: Quality in Education and Training (www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4106); Cedefop (2003) Glossary; EQAVET (www.eqavet.eu/qa/gns/glossary.aspx); Harvey, L., 2004–12, Analytic Quality Glossary, Quality Research International (www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/).

Terms and definitions related to quality assurance	
Quality	Quality is: The totality of characteristics of an entity that bear on its ability to satisfy stated and implied needs. *Source:* ISO 8402 *or* The degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfils requirements. *Source:* ISO 9000 – Quality management systems – fundamentals and vocabulary. *or* The consistent conformance of a product or service to a given set of standards or expectations. *Source:* ISO-9000 *or* The sum of features and properties/characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. *Source:* USEPA, Quality Assurance Division, Washington DC, Glossary of quality assurance terms and related acronyms www.hanford.gov/dqo/glossaries/Glossary_of_Quality_Assurance_Terms1.pdf
Quality approach	The term 'approach' is often used as an overall term, instead of 'system', which is used in the strict sense. So the term 'approach' is used to comprise both a very fixed and formalised real system and any set of more systematic behaviour meant to regulate and or develop the performance quality of a VET system. *Source:* TWG-QA 2002-2004
Quality assurance	Quality assurance is about ensuring that there are mechanisms, procedures and processes in place to ensure that the desired quality, however defined and measured, is delivered. *Source:* 'Defining' quality for assessment and evaluation in higher education. *Source:* L. Harvey and D. Green (1993) *or* All the planned and systematic activities implemented within the quality system, and demonstrated as needed, to provide adequate confidence that an entity will fulfil requirements for quality. *Source:* ISO 8402 *or* Part of quality management focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled. *Source:* ISO 9000 – Quality management systems - Fundamentals and vocabulary *or* An integrated system of activities involving planning, quality control, quality assessment, reporting and quality improvement to ensure that a product or service meets defined standards of quality with a stated level of confidence. *Source:* USEPA, Quality Assurance Division, Washington DC, Glossary of quality assurance terms and related acronyms. www.hanford.gov/dqo/glossaries/Glossary_of_Quality_Assurance_Terms1.pdf or

	Quality assurance is an organisation's guarantee that the product or service it offers meets the accepted quality standards. It is achieved by identifying what 'quality' means in context; specifying methods by which its presence can be ensured; and specifying ways in which it can be measured to ensure conformance. According to the ISO, quality assurance is a part of quality management, providing confidence that quality requirements (need or expectation that is stated, generally implied or obligatory) will be fulfilled. *Source:* ESS Quality Glossary 2010, Developed by Unit B1 'Quality; Classifications', Eurostat, 2010. http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/pls/portal/!PORTAL.wwpob_page.show?_docname=2344300.PDF *or* Processes and procedures for ensuring that qualifications, assessment and programme delivery meet certain standards. *Source:* An Introductory Guide to National Qualifications Frameworks: Conceptual and Practical Issues for Policy Makers. Tuck, R., Skills and Employability Department. International Labour Office (ILO), 2007.eLabour Office (ILO). www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/2007/107B09_57_engl.pdf *or* Quality assurance encompasses any activity that is concerned with assessing and improving the merit or the worth of an intervention in the field of VET or its compliance with given standards. *Source:* Adapted from Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management. OECD, Paris, 2010. www.oecd.org/dataoecd/29/21/2754804.pdf *or* Quality assurance relates to the achievement of educational program standards established by institutions, professional organizations, government, and/or standard-setting bodies established by government. Quality assurance mechanisms are the processes by which the achievement of these standards is measured. *Source:* Quality Assurance Practices for Postsecondary Institutions in Canada, Fact sheet No 5. www.cicic.ca/510/fact-sheet-no-5.canada#top *or* Measures established to verify that processes and procedures are in place, which aim to ensure the quality and quality improvement of VET. These measures often have a regulatory or legislative underpinning and status and usually are intended to influence the aforementioned processes and procedures; the dividing line between the two can be fine. The measures relate to quality standards with underlying principles, criteria and indicators. This working definition is based on various sources and the author's own views.
Quality assurance education and training	Activities involving planning, implementation, evaluation, reporting, and quality improvement, implemented to ensure that education and training (content of programmes, curricula, assessment and validation of learning outcomes etc.) meet the quality requirements expected by stakeholders. *Source:* Cedefop (2011) Glossary – Quality in Education and Training Luxembourg. Publications Office of the European Union, 2011. www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4096_en.pdf
Quality audit	Systematic and independent examination to determine whether quality activities and related results comply with planned arrangements and whether these arrangements are implemented effectively and are suitable to achieve the quality objectives. *Source:* ISO 8402

Quality benchmark	A benchmark is a point of reference against which something may be measured. *Source:* www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/ *or* The UNESCO definition is: A standard, a reference point, or a criterion against which the quality of something can be measured, judged, and evaluated, and against which outcomes of a specified activity can be measured. The term, benchmark, means a measure of best practice performance. The existence of a benchmark is one necessary step in the overall process of benchmarking. (Vlăsceanu, et al., 2007). *Source:* www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/ *or* A recognised standard that forms the basis for comparison. In the quality improvement lexicon, a benchmark is a 'best in class' achievement. This achievement then becomes the reference point or recognized standard of excellence against which similar processes are measured. *Source:* Content-oriented guidelines. Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX), 2009. http://sdmx.org/ *or* Reference point or standard against which performance or achievements can be assessed. A benchmark refers to the performance that has been achieved in the recent past by other comparable organizations, or what can be reasonably inferred to have been achieved in the circumstances. *Source:* Glossary of key terms in evaluation and results based management. Development Co -operation Directorate, OECD Publications, Paris, 2002. www.oecd.org/dataoecd/29/21/2754804.pdf *or* Anything taken or used as a point of reference or comparison; something that serves as a standard by which others may be served; anything or something that is comparatively measurable. *Source:* Benchmarking for best practice: continuous learning through sustainable innovation, M. Zairi, 1998, Butterworth-Heinemann. *or* Standards by which the performance of an intervention can be assessed in a non-arbitrary fashion. An obvious way of deriving benchmarks would be to examine the intervention's objectives as expressed by expected outputs, results and outcomes. Ideally, benchmarks should allow us to compare the performance of an intervention with that of other policy instruments in the same field of action or in a related one. *Source:* www.evaluation.org.uk/resources/glossary.aspx

Quality criteria	A distinctive mark (or characteristic) used to assess the quality of a VET-system or the quality of the VET-activities of an organisation. Quality criteria should be supplied with one or several indicators depending on the complexity of the relevant criteria. *Source:* TWG-QA 2002-2004 *or* The specification of elements against which a judgment is made. In the higher education context, they are specifications of the quality of inputs, processes or outputs and/or standards (academic, competence, service or organisational) against which provision or performance can be evaluated. More specifically, in a learning context, they may be the articulation of the judgements of student learning against which students are (summatively) assessed. Traditionally, many quality and standards criteria were implicit and neither codified nor communicated directly. Recent developments have put more emphasis on transparency of quality and standards criteria. *Source:* www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/ *or* The UNESCO definition: Yardsticks/checkpoints/benchmarks by which the attainment of certain objectives and/or standards can be examined. Criteria describe, in a certain degree of detail, the characteristics of the requirements and conditions to be met [in order to meet a standard] and therefore provide the (quantitative and/or qualitative) basis on which an evaluative conclusion is drawn. (Vlăsceanu, et al., 2004, p. 32). They differentiate this from: Performance Criteria: Yardsticks/checkpoints/benchmarks that are used to judge the attainment of performance standards. As qualities, characteristics, or dimensions of a standard for student performance, they indicate how well students meet expectations of what they should know and be able to do, as expressed by varying gradients of success by (scoring) rubrics or by grades. (Vlăsceanu, et al., 2004, pp. 32–33). *Source:* www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/
Quality control	Quality control is a mechanism for ensuring that an output (product or service) conforms to a predetermined specification. *Source:* www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/
Quality culture	Quality culture is a set of group values that guide how improvements are made to everyday working practices and consequent outputs. *Source:* www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/ *or* Quality culture refers to an organisational culture that intends to enhance quality permanently and is characterised by two distinct elements: on the one hand, a cultural/psychological element of shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality and, on the other hand, a structural/managerial element with defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordinating individual efforts. *Source:* European University Association: Examining Quality Culture: Part 1 – Quality Assurance Processes in Higher Education Institutions, Brussels 2010.
Quality data	Extent to which data adhere to the six dimensions of qualities – which are accuracy, reliability, completeness, precision, timeliness and integrity. *Source:* Making monitoring and evaluation systems work: a capacity development tool kit. Marelize Görgens and Jody Zall Kusek, World Bank, Washington, DC, 2009 www.eqavet.eu/qa/gns/glossary/d/data-quality.aspx

Quality descriptor	A word or phrase used as a label to describe or classify; a term used to identify or locate a file or specific data. *Source:* Webster's New World College Dictionary. Wiley Publ. Inc., Cleveland, Ohio, 2010 www.yourdictionary.com/dictionary-definitions/ *or* Descriptors are phrases that aid in defining and outlining the expected behaviour for a particular criterion. The descriptors are not an all-inclusive listing of behaviours that might be associated with a criterion. *Source:* Guidelines for performance-based teacher evaluation, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 1999. http://dese.mo.gov/divteachqual/leadership/profdev/PBTE.pdf
Quality indicator	Statistical indicators are any quantitative data that provide evidence about the quality or standard of higher education. *or* An indicator is something that points to, measures or otherwise provides a summary overview of a specific concept. A set of indicators that are combined is referred to as an index. www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/ *or* Formally recognised figures or ratios, which are used as yardsticks to judge and assess quality performance. *Source:* Cedefop (1996) *or* A characteristic or an attribute, which can be measured to assess a public intervention. This may relate to the measurement of an objective to be met, a resource mobilised, an effect obtained, a gauge of quality or a context variable. Indicators can be either quantitative or qualitative. However, qualitative indicators should only be used under certain conditions; if, for example, quantification is not (yet) possible for information that is urgently needed. Indicators produce information with a view to helping actors in public interventions to communicate, negotiate or make decisions. Comments: Indicators can be used for a number of different aims and requirements. These include political planning, setting standards, the monitoring and reviewing of progress achieved in a certain sector, documentation, statistical comparison, as a basis for benchmarking processes, promotion of competition or in order to stimulate (quite general and unspecific) learning effects. *Source:* TWG-QA 2002-2004
Quality inspection	Inspection is the direct, independent observation and evaluation of activities and resources by a trained professional. Inspection differs from peer review in many ways. First, inspectors tend to be full-time occupations (although sometimes seconded). Second, inspectors usually have far more training in and experience of evaluation than peers. Third, inspection visits are more fluid and less predetermined than peer group visits. Fourth, inspection tends to involve more direct observation of practice than most peer reviews. Fifth, inspection tends to involve more two-way dialogue and sharing of practice than peer review events. *Source:* www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/

Quality management	All activities of management that determine the quality policy, objectives and responsibilities, and implement them by means of a quality plan, quality control, and quality assurance within a quality system. *Source:* ISO 8402 *or* Coordinated activities to direct and control an organisation with regard to quality. *Source:* ISO 9000 - Quality management systems - Fundamentals and vocabulary *or* The process, supported by policies and systems, used by an (educational) institution to maintain and enhance the quality of education experienced by its students and of the research undertaken by its staff. *Source:* www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/
Quality management approach	Any integrated set of policies, procedures, rules, criteria, tools and verification instruments and mechanisms that together insure and enhance the quality provided by any VET institution. Comment: The term 'approach' is used as an overall term because the term 'system' is often used in a narrower sense. The term 'approach' covers both very fixed and formalised real systems and any sets of more systematic behaviour meant to regulate and/or to develop the quality performance of a VET system. *Source:* TWG-QA 2002-2004
Quality standards	Norms, expectations or specifications that provide the basis for the assurance of quality. *Source:* www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/ *or* Technical specifications, which are measurable and have been drawn up by consensus and approved by an organisation recognised at regional, national or international levels. The purpose of quality standards is optimisation of input and/or output of learning Cedefop, 2003. *Source:* Cedefop (2011) Glossary – Quality in Education and Training Luxembourg. Publications Office of the European Union, 2011. www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/4096_en.pdf
Quality system	A quality system is a set of integrated policies and practices that structure the management, implementation and adaptation of quality assurance processes. (Explanatory context: A quality system usually refers to the management of quality assurance rather than to a system for addressing the improvement or enhancement of quality itself.) *Source:* www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/qualitysystem.htm

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Selected EQAVET publications (www.eqavet.eu)

A range of documents related to the development and implementation of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET are available on the EQAVET website (including reports of seminar proceedings and the outcomes of peer learning activities, studies and surveys) – a selection follows:

- Study on the indicators proposed in the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET.
- Report on social partners and quality development in VET.
- Report on quality assurance procedures for student assessment.
- Report on quality labels for VET.
- Report on quality assurance and the training of trainers.
- Quality assurance systems in work-based learning and assessment.
- Report on quality assurance procedures for work-based learning.
- Proposal for a structure and process for transnational peer reviews.
- Report on quality assurance procedures for the recognition of prior learning.
- Making initial vocational education and training (IVET) more attractive for learners.
- Joint working group on EQAVET and ECVET report.
- Joint Expert Seminar on QA in VET and Higher Education for improving their permeability.
- Information Gathering Exercise results of biennial surveys on QA in VET in the EU.

Useful weblinks

http://eur-lex.europa.eu

http://etf.europa.eu

www.eqavet.eu

www.efqm.org

www.cedefop.europa.eu

www.iso.org

Website: **www.etf.europa.eu**

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