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THE ETF APPROACH TO PROMOTING QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VET



ETF partner countries share the universal challenges brought about by technological advancement and the global spread of the market economy. This requires an upskilled, adaptable and mobile workforce. The modernisation of VET, aimed at addressing changing needs, requires new forms of quality assurance for VET systems. The ETF approach to quality assurance modernisation is responsive to these needs.

The ETF defines quality assurance in VET as the measures established to verify that processes and procedures are in place to ensure VET quality. The measures relate to quality standards with underlying principles, criteria and indicators. Underpinning principles for quality assurance in VET can be clustered under the headings: leadership; stakeholder engagement and co-ordination; relevance, effectiveness and efficiency; clarity and coherence. Quality assurance is a matter of good governance of the VET system. Its purpose is to monitor, evaluate and demonstrate that VET is dependable and its outputs and outcomes are trustworthy. Effective quality assurance acts as an early warning system as reform needs can be detected. Although accountability and 'consumer' protection are important goals, the over-arching aim is to ensure good VET, which means that it is responsive to labour market, societal and individual needs, enables access to decent jobs and sustainable employment, is attractive, inclusive and accessible and fosters capabilities that enable progression to further learning.

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WHAT VET AREAS ARE ADDRESSED BY QUALITY ASSURANCE MEASURES?

A holistic quality assurance system addresses five key areas and their interconnectedness: policy and governance; qualifications standards; provision; assessment, validation, certification; data and knowledge creation. For these areas, criteria for effective and efficient quality assurance need to be defined, and measures that ensure the criteria are met need to be established. These measures should aim to foster a quality culture in the VET system.



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

WHY IS THERE A NEED TO MODERNISE QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VET?

Equipping new labour market entrants with the most up-to-date skills, and the capabilities to learn continuously, as well as up-skilling and re-skilling the existing workforce in decreasing time-spans, demands relevant, top quality, accessible VET responsive to lifelong learning needs. Expanded and extended VET provision often requires VET reform, including new forms of governance. With the granting of

greater autonomy to VET providers, the opening up of provision to private providers and the reform of qualifications systems, including the introduction of national qualifications frameworks that support lifelong learning, the need for VET quality assurance reform becomes evident. When making plans to renew or reform VET quality assurance, it is crucial that the type and underpinning philosophy of the VET system and its

governance model are considered, as well as VET purpose, functions, scope, and institutional context and target groups. The heterogeneity of VET militates against a one-size-fits-all approach to measures for quality assurance and this needs to be taken into account when considering the transferability/adaptability of externally developed models that evolved in different contexts.

HOW IS QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VET REFORM ADDRESSED IN EU POLICY AND PRACTICE?

Modern quality assurance in education and training has its origins in industry: International Standards Organisation, Total Quality Management, European Foundation for Quality Management provided the instruments. Neo-liberalism provided the political context for New Public Management (NPM): Management by objectives combined with indicators, the evaluation of related performance and subsequent action (evidence-based policy). NPM provides the context for the European quality assurance in education discourse. Approaches in the education and training sub-sectors differ, both within and across countries. Education and training systems evolve and if quality assurance is to be 'fit for purpose', it must evolve too. Quality in VET has been on the EU agenda since the 1963 Council Decision laid down general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy. Quality assurance surfaced as an EU-level policy area with the Council Conclusions of 1995, which invited Member States to improve the quality of VET and develop, with the social partners, exchanges of information and experience to promote methods and tools that best

assure quality. Since 2002, EU co-operation to enhance the excellence, transparency and comparability of quality assurance in VET has intensified in the context of the Copenhagen Process. The EU Network for Quality Assurance in VET (ENQA-VET) was launched in 2005. In 2009, the European Council and the European Parliament passed the Recommendation establishing a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQARF) and the Quality Assurance National Reference Points; ENQA-VET became the EQAVET Network. EU member states and candidate countries are currently working towards the achievement of the 2020 medium term deliverable on systemic QA improvement as set out in the 2015 Riga Conclusions (Copenhagen Process). Given the increasingly blurred boundaries between VET and higher education, synergies with the European policy for quality assurance in higher education, supported by the Bologna Process, are intensifying at European, national/regional and even institutional levels. The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) aims to augment trust in quality assurance across education and training sub-systems.

WHAT IS THE STATUS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VET IN THE ETF'S PARTNER COUNTRIES?

Partner countries are striving to modernise their VET systems and make them more responsive to learner and employer needs. They share the worldwide drivers of VET reform, including those related to changing economies e.g. globalisation, technological change, demographics, lifelong learning and societal demands e.g. accessible, inclusive, high quality education and training and relevant qualifications. However, for many, VET has for long been overlooked and under-resourced, resulting in the need for radical, broad and deep reform of policies, contexts, inputs and processes. These challenges are often faced in tandem with political and societal strife, challenged labour markets and limited resources including capital, knowledge and know-how. Many are reliant on external assistance to support VET reform, which offers valuable opportunities but also presents challenges regarding the mainstreaming and sustainability of innovation as well as holistic, systemic development.

To date, the most dominant quality assurance approach, at VET system level, across partner countries, is the traditional, centralised and prescriptive one with emphasis on rules, inspection and control. Partner countries, for the most part, are only at the stage

of experimentation when it comes to quality assurance reform. Nevertheless, good examples of policy and practice for the reform of quality assurance in VET exist in all countries. The most common reform is to introduce an autonomous or semi-autonomous accrediting agency to implement formal procedures for licensing providers or accrediting their programmes. In recognition that quality assurance policy and practice needs to modernise coherently with the reform of the VET system, many pilot projects address quality assurance reform in relation to, for example: new/ renewed qualifications standards, or VET personnel continuing professional development, or school external-internal evaluation.

Priority needs that are common to many PCs include: embedding a systemic and systematic quality assurance approach; improving quality assurance regulations, facilitating multi-actor engagement at macro, meso and micro levels in quality assurance governance; ensuring robust demand/ supply data underpin new qualifications' standards; developing capabilities for the successful introduction of new approaches (e.g. competency-based), methodologies (e.g. formative assessment) and tools (e.g. ICT).

Key publications

- Cedefop (2011): Assuring quality in vocational education and training; the role of accrediting VET providers
- Cedefop (2011) Glossary – Quality in Education and Training Luxembourg. Publications Office of the EU.
- Cedefop (2015): Handbook for VET providers – supporting internal quality management and quality culture. Cedefop Reference series; No 99. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the EU.
- Deane, C., Watters, E. (2004): Towards 2010 - Common Themes and Approaches across Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training in Europe, NQAI, Ireland
- ETF (2013) Higher Quality VET – better chances for young people. Challenges and policy responses in the Arab Mediterranean countries. Author: E. Watters
- ETF (2014) A collection of articles on quality assurance in vocational education and training. Authors: S. Feerick, M.E. Galvão, M. Nikolovska, A. Oviedo, Z. Raicevic
- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2015): Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe. Luxembourg: EU Publications Office.
- Fischer, M. (Ed.) Qualität in der Berufsausbildung: Anspruch und Wirklichkeit, Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, Bielefeld (Bertelsmann)
- Harvey, L., & Green, D. (1993) Defining quality. Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, 18 (1)9-34.

The ETF guides the modernisation of quality assurance measures to:

- Focus on making VET more relevant and attractive for learners and employers;
- Are fit for purpose and context with emphasis on relevance and cost-effectiveness;
- Acknowledge that quality assurance is a dependent variable (e.g. context, other policy areas);
- Address VET inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes;
- Apply the quality cycle: plan, implement, monitor and evaluate, review and renew;
- Make visible strengths, weaknesses and improvement successes;
- Promote quality improvement through a pervasive quality culture;
- Take into account internationally accepted quality assurance concepts and European policies and models.

WHAT IS THE ETF APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VET DEVELOPMENT?

The ETF has no 'one-size-fits-all' solution for quality assurance in VET reform that can be applied successfully across all partner countries, however, common needs steer the ETF approach, which is generic, non-prescriptive and set in a loose framework of common principles, criteria and methods and therefore evolutionary rather than revolutionary. The ETF position prioritises the continuous improvement of existing core quality assurance measures whilst also addressing emerging needs related to lifelong learning and the internationalisation of VET that may require a renewed quality assurance approach. The ETF approach has an EU perspective and makes best use of the EQAVET Framework (EQARF) and Network.

Support focuses on the formal VET system, so that developments are relevant for all

VET and coherent with other education sub-systems. The ETF advocates a systematic approach that addresses the five key areas through the application of quality cycle methodology and makes use of a set of indicators for progress measurement. Quality culture enhancement for VET quality improvement is the priority goal.

The ETF supports countries to develop their own visions for VET quality assurance. It responds to reform needs, as determined by national level VET decision-makers and creates co-operation contexts for inductive learning, the sharing of experience/ expertise and joint ventures for the development of VET quality assurance. There are good foundations for enhanced co-operation with the aims of mutual trust and development.

CONCLUSION

The ETF has prepared the way for a more co-ordinated and coherent approach to promoting quality assurance in VET, which is in line with European policy, generic, non-prescriptive and based on a conceptual framework of core principles and criteria, indicators and methods. It aims to support partner countries to develop their own vision for VET quality assurance reform and identify measures to improve their policies and practices and test new ones that are responsive to wider VET reform. The ETF supports partner countries to plan VET quality assurance reform in a medium to long-term perspective as well as transnational co-operation to enhance VET quality assurance development through policy learning.

TEN KEY FACTORS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VET REFORM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mind-set: Nurture VET quality cultures and develop capabilities for quality assurance at all levels. Teachers/trainers and their managers require special attention.

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