

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

A COLLECTION OF ARTICLES

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FOREWORD

Assuring the quality and relevance of vocational education and training (VET) has become a more important and challenging task as today's labour markets change faster than ever. In government conferences and in school meetings, the issue of quality in VET tops the agenda. If learning doesn't lead to satisfactory outcomes, everyone loses: learners, employers and society at large. This is what stirs up the field of quality assurance in VET. There are new approaches to performance monitoring, measurement of quality or output-based policies. The very concept of quality in VET is discussed and understood differently, depending on the country and context.

The subject is not new in the ETF's partner countries. Their policy makers, education institutions, administrators and teachers have always been concerned with quality in education and training. However, with so many new developments, the ETF decided to capture the state of the art in the field and stimulate the debate, and in 2012 it launched a call for articles. These are presented here. By publishing this collection the ETF hopes to raise awareness about the potential of quality improvement and quality assurance in VET in the partner countries.

ETF experts Elizabeth Watters and Margareta Nikolovska provided their support and expertise in the course of the call and preparation of this publication. Special thanks are also due to Eduarda Castelo Branco, Michael Graham, Mounir Baati and Vincent McBride, all ETF experts, for peer-reviewing the articles.

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Zeljko Raicevic and Margareta Nikolovska

MAKING THE CASE FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IMPROVEMENT: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Maria Emília Galvão¹

Abstract

This paper explores the issues and challenges in making the case for the quality assurance (QA) and quality improvement (QI) of vocational education and training (VET). Undoubtedly, QA and QI are crucial issues in VET, but as subjects are too wide to be explored in-depth in this paper. Accordingly, the article first revisits basic concepts and theories as adopted and adapted in education and training, and then explores the use of the plan–do–check–act (PDCA) cycle as a model that countries may use to create (or revise) their own approach on QA and QI in VET.

1. Introduction

There are two major reasons that managing for quality in vocational education and training (VET) should first be defined at system level and then cascaded down to the VET provider level (adapted from Conte (2010)).

1. VET is one of the (most diversified) subsystems of education and training.
2. A systemic perspective on quality is crucial because the performance of a VET subsystem is a combined effect of all its variables and their mutual relations.

It is important to realise that in this era of globalisation, although the development and growth of countries around the world depend on a number of conditions, it is largely accepted that the performance of their education and training systems, and specifically their VET subsystems, is among the most critical of these conditions. Although national VET subsystems should operate on scientifically based principles and independently of all political pressures from stakeholders, strengthening these systems is a shared responsibility that requires investment and participation on the part of both the public and private sectors. In other words, in order to address the growing international demands, national education and training systems are required to a) adopt a broader mandate; b) have a global vision; and c) act locally. This will entail stronger alliances and increased cooperation with the various stakeholders, including governmental institutions, VET providers and their staff, employers' associations and trade unions.

However, many countries have separate education systems and training systems that for generations have operated in relative isolation from one another. There are wide variations between the two sectors in terms of a) their different cultures, governance, finance and accountability; and b) their standards, expectations and ways of measuring learner progress. There is a growing movement by countries to adopt quality-focused VET strategies that rely on strong partnerships with stakeholders in order to make data-informed decisions about identified needs and expectations.

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2. Background issues

Throughout the past decade the focus on quality in education and training has increased, and this is expected to continue as the demand for transparency, better communication of the outcomes of learning, and improved monitoring and evaluation of education and training grows all over the world. This explains why governments have started to review their education and training systems, particularly their VET subsystems, and why various reform initiatives are being introduced at country level. However, the cumulative effect of a country's efforts to improve its VET quality may be problematic because a number of key conditions are often absent: for example, there is no comprehensive understanding of the complex nature of VET quality, no definition of standards, and no adoption of a set of indicators for directing practice and evaluating and monitoring performance.

In order to provide a holistic understanding of quality and, hence, to develop a comprehensive national approach on improving quality in VET, it is commonly accepted that policy makers at country level need to agree on:

- what quality means in their country (point 2.1);
- how to involve the key stakeholders (point 2.2);
- how to correlate some of the main variables at policy level (point 2.3).

2.1 Conceptualising quality in education and training

In view of the focus on quality, it is no surprise that there has been a constant debate for the past 10 to 15 years over the meaning of the word, and several lists of alternatives have been produced. For example, Harvey and Green (1993) explore the nature and usage of quality in relation to higher education and point out that quality is a relative concept. Harvey (2004–12) provides definitions that are summarised below.

- The **exceptional view** sees quality as something special.
- **Quality as perfection** sees quality as a consistent or flawless outcome.
- **Quality as fitness for purpose** sees quality in terms of fulfilling a customer's requirements, needs or desires.
- **Quality as value for money** sees quality in terms of return on investment.
- **Quality as transformation** is a classic notion of quality that sees it in terms of change from one state to another. In educational terms, transformation refers to the enhancement and empowerment of students or the development of new knowledge.

Another perspective on the concept is offered by Cheng (2001), who states that the worldwide education reforms have experienced three waves since the 1970s. He proceeds to identify three paradigm shifts in quality improvement in education:

- **internal quality assurance**, which 'makes an effort to improve internal school performance, particularly the methods and processes of teaching and learning';
- **interface quality assurance**, which emphasises 'organizational effectiveness, stakeholders' satisfaction and market competitiveness and makes an effort to ensure satisfaction and accountability to the internal and external stakeholder';

- **future quality assurance**, which is defined ‘in terms of relevance to the new school functions in the new century as well as relevance to the new paradigm of education concerning contextualized multiple intelligences, globalization, localization and individualization’.

Although some mechanisms and procedures are in place for the purposes of quality assurance and quality improvement, countries may not have a comprehensive and systematic approach. The relationships between these QA and QI mechanisms and procedures and important areas such as governance, access, funding and VET programme planning are often unclear, and there is very little integration in critical areas. Authorities may find it difficult to clarify and prioritise reasons for and purposes of QA and QI at policy and institutional level; it is important that reasons and purposes are carefully chosen, agreed to at all levels and phased in through a process of consensus and capacity-building on quality in VET so that the QA system is at least well understood and accepted. Thus, in developing a streamlined QA approach for VET, countries show their firm commitment to cultivating a culture of quality in education both at the level of policy making and at provider level.

2.2 Reconceptualising the stakeholder theory – from business to VET

Stakeholder theory² is an approach to organizational management and governance that emphasises the importance of considering organisational stakeholders when making leadership decisions. A typical definition for a stakeholder is ‘any individual or group who can affect or is affected by the actions, decisions, policies, practices, or goals of the organization’ (Freeman, 1984). The key stakeholders in the VET sector are:

- national authorities,
- VET providers and staff,
- learners and families,
- employers.

Stakeholder theory should be considered in any VET QA approach, at national or European/international level, because it focuses on the need to align multiple stakeholders’ requirements and provides a unified approach to identifying the nature and relationships between those different parties, as well as offering significant insight into their coordination. Available literature on quality management usually distinguishes three different approaches to satisfying stakeholders, namely accommodation, alignment and balancing of interests. The concept of alignment, suggesting that interests move in the same general direction, seems to be the most appropriate in the field of VET.

2.3 Reconceptualising the alignment theory – from information systems and business to VET

Alignment is a common concept in information systems literature. It is defined as the interconnection between different elements of an organisation and/or its partners, i.e. it describes what an organisation wants to achieve and how it is going to achieve it. This theory is generally attributed to the work of Henderson and Venkatraman (1999), and their paper is often used as a basis for other papers on information systems and business alignment. The concept is sometimes defined as ‘strategic fit’, as in Chorn (1991). Given that the quality movement in the education and training sector has consistently

² The scholarly roots of the stakeholder theory date back to the 1930s in the USA, but the theory was not advanced as an alternative to corporate governance until it re-emerged in the work of Edward Freeman, who in 1984 published his landmark book, *Strategic Management: a stakeholder approach*, a work that set the agenda for what we now call stakeholder theory. In the intervening years, the literature on stakeholder theory has become vast and diverse. For further information see Freeman (1994).

borrowed concepts and methodologies from the quality movement in business and industry, it seemed useful to borrow this concept too, and to adapt it to VET policy.

The practice of policy alignment can sound threatening, particularly if policy makers and VET providers do not have the kind of political power to change or inform government policy. However, policy alignment is about understanding labour force development, economic development (at global, national/regional and local level), education and training (particularly VET) and sector policies, and using that understanding to improve learning outcomes and create an environment for VET QI and longer-term conditions for success.

Another important element to be taken into account is that VET policy alignment is not policy making. Instead, it implies working with existing policy to integrate VET QI into a larger effort. Ultimately, policy alignment is really about collaboration, i.e., working with other groups to fulfil larger ideas. In the field of VET, QA and QI policy alignment may include the following dimensions.

Alignment of stakeholders' views on quality

VET policy and expectations about QA and QI are sometimes confused and contradictory because core issues of meaning, values and outlook have not been fully addressed. Consequently, whatever definition a country decides to choose and use, it is imperative that it is aligned, i.e. that there is a common interpretation and acceptance of the chosen definition among the different stakeholders at national level.

Alignment of policies and procedures

Changes in VET systems are often required to support and sustain the implementation of quality practices. Policies, linked implementation teams, shared visions, stakeholder collaboration, data systems and supports, as well as the professional development of VET staff, are key elements that must be aligned in order to best support and sustain effective and efficient work in VET. Key principles of policy alignment are:

- knowledge of the policy environment,
- identification of other stakeholders,
- stakeholder collaboration,
- collection, use and sharing of data.

Alignment of sector policies

The process of creating an alignment of quality VET, economic development and labour force development differs from country to country. In some countries there is a myriad of specific VET programmes and QA mechanisms in place, but collectively these do not add up to a national strategy to achieve high-quality in VET. Other countries have a vision for greater alignment, but are having a difficult time moving forward with policy and programme reform, particularly at a time of generalised economic and financial crisis.

Alignment of VET around evidence-based decision making

Aligning the VET system around evidence-based decision making – that is, the use of evidence by policy makers and staff representing all the VET system's entities and partners, at every decision point – offers the greatest promise for improvement. In fact, it is no longer sufficient for public or private VET organisations to claim that they are 'successful' and 'effective'. In today's world, results must be demonstrated with hard evidence. This means that both public and private entities must

become evidence-based, in terms of both the VET policies they pursue and the practices they employ to implement those policies.

Alignment with international QA and QI approaches

Finally, countries could bring their approaches into line with international QA approaches, such as the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training for Vocational Education and Training (European Parliament and Council, 2009)³. This was created in response to growing concerns about the quality of VET being provided to students and trainees across Europe and the lack of European workforce competitiveness compared with that in other regions around the world. In aligning their national approaches with the Recommendation, EU Member States may ensure international acceptance of their qualifications and improve their learners' access to further learning programmes and employment across Europe.

3. Challenges for VET improvement

3.1 Revisiting core QA functions: defining, measuring and improving quality

The quality movement emerged as a management methodology in the industry and business sectors throughout the 1950s and in the early 1960s. In the last quarter of the 20th century the focus on quality, quality improvement and quality management brought about a range of 'quality models' that were created mainly as templates for the assessment of organisations in industry. Although some argue that these models have not been fully exploited, and others claim that they have been mostly misused, there are yet those who maintain that such models e.g. ISO (International Organization for Standardization) 9000 standards, total quality management (TQM) models and the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model constitute a significant source of inspiration for decision makers, provided that their choice is made on the basis of 'the right model for the right purpose'.

In social sectors, and specifically the education sector, the origins of the movement can be traced back to the mid-1980s. However, quality has become a central concept and a core policy of education in many countries because it impacts on their systems. The quality movement in education is particularly important in the VET sector. Any effort to reform VET and achieve excellence presupposes that VET decision makers, policy developers, providers and key stakeholders face challenges regarding the choices they make in relation to three core QA functions, namely defining quality, measuring quality and improving quality.

Defining quality means developing standards of VET quality for:

- inputs (e.g. training of teachers/trainers);
- processes (e.g. how access to VET is promoted);
- outcomes (e.g. how VET responds to the changing demands of the labour market).

In short, standards state the expected level of performance for system and provider levels, and these standards should be aligned, i.e. there should be a common interpretation and acceptance of the chosen standards among the different stakeholders.

³ See http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c11108_en.htm. For further information on the implementation of the Recommendation, including the material developed by the EQAVET Network, see www.eqavet.eu/gns/home.aspx. For more information on EQAVET see ETF/Feerick and Oviedo (2014).

Hence, the challenge for stakeholders is to arrive at a consensus on what constitutes VET quality, and on the choice of standards.

Measuring quality consists of quantifying the current level of VET performance against expected standards. Measuring VET quality is closely linked with defining quality because the indicators for measuring quality are related to the specific definition or standard of VET quality that is adopted. In addition, the collection, sharing and use of data among the relevant stakeholders constitutes one of the key principles of VET policy alignment, i.e. the use of evidence by policy makers and key stakeholders (e.g. VET providers, employers, trainers and trainees) at every decision point. Accordingly, measuring quality leads directly to the identification of areas for improvement.

The challenge here is to move from the assumption that the existing VET policies, procedures and practices are 'good enough' to accomplish the expected outcomes, to the stage where the notion of quality as 'the best possible' way to achieve those outcomes is embedded in every level of the quality loop.

Improving quality uses QI methods to close the gap between current and expected levels of quality as defined by standards. These should reflect the challenge that most countries at the beginning of the 21st century have to deal with: the shape of the economy and the world of work are changing dramatically and VET should offer learners the opportunity to enter skilled employment. Improving quality applies quality management tools and principles in order to:

- identify what needs to be improved;
- develop hypotheses on which changes might improve quality;
- implement the changes to see whether they actually generate improvement;
- evaluate the results of the implementation exercise;
- review the existing situation in the light of lessons learned.

The challenge is to see QI not as an end in itself but rather as something that needs to be developed, nurtured and sustained over time through continuous assessment.

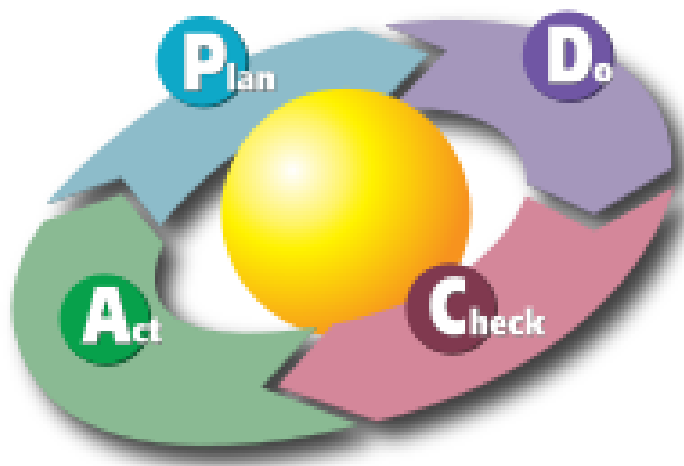
3.2 Approaching QA and QI in VET: the PDCA cycle

Policy makers and VET practitioners face several challenges in implementing high-quality VET provision, including the significant amount of knowledge and skills required, the large number of steps that need to be taken (e.g., needs assessment, setting of priorities, planning and delivering programmes, monitoring and evaluation), and the wide variety of contexts in which VET provision needs to be implemented. These challenges may result in a large gap between the decision makers and policy developers at national level and practitioners at local level. In order to narrow this gap between policy and practice, it is crucial that there is a common approach to QA and QI at policy and provider level. Such an approach will lead to the enhancement of the VET providers' skills while empowering them to plan, implement and evaluate their own provision.

One of the most common models of QI is the plan–do–check–act (PDCA) cycle⁴, which is briefly defined as an iterative way of feeding management information based on measurements and targets into an ongoing cycle of continuous improvement by completing the feedback loop (Figure 1).

⁴ Shewhart was a quality engineer with Bell Laboratories in the 1920s and 1930s. He is credited with developing the Plan–Do–Check (Study)–Act (PDCA) cycle, which was later promoted by W. Edwards Deming, a quality management expert, and is still sometimes referred to as the 'Deming Wheel'.

Figure 1. The PDCA cycle⁵



The ‘**plan**’ part of the PDCA cycle needs to be operationalised and based on the best evidence, i.e. who will say or do, what activities, with whom, under what conditions? To what degree are these components supported by monitoring and evaluation of VET outputs and outcomes?

The ‘**do**’ part of the cycle offers an opportunity to specify how the plan will be implemented. The speed and effectiveness of implementation may depend on knowing exactly:

- what needs to be in place in order to achieve the desired results for VET stakeholders;
- who is most likely to be able to engage in executing the plan;
- how ‘readiness for change’ among key stakeholders is created in the context of implementation⁶.

Highlighting the ‘check’ stage and the role of indicators

In this cyclical process, the ‘**check**’ stage plays a crucial role in ensuring and improving the quality of VET provision, particularly by monitoring and evaluating VET processes and results. In reality, there are many reasons why countries and VET providers should undertake monitoring and evaluation⁷, the need to know whether VET provision is meeting its objectives; whether VET provision is leading to the desired effects among its target group; and because detailed information is generated about the progress of VET provision and the results it has obtained.

In addition, monitoring and evaluation allow greater transparency and accountability regarding the management of financial resources. Both monitoring and evaluation are based on the use of indicators, i.e. measures of the status of, or change in, the VET system and provision with regard to its goals (Figure 2).

Users of education and training data, such as policy makers, teachers, parents and employers, generally focus on performance indicators that measure the outcomes of the VET system, namely student or trainee achievement and success. However, a sound indicator system must also include context indicators, i.e. those measures of system inputs and processes that assist in the interpretation

⁵ Diagram by Karn G. Bulsuk (www.bulsuk.com/). Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:PDCA_Cycle.svg

⁶ According to Fixsen et al. (2005), implementation is ‘a specified set of activities designed to put into practice an activity or programme of known dimensions’.

⁷ Evaluation theorists generally identify two distinctive, yet complementary, types of evaluation. **Monitoring**: self-assessment of an *evaluand*, which provides indication on where an evaluand is relative to its goals. It is descriptive and its aim is to focus on the evaluand’s improvement. **Evaluation**: external assessment of an *evaluand*, i.e. object of evaluation, which explores causality. Its aim is to focus on the evaluand’s accountability.

of outcome data. In particular, indicators can assist VET providers to ask their own questions, gather and analyse their own data and use their own information as part of their self-assessment and decision-making processes. As Lawn (2013) puts it: 'Data has become key to the governing of education [...] and through international comparison, it has great discursive power across many education sites. No longer administrative, it is now linked to performance, audit and production.'

Figure 2. Key elements in QA and QI



Note: I&A – improvement (of VET quality: improvement of the VET teaching/training process and of the learning outcomes) and accountability (demonstration that resources are being properly used to maintain and improve the quality of the VET provision); M&E – monitoring and evaluation.

However, self-assessment by VET providers is not performed in order to please external stakeholders, but rather to promote learning. In other words, learning should be the primary motivation for undertaking the exercise because it will empower VET providers and key actors such as teachers/trainers, who will learn what works and what does not, what they are doing right and what they are doing wrong.

Finally, the 'act' phase involves a review system, which should be complete and holistic, and should include all the aspects of the process to ascertain the scope for improvement. This final step constitutes the most important aspect of the PDCA cycle: it completes the circle, and the design and revision of the process starts all over again. Ultimately, VET providers (and their staff) who do not learn and who fail to question what they are actually doing will in all probability stagnate.

To summarise, while bearing in mind that the quest for quality is a never-ending journey, the main challenges for countries (those that are determined to address the issues of QA and QI in VET) seem to be:

- to design and implement a comprehensive approach to VET QA and QI based on a model such as the PDCA cycle, if no such approach is yet in place;
- where some QA and QI mechanisms are being used, but do not constitute a coherent approach, to revise and align them with an appropriate model, such as the PDCA cycle.

3.3 Making the case for VET improvement

The above analysis makes it clear that countries must have a quality vision and policy with clear definitions of quality and QA approaches. Making the case for VET improvement indicates the need for a National Quality Assurance Approach (NQAA) that will align quality standards, procedures and measurements at every level, namely at policy and provision levels. It will also ensure that the VET system (both at national/regional level and at local level) and key stakeholders (policy and decision makers, VET providers and trainers, employers, trainees and their families) relate to one another in supporting quality. As Conti (2010) states, 'Managing for quality should [...] be first defined at the system level, and then down, in a consistent way, to the lower levels (subsystems, techniques and tools).'

However, countries may be at different stages of VET QA. In some countries, diverse QA approaches co-exist, for example at regional and VET provider level, but these do not constitute a coherent whole at national level. In others, no QA approach exists, either at system or at provider level.

In both of these cases, a coherent and transparent NQAA may be used as a reference framework that will help to reduce the burden on providers and practitioners in their effort to improve quality. In the case in which diverse QA approaches co-exist, the alignment of these approaches requires not only a comprehensive review of what exists, but also a match–mismatch analysis of their respective views on quality, policies and procedures. In addition, because of the changing landscape for VET quality measurement and reporting, it is critical that VET providers develop their own approaches in line with the NQAA and develop a model for improvement. An example of such a model is that described by Langley et al. (2009), which is based on the PDCA cycle in combination with three fundamental questions: What are we trying to achieve? How will we know that a change is an improvement? What change can we make that will result in an improvement?

The fundamental elements of a NQAA are:

- clearly stated goals and objectives for further development and improvement of VET, which will be continuously reviewed and adapted, according to the results of the cyclical work (PDCA cycle);
- definition of a set of indicators to measure the stated objectives and their impacts, namely input, output, outcomes, context and process indicators;
- agreement among the key stakeholders on the methodological and procedural principles that will guide its implementation.

4. Conclusion

As the need to ensure the quality of education and training systems increases all over the world, particularly in terms of improvements in VET provision, countries cannot afford to delay this process, especially with regard to VET subsystems and policies. It is time for all stakeholders in VET, in all jurisdictions and sectors, to engage in a dynamic dialogue and to take action to ensure that every learner receives excellent VET. In order to support the development and implementation of a quality agenda, national authorities need to:

- perform such specific activities as the mapping of their quality landscape (issues, challenges);
- consider the establishment (or revision) of an aligned NQAA for VET.

Acronyms

EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training
ISO	International Organisation for Standardisation
NQAA	National Quality Assurance Approach
PDCA	plan–do–check–act
QA	quality assurance
QI	quality improvement
TQM	total quality management
VET	vocational education and training

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SUPPORTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE REFERENCE FRAMEWORK FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING: THE EXPERIENCE OF EU-28 AND CANDIDATE COUNTRIES

Sean Feerick and Arancha Oviedo⁸

Abstract

The European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) Network plays an important role in supporting the development of a culture of quality assurance within the EU Member States. The main purpose of the network is to create a structured and sustainable platform for policy makers, social partners and providers to exchange information and experience on their quality assurance (QA) policies and practices, and thereby strengthen the culture of QA in vocational education and training (VET). The EQAVET Recommendation⁹ adopted in 2009, which builds on growing levels of cooperation between Member States at European level, has continued to provide guidance for VET policy makers as they assess and reform their VET systems and establish QA frameworks for VET providers. The EQAVET Secretariat, which supports the European Commission and the Member States in implementing the Recommendation, undertook major surveys in 2011 and 2012 to assess the progress achieved at national level in relation to the Recommendation.

This article is based on the results of the 2012 survey. The survey provides an overview of the developments in national approaches to the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation in the EU-28 countries, one European Free Trade Association (EFTA) country (Norway) and three candidate countries (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Turkey). The article elaborates on survey results related to, *inter alia*, managing VET quality at system and provision levels and the use of indicators.

1. Introduction

At a time of economic crisis, high-quality VET has a key role to play in helping countries in the EU to address the challenges of unemployment and to return to sustainable social systems. Since 2002 the Copenhagen Process has created the policy context that has contributed to increased voluntary cooperation in VET, while quality in VET remains one of the priorities on the policy agenda at EU level.

The EQAVET Network plays an important role in supporting the development of a culture of QA within the EU Member States. The main purpose of the network is to create a structured and sustainable platform for policy makers, social partners and providers to exchange information and experience on their QA policies and practices, and thereby strengthen the culture of QA in VET¹⁰.

⁸ Sean Feerick is the Director of the EQAVET Secretariat and his colleague Arancha Oviedo is a Policy Officer. The EQAVET Secretariat is based in Dublin.

⁹ ETF's note: In this article EQAVET Recommendation refers to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training. This recommendation establishes a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework as a reference instrument to help Member States to promote and monitor continuous improvement of their VET systems based on common European references. The text refers also to EQAVET Framework.

¹⁰ More information on the EQAVET Network is available at www.eqavet.eu. Details of the various activities provided by the EQAVET Network's work programmes are available at www.eqavet.eu/gns/what-we-do/overview.aspx; the Quality Cycle online tool at www.eqavet.eu/index.html provides guidelines at system level, while guidelines at provider level are available at www.eqavet.eu/index2.html.

Countries participating in the EQAVET Network have worked consistently to support the development of robust QA approaches in order to ensure the quality and attractiveness of VET as a learning and career pathway for young people. The [EQAVET Recommendation](#)¹¹, which builds on growing levels of cooperation between Member States at European level within the context of the follow-up of the Copenhagen Declaration, has continued to provide guidance and inspiration for VET policy makers as they assess and reform their VET systems and establish QA frameworks for VET providers.

The EQAVET Secretariat, which supports the European Commission and the Member States in implementing the EQAVET Recommendation, conducted a survey of progress in QA policies at national level in 2012¹². The survey provides a comprehensive overview of the developments in national approaches to the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation in the EU-28 countries¹³, one European Free Trade Association (EFTA) country (Norway¹⁴), and three candidate countries (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Turkey). It presents a picture of how the EU cooperation process has supported the development of a common understanding of what quality in VET is and how quality improvement works, identifies emerging challenges and considers how these can be addressed.

The article elaborates on the results of the survey, examines the QA approaches that have been put in place to ensure that VET quality is managed at VET system level, and examines the issues relating to quality at VET provider level. It also discusses the use of 10 EQAVET indicators in monitoring the quality and performance of VET at both system and provider levels. In examining the results of the survey in candidate countries alongside the results of EU-28 countries, and in view of recent developments and participation of candidate countries in the Bruges Process¹⁵, the article also identifies some emerging trends and highlights some of the challenges to be addressed.

1.1 The Bruges Communiqué and the EQAVET Recommendation: VET policy context and policy objectives

The Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training, for the period 2011–2020 (EU, 2010) indicates that since 2002 the Copenhagen Process has played a crucial role in raising awareness of the importance of VET at both national and European level. The impact of the Copenhagen Process on countries' VET policies has been both rapid and strong: by changing the perspective from an input-oriented learning process to learning outcomes, comprehensive frameworks that include general education, VET and higher education can help to create transparent, permeable and flexible national qualifications systems.

Furthermore, the Bruges Communiqué indicates that VET should play its part in achieving the two Europe 2020 headline targets set in the education field, namely – by 2020 – to reduce the rate of early leavers from education to less than 10% and to increase the share of 30–34-year-olds who have completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40%. In terms of strategic objectives, it is stated

¹¹ The Recommendation is a voluntary instrument.

¹² The objective of the survey is to provide a basis for assessing the degree of progress in the development of national approaches to the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation and the strengthening of a culture of quality assurance in VET. The survey was designed to provide a baseline from which a process of regular reporting could be developed in order to support policy development at national and EU levels in relation to quality assurance of VET in the EU-28 and the other countries eligible to participate in the lifelong learning programme. This reporting process within the EQAVET Network has changed since the development of the survey, as it is increasingly used by the European Commission in the follow-up of the associated EQAVET short-term deliverables of the Bruges Communiqué, which is carried out by Cedefop. In 2012 the survey was used as part of the Commission's review of the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation, along with the results of the external evaluation commissioned in order to prepare its report to the European Parliament.

¹³ Belgium submitted two surveys – one from the French and one from the Flemish community; the United Kingdom submitted four surveys – one from each region (England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland), as the responsibility for education and training lies at region level. Therefore, the analysis is based on 32 surveys, which describe 32 national VET systems.

¹⁴ For the purpose of this article, Norway is not included in the analysis.

¹⁵ Since 2012, candidate countries participate in the Bruges Process with support from the ETF.

that VET should be highly relevant for the labour market and for individuals' careers. In order to increase the attractiveness of VET, strategic objectives 2a and 2b, which are directly related to EQAVET Recommendations, should be reached (see Box 1).

Box 1. Strategic objectives related to EQAVET in the Bruges Communiqué

2. Fostering the excellence, quality and relevance of both IVET and CVET

Quality assurance

(2a) High quality of VET provision is a prerequisite for its attractiveness. In order to guarantee improved quality, increased transparency, mutual trust, the mobility of workers and learners, and lifelong learning, participating countries should establish quality assurance frameworks in accordance with the EQAVET Recommendation;

(2b) Participating countries should – by the end of 2015 – establish at national level a common quality assurance framework for VET providers, which also applies to associated workplace learning and which is compatible with the EQAVET Framework.

While the Bruges Communiqué provides broad directions for EU Member States, and more recently for candidate countries, the EQAVET Recommendation is more specific and provides consistent direction for development of VET QA policies. The Recommendation on the establishment of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQAVET Framework) invites Member States to 'devise [...] an approach aimed at improving quality assurance systems at national level, where appropriate, and making best use of the [EQAVET] framework, involving the social partners, regional and local authorities, and all other relevant stakeholders in accordance with national legislation and practice'. The framework is an instrument for improving the quality of VET systems. It provides a European approach that can help Member States and stakeholders to document, develop, monitor, evaluate and improve the effectiveness of their VET provision and quality management practices.

The EQAVET Framework was developed by Member States in cooperation with the European Commission and adopted by the European Parliament and the Council. It is a key element in the follow-up to the Copenhagen Declaration, which calls for closer cooperation in the field of VET, particularly QA for VET, and in the ongoing work to renew Europe's education and training systems. It is designed to promote better VET by providing authorities and VET providers with common tools for the management of quality in VET. Given the diversity and complexity of VET systems and of the approaches to quality within and across Member States, the framework offers a common point of reference that ensures transparency, consistency and portability between the many streams of policy and practical development across Europe, in order to increase mutual trust and mobility of learners and workers.

1.2 Results of the EQAVET Secretariat survey: the implementation of VET QA policies¹⁶

The EQAVET Secretariat survey 2012 was designed to capture developments in QA processes within European VET in a quantitative manner. The survey comprises five parts:

1. national VET policy and national approaches to QA that are in line with the EQAVET Reference Framework;
2. QA national reference points (NRPs);
3. the Bruges Communiqué and EQAVET;
4. the use of EQAVET indicative descriptors at system and provider levels for the initial and continuing VET sectors (IVET and CVET);
5. the use of EQAVET indicators for IVET and CVET.

The survey received responses from all EU-28 Member States, one EFTA country (Norway), and three candidate countries (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Turkey).

2. National VET policy and national approaches to QA in line with the EQAVET Reference Framework

The analysis of the survey results shows that significant progress has been made in QA for VET since the adoption of the EQAVET Recommendation in 2009. Most VET systems in the countries surveyed have developed, or are currently developing, policies, structures and processes in order to devise and establish their national approaches to improving QA systems at national level, and are making best use of the EQAVET Framework. A wide variety of organisational arrangements and structures exists to support the implementation of QA processes in the national context. In general, the majority of countries have devised a national approach: a) at ministerial/central level; b) by developing and publishing a strategy and/or policy document; and c) involving key stakeholders.

With regard to candidate countries, the results show that only one country, Montenegro, has devised its national approach in line with the EQAVET Recommendation; Montenegro reported that its national approach has been constituted as a legislative requirement¹⁷. The remaining national VET systems within this category (i.e. the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey) are in the process of preparing a national approach (Turkey plans to introduce this by 2015). This suggests that there is high-level political commitment to QA in VET across the participating countries, and that the relevant ministries are playing a leadership role. This is of crucial importance in the development of a culture of QA in the national contexts.

¹⁶ In June 2011 and 2012 the EQAVET Secretariat undertook a survey among EQAVET members to explore the state of play in the development of national approaches to the implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation. Following the discussion at the EQAVET Annual Forum (Dublin, March 2013), the secretariat published the *Progress Report on the implementation of the EQAVET Framework* (EQAVET, 2012) based on the survey responses collected in 2012.

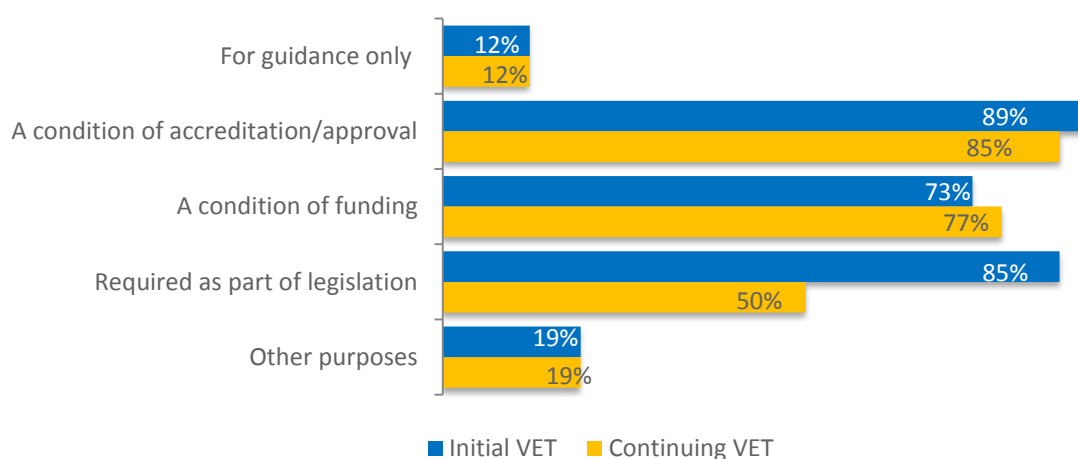
The report is based on responses from all EU-28 Member States; one EFTA country, Norway; and three candidate countries, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Turkey. The survey was completed by national reference points, the Member State representatives in EQAVET and other stakeholders. The preparation of the national responses involved close collaboration with all relevant partners in the various national contexts.

¹⁷ For more information on the VET quality approach in Montenegro, see ETF/Raicevic and Nikolovska (2014).

2.1 National standards

Setting national standards ensures nationally consistent, high-quality training and assessment services for the provision of VET. Setting standards implies that only registered training organisations and institutions can issue qualifications and deliver accredited training and assessment. By adhering to national standards, training providers and authorities can ensure that key QA aspects of VET provision are implemented. A large majority (81%) of national VET systems in EU-28 countries include quality standards for VET at national level. Figure 1 shows how these are used.

Figure 1. Use of national quality standards for VET providers



These figures indicate that, on average, EU-28 countries set standards for VET providers to the same degree and in a similar way for both the IVET and CVET sectors. The facts that the IVET sector is more likely to be under central control and that the CVET sector interacts with industry and needs to adapt to the market may in part explain the lower figures for CVET.

The national VET systems in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro include quality standards for VET providers at national level as follows:

- in the IVET sector – because they are ‘required as part of legislation’;
- in the CVET sector – used only by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia because they are ‘required as part of legislation’;
- neither of these countries uses standards as ‘a condition for funding’ for either IVET or CVET.

2.2 Stakeholders involved in national approach

The purpose of involving stakeholders in developing a national approach is to coordinate individual and institutional efforts towards a common goal. By creating a link between the QA processes and the national strategic plan for QA involving relevant stakeholders, national authorities are establishing a solid basis for the embedding of a quality culture within the national context.

Figure 2. Stakeholders involved in the development of a national approach

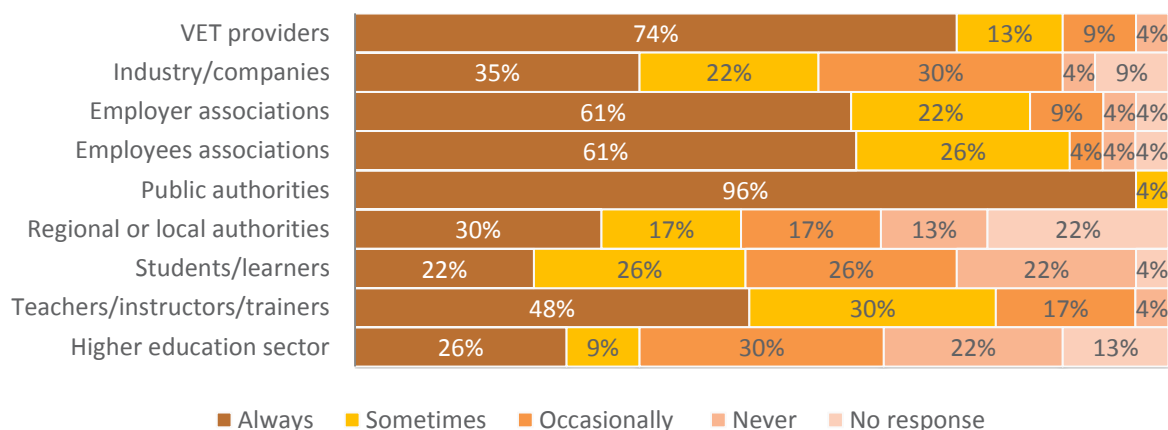


Figure 2 shows the responses of the 23 national VET systems in the EU-28 that stated they had devised a national approach. The data demonstrate that EU-28 countries are involving stakeholders in the development of a national approach that promotes a culture of QA in VET in the broadest sense, not only by putting in place the structural and management arrangements that enhance quality, but also by investing significant effort in developing the broader cultural aspects of shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitments towards quality, by engaging with the wider VET community.

However, more work is needed in order to involve stakeholders.

- Industry/companies need to be involved as
 - they deliver work-based training (apprenticeships), which is a way of ensuring that VET responds to the conditions prevailing in the workplace, in order to improve the efficiency of training (through better integration of theory and practice) and to facilitate the transition from school to work;
 - if they make a contribution at all levels of VET provision, they will be more inclined to recognise the skills of those holding a VET qualification, thereby increasing employability.
- Regional authorities need to participate in order to ensure that VET is tailored to regional and local needs.
- Involving students/learners and teachers/instructors/trainers will ensure that QA in teaching and learning is based on outcomes rather than inputs.
- The higher education sector needs to be involved in order to foster the transition from VET to higher education. This will make VET more attractive and fit for learners' purposes. Quality assurance frameworks promote high quality and excellence of VET provision, which facilitates mobility and the recognition of skills and competences between the education sectors. As such, QA becomes a condition for ensuring progression and permeability.

With regard to Montenegro (the only candidate country reporting that it has devised its national approach in line with the EQAVET Recommendation), VET providers, public authorities and teachers/trainers were always involved; employer and employee associations were sometimes involved; and industry/companies, regional/local authorities, students/learners and the higher education sector were occasionally involved. This reflects the trend observed in the EU-28 countries.

3. QA national reference points

An important part of developing a national approach to QA in VET in line with the EQAVET Framework is the establishment of a QA national reference point (NRP). The EQAVET Recommendation invites Member States to designate an NRP for VET that brings together national and regional key players who have a role to play in the development of the QA of VET, in order to support developments at national level and ensure the efficient dissemination of information. With the adoption of the EQAVET Recommendation, the NRPs have a legal basis: this ensures that the NRP is 'linked to the particular structures and requirements of each Member State and that, in accordance with national practice, brings together existing relevant bodies and involves the social partners and all stakeholders concerned at national and regional levels, in order to ensure the follow-up of initiative' (European Parliament and Council, 2009).

Of the 32 different VET systems within the EU-28 countries, 27 have established NRPs (Belgium – Flemish Community, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, France, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden, United Kingdom (England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland)¹⁸). In most countries (89%) the NRP is part of, or is funded by, the relevant ministry or ministries. This is also the case in Montenegro, which established its NRP in 2012 as part of the Ministry of Education and Sports; and in Turkey, which established its NRP (which is in the process of final approval) within the Ministry of National Education.

The EQAVET Recommendation specifies the functions and activities of NRPs, and Table 1 outlines their progress in this regard.

Table 1. Responsibilities of NRPs as set out by the EQAVET Recommendation

Responsibilities of NRPs	Response count	%
Keeping stakeholders informed about the activities of the EQAVET Network	27	93
Providing active support for the implementation of the work programme of the EQAVET Network	26	90
Taking concrete initiatives to promote the further development of the EQAVET Reference Framework in the national context	22	76
Ensuring that information is disseminated effectively to stakeholders	25	86
Supporting training providers to identify areas for improvement in QA and to implement QA systems in line with the EQAVET Recommendation	21	72
Supporting training providers to introduce or develop self-evaluation systems	20	67

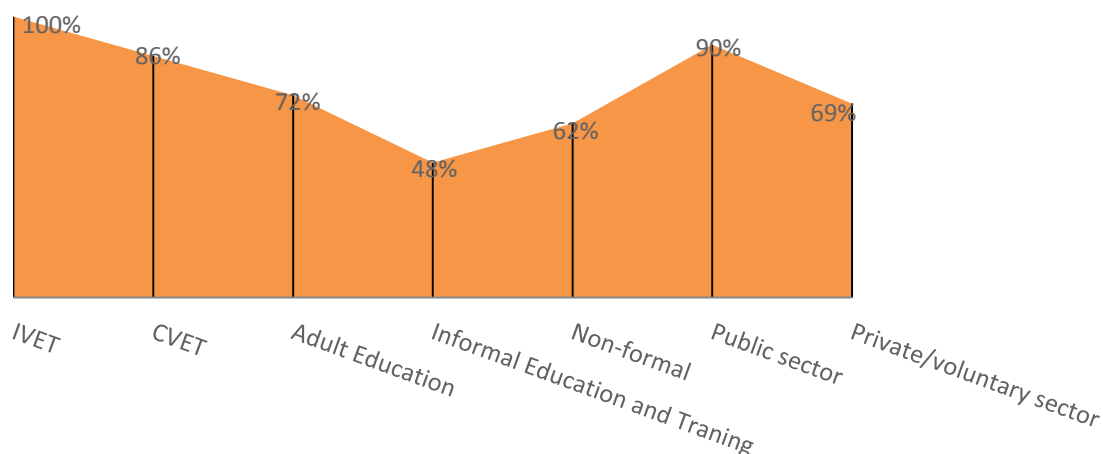
The figures suggest that NRPs in the EU-28 countries are undertaking the tasks, duties and responsibilities set out in the EQAVET Recommendation. In Montenegro, the NRP is undertaking all of the actions set out in the EQAVET Recommendation.

Nevertheless, the figures suggest that there is room for improvement. NRPs need to carry out further work in order to support their own VET providers: a) to identify areas for improvement in QA and to implement QA systems in line with the EQAVET Recommendation; and b) to introduce or develop self-evaluation systems.

¹⁸ France and Latvia have not yet established a NRP but they responded to this question.

Figure 3 shows the areas in which NRPs act or operate within their national education and training systems in relation to the development and implementation of the EQAVET Framework.

Figure 3. Areas of VET supported by NRPs in the EU-28 regarding the implementation of the EQAVET Reference Framework



The fact that large numbers of NRPs are supporting CVET and adult education indicates that their work is undertaken from a lifelong learning perspective, which is of interest in terms of the role they can play in supporting efforts towards reaching the benchmark (European Council, 2007) of having 15% of adults participating in education and training by 2020. However, NRPs seem to have limited ability to feed into the informal and non-formal learning sectors of education and training within the national context, resulting in a lack of progress on the strategic objectives set by the Bruges Communiqué. The Communiqué advises countries to ‘start to develop, no later than 2015, national procedures for the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, supported as appropriate by national qualifications frameworks’. QA will be the cornerstone of solid, accountable and transparent bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning, leading to an increase in the awarding of qualifications on the basis of experience acquired.

With regard to the role of NRPs in broader European policy initiatives, almost all NRPs contribute to the development and implementation of the QA aspects of the European Credit system for VET (ECVET) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (72% and 70%, respectively). This shows the complementarity and consistency of the arrangements put in place by VET systems in the EU-28 in response to policy initiatives taken at EU level. However, only 38% of NRPs provide support in relation to QA issues relating to the ‘Common EU principles for identification and validation of non-formal/informal learning’ (Council of the EU, 2004), despite its importance within the broader EU strategy of growth and jobs for all. Just 30% of NRPs provide support in relation to the implementation of the European Charter for Mobility (European Parliament and Council, 2006; Cedefop, 2009b). This is significant, particularly since it is mentioned by the EQAVET Recommendation as an initiative in which QA plays a crucial role.

When the efforts of candidate countries in the areas of QA and VET were analysed, only Montenegro provided information to the effect that its NRP supports the QA aspects of the IVET, CVET and adult education sectors, EQF, ECVET, the Common EU Principles for Identification and Validation of non-formal/informal learning, and the EU Quality Charter for Mobility. However, Montenegro reported that its NRP does not cover the informal and non-formal learning sectors, confirming the trend observed in the EU-28.

4. EQAVET and the Bruges Communiqué

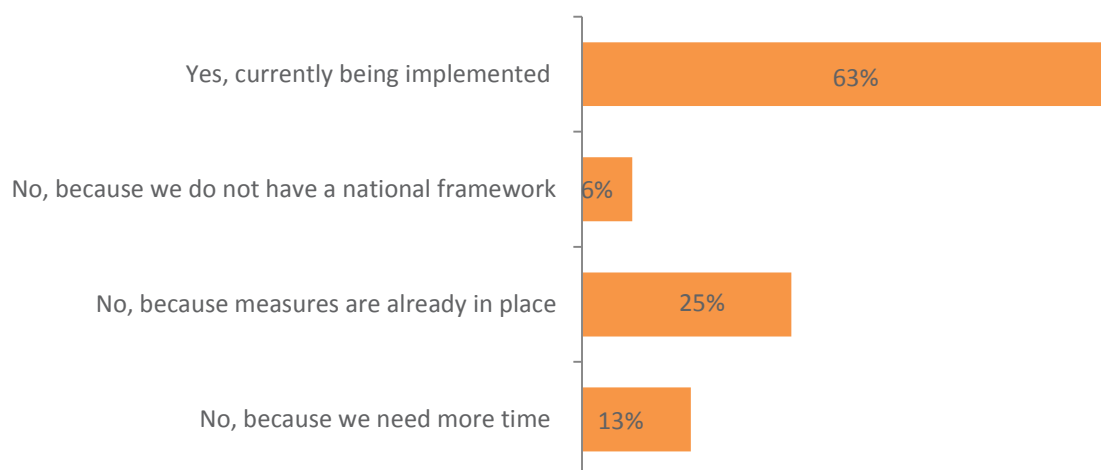
The Bruges Communiqué defines common objectives for 2020 and an action plan for the coming years, combining national measures with European support. It sets out strategic objectives 2a and 2b with regard to fostering the excellence, quality and relevance of QA in both IVET and CVET (see Box 1, p. 19).

4.1 EQAVET and the Bruges Communiqué – strategic objective 2a

According to the Bruges Communiqué, actions and measures taken by countries towards strategic objective 2a will improve the quality and efficiency of VET and enhance its attractiveness and relevance. In this regard, it encourages countries to take adequate measures to implement the EQAVET Recommendation and make progress towards national QA frameworks for VET by 2014.

Figure 4 illustrates the measures taken by national VET systems in the EU-28 towards a national reference QA framework for VET in accordance with the EQAVET Recommendation.

Figure 4. Bruges Communiqué – strategic objective 2a



These figures show that most national VET systems in the EU-28 have established, or are taking action and making progress towards the implementation of, national QA frameworks in their VET systems. This is closely related to, and may possibly come as a consequence of, the long process of consultation and work on European cooperation in QA for VET (since 2002); and it reflects the emphasis that the EQAVET Network has placed on supporting Member States to devise a national approach to QA in line with the EQAVET Reference Framework.

With regard to candidate countries, the results of the survey show that Montenegro has taken action and made progress towards the Bruges Communiqué's strategic objective 2a. However, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey reported that they need more time to undertake measures and make progress towards a national approach to QA for VET in accordance with the EQAVET Recommendation.

4.2 EQAVET and the Bruges Communiqué – strategic objective 2b

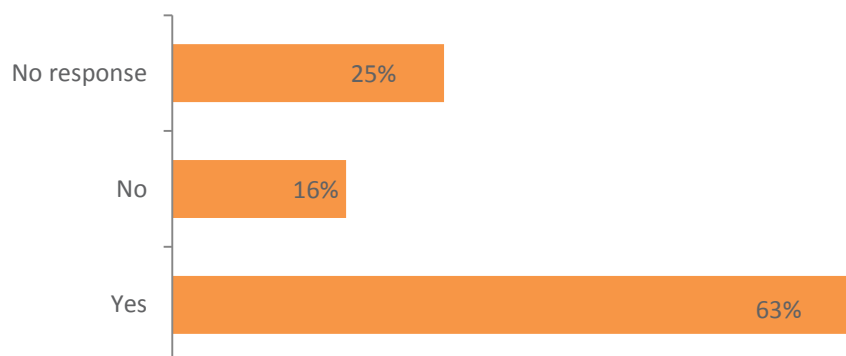
The Bruges Communiqué encourages participating countries to establish a national framework for QA for VET institutions – which can also be applied to workplace learning – in line with the EQAVET Recommendation.

The results of the survey show that 21 VET systems in the EU-28 (66%) have in place or have implemented a common QA framework for VET providers at national level, in line with the EQAVET

Framework, while 10 national VET systems (32%) reported either that they are still preparing or that they need more time. No country reported that it did not have a common QA framework compatible with the EQAVET Recommendation for VET providers at national level.

Figure 5 shows whether the common QA framework for VET providers compatible with the EQAVET Recommendation applies to associated workplace learning. Of the 21 systems that reported having a common QA framework for VET providers, 19 (63% of the EU-28) indicated that progress towards a national QA framework for workplace learning compatible with the EQAVET Framework has taken or is taking place, while five VET systems (16% of the EU-28) reported that there has been no progress.

Figure 5. Bruges Communiqué – strategic objective 2b



Of the candidate countries, the survey reveals that only Montenegro has taken action and made progress towards the Bruges Communiqué's strategic objective 2b. It also indicates that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia needs more time to move towards this objective.

5. The use of EQAVET indicative descriptors¹⁹ at VET system and provider levels of the IVET and CVET sectors

For each of the four phases of the QA cycle (planning, implementation, evaluation and review), the EQAVET Recommendation identifies a series of quality criteria or indicative descriptors for VET systems and providers that are relevant for the IVET and CVET sectors. These describe different parts of the EQAVET approach to QA; they are provided as guidance only and may be selected and applied by users of the EQAVET Framework in accordance with national legislation and practice.

The report provides an analysis of how EU-28 countries are implementing the EQAVET indicative descriptors at system and provider levels in the IVET and the CVET sectors.

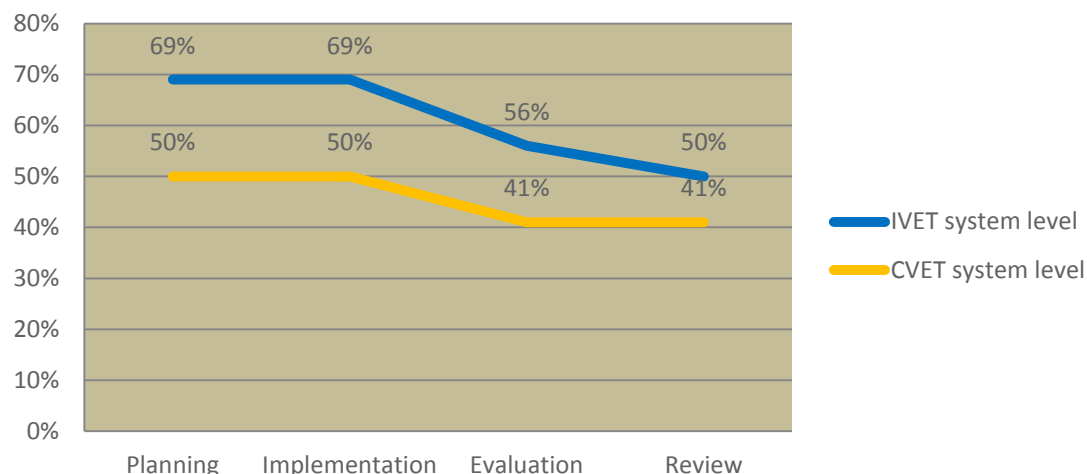
This analysis reveals that:

- EU-28 countries are 'always' using and implementing the EQAVET indicative descriptors more often in the planning and implementing phases than in the evaluation and review phases within their national IVET and CVET systems. This may suggest that on average, national VET systems in the EU-28 have established more developed quality management systems in these stages.
- The IVET sector has higher percentages of 'always used' than the CVET sector, signalling that the CVET sector in the EU-28 needs a more systematic approach in relation to the QA procedures that are being put in place (see Figure 6). The European Commission has placed CVET as a central component of its education and training strategy, as it enhances employability and competitiveness in European societies, which face increasing globalisation, technological change

¹⁹ For more information on the indicative descriptors at VET system and provider levels, see the EQAVET Recommendation.

and the ageing of their populations. All of these factors emphasise the need to ensure that the skills of the workforce are kept up-to-date and relevant, and that they are continually upgraded. Moreover, CVET fosters innovation, personal development, active citizenship and protection against unemployment as the workforce becomes more adaptable.

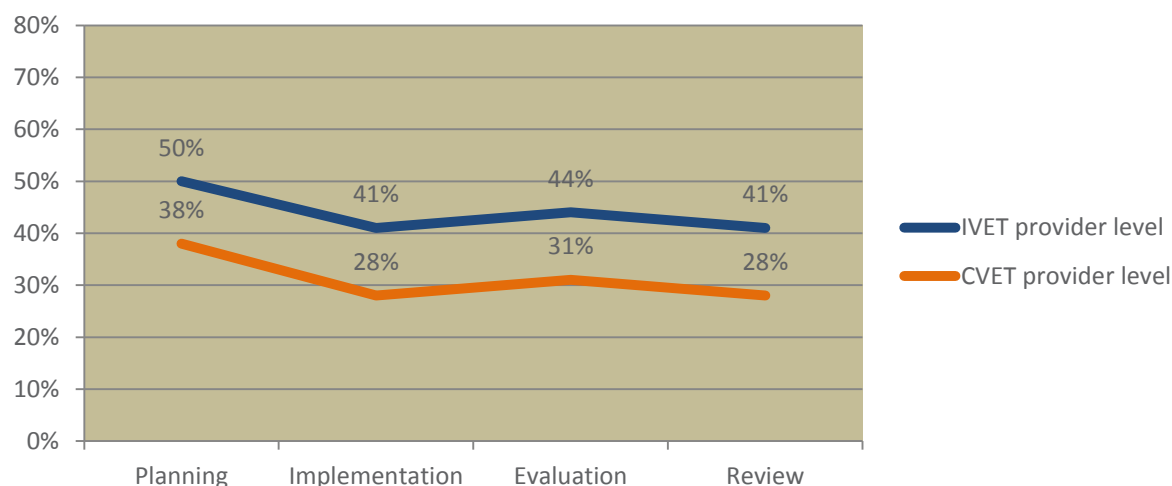
Figure 6. The use of the EQAVET indicative descriptors at system level for IVET and CVET in EU-28 countries



In terms of the use of EQAVET indicative descriptors by VET providers in the national contexts, the results of the survey show the following.

- VET providers in the EU-28 are 'always' using and implementing the EQAVET indicative descriptors more often in the planning phase than in the implementation, evaluation or review phases in the IVET sector. This may suggest that on average VET providers at national level have established more developed quality management systems in the planning than in the other stages.
- There were more affirmative responses in the evaluation phase than in the implementation and review phases, which may suggest that IVET providers in the national contexts are complying or responding to external evaluations/regulations proposed by the relevant authorities (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. The use of the EQAVET indicative descriptors at provider level for IVET and CVET in EU-28 countries



Figures 6 and 7 show that:

- VET providers seem to use the EQAVET descriptors less often than systems do, in both the IVET and CVET sectors.
- The quality management approaches put in place by systems and providers follow different patterns of action for each of the four phases of the quality cycle.

For the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Turkey, the results of the survey show the following.

- IVET systems seem to have established more developed quality management systems for the planning and review phases than for the other phases of the quality cycle. However, the CVET systems in these countries need to focus their efforts in all four phases.
- VET providers offering IVET and CVET provision have in place more developed quality management systems in the evaluation phase for the IVET sector and in the evaluation and review phases for the CVET sector.

6. The use of EQAVET indicators for IVET and CVET

The purpose of this section of the survey was to examine:

- the type of information available within national VET systems in the countries, in line with the EQAVET Recommendation;
- how this information is stored and used by these VET systems;
- how the systems communicate this information to the communities involved;
- how the information feeds into the internal discussions and decision-making processes.

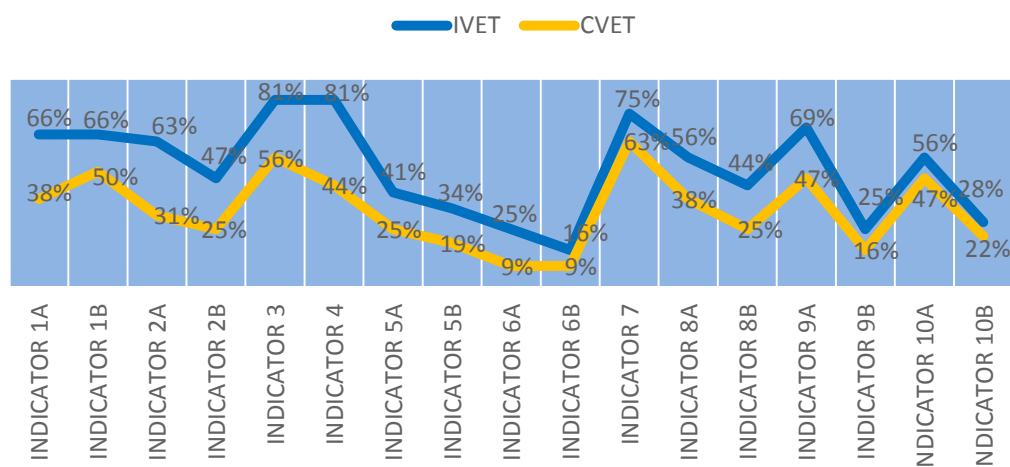
Eighteen national VET systems (56%) reported that they have put in place arrangements to review their national approach to QA. This implies that more than half of all systems have developed and established centralised review procedures for monitoring their QA activities, and centralised systems to collect data on VET performance. Of these 18 systems, the majority (16, or 88%) communicate and make publicly available the outcomes of their review processes. This indicates that the feedback loop is functioning well among the national VET systems that have in place a review system for their national approach. Among candidate countries, only Montenegro reported that arrangements are in place to review the national approach to QA and that the outcomes of the review process are communicated and made publicly available. No such arrangements are in place in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey.

The survey provides data on the type of information that national VET systems in the EU-28 collect in line with the EQAVET Recommendation. The EQAVET Recommendation offers a set of quality indicators for assessing quality in VET (see Annex 1), and these can be used as a toolbox to support the evaluation and quality improvement of VET systems or VET providers. The EQAVET indicators are linked to the three policy priorities in VET at European level:

- increasing employability;
- improving the match between labour demand and supply;
- offering better access to lifelong learning/training, in particular for vulnerable people.

Figure 8 shows the use of the EQAVET indicators by national VET systems in the EU-28 for the IVET and CVET sectors.

Figure 8. Overview of EQAVET indicators used at system level for the IVET and CVET sectors



The use of the EQAVET indicators at national system level is replicated in the IVET and the CVET sectors. In general, the indicators providing qualitative data, i.e. indicators 6, 9 and 10(B), are less frequently 'always used' than the other indicators by VET systems in the EU-28 for IVET and CVET.

Table 2 shows how candidate countries are using the EQAVET indicators at system level for the IVET and CVET sectors.

Table 2. EQAVET indicators at system level for IVET and CVET in candidate countries

EQAVET indicators	Always used	Sometimes used	Not used	No response	Always used	Sometimes used	Not used	No response
	IVET				CVET			
1A	MK	ME	–	TR	MK	ME	–	TR
1B	MK	ME	–	TR	MK	ME	–	TR
2A	–	MK, ME	–	TR	–	MK	ME	TR
2B	–	ME	MK	TR	–	–	MK, ME	TR
3	MK, ME	–	–	TR	MK	ME	–	TR
4	ME	MK	–	TR	–	MK, ME	–	TR
5A	–	MK, ME	–	TR	–	–	ME	MK, TR
5B	–	MK, ME	–	TR	–	–	ME	MK, TR
6A	–	–	ME	MK, TR	–	ME	–	MK, TR
6B	–	–	ME	MK, TR	–	ME	–	MK, TR
7	MK, ME	–	–	TR	–	–	ME	MK, TR
8A	–	MK, ME	–	TR	–	ME	–	MK, TR
8B	–	ME	–	MK, TR	–	ME	–	MK, TR
9A	–	MK, ME	–	TR	–	MK, ME	–	TR
9B	–	MK, ME	–	TR	–	MK, ME	–	TR
10A	MK	ME	–	TR	–	MK, ME	–	TR
10B	–	MK, ME	–	TR	–	MK, ME	–	TR

Notes: MK* – the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (*) Provisional code that does not affect the definitive denomination of the country to be attributed after the conclusion of the negotiations currently taking place at the United Nations; ME – Montenegro; TR – Turkey.

7. Conclusions and emerging challenges

The results of the survey show that the EQAVET Framework has instigated a process under which EU-28 countries have established clearly defined missions and strategic goals for VET at national level, and have shared their understanding of what quality means among relevant stakeholders in light of these goals. This collaborative process has enabled stakeholders to contribute to the development of a well-functioning QA system for VET in the national contexts. These results appear to be replicated in the candidate countries, showing that the EQAVET Framework is serving as a catalyst for the reform and adaptation of QA in these countries' VET systems. This will ensure greater responsiveness to the needs of the labour market, the economy and the learner.

The results further indicate that the EQAVET Recommendation has provided a basis for supporting more broad-ranging reform, and, in some cases, for rethinking approaches to QA in VET. National approaches to QA have been established and are well developed. The key stakeholders have been involved, and in general the national approaches correspond to the provisions of the EQAVET Recommendation. The NRPs, supported by the EQAVET Network, have played an important role in this process. However, the following challenging areas would benefit from further attention.

Embedding a QA culture

The establishment of formal and structural QA procedures does not always imply the development of a QA culture within the national context. The EQAVET survey highlights the importance of the full participation of stakeholders in the implementation of QA approaches as an essential requirement in the development of a sustainable culture of QA.

A culture of QA is closely related to values, beliefs, expectations and commitments, and generally requires more time and effort in order to become embedded in systems. The participation of stakeholders in the implementation of QA processes is shown to be an essential requirement in the development of a sustainable culture of quality. While VET systems in the EU-28 appear to have involved all relevant stakeholders to some extent in their national approaches to QA, further and continued attention is necessary in this area.

Fostering a greater focus on the learner

QA processes need to be learner-centred. This requires an increase in the participation of students/learners in QA processes and the promotion and consolidation of EU initiatives that aim to widen access to qualifications, support lifelong learning and foster transnational mobility. Cooperation with the higher education sector is important in this context, and the QA system should facilitate permeability between VET and higher education.

Using the quality cycle to support a holistic approach to QA

QA processes at national level within VET systems appear to be more developed in the input phases (planning and implementation) than in the output and feedback phases (evaluation and review).

However, VET providers appear to offer more developed QA procedures in the planning and evaluation phases than in the implementation and review phases. This may suggest that they are responding to external regulation/evaluation requirements, which does not necessarily demonstrate that internal QA processes or self-assessment are embedded, nor that a culture of QA has been developed within training institutions. The processes for monitoring and reporting on quality need to be seen as instruments that strengthen accountability and enable providers to adapt and change in order to improve their performance.

Developing a greater focus on continuous improvement

More effort is required to promote the importance of internal and self-evaluation processes, together with external evaluation among VET providers at national level. The challenge is to strike a balance between the autonomy and empowerment of VET providers and the needs of the VET system in terms of ensuring sufficient levels of consistency across all VET-related policies. The EQAVET Framework can play an important role both in this respect and in relation to the development of national standards.

Respecting diversity

It is important to bear in mind the significant diversity and complexity of internal QA processes and frameworks put in place and developed by national VET systems and providers across the EU. This diversity, particularly given the financial constraints faced by institutions, should not be undermined when considering the adaptation and development of national approaches to QA in line with the EQAVET Recommendation.

Annex 1. Quality indicators set out in the EQAVET Recommendation

Indicator 1. Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers: **A.** share of providers applying internal quality assurance systems defined by law/at own initiative; **B.** share of accredited VET providers.

Indicator 2. Investment in training of teachers and trainers: **A.** share of teachers and trainers participating in further training; **B.** amount of funds invested.

Indicator 3. Participation rate in VET programmes: number of participants in VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria.

Indicator 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.

Indicator 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.

Indicator 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.

Indicator 7. Unemployment rate according to individual criteria.

Indicator 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.

Indicator 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.

Indicator 10. Schemes used to promote better access to VET: **A.** information on existing schemes at different levels; **B.** evidence of their effectiveness.

Acronyms

CVET	continuing vocational education and training
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
IVET	initial vocational education and training
NRP	national reference point
QA	quality assurance
VET	vocational education and training

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THE QUALITY APPROACH IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE AND TURKEY: BUILDING ON THE TORINO PROCESS FINDINGS

Margareta Nikolovska²⁰

Abstract

As part of the agenda to improve the quality of skills available to the labour market, countries have introduced a range of vocational education and training (VET) reform policies that have had an impact on curricula, especially in VET. The primary objective has been to develop the quality of VET and to improve the performance of students, with the aim of bringing work and VET closer together, and focusing on the relevance of students' skills to labour market needs. This article is an attempt to briefly summarise quality approaches in VET in South Eastern Europe (SEE) and Turkey, including highlighting some of the lessons learned. Its content has been developed on the basis of an analysis of the Torino Process²¹ 2012 reports for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo²², Montenegro and Serbia, and of the Human Resources Development reports for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey.

1. Introduction

Quality in vocational education and training (VET) systems is vital to the region's development and prosperity. Industry and business, their performance and profitability, largely depend on the quality of the labour force that is available to them. Quality in VET affects the lives of most young people in the region: the region is characterised by high participation in VET, with enrolment rates at ISCED level 3 ranging from 16.3% in Albania (which is the exception, as in other countries a majority of high school students pursue VET programmes) to 76.2% in Serbia.

The development of quality in VET systems in South Eastern Europe (SEE) and Turkey region started at the beginning of the 1990s, with the focus on curriculum reform. Quality in VET has generally been viewed through the prism of improved curricula, improved in-service teacher training, decentralisation and school autonomy, and inspection. Since the beginning of the 2000s the philosophy has changed, and countries' VET policies have started to introduce entire new sets of quality management tools, with the objective of ensuring that VET schools are better able to meet the challenges of the current environment in an efficient and effective way. The core of this new focus on quality in VET includes external and internal evaluation processes, self-evaluation, and a new role for inspection services.

This article is an attempt to briefly summarise the approaches²³ to VET quality in SEE and Turkey, including by highlighting some of the lessons learned. Its content has been developed on the basis of an analysis of the Torino Process 2012 reports for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia, and the Human Resources Development reports for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey.

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²¹ The Torino Process is a participatory review of progress in VET policy. It is carried out every two years by all ETF partner countries with the ETF's support. More information is available at www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Torino_process

²² This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the International Court of Justice's Opinion on Kosovo's declaration of independence – hereinafter 'Kosovo'.

²³ 'Approach' is used as an overall term because the term 'system' is often used in a stricter sense. Thus, 'approaches' comprises both very fixed and formalised real systems and any set of more systematic behaviour intended to regulate and/or develop the performance quality of a VET system (Cedefop, 2011).

The article examines the following issues.

- What are the key socioeconomic drivers for renewed debate about quality in VET?
- What is the strategic focus in relation to VET of the countries in the region, and what are the objectives they pursue with their quality approaches?
- Which tools and instruments are used in quality assurance (QA) policies?

2. Quality in VET: a complex and evolving concept

There is no simple definition available of VET quality, given the complexity of the VET fabric and the variety of customers who may even have conflicting expectations of 'their' VET. Traditionally, quality has often been interpreted fairly narrowly in the education world as an absolute concept, even as something that is innate and not measurable. Although this changed when, in the early 1990s, an apparently irreversible quality movement in education and training emerged, it is still difficult to find real consensus on an updated definition of education and training quality²⁴. Many challenge the idea that quality can be clearly defined in an education and training context. Others find that 'effectiveness of learning' is the concept that comes closest to most quality views. However, this in itself is not a very practical definition; it may even suggest that the quality of education is merely the result of the individual's learning.

Education system specialists normally avoid this dilemma by focusing on the different elements that contribute to educational quality, rather than on the definition itself. When this happens, the dominant quality dimension tends to immediately transform itself into an issue of management. Several models focus on quality components in order to bring some order to the various factors that contribute to the (undefined) quality concept. A list of such components is then linked together into a matrix and said to represent the overall quality of education and training. This 'chained process' logic underlies the fundamental assumptions of what is called 'total quality management' (TQM). TQM principles have greatly influenced the design of quality conceptions in both general education and VET.

Since 2009 – particularly in connection with the development of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF)²⁵ for VET as a new reference instrument to help the authorities in Member States to promote and monitor the improvement of their VET systems – it has been recommended that QA be used as a systematic approach to modernising education systems, especially by improving the effectiveness of training. Therefore, QA should underpin every policy initiative in VET, and Member States are invited to develop and use this instrument on a voluntary basis. The main users of the EQARF will be national and regional authorities as well as public and private bodies responsible for ensuring and improving the quality of VET.

The methodology proposed by the framework is based on a cycle consisting of four phases (planning, implementation, evaluation and review) described for VET providers/systems; quality criteria and indicative descriptors for each phase of the cycle; and common indicators for assessing targets, methods, procedures and training results (some of the indicators are to be based on statistical data, others are of a qualitative nature). The recommendation stresses a culture of quality improvement (QI) and responsibility at all levels, i.e. at the VET system, VET provider and qualification-awarding levels.

24 For an in-depth discussion of quality in education and training, and its different aspects, see ETF/Galvão (2014).

25 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training. This recommendation establishes a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework as a reference instrument to help Member States to promote and monitor continuous improvement of their VET systems based on common European references. The framework should contribute to quality improvement in VET and to increased transparency of, and consistency in, VET policy developments between Member States, thereby promoting mutual trust, mobility of workers and learners, and lifelong learning. The Recommendation describes the various elements in a quality model and raises a number of key questions to be considered by the major stakeholders.

The EQARF for VET attaches importance to systematic self-evaluation, including internal and external evaluation mechanisms that will allow feedback on the progress achieved.

For the purpose of this article it is important to distinguish between quality and QA in VET. While quality is defined as ‘all characteristics of an entity that bear on its ability to satisfy stated and implied needs’ and ‘a degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfil certain requirements’ (Cedefop, 2011, quoted ISO, 2000), QA in education and training is ‘activities involving planning, implementation, education and training 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’ (Cedefop, 2011).

The quality movement is also a driver in most ETF partner countries, in particular candidate countries²⁶ and countries that have a membership perspective²⁷. This is conveyed through the Copenhagen/Bruges Process, which was initiated in 2000, and has been strengthened by the fact that more recently, candidate countries have also participated in the Bruges Process and are reporting on short-term deliverables. One of the aims is to promote cooperation in QA and QI.

3. What are the drivers for the renewed debate on quality in VET in the region?

To improve economic productivity and competitiveness, particularly in the context of globalisation, national governments need VET systems²⁸ that are highly responsive to the changing needs of their economies and labour markets. In order to adequately prepare citizens with the relevant knowledge and skills needed in the present and the near future, VET policy making must be informed by robust economic intelligence and systems, and provision must be governed and managed so as to attain the highest levels of VET excellence, characterised by relevance, equity and efficiency (ETF, internal document).

The economic transition in SEE countries over the past decade has brought about major changes in the demand for skills, and, as a result, new challenges for VET. VET is perceived as an important policy priority throughout the region, particularly with respect to young people, who are among those most affected by unemployment and informal employment. Youth unemployment levels are high in all countries: Kosovo (73% in 2009), Bosnia and Herzegovina (57.9% in 2011 – up 10.4% since 2008), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (55.3% in 2011), Serbia (50.9% in 2011 – up 15.7% since 2008) and Albania (30.5% in 2010) (ETF, 2013). There is a gap between the skills required for newly created jobs and those that are available.

There are two strong influences on VET in the region. First, policy development in each country is shaped by labour market realities, especially the unemployment rate, the type of skills demanded in the labour market and the specific economic, social and institutional context. Second, the EU influences VET, as the region’s countries aspire to EU membership (ETF, 2013). The candidate countries participate in the EU’s Bruges Process and so seek to meet the same objectives and short-term deliverables as the Member States. Like many regions in the world, SEE and Turkey is experiencing a changing economic and social context, shaped by globalisation, which includes rapid technological change, economic interdependence, a move towards free market economies, international migration movements, increasing calls for public accountability, and aspirations to active citizenship. VET systems are now also expected to support sustainable development, in addition to their traditional role of preparing people for work. Their economic role is to support growth and

²⁶ The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey.

²⁷ Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo.

²⁸ VET systems in the strict sense comprise all formal VET. In the context of a lifelong learning strategy VET also includes arrangements for non-formal and informal learning.

competitiveness by providing relevant and high-quality skills; their social role is to contribute to inclusive societies by educating young people and enabling adults to gain additional skills, and by providing individuals with the key competences and values needed to ensure their employability and active citizenship (ETF, 2012, Chapter 1).

A number of issues emerged from the Torino Process and Human Resources Development reports as key areas for VET quality in the countries (ETF, 2013). The focus is on national steering mechanisms in the form of strategic documents and new institutions development, and a quality management process that integrates external evaluation mechanisms with internal evaluation at school level, where self-evaluation is becoming a fundamental tool.

4. Strategic focus on QI in VET: attractiveness, labour market relevance, and equity

As their economies internationalise, there is an increasing need for national governments to be able to demonstrate the excellence of their VET system outcomes. This will enable them to compete effectively for foreign direct investment and market niches for exports. Within the formal system, quality VET encompasses employability and relevance to the labour market, lifelong learning and equity goals, and relies on the quality of policies, inputs, processes and outcomes. As these are interdependent, key actors at system and provider levels need to engage horizontally and vertically in quality management processes. Striving to attain and maintain high levels of verifiable excellence is the aim of VET quality management. Good quality management is inextricably linked to good governance (ETF, internal document).

In Albania the quality of VET is seen as a key factor that will improve the efficiency of provision and ensure support for achieving equality for individuals. The new VET Strategy (Ministry of Education and Science and Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2012) underlines the fact that since it is important to human resources development, VET has undergone permanent changes in order to fit the socioeconomic transformations. This is particularly relevant for those that are related either to citizenship and social participation demands or to the labour market and employment dynamics. A key policy objective is to increase the participation of the Albanian population in VET through permanent and continuous work on VET system quality. In addition, the strategy stresses that at provider level a paradigm shift from traditional inspection to quality management is needed.

The major issue remains that VET providers still lack defined realistic and achievable objectives. The monitoring and evaluation capacities of both VET providers and supervisory bodies need to be strengthened. At the same time there is a need to introduce quality management systems for VET providers. The strategy also foresees changes in the funding mechanism, as previous mechanisms for the disbursement of the modest public funds to VET providers have suffered numerous problems. As a result, it is necessary to formulate new approaches to the planning, management, funding and evaluation of publicly financed VET programmes. The mechanisms to be adopted will aim to achieve a funding system based on nationally agreed qualifications and high-quality provision, which is responsive, cost-effective and accountable.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina VET quality is seen as a key factor in improving the labour market relevance of qualifications. The VET Strategy 2007–2013 states that quality is crucial, and the main aspect of developing VET. There are four key concepts noted in the strategy, namely quality assurance, quality improvement, quality evaluation and quality management (p. 29). The strategy recognises that quality in VET is also related to a modern and flexible curriculum, new teaching methods, continuing professional development for teaching staff, and improved and well-equipped facilities in VET schools, etc. With the Law on the Agency for Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary Education adopted in 2007, the role of the institution in educational quality has been defined. The VET

Department of the Agency has a number of responsibilities relating to VET quality. Article 5 on curricula development and certification, sets out the following objectives:

- develop a framework, namely, learning standards for related occupations; apply modular methodology in developing the curricula; develop curricula in line with the occupational standards agreed with the representatives of employers and the labour market;
- learning standards and curricula are to be comparable and compatible with EU requirements;
- establish an external evaluation system to evaluate the quality of secondary vocational education.

However, the focus of the strategy is mainly on initial VET (IVET).

In Serbia the new Strategy for Educational Development (adopted by the government in November 2012) defines the main direction for education system improvements in the country as follows: 'continuous education system quality improvements and higher investment in education'. In order to ensure a better response to the ever-changing needs of the environment and the labour market, in particular for specific vocational profiles, universities and secondary schools must introduce monitoring indicators such as the number of students employed after graduation, the percentage of students who progress to different types of studies, and the time taken for students to gain employment. With regards to quality, there is a particular focus in the strategy on teachers, and on the urgent need to put in place a framework for VET teachers' professional development.

While the type of strategic steering implemented in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia will support QI in VET, it is obvious that success will depend on numerous and interlinked stakeholders. Key stakeholders, including employers, social partners, VET providers, teachers and trainers, need to be more widely consulted on and represented in processes for the development of quality in IVET. Shifting the emphasis to 'involving stakeholders in a culture of continuous improvement' is the key to enhancing the quality and relevance of IVET. The aim should be to strengthen QA at all levels. At national/state level the responsibility should be to set clear objectives for QI, but also to provide a framework within which these objectives will be reached. In the European context the discussion has focused on planning, implementation, evaluation and review²⁹. Table 1 describes these four elements.

Table 1. The four elements of quality assurance

Planning	Set up clear, appropriate and measurable goals and objectives in terms of policies, procedures, tasks and human resources.
Implementation	Establish procedures to ensure the achievement of goals and objectives (e.g. development of partnerships, involvement of stakeholders, allocation of resources, and organisational and operational procedures).
Evaluation	Design mechanisms for the evaluation of achievements and outcomes by collecting and processing data in order to make informed assessments.
Review	Develop procedures to achieve targeted outcomes and/or new objectives. After processing feedback from key stakeholders, conduct discussions and analyses in order to devise procedures for change.

Policy developments are aimed at improving the quality, relevance, image and status of VET and to improve its overall attractiveness. The quality of the IVET system is dependent on numerous interlinking 'satellites' of competent stakeholders, each operating within a culture of QI. Quality management within these satellites (for policy development, strategic planning, curricula and content development, teacher education, learner guidance and learning provision, validation and certification of learning, etc.) can take different forms for different purposes. A key issue is to ensure the transparency of the quality management processes and practices that are used (ENQA-VET, 2009,

²⁹ See www.eqavet.eu/qa/gns/home.aspx

p. 38). However, the management of quality can be approached in different ways. It is ultimately with the VET school or other provider that the process begins and ends. The current international discourse on quality at VET school/provider level highlights the importance of evaluation as a tool.

5. School evaluation in IVET: external evaluation, internal evaluation and VET school self-evaluation bases for QI in VET³⁰

The quality of VET school provision is not a new issue in education and training reform agendas in the enlargement region. The overall tendency towards greater autonomy of VET schools is moving the responsibility for quality towards internal processes, requiring a new positioning in a common structure for QA, where external evaluation, internal evaluation and VET school self-evaluation play important roles. There are a number of similar developments throughout the countries in the region that integrate, to a significant extent, external evaluation, internal evaluation and VET school self-evaluation into their education and training policies.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia the government strategy for education identifies three priority areas for policy action: decentralisation, improving the quality of education, and promoting social inclusion and cohesion. Since the school year 2008/09, VET school self-evaluation as an approach to quality has been required by law. It is a basis for a comprehensive evaluation of these schools. At the heart of the process are seven priority areas that are recommended to schools for self-evaluation: teaching plans and programmes; students' achievements; teaching and learning processes; support to students; school climate; school resources; and issues of leadership and management. A number of quantitative and qualitative indicators have been developed for measuring quality at school level. Based on the self-evaluation process, the school prepares a report, which becomes the starting point for a comprehensive evaluation of the school.

Quality in schools in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is assessed through external evaluation (called 'integral' or 'integrated') and self-evaluation, both of which use a common system of school quality indicators (Ministry of Education and Science, 2010 and 2011; USAID, 2011). With the Law on Education Inspection (adopted in 2005), the State Inspectorate of Education (SEI) was given a new mandate to assess the quality of education in schools through integral evaluation. Integral school evaluation started in 2009 across the country. By using a common system of indicators and an agreed methodology, integral evaluation aims to be objective, comparable and unambiguous. It contributes to the creation of a culture of QI based on partnership cooperation with schools (Ministry of Education and Science, 2010 and 2011). SEI evaluated 248 schools in the period 2009–2011 (out of 457 public schools, primary and secondary). In the assessment of the quality of education in 2010–2011, the 214 schools evaluated fell into two roughly equal groups:

- 'good' (53% of evaluated schools);
- 'partially satisfactory and unsatisfactory' (46%).

Only two schools received the highest rating, 'very good'. Of the schools evaluated, 40 were vocational (all urban), and their scores were:

- 'good' (57.5% of evaluated VET schools);
- 'partially satisfactory and unsatisfactory' (42.5%).

³⁰ In the literature, 'internal evaluation' and 'self-evaluation' are often used interchangeably by different authors. There is a difference between the two. In VET system policies in Montenegro all three (external evaluation, internal evaluation and self-assessment) are used for clearly different steps in the VET quality process. See ETF/Raicevic and Nikolovska (2014).

Teachers consider this evaluation system useful for school development, but many recommend wider dissemination and debate on the common findings. Some teachers would like an opportunity to express more openly their opinions on certain weaknesses of their schools. The exit evaluation report (USAID, 2010) of the five-year project that supported these developments maintains that substantial improvements have been achieved in terms of mutual trust between inspectors and schools, alongside the technical capacity to carry out fair and transparent school evaluation. The report highlights a number of areas for further improvement, in particular the need to ensure the sustainability of school evaluation, to improve the current practice and quality of evaluation reports, and to disseminate the findings.

In Kosovo, the National Qualifications Authority manages the National Qualifications Framework and plays a major role in the wider quality and QA approaches in the country's VET system. The Authority provides guidance and support to schools on conducting self-evaluation, including through training sessions and the publication of guidance documents and manuals. At school level the starting point for quality is self-evaluation. Indeed, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology VET schools are legally required to conduct annual self-evaluations. Self-evaluation is also a necessary step for VET providers to gain National Qualifications Authority accreditation. The Authority oversees the process and receives the self-evaluation reports. The majority of VET providers (64 out of 80) have by now submitted at least one such report to the National Qualifications Authority. However, it should be emphasised that the concept of self-evaluation is new for Kosovo, and so engaging all staff in the processes requires much effort from school leaders. Predictably, then, the quality of the reports submitted has been variable.

Montenegro (ETF/Raicevic and Nikolovska, 2014) began to introduce QI policies in VET in 2004. Recent changes in education legislation favour self-evaluation by VET schools as a tool for QI, linking it with external evaluation. According to the General Law on Education, which came into force in August 2010, maintaining and improving the quality of the work of VET schools should be done through self-evaluation: each year a self-evaluation should be conducted in several areas of education and training services, and every two years a complete and comprehensive self-evaluation should be carried out. There are three institutions in Montenegro in charge of quality in education: the Bureau for Education Services, the Examination Centre and the VET Centre. The key challenges relating to internal QA are the lack of capacity for the proper implementation of self-assessment and indicators; the lack of proper funding mechanisms to stimulate the development of quality in VET schools; and gaps in the process of external support to VET providers and adult education providers for the implementation of VET delivery and improving the quality of education and training.

In Turkey, TQM³¹ is used for QI in VET schools. The Ministry of National Education initiated implementation in November 1999 through the adoption of the Total Quality Management Implementation Directive. TQM is not obligatory for all schools. However, in order to motivate schools to become involved in QI processes, the ministry introduced an award for quality in education, based on criteria published in the Manual of Award for Quality in Education. TQM implementation at school level starts with VET school self-evaluation³². Self-evaluation reveals the 'strengths' and 'improvable aspects' of the school.

After several years of experience with TQM applications based on self-evaluation activities in VET schools, an evaluation of the results was carried out. According to the study implemented in VET schools that took part in TQM (Okay, 2010), those teachers who were involved in self-evaluation

³¹ According to the main principle of TQM, quality does not depend on the control of the product after its production. Rather, it depends on continuous improvement that is built into different organisational processes. In the case of VET schools, these processes will refer mainly to teaching and learning, and communication with stakeholders.

³² In the case of TQM in vocational schools in Turkey, the Excellence Model developed by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) has been applied as the basis of the continuous improvement of those areas of concern that emerge from the self-assessment process.

teams and TQM processes gave positive views about their effects in terms of improving the feeling of belonging to the team; that is, the emphasis was felt to shift from personal achievement to school achievement (moving from 'me' to 'us'). The study concluded that the teachers who actively participated in TQM and self-evaluation in VET schools were more open to 'making [the] attempt to be a part of the solution rather than the problem', and made more optimistic evaluations than did those who did not take part in TQM. It is believed that the main reason for the success of TQM and VET school self-evaluation is the opportunity to move quickly to practical implementation, giving good results at school level.

Global trends show that countries are increasingly inviting VET schools to undertake self-evaluation as part of national policies for VET QI. Among the EU Member States, the use of self-evaluation is further encouraged through the EQARF. The EQARF is based on the idea that self-evaluation is linked to the development of quality at both the VET system level and the school level, where the starting point is self-evaluation of VET schools. Thus, it provides a systemic approach to quality, incorporating and interrelating the relevant levels and actors.

According to this model, self-evaluation provides:

- an assessment based on evidence;
- a means of measuring progress over time through periodic self-evaluation;
- a means of achieving a stakeholder-focused strategy, consistency of direction and consensus on what needs to be done to improve an organisation;
- an assessment against a set of criteria that has been carefully selected across IVET and continuing VET (CVET);
- a link between goals and support strategies and processes;
- a means of focusing improvement activity where it is most needed;
- a means of creating enthusiasm among employees by involving them in the improvement process;
- opportunities to promote and share good practice within different areas of VET provision and with other VET providers (Cedefop, 2003).

School evaluation serves two interlinked purposes: improvement and accountability. School improvement relates to access to education (equity) and educational performance (quality and efficiency). School evaluation for improvement aims to close achievement gaps between low-performing and high-performing schools, as well as to enhance the performance of all students. School evaluation for improvement purposes generally implies a formative approach. However, definitions and perspectives regarding the purpose and the focus of improvement can vary according to different stakeholders. School accountability aims to provide information to policy makers and the public about value for money, compliance with standards and regulation, and the quality of the services provided. School evaluation for accountability purposes generally implies the use of summative approaches (Faubert, 2009, p. 7). The analyses show diversity among the countries in the way in which VET school evaluation is introduced and implemented in the system. This variation is a result of different policies in the IVET systems, different traditions and different overall approaches to VET reform.

In all the countries, it should be recognised that VET school self-evaluation is also a policy option for improving the school as an organisation. While the primary feature of VET school self-evaluation is that it is based on dialogue among staff within the school, a secondary key feature is that it incorporates a review process. This helps schools to analyse the challenges they face. It is a process

for improving the quality of VET in schools, and it has the potential to turn the VET school into a learning organisation. When performing a self-evaluation, the organisation is in a learning process during which it has to recognise which actions lead to improved results. This gives the organisation an opportunity to react and take decisions at grassroots level. However, it must be recognised that no VET school development is possible without the appropriate policy framework.

6. Conclusion

Throughout the region VET is perceived as an important policy priority that is capable of contributing to economic growth and social development. Each country has established policies and strategies to target development of the VET sector. Most of these are focused on key areas such as qualifications frameworks that provide clear pathways through education systems; adult learning to assist with requalification and skills upgrading; and IVET within the context of secondary education. Despite the wide variations in scale of the country systems, there is a common trend in the region, particularly in terms of VET within a lifelong learning context, and all of the individual countries are adopting measures that favour QI at various levels of the system (ETF, 2013).

Although the QA policies in SEE and Turkey vary in terms of their characteristics, they share the common purpose of improving quality in teaching and learning in VET. The findings suggest that the focus in the region is mainly on IVET, while CVET is often excluded from QI actions. While this is understandable, given that IVET is a formal part of the system, and therefore governed and organised mostly by ministries of education and sometimes by ministries of labour, it should be recognised that the often formal nature of the evaluation process is influenced by precisely this situation, and often even in IVET, employment and the economy are not part of the discussion about VET quality.

One question remains open: to what extent do quality approaches in the region respond to different contexts? 'One size fits all' procedures are not appropriate. Employers and social partners need to engage proactively in policy planning for VET QI and QA. Their engagement may need to be facilitated through the establishment of appropriate structures and mechanisms. Cooperation should be purposeful and realistic; the 'added value' of assuming joint responsibility for and ownership of the quality of IVET must be visible to employers. At VET school level, school boards can be more involved in the process, while at system level, using existing structures – in the form of different councils or education boards – can help to move VET quality forward.

At VET provider level there is a need to exploit the potential of internal evaluation and self-evaluation. These processes can be developed at VET school level in such a way that they take into account the dual nature of VET: preparing students for lifelong learning, and at the same time preparing them to be employable. This approach will need new thinking.

VET school evaluation is introducing an important culture of reporting at various levels of the system. Together with indicators at both system level and provider level, it represents the first step towards the establishment of more robust systems for performance measurement of quality in the system. The reporting process will need to evolve, including in terms of the way indicators are used at different levels of the system. Schools need to take active ownership of their self-evaluation reports. Rather than talking about the quality of the report, schools should focus on what can be done to improve performance. This should be an iterative process.

All VET providers – those offering IVET programmes as well as those offering programmes in adult education and training – should be given an opportunity to improve the quality of the teaching and learning services they provide to various groups of students and target groups. There are various tools and mechanisms available for achieving this, including through the development of external evaluation of VET providers, including self-evaluation of providers, and the development of indicators and of monitoring and evaluation systems at policy and system levels.

Quality is a driver in most candidate or potential candidate countries in SEE and Turkey. One of the aims of the Copenhagen/Bruges Process is to promote cooperation in QA and QI, in order to enhance mutual trust. Today, the increased focus on quality in VET is common across Europe, as framework governance and the decentralisation of VET systems have become mainstream policies. Granting providers greater autonomy in adapting their VET courses to local needs and demands underlines the need to implement national quality strategies that seek to find a balance between control and mutual trust among VET stakeholders.

The performance of VET systems is increasingly judged by students' learning outcomes and their employability, and hence, countries use a range of techniques, including performance indicators, to measure the progress in QI in VET. Some VET providers are faced with a situation in which self-evaluation is mandatory on the basis of legislation, while at the same time external evaluation is also becoming common for policies in VET QI. Although the context of each country in the region is unique, there is a widespread recognition that quality is the key to developing more responsive VET, which will ensure stronger and fairer opportunities for the citizens of the region and enhance the availability of appropriate skills.

At the same time it should be recognised that VET in these countries comprises a range of pathways that interface with general and tertiary education and with the world of work. This is one of the reasons that IVET providers in the public sector tend to take account of the function of IVET for employability, further learning and social inclusion, and provide more broad-based holistic learning opportunities. Employers tend to prioritise training that is more strictly job-related (ENQA-VET, 2009, p. 45). When employers have closer links with public providers, their appreciation of the other functions of IVET increases, and this can lead to improved corporate responsibility. This is a major reason that different key stakeholders – teachers and instructors, employers, social partners, VET schools/providers – need to be consulted more widely when strategies for QI are being devised, at system level, but also at VET provider level. Shifting the emphasis to 'involving stakeholders in a culture of continuous improvement' is the key to enhancing the quality and relevance of IVET (ENQA-VET, 2009, p. 46).

Ensuring the relevance of VET, for the purposes of gaining access to employment and further learning, is a fundamental criterion to be addressed when improving its quality. If VET is more responsive to the needs of the labour market, it will make it easier for the learner to obtain a job, thus making VET relevant, raising its status and making it more attractive. The more sector-specific and occupationally orientated the programme and qualification, the more likely it is that the knowledge input will be based primarily on occupational standards and learning outcomes. VET curricula and contents must be responsive to sector needs. Employment-relevant curricula and content contribute to the development of appropriate competences for targeted occupations (ENQA-VET, 2009, p. 38).

Furthermore, the need for national governments to be able to demonstrate the excellence of the outcomes of their VET systems increases as economies internationalise, as this will enable them to compete effectively for foreign direct investment and market niches for exports. Within the formal system, quality VET encompasses employability and relevance to the labour market, lifelong learning and equity goals, and is reliant on the quality of policies, inputs, processes and outcomes. As these are interdependent, key actors at system and provision levels need to engage horizontally and vertically in quality management processes. Striving to attain and maintain high levels of verifiable excellence is the aim of VET quality management. Good quality management is inextricably linked to good governance (ETF, internal document).

Acronyms

CVET	continuing vocational education and training
EQARF	European Quality Assurance Reference Framework
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
ETF	European Training Foundation
IVET	initial vocational education and training
QA	quality assurance
QI	quality improvement
SEE	South Eastern Europe
TQM	total quality management
VET	vocational education and training

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QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING: THE EXPERIENCE OF MONTENEGRO

Zeljko Raicevic and Margareta Nikolovska³³

Abstract

Vocational education and training (VET) reform in Montenegro relies on the premise that the VET system should provide broad-based education that not only covers vocational skills and knowledge, but also offers access to further and higher education, access to the labour market, and good opportunities for personal development and social integration. The question of quality in VET is an essential element in these system processes. Applying effective quality assurance (QA) policies helps to develop trust between labour market partners and VET providers.

1. Introduction

VET reform in Montenegro relies on the premise that the VET system should provide broad-based education that not only covers vocational skills and knowledge, but also offers access to further and higher education, access to the labour market, and good opportunities for personal development and social integration (ETF, 2012). The question of quality in VET is an essential element in these processes. Applying effective QA policies helps to develop trust between labour market partners and VET providers. Without this trust, progress towards the enhanced relevance and attractiveness of VET will be almost impossible. For Montenegro, quality in VET is becoming even more important. The European Council's decision in December 2011 to open accession negotiations between Montenegro and the EU has made the need to address the challenges more pressing. The issue is also highlighted by the drive within EU countries for higher quality in VET in line with the Lisbon Strategy, the related Education and Training 2020 agenda, and the Copenhagen and Bruges Processes.

This report discusses the experience of Montenegro in introducing QA policies in VET. It reflects on the impact of external and internal evaluation, and the contribution they make to improving quality in VET. The following main issues are examined:

- the context and ongoing reform in VET in a challenging economic environment;
- the process of external and internal evaluation in VET schools and the way in which this is implemented in VET schools;
- the impact that internal evaluation has on VET schools and the difference it can make to their performance;
- the lessons learned in the process of introducing VET quality policies from the perspectives of both the VET school and the VET system.

The aim is to draw conclusions from Montenegro's experience of the process of putting in place explicit policies for QA in VET.

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2. Social context, ongoing reform and quality in VET: key findings of the Torino Process³⁴ in Montenegro

Montenegro took part in the 2012 Torino Process exercise. The ETF Torino Process Analytical Framework explores important dimensions of VET. One of these relates to the internal efficiency and effectiveness of VET, focusing mainly on provision in schools, colleges, faculties, company training sites, etc. The Analytical Framework also addresses how quality at VET provider level is defined and managed. Internal efficiency denotes how well a country's VET system correlates with the external environment within which it operates, and how well it responds to related signals or challenges.

The external environment in Montenegro is characterised by social trends and challenges that are similar to those in the Europe, namely the restructuring of the economy and unemployment, particularly youth unemployment. The global crisis affected the economic growth rate, which declined from 2.5% in 2011 to 0.2% in 2012. Tourism and real estate receive most of the foreign direct investment, and services represent 70% of gross domestic product (GDP). In 2012 the high proportion of micro and small businesses was a notable feature of the economy: 98.6% of enterprises were micro and small companies with less than 50 employees, contributing 31.0% of exports and 61.7% of overall employment in the economy. The main challenge is to support the development and growth of more dynamic small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and for the VET system to deliver more relevant SME skills and quality training.

Gross enrolment rates at upper secondary level (ISCED 3) continued to rise, from 80.0% in 2006 to 97.7% in 2012, while enrolment in pre-school education rose from 27.9% in 2008 to 44.8% in 2012, partly as a result of the national Strategy on Early Childhood and Pre-school Education for the period 2010–2015. The introduction of nine-year compulsory schooling has led to higher enrolment and completion rates in elementary education. Progress has also been achieved in improving the educational attainment of the population. The proportion of Montenegrins aged 15+ who have completed secondary general education stood at 76.0% and vocational education 39.8% (2012), while the proportion of those who have completed higher education rose from 13.4% in 2009 to 17.4% in 2012. The proportion of enrolment in upper secondary VET is relatively high, standing at 67.3% in 2012. Latest data from the Ministry of Education suggest that the level of attractiveness, in particular of the three-year VET programmes, is decreasing.

Although completion of the four-year cycle in upper secondary VET in Montenegro allows for access to higher education, many individuals face difficulties in completing their higher education studies. The upward trend in higher education enrolments (from 25.8% in 2006 to 47.6% in 2010) continued with a 6% rise in 2010/11 compared with the previous academic year. However, the increase in higher education enrolments contrasts with the low completion rate. This is more typical for the first cycle of higher education studies: the number of Bachelor's degrees fell by 5% in 2010 compared with 2009, while the number of postgraduate degrees increased (12% for specialist and 14% for Master's degrees). Given the high enrolment rate in VET and the large cohort of students/graduates from upper secondary VET who enrol in higher education, the assumption is that the quality of VET needs further attention.

Sustained efforts are in place to improve the quality of education. Reforms carried out so far have increased compulsory schooling from eight to nine years, introduced new curricula and textbooks and improved school infrastructure. However, VET, which accounts for 67.3% (2012) of upper secondary education students, continues to face challenges with regard to quality and responsiveness to labour market skill needs. One of the priority areas for action in the Strategy for the Development of Vocational Education in Montenegro 2010–2014 is QA in VET. In 2011 and 2012 Montenegro made

³⁴ The Torino Process is a participatory review of progress in VET policy. It is carried out every two years by all ETF partner countries with the ETF's support. More information is available at www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Torino_process

progress in implementing the provisions of its 2010 legislation. Internal evaluation for VET schools has been introduced as an obligatory exercise that must be carried out every two years. External evaluation is carried out every four years, and has been in place in the country since 2006. The leading institution in the reform process is the Ministry of Education, with the VET Centre, the Examination Centre and the Bureau for Education Services having an important implementation role. QA in VET, including external and internal evaluation, has been recognised as a very important support to the management of VET schools and as an essential part of the planning and decision-making process.

In summary, VET is high on the policy agenda in Montenegro, and the pressure on the VET system to deliver better-quality training is obvious. In general, the main reasons for improving the policies for high-quality VET in Montenegro are as follows.

- In order for the economy to ensure growth and an adequate response to the changing and restructuring challenges, there is a need for upper secondary VET and the VET system as a whole to be able to address the needs of business and the labour market. The context is not only Montenegrin: it is also European and global.
- In order for business to be responsive to the changing and restructuring challenges of the economy and the labour market, there is a need for VET programmes to be reliable and trusted.
- In order for the individual to have wide access to education and training opportunities, and similar access to career opportunities, there is a need to ensure that VET provides high-quality teaching and learning. Quality enhancement mechanisms put in place at VET school level will significantly support these objectives.

3. VET quality in focus: policies for improved quality in VET in Montenegro

The introduction of QA policies in Montenegro relates to upper secondary VET. There are around 40 VET schools, divided into three types:

- VET schools that offer education in highly specialised areas (economics, electronics, health services and tourism);
- schools with a large number of diversified programmes (engineering, agriculture, construction work, chemistry, transportation, etc.);
- mixed schools, which offer both general education and VET.

Montenegro's Bruges and Torino Processes reports for 2012 emphasise that VET quality policies need to be further aligned with the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework³⁵ (EQARF).

³⁵ The EQARF describes the various elements in a quality model and raises a number of key questions to be considered by the major stakeholders. It is a tool developed in Europe to promote transparency and provide a common basis for quality assurance and development - Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a [European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training](#). This recommendation establishes a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework as a reference instrument to help Member States to promote and monitor continuous improvement of their VET systems based on common European references. The framework should contribute to quality improvement in VET and to increased transparency of, and consistency in, VET policy developments between Member States, thereby promoting mutual trust, mobility of workers and learners, and lifelong learning.

At the EU level, the use of evaluation processes is further encouraged through the EQARF³⁶. The EQARF³⁷ is based on the idea that evaluation is linked to the development of quality both at the VET system level and at the VET school level, where the starting point is self-evaluation of VET schools. Thus, it provides a systemic approach to quality, incorporating and interrelating the relevant levels and actors. The following sections relate to VET QA policies that are in place, and in which the core is evaluation in its different forms.

Box 1. QA in VET: summary of the process in Montenegro

The policy framework for quality improvement (QI) in VET comprises two processes: external evaluation and internal evaluation. There are three institutions at national level in charge of QI in education: the Bureau for Education Services, the Examination Centre and the VET Centre.

Advisers from the VET Centre evaluate the work of the VET schools. On the basis of these recommendations, the schools plan the process of QI.

The Evaluation Department of the VET Centre visits each school once every four years, as required by the General Law on Education and the *Rulebook on the Content, Form and Manner of Determining the Quality of Teaching and Education*. On the basis of the methodology for external evaluation of quality, advisers from the VET Centre assess the achievement against standards in key work areas of schools, and prepare reports. The reports comprise a description of the situation and recommendations for QI.

The VET school, on the basis of the situation identified and the recommendations elaborated in the external evaluation, prepares a Plan for Quality Improvement for a four-year period. The report is submitted to the Educational Inspection and the Ministry of Education. During the four-year period, the activities implemented from the Plan are evaluated externally.

3.1 External and internal evaluation in VET schools in Montenegro: strategy and policy developments that have an impact on quality in schools

Although evaluation within school systems is not a recent concern, for many years it was limited mainly to the evaluation of students. The systematic evaluation of teachers, programmes, and the school as a whole has emerged more recently. In fact, it is still far from being common practice, even in education systems that are frequently perceived as being the most advanced (Nevo, 2001). Evaluation schemes are now increasingly being considered as potential levers of change that could assist with decision making, resource allocation and school improvement (Faubert, 2009).

Montenegro's experience with the introduction of evaluation in the education system includes self-evaluation, internal evaluation of schools, preparation of internal evaluation reports, the external evaluation process, and external evaluation team reports. The same process applies for all upper secondary VET schools. The key requirements underpinning the introduction of these steps is that there must be provision in place for a QA process at the VET school level, but also that processes exist at VET system level to provide for the analysis of varying performance between schools, and subsequently the identification of priority areas for policy interventions. The major objective of this shift in the process is to emphasise that although each individual teacher is responsible for quality, overall school quality is a collective responsibility, and one that is central to school improvement efforts.

³⁶ Montenegro took part in the EQAVET survey in 2012. The results are analysed and available in the article by Feerick and Oviedo (ETF, 2014).

³⁷ For more information on the results of EQAVET 2012 survey and results in relation to different dimensions of EQARF, see ETF/Feerick and Oviedo (2014).

Significant changes in the QA processes in the country's education system that have had an impact on schools started in 2004. The Montenegrin education authorities previously had inspection services that supervised school processes in accordance with the characteristics of the former system of social and educational organisation. However, the primary role of inspection was to control the ways in which laws and regulations were applied, how the teaching process was carried out, and the records that were maintained. In large part it had an administrative emphasis.

Since 2006, the new quality framework has gradually introduced external and internal evaluation. For the first time the education authorities and schools have been faced with two new processes, in which the key element is 'evaluation' and which allow the quality of the education services delivered to be measured. A common challenge in this situation is that of meeting the information and data needs at system level in order to monitor performance. At school level the challenge is to align external evaluation with internal evaluation, and to ensure transparent and well-balanced reporting on VET school performance, including using the findings of the processes to improve performance, thereby improving quality. Despite these challenges, synergy has been achieved between general secondary education and upper secondary VET: the QA processes are the same, and there is no differentiation between VET schools and general secondary schools. This has some advantages and some disadvantages.

The General Law on Education, the Law on Vocational Education and the Law on Adult Education define the obligations, responsibilities and dynamics of QA activities for both the system and the schools. In addition, laws and sub (i.e., secondary) legislation define the quality standards required for curricula and teachers. The Bureau for Education Services, the VET Centre and the Examination Centre support the processes of quality assessment (see Table 1). Significant methodological development work has been undertaken, and a number of frameworks, procedures and quality standards have been developed. The methodological framework for the external evaluation of schools has been developed by the Bureau for Education Services, in cooperation with the VET Centre. Quality indicators for external evaluation have four defined levels: very successful, successful, satisfactory, and unsatisfactory. Each indicator level has its own definition.

Table 1. Roles and responsibilities of different actors in the VET quality management process

	General Law on Education	Rulebook on the content, form and manner of determining the quality of education in institutions	Montenegrin Vocational Education Development Strategy (2010–2014)
Ministry of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establishing procedures for licensing education providers ■ Adopting concepts for external and internal evaluation ■ Creating legislation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Analysing external evaluation reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Developing methodological framework for evaluation and national indicators for measuring quality ■ Establishing a system of QA in VET at national level
Bureau for Education Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Performing external evaluation ■ Preparing concept and methodology for external evaluation ■ Creating concept and methodology for internal evaluation for general education institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Performing external evaluation (with VET Centre) ■ Nominating supervisors and teams for external evaluation ■ Preparing external evaluation reports 	
VET Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Performing external evaluation for VET schools ■ Preparing concept and methodology for internal evaluation ■ Promoting EQAVET ■ Analysing school plans for improving quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Performing external evaluation of VET institutions (with the Bureau for Education Services) ■ Nominating consultants for external evaluation ■ Preparing external evaluation reports for VET schools ■ Analysing internal evaluation reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establishing a system of QA in VET at school level ■ Improving the procedures and measurements for self-evaluation ■ Training internal evaluators in VET schools
Examination Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Conducting external exams at the end of secondary education 		
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fulfilling obligation to perform internal evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Performing internal evaluation (self-evaluation) ■ Providing internal evaluation reports ■ Preparing plans for improving the quality of education and training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Defining strategy for quality at VET school level ■ Establishing a group for internal evaluation ■ Training internal evaluators ■ Performing internal evaluation

VET schools are legally obliged to implement internal evaluation and to prepare a report. Reports that are submitted within the external evaluation process represent a very significant source of data for analysing the strengths and weaknesses of each individual VET school. They also help to determine whether the measures taken to improve quality are relevant, and whether they actually work. With regard to the internal evaluation process, the methodology defines four indicator levels that are similar, though not identical, to the external indicators: excellent, good, satisfactory, and unsatisfactory.

Depending on the indicator level attained, schools issue their evaluation reports in green (achieved results), yellow (partially achieved results) or red (not achieved results), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Indicators and scale of the internal evaluation of schools

Results' achievement (colour of report)	Level of indicators attained
Achieved (green)	80% or more of indicators are rated excellent, or in progress.
Partially achieved (yellow)	Indicators are mostly satisfactory or good, with only some of them not satisfactory (or even excellent).
Not achieved (red)	20% or more indicators are not satisfactory.

Since 2006, all VET schools have taken part in the first external evaluation cycles. In 2010, in order to strengthen the process of external evaluation, internal evaluation became a mandatory exercise for VET schools, incorporating elements of self-evaluation. The changes in legislation were introduced through the amendments in the General Law on Education, and thus apply to both general education and VET. Article 17 of the legislation specified that QA and QI of educational services must be carried out by each institution in the form of self-evaluation every year for the selected areas, and every two years as a comprehensive internal evaluation. The QA and QI of educational services in the form of external evaluation is carried out at least once every four years by the VET Centre and the Bureau for Education Services.

Guidelines have been provided to support VET schools in the process of self-evaluation and internal evaluation. The Quality Assurance Model in VET in Montenegro (developed by the VET Centre) contains a catalogue of 25 questionnaires classified by key areas for self-evaluation and internal evaluation. These have been implemented since 2006 on a pilot basis in some VET schools. Since 2011 VET schools have been implementing the framework, containing key indicators, quantitative and qualitative indicators relating to school work, teaching, learning and students' achievement.

In 2010 a new QA cycle started. This second cycle of external evaluation has so far been completed for around 25 out of 40 VET schools. The second cycle of external evaluation showed that a small number of schools have made obvious progress (compared with the first cycle) in multiple areas, including equipping workshops, training teachers, introducing new teaching methods, achieving greater participation of employers and companies in training, and providing stronger support to students who lag behind in their studies. It is worth noting that between the two rounds of external evaluation, most schools managed to keep the quality of education and training at the same level. Some schools showed a higher level of quality in areas pointed out as being unsatisfactory or barely satisfactory during the first cycle of external evaluation. However, a decline in quality was observed in the same schools within the areas previously judged to be successful. This emphasised the need to create mechanisms and systems that, through the monitoring of quality, encourage schools to maintain and continuously improve the quality levels achieved.

Aside from this, the second cycle of external evaluation produced important findings that may merit further exploration.

- A small number of schools defined their internal (school) descriptors of indicators for the purposes of self-evaluation and internal evaluation. Having an individual set of indicators at school level is certainly very important, because it allows specific measurement of the quality in that particular school. This approach needs to be further encouraged. If evaluation seeks to improve the quality of schools, it is important that the school staff, who are in the best position to decide what should be evaluated, can play an active part in defining standards and designing the evaluation process. In contrast, when evaluation is used mainly to report to the education authorities, or to supply

information for the purposes of external evaluation, it is preferable for the authorities to partly determine the criteria (Faubert, 2009, p. 42).

- To a certain extent, VET schools form their attitude to quality on the basis of achieving the highest possible key indicator standards, which are assessed through the external evaluation process. This indicates that the schools need better support from all the institutions involved in order to understand the objectives of the different processes in VET QA: self-evaluation, internal evaluation and external evaluation.
- The process of internal evaluation in schools, which is still not fully functional in practice, is largely directed towards the formal assessment of indicator levels and only partly towards QI activities. This can undermine the objectives of introducing a coherent framework for QA policies in VET. VET schools are more likely to develop their capacity for QI if they are in an environment in which they are being supported in a comprehensive way by the Ministry of Education, the VET Centre and the Bureau for Education Services. Although the support available is significant, better solutions are obviously needed.

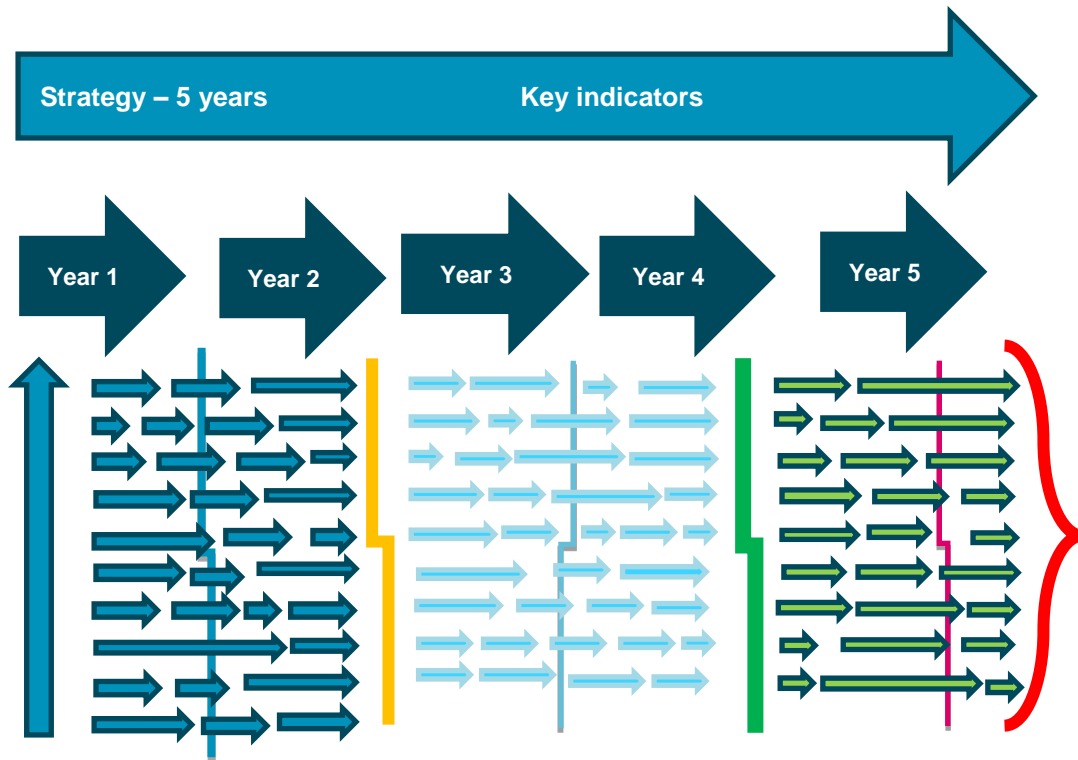
3.2 The impact of internal evaluation on VET schools: new steps to support schools to introduce quality in a sustainable way

The difference between internal and external evaluation in QA essentially comes down to the question of who has responsibility for the process (Scriven, 1991; Nevo, 2001). Internal evaluation covers activities undertaken by the school itself. Internal QA means that the monitoring, development and improvement of educational quality takes place within the school, whereas in external QA, the initiative for undertaking QA activities lies with persons or institutions outside the school (e.g. the educational inspectorate or an accreditation institution) (Nevo, 2001). External evaluations by the inspectorate usually focus on policy, legislation and regulations and educational performance (i.e. the statutory expectations with respect to student outcomes). Internal evaluation can, in principle, concern itself with whatever topic the school believes to be important (three groups of expectations) (Van Petegem, 2005).

The Quality Assurance Model in VET in Montenegro, in its internal evaluation section, indicates that quality in the school should be developed through team work and ongoing dialogue involving all VET school staff. The critical starting point is self-evaluation, a process that is planned annually and is selective based on the need for QI in the school. Finally, based on the self-evaluation and internal evaluation process, VET schools need to develop a 'catalogue of quality', and over a period of two years to complete the internal evaluation process and produce a VET school report of the internal evaluation. Furthermore, VET schools develop a Plan for Quality Improvement, which contains priority activities for improvement, defined dynamics, responsibilities and required funds.

Careful review of the VET school internal evaluation reports indicates that it is precisely here that the QI in an individual school begins. Paradoxically, this is also often where it ends. Only in cases in which the school management succeeds in accessing funds through social partnerships or international support is it possible to implement in the schools the QI activities defined in the Plan for Quality Improvement. Otherwise, schools are left with plans that are difficult to implement, or worse: for example, in the majority of schools, development plans are presented in such a way that limited funds and a lack of support are taken into account, which clearly cannot satisfy or enable the achievement of the stated objectives.

Figure 1. Internal evaluation of the VET schools as a continuous process



Since expectations and objectives for QI differ, the idea of what quality is will vary among different VET schools. This also depends on the type of school. For this reason, the planning of QI activities is based on different interpretations of quality that each VET school describes in its development plans. While for some schools quality is linked with expectations in terms of results (e.g. the expectation that the drop-out rate in VET programmes can be reduced, the expectations of higher grades in final exams, etc.), for others, quality is understood and mainly interpreted as a process. This is further illustrated by the examples shown in Box 2.

Box 2 illustrates that quality culture varies widely among VET schools. While this is understandable, it also suggests the complexity of VET quality issues at the school level. In any QA policy it is essential to find a way of aligning the quality expectations with the quality process. This is probably also one of the reasons that internal evaluation, as one of the tools for QI at VET school level, has been used by only around 25% of VET schools and mainly by those that had already accepted quality as one of the objectives in the strategic plans, and had clear expectations for it. Other schools understood internal evaluation only as an obligation to be fulfilled and for producing the actual report for the requirements of the external evaluation. This means that overall, in around 75% of the schools there was a formal acceptance of internal evaluation but no significant implementation of the process (self-evaluation in selected areas for improvement, followed by comprehensive internal evaluation) or the creation of a school QI system. Even with these difficulties and a significant shortage of resources at both system and school levels, the overall experience of Montenegro demonstrates the value of having a common internal evaluation framework.

Box 2. What is quality? Statements from VET schools in Montenegro

- Quality is a mechanism for the improvement of education and training, the systematic monitoring and evaluation of activities, the improvement of planning and the strengthening of schools, and is an indicator of the current activities in schools, and their experience, expectations and integration into the European education system.
- Quality is a model of the good organisation of a school with precisely defined objectives and the creation of policies acceptable to teachers, students, parents, social partners and the local community.
- Quality is a subject and matter of learning – how students learn, how much is learned – in order to ensure that students learn more overall (qualitatively), and not just reproduce what they have heard in the classroom, but to be risk-takers and innovators.
- Quality is the result of team work, good communication and the exchange of information that is relevant for the achievement of quality and success in everyday teaching and learning.
- Quality is the implementation of the objectives from the school plan, strategies and enrolment policies, student achievement and student impact on society, the satisfaction of students, parents and employees, enhancement of resources, observance, control and improvement of school processes (particularly teaching), etc.
- Quality is meeting educational objectives in a timely manner: improvement of the quality of education and training; human resources development; improvement of student achievements; development of school support to students; improvement of cooperation among staff members and the student–teacher relationship; improvement of the technological and safety conditions in schools; improvement in the cooperation with social partners; encouraging cooperation with parents and the local community; and participation in projects conducted by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international organisations.
- Quality is preparing students for lifelong learning and the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences that will enable them to perform at a high level in future jobs.
- Quality is the sharing of scientific, pedagogical and professional knowledge and skills; analysis and development of existing school practices and capacities in line with its aims, the needs of the community and legal framework; orientation towards meeting the requirements and needs of all actors in the educational process; continuous improvement of the educational process; monitoring how motivated staff are to improve quality, etc.

VET schools that had quality as an aim and a vision for development, and at the same time invested in the training of school teams, were able to better define their QI direction. The Maritime School in Kotor is a good example of a school that relies heavily on the internal evaluation process in order to keep up with the specificities of the labour market for its graduates. Moreover, this school has been systematically working on the implementation of quality standards over a period of time. Following completion of their education and training at the Maritime School, students become cadets in international maritime companies. Students are eligible for employment only if the school holds a quality certificate. This has required the school's management to create a quality system that is supervised by a specially trained quality manager. Based on defined procedures, the school assesses QI indicators. External evaluators visit every year, while every three years the school undergoes comprehensive external evaluation of its overall quality, which is a requirement to keep the school on the 'white list' that enables the cadets to gain employment.

Other good examples include VET schools in Bijelo Polje and Plav. During the four-year period, through developmental activities and sustained work on the implementation of its Plan for Quality Improvement, the Vocational School in Bijelo Polje improved the conditions for education and training; this had an impact, and significantly improved teaching and learning services that the VET school provides. Based on clearly stated objectives, the school is transforming the way teachers create learning environments for developing key competences through intensive in-service training. Plav Combined High School, as a result of an internal evaluation based on clear expectations and a well-elaborated process, has developed many practical approaches for improving the educational process. These include a quality group, with teachers providing continuous evaluation and feedback on professional work; professional tuition for teachers; a study centre for students, with 20 learning areas; many outdoor and environmental activities; and strong community links and international links.

4. Major lessons learned from Montenegro's experience in introducing QA policies in the VET system: What is next?

It is some time since Montenegro embarked on a challenging reform of VET, and since it began to take the steps required for the coherent introduction of VET QA policies. Since 2004, new policy measures and accompanying new institutions, including new modes of governance, have been put in place. The implementation of new curricula in VET began in 2004 and an external evaluation as part of the QA process began in 2006. Between 2006 and 2010 external evaluation was performed for all VET schools. A second round of external evaluation has been ongoing since 2010. As a result, substantial improvements have been achieved.

The process of external evaluation has played a significant role in VET reform. There has been an important step forward from the traditional system of inspection of teachers towards counselling the management and teachers in VET schools about which activities for QA and QI to undertake, and how to perform them. As well as involving those with experience in education, the process of external evaluation includes employers' representatives, experts from various fields of trade and the economy, and university representatives, among others. Schools have become familiar with quality standards, indicators, assessment criteria, etc. This has all contributed to a change in the internal organisation and direction of activities towards key areas of quality that lead to students having usable knowledge and skills, and being competitive in the labour market.

The second round of external evaluation showed that there have been numerous improvements in VET schools, including significant teacher participation in various school activities, contributing to an improvement in the quality of teaching. However, it also highlighted that the indicators used in internal and external evaluation have become limiting factors for some schools. Experience from the previous period indicates a clear need for further development of the process of self-evaluation and internal evaluation, and improvement of the indicators and tools that are used. The transparency of the entire process should also be developed further.

This final point relates particularly to the reports that are produced. Making them publicly available could increase awareness and encourage the drive for QI in VET schools. They could also be subjects for further discussion. Reports of school evaluations could be used to collect examples of best practice, and encourage schools to share best practice and improve performance. In some case they can also be used to identify bottlenecks in specific schools and encourage those schools to improve. Where VET is concerned, further development envisages the involvement of partners, social partners, employers, etc., in the process of internal evaluation of schools, education and training, and conditions for the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Montenegro's experience with the introduction of internal evaluation shows that it is possible to motivate VET schools to be more engaged in QI activities. The results are verifiable: improved student achievements, better school leadership, improved accountability, and greater satisfaction among employers. However:

'[N]either *external* nor *internal* strategies will impact upon the progress of students, *unless* the strategy itself impacts *at the same time* on the internal conditions or change capacity of the school. It is clear that if a school improvement strategy is to contribute to the sustained progress of students, then it must impact on, and be integrated with, the school's capacity for development. The argument is that if the aspiration of continual improvement is to be taken seriously, then the focus of authentic school improvement needs to be on the school's capacity for development. 'Real' school improvement strategies therefore need to be context-specific, both in terms of the learning needs of students and the organisational conditions of the school.' (Hopkins, 2001, p. 160, emphasis in original)

The development and introduction of explicit policies on quality in VET in Montenegro are significant, and a number of lessons can already be drawn. It is becoming clear that while it is important to ensure better integration of self-evaluation and internal evaluation in VET schools, it is also important to ensure that self-evaluation, internal evaluation and external evaluation are all related to VET schools' improvement process, and that this is their primary objective. Therefore, approaches should be sought to encourage discussions and dialogue that will promote a common understanding of the key factors that are influencing the teaching and learning in VET schools, and a recognition that the exercise is not simply a formal one. This is required at both VET school and VET system levels. If self-evaluation and internal evaluation priorities are not clearly valued, there is a risk that schools will develop self-evaluation activities and internal evaluation processes only to satisfy the demands for accountability during external evaluation.

From the point of view of usefulness in VET policy making, internal evaluation can help policy makers to assess how each school performs and how it compares with other schools. It can also provide important information for assessing where weaknesses may exist, and which schools are benefiting most or least from specific policy actions. Having a common approach to school quality means that it is easier to identify differences between schools, to understand why these differences may be occurring, and to find possible ways of addressing these differences. Having a policy framework for ensuring quality in all schools by combining internal and external evaluation with review and improvement processes, supported by quantitative and qualitative analyses, can reinforce the benefits for individual schools. This can potentially provide a good balance between top-down steering and bottom-up implementation.

In many countries there is a trend towards placing the primary responsibility for educational quality with the school, with schools increasingly becoming autonomous in terms of their freedom to formulate and conduct their own operations. In return for this autonomy, schools are being required to evaluate their own educational quality and to come up with their own plans for improvement. The responsibilities for QA in education are more complex, and are increasingly spread across various partners. The parallel existence of these responsibilities has led the government, the educational inspectorate and schools to look for a way in which internal and external evaluations can be matched with each other (Faubert, 2009). This is also becoming a critical issue for the QA policies in Montenegro: how to ensure that external and internal evaluation are better integrated and that they actually work for continuous VET school improvement. These next steps will better support a positive relationship between top-down policies and bottom-up practices at the school level.

Acronyms

EQARF	European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training
ETF	European Training Foundation
GDP	gross domestic product
NGO	non-governmental organisation
QA	quality assurance
QI	quality improvement
SME	small and medium-sized enterprise
VET	vocational education and training

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