QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN MONTENEGRO

**ETF Forum Member Institution:
Centre for Vocational Education and Training**

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**THE ETF FORUM FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 National context

With 13 812 square kilometres and 622 359 inhabitants, Montenegro is one of the smallest countries in the world; according to the Statistical Office of Montenegro (Monstat), it ranks 39th in Europe (156th worldwide) by area size and 43rd out of 51 (163rd worldwide) by population size. Economy-wise, Montenegro is classified by the World Bank as an upper middle-income country.

Montenegro is an open and service-oriented economy. The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita places the country among the poorest in Europe, at a comparable level to other Western Balkan countries. However, the GDP growth is remarkable, with 4.3% annual growth in 2017 and 4.9% in 2018. The service sector accounts for 60% of GDP (59.1% in 2017), while around one-sixth (15.9% in 2017) is generated by (energy-intensive) industry and only 6.8% by the agriculture sector – the rest being the informal sector.

1.2 Statistics

TABLE 1. POPULATION

	Size of population	Size of youth population (15–24, %)
2010	619 001	21.0
2014	621 521	19.7
2018	622 359	18.3

Source: Eurostat; ETF calculations based on Monstat and Eurostat data

TABLE 2. EMPLOYMENT

	Employment rate (15+, %)	Employment rate of young people (15–24, %)
2011	39.0	14.7
2014	43.2	18.8
2018	47.5	23.2

Source: Eurostat

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TABLE 3. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF ACTIVE POPULATION (% AGED 15+)

	Low	Medium	High
2010	9.8	69	21.2
2014	8.5	63.1	28.4
2018	9.6	62.6	27.7

Note: Low – International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 0–2; Medium – ISCED 3–4;
High – ISCED 5–8

Source: Eurostat

TABLE 4. PARTICIPATION IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET) (STUDENTS IN VOCATIONAL PROGRAMMES AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL UPPER SECONDARY STUDENTS)

	Upper secondary (ISCED 3) VET	Post upper secondary (ISCED 4) VET
2010	68.2	N/A
2012	68.0	N/A
2017	61.6	N/A

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

TABLE 5. SPENDING ON GENERAL EDUCATION AND VET

	Spending on ISCED 3–4 all education (including VET) as % of GDP	Spending on ISCED 3–4 VET only as % of GDP
2010	4.4	N/A
2014	4.8	N/A
2016	4.5	N/A

Source: Ministry of Finance

1.3   The VET system

Governance and management

The Ministry of Education is responsible for planning, implementing and improving education policy. The National Council for Education, the Higher Education Council, and the Qualifications Council provide support in developing and adopting education standards.

The VET Centre, a government research institution, is responsible for the development and improvement of the vocational and adult education system. It conducts external evaluation of VET providers/schools. The Chamber of Economy of Montenegro and Union of Employers represent employers in the design and delivery of education. They are both members of all key national bodies involved in skills development.

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Financing

Vocational schools are funded from the budget of Montenegro on an annual basis, taking into account the economic cost of enrolling pupils for a particular education programme, as well as the number of students, the coefficient of the programme group in which it is classified and other criteria typical for the education programme and certain area. In addition to state funds, institutions may, in accordance with the law, also be financed from tuition fees in private institutions, fees paid by parents, income from property (lease), funds from the sale of services and products, donations, sponsorships and legacies, and other sources.

Regulatory frameworks

The Montenegrin education system is governed by a set of laws: General Act on Education, Vocational Education Act, Adult Education, National Vocational Qualifications Act, National Qualifications Framework Act, the Act on Recognition of Foreign Educational Certificates and Harmonisation of Qualifications.

VET reforms in Montenegro are framed by the Vocational Education Development Strategy (2015–2020) and Action Plan, adopted in December 2016. The priority areas in VET for the period 2015–20 included ensuring high-quality and efficient VET provision, social integration, lifelong learning and mobility. The strategy implementation is guided by yearly action plans.

Main provider institution types

Current VET provision is predominantly state-led and school-based although schools are encouraged to develop dual education

During the academic year 2016/17, 277 students were enrolled in dual education involving around 100 companies. The total number of students reached 800 with the participation of 270 companies during the following academic year. Out of 193 VET students who attended second grade in 2018/19, 134 students continued their education through dual form in the third grade. Incentives for first and second grade students are provided by the Ministry of Education; subsidies for the third grade are paid by the employer.

Main provision/programme types

The VET system offers three different types of initial VET (IVET) programmes: lower VET (two years), secondary VET (three and four years) and post-secondary VET (two years, following secondary VET).

The lower VET programme starts after completion of nine years of primary education and it refers to ISCED 3, national qualifications framework (NQF) Level II. Graduates can either enter the labour market or access the next level of education after passing an additional exam.

Most three-year programmes (ISCED 3, NQF Level III) contain approximately 40–50% of practical learning and are offered in two forms: (i) the student acquires practical skills in school workshops and partially in companies; and (ii) through dual education, where the student acquires practical skills exclusively in companies. At the end of either form, the student has to take a final exam.

The majority of programmes offered in IVET are four-year programmes (ISCED 3), NQF Level IV. Students opting to continue education need to pass a vocational exam organised externally, and those planning to enter the labour market take a vocational exam organised by the school.

Post-secondary VET theoretically starts at age 18 or 19, upon completion of secondary vocational education, and it is equivalent to ISCED 4 (NQF Level V). This leads to the labour market, and there is no further academic progression.

Continuous VET is provided through the network of adult education providers, offering short- and medium-term training programmes for vocational qualifications as well as for key skills.

Main qualifications according to ISCED levels

Around 98 different VET programmes are provided in 37 vocational schools.

In academic year 2017/18, 1 797 students were enrolled in three-year programmes (14% of them in dual education) and 17 095 students in four-year programmes. There are currently no students in two-year programmes.

More than 67% of students in upper secondary education (ISCED Level 3) are enrolled in VET programmes.

2. QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

2.1 Overview

Quality assurance and improvement in VET is a legal obligation for all schools and it is, among other things, exercised via the processes of external and internal evaluation. Assessment of quality of education activity is carried out for the areas defined by secondary legislation. The areas in which quality is assessed, except for teaching and learning, are unique for all VET institutions up to university level. The assessment of quality is carried out for each school, grade and programme, based on indicators, developed from key areas.

2.2 General information on quality assurance at VET system level

The main legislation pertinent to quality assurance are the General Law on Education (2002), the Law on Vocational Education (2010), and the Law on Adult Education, in addition to a few acts of secondary legislation.

At the level of VET, it is the responsibility of the VET Centre to coordinate the development of all VET standards, including quality assurance ones.

2.3 Quality assurance related to key VET areas

Evidence – statistics, and research and development

The Montenegrin Education Information System (MEIS) is the ultimate point where all statistics related to pre-university education is collected, including all data about VET providers and VET students. As per 2019, a separate MEIS module is also collecting information about adult education providers and training offered and implemented.

A systematic labour market information system is lacking. Several institutions collect labour market data. Regular labour force surveys by Monstat provide updates by sectors/type of education. The Employment Agency does an annual employers' survey. Results are shared among relevant stakeholders. Sector commissions and the Department for Qualifications, within an Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance project, plan instruments to gather and analyse labour market data.

An overall management information system is lacking. Vocational schools process indicators related to student achievement and dropout numbers and monitor graduate destinations for at least 12 months. Data is collected on EU2020 benchmarks which are the following: adult participation in lifelong learning, low achievers in basic skills, tertiary level attainment, early leavers from education and training and early childhood education.

The Ministry of Education launched a pilot tracer study on IVET graduates in 2015 and is introducing related software.

Quality assurance and the qualifications cycle

A comprehensive legislative framework supports the qualifications cycle. This consists of the National Qualifications Framework Act, the Rulebook on Descriptors for Qualification Levels and Sub-levels, the Rulebook on Procedures for Developing Qualifications from Level I to Level V, and the Rulebook on Procedures for Developing Qualifications from Level VI to Level VIII, as well as a set of regulations in the field of education, including the National Vocational Qualifications Act.

While the overall process is coordinated by the VET Centre, it is governed by the multi-stakeholder Qualifications Council. This council is responsible for classifying existing qualifications on NQF, proposing qualifications development/improvement, adopting occupational and qualifications standards, adopting basic qualifications descriptions (including learning outcomes), and monitoring NQF development.

The council establishes sectoral commissions for all qualifications sectors. They are in charge of drafting qualifications' descriptions and making recommendations to the council on priority qualifications.

The process of setting qualifications standards involves the key stakeholders from the employment sector who take the lead on developing occupational standards, while qualification standards are designed by working groups composed of teachers from vocational schools. Finally, the Qualifications Council is the competent body to adopt the qualifications and decides on their inclusion in the NQF.

Quality assurance and VET provision/provider institutions

The Ministry of Education sets standards for licensing VET providers delivering state-approved programmes. Licensing is done by ministry-established licensing commissions.

Mandatory external evaluation of VET providers is carried out by the Bureau for Education and VET Centre advisors/supervisors at least once every four years. The evaluation process uses seven key indicators with 49 sub-indicators, some of which match European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) indicators 1A, 2A, 8A and 10B. As well as education personnel, the external evaluation process includes employer and higher education representatives and various experts. A follow-up evaluation report, with recommendations for quality improvement, is prepared and the school develops a four-year quality improvement plan that is submitted to the Educational

Inspection and the Ministry of Education. Over the four-year period, implementation of planned activities may be externally evaluated.

Internal evaluation is also mandatory for VET providers. Guidelines for the Organisation and Implementation of Internal Evaluation provide support. Each school has a Group for Quality composed of the school management, professional departments and selected teachers, and this group trains internal evaluators. Since 2011, vocational schools have been self-evaluating on indicators relating to school work, teaching, learning and student achievement. Based on the evaluation report, the VET provider submits a quality assurance action plan to relevant authorities. The report is submitted to the VET Centre and the Bureau for Educational Services and it is recommended to be uploaded on the school's website. Additionally it is presented during the meetings of the panel of teachers, school committee and board of parents. Evaluation is the basis for developing a school improvement work plan.

Quality assurance and VET teacher/trainer qualifications' standards and continuing professional development

Basic qualifications for VET teachers are prescribed by the legal framework and recently adopted national teacher competency standards. Most VET teachers did not undergo pedagogic training before they were hired, and formal training of in-company trainers is rare. Commonly accepted specific requirements for becoming a trainer/mentor in a company are not widespread, and there is no strategy in place for initial and continuing professional development of instructors/trainers or mentors in enterprises.

To work in a vocational school, teachers/directors must hold a teaching licence, issued when they pass a professional examination. New teachers who do not hold a pedagogic qualification undertake a one-year internship, after which they take the professional examination.

Licensing and relicensing of teachers is done by the commission of the Bureau for Educational Services (for general subject teachers) and VET Centre (for VET teachers). The conditions, method and procedure for acquiring, issuing and renewing the licences of teachers, directors and directors' assistants of the institutions and the content and form of the licences are prescribed by the Ministry of Education in a Rulebook.

The VET Centre is responsible for continuing professional development for VET teachers/principals. A range of continuing professional development takes place, mainly through donor-funded projects, including accredited training courses; delivery of experimental/model lessons/activities; participation in action research; and participation in focus groups, professional networks and national/international conferences/meetings.

VET teachers are evaluated according to established standards at four levels: recognition, understanding, application and integration. Teachers use a new competency, standards-based questionnaire for the following: to self-assess their knowledge, skills and attitudes; to examine their teaching practice; and to plan their continuing professional development. The internal evaluation of vocational schools contains an indicator that deals with the quality of teachers, trainers and instructors. Students are asked to provide feedback on their satisfaction with the support they receive from teachers, trainers and other staff and the teaching materials prepared by teachers.

The quality of teaching and learning is evaluated as part of external evaluation and is based on student achievement and student questionnaires/interviews.

3.   STRENGTHS, DEVELOPMENTS, NEEDS

Challenges in relation to improving VET quality assurance include the need to:

- progress with the development of an integrated labour market information system and management information system;
- continue to develop qualifications in accordance with NQF principles and quality assurance requirements;
- improve the monitoring and evaluation of VET teachers' professional development and the competences of vocational school management;
- ensure that internal and external evaluation are related to vocational schools' quality improvement processes;
- ensure that processes exist at VET system level to analyse external evaluation reports to inform identification of priority areas for policy interventions.

4. GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE: A NATIONAL APPROACH TO THE EVALUATION OF VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

A wide range of state and non-state actors were involved in developing the statutory national approach to the evaluation of VET providers in line with the EQAVET Recommendation.

Quality assurance and quality improvement are based on the Law on General Education, while forms/methods are governed by relevant Rules on the Content, Forms and Methods of the Quality Assessment of Education Institutions. The framework for quality assurance in VET comprises two processes: external and internal evaluation, thus providing a systematic approach to quality.

External evaluation of vocational schools is carried out at least once every four years, by the Bureau for Education and VET Centre advisors/supervisors, with the possible involvement of employer and higher education representatives and various experts. A follow-up quality improvement plan is submitted to the Educational Inspection and the Ministry of Education. Over the four-year period, activities implemented from the quality improvement plan may be externally evaluated.

Amendments (2010) to the Law on General Education made internal evaluation mandatory for all VET institutions. Guidelines for the Organisation and Implementation of Internal Evaluation provide support. Each school has established a Group for Quality and trains internal evaluators. Schools carry out self-evaluations every year in specific fields, and every two years in all programme areas.

Consequently, around 90% of vocational schools carry out an internal evaluation on a regular basis, and there is a tendency for the process to be compatible with external evaluation. This means that the same areas and indicators may be used for the internal evaluation as those used during external evaluation, while schools may also use other areas and indicators depending on their specificities.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross domestic product
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IVET	Initial vocational education and training
Monstat	Statistical Office of Montenegro
NQF	National qualifications framework
VET	Vocational education and training

Where to
find out more

Website
www.etf.europa.eu

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